

Chapter 3

The Prophet's Impact on Europe, Then and Now

Elder Keith K. Hilbig

I AM INTRIGUED by Church history, especially with respect to Joseph Smith, the remarkable man and prophet who opened this dispensation. The impact of his work upon the world is significant. Upon reflection, I feel the title of my remarks may be a bit misleading, because the impact of his work (and that of his successors) has not necessarily been upon nation-states alone but also upon the individual inhabitants of those sovereign nations, which we collectively call Europe. His impact is not only upon a continent or a government; the impact is really upon people. For those European individuals who were exposed to and responded to the restored gospel, and for their progeny, the Prophet's impact upon them has been profound. And it remains profound. My approach shall not be one of details and academic analysis. Rather, since I am one of the progeny of that group, I want to speak with you on a personal level about experiences I have had in light of the larger issue, namely Joseph's impact upon Europe.

My wife also stems from the group who accepted the gospel in Europe in the early 1900s. Our children have become beneficiaries of those early labors, as have our grandchildren. So it will continue to reverberate through future generations. We have been blessed by the prophetic vision that Joseph had concerning the work in those

foreign lands. Some results were apparent in his lifetime; others followed his martyrdom and continue into our time. Currently, nearly *all* the peoples of the European continent have been exposed to the gospel.

I have had the privilege of living, studying, working, and serving in a variety of settings throughout Western and Eastern Europe for about twelve years of my adult life. I desire to share with you some of the things that I personally experienced that reflect the impact of the Prophet, then and now.

In 1924, during the very chaotic decade following World War I in Germany and the prelude to what would become Hitler's rise in the following decade, two missionaries walked through the small town of Zwickau. It lies in the southeast corner of Germany, nestled up against the Erzgebirge, a mountain range that forms the border with Czechoslovakia. Those two missionaries brought the gospel to my grandmother and to my father, his brother, and two sisters. My father was baptized at age twelve. At sixteen, he was an orphan. He had just completed his three-year apprenticeship as a baker. I once asked him why he decided to become a baker. He answered, "It was the only way I could be assured of having something to eat."

At age sixteen, he and his seventeen-year-old brother, seeing no future in that environment and because of the gospel they had accepted as teenagers, came to the New World to begin a new life. Just one generation later, I had the privilege of earning a law degree. Such was one impact of Joseph, through those two missionaries in Zwickau, upon *my* life.

When my father landed at Ellis Island, they put a ribbon around his neck with a card attached, stating, "Send this person to Milwaukee." He and his brother walked out of the processing center, a taxi cab driver read the sign, and he took them to the correct train in New York City. They woke up a day and half later in Milwaukee, where their sister had gone earlier to live. The next day, a Sunday morning, they were up early. They went to Church in the small branch in Mil-

waukee, because the restored gospel was of such great importance to them.

At age twenty-one, some five years after his arrival, my father received a German-language triple combination from a friend. He suggested that my father consider serving a mission. My dad had been saving his money since he arrived in September 1929; he often said that he was perhaps responsible for the Great Depression, which began the next month. He was very cautious about preserving his limited funds. In 1937, some eight years after his arrival, he had saved enough money to request the opportunity to serve as a missionary. He was called at the height of the Depression, the very first missionary sent from the Chicago Illinois Stake. He took his triple combination with him during his service in the East German Mission, eventually proselyting in the town where he was born and where he was baptized.

My father was one of those German missionaries who escaped into Denmark the day before World War II began when all German borders were sealed. He always wanted to go back again and serve among the German-speaking Saints.

In 1962 he gave his German-language triple combination to me, as I left for my mission in Germany. When I came back, I returned it to him as he and my stepmother were called to serve as senior missionaries assigned to Austria-Yugoslavia. When they came back, I took it and used it during the three years our family served in Switzerland. Thereafter, I gave it to a son who was called to serve in Dresden, Germany, before the Berlin Wall came down, and later to another son who labored in the Germany Frankfurt Mission.

