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## President Louis Bertrand and the Closure of the French Mission, 1859–64

Richard D. McClellan

Of all the settings that have embraced and encouraged eclectic social ideas, nineteenth-century France emerges as one of the most passionate stews of feelings and ideologies ever to have boiled over. Even so, the governments that managed this liberal mishmash seldom looked without suspicion on orientations that were ubiquitously un-French. From the time Elder John Taylor first attracted the government’s attention by preaching the overthrow of their regime by the kingdom of God (and got himself chased out of the country for it) at the close of 1851, the Latter-day Saints managed to attract little but suspicion, mistrust, and opposition from the government during their first sustained effort on French soil (1850–64). Perhaps sensing that many of the problems derived from cultural barriers, Brigham Young determined in 1859 to send the French a native countryman, calling a close friend and ex-communist to preside over the French Mission, Elder Louis Alphonse Bertrand.

Earlier missionaries had achieved little success. After a little documented visit from an obscure Scottish Elder [1] and an unanswered plea for volunteer missionaries to France put out by the British Mission presidency in December 1847, [2] the first noteworthy Latter-day Saint missionary in France was Elder William Howell, who by April 1850 had established a small branch in Boulogne-sur-Mer. The French Mission officially opened on 18 June under the leadership of Apostle John Taylor, Curtis E. Bolton, and John Pack. Elders Taylor and Bolton discovered Bertrand in Paris within their first few months, and he was within the first group baptized there on 1 December, though his wife and two sons did not join him. Immediately—and over the ensuing years—Brother Bertrand proved to be the most valuable asset of the Church in France.

President Young knew that Brother Bertrand was intimately acquainted with the people and politics of France. Bertrand, whose birth name was John Francis Elias Flandin, was born in 1808 near Marseille to a well-to-do olive oil merchant and farmer. [3] Under his father’s direction, he attended a ministerial school until the age of sixteen, when he joined a shipping company. Though Bertrand traveled the world during the next fifteen years and lived for seven years in the United States, as well as a year in Brazil, and a year in China, he ultimately returned to his motherland just as it was fomenting in revolution. He was voted a leader in the Red Republican Party by the people and was involved heavily in the Revolution of 1848, for which he later spent time in prison. [4] By 1850 Bertrand was editing the political section of Paris’s largest communist newspaper, *Le Populaire*, for Etienne Cabet, who then was settling his Icarians into the abandoned homes of Nauvoo, Illinois. Though the revolution had ended, both the government and conditions in general continued to be volatile. Individuals like Bertrand were constantly monitored.

Brigham Young also knew that Brother Bertrand was familiar with the workings of the French Mission. Soon after his baptism, he played a pivotal role in the translation of the Book of Mormon into French [5] and also translated the Doctrine and Covenants, [6] Elder Parley P. Pratt’s *Voice of Warning*, and various other tracts. He served in mission presidencies with both Bolton and Andrew Lamoureaux, who replaced Bolton in 1853. At the beginning of 1855 he left his family in Paris and traveled to Utah to receive his endowments. He lived in Brigham Young’s house for the next four years and advised the president on several issues related to the state of affairs in the French Mission and in Europe in general.

Immediately after receiving his endowment, Brother Bertrand sent a letter to Brigham Young that included the following:

Dear brother, you have been always and in every circumstance extremely kind to me. I love you [a] hundred times more than my father. I suppose that, as soon as the present war is over in Europe, you will send me to take charge of the French Mission. I should be very glad at any time to fill such a mission; and, God [being] my helper, I will bear a faithful testimony before my countryman of the divinity of that strange work. Mormonism is now every thing for me in this world. The only favour I ask at your hands is to let me know as soon as

convenient your own determination on that subject. <sup>[7]</sup>

Within days of this candid request, Bertrand received the call and was set apart as mission president on 18 September 1859. He arrived in Paris on 10 December, returning to his family and native land with high hopes and lofty goals of introducing the gospel of peace to a country ravished by war and revolution.

### President Herail

“To Bertrand’s chagrin however, he noted that the president of the [Paris] branch, Elder Herail, had assumed dictatorial powers over the other members, and had refused to submit to the authority of elders previously sent to visit the branch.”<sup>[8]</sup> Herail was not unfamiliar to Bertrand, who claimed to know the man better than Herail knew himself; in fact, Bertrand was aware that this difficulty awaited him well before he left Utah, as indicated by several letters sent to Brigham Young in the year prior to Bertrand’s appointment to the French Mission.

The first of these is a letter from Herail dated 25 October 1858 complaining of abuses by various European leaders and including a four-page record of proceedings in the Paris Branch on Sunday, 10 October. During this meeting the branch had rejected Thomas Liez, who had recently been sent there to preside, and reinstated Herail as branch president. The record contains accusations against Liez, President Callan, and even Brigham Young—oddly enough—but mostly asserts that the branch has the right to choose its own president and that all ought to be done by common consent rather than appointment. The record also decries eight points as the false “Doctrines of Calkin, of Liez, of Huber, and of others . . . who have passed here,” including “that it is suitable to appoint for President him who gives more money,” and “that the Book of *Doctrine and Covenants* has value no more, be[ing] done away by revelations of Brigham Young.”

In May of 1859, Brigham Young received another letter from Herail that he asked Bertrand to translate. He received the following response:

The french letter from Paris you have received by the last eastern mail has been sent by a certain Mr. Herail, who styles himself *president of the Paris Branch*. But I know the man far better than he knows himself. Hell is quite full of such poor, miserable curses. He has been cut off lately from the church for having made his best exertions to destroy said Branch.

