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## Romney's Run Has Mormons Wary of Scrutiny

By [LAURIE GOODSTEIN](#)

LOGAN, Utah — In this wide valley where the twin spires of the Mormon temple dominate the landscape and some neighborhoods have a Mormon chapel every few blocks, [Mitt Romney](#)'s bid for president is both a proud sign of progress and a cause of trepidation.

Many Mormons here are rooting for Mr. Romney, a fellow church member whose success in business, Adonis looks and wholesome family tableau seem to them to present the ideal face of Mormonism to the world. Among the Republican front-runners, Mr. Romney, former governor of Massachusetts, recently was the leader in campaign fund-raising; his candidacy is, for many Mormons, a historic moment of arrival.

“He represents the best of what the church can produce,” said Kenneth W. Godfrey, 73, a historian of Mormonism and of this valley about 80 miles north of church headquarters in Salt Lake City.

But even for the many Mormons who support Mr. Romney, the moment is fraught with anxiety because his candidacy is bringing intense scrutiny to their church, and could exacerbate longstanding bigotry.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, as the Mormon Church is called, has been fighting for legitimacy since its founding 177 years ago in upstate New York. The church's first prophet, Joseph Smith Jr., was killed by a mob in Illinois and his followers fled from persecution and settled in Utah.

While Mormons are by now successfully integrated and prospering in the American mix, memories of that persecution are still fresh. Many current members can trace their great-great-grandparents to the church's earliest pioneers, and children grow up reading their ancestors' original diaries. Many Mormons fear that Mr. Romney's campaign may reopen old wounds.

“I thought we might get mud thrown at us,” said Lula DeValve, 82, a retired teacher and a Democrat who volunteers with the [League of Women Voters](#).

John Hatch, 30, a history student at the [University of Utah](#) in Salt Lake City, said, “What most Mormons desire is acceptance.”

“We see ourselves as normal,” Mr. Hatch said. “We struggle with those outsiders who see us as weird — the magic underwear stuff,” a reference to the ritual garments that Mormons are supposed to wear under their clothing.

At the core of these tensions is that Mormons consider themselves to be Christians who believe in Jesus Christ and the Bible, but many of their tenets and practices have been denounced by other churches as heretical.

Some Mormons have watched with concern how Mr. Romney has responded to grilling by interviewers

about his church's distinctive doctrines.

Mr. Romney has been questioned about the Mormon definition of God, [polygamy](#), the location of Jesus's arrival when he returns to earth, and even a mysterious saying attributed to Joseph Smith Jr. called the "White Horse Prophecy," which some interpret as a prediction that when the American Constitution is hanging "by a thread," a Mormon will rescue the nation.

Mr. Romney's tendency to gloss over Mormonism's history and distinctive tenets has upset some fellow Mormons. Some said they cringed when Mr. Romney said on "60 Minutes," "I can't imagine anything more awful than polygamy."

Tom Grover, 26, a Mormon who is the host of a weekday talk show on politics on radio station KVNU here, said that while he thinks Mr. Romney has handled the scrutiny admirably, some of his callers were incensed about Mr. Romney's repudiation of his own ancestors' polygamy. The church outlawed the practice a century ago, but members are taught to understand that polygamy had a theological and historical context in the church, which Mr. Romney's remark ignored.

"That really left a bad taste in people's mouths," Mr. Grover said. "That's a tough thing for people to hear when their ancestors sacrificed a lot to live that life. They probably wouldn't bring polygamy back, but they honor the place of it in church history."

Audrey M. Godfrey, a historian who has written books with her husband, Kenneth, said of Mr. Romney, "If I were one of his relatives, I would be upset with him."

Another case arose when [George Stephanopoulos](#) of ABC News asked Mr. Romney about a Mormon teaching that Jesus will come to the United States when he returns to reign on earth. Mr. Romney responded that the Messiah will return to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, "the same as the other Christian tradition."

Mr. Grover said some of his radio listeners were astounded.

