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# Who Holds the Keys?

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Daniel C. Peterson

**Abstract:** *While, for understandable reasons, Protestant Christendom tends to downplay the question, the more ancient Christian churches have historically placed considerable weight on what is often termed “apostolic succession.” The Catholic church, for instance, strongly affirms the “primacy of Peter” and the status of the Bishop of Rome, the Pope, as ancient Peter’s lineal successor. Curiously, perhaps, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, although it was founded on the American frontier in the early nineteenth century, takes a view of the matter that crucially resembles the Catholic viewpoint more than it does a western Protestant one. But the Latter-day Saint view differs dramatically on the history of the apostolic succession and, accordingly, on the identity of the modern successors to the ancient apostles.*

**S**t. Peter’s Basilica, located in Vatican City (which is, in its turn, surrounded by the ancient city of Rome), is the largest Christian church in the world. It was intended to be so, and to be grand, because it was intended to be a monumental declaration and celebration of the power of the Renaissance papacy.<sup>1</sup> It was built between 1506 and

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1. Perhaps surprisingly, though, it is not a cathedral. What makes a church a cathedral is not its size, although cathedrals commonly rank among the largest of churches. Cathedrals bear that name because, in denominations that use the term, they contain the *cathedra* (Latin for “seat” or “throne”) of a bishop, thus serving as the central church of a “diocese,” “conference,” or “episcopate.” But, strictly speaking, the “seat” of the Pope, who is the Bishop of Rome—which makes it the cathedral of the diocese of Rome—is the *Archibasilica Sanctissimi Salvatoris ac Sancti Ioannis Baptistae et Ioannis Evangelistae ad Lateranum* (“Archbasilica of the Most Holy Savior and Saints John the Baptist and John the Evangelist at the Lateran”) which is located in a district of Rome and is commonly known as the Lateran Basilica or Saint John Lateran.

1626, following designs created by, among others, Donato Bramante, Michelangelo Buonarrotti (yes, *that* Michelangelo), and Carlo Maderno, with the piazza outside and some of the important interior features by Gian Lorenzo Bernini.

I freely admit that, for me, the most jarring expression of papal grandiosity is to be found on the façade of the church, which is (I also grant) surmounted by a relatively small central statue of Jesus. The inscription below the cornice, on the meter-tall frieze that faces Piazza San Pietro, reads as follows: *In Honorem Principis Apost Paulus V Burghesius Romanus Pont Max An MDCXII Pont VII* (“In honor of the Prince of the Apostles, Paul V Borghese, a Roman, Supreme Pontiff, in the year 1612, the seventh of his pontificate”).<sup>2</sup>

But the primary take-away from St. Peter’s isn’t one of an individual pope’s, umm, healthy personal self-esteem. It’s about the claim to apostolic authority of the papacy itself.

The façade is crowned by thirteen statues: The figure of Jesus Christ that has already been mentioned is flanked by eleven of the apostles and John the Baptist. (The apostle Peter stands outside nearer ground level, by the lefthand staircase. The apostle Paul stands outside to the right. For obvious reasons, Judas Iscariot is omitted altogether.) All throughout the immense church are representations of the papal crown atop a pair of crossed keys — the crossed keys being a feature of every papal coat of arms since roughly 1450, and an obvious reference to the keys of authority mentioned in Matthew 16:13–19:

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?

And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets.

He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?

And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon

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2. Pope Paul V, born Camillo Borghese, was born to a Sienese family, but in Rome he apparently liked to emphasize his “Romanness.”

this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.<sup>3</sup>

Written in letters that are nearly a meter and a half high — which is to say, somewhat more than four and a half feet — the Latin inscription on the interior at the base of the dome reads: *Tu es Petrus et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam et tibi dabo claves regni caelorum*. It's a partial quotation from the Latin Vulgate translation of specifically Matthew 16:18–19: "Thou art Peter [*Petrus*], and upon this rock [*petram*] I will build my church . . . and I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven."