Now, as the *Millennial Star* has published every particular on that affair, I deem perfectly useless to translate that letter into the English language. But herewith I transmit to you a lengthy communication I received last fall from Mr. Herail written by himself in very brokenenglish, and to your address. It is full of nonsense, unworthy of a perusal, and only fit to be burnt. That’s no candid opinion. <sup>[9]</sup>

Dear Brother,

please believe me one of your most devoted friends & admirers. <sup>[10]</sup>

Hereafter, Bertrand was apparently appointed to deal with the situation. In July of 1859, President Young received a letter from Herail and two others, complaining about their recent excommunication, of which Bertrand had informed them. It begins:

We have received a letter from Bro Bertrand in which he announces to us two things. 1st That we have been cut off from the Church. 2nd That you told him to tell us that you had not time to give us answersto the demands and questions addressed by us to the Council of the High Priesthood.

Dear Brother we ought first to say to you that we cannot find any faith in what Bro Bertrand has told us. We love to doubt, for your honor and out of respect for your character of presiding Elder and even of that of a Man that his recitals is true and exact.

Also his conduct, not at all impartial in this matter, in which we have not been able to obtain from him a single catagouiral answer by the points given: and wherein he has only applied himself to dealing out dirty slanders against Bro Herail, whom he does not know. Slanders in which another Elder has meddled named Ursenbach. His conduct, according to our judgment, leads us to suppose that he is hardly walking in the fear of the Lord and consequently is not a competent instrument to be employed in those things which regard the Church of Christ. However, what can we expect of a man who has been baptised and who has abandoned a wife

and two children in Paris.<sup>[11]</sup> We don't know Dear Brother how you do at Salt Lake Valley, but here, we judge the tree by its fruits.

If you admit that the gospel teaches us not to speak evil even of those who speak evil of us—you would be very desirous to oppose, as we oppose, that these two Elders should partake of the Holy Sacrament before they shall have testified to Bro Herail their repentance for the really disgusting slanders, which they have permitted themselves the liberty to utter against him, without any cause or provocation.<sup>[12]</sup>

The letter further asserts that only the Paris Branch has the right to excommunicate its members, so the authors of the letter obviously could not have been excommunicated. There also is an extended attack on Brigham Young, accusing him of introducing various nonsensical doctrines and condemning him for leading the Church astray.

The timing of this letter, received on 20 July 1859, helps explain why Brigham Young called Brother Bertrand to head the French Mission only one month later. Knowing Herail, and having been intimately involved in his excommunication and other matters, Bertrand was the perfect man to clean up the ecclesiastical mess brewing in Paris. Previous elders and authorities had been rejected and refused an audience by the Paris Branch under Herail's influence.

Apparently Bertrand was treated in the same manner for he stated that it took some efforts on his part to get the members to give up their allegiance to Herail and to conform to the accepted teachings of the Church. After they accepted the authority of Bertrand they were all rebaptized, and the new mission president at once set about to renew missionary efforts in France.<sup>[13]</sup>

Only a month after his arrival, Bertrand reported to Brigham Young that “the very small Branch of the Church in Paris was divided in two parts, when I got there. But now that breach or split has been entirely mended.”<sup>[14]</sup> Although Bertrand was able to reclaim most of the Paris Branch, Herail was still making trouble for the Church as late as 1862. Bertrand complained in a letter dated 9 October that “M. Herail and three other apostates are working very hard to oppose my exertions in every thing. But the Lord has given me wisdom enough to escape their devilish plans.”<sup>[15]</sup>

### **The New Mission President, 1859–60**

In Bertrand's absence, the French Mission “had dwindled to very meager proportions.”<sup>[16]</sup> By November 1855, President Dunbar had withdrawn all missionaries but one from France because the political state of affairs was hindering all progress. Even this last missionary was withdrawn by the end of that year. From this time until Bertrand arrived, some missionary work was done on the Channel Islands, but mainland France was untouched.

Despite Herail, or perhaps to spite him, Bertrand founded a small branch in Paris and a larger one in Le Havre shortly after his arrival as the mission president and only missionary in France. The Paris Branch had remained in some contact with the Church largely through a periodical then published in Switzerland. Herail's influence aside, the political and intellectual conditions in France suggested a great struggle lay before Bertrand, who, though his efforts had aided in bringing Louis Napoleon III to power, was suspected (and constantly watched) for both his socialist and Mormon ties.

After preaching to the French speakers in the Switzerland Mission at the request of President Woodard and visiting his brothers in Marseille, where he found that old creditors had commandeered his entire estate, Bertrand commenced a tireless political struggle for Church recognition, hoping for permission to preach, hold public meetings, or enjoy any other such privileges. By March he was already preparing an application to Napoleon for permission to preach, while his various friends in Paris remained divided on what they thought would be the outcome.

On 10 April Bertrand wrote to Brigham Young of his lack of progress, saying that after several letters and interviews he was informed by the chief secretary of the Prefecture of Police that “not only my request for preaching publically the Gospel in Paris has not been granted, but that I was forbidden to attend the private meetings of the saints.” He bitterly added, “Here is a very singular sample of political liberty and religious tolerance, as we now enjoy in France.”<sup>[17]</sup> In a letter published in a Paris newspaper in 1868, Bertrand wrote that this order had come from Mr. Billault, then minister of the interior, and that he had been threatened with the penalty of a judicial prosecution, should he attempt to attend any Church meetings—a devastating restriction for the newly appointed ecclesiastical leader over

the countrys Saints.<sup>[18]</sup> Undaunted, Bertrand continued to preside over meetings and to draft his formal appeal to Louis Napoleon III for permission to preach—a letter which he had known he would have to write before he even left Utah.<sup>[19]</sup>

Although he was denied permission to preach, Bertrand began to use his political and literary connections to make positive progress for the Church. On May 3 he attended an interview with M. Louis Jourdan—a principal “reducteur” of the republican daily paper *Le Siecle*, the most influential paper in Paris.<sup>[20]</sup> Jourdan had requested the interview, and when Bertrand arrived, more than a dozen literary men had convened to ask him questions on polygamy, Brigham Young, Utah, and so forth. “They were a little puzzled to find in their midst an old red republican now professing such principles, and especially a French Mormon capable of discussing and writing on nearly every subject.” After the interview, Jourdan, “in presence of the gentlemen,” expressed his willingness “to publish in *Le Siecle* any Communications whatever on Mormonism from Bertrand,” who in turn felt that “much good shall result of it.”<sup>[21]</sup>

### Jules Remy

By late 1860 Bertrand began to realize more than ever that the times called for intellectual warfare and a battle of pens rather than spoken words. Jules Remy, who had spent considerable time among the Mormons, published the first less-antagonistic book on the unique faith to appear in France. He quoted Brigham Young’s views of the French extensively, many of which likely originated with Bertrand. Regardless, Remy’s book greatly intrigued him, and he began writing furiously. The following excerpts from a personal letter discuss the book and describe a few of the projects Bertrand had already undertaken by December:

The Lord is preaching the Gospel in France in its own way.