I am now holding this book in trust, against the day when (I am confident) the Lord will yet call one of my father's great-grandsons to again take this now eighty-year-old book into missionary service in Europe. I cannot comment on the impact of Joseph on European *governments*, but I do know about the impact of Joseph's labors upon European *individuals* and upon our family in particular.

To me, this German triple combination constitutes tangible evidence of the Prophet's impact upon Europe, then and now.

Now I should like to return to the time of the Prophet. We have heard of his worldview and of his world religion concept and of the results of his efforts in various parts of the world. Such a global vision in 1830 should not surprise us. It had to be (from the very beginning) a worldwide Church because the apostasy itself was worldwide—the cure would have to be at least as broad as the malady. Just as individual people were surrounded by a loss of truth for decades and centuries, so also would it be necessary that individual people be exposed to the fulness of truth.

This idea of establishing a world church was not Joseph's idea. We have spoken in terms of *his* decisions and *his* recommendations and *his* writings. In fact, that which he was teaching was of the Lord. The concept of the Church being worldwide, even at the outset, is to be found in the scriptures and the revelations. For example, if you will open the Book of Mormon and read the testimony of the Three Witnesses, the first line states, "Be it known unto all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, unto whom this work shall come: That we, through the grace of God the Father, . . . have seen the plates" (Book of Mormon, Testimony of Three Witnesses). Exactly the same opening line is contained in the testimony of the Eight Witnesses. Those experiences were in June of 1829, many months before the Church was even organized.

In section 58 of the Doctrine and Covenants, Joseph is in Jackson County, Missouri. This revelation is given to him in August 1831. In verse 45 (speaking of the missionaries) we read: "For, behold, they [the elders of the Church] shall push the people together from the ends of the earth." Now in that day the "pushing together" was going to be manifested in the creation of Zion, the *gathering of Zion*. Nowadays we seek to "push the people together" in *stakes of Zion*, where they are equally finding a refuge. But the central concept was to "push the people together from the ends of the earth" into Zion. And then just a few lines further, in verse 64, we read: "For, verily, the

sound [meaning the gospel message] must go forth from this place [meaning Jackson County] into all the world, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth.” No question that this was intended to be an international effort. Three months later, Joseph received the revelation that would become the preface to the Doctrine and Covenants. Now from section 1, verses 1–2 and 4–5:

Hearken, O ye people of my church, saith the voice of him who dwells on high, and whose eyes are upon all men; yea, verily I say: Hearken ye people from afar; and ye that are upon the islands of the sea, listen together.

For verily the voice of the Lord is unto all men, and there is none to escape; and there is no eye that shall not see, neither ear that shall not hear, neither heart that shall not be penetrated. . . .

And the voice of warning shall be unto all people, by the mouths of my disciples, whom I have chosen in these last days.

And they shall go forth and none shall stay them, for I the Lord have commanded them.

In the October 2003 general conference, President Gordon B. Hinckley quoted those verses, and then he added these words: “There can be no doubt concerning our responsibility to the peoples of the earth. There can be no doubt that we are moving forward in pursuing that responsibility.”¹ The task outlined to the Prophet Joseph has now been transferred to our shoulders by President Hinckley. May our efforts have the same impact as was experienced in Joseph’s day!

We have heard passages from the Wentworth Letter, including the “standard of truth” language, how it would go forth boldly and nobly. We also have heard of Joseph’s prophecy (as recorded by Wilford Woodruff and recounted by him in general conference in 1898) about how the word, the Church, would fill North and South America. I want to read a further portion of Joseph’s prophetic text,

1. Gordon B. Hinckley, “The State of the Church,” *Ensign*, November 2003, 4.

because we usually stop at the “filling of the Americas.” Joseph stated as follows: “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. . . . This people will go into the Rocky Mountains; they will build temples to the Most High. They will raise up a posterity there.”²

Part of the posterity that would be raised in that setting of the Rocky Mountains, I submit, would be the progeny of those who were gathered in Europe and ultimately landed in the Utah valleys. A generation later they would be sending their offspring back to Europe, the lands of their heritage. It was not only Joseph who thought in those terms. Sidney Rigdon reminisced once about a visit to the Peter Whitmer Sr. cabin in Waterloo, New York. He gave a talk in April of 1844, saying: “I recollect in the year 1830, I met the whole church of Christ in a little old log house just about 20 feet square . . . and we began to talk about the kingdom of God as if we had the world at our command; we talked with great confidence, and we talked big things, although we were not many people, we had big feelings; . . . we looked upon the men of the earth as grasshoppers . . . we talked about the people coming as doves to the windows, that all nations should flock unto it.”³ Now talk about self-confidence and the ability to carry out that obligation; they had it!