Of course, St. Peter's Basilica (like its Constantinian predecessor) was built over the traditional location of the burial place of the apostle Peter. It's a tradition for which I have some sympathy; I think it may be true. And, if so, I think it significant. Permit me to explain why.

Simon, eventually known as Peter, was born somewhat more than 2,000 years ago in the small village of Bethsaida, on the north end of Lake Kinneret, later known as Lake Tiberias and often called "the sea of Galilee." His father's name was Jonah; his mother's name is lost to history.

Bethsaida was a fishing village; its name means "House of Fishing." Except during religious festivals, when so many sacrificial animals were slaughtered that it was sold at discount prices — there were, obviously, no refrigerators in those days — meat was expensive in first-century Palestine. So, whether smoked or pickled, fish was a vital protein source and fishing was a solid trade.

Simon and his brother Andrew took up the trade, presumably following their father. Eventually, they formed a partnership with two brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. And they did well. They owned their own boats and may have had a few employees. At some point, Simon moved a few miles to another tiny lakeside town,

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3. It seems clear from Matthew 18:18 that the keys were given to others along with Peter: The entire chapter has Jesus addressing "the disciples" (οἱ μαθηταί; 18:1), and the relevant pronoun and verbs are in the second person plural: "Verily I say unto you [ὑμῖν], Whatsoever ye shall bind [δῆσητε] on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose [λύσητε] on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

Capernaum, where the likely foundations of his small house have been located.<sup>4</sup>

Had he simply followed the path of his ancestors and his neighbors, Simon would have grown old fishing on the lake. He might have traveled the 120 miles to Jerusalem once or twice at festival season—roughly six days by foot each way—though maybe not. He would have been completely forgotten eighteen or nineteen centuries ago.

Decades after the two sets of brothers established their lakeside fishing business, just after nightfall on AD 18 July 64, fire broke out in a crowded neighborhood of Rome near where the partially ruined Coliseum now stands. Rome was mostly built of wood before the fire, and so, fanned by a hot summer breeze, the flames spread rapidly. They burned for a full week, destroying ten of the city's fourteen districts.

Emperor Nero was trying to avoid the summer heat at his lavish villa in his birthplace, the seaside resort of Antium (modern Anzio), when the news arrived. He hurried back to direct the firefighters and provided makeshift temporary housing for scores of thousands who had been displaced by the disaster. But then his massive ego kicked in. The destruction of most of Rome had provided him, as he saw it, with an opportunity to redesign the city more to his liking—and his liking happened to include an enormous imperial palace very near where the fire had started, set in the middle of a huge park ornamented with . . . well, a 120-foot-tall statue of himself.

Resentful rumors began to circulate that Nero had set the fire deliberately. He needed a scapegoat to shift the blame, so he settled on a new and little known but suspicious sect called “Christians.” Nobody knows how many Christians died—thrown to wild beasts at the circus, crucified, doused with oil and set aflame to illuminate Nero's parties—in the horrific persecution that followed, but early Christian sources touching on the subject unanimously testify that Simon (by this time known as the apostle Peter) had come to Rome and that he was among Nero's victims. There is a strong case to be made, in fact, based upon excavations beginning in 1940, that his tomb is located precisely where tradition has long claimed it to be—directly under the

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4. See Daniel C. Peterson, “Capernaum Bears Witness of Christ,” *Deseret News*, 9 June 2010, [deseret.com/2010/6/9/20679544/capernaum-bears-witness-of-christ/](https://www.deseret.com/2010/6/9/20679544/capernaum-bears-witness-of-christ/).

high altar of St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City — and even that his very bones have been identified.<sup>5</sup>

Peter's apparent martyrdom in Rome poses a powerful challenge, and not merely to historians. "He was known throughout the world," wrote the chronicler Eusebius two and a half centuries after his death, "even in the western countries, and his memory, among the Romans, is still more alive today than the memory of all those who lived before him."<sup>6</sup>

What brought this locally prosperous but seemingly quite commonplace Galilean tradesman to Rome? Simon, whose native language was Aramaic, may have possessed some Greek, but he probably knew relatively little Latin, the language of the imperial capital. What led him to the world's largest city — probably a million or more inhabitants in his day, and overwhelmingly pagan — from the backwater kosher-Jewish fishing village of Capernaum (estimated population 1500)? How did Simon become famous? Why was he executed there by imperial decree?