A most magnificent work has been lately published in Paris entitled *A Journey into the Country of the Mormons*, by Jules Remy, a french naturalist. You remember the man, I suppose. The work consists of 2 volumes and about 980 pages, with ten splendid steel engravings. It is altogether a beautiful and most important publication. On the first page there is your daguerreotype with your autograph & the words: Brigham Young the first pope of the Mormons. The general account of M. Remy on Mormonism is extremely favorable, and his testimony on the morality and industry of the Saints in Utah is a proof that the Lord will open soon the doors of France to the Cospel of the Kingdom.

In order to hasten such an event I did write myself a work of about 400 pages entitled: *The Mormons or a residence of four years in Mormondom by a french Mormon*.<sup>[22]</sup> It will soon be published, and then I will try to present a copy of it to Louis Napoleon in [his] own palace.

Another work of mine has been written entitled: *Mormonism or an historical study on its past, its present and its future*.<sup>[23]</sup> It will consist of about 130 pages and shall be published by *La Revue de Deux Mondes* (the review of the two worlds), one of the best and most influential parisian periodicals.

Mighty [things] are coming in Europe. The popes shall leave Rome soon and forever, and the Austrian empire shall fall to the ground next year.

The little Paris Branch is progressing & getting more healthy. I am making my best exertions to persuade the interests of God’s kingdom in Europe. My health is good and my faith is stronger than ever. My two brothers will embrace the Truth sooner or later. Now I am perfectly willing to obey strictly to your counsels or order. But please let me tell you that my opinion is that, under the present critical circumstances, my presence in my native land is more beneficial to the cause of Truth than in Utah. I wish to stay in Paris three or four years more, in order that the Gospel might take a powerful footing in France.”<sup>[24]</sup>

Four months later, Bertrand indicated “many comments have been made by the leading papers in Paris on the splendid work lately published by H. Jules Remy. Said work is certainly the most important book ever published on ‘Mormonism’ in any language. A lengthy analysis of it has been published by myself in a republican review. The prospects before me are now far better than last year.”<sup>[25]</sup> As optimistically as Bertrand praised the book, he offered some critical remarks on it as well:



Three things have struck [me] in that work: the laudable though often unhappy efforts of the author to remain impartial; his pompous praise of the Mormons, but especially the ineptia of his arguments set forth to prove the founder of that work to be an imposter. [\[26\]](#)

### Letter to Louis Napoleon III

The *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* of 2 March 1861 contains the text of Bertrand's finished appeal for permission to preach publicly in France, two weeks before Bertrand even sent the request to Louis Napoleon himself. The text, introduced in the *Millennial Star* with the hope "that the Emperor will give the petition a favourable reception and grant the prayer of the petitioner," [\[27\]](#) follows:

To his Majesty Napoleon III, Emperor of the French,

Sire,—Having been sent by the Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who reside now on the shores of the Great Salt Lake, to take the direction of the French Mission, I had the honour last year to apply to two of your State Ministers to ask them the privilege of preaching the Gospel in France. Both made a negative reply.

This day I take the respectful liberty of applying directly to your Majesty to supplicate you to grant me a particular interview. Having spent four years in Great Salt Lake City, I should be happy to be able to answer any inquiries you might make on that work vulgarly called "Mormonism," which nobody but Saints can understand. [\[28\]](#)

Sire,—Let me affirm to your Majesty that you could do nothing more beneficial to strengthen your throne and dynasty than to grant me the privilege of giving my testimony in Paris on that work, and of preaching the Gospel of the kingdom in France.

I take the present opportunity to declare to you that that work is of God, and by no means a human one. Joseph Smith was really and in very deed a Prophet—the greatest Prophet of the Lord on the earth. By the side of his mission, that of Moses was a secondary one. For having rejected the Divine mission of Joseph, for having killed him and so inhumanly persecuted the Saints, the United States (now disunited) are to suffer the most unexpected trials. The present situation of the American people is perfectly similar to the order of things which existed among the inhabitants of Jerusalem when Titus and his legions went there to execute the awful sentence pronounced by the mouth of the Messiah against that deicidal people. The sword of the American Titus is named "the slavery question."

The revolution which is raging on that side of the Atlantic will have immediate and exceeding awful consequences for all European nations. Twenty-eight years ago the Prophet Joseph predicted the crisis which is now threatening the whole world. I ask leave to lay before your Majesty the English test of his prophesy as it was published at Liverpool, in the "Pearl of Great Price," in the year 1851.

Verily thus said the Lord, concerning the wars that will shortly come to pass beginning at the rebellion of South Carolina, which will eventually terminate in the death and misery of many souls. The days will come that war will be poured out upon all nations, beginning at that place; for behold, the Southern States shall be divided against the Northern States and the Southern States will call on other nations, even the nation of Great Britain, as it is called; and they shall also call upon other nations, in order to defend themselves against other nations; and thus war shall be poured out upon all nations. And it shall come to pass after many days, slaves shall rise up against their masters, who shall be marshaled and disciplined for war. And it shall come to pass also that the remnants who are left of the land will marshal themselves, and shall become exceedingly angry, and shall vex the Gentiles with a sore vexation; and thus with the sword and plague, and earthquakes, and the thunder of heaven, and the fierce and vivid lightning also, shall the inhabitants of the earth be made to feel the wrath and indignation and chastening hand of the Almighty God, until the consumption decreed hath made a full end of all nations; that the cry of the Lord of Sabaoth, from the earth, to be avenged of their enemies. Wherefore stand ye in holy places, and be not moved until the day of the Lord come; for behold it cometh quickly, saith the Lord. Amen.