About six weeks before his martyrdom, Joseph stated, “I calculate to be one of the instruments of setting up the kingdom of Daniel by the word of the Lord, and I intend to lay a foundation that will revolutionize the whole world.”⁴ We can only speculate as to what would have happened if that martyrdom had been avoided or, at least, delayed, but it was not the plan.

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2. Joseph Smith, as quoted by Wilford Woodruff, in Conference Report, April 1898, 57.
 3. “Conference Minutes,” *Times and Seasons*, May 1, 1844, 522–23.
 4. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 366.

In addition to Sidney Rigdon, Parley P. Pratt made this insightful statement referring to Joseph: “He has organized the kingdom of God.—We will extend its dominion. He has restored the fulness of the Gospel.—We will spread it abroad.”⁵ Again, an abiding sense of certainty and self-assurance is evidenced by the early Saints. Joseph grasped the big picture. He had the vision. But he needed strong men and strong women to realize that vision. The attitude of Parley P. Pratt reflects the kind of people whom the Lord raised up at the opening of this dispensation, people who would make it work. Joseph’s boldness in pronouncements and expectations were, I suggest, born of his experiences with the Savior and other heavenly tutors. This was not Joseph’s personal plan. He was the spokesman for what the Lord had in mind.

By January 1841, the Saints are, of course, in Nauvoo. Section 124 is given, continuing instructions to the Prophet Joseph Smith. I shall read from the middle of verse 2: “I say unto you [the Lord speaking to Joseph], that you are now called immediately to make a solemn proclamation of my gospel, and of this stake which I have planted to be a cornerstone of Zion, which shall be polished with the refinement which is after the similitude of a palace.” In verse 3 the Lord stated: “This proclamation shall be made to all the kings of the world, to the four corners thereof, to the honorable president-elect, and the high-minded governors of the nation in which you live, and to all the nations of the earth scattered abroad.”

Note that the proclamation that Joseph was commanded to prepare “immediately” was to be made to “all kings of the world, to the four corners thereof, to the honorable president-elect, and the high minded governors of the nation in which you live, and to all the nations of the earth scattered abroad.”

In Doctrine and Covenants 124:12, the Lord said further, “And again, verily I say unto you, let my servant Robert B. Thompson help

5. Parley P. Pratt, “Proclamation to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Greeting,” *Millennial Star*, March 1845, 151; emphasis added.

you to write this proclamation.” The proclamation was not produced in a timely manner. It was not until the martyrdom approached that they responded to the direction of the Lord. In April 1845 that four-year-old commandment was finally realized. It was, however, not written by Brother Robert B. Thompson (who probably fainted at the assignment). Rather, Wilford Woodruff picked up the pen. He wrote this “Proclamation to the World” in behalf of the Twelve. They approved his text, and it was printed and subsequently distributed by the missionaries throughout the world.

I shall read just a few excerpts to give you a flavor of the confident attitude of these pioneers. The proclamation was directed to all the various important people of the earth, as instructed by Doctrine and Covenants 124:3. The actual proclamation includes this bold language: “Know ye that the kingdom of God has come as has been predicted by ancient prophets and prayed for in all ages. Even that kingdom that shall fill the whole earth and shall stand forever.” Being very conscious of Daniel’s prophecy, the authors continue: “We say to all people, Repent, and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, for remission of sins; and you shall receive the Holy Spirit, and shall know the truth, and be numbered with the House of Israel.” After fourteen pages of text, the proclamation concludes with a bold invitation and with a stirring promise of blessings:

And we once more invite all the kings, presidents, governors, rulers, judges, and people of the earth, to aid us, the Latter-day Saints; and also, the Jews, and all the remnants of Israel, by your influence and protection, and by your silver and gold, that we may build the cities of Zion and Jerusalem, and the temples and sanctuaries of our God; and may accomplish the great restoration of all things, and bring in latter-day glory.

