



Brent L. Top

THE ATTRACTION OF MORMONISM

For those who have not taken the time to investigate Mormonism—to seek to discover, for example, what it is that people find particularly attractive about this growing movement—it is easy to assume the worst and suppose that something nefarious is afoot. In this chapter, Professor Brent L. Top, who has served as a bishop, stake president, and mission president, addresses many of the features of the faith, beliefs, and practices that make The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints an object of continuing and growing interest.

WHY is The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints one of the fastest-growing religious denominations in the world?¹ What is it about the Church—its teachings, practices, and members—that each year causes hundreds of thousands from all over the world to convert to Mormonism, often in the face of much opposition and persecution? What is the attraction of Mormonism? Although the answers to those questions may be as numerous as the individuals who embrace the faith—each with a unique reason for his or her attraction to Mormonism—three general themes appear to be at the core of every answer: faith, fruits, and future.

Faith

“The strength of the Church,” President Gordon B. Hinckley observed, “lies in the conviction carried in the hearts of its members,

by the individual members of the Church.”² From the earliest days of Mormonism—even before the official organization of the Church—to the present, the spiritual message of the Restoration is what has resounded most powerfully in hearts and minds. Mormonism’s message is not subtle. It is not merely a life philosophy or social movement. Mormonism’s declaration is dramatic, leaving no middle ground. Founded upon the claim that God Almighty and his Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, personally appeared to and spoke with the boy Joseph Smith, Mormonism demands attention by its bold declarations—declarations such as the following that both challenge and transcend traditional Christian teachings:

- The Father and Son are distinct beings with glorified bodies of flesh and bone, and the Holy Ghost is a personage of spirit (see D&C 130:22–23).
- God continues to speak to mankind through prophets today as was done in biblical times, and “he will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God” (Articles of Faith 1:9).
- The scriptural canon is not closed, but rather expanding. The Book of Mormon and other modern-day scripture found in the Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price stand on equal footing with the Holy Bible.
- With authority given directly from God by heavenly manifestations and ministrants, the Church of Jesus Christ has been restored to the earth—a Church bearing the name of Jesus Christ and his endorsement as “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth” (D&C 1:30).
- All mankind is literally of the family of God—begotten sons and daughters of heavenly parents, endowed with a divine nature and the potential not only to dwell with God but also to become like him.

To many, the bold declarations of Mormonism are outlandish, even abhorrent. To others, they are amusing, merely a curiosity to observe and then dismiss. Yet to thousands, even millions, the claims of heavenly beings visiting the earth to establish a church and of the availability of new scripture are indeed attractive, striking a spiritual chord that draws people into, rather than repels them from, further investigation of Mormonism's message. The profound spiritual nature of Latter-day Saints' acceptance of these things and the certitude they express concerning their religious beliefs are uniquely attractive to many because such faith flies in the face of the prevailing culture of secularism, relativism, and skepticism. Faith is attractive because it provides "hope for a better world" (Ether 12:4), greater confidence in dealing with the challenges of this fallen world, and a sense of spiritual security and strength, even when "all things [are] in commotion" (D&C 88:91). That cannot help but be attractive to many.

Several years ago, I attended the Mormon History Association's annual conference in Copenhagen, Denmark. The conference commemorated the 150th anniversary of the Church in Scandinavia and continental Europe. One of the featured speakers was a prominent Danish government official. He acknowledged the thousands of Danes and other Scandinavians who embraced Mormonism in the nineteenth century and subsequently immigrated to America. In an effort to explain that phenomenon, he discussed the conditions that prevailed in Denmark in the mid-nineteenth century and how the American Dream tempted and tugged at the struggling, working-class Dane. To this government official, the attraction of Mormonism among those Danish converts was merely socioeconomic, the hope to find the proverbial pot of gold at the end of the American rainbow. Mormonism, as a new American religion, became just another way whereby one could get ahead in the land of opportunity.

