



Type: Magazine Article

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## The Church in the Mission Field

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Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 23, No. 6 (April 1920), pp. 549–553

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

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# The Church in the Mission Field

*By Andrew Jenson, Assistant Church Historian*

During the past century, since Joseph Smith received his first Vision, all parts of the world have become known to humanity, and the conditions, religiously, politically, socially and morally, existing in different lands and climes, have been thoroughly investigated by elders of the Latter-day Saints who have visited all parts of the world; and now in the light of one hundred years of research and thorough investigation we should know whether the boy Prophet did or did not tell the truth in regard to the condition of the religious world, when he practically declared that none of the Christian sects then in existence represented the true Church of Christ.

Soon after the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was organized, April 6, 1830, the elders of the Church began to preach the gospel, as it had been restored through the instrumentality of Joseph Smith, who had received much divine instruction during the ten years that intervened between his first vision and the establishment of the Church. During the next few years the elders visited nearly every state in the Union, where they came in contact with all the modern sects and denominations which at that time were found or had representatives in North America, and they came to the conclusion that as far as the United States was concerned there was no Church organization that resembled the one originally organized by Jesus Christ in Palestine.

In 1836 Parley P. Pratt, who by that time had been chosen as one of the twelve apostles of the Church, went as a missionary to Toronto, in Canada. There he found John Taylor and others who were earnestly seeking after truth. They had formerly been Methodists, but not finding the creed of that great denomination satisfactory, they were now independent of any sectarian organization and holding Bible meetings of their own. In one of these meetings, John Taylor read from the Acts of the Apostles the account of Philip preaching the gospel to the Samaritans, and of Peter and John coming down to visit them from Jerusalem. "Now," said Mr. Taylor, "where is our Philip? Where is our receiving the Word with joy when we believe and are baptized? Where are our Peter and John? Where are our apostles? Where is our Holy Ghost by the laying on of

hands? Where are our gifts of the Holy Ghost? Echo answers where?" After further investigation it was found that conditions in Canada were practically the same as in the United States; no true Church of Christ could be found within the limits of the British dominion.

In 1837 Heber C. Kimball, Orson Hyde, Willard Richards, Joseph Fielding and others were sent to England as the first Latter-day Saints missionaries called to labor in a distant foreign country; they commenced their missionary labors in Preston, Lancashire. Here they found James Fielding (a brother of Joseph Fielding, one of the missionaries), who had withdrawn from the Methodist church and had collected quite a congregation in Preston. These people (among them Robert Aitkin) were diligently contending for "that faith which was once delivered to the Saints," but had been unable to find the true Church of Christ in England. Most of them afterwards became converts to "Mormonism."

In 1839 Alexander Wright and Samuel Mulliner, and later, the same year, Apostle Orson Pratt commenced successful proselyting work in Scotland where the adherents of John Knox constituted a great part of the population. They were Scotch Presbyterians who had incorporated into their creed many sublime truths, but who nevertheless had erroneous doctrines and lacked the organization of the original Christian church in its main features. Many people in Scotland subsequently became true and faithful members of the Church whose representatives brought them the fulness of the gospel.

In 1840 John Taylor and others commenced missionary labors in Ireland and in 1841 actual proselyting work was also commenced in Wales, but neither the Catholics in Ireland, nor the Protestants in Wales, could sustain any consistent claim of being successors of the original Church established by Christ.

In 1841, also, Orson Hyde, who had been called on a special mission by the Church to Jerusalem, visited Holland where he became acquainted with followers of the Dutch Reformers and afterwards he spent several months in Regensburg, Germany, investigating conditions, while studying the German language. But while the Reformed Church of Holland and the Lutherans of Germany had many beautiful doctrines of Christianity, they had strayed away from the original faith in many points, and consequently could not represent the true Church of the Savior.

Continuing his journey, Apostle Hyde found himself in Palestine where the Roman Catholic Church was contending with the Greek Catholic Church, and a number of others who represented several Protestant denominations were contending

with the ministers of the older churches. But they all seemed to have lost the love of the gospel, had changed the ordinances which existed in the primitive church, and had engendered in their hearts bitterness of feeling and hatred toward one another, so much so that it had become necessary for the Turks to protect, with armed force, the individual rights of the contending Christians. Hence, sad as the contemplation is, not even in the Holy Land, the cradle of original Christianity, was to be found any organization which resembled in discipline or doctrines the original church. Nor were these contending Christians willing to listen to the testimony of Elder Hyde concerning the restored gospel. All that he could do was to offer up a sincere prayer on the Mount of Olives, dedicating the land for the gathering of the Jews.

In 1844 Noah Rogers, Addison Pratt, and Benjamin F. Grouard arrived as the first Latter-day Saints missionaries on the South Pacific Islands. Here they found representatives of the London Missionary Society contending with Catholic priests about Christianity, thus bewildering the native Polynesians, who in their simplicity listened to the story of the mission of the Prophet of Nazareth. When the true gospel was preached to these uneducated natives, thousands of them embraced it, and to this day the Church has had faithful members in the Society Islands and neighboring groups.