That knowledge, truth, light, love, peace, union, honor, glory, and power, may fill the earth with eternal life and joy. That death, bondage, oppression, war, mourning, sorrow, and

pain, may be done away with for ever, and all tears be wiped from every eye.⁶

What lofty aspirations! But it wasn't only talk; they did try to go out and actually do it.

Early Gathering Efforts

If I am going to be true to my topic, I had better start now talking about Europe a bit. We are all aware that Europe was the initial source of the gathering to Zion. It would provide strength to Nauvoo. It would populate the Great Basin. It would establish the Church. And thereafter, the European immigrants would be sending out generation after generation to return to the lands of Europe as missionaries.

The very first foreign mission was, of course, Canada. However, the first overseas mission did not occur until much later. That effort commenced on Sunday, June 4, 1837, in the Kirtland Temple. Heber C. Kimball was attending Church services there. Following the meeting, the Prophet said to Heber, in effect, "I want to talk to you." He then issued the call for Heber C. Kimball to lead the overseas missionary effort, which was to commence in Great Britain.

Heber wrote in his journal that he was informed by "Brother Hyrum Smith of the Presidency of the Church," who said that he (Heber) had "been designed by the Spirit" and was now appointed to take charge of the mission for the kingdom of Great Britain. Heber C. Kimball was hesitant. He felt inadequate. He was concerned for the welfare of his family, but consider what Heber wrote in his journal: "The moment I understood the will of my Heavenly Father, I felt a determination to go at all hazards, believing that He would . . .

6. "Proclamation of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," as quoted in James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965), 1:264.

endow me with every qualification I needed.⁷⁷ The men who would carry out the Prophet's vision operated with that mindset.

Seven brethren went. Heber was the leader, but with him came Orson Hyde, Willard Richards, Joseph Fielding, and then John Goodson, Isaac Russell, and John Snyder. This call came on June 4. By June 13 they were on their way to the East Coast, a mere nine days after the call. We do not know what Sister Kimball had to say, but Heber was gone by June 13. The missionaries landed in Liverpool on July 20. Ten days later, at the end of July 1837, the first baptisms occurred. The city of Preston, where a temple has now been built, is where the Church began in Great Britain.

The seven intrepid missionaries departed after nine months. It was a relatively short period, but when they left, some fifteen hundred baptisms had been performed. In 1838 six returned to America, while Willard Richards remained in England. In 1840 the second group was sent out: Brigham Young, Parley P. Pratt, Orson Pratt, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, and George A. Smith. Heber C. Kimball went along for his second tour of duty, and Willard Richards rejoined the arriving group to begin his second mission. Upon landing, Orson Pratt was assigned to Scotland. John Taylor was assigned to Ireland. Wilford Woodruff, George A. Smith, and Heber C. Kimball went into London to deal with the metropolis head on. There was great harvesting in all of those settings.

The success of this missionary effort must be measured not only in the number of baptisms but also by the effect it had upon the Quorum of the Twelve. In Kirtland the Quorum members had experienced some problems, but in Great Britain they labored together effectively. A relationship was forged; they solidified as a body; they were being prepared for what would follow once they returned to their homes.

