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- Scholars whose work merits publication in a venue committed to both revealed and discovered truth
- Students who gain experiential learning while making vital contributions
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Figure 1. Detail of map of New Castle County, Delaware. The circle indicates where Centreville is located within the Christiana Hundred. Public domain, courtesy Library of Congress.
Being Latter-day Saints (1841–1857)
Four Matriarchs in the Centreville, Delaware, Branch

*Marie Cornwall*

After Joseph Smith established The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, he began sending missionaries to the eastern states. It did not take long before small branches began popping up in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, and Delaware. While many of the new converts joined with the main body of the Saints, first in Missouri and later in Nauvoo, others remained in their communities. With few exceptions, much of the history of the Latter-day Saints focuses on the migrations to Nauvoo and settlements in Utah.¹ Available histories offer few details about community life among Latter-day Saints who remained where they converted. This article is a case study of the Centreville, Delaware, branch and the women who maintained the continuity of the branch from its establishment in 1841 until 1857 when a large contingent of the branch finally headed west. Who were these converts and what might we learn about the early Church by focusing outside an organizational history and away from the work of missionaries and local male leaders?

This case study is possible because of a unique set of primary historical records: (1) branch records that detail membership, baptismal dates, and departures for Nauvoo; (2) the journal of Samuel A. Woolley, a missionary on his way home from a proselyting mission in Calcutta, India,

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who arrived the end of February 1855 and remained through December, keeping a detailed record of branch activities; (3) family histories and genealogies posted on FamilySearch.org and other genealogical sites; (4) census, emigration, and pioneer databases; and (5) civil birth, marriage, and death records.

First, a brief lesson in the geography of the Centreville area and a history of missionary work will set the stage for further analysis. Second, a description of four matriarchs and their families, which consisted mostly of daughters, explores the relationships that existed among the branch members. The four matriarchs were among the first converts in the area, and their stories make clear how important they were to the success of the branch. The women described herein left no accounts of their lives. But recovering their history tells us much about the small communities that emerged in the early years of the Latter-day Saint experience.

**Centreville, Delaware**

Centreville was located along the Kennett Pike in Christiana Hundred of New Castle County, Delaware (fig. 1), and remains an unincorporated subdivision of New Castle County today. A twelve-mile arc separates New Castle County, Delaware, to the southeast from Chester County, Pennsylvania, to the northwest. Centreville lies just a mile from that boundary on the Delaware side. By 1850, Centreville had become the regional center for the cattle trade and the transport of agricultural goods from the farms of Pennsylvania to Wilmington, Delaware. Farming dominated Christiana Hundred, but there was also work in the flour and cotton mills that came to populate the Brandywine Creek. Irenee du Pont bought land near the Brandywine in 1802 and established what became the Eleutherian Mill, which soon became the largest gunpowder producer in the country.

Missionaries reported great success in the area beginning in the late 1830s and early 1840s. In a September 1839 letter, Elder Lorenzo Barnes, then a twenty-nine-year-old member of the First Quorum of Seventy, wrote of great interest in the gospel in Chester County, Pennsylvania,

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which was just a few miles from Centreville. He reported thirty new members and “many more . . . believing, whom I trust will obey the gospel soon.” Ten months later (July 1840), the new members numbered 107.4 In October, Erastus Snow wrote, “In Philadelphia and the country around, . . . the cause is onward with rapid strides: many sound, intelligent, influential, and wealthy men have embraced the gospel in that country. . . . All eastern Pennsylvania is literally crying out ‘come and help us,’ ‘send us preachers’ . . . and on the other side of the Delaware [River] it is the same.”5 By then, Elder E. Malin, a representative at an October conference of elders, reported 135 members in Chester County and the establishment of the Brandywine Branch no more than fifteen miles from Centreville.6 Outsiders began referring to the area as Mormon Hollow.7

By 1841, the gospel message had spread across the border into Christiana Hundred, and the Centreville Branch was created with William A. Moore as the presiding elder. Twenty-three-year-old Erastus Snow, who would become a member of the Quorum of the Twelve by the end of the decade, recorded accompanying Moore to Centreville in April where Moore had baptized nine persons. Soon four additional new members were baptized.8 By July 6, Moore reported at the Philadelphia conference twenty-seven new members in Centreville, of which nineteen were women.9

The detailed information that enriches this study comes from the journal of Samuel A. Woolley.10 Returning from a two-year proselyting

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7. ‘Mormonism Is Rolling Along with All Power’ Says Letter of 1852,” Northern Chester County (Honey Brook, Penn.) Herald, May 1, 1952.
10. Samuel Amos Woolley, Journal, 1854 April–1855 December, Church History Catalog, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed September 28, 2023,
mission in Calcutta, India, Woolley arrived in Centreville at the end of February 1855. He had family in the area (both in Chester County and in New Castle County) and hoped to convince his relatives to give him his inheritance so he could complete the journey home to his wife and children. However, his extended family was reticent because they did not want him to use the money to further the work of his new religion. He stayed in Centreville until the end of the year. Because he had no money of his own, he depended on the branch members for all his needs. For nine months, he would drop in unannounced for a bite of supper and a place to sleep at one or another member’s home, with the hope of breakfast the next morning. Because he kept a detailed journal, we not only know about the support he received from the members but also the daily activities of many members.

**The Matriarchs of Centreville**

Woolley mentions four women most frequently in his journal. They all joined the Church within two years of the branch’s founding, remained faithful during the difficult years that followed the death of Joseph Smith, and were related in one way or another to all but one of the participating branch members. They were mature women, between fifty-three and sixty-one, with considerable life experience by 1855. Their names are Ann McMenemy Mousley, Eliza Ann Stilley McCullough, Elizabeth Lancaster Carpenter, and Theresa Raymond Crossgrove.

https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/95e75ff8-8b5c-4173-b9fa-f07f2a3d84d6/0/2?lang=eng.


12. This claim is based on extensive research matching the names of branch members with 1850 Census information and information from FamilySearch.org and Ancestry.com. Using the branch records and the Woolley journal, I first identified each person in the 1850 Census. The 1840 Census does not list individual family members. Because some members may have already left the area, individuals not found in 1850 Census were located using the Pioneer Database (now available as the Church History Biographical Database, https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/chd/landing), FamilySearch.org, and Ancestry.com. Census data and available vital statistic information (births, marriage, and deaths) were checked to verify the quality of online genealogical services. Clues to family relationships were also found in the Woolley journal and verified using the 1850 Census for Centreville, Delaware. Histories posted on FamilySearch.org were used as background, and facts were tested to the extent possible. Summary tables available from author.

13. Further information is available for each of these women on FamilySearch.org. Ann McMenemy Mousley (Ancestor ID: KWJY-8ZZ), Eliza Ann Stilley McCullough (KWVS-9QQ), Elizabeth Lancaster Carpenter (LLQ6-V55), and Theresa Crossgrove (KHD6-VJJ). Eliza Ann Stilley McCullough and Elizabeth Lancaster Carpenter are the author’s great-great-grandmothers.
Ann McMenemy Mousley

Ann Mousley was forty-one and the mother of ten when she was baptized on March 25, 1841, along with one of her sisters and a daughter. A second-generation Irish immigrant, she had been married to Titus Mousley for almost twenty-four years at the time of her baptism. Though Titus never converted, he supported his family in the affairs of their church. He owned a cooper shop that manufactured and sold wooden tubs and buckets for the gunpowder manufactured at the Eleutherian Gunpowder Mill. Ann and Titus Mousley were well-to-do and lived in a large stone home that frequently accommodated the entire branch for worship services. They also had a large family, and Woolley records the activities and visits of all their children, but particularly the four single daughters, the young Mousley sisters ranging in age from fifteen to twenty-seven.

The Mousley family, with Ann as matriarch, functioned as the center of the Latter-day Saint community. Her oldest living daughter, Margaret Jane, was married to Joseph Foreman, the branch president. Two sons, who lived nearby, were active participants in the branch. While her husband was never baptized, he traveled west when the family decided to go, as did her mother and other extended family members who had converted. She was friends with Eliza McCullough, as suggested by McCullough’s frequent visits to the Mousley home. Ann frequently hosted branch members

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14. Centreville, Delaware, Branch Records, 1. Ann Mousley was baptized March 25, 1841, along with her sister Margarett McMenemy, and her daughter Margarett Jane Mousley.


16. Woolley, Journal, 295 (February 27, 1855). See also FamilySearch information for Ann McMenemy Mousley (KWJY-8ZZ) and for dates when unmarried children were born: Sarah Maria Mousley (age 27), Martha Ellen Mousley (age 25), Ann Amanda Mousley (age 19), and Wilhelmina Logan Mousley (age 15).


at her home after branch meetings, and she helped care for immigrants arriving in the area. She also frequently hosted Woolley at her home.

When he arrived in Centreville, Woolley described Ann Mousley in glowing terms. No other female Latter-day Saint living in Centreville is given such a detailed description in his journal: “She is a first rate woman & enjoys the Spirit. She has 3 sons & 5 daughters living [. T]wo sons belong to the Church & are married & I trust the other will obey soon [. T]he married daughter & 2 single ones belong to the church & all appear strong in the faith & possessed of a good spirit. Bro Foreman (her son in law) is strong. Sister Mousley was glad to see me although personally a stranger to each other even not so in spirit & faith.”

Ann Mousley’s success with bringing her children into the fold and her generosity to everyone in the area created strong community bonds both among Latter-day Saints and in the larger community; she seems to have had a charisma that garnered the respect of everyone. Her obituary noted her generosity and strength of testimony:

Mother Mousley, as she was familiarly called by her acquaintances, proved to be one of the most valiant for the truth. . . . She so influenced her nine living children that they all followed her example. Her house was always open to the servants of the Lord, and her voice ever heard strengthening their testimony. Kind to the sick and generous to the poor, thousands have loved her for her womanly sympathy. . . . When taken ill last Monday evening, she said she would soon depart, and with patience and love towards all, she quietly fell asleep in the Lord.

**Eliza Ann Stilley McCullough**

Eliza Ann McCullough was forty-one and the mother of four almost-launched children when she was baptized April 5, 1841. Her husband of twenty-three years, John McCullough, was a farmer, and the family lived on an average-sized farm in Christiana Hundred. Eliza’s mother died when she was twelve, and her father died when she was fifteen, leaving

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her an orphan. She had only one brother. But her husband came from a large family of five brothers and three sisters, and though he was not interested in the new religion, others in the McCullough extended family joined, perhaps under Eliza Ann’s influence. A sister-in-law (Ann Mousley’s sister) was baptized as well as two nieces, daughters of two of John’s brothers. There may have been some tensions in the family as a result, as suggested by comments in Woolley’s journal.

Of English descent on her mother’s side and Swedish on her father’s, Eliza was several generations American. The McCulloughs were well-known and respected citizens in the area. She was educated and well-versed in religious ideas. Her daughter Margarett was baptized a few days after Eliza Ann and later married John Carpenter, the son of Elizabeth Lancaster Carpenter, and a Latter-day Saint. Another daughter, Lydia, married Carpenter’s oldest son, James. The double marriage between the McCullough and Carpenter siblings created a bond that may have accounted for later conversions among the Carpenters.

Figure 3. Eliza Ann McCullough. Public domain, courtesy Marie Cornwall.

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24. Elizabeth McMenemy McCullough (2R45-52Q) was baptized the same day as her sister Ann. Centreville, Delaware, Branch Records, 1. Ann Elizabeth McCullough Westcott (LDM1-XPK) and Maria Louisa McCullough Clark (GWDK-KTK) were baptized April 13, 1842. Centreville, Delaware, Branch Records, 2.
25. Woolley, Journal, 479–80 (November 23, 1855). Woolley reports a strange encounter with George Gould who was upset with him for teaching false doctrines. George Gould was the nephew of John McCullough, Eliza Ann McCullough’s husband.
26. Erastus Snow mentions baptizing four new members during his visit to Centreville (see note 8). Family histories report that Margarett McCullough was baptized along with her mother, but her name does not appear on the Centreville records. She may have been one of the four baptized by Erastus Snow. Family histories have always claimed she was baptized by Snow. Baptism date for Margarett McCullough is listed as April 11, 1841, on FamilySearch, https://www.familysearch.org/tree/person/ordinances/KWJK-JB4/.
27. James Lancaster Carpenter (LCMF-PV6) and John Steele Carpenter (KWV9-YZQ), FamilySearch.
Eliza was likely known by the Church leadership in Philadelphia since she felt comfortable seeking their support. She seems to have also encouraged other women to join—for example, a neighbor and the two McCullough nieces. She did not go west with the others in 1857, but eight years later, at age sixty-five, she began the journey to Utah.

Elizabeth Lancaster Carpenter

Elizabeth Carpenter was forty-seven and the mother of twelve children (eight sons and four daughters) ranging in age from six to twenty-six when she was baptized on March 16, 1843. She was already the grandmother of four. Elizabeth had married William Carpenter, a Quaker, in 1816. Their son John was the first in the family to join the Church; he was baptized in April 1842. Elizabeth and her daughter Rachel were baptized almost a year later. And then over the next couple of years, her husband, William, and another daughter Elizabeth Jane joined as well.

Elizabeth had deep ancestral roots in America. Her paternal fourth-great-grandparents met on the Mayflower and were married in Plymouth, Massachusetts. Her mother, of Irish descent, died in childbirth when Elizabeth was sixteen. She was the oldest child and likely had responsibilities for raising her four younger siblings after her mother died, especially the infant brother. The Stilley and McCullough families were both well-known, prominent, long-time citizens of Centreville.

30. Centreville, Delaware, Branch Records, 2–3. John was baptized April 13, 1842. His sister, Rachel Carpenter, was baptized March 16, 1843, and his mother, Elizabeth Carpenter, was baptized March 16, 1843 (and then rebaptized March 19, 1855). Another Elizabeth Carpenter (likely his sister Elizabeth Jane, who did not marry until 1847) was baptized July 19, 1843. John’s father (William Carpenter) was baptized February 10, 1844.
Elizabeth’s husband, William, died of cancer in 1849. Their oldest son, James, inherited the family property handed down from his grandfather Samuel. Given inheritance laws of the time, Elizabeth’s personal financial resources may have been limited after the death of her husband. According to census records, she was living with her daughter Rachel Crossgrove in 1850. By 1860, she had moved to the home of Rebecca Ann Lackey, her oldest daughter. Woolley mentions visits of “the Sisters Carpenter” (Elizabeth and her daughter-in-law Margarett Carpenter) to Rachel’s home. According to branch records, another daughter, Elizabeth Jane, “believed the work was of God [sic] and She had no desire to be cut off but her husband was not willing for her to attend the meetings.”

Although her daughter Rachel Crossgrove and her daughter-in-law Margarett Carpenter were part of the exodus in 1857, Elizabeth did not gather with the Saints in Utah. She had many more children in the area who had not joined with the Latter-day Saints, and she had no means of

32. The 1850 U.S. Census indicates James S. Carpenter was a farmer of land valued at $10,000. This was one of the largest farms in the area. His youngest brother, Alfred Dupont Carpenter, age twelve, was also living on the farm and not with Elizabeth. “Christiana Hundred. Census 1850,” entry for James S. Carpenter, FamilySearch, accessed December 15, 2023, https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:S3HY-D199-VWZ?view=index&personArk=%2Fark%3A%2F61903%2F1%3AI%3AMHD9-WPR&action=view.
36. Woolley, Journal, 310 (March 24, 1855), 311 (March 26, 1855).
37. Centreville, Delaware, Branch Records, 10.
her own to finance the trip. Had she left in 1857 when other members did, she would have said goodbye to twenty-six grandchildren. Sister Elizabeth Carpenter passed away at the age of sixty-eight in Centreville in 1863.

**Theresa Raymond Crossgrove**

Theresa Crossgrove was forty-one and the mother of five children under the age of twelve when she decided to become a Latter-day Saint in 1843. She and her husband were farmers, and her brother, who was thirty-eight, lived with them. Her brother joined the Church in February, and then Theresa was baptized just two weeks later. Her husband, Charles Wright Crossgrove, joined the very next week, and then several of his siblings converted the following year.

Theresa Crossgrove was a first-generation immigrant from Switzerland. She arrived in the United States as a fourteen-year-old with her father and two brothers and soon became an indentured servant until she married Charles Crossgrove. According to the 1850 Census, Theresa and Charles owned an average-sized farm in Christiana Hundred and had a family of five girls and two boys. They had purchased

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40. Theresa’s name is spelled in a variety of ways in the records. For example, her name is spelled “Trissa” in the branch records and “Therissa” in the 1850 Census. https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/19341360:8054. Woolley spells her name Thrisa. See Woolley, Journal, 397 (July 31, 1855).

41. Centreville, Delaware, Branch Records, 2. Branch record transcription spells the family name as Crosgrove. This is a transcription error. For example, the 1850 Census lists the family using the handwriting rules of the nineteenth century (Croſsgrove). The ſs should be transcribed as a double s.


the land just after they married and were newcomers in the area. Charles died in 1852, leaving Theresa to raise the children on her own.\(^{44}\) The oldest was twenty-one, but her two youngest children were only seven and four years old when her husband died. In her husband’s will, Theresa was named executrix (female executor of a will) along with her son James. Theresa and her brother Francis continued to run the farm together.

Theresa faced the trauma of losing her mother when she was just seven years old.\(^{45}\) Unlike the other three matriarchs, she likely never had the benefit of formal education in America and may not have learned to read or write in English until she was much older, if ever. Woolley described her as “from the old country, some place in Germany”\(^{46}\) and often visited her home and read to her and her brother Francis.\(^{47}\)

Theresa Crossgrove’s baptism initiated the interest of her husband and several Crossgrove siblings and children. Her brother-in-law, Joseph Crossgrove, became a member in 1844 and later married Rachel Carpenter. Her children were young when she and Charles were baptized, and by the end of 1854, none of the children were baptized. By then, her two older daughters had married and were apparently uninterested. But Woolley was pleased to record the baptism of thirteen-year-old Sarah\(^{48}\) and sixteen-year-old Mary Ann in 1855.\(^{49}\) The next year, the oldest son, James, and the daughter Olive were also baptized. By the time Theresa Crossgrove’s family left for Utah in 1857, eight-year-old Josephine had also been baptized.\(^{50}\)

Although she was executor of her husband’s will, her financial resources may have been limited, again by property laws. When she joined the others migrating to Utah, her brother Francis remained in

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\(^{45}\) See Theresa Raymond (KHD6-VJJ) and Theresa’s mother (24LD-YX5) on FamilySearch.

\(^{46}\) Woolley, Journal, 315 (March 31, 1855).

\(^{47}\) Woolley, Journal, 297 (March 1, 1855); 397 (July 31, 1855); 398 (August 1, 1855).

\(^{48}\) Woolley, Journal, 328 (April 22, 1855).

\(^{49}\) Woolley, Journal, 455 (October 23, 1855).

\(^{50}\) Centreville, Delaware, Branch Records, 8, indicates a “Jas L. Crossgrove” baptized in April 1856. She may have been rebaptized upon arrival in Salt Lake City, because other records indicate a November 7, 1857, baptismal date.
Centreville to take care of the farm until it could be sold. Although the farm was eventually sold, problems with the title created an opportunity for the buyer to renege on the agreement. She and Francis were never able to receive full payment.

In her obituary in the *Deseret News*, Theresa was described as an industrious woman who “passed through” forty-two years of widowhood, most of it in Bluffdale, Utah. The obituary continues: “She was ever sympathetic and hospitable to those suffering affliction or experiencing distress, never having been heard to complain during her eventful life. Her soul was ever Joyous in the knowledge that she had been permitted to receive the Gospel as restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith.”

**Latter-day Saint Religious Life in the Centreville Branch**

Woolley’s meticulously kept journal offers clues to the everyday life of Latter-day Saints who did not gather with the body of the Saints. His journal also gives evidence as to how women converts contributed to the Latter-day Saint community.

**Participation in Branch Meetings**

Women participated fully in the regular “communion meeting[s],” as Woolley referred to them. Woolley describes his first meeting in the branch; he and Branch President Foreman spoke, “Sister [Eliza Ann] McCullah [sic] prayed, Sister Margaret Carpenter spoke, Sister Sarah Mariah Mousley sang a hymn, So all done as St. Paul said ‘if any have the spirit of exhortation, let them exhort, if any have a Psalm (Hymn) let [them] sing it.’” Sister Eliza Ann McCullough also spoke at a gathering at Rachel and Joseph Crossgrove’s home after a baptism in Brandywine Creek. Woolley opened with prayer, and “Sister McCullah [sic] made a few remarks.” Other entries merely note that both sisters and brethren spoke, without mention of exactly who. It is worth noting that in the

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53. “Two Noble Women.”

54. Woolley, Journal, 316 (April 1, 1855); 329 (April 22, 1855).
1850s, women were often not allowed to participate in church services, except among the Quakers. These women, however, both prayed and spoke publicly.

**Baptisms, Blessings, and the Sacrament**

In addition to participating in weekly meetings, the women of the Centre ville Branch contributed to the members’ spiritual life by calling upon and recognizing the power of the priesthood. The Centreville families kept Woolley busy giving healing blessings to adults and children who were sick. The Crossgrove and Foreman women regularly requested blessings for their children. After Rachel and Joseph Crossgrove lost their two-year-old son, their four-year-old was suddenly taken ill. Rachel sent for Woolley to administer to him. Woolley recorded in his journal, “He was up in less than one hour, & playing about. [And] in the course of two hour eat [sic] a hearty supper. . . [H]e had not eat any thing for two days his throat was very sore & much swelled [sic].”

In November 1855, several members were sick or injured over the course of just two days. Woolley recorded the experience in his journal:

I administered to Sister Amanda Mousley three times during the day & evening as she is quite sick with fever, cold, & sore throat, etc. I administered to Bro. G. W. Mousley’s little son who is afflicted but is much better since I administered to him yesterday. Amanda felt better after being administered to. I administered to Sister Elizabeth Mousley (Wm’s wife) as she had scalded her hand pretty bad. Also to sister Crossgrove’s (the widow) little daughter (seven years old) Josephine, for her face as it is poisoned.

Women requested priesthood blessings on other occasions as well. Elder Jeter Clinton was visiting in Centreville for a couple of days in September 1855. According to Woolley, during that time “Sister [Eliza Ann] McCullah [sic] & Pratt were here. Bro. J. Clinton & I blessed Sister McCullah [sic] by her request.” The next evening Sister Mousley, Martha Ellen, and Sarah Mariah Mousley also received priesthood blessings from Brothers Clinton and Woolley. Such requests were infrequent from the men in the branch.


56. Woolley, Journal, 482 (November 27, 1855). Some creams used mid-nineteenth century contained toxic chemicals such as arsenic and iron. Josephine may have used some such product on her face.

When new converts were baptized during the summer of 1855, gatherings at the Brandywine River just below Chadd’s Ford brought branch members out in celebration. On Sunday, October 21, Woolley had performed three baptisms, including Ann Mousley’s daughter Wilhelmina.58 Two days later, Margarett Carpenter dropped by the Crossgrove home where Woolley had stayed the night to ask that her eleven-year-old son be baptized (grandson of Eliza Ann McCullough and Elizabeth Carpenter). Word spread, and the Saints gathered quickly. Soon there were four to be baptized: the Carpenter and McCullough grandson, Theresa Crossgrove’s daughter, and two more of Ann Mousley’s daughters. After confirming those baptized, the brethren administered to and blessed Sister Margarett Carpenter and Sister Sarah Taylor.59

Visiting among the Saints and Hosting Gatherings

Woolley frequented some households more than others, so his accounts are only of the visits he observed. But there are enough accounts to suggest that the women frequently visited in each other’s homes. He recorded that Eliza McCullough “was over to spend the afternoon [at Mousleys’], talked some to her & the rest . . . more pleasant than it has been for some time.”60 He noted an occasion when “the sisters Carpenter” (Elizabeth Carpenter and her daughter-in-law Margaret McCullough Carpenter) visited Rachel Crossgrove’s home,61 and another when the Mousley sisters visited and had supper with the widow Theresa Crossgrove.62 The women also sometimes traveled together to church conferences in Philadelphia and enjoyed dinners and informal gatherings.63

When the branch was first organized and small, sacrament and council meetings were convened at Rachel and Joseph Crossgrove’s home or the home of Ann and Titus Mousley. Church members also gathered informally for an afternoon or evening of food and gospel discussions. Joseph and Rachel Crossgrove often hosted these gatherings. Woolley describes a November 1855 gathering on a Tuesday afternoon at their home. The attendees included two missionaries, the two older Mousley

58. Centreville, Delaware, Branch Records, 7.
59. Woolley, Journal, 453–55 (October 23, 1855). The Mousley daughters were rebaptized, as was the custom in the early days of the church.
60. Woolley, Journal, 314 (March 30, 1855). The reference to being more pleasant is personal to Woolley. In the early days of his visit in Centreville, he frequently notes how nice it is to be with Latter-day Saints once again.
sisters, the young widow Margarett Carpenter, two newly arrived English immigrants (both also single) and Eliza Ann McCullough’s neighbor who was widowed and would be baptized the next month.\(^\text{64}\)

**Subscriptions to Church Publications**

Elder John Taylor launched the periodical the *Mormon* in the winter of 1855, instructing local leaders like Woolley to encourage the members to subscribe.\(^\text{65}\) Woolley notes that payment in support of the publication would be credited as tithing. Typically, payments to the *Mormon* were made by men, but Lydia Carpenter (Eliza McCullough’s daughter who married Elizabeth Carpenter’s son James) gave Woolley money for a six-month subscription.\(^\text{66}\) She was not a member, but she may have purchased the subscription for her mother.

Eliza McCullough had a subscription to the *St. Louis Luminary*. Woolley’s visits to her home during his ten-month stay in Centreville were always about reading the periodical; he never stayed for dinner or supper. Erastus Snow published the *St. Louis Luminary* to strengthen the Saints in the greater St. Louis area. Eliza Ann and her daughter Margarett Carpenter had heard Erastus Snow preach, and although he did not baptize Margarett, Snow was present at her baptism and likely confirmed her a member. The paper published epistles from the First Presidency, doctrinal treatises, and news from the Salt Lake Valley. Snow also republished Orson Pratt’s writings from the *Millennial Star*.\(^\text{67}\) While Woolley visited other homes and read to the occupants, he never mentions reading at the homes of Eliza Ann McCullough or Elizabeth Carpenter. They may have been the most educated of the matriarchs.

**Generous Support for Missionary Efforts**

The women of the Centreville Branch were particularly generous in contributing to the well-being of members in need. Because of his two-year missionary journey to Calcutta, Elder Woolley must have come to look particularly shabby. Although clean, his clothes had not been replaced for some time. Soon the sisters of the branch were gently taking care of him. Toward the end of March, Ann Mousley washed a shirt

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\(^{64}\) Woolley, Journal, 471 (November 13, 1855).


\(^{66}\) Woolley, Journal, 312 (March 28, 1855).

and garment and gave him “a nice white Linen Hdkf [handkerchief].” Her daughter Wilhelmina washed the new handkerchief and the one he already had. Two days later, Eliza Ann McCullough dropped by to spend the afternoon with Ann Mousley and while there gave Woolley “a silk pocket Hdkf.”

At a May 1855 sacrament meeting, Brother Foreman read a letter from Brother Jeter Clinton announcing that Woolley would “take charge of the Church in [what would be called] the Delaware Conference.” Woolley then spoke to the group about sustaining and assisting one another: “The vote was carried unanimous by both the English & American Saints in the affirmative. . . . They all agreed to raise a fund, which they would do by weekly or monthly paying in a certain amount. This I was coun-ciled [sic] to do by Bro' Taylor & all the Branch were willing to carry it out.” The next Friday, Eliza Ann McCullough dropped by the Mousley’s to leave Woolley a shirt she had made him, likely her effort to sustain and assist him personally. On Monday, Ann Mousley gave him $1.50 to buy a new vest.

In July, Ann Mousley collected $1.00 from Theresa Crossgrove and $1.00 from her brother and added $1.00 from herself. She instructed Woolley to buy a pair of pants with the $3.00 (equal to about $90 today). Their generosity touched him. He recorded in his journal that “[I] never intimated to her that I wanted any, but she see I kneaded [sic] them, & May the Lord God of Israel bless them & particularly Sister Ann Mousley for her kindness not only in this thing but many others yet unnum-bered by me. I say may she & they be blessed, not only in this time, but also be rewarded over again in the resurrection of the just, & be saved & exalted in the Kingdom of God.”

The sisters continued their generosity, with no indication that Woolley might be overstaying his welcome. Sister Pratt, an English convert, gave Woolley seventy-five cents to buy a handkerchief. Sister Eliza Ann McCullough gave him fifty cents for the fund to assist the members. He blessed them both in his journal. Toward the end of September, he received more gifts. Sister Eliza Ann McCullough gave him seven yards of white flannel to make garments. Once again, he was effusive in his journal:

69. Woolley, Journal, 343 (May 13, 1855); Centreville, Delaware, Branch Records, 9.
70. Woolley, Journal, 345 (May 18, 1855).
I say in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ may the above blessing be hers also. I feel to thank these sisters, & also the Lord God of Israel, for their acts of kindness [toward me], for it is through His Goodness & blessing to me that I receive it. . . . I will testify before God in a coming day of those good deed for said our Lord & Savior, “if ye do it unto one of the least of my Servants ye do it unto me.” So they have administered to my wants as a Servant of God & “they shall in no wise loose [sic] their reward.”

In October, as the weather began to turn cold, Sister Mousley and her daughter Sarah Maria organized the sisters, collecting $10.50 (equivalent to $320 today) for Woolley to buy himself a coat. He recorded the donations with the same precision he recorded subscriptions to the Mormon or the branch fund to assist members:

- Ann Mousley ($2)
- Sarah Maria Mousley ($1)
- Martha Ellen Mousley ($0.50)
- Eliza McCullough ($1)
- Rachel Crossgrove ($1)
- Margaret Carpenter ($1)
- Sarah Taylor ($0.50)
- Sarah [Langton] Lancton ($1)
- Lucy & Emma Stradwick ($0.50)
- Eliza Kemp ($0.25)
- Selina Hodgins ($0.25)
- Elizabeth Carpenter ($0.50)

His gratefulness for the gifts was as effusive as previous entries that asked God to reward those who made these contributions. He wrote,

> I pray our Father who art in heaven to bless them all & I bless them in the name of His Son Jesus Christ & by the authority of the Holy Priesthood, & say they shall be blest in time & eternity, & if faithful shall receive a hundredfold, & also be recorded in the Resurrection of the just, which may God grant for Christ’s, Amen. I feel to thank those who gave me this amount, & would say to others where the Elders are, “go & do likewise.” . . . The sisters done first rate, & my heart is full of blessing from them & I know God’s hands are full for them as soon as they are prepared to receive them.

These contributions by Centreville’s women were repeatedly noted by Woolley. He acknowledged the importance of what they were doing, just as he acknowledged the contributions made by the men in the

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branch—subscriptions to the *Mormon*, gifts to the fund to assist members, and their willingness to travel to the homes of members to give blessings. However, the domestic work that sustained the community—preparing meals, offering shelter, caring for the sick, and more—was not reflected in Woolley’s records. As many have suggested, the domestic work of women was invisible to their contemporaries. The same holds today; invisible work, by definition, cannot be valued.76

**Responding to Requests from Presiding Authorities**

The route taken by Latter-day Saints emigrating from England and Europe changed in 1855. Before 1855, immigrants were landing in New Orleans and traveling up the Mississippi River. Cholera often broke out along the route, and so, in 1855, ships carrying Latter-day Saints began arriving in Philadelphia and New York.77 While many immigrants continued their journey west immediately, a few remained in the East for a season to acquire the necessary resources to continue their journey. John Taylor, presiding elder of the Eastern States Mission, was given the responsibility to oversee the Saints arriving on ships from England and Europe.78 Taylor delegated some of the work to Samuel Woolley. Woolley busied himself during April and May helping the newly arrived find accommodation and employment in and around Centreville.79 The Centreville Branch was soon welcoming weary travelers from England. The women of Centreville supplied food and shelter with little advance notice for when the immigrating Saints would arrive.

79. The immigrants arrived on four ships, beginning with the *Siddons* (April 20, 1855; see Woolley, Journal, 330 [April 24, 1855]); *Juventa* (May 5, 1855; see Woolley, Journal, 339 [May 7, 1855]); *Chimborazo* (May 21, 1855; see Woolley, Journal, 346 [May 1855]), and *William Stetson* (May 27, 1855; see Woolley Journal, 353 [May 30, 1855]). The names of the ships were identified by arrival date and by matching passenger names with the names of immigrants mentioned in Woolley’s journal.
Woolley gave only passing attention to the ways the Centreville sisters cared for the arriving converts. However, he offers many clues as to their contributions—for example, how many English Saints arrived and where they were staying and who he called upon in emergencies. In addition to their domestic tasks, the women were ready to help in whatever way they could, although care for their own families sometimes got in the way. The week the first group of Saints arrived, Margaret Jane Foreman (Sister Mousley’s daughter) likely wanted to help her mother care for the travelers, but she had three children down with the whooping cough.\(^80\)

The first group of immigrants arrived in the latter part of April 1855. Woolley delivered sixteen adults and five children to Wilmington. Titus Mousley met them in the Dearborn\(^81\) and brought a wagon for their luggage. The travelers had to walk the eight miles to Centreville. Sister Ann Mousley and her daughters greeted them kindly. They had prepared supper for all with less than twenty-four hours’ notice. Woolley makes no mention, but it is likely that other sisters in the branch delivered additional food to help feed the group. While Woolley, Foreman, Mr. Mousley, and his sons William and Washington looked for housing and jobs for the immigrants, the sisters of the branch fed them and gave them a place to sleep.

The second group arrived two weeks later, this time seven men, six women, and six children. When everyone gathered for services on Sunday, there were more English Saints than American. Another four women arrived on the 23rd. This time, Brothers Foreman and Crossgrove met the group in Wilmington and delivered them to Rachel and Joseph Crossgrove’s home.\(^82\) Theresa Crossgrove had loaned her Dearborn carriage and horse to manage the luggage belonging to the English Saints. Ann and Titus Mousley sent two English families “a fine piece of pork . . . &tc. as a present & sent them on loan 4 chairs a tea kettle, Duch [sic] oven, two pichers [sic], tin pan &tc.”\(^83\)

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\(^81\) A Dearborn was “a light, four-wheeled vehicle with a top and sometimes side curtains, usually pulled by one horse. Long-standing tradition, dating back to 1821, attributes its design to General Henry Dearborn. It usually had one seat but sometimes as many as two or three, and they often rested on wooden springs.” See “Dearborn Wagon,” Dictionary of American History, Encyclopedia.com, updated November 15, 2023, https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/dearborn-wagon.