These words are so very clear and plain that they need no comment. We are going to see the literal fulfilment of the whole prophecy.

In the present state of human knowledge, America forms the problem of problems for the most learned

individuals in the world. The mysterious origin of the red man, as well as the origin of the American antiquities, is entirely unknown to modern science. For the Christian theology, and for the sceptic philosophy, America is a most precious book which they are unable to read: hence the necessity of a special revelation. Being a necessary complement of all anterior revelations, this Divine message reveals the past, the present, and the future of the new continent and of the rest of the world, inaugurates the great and last dispensation of the fulness of times, and opens to mankind the door of a celestial era. Out of the light of that new revelation it is utterly impossible, even to the most learned men, to understand the extreme gravity of the present times. That is the reason why the European publicists did not foresee the American crisis, and are very far from being able to predict the final result of it.

Sire,—I am going to do the work for them.

The great Elohim, the living God of Israel, is as little known now at die cathedral of Notre Dame of Paris, or at the Vatican, as he was known at Athens when Paul went there to preach the Gospel to the Areopagi.

In the plan of His providence, the work of George Washington was only a provisional government, in order that His kingdom might be founded on the earth. Since the 6 day of April, 1830, when it was first organized with only six individuals, that kingdom has so widely extended that it possesses today, near the centre of North America, a Territory called Utah, nearly as large as France. The work of Washington is going to miserably destroy itself. You will soon see that young and powerful kingdom in His hands the political direction of the American people, reconciling the three hostile posterities of Shem, of Japheth, and Canaan, which are parts of it, resolving all the great problems which are before mankind, forming the angular stone of the New World, and initiating the whole earth into the knowledge of the true God and his Christ.

I supplicate the Almighty to pour out on your head his most precious gifts and blessings and to inspire you with the will of granting my request.

Sire,—Permit me to present to you the offering of my devotedness, and of the profound respect with which I have the honour to be your Majesty's most humble, most faithful, and most obedient servant,  
Louis A. Bertrand

Paris, 14th March, 1861 <sup>[29]</sup>

The letter was sent to Napoleon on March 14. By April 25, Bertrand still had heard nothing, and he took this as a foreboding ornen:

Being moved upon by the spirit of Zion which burns in my heart . . . I did send a written request to Louis Napoleon to ask him directly the privilege of preaching publicly the Gospel in Paris. My testimony was a powerful one, & I am perfectly satisfied that it reached the Emperor. No answer has been made to my application. As long as the present government shall stand, no religious or political liberty is to be expected in my native land. <sup>[30]</sup>

Meanwhile, “the letter was transmitted to the proper authorities, and Elder Bertrand was later informed by Mr. Moquard, the private secretary to Napoleon III, that the emperor had been given the letter, read it, and then broke into laughter and tore it to pieces.” <sup>[31]</sup> One portion of the appeal that may have elicited such a response from the lesser nephew of the Great Napoleon was Bertrand's suggestion that the emperor “could do nothing more beneficial to strengthen [his] throne and dynasty than to grant [Bertrand] the privilege of giving [his] testimony in Paris on that work, and of preaching the Gospel of the kingdom in France.” In a subsequent letter to Elder George A. Smith, Bertrand indicated that he foresaw the imminent destruction of the French government and looked forward to writing a pamphlet entitled “Mormonism and Louis Napoleon”—not a terribly sympathetic pamphlet. <sup>[32]</sup>

It is especially interesting to note, in light of this, that Louis Napoleon III was one of the one hundred “noted men of the seventeenth and eighteenth century” for whom Wilford Woodruff performed temple ordinances after his vision of the signers of the Declaration of Independence and others in the St. George Temple, during August of 1877. <sup>[33]</sup> When President Woodruff performed these ordinances, he ostensibly omitted ordinance work for other world leaders who had not been kind to the Mormons, stating in conference: “I then baptized him [the proxy] for every President of the United States, except three; and when their cause is just, somebody will do the work for them.” <sup>[34]</sup>

## The Masonic Connection

Not even deterred by rejection from the highest authority in France, Bertrand continued to use his connections, tapping former political, literary, and even quasi-religious associations, for his cause. A Mason himself, he began attending Masonic lodges throughout Paris, where he was soon invited to speak to hundreds of Masons and was received with great interest. He records:

A few days ago, I attended a meeting in my capacity of a Mason, in one of the leading masonic lodges in Paris. The number of brethren was about two hundred. The greatest masonic honors were tendered to me. Being invited by the Master to speak on “Mormonism,” my discourse was heard with a profound attention. They were particularly pleased with my remarks on the social system of the Utopian. Since that day, many important houses are open to me in Paris. Unfortunately, nearly all the learned men in my native land are infidels; and it is difficult to persuade a man who rejects any kind of revelation. Nevertheless, . . . I hope and trust that the present years will prove more profitable to the cause of truth than the last. I am making my best exertions to build up a good Branch here on a permanent footing. [\[35\]](#)

Still, Bertrand felt that the Masonic movement was witnessing its final hour in France—”Myself a member of the French and Scottish Free Masonry, I hold that this institution has seen its best days.” [\[36\]](#) He was right; the French Masonic temples were shut down by the government shortly after Bertrand’s address, and the Mormon Mason was again kept from preaching publicly. He expressed his opinions at this time as follows:

My present mission in France is getting particularly difficult, because of the critical circumstances of the french government. Mighty political events are coming in Europe to fulfill the revelations of Jesus Christ by his prophet Joseph. In relation to the present american revolution, I should be very glad to live enough in order that I might see the foundation of the New Jerusalem in Jackson county.