7. Heber C. Kimball, *Journal of Heber Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1882), 10–11.

The baptismal successes generated hundreds of immigrants. The numbers of people leaving England because of the Church became somewhat of a topic in Great Britain. Charles Dickens wrote about the phenomenon in a book called the *Uncommercial Traveler*. He described a man (which was Dickens himself) who liked to travel about, observing events. Let me read from Dickens's novel: "I . . . had come aboard this Emigrant Ship to see what Eight hundred Latter-day Saints were like, and I found them (to the rout and overthrow of all my expectations) like what I will now describe with scrupulous exactness." What he saw surprised him (he had anticipated a coarse group, as he had seen on other immigrant ships). After confirming with the shipping agent that the people really were Mormons, Dickens's character says to the agent: "These are a very fine set of people you have brought together here. . . . Indeed, I think it would be difficult to find eight hundred people together anywhere else, and find so much beauty and so much strength and capacity for work among them." The agent responds saying, "I think so! We sent out about a thousand more, yes' day, from Liverpool."⁸

There was clearly something about those converts that impressed even a jaded Charles Dickens. He wrote that their "universal cheerfulness was amazing." He saluted the impressive Mormon convert immigrants as follows: "I should have said they were in their degree the pick and flower of England."⁹

By the way, that phrase became the title of a 1987 book that commemorated the first century and a half of the Church in England. They *were* indeed the pick and flower of England, being "pushed together" for the establishment of the Church. The European missionary work had been effective; these converts were changing their

8. Charles Dickens, *The Uncommercial Traveler*, [1863], 445–49.

9. Dickens, *The Uncommercial Traveler*, 445–49. Brigham Young, as quoted in "To the Editor of the Millennial Star," *Millennial Star*, February 1, 1846, 39.

lives. It was a palpable change, as Dickens's characterization of the Mormon convert immigrants confirms.

The second group of missionaries had spent a year in Great Britain and returned to Nauvoo in 1841. In 1846, Parley P. Pratt and John Taylor went back to England, some others having been sent in the intervening years. But Joseph was interested not only in Great Britain but also in the continent. Indeed, in 1843, he had assigned Orson Hyde and James Adams to go to St. Petersburg, Russia. I do not know what happened to them, but it would not be until 1989 that Mormon missionaries appeared in St. Petersburg, Russia.

Joseph's martyrdom occurred in 1844, and Brigham Young was confronted with many challenges. Yet Joseph's vision still had to be responded to. In 1849, Brigham sent John Taylor to France, and John Taylor went on to Germany as well. He translated the Book of Mormon into French, arranged for its printing, and then went up to Hamburg to work on the German translation of the Book of Mormon in 1851.

Germany in those days was not the Germany of today. There were thirty-one independent states comprising German territory. No central government existed. In 1840 a British convert had gone into Hamburg to try to preach and was immediately arrested. In 1841 Orson Hyde stopped in Germany on his way to the Holy Land; he was promptly detained by the authorities and thrown out. In 1843 a branch was finally established just south of Frankfurt, but the missionaries were imprisoned and banished from that particular land. In 1853 missionaries had tried to get back into Berlin, which was then Prussia. They were ordered to leave immediately.

There were, however, some successes, interestingly enough in East Germany. In 1855, Karl G. Maeser was baptized in Dresden. It was such a significant event that Franklin D. Richards, then the European Mission president based in England, crossed the channel to discover who this Karl G. Maeser really was. Within a year, Brother Maeser and his family had left Dresden, immigrating to Utah. The rest is, as they say, history (especially on the BYU campus).

President Heber J. Grant once said, "If nothing more had ever been accomplished in Germany than the conversion of Karl G. Maeser, it would have been worth all the effort and money and time for that alone." So President Grant thought highly of him as well.

Interestingly, after World War I things were so chaotic in Germany that no one interfered with the missionaries. Thus, the gospel was widely preached throughout the land. It was two of those missionaries who, in 1924, baptized my father. Politically and economically, things began to fall apart in Germany between the world wars, but the missionary work was productive.

The success was so great that, before World War II, German was the second language of the Church. There were more German-speaking members than any other language save English. There were large branches in Germany before World War II, each with hundreds of members during that brief period between the two world wars.

In 1850, Lorenzo Snow went into Switzerland, and in 1853 he traveled into the Piedmont, the northern part of Italy, where he worked with Protestants rather than Catholics. However, given the governmental and cultural situations then prevailing, it would not be until 1966 that Mormon missionaries officially went back into Italy. I might parenthetically note that in May 2005, the first stake in Rome was formed. What a bookend to the initial experiences of Lorenzo Snow so many decades ago—a stake in the city of Rome itself!

