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Photo Caption: Maxwell Ferrera sings a song in Junior Sunday School at his ward in Botafogo, Brazil.; Jump Page C4: Neia Martin smiles as her son Gabriel, 3, gives the prayer in their home in a Rio de Janeiro favela. LDS missionaries had just given the Martin family a lesson on the Mormon faith. Many Mormon converts are attracted to the church's family-oriented lifestyle.; Milena Ferrera rehearses for the Primary program in her Botafogo ward in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.; The LDS Temple in Capinas, near Sao Paulo, one of four LDS temples in Brazil.; Jump Page C5: Instead of hamburgers and funeral potatoes, Dierci Marcio C. da Silveira cooks up chicken, fish, beef and pork at a ward BBQ in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. And the game of choice is soccer, not basketball.; Crowded shanty towns called favelas continue to grow up the steep hills of Rio de Janeiro. Favelas are often controlled by gangs. LDS missionaries, who spend many hours there preaching to the poor, are left alone.; "Home storage is not about money or space, it's about faith," says Jeannie Mingorance, a Sao Paulo Relief Society president. Here she shows her personal food storage unit adjacent to her upper middle-class home.

Art Credit:
Art Caption: Jump Page C4: Graphic: Mormonism in Brazil (map, table)

Correction: Only a few Brazilian missionaries for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints cannot read and write, though some struggle with the complex language of Mormon scriptures. An April 5 story, based on old data, suggested a much higher rate of illiteracy.

The Brazil Connection

As Mormons make inroads into the country, Brazilians leave their mark on LDS Church; Brazil Leaves Impression on LDS Church

By

RIO DE JANEIRO, Brazil -- A few miles from the sultry beaches of Ipanema and down the mountain from the beckoning Christus statue is a boxy brown adobe church.

The two-story LDS Botafogo Ward sits amid high-rise apartments, bars and markets, within view of multi-colored shanties cascading down the hillside. Its believers worship quietly, oblivious to the constant whirring of ceiling fans and the amplified sermon of a Pentecostal preacher across the street.
Upstairs, children are swaying and gesturing to lyrics about temples or going on a mission. Their special clothing for the annual Primary program is uniformly white, but their faces are beige, bronze and ebony.

This is Mormonism Brazilian-style -- a blend of pragmatic theology (how to be good parents, how to get your kids to heaven) stories about visions and pioneers, American cultural traditions (such as sitting upright in folding chairs and listening quietly to sermons) and a well-ordered church structure, sprinkled with the intoxicating ebullience of Latin American spirituality.

And then there is color.

Down through the centuries, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, Indian, African and Asian bloodlines crossed and co-mingled endlessly in Brazil. It was this genealogical brew, rather than the American civil rights movement, that helped lift the ban on black men being ordained to the faith's priesthood.

That momentous reversal in 1978 catapulted a Rio executive, Helvecio Martins, into the leadership ranks of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as the first black general authority. His son, Marcus, became its first black missionary.

Today, Mormons in Brazil are as abundant as the fruit-bearing trees and blue-winged butterflies in Rio's lush botanical gardens.

They number more than 800,000, more than in any country besides the United States and Mexico. Brazil has 26 LDS missions, more than Germany, Italy and Great Britain combined. One in 10 missionaries is called to this most populous South American nation.

That means nearly every Mormon in Utah -- from LDS First Presidency member James E. Faust, a missionary there in the 1940s, to the cashier at the old Kenji's Japanese restaurant in downtown Salt Lake City -- has some connection to Brazil.

William Grant Bangerter of Alpine even gave three of his children, born when he was mission president in Brasilia, the middle names Rio, Paulo and, yes, Brasilia.

Some, such as Eric Peterson of Ephraim, return again and again as an ongoing vocation and even dragged his parents there for Christmas. Others, such as Brigham Young University librarian Mark Grover, make it the center of their academic career.

The story of the faith's remarkable growth in Brazil is the unfolding tale of Mormonism itself, with its competing needs to push outward across the globe while holding fast to its center. It speaks of the faith's ability to adapt to new environments and diverse cultures, navigating through ever-changing governmental politics and policies. It points to the future.

It started with Germans: Mormon missionaries didn't arrive in Brazil until the mid-1920s, nearly 100 years after the church was founded in upstate New York, Grover explains in his comprehensive 1986 dissertation, Mormonism in Brazil: Religion and Dependency in Latin America.

For the next decade, LDS evangelism was directed exclusively at German immigrants flooding into Brazil after World War I. It was centered in Joinville, a Germany colony about 125 miles south of São Paulo. In 1931, the tiny branch of 48 women, 14 men and 18 children built a modest chapel, the first in Brazil.

Soon, though, Nazism was seen as a growing threat, and in August 1942, when German submarines sank three Brazilian ships, the Brazilian government forbade its citizens to speak German even in private meetings. The church called its missionaries back to Utah to sit out the
war. After the war, missionaries turned their attention to Portuguese speakers who joined in
droves. The Book of Mormon was translated into Portuguese.

But with those converts came the thorny issue of race.

Church policy forbade giving the priesthood to any man with African ancestry, no matter how
distant. They could not officiate in the sacrament, preside at meetings, give their children
priesthood blessings or enter the temple.

Missionaries were forced to become gate-keepers, trying to determine racial background
through facial features or extensive pedigree charts, Grover writes. "They were encouraged to
visit with relatives to examine family pictures."

After LDS Church President David O. McKay visited Brazil on his 1954 world tour, he shifted
the emphasis to self-reporting. But that caused problems when people doing their own genealogy
discovered African roots after having been ordained.

Apostle Spencer W. Kimball's 1965 assignment to oversee the LDS Church in Brazil may have
set in motion an inexorable drive toward ending the ban.

Among the most devoted and visible black members was petroleum executive Helvecio
Martins. He became the church's spokesman in Rio, giving countless interviews to explain LDS
beliefs and doctrines and becoming the most recognizable Mormon in the nation.

After ground was broken in Sao Paulo for Brazil's first temple, several people saw Martins and
his wife holding each other and crying in the unfinished sanctuary, Grover wrote.

