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THE LIVING EARTH: A NINETEENTH-CENTURY LATTER-DAY SAINT PERSPECTIVE

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Brigham Young University

Nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints spoke frequently of the earth, its nature, and its relationship to humanity. They referred to the earth in anthropomorphic terms. It was a living orb endowed with intelligence and feelings. The earth's life paralleled that of the humans who lived on it. So entwined were the lives of the earth and its humanity that one could not act without affecting the other. From surviving nineteenth-century sermons and writings, it is possible to construct a biography or life story of the earth—a nineteenth-century biography from the Latter-day Saint perspective.

The Earth's Creation

Jesus Christ created the earth and everything in it through the power of the priesthood and under the direction of our Heavenly Father (see Moses 1:33). Like man, the earth was created spiritually before it was created physically (see Moses 3:5). Joseph Smith explained that “spirit is a substance; that it is material, but that it is more pure, elastic and refined matter” than that which composes physical entities.¹ He also explained that the substance we call spirit is made of light (see Doctrine and Covenants 84:45). A revelation given in 1832 through Joseph Smith stated that light is in all things and is the law by which all things are governed, even the earth upon which we stand (see Doctrine and Covenants 88: 10, 13). This same revelation teaches us that light gives life to all things. Joseph Smith explained “that light and life and spirit [are] one; that all light and heat are the ‘Glory of God,’ which is his power, that fills the ‘immensity of space,’ and is the life of all things, and permeates with latent life, and heat, every particle of which all worlds are composed; that light or spirit, and matter, are the two first great primary principles of the universe, or of Being; that they are self-existent, co-existent, indestructible, and eternal.”²

The dual nature, physical and spiritual, of the earth's matter means that it is alive with spirit and light. Brigham Young said, "There is life in all matter, throughout the vast extent of all the eternities; it is in the rock, the sand, the dust, in water, air, the gases, and, in short, in every description and organization of matter, whether it be solid, liquid, or gaseous."³ When God formed man from the dust of the ground, before he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, man's body was alive with light and spirit which had come from mother earth's living matter (see Moses 3:7). He then breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life, which was the unique intelligence we also call spirit (see Moses 3:7 and Abraham 3:22). When a man dies, his spirit intelligence separates from his body, but there is still life in his body, which returns to the dust of the earth (see Genesis 3:19). Brigham Young taught, "Is there life in a tree when it ceases to put forth leaves? You see it standing upright, and when it ceases to bear leaves and fruit you say it is dead, but that is a mistake. It still has life, but that life operates upon the tree in another way, and continues to operate until it resolves it to the native elements. It is life in another condition that begins to operate upon man, upon animals, upon vegetations, and upon minerals when we see the change termed dissolution. There is life in the material of the fleshly tabernacle, independent of the spirit given of God to undergo this probation. There is life in all matter, throughout the vast extent of all the eternities."⁴

In planning to create the physical earth, Christ said to those who were with him, "We will go down, for there is space there . . . and we will make an earth whereon these [the spirit children of our Father in Heaven] may dwell" (Abraham 3:24). Under the direction of the Father, Christ formed and organized the physical earth. Joseph Smith explained that the word *create* as used in Genesis "does not mean to create out of nothing; it means to organize; the same as a man would organize materials and build a ship. Hence, we infer that God had materials to organize the world

out of chaos—chaotic matter, which is element, and in which dwells all the glory.”⁵ Speaking of this matter, Orson Pratt said, “How many thousand millions of times the elements of our globe have been organized and disorganized; or how many millions of shapes or forms the elements have been thrown into in their successive organizations and disorganizations; or how widely the particles have been diffused through boundless space; or of how many different worlds these particles have, at one time and another, formed component parts; or how long they have been parts of the solar system; or how long that system itself has formed a branch of our stellar heavens—is unknown to us mortals.”⁶

Nineteenth-century Church leaders likened the earth’s creation to human birth. According to Orson Pratt, the earth experienced upheavals that caused the dry land to come forth from the “womb of mighty waters,” and as “it came forth from the ocean floor, like the new-born child, it was innocent.”⁷ “Where did the earth come from?” Heber C. Kimball asked. “From its parent earths,” he said, answering his own question.⁸ This is consistent with Joseph Smith’s statement that the “earth was organized or formed out of other planets which were broken up and remodeled and made into the one on which we live.”⁹