Regarding Scandinavia, Erastus Snow arrived there in 1850 and tried to work in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. A branch was established in Copenhagen with just fifty members. The first Book of Mormon translated from English was in Danish. By the time Erastus Snow left Scandinavia in 1852, many converts had immigrated to Zion. However, there were still some seven hundred people who had been baptized but remained in Scandinavia. By 1857 there were 3,400 members resident in Scandinavia. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the records show that 14,000 converts from Scandinavia came to Utah. So once again, the impact was not on governments, for they had the upper hand (a tale that does not change from century to

century). Thus, the impact on the people was great, and the gathering work was clearly under way.

Just quickly, let me give a European overview: in 1861 missionaries entered Belgium, in 1864 the Netherlands Mission was opened, and in 1865 a mission was created in Austria. Finally, in 1875, the missionaries entered Finland. From 1850 to 1900, the records of the Church reflect that a total of 4,831 missionaries were sent to Europe. The areas included Great Britain, Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, and Austria. Just under five thousand missionaries were sent to Europe during the last half of the nineteenth century. More than half of that missionary total went to Great Britain, where the work still continued to grow.

Some Saints in Utah wondered why so few missionaries were being sent to the United States, while so many were going abroad. President Brigham Young made this statement in response: “We don’t owe this nation another gospel sermon, they are left to feel the wrath of an angry God.” This was pre-Civil War. President Young chose to place the missionary forces where the greatest results would occur, largely in Europe. He did not lose any sleep over the United States.

Now, the real reasons for this limited missionary effort within the States were, first, the polygamy issue. Once that practice became public, it became the topic of conversation. Much animosity toward the Church was generated throughout all of the states. Second, there was a great deal of affection for Great Britain among the Twelve, because they themselves had labored there. They wanted missionaries to return and help more of those people. And third, they had much more success per missionary than would have been the case if those missionaries had been sent to the States.

The work in Great Britain also spread the gospel throughout the British Empire. Many who joined later found themselves in India or Australia and thereby became the vehicle for beginning the Church in those lands. There were, of course, missionaries sent to the

Pacific Islands, but actual emigration from the islands (the gathering to Zion) did not occur as frequently as in Europe.

The Impact Today

Allow me to scroll forward and tell you about the impact of Joseph in Europe *now*. The most recent substantial impact occurred in Eastern Europe, when the Soviet Union began to disintegrate. Estonia was one of fifteen republics in the USSR—Russia, of course, being the largest republic. The Church's experience in Estonia evidences the hand of the Lord in this work.

In 1987 a new Finland Helsinki Mission president, Steven Ray Mecham, was set apart by Elder Russell M. Nelson to begin his assignment. In the blessing Elder Nelson stated that President Mecham would open missionary work in the Baltic States and Russia. Remember, this was said in 1987. The Baltic States (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania) were still part of the USSR. Elder Nelson, in effect, informed the president going to Finland, "You'll open up Eastern Europe." Now, Estonia was a tiny country, half the size of Utah, with a million and a half people; it did not like the Soviet system one bit.

Two years later, in October 1989, Elder Nelson attended a mission presidents' seminar for Europe. Sister Hilbig and I were at that seminar in Budapest, Hungary, and so was President Mecham. I learned afterward that Elder Nelson took him aside at that seminar and said, "President, the time has come for you to begin missionary work in Estonia and in Russia." President Mecham promptly sent two missionaries from Finland into Estonia on month-long visas. By December 1989 four Estonians had been baptized. They were the first citizens of the Soviet Union baptized in this era. Between December 1989 and April 1990, one hundred people had been baptized in Estonia.