\(^82\) Woolley, Journal, 348 (April 23, 1855).

\(^83\) Woolley, Journal, 335 (April 30, 1855).
Initially, much of the hosting was done by the Mousley family. As more immigrants arrived, other members of the branch provided space and meals. Woolley wrote in his journal that he had made his home at the Mousley’s, but just two weeks later he found there was little room for him, and he more frequently called in at the home of his Aunt Sarah, who lived in Wilmington, or Rachel Crossgrove or Theresa Crossgrove for his meals and a place to stay the night. By the end of May, forty-four English Saints and sixteen of their children had arrived in the area. The women of Centreville Branch were likely busy during the first few weeks making sure the visiting Saints had what they needed—whether it was food, cooking tools, or provisions to cook for themselves.

The sisters also assisted Woolley when emergencies arose. In mid-May, Woolley had discovered one English sister “had had nothing to eat for near 2 days except a little rice.” Elizabeth Mousley (wife of Washington Mousley), though not yet a Latter-day Saint, was tasked with sending the sister something that would stay down and calm her stomach. When it was discovered that an English couple was unable to provide for themselves, the widowed Theresa Crossgrove agreed to allow them to board with her. The husband was so unwell that he was unable to work. What was to be a few days, became several weeks.

On May 31, Sister Margaret Jane Foreman found herself caring for twelve-year-old Emma Stradwick who ran into trouble at her housekeeping job:

This morning after breakfast Sister Stradwick’s daughter Emma came down and told me [Woolley] that her Mistress, Mrs. Nickles said she must leave them to day & that she had charged her with stealing money & giving it to me. So I went up to see what was wrong. I found that she had been guilty of stealing, for which I gave her a sharp reprimand for, but it was falce (sic) about her giving me any money at any time. So I took her away brought her down & left her in Sister Foreman’s care. I then got Father Mousley’s horse & Dearborn to go to Wilmington to meet the Brethren & Sisters from Phila[delphia].

By the end of May, Woolley was feeling a bit overwhelmed, as he reported in his journal: “Just after I got here, I was consoling my self with having finished my job of getting places for and taking the Brethren to it,

86. Woolley, Journal, 354 (May 31, 1855). He needed to leave the girl with someone because he was due to pick up another group of immigrants.
up walked 5 more which Bro. Clinton had sent out here to me to see to & provide for &tc. So I see it is still as it always has been with me, in this Church, & perhaps always will be for aught I know, as soon as one job is off my hands another is on & so it goes.”

The sisters of the branch were likely feeling much the same; in just a few more days, another group of immigrants would arrive in Centreville needing food and temporary shelter. The women of Centreville had no more idea than Woolley how many more immigrant Saints were going to arrive in Delaware.

Woolley relied heavily on the women of Centreville to help manage the settling of the English Saints, though in his journal he does not specifically address the work they did. In June, when Woolley learned that the Mousley’s were once again hosting several English Saints at their home after the Sunday meeting, he wrote a blessing in his journal for Father Mousley: “May the God of Israel bless him for ever & ever in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen. They also have 3 strangers from Phila[delphia] which marks 8 besides his own (large) family here tonight.”

Though Mousley certainly deserved the blessing, given all he had done to support the immigrants, the lack of any word that recognized the work of the women suggests that their work was at the very least partially invisible to him. The lack of blessings is in stark contrast to his effusiveness when the sisters offered him gifts of clothing. That was not invisible to him.

Conclusion

The importance of women to the growth of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in and around Centreville, Delaware, is apparent in this history. Erastus Snow’s description of intelligent, influential, and wealthy men joining may have been true. But a more accurate statement would have noted that many new converts were women. Among the twenty-seven members of the newly established Centreville Branch, seventy percent were women. And some were prominent women within their communities. Perhaps even more surprising, we learn that women were converting without their husbands. Less surprising, given what we know about the importance of social networks in the process of conversion, the new converts were introduced to the Church by family members.

88. Woolley, Journal, 360 (June 7, 1855).
89. Erastus Snow to Messrs Editors, October 31, 1840.
Though the conversions were steady over time, there is no evidence of mass baptisms or large family groups being baptized all together. Instead, baptisms occurred in groups of four or nine or six people at a time. Relatives of early Church converts—husband and wives, brothers and sisters—did not convert at the same time. The Mousley, McCullough, Carpenter, and Crossgrove siblings followed one another into baptism, but the time span between baptisms ranged anywhere from a week to more than three years.

Conversion created part-member families. The same networks that facilitated conversion also kept women from joining with the main body of the Church in the West. All four matriarchs were baptized without husbands. Titus Mousley was supportive though not converted. John McCullough was not interested, and neither were two of their three children. Elizabeth Carpenter’s husband joined two years later, but only four of her eleven living children converted. The rest were not interested. Theresa Crossgrove’s husband was converted, but he died young; two of her oldest daughters did not join. These relationships kept the four matriarchs bound to Centreville.

The daily activities of the Latter-day Saints mirror modern activities such as paying into a fund to support the poor, visiting members, performing blessings, organizing to help the new immigrants, meeting together to discuss the gospel, and more. The women were an integral part of those activities despite the lack of a formal Relief Society. Much of the community work described by Woolley was directed and carried out by women. They visited and supported one another in the faith, participated in religious gatherings, and called for priesthood blessings to benefit them and their families. They cooked meals and managed their homes such that they could accommodate any guest at any time, whether it be a missionary, a branch member, or a new convert just arrived from England. They studied the gospel and kept up with Church news by subscribing to regional publications. They saw to it that their children were taught the gospel and were baptized, and they encouraged family and friends toward baptism. They contributed to the missionary work by making sure Samuel Woolley was a presentable representative of the Church and gave him money to purchase clothes or fund his travel.

The women may have wanted to join with the rest of the Saints in Utah, but none had the financial resources to make the journey. Elizabeth Carpenter was living with one or another of her adult daughters. We do not know if she had any liquid assets that would facilitate a journey west, but we do know that her oldest son had inherited the family farm. Eliza Ann McCullough’s husband was not a member, and she likely had few assets to
Being Latter-day Saints (1841–1857) go it alone. Her daughter, Margarett McCullough Carpenter had always planned to go west, but John Carpenter died young of consumption. She had four children under the age of eleven and lived with her parents because she had no assets of her own. Theresa Crossgrove was also constrained by the lack of liquid assets. For reasons that remain unclear, she had trouble selling her farm and, when she finally did, was never able to receive full compensation. Her brother, Francis, remained behind to manage the estate. Both Margarett and Theresa were able to travel west because of the generosity of Rachel and Joseph Crossgrove, who sold their farm and purchased three wagons and oxen. They offered one wagon to Margarett Carpenter and the other to Theresa Crossgrove. The branch fund to assist the poor was given to Margarett to buy supplies and prepare for the journey.

We also learn that their staying in Centreville benefitted other Latter-day Saints attempting to make the journey to Zion. Just as some of the Nauvoo Saints remained on the prairie for five or more years to help others make the long journey to Zion, the Saints who remained in the East were vital to the journey of the Saints who crossed the Atlantic without the means to continue their journey once they arrived in America.

Why did two of these four women finally decide to gather with the Saints two years after Woolley left the area? First, in Ann Mousley’s case, her husband, Titus, was willing to go despite his reticence to be baptized. Second, both were able to acquire the necessary resources for the journey. Third, they may have gathered for the sake of their daughters. There may have been growing awareness of the consequences for women who did not marry within the Church. Only three young women converts had found a mate among members of the Centreville Branch—Margarett McCullough Carpenter, Rachel Carpenter Crossgrove, and Margaret Jane Mousley Foreman. Others, like Elizabeth Jane Carpenter, married non-member husbands and then found it difficult to continue participating. Both Ann Mousley and Theresa Crossgrove had four single daughters. Whom would they marry?

Eliza Ann McCullough and Elizabeth Carpenter remained behind. Neither had the means to move and were tied to the community because of children and grandchildren. Elizabeth Carpenter died in Centreville in 1863; she was sixty-eight. Eliza Ann McCullough began her journey to Utah after the death of her husband and her good friend Elizabeth Carpenter. Her daughter, Margarett, was living in Utah, had married again, and had another child. She wanted to see her grandchildren and join with other members of the Church in Zion. In 1865, she began the journey but died en route in Wyoming, Nebraska—the outfitting station where travelers began their overland trip.
This case study of the women of Centreville offers insight into the early days of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the significance of women’s readiness to respond to the message missionaries brought. As a case study, it offers clues, but until further research can examine how communities of women built the kingdom, more evidence is required to draw firm conclusions.

One final note is necessary to demonstrate the usefulness of analyzing communities of women. When branch members left Centreville in 1857 to gather with the Saints in Utah, the group had to hire seven teamsters to handle the oxen and wagons. There were twenty women and twelve men in the Jacob Hofheins Company. They were traveling with forty children and teenagers under the age of eighteen. Thirty-two of the children were under age twelve.90

According to family history, the Mousley daughters arrived in the Salt Lake Valley with great fanfare in their father’s Dearborn carriage. More importantly, twenty-nine members of the company were the children and grandchildren of the four matriarchs of the Centreville Branch. They joined another five grandchildren already living in Utah, and more grandchildren would be born in the ensuing years. The importance of women for raising the next generation of Latter-day Saints must not be ignored but neither should their other contributions. Though from very different backgrounds and social stations, these sisters sustained each other temporally and spiritually for many years in the little village of Centreville. And in doing so, they sustained a community that contributed to the strength of a small but emerging religion.

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“It Must Needs Be”

Eric Dahlin

After speaking to his son Jacob about Jesus Christ’s redemption of mankind, the Book of Mormon prophet Lehi declares, “It must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things” (2 Ne. 2:11). We often use the word *opposition* colloquially to explain the difficulties or challenges that we or others encounter. When others experience troubling times, we frequently, as well-intentioned members of the Church, remind them of this sentiment. Our aim is to provide solace for the one who is suffering by pointing out that facing opposition is a common feature of life (even if normalizing the suffering may inadvertently minimize, as the Jewish scholar Rachel Adler puts it, the “agony and grief [of the sufferer] in all their unendurable concreteness”¹).

However, this view of opposition is incomplete. While the online Merriam-Webster dictionary includes several definitions for *opposition* that reflect antagonistic, adversarial, or otherwise difficult situations,² other definitions derive from the Latin verb *opponere*, with the prefix or preposition *ob* (“in the direction of, in front of, because of”)³ and

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Accordingly, opposition can also reflect the act of placing something in a position relative to another thing. A given position is not inherently troubling or difficult. It does not necessarily convey a negative or positive meaning. Alessio Moretti, a professor of literature, identified multiple ways to characterize these types of opposing positions: (1) as symmetric or reflective of one another (as a mirror), (2) with inverse or contrasting qualities (as a photograph and its negative image), and (3) ordered (as in front, behind, or next to).

To further illustrate this relational meaning, opposite numbers are the same distance from zero on a number line. A negative seven (−7) is the same distance from zero as a positive seven (+7). In this context, the word *opposite* denotes a relationship. A set of values that represent this type of relationship could include positive and negative three, positive and negative nineteen, or positive and negative twenty-five. The relationship of any of these sets does not change relative to the number line: both numbers are equidistant from zero.

The relational meaning of opposition helps us recognize the variety of dialectical forces operating in our lives. The scriptures are filled with examples of women and men who confront opposite and even contradictory directives, leading to personal dilemmas. Abraham and Nephi were prompted to take another’s life, violating God’s commandment not to murder (Gen. 22:3; 1 Ne. 4:10). In the Garden of Eden, God exhorted Adam and Eve to “be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Gen. 1:28), on the one hand, and not eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17), on the other. By eating the fruit of this tree, Adam and Eve, as Elder Holland says, “transgressed a commandment of God.” But if Adam and Eve did not eat the fruit as commanded, they would have been unable to satisfy the commandment to multiply and replenish the earth (2 Ne. 2:23).

There are moments when God uses oppositional or seemingly contradictory circumstances to bring about his eternal purposes. Second Nephi 2:15 speaks about Adam and Eve’s experience of opposition as fulfilling God’s ultimate objective: “And to bring about his eternal purposes

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in the end of man, after he had created our first parents, . . . it must needs be that there was an opposition; even the forbidden fruit in opposition to the tree of life; the one being sweet and the other bitter.” God’s eternal purpose includes a fallen state where we learn simultaneously from good and evil. Exposure to these opposing forces led Adam and Eve to “the Only Begotten of the Father” (Moses 5:7). Christ’s Atonement also fulfilled God’s eternal purpose: “And the Messiah cometh . . . that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil” (2 Ne. 2:26). When they ate the fruit and God introduced the Atonement, Adam and Eve gained the knowledge of and ability to practice discerning good from evil. Eve’s discernment and foresight to choose one of the commandments at the expense of the other in that moment brought about the Fall and Christ’s Atonement. Without opposition, Eve would not have had the choice that brought about “the joy of [their] redemption” (Moses 5:11).

Similarly, we can view phenomena we consider to be opposites as existing simultaneously. That is, many situations or decisions may involve positive and negative aspects and outcomes. A decision to move across the country may be financially beneficial to the person moving, but the friend and neighbor who remains might be sad. Or the person moving might be excited about certain aspects of the move and feel sad to leave the neighbor and friend behind. The death of a loved one, though excruciating, can bring family members closer to one another or help them feel God’s love to a greater degree for a time. Personal relationships often contain highs and lows, or a difficult relationship in the present can help prepare a person for more healthy relationships in the future.

In March 1839, the Prophet Joseph Smith had spent months in jail while members of the Church faced intense and unspeakable persecution. Caleb Baldwin, who was imprisoned with Joseph Smith, learned that his son had been “beaten nearly to death by Missourians with hickory sticks.”7 Joseph Smith’s despair is evident in his petition to God: “O God, where art thou? And where is the pavilion that covereth thy hiding place?” (D&C 121:1). Joseph Smith continues his prayer by pleading for God to intervene (D&C 121:4–5). Members of the Church had wrongfully, unlawfully, and
mercilessly suffered, and Joseph no doubt felt powerless. For him, the situation called for God to intercede on behalf of, demonstrate compassion for, and deliver those who were suffering. Joseph wanted God to change God’s position relative to Joseph’s. But God ostensibly did nothing at the time, and Joseph Smith did not understand why. These distressing events seemed to contradict Joseph Smith’s firsthand knowledge of God’s power, compassion, and vision for the Church’s survival and future success. But the trials Joseph Smith and others experienced were simultaneously devastating and included certain value, as illustrated by God’s response to Joseph that “all these things shall give thee experience, and [ultimately] shall be for thy good” (D&C 122:7).

What personal dilemmas or contradictions between opposites do we face? Despite our very best efforts, our circumstances might involve a sincere desire to be married or have children, or for loved ones to make different decisions. We may have poor mental health that disrupts our personal relationships or the extent to which we feel God’s presence and love. We may feel isolated, homesick, or entangled in seemingly irreparable or harmful relationships. We—and others we love—may confront dilemmas that hinder our efforts or contradict our deeply held aspirations to align ourselves with God’s will. Such situations could be related to the death of a loved one, financial burdens or loss of employment, discrimination and prejudice, terminal illness, chronic or debilitating disease, suicidal ideation or attempted suicide, women’s roles in the Church, the Church’s past marked by a priesthood ban for Black men, the personal weaknesses of Church leaders, a faith crisis, or cultural and political expressions by other members of the Church with which we strongly disagree. These dilemmas we face are heartbreaking, painful, distressing, and unresolvable in the moment. Any of these situations have the potential to push us beyond our physical, spiritual, and emotional limits.

Lehi’s discussion of Jesus’s redemption precedes his comment that it “must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things” and provides a useful backdrop for understanding the tensions that can trigger personal crises. These difficult experiences consist of a relationship between competing demands or the juxtaposition of both positive and negative influences or outcomes. Though personal crises sometimes feel as if they push us farther from God, these moments can also draw us closer to him—even amid contradiction. Just as opposite values on a number line describe a relationship, these situations place us in prime position to recognize our dependence on Jesus Christ more fully. The personal dilemmas that pull us in multiple directions simultaneously provide
poignant opportunities for us to seek Jesus Christ and experience his grace. In these moments, when there is no obvious path forward or it seems difficult or impossible to navigate, Jesus Christ becomes the Way forward (John 14:6), and our dependence on him becomes unmistakable. We become profoundly desperate for his intercession in our lives. We ache to be remembered and comforted by the only one who can “succor [us] according to [our] infirmities” (Alma 7:12).

When we seek Jesus Christ and opposition remains, our relationship with him deepens. By virtue of these persisting circumstances, we spend more time with God on “bended knee.” These moments provide a portal through which we can spend more time in his presence and feel his love more deeply. And as we continue to commune with him, we become even more disposed to recognize, learn about, and receive the depths of his grace. Precisely because the circumstances remain unresolved, opposition is the invitation and gateway to a more personal and sacred relationship with God. Relief and solace begin to come about because of the relationship itself, even when nothing changes or things get worse. Because of our ever-increasing emotional bond with and greater knowledge of the divine, we begin to experience God’s “blessings . . . through raindrops,” and “healing . . . through tears.” We come to know that “a thousand sleepless nights are what it takes to know [God is] near” and the “trials of this life [become his] mercies in disguise.”

In the field of astronomy, planetary bodies are considered “in opposition” when they are aligned. At the moment of opposition, the angle between them is approximately 180 degrees. For example, when the earth is situated directly between the sun and moon, it is considered in opposition. A full moon appears because its entire surface reflects the sun’s light. Incidentally, this is the best time to observe planets. “During opposition the planet appears at its largest and brightest, and it is

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above the horizon for much of the night. For stargazers and astrophotographers, it is an ideal time to view and photograph the superior planets.”

When we are aligned with God, perhaps we should expect opposition—being caught between difficult choices or feeling pulled in different directions. The opposition generates more reflected light and love. And perhaps we should not be surprised when we are situated between confusing or contradictory circumstances that also include moments of joy or grace. Years ago, I decided to get an advanced university degree, and I felt my decision had been spiritually confirmed by God. I applied to several schools and was not accepted by any of them. This was a frustrating and confusing time for me. The following year, I continued to feel good about this route, applied to a different set of schools, and was accepted. While attending one of these schools, I encountered extremely challenging circumstances and Jesus Christ’s love and grace to a much greater degree.

These opposition moments not only provide the opportunity to draw nearer to God but help us recognize that he weeps for and stays with us. Before the resurrected Christ left his disciples, he proclaimed, “And, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matt. 28:20, italics added). When we grieve and sorrow, Jesus Christ willingly grieves and sorrows with us—by our side. The prophet Isaiah attests, “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows” (Isa. 53:4), and “in all their affliction he was afflicted” (Isa. 63:9). He will never forget us because we are “graven upon the palms of [his] hands; [our] walls are continually before [him]” (Isa. 49:16). Nothing can separate us from his love (Rom. 8:35–39). Through opposition, we learn that God walks with us.

As an example, the great writer and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel witnessed a young boy being hanged by the SS in a German work camp during World War II. At that point, Wiesel overheard someone in the crowd ask, “Where is God now?” Wiesel continues, “And I heard a voice within me answer him: ‘Where is He? Here He is—He is hanging here on this gallows.’”

God abides with us in our darkest hour. He suffers

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and mourns with the sufferer, and only a God who is willing to suffer with us can understand us. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German pastor who was imprisoned and eventually executed for his role in a coup attempt of the Nazi government during World War II, wrote a note from his cell in the Flossenbürg concentration camp. It read, “Only a suffering God can help.”

In his influential writings, the Jewish theologian Abraham Heschel describes what he calls the pathos of God. Divine pathos means that God willingly feels passionately toward and expresses concern for us. He is attentive to and involved in our lives. Heschel’s view provides a stark contrast to Greek conceptions of God, traced to Aristotle and Plato, that depict a stoic God who is an objective observer and detached judge of humanity. Instead, Heschel discusses Old Testament prophets who viewed God as directing the affairs of his people because of his emotional connection to and love and concern for them.

Heschel reasons that prophets learn God’s will as they enter a relationship and commune with God. “To the prophet, knowledge of God was fellowship with Him, not attained by syllogism, analysis, or induction, but by living together.” Heschel stresses the importance of covenant-making for fellowship with God. Covenanting with God refers not only to “a covenant of mutual obligations, but also a relationship of mutual concern.” Indeed, Old Testament covenants associated with the rites of atonement culminated in fellowship with God. In a 1990 Ensign article, Hugh Nibley describes the rites performed in Moses’s tabernacle that led to this kind of fellowship. Once the high priest put on the appropriate garb before entering the tabernacle, he was anointed with oil, was set apart, and then performed the animal sacrifice. “Then the Lord received the high priest at the tent door, the veil (in Lev. 16:17–19, the high priest alone enters the tabernacle), and conversed with him (Ex. 29:42), accepting the sin offering, sanctifying the priests and people, and receiving them into his company to ‘dwell among the children of Israel, 15. As we “mourn with those that mourn” (Mosiah 18:9), we are doing what God would do.
19. Heschel, Prophets, 32. Similarly, in his intercessory prayer, Jesus Christ underscores the importance of knowing God: “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3).
and [to] be their God’ (Ex. 29:45).”\(^{20}\) In another article within the same series on Christ’s Atonement, Nibley reports that one of the meanings of the word *atonement* is “a close and intimate embrace, which took place at the kapporet or the front cover or flap of the tabernacle or tent.”\(^{21}\)

Experiencing opposition that cultivates contradictions in our lives enables a “close and intimate embrace” with God. These experiences direct our gaze toward, enable our dependence on, and deepen our relationship with him. During these times, we can petition Heavenly Father as the Savior did: “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). This prayer reveals Jesus Christ’s desire to elude the “bitter cup” (D&C 19:18) and do the Father’s will. Soul-expanding and grace-inducing moments of opposition are not the result of weakness but the divine design of mortality. Second Nephi 9:18 confirms that “the righteous, . . . [are those] who have endured the crosses of the world.” In his October 2011 general conference talk, Elder Quentin L. Cook states, “Adverse results in this mortal life are not evidence of lack of faith or of an imperfection in our Father in Heaven’s overall plan. The refiner’s fire is real, and qualities of character and righteousness that are forged in the furnace of affliction perfect and purify us and prepare us to meet God.”\(^{22}\) Whether we are the prodigal child or the one who remained, God will embrace and remind us, “Thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine” (Luke 15:31). Opposition—a position between seemingly incongruous paths or experiences—can bind us in relationship to Jesus Christ and pave the way for our return to live with our heavenly parents, their greatest desire for us.

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Was Joseph Smith a Money Digger?

Steven C. Harper

Was not Jo Smith a money digger?” It’s a legitimate, frequently asked question from Joseph Smith’s day to ours. An early Latter-day Saint newspaper, the Elders’ Journal, asked and then answered that question in a pair of articles published in 1837 and 1838. The first article teased readers with a list of provocative “questions which are daily and hourly asked by all classes of people whilst we are traveling,” then promised that answers would follow in a subsequent issue.¹ The second article answered candidly: “Yes.” Joseph Smith was a money digger, meaning that he dug for buried treasure. “But,” the article added, “it was never a very profitable job to him, as he only got fourteen dollars a month for it.”²

Informed people do not dispute the fact that Joseph Smith searched for buried treasure. The disagreement is about what it means that Joseph searched for buried treasure. For example, siblings Fawn McKay Brodie and Thomas McKay, niece and nephew of President David O. McKay, represent different interpretations of the same facts. Both well-educated, they studied the same sources. According to her biographer, “Fawn was particularly bothered by the discovery of Smith’s ‘money-digging’

activities, that is, the quest for hidden or buried treasure.”³ She told Thomas “that the Lord would never have permitted a prophet to engage in such activity.”⁴

Thomas did not share that assumption. He reasoned that Joseph could have been motivated to search for treasure by his family’s poverty. “Besides,” Thomas thought, “at that period of his life, Smith had not proclaimed himself a prophet.”⁵ Neither sibling persuaded the other. They arrived at their interpretations and stuck with them not because they differed in knowledge of objective facts but because they chose different subjective conceptions of God and prophets.

History has no power to prove which (if either) of the siblings believed correctly. All it can do is gather evidence on which readers can rely to make more informed judgments. But readers inevitably interpret the evidence and decide its meaning based on their own views of God and prophets.

In the process of this article, I will compare Fawn Brodie’s hypothetical version of history—if Joseph was a prospective prophet, he would not have dug for treasure—with her brother’s contextual interpretation of the same evidence. I will feature the views of some scholars (including President Dallin H. Oaks) who interpret the evidence to mean that Joseph progressed over time. For example, Mark Ashurst-McGee, the most thorough and best-informed scholar of this evidence, interpreted the facts to mean that Joseph Smith was a village seer who used his spiritual gift to search for lost objects and legendary treasures, who was called and nurtured by God until he became a Judeo-Christian prophet and repurposed his gifts to bless people.⁶ I will conclude by highlighting an interpretation of the evidence chosen by those who knew Joseph best.

The Past Is a Foreign Country, or Joseph the Seer

Joseph Smith lived in a world where many people believed in magic, spirits, and supernatural forces. Some gifted individuals in that world were called scryers, a synonym of seers. To scry was to perceive in objects

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⁴ Bringhurst, Reconsidering ”No Man Knows My History,” 72.
⁵ Bringhurst, Reconsidering ”No Man Knows My History,” 73.
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“the future or secrets of the past or present.”7 By Joseph’s lifetime, the expansion of Enlightenment rationalism was marginalizing magic and spirits, interpreting them as superstition. In time, everything came to be explained by natural, rather than supernatural, forces.

Washington Irving (1783–1859) wrote stories about the enchanted world Joseph knew, including several about money diggers. One of Irving’s stories, published in 1824,8 the year after Moroni first visited Joseph, tells of a nocturnal treasure dig in which a scryer or seer with green glasses and a forked divining rod finds the location of a buried treasure, silently draws a circle around it, and performs ceremonies “to prevent the evil spirits which kept about buried treasure, from doing them any harm.” Then the fisherman, Sam, dug “a considerable hole” while the scryer, “by the aid of his spectacles, read off several forms of conjuration,” and Wolfert Webber “bent anxiously over the pit, watching every stroke of the spade.”9

7. See Oxford English Dictionary (1911), s.v. “scry, scryer, scrying.”
“At length the spade of the fisherman struck upon something that sounded hollow. . . . ’Tis a chest,’ said Sam. ‘Full of gold, I’ll warrant it!’ cried Wolfert.”\(^{10}\)

Just then they heard a sound, looked up, and saw on the rocks above them in a red cap “what appeared to be the grim visage of [a] drowned buccaneer, grinning hideously.” The 1832 painting *The Money Diggers* depicts this moment. The scryer dropped his divining rod and ran one way, Sam “leaped out of the hole” and ran another way, and “Wolfert made for the water-side.”\(^{11}\) Each eventually made their way home and told their tales, but “whether any treasure were ever actually buried at that place; whether, if so, it were carried off at night by those who had buried it; or whether it still remains there under the guardianship of gnomes and spirits . . . is all [a] matter of conjecture.”\(^{12}\)

According to the Joseph Smith Papers, “by 1825 Joseph Smith had a reputation in Manchester and Palmyra, New York, for his activities as a treasure seer, or someone who used a seer stone to locate gold or other valuable objects buried in the earth.”\(^{13}\) Treasure-seeking culture was real, including the gift of seeing, but the treasures were probably legendary or imaginary. There is no evidence that Joseph or his peers ever found the treasures they sought. So why did people think Joseph could find them?

At twenty years old, in 1826, Joseph Smith stood amid a crowd of curious (and some hostile) onlookers before a justice of the peace in northeastern Pennsylvania, not far from the Susquehanna River. The nephew of his employer, Josiah Stowell, accused Joseph of fraud by leading Stowell to believe he could find buried treasure by looking into a certain stone. According to one account, Joseph

\[\text{said when he was a lad, he heard of a neighboring girl some three miles from him, who could look into a glass and see anything however hidden from others; that he was seized with a strong desire to see her and her glass; that after much effort he induced his parents to let him visit her. He did so, and was permitted to look in the glass, which was placed in a hat to exclude the light. He was greatly surprised to see...}\]

\(^{10}\) Irving, *Tales of a Traveller*, 254.

\(^{11}\) Irving, *Tales of a Traveller*, 254.

\(^{12}\) Irving, *Tales of a Traveller*, 256.

but one thing, which was a small stone, a great way off. It soon became luminous, and dazzled his eyes, and after a short time it became as intense as the mid-day sun. He said that the stone was under the roots of a tree or shrub as large as his arm, situated about a mile up a small stream that puts in on the South side of Lake Erie, not far from the New York and Pennsylvania line.¹⁴

Joseph testified that he had gone and found the stone, washed it, dried it, put it in his hat, “and discovered that time, place and distance were annihilated; that all intervening obstacles were removed, and that he possessed one of the attributes of Deity, an All-Seeing-Eye. He arose with a thankful heart. . . . On the request of the Court, he exhibited the stone. It was about the size of a small hen’s egg.” Joseph Sr. then testified that it was all true, and that both he and Joseph Jr. “were mortified that this wonderful power which God had so miraculously given him should be used only in search of filthy lucre.”¹⁵

Then Josiah Stowell testified. “He swore that the prisoner possessed all the power he claimed, and declared he could see things fifty feet below the surface of the earth, as plain as the witness could see what was on the Justices’ table, and described very many circumstances to confirm his words.” When the justice questioned, “Deacon Stowell, do I understand you as swearing before God, under the solemn oath you have taken, that you believe the prisoner can see by the aid of the stone fifty feet below the surface of the earth, as plainly as you can see what is on my table?’ ‘Do I believe it?’ says Deacon Stowell, ‘do I believe it? no, it is not a matter of belief: I positively know it to be true.’”¹⁶

Martin Harris also knew that Joseph could see in his stone, and just as certainly as Stowell did. Martin said,

I was at the house of his father in Manchester, two miles south of Palmyra village, and was picking my teeth with a pin while sitting on the bars. The pin caught in my teeth, and dropped from my fingers into shavings and straw. I jumped from the bars and looked for it. Joseph and Northrop Sweet also did the same. We could not find it. I then took Joseph on surprise, and said to him—I said, ‘Take your stone.’ I had never seen it, and did not know that he had it with him. He had it in

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¹⁶ “Appendix: Reminiscence of William D. Purple,” 3, emphasis original.
his pocket. He took it and placed it in his hat—the old white hat—and placed his face in his hat. I watched him closely to see that he did not look [to] one side; he reached out his hand beyond me on the right, and moved a little stick, and there I saw the pin, which he picked up and gave to me. I know he did not look out of the hat until after he had picked up the pin. 17

In his Manuscript History, excerpted in the Pearl of Great Price, Joseph Smith explained that after the death of his older brother Alvin, which crippled his family’s ability to make cash payments on their farm or finish the construction of their home, Joseph went to work for “an old Gentleman, by the name of Josiah Stoal [Stowell] who lived in Chenango County, State of New York. He had heard something of a silver mine having been opened by the Spaniards in Harmony Susquahanah County, State of Pensylvania, and had previous to my hiring with him been digging in order if possible to discover the mine.” Joseph said that he searched for the silver for nearly a month, along with others, before giving up the quest. “Hence arose the very prevalent story of my having been a money digger,” said Joseph in his history. 18

Another document to examine “is an agreement allegedly made between two groups of investors” who hired Joseph Smith and others, including Joseph’s father, to share what they might discover “at a certain place in Pennsylvania . . . , supposed to be a valuable mine of either Gold or Silver.” The scholars of the Joseph Smith Papers did excellent source criticism of this document, showing that it “cannot be authenticated.” Though dated 1825, the only known version of the document comes from an April 1880 issue of the antagonistic Salt Lake Daily Tribune newspaper. The hostile article got several details about the document wrong, but the document itself does not discredit Joseph. It is consistent with his history and with his mother’s memoir. 19

Lucy Mack Smith’s memoir of her family explains why Josiah Stowell recruited Joseph. She echoed Joseph’s story about how his work for Stowell led to later disrepute as a money digger. Unlike Joseph’s account, however, Lucy’s version includes a reason why Stowell valued Joseph’s help. He “came for Joseph,” Lucy says, “having heard, that he was in

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possession of certain means, by which he could discern things, that could not be seen by the natural eye.\footnote{20}

Evaluating Our Sources of Knowledge

This is explained further in the largest collection of documents relative to Joseph Smith’s treasure seeking. These documents include several controversial statements by neighbors and some acquaintances of the Smith family who believed that Joseph’s ability to discern involved a stone or stones. Many of these statements were gathered in 1833 by a man named Doctor (really, he was named Doctor) Philastus Hurlbut, an excommunicated Latter-day Saint who was antagonistic to Joseph Smith and the Church.\footnote{21}

The statements Hurlbut gathered were published by another critic, Eber D. Howe, in\textit{ Mormonism Unvailed} (1834). Scholarly analysts of the statements have made strong arguments for and against their reliability.\footnote{22} Making sense of them is a challenge because they are neither all true nor all false, neither informed nor ignorant. Some of the statements are by people who knew Joseph, and others are by people who heard about him. The statements mix factual memories of events or conversations with interpretive memories—the subjective understandings of what the events or conversations meant. The statements mix eyewitness evidence with hearsay, observation with gossip, and it is difficult to discern where one ends and the other begins.

The statements Hurlbut gathered and Howe published are useful for learning what some of Joseph Smith’s former neighbors thought and felt about him in the early 1830s, after the Book of Mormon was published and the Savior’s Church was established. But the documentation is much less reliable for learning the facts of Joseph Smith’s experience in the 1820s, when he was involved, by his own admission, in treasure


digging. Joseph did not dispute the fact that he searched for buried treasure using a stone, and his mother tacitly acknowledged it. Joseph Knight, who employed Joseph in 1826 and who converted shortly after the Church was organized, wrote that Joseph “looked in his glass,” meaning his stone.  

Brigham Young later used the term *seer stone* to describe the type of object Lucy Mack Smith called “means” and Joseph Knight called a “glass.”