Like man, the earth was born with a spirit intelligence that was unique from the living matter that made up its physical presence. Heber C. Kimball said, “Some say the earth exists without spirit; I do not believe any such thing; it has a spirit as much as any body has a spirit.”¹⁰ Orson Pratt said, “What! is the earth alive too? If it were not, how could the words of our text be fulfilled, where it speaks of the earth's dying? How can that die that has no life?”¹¹ Since Brigham Young explained that “death only separates the spirit and body, and a principle of life still operates in the untenanted tabernacle,” we can assume the death spoken of here is the separation of the spirit intelligence from the physical earth, and not the annihilation of the earth’s

living matter.¹² Joseph Smith taught that the earth was not created to be annihilated.¹³ However, at this early time, death was not a possibility for the earth. It was not yet mortal. As Orson Pratt explained, “immortality reigned in every department of creation; hence it was pronounced very ‘good.’”¹⁴

The Earth’s Fall

When Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden of Eden, they were not yet mortal. There was no death. They existed, like the earth, in a paradisiacal state.¹⁵ The garden was located in what is today, Independence, Missouri.¹⁶ Located in this garden was the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which God commanded Adam and Eve not to partake of, saying “for in the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Moses 3:9, 17). Satan tempted Adam and Eve, and they ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, sometimes called the tree of death.¹⁷

Adam and Eve’s physical condition changed as a result of their eating the forbidden fruit. They became mortal and could now die. Emphasizing humanity’s unique connection with the earth, God said, “for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Genesis 3:19). In other words, their spirits could separate from their bodies. Because of their transgression, they also suffered spiritual death, which meant they could no longer talk face to face with God. Heavenly Father sent them out of the Garden of Eden into the earth, which was now also mortal (see Moses 4:29-31). God told Adam, “Cursed is the ground for thy sake” (Genesis 3:17). These changes that came upon Adam, Eve, and the earth are called the *fall*. Orson Pratt said, “So far as the original sin is concerned, mankind and the earth keep pace with each other. When one falls the other falls.”¹⁸

When God drove Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden, they made their way to a place called Adam-ondi-Ahman.¹⁹ There they built an altar and offered sacrifices. An angel appeared to them and asked Adam why he was offering sacrifices, and Adam answered, “I know not, save the Lord commanded me” (Moses 5:6). The angel then explained, “This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth” (Moses 5:7). The Holy Ghost then fell upon Adam and taught him the plan of salvation (see Moses 5:9). Adam learned that Jesus Christ would come into the world “to be crucified for the world, and to bear the sins of the world, and to sanctify the world, and to cleanse it from all unrighteousness, that through him all might be saved” (Doctrine and Covenants 76:41-42).

The atonement of Jesus Christ was to overcome death, both physical and spiritual. Because of the atonement, all persons born on this earth will be resurrected (see Corinthians 15:21-22). Those who accept Christ’s atonement can also overcome spiritual death and return to live with God (Doctrine and Covenants 19:16-17). Orson Pratt taught, “The earth, like the posterity of Adam, was cursed because of original sin, and like them it will be redeemed unconditionally, and restored again into the presence of God. . . . When one is redeemed, the other is redeemed also.”²⁰ Brigham Young said, “The curse will be taken from the earth and sin and corruption will be swept from its face.”²¹

The Mortal Earth

In a revelation given to Joseph Smith in March 1832, the Lord stated that the Earth is going through a “temporal existence” (Doctrine and Covenants 77:6). The fall of Adam and Eve affected the earth and all things upon it (see Moses 4:24; Genesis 3:18). God turned Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden and into the temporal earth (Moses 4:29, 5:1; Genesis 3:23). Having learned that Jesus Christ would atone for the sins of the world, Adam began to teach his

posterity the plan of salvation. Yet Satan came among the posterity of Adam, and “they believed it not, and they loved Satan more than God. And men began from that time forth to be carnal, sensual, and devilish” (Moses 5:13). Brigham Young said, “During this time the earth and all creation groaned in sin, and enmity increased, and the lives of men and beasts decreased.”²² Orson Pratt said, “Had there been no other sin but that of Adam’s, the redeemed earth would have become the eternal abode of all the posterity of Adam, without one exception. But both man and the earth have been still further corrupted by other sins.”²³

The sins of humanity affected the earth, even pained and hurt the earth. Parley P. Pratt said that a spiritual body was “an individual intelligence, an agent, endowed with life, with a degree of independence, or inherent will, with the powers of motion, of thought, and with attributes of moral, intellectual, and sympathetic affections and emotions.”²⁴ The earth’s response to human sin shows just such a spirit in the earth. Joseph Smith’s translation of the Bible states that the prophet Enoch heard the earth speak, saying, “Wo, wo is me, the mother of men; I am pained, I am weary, because of the wickedness of my children. When shall I rest, and be cleansed from the filthiness which is gone forth out of me? When will my Creator sanctify me that I may rest, and righteousness for a season abide upon my face?” When Enoch “heard the earth mourn, he wept, and cried unto the Lord, saying: O Lord, wilt thou not have compassion upon the earth?” (Moses 7:48-49). The Book of Mormon teaches that “because of the groanings of the earth, many kings . . . shall be wrought upon by the Spirit of God, to exclaim: The God of nature suffers” (1 Nephi 19:12). Both Jeremiah and Isaiah declared that the “earth mourneth” because the “earth is defiled under the inhabitants thereof, because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinances, broken the everlasting covenant” (Isaiah 24:40-5, 33:9; Jeremiah 4:28).