There was no mention whatsoever of the spiritual motivation to convert and gather to Zion. There was no mention of the fact that many of those Mormon converts left behind a known existence

of financial security and comfortable homes when they left for an unknown existence in the barren desert lands of the Utah territory. There was no mention of the unspeakable hardships that many encountered on their journeys by ship, or by wagon train and handcart over a thousand-mile distance. What motivated them? Why would they be willing to sacrifice so much? Certainly the promise of a better life, from a socioeconomic standard, was a factor; but it was a factor overshadowed by one overriding motivation—deep personal conviction that the claims of Mormonism were in very deed true. Journals and reminiscences overwhelmingly record that these early converts were attracted to Mormonism because of profound spiritual feelings, not the promise of economic gain. Curiosity in this new American religion and prospects of establishing a modern-day Zion may have piqued their interest, but it was their deep and abiding faith that drove their actions. It was their spiritual assurance that God's true Church had been restored to the earth and their complete devotion to God that led to a willingness to sacrifice every earthly thing. Though the circumstances are much different for twenty-first-century Latter-day Saints, the spiritual pull of Mormonism is the same. It still takes faith to fully embrace the message of Mormonism and adhere to its high standards. That kind of faith is rare. And because it is so rare, Mormonism is attractive.

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught, "A religion that does not require the sacrifice of all things never has power sufficient to produce the faith necessary unto life and salvation."³ It could also be said that the faith produces a willingness to sacrifice. Like the chicken and the egg, faith and sacrifice are connected. It is the spiritual conviction that Latter-day Saints possess that enables them to embrace a way of life that, to many, seems too demanding or difficult. Yet that kind of faithfulness and devotion, that depth of spiritual strength, is certainly a very real attraction of Mormonism. This is confirmed by eminent sociologists Roger Finke and Rodney Stark and their studies of "winners and losers in our religious economy." They found that

denominations that place high demands on members and maintain distinctive boundaries with the surrounding culture “have shown the most rapid growth.” They further demonstrated that it was not merely a denomination’s demands or expectations that brought growth but also their uncompromised core religious beliefs—“beliefs that define their interactions or relationships with the supernatural.”⁴

In a recent study, spirituality and depth of conviction were listed among the traits most liked and admired concerning Mormons and Mormonism. “They have the courage of their convictions,” one person observed. Another said, “Their structure is something they really try to live by.” Nearly 80 percent of the respondents cited “spiritual” as a trait that describes Latter-day Saints.⁵ When questioned by prominent British journalist Lawrence Spicer concerning the appeal of Mormonism and the reasons for its continual growth, with other religious movements and denominations declining precipitously, President Hinckley responded, “We think that people have in their hearts a desire to improve their lives and develop their spirituality. There is within each of us something that longs for kinship with the Almighty, and we feel that there is a response to that as we teach concerning that. . . . The Church is a constant in a world of change. It is an anchor in a world of shifting values.”⁶

Even though they may not accept or completely understand the tenets of Mormonism, it is not uncommon for many not of our faith to comment on how the doctrines of Mormonism help Latter-day Saints connect the dots by providing answers to some of life’s most perplexing theological questions and most difficult issues—questions of the soul dealing with the meaning of life, the apparent inequities and injustices of the human condition, and what, if anything, awaits beyond the grave. Some of the Latter-day Saint doctrines that address these issues, and that are respected by and particularly attractive to outsiders, include the following:

- All mankind are sons and daughters of a loving Heavenly Father; we are all part of the same family, brothers

and sisters with each other. As the offspring of God (see Acts 17:28–29; Hebrews 12:9), each person has a divine identity and infinite potential.

- There is divine purpose in our mortal existence, both individually and collectively. God has a merciful plan for each of us, a plan of happiness that will both guide and bless us on earth and make right, in the next life, many injustices and inequities inherent in a fallen world.
- There is a life after death—a life where “that same sociality which exists among us here” will also exist there, but “coupled with eternal glory” (D&C 130:2). Loving friendships and family relationships will continue. A happy marriage can last for eternity.
- God’s merciful plan of salvation is not exclusionary but available to all people. Everyone, no matter where or when they have lived, will be given an opportunity to learn of the gospel and embrace its principles and ordinances.

As important as the teachings of the Church are, how Mormons live their lives attracts the most interest. That is the fruit of the faith.