And Kimball wrote in his journal about "shedding tears when he saw faithful members who
would not be able to use the temple," says his son, Edward Kimball, who is completing a second
volume of his father's biography.

On June 9, 1978, just months before the Sao Paulo temple was dedicated, Kimball, by then
president of the LDS Church, announced that the priesthood would henceforth be open to "all
worthy men," regardless of race.

Mormons believe Kimball had received divine revelation.

Says his son: "It's hard to avoid a conclusion that his experience in Brazil as supervisor and his
observation of the faithfulness of black members certainly made a profound impression."

Just a slab of hamburger? The ward barbecue on a November evening near the upscale Barre
de Juca suburb of Rio seems eerily familiar. The brick meeting house has the look of any
Wasatch Front Mormon chapel, with its wood pews, classrooms, kitchen and gym.

Close your eyes and you could be in Bountiful, minus hamburger buns, funeral potatoes or
Jell-O.

Instead, it feels like stepping into Trolley Square's Rodizio Grill, with its skewers of steak, fish,
pork, chicken and sausage. The Relief Society sister offers water and insists on spraying
mosquito repellent on bare arms and legs — a matter of survival on a hot, humid evening.

Oh, and the kids play soccer, not basketball.

These members are largely doctors, lawyers and businessmen and women. They are attracted to
Mormonism for its teachings about eternal families, its vision of God and Jesus, its unique
scripture, the Book of Mormon and a contemporary leader whom they believe speaks with God.

But, like many new members from poverty-stricken areas, they also mention the church's social
appeals — friends, a close-knit, welcoming community and a boot-strap theology that promises
constant spiritual progress in this life and the next. It helps members live a disciplined,
family-oriented lifestyle.

"We were very, very poor," says Reinaldo Barreto, LDS mission president in Rio, whose family joined the church when he was 13. Since then, Barreto and his six brothers all graduated from college, served LDS missions and were married in the temple. They are now financially secure and in LDS leadership positions. "The gospel changed our whole lives, not just spiritually."

Some converts like Mormonism's lay clergy, which gives just about everyone a title and something important to do. It makes people responsible for each other as friends and role models.

Walmir Silva, a member for a half-century, has been a branch president six times, a bishop once and a counselor to the mission president in Rio. He now is a stake patriarch.

Others choose the faith's prohibition on smoking, alcohol, tea and coffee, clearly counter-cultural in a coffee-rich region.

"I got sick when I drank coffee. When I gave it up, I felt better," said Marcelo Alvarenga, who served an LDS mission to Japan and learned Spanish and English from his companions.

One final appeal, perhaps, is the church's connection to the United States. By any standard, Brazil is more pro-American than most other Latin American countries.

"Blond, blue-eyed missionaries are attractive to Latin American young people," says Francisco Jara, a Chilean journalist who is writing a dissertation on Mormons in Latin America. "Many young women fall in love with elders."

That doesn't mean, however, that Brazilian Mormons are mirror images of their U.S. counterparts.

Some even belong to the Workers' Party, which just helped elect the new president, Lula de Silva, says Warner Woodworth, a BYU professor who has done economic development in Brazil for decades. "They are not all conservative Republican Mormons."

**On the religious margins:** Brazil remains the most Roman Catholic country in the world; the faith claims nearly 80 percent of the nation's nearly 200 million residents.

The Catholic Church lives comfortably with other faiths, unthreatened when its members fold other religious practices into their lives.

The Rev. Edward Cleary can understand why some Catholics are drawn to the intimacy of a Mormon ward.

"Many Catholics, especially in the cities, feel the church is far from them because their parishes are so large," says Cleary, director of Latin American studies at Providence College in Rhode Island. "Sometimes there is one priest for 8,000 members. In some places it might be one to 40,000."

But Brazil's Catholic hierarchy is untroubled by the Mormon "sheep stealing," says Cleary, a Dominican priest who has been going to Brazil since 1967. "The bishops have, by and large, adopted a position of simply trying to take care of their own, by enlivening the experience for the core group of believers."

Mormons are "minor players" in a crowded field that includes mainstream Protestants and Evangelicals to Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses. Many target the poor in the teeming shantytowns known as favelas.

And unlike Pentecostals, who jumped into electoral politics after 1985, the Mormons "are not offering any political challenges to the Catholic Church," Cleary says. Pentecostalism is by far the most successful movement, enlisting a commanding 20 million
members over the past 20 years with a combination of lively worship and the promise of healing broken bones and broken spirits.

Both are clearly evident in the 2,000-seat Universal Church of the Kingdom of God around the corner and down the street from the Botafogo Ward in downtown Rio.

At the end of a guitar- and drum-filled service, ushers in white shirts, ties and dark pants (looking a lot like Mormon missionaries) pass out contribution cards and sell Christian music CDs.

Dozens of believers line up at the front of the air-conditioned auditorium to speak personally to Pastor Isaias, a youngish man wearing a well-cut navy pinstripe suit, pink shirt and black tie adorned with a gold key on a chain. As they wait for just 15 minutes, they see a baptism, a healing blessing and an exorcism of a distraught young woman kneeling, moaning softly and rolling her head, while Isaias' female assistant calls on the dark spirits to leave her body.

"I don't know much about Mormons," Isaias says through an interpreter. "I preach the son of God, Jesus Christ, who died to take the devil away from people."

Most of his members come from African Spiritism, not American groups like Latter-day Saints, he says. "Our people want divine healing. It's evidence of God."

**Holding onto the flock**: Though the LDS growth rate in Brazil is impressive by U.S. standards, "revolving door" baptisms continue to be a major problem for the church. According to several Brazilian leaders, the LDS activity rate here is between 25 percent and 35 percent. That means for every three or four converts, only one stays.

Silva, an elderly member of the Botafogo Ward, thinks the problem is simple: proximity to the white-groomed sands made famous by Antonia Carlos Jobim in "The Girl From Ipanema."

They are always seductive, he says. "It's one big temptation."

But that's too easy.