The physical earth has gone through many changes over the course of its existence. When Adam held a great priesthood meeting at Adam-ondhi-Ahman, Orson Pratt tells us that he “gathered out the righteous from all the nations, and as there was not Atlantic Ocean in those days rolling between the eastern and western continents, they could gather together by land from Asia, Africa and Europe. In those days the earth was not divided.”²⁵ The scriptures tell us that it was in the days of Peleg that the earth was divided (see Genesis 10:25). Some physical changes that have taken place on the earth are closely related to the human drama unfolding on the earth. Matthew tells us that when Jesus was crucified and “yielded up the ghost,” the earth “did quake, and the rocks rent” (Matthew 27:50-51). The Book of Mormon is more explicit, describing great tempest, terrible thunder, sharp lightnings, whirlwinds, and great quaking. The City of Moroni sank into the sea. The city of Moronihah was buried beneath a mountain. Highways were broken up; roads leveled. People were carried away in whirlwinds. “The whole earth became deformed” (3 Nephi 8:5-20).

For Brigham Young, the moral corruption of humans went hand in hand with the physical corruption of the earth. He said, “The soil, the air, the water are all pure and healthy. Do not suffer them to become polluted with wickedness. Strive to preserve the elements from being contaminated by filthy, wicked conduct and sayings.”²⁶ There is divine justice in God’s use of the Earth in punishing humanity for its wickedness. After Cain killed Abel, the Lord said to Cain, “art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother’s blood from thy hand; When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth” (Genesis 4:11-12). God said to Noah, “the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth” (Genesis 6:13). When three wicked men rebelled against the priesthood authority of

Moses, “the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up” (Numbers 16:32). Job warned “the earth shall rise up against [humanity]” (Job 20:27). In the Book of Mormon, Nephi prophesied, “they that kill the prophets, and the saints, the depths of the earth shall swallow them up” (2 Nephi 26:5). In a warning to the wicked, Heber C. Kimball said, “We will let you know that the earth can swallow you up.”²⁷

Like humankind, the earth is growing old and weary of sin. Orson Pratt stated, “The earth has not been permitted to rest during the period of four thousand years and upwards Wickedness again has accumulated upon its face. The inhabitants of the earth have corrupted and defiled the earth by their transgression.”²⁸ In the last days, we are told that the “earth shall quake” (Joel 2:10) and “shall remove out of her place” (2 Nephi 23:13). Isaiah tells us, “The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage; and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall” (Isaiah 24:20). A revelation given through Joseph Smith in December 1832 states that the earth shall die (see Doctrine and Covenants 88:26). Isaiah prophesied that the “earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner” (Isaiah 51:6).

The Earth’s Redemption

Orson Pratt explained, “as the earth has been corrupted by other sins than the original, it must partake of the curses of the second death after it is redeemed from the curses of the first, unless God has provided a way for its sanctification and redemption therefrom. It has seemed good unto the great Redeemer to institute ordinances for the cleansing, sanctification, and eternal redemption of the earth, not from the original sin, but from the sins of the posterity of Adam. The first ordinance instituted for the cleansing of the earth, was that of immersion in water.”²⁹ As recorded in Genesis, the Lord said, “I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to

destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die” (Genesis 6:17). Noah and his family made a covenant with the Lord and entered the ark with beasts of every kind from the earth. For forty days and nights it rained, flooding the earth and killing all that lived on it. Waters prevailed on the earth for one hundred and fifty days before the flood receded and dry land once again appeared (see Genesis 7-8). Orson Pratt said that this was the earth’s “second birth from the womb of mighty waters” and as the earth came forth from the ocean it was “clothed with all the innocence of its first creation.”³⁰ Brigham Young explained, “The Lord baptized the earth for the remission of sins, and it has been once cleansed from the filthiness that has gone out of it, which was in the inhabitants who dwelt upon its face.”³¹ Joseph Smith said that God who once “cleansed the violence of the earth with a flood,” promised that he would purify the earth “again with fire in the last days.”³²