"They were just in disbelief, saying that's not true, Jesus is coming back to Missouri," Mr. Grover said. "It's the L.D.S. Church's 10th article of faith that Zion will be built upon the American continent."

While Mormons tend to be conservative on social issues, Mr. Romney has taken some positions that are more conservative than those of his own church.

Mormon teaching allows [abortion](#) in cases of rape, incest and severe fetal defects, and to protect the health of the mother. The church has no position on embryonic stem cell research. Mr. Romney has in the last few years shifted to embrace an anti-abortion, anti-stem cell research, anti-gay agenda.

Some politically liberal Mormons said in interviews that they were dismayed that he appeared to be both pandering to the right and compromising his integrity.

John Dehlin, 37, who produces the podcast [Mormonstories.org](#) here, said, "I don't see him as any worse than any other politician out there, but I wanted my guy, who represents my church, to be different."

"I had the hope that Romney would be steadfast, be up front and have integrity and consistency, but I've

been disillusioned,” Mr. Dehlin said. “It makes me a lot less proud than I otherwise would have been.”

Such critical views, however, were overshadowed in interviews here and in Salt Lake City by enthusiasm for Mr. Romney. The only other candidate who seemed to generate such interest here was Senator [Barack Obama](#), Democrat of Illinois, who drew praise for his integrity and fresh approach.

In a poll of Mormons in Utah taken in February by Dan E. Jones, a Utah pollster, 62 percent said they would vote for Mr. Romney. Mormons make up about two-thirds of voters in Utah, and 59 percent of them are [Republicans](#).

The church itself has been careful to avoid doing anything that could be interpreted as an endorsement of Mr. Romney. In contrast to some denominations where political endorsements are a staple of sermons, the Mormon Church avoids preaching politics from the pulpit, and routinely reminds local leaders of this before elections.

“No one knows whether having a Mormon president would be good or bad for the church,” said Michael Otterson, the church’s media relations director. “On the plus side, we would become better known and possibly better understood. On the negative side, some people could confuse both domestic and foreign policy positions as having something to do with the church” — clearly a risk for an international church with 13 million members, more than 7 million outside the United States.

Richard Lyman Bushman, a Mormon scholar and emeritus professor of history at [Columbia University](#), said that while “the dominant portion of the church will support” Mr. Romney, he was hearing concerns from some fellow Mormons about the potential effect of a Mormon president.

“He’s not going to be able to please people all the time, and if he’s maligned in the press, his Mormonism will be brought up over and over,” Mr. Bushman said. “I’ve heard Mormons say, ‘I just wish he’d forget it, and go back to making money with Bain,’ ” the investment firm Bain Capital where Mr. Romney made his fortune.

Many Mormons said in interviews that they like Mr. Romney not because he is a member of their church, but because he proved his managerial abilities by rescuing the Olympics in Salt Lake City in 2002.

Gary and Sheryl Anderson here said they gave the maximum \$2,300 donation to Mr. Romney’s campaign. Mr. Anderson, a lawyer, said: “I think he has a particular talent for getting good solid data and effectively being able to turn things around. The country needs some of that.”

Mr. Romney is not the first Mormon to run for president; he is following in the footsteps of his father, George W. Romney.

Back in 1844, Mr. Smith, the church’s founder, announced he was running for president but he was killed later that year. Representative Morris K. Udall of Arizona, born a Mormon but inactive in the church, was defeated by [Jimmy Carter](#) at the 1976 Democratic National Convention. In 2000, Senator [Orrin G. Hatch](#) of Utah withdrew from the Republican race, saying bias against Mormons contributed in part to his lack of success.

Now, many Mormons hope that the Romney candidacy will re-introduce Americans to a church that has been maligned and misunderstood.

Many said that they had been asked why they were not dressed in black, and had to explain that being Mormon is not the same as being Amish.

Vicki Blanch, a vivacious 58-year-old grandmother who lives here, said she was pained when she overheard a man at her gym saying one morning in May that he hated "Mormon culture."

"I think Mitt will open a lot of eyes to see that the church is really not a Satanic cult," Mrs. Blanch said.

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