Interpretation and Adherence to the Prescriptive Elements of the Word of Wisdom among Latter-day Saints

Rick B. Jorgensen, Brigham Young University
Ray M. Merrill

Abstract
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (also called Mormon) has a health code generally referred to as the "Word of Wisdom". Written in 1833, this code includes various dietary and other recommendations, including abstention from using tobacco and drinking alcohol, coffee, and tea. Although some of these dietary behaviors tend to be strictly followed by Church members, others are not. The purpose of this paper is to identify how a homogeneous group of young church members interpret and adhere to the proscriptive and prescriptive directives of the Word of Wisdom.

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Latter Day Saints teach that the Latter Day Saint movement began with a revelation from God. They also teach that revelation is the foundation of the church established by Jesus Christ and that it remains an essential element of his true church today. Continuous revelation provides individual Latter Day Saints with a "testimony," described by Richard Bushman as "one of the most potent words in the Mormon lexicon."[1]. In response to an inquiry on the beliefs of the church, Joseph Smith wrote what came to be called the Wentworth Letter, the last section of which was canonize No Latter-day Saint, no member of the Church can afford it, for it is humiliating to him, it is disgraceful in him to do it, and God will judge him according to his works. We should observe the Word of Wisdom that has been given to us.... The drunkard becomes a slave to his drink; others become slaves to the use of tea, coffee and tobacco, and therefore they consider them necessary to their happiness; but they are not really necessary to their happiness nor to their health.