My health is excellent, and my faith is growing stronger every day. I feel bold, extremely bold, in my public or private testimonies in favor of the Gospel. Unfortunately, the principal masonic lodges of Paris have been closed yesterday for five months by a special order of the french government. We are living under a military, a pure military, despotism. . . .

Dear Brother, things are looking up in the small Paris Branch; the only thing we want is religious liberty. May the Lord bless you with his most precious gifts and enable you to accomplish his holy purposes, is the constant prayer of your faithful brother in the Gospel of peace. [\[37\]](#)

## *Mémoires d’un Mormon*

I am writing neither an apology nor a catechism,  
I only want to try to give to people of the world  
somewhat of an idea of the strange work  
so much spoken of and so little known. [\[38\]](#)

Consistent with his trend of proliferate words, Bertrand now produced his most widely read work, *Mémoires d’un Mormon*—an apologetic, theological treatise on Mormonism whose first edition sold over 2,000 copies. Many anti-Mormon books had already been published in French, and Bertrand, limited to working only with his pen, decided to answer them. The foreword, written by the book’s publisher, gives some indication of the prevailing Parisian attitudes toward both Mormonism and Louis Bertrand at the time:

Several expositions or apologies of Mormonism have already appeared in America, in England and in other lands. But the work which we publish today is the first French book, written by one of our countrymen, a faithful member of the new faith. None of the writers who have spoken of the Mormons here has been placed in so favorable a position to relate what goes on among them. Almost all of them have borrowed their information from turncoats or avowed enemies of the disciples of Joseph Smith. It can therefore be very interesting and useful to hear on this subject the voice of a converted man, and to admit, be it only for the sake of curiosity, the

artless testimony of a believer. The author of these memoirs has lived for several years among his fellow believers; he has been the eye witness of a number of events related here and no matter what our judgment may be of his religious and political convictions, we cannot deny to his account a certain stamp of candor and loyalty. We are therefore appealing to the impartial attention of the French public in his behalf. The sacred principle of the free defense of the accused can be applied here and the floor can be granted at least once to a Mormon *so* that he may expose his point of view relative to events which have been known among us only by railing or hostile appreciations.

Bertrand describes the book as “my impressions and an exposition of the doctrines I believe. The reader will find therein the truth such as I understand it, [the] simple and naked truth about everything, and an account of events such as they happened to me.”<sup>[39]</sup> He begins his book with a lengthy history of Joseph Smith and the rise of Mormonism; for this section, he depends heavily on the Prophet’s writings, either quoting or paraphrasing most of it. His description of the history of the Book of Mormon includes the Testimonies of the Three and Eight Witnesses as well as the title page of the book, but still retains Bertrand’s fresh ideas and characteristic flavor, such as the following samples illustrate:

At a later time [the Nephites] navigated in and around the western Indies and upon the Pacific and they sent numerous colonies to the North. Others emigrated by land, and after a few centuries the whole northern continent was peopled. At that time . . . the forests had been depleted by the Jaredites, the first colonizers, who came from the Tower of Babel. But the Nephites became proficient in cement construction and shipped much lumber from South to North America. They also had immense plantations.<sup>[40]</sup>

Such are the major historical facts about the Book of Mormon. My conversion, the result of a sincere and persistent conviction, expresses better than words my opinion on the authenticity of that book and of its social and religious importance. No other work since the Koran has given birth to a people. [I] have carefully read almost all that has been written against the Book of Mormon. It can be reduced to the following argument: That book is a fraud because it is a fraud.<sup>[41]</sup>

Bertrand next sets forth several proofs of the Book of Mormon and details the history of the Church in Kirtland, Missouri, and Nauvoo, as well as the exodus of the Saints to the Salt Lake Valley. He describes various Church periodicals, recounts his version of the Utah War, and relates visits with prominent men in Utah, including Thomas L. Kane, Governor Alfred Cumming, General Albert Sidney Johnston, Brigham Young, and John Taylor. Bertrand discusses his own views of polygamy<sup>[42]</sup> and the endowment, proclaims that the Saints will soon have national independence in the Rocky Mountains, relates the massive emigration project of the Church, using his own experiences, and addresses Mormonism and Socialism, including the mechanisms of consecration and tithing.

Before becoming a book, the various chapters of Bertrand’s book were published serially in *La Revue Contemporaine* as early as the spring of 1861.<sup>[43]</sup>

*La Revue Contemporaine*, one of the best literary periodicals in Paris, shall publish next month a work of mine on “Mormonism” of about 80 pages. The last chapter entitled, “Political future state of the Mormons—American cataclysm: Its direct cause and final result,” will create a considerable attention in France and in the European world. I will forward you said work as soon as I can, with a copy of *A Journey into the Country of the Mormons* by M. Jules Remy and a lengthy analysis of mine on the last book.<sup>[44]</sup>

After the first nine chapters had been published, Bertrand expressed his disgust with the copyright agreement and the publisher, who, as they often did, had left him without much money or many rights over his own writings:

*La Revue Contemporaine*, one of the best literary periodicals of Paris, has now published the first part of a work of mine on “Mormonism.” It consists of 9 chapters. M. de Catonni, the editor of that review, has bought my authorship right for said work for a mere trifle. Now he has the right of publishing the 9 chapters in its periodical for the small sum of 400 francs (about eighty dollars), to be paid 3 months after the publication. He has also right of publishing the same in volumes for five years. I shall get only fifty volumes for my share. Several large



editions shall be issued by M. de Catonni. He will make perhaps six thousand dollars on that speculation. It is, indeed, a very poor business for my pocket. But you know pretty well I don't care a fig about gold or silver. The Lord is rich enough to grant me my reward.<sup>[45]</sup>

The book itself was likely first published in early 1862.<sup>[46]</sup> Because of his financial circumstances,<sup>[47]</sup> Bertrand requested funding for the book from Brigham Young:

M. Dentu, one of the principal editors of Paris, the same who has published the splendid book of M. Remy, has in his possession a manuscript of mine, ready for the press, of almost 300 pages of printed matter, entitled *Mormonism and the United States, or Four Years of Residence in Utah, by a French Mormon*.