Some new members drop out because they don't have bus fare to get to church. Many can't read, including up to 40 percent of Brazilian returned missionaries, according to one church estimate.

Or they feel the church hasn't met their expectations of a job and a new life. The wards and branches sometimes are like dysfunctional families, with overwhelming social needs and too few capable male volunteers to staff the all-male administration. Men make up less than one quarter of the converts and only a small percentage stay active long enough to fill administrative positions.

And many of those who do serve as bishops, stake presidents and area authorities are unusually young, says Marcus Martins, who interviewed nearly 200 church members for his 1995 dissertation, The Oak Tree Revisited: Brazilian LDS Leaders' Insights on the Growth of the Church in Brazil.

The majority of these leaders are between 20 and 40, with little leadership training, Martins says. And they must work hard to connect with the members, many of whom are in a different social class.

Some may be lost to the sheer challenges of geography in a country that is nearly as big as the continental United States. Chapels are far apart and travel on public transportation is arduous.

It takes three days by boat and three days by bus for many northern Brazilians to travel about 1,500 miles to the temple in Campinas, an hour outside of Sao Paulo. With a few days of temple
rituals and six more days to get home, many people are forced to take their entire annual vacation to fulfill that obligation.

"Some walk the whole way," says Sadayosi Ichi, the temple president. "It is a big sacrifice."
And that's why some people hang in there, trying to make Mormon values and practices work.
Take food storage, the LDS teaching that members should have a backup of staples for any emergency. In Utah, the church encourages a two-year supply.
But what about poor favelas, where living conditions are spartan at best?
"Home storage is not about money or space, it's about faith," says Jeannie Mingorance, a Sao Paulo Relief Society president who has been featured on the Brazilian version of "Oprah."
Mingorance has an expansive alphabetical, color-coded storage unit that she's been working on for 30 years. Shelf after neatly organized shelf displays such items as heart of palm, rice, beans, chocolate mix, garlic, zip-lock bags, oil, spices, batteries, vitamins, candles, matches, a radio, china and first aid gear. Many items have to be preserved with garlic and dry ice.
"Every time you have rice or beans, take one spoonful and put it in a can," Mingorance tells the poorest women. "It is a joy when you can do it, spoon by spoon, not kilo by kilo."
This is the kind of trust that transforms Mormon converts into true believers.
Erika Gomes, a teen wearing a white T-shirt that reads, "Scooter Babe," strolls confidently to the podium in her tiny LDS branch in Bangu, about an hour's drive from Rio.
Her topic today is charity, she says to a nearly empty chapel.
"People who don't have food or housing, we need to help them," she says. "We need to have compassion for every son and daughter of God."
The mostly women and children in the congregation, who live in what would be extreme poverty in the United States, nod their heads in agreement.
The next speaker is Gomes' mother, Edna Gomes.
"If the prophet is asking us to go to a different country on a mission, do you have the courage to go?" she asks, gazing out at people who may never have been to downtown Rio, let alone another country.
New SLC rabbi ready for all ... 07/20/2003

Photo Caption: Rabbi Tracee Rosen with Valley Beth Shalom synagogue in Encino, Calif., is moving to Utah in August to become the senior rabbi at Kol Ami Congregation in Salt Lake City. Rosen teaches in the conservative tradition and feels it is a representation of who she is theologically. "Judaism is about affirming human dignity," Rosen says, seen below in a quiet moment.; Jump Page A8: Rabbi Tracee Rosen prides herself on building a welcoming sense with the parishioners at the synagogue and visiting newcomers at day schools. While she waits to assume her position in Salt Lake City, she will lead the synagogue in Encino, Calif., through the end of July. Rosen wears a four-cornered, hand-embroidered tallit, or prayer shawl, she decorated. The tallit's fringe, below, is a reminder to respect God's commandments.

New SLC rabbi ready for all

Yearning for something greater, Rabbi Tracee Rosen comes to the Kol Ami Congregation in Salt Lake City with a sense of 'empathy for the stranger'; Rabbi balances tradition with change

ENCINO, Calif. -- The first thing you notice about Rabbi Tracee Rosen is her cap. The round cloth bobby-pinned to the top of her head is black with gold-stitching, like her silky blouse and midcalf length skirt. The rabbi has a whole collection of these head coverings (known as kippot and usually worn by men), each designed to match a different outfit, the way some women coordinate shoes or purses.

Next you will see how much Rosen loves her car. It's red and it's a convertible.

But mostly, you will be drawn to the way she talks. "Look," she says into the phone to a breathless mother-of-the-bride in crisis. "If a couple doesn't want to elope sometime during the process, you're not doing it right." Rosen often starts her sentences with words like "look" and "listen" as if the kippot and the car and the fact that the love of her life is a woman were not enough to get your attention.

Other than that, she is the epitome of a rabbi who can whip up a sermon about sorrow on a moment's notice and dishes out advice like Dear Abby.

Questions are answered with stories, like the one about the man who said he would become Jewish if the rabbis could teach him the entire Torah while he stood on one leg. The first rabbi says, "Go away. You cannot be serious in your desire to be Jewish."

But Rabbi Hillel, renowned for his wisdom, takes the challenge. "Here is the sum of Judaism: What is hateful to you, don't do to others and all the rest is commentary. Now go and learn."
That, she says, is what she plans to do when she arrives next month as the new rabbi at Salt Lake City's Congregation Kol Ami.

Utah seems like the right step, she says, leaning over her schnitzel and Israeli salad at Sassi, a kosher eatery near the Ventura Highway.

It feels like the same kind of unexpected destiny that led her to drop a career in banking and go to rabbinical school in 1996.

"Look," Rosen says. "I was born and raised in Denver, which has a similar climate and geography to Utah. I loved the mountains."

You might say she's always been a bit of a nonconformist.

Though her parents were not strictly observant Jews, she chose to attend an Orthodox Jewish Day School from fourth to eighth grade. There she became proficient in the alphabet and grammar of Hebrew and conversant with Bible stories and Jewish culture.