Plainly, something transformed the ordinary village fisherman Simon of Bethsaida into the courageous, far-traveling, world-historical apostle Peter. It must have been something very significant. And the New Testament suggests a very good possibility for what that was.

But let's return to the keys of authority. There is, as the vast majority of the readers of this essay will already know, a competing narrative about them. According to that narrative, the ancient keys of authority were *not* passed down by the bishops of Rome. They were lost. And then they were restored, returned again to the earth, in the nineteenth century. First, the Aaronic priesthood and its keys were conferred upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery by the resurrected John the Baptist on the banks of the Susquehanna River, near Harmony, Pennsylvania, on 15 May 1829:

We still continued the work of translation, when, in the

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5. For very readable accounts of the excavations beneath St. Peter's Basilica, see John Evangelist Walsh, *The Bones of Saint Peter: The First Full Account of the Search for the Apostle's Body* (New York: Doubleday, 1982), or the shorter and more sketchy *St. Peter's Bones: How the Relics of the First Pope Were Lost and Found . . . and Then Lost Again*, by Thomas Craughwell (New York: Random House, 2014).

6. As quoted by Margherita Guarducci, "Preface," *The Tomb of Saint Peter* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1960), [stpetersbasilica.info/Necropolis/MG/TheTombofStPeter-1.htm](http://stpetersbasilica.info/Necropolis/MG/TheTombofStPeter-1.htm).

ensuing month (May, 1829), we on a certain day went into the woods to pray and inquire of the Lord respecting baptism for the remission of sins, that we found mentioned in the translation of the plates. While we were thus employed, praying and calling upon the Lord, a messenger from heaven descended in a cloud of light, and having laid his hands upon us, he ordained us, saying:

*Upon you my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah, I confer the Priesthood of Aaron, which holds the keys of the ministering of angels, and of the gospel of repentance, and of baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; and this shall never be taken again from the earth until the sons of Levi do offer again an offering unto the Lord in righteousness. (Joseph Smith — History 1:68–69; compare Doctrine and Covenants 13.)*

Not long thereafter, the authority of the higher or Melchizedek priesthood was conferred upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery by

Peter, and James, and John, whom I have sent unto you, by whom I have ordained you and confirmed you to be apostles, and especial witnesses of my name, and bear the keys of your ministry and of the same things which I revealed unto them;

Unto whom I have committed the keys of my kingdom, and a dispensation of the gospel for the last times; and for the fulness of times, in the which I will gather together in one all things, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth. (Doctrine and Covenants 27:12–13)

And, finally, on 3 April 1836 a series of specialized keys of particular authority for particular tasks were conferred upon Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the newly dedicated temple at Kirtland, Ohio:

After this vision closed, the heavens were again opened unto us; and Moses appeared before us, and committed unto us the keys of the gathering of Israel from the four parts of the earth, and the leading of the ten tribes from the land of the north.

After this, Elias appeared, and committed the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham, saying that in us and our seed all generations after us should be blessed.