Fruit

In his work, *How Americans View Mormonism*, Gary Lawrence demonstrated that those who did not know many Latter-day Saints had a negative view of Mormonism. On the other hand, those who knew many Mormons had quite favorable perceptions of the faith. Even when there was a negative view of Mormon doctrines, there was a positive view of how Latter-day Saints lived their lives. Wholesomeness and happiness are attributes of Mormonism that are attractive to those not of our faith. Interestingly, many who view Mormonism as weird are quick to acknowledge that Mormons themselves are not weird but very normal in good ways—upright, honest, caring, contributing members of the community.

While serving as a mission president, I was invited to participate in a discussion of Mormonism on a popular local radio talk show. At that time, a prominent Latter-day Saint was running for president of the United States, and his candidacy had generated much interest in and debate regarding his religion. Old stereotypes, misrepresentations, and misconceptions reemerged and were a disturbing part of the discussion. I tried my best to answer questions and contextualize the doctrines and practices of the Church. A prominent evangelical pastor in the community called to inform the listening audience that Mormons, according to his characterization, are not Christians and that their beliefs are not only nonbiblical but Satanically inspired. He proceeded to give all of the “weird doctrines” (his terminology) that Mormons believe. He repeated the word “weird” numerous times. He expressed very real contempt for Mormonism. None of my efforts to appropriately address the issues he raised, correct the misconceptions or falsehoods, or properly contextualize the teachings and practices of the Church satisfied him.

Then something remarkable happened. One of the hosts of the program spoke of the many Mormons he had personally known. He spoke glowingly of their goodness and integrity. Soon the other host chimed in with similar anecdotes. “I may not agree with or understand their beliefs,” he said, “but you can’t argue with the fact that they are good people and have strong families.” The observations of the hosts of the radio show changed the entire tenor and direction of the program. Even the critical minister acknowledged that all the Mormons he knew were good, decent, wholesome, honorable, God- and family-loving people. What had started as a program that could have been called “Strange Beliefs of Mormons” soon became a discussion of “Good Mormons I Have Known.” It seemed that everyone had had very positive experiences with Latter-day Saints and was impressed with how they lived their religion, as well as with the fruits of their faith. There was a discussion of the Church’s emphasis on strong families and its humanitarian efforts to care for the poor and

needy throughout the world. It was interesting to note that although the callers to the show expressed confusion or disbelief regarding doctrines, they clearly understood and appreciated the practical benefits and contributions of the Mormon way of life. Someone even observed, “Mormons are the most Christian people I have ever met, even though they are not Christians.” You can reject the faith, but you can’t deny the fruit.

“A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit,” Jesus taught (Matthew 7:18). As the Master himself counseled his ancient disciples, we today understand that fruits or outcomes are an integral part of ascertaining the value of something. Prophets and churches can likewise be judged by the products of their ministry and teachings. An individual’s commitment to be a follower of Christ should be judged—if judged at all by mortals—by the quality of character and actions that that commitment produces. As the Savior himself taught, evil trees cannot produce good fruit; so, the good fruit is a sign of the goodness of the tree. What are the fruits—tangible, real-life, practical benefits—that come because of Latter-day Saints’ devotion to their faith? Numerous empirical studies⁷ have observed that Latter-day Saints who devoutly espouse the teachings of their Church, when compared to society in general, are

- Healthier and live longer. Medical researchers have found significantly lower rates of cancer and heart disease in Mormons, resulting in significantly higher life expectancy.⁸
- Happier in their marriages and families. Latter-day Saints describe their marriages as “very happy” at a higher rate than national averages and other religious denominations. The divorce rate is lower among Mormons than Protestants.⁹
- Generally more educated. Approximately one in five Latter-day Saints in the United States have graduated

from college, with 14 percent of Latter-day Saint men and nearly 10 percent of Latter-day Saint women having received graduate training. More education results in a higher rate of Mormon professionals and managers than for Catholics and Protestants.¹⁰

- Considerably less likely to use alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drugs. Only about a quarter of Mormons say they drink alcohol, as compared to 65 percent of Protestants, 85 percent of Catholics, and 86 percent of Jews. Teenage substance abuse is significantly lower among Latter-day Saint youth than any other religious group.¹¹
- Less likely to engage in premarital or extramarital sexual behaviors.¹²
- More likely to enjoy strong mental health and less likely to experience depression.¹³
- Less likely to engage in criminal, delinquent, deviant, or antisocial behaviors.¹⁴