Many people are suspicious about the idea of seeing or discerning with a stone or other material objects endowed with supernatural power. The suspicion is based on a skeptical assumption, not a proven fact, and it is a recent phenomenon, as history goes. In ancient Israel, certain stones were associated with the priestly or prophetic office and considered a means of revelation. The Bible says that Jacob, Moses, and Aaron had powerful rods and that Joseph of Egypt had a cup “whereby indeed he divineth” (Gen. 44:5).

In early modern Europe, there were several magician mathematicians, including Isaac Newton, who sought after or used marvelous stones. John Dee, for example, taught algebra and navigation, sought to commune with angels, and used a translucent stone that has been displayed in the British Museum.

However, by Joseph Smith’s time, Enlightenment rationalism in large parts of Europe and America turned revelatory stones and similar objects into a form of magic, which some elites and many in the developing middle class separated from religion. The word *occult*, which originally described desirable secret knowledge given only to the initiated, acquired a negative sense and became a weapon to label and thus discredit people who continued to think of “the supernatural as inseparably interwoven with the material world.”

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26. See also Genesis 30 and Exodus 7, 14. For more on the gift of Aaron in latter-day scriptures, see Dennis L. Largey, ed., *Doctrine and Covenants Reference Companion* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2012), s.v. “Gift of Aaron.”
This is the environment in which Doctor Philastus Hurlbut gathered statements from some of Joseph's former neighbors. The documents were intended to imply “that treasure-seeking was an ignorant superstition whose devotees were either credulous dupes or cunning con-men equally driven by materialistic greed.”

But given many neighbors’ Enlightenment-biased view, their interpretation of Joseph’s behavior is subjective. It is not an objective truth that is verifiably the same regardless of what point of view a person chooses. Rather, it is one possible explanation of the fact that Joseph and others could reputedly see in stones and sometimes used that ability to search for buried treasures.

In an age when new revelation of any kind was suspect, revelatory stones were certainly seen as dubious. Though many people in Joseph Smith’s time had adopted skeptical views, he and others continued to live in what one scholar called the shadow of the Enlightenment, meaning that they still inhabited a world like Isaac Newton’s a century and a half earlier: a world in which revelation and magic, God and buried gold coexisted along with calculus, and all made good sense. It was seen as an enchanted world as much as an enlightened world, and no matter how strongly or widely held the opinion to the contrary, it is by no means a proven fact that Enlightenment rationalism represents reality better than a world that includes supernatural forces, divine beings, demons, and marvelous works and wonders. Making occult a bad word does not prove that there are not supernatural forces infusing the material world. It can be hard to see past our own sense of scientific certainty, escape our assumptions about what is possible, and overcome a feeling of superiority that regards people in the past as more primitive and less informed in order to understand the world as Joseph Smith and many of his peers experienced it. This is in part because, as Alan Taylor


31. Herbert Leventhal, In the Shadow of the Enlightenment: Occultism and Renaissance Science in Eighteenth-Century America (New York: New York University Press, 1976). On Newton’s magically scientific world, see Michael White, Isaac Newton: The Last Sorcerer (Reading, Mass.: Addison–Wesley, 1997), including pages 105–6, where White claims, “Ironically, although Newton was largely responsible for the development of the scientific enlightenment which swept away the common belief in magic and mysticism, he created the origins of empirical science and the modern, ‘rational’ world in part by immersing himself in these very practices.”
(a Pulitzer Prize–winning historian of Joseph Smith’s culture) described it, we assume a “rigid insistence that magic and Christianity are polar opposites when in fact they have usually been inseparable and natural allies.” That was true for the respected Presbyterian Josiah Stowell and for the upstanding Methodist Willard Chase.

Chase was one of the people who made a statement for Philastus Hurlbut to explain his claim that Joseph Smith kept a stone that belonged to him. Another neighbor claimed that Willard Chase’s sister Sally could see in the stone. Another said Sally could reputedly “look through [a] stone she had & find money” and added that “Willard Chase use[d] to dig when she found where the money was.” Willard’s own statement never mentions his sister’s reputation as a scryer or his participation in treasure quests. Instead, it casts Willard as informed and intelligent, in contrast to the Smiths, whom he represents as dishonest opportunists. Yet the statement suggests that they knew each other well and that they cooperated with and confided in each other, until they disagreed about the stone or, perhaps, the meaning of Joseph’s discovery of gold plates.

According to Willard Chase’s statement, he employed Joseph and his brother to help him dig a well. “After digging about twenty feet below the surface of the earth,” he said, “we discovered a singularly appearing stone, which excited my curiosity. I brought it to the top of the well, and as we were examining it, Joseph put it into his hat, and then his face into the top of his hat.” According to Willard, Joseph said “that he could see in it.” This curious telling of the events says that Joseph claimed to have “brought the stone from the well; but this is false,” said Willard. “There was no one in the well but myself.”

Willard Chase’s version of this story has him hiring Joseph and his brother to dig a well, but then digging it himself as they watched. It may be that Willard shaped his story to give him rightful claim to the stone while distancing himself from Joseph Smith and what Willard called “the credulous part of the community.” But evidence, including his own statement, shows that Willard Chase believed in supernatural means

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34. Anderson, Joseph Smith’s New York Reputation Reexamined, 120.
35. Anderson, Joseph Smith’s New York Reputation Reexamined, 120.
as well.\textsuperscript{36} So did other people in the area. Several of the people who made statements about Joseph’s reputation for being able to discern the location of buried treasure in a stone were involved with him in these adventures and believed in his gift.\textsuperscript{37}

Records from the Chenango County courthouse in Norwich, New York, show that a justice of the peace issued an order for a constable to bring Joseph before him, and that the justice ruled on the case of Joseph Smith the “Glass looker.”\textsuperscript{38} But these records do not tell what the ruling was. Josiah Stowell, the man who employed Joseph to seek for buried treasure in 1825, testified that Joseph was a legitimate seer. The charges against Joseph were apparently made by one of Stowell's relatives. A New York law against disorderly conduct at that time forbade people “to discover where lost goods may be found,” assuming that such activity was fraudulent.\textsuperscript{39} The law itself and various versions of what took place at the hearing or trial indicate how the world around Joseph Smith was moving from enchanted to enlightened, from supernatural gifts to naturalistic explanations, and how, in that process, Joseph’s gift was subject to different interpretations.

There are five different inconsistent accounts of Joseph’s appearance before the justice of the peace, published anywhere from five to fifty-seven years after the event. Only one of them claims to be the record of an eyewitness, a fellow named William Purple, who wrote that he kept the records for the justice of the peace. The Purple account includes quite a bit of testimony reportedly from Joseph and claims that he was discharged, meaning released without being cleared or condemned.

In 1831, a Christian magazine published the earliest account of Joseph’s 1826 hearing. The article was by a doctor named Abram Benton, who was not at the hearing but learned of it later. He represents the skeptical view, claiming that Joseph was a glass-looker who deceived the gullible and that he was “tried and condemned before a court of Justice” but allowed to escape.\textsuperscript{40}

\begin{footnotes}
\item 37. Anderson, \textit{Joseph Smith's New York Reputation Reexamined}.
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Published in 1835, the next account comes from Oliver Cowdery, who said that he gained his knowledge of the events from Joseph. Commenting “on the private character” of Joseph, Oliver claimed that “some very officious persons complained of him as a disorderly person, and brought him before the authorities of the country; but there being no cause of action he was honorably acquitted.”

Two accounts, published in 1873 and 1883 respectively, say they are copies of an actual record that a niece of the justice of the peace later tore from his docket book, but that cannot be verified from known records. The docket book is missing, the pages have not been found, and justices of the peace were not required to make trial transcripts and usually did not. These two accounts disagree on some details, but both say that Joseph was found guilty. Between these accounts, in 1877, William Purple, the only eyewitness, published his version, which says, again, that Joseph was discharged.

The conflicting evidence makes the most sense when we recognize that each of the accounts is a mixture of factual memories and interpretive memories. Factual memories recall verifiable data that does not vary over time or between reporters, such as Joseph Smith appearing before a justice of the peace named Albert Neely in March 1826, charged with disorderly conduct. Interpretive memories are subjective, specific to the rememberer, and prone to vary over time. Imagine that a few friends sat side by side at the same symphony, movie, or sporting event. When they recall the event later, they will share factual memories but have different interpretive ones. Perhaps one friend enjoyed the symphony while another found it boring. One person’s toothache could mar his or her movie experience while friends laugh nonstop. Interpretive memories tell us more about the subjective interpreter than about the facts of the remembered event.


Differences in the several accounts regarding Justice Neely’s ruling are probably examples of interpretive memory. The 1877 account by the eyewitness William Purple is likely accurate about the verdict—a discharge, meaning that Joseph was found neither innocent nor guilty. Oliver Cowdery interpreted the decision as acknowledgment of innocence, while sources unfriendly to Joseph interpreted the event as acknowledgment of guilt. Probably none of these reporters flatly lied or knowingly distorted their story. Rather, each likely reported the event as their interpretive memories perceived it.

Why a discharge? Available records are inconclusive, but it seems likely that there was no evidence presented that Joseph was anything but what he claimed to be. The William Purple account is not friendly to Joseph, but it acknowledges in the end that “as the testimony of Deacon Stowell could not be impeached, the prisoner was discharged.”44 One of the consistent evidences in most of the accounts is Stowell’s confidence in Joseph as a seer. Three of the accounts that otherwise vary give the same account of Stowell’s testimony, that Joseph Smith could see by supernatural power.

Understanding Joseph’s Motives for Telling His Own Story

Josiah Stowell is an example of an upstanding Christian in Joseph’s time and place who still believed that God’s power infused material objects and was manifest in gifts possessed by seers.45 At least some members of Stowell’s family represented the newer, more skeptical way of thinking and thus interpreted the same facts differently. A later article in a Christian magazine, for example, described Joseph as “a money-digger and necromancer from his youth.” Those words weaponize a neutral fact by associating treasure seeking with necromancy, a negatively charged word describing conjuring the dead to assist in magic. The article went on to tell readers how to interpret Joseph’s character: “An equal compound of the imposter and the fanatic, and combines all the features of the knave and the dupe.”46

This helps us understand why Joseph responded to such reports by telling his own story, “owing to the many reports which have been put

45. W. D. Purple, “Joseph Smith, the Originator of Mormonism,” Chenango Union (Norwich, N.Y.), May 2, 1877, 3.
46. James H. Eells to Joshua Leavitt, April 1, 1836, in New York Evangelist (New York City), April 9, 1836, 59.
in circulation by evil-disposed and designing persons.”

In telling his own story, Joseph said he “was very conscious that I had not kept the commandments, and I repented heartily for all my sins and transgression, and humbled myself before Him whose eyes are over all things.” In his history, Joseph confessed that he searched for treasure, mingled with all kinds of society, and frequently fell into foolish errors, but he endowed those autobiographical facts with different meanings than his critics did. Joseph said he “often felt condemned for [his] weakness and imperfections.” As a result, he was repenting when an angel revealed to him that there were actual gold plates containing a gospel, not material treasure, and that Joseph could only get them if his purpose was to glorify God, and if he rejected the temptation “to get the plates for the purpose of getting rich.”

Joseph candidly acknowledged, in both his 1832 history and to Oliver Cowdery, that it took him years and concerted effort to become reoriented. “I had been tempted of the adversary,” he said, “and sought the Plates to obtain riches and kept not the commandment that I should have an eye single to the Glory of God therefore I was chastened and sought diligently to obtain the plates and obtained them not until I was twenty one.” For Joseph, and apparently for Moroni, Joseph's treasure seeking was misguided but not malignantly sinful behavior that Joseph outgrew as he became converted to Jesus Christ and learned from an angel “what the Lord was going to do, and how and in what manner his kingdom was to be conducted in the last days.” Treasure seeking was not the sum of Joseph’s story. It was one obstacle he overcame in the story of becoming a chosen seer.

Reasons to Trust Sources That Say Joseph Could See

Regardless of Joseph's treasure seeking, many trusted sources claim that he was a seer. His mother wrote that he was known to “discern things, that could not be seen by the natural eye.” His father knew it. Joseph

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52. “Lucy Mack Smith, History, 1845,” 95.
Knight knew it. Martin Harris knew it. Josiah Stowell told a justice of the peace “very many circumstances” that proved to him that Joseph could see in his stone.

Despite his gift, Joseph Smith did not find any buried treasures he had looked for. What is the best interpretation of that fact? Abram Benton gave a hostile interpretation of it in an 1831 Christian magazine article titled “Mormonites.” Benton said Joseph “constantly failed in his pretensions” to find treasures, but “still he had his dupes who put implicit confidence in all his words. In this town, a wealthy farmer, named Josiah Stowell, together with others, spent large sums of money in digging for hidden money, which this Smith pretended he could see, and told them where to dig; but they never found their treasure.” None of the witnesses to Joseph’s gift claimed that Joseph found treasure. Rather, they watched as he saw and found other, more mundane things. That led Stowell to hire Joseph to use his gift to find treasure. But while working for Stowell, Joseph may well have felt conflicted in making money by using his gift to search for a treasure he soon realized did not exist. After “nearly a month” he made it clear to Stowell that they were not going to find a treasure.

Making sense of this past requires us to see that Joseph Smith and hostile commentators created various versions of the story—interpretations that are not the facts themselves but meanings assigned to the facts, meanings we may assume are true but that are not objectively, demonstrably true. It may come as a surprise to some readers that Fawn Brodie and many Latter-day Saint believers share the same interpretation of the facts: that God would not call someone who searched for buried treasure by using a seer stone. Dale Morgan, a well-informed but unbelieving student of early Latter-day Saint history and a confidant of Fawn Brodie, highlighted her flawed interpretation. “Your chain of reasoning looks logical,” he wrote to her, “but it is attended by a string
of ifs all along the line (precisely as with the orthodox Mormon reasoning), and the probability of error increases as the chain of reasoning lengthens." 58

Fawn Brodie nevertheless adopted the version of the past created by Philastus Hurlbut and Eber Howe, who didn’t unveil "Mormonism" as much as they shaped the way generations have interpreted it. 59 That includes generations of believers, who may not recognize that any discomfort they feel from the prospect of Joseph Smith using a seer stone is not an objective reality. Rather, it is created by assuming a negative interpretation of otherwise neutral facts. The Book of Mormon says, after all, that the Lord would prepare for his servant a stone "which shall shine forth in darkness unto light" (Alma 37:23). Why not, therefore, choose to interpret the fact that Joseph discovered just such a stone or stones positively instead of negatively? Assuming the validity of the Hurlbut and Howe interpretation may cause us to either conclude that Joseph was not a prophet or shut our eyes to the well-attested fact that he used a stone to search for buried treasure. But we do not have to accept the meaning others gave to the facts. We do not have to perceive the past hypothetically, as Fawn Brodie did.

It was her interpretive choice to perceive Joseph’s seeing and treasure seeking as negative. Like many believers, she was, remember, “particularly bothered by the discovery of Smith’s ‘money-digging’ activities” since she assumed “that the Lord would never have permitted [a prophet] to take part in such activity.” 60 That perspective was not based on any verifiable facts. It was based on Brodie’s assumption about the mind of God. It is hypothetical history as compared to well-documented history. After all, a characteristic of some scriptural call narratives is the prophets’ statement of their sinfulness and of being called and qualified by God despite their flaws (see Isa. 6; Jer. 1; Ether 12; and Moses 6). In some of his own revelations from the Lord, Joseph is rebuked and told to repent (see D&C 3, 10, 64). And in his own histories, Joseph confesses his sins and documents his repeated repentance. In Joseph’s interpretation of himself, as with many prophets in scripture, he was a flawed vessel who

60. Bringhurst, Reconsidering “No Man Knows My History,” 72.
was called of God and qualified for divine work. Beset by conflicting choices, Joseph steadily if not exclusively chose faith, hope, charity, and an eye single to God’s glory (D&C 4).

**Learn the Facts and Then Interpret Them with Faith, Hope, and Charity**

We can interpret historical records less hypothetically and more accurately when we deliberately think in this order:

1. Discover from primary sources of knowledge what the facts are, meaning the knowledge that is verifiably the same regardless of how one interprets it.
2. Then consider various interpretations and judge for ourselves how best to interpret the facts.

Wise and well-informed historians interpret the facts discussed here as part of a past “where treasure-seekers were neither fools nor deceivers, where treasure-seeking was part of an attempt to recapture the simplicity and magical power associated with apostolic Christianity.” Joseph came to think of his ability as “a gift from God.” His family and friends knew of his gift and believed in him. They believed because they knew of his ability to see, and they marveled at it. Josiah Stowell was certain that Joseph could see, as were Martin Harris, Oliver Cowdery, and David Whitmer. These witnesses interpreted Joseph’s past in terms of growth and progress along a path from local seer to biblical-style prophet.

Brigham Young, for instance, believed “that there are thousands in the world who are natural born Seers, but when the Lord selected Joseph Smith to be his . . . mouthpiece upon the earth in this dispensation, he saw that he would be faithful and honor his callings.” Alan Taylor, a prominent non-Latter-day Saint historian, interpreted the facts to mean that Joseph’s “transition from treasure-seeker to Mormon prophet was natural, easy, and incremental.”

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knowledgeable believing biographer, wrote that Joseph’s ability to see in stones enabled him to “move step by step into his calling.” In his wordy way, Oliver Cowdery judged Joseph “worthy the appellation of a seer and a prophet of the Lord. In this,” he added, “I do not pretend that he is not a man subject to passions like other men, beset with infirmities and encompassed with weaknesses; but if he is, all men were so before him, and a pretence [sic] to the contrary would argue a more than mortal, which would at once destroy the whole system of the religion of the Lord Jesus; for he anciently chose the weak to overcome the strong, the foolish to confound the wise.”

In the 1980s, after a modern document forger named Mark Hofmann proved to be a deceiving murderer, and it was clear that his forgeries were designed to undermine faith in Joseph Smith, Elder Dallin H. Oaks reclaimed the historical way of seeing the past, offering an alternative to the Hurlbut, Howe, and Hofmann interpretations. President Oaks is widely known for his ability to analyze evidence carefully with both spiritual sensitivity and a judicious, highly trained intellect. He even-handedly announced, “Some sources close to Joseph Smith claim that in his youth, during his spiritual immaturity prior to his being entrusted with the Book of Mormon plates, he sometimes used a stone in seeking for treasure. Whether this is so or not, we need to remember that no prophet is free from human frailties, especially before he is called to devote his life to the Lord’s work. Line upon line, young Joseph Smith expanded his faith and understanding and his spiritual gifts matured until he stood with power and stature as the Prophet of the Restoration.”

Was Joseph Smith a money digger? Yes. And when we discern the difference between that neutral fact and hostile interpretations of it, we no longer deny the fact or fear its implications. Joseph responded to the many reports “designed by the authors thereof to militate against” the Savior’s Church. In that situation, he “did not want to make himself a target for attacks that would cripple the work. But neither did he repudiate the stones or deny their powers.” Like Joseph, we get to choose how to make sense of the historical facts, what we believe about God and how God calls prophets, and whether we believe that stones can be endowed with

supernatural power to “magnify to the eyes of men” words that could not otherwise be read (Ether 3:23–24).

These are open choices. The facts of history do not force us to conclude either that Joseph was a disingenuous deceiver, as Hurlbut and Howe believed, or that he was endowed with spiritual gifts and called by God to use them, as his family and friends believed. Both of those options are open to people who know the very same facts. The historical facts do not act on us. We act upon them. If we wish, we can choose to be guided in our actions by faith, hope, charity, and an eye single to God’s glory (D&C 4).

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One Week before Kindergarten

I see you from the window
As I do dishes
Again—
Sunshine soaking your hair
Mud soaking your dress
As you pet the cat and eat garden peas.
Crack
Peel
Chew
Pet
Again and again
For an hour or more.

You know your letters
And how to write your name.
You know what to do if someone tries
To take your lunch
Or pull you from a swing.
We’ve practiced all this,
But bells will soon ring
And lines will form.
You will try to find your place
And kids will laugh and cut
In front
Before the teacher sees.

So stay outside, love.
Soak up another hour
Of light
And garden
And mud.
Cross-contaminate your little hands
With peas and cat hair.
The sanitizer dispenser
Will be posted
By your classroom door
Next week.
So soon.
Too soon. —Ali Benson Moulton

This poem was a finalist in the 2022 BYU Studies Poetry Contest.
Coming and Going to Zion
An Analysis of Push and Pull Factors Motivating British Latter-day Saint Emigration, 1840–60

Samuel Benson

In 1863, acclaimed British writer Charles Dickens boarded a New York–bound emigrant ship docked at Liverpool. He was not a passenger but an observer; the subjects of his study were more than eight hundred Latter-day Saint emigrants aboard the ship Amazon. Dickens's stated purpose, as he later wrote in The Uncommercial Traveller, was “to bear testimony against them if they deserved it,” but to his surprise, he instead found “the pick and flower of England.”¹ Dickens lauded the Latter-day Saints’ politeness and their “aptitude for organisation,” and he praised their leader, Apostle George Q. Cannon. By the end of his visit, Dickens found it “impossible to deny that, so far, some remarkable influence had produced a remarkable result, which better known influences have often missed.”²

But Dickens—and countless other observers of nineteenth-century British Latter-day Saint emigrants—found some difficulty in describing why these people left their homeland to gather in the New World. Indeed, Dickens evaded the question entirely. This Latter-day Saint

¹. Dickens’s analysis was correct, as passengers aboard the Amazon would go on to be respected vocalists, newspaper editors, business and community leaders, and one U.S. Supreme Court justice. See Richard L. Jensen and Gordon Irving, “The Voyage of the Amazon: A Close View of One Immigrant Company,” Ensign 10, no. 3 (March 1980): 16–19.
movement “was, taken all in all, the most successful example of regulated immigration in United States history,” one twentieth-century historian wrote. Existing literature contextualizes this emigration within its economic and social framework, but to date, there exists no sociological analysis of migratory motive focused on the first two decades of British Latter-day Saint emigration alone.

This article consults diaries, autobiographies, and letters written by fifty emigrants. They are housed in several locations, including Brigham Young University’s Saints by Sea database, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints’ History Library, FamilySearch digital records, local collections in England, and published volumes. To identify any correlating themes between the writings of the emigrants and the message originating from Latter-day Saint leaders, the accounts are frequently compared with the writings of contemporary missionaries, especially Parley P. Pratt, whose A Voice of Warning (fig. 1) was the preeminent missionary tract of the age. The Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star, the

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5. A Voice of Warning, a catalytic 216-page tract written by Elder Parley P. Pratt, published in 1837, had a profound impact on many Latter-day Saint conversions. Pratt’s biographers, Terryl L. Givens and Matthew J. Grow, argue that from the time A Voice of Warning was published, it “served the church as its most powerful proselytizing tool—after the Book of Mormon—for more than a century.” It was eventually printed in over thirty English-language editions. See Terry L. Givens and Matthew J. Grow, Parley P. Pratt: The Apostle Paul of Mormonism (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 90, 103, 119; see also Parley P. Pratt, A Voice of Warning and Instruction to All People, Containing
Church’s British-focused newspaper published from 1840 to 1970, is also referenced frequently.

In an attempt to identify emigrant motives within a sociological framework of push and pull factors, I discovered a strong link between the spiritual and temporal motives of the emigrants, encapsulated by their millenarian belief that Christ’s return was at hand. The first section briefly reviews the existing literature on religious emigration from Britain during the mid-nineteenth century, with a particular emphasis on historical accounts and analysis of Latter-day Saint emigration. The second outlines my methodology in selecting and analyzing emigrant accounts. The following section lays out my findings, organized by three central themes: economic factors, revelatory factors, and the doctrine of “gathering.” For the British Latter-day Saint of the nineteenth century, nearly all motives for emigration—whether economic, social, or religious—could be tethered back to an apocalyptic belief and understanding that their emigration was a necessary part of end-of-times prophecy.

**Literature Review**

Among nineteenth-century movements from Britain, the Latter-day Saint emigration was “the only successful, privately organized emigration system of the period,” as one observer wrote. Historians, from both

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7. This belief stemmed from Joseph Smith’s early teachings. Five months after the Church was organized in April 1830, Smith received a revelation in which he was commanded to “bring to pass the gathering of mine elect” and gave a specific purpose for this gathering: “Wherefore the decree hath gone forth from the Father that they shall be gathered in unto one place upon the face of this land, to prepare their hearts and be prepared in all things against the day when tribulation and desolation are sent forth upon the wicked” (D&C 29:7–8). In January 1831, another revelation gave additional reasons for gathering, including building a community with the righteous, escaping “the enemy,” and receiving heavenly power: “And that ye might escape the power of the enemy [and Babylon], and be gathered unto me a righteous people, without spot and blameless—wherefore, for this cause I gave unto you the a commandment that ye should go to the Ohio [or other gathering places]; and there I will give unto you my law [consecration]; and there you shall be endowed with power from on high” (D&C 38:31–32).

8. Hence the periodical’s title: the Millennial Star.

within and without the Latter-day Saint tradition, have taken a keen interest in the early Church history in Great Britain. Volumes exist on the activities of early Latter-day Saint missionaries to the British Isles, their converts, and the subsequent emigration of those converts.

The Conversion of the British Saints

Latter-day Saints first arrived in England in 1837 and enjoyed massive success.\(^{10}\) In the *Latter-day Saint Gathering*, Fred E. Woods notes that by 1850, there were “more Latter-day Saint converts in the British Isles than there were in all of North America, including Utah.”\(^{11}\) The emigration of Latter-day Saint converts to North America began a decade earlier, in 1840, when John Moon led a group on the ship *Britannia* from Liverpool to New York.\(^{12}\) For the next fifty years, more than

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Coming and Going to Zion

four hundred additional ships would follow, and emigration became increasingly systematized, with Liverpool—then the most active port in Europe—serving as headquarters for departures and a hub for organization. Meanwhile, robust missionary work continued throughout England, Wales, and Scotland.

Historians have documented a series of events—that influenced the Latter-day Saint emigration over the next two decades. In 1842, Great Britain implemented the Passenger Act, a law governing the treatment of emigrants on British-origin ships by introducing standards for passengers' food, medicine, and lodging. The law raised the price of emigration, increasing the

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17. Significant levels of Latter-day Saint emigration persisted until the 1890s, though my study focuses only on the first two decades of emigration.


19. It is worth noting that another Passenger Act was passed in 1855, and while it was being crafted, the House of Commons invited Samuel W. Richards, on behalf of the Church, to testify before a select committee about the Latter-day Saint migration system. The *Morning Advertiser* wrote, “[Richards] gave himself no airs but was so respectful in his demeanour, and ready in his answers, that, at the close of his examination he received
Latter-day Saints’ need for a systematized, efficient program. Between 1840 and 1846, most Latter-day Saint emigrants migrated to Nauvoo, Illinois, where the Church was headquartered. In 1846, Latter-day Saints were expelled from Illinois and pushed farther west, and the British emigration was paused. By 1848, British emigrants resumed their migrations, which now included cross-continental travel (usually by foot) to the Utah territory in addition to the sea voyage. In 1849, Church leader Brigham Young implemented the Perpetual Emigrating Fund (PEF), a loan program that facilitated the cross-Atlantic and overland travel of Latter-day Saint emigrants from Great Britain and other countries. The so-called Utah War, a prolonged conflict between the U.S. government and settlers in Utah Territory, began in 1857, causing a recall of nearly all American missionaries from Great Britain and slowing the emigration process once again.

The Emigration of British Latter-day Saints

For decades, the chief historical writing on nineteenth-century Latter-day Saint emigration from Great Britain to the United States was that of Phillip A. M. Taylor. His 1954 article “Why Did British Mormons Migrate?” and his 1965 book, *Expectations Westward: The Mormons and the Emigration of Their British Converts in the Nineteenth Century*, both chronicle the mass movement of this group from 1840 until the mid-1890s and explore the factors that may have motivated its migration. Both works are irreplaceable in their exploration of the economic factors that may have pushed emigrants away from Great Britain and the unique messaging employed by Latter-day Saint emissaries from

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the thanks of the committee in rather a marked manner.” See Frederick Piercy, *Route from Liverpool to Great Salt Lake Valley* (Liverpool: Franklin D. Richards, 1855), 18.


North America. Where Taylor’s work leaves an opportunity for further research is the absence of emigrants’ writings as a primary source for gauging motive. In his 1954 article, Taylor offers an extensive list of his source material, including ship records, the *Millennial Star*, and the *Journal of Discourses*. Mentioned last are “a great number of diaries,” though none are directly cited in his work. In his 1965 book, Taylor writes that “few [migrants] recorded, honestly or dishonestly, why they joined the Church, why they emigrated, or what the experience meant to them.” We now know this is not the case. In the nearly six decades since Taylor’s book was published, access to the writings of these emigrants—including in digitized form—has opened the door for further exploration.

Other scholars have since built upon Taylor’s work, using emigrant writings as a chief source. Professor Fred Woods at Brigham Young University, the curator of the vast Saints by Sea collection, has written extensively about these early emigrants. Several of his works draw heavily on first-person accounts written by emigrants. Of particular interest to my study are his 2002 book *Gathering to Nauvoo*; his 2008 article, “The Tide of Mormon Migration Flowing through the Port of Liverpool, England”; and his 2022 essay, “The Latter-day Saint Gathering.” In *Gathering to Nauvoo*, Woods’s third chapter, “Embarkation and Crossing the Atlantic,” directly cites over a dozen emigrant accounts, several of them accompanied by photographs of the emigrants themselves. The following chapter, “Up the Mississippi,” includes citations to a number of additional emigrant accounts. Woods’s article “The Tide of Mormon Migration Flowing through the Port of Liverpool, England” uses dozens of emigrant autobiographies, diaries, and letters as source material to document the Latter-day Saints’ movements through Liverpool between

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25. One example of this is the Saints by Sea database, which contains over thirteen hundred first-person emigration accounts written by Latter-day Saints. But even in Taylor’s day, access to many emigrant accounts was possible, as evidenced by the scholarly work in this literature review that dates to the mid-twentieth century. Taylor, who wrote his 1965 book as a faculty member in the Department of American Studies at the University of Hull in Hull, U.K., would have had considerably more difficulty in accessing many of these emigrant accounts, largely stored in archives in the western U.S., than his American counterparts would have had.
1840 and 1890. Woods notes several potential reasons for the writers’ decisions to emigrate, including a desire to “come to Zion” and to be “taught by the Prophet of God,” though analyzing migratory motive is not the principal purpose of the article. Woods’s essay “The Latter-day Saint Gathering” also cites several first-person accounts, but of particular interest is his section “Letters Encourage the Gathering of British Saints,” which quotes emigrants who corresponded with the Latter-day Saints still in Great Britain, encouraging their emigration. Some of these cite the original letter; others were published later in the *Millennial Star*. Woods’s contributions to the literature are immensely noteworthy because they synthesize the largest trove of first-person emigrant accounts, the Saints by Sea database.

In 1977, Malcolm R. Thorp’s article “The Religious Backgrounds of Mormon Converts in Britain, 1837–52” entered the literature at precisely the point Taylor left a hole, utilizing diaries, reminiscences (autobiographies), or “insightful family histories” to assemble case studies of 298 British Latter-day Saint emigrants. He modeled his work after that of British minister and historian Leslie F. Church, whose 1948 treatise, *The Early Methodist People*, attempted to “rediscover the first Methodist people, and to see them, not only in groups or as followers of John Wesley, but as individuals with definite personalities and lives of their own.” “Too often,” Thorp lamented, “it is the institutions that really count” to the Latter-day Saint historians of his day, “and little attention is paid to the rank and file.” But Thorp’s analysis had the express goal of identifying the British writers’ motive for converting to the Latter-day Saint faith, not the subsequent step of emigrating. This distinction is important. The concept of emigration indeed formed part of the missionaries’ pitch—the doctrine of gathering “permeated the literature, discourses, and music of the church,” wrote historian Conway Sonne—but emphasizing conversion

32. Conway B. Sonne, *Saints on the Seas: A Maritime History of Mormon Migration, 1830–1890* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1983), xv. Taylor makes this case, as well: “It is, indeed, possible that, within the broader teaching about the Kingdom, the theme of emigration may have seemed especially attractive [to the British convert]. But it would be unwise to isolate this from the appeal of the Mormon faith as a whole.” See Taylor, *Expectations Westward*, 38.
motive over emigration motive changes Thorp’s lens of focus and thus his results. Conversion is a spiritual act, costing nothing; emigration, as I show later in my study, is both temporal and spiritual but certainly has a significant economic cost. The culminating act of the decision to convert is baptism, a single, one-time act. The result of the decision to emigrate involves the sale or abandonment of nearly all of one’s possessions and relationships; a monthslong voyage; a permanent change of residence, nationality, and social community; and a host of other factors. I do not dispute that the two are connected—“In the early days of the Church,” taught President Russell M. Nelson, “conversion often meant emigration as well”\(^33\)—but in the work of the historian or social scientist, studying the two as separate (yet related) factors is essential to adequately understand migratory motives (or, in the inverse, to understand motives for joining the Church).\(^34\) The dramatic difference between Thorp’s findings and my own are evidence of this.\(^35\) It is worth noting, too, that Thorp found that “emigration to America” did not “have any apparent influence on conversion,”\(^36\) further solidifying the possibility that the two are separate enterprises and should be studied as such.

Other historical work has also attempted to use emigrants’ writings as its primary source material. Rebecca Bartholomew’s *Audacious Women: Early British Mormon Immigrants* is a hallmark account of one hundred female emigrants between 1838 and 1888, following them (wherever possible) from their conversions to the Church in Great Britain to their emigration to North America and, for many, to their subsequent migration to Utah. Bartholomew attempted to rely on “quality” documents\(^37\) for each

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34. For this reason, I do not directly cite Polly Aird, “Why Did the Scots Convert?,” *Journal of Mormon History* 26, no. 1 (2000): 91–122, in this work, although its subject matter is similar to my own, because Aird does not adequately distinguish between the acts of conversion and emigration. Her title suggests an emphasis on conversion, yet the paper is an analysis of the push and pull factors driving emigration. She frequently uses the terms “convert” and “emigrate” interchangeably, with no apparent distinction.
35. For example, Thorp did not discover any evidence of economic factors or “the building of Zion” having a role in converts’ decision to join the Church. Both of these themes recur in my study, which will be detailed further. For Thorp’s analysis, see Thorp, “Religious Backgrounds,” 63.
37. Bartholomew defines this as “contemporary documents created by a directly-involved party,” such as diaries. She called these “Type A” records. “Type B” records are “further removed from the actual events but still close to the women’s lives,” such as autobiographies or biographies written by a close family member. “Type C” records,
woman, but this was possible for only thirty-four of them; the remaining sixty-six are documented through autobiographies written later in life or biographies written by others. In her seventh chapter, “Emigration,” Bartholomew undergoes a robust analysis of the emigrants’ writings. “Instead of considering theories of why they emigrated,” Bartholomew writes, “we will examine the phrases with which emigrants themselves described the adventure of migrating.” Many of the phrases she encountered overlap with my own discoveries, such as a desire to “go home,” obey “the gospel,” or act in accordance with “the spirit of gathering.”