In 1849 missionaries were called in Salt Lake City, Utah, to open up new missions in continental Europe, among non-English-speaking people. Thus Apostle John Taylor with others were called to France, Lorenzo Snow and others to Italy, and Erastus Snow and others to Scandinavia. Elder Taylor found considerable opposition to his preaching in France where he commenced operations in 1850. Most of the French people were Roman Catholics and cared not, apparently, for the genuine gospel of Christ. Lorenzo Snow found almost the same conditions prevailing in Italy, though he and his fellow-missionaries there succeeded in making a few converts among the Waldenses, in the valleys of the Alps. In Denmark, Erastus Snow found that Lutheranism had been established as the state religion, the same as in Germany, but there were a few sincere Baptists who had suffered much persecution on account of their religion before religious liberty had been established in the land. Some of these were willing to receive further light from Apostle Snow and his companions, and they became the first converts to the true gospel in Denmark, in 1850.

Elder John E. Forsgren was the first missionary in Sweden; he was universally rejected by his countrymen, most of whom were adherents to Lutheranism, but in due course of time many

of the Swedes accepted the restored gospel, becoming convinced that neither the Lutherans nor the other Christian denominations in Sweden represented the true faith.

In Norway, where the first missionaries commenced operations in 1851, many of the people received "the Word" with joy, but the Lutheran clergy caused all the first "Mormon" missionaries to be imprisoned, and the civil authorities, under ecclesiastical influence, were forced to deny the "Mormons" the protection that the so-called Dissenter Law extended to certain denominations which had cut loose from the dominant church of the land. Subsequently many of the Norwegians became members of the true Church and are now found with their posterity among Zion's most faithful sons and daughters.

When Lorenzo Snow and his companions met with so little encouragement in Italy, Elder Thomas B. H. Stenhouse, one of Brother Snow's missionary companions, turned his attention to Switzerland, where he found the Roman Catholics in the majority in the French cantons and the Lutherans in the German cantons, but there were also many adherents to the doctrines of John Calvin. Many of the Swiss people, who became convinced that none of the churches represented in their land before was the Church of Christ, later became followers of the true Church of Jesus Christ.

In 1850 George Q. Cannon and others, landed as the first Latter-day Saint missionaries in Hawaii, where they found that Calvinism had been preached to the natives, but not with any success morally. In the course of a few years many of the natives saw the difference between false, theoretical Christianity and true, practical Christianity, and embraced the latter.

When John Murdock and Augustus Farnham arrived as the first Latter-day Saints missionaries in Australia, in 1851, they found the Episcopalians, or members of the Church of England, in the majority, but most of the people in that new country were not religiously inclined; hence most of them would neither accept the true gospel of Christ nor become loyal to any of the Christian sects.

When Joseph Richards and William Willis, in 1851, landed in India as the first "Mormon" missionaries there they found the great bulk of the native millions divided on the question of the truth of Mohammedanism and Buddhism, and the so-called Christians contending as to the truth of the Episcopalian form or the different Protestant forms of Christianity.

In 1851, when Parley P. Pratt and Rufus C. Allen endeavored to open up a mission in Chili, South America, they found Catholicism prevailing and the people unwilling to accept any other form, and a similar condition was found by Gudmundsen

and companion when they (also in 1851), as representatives of the Church of Jesus Christ, arrived in Iceland. The people there were Lutherans and desired to continue as such.

When Elders Jesse Haven, Leonard I. Smith, and William Walker, in 1853, arrived in the Cape of Good Hope as Latter-day Saints missionaries, they found the Church of England the dominant church in that colony. A number of other sects were represented, but only a few would accept the true gospel.

In 1854 Augustus Farnham and William Cooke arrived as the first missionaries of the Church in New Zealand. There they found the adherents of the Church of England with headquarters at Christchurch contending with the Presbyterians, with headquarters at Dunedin, and the hatred and bitterness of feeling ran so high between the two factions that it was almost prohibitive for a Church of England member to stay unmolested in Dunedin, and *vice versa*, for a Presbyterian to stand any show of equal rights in Christchurch. The influence brought to bear upon the Maoris of New Zealand by these contending Christians was such that no confidence had been established.

I consider it unnecessary to refer to similar conditions found by Latter-day Saints missionaries, when opening missions on the island of Malta in 1852, in Gibraltar in 1854, in Holland in 1861, in Australia in 1865, in a number of Turkish provinces in 1879 and following years, in Samoa in 1888, in Tonga in 1893, in Japan in 1901, and in other localities. The missionaries of the true Church found in all these places internal religious contentions but universal appreciation toward the true gospel of Christ.

Suffice it to say, in conclusion, that after our elders have visited nearly every land and clime in the whole world and have investigated the religious conditions among Christians, Jews, Mohammedans, and Pagans, they have become absolutely convinced that the statements made by the boy prophet Joseph Smith in western New York, early in the spring of 1820, are true. The boy prophet could not possibly have known the condition of the world as he explained it; but the great Master, the founder of Christianity, knew, and he told the praying boy the facts which one hundred years of careful investigation and experience have proved to be true.