When the classes were divided by sex in seventh grade, Rosen was incensed that the boys got to study Jewish scriptures and laws, while the girls were relegated to home economics.

"I didn't understand why there was any Jewish learning that was denied to women," Rosen recalls. "I definitely had a budding feminist sensibility."

So she decided to have a bat mitzvah, a coming-of-age ritual for Jewish girls that parallels the boys' more common bar mitzvah. She was the first girl from her school to do it.

At a public high school in Englewood, Rosen was involved in B'nai Brith Girls but also was drawn to journalism and computers. ("I was one of the first generation computer geeks," she says, laughing.)

After graduating from high school in 1978, she spent a year in Israel on a kibbutz, studying Jewish history and culture. She was there when Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat signed the Camp David Accords and grew to love the nation.

When she returned, she enrolled at Washington University in St. Louis, where about a third of the students are Jewish. She had a ready-made major in Jewish studies, so she added accounting and economics courses. Within five years, she also had a master's degree in business.

With her technology background and workaholic temperament, Rosen quickly climbed the corporate ladder at Bank One in Columbus, Ohio. Soon her social life mostly revolved around work.

"There was a great loneliness," she says. "I longed to belong to something greater."

Then, she says, came a gentle nudge from God.

A co-worker was taking a class in comparative religions and asked Rosen, the resident Jew, for help researching the topic of women rabbis. That coincided with her return to more active involvement at the synagogue, which was looking for an assistant to help manage its membership growth.

As she watched the parade of applicants, all young, male students, she found herself thinking, "I could read the Torah. I could do that chanting. I could say those prayers."

And, for the first time, she said aloud words she had scarcely dared to think: "I could be a rabbi."

The matchmaking committee: Kol Ami, which means "all my people," is Utah's principal Jewish community. It was created in 1972 by combining two smaller synagogues, Congregation B'nai Israel (Reform) and Congregation Montefiore (Conservative) and offers services in a mix
of Hebrew and English.
"We have to be all things to all Jews or at least lots of things to lots of Jews," says Beth Levine, a committee member.

Its rabbi is automatically a key player on many of Utah's interfaith councils, joining regularly with Catholic, Protestant, LDS, Buddhist and Muslim leaders. That person is routinely asked to give the official Jewish perspective on public issues.

Finding just the right rabbi, then, was important not only for Kol Ami but for Utah in general. It fell to an "assembly of tokens," as Levine jokingly put it, each member representing some segment of the community: old, young, long-timers and newcomers, interfaith partners, single parents, retirees, progressive and conservative Jews.

At first, members of Kol Ami's search committee were only seeking an assistant to Rabbi Frederick Wenger, whose administrative skills were stretched too thin. But when Wenger announced his retirement, the task became more urgent. The committee hosted focus groups, met weekly, talked on the phone often, e-mailed back and forth and came up with a plan.

"Soon the terms 'Conservative' and 'Reform' became less important," says Rick Rappaport, one of the co-chairs. "We didn't define ourselves that way."

Nor did they set out to hire a woman. They wanted someone who could help the congregation become more welcoming and open, especially to interfaith couples and transplants from other cities.

"We wanted someone who wanted us, who saw our reality and our potential," says Maeroa Shreiber, the other co-chairperson.

Levine helped make a recruitment video starring Mayor Rocky Anderson, who said Salt Lake City was more diverse than most people thought, that it had a world-class symphony that had had two Jewish conductors and that the city had a Jewish mayor and the state a Jewish governor before New York did. It also featured scenic mountain vistas and lively shots of children at play in the Jewish Community Centers.

Rosen had watched the video four times. She was ready for their questions.

How did you come to be a rabbi? they wanted to know. How would you lead a service in the opposite (Conservative/Reform) movement? How would you handle interfaith couples? What would you do to attract and retain members?

In her answers, Rosen drew on her three-year apprenticeship at Valley Beth Shalom in Encino. She realized that coming from one of the largest and most prestigious synagogues in the Conservative movement to a smaller, blended congregation will give her a chance to test her ideas on leadership.

She told them she had no intention of becoming a CEO or "parent" rabbi. She wanted the rabbi and the congregation to be partners, and she wanted to leave the front door open.

As Kol Ami's rabbi, Rosen would work to make everyone feel recognized and accepted -- including herself and her partner. "Empathy for the stranger is a very biblical thing," she told them.

At that point, any question of her sexual orientation became irrelevant to the committee, Levine says. The congregation was dazzled. She had led a service, coaxed a lethargic congregation into song, taught an adult education class and outlined a vision for Utah's Jewish community that mirrored their own.

"She's a class A rabbi, the Michael Jordan of rabbis," Levine says. "Salt Lake City was lucky to
get her."

The match was made.

On the road: Still, Rosen has her worries. In Utah, where she starts work in mid-August, domestic partners do not have joint property rights and unmarried couples who live together cannot adopt children -- and there are few kosher delis.

But, she says, no one should have to choose between religion and anything, "not politics, gender or sexuality."

Like most world religions, Judaism has been slow to open its leadership ranks to women. Orthodoxy prohibits it, but Reform and Reconstructionist Jews have allowed women to be rabbis since the 1970s. The Conservative movement ordained its first woman in 1985 and by now, women make up about 15 percent of its 1,200 rabbis.

The question of ordaining gays, however, is still open. Officially, the movement forbids it, but several rabbis have acknowledged their sexual orientation after ordination. It's a kind of don't ask, don't tell policy, Rosen says.

It was while studying to be a rabbi at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles that Rosen met Keren Goldberg at a Gay/Lesbian Outreach Synagogue. A year ago, they exchanged rings in a commitment ceremony.

Rosen wouldn't consider leaving either Goldberg or Conservative Judaism.

"Conservative, that's who I am theologically," she says. "My bent is towards traditional observance, and balancing tradition with change."

Now her bookshelves are packed ("I buy books like other people buy produce -- by the pound and by the bushel"). She has an embroidered prayer shawl that makes her feel wrapped in a hug from God. She's bought a house a few miles from Kol Ami.

