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Review of Mormonism and the Making of a British Zion, by Matthew Lyman Rasmussen

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THROUGH EIGHT CHAPTERS AND FOUR APPENDIXES, Rasmussen develops a book from a previous postgraduate dissertation on the emergence and organization of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Great Britain. As with numerous regional-national histories of Mormonism, *Mormonism and the Making of a British Zion* includes basic elements of Mormonism's emergence in the US, but always with a keen eye on the UK and, more specifically still, on North West England. While Liverpool was the key seaport for early missionaries traveling to the UK, and for the emigration of converts to the US in the last half of the nineteenth century, Preston and its River Ribble Valley environs are shown to have assumed more than geographical or transportational significance. Here we encounter some of the book's major themes as empirical information derived from considerable historical, archival, local, and oral history research engages with descriptive interpretations of church doctrine, organization, and policy. For this review I single out just two themes, what might best be called inspired tradition, on the one hand, and intergenerational flourishing, on the other.

By inspired tradition, I refer to what emerged as a prophetic charter for viewing the Ribble Valley area as its own form of sacred place, a perspective seen to motivate generations of Latter-day Saints in this area. When one of Joseph Smith's key associates, Heber C. Kimball, arrived as a missionary to this area in 1837, he met with considerable success that was soon reinforced by nine other key church leaders. Just

before returning to the US in April 1838, he experienced such intense feelings that he “was constrained” to remove his hat while sensing that “the place was holy ground” (p. 4). When Kimball asked Joseph why this had been so, the Prophet explained that “this is the place where some of the old Prophets travelled and dedicated that land, and their blessing fell upon you.” Rasmussen sees this explanation as engendering “long-term significance for British Mormonism” in the sense that the region gained prophetic sanction as its own form of sacred place (p. 5). For example, the area, which contains the longest uninterrupted existence of a Mormon congregation anywhere (including the US), was chosen as the site for the UK’s second temple—the Preston England Temple—at Chorley in 1998. Mormon culture can seldom be understood apart from the interplay of the grandly eternal plan of salvation with local narratives, and this is how the book’s chapters unfold in accounts of Mormonism’s notion of “the gathering” of converts through periods of “establishment and expansion,” “consolidation and decline,” “opponents, apostates, and dissenters,” “revivals and reversals and the struggle for stability in the twentieth century.” All this is clearly documented and with good use of the UK-focused, long-running, and highly significant LDS newspaper-journal the *Millennial Star*.

As for intergenerational flourishing, two significant points can be made. The first is well represented in Rasmussen’s sketched account of internal UK migration of church members, especially older and retired people, to live near the temple in Chorley. The establishment of such a sacred space within a geographically sacred place is seen to have catalyzed this movement in which “temple work” on behalf of the dead may come into its own. He rightly advocated the need for further research on this topic, especially in an era when older people sense a need to live creative and appreciated lives. This is a valuable point, reminding me of the rise of elderly Christians engaging in hand copying the Bible text in South Korea.¹ But shifts carry consequences, and such an attraction of people can lead to decline in local church strength where these internal

1. See Chang-Won Park, *Cultural Blending in Korean Death Rites: New Interpretive Approaches* (New York: Continuum, 2010).

migrants had once lived. A second intergenerational factor concerns the need for current LDS families to retain their children as active church members, and Rasmussen identifies the joint necessity of “the temple and the home” in this process (p. 190). This theme is probably more pressing in 2017 than it was even during Rasmussen’s period of active research.

Matthew Rasmussen gives us a good read, incorporating named local individuals and events within the wider dynamics of US church strategy. Non-Mormon readers will learn a great deal about the LDS Church at large in and through this cameo of an unusually “sacred space.”

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