The cost of printing a thousand copies of my work will amount to 1,500 francs, or about three hundred dollars. But M. Dentu asks one half of that sum, or 150 dollars in advance before beginning the printing of the manuscript. On that condition, he will disburse the other half of the sum necessary to the printing. He will keep for himself the first three hundred dollars resulting from the sale, and share with me the surplus of the sum on equal terms.

Now, you know perfectly well that I am as poor as a man can be. But I am extremely rich in faith. Is the Church rich enough to enable me to publish said book in Paris, in advancing the sum of 150 dollars? That's the question.

Uncle Sam, President Davis, President Lincoln, M. Sward,<sup>[48]</sup> M. Douglas, and all the States are going right way to destruction. I hope and trust that the publication of my book in Europe, under the present very critical circumstances of the American people, shall prove very beneficial to the cause of truth and the triumph of the kingdom of our God.<sup>[49]</sup>

In May of 1862, Bertrand forwarded a copy of *Mémoires* to Brigham Young, asserting his belief that "the publication of that work will dispel a vast amount of prejudice against us in the European world" and informing President Young that "two new chapters are ready to be published and shall be added to the next edition. . . . Several french papers are loudly talking of the merits and demerits of my work."<sup>[50]</sup>

*Mémoires* sold widely<sup>[51]</sup> and received both positive and negative reviews from several important papers. The first of these, mostly quite positive, appeared in the *London Daily Telegraph* 15 May 1862. A December 1862 edition of the *Deseret News* quoted the following from a Paris newspaper:

A prophet from Utah has appeared in Paris. Fearing that the police would not allow the public dissemination of the marvelous doctrines of his sect, he has committed to the press a volume which seems to promise to have an extraordinary circulation, if its contents are correctly stated. M. Bertrand, the missionary in question, is a Frenchman, and Brigham Young has dispatched him from the great Salt Lake to preach the doctrine of the last days of the Saints.<sup>[52]</sup>

By 1863 *Mémoires* was being reviewed as far away as Cedar Falls, Iowa, in the *North American Review*.<sup>[53]</sup> The book (and Mormonism in general) received a sneering criticism in Charles Dickens's *All the Year Round*, a weekly London journal.<sup>[54]</sup> As described in a later Church periodical, the book was "no doubt, the first of its kind, not only in French, but in English, and preceded by some eight or ten years any similar biographical work published in Utah."<sup>[55]</sup> It was further termed "not a theological treatise merely, but a practical book, in which the temporal as well as the spiritual side of 'Mormonism' is presented in clear language and entertaining style. This book can well be recommended to prospective missionaries to France, for it is written in classical French."<sup>[56]</sup>

## The Final Efforts of the French Mission, 1862–64

With the book published and many doors in Paris opened to Bertrand, his zeal was running high in the early summer of 1862. A sampling of his activities and spirits, the following items are taken from a letter to Brigham Young dated June 8: his health “continues to be perfect, although [he] feed[s] only on bread”; he still trusts and hopes the Lord will open the door of France to the gospel; President Young’s latest letter was honorably commended by an influential French paper, so he should send more; Bertrand will send another copy of his book as soon as the second publication is ready; he is working hard to “conquer some precious souls here”; “afew french Saints are en route for Zion”; and he wishes to spend a few more years on his mission. [\[57\]](#)

Bertrand closes with the desire that “I should be most happy to see, before my death, the first foundations of the New Jerusalem on the banks of the Missouri.” Though he mentions this desire at least twice, it cannot be certain whether he was ever able to visit the site. Part of this hope stemmed from his desire to visualize the future temple in Missouri:

We believe that once completed [the Salt Lake Temple] will be one of the most beautiful structures in the New World. Yet, according to the Mormons, it will be nothing compared to the great temple to be built by them on the banks of the Missouri, at Independence, Jackson County, a temple whose plans will be given from above and which will surpass in magnitude of design and splendor of decorations all that has ever been erected by the hand of man and will become the focal point from whence truth and true religion will radiate to the extremities of the earth. [\[58\]](#)

By January, Richard Burtons *A Journey to the City of the Saints* had been published in French and was proving helpful to Bertrand in his efforts; he called the translation “excellent.” He himself was then translating Elder Pratt’s *Divine Authenticity of the Book ofMormon*. Several families wanted to emigrate from Paris but were too poor; he requested funding for the Fonteneau family, whom he felt the best among them all. [\[59\]](#) *Memoires* by this time had been addressed extensively by French and other European papers but ostensibly unnoticed by Catholic papers. Because of Bertrand’s book, many Protestant homes had been opened up to him, and he was “now favorably received by many rich and influential families of various persuasions.” [\[60\]](#)

Though pleased with the positive attention of his book, Bertrand became discouraged, presumably by the scanty number of baptisms, indicating that “an experience of three years has taught me that nothing at all is to be expected among the French infidels: they are every one of them spiritually dead.” He felt that the work was being slowed by the spread of spiritualism throughout France. Still, he wrote, “My firm determination is to live my religion the best I can, and to keep my faith to the end.” [\[61\]](#)

Despite the fact that Bertrand had published many articles (and even a book) that had greatly aided in softening public opinion and had made many important and well-connected friends, he converted what he deemed only a few. During his last year in France, he became increasingly disillusioned regarding his fellow Frenchmen and began to be discouraged with himself as a missionary. By July he called France the “most skeptical and the most corrupt nation in Europe,” believing that the country would sooner or later be conquered by Austria, Prussia, or Spain. For the first time he requested a release, wanting a better man to take his place and adding, “I am far from being as good a Saint as I wish to be.” [\[62\]](#)