Orson Pratt said, “As the earth was cleansed from its transgression by baptism in water, so it must again be cleansed, before it is made immortal. It must be cleansed by an element that is stronger and more purifying than that of water, namely, the element of fire. Fire must prevail over all the face of this earth. What for? For the purpose of cleansing the earth from its transgressions, the same as the Latter-day Saints expect to be cleansed and purified more fully than by baptism in water—by the baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost.”³³

The fire and cleansing of the earth will occur at the second coming of Jesus Christ to the earth (see Doctrine and Covenants 101:24-25). Preceding His second coming, Christ will provide us with signs that will warn us that His coming is near. We can expect earthquakes, disease, and famines (see Matthew 24:7), and great storms, lightnings, and thunder (see Doctrine and Covenants 88:90). Hailstorms will destroy the crops of the earth (Doctrine and Covenants 29:16).

When Christ returns, He will judge the nations and will divide the righteous from the wicked (Matthew 25:31-46). John the Revelator wrote, “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works” (Revelation 20:12). The prophet Alma testified, “Our words will condemn us, yea all our works will condemn us; . . . and our thoughts will also condemn us” (Alma 12:14). The Lord himself said, “Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned” (Matthew 12:36-37). The Earth will also assist the Lord in judging humanity. Moses called upon the Earth to witness against wicked Israel (Deut. 4:26, 30:19, 31:28). Isaiah warned that the “earth also shall disclose her blood” (Isaiah 26:21).

Christ is coming to usher in the Millennium, the thousand years of peace, love, and joy on the earth. It will be the final thousand years of the earth’s temporal existence. Only righteous people will continue to live on the earth during the Millennium. While mortal humans will continue to inhabit the earth, they will be visited and helped by immortal beings.³⁴ During the Millennium, Jesus Christ will “reign personally upon the earth,” and the earth will again be as it was when Adam and Eve lived in the Garden of Eden (tenth article of faith). In a revelation given through Joseph Smith in 1831, the Lord said that during the Millennium there would not be different continents as we have now, but the land will all be gathered in one place as it was in the beginning (see Doctrine and Covenants 133:23-24). There will be two world capitals, one in Jerusalem and the other in America (Isaiah 2:3). During the Millennium, Satan will be bound and will not have power to tempt those who are living on the earth (Doctrine and Covenants 101:28; 1 Nephi 22:26). There will be no war; all living things will live in peace (Isaiah 2:4).

At the second coming of Jesus Christ, many will be resurrected. Isaiah tells us that the “earth shall cast out the dead” (Isaiah 26:19). In a revelation given through Joseph Smith in 1831, the Lord said, “And the graves of the saints shall be opened; and they shall come forth and stand on the right hand of the Lamb, when he shall stand upon Mount Zion, and upon the holy city, the New Jerusalem” (Doctrine and Covenants 133:56). Orson Pratt said that after the saints “have died as the earth will die, they will have to be resurrected, as this earth will be resurrected, and then receive their inheritance upon it.”³⁵

The Celestial Earth

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). “Who are the meek?” asked Orson Pratt. “None but those who receive the ordinances of the Gospel, and live according to them; they must receive the same ordinances the earth has received, and be baptized with fire and with the Holy Ghost, as this earth will be when Jesus comes to reign upon it a thousand years; and be clothed upon with the glory of God, as this earth will be; and after they have died as the earth will die, they will have to be resurrected, as this earth will be resurrected, and then receive their inheritance upon it.”³⁶ In a revelation given through Joseph Smith in 1832, the Lord said, “And again, verily I say unto you, the earth abideth the law of a celestial kingdom, for it filleth the measure of its creation, and transgresseth not the law—Wherefore, it shall be sanctified; yea, notwithstanding it shall die, it shall be quickened again, and shall abide the power by which it is quickened, and the righteous shall inherit it” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:25-26).

The earth that the meek inherit will be a transformed, glorified, celestialized earth. A revelation given through Joseph Smith in 1831 stated, “Nevertheless, he that endureth in faith and doeth my will, the same shall overcome, and shall receive an inheritance upon the earth

when the day of transfiguration shall come; when the earth shall be transfigured, even according to the pattern which was shown unto mine apostles upon the mount” (Doctrine and Covenants 63:20-21). In a revelation received in 1843, the Lord said, “This earth, in its sanctified and immortal state, will be made like unto a crystal and will be a Urim and Thumim to the inhabitants who dwell thereon, whereby all things pertaining to an inferior kingdom, or all kingdoms of a lower order, will be manifest to