After this vision had closed, another great and glorious

vision burst upon us; for Elijah the prophet, who was taken to heaven without tasting death, stood before us, and said:

Behold, the time has fully come, which was spoken of by the mouth of Malachi — testifying that he [Elijah] should be sent, before the great and dreadful day of the Lord come —

To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, lest the whole earth be smitten with a curse —

Therefore, the keys of this dispensation are committed into your hands; and by this ye may know that the great and dreadful day of the Lord is near, even at the doors. (Doctrine and Covenants 110:11–16)

Eventually, though, as Joseph Smith's earthly ministry was approaching its tragic end—by this time, Oliver Cowdery was out of the Church and, thus, unavailable for its leadership—he passed the keys of the authority that he had received from heavenly messengers on to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. This event very likely occurred on the morning of 26 March 1844, almost exactly three months before his murder in Carthage, Illinois, at the hands of an anti-Mormon mob.<sup>7</sup> Ever since then, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been governed, and the ordinances of salvation and exaltation have been administered, under the authority of those priesthood keys.

A story related by the late Elder Boyd K. Packer—who served as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles from April 1970, and who presided over the Quorum from February 2008 until his death in July 2015—serves as a striking illustration of the claim made by the Restored Church.

In 1976, the Church held a European area conference in Copenhagen, Denmark. After the closing session, President Spencer W. Kimball expressed a desire to visit the Vor Frue Kirke, the "Church of Our Lady," which is the city's Lutheran cathedral. President Kimball

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7. See Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, "'There's the Boy I Can Trust': Dennison Lott Harris' First-Person Account of the Conspiracy of Nauvoo and Events Surrounding Joseph Smith's 'Last Charge' to the Twelve Apostles," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 21 (2016): 23–117, [journal.interpreterfoundation.org/theres-the-boy-i-can-trust-dennison-lott-harris-first-person-account-of-the-conspiracy-of-nauvoo-and-events-surrounding-joseph-smiths-last-charge/](http://journal.interpreterfoundation.org/theres-the-boy-i-can-trust-dennison-lott-harris-first-person-account-of-the-conspiracy-of-nauvoo-and-events-surrounding-joseph-smiths-last-charge/). For a more recent treatment of this episode, see Jeffrey M. Bradshaw, *Emer Harris & Dennison Lott Harris: Owner of the First Copy of the Book of Mormon, Witness of the "Last Charge" of Joseph Smith* (self-pub., 2023).



had visited that church several years earlier, and he wanted those who were with him to see it, as well.

Behind the altar of Vor Frue Kirke stands Bertel Thorvaldsen's statue of the *Christus*, so familiar to Latter-day Saints from our visitors' centers and, now, as part of the Church's official logo. He is the resurrected, living Savior. He has already atoned for our sins and he stands with his arms outstretched toward us, his hands bearing the imprint of the nails and the wound in his side clearly visible. On either side of the *Christus* along the cathedral's walls stand the statues of the apostles. Peter is at the front right and the other apostles stand in order.

The words that follow are those of Elder Packer himself:

Most of our group was near the rear of the chapel with the custodian. I stood up front with President Kimball before the statue of Peter with Elder Rex D. Pinegar and Johan Helge Benthin, president of the Copenhagen stake.

In Peter's hand, depicted in marble, is a set of heavy keys. President Kimball pointed to those keys and explained what they symbolized. Then, in an act I shall never forget, he turned to President Benthin and with unaccustomed firmness pointed his finger at him and said, "I want you to tell everyone in Denmark that I hold the keys! We hold the *real* keys, and we use them every day."

I will never forget that declaration, that testimony from the prophet. The influence was spiritually powerful; the impression was physical in its impact.

We walked to the back of the chapel where the rest of the group was standing. Pointing to the statues, President Kimball said to the kind custodian, "These are the dead Apostles." Pointing to me, he said, "Here we have the *living* Apostles. Elder Packer is an Apostle. Elder Thomas S. Monson and Elder L. Tom Perry are Apostles, and I am an Apostle. We are the living Apostles.

"You read about the Seventies in the New Testament, and here are two of the living Seventies, Elder Rex D. Pinegar and Elder Robert D. Hales."

The custodian, who up to that time had shown no emotion, suddenly was in tears.