On 28 November Bertrand wrote the following: “Frenchmen, speaking of them generally, are the most incredulous people in Europe. . . . They have lost the religious faith of their forefathers, and they feel perfectly indifferent about religion. The Parisians are spiritually dead towards everything pertaining to salvation.” [\[63\]](#) The following February, the *Millennial Star*, regretting that Elder Bertrand was unable to attend the general council of elders at Birmingham, praised him for his efforts and persistence and related the slowness of the work throughout France. [\[64\]](#)

### **Bertrand’s “Failure” in the French Mission**

If I were asked why Mormonism has not succeeded in winning a greater number of converts in France, I would reply that the Gospel of the latter-days has been proclaimed in Paris but twice: in 1851, in the Faubourg St. Antoine. Unrestricted freedom of worship such as it exists in England and the United States will not be seen in France for a long time. I doubt that this official restriction will benefit any movement except perhaps that of materialism, which is nothing

but the invalidation of all religious beliefs and of the principle of authority.<sup>[65]</sup>

Although Bertrand largely felt himself a failure on his mission, he was better suited to find success in France by his connections, experience, and love for his country<sup>[66]</sup> and its people than any other Church member of his day. Held to the standard of the thousands baptized by the Twelve in Great Britain, his more moderate success was understandably disappointing; records indicate Bertrand's baptisms in France, Switzerland, and Belgium by fives and tens, not hundreds. For instance, the *Millennial Star* reports that he occasionally baptized a few. Andrew Jenson writes that by him "many conversions were made in Switzerland and Belgium as well as in France."<sup>[67]</sup> A report of the Hudson Company as the ship awaited departure from the Isle of Wight on 8 July 1864 shows that Bertrand even baptized a French sister while in London, awaiting his own voyage to the United States.<sup>[68]</sup> Bertrand's letters often request funds for various families to emigrate to Utah, and we can assume he played a major part in many of their conversions. In his personal correspondences, Bertrand regularly mentions baptizing individuals when appropriate.<sup>[69]</sup> Also, according to the author of an 1886 *Improvement Era* article, Bertrand not only petitioned Napoleon for permission to preach but also "presented a copy of the Book of Mormon to the Emperor of France, Napoleon III"; hopefully this was handled more delicately than Bertrand's petition.<sup>[70]</sup>

Bertrand wrote the following to Brigham Young just before his departure from France:

Before leaving my present mission, I take the respectful liberty of writing these few lines to you. I shall embark in a few days with the Swiss Saints in board the ship *Hudson* bound from London to New York.

An experience of 4 years has taught me that the Frenchmen are certainly the most skeptical and the most corrupt people of Europe. That's the reason why the Lord is now governing them with an iron rod. The lack of religious liberty has been the greatest impediment to my labours in France. Here is a fresh proof of my saying. Brot. Renard, the president of the Bordeaux Branch, has been lately sentenced to six days imprisonment & its beautiful press has been destroyed by the police of that important city. Such is the liberty we now enjoy under the imperial dynasty.

Still, he optimistically added that his "firm belief is that sooner or later the Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached freely in France."<sup>[71]</sup>

Bertrand's greatest disappointment as mission president was the continued rejection of his persistent applications for permission to preach. Unable to hold public meetings, or even preach, he never got what he considered a fair chance at being a missionary. For four and a half years he tapped every opportunity, but never once was officially permitted to preach. "After his return to America in 1864, the Channel Islands Conference, which included the few saints in France, reverted to the British Mission,"<sup>[72]</sup> and the French Mission was closed until 1912. It then lasted only two years before the outbreak of World War I, which brought about another closure. The mission was not reopened until 1923.

Bertrand's greatest personal disappointment was his failure to convince his family to return with him to Utah. He concludes his final letter to Brigham Young:

Dear Brother, I went to my mission with 50 dollars in my pocket. I am returning home wifeless and entirely penniless, but extremely rich by my faith. I don't care a fig about money. The only thing I want is a good young Zion wife, and a little farm to make several agricultural experiments. I should be most happy to be judged worthy of receiving such a precious boon from your hands.<sup>[73]</sup>

Though Bertrand did get to experiment agriculturally as the manager of President Young's cocoonery back in Salt Lake City, he was fired for an accident caused by one of the workers; thereafter he headed other cocooneries and worked as a correspondent for the *Deseret News*. He published articles on sericulture, viticulture, Mormonism, Indians, and other subjects in various Paris newspapers until his death on 21 March 1875 after losing his sanity. Despite the fact that Brigham Young counseled him to remarry, he never did.

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- [1] *Times and Seasons* 6 (1 August 1845): 989.
- [2] *MillennialStar* 9, no. 23 (1847): 359–60.
- [3] He likely changed his name during or after the Revolution to protect his family. *Bertrand* is his mother’s maiden name.
- [4] From this revolutionary involvement, he was familiar enough with Victor Hugo to later gain an audience and preach the gospel to him on the Island of Jersey.
- [5] Though John Taylor’s name appears as the translator, it is apparent that he had very little to do with it beyond collecting the funds—he hardly spoke French. Curtis Bolton performed the bulk of the work, but Bertrand came in for the last few months and made many corrections.
- [6] “Bertrand placed his manuscript of the Doctrine and Covenants in the hands of Franklin D. Richards—then president of the British Mission. Unfortunately, the translation has never been found; more than a hundred years transpired before a complete translation of the Doctrine and Covenants appeared again in French in 1958.
- [7] Letter to Brigham Young, 23 August 1858. All letters from Bertrand to Brigham Young located in the Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latterday Saints; hereafter Church Archives
- [8] Gary Ray Chard, “A History of the French Mission of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: 1850–1960” (master’s thesis, Utah State University, 1965), 34.
- [9] This is likely the letter quoted above.
- [10] Letter to Brigham Young, 16 May 1859.
- [11] Bertrand left his family first (as instructed by Lamoureaux) when he served a mission to the Jersey Islands, and second when he left for Utah to receive his endowment. Regardless of whether or not Bertrand was supporting his family (he often corresponded with them and probably sent them money), Herail’s accusation was a personal attack.
- [12] Letter from Elder Herail, et al., to Brigham Young, received 20 July 1859.
- [13] Chard, 34.
- [14] Letter to Brigham Young, 16 January 1860.
- [15] Letter to Brigham Young, 9 October 1862.
- [16] Andrew Jenson, *Encyclopedic History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latterday Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1941), 268.
- [17] Letter to Brigham Young, 10 April 1860.
- [18] *Deseret Evening News*, 14 September 1868.
- [19] Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1859, 649, Church Historical Department Library.
- [20] At this time, *LeSiccle* boasted 52,000 subscribers and over a million readers.
- [21] Letter to Brigham Young, 3 May 1860.
- [22] This is surely an earlier title for at least part of what became Bertrands *Mémoires*.
- [23] This piece, or an adapted version of it, also shows up in *Mémoires*.
- [24] Letter to Brigham Young, 2 December 1860. These last three lines are likely a response to President Young’s earliest attempt to persuade Bertrand to quit France and return to Utah only a year after Bertrand undertook his mission.