And she's writing sermons in her head. "We are all still trying to hear God's voice."
Spirituality's OUTER LIMITS 

If they exist, are extraterrestrials good or evil?; UFOs: Harbingers of Good or Evil?

Joe Firmage's long-held, science-based skepticism shattered on a cold fall morning in 1997. One little alien encounter and the Silicon Valley wunderkind became a believer. Firmage had just hit the snooze button on his alarm, he said, when he saw a shimmering being, clothed in brilliant white light, hovering over his bed. It seemed that an electric blue sphere, just smaller than a basketball, left its body, floated down and entered Firmage, he wrote in The Truth, a 600-page treatise about his experience that he posted online.

Suddenly, the idea of angels and aliens didn't seem so unbelievable to a guy who had made millions building an Internet company and had long ago rejected the Mormonism of his youth -- and, indeed, all religious faith.

Now, seemingly miraculous events could be linked and eventually explained, Firmage came to believe. He discovered a new kind of spirituality, an awakening to God and the universe.

"Supernatural is a phrase that I don't like to use," said Firmage, who was visiting relatives in Utah last week. "Everything is natural. It is just a question of human understanding."

But UFOs pose a problem for some Christians, who cannot reject the seemingly inexplicable. After all, their faith is based on believing in the unbelievable -- such as a resurrected Christ.

So they must grapple with distinctions. What makes walking on water true and a spin in a spaceship a figment of the imagination?

They are both real, say Hugh Ross, Kenneth Samples and Mark Clark, authors of a new book, Lights in the Sky and Little Green Men: A Rational Christian Look at UFOs and Extraterrestrials.

But, the authors say, UFOs are demonic.

Earth is not being visited by aliens from another planet, Ross writes in the book's concluding chapter. Those extraterrestrials are fallen angels disguised as beings from outer space.

Even if the experience is positive and uplifting, it can still be counterfeit spirituality, he says. "The apostle Paul warned his friends that a messenger of darkness often 'masquerades as an angel of light.' Such beings can perform convincing and deceptive 'miracles, signs and wonders.'"

These aliens also can be distinguished from angels by where they hang out and what they do, he says.

"Only one kind of being favors the dead of night and lonely roads. Only one is real but
nonphysical, animate, powerful, deceptive, ubiquitous throughout human history, culture and geography, and bent on wreaking psychological and physical harm," Ross writes. "Demons."

**UFO History:** The flying-saucer age began in 1947, when businessman and pilot Kenneth Arnold, flying his plane near Washington's Mount Rainier, reported seeing nine bright objects traveling at incredible speeds. He described them as "boomerang-like and disc-shaped," moving "like a saucer would if you skipped it across the water," writes Kenneth Samples in Lights in the Sky.

By the 1950s and into the 1960s, UFO sightings became more common.

The U.S. Air Force investigated such reports until about 1970. In a concluding report, military officials wrote that "nothing has come from the study of UFOs in the past 21 years that has added to scientific knowledge."

Though up to half of all Americans today say they believe in alien encounters, more than 90 percent, perhaps as many as 95 percent, of UFO sightings can be explained as naturalistic or bogus, writes Samples.

They can be misidentified natural or human-made phenomena, false images produced by various kinds of scientific instruments, faulty human perception or straight-out hoaxes, pranks or frauds. A surprising number are simply the result of subjective assessments.

That still leaves a significant number of what are called "residual UFOs," or reported sightings that remain unexplained.

These RUFOs follow certain patterns, writes Ross.

They tend to make repeat visits to certain witnesses and sites, he concludes. They arouse disturbing emotions. They appear to be alive. They often cause bodily and psychological harm. They deceive their human contacts.

"RUFOs try mightily to portray themselves as advanced humanoids from a distant planet traveling to Earth in metallic crafts," Ross writes. "The messages forthcoming from close encounters of the fourth kind launch a two-pronged attack -- one against naturalism, the other against orthodox Christianity."

This is not the way God would do it, he writes.

"God never performs a miracle to dazzle, fascinate, or impress anyone," Ross writes. "The miracles are designed to engender humility, to turn people away from exalting anything or anyone above God."

**Different Eyes:** Not all Christians see a conflict between their own scriptures and otherworldly visitors.

They speculate that Moses on Mount Sinai, the parting of the Red Sea and the Apostle Paul's blinding vision on the road to Damascus were UFO encounters.

A natural phenomenon could not have stopped and pointed out where the baby Jesus was, writes Brian Boldman in "Extraterrestrial Links to Christianity," an essay posted on Web site The Devil's Advocate.

"What if the star was an alien ship?" Boldman writes. He proposes that some of the Virgin Mary apparitions might have been orchestrated by aliens.

"Beginning in 1915, and culminating with the miracle of the sun on October 13, 1917, in Fatima, Portugal, several children had ongoing visions on a monthly basis," Boldman writes.
"Witnesses reported balls of light, buzzing sounds, clouds with rainbow colors, even skyquakes and underground explosions."

He notes with interest that "the Vatican maintains one of the largest private telescopes in the world." The Vatican also is rumored to have a UFO research division at the Vatican University's Alfonsi S Academy, he says.

Rather than attacking Christianity, Firmage's experience led him to re-embrace religious faith, including belief in the miracle of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection.

"The greatest truth I have learned in my life is that you [Jesus Christ] exist," Firmage wrote in The Truth.

He swears he has not seen the malevolent side of extraterrestrials.

"The empirical evidence suggests to me that these visitors are at worst neutral to humanity and at best, extremely important to our past and to our future," he says.

Firmage believes that such aliens are beings with superior knowledge who have been visiting Earth for centuries, offering insights and planting knowledge that has led to great technological advancements. He refers to them as "teachers."

"It has never been alleged that these objects are responsible for killings," Firmage says. "Many of the sightings point to the disabling of human weapons, including switching off the launch capabilities of nuclear silos."

That isn't the work of demons, he says.

"Jesus speaks of himself and all of us as children of God, if you will, made of the same light-like force," Firmage says. "Perhaps these beings are trying to acclimate and slowly introduce human beings into a staggering, beautiful cosmic future."