I felt I had had an experience of a lifetime.<sup>8</sup>

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8. Boyd K. Packer, "The Twelve," *Ensign*, May 2008, 85, churchofjesuschrist.org

And the implications of this claim, if it is true, are enormous. Here, I mention just one of them: Many members, especially those of a more seasoned generation, may recall a passage from Elder LeGrand Richards's long-popular 1950 book, *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*.<sup>9</sup> It is a passage that he quoted from a pamphlet written by his fellow apostle Elder Orson F. Whitney (1855–1931).

Of course, the sentiment expressed in the quotation predates the liberalizing theological and ecclesiological reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) and it may not precisely reflect current Catholic sentiment. Moreover, many Americans are much more aware today than they were during my youth that Christendom isn't exhausted by the simple Protestant/Catholic divide with which I grew up. There are also several churches claiming apostolic succession in, broadly speaking, the Orthodox tradition.<sup>10</sup> But I still think that the sentiments of a Catholic theologian that Elder Richards cited from Elder Whitney help to make an important aspect of the Restoration both clear and memorable:

A Catholic Opinion. — Many years ago there came to Utah a learned doctor of divinity, a member of the Roman Catholic Church. I became well acquainted with him, and we conversed freely and frankly. A great scholar, with perhaps a

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</study/general-conference/2008/04/the-twelve>.

9. LeGrand Richards, *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1950).

10. From 1978 to 1979, while my wife and I were first living in Cairo, our nearest neighbor was the American Lutheran pastor of the nearby expatriate Protestant church. We became friends, and we continued to interact even after my wife and I moved to another apartment. He told me rather indignantly one day of his attempts to meet with leaders of the Coptic Orthodox Church—the historically dominant Christian church of Egypt, headed by the Patriarch of Alexandria, who is often referred to in Arabic as the Baba or Pope. Basically, the Coptic leaders ignored him. To them, he said, since he was outside of the apostolic succession—a schismatic whose church had split off from the Catholic line of authority—he was a mere layman, with neither ecclesiastical authority nor status. They, by contrast, derived their authority from St. Mark, the Gospel writer, who, tradition says, brought Christianity to Egypt. To his chagrin, they treated Catholics quite differently. For a story from my own personal experience of how the late Pope St. John Paul II attempted to negotiate the matter of apostolic succession without emphasizing "Petrine supremacy," see my *Deseret News* column for 10 September 2020, "When the Pope left the Vatican for a Meeting of Healing," [deseret.com/faith/2020/9/10/21424515/daniel-peterson-pope-john-paul-ii-vatican-meeting-healing-saint-paul-outside-the-walls-rome-italy/](https://www.deseret.com/faith/2020/9/10/21424515/daniel-peterson-pope-john-paul-ii-vatican-meeting-healing-saint-paul-outside-the-walls-rome-italy/).

dozen languages at his tongue's end, he seemed to know all about theology, law, literature, science and philosophy, and was never weary of displaying his vast erudition. One day he said to me: "You Mormons are all ignoramuses. You don't even know the strength of your own position. It is so strong that there is only one other tenable in the whole Christian world, and that is the position of the Catholic Church. The issue is between Catholicism and Mormonism. If we are right, you are wrong; if you are right, we are wrong; and that's all there is to it. The Protestants haven't a leg to stand on. If we are wrong, they are wrong with us, for they were a part of us and went out from us; while if we are right, they are apostates whom we cut off long ago. If we really have, as we claim, the apostolic succession from St. Peter, there was no need for Joseph Smith and Mormonism; but if we have not that succession, then such a man as Joseph Smith was necessary, and Mormonism's attitude is the only consistent one. It is either the perpetuation of the Gospel from ancient times, or the restoration of the Gospel in latter days."<sup>11</sup>

It is, I think, clearly no coincidence that precise Carrara marble replicas of Bertel Thorvaldsen's twelve apostles, including Peter, who is easily identified because of the massive keys that he holds, now stand in the Visitors' Center adjacent to the landmark Rome Italy Temple. They make a statement. It is the same statement that was made so powerfully in Copenhagen back in 1976 by the meek and mild Spencer W. Kimball — short of stature but an ordained apostle and a mighty prophet of God. It is the same statement that is made by the iconic photographs that were taken in March 2019 of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve — all of the living apostles at the time — in front of those statues in the Visitors' Center in Rome. This was the