Bartholomew’s work is valuable in charting potential motives for emigrants, though her sample is broader than my own in its scope (1838–88) and narrower in its demographics (a study of only females).

An essential—and unexpected—contribution to the literature is by John F. C. Harrison, a renowned professor of history at the University of Leeds, Sussex University, and the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

the most numerous of all, include biographies written by descendants. The total tally for Bartholomew’s study: Type A, 34; Type B, 16; Type C, 50. See Rebecca Bartholomew, Audacious Women: Early British Mormon Immigrants (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 1995), xii–xiii.

40. When Harrison—a renowned professor of history at the University of Leeds, Sussex University, and the University of Wisconsin–Madison—passed away in 2018, the Guardian praised him as a “pioneer of ‘history from below,’” noting his extensive work on working-class movements and “popular” life in Victorian England. In his early work on this topic, he was not sympathetic to Mormonism, however. In 1971, Harrison clumped Mormonism under the umbrella of “popular religion,” alongside the “adventist and millenarian sects” that flourished in Victorian England—none of which qualified to be called, by his term, “respectable religion.” But by 1987, Harrison was intimately interested in Latter-day Saint history, as evidenced by his being invited to offer the Tanner Lecture at the Mormon History Association’s annual conference, in which he presented his research on Latter-day Saints in early Victorian Britain. Perhaps Harrison’s discovery, in his words, of the “rich collection of Mormon journals and autobiographies” from his period of study played a role in his paradigm shift on Mormonism. In his 1971 work, Harrison noted “popular religion[s]” were those “about which historians at present know very little”; by his keynote address in 1987, he’d discovered a trove of journals and autobiographies, “scarcely known outside Mormon circles, just waiting to be exploited by historians of nineteenth-century Britain.” His warmth toward Latter-day Saints (and, particularly, to BYU professor Malcolm Thorp) eventually led to an additional contribution to Mormon history: he sold some 5,400 items to Brigham Young University from his personal collection, dealing largely with Victorian British history. These books, pamphlets, and serials are now housed in the J. F. C. Harrison Collection in the Harold B. Lee Library. See J. F. C. Harrison, Early Victorian Britain, 1832–51 (London: Fontana/Collins, 1971): 159; John F. C. Harrison, “The Popular History of Early Victorian Britain: A Mormon Contribution,” in Jensen and Thorp, Mormons in Early
His article, “The Popular History of Early Victorian Britain: A Mormon Contribution,” was presented as the Tanner Lecture at the Mormon History Association’s 1987 conference in Oxford, U.K. In it, Harrison studies thirty-five autobiographies written by Latter-day Saint converts who resided in Great Britain at some point in the 1830s or 1840s. He notes that despite living in “one of the periods of greatest political, economic, and social change in English history,” the writers center their accounts on two key events—baptism and emigration. “Time was to be measured as before or after the great event,” Harrison writes, initiated by baptism and “further emphasized by emigration.” However, Harrison comes to a surprising, Durkheimian conclusion, claiming that the writers’ impoverished temporal conditions quite literally forced them to emigrate—not of their own free will, but as compelled by their status:

The pursuit of material well-being and escape from the anxieties and stresses that poverty entails preoccupied most of them for much of their time. . . . They did not, for the most part, make the decisions that affected their lives, but were, in effect, controlled by others. A working man, even a skilled artisan with traditional notions of independence, could do little about external conditions that affected his work. Perhaps the biggest step toward emancipation that he could take was emigration, which seemed to offer a new dimension of freedom.

A significant amount of scholarly work shares commonalities with my own research, be it overlapping periods of focus or similar examinations of potential migratory motives. One 1989 undergraduate thesis from a British university, “Across the Waves: Mormon Emigration of British Saints, 1840–1870,” analyzes a similar time span as my own, and though the author discusses potential impetuses for emigration, she cites only three first-person accounts. Conway B. Sonne’s landmark work, “Saints on the Seas,” masterfully describes potential reasons for

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41. The Tanner Lecture, now a mainstay of the Mormon History Association’s annual conference, was founded in 1980 and provides a platform for prominent, non–Latter-day Saint historians to share their research on themes relating to Latter-day Saint history or practice. See Dean L. May and Reid L. Neilson, eds., The Mormon History Association’s Tanner Lectures: The First Twenty Years (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006).


British migration—“to the Mormons the gathering was both spiritual and temporal,” he wrote—but his use of emigrant journals as a source is far outweighed by other data, such as missionary tracts, ship records, and Church publications.\footnote{Sonne, Saints on the Seas, xv.} Even so, Sonne operated with access to fewer records than the modern historian does, as evidenced by some of his assertions. For example, he claimed only 333 Latter-day Saint companies crossed the Atlantic between 1840 and 1890, although records now exist of hundreds more.\footnote{Sonne, Saints on the Seas, 148–59; for a more complete list of companies, see the Deseret News 1997–98 Church Almanac (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1996): 159–67.}

Historian W. S. Shepperson, in British Emigration to North America, asserts that “[Mormons emigrated to improve their economic and social position, and because they believed it to be the will of God.”\footnote{Shepperson, British Emigration to North America, 143.} Remarkably, this conclusion is declared without citing a single first-person account of an emigrant (missionaries excluded).

**Methodology**

This article consults a sample of diaries, autobiographies, and letters written by United Kingdom–born Latter-day Saint emigrants who traveled to North America between 1840 and 1860. (For simplicity, these writings are henceforth referred to by the blanket term “accounts.”) In this time period, some twenty-three thousand Latter-day Saints emigrated from England to North America, peaking with thirty-five hundred in 1856 alone.\footnote{Taylor, Expectations Westward, 145.} Emigration paused in 1846, after the death of Joseph Smith and while Church leaders, then headquartered in Nauvoo, Illinois, searched for a new place to settle.\footnote{See Richard E. Bennett, We’ll Find the Place: The Mormon Exodus 1846–1848 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997).} As such, my sample is divided into two subgroups: the “Nauvoo period,” spanning from 1840 to 1846, and the “Utah period,” from 1847 to 1860. I choose 1860 as the ending point because the advent of the American Civil War in 1861 caused significant changes to the flow of Latter-day Saint emigration from England.\footnote{Many early Latter-day Saints saw the Civil War as a fulfillment of Joseph Smith’s 1832 prophecy, in which he predicted the “rebellion of South Carolina,” so that the “Southern States shall be divided against the Northern States.” This revelation is now canonized as Doctrine and Covenants 87. The revelation was likely used by early missionaries, and its contextualization of the war as a part of the chaos to precede Christ’s Second Coming only hastened the need to gather. See Scott C. Esplin, “‘Have We Not Had a Prophet among Us?’: Joseph Smith’s Civil War Prophecy,” in Civil War Saints (Provo,
Journaling has long been a practice of Latter-day Saints. From the very first emigrant voyage in 1840, Church leaders encouraged emigrants to record their travels with acute detail.\(^{51}\) The majority of the existing accounts were written by men,\(^{52}\) though I made an effort to include women in my study wherever possible.\(^{53}\) The accounts themselves are remarkable troves of information about the early Church in England, the emigrant experience, and life in the nineteenth century.\(^{54}\) Many of


\(^{52}\) Wrote historian Rebecca Bartholomew: “Nineteenth-century Mormon church records in Britain were kept by men, which may explain why they dealt 96 percent with men. . . . Whether it is strictly true that [Victorian British women] could not write, most did not.” Historians have made strides in writing the oft-unwritten history of women, including Bartholomew—who, as the descendant of Welsh and English emigrants, sees her work as “a search for my mothers.” See Bartholomew, Audacious Women, viii–ix.

\(^{53}\) Nine of the fifty accounts I studied were written by women.

\(^{54}\) The accounts I studied are housed in several places. The resource that proved most useful was Brigham Young University’s Saints by Sea database, formerly called “Mormon Migration.” This online database includes ship records for every known vessel that carried Latter-day Saints across the Atlantic from 1840 to 1890. Biographical information—such as emigrants’ age, ship name, and travel dates—are readily accessible. Some writings of the emigrants themselves are available in this database, but only in snippets (and usually only when emigrants describe the journey itself, not the buildup to emigration, where hints as to motive are more likely found). As such, although I reference accounts published in Saints by Sea frequently, I located the original documents wherever possible. I also consulted FamilySearch’s digital records, an online genealogical service provided by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I found several accounts in physical archives, namely the Church History Library in Salt Lake City; Brigham Young University’s Harold B. Lee Library in Provo, Utah; the British Library in London; and the Cambridge University Library in Cambridge, U.K. The Church History Library holds troves of accounts, many of which I located using references in the Saints by Sea database, and a number are accessible in the library’s reading room on microfiche or in physical form. The Harold B. Lee Library includes every edition of Our Pioneer Heritage, a twenty-volume series published by the Daughters of Utah Pioneers between 1957 and 1977, which often includes full autobiographies of early British converts. The British Library and Cambridge University Library both contain published diaries of more well-known emigrants. The family history library at the local chapel of The Church
the accounts I consulted, however, had little information about clear motives for emigration. As such, I studied many more documents than those cited in this study; the fifty emigrants cited here were selected precisely because they referenced, either explicitly or implicitly, potential motives for their emigration. Where I had access to day-to-day diaries written by the emigrants, I focused my study on the period between that individual’s baptism into the Church and the time of their emigration, because any discussion of motive typically fell in this period. These writings were rich and complex, chronicling many aspects of the daily life of nineteenth-century British people—work, family strife, holiday celebrations, religious meetings, social gatherings, and the sort. Rare were the instances in which individuals explicitly stated, “This is why I wish to emigrate.” Instead, I pieced together potential motives by coding writings based on recurrent themes, both temporal and spiritual—whether economic struggle, family in North America, or spiritual promptings—or other clues.

The diaries studied were written by a diverse group of authors—men and women, adults and children, single people and married people. Common characteristics include their birth in the United Kingdom (where birth records are available), departure from a British port (usually Liverpool), and membership in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The average age upon departure of emigrants studied was twenty-six years old. A table of demographic information is included in the appendix. I recognize the limits of my research. How emigrants describe their motivations may differ based on the time of writing or their intended audience, and because few explicitly state their motive, much of my analysis is reliant on logical conclusions of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Cambridge was an unexpectedly helpful resource as well, thanks to the superb work of former ward historian Leonard Reed in documenting the early converts in Cambridgeshire. I cite his work repeatedly.

55. All North America–bound ships carrying British Latter-day Saints between 1840 and 60 departed from Liverpool except three, which departed from Bristol: the Caroline, the Harmony, and the Caroline (each 1841 departures). See the Deseret News 1997–98 Church Almanac, 159–62.

56. In this table, each emigrant is numbered 1 through 50. Throughout the text, whenever I reference this dataset, I indicate it by including the number after the emigrant’s name in parentheses, such as William Clayton (1). I do this for two reasons: First, I reference a number of secondary sources throughout my analysis, and I do not wish the reader to be confused when distinguishing between the two. Second, if the reader desires to see more demographic information on the emigrant quoted, the reader need only find the emigrant’s number in the appendix.
based on their writings and their actions. I hope to have eliminated a
degree of bias by counterbalancing emigrants’ writings against those
of nineteenth-century Latter-day Saint missionaries and Church pub-
llications, but I recognize I still write through the lens of a twenty-first-
century researcher.

Analysis

Economic Motives

The existing literature on British Latter-day Saints’ emigratory motives,
including P. A. M. Taylor’s seminal works, focuses nearly exclusively
on economic factors. It is a matter of fact that many of these emigrants
were leaving a region besieged by economic deprivation: England faced
severe economic recessions throughout the late 1830s and early 1840s,
Ireland faced its Great Famine, and Scotland was whipped about by the
early turbulence of the Industrial Revolution. Taylor’s work makes
repeated reference to the British economy of the age, and with reason:
“It may fairly be asserted that the Mormons began their work in Britain
at a time of acute economic difficulties for the working classes, and of
grave social discontent,” wrote Taylor. The People’s Charter of 1838—
a document signed by thousands of working-class British people and
presented to Parliament—accurately expresses the general deprivation
of the country’s laborers during this time: “We find ourselves over-
whelmed with public and private suffering. . . . Our traders are trembling
on the verge of bankruptcy; our workmen are starving. Capital brings
no profit, and labour no remuneration. The home of the artificer is deso-
late, and the warehouse of the pawnbroker is full.”

An article in the Times of London on June 3, 1857, cited in Taylor’s
work, further describes the economic state of some Latter-day Saint
converts: “The time of distress which just preceded the great emigration
movement was exactly the time at which the highly coloured picture of
peace, comfort and prosperity in a new land, drawn by the Mormonite
missionary, would tell most powerfully upon our own people, crushed
by low wages and tempted to look upon their own country as a scene of

immovable hardship, inequality and oppression. . . . Their arguments were addressed to a mass that was already on the move.”

To contemporary observers, the British Latter-day Saints certainly appeared to form part of a “mass . . . already on the move.” During the hundred years between 1815 and 1914, around ten million people emigrated from Britain (the country’s 1914 population was only forty-three million). But a closer analysis shows distinctions between the Latter-day Saints and the British populace writ large. As Taylor explains, most British emigration to the U.S. during this period was that of able-bodied males, presumably seeking work in the New World and, in many cases, saving funds to bring family later. Among Latter-day Saints, however, the number of males and females was almost equal and included a notable number of children, suggesting a much higher rate of familial migration than other emigrant groups. Although Latter-day Saint emigrants are believed to be predominantly urban and of lower classes (factory workers, miners, and so forth), when Taylor divided Britain into regions of affluence and poverty, he found no distinction in Latter-day Saint emigration rates from the various regions (though Taylor’s analysis of emigrants as mostly urban has been called into question). Perhaps most damning of all to the economic-motive theory is Taylor’s analysis of Latter-day Saint emigration versus general emigration, wherein he finds sharp distinctions in year-over-year rates. Latter-day Saint emigration, he discovered, was much more responsive to trends within the Church than to the economic trends that pushed the emigration of their British compatriots to the United States.

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62. The late Leonard Reed, former ward historian in the Cambridge Ward, disputes Taylor’s assertion that these British emigrants were predominantly urban. Of the 163 documented emigrants from Cambridgeshire from 1850 to 1862, only 33 came from urban areas, Reed argues. Writes Reed, “My study, which also looked at the same period (1850–62), showed that a majority of the Cambridgeshire emigrants came from rural areas—approximately 54–68% from rural locations compared to around 27–41% from urban areas. . . . Both Taylor’s figures and my own suffer from the limitations of available data, so are not entirely accurate. However, with 55 known emigrants in this period coming from one Cambridgeshire rural parish alone (Gravely), Taylor’s figures cannot possibly represent the true picture.” For further analysis, see Reed, Living Latter-day Saint History in Cambridgeshire, 25, emphasis in original.
While Taylor’s work helps contextualize Latter-day Saint emigration within its broader economic setting, we cannot generalize one motive for all, nor can we fairly distinguish economic motives from other factors. Taylor, admittedly, recognizes this: “There must be a certain element of ambiguity in any investigation into the secular or spiritual motives of Mormon emigration. . . . With a doctrine and propaganda of such a type, it is perfectly possible that the effect upon the minds of converts would not admit of any rigorous distinction between secular and spiritual.” My research confirms this: when emigrants refer to the paltry economic state of Britain, their language rarely fails to contain equal religious meaning, often connected to a millenarian belief in the coming end-times. Taylor’s work does not use emigrant accounts as source material; in my study of these accounts, it is often impossible to divorce the temporal (often economic) motives for emigration with the spiritual, religious ones.

My analysis of economic motive centers on three themes: economics as a push or pull factor, economics as a nonfactor, and the prevailing idea of “Babylon” as the spiritual lens through which emigrants describe their temporal state.

Economics as Push or Pull Factor

The Church as an institution—whether through its leaders in Nauvoo and in Utah, its missionaries, its U.K.-based newspaper (the *Millennial Star*), or its printed missionary tracts—sometimes wielded economic motives as a tool to encourage emigration. The *Star* often referenced the temporal prosperity emigrants could enjoy in the New World. An article about one of the first companies in 1840 to leave Britain described the emigrants as “the industrious poor, who were upon the point of starvation in this land, or who were working like slaves to procure a very scanty substance,” who “escape[d] from worse than Egyptian bondage, and [went] to a country where they [could] by their industry obtain an inheritance, and enjoy plenty for themselves and their children.” Another 1842 article noted the “oppression, priestcraft and iniquity” that abounded in Britain and called America “a country every way adapted to [the emigrants’] wants and conditions.” In 1850, yet another article pleaded for more emigrant workers: “We feel the need of more laborers,

64. “Emigration,” *Millennial Star* 1, no. 10 (February 1841): 263.
for more efficient help, and multiplied means of farming and building
at this place. We want men. Brethren, come from the States, from the
nations, come! and help us to build and grow, until we can say, enough—
the valleys of Ephraim are full.”

Emigration was temporarily put on hold after the martyrdom of
Church President Joseph Smith in 1844 and Latter-day Saints were
forced to evacuate Nauvoo in 1846. During the interregnum, British
Latter-day Saints took it upon themselves to approach the queen and
petition for land on British-controlled Vancouver Island. Their letter,
titled “Memorial to the Queen for the Relief, by Emigration of a Portion
of Her Poor Subjects,” makes frequent and forceful reference to emigra-
tion as an economic decision. Instead of making a religious argument for
emigration, its authors focus entirely on the temporal destitution of the
British working class:

Your memorialists are moved to address your Majesty by the unexam-
pled amount of abject, helpless, and unmerited misery which at present
prevails among the labouring classes of this country. . . . The sufferings
and destitution of these portions of your Majesty’s subjects have, in the
judgment of your memorialists, reached a point at which it has become
the duty of both sexes, and of all ranks, to use every constitutional means
for their relief and remedy. . . . Your memorialists, without attempting
to enumerate the many alleged causes of the present national distress
and suffering, feel convinced that Emigration to some portion of your
Majesty’s vacant territories is the only permanent means of relief left to
a rapidly increasing population, which, if retained here, must swell the
aggregate amount of misery, wretchedness, and want.

By 1849, the request for land in Canada was denied, and British emi-
gration to the U.S. was resumed. The Church, now headquartered in the
valley of the Great Salt Lake, established its Perpetual Emigrating Fund
Company, a welfare system that functioned off the volunteer donations
of well-settled members in Salt Lake City. According to its articles of incorporation, the PEF’s purpose was twofold: to assist the migration of both the poor and of skilled laborers. In 1856, the criteria for receiving PEF loans was changed to prioritize those who had been waiting the longest to emigrate. See Scott Alan Carson, “Indentured Migration in America’s Great Basin: Occupational Targeting and Adverse Selection,” Journal of Interdisciplinary History 32, no. 3 (Winter 2002): 389–90. For further reading, see Gustive O. Larson, “The Story of

66. “Important from Salt Lake City,” Millennial Star 12, no. 8 (April 1850): 120.
68. According to its articles of incorporation, the PEF’s purpose was twofold: to assist the migration of both the poor and of skilled laborers. In 1856, the criteria for receiving PEF loans was changed to prioritize those who had been waiting the longest to emigrate. See Scott Alan Carson, “Indentured Migration in America’s Great Basin: Occupational Targeting and Adverse Selection,” Journal of Interdisciplinary History 32, no. 3 (Winter 2002): 389–90. For further reading, see Gustive O. Larson, “The Story of
could receive a loan to aid the costs of travel and repay it on some future day. Though it wasn’t available to British converts until later, by 1853 the PEF was being touted in the *Millennial Star* as an effective path out of poverty: “Many a Saint, poor, afflicted, and distressed, will yet turn to the Emigrating Fund as to the guiding star to a better land.” The effect this program had on emigration cannot be easily quantified, though it is worth noting a concern from Church leaders around this time was one of emigrants making the trek solely for financial purposes. In 1855, Church President Brigham Young wrote to Elder Franklin D. Richards, then the British Mission president, “Be wary of assisting any of those who come into the Church now, during these troublesome times for Britain, whose chief aim and intention may be to get to America.”

Several emigrants made note of some passengers who seemed interested in economic gain and nothing else. In a letter, one individual, Joseph Fielding (11), wrote of several of his fellow emigrants who left the group upon reaching the United States: “They seem afraid to suffer affliction with the people of God, and so go to Missouri, where there are none, thinking also to get a little more money.” Another emigrant, George Whitaker (32), wrote of meeting some friends in St. Louis, who told him he “could make a better living there than at Nauvoo, as it was a very poor place to make money.” He declined their offer, but not before noting that “quite a number of the weak-minded Saints remained there” in St. Louis, presumably for economic reasons.

Nonetheless, incidents of emigrants writing specifically of economic allure in their decision to emigrate—and not citing parallel religious motives—are rare. Of my sample, 1841 emigrant Richard Bentley (9) is the lone example. He wrote of a family friend who encouraged his emigration to America as “the best thing I could do as there was a much better chance for an opening for a young man in that country than in England.”

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70. *Millennial Star* 17, no. 52 (December 1855): 814–15. Interestingly, Young signs this letter as “President, P.E.F. Co.” instead of as “Church President.”
Thus, although it is clear that economic factors were frequently mentioned to encourage migration, there is a significant dearth of references to economic benefit alone in this dataset. Instead, when writing about the financial distress of the U.K. or the opportunities of North America, emigrants usually paired those themes with religious ideas and language.

Economics as a Nonfactor

In January 1841, only months after the first wave of British emigrants set sail, the Church’s First Presidency wrote a letter to the British Saints encouraging emigration. The letter pushes back on any assumption of temporal benefit from emigration; instead, British Saints are told to “freely make a sacrifice of their time, their talents, and their property, for the prosperity of the kingdom.”74 On top of the “tribulation” Saints would face upon arriving in America, the trip was expensive (costing between £9 and £15 per passenger), and for the first decade of emigration, loans from the Perpetual Emigrating Fund were not available, so converts were responsible for paying their own way (or receiving modest help from the local branches).75

In the accounts studied, there are many more references to emigrants spurning financial opportunity or economic gain in order to emigrate than there are in favor of it. Several people described receiving financial offers to stay and choosing to emigrate nonetheless. Upon deciding to emigrate in 1841, Mary Ann Weston Maughan’s (7) father hired a series of lawyers to convince her to stay in England. She writes in her diary their offer to “give me money to stay at home but none to go away with.” Mary was undeterred: “But trusting in the work of God I bade them all adieu.”76 Thomas Steed (29), a teenager when he emigrated, was


75. Taylor claims migration was “as likely to be as high as £15” per person; an 1856 Millennial Star article claims it was £9 for those over one year old and £4.10 for infants. In early Victorian Britain, a common laborer in London received between twenty and thirty shillings per week; thus, the cost to cross the Atlantic was the equivalent of about three months’ wages. See Taylor, “Why Did British Mormons Emigrate?,” 267; “Emigration to Utah for 1856,” Millennial Star 18, no. 8 (February 1856): 122; Liza Picard, “The Working Classes and the Poor,” British Library, October 14, 2009, https://www.bl.uk/victorian-britain/articles/the-working-classes-and-the-poor.

first approached by a man with a job in Scotland to work “under a first class gardener, ‘So you would,’ said he, ‘be fixed for life.’” Steed declined the offer and emigrated. When 1842 emigrant George Cannon (14) resigned from his job to travel to America, his employer offered him “five shillings a week more wages,” saying it was “quite absurd to think of more distress coming on this country—that things were beginning to look brighter, and in a short time would be (as he termed it) alright.” In dramatic fashion, Cannon recalled his response to his employer, in which his boss relented: “Finding that I was determined by the help of God to go, he acknowledged that my testimony and his own observation had led him to conclusions which made him tremble, and he begged of me to write to him when I got to Nauvoo the truth, and he would place confidence in my account, and he thought he could induce about forty of his relatives to join him in emigrating to Nauvoo, and they are pretty rich in worldly substance (he has no prejudice against the doctrine.)”

Although the financial status of emigrants prior to their departure from Great Britain is not always clear, it can be assumed several emigrants were quite well-to-do based on their occupations or other clues in their writings. Edward Ockey (4) inherited his father’s farm and must have received significant wealth from it, because he wrote of paying the “passage to America” of six other Latter-day Saints—a significant sum. He later claimed he “had loaned out a great portion of [his] money to bring the poor saints to America which consisted of about $2,000,” a sum that likely would have covered the sailing cost of about two hundred emigrants. William Rowley (28), an 1843 emigrant, wrote of “the loss of rich and influential friends and connections, with other claims

79. “A Short Account of the Life of Edward Ockey,” 1–2, MSS SC 681, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
80. This is an estimate. An original copy of Ockey’s diary is not available. I compared several typescripts of it (at the Lee Library and on FamilySearch.org), each of which use the American (USD) dollar sign ($). This is likely due to his autobiography being written decades after settling in Utah. However, it is unlikely he calculated the sum he spent in paying for others’ emigration in USD, since he made that payment in 1841 while still in England and before ever traveling to the U.S. As such, I assume that Ockey’s figure of 2,000 is in pounds (GBP, £), and either out of habit or the error of later transcribers, that sign was changed to USD. My calculation is simple: I divide his figure (£2000) by the reported cost of
of a lucrative and secular nature,” which he suffered by emigrating to the U.S.: “Yet all these have been hushed and subdued in the contemplation of thus becoming a citizen in one of Zion’s stakes.”

Hannah Tapfield King (40; fig. 2), who emigrated with her husband, came from some wealth. Days before sailing, the King estate was sold, and Hannah wrote in her diary, “It only fetched 615 £—I must say I feel disappointed but they think we must go now & we cannot help ourselves I had expected it to realize much more—it is a sweet pretty place—well the will of God be done.”

Robert Crookston (13) wrote that his “neighbors thought we were crazy, and as they knew that we could not take much of our possessions with us we had to sell everything at a great sacrifice.” But he thought little of their opinions: “We wanted to come to Zion and be taught by the prophet of God. We had the spirit of gathering so strongly that Babylon had no claim on us.”

An 1855 emigrant, Jane Charters Robinson Hindley (46), wrote that she “forsook my home but not to gather wealth or the perishable things of this world.” In this dataset, the evidence of potential economic benefit fueling emigration is small in comparison to the evidence of individuals spurning economic benefit in order to emigrate.

emigration for Latter-day Saints (between £9 and £15), and the result is between 133 and 222. See footnote 75 for more discussion of emigration costs.


Babylon

In the accounts studied, references to economic deprivation are often paired with spiritual or biblical imagery, drawing attention to end-times prophecy. This Mormon millenarianism has a prominent place in the *Millennial Star*, which included a section called “Earthquakes, Floods, and Shipwrecks” and was later titled “Do We Not Live in the Last Days?” In these passages, natural disasters and other disruptions around the world were publicized, suggesting that the apocalypse preceding Christ’s return was shortly at hand. One 1851 *Millennial Star* passage read, “We are rapidly merging into the last days, and we shall be compelled to witness the scenes thereof.” Often, the term “Babylon”—the ancient cosmopolitan capital of the Babylonian empire—became synonymous with the sinful world emigrants attempted to escape. One particularly somber edition on December 28, 1861, declared, “The year closes gloomily on the nations of Babylon.” This suggests that Babylon had evolved to be a uniform term that encompassed all nations beyond the borders of Zion, not just England. The desire to escape Babylon was a key motive of the gathering, as stated in an 1830 revelation to Joseph Smith: “And ye are called to bring to pass the gathering of mine elect; . . . wherefore the decree hath gone forth from the Father that they shall be gathered in unto one place upon the face of this land, to prepare their hearts and be prepared in all things against the day when tribulation and desolation are sent forth upon the wicked” (D&C 29:7–8).

During early Latter-day Saint missionary work in Britain, “Babylon” was sometimes used as a moniker specifically for the United Kingdom, suggesting that the impoverished nation represented the filth and sin of the world. This is a somewhat puzzling description of Great Britain, as historian Matthew Rasmussen notes, since early Church leaders (like founder Joseph Smith) repeatedly called the United Kingdom a “blessed” region, justifying the decision to send missionaries to the area. Nonetheless, at some point shortly after missionaries arrived in the British Isles, the “Babylon” moniker took hold. “In spite of Joseph Smith’s

86. “Do We Not Live in the Last Days?,” *Millennial Star* 13, no. 13 (July 1851): 205.
87. As early as 1831, Joseph Smith’s revelations included language that referred to Babylon and expressly instructed the Latter-day Saints to escape Babylon. One early revelation condemned anyone who walks “after the image of his own god, whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol, which waxeth old and shall perish in Babylon, even Babylon the great, which shall fall” (D&C 1:16).
proclamation regarding the region’s blessedness, missionaries throughout the nineteenth century reviled the industrialized north” and often referred to it as Babylon. The frequent references in emigrants’ journals to their homeland as “Babylon” likely stems from the missionaries’ prior usage of the term.

An 1845 emigrant, George Whitaker (32), when recording his doubts about leaving his homeland, reminded himself that his native country was “Babylon,” and that he must leave so as to “not [be] partakers of her sins, and that we receive not of her plagues. Then I felt glad that I had left my native country, the place of my childhood, and all its surroundings.”

This reference to “plagues” implies that Whitaker saw Babylon in a scriptural light, wherein plagues would be poured out on the nations of the world in the last days (Rev. 16:1–9). Peter McIntyre (39), when emigrating in 1853, also made frequent references to Babylon in his journal. Instead of referring to his homeland as England, he mentioned that he “leave(s) none of my family in Babylon,” and referred to his emigration as “releas[ing] me and my children from Babylonish captivity.”

On a later occasion, he wrote of leaving Britain, then corrected himself with “Babylon”: “We feel to rejoice as we are the 9th ship load that has left Britain or Babylon this season, and there is no more coming after us.” On May 24, 1853, McIntyre—who was a veteran of the Napoleonic War—writes a particularly biting entry in his diary, weaving his economic poverty with spiritual dialogue:

This is Queen Victoria’s birthday. My God will remove your diadem and take off your crown, your power will be as the potsherd and King Messiah will as with an iron rod pound all your scepters. All you kings and queens of Babylon. Come Lord, our King, come quickly is my prayer. Thou knowest what I suffered from oppression and hard labor for a morsel of bread after my sore travel, hunger and thirst in the Peninsular War. My cry to thee, Oh, Lord, is Remember the cry of the poor and fill thy promise, destroy them who have oppressed the hireling and kept back their wages by fraud.

89. Matthew L. Rasmussen, Mormonism and the Making of a British Zion (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2016), 16.
In this entry, McIntyre portrays the queen as an anti-Christ figure, praying that her power be squelched and her nation destroyed by the true King. Though he never explicitly states such, his references to wage fraud may suggest McIntyre viewed America as a land of economic opportunity, where his postwar poverty would no longer impair him. This is a sentiment echoed by Thomas Callister (12; fig. 3), who quotes in his journal Elder Parley P. Pratt (fig. 4), one of the early missionaries and a fellow passenger on his ship: “Elder Parley P. Pratt was on board & delivered an oration to the Saints. It was a New York ship & had an American flag. I recollect him tell that the stars & stripes had reference to a land of liberty & that they had now left the oppressive land of England & was now on their way to a land of liberty & a land of plenty & would no longer have to give six pence for a small loaf of bread &c, &c.”

Here, Callister characterizes Pratt as alluding to England as an “oppressive” land and America as a “land of liberty” and of economic opportunity. Just one year prior, an article in the Millennial Star used near-identical language in describing the United States: “They hoist the Flag of Liberty—the ensign of Zion—the stars and stripes of the American Union; and

under its protection they completely and practically *nulify the bread tax*. They eat free bread, free tea, free sugar, free every thing.”

Matthew Rowan (45), an 1855 emigrant, weaves these themes together in his poetry. To Rowan, the concept of Babylon was inherently millenarian; as the chaos of the last days would come to a head in Babylon, the Saints would gather to Zion. He kept a journal full of original poetry, and he wrote this apocalyptic poem while aboard an emigrant ship:

Great plagues will storm the land, and tornadoes sweep the deep
Famine then will stalk abroad, they may sow but will not reap.
The convulsed earth will yawn! and its myriads will entomb.
Such will be the fate of bab‘lon, when the Saints go home.
When the Saints go home, when the Saints go home
when the vials are pour‘d out, and the Saints all home.”

In this dataset, emigration is often described as an act of fleeing Babylon, feeding into prevalent millenarian ideas and end-times prophecy.

**Prophetic Charisma and Obedience to God**

“No single doctrine distinguishes Mormonism more sharply than the belief in direct revelation,” wrote historian Richard Bushman. Early Latter-day Saints believed in two forms of communication with God: through an oracle, known as the “prophet,” or directly to the believer through the Holy Spirit. British converts were introduced to this idea in their investigations of the faith and likely recognized it as a unique aspect of the faith. Emigrant journals reflect this, making frequent references to direction from God or other forms of heavenly guidance as motivation for the decision to emigrate. This guidance is often explained in one of two ways: as a desire to follow

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95. “Emigration,” *Millennial Star* 2, no. 10 (March 1842): 154, emphasis in original.
98. Pratt’s *A Voice of Warning* cites the word “revelation” 55 times and “prophet” 103 times. Writes Pratt, “But do you ask, why is the Lord to commission men by actual Revelation? I reply, because he has no other way of sending men in any age” (61). And later, when assuring latter-day, “face to face” communication between God and man: “Let me inquire how does God make a covenant with the people in any age? The answer must be by communicating his will to them by actual revelation; for without this, it would be impossible to make a covenant between two parties” (66).
the direction of charismatic authority, such as a prophet or a missionary, or a more ambiguous manner of following the voice of God (through personal revelation, scripture, or another medium).