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In the Name of God

Mormons' belief in personal revelation can lead some to divine illusions; Revelation: Is It Divine Inspiration or Delusion?

Some Mormons expect God to provide a personal road map of dos and don'ts. (Marry Sam and take that job in Omaha. Don't buy stock in Microsoft.)

Or they want a straightforward answer to life's provocative mysteries. (The Messiah will arrive on April 6, 2010.)

After all, they believe, God gave 14-year-old Joseph Smith a one-on-one in a grove of trees when the Mormon founder simply asked which church to join. So why not them?

In the Mormon lexicon of belief, everyone is entitled to such personally crafted messages from heaven. And that can be an invitation to chaos born of individuality.

"The blessing of this church is personal revelation," says Robert Millet, a religion professor at Brigham Young University. "And the burden of this church is personal revelation."

Being open to divine communication can enhance a person's spirituality, Millet says, but it also make people vulnerable to all kinds of supernatural influences. Or plain lunacy, if not depraved and criminal behavior.

The dark side of Mormon revelation may be at work in Brian Mitchell's actions. He claimed a quasi-divinity in a religious manifesto dated April 6, 2002, which also guaranteed his wife "seven sisters" -- code for wives. He now is charged with kidnapping Elizabeth Smart at knife point.

The Lafferty brothers, who killed their sister-in-law and her baby in Utah County, have even justified murder as being God's mandate.

While no Mormon would countenance violence, in a troubled mind such reasoning for aberrant behavior is not so far removed from how the church defended plural marriage, which was anathema to 19th century American sensibilities. Early LDS leaders argued that God's law is sometimes higher than human laws.

In 1890, the church discontinued the practice in order for Utah to gain statehood. But the principle remains in the LDS canon of scripture, and there are those on the church's fringe who believe it must be restored before the second coming of Christ.

People "in the midst of delusions" can tell themselves that Lehi, a Book of Mormon prophet, would have been considered a dangerous outlaw in his day, says Sterling Allan of Ephraim, once a leader in Utah's "patriot" movement, which preached the decline of America, the evils of
communism and the coming Armageddon.

"Lehi left great wealth and prominence in the community behind, endangering his family in the wilderness; and then another family; his sons stole some highly valuable records and killed a man," Allan wrote in an online essay this week. "Nothing is too outlandish to perform in the name of being faithful to God."

Reading some biblical and Mormon prophecies about the last days before the end of the world, these people begin to think the LDS church itself is out of order.

Mitchell's 27-page manifesto outlined what he saw as the LDS Church's apostasy: it relinquished its communitarian ethos, gave up polygamy, wasn't serious enough about eating only fruits and vegetables as suggested in the Word of Wisdom, and was too enamored of world approval following the death of church president Ezra Taft Benson in 1994.

Many people, inside and out of the church, share at least some of these concerns.

Like their fundamentalist Christian counterparts, these LDS believers pore over certain biblical passages in Isaiah, Revelation and Daniel, trying to decode enigmatic messages from the past about the return of the Messiah and the end of the world.

Many in these groups conclude that the world is in the midst of global and national upheaval, the U.S. Constitution is no longer respected, the U.N. is an effort at global domination and socialism, that the United States will soon come under martial law and that the biblical "mark of the beast" (Revelations 13:13) is evident in such things as retail bar codes. Oh, and that UFOs are real.

Many have written letters about these things to the LDS First Presidency, although many believe that President Gordon B. Hinckley is no longer functioning as a "prophet, seer and revelator."

They look forward to the "One Mighty and Strong," described in the LDS Doctrine and Covenants, who will emerge as a powerful religious leader destined to set the church's house in order.

"I know hundreds of people in Utah," Allan says, "who all think they are the One Mighty and Strong."

Too Close for Comfort: Allan can see himself in Mitchell's mirror and it has shaken him up.

"As I reflect on Mitchell's religious and political paradigm and compare it to my own, the resemblances are close enough to cause me to shudder," Allan wrote this week in an online mea culpa entitled: "Meditations of a disgruntled former one and only One Mighty and Strong."

For starters, the two were drawn to the same authors.

Among them are: Avraham Gileadi's studies of Isaiah and Samuel West's The Golden Seven Plus One, which describes "the role of the lymphatic system for draining out poisons and keeping the body healthy," Betty Eadie's experience in the afterlife, Embraced by the Light, and Rick Joyner's The Final Quest, an allegorical battle between good and evil in the end times.

Neither Joyner nor Gileadi has ever had any connection with these groups, both said this week. West did have a relationship with Mitchell, but they parted company after the latter became antagonistic towards the LDS Church.

The tone and themes of Mitchell's manifesto reflected the discussions of the American Study Group, which Allan helped organize in the early 1990s, but which later dissolved under pressure from the LDS Church.
Once a person has cut been cut loose from church strictures, the leap from fanaticism to out-of-control behavior in the name of God is not that far, says Allan.

People like Mitchell begin to feel persecuted for being so different from others in the church and that drives them to extreme behavior, he says, and that makes them believe they are martyrs in an unpopular, counter-cultural cause.

Allan knows how that feels.

He was excommunicated in 1992 after he tried to warn the church of its apostasy during the faith's semi-annual General Conference. A few years ago, he nearly ran off with a 14-year-old.

Since then, Allan credits his wife and two children with keeping him home and grounded.

But the Mormon answer to avoiding fanaticism -- just follow the prophet -- is too easy, he says. "It creates a spiritually lethargic people, who can't think for themselves."

Some people yearn for the intensity of regular spiritual experiences they find described in the journals of 19th century Mormons.

In 1995, 75 Mormons and former Mormons took out a full-page ad in The Salt Lake Tribune, saying that Christ's second coming was at hand. The group claimed to have regular angelic visits and divine insight. A couple of them produced a book called Sacred Scripture, which purports to be a diary of the biblical Abraham.

Since then, Sacred Scripture has sold between 12,000 and 14,000 copies, says Mike Rigby, president of M.A.P., the Orem publishing house that produced the book.

These days, Rigby's spiritual experiences are less frequent.