- [25] Letter to Brigham Young, 25 April 1861.
- [26] Louis A. Bertrand, *Mémoires d'un Mormon*, trans. Gaston Chappuis (ca. 1960), 138, Church Archives.
- [27] *Millennial Star* 23, no. 14 (1861): 220.
- [28] With the success Bertrand had experienced with the journalists, he must have hoped he could pique the emperor's interests with his stories about living among the Mormons and thereby gain an interview.
- [29] *Millennial Star* 23, no. 14 (1861): 220–21; also included in Chard's thesis as appendix B, 147–49.
- [30] Letter to Brigham Young, 25 April 1861.
- [31] Chard, "A History of the French Mission," 37.
- [32] Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1860, 52. This letter is filed in the wrong place.
- [33] Vicki Jo Anderson, *The Other Eminent Men of Wilford Woodruff* (Cottonwood, Ariz.: Zichron Historical Research Institute, 1994), 2, 21–29.
- [34] Wilford Woodruff, in *Journal of Discourses*, 19:229.
- [35] Letter to Brigham Young, 25 April 1861.
- [36] Bertrand, *Mémoires*, 111.
- [37] Letter to Brigham Young, 26 May 1861.
- [38] Bertrand, *Mémoires*, 3.
- [39] *Ibid.*
- [40] Bertrand, *Mémoires*, 22.
- [41] Bertrand, *Mémoires*, 24.
- [42] His uniquely reasoned discussion of polygamy starts as follows: "I will begin by saying that I have spent four years on the shores of [the] Great Salt Lake in the most complete state of celibacy by living alone in my hermitage. I therefore speak of this question in an entirely disinterested manner" (Bertrand, *Mémoires*, 113).
- [43] Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1860, 52.
- [44] Letter to Brigham Young, 26 May 1861.
- [45] Letter to Brigham Young, 9 October 1861. With regard to his personal wellbeing at this time, Bertrand optimistically added that "my health is perfect. And the amount of my personal expenses for food is only twelve cents a day! That's a great blessing."
- [46] During April, President Charles C. Rich came to visit Paris, but the branch was not allowed to hold a meeting, and Rich was watched carefully by police spies—such was the political situation at the time *Mémoires* was published.
- [47] Consistent with the policies of the Church, Bertrand relied solely on funding from local members. He wrote the following on missionary funding: "After the pattern of the first apostles, these men were sent without purse or scrip, which is to say without spare means or baggage. As this has often been challenged, we formally testify that this Church has never had any special fund for its missionaries" (Bertrand, *Mémoires*, 47).
- [48] Presumably Secretary of State William Seward.
- [49] Letter to Brigham Young, 26 May 1861.
- [50] Letter to Brigham Young, 8 June 1862.
- [51] In a letter to George A. Smith dated 6 March 1865, Bertrand reported that he had published and sold 2,200 copies

of his book (Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1860, 52).

[52] *Deseret News*, December 1862, 198.

[53] “L. A. Bertrands ‘Mémoires d’un Mormon,’” *North American Review* 96 (April 1863): 563–64.

[54] “Brother Bertrand, Mormon Missionary,” *All the Year Round* 11 (14 March 1863): 68–72.

[55] A. A. Ramseyer, “The Memoirs of a ‘Mormon,’” *Improvement Era* 11, no. 2 (December 1907): 81.

[56] Ramseyer, “Mémoires,” 87.

[57] This may have been in response to further requests from Brigham Young for Bertrand, now fifty-four, to conclude his mission and head to Utah. Not only did his missionary work compel Bertrand to stay in Paris, but the presence of his family surely influenced him as well. Still, over a year before (April 25, 1861), he had closed another letter to President Young with the following sentiment: “Dear Brother, my faith is stronger than ever. My only desire is to spend my old days among the people of the Lord.”

[58] Bertrand, *Mémoires*, 55.

[59] Eleven years in good standing, with four adults and two boys, Bertrand vouched for their industrious nature and promised that they will have paid off any borrowed money quickly.

[60] Letter to Brigham Young, 23 January 1863.

[61] *Ibid.*

[62] Letter to Brigham Young, 27 June–31 July 1863.

[63] *Journal History of the Church*, 28 November 1863, Church Historical Department Library.

[64] *Millennial Star* 26, no. 6 (1864): 89.

[65] Bertrand, *Mémoires*, 186.

[66] “Born in France, I love my country and will ever be proud to have seen the light of day in a country illustrious among the illustrious” (Bertrand, *Mémoires*, 135).

[67] Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia* (Salt Lake City: The Andrew Jenson History Co., 1901—36), 334.

[68] *Millennial Star* 26, no. 26 (1864): 414.

[69] Such as he does when describing a prominent Mormon family to Brigham Young: “A few days ago, I baptized his younger brother, a very influential farmer” (letter to Brigham Young, 26 May 1864).

[70] Ramseyer, “Mémoires,” 86.

[71] Letter to Brigham Young, 26 June 1864.

[72] *Encyclopedic History*, 268.

[73] Letter to Brigham Young, 26 June 1864.