These statistics are not presented here to boast or to cast a bad light on people of other religious beliefs or of no belief system at all but rather to demonstrate that as Latter-day Saints seek to live their religion, very real benefits occur. Behavioral statistics and the practical benefits derived from Church affiliation do not prove the truthfulness of the claims of Mormonism. They are, however, evidences of the faith and devotion of Latter-day Saints. These fruits come as a natural result of striving to live by a foundational article of our faith articulated by Joseph Smith: “We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men. . . . If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things” (Articles of Faith 1:13). Latter-day Saints do not live their religion to impress others. Their motivation comes from the sure testimonies that burn in their hearts and inspire their minds, and from their sacred covenants to love God



Latter-day Saints earnestly strive to live the second great commandment—“love thy neighbor as thyself”—and have promised to show their love for the Christ by loving and serving others. (Robert Casey, Service, © 2006.)

with all their heart, might, mind, and strength and “serve him and keep his commandments” (Mosiah 18:10). Likewise, they earnestly strive to live the second great commandment—“love thy neighbor as

thyselves”—and have promised to show their love for Christ by loving and serving others.

The extensive welfare system of the Church and its humanitarian efforts throughout the world, as well as the acts of kindness and generosity exhibited by Church members in neighborhoods and communities, are all byproducts of a sincere effort on the part of members to love their fellowmen and to be true to their covenants. An especially important covenant is that they be “willing to bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light” and “mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort” (Mosiah 18:8–9). This Christian service and compassion is not restricted to members of the Church; it has no regard to race, religion, or nationality. Latter-day Saints seek to follow the admonition of the Prophet Joseph Smith to “feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to provide for the widow, to dry up the tear of the orphan, to comfort the afflicted, *whether in this church or any other, or in no church at all.*”¹⁵ This is truly a fruit of the faith—an outward manifestation of inward conversion and commitment to covenants.

Future

Another fruit of Mormonism that attracts others is our faith in the future—a hope for a better world and a confidence that things will all work out for the good; this hope and confidence are born from profound trust in God and his promises. Both the history and theology of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints provide the basis for such hope and for such confidence.

The Church was organized on April 6, 1830, with six founding members. Not many more than a score of other people at that time were affiliated with this newly established religion. Despite the apparently insignificant size of the Church, there burned within the hearts of those early converts convictions that they were in very deed members of the earthly kingdom of God—a kingdom that, as

Daniel declared, was established not by human hands but by the power of God. They were convinced that their little band of believers would one day fulfill Daniel's prophecy, as well those of other prophets, and grow into a mighty power that would fill the earth (see Daniel 2:44–45; see also D&C 65:2). The words of Joseph Smith, both in his discourses and in the revelations he received from God, resonated with these relatively few members. The teaching that the gospel they had embraced would be proclaimed in "all the world, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth" (D&C 58:64) and would be the major means whereby the earth would be prepared for the Second Coming of the Savior was attractive. That belief gave them confidence in the future and conviction that they were engaged in a remarkable cause, even though they were both few in number and dismissed by others as an insignificant sect. President Wilford Woodruff described a meeting held in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1834 during which Joseph Smith prophesied of the future destiny of this Church:

On Sunday night the Prophet called on all who held the Priesthood to gather into the little log school house they had there. It was a small house, perhaps 14 feet square. But it held the whole of the Priesthood of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who were then in the town of Kirtland, and who gathered together to go off in Zion's camp. . . . When we got together the Prophet called upon the Elders of Israel with him to bear testimony of this work. Those that I have named spoke, and a good many that I have not named, bore their testimonies. When they got through the Prophet said, "Brethren, I have been very much edified and instructed in your testimonies here tonight, but I want to say to you before the Lord, that you know no more concerning the destinies of this Church and kingdom than a babe upon its mother's lap. You don't comprehend it." I was rather surprised. He said "it is only a little

handful of Priesthood you see here tonight, but this Church will fill North and South America; it will fill the world.¹⁶