"You go through an important period of time when you need them to give you direction and teach you what God is really like," Rigby says. Slowly, understanding of God is enlarged, healing becomes natural and godliness is obvious.

"If I was to take all these experiences and boil them down, it's about learning to love unconditionally," Rigby says. "Any other thought is coming from a bad source -- or from your own mind."

View From Inside the Church: In the early 1990s, those who claimed to be receiving these kinds of divine revelations were excommunicated from the LDS Church, but lately some have found a way to stay within church ranks.

"They are realizing they don't have to be out of the church to expand their spirituality," Rigby says. "And the church has backed off a little."

For its part, the church has always provided institutional "checks and balances" on how to tell the difference between real and counterfeit divine communication, Millet says.

He offers some guidelines:
* Only the prophet receives revelations for the church.
* People are entitled to revelations only for themselves, their family and those for whom they are responsible.
* No revelation will require force or manipulation to implement.
* Personal revelations are meant to be kept private, not used for individual aggrandizement.
* A revelation will not violate the law of the land or contradict the present principles or practice of the church.

"God is not going to work against himself," Millet says.

People should beware of those who introduce their so-called revelation with phrases like, "I
have a feeling that" or "I feel impressed that you should."

Such phrases may sound authentic to Latter-day Saints, Millet says. "But that's because Satan speaks fluent Mormonese."
Priest in the Making

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Photo Credit: 

Photo Caption: Sam Dinsdale, serving as deacon for an 8:30 a.m. Mass at St. Patrick's Catholic Seminary in Menlo Park, Calif., stands in a beam of light in the sacristy as priests prepare for the service in the 100-year-old Mass Chapel. Dinsdale, an Ogden native, says he feels blessed because of the seminary's supportive environment. In the Mass Chapel at St. Patrick's, priests take their seats in the high-backed oak chairs on the right side; students and visitors on the left. Priests are in high demand: Last year, there were nearly 3,000 U.S. parishes without a resident priest.; The Rev. John Talesfore instructs Sam Dinsdale, left.; Jump Page C3: Seminarians walk through the courtyard on 41 acres of the St. Patrick's Seminary located a few miles from Stanford University.; While on an internship with the forest service in Colorado, Dinsdale had a flash of insight: God was calling him to the priesthood.; Sam Dinsdale starts out on his morning run as the sun rises on the St. Patrick's Seminary. There are about 100 students enrolled at the seminary.

Priest in the Making

Roman Catholic seminarian poised for the pulpit; Seminarian Poised for the Pulpit

MENLO PARK, Calif. -- Sam Dinsdale stands before the class, arms raised, tilted upward at the elbow. His head is down scanning pages of scripture. He reads the words: "Lift up your hearts."

No, no, no.

Off to the side, the Rev. John Talesfore calls out tips like a Roman Catholic version of the off-screen director in "Chorus Line."


(Nervous laughter from the class.)

Dinsdale continues. "...together with George, oops, I mean, John Paul, our pope."

(More snickers.)

He picks up the goblet and wafer and carefully speaks the remaining passages, then takes his seat among his dark-clothed peers who sit in anxious silence.

Classmate (apologetically): "He's very sincere."

But His Finickiness, whose formal title is director of liturgy for the San Francisco Archdiocese, is just getting warmed up. The Mass, he stresses, is Catholicism's most important ritual.
Talesfore (with a flourish): "Eye contact is essential. Who are you speaking to, God or the people? And don't stress prepositions. It's drink from it, not drink from it."

Class ends. Talesfore reminds the students he will be videotaping their performance of the Mass. Don't forget, he says, to practice in your rooms at night. Intone the Mass as if it's your first time, your last time, your only time. Monotony will put the people to sleep.

Next week: Chanting.

Religious theater: This is the script at St. Patrick's Seminary, where men -- young and old, gay and straight, never-married, divorced and widowed, teachers, truck drivers and dishwashers -- are molded into stand-ins for Jesus Christ.

Dinsdale is in his fourth year here, one of 12 seminarians from the Salt Lake Diocese but the only one who will graduate in May. When he does, he will be in immediate demand. Last year, there were almost 3,000 U.S. parishes without a resident priest. There are about 100 students enrolled at the seminary and half of them are from far away places such as Mexico, Vietnam and the Philippines.

The Ogden native's years at St. Patrick's, the secluded 100-year-old seminary located a few miles from Stanford University, have been quiet and contemplative. He has had lots of time to read Dostoevsky and Kafka, hone his sermon-writing skills, establish what he hopes will be bedrock moral reasoning, develop close friendships, and plumb the riches of ceremony, service and solitude.

The 28-year-old seminarian needs no reminders of the sex abuse scandal that has rocked the American Catholic Church in previous years. There is no escaping it. After all, this is a seminary not a monastery. There are televisions and newspapers and free-flowing discussions on and off the campus. In addition, two priests on St. Patrick's faculty have left following abuse allegations during Dinsdale's years there. Nationally, more than 1,200 priests stand accused of sexual misconduct.

Dinsdale and his classmates have attended endless lectures about coming to terms with their sexuality and the importance of boundaries. They have had workshops with abuse victims and experts. They have read books and watched videotapes. They have discussed the problem over dinner and drinks and during Monday night socials.

Individually, as a pre-emptive strike against abuse, each would-be priest is grilled again and again on his motives, psychological health and sexual needs. They meet with bishops and therapists and spiritual counselors on a regular basis. Even before they arrive, every candidate is evaluated by the diocese which supports him. They are given the Minnesota Multi-Phasic Personality Inventory test and an AIDS test.

Dinsdale has heard the claims that the majority of priests are homosexuals and that the so-called "gay subculture" in Catholic seminaries is causing serious rifts. He's not buying it.

"If you ask others, they might say yes, but I haven't seen it," he says. "People come here gay and straight. If people are homophobic, they're going to be put off a lot. Generally, though, it's not a problem."

Sexuality is no longer a taboo subject, but rather an essential part of spiritual maturity.
"Sexuality is how you see yourself. It's what connects you with God," he says.