Charismatic Authority

The idea that Latter-day Saints were led by a living prophet (fig. 5), in the same vein as Old Testament patriarchs, was a key factor for many emigrants. Thomas Steed (29), an 1843 emigrant, records a scene upon the ship’s arrival to Nauvoo. George A. Smith, one of the Church’s leaders, came on board to welcome the emigrants and asked, “What do you come here for?” Steed recorded the simple response of one of his fellow travelers: “To be instructed in the ways of the Lord.”99 Early Latter-day Saints expected that instruction to come by way of a living prophet, called in the same manner that Jehovah had spoken to the Old Testament prophets. Pratt’s A Voice of Warning focused on this principle from the beginning and with emphasis. Toward the front of his book, Pratt noted the role of revelation in the primitive biblical church and connects that belief to the present day:

But, O, kind reader, whoever you are, if . . . you are bound by the creeds of men, to believe just so much and no more, you had better stop here; for if you were to believe the things written in the Bible, that are yet to come, you will be under the necessity of believing miracles, signs, and wonders, revelations, and manifestations of the power of God, even beyond any thing that any former generation has witnessed; . . . for no man ever yet believed the Bible, without believing and expecting such glorious events in the latter days.100

During Smith’s tenure as head of the Church, many emigrants equated their goal with personal interaction with Smith. Several emigrants referred to Nauvoo simply as “the land of Joseph” in their writings.\(^1\) William Clayton (1; fig. 6), a prolific writer, penned a letter to the Saints in England encouraging them to join him in Nauvoo. The bulk of his letter dealt with squashing negative rumors about Smith and lauding his character. Clayton wrote that Smith is “innocent” and “not an idiot, but a man of sound judgment, and possessed of abundance of intelligence.” Not lost on Clayton was Smith’s prophetic quality: “He seems exceeding well versed in the scriptures, and whilst conversing upon any subject such light and beauty is revealed I never saw before. If I had come from England purposely to converse with him a few days I should have considered myself well paid for my trouble.”\(^2\) A sister and brother-in-law of 1842 emigrant Thomas Wrigley (20) had previously immigrated to the U.S., and he visited them en route to Nauvoo. When he visited them in St. Louis, they immediately attempted to persuade him to leave his newfound faith. “In turn,” Wrigley wrote, “I preached the gospel to them and bore a faithful testimony to the truth of Joseph Smith being a Prophet of the Lord.”\(^3\) The most compelling of the new doctrines—and the most justifiable for his decision to immigrate to Nauvoo—was that of a living prophet. Some converts saw their emigration as a form of direct obedience to the prophet, like 1843 emigrant George Spilsbury (27): “We left our native land in obedience


to the command of the Lord through the Prophet Joseph Smith to come to the gathering place of the saints, namely, Nauvoo.”

Missionaries, too, played the role of charismatic leaders and had sway in emigrants’ decisions. James Barnes (6) joined the Church shortly after the first missionaries’ arrival to Britain in 1837, and he later spent time as a traveling missionary himself. But after a period preaching the gospel and seeing “many of my Brethren . . . [go] to the Land of Zion,” he “began to want to follow after them.” Among his chief incentives was “to see the prophet of the Lord.” However, because he “did not like to do anything contrary to the will of the Lord,” he first petitioned Apostle Wilford Woodruff—then stationed in Great Britain—for advice. Woodruff instructed Barnes “to go as soon as I could,” so Barnes immediately “began to make preparations to get home to Zion.”

Brigham Young (fig. 7), prior to his tenure as Church President, served as a missionary in Great Britain and was assigned to shepherd a group of emigrants to America in 1841. Thomas Quayle (5) wrote of the others on board, who “worshipped and obeyed” Young: “With a masterful air he stood among his followers. Most of the time during that journey he spent preaching to us. His was a firm belief in the direct revelation of this New World religion. So sincere and honest was he in his belief that he inspired the same sincerity and honesty in the belief of his followers.” This idea of early Church leaders was common across the emigrant accounts in this dataset; the novelty of a living prophet who communed with Deity was discussed as a pull factor in emigration.

105. “Barnes diary.”
Obedience to Other Heavenly Guidance

Other emigrants wrote of obedience to God—by way of scripture, direct revelation, or something else—as a motive for emigration. In 1842, David Candland (16; fig. 8), who boarded a ship from Liverpool to New Orleans, wrote in his journal that he was “appointed to leave England the land of my birth” and gather “to the body of the church in Nauvoo.” But that appointment was not by a Church authority or any earthly entity; rather, he was to “obey the call of heaven” in emigrating.107 James Burgess, another passenger aboard the same ship as Candland, writes of bidding “farewell to our native land, leaving all as it were for the truth’s sake.” His motive, too, was a call from Deity: “Because we believed that God had spoken from the heavens and began to call his children together from the ends of the earth to prepare for the coming of his son Jesus Christ.”108 This echoes Pratt’s A Voice of Warning, wherein Pratt writes, “But in these last days, God has again spoken from the heavens, and commissioned men to go, . . . commanding them everywhere to repent, and obey the gospel.”109 Priscilla Staines (31), who emigrated in 1844, wrote of her emigration as a requisite for her salvation. The “doctrine of the gathering,” she wrote, “was preached at this time with great plainness by the elders as an imperative command of God. We looked upon the gathering as necessary to our salvation.”110 She further wrote extensively of a “promise” given her by God: “When I arrived at Liverpool and saw the

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ocean that would soon roll between me and all I loved, my heart almost failed me. But I had laid my idols all upon the altar. There was no turning back. I remembered the words of the Savior: ‘He that leaveth not father and mother, brother and sister, for my sake, is not worthy of me,’ and I believed his promise to those who forsook all for his sake; so I thus alone set out for the reward of everlasting life, trusting in God.”

In this passage, Staines did not claim that God spoke to her and directly commanded her emigration. Instead, she took instruction from missionaries and from scripture as her command. A passage from the New Testament—in which Christ directs his followers to leave “houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name’s sake” (Matt. 19:29) as a prerequisite for his acceptance—became a subject of her literal interpretation. She applied Christ’s injunction, recorded some 1800 years previous, as a direct command to herself. This is a form of biblical literalism outlined repeatedly by Pratt in A Voice of Warning, wherein he quotes several prophecies of the Old and New Testaments and identifies their literal fulfils. “Having summed up the description of these great events spoken of by these three Prophets, I would just remark, that there is no difficulty in understanding them all to be perfectly plain, and literal in their fulfilment,” he writes, and he derides religious leaders who view scripture to be symbolic or figurative.112 It is no stretch to assume that Staines’s interpretation of Christ’s injunction to leave her family behind was a literal one, spurring her emigration from her homeland to the United States.

Some emigrants seemed to use their journals as spaces for open contemplation, expressing doubtfulness, or working through the uncertainties that lay ahead. Hannah Tapfield King (40) wrote extensively about her preparations for emigration, and she frequently lamented the opposition she faced from friends and family. Consistently, she relied on the “Will of God” as the motive for her decision: “Oh! Nothing but the Conviction that I am doing the Will of God could urge me forward to take the Stand I have done—and many trials are yet in store for me! I feel that if I am enabled to overcome them it may truly be said I shall be one of those ‘who have come up thro’ much tribulation’ but I trust in God!”113

111. Staines, quoted in Tullidge, Women of Mormondom, 288.
112. Pratt, Voice of Warning, 80–81.
113. Brewerton, Gorwill, and Reed, Songstress of Dernford Dale, 66.
On other occasions, she wrote in her journal as if it was a space for open prayer to God. In the following passage, she supplicated Deity for guidance in her travels, while acknowledging all she is about to sacrifice is “for the Gospel’s sake”:

I seem to realize something tonight of the Sacrifice we are about to make for the Gospel’s sake Oh! my Father in Heaven! thou that Know-est the hearts of all living, Thou Knowest that we are leaving our dearly beloved Home for Thee and Thy Gospel’s sake—and that we may dwell with thy people—Oh! my Father—strengthen us, and preserve us from every evil—and from the pestilence that walketh in darkness and grant Oh! my Father that we may reach the Land of Zion in Safety with all our dear ones in health & strength and safety.\(^{114}\)

Jane C. Robinson Hindley (46; fig. 9), an 1855 emigrant, used similar language to describe her decision: “I believed in the principle of the gathering and felt it my duty to go although it was a severe trial to me . . . to leave my native land and the pleasing associations that I had formed there. But my heart was fixed, I knew in whom I had trusted and with the fire of Israel’s God burning in my bosom I for-sook my home.”\(^{115}\)

Both of these emigrants, who departed from England only two years apart from each other, described their decision to migrate in similar terms. King wrote of a “Conviction that I am doing the Will of God”; Hindley wrote of her “duty to go” and felt “the fire of Israel’s God burning in my bosom.” These two emigrants, like many others, described some sort of divine guidance pushing them to go, independent of charismatic leaders.

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\(^{114}\) Brewerton, Gorwill, and Reed, *Songstress of Dernford Dale*, 67.

The Doctrine of the Gathering

The most prevalent theme relating to emigrant motives in the journals analyzed is the doctrine of the gathering. This gathering was twofold; the emigrants wrote of gathering to a specific place (Zion) as well as gathering with a specific people (fellow Latter-day Saints or family). Early Latter-day Saints believed that in preparation for Christ’s return, Christians must gather to a place of refuge and build a literal city called “Zion.” This idea is reinforced in Latter-day Saint scripture and was consistently preached by early missionaries. Pratt’s *A Voice of Warning* references “Zion” fifteen times and often links it to Old Testament prophecies about the last days: “From [the scriptures] we learn, First, that there is a set time to build up Zion, or the city of which Isaiah speaks; namely just before the second coming of Christ.” This city would be occupied by “the pure in heart,” as Joseph Smith recorded in a revelation in 1833 (D&C 97:21).

As Latter-day Saint emigration from Europe to the U.S. matured, patterns in emigrants’ writings relating to gathering become apparent. I examine here the two overarching categories of gathering, as described by emigrants: gathering to a physical location, such as Zion, the “promised land,” or America; and gathering with a people, such as the Saints, or with family. I also note a shift away from an emphasis on America after Latter-day Saints relocate outside of U.S. territory in 1847.

Gathering to a Place

In the early Latter-day Saint mind, Zion was more than just a community; it was a physical location. In 1831, Smith declared the Lord had commanded him to organize in Jackson County, Missouri, a “land of promise” that had been “appointed and consecrated for the gathering of the saints”
and for “the city of Zion” (D&C 57: 1–2).

Persecution from Missourians forced the Latter-day Saints to flee Missouri and find refuge on the other side of the Mississippi River, where they settled at Commerce, later Nauvoo, in western Illinois. When the first British converts arrived in the U.S. in 1840, Zion was being built in Nauvoo; in the mid-1840s, when Latter-day Saints were driven from Nauvoo and later settled in what is now Utah, the latter became the new gathering place and subsequently was given the title “Zion.” Wherever Zion was being built, emigrants frequently equated that place to the “land of promise.” But to many early Saints, America and the concept of Zion were one and the same.

In many diaries written during the Nauvoo period (1840–46), “Zion,” “America,” and the “land of promise” were used interchangeably, with no noticeable distinction. Rarely is this as apparent as the case of James Barnes (6), who was married on May 3, and that same evening, he and his new bride “made our way for America [or] in other words to the Land of promise [or] the land of Zion.” Interestingly, Barnes and his wife were not on a U.S.-bound ship; instead, they sailed to Quebec, traveling from there to Buffalo and then Nauvoo. Nonetheless, although their initial destination was not the U.S., they associated their travel with America—the “Land of promise,” the “land of Zion.” Edwards Phillips (8), another 1841 Quebec-bound passenger, wrote that he “left [his] home to emigrate to America” and “boarded the Caroline, for America.” Thomas Quayle (5), who emigrated in 1841, characterized the journey as “going to the Land of Promise—to America.” Richard Bentley (9), an 1841 emigrant, wrote of his decision to “go to America.” Charles Smith (26), an 1843 emigrant, wrote of turning his face “Zion-ward” as he “prepare[d]...
to emigrate to America.” Emigrant John Nelson Harper (24) in 1843 “decided to gather with the Saints in the land of America.” Emigrant Christopher Layton (23), onboard a boat in 1843 “en route for America,” wrote that as he and his fellow passengers “slowly saw the land disappear in the distance we sang one of the songs of Zion and cheered each other with sympathizing words.”

Among the most lucid of the America-as-promised-land descriptions was written by 1841 passenger Thomas Callister (12), who—as previously mentioned—heard Parley P. Pratt point to an American flag and note it represented a “land of liberty” and “of plenty.”

In the journals written in 1846 and before, there are frequent references to America in this vein—as a land of prosperity and liberty. But during this period, Latter-day Saints in the U.S. were facing serious persecutions by both vigilante groups and state-sanctioned mobs. The American Saints began preparations to leave Illinois in 1846 and to move west, beyond U.S. territory.

### Gathering to a Community

It is at this mark—when companies of Latter-day Saints began the trek westward into Mexican territory beyond the United States’ border—that there was a subtle shift in emigrants’ descriptions of Zion. Of the

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127. “Collection of Reminiscences of Thomas Callister.”
128. It is unclear how much the missionaries in Britain and, in turn, their converts understood about the persecutions American Latter-day Saints faced. For example, Joseph Smith visited President Martin Van Buren in 1839 to seek redress for the Latter-day Saints’ hardships in Missouri, but Van Buren’s unwillingness to help left Smith disillusioned (and likely played an instrumental role in inspiring Smith’s subsequent 1844 presidential campaign). This experience conflicts with Pratt’s effusive praise of the American flag as a symbol of the “land of liberty.” Missionaries and converts in Britain were likely not apprised of Smith’s June 1844 death until the fall of that year; the first known correspondence advising British Saints of Smith’s death was a letter written by Orson Hyde on July 10, 1844. See “Letter from Elder Orson Hyde,” *Millennial Star* 5, no. 4 (September 1844): 14. For more on the Latter-day Saints’ disenchantment with the U.S. government and Smith’s subsequent presidential campaign, see Spencer W. McBride, *Joseph Smith for President: The Prophet, the Assassins, and the Fight for American Religious Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).
thirty-two accounts I studied written by pre-1846 emigrants, one-third wrote of “America” as their destination, with many linking the U.S. with Zion; of the post-1846 writings, there is not a single mention of America, despite every passenger sailing on ships that arrived in Boston, New Orleans, New York, or Philadelphia. In these writings, no longer was Zion connected with a political state (the United States) or geographical location; instead, references to Zion were more frequently linked to community (often gathering “with the Saints”). A pertinent example is 1857 emigrant Ann Prior Jarvis (49), who wrote that her migratory desires were not tethered to a specific locale, but to wherever the Saints were gathered. She arrived in the U.S. on a Boston-bound ship, but she “dreaded living in Boston,” she wrote. “If it had been a city of Saints I might have felt different.”

Once Utah was solidified as the new gathering place, some emigrants reverted to connecting Zion with a place, but these references are few. More frequent is the use of “Zion” as the blanket term describing the destination. An 1851 emigrant, Charlotte Jarrold Hyder (37), the daughter of the first female convert in Cambridge, wrote while aboard a ship: “Although I long to see my friends in Cambridge, I console myself in the thought that I am going to Zion, the promised land. Oh! glorious thought.” The same year, John Moon (3)—who had already emigrated—encouraged those preparing to leave Britain by conflating Zion with “the kingdom of God”: “You must expect great tribulation in the way to Zion for those who John saw had come through much

129. “Autobiography of Ann Prior Jarvis,” 10, MS 8620, reel 12, no. 6, Church History Library.
130. The case of the Hyder family is an interesting—and somewhat disputed—one. Former Church President Gordon B. Hinckley’s wife, Marjorie Pay, descended from Charlotte Jarrold Hyder. Charlotte’s father, Richard Hyder, was believed to be the dyer and tailor for Queen Victoria and the royal family, and after his death, his late wife, Sarah, joined the Church with her daughters (Ann Eliza, Charlotte, and Martha). When relating their story, Marjorie P. Hinckley claimed Sarah “was the first woman to be baptized in Cambridge.” The late Cambridge historian Leonard Reed disputes this: “This is probably not the case. William Goates’ wife Susan, who was baptized in July 1844, almost certainly preceded Sarah, and as there are no surviving nineteenth century records of the Cambridge LDS Branch, it is difficult to know who was baptized after her and when the baptisms occurred.” See Gordon B. Hinckley and Marjorie P. Hinckley, The Wondrous Power of a Mother (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 11; Reed, Living Latter-day Saint History in Cambridgeshire, 18.
tribulation and I do not know any way but one that leads to the kingdom of God,” he wrote. “But I can say with truth that if things had been 10 times worse than was I would just have gone right ahead through all.”\textsuperscript{132} In 1853, Peter McIntyre (39) connected “the land of Zion” with “Salt Lake City, Utah the city of refuge where the house of the Lord is to be built on the top of the mountains, according to ancient prophecies; where all the seed of Abraham will be gathered, to fulfill the promise of God to our fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”\textsuperscript{133}

Other Saints took to poetry when describing Zion, like this additional verse penned by Matthew Rowan (45):

\begin{quote}
O flee to Zion's land all ye saints, now haste away; 
For there shall be salvation, as holy prophets say; 
For the day of warning hies! And the judgements soon will come, 
Which will marke the wicked mourn, when the Saints go home. 
When the Saints go home, when the Saints go home, 
When the day of warning's past, and the Saints all home.\textsuperscript{134}
\end{quote}

Rowan’s emphasis on Zion as the “home” of the “saints” is emblematic of the common belief among emigrants of his era that the gathering place would be a refuge for the faithful. Even those whose lives were jeopardized by their emigration often found comfort in the idea of Zion. Mary Goble (48), whose mother lost her life while journeying to Utah in 1855, described some of her mother’s final words: “Polly, I want to go to Zion while my children are small, so they can be raised in the Gospel of Christ, for I know it is the true church.”\textsuperscript{135} Prior to 1846, discussion of Zion was linked to geography or a political state; after 1846, when the Saints moved west, the idea of Zion was untethered from a physical place and became near-synonymous with the community of Saints.

\textbf{Conclusion}

If accounts written by emigrants in their diaries, autobiographies, and letters are to be taken at face value, one can credibly surmise that the spiritual and economic motivations for emigrating were not divorced in the Mormon mind. These Latter-day Saint migrants were driven by a host of

\textsuperscript{132} Quoted in Allen, “‘We Had a Very Hard Voyage for the Season.’”
\textsuperscript{133} “Peter McIntyre Autobiography,” 28–29.
\textsuperscript{134} Rowan, “Poetry Book,” 5. A more complete treatment of poetry composed by Latter-day Saint emigrants between 1840 and 1890 was written by William H. Brugger, “Mormon Maritime Migration in Meter” (PhD diss., Drew University, 2007).
potential reasons, and we see references to many of these in their writings. Often they were meticulous in recording their emigration, because it was (alongside baptism) an inflection point in their lives—a “watershed, the reference point . . . against which all else was to be assessed,” as historian J. F. C. Harrison described it. Utilizing their first-person accounts for our study, instead of other secondary sources, allows for a clear-eyed understanding of what motivated (or what they claimed motivated) their life-changing emigration.

The accounts in this dataset yield several findings, chief among them that temporal and spiritual motives were deeply intertwined in the minds of early Latter-day Saint British emigrants. Even when writing about the temporal aspects of their migration—such as economic factors and the countries of departure and of arrival—the emigrants often overlaid these with spiritual or religious language and symbolism. Thus, divorcing these factors (the spiritual and the temporal) is difficult. Several other patterns emerge in the study of these accounts. First, when discussing economic factors, emigrants often wrote in a language of millenarian belief, such as referring to the United Kingdom as “Babylon” and the U.S. as a refuge. Second, the allure of charismatic authority (prophets) or communication with God was influential, and emigrants often spoke of revelation from Deity as a motive for their emigration. Third, the doctrine of “gathering” was central to their decision-making, though the focus of where the “gathering” would take place shifted during this time span. While early emigrants viewed Zion and America as synonymous, later emigrants stopped writing about America as their destination and instead focused on Zion as a community of Saints.

Migration is an incredibly complex process; it was especially so in the nineteenth century. The decision to emigrate from Great Britain and board a ship to the New World almost certainly meant a permanent goodbye to the emigrant’s homeland and all that remained there, including (as it so often did) family and friends. The process of gauging the motives for this life-altering decision is likewise complex, and it is admittedly an inherently imperfect science. I do not claim that my findings are true for all samples of British Latter-day Saint emigrants, only that they are the result of a close reading of this dataset. It is impossible to know the expected audience for the emigrants’ accounts, their motivation for writing, or the accuracy of their memory when they wrote retrospective autobiographies; thus, my findings should be taken for what they are: an analysis of the writings, as they are.

There is room for further study in the same vein as I have attempted. I studied accounts from the first two decades of British Latter-day Saint emigration; three decades of study remain, with hundreds (and potentially thousands) of first-person migrant accounts available for analysis. A careful reader of journals from 1860 to 1890 would be wise to pay heed to how the end of Latter-day Saint isolation, especially due to the arrival of transcontinental rail passengers, affected migration. Further, Britain was not the lone destination from which Latter-day Saint emigrants departed; migration flowed from other parts of Europe, Canada, the Pacific islands, and elsewhere, and many of these emigrants wrote of their experiences as well.

As a final note, although Church leaders no longer call on new converts to migrate to a centralized location, Latter-day Saint migration continues. Professor Jane Lopez at Brigham Young University and others have begun the important academic work of studying recent migrants and analyzing their social integration into Utah communities or other predominantly Latter-day Saint areas. How we view these modern migrants can be mirrored by our discoveries of nineteenth-century emigrants: they are complex individuals with many variables playing into their decisions to migrate. Their motives cannot be fairly categorized into one or two buckets. The modern reader should recognize today’s migrants as similarly complex and recognize that perceived motives are rarely complete.

Samuel Benson holds a BS in sociology and Spanish studies from Brigham Young University, where he was the 2023 outstanding honors graduate. He is the national political correspondent for the Deseret News.


## APPENDIX

Diaries, Autobiographies, and Letters of LDS British Emigrants, 1840–1860

<table>
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<th>No.</th>
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Figure 1. Restored home of Joseph and Emma Smith in Kirtland, Ohio. Photograph by Steffani Young © Intellectual Reserve, Inc.
Learning Eternal Truths in Joseph and Emma Smith’s Restored Kirtland Home

Aaron L. West

At the beginning of 2023, the historic sites of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints featured twenty-five toured historic homes.¹ That’s a lot of old houses. And the number recently increased by one. On August 29, 2023, the restored home of Joseph and Emma Smith in Kirtland, Ohio, opened for guided tours (fig. 1).

So the Church now has another historic home, restored after more than a decade of meticulous work, including historical research, architectural studies, and archaeological excavations. What makes this home worth so much time and so many resources?

Spiritual Significance, Spiritual Impact

Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles answered this question on August 26 in the dedicatory services for the home and surrounding property. First, he delivered a brief discourse in which he succinctly expressed the significance of the home:

1. (1) The log home and (2) the frame home at the Sacred Grove; (3) the Hale home and (4) the Smith home at the Priesthood Restoration Site; (5) the home at the Whitmer Farm: Church Organization Site; (6) the Whitney home and (7) the Smith home at the Newel K. Whitney Store in Historic Kirtland; (8) the Johnson home in Hiram, Ohio; (9) the Sarah and Hiram Kimball home, (10) the Heber C. and Vilate Kimball home, and the (11) Young, (12) Taylor, (13) Woodruff, (14) Hyde, (15) Gheen, (16) Weeks, (17) Hunter, (18) Browning, (19) Pendleton, and (20) Lucy Mack Smith homes in Historic Nauvoo; (21) the home of the jailer’s family at Carthage Jail; (22) the Beehive House in Salt Lake City; (23) Cove Fort; (24) the Brigham Young Winter Home and Office in St. George, Utah; and (25) the Hamblin home in Santa Clara, Utah.
This house was not a Church administration building when the Prophet Joseph Smith lived here, even though he did conduct some Church business here. When they moved in, in late 1833, they had a 2½-year-old daughter (Julia, adopted) and a one-year-old son, Joseph III. Frederick is born in June 1836. This was a bustling family home.

This house today is not just intended to be a museum, even though people will go on guided tours here.

This house is far more than a building of historic interest. This house was truly a home to Joseph and Emma Smith—the place where they lived together for the longest period of time before Joseph’s death.

This home was a place where they obeyed the commands that the Lord recently had given to parents: to teach their children the gospel and bring them up in light and truth.

In this home, Emma and Joseph worked unitedly to take care of each other, their children, and members of their extended family. . . .

This house was not just any home. Rather, it was the home of a prophet—the home of the Prophet of the Restoration. In this home, Joseph received revelations that continue to guide and strengthen the Church to the present day.²

After Elder Bednar spoke about the significance of the home, he offered the dedicatory prayer in which he focused on the impact of the home. “We ask Thee,” he prayed, “to sanctify this historic site with the presence of Thy Holy Spirit. We ask Thee to bless all people that come to this home with open minds and sincere hearts. May they learn in this setting eternal truths by the power of the Holy Ghost.”³

For most people who travel to the Church’s historic sites, the primary purpose of their visit is to connect with sacred stories in the places where those stories actually occurred. They hope to learn truth—and to help family members and friends learn truth—through authentic, immersive experiences on holy ground.

Keeping Elder Bednar’s prophetic plea in mind, here are a few truths people might come to understand with greater depth when they visit Emma and Joseph Smith’s Kirtland home.

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². David A. Bednar, remarks at the dedication of Joseph and Emma Smith’s Kirtland Home, August 26, 2023, 1–2, italics in original; document in author’s possession.
³. David A. Bednar, dedicatory prayer for Joseph and Emma Smith’s Kirtland Home, August 26, 2023, 2; document in author’s possession.
The Centrality of the Family

As Elder Bednar observed, visitors at this site, whether they come in person or virtually, really do enter a *home*. The structure has been restored to its original dimensions, consistent with studies of ceiling beams, floor joists, and wall studs dating to late 1833. The upper floor, a half-story garret where the Smith family slept, is restored but not furnished and is not part of the tour for visitors. The three small rooms on the ground floor feature artifacts that are arranged not as displays but as examples of everyday life for the Smiths, as if visitors are arriving at their home in the middle of a busy day in the 1830s.

The first room in the tour, the kitchen, is plain and functional, with a wood floor and white walls finished to give the look and feel of early nineteenth-century plaster (fig. 2). The ceiling, also white, is about seven feet from the floor. Chair rails and trim around the doors and windows feature a light gray paint, a color historians found in a careful study of a few pieces of surviving original woodwork. The room features a pantry full of items for food preparation, a laundry tub overflowing with
clothes, a sink for washing dishes and garden produce, a short cabinet designed as a station for making butter and cheese, a table, chairs, a pie safe, and a hearth that looks ready for Emma to start a fire for the next meal. The room is an immersive reminder of a line Emma wrote in a letter to Joseph—an understatement that should resonate with young parents today: “Our family is small and yet I have a great deal of business to see to.”

In one corner of the room, a portion of a tree branch leans against the wall. Attached to it is a piece of thread with a bent hook tied to its end. This is a reminder that part of Emma’s “business” was the nurturing of her children. Missionaries love to share the following story, told by Joseph Smith III:

Memory has a picture of my going down to the creek with a number of other boys who engaged in fishing for the small edible fish the stream afforded. Seeing their success I, too, wanted to fish. My mother, to gratify me, procured a little pole and attached a thread thereto, with a bent pin for a hook, and away I marched to the creek. I threw my hook without bait into the water and the little fishes gathered to it as it fell. By some strange chance one became fastened to it and was drawn to the shore. In great excitement I dropped the pole and gathering the fish in my hands rushed to the house with it, shouting, “I’ve got one! I’ve got one!”

Whether or not the fish was cooked for my delectation or whatever became of it, I have not the remotest remembrance.

Near the fishing pole is a small item that connects directly to the Prophet Joseph: a tow frock—a long work shirt worn over other clothing (fig. 3). This specific tow frock was made especially for the restoration of the home. It is stained with stone dust, reflecting Joseph’s work as a foreman at the quarry where men cut and harvested stone for the Kirtland Temple. Heber C. Kimball remembered working there. He said that even though Joseph was “at the head” as their leader, “he did not put his hands in his pockets but he put on his tow frock and went into the quarry.”

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6. Heber C. Kimball, April 6, 1864, in Church History Department Pitman Short-hand transcriptions, 2013–2023, page 10, Church History Catalog, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, accessed December 7, 2023, https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/162093ff-e5d7-4ca1-a03b-81a8761f4b84/0/0.
Today a tow frock hangs on a peg near the back door. It serves as a reminder that although Joseph was devoted to his work as the earthly leader of the Savior’s restored Church, he also loved coming home. Missionaries might invite visitors to picture Joseph opening the door, hanging up his tow frock, and embracing Emma and the children. Although it is unrealistic to imagine this scene every day that the Smiths lived in the home, it is consistent with Joseph’s feelings about his family. He wrote in his journal about experiencing “much joy” and “solid comfort” with his family “at home.”

Emma did not keep a journal, and Joseph dedicated most of his journal to his church service. Consequently, we have very few records of the Smith family’s daily life. Occasional lines in Joseph’s journal provide glimpses, showing that he and Emma enjoyed spending time with their children. In one entry, he wrote, “Returned home and spent the evening,”

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around my fire-side, teaching my family the science of grammar.” In another entry, he wrote about taking the family for a ride in their horse-drawn sleigh.

For one long period—more than three months—Joseph was unable to see Emma and the children. From early May to mid-August 1834, he led the Camp of Israel, or Zion’s Camp, to Missouri, hoping to help the Saints who had been expelled from Jackson County. While he was gone, his heart and mind were never far from home and family. One day he paused to write a letter to Emma. “I sit down in my tent to write a few lines to you,” he said, “to let you know that you are on my mind and that I am sensible of the duties of a husband and father and that I am well and I pray God to let His blessings rest upon you and the children.”

One of Joseph’s most significant duties as a husband and father was a responsibility he shared with Emma: the responsibility to teach their children the gospel of Jesus Christ. Before they moved into their home, the Lord had revealed to Joseph that parents are primarily responsible for their children’s spiritual welfare:

Inasmuch as parents have children in Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized, that teach them not to understand the doctrine of repentance, faith in Christ the Son of the living God, and of baptism and the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of the hands, when eight years old, the sin be upon the heads of the parents.

For this shall be a law unto the inhabitants of Zion, or in any of her stakes which are organized.

And their children shall be baptized for the remission of their sins when eight years old, and receive the laying on of the hands.

And they shall also teach their children to pray, and to walk uprightly before the Lord. (D&C 68:25–28)

I have commanded you to bring up your children in light and truth. (D&C 93:40)

These revelations came during a time when Emma and Joseph were busy with duties in their home and in the Church and community. In concert with Emma’s statement that she had “a great deal of business to see to,” Joseph later said that his life at that time “consisted of activity and

unyielding exertion.” He also said, “I made this my rule: when the Lord
commands, do it.”

With an understanding that Joseph and Emma loved their children
and were faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, visitors in their home might
picture the young family gathering to read from the scriptures and pray.
Visitors might sense that this home was a place where a husband and
wife worked together to “bring up [their] children in light and truth.”
Surely Emma and Joseph weren’t perfect parents or spouses, but love is
the prevailing feeling in their letters to one another and in Joseph’s jour-
nal entries. It is a prevailing feeling that visitors often notice within the
walls of this newly restored home.

In this home, visitors can get a sense that Joseph and Emma saw their
family as centrally important in their lives—and that they were learning
about the centrality of home and family in God’s plan of redemption.

Service as an Expression of Discipleship and Charity

As our society becomes increasingly contentious and self-centered,
we all need examples of soul-stretching acts of charity. In Emma and
Joseph’s Kirtland home, missionaries often share stories that teach about
the power of simple acts of kindness.

One frequently told account is about a man named Jonathan Crosby
and his wife, Caroline. In the spring of 1837, Jonathan joined a crew work-
ing “on a house for the Prophet [Joseph] Smith,” probably the home of
Joseph Smith Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith. Joseph Jr. paid the workers with
banknotes from the Kirtland Safety Society. When the worth of those
notes plummeted, all the workers but Jonathan left abruptly to find other
employment. Jonathan was determined to finish the job.

One day, after trying to buy food for his hungry family, he went home
empty-handed and “sorrowful” and sat down with Caroline.

“Now what shall we do?” Caroline asked.

“Well,” he replied, “in the morning I will go tell Sister Emma . . . how
it is with us, and we won’t starve in one night.” The Prophet Joseph was
gone at the time, but Jonathan felt that Emma would do all she could to
help. Jonathan later recounted:

11. “History, 1838–1856, Volume B-1 [1 September 1834–2 November 1838],” 558 (Novem-
papers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-b-1-1-september-1834-2-november
-1838/12; punctuation and capitalization standardized, emphasis in original.
The next morning I went back to work with a resolution to tell Sister Emma of our poverty and see if she would let us have some provision; well, I went to work and did not go in to see her, but in about 2 or 3 hours she came in and brought a nice ham of bacon and said, “I do not know how you are off for provision, but you have stopped and worked while the others are all gone. Therefore I thought I would make a present of a ham of bacon.” I thanked [her] very much and told her of our destitute situation. “Well,” she said, “I will let you have some flour”; so she gave me . . . over 40 pounds of flour.12

Many people have already heard this story. It is a beloved account in the Kirtland area, and it is retold in volume 1 of Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days.13 But the story gains dimension and substance when visitors hear it anew in the Smiths’ kitchen, where Emma probably retrieved the ham and flour, or in their back room, where she might have looked out the window to see Jonathan working alone, burdened with hunger and worry.