Joseph Smith's prophecy was undoubtedly met with amazement by all and incredulity by some. Who could imagine how such a prophecy would ever be fulfilled? At that time, the Church, which began with a handful of members, had grown to not many more than a thousand or two. Within ten years, there were perhaps twenty thousand members—still a far cry from spanning North and South America and filling the whole earth. With the murders of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, there were many convinced, as evidenced by headlines and stories in newspapers from around the country, that the demise of Mormonism was at hand. Yet even amidst persecution and extraordinary challenges, the Church continued to grow and prosper. Andrew D. White, president of Cornell University and later US ambassador to Germany, recounted a conversation he had with Count Leo Tolstoy, the great Russian author, statesman, and philosopher, while serving as US foreign minister to Russia in 1892. Dr. White visited often with Count Tolstoy, and upon one occasion they discussed religion:

“Dr. White,” said Count Tolstoy, “I wish you would tell me about your American religion.”

“We have no state church in America,” replied Dr. White.

“I know that, but what about your American religion?”

Patiently then Dr. White explained to the Count that in America there are many religions, and that each person is free to belong to the particular church in which he is interested.

To this Tolstoy impatiently replied: “I know all of this, but I want to know about the *American* religion. Catholicism originated in Rome; the Episcopal Church originated in England; the Lutheran Church in Germany, but the Church to which I refer originated in America, and is commonly known

as the Mormon Church. What can you tell me of the teachings of the Mormons?”

“Well,” said Dr. White, “I know very little concerning them. They have an unsavory reputation, they practice polygamy, and are very superstitious.”

Then Count Leo Tolstoy, in his honest and stern, but lovable, manner, rebuked the ambassador. “Dr. White, I am greatly surprised and disappointed that a man of your great learning and position should be so ignorant on this important subject. The Mormon people teach the American religion; their principles teach the people not only of Heaven and its attendant glories, but how to live so that their social and economic relations with each other are placed on a sound basis. If the people follow the teachings of this Church, nothing can stop their progress—it will be limitless. There have been great movements started in the past but they have died or been modified before they reached maturity. If Mormonism is able to endure, unmodified, until it reaches the third and fourth generation, it is destined to become the greatest power the world has ever known.”¹⁷

Writing in *Review of Religious Research* in 1984, Dr. Rodney Stark, an eminent sociologist (who is not a Latter-day Saint), projected that Mormonism, “if growth during the next century is like that of the past,” would “become a major world faith.” Assuming a 30 percent membership growth per decade (which is considerably lower than the Church’s actual growth rate since World War II), Stark predicted that by 2080 there would be more than sixty million Mormons worldwide. He went so far as to project that, with a 50 percent growth rate per decade, there would be over 250 million members by the end of the twenty-first century. Stark stated:

Admittedly, straight-line projections are risky; they assume the future will be like the past. There is no way to be sure that Mormon growth won't suddenly begin to decline. But it would be wise to keep in mind that back in 1880 scholars would have ridiculed anyone who used a straightline projection to predict that the 160,000 Mormons of that year would number more than five million a century hence. But that is now history.¹⁸

Scholars have debated Stark's projections in the years since. Likewise, critics of the Church have challenged the veracity of the Church's actual growth and member retention rates. This attention, Stark himself stated, "has been prompted by Mormon-bashers seeking to alarm the world against the impending Mormon takeover."¹⁹ Despite the controversy and questions raised by his 1984 projections, Stark revisited the results a decade later and concluded that his projections were on target. Speaking of the growth rate he predicted in 1984, Stark stated that "in all comparisons the actual [growth] rate is substantially higher than the high projection. In fact, in 1995 Mormon membership exceeds the high estimate by almost a million members, or about 11 percent. . . . Granted there are 85 more years to go. But so far, so good."²⁰ Today, there are over fourteen million Latter-day Saints in over 160 countries, with congregations on every populated continent of the world.