In early 1990, Elder Nelson returned to Europe and formally dedicated the land of Estonia for the preaching of the gospel. I was touched by something we are not often able to read, namely that

remarkable dedicatory prayer. I will read to you four sentences. Elder Nelson knelt down and offered these extraordinary words:

We pray for a blessing upon the leaders of this land [remember, Estonia was still Soviet territory] that there may be peace and religious liberty that will enable the people of this land to come unto thee. Wilt thou grant unto them the privileges of freedom as a republic, an independent republic, not a part of the Soviet Union, and give unto them opportunity to be valiant unto thee. May these people become a beacon of faith to this part of the world that from this point the gospel shall roll forth to the nations to the East and south [which nations could only be their neighboring Baltics and then Ukraine] and to the neighboring areas even beyond. May that which is accomplished here be a great forerunner of the work in the Eastern part of Europe.¹⁰

This dedication of Estonia occurred just four months after the first baptisms in the land. Then, just sixteen months after this dedicatory prayer, Estonia declared its independence from the Soviet Union! It had begun to receive the wondrous blessings that had been pleaded for by an Apostle. From Estonia, the restored gospel did indeed go south into Latvia and then into Lithuania. Thereafter, it went east into Russia itself.

Now, if Joseph Smith had offered such a dedicatory prayer some 150 years ago, we possibly would now be saying, “Marvelous; it has finally come true.” It is also marvelous when a modern Apostle, Elder Nelson, gave the prayer, and its realization was nearly instantaneous! The same hand has always been directing the Restoration, then and now. It was not much longer thereafter until the entire Soviet Union crumbled, and the gospel began to flourish in the lands of Eastern Europe. The world changed most rapidly. I could tell you a story about each one of the lands behind the iron curtain. Time will not permit today, but I will share one more.

While Sister Hilbig and I were still in Budapest at the seminar at which Elder Nelson presided, we looked out the window from the

10. Russell M. Nelson, Dedicatory Prayer of Estonia.

meeting hall and noticed that fire trucks were gathering in front of the parliament building. On that day in October 1989, the ladders went up—they were dismantling the Red Star on top of the parliament building in Budapest! (Just one year prior, Elder Nelson had dedicated the land of Hungary for the preaching of the gospel.) The people of Hungary had declared independence from the Soviet Bloc and obtained their freedom.

Later, as we were traveling with Elder Nelson, word came that Erich Honecker had just died. He was the Communist head of the East German government and the man who had finally, after years of effort allowed construction of a temple behind the iron curtain and missionaries to pierce that iron curtain. We asked Elder Nelson (who knew Honecker well), “What does this mean for the future?” His calm response still rings in my ears, “Whatever happens will work for the benefit of the Church.” That’s prophetic. In fact, just three weeks later, the Berlin Wall came down. It was all over. “Whatever happens will work for the benefit of the Church.” And it was so.

Someday, perhaps we can talk about the twenty other stories I had prepared. They are essentially the same, each reminding us of the hand of the Lord in Eastern Europe. Joseph saw the future scope of the kingdom, but he had limited opportunity to implement it. There were, throughout the Soviet Empire, solid, committed, effective people who were willing to step in and do the implementation. In a very real sense, the fall of the Soviet Union and the opening up of the East is as much a pioneering effort as were the efforts in England a century and a half before. Both efforts contributed to the establishment of the Church. I find it interesting how much those two time periods and those two efforts have in common.

I am intrigued to consider what the *next* time period will bring. I am interested in history—both secular and Church—and the more I read of both, the more I come to appreciate that the Lord is directing the affairs of man. If we will, as members of His kingdom, do *our* part, the stone will indeed roll forth, and it will roll into the waiting lands that contain half the population of the earth: China, India,

and the Muslim world. If the events of Eastern Europe have already miraculously come to pass, so also can governments and individuals respond to the plan of the Lord in the coming days, precipitating further miracles.

However, *we* must bring the same qualities, resolve, capacities, and commitment that made miracles possible a century and a half ago, indeed, fifteen years ago, for those attributes will certainly be required in the decades that lie ahead.

I leave with you my testimony that this is the work of the Lord. May the Lord bless us in our individual efforts and responsibilities against this great challenge of filling the earth and preparing for the Millennium, which work was commenced by the Prophet Joseph Smith and now rests upon our shoulders.

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Elder Keith K. Hilbig is a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy. This essay was presented at "Joseph Smith and the World," the International Society's sixteenth annual conference, April 2005, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.