This story becomes more meaningful when we consider that Emma probably did not give that ham and flour from a position of abundance—especially in 1837, as the Kirtland Safety Society limped toward its ultimate failure. She and Joseph were never wealthy. They often needed the very kind of service they gave, and they often received it from the covenant community of Saints in Ohio. About a year and a half earlier, Joseph wrote in his journal about charitable acts toward him and his family, including forgiveness of debts and gifts of money, food, and firewood. Those acts were not extravagant, but Joseph appreciated each one. He said:

My heart swells with gratitude inexpressible when I realize the great condescension of my Heavenly Father in opening the hearts of these, my beloved brethren, to administer so liberally to my wants, and I ask God in the name of Jesus Christ to multiply blessings without number upon their heads, and bless me with much wisdom and understanding, and dispose of me to the best advantage for my brethren and the advancement of thy cause and kingdom, and whether my days are many

13. See Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days, vol. 1, The Standard of Truth: 1815–1846 (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2018), 277–79; note that Saints says that Jonathan Crosby was working on the home of Joseph Jr. and Emma Smith, but recent research in connection with that home shows that he was mostly likely working on the home of Joseph Sr. and Lucy Mack Smith.
or few whether in life or in death I say in my heart, O Lord, let me enjoy the society of such brethren.\textsuperscript{14}

In the kitchen of Joseph and Emma Smith’s Kirtland home, visitors find themselves immersed in a place that was, for a time, a center of such society—a place where service was freely given and gratefully received. As visitors hear about charitable acts in this home, they might be inspired to find ways to give and receive service when they return to their own homes.

\textbf{Women and Men Serving as Instruments in the Lord’s Hands}

After spending a few minutes in the kitchen, visitors move to the parlor (fig. 4). This room features the same white walls and ceilings and the same gray trim, but the walls are decorated with stenciled floral patterns in green, red, and orange, typical of surviving 1830s middle-class homes in the area. The window treatments are more elegant than the curtains in the kitchen. The floor is covered with an eye-catching Venetian-weave carpet, a common style of the day and a pattern that Joseph Smith purchased at his brother Hyrum’s store in 1836.\textsuperscript{15}

A table stands in one corner of the room. Evidence suggests that this is the only original artifact in the home. It is likely that Emma and Joseph’s friend Levi Hancock built the table for them and that it once stood in the very corner where it stands today.\textsuperscript{16}

It was in this home, and likely at this table, where Joseph once sat with scribes as the Lord began to reveal to him teachings of the prophet Abraham. We do not know how much of the book of Abraham the Lord revealed to Joseph in Kirtland, but we know he revealed, at the very least, what is now in the first chapter and the first eighteen verses of the second chapter.\textsuperscript{17}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{14} “Journal, 1835–1836,” 59–60 (December 9, 1835); capitalization and punctuation standardized.
\textsuperscript{16} Historians chose to place the table and chairs in this specific part of the room because of an entry in Joseph Smith’s journal, dated October 29, 1835: “Br W. Parish [Warren Parrish] commenced writing for me, Father & Mother Smith visit[ed] us, and while we set writing, Bishop, Partrige [Edward Partridge] passed our window just returned from the East.” “Journal, 1835–1836,” 10 (October 29, 1835). This entry suggests that Joseph and his scribes worked close to a window that provided a view of Chillicothe Road.
\textsuperscript{17} See “Historical Introduction,” “Book of Abraham Manuscript, circa July–circa November 1835–C [Abraham 1:1–2:18],” 1, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed November 25,
Visitors might picture Joseph in this room, uttering some of Abraham’s teachings for the first time. For example, they might imagine Joseph sitting at the table with his scribes and hearing himself say the following words: “Finding there was greater happiness and peace and rest for me, I sought the blessings of the fathers, and the right whereunto I should be ordained to administer the same” (Abr. 1:2). Just six years earlier, Joseph had prayed about the authority to baptize. He had received, in close succession, the Aaronic Priesthood and the Melchizedek Priesthood. Joseph could relate to Abraham’s yearning to receive the blessings of the fathers and the right to administer the same.

Joseph’s understanding of Abraham’s words would soon increase, beginning with Elias coming to the house of the Lord to reestablish the
Abrahamic covenant (see D&C 110:12). The blessings of that covenant—“the blessings of the fathers”—would extend far beyond the Smiths’ parlor. As the Lord promised Abraham, “all the families of the earth [would] be blessed, even with the blessings of the Gospel, which are the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal” (Abr. 2:11; see also verse 10).

Joseph was not the only one in this home who prepared a publication to bless individuals and families throughout the world. About six months before the Smiths arrived in Kirtland, the Lord had given Joseph a revelation for Emma, saying: “It shall be given thee, also, to make a selection of sacred hymns, as it shall be given thee, which is pleasing

unto me, to be had in my church. For my soul delighteth in the song of the heart; yea, the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads” (D&C 25:11–12).

Emma completed her work on the hymnal in 1835 while she and her family lived in their Kirtland home. She led the effort, assisted by William W. Phelps, who wrote twenty-five of the hymns and helped oversee the printing of the book.19 Next to the table in the parlor is a carefully crafted replica of a secretary desk that Levi Hancock made for the Smiths in Kirtland.20 On that desk are several replicas of the Latter-day Saints’ first hymnal, compiled by Emma Smith (fig. 5).

When the Lord commanded Emma to make a selection of hymns, he also commanded her, “Thou shalt be ordained under [Joseph's] hand to expound scriptures, and to exhort the church, according as it shall be given thee by my Spirit” (D&C 25:7). As visitors spend time in the Smiths’ restored home, they might come to understand how those two commands were intertwined. Emma certainly expounded the scriptures and exhorted the Church later in her life when she became the first president of the Relief Society. But her efforts to expound and exhort began long before that, when she prepared the Saints’ first hymnal. Seeking and receiving revelation from the Lord, she created what Elder Boyd K. Packer would later call “a course in doctrine.”21

Emma understood that she was doing more than collecting her favorite religious songs. The introduction in that first hymnbook gives us a glimpse into the way she approached this divine calling:

In order to sing by the Spirit, and with the understanding, it is necessary that the church of the Latter Day Saints should have a collection of “Sacred Hymns,” adapted to their faith and belief in the gospel, and, as far as can be, holding forth the promises made to the fathers who died in the precious faith of a glorious resurrection, and a thousand years’ reign on earth with the Son of Man in his glory. Notwithstanding the


20. Community of Christ owns the original desk. They allowed The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to borrow the desk for a time. With the permission of Community of Christ, a carpenter studied the desk closely so he could learn how to make a replica of the desk as Levi Hancock first built it for Joseph and Emma.

church, as it were, is still in its infancy, yet, as the song of the righteous is a prayer unto God, it is sincerely hoped that the following collection, selected with an eye single to his glory, may answer every purpose till more are composed, or till we are blessed with a copious variety of the songs of Zion.22

The Smiths’ home is small. It is so small that today a maximum of twelve visitors and two missionaries are allowed to participate in a tour. In this little home, Joseph and Emma sought and received guidance from the Lord, leading to publications of enduring and widespread influence. The book of Abraham and many of the hymns in Emma’s original collection are now in the hands, hearts, and minds of Latter-day Saints throughout the world.

In the parlor, missionaries might suggest that visitors pause for a moment and consider the influence of the book of Abraham and the hymns of Zion in their lives. Missionaries might also suggest that visitors consider the significance of Joseph and Emma’s simultaneous efforts as instruments in the Lord’s hands—fulfilling different callings with unity of purpose.

The House of the Lord and the Plan of Redemption

When Joseph and Emma and their children lived in this house, they could look out their south windows and see another house: the house of the Lord, just up the hill (fig. 6). That house, the Kirtland Temple, was a constant physical presence for them, both as it was being built and after it was dedicated. For the Prophet Joseph Smith, it was a constant spiritual presence as well. Two simple entries from his journal and one from his dedicatory prayer highlight the connection between the family’s house and the house of the Lord.

In an entry dated January 30, 1836, Joseph wrote about working with priesthood brethren “to purify them for the solemn assembly according to the commandment of the Lord”—in other words, to help them prepare for the blessings they could receive in the temple. He said, “I returned to my house being weary with continual anxiety and labor.”23 Visitors might imagine the Prophet fatigued by the spiritual work of gospel teaching. And where did he go? He walked home.

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In an entry dated March 26, 1836, Joseph wrote, “At home attending to my domestic concerns in the morning. After breakfast met with the presidency to make arrangements for the solemn assembly, which occupied the remainder of the day.”\textsuperscript{24} We don’t know what his “domestic concerns” were that day. Today, we often use the word \textit{concerns} to refer to things that trouble us. In the 1830s, people used the word more often to refer to “whatever occupies the time and attention, or affects the interests of a person” and to “that which affects . . . welfare or happiness.”\textsuperscript{25} Joseph’s family concerns that morning might have included doing chores on the farm or attending to the needs of Emma and the children. Whatever they were, he saw to those “concerns” first, before he ate breakfast and before he met with other Church leaders to prepare for the solemn assembly in the house of the Lord the very next day. Oliver Cowdery said that in that meeting he and Sidney Rigdon, Warren Cowdery, and Warren Parrish “assisted in writing a prayer for the dedication of the house.”\textsuperscript{26}

On March 27, 1836, Joseph offered that dedicatory prayer. Toward the end of the public prayer, he asked God to bless Emma and the children (see D&C 109:69). He pleaded for blessings on the families of other Church leaders (D&C 109:71). Then he said, “Remember all thy church, O Lord, with all their families” (D&C 109:72, italics added). And what would be the results of the Lord blessing all the families of the Church? Note these words from the prayer:

\begin{quote}
26. Oliver Cowdery, Diary, 1836 January–March, 21, microfilm of typescript, Church History Library.
\end{quote}
Remember all thy church, O Lord, with all their families, and all their immediate connections, with all their sick and afflicted ones, with all the poor and meek of the earth; that the kingdom, which thou hast set up without hands, may become a great mountain and fill the whole earth;

That thy church may come forth out of the wilderness of darkness, and shine forth fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners;

And be adorned as a bride for that day when thou shalt unveil the heavens, and cause the mountains to flow down at thy presence, and the valleys to be exalted, the rough places made smooth; that thy glory may fill the earth;

That when the trump shall sound for the dead, we shall be caught up in the cloud to meet thee, that we may ever be with the Lord;

That our garments may be pure, that we may be clothed upon with robes of righteousness, with palms in our hands, and crowns of glory upon our heads, and reap eternal joy for all our sufferings.

O Lord God Almighty, hear us in these our petitions, and answer us from heaven, thy holy habitation, where thou sittest enthroned, with glory, honor, power, majesty, might, dominion, truth, justice, judgment, mercy, and an infinity of fulness, from everlasting to everlasting. (D&C 109:72–77)

Visitors won’t hear all these details when they visit Joseph and Emma’s Kirtland home. The missionaries won’t have time to share them. But as visitors immerse themselves in the experience at this home, they might see, in new ways, how the entire plan of redemption comes together in the house of the Lord: the centrality of home and family; charitable attention to the sick, the afflicted, the poor, and the meek; men and women serving as instruments in the Lord’s hands to help the Church of Jesus Christ come forth out of the wilderness; blessings through priesthood and covenants; and diligent preparation for the Savior’s return to the earth.

The Unfolding Restoration

President Russell M. Nelson has said that the Restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ is “an unfolding Restoration that continues today.” Where did the Lord begin to unfold his gospel? In forests. On a hill. At a river. In temples. In homes.

In Emma and Joseph Smith’s Kirtland home in the 1830s, the Lord unfolded truths for people throughout the world. Today, an Apostle of the Lord has dedicated this home “as a place of remembrance, a place of inspiration, a place of appreciation, a place of knowledge, a place of seeking and learning, and a place of reverence.”²⁸ It continues to be a place where truth is unfolded, one visitor at a time.

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²⁸ Bednar, dedicatory prayer for Joseph and Emma Smith’s Kirtland Home.
I get the call on Monday. Grandma Jean is being transported from her nursing home to the ER. There is blood in her urine. Her body has still not healed from the pelvic fracture a month prior, and I wonder—all of us do—if this is it. At ninety-five, my husband’s fierce grandma is failing in body and fading in mind.

My sister-in-law meets me in the ER lobby and takes me back to Jean’s room. Sarah is calm, but her concern for Grandma is palpable. Jean has favorites among her ten grandkids and their spouses. She likes the feisty ones, and nobody has sass quite like Sarah, “the baby” now in her thirties. My husband, Dave, the oldest, is not even in Jean’s top ten. But she trusts him and appreciates that he looks out for her and has done her taxes for the past twenty or so years, ever since her husband Larry passed. She likes me because I make her laugh and weather her stormy moods.

Jean’s tiny frame is swallowed up by the bed. I can hardly tell what is limb and what is tangled sheet. Her lips are dry; her mutterings are unintelligible. We can’t get her to drink, so instead we use the straw as a dropper, slowly letting beads of water fall into her mouth. She swallows like a tiny bird and smiles when Sarah urges her to drink a little more.

Like my Oma, Jean was an Olympic-level food pusher, offering you a sandwich fifteen minutes after finishing a meal. But unlike my Oma, who could make toast gourmet, Jean is a terrible cook. On a visit to Denver when my son Jonah was three, he got strep. Fever, rash, and a super sore throat. Jean was so upset that he wouldn’t eat, only drinking juice from a sippy cup. One morning I awoke at seven to the sound of Jonah crying and the smell of burnt meat. I found him in a highchair with
a blackened rump roast on the tray. Jean looked at me in frustration, “Mama, you said he likes beef—but he won’t eat anything! I cannot let this baby starve!”

Another time when we visited, she served the kids some chili. One daughter found a pickle in her bowl. When we asked how it got there, Jean explained with pride that she had gone to lunch with friends a week or so ago, collected the leftover burgers and repurposed the meat. “Walah!” she exclaimed, “Just throw in a can of beans and you’ve got chili!” Dave distracted Grandma while I drove to McDonald’s.

The doctor arrives with Jean’s test results. She says things like “DNR” and “palliative care,” and we nod. We just want her to be comfortable. But I fear Jean won’t go gently into her good night. She may be only slightly larger than an American Girl Doll, but she is a fighter. Like her husband was, she is a nondenominational Christian. But unlike Larry, who passed from cancer in the ’90s, she’s scared to die. Jean has asked me enough times about what I think will happen to the “bad people” on the other side that I know she’s anxious about where she’ll end up. When I first told my husband this, he confided that some family members think she might have drowned someone once. I laughed out loud. He didn’t. Grandma Jean is more tightlipped about her past than someone in witness protection. It is clear her body is filled with trauma and secrets just as surely as it is with failing organs. But for more than thirty years she has loved me and my children, has played patty-cake and changed diapers and made terrible food with what she called her “crooky hands”—twisted and spotted and beautiful.

The sips of water seem to loosen her tongue, and soon she is talking to people only she can see. Her dearest Larry is here, and she calls after a young version of her only child, my husband’s father. Then a cloud passes over her face, and she’s back in time to whatever it is that scares her, that keeps her spirit tethered to a body trying to transition. She mumbles about water, a girl, and cries out, “I didn’t mean to hurt nobody!” Sarah and I each take a hand, willing her back to the present. It is gut-wrenching to see this pain that no narcotic can touch. She needs divine relief. She needs to hear in an authoritative way that hell-fire and brimstone are not what awaits. She needs to feel the grace only Jesus can offer.

“Grandma,” I say, “it’s time to pray.” My hands gently cradle Jean’s head, and I open my heart to feel as much of God’s love for this woman as I can, mingling it with mine and Sarah’s. I imagine pouring that love as a golden warmth into her body. I open my mouth, and I say that her time
is coming soon, and I encourage her to go in peace. I feel prompted to be explicit: “The Lord and Larry are waiting on the other side with open arms. And by ‘other side’ I mean heaven, paradise, the good place, up there.” My supplication is awkward but sincere.

It used to embarrass me when Jean and Larry would pray in restaurants. These were not “bless the food” quickies, but long, drawn-out affairs with every grandchild mentioned by name and need. I vacillated between keeping my eyes shut so I wouldn’t have to see other patrons stare at us as Grandpa asked God to “lift up these chicken nuggets” and wanting to keep my eyes open to give the server an “I’m sorry, this is weird for all of us” look in case they came to refill our glasses mid-benediction. Now that I am in my fifties and feel simultaneously so tender and helpless regarding my own children, I wish I could go back and bottle every holy and cringey word of those prayers. I would keep them in the pantry with the food storage, knowing the faith and love of these grandparents would be waiting for a rainy day to feed our souls.

Over the next few days, several grandkids trickle in from out of town to be with Grandma, now back in her nursing home on hospice. Grandsons hold her hands, rub her feet, tease her. Granddaughters bring nail clippers, files, polish, lotions and set to work on her “crooky” hands and feet, making her sparkle and shine. One makes sure none of Jean’s skin gets dry, plying her with Chapstick, aloe-infused socks, and CeraVe. They turn the tables on their grandmother and ply her with food. Fig bars, applesauce, cheeseburgers, chicken enchiladas with extra onions. Much like my Jonah with strep, she tries to obey, but her pain keeps her from being compliant. Her body is beginning to let go.

One night when we are leaving, I tell her we are going to pray. She comes to the surface as if swimming up from the bottom of a pool and says, “Let me pray.” We encircle her bed, and she launches into a supplication on our behalf. When she gets to the grandkids, she starts at the top. “Lord, I trust David,” she says, then adds with emphasis, “But I don’t like him.” We all hold our breath—and our laughter. She’s never been one to hide her feelings. She starts again after a few beats: “I love him, Lord. I love him.” My heart lurches at this unexpected affection. She does not like him. He has had to make hard choices that often angered her. But to have that trust translate into love? I am giggling and crying at the same time, blessing her as she blesses us. My husband is speechless as tears collect in his ginger-white beard.

These days are long. Waiting for a spirit to leave the body is tender and boring and sacred. Tedium and holiness can go hand in hand. One
evening, Sarah and I are at her bedside when the nurses come in to change her. Jean requires cleaning up. Knowing how frail her body is, we fear the mere pressure of turning her and rearranging limbs will bruise flesh as easily as a careless hand can leave marks on a too-ripe peach. We offer to help. Sarah cradles her ribs and I her legs, as if we are handling a Ming vase or a live grenade. I hope she can feel the love we have for her, can know how grateful we are. I remember her changing the diaper of a squirming two-year-old Sarah and hearing Jean say, “Ain’t this girl something?!” Jean bathed and changed and sang to all my babies in turn, eager to show her love through mundane tasks. I know in this moment that Sarah and I are attempting to give an offering in return. There is something sacred about tending to the bodies of those who cannot do it themselves: the babies, the sick, the elderly, the dead. Our hands say more than what our mouths can. Or perhaps her body receives what her ears won’t hear. This is our blessing: Dearest Jean, grandmother, and friend, you are forgiven. You are free. Healing awaits. With every last beat of your heart, know this: we love you, we love you, we love you.

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Your Daddy or Your Father?—Mimetic Desire versus Christian Fatherhood

Bryce Dixon

Introduction

“The Yankees are my Daddy,” the Boston Red Sox pitcher Pedro Martinez famously announced following the loss of some critical baseball games to their New York City rivals. The idiom “Daddy” refers to a victor’s domination over a loser in a competition. The winner becomes the Daddy, and the loser the submissive child. Ironically, a Red Sox player, David Ortiz—nicknamed “Big Papi,” or “Big Daddy” in Spanish—became the Yankees’ “Daddy” when his batting heroics led the Red Sox to a miraculous comeback win over the Yankees in the 2004 playoffs, reversing the “curse of the Bambino”¹ that was believed to have deprived them of a World Series victory for eighty-six years.

In John 8, Jesus declares that whoever we imitate becomes our father, a figure who controls the moral direction of our lives. He links imitation to a father figure, which finds echoes in our modern idiomatic use of “Daddy.” We also see the idea reflected in literary critic Rene Girard’s theory of “mimetic desire,” contending that humans instinctively pursue prestige by imitating an admired model, whom Girard calls the “mediator” of desire. Not only do we imitate the behavior or style of those we admire, but we also imitate their wants, which become in us

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¹. Red Sox baseball lore has it that the Yankees were blessed with a multitude of World Series championships and the Red Sox cursed with repeated failures because the Red Sox traded Babe Ruth, the Bambino, arguably the greatest baseball player of all time, to their rival Yankees. It is a happy coincidence that a Big Papi helped reverse the curse of a Babe.
mimetic—or imitated—desires. Girard never addresses the connection between imitation and fatherhood, but his theory of mimetic desire elucidates both Jesus’s use of the term “father” and others’ use of its modern counterpart, “Daddy.”

The theory of mimetic desire helps us to understand why Jesus considered the object of our imitation all important. Jesus implies that it is not a matter of whether but whom we imitate. He suggests that as we imitate him, he becomes our Father. I propose that Christ offers his disciples liberation from this deep, envious desire for prestige—the inherited craving to please the Daddy of the dominance hierarchy. Instead of instinctively imitating the desires of people we admire, we can freely choose a desire to follow Christ, to choose our own Father. Until then, we remain subject to the domination of some prestigious Daddy.

The honor of defeating rivals and thus becoming a Daddy does not refer to biology. A Daddy is not necessarily a male or a father. Rather, the idiom indicates a supreme position within a competitive hierarchy, a position that can be acquired regardless of gender. A Daddy is a model whose prestige we envy. The stronger our desire to become like the model, the stronger the Daddy’s hold upon us. The “children” of the Daddy fear his (or her) judgment and seek to gain his approval because that would raise their hierarchical status. Girard shows that while the Daddy’s children compete among themselves for his approval, they also compete with him, seeking to supplant him in the hierarchy and seize his honor. This leads to conflict and violence.

Girard also contends that all human relations are characterized by a form of mimetic behavior known as reciprocity: we treat each other exactly as we have been treated. When offended, we reciprocate the offense in a like manner to defend our sacred honor. We find a “quarrel in a straw / When honor’s at the stake.”

Thus the personal duel for honor, a form of negative reciprocity, tends to become the dominating factor

3. A gender-neutral use of “Daddy” occurs in the spy movie *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, directed by Doug Liman (20th Century Fox, 2005), when Mrs. Smith employs the idiom to proclaim her dominance over Mr. Smith, her husband and rival spy.
in every human relationship, escalating from personal conflict to tribal conflict and finally to national wars of annihilation and genocide.⁶

Human nature compels us to imitate prestigious models. Therefore, we cannot change our natural desire to imitate, just as we cannot change our genetically determined height by taking thought (Matt. 6:27). But we can choose whom we imitate. As we replace our models of worldly prestige with Christ, God instills within us a new desire. Born of a new Father, our nature is changed, and we lose our desire for evil and competition. Filled with hope, we desire to do good continually, our hearts so full of love that there is no place for pride and envy (Mosiah 3:19; 4:12–13; 5:2–8).

**Jesus Declares That Imitation Determines Fatherhood**

The dominating authority of fatherhood—“Who’s your Daddy!”—and Girard’s insight into mimetic desire echo ideas about human nature revealed by Jesus. In John 8 (King James Version), addressing a group of Jews who have proudly claimed Abraham as their father, Jesus declares that whoever an individual imitates is his or her father:

> Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. . . . I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you. I speak that which I have seen with my Father: and ye do that which ye have seen with your father. They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham. But now ye seek to kill me, a man that hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God: this did not Abraham. Ye do the deeds of your father. Then said they to him, Ye be not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God. Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. . . . Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. (John 8:31–34, 37–42, 44, emphasis added)

First, the Jews claim to be free because of their noble pedigree, but Jesus says they are servants of sin, slaves to the desires of their cultural fathers. These Jews correctly claim to be Abraham’s descendants, yet Jesus insists that Abraham’s paternity does not make them Abraham’s children; instead, they are the children of that model whose deeds and desires they copy. Since the Jews desire to murder Christ, their father is a murderer. They have learned to desire murder by imitating cultural models filled with homicidal indignation. In Matthew 23 (New American Standard Bible), Jesus condemns the Pharisees to fill “the measure of the guilt of [their] fathers,” referring to them as a brood of murderous vipers, the children of poisonous serpents:

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, “If we had been living in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partners with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.” So you testify against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how will you escape the sentence of hell? (Matt. 23:29–33, emphasis added)

Jesus’s question at the end of this diatribe is not entirely rhetorical. We must all ask ourselves: How do we escape the cultural prison into which we are born? How do we free ourselves from the wicked traditions imposed upon us by our mimetic fathers? Both John and Matthew quote Christ applying the word “father” not to a literal progenitor but to models of mimetic desire. The cultural father of pride, anger, and envy on whom the scribes and Pharisees model their murderous desire is personified as the devil. For example, Latter-day Saint scriptures often speak of fatherhood as a cultural construct, as when the Pearl of Great Price records the Lord’s words to Enoch concerning the wicked who would face destruction in the Great Flood: “But behold, their sins shall be upon the heads of their fathers; Satan shall be their father” (Moses 7:37). It appears that the guilt for the pervasive wickedness in Noah’s day would be imputed not just to those who lived in that day but also to their fathers, and to their fathers’ fathers, and so on in a lineage of continuous regression to the original source who first introduced mimetic desire to humankind through Cain—Satan.7

7. We may ask why Jesus uses the metaphor of “father” instead of “parent” or “mother” to describe the relationship of a person with his or her model. Use of the term may have some basis in human nature because the metaphor is remarkably persistent through time—in our day, the idiomatic use of “Daddy” arcs across a vast cultural gulf
Similarly, submission to righteous fatherhood means following a righteous example. For instance, the Lord declares to Abraham: “For as many as receive this Gospel shall be called after thy name, and shall be accounted thy seed, and shall rise up and bless thee, as their father” (Abr. 2:10). Abraham becomes the father of the faithful as they imitate his example, rejoicing as he did in Christ’s “day” (John 8:56). D&C 84:34 says that those who keep the covenant of the priesthood and magnify their callings therein become “the sons of Moses and of Aaron” and the “elect of God.” Certainly, Christ emphasized imitation as the way to follow him—the way to become his sons and daughters (3 Ne. 27:21, 27). As we walk this path of Christian imitation, we shed our envy of the prestigious other; we dispel the desire to become like our mimetic Daddy. We learn of Christ’s meekness and lowliness of heart (Matt. 11:20). Then his meekness overthrows our pride and opens the door that leads to life in Christ.

**Imitation and Violence**

**Imitation Dominates Us from Our Infancy**

Our mimetic desire takes hold at a very early age. Infants between twelve and twenty-one days old “imitate both facial and manual gestures,” implying that they can “equate their own unseen behaviors with gestures they see others perform.”

Humans of all ages are extraordinarily imitative. One study calls this tendency “over-imitation,” noting that it “operates automatically, even subconsciously.” Not all primates over-imitate; only humans do, enabling the means by which children learn to separate modern America from ancient Israel. Christ’s use of “father” in describing ancestors who were murderers is wholly negative and can be read to imply something about existing social orders as potentially killing in their very nature.

I must also comment on my use of the word “man” in this article, which is intended to include “woman,” a use which similarly has a long history that, viewed in the most positive light, suggests the complementary oneness of man and woman. Such language is found in Moses 6:9: “In the image of his own body, male and female, created he them . . . and called their name Adam.” Later, Moses elaborates on the baptism by fire, concluding, “And thus may all become my sons (Moses 6:66–68).” “All” must include daughters, and if the word “son” includes “daughters,” so should “fathers” include “mothers.”


their culture. Imitation is so powerful in children that they learn not only mindsets and goals but also persistence in the accomplishment of goals. In other words, they imitate determination and desire.

Children cannot help but imitate the sinful culture into which they are born. That imitation of a wicked culture should taint even childhood provides one explanation for the surprising declaration in Moses 6:55: “Thy children are conceived in sin, even so when they begin to grow up, sin conceiveth in their hearts.” Even a righteous people afflict their innocent children with their wicked traditions. After his Resurrection, Jesus visited the “more righteous” survivors of the destruction that occurred in the Americas during his Crucifixion (3 Ne. 10:12). While ministering to the people, he called for their children to be brought to him that he might bless them. Standing in the midst of the children, Jesus “groaned within himself, and said: Father, I am troubled because of the wickedness of the people of the house of Israel” (3 Ne. 17:13–14). Perhaps what Jesus perceived in the children made him groan for the wickedness of their fathers.

**Imitation Creates a Worldview**

As children adopt their parents’ culture by imitation, they acquire their parents’ worldview and make it, or some version of it, their own. One researcher paraphrases Carl Jung: a “worldview is something firmly entrenched in an individual’s psychology, largely unconscious and culturally transmitted, an element of personality that is of ‘cardinal importance’ in guiding the person’s perceptions and choices.” A worldview is necessary for human perception and understanding, for without one, no human could make sense of the bewildering array of perceptual data with which we are constantly confronted. It appears that as children imitate

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a parent, they enact the worldview of the parent’s culture, a culture that has itself been created by innumerable acts of imitation. As children grow toward adulthood, their models light a dark path, protecting them from the shame of not knowing how to act in various social settings.

As children leave the protection of parental imitation, they still need the continuing guidance of a model, and their parents’ culture serves that purpose. Peterson states: “As parents are to children, cultures are to adults.”15 Roger Scruton adds that convention and custom learned by imitation are necessary to engender social cohesion, create culture, and erect “permanent symbols of a settled form of life.” By imitation we learn how to create a “fitting” order in our lives, “a right way and a wrong way to proceed.”16 Our imitation of cultural norms teaches us how to conduct ourselves in an uncertain, even dangerous, world.

G. William Barnard paraphrases Henri Bergson to say that individuals learn to fit into society, constructing the “day-to-day” life of a “superficial self” by “internalizing and reacting to an enormous amount of cultural cues as to how we should behave in various situations, what we should like and dislike, what roles we should play.”17 Bergson also calls this self a “social ego” or “social self” and postulates that it has a personal conscience that is offended when societal norms are violated. He maintains that this social conscience is developed by habit or instinct, suggesting that the social self develops through instinctive imitation of cultural norms.18

Hyperimitation allows us to develop ourselves in socially useful ways and to fit into society—even though that society may be fraught with corruption and tainted by evil traditions. Our worldview and our worldly culture teach us what and how to see. We desire what we see, and we see what we desire.

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17. According to Barnard, Bergson believed that the more we identify with our superficial self, the more we will remain cut off from our “deep self,” the “more profound dimensions of our selfhood.” G. William Barnard, Living Consciousness: The Metaphysical Vision of Henri Bergson (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 20, see 18–27.

The Imitation of the “Great Father”

Certainly, imitation is not all powerful. If imitation dictated all behavior, cultures would not change much, and obviously they do. Escaping the strictest constraints of imitation, innovators make breakthroughs, learn insights into human behavior, and achieve new successes in business, science, and technology. Imitations of these achievements build a foundation for more innovations. Successful innovators rise to the top of various hierarchies, becoming models for imitation. Prestigious authority figures—mimetic Daddies—shift as new cultural heroes emerge and new champions are crowned. A shift in authority figures inevitably inspires the imitation of newly minted models. Few people notice how their ideas and behaviors alter as their models change. Many fail to recognize that they are bound to a model because the model may remain unconsciously adopted; its shape may be a many-layered composite of desired attributes and accomplishments.

It is difficult to trace the outline of this composite model and fully determine its psychological influence, but our subservience to imitative desire is conceptualized in the idea of the “father.” Jordan Peterson describes a “Great Father” as “history . . . acted out”; as “patrician society, tradition, . . . demanding [and] rigid”; as a representation of security and safety through a “culturally determined structure.”19 Peterson sees the image of fatherhood as a wall that protects children from the chaos of the unknown, a defense from the “intrusion of the dangerously unpredictable, the floodgate that controls the ocean behind.”20 Scholars Roger Scruton and Jordan Peterson argue that the culture created by this Great Father results in social cohesion, reciprocity, and economic cooperation, which have made possible the amazing progress of civilization in the last two hundred years.21

19. Peterson, Maps of Meaning, 207–9. The phrase “traditions of the fathers,” commonly heard among Latter-day Saints, suggests a rigid adherence to morally dubious cultural norms, which is somewhat in line with Peterson’s use of the mythological term “Great Father.” “Great Father” here refers to a rigid, traditional social order that offers safety but smothers creativity.


But these benefits carry corresponding detriments. Perhaps most damnably, the father is an “impediment to genius,” for anything “that protects and fosters . . . has the capacity to smother and oppress.” Since the Great Father is “authoritarian” and “dangerously out of date,” he invites youthful rebellion, specifically through the exploration of the novelty that is chaos. While we assert our autonomy and unique sense of identity, we also find it hard to stop imitating the Great Father. The disposition and the need to imitate are too ingrained in human nature.

The Imitation That Leads to Violence and Vengeance

Girard asserts that while we may think our desires arise spontaneously from our unique identities, they chiefly conform to the desires we perceive in the model: “Desire chooses its objects through the mediation of a model; it is the desire of and for the other . . . Desire is always an imitation of another desire, desire for the same object, and, therefore, an inexhaustible source of conflicts and rivalries.” Girard adds, “Individuals who desire the same thing are united by something so powerful that, as long as they can share whatever they desire, they remain the best of friends; as soon as they cannot, they become the worst of enemies.” Thus models can be both idols and rivals: idols because of an intense desire to have what they have and be what they are, and rivals if by competition we can defeat them and gain their status. Therefore, in life we encounter a succession of mimetic fathers with whom we grapple and whom we perhaps defeat or are defeated by.

Peterson suggests how our desire for status arises. He claims that humans always order themselves such that the strong, the smart, the competent, or the fortunate dominate others less favored and that our perception of such a “dominance hierarchy is . . . exceptionally ancient and fundamental.” He says that our brains have long ago evolved with a master control system that keeps track of our position in this fundamental hierarchy. Higher spots in the hierarchy yield increased

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the Rest (New York: Penguin, 2011), especially chapters 2 and 4, the latter of which notes the tremendous increases in life expectancy owing to the advent of modern medicine.
22. Peterson, Maps of Meaning, 216.
23. Peterson, Maps of Meaning, 217. In the United States, an often-invoked political rationale for supporting an authoritarian regime is the argument that chaos will ensue if the regime and its tyrant-in-chief fall.
serotonin levels (the brain’s happiness hormone) and “less illness, misery and death.” He suggests that, like ancient animals (such as lobsters), humans establish a pecking order by which the brain assesses “how you are treated by other people,” and upon “that evidence, it renders a determination of your value and assigns you a status.” The higher your status in the pecking order, the greater the positive emotions you enjoy, the more money you make, and the longer you live.\(^\text{27}\)

No wonder the competition for prestige is intense. No wonder we struggle to rise in the dominance hierarchy by surpassing a rival. Consequently, Peterson advises that we “stand up straight with [our] shoulders back” to project the appearance of a winner.\(^\text{28}\) He also emphasizes competence as a means to rise in the dominance hierarchy.\(^\text{29}\) But competence is only one means to higher status. The fundamental human desire controlled by the dominance hierarchy is for position and prestige.\(^\text{30}\) And prestige can be bought, stolen, or inherited.