People are not attracted to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints because it is fast growing or worldwide. Growth-rate projections and membership numbers do not prove the truthfulness of Mormonism's claims. They do, however, attest to the fact that there is something about Mormonism found in its message and in the hearts and lives of its members that invites investigation and inspires conversion. It is something profoundly spiritual, not merely sociological, that attracts others. It is this spiritual conviction that instills in the souls of Latter-day Saints an abiding trust in God's protective and prospering

power. It is what motivates Mormons to strive to live good lives, be good citizens, raise strong families, and serve others. While many continue to dismiss, discount, or discredit the attraction of Mormonism, it has not died, nor is it even sick. It continues on its steady course to the fulfillment of its destiny, as prophesied by Joseph Smith in 1842: “The Standard of Truth has been erected; no unhallowed hand can stop the work from progressing; persecutions may rage, mobs may combine, armies may assemble, calumny may defame, but the truth of God will go forth boldly, nobly, and independent, till it has penetrated every continent, visited every clime, swept every country, and sounded in every ear, till the purposes of God shall be accomplished, and the Great Jehovah shall say the work is done.”²¹

Notes

1. The Church says on its own website, “According to the National Council of Churches, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the second-fastest-growing church in the United States. However, despite its increasing numbers, the Church cautions against overemphasis on growth statistics. The Church makes no statistical comparisons with other churches and makes no claim to be the fastest-growing Christian denomination despite frequent news media comments to that effect. Such comparisons rarely take account of a multiplicity of complex factors, including activity rates and death rates, the methodology used in registering or counting members and what factors constitute membership. Growth rates also vary significantly across the world. Additionally, many other factors contribute to the strength of the Church, most especially the devotion and commitment of its members.” www.newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/background-information/growth-of-the-church.
2. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 647.
3. Joseph Smith, comp., *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 69.
4. Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776–2005* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 249–51.
5. Gary C. Lawrence, *How Americans View Mormonism: Seven Steps to Improve Our Image* (Orange, CA: Parameter Foundation, 2008), 26, 34.
6. Gordon B. Hinckley, interview with Lawrence Spicer, London News Service, London, England, August 28, 1995, in Sheri L. Dew, *Go Forward with Faith: The Biography of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 579–80.

7. Many of these studies, published previously in academic journals, can be found in *Latter-day Saint Social Life*, ed. James T. Duke (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1998).
8. James E. Enstrom, "Health Practices and Cancer Mortality among Active California Mormons," *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* 81, no. 23 (1989): 1807–14.
9. Melvin L. Wilkinson and William C. Tanner III, "The Influence of Family Size, Interaction, and Religiosity on Family Affection in a Mormon Sample," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 42, no. 2 (1980): 297–304; see also Tim B. Heaton and Kristen L. Goodman, "Religion and Family Formation," *Review of Religious Research* 26, no. 4 (1985): 343–59.
10. Stephen J. Bahr, "Mormon Statistics," www.lightplanet.com/mormons/daily/social_eom.htm.
11. Ricky D. Hawks and Steven J. Bahr, "Religion and Drug Use," *Journal of Drug Education* 22, no. 1 (1992): 1–8.
12. Brent C. Miller and Terrance D. Olson, "Sexual Attitudes and Behavior of High School Students in Relation to Background and Contextual Factors," *Journal of Sex Research* 24 (1988): 194–200.
13. Allen E. Bergin and others, "Religion and Mental Health: Mormons and Other Groups," in *Contemporary Mormonism: Social Science Perspectives*, ed. Marie Cornwall, Tim B. Heaton, and Lawrence A. Young (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 138–58; see also Daniel K Judd, ed., *Religion, Mental Health, and the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1999).
14. Bruce A. Chadwick and Brent L. Top, "Religiosity and Delinquency among LDS Adolescents," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 32, no. 1 (1993): 51–67; see also Bruce A. Chadwick, Brent L. Top, and Richard McClendon, *Shield of Faith: The Role of Religiosity in the Lives of LDS Youth and Young Adults* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2010).
15. *Times and Seasons*, March 15, 1842, 732; emphasis added
16. Wilford Woodruff, in Conference Report, April 1898, 57.
17. Thomas J. Yates, "Count Tolstoi and the 'American Religion,'" *Improvement Era*, February 1939, 94.
18. Rodney Stark, "The Rise of a New World Faith," *Review of Religious Research* 26 (1984): 18–27; reprinted in *Latter-day Saint Social Life*, 9–27.
19. Stark, "New World Faith," 22.
20. Rodney Stark, "So Far, So Good: A Brief Assessment of Mormon Membership Projections," *Review of Religious Research* 38, no. 2 (December 1996): 177–78.
21. *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 4:540.