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11. Orson F. Whitney, *Saturday Night Thoughts*, Part 3 (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1921), 63–64, [gutenberg.org/cache/epub/56691/pg56691-images.html](http://gutenberg.org/cache/epub/56691/pg56691-images.html) - ARTICLETEN. Kevin Barney writes that the Catholic theologian's name is John M. Reiner, according to Orson F. Whitney's autobiography, *Through Memory's Halls: The Life Story of Orson F. Whitney, as Told by Himself* (Independence, MO: Zion's Printing and Publishing, 1930), 222–23. Kevin Barney, "Question: What do we know about Orson F. Whitney's 'Strength of the Mormon Position' claim regarding a Catholic Theologian?" Fair Latter-day Saints (website), [fairlatterdaysaints.org/answers/Question:\\_What\\_do\\_we\\_know\\_about\\_Orson\\_F.\\_Whitney%27s\\_'Strength\\_of\\_the\\_Mormon\\_Position'\\_claim\\_regarding\\_a\\_Catholic\\_theologian%3F-cite\\_note-2](http://fairlatterdaysaints.org/answers/Question:_What_do_we_know_about_Orson_F._Whitney%27s_'Strength_of_the_Mormon_Position'_claim_regarding_a_Catholic_theologian%3F-cite_note-2).

very first time in the history of the modern Church that all of the living apostles were gathered together outside of the United States. It's an audacious statement but, clearly, we do not back away from it.

One of the most memorable experiences of my life, and certainly of the years that I spent living and studying in Cairo, was the six months or so that I studied Islamic philosophy, one on one, with Father Georges Anawati OP (1905–1994) of the Institut dominicain d'études orientales.

He was a wonderful person. Once, having bought and just begun to read a book by F. E. Peters of New York University, I noticed that it was dedicated to Father Anawati, "of the Dominican Institute and the Kingdom of God." I was so pleased at that dedication that I located Professor Peters's office telephone number and called it, thinking to leave a message of gratitude. It was late at night in Utah and early in the morning in New York City, but, to my surprise, Professor Peters was in his office and answered the phone. We reminisced for about twenty minutes about our mutual friend, who had passed away several years before.

Here, though, is the experience that I specifically wish to share: One day, while I was reading through a text with him at the Institut Dominicain, which was housed in a Dominican monastery in Cairo, it suddenly hit me how wildly unlikely it was that the claims of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were uniquely true. Here I was, studying the sophisticated intellectual products of one of the world's great religions, Islam, with a Dominican priest and monk, an internationally prominent scholar, theologian, and philosopher, who, as such, was a sophisticated representative of another of the world's great religions and intellectual traditions, Catholic Christianity. Even at that time—it has grown enormously since then—Greater Cairo alone was fifteen to twenty times the size of the metropolitan Salt Lake City area and very few Latter-day Saints, almost all of them expatriates in those days, lived there.

Islam, as we know it, is nearly a millennium and a half old. Catholicism claims a heritage of two thousand years. By contrast, during the months that I was studying with Father Anawati, the Restoration was about a century and a half old. For most of that time, our people had been a small and isolated group out in the Great Basin West, preoccupied with digging irrigation canals and building little settlements in a demanding, remote, semi-arid landscape. Provincial and tiny in number, we had made few if any notable contributions to world culture. Thomas Aquinas, Ibn Sina, Albertus Magnus, al-Farabi . . . no

Latter-day Saint has yet managed to enter that pantheon, even today. Nor even close.