The desire to obtain and maintain prestige seems most visible among the elite classes of society,\(^\text{31}\) but everyone is subject to the rule of the dominance hierarchy, where every judgment invites pride and envy. In all hierarchical comparisons, human nature leads us to look down on our inferiors and envy our superiors. Thus our mimetic desire for prestige carries a contagious infection that spreads hostility throughout society when people set themselves as rivals against the very persons whose prestige and possessions they envy, or against other competitors for that prestige and those possessions.\(^\text{32}\)

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\(^{27}\) Peterson, 12 Rules for Life, 15–16.

\(^{28}\) Peterson, 12 Rules for Life, 1–30.


\(^{30}\) Peterson, 12 Rules for Life, 14–16.

\(^{31}\) Peter Turchin, End Times: Elites, Counter-Elites, and the Path of Political Disintegration (New York: Penguin Press, 2023), 7, 30, 93. Widespread cheating to perpetuate elitism is noted.

\(^{32}\) Girard, Theater of Envy, 3, 160–84.
becomes when he possesses this or that object.” If envy cannot satisfy that desire, it seeks to destroy its rival/model, often a person who has gained power and prestige by admirable accomplishment. Shakespeare’s Iago dramatically demonstrates this phenomenon. Pride builds monuments; envy tears them down. Girard concludes that wrath and its expression in violence become commonplace in the presence of mimetic desire, which eventually drags us toward an apocalyptic nightmare of vengeful reciprocit. The world devolves into rivalrous duels between individuals, organizations, and nations—contests to the death.

The paradox of mimetic desire is profound: like a volcano, imitation creates and destroys. As volcanic magma under immense pressure extrudes from the earth’s mantle to the surface and then explodes high into the atmosphere, it casts down suffocating ash, fiery rocks, and sulfuric rain. But the ash also lays down the fertile soil that later nurtures a flourishing life. So, too, in a never-ending cycle, does mimetic desire both create and then destroy civilization and then create it again out of the ashes, but because we never recognize the paradox of mimetic desire, we are unable to forecast the volcanic eruption of violence. Girard says we ignore this paradox because we cannot believe that which creates a cohesive culture could incite the violence that tears it apart. We become willfully blind to the bondage of mimesis and its violent inevitability.

As violence erupts, civilized societies seek to contain it with elaborate judicial systems. This solution may amount to little more than a substituted form of legal violence. Violence as a punitive response to violence yields more violence. The wicked punish the wicked (Morm. 4:5). Girard

33. Girard, Battling to the End, 30.
34. This is the dominant theme of Girard, Battling to the End. For example, the first chapter of the book is entitled “The Escalation to Extremes” with the subheading quote “War Is Nothing but a Duel on a Larger Scale.” Throughout the book, Clausewitz’s theories of war predominate. See pages 6–7, where “absolute war” is discussed; pages 53–54, where it is discussed in the context of Clausewitz’s famous statement “War is merely the continuation of policy by other means”; page 74, where Girard says that the “catastrophe” of absolute war is “imminent”; pages 39–40, where wars of extermination are discussed; and page 11, where Girard distinguishes between “war of overthrow” and the “apocalyptic tone of ‘absolute war.’”
35. René Girard, Violence and the Sacred, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 37, 49; Girard, Battling to the End, 20. See the section on reciprocity herein for a fuller development of this idea.
36. Turchin, End Times, xii: “All complex societies go through cycles of alternating stretches of internal peace and harmony periodically interrupted by outbreaks of internal warfare and discord.”
contends that the judicial system of punishing violence is not permanently effective; many times, it does not satisfy the spiteful demands for reciprocal justice and merely bottles up the rage for vengeance until it explodes in even greater violence.\(^{38}\) Consider the violence triggered by the murder of George Floyd in May 2021. Advocates for Black lives protested the killing of a Black man by a white policeman, contending that this killing stemmed from a justice system that shielded the police from their abuse of Black citizens. A summer of protests and riots ensued. Those opposing the Black Lives Matter movement objected that rioters who destroyed property and took others’ lives were not brought to justice; some of these frustrated people resorted to vigilantism, resulting in more violence.

We swim in a sea of hostile reciprocity, defending violence in the name of justice. As discussed below, our natural inclination to reciprocity demands that violence be met with a similar, but escalated, violence. Thus we rarely, if ever, notice this sea’s overwhelming power to carry us toward destruction. Girard would almost certainly deem the slogan “No Justice, No Peace” as a pretext for violence.

**Reciprocity**

Reciprocity, a kind of imitative behavior, seems innocent, even highly beneficial as a form of justice. Peterson and Scruton think reciprocity is the cornerstone of civilized society.\(^{39}\) A “hardwired instinct,”\(^{40}\) reciprocity features an equal exchange both in economic and social relations. Imitation requires us to reciprocate how others treat us. Pay a fair price and get a fair value. Do a good deed, then enjoy a good deed in return. Offend, then prepare to be offended in like manner.

The Old Testament legislated reciprocity between individuals in conflict: an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth is the ancient formula for like-kind justice (Ex. 21:24–25). Reciprocity thus deters crime. In personal

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38. Girard, *Battling to the End*, 84.
40. Ray Fisman and Michael Luca, “Did Free Pens Cause the Opioid Crisis?” *Atlantic* (January/February 2019), https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2019/01/did-free-pens-cause-the-opioid-crisis/576394/. This article demonstrates how instinctually everyone reciprocates even a small gift; for example, physicians prescribed more opioids if they received gifts from opioid sales representatives.
injury, contract, and criminal law, the justice of reciprocity requires a wrongdoer to pay the amount of the damage he or she has done.

However, as a form of imitation, reciprocity can have the same mysterious and paradoxical consequences as those of mimetic desire. It creates and sustains culture as positive reciprocity prevails, responding to kindness with kindness, courtesy with courtesy and honesty with honesty. However, negative reciprocity instigated by mimetic desire and rivalry can spiral into vengeance and cataclysmic destruction.

People are bound to one another by beneficial exchanges of all kinds in both personal and business relationships and throughout the various hierarchies of the world. On a personal level, this may look like a dinner invitation to one couple being reciprocated by that couple two weeks later. “You scratch my back, I scratch yours” works all the way up the chain of connections in civic, business, and government entities. This is the key to success in the service of Mammon, which the Lord denounces as incompatible with the service of God (3 Ne. 13:24; Matt. 6:24).

Christ does not approve of this culture of reciprocity that we accept unthinkingly. He says of friends you may invite to a feast, “They may also invite you to a meal in return, and that will be your repayment. But whenever you give a banquet, invite people who are poor, who have disabilities, who are limping, and people who are blind; and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous” (Luke 14:12–14, NASB). Jesus suggests that God will impute righteousness only to those who give without expectation of a compensating reciprocal gift—those who give freely. While this may sound simple enough, how much more often do we fete our friends and loved ones while ignoring the poor who might smell bad, the crippled who may have difficulty surmounting the steps to our house, the palsied who struggle to raise a fork to their mouth, and the old and dying who remind us of our own mortality? Jesus recommends a law higher than what reciprocity commands.

Reciprocity also taints our ability to feel gratitude for the free gifts of God and our neighbors, for which we should live in thanksgiving (D&C 50:15–21). Miguel de Cervantes’s famous hero Don Quixote, having received lavish gifts from a duke, suffers bitter sorrow because he is

too poor to pay his debt of reciprocity. The proud, like Don Quixote, may resist accepting a gift because they do not wish to appear like a lowly beggar. But before God, “are we not all beggars?” (Mosiah 4:19).

Cervantes presses the point by repetition. Some maidens treat Quixote to a banquet, and Quixote, “not being able to correspond in kind,” offers to repay his debt by standing in the middle of the king’s highway and declaring to all passersby that his benefactors are the “most beautiful and courteous maidens in the world.” Anyone who contradicts his decree will face Quixote in a duel. But as Quixote stands in the highway, a herd of bulls and cows trample him. He fails to see that loving gifts require no repayment.

In social relations, it is easy to return evil for evil in equal measures. Typically, if someone offends us, we offend in a similar manner. If I am insulted, I do not steal the insulter’s wallet; rather, I insult him back. If someone thoughtlessly cuts too abruptly in front of my driving path, I am tempted to return the favor and then slow down to emphasize my point. If I am publicly snubbed, I find a way to snub in return or, at least, to gossip about some fault of the offender, returning public shaming for public shaming. Such reciprocity is justified as necessary to teach the offender what the offense feels like.

Girard asserts that the logic of reciprocity means that the duel “is the underlying structure of all human activities.” We are all engaged in contentious duels—of both great and small consequence, sometimes fought with violence, most times in subtler, more subliminal ways. Every relationship is infected to an extent; everyone demands proper respect; everyone desires justice; everyone seeks to defend their rights.

Cervantes takes aim at the duel in Don Quixote. Almost every chapter of the author’s lengthy book demonstrates the folly of the honor culture, as his famous hero, imagining wrongs where none exist, imitates the various combats of the fictional knight Amadis of Gaul and, in so doing, fights foolish duels against any number of foes—to protect, for example, the honor of his imaginary lady Dulcinea; to free a lady accompanied by church friars who he falsely imagines are brigands who have captured her; and to vindicate a wrong to his squire Sancho’s mule. He justifies his resort to violence by the example of several heroes of the

43. Cervantes, Don Quixote, 839–42.
44. Girard, Battling to the End, 63, see 57–58.
ancient Roman past but has nothing to say in response to Sancho’s question as to why they should not instead imitate the Christian saints.46

Humans escalate reciprocal offenses nearly effortlessly. The person offended exaggerates the harm done, and so his response is equal not to the real harm but to the perceived one. Moreover, if I cannot or do not reciprocally punish the person who harmed me, I may take it out on another, sometimes people closest to me—or even the dog. Too often, a never-ending cycle of increasingly hostile, even violent, acts of reciprocity follow offenses large and small, not only from avowed enemies but from close friends and spouses. The desire to return offense for offense possesses each person until he or she can dispel that spirit. That spirit of offense then offends a third party, and so on in a continuous chain of escalating offenses. Tribes, teams, corporations, institutions, and nations all stand ready to respond to the offense of a rival. Thus the contagion of violent imitation—insult leading to insult, ad infinitum—may spread across an entire society. Unless curtailed, it foments war, first “civilized” and limited, but potentially total war that sees whole nations annihilated, a phenomenon Girard discusses at length.47

The Book of Mormon supplies types of the apocalyptic consequences of this contagion. The first example details the wars between two competing tribes. The crux of their mimetic conflict remains constant over the span of centuries: the Nephites, blessed with wealth from their industry, inevitably grow proud and despise their neighboring Lamanites as filthy, lazy, and loathsome; the Lamanites envy and resent the wealth of the Nephites. The Lamanites justify their desire to dominate the Nephites by claiming the Nephites robbed them of the rightful tokens of leadership in the tribal hierarchy (2 Ne. 5; Mosiah 9:12; 10). These cultural grievances and proud disputes become so entrenched in tradition that they resume even after the two tribes have become one, intermarrying in peace for two hundred years. This long unity of the people disintegrates when a faction takes up the cultural identity and name of the Lamanites and becomes envious of the wealth of the other faction, which identifies as Nephites (4 Ne. 1). The inevitable escalation of offenses leads to wars. Ultimately, envy prevails over pride. The Lamanites exterminate the Nephites, hunting down every straggler following the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of people (Morm. 6:6–15).

46. Cervantes, Don Quixote, 506–8.
47. See Girard, Battling to the End.
The Book of Mormon records an even more devastating annihilation that occurred centuries earlier. A group of Mesopotamians called Jaredites had arrived in the New World and established an advanced civilization, which eventually fell. In their final civil war, even children were armed. Drunk with anger, every man, woman, and child fought by day and slept on their swords by night. Two million Jaredites died, leaving only two survivors, one of whom reported the destruction of his people (Ether 15:2–32).

Two other incidents from the Book of Mormon show how reciprocal violence can be stopped when one participant in a “duel” forgives the other and withdraws from the fight. The Anti-Nephi-Lehies, having experienced surpassing relief at the forgiveness of their sins (including many murders), bury their swords, refusing to defend themselves when attacked by the Lamanites (Alma 24:23–27). Not many years later, Captain Moroni, fighting a furious, blood-soaked battle, sees that his army is about to slaughter the enemy. In that moment, he could have been consumed by blind vengeance to annihilate those who had been seeking his destruction—but he was not. Desiring to stop the shedding of blood, he offers to withdraw from the battle and allow his opponents to depart in peace (Alma 43:29–54; 44:1–6). After a brief back and forth and a second skirmish, the enemy agrees.

The Old Testament

The violence of mimetic desire is typified by Cain and Abel. The two rivals seek the approval of God. Abel’s sacrifice gains that approval; Cain’s does not. He envies Abel’s prestige as the preferred son of Adam and resents Abel’s favor in the eyes of Adam. Lusting to possess both the property and prestige of Abel, Cain takes Abel’s life to acquire them (Moses 5:18–38).\(^48\) Cain’s envy of Abel and his desire to have what Abel possesses subject him to Abel’s dominating influence as though Cain were his brother’s slave. Therefore Cain thought to obtain freedom by removing the source of his envy and resentment. Upon slaying Abel, Cain declares his freedom (Moses 5:33). This original murder becomes the archetype of murder—a crime motivated by envy of property and prestige, by intense resentment, and by desire to destroy the rivalrous source of an imagined or exaggerated injustice and gain freedom from an illusory grievance.

The Imitation of Christ Dispels Mimetic Desire

In the world, we are ruled by Daddy. To reject his rule, we must first recognize how we slavishly imitate him and how he dominates our lives. Girard asserted that “we have to acknowledge our mimetic nature if we hope to free ourselves of it.” Our imitation of Christ begins as we come to understand, if but dimly, that our current desires—typically enacted with little or no thought—are modeled upon the desires of someone else, be it another person or a figment produced within the complexities of culture.

By seriously seeking to be like Jesus, we become aware of the weaknesses we have inherited since our infancy. We may be bound by evil traditions arising from mimetic desire, but Christ has empowered us to cast off our bonds and choose liberty.

In *Joseph and His Brothers*, Thomas Mann retells the Bible story of Jacob and his son Joseph, suggesting an echo of Abraham’s test of faith in the thwarted sacrifice of his son, Isaac—an incident that repeats itself in the history of Abraham’s children. In an exchange between Abraham’s grandson and great-grandson, Jacob observes that his wife’s father, Laban, sacrificed his firstborn son to idols and thus brought misery to his household. Joseph replies, “Laban acted as outworn custom demanded and so made grave errors. For the Lord abhors what is outworn and wants to move us beyond it as He Himself has done, for He casts it out and curses it.” Mann suggests we must take our culturally acquired desires (the desires of the Great Father) and cast them away like a worn-out garment.

It is not easy to disregard one’s cultural dictates. It requires deep, penitent introspection and a change that only Christ’s power can bring about. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wrote, “Atonement is the ultimate expression of freedom because it brings together the two mental acts—repentance and forgiveness—that have the power to break the iron grip of the past.”

When we offend others, they offend others, who offend others, and so on endlessly do sin and vengeance multiply from generation to generation (*Mosiah* 13:13; *D&C* 98:28–30, 37, 46). If we fail to forgive, we are condemned to repeat the offenses we suffer. If a father abuses his son, his son will imitate his father’s abusive ways, and thus will the abuse

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continue through generations of time—until a child takes on a new Father in Christ and then, by following Christ’s example of forgiveness, breaks the chain of reciprocal offense. When we forgive the offenses of our fathers and mothers, we may feel inclined to seek their salvation. Temple ordinances enable us to enact forgiveness of our forebears.

Christ gave us the perfect example of forgiveness. He suffered innocently every offense and every pain (Mosiah 3:7; Alma 7:11–13; 2 Ne. 9:21), yet he uttered no word of recrimination. He was born into a wicked culture, just as we have been, and he was tempted, just as we are. He must have felt a strong desire to lash out against his torturers. He had the power to call legions of angels to his defense (Matt. 26:53). But he forgave. Suffering on the cross, he forgave his torturers. If he could forgive that, we can forgive our petty grievances—and our great ones.

In Matthew 5:39, Christ commands his disciples to “resist not evil,” explaining that if someone slaps you on one cheek, you should offer the other as well. While reciprocity makes us desire to punish evil by slapping back, Christ insists that we change the mimetic culture of negative reciprocity by refusing to respond to offense with a reciprocal offense. Instead, he commands us to meekly cease reciprocation even at the cost of our honor.

To cast away hostile reciprocity, we must replace it with the positive generosity of love that “seeketh not her own” (1 Cor. 13:5). We must not treat others as well or as badly as they have treated us, but always as we would wish to be treated. This “Golden Rule” requires nothing less than for us to forsake this culture of mimetic desire and reciprocity. We must flee the oppressive traditions of the Great Father and come unto Christ.

As the norms of our inherited culture degenerate, we must be even more willing to sacrifice our need for the approval of the Great Father and our mimetic desires to possess what someone else has. As we flee our oppressive culture and desires, we must ignore the ridicule of the many who have adopted degraded standards of morality and who pass such standards off as proper behavior. This increasing debasement of our morality, once established by various models now sometimes called “influencers,” becomes particularly harmful to youth, who in their formative years are so vulnerable to the influence of the many.

Mimetic desire seeks always to climb higher, to exalt itself, to overtake the prestigious and put on—as if it were our own—the mantle of prestige. But Christ, who asks of us a different sort of imitation, teaches that if we would be exalted, we must be abased (Matt. 23:12). Stripping away the worn mantle of mimetic desire reveals the “deep self,” the divine inner creature, that Bergson identified in distinction to the superficial or
social self of inherited culture. For the first time, we will see things with spiritual eyes and then—with the beam cast out of our eyes (Matt. 7:3–5)—we will see how futile and destructive it has always been for us to judge and punish one another in our pursuit of the world's many forms of prestige. Our eyes will be opened to the love that God showers upon all his creatures, and we will desire to love his children exactly as he loves them: graciously, freely, without judgment or thought of personal gain.

As servants fulfill their missions by imitating the love of Christ, transcending cultural constraints, progressing by degrees to become like their divine model, they are born again as children of Christ. In Galatians 4:1–7 (KJV), Paul writes,

> Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant. . . . Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world: But . . . God sent forth his Son . . . that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

God's children must choose between two inheritances. Our first birth ushers us into a cultural inheritance that excites mimetic desire toward people who model various forms of prestige that we desire. We yearn after and imitate our models (beginning with parents, peers, or other cultural authorities), whom we, consciously or unconsciously, hope to supplant. We desire to inherit whatever our model has. Our second birth, if we choose it—and it must be actively chosen—promises an eventual inheritance of God's very power and character. This inheritance requires willing submission to the divine will and humble acceptance of whatever the Lord does or does not grant. Our longing is not to acquire a worldly father's fame or beauty or wealth but to mirror and one day fully embody Christ's self-sacrificial love of others.

Our need to imitate must be focused on Christ—including the Christlike qualities we see in his disciples—until he becomes our Father. The Book of Mormon testifies that when Christ's disciples are born of him, they lose the desire to do evil (Mosiah 5:2–3; 27:25; Alma 19:33) and, like little children, meekly submit to his will (Mosiah 3:19). The essential desire that we should imitate is the loving desire of Jesus to do his Father's will. Otherwise, if we desire that our own will be done, we

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may find ourselves playing the same role that Lucifer acted when, at the foundation of the world, defying the will of the Father, he proposed his own plan of salvation. He sought to seize the honor of the Father in a supremely audacious act of mimetic envy. When we insist upon our own will, we imitate, however slightly, that Satanic type. Instead, we can and must imitate the Father’s “Beloved Son,” who said to the Father from the beginning, “Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever” (Moses 4:2).

**Conclusion**

The idiom “Who’s your Daddy?” is not a question but an assertion of the dominance of a victor over a humiliated rival. The pronouncement of the idiom declares that a competitor has defeated a rival in a duel and rendered him or her a submissive child to the victorious father. The victor earns prestige and honor in the eyes of the world. That is not the nature of Christian fatherhood. When Christ becomes our Father, we meekly submit to his will but endure no humiliation, because he lifts us to be like him, creating us a second time in his image.

The greatest miracle in human life reverses the curse of mimetic desire. The miracle of conversion to Christ roots out the mimetic desire to pit ourselves against each other in rivalrous duels. By the Lord’s miraculous power, Christian disciples pull down, one by one, the spirals of vengeful reciprocity. Christ is our model and our Father. God sent him to earth to exemplify perfect love. His example shows us how to sacrifice for our friends and how to love our enemies. We accomplish our work on earth as we imitate his love and sacrifice. As Christ’s disciples follow this model, they become free from the servitude of sin, liberated from the bondage of mimetic desire.

Christian disciples must constantly ask themselves: Do I try to please some mimetic Daddy—or do I always seek to please the Lord? Do I desire to do the will of the fathers of my envy and admiration—or do I desire to do the Lord’s will? Do I imitate the prestigious and the powerful, or do I imitate Christ?

Has Christ become my Father?

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What’s in a Name?
The Growing Focus on Jesus Christ (by Name) since 2000 in General Conference Talks

Grant Madsen and Joseph Corey

In the last talk of the Sunday morning session of the October 2018 general conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter “the Church”), President Russell M. Nelson felt “compelled to discuss . . . a matter of great importance.” He recognized that nicknames such as “Mormon Church” or “LDS Church” had a certain acceptance and utility, particularly in a world dominated by social media. Still, he called on members to rely on the full and proper name of the Church moving forward. “What’s in a name or, in this case, a nickname?” President Nelson asked. “When it comes to nicknames of the Church . . . the most important thing in those names is the absence of the Savior’s name.”

Of all the talks given that October’s conference, this talk by President Nelson “generated the most buzz on social media.” The local press responded with a bit of surprise at President Nelson’s “course correction.” After all, the Church itself had “previously embraced and promoted the term Mormon, including with a 2014 documentary about its members called ‘Meet the Mormons.’” Writing for Religion News

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Service, Jana Riess noted that “President Nelson is not only moving in a different direction, but he also hinted that the old direction may have been a ‘major victory for Satan.’” Such a sudden “180-degree turn . . . is almost unheard of in modern Mormonism, where change happens glacially and current leaders simply don’t overturn the legacy of deceased ones.” When seen from the vantage of data science, however, President Nelson’s talk looks less like a departure and more like the culmination of a longer trend among Church leaders—particularly in their general conference talks—to not only emphasize the Savior but to call him by his name. As we will show below, since 2000, Church leaders have more than tripled their mentions of Jesus Christ by name.

Scholars across disciplines, including scholars interested in Church history and theology, have found increasing utility in using the power of computers to analyze large sets of linguistic data. This approach goes by different names depending on the scholarly field and analysis: corpus linguistics, natural language processing, computational linguistics, digital humanities, digital history, word mining, and data science, to name a few. Each approach follows a similar methodology: it leverages computing power to go through millions or billions of words found in documents that have some logical connection (for example, all Supreme Court opinions or all Amazon reviews of a particular product). These documents collectively are referred to as a corpus, and scholars working in this field use computers to find patterns that might otherwise elude the human eye or prove too laborious to investigate manually.


Our project takes advantage of the LDS General Conference Corpus, a collection of over eleven thousand talks (comprising twenty-five million words) given since 1851. Using this corpus, we tried to decipher any patterns in the use of the appellation Jesus Christ, including twenty-four recognized titles such as Savior, Redeemer, or Lamb of God. We could thus gather the total references to Jesus Christ even if the speaker did not use his proper name. We were careful to also eliminate perfunctory uses of his name—for example, when speakers closed their talks in his full name, or the speaker performed official Church business and therefore used the name of the Church (such as the typical greeting to the “semiannual conference of The Church of . . .”). We did this because we wanted to understand the usage of Jesus Christ’s names and titles as Church leaders taught about him (rather than simply counting talks closed in his name or mentions of the name of the Church).

Among the notable findings, we discovered a sharp increase in the usage of the name Jesus, Christ, and most especially Jesus Christ beginning at the turn of the twenty-first century (see fig. 1). President Nelson’s talk, in other words, fits nicely within a trend begun during President Gordon B. Hinckley’s administration (March 1995–January 2008).


8. In a technical sense, Jesus Christ is both a name and a title. His name was Jesus (Yeshua) and his title Christ, the Anglicized version of Χριστός (which comes from the Hebrew word for Messiah, or, more literally, “anointed with oil”). For our purposes, we use Jesus Christ as a name, not a name and title, throughout this article, since Christ is generally considered part of Jesus’s name (including by President Nelson).

9. In fact, as Stapley points out, the practice of closing all talks “in the name of Jesus Christ” evolved over time and was standardized in our familiar usage only “in the latter half of the twentieth century.” Stapley, “Invoking the Name of the Lord,” 2.

10. To be sure that we make a fair comparison across the long span of this study, all totals have been normalized. To normalize a word count, we first get a total of all instances of a particular word (for example, Lord) uttered in conference during a particular year. We then divide that total by the number of all words spoken in conference for that year. We then multiply that percentage by 1,000,000. The result is the normalized count for that word and year.

Thus, and for example, if our graph suggests that speakers uttered the word Lord 4,000 times in a particular year’s conferences, that should be understood as 4,000 utterances per 1,000,000 spoken words. Linguists prefer to illustrate results per million because the very tiny percentages these investigations produce belie the importance of a content word’s frequency. We might be tempted to see a result of 0.4 percent for the word Lord as insignificant. Since, however, much of spoken English involves what are called “filler” words (articles, prepositions, pronouns, and so forth), a very few “content” words (nouns, for example) convey most of the meaning in any given sentence. As a result, most scholars show results per million words spoken (rather than one hundred, which would give a typical percentage). We have followed that practice here.
When we looked more closely at the data, the turning point appears to be the April conference of 2003. Despite the fact that the Church had tried through the 1990s to emphasize its Christian bona fides (by, among other things, changing the font size of the name Jesus Christ in its official logo in 1995), general conference speakers did not necessarily reflect that emphasis on Jesus Christ (at least by name) in their talks (see fig. 2).\(^{11}\) Indeed, even after the the First Presidency issued a letter in March 2001 asking “members, news organization, and others to use the Church’s full and correct name—The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—and to avoid use of the terms ‘Mormon Church’ or ‘LDS Church,’” talks that discussed Jesus Christ by name continued to decline.\(^{12}\)

Then, two years later, the trend reversed. Since April 2002, general conference speakers have used the Lord’s name at a generally increasing rate (see fig. 3), doubling between 2002 and 2018, when President Nelson made the proper name of the Church a point of emphasis, and then nearly doubling again after that 2018 talk until April 2023, when we compiled this data.


Unfortunately, data science cannot tell us precisely why this shift occurred—whether instruction came from the prophet to conference speakers, or whether they (on their own) collectively felt inspired to make Jesus Christ a point of focus by name. Given the up and down of the graph line, though, we suspect the latter. On its surface, it would appear that conference speakers on their own and somewhat haltingly decided to name Jesus Christ in their talks more frequently after 2002—and that this trend continued right up until the moment President Nelson became President of the Church.

As often happens with computer analysis of large corpuses, curiosities also appear. To mention one in passing (and returning to fig. 1), we were intrigued to discover that early Church leaders preferred simply Jesus over Christ or Jesus Christ when speaking of the Savior. Consider, for example, two sentences with similar content: first, John Taylor’s 1869 sermon in which he said, “I want the doctrines that were promulgated by the disciples of Jesus on the day of Pentecost, through obedience to which men may gain the power and inspiration that were enjoyed by them, in accordance with the promises which Jesus had made”;13 and then Elder Quentin L. Cook’s statement in 2015 that “as individuals, disciples of Christ, living in a hostile world that is literally in commotion, we can thrive and bloom if we are rooted in our love of the Savior and humbly follow His teachings.”14 In both sentences, a leader of the Church

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speaks of the Lord’s disciples; however, it fit the style of the nineteenth-century speaker to say Jesus, whereas the twenty-first century speaker preferred Christ.\textsuperscript{15}

Our research also shows that Church leaders have referred to Jesus Christ even more often by his many titles or roles, and like the usage of his proper name, these frequencies have also increased over the last two decades. We began this part of our study by relying on a list of “50 Names and Titles of Jesus Christ” provided by the Church as found in the Holy Bible.\textsuperscript{16} After some analysis, we chose to remove a bit more than half of the titles because either (1) these titles (such as “Wonderful”) usually appeared in conference talks as an adjective, not as a title for Jesus Christ, or (2) some titles (such as “the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls” [1 Pet. 2:25]) appeared very infrequently or not at all in conference talks. After eliminating terms that only occasionally act as titles or that rarely or never appear in the conference corpus, we settled on a list of twenty-four titles and names that appear at least a dozen times in the corpus and clearly refer to Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{17}

As seen in figure 4, the title Lord appears by far the most often, although the gap has closed in the last decade, primarily due to a doubling in the usage of the term Savior in conference talks. Indeed, at the current rate, it could become the most preferred title within the decade, which suggests a subtle shift in the way Church leaders wish to emphasize Jesus Christ’s relationship to Church members.

In figure 5, we show how usage of the term Lord compares with the names Jesus, Christ, or Jesus Christ. Here, we note that Church leaders have used the title Lord at a relatively consistent rate since the 1890s,

\textsuperscript{15} The transition from Jesus to Christ is also a topic of academic investigation on the early Christian Church in the centuries after his death. As the generation that knew him passed away, the early Church also began to prefer the title Christ over the name Jesus. See, for example, Paula Fredriksen, From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Christ (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2000). For similar results, see Spencer, “What Don’t the Prophets Say Anymore?”


\textsuperscript{17} Our list of twenty-four includes (in order of total usage in general conference—more on this below): (1) Lord; (2) Savior; (3) Redeemer; (4) Son of God; (5) the Almighty; (6) Son of Man; (7) Only Begotten Son; (8) Creator; (9) Beloved Son; (10) Son of the Living God; (11) Messiah; (12) King of Kings; (13) Mediator; (14) Lamb of God; (15) Good Shepherd; (16) Prince of Peace; (17) Bread of Life; (18) Holy One of Israel; (19) Chief Cornerstone; (20) Immanuel; (21) King of the Jews; (22) Alpha and Omega; (23) Author and Finisher of Our Faith; (24) Fountain of Living Waters.
**Figure 4.** Lord vs. all titles except Lord.

**Figure 5.** Lord vs. Jesus, Christ, or Jesus Christ.
when they were more than twice as likely to prefer the title Lord to the name Jesus Christ. The gap closed toward the end of the twentieth century, but again, the most obvious change appears from 2000 to 2022 as Church leaders began preferring Jesus Christ instead of the title Lord.

After Lord, the next most common spoken titles are Savior (as noted), Redeemer, and Son of God. All other titles (including, for example, Only Begotten and Messiah) appear much less frequently. One very common title for Jesus Christ, the Almighty, would stand in second place on this list (aside from Lord), had we written this article in 1870 (see fig. 6). “Be patient, live your religion, and when the Almighty does reward, it will be on a large scale,” preached Orson Hyde in a sermon from 1869 with a typical use of that title.18

When seen in total (and as fig. 7 shows), Church leaders have collectively preferred to use titles when speaking of Jesus Christ, although that gap narrowed in the 2000s and reversed itself in 2022, suggesting, again, that President Nelson’s 2018 talk reflected an ongoing trend rather than breaking from one.

After compiling these results, we also wondered how the growing focus on Jesus Christ (by name) compared to other important topics addressed in conference. We wondered, for example, if the focus on the Savior by name “crowded out” other topics, complemented other topics, or seemed irrelevant to the other concerns of Church leaders.

To find answers to these questions, we turned to the Church’s missionary guide, Preach My Gospel, to identify topics central to the Church’s teachings (such as prayer, faith, the Restoration, the Book of Mormon, and so forth). With these topics in hand, we counted how often Church leaders referenced these topics to see how they measured up to the growing focus on the Savior in conference talks.

Of the topics we gathered from Preach My Gospel, “the Church” itself proved the most frequently spoken term we found in conference talks since 1860. This analysis excludes incidents when a speaker referenced the Church by its full title. As shown in figure 8, we found that Church leaders referenced the Church more often than Jesus Christ (by proper name) starting around the 1880s and increasingly through the middle part of the twentieth century. The gap declined after the 1960s, initially because Church leaders mentioned the Church less often in their talks. Then, as noted, the focus on Jesus Christ by name began in the 2000s,

Figure 6. Most common titles (aside from Lord), 1860–1900.

Figure 7. All titles vs. proper name (Jesus, Christ, and Jesus Christ).

Figure 8. Church vs. proper name (Jesus, Christ, and Jesus Christ).
and now Church leaders are more than twice as likely to reference Jesus Christ by name as they are to mention *the Church*.

To account for the upsurge in references to the Church in the mid-twentieth century, we looked at a number of specific talks and found a few patterns. In part, the rise coincided with a growth in Church officers or practices (for example, “General Authorities of the Church” or “the organizations and activities of the Church”). The rise also coincided with more frequent mentions of the Church’s growth, and particularly its growing list of programs and facilities. This usage may reflect the Church’s increasing acceptance within the United States, its standardization of practices, or its successful missionary work (or all three). Overall, though, the analysis reiterates that Jesus Christ has become the increasing focus of talks in general conference.

In figure 9, we compare some common conference themes with usage of the Lord’s name. *Pray*, along with its iterations (*prayer, praying, prayerful, prayed*, and so forth), accounted for the next most frequently used term we found, followed by *family*. That term became increasingly important in the 1960s, when the Church made it a point of emphasis (in programs such as family home evening). Still, when we compare *family* to mentions of Jesus Christ by name, we can see that it comes close to matching Jesus Christ in frequency by the early 2000s, only to decline since then. By contrast, the term *covenant* has seen a growing emphasis in rough parallel to the increasing focus on Jesus Christ. Of course, staying “on the covenant path” has been a central message since the start of President Nelson’s tenure. However, this message also appears to fit within a longer trend rather than departing from one. Usage of the word *covenant* climbed slowly through the twentieth century. Here, again, it might appear that President Nelson’s emphasis on covenants augmented a trend begun earlier.

Looking at other common topics central to the Church—captured in terms such as *faith, priesthood*, and *love*—we see again that none of these has been as frequently used as the name of Jesus Christ since the 1850s (see fig. 9).