Whatever their orientation, the students must vow to live a celibate life.
"We've all been called to a life of holiness," he says. "If we can't, we are forced to leave."
And for a variety of reasons, only half of the students who entered seminary with Dinsdale are still in the program.

In the church’s embrace: Sam Dinsdale grew up in "a Catholic bubble," as he puts it. His father Luke Dinsdale, a lapsed Mormon, sold S&H Green Stamps at truck stops and grocery stores, which meant he travelled a lot. Georgia Dinsdale worked at USWest and entrusted her young son to the care of nuns and priests and teachers and friends in Ogden's Catholic schools. They burnished him into a smoothly devoted son of the church. Everything he knew was Catholic.

His only rebellion was occasionally wearing khaki pants rather than the required navy blue.

At 11, Dinsdale became an altar boy at Holy Family Parish where he learned to love the liturgy and the priests who, like the Rev. Lawrence Sweeney, administered it. He began to imagine himself in that role. Not so much that he practiced giving the host to family pets, mind you. Just a small, still voice beckoning him in that direction.

After graduating from St. Joseph's Catholic High School in 1992, Dinsdale studied forestry and philosophy at Utah State University. He dated a bit, not serious enough to consider another kind of altar, he says.

One night after his sophomore year, while on a summer internship with the forest service in Vail, Colo., Dinsdale had an epiphany.

"That night I felt joy, expectation, fear, and the need to tell someone I knew about the experience," he says.

He immediately drove all night back to Ogden to share the news with Sweeney: God was calling him.

It was life changing, but also, says Dinsdale: "It was naive abandon." He knew nothing of the arduous journey that awaited him.

Soon, he was meeting monthly with the Rev. Gerry Lynch, vocational director for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Salt Lake City. Unlike earlier generations of Catholics, who had willingly given at least one son per family to the priesthood, his parents were not thrilled at the prospect. Back then, families were larger and priests were an honored class. But Dinsdale was an only child. Eventually, his parents warmed to the idea once they realized how committed he was to it. His father even converted to Catholicism.

Dinsdale finished his liberal arts degree at USU in the spring of 1997. By the fall, he was navigating his white Nissan Altima down the tree-lined drive toward St. Patrick's, gulping down meals prepared by Mexican nuns who cook and pray for the priests, and taking early morning runs past the vacant tennis courts where young priests once got their exercise.

Decades ago, many seminarians came straight out of high school. Now, most students are in their mid-30s to mid-70s making Dinsdale, at 22, one of the youngest freshmen entering the school.

Once on the campus, Dinsdale immersed himself in classes on biblical theology, ancient, medieval and modern Catholic history, pastoral counseling and social ethics. He was tested on the proper sequence of a Christian funeral, when to allow for a "substantial period of prayerful silence" and when not to say "alleluiah." Latin is no longer required, but a second language is. Dinsdale chose Spanish.

For a master's of divinity degree and a bachelor's in sacred theology, he must maintain a 3.00
grade-point average and intern at least one year in a Catholic parish.

From 2000 to 2001, Dinsdale taught religion to sixth- and seventh-graders at St. Francis Xavier in Kearns and helped prepare adults for baptism. He spent that summer consoling patients at St. Mark's Hospital in Salt Lake City. Then there were the summer stints ministering to parishes in Richfield and Cedar City and polishing his Spanish in Mexico.

His favorite seminary classes have been in philosophy. "People always ask you the big questions, existential questions," he says.

Then there's the chemistry among seminarians who eat, party and vacation together. When Dinsdale's parents announced they were divorcing during his second year, his friends circled around him like an extended family.

"It was a blessing to be at seminary with such a supportive community," he says. "We've been able to forge an intimate bond as brothers. There are few places where men enter into [such] deep relationships by working, living and praying together."

**Behind the altar:** It's 8:30 Mass and it's Dinsdale's turn to serve as deacon. He enters the sacristy behind the altar to get dressed. He pulls the alb, a simple white robe, over his gray jacket and slacks. Then comes the chasuble, a purple deacon's stole. He grabs a safety pin to affix it to his shoulder. The first time he wore one, it fell off and got in his way. Now he knows better.

Dinsdale has always been a stylish dresser -- he once worked at The Gap -- yet there is a certain awkwardness about him that is emphasized by street clothes. With each robe, with each sash, Dinsdale stands a little taller and a gracefulness comes over his body.

Soon the sacristy is filled with full-fledged priests, taking down robes from the oak-panelled closets. Quietly they dress, then take their seats in the high-backed oak chairs on the right side of the Mass Chapel. Students and visitors on the left.

The Rev. Fred Cwiekowski, who will be conducting the Mass, clamped a portable microphone to his pocket to magnify the service for three hearing-impaired students. Dinsdale puts a crib sheet in his pocket, in case he forgets any of the steps in the service.

Then priest and deacon enter the sanctuary, genuflect before the image of Christ, kiss the altar and begin the service beneath the oval wood ceiling. Each song, Bible reading, sermon and prayer is punctuated with silence. No fidgeting, coughing or shifting.

"We long for you O Lord... We cannot rest O Lord... We hunger for you Lord... You live in us O Lord."

It's a solemn sound, without sopranos, altos or harmony. Just a divine yearning in melodic unison.

The next day, Dinsdale is in robes again, this time 30 miles away in San Francisco at the Holy Name of Jesus Parish. It is a huge church with a largely Asian congregation. Dinsdale has been coming here throughout the year to help the priest as part of his pastoral practice. It is his turn to give the homily and he has chosen to speak about his Colorado epiphany. His carefully typed sermon is rolled up in his fingers.

The student is gone and an almost-formed priest stands in his place.

Any jitters?

"Oh no," he says, casually clasping his hands. "I can do anything in front of people. It's only my peers who make me nervous."

By the end of next month, that confidence will be put to the test. Dinsdale will be leaving the
emotional protection of seminary life for Salt Lake City.

Editors note: This is the first in a series exploring Sam Dinsdale's journey to the Catholic priesthood. Upcoming stories will chronicle his May ordination and first few months in a parish.