The audacity of Latter-day Saint claims seemed breathtaking. And yet, it occurred to me almost immediately that my feelings at that moment must not be altogether different from those that an early Christian might have held at roughly the dawn of the third century. In 200 AD, Michelangelo, Dante, Augustine, Milton, Aquinas, Handel, Kierkegaard, and the host of other great Christian thinkers, composers, writers, and artists yet to come were still far, and sometimes very far, in the future—and, in a sense, essentially inconceivable. The proportion of the population of the Mediterranean basin that was Christian at the beginning of the third century AD—to say nothing of the proportion of the inhabitants of the globe overall—was still negligible. That Christianity would expand to be a major world religion wasn't yet at all obvious.

The mood passed quickly, but I've never forgotten it. However, I don't worry about the issue much. Have we climbed to the summit of world culture and science yet? Probably not. But good things will come, in their time. Have we converted the entire world? Not even close. But we've spread throughout much of it. The global expansion of the Church is manifest in our General Conferences, with speakers not only from North America but South America, Europe, Asia, and Africa, and with temples announced around the globe.<sup>12</sup>

"We will yet have Miltons and Shakespeares of our own," predicted the future apostle Orson F. Whitney in June 1888.

God's ammunition is not exhausted. His brightest spirits are held in reserve for the latter times. In God's name and by His help we will build up a literature whose top shall touch heaven, though its foundations may now be low in earth. Let the smile of derision wreath the face of scorn; let the frown of hatred darken the brow of bigotry. Small things are the seeds of great things, and, like the acorn that brings forth the oak, or the snow-flake that forms the avalanche, God's kingdom will grow, and on wings of light and power soar to the summit of its destiny. Let us onward, then, and upward, keeping the goal in view; living not in the dead past, nor for

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12. No Antarcticans have yet been called to the ranks of the General Authorities, of course—an ongoing scandal that awaits proper exploitation by our critics.

the dying present. The future is our field. Eternity is before us.<sup>13</sup>

Those of us who volunteer our services through The Interpreter Foundation do so because we believe that the truths of the Gospel and the keys of authority to administer its ordinances have been restored in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

I cite the words of President Russell M. Nelson from the April Conference of 2024:

These keys authorized Joseph Smith — and all succeeding Presidents of the Lord’s Church — to gather Israel on both sides of the veil, to bless all covenant children with the blessings of Abraham, to place a ratifying seal on priesthood ordinances and covenants, and to seal families eternally. The power of these priesthood keys is infinite and breathtaking.

Consider how *your* life would be different if priesthood keys had not been restored to the earth. Without priesthood keys, you could not be endowed with the power of God. Without priesthood keys, the Church could serve only as a significant teaching and humanitarian organization but not much more. Without priesthood keys, none of us would have access to essential ordinances and covenants that bind us to our loved ones eternally and allow us eventually to live with God.

Priesthood keys distinguish The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from any other organization on earth. Many other organizations *can* and *do* make your life better here in mortality. But no other organization *can* and *will* influence your life after death.

Priesthood keys give us the authority to extend all of the blessings promised to Abraham to every covenant-keeping man and woman.<sup>14</sup>

I am grateful to all of those — authors, reviewers, designers, source checkers, copy editors, donors, and others — who make possible the Foundation’s work of commending, defending, and elucidating the claims of that Restoration. In particular, with regard to this volume of

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13. Orson F. Whitney, “Home Literature,” *The Contributor* 9, no. 8 (June 1888): 300, [archive.org/details/contributor0908eng/page/300/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/contributor0908eng/page/300/mode/2up).

14. Russell M. Nelson, “Rejoice in the Gift of Priesthood Keys,” *Liahona*, May 2024, 121.

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**[Author's Note:** *Understanding that there are a few highly critical readers who believe it possible for an author, sans attribution, to plagiarize his own past works, I freely admit that portions of this essay—particularly the recitations of personal stories and recollections—have appeared previously in various online venues. In this admission I seek nothing more than to protect the tender literary sensibilities of those few readers. Forewarned is forearmed, so let the reader beware. To the not-so-tender reader, however, the points I chose to raise will, no doubt, be identifiable and understandable despite my blatant literary malfeasance.]*

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