**Figure 9.** Pray, family, and covenant vs. proper name (Jesus, Christ, or Jesus Christ).

**Figure 10.** Other topics vs. proper name (Jesus, Christ, or Jesus Christ).
We note in passing, though, the gradual but significant increase in the usage of love in conference talks. Looking more closely at the way the term’s usage has evolved, it appears that the uptick comes from several shifts in the way Church leaders express themselves. For one thing, Church leaders have more frequently expressed their love for Church members and each other. President Spencer W. Kimball seems to have made this acceptable in the 1970s. Today, it is quite common. For example, in a 2018 address, President Nelson concluded by saying, “I love you and thank you and now bless you with the ability to leave the world behind as you assist in this crucial and urgent work.” In addition, Church leaders have become more focused on encouraging the Saints to love one another. “Fill your heart with love for others,” Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf taught in general conference, to give one typical example. Other General Authorities have given similar instruction in their talks.

When taken collectively, figures 8–10 reveal that the increasing frequency by which Jesus Christ is mentioned either by name or by title only sometimes comes at the expense of other topics. Church, priesthood, and family have declined as a point of focus in conference talks recently. Other topics, though, have remained fairly constant or increased in focus (such as covenant). We might conclude, then, that since 2000, Church leaders have generally emphasized the ways in which Jesus Christ is the author, exemplar, or otherwise the center of specific Church principles and topics. “When we discard the Savior’s name,” President Nelson explained in 2018, “we are subtly disregarding all that Jesus Christ did for us—even His Atonement.” Put in positive terms, we might conclude that the last two decades of conference talks have collectively stressed all that Jesus Christ has done for us, as expressed through all the principles, teachings, and programs of the Church.

We could, of course, consider many additional topics addressed in general conference to discern patterns and gain insights. We will have to leave those investigations to other scholars. Our purpose in considering love, faith, priesthood, family, and so forth here largely serves to support our main observation that President Nelson’s insistence on using

the correct name of the Church fits within a broader shift in focus by Church leaders in their conference talks. Before 2018, they had already increasingly emphasized Jesus Christ by name in a noticeable and measurable way. It makes sense that this growing focus on Jesus Christ by name would eventually apply to the name of the Church. In this way, Church leaders have echoed the resurrected Christ’s admonition to “take upon you the name of Christ” (3 Ne. 27:5), not only as that applies to each individual member but also as it applies to his Church.

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The Last Leaf

Shadows strained eastward as the yielding sun,
In solemn salute, frosted Nebo’s peaks
In glowing hues of squash and melon and
The last leaf dropped. Like fine pink sugar spun

At county fairs, a cotton candy puff
Of cloud, adrift in a periwinkle sky,
Had lingered with a patient reverie
Until the maple tree could finally slough

Its last leaf. No breeze stirred the home-made swing
Of rope and plank hung from the sturdy limb
Where pig-tailed pixies touched toes to the sky
In carefree giggles back when pale green Spring-

Sprung helicopter seeds speckled the grass
Beneath dragon fly ballets. The alchemy
Of green to gold complete, no breath of air
Cajoled the leaf to fall. It just fell. As

Is requisite, earth’s axis foreordains
The fall of maple leaves when Autumn wanes.

No sparrow requiem paid tribute to
The fallen leaf, just sharp staccato taps—
A woodpecker’s last supper for the day,
Some tree-killing bark-beetles to pursue

While hopping, inverted, on the gravity side
Of the naked branch, somehow cheating the fall
That pulled the last leaf to the still green grass
Below where it would peacefully abide
The white shroud of the seasons’ eventide.

—Ben de Hoyos

This poem was a finalist in the 2022 BYU Studies Poetry Contest.
My children were grassy and wet that early fall day as they rolled down the hill over and over again. They giggled and slid down the muddy slope. This was not quite the experience I hoped to give when I dragged them from the suburbs of Washington, D.C., up to rural New York, but they seemed more pleased with this outcome than any other. Rain drizzled, and trees hung on to their green in a last attempt at modesty before their gorgeous reds and oranges were revealed.

As I stood at the crest of the hill watching my children's delight, I looked down at the path and saw a gentleman coming up the track. Wow, that guy looks like Bill. But Bill and Alicia live in Alabama or Louisiana or somewhere down South. They wouldn't be up here. Not in the middle of the school year.

I motioned to my husband to come and see. “Doesn’t that guy look like Bill?” He agreed, and we chuckled at the absurdity of having friends we hadn't seen in years suddenly arrive at the top of the Hill Cumorah at the exact same time we were there. It would be almost as miraculous as having an angel appear and show a young boy the location of buried golden plates.

By then the gentleman had walked farther up the path. He looked up, and with the effervescence of surprise, we saw his face and recognized that it was, in fact, Bill. His children pushed ahead of him, swarming up the path, and Alicia followed close behind, making sure everyone reached the top.

Six years ago we had been stationed together in Montana but hadn't seen each other since our respective moves across the country in service of the United States Air Force.
We stood and chatted as their children joined ours rolling down the hill—all of our children except one. My daughter sat patiently in her stroller wheelchair clapping her right hand against her weak left arm, hooting her delight as the other kids rejoiced. She was born without a gene that stops tumor growth. So she grows tumors. All over her body.

Earlier that summer, we had traveled from Virginia, where we now lived, to Texas Children’s Hospital in Houston, the largest children’s hospital in the country. We hoped their chief neurosurgeon would be able to remove the offending tissue without causing further damage. The goal was to stop her daily seizures. At four years old, she could walk haltingly across the living room, she was fed by a G-tube, and she could not speak.

After a few minutes of general catching up, Alicia turned to me and said, “So the surgery went well?”

“Well, it didn’t cause her further paralysis or damage, but it only stopped her seizures for about a month,” I answered simply.

“But you’re okay with that? You seem okay.” Alicia’s eyes gently searched mine for the truth.

I nodded and heard myself say, “The Lord was so much in the details of how we were able to get this surgery in the first place that I know he loves us even though things didn’t turn out the way we hoped.”

But Alicia’s question reverberated in my mind in the following months as I adjusted to the looming, lifelong care of a medically complex, nonverbal adult, who would someday be as big as I was, a person whose care might last the remainder of my life. I started to question whether God really did love us. Was I okay with this? No. No, I was not.

As a child, I would quietly sneak into the “white room” of our house, aptly named because someone in the seventies thought that putting pure white carpet into a living room was a great idea. My mom, however, realized the folly of white carpet and a household of children. She kept us out of there unless we were having home teachers over or practicing the piano. It became a pseudocelestial room for us, a quiet place where there was no roughhousing or shenanigans. On a glass table near a brass and crystal lamp lay an oversized white leather Bible with beautiful illustrations and gold-leaf edges.

To me, the most intriguing story in that Bible was the story of Abraham, whose impeccable obedience on the top of a hill brought rescue from sacrificing his son—at the very last minute. A ram in the thicket. Perfect obedience was thus the key to being saved from doing awful things. It was so clear. I would quietly look at the picture of Abraham poised to slice through his child with an angel holding back his arm.
I certainly wanted a ram in the thicket for my daughter’s situation. Wasn’t there a way to save her from this terrible life of suffering and heart-ache? And if I was honest, a way to save me from providing the care she would need to survive it? Had I not been obedient enough to qualify for the desired miracle? I felt I’d been inspired in the steps I took before her surgery.

Maybe the real test was just beginning, and the miracle was still to come. Maybe I needed to increase my obedience a bit more. More scripture study. Longer and more fervent prayers as I begged wholeheartedly for deliverance. More church service. More care for my family. More. More. More.

Each morning I felt like Sisyphus muscling his boulder up the hill. G-tube feedings began at six a.m. and lasted for a half hour while her pump pushed formula into her stomach. These feedings were repeated every three hours until nine p.m. when I would throw away the formula bag, plug in the pump to charge, and prepare the formula for the next day. Then there were doctors’ appointments to manage her multisystem organ involvement. There was speech therapy, physical therapy, feeding therapy, and occupational therapy. She started special-ed preschool far from our home, and although it was nice to have someone else care for her for three hours, I worried not just about her having a life-threatening seizure but about her getting abducted or abused since she wasn’t able to ask for help or tell anyone. My anxieties would spin and spiral while she was gone—a whirlpool of fear that I could drown in. When she returned home, the emotional exhaustion would give way in the face of physical exhaustion. I would complete all her daily care knowing that it would begin again the next day. No respite. No stopping. Perpetual, never-ending care. Hello, hill. Hello, boulder.

On top of this, I had five other children (my oldest was just thirteen years old) who needed and deserved a mother’s attention, love, and support even when I was emotionally bereft and wiped out physically. My husband understood my utter despair and helped as much as he could, but he was feeling his own grief, trying to provide for us financially and managing the real stresses of being an active-duty service member in the military. We both held our sorrows tightly to ourselves so that we wouldn’t drown the other who was barely staying afloat.

In Relief Society one day, the teacher asked what brought me joy, and I responded, “Do I have to answer?” I was so completely empty despite doing more of the things that I knew were right.

Why did I feel so hopeless? Why didn’t God save my daughter from her seizures? Why wasn’t he at least saving me from my despair?
One evening, I arrived late to book club at a friend's house—my sole social outing each month. I hadn't read the book. My friends, who were all about ten years older than I was and about a hundred years wiser, sat around discussing the true account of Ernest Shackleton's trip to the Antarctic. They talked about how the crew was stranded on the ice for 492 days, enduring months of darkness, then their boat was crushed by the floes before they daringly rowed in lifeboats to Elephant Island. Once they were there, their leader abandoned most of them and took a smaller group of men to row hundreds of miles to South Georgia, where hope of rescue lay.

“Wow. How many of the crew survived?”
“Twenty-eight.”
“How many of them were there to begin with?”
“Twenty-eight.”

I was shocked. “He saved all of them? How is that even possible?” I asked incredulously.

“He was always very concerned about the morale of his men. Even when they had to do terrible things, they would get together every night to tell stories and jokes, and sing together. When he took the small crew with him to go for help at the end, he brought the most cynical person with him because he knew that the men he left behind could not withstand his negativity. Shackleton’s motto was *Fortitude Vincimus*—by endurance, we conquer. That’s what the ship was named—*Endurance*.”

I felt heat rush to my face and heart. By endurance, we conquer. Everyone made it home safe. That’s what I wanted for my children. For my marriage. For myself. I wanted to feel rescued from the polar darkness that seemed to be surrounding me, from the floes of ice crushing my heart.

I just needed to reclaim some laughter, jokes, stories, and music. I needed to send my cynicism on a long journey. I needed some hope.

But what was hope anyway?

As I added some levity into my life, I also worked to understand hope. Faith, hope, and charity have always seemed enmeshed to me. Where does one stop and the other begin? I wanted to have a very clear definition of what hope was so that I could finally obtain it. I decided to reverse engineer hope by analyzing its sister virtues: faith and charity.

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In *Lectures on Faith*, attributed to Sidney Rigdon and Joseph Smith, we’re taught that faith is a principle of righteous action based on beliefs about who God is and why we can trust him.

In simpler words, faith is knowing, trusting, and loving God. We come to know God through the words of the scriptures and the living prophets. As we learn who God is, then we begin to trust him to redeem us. We trust his timing and know his goodness.

We show our trust through obedient actions and keeping the commandments. Jesus Christ himself said, “If you love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). So our knowledge of who he is allows us to trust in his redemption enough to obey him; our obedience is the sign of our love for him.

Our obedience is not an investment we make to try to yield further dividends of blessings. It’s an act of devotion, regardless of outcomes. Abraham didn’t know there was going to be a ram in the thicket. He didn’t obey with the belief that he would be rescued from experiencing heartache. He obeyed because he knew, trusted, and loved God. Which brings us to charity.

Charity is the pure love of Christ. It’s the love that the Savior feels for each of us. It’s the devotion we feel toward him, but even more importantly, it’s the love that he wants us to feel for each other. It’s a portion of God’s love, given to us so that we can value the people around us the way he does. He doesn’t ask us to manufacture this love for others out of thin air. Like every spiritual gift, charity comes from Christ.

Charity is seeing our brothers and sisters as they truly are. Knowing and loving them with their flaws. Trusting that they will make their own choices and that the Savior can help strengthen them. It’s loving them the way God loves them—wholeheartedly.

At this point, I began to see the pattern. Faith is knowing, trusting, and loving God; charity is knowing, trusting, and loving others; and hope is knowing, trusting, and loving ourselves.

Hope is believing that I am personally able to do what I need to do and that I will make it back home to my Heavenly Father and Mother. Charity is believing that no one is beyond the redeeming grace of God. And faith is believing that the Savior makes it all possible.

An essay on the Church website reads, “Hope is the confident expectation of and longing for the promised blessings of righteousness. The scriptures often speak of hope as anticipation of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.”
It goes on, “In our everyday language, the word [hope] often has a hint of uncertainty. For example, we may say that we hope for a change in the weather or a visit from a friend. In the language of the gospel, however, the word hope is sure, unwavering, and active. Prophets speak of having a ‘firm hope’ (Alma 34:41) and a ‘lively hope’ (1 Peter 1:3). The prophet Moroni taught, ‘Whoso believeth in God might with surety hope for a better world, yea, even a place at the right hand of God, which hope cometh of faith, maketh an anchor to the souls of men, which would make them sure and steadfast, always abounding in good works, being led to glorify God’ (Ether 12:4).”

If hope is an anchor, then it keeps us steady during the storms of life. Knowing that we can handle the things that come our way when we are coupled with Christ allows us not to capsize when the winds of tribulation blow or when waves of depression and anxiety start to rise. Charity is our helm, the tool we use to steer our souls, giving our lives direction and purpose. Our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is our sail. He can harness every misfortune, each trial that blows against us, and bless us with power and speed to move forward.

We can “press forward with a steadfast faith in Christ, having a perfect brightness of hope, and a love of God and of all men. Wherefore, if ye shall press forward, feasting upon the word of Christ, and endure to the end, behold, thus saith the Father: Ye shall have eternal life” (2 Ne. 31:20).

Shackleton’s men may not have called their camaraderie and goodwill by the names of faith, hope, and charity, but they certainly exemplified those virtues. While I couldn’t stop the Endurance from sinking to the bottom of the ocean, I could certainly help myself.

I could trust that I was enough as I was: flawed, tired, and discouraged. I was still enough because of Christ. I could tell myself the stories of how God had prepared me for the experience of being a caregiver. I could laugh about the disgusting things I was doing and the hoops I had to jump through to get the necessary care for my daughter. I could rejoice in the triumphs of my children whether they were typical or not. I could sing praises to God, and those songs would echo the melodies from my daughter’s heart, because I knew that “Jesus, listening [does]

hear the songs [she] cannot sing.” I could “lift up the hands which hang down” and strengthen “the feeble knees” (Heb. 12:12).

As I recall standing with my friends that rainy day on the Hill Cumorah, I remember the peace I felt as I answered Alicia: “The Lord was so much in the details of how we were able to get this surgery in the first place that I know he loves us even though things didn’t turn out the way we hoped.”

Being a Latter-day Saint in the United States military makes for a small world. But not that small. To meet our friends at the top of the Hill Cumorah when we lived in different states, with eleven children to wrangle between us, in the middle of a school year, on a rainy day—that wasn’t a coincidence. That was providence. Miracles do come but usually in unexpected ways. Seeing them there was the miracle that began my understanding of my relationship with God and the relationship between faith, hope, and charity.

Now I realize that hope isn’t in outcomes—at least earthly outcomes. It’s a feeling of deep personal confidence that I am enough because of my partnership with Christ. That things will turn out alright in the end, but that this isn’t the end. It’s accepting the duality of my nature—that I need to grow to become more like him, and that I’m perfectly whole right now because he fills me.

Now I know that hope doesn’t come from the ram in the thicket. It comes from the altar of stones at the top of the hill where a son was not spared, rather than where one was.

It comes from a “green hill, far away, without a city wall, where the Dear Lord was crucified, who died to save us all.”

Jesus is my rock. I will lean on him as I struggle up Mount Zion. Hello, boulder. Hello, hill.

This essay by Miranda H. Lotz was a finalist in the 2023 BYU Studies Personal Essay Contest.


Stiff-necked

Caught in the drainpipe
of this tin-can quick-charge one-use world,
I’ve had enough.
Blast me, Lord; tear the roof right off.
Crack me open
like a book spine puckered new; splay me.
Dog-ear me.

Breathe me; knead me. Tender me and tender me,
hoard and toss and trundle me,
 yea, even to and fro.

Enwrap, enrap, and dandle me,
dangle, dash and shatter me.
Tethered, I will down-dog, belly high,
or down-shift. I will bow.

I will pour myself through your sieving fingers;
clarify me pure as rendered butter,
silken-smooth and mellow.
I would be honed
and owned.

—Darlene Young

This poem was a finalist in the 2023 BYU Studies Poetry Contest. It appears in Count Me In (Signature Books, 2024) and is used by permission.
Grant Hardy’s *The Annotated Book of Mormon* shares its literary DNA with four previous works. Hardy’s first take on a specialized Book of Mormon edition was *The Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Edition*, published by the University of Illinois Press in 2003. It reformatted the text so that poetry was presented in poetic stanzas, and prose text appeared in paragraphs with the punctuation modernized (most notably by including quotation marks). Section headings helped readers easily navigate literary units. Footnotes were used sparingly and identified dates, the source of quotations, narrative threads, and the locations of original chapter breaks. Appendices provided statements from Joseph Smith and other witnesses to the Book of Mormon, as well as charts, maps, background essays, and suggestions for further reading. One drawback of the *Reader’s Edition* was its use of the 1920 Book of Mormon text,

2. Although the Book of Mormon was published with paragraphs in 1830, official Church editions since 1879 have followed the King James Version (KJV) by inserting verse numbers and using a verse-centric paragraphing system. Quotation marks as a means of representing direct speech had not yet been invented when the KJV was published in 1611, and they remain absent in standard KJV Bibles to this day—another feature that all official Church editions of the Book of Mormon, as well as most nonofficial editions, have emulated.
3. The Book of Mormon’s original chapter system was part of the inspired translation and apparently reflects literary divisions marked on the gold plates. The current chapter system was introduced by Elder Orson Pratt in 1879. See Richard E. Turley Jr. and William W. Slaughter, *How We Got the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2011), 80–91. Modern Book of Mormon scholars have made the case that the original system more accurately represents the Book of Mormon’s literary structure as its ancient authors intended it, which is why Hardy’s editions include the old system alongside the now-standard Orson Pratt system.
which differs from the Church’s current edition in some 150 places but
has the advantage of being in the public domain.

The deep engagement with the Book of Mormon required to create
the Reader’s Edition led to Hardy’s Understanding the Book of Mormon:
A Reader’s Guide, published by Oxford University Press in 2010.4 Like
his first book, this volume addressed readers who do not share Hardy’s
Latter-day Saint faith in the Book of Mormon as inspired scripture, but
Hardy made the case that the Book of Mormon is still worth their seri-
ous attention both as literature and as world scripture.5 Because Understanding the Book of Mormon is an academic publication addressed
to a diverse audience, it is nondogmatic in its approach to historical
questions (such as the existence of an actual Nephi) and explains how
any given literary feature might be understood either by believers or
nonbelievers.6

Hardy’s second publication of the full Book of Mormon text was The
Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ—Maxwell Institute
Study Edition (MISE), published jointly in 2018 by BYU’s Religious Stud-
ies Center, BYU’s Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship,
and Deseret Book.7 The MISE is an updated Reader’s Edition—the head-
ings, formatting, footnotes, and appendices are all improved. The original chapter breaks are moved from the footnotes to the body text, and

6. Daniel C. Peterson, “An Apologetically Important Nonapologetic Book,” Journal of Book of Mormon Studies 25 (2016): 52–75, observes that even though Understanding the Book of Mormon does not actively try to persuade readers to accept the Book of Mormon as authentic ancient American scripture, the literary complexity that Hardy documents can very much be interpreted by believers as a confirmation of the Book of Mormon’s historical claims.
the footnotes are expanded with additional literary and narrative observations as well as alternative readings from Book of Mormon prepublication manuscripts. Thanks to Church copyright permission, the 1920 text was replaced with the Church’s 2013 text, allowing the MISE to match the official version. But the most significant change from the Reader’s Edition is that the MISE is written for believing Latter-day Saints, so its notes and appendices explicitly present a position of faith.  

The final work in The Annotated Book of Mormon’s ancestry is The New Oxford Annotated Bible, edited by Michael Coogan and published by Oxford University Press. The Annotated Bible (in its fifth edition as of 2018) is the flagship Bible in OUP’s study-Bible line and includes denominational variations, such as The Catholic Study Bible and The Jewish Annotated New Testament. The Annotated Book of Mormon is also published by Oxford’s Bible division and is in fact the first non-Bible in its history. Although The Annotated Book of Mormon is a refinement of the format Hardy has been perfecting since the Reader’s Edition, this new work also takes many of its visual and organizational cues from the Annotated Bible (as their similar titles are meant to suggest). These include introductions to each individual book, a series of essays in the appendix that examine the text from different angles, and a dense block of footnotes at the bottom of each page where the word or phrase under discussion is highlighted in italics.  

In sum, one may think of The Annotated Book of Mormon as a combination of all four previous works: it includes the user-friendly format of the Reader’s Edition and the MISE, the interpretive insights and outward-facing scholarship of Understanding the Book of Mormon, and the visual style and prestige of the Oxford study Bibles. Understanding the Book of Mormon remains an invaluable stand-alone resource for its in-depth analysis, but the Reader’s Edition is now effectually obsolete, having no benefits over this new successor. Unfortunately, The Annotated Book of Mormon could not secure the copyright agreement that allowed the MISE to use the Church’s 2013 text, so it reverts to the 1920 text used in the Reader’s Edition, leaving the MISE with that advantage. The MISE also remains unique with its Latter-day Saint target audience.


9. As with the Annotated Bible, technical information about the text, such as alternative readings, are presented under the body text but above the main block of interpretive footnotes (the MISE had included this information among the footnotes).
A primary audience for *The Annotated Book of Mormon* is those outside the faith, especially those who are academically minded (that is, people who read the kinds of things published by Oxford). These readers may be willing to engage with the Book of Mormon, not necessarily because they are exploring conversion but at least because they are willing to learn more. Hardy identifies himself in the introduction as “a believer” and describes his role as “a host (I hope a gracious one) in inviting outsiders to see how the narrative operates, how it makes its points, and to gain some sense of the book’s message and why believers have found it so compelling” (x). Conscious of readers who do not accept Joseph Smith’s story of ancient American plates and angelic messengers, Hardy’s footnotes and essays will sometimes explain how a Book of Mormon passage was relevant in the nineteenth century, which is where these readers might assume the text originates, or will explain how the Book of Mormon could be seen as religious fiction. Because this is a primer on the Book of Mormon, not the Church, the annotations as a rule explain what the Book of Mormon says without exploring how a given idea may have developed among Latter-day Saints since 1830.10

Some Latter-day Saints may be uncomfortable with a Book of Mormon edition that is not designed for religious conversion. Given that the Book of Mormon self-identifies as a missionary tool, an academic intent can seem like a betrayal of its purpose. However, I can appreciate the value of this approach when I consider the times I have been on the other side of the equation. For example, when I as a Christian want to enhance my understanding of Islam by reading a study edition of the Quran, my preference would be to read something edited by Muslims. I want them to explain the Quran and why they love it so much. At the same time, because I do not share their religious faith, I would appreciate them being honest about the Quran’s complexities and controversies. Were their work designed only to convert me, I honestly would not read it. And although I respect their view of the Quran’s inspiration, I would also want the Muslim editors to suggest how a nonbeliever such as myself might think about the Quran’s origin and nature. A volume such as HarperOne’s *The Study Quran* (2015) succeeds as a literary ambassador because it checks all these boxes and helps me feel comfortable

10. There are a few places where Hardy breaks this rule, which I am grateful for. For example, the annotation for 2 Nephi 5:21 clarifies that, despite what readers might assume based on the scriptural text, “The current LDS Church disavows any connection between dark skin and curses.” At Moroni 9:9, it explains, “The LDS Church today disavows the notion that virtue or chastity can be lost through rape or abuse.”
learning about the Quran as a reader who is curious to learn but not interested in becoming a Muslim. *The Annotated Book of Mormon* fills this role for the Book of Mormon. While it does not expressly invite its readers to come to Jesus, it does allow curious readers to engage with our founding scripture in a serious yet nonpushy way. If this creates space for more people to read the Book of Mormon than would otherwise happen, then I consider that a win.

In addition, *The Annotated Book of Mormon* presents the world with a Book of Mormon that *looks* like it deserves serious engagement as a scriptural text. More than a century ago, Church editors worked hard to change the Book of Mormon’s originally novel-like format so that it matched what readers expected scripture to look like in the King James Version (KJV). To that end, chapters were shortened, verse numbers were added, and new paragraphs began with each verse. While that may have been a savvy missionary-minded move at the time, official Book of Mormon editions since then continue to emulate the KJV while ignoring the fact that the Bible moved on. Today, virtually all translations (including special editions of the KJV) arrange prose narrative into paragraphs and display poetry in poetic stanzas. Verse numbers are shrunk to superscripts to make them visually unobtrusive, and the chapter breaks (invented in the medieval era and often placed in intrusive locations) are deemphasized in favor of section headings marking natural literary divisions. These developments are universally adopted because this format makes the Bible far easier to read. (To anyone who doubts this, I challenge you to read anything other than scripture in a format where a new paragraph begins every sentence or half-sentence and see if that doesn’t ruin the experience.) Furthermore, serious students of the Bible today are accustomed to engaging with the text in a study Bible format, where the bottom half of each page is packed with dense annotations reflecting a rich history of biblical interpretation. 11 Official editions of the Book of Mormon, by contrast, are still printed with verse-centric paragraphing that obscures the natural contours of the narrative. The footnotes primarily consist of cross-references or point to the Topical Guide. These references perform their intended function of signaling that the Book of Mormon is a companion to the Bible, 12 but their ability to help readers

12. The editors of the 1979 Latter-day Saint edition of the Bible and its companion volume, the 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon, described this signaling as one of the primary benefits of the cross references. See *That Promised Day: The Coming Forth of the*
dive deep into the Book of Mormon’s meaning is limited, particularly since most of them point to other passages whose relationship to the starting passage is merely thematic. By contrast, *The Annotated Book of Mormon* reimagines the Book of Mormon in the format of a modern Bible translation like the NRSV, inviting outside readers to *see* the Book of Mormon in the way they expect biblical scripture to look. And since the notes elucidate the text in the manner of a study Bible, they communicate that this text has received, and continues to deserve, serious study. All of this aids *The Annotated Book of Mormon* in its role as an ambassador to readers outside the Latter-day Saint faith.

Of course, this book will also find an audience among Latter-day Saints. Given the academic publisher, I was initially concerned that Oxford would mandate a strictly secular editorial approach (“No angels or gold plates allowed here!”). I was therefore pleased to find that Hardy was permitted to take the stance of a believer: “I believe the Book of Mormon is [a] gift from God, a revealed translation of a record written by ancient American prophets” (xi). Instead of taking some posture of objectivity, Hardy says that he has *not* “adopted a disinterested, neutral stance” and admits that while attempting to treat the complex issues honestly, he has also consciously “emphasized the book’s strengths” (x). Because of this framing, the annotations on each page adopt the perspective of the Book of Mormon’s own internal point of view (“Nephi sees . . .”) rather than create some way to distance the text from reality (“Joseph Smith claimed that Nephi saw . . .”). Outsiders are welcome to interpret this perspective through a literary lens (“Within the narrative, the character of Nephi sees . . .”), but the notes will feel most natural to believers who are accustomed to thinking of Book of Mormon authors as real people. On the occasions where the notes do present a nineteenth-century connection for the benefit of readers outside the faith, Latter-day Saint readers can interpret these data in alternative ways, such as assuming that ancient prophets wrote under inspiration in a way that made the book relevant during the time of its future translation.

While the book introductions, annotations, and essays are written to welcome first-time readers outside the faith, this does not mean they

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are simplistic. Hardy is one of our most important Book of Mormon scholars, and even the most experienced Book of Mormon readers will learn much from this edition. That being said, I anticipate that invested students of the Book of Mormon will not agree with every annotation or editorial decision. In a volume of 892 pages and thousands of notes, some annotations will inevitably miss an important insight or make an observation that the reader finds flawed. Also worth observing is the book’s univocality, with Hardy functioning as the only named editor and as the only named author of the annotations and essays. Were this edition written by another individual, or were it produced by a team of scholars (which is standard in Oxford’s other scripture editions), the book would undoubtedly read very differently. Still, whatever limitations are inherent to a one-man project of such an audacious scope, the quality of the final product is truly remarkable. I could quibble about notes I would have written differently, but overall, I have difficulty imagining a better edition to serve as the Book of Mormon’s ambassador to the scholarly world.

No one edition of the Book of Mormon can serve the needs of all people. For our family scripture study, I will still pass out copies of the MISE to my kids. For those who want interactive videos, reading schedules, and links to online content, an app like ScripturePlus will still be their first choice. For sharing copies of the Book of Mormon in bulk, nothing beats the Church’s inexpensive missionary edition. But for those who want to dive deep and appreciate the Book of Mormon’s literary complexity and doctrinal richness in new ways, I heartily recommend this book.

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13. The General Essays alone span ninety-four pages and cover a diverse range of topics, including the origin of the text, the Book of Mormon’s relationship to the Bible, how Latter-day Saints use and understand the Book of Mormon, ways in which people have read the Book of Mormon as either ancient history or fiction, and an annotated bibliography for further study.
Slavery in Zion: A Documentary and Genealogical History of Black Lives and Black Servitude in Utah Territory, 1847–1862 by Amy Tanner Thiriot (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2022)

Slavery in Zion: A Documentary and Genealogical History of Black Lives and Black Servitude in Utah Territory, 1847–1862 is an important and carefully researched book by Amy Tanner Thiriot. Delving deep into an often-overlooked and lesser-known aspect of Utah's history, Thiriot explores the intricate dynamics of slavery and servitude in the region during the period spanning from the Saints' arrival in the mountain west to 1862. Thiriot is an independent historian and adjunct instructor in the BYU–Idaho Family History Research program.

The introduction describes some of the questions the book attempts to answer: “How did these enslaved men, women, and children come to live in Utah Territory? What were their experiences in the territory? What happened to them after they were freed?” (x–xi). Thiriot describes a subsequent question that her research gave rise to: “How can we best honor the memory of men, women, and children who struggled under the heavy burdens of enslavement?” In response, she writes, “The best way to honor their memory is to tell their stories as completely and honestly as possible” (xi).

Thiriot's work goes beyond a mere historical account; it serves as a comprehensive documentation of the lived experiences of Black individuals and their roles in Utah Territory. By combing through a wide array of primary sources—including journals, court records, and personal accounts—the author sheds light on the struggles, resilience, and agency of Black people during this era. Readers will learn about early Black pioneers, most commonly coming to Utah Territory as slaves, such as Cordelia Litchford, Martha Ann Morris Flake, Green Flake, Venice and Chinea, and many more.

The book traces the origins of Black servitude in Utah Territory and examines the intricate—and complicated—web of relationships between Black individuals, white settlers, and Native American communities. Thiriot deftly illuminates the multifaceted aspects of these often-complicated relationships.

Through genealogical research, Thiriot unveils the stories of Black families and their contributions to the development of the territory. She highlights the challenges they faced, their aspirations, and the networks they built within their communities.

Slavery in Zion invites readers to reevaluate and enhance their understanding of Utah's history. Thiriot's rigorous research and compelling narrative style make the book an engaging and eye-opening read for both scholars and general readers interested in American and Utah history. As President Dallin H. Oaks declared, “Black lives matter.”

By amplifying the voices of those silenced by time, Thiriot brings to light the complexities of Black lives and servitude within Utah Territory, fostering a greater understanding of the region's past and a path toward a more inclusive future.

—Matthew B. Christensen

Approaching the Tree: Interpreting 1 Nephi 8, edited by Benjamin Keogh, Joseph M. Spencer, and Jennifer Champoux (Provo, Utah: Neal A. Maxwell

Approaching the Tree: Interpreting 1 Nephi 8 is a collection of essays and artwork about Lehi’s dream compiled by Benjamin Keogh, a PhD candidate in systematic and historical theology at the University of St Andrews; Joseph M. Spencer, an associate professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University; and Jennifer Champoux, the director of the Book of Mormon Art Catalog. It focuses on “providing original readings” of 1 Nephi 8 from a variety of scholars and artists (xi).

The book begins with two historical studies: one narrates past scholarly interpretations of Lehi’s dream, specifically historical, literary, and theological approaches to analyzing it; and the other portrays a history of how Lehi’s dream has been depicted in visual art. The studies center the book in a larger context by showing what has come before in these two fields as they converge.

The essays that make up the bulk of the volume study different aspects of Lehi’s dream in 1 Nephi 8 through literary and theological investigations of the text. Topics include Lehi’s family relationships as revealed in the dream, the images of Lehi’s dream in the culture of Joseph Smith’s day, the spiritual significance of Lehi’s dream from the point of view of other Christian theological traditions, the meaning of the tree, the arboreal imagery in the dream compared to the arboreal imagery in Augustine’s Confessions, and the theme of spiritual anxiety leading to spiritual quests for relief and discernment. The book also contains original artwork featuring various elements of Lehi’s dream. Each piece is accompanied by a short interpretation by the artist explaining elements of the work.

In this book, readers will find many ways of looking at Lehi’s dream in a new light and with new eyes. It will be of particular interest to art lovers and those interested in new ways of studying this familiar story.

—Sydney Gee
A key mission of the BYU New Testament Commentary series is to make New Testament scholarship accessible to Latter-day Saints as they study this book of sacred scripture. As stated on the project’s website (byuntc.com), “With a rapidly growing number of studies on the New Testament, the time has come to offer a responsible, carefully researched, multivolume commentary that illuminates both the historical and cultural settings as well as the linguistic heritage of this scripture for Latter-day Saints. A virtual river of discoveries during the past one hundred years in the Near Eastern and the Mediterranean regions highlights the need to bring together information that not only elucidates the New Testament documents but also unpacks their rich legacy for all readers.” While individual volumes in the series provide information about these discoveries as they relate to specific books of the New Testament, this volume provides a single resource for readers that illuminates the history and scholarship behind these sacred texts collectively. This volume sheds light on the historical and cultural settings of the New Testament and serves as a complement to the renditions and commentaries provided in each volume of the series. We invite you to study each chapter and become immersed in the world of the people and texts of the New Testament.
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Was Joseph Smith a Money Digger?
“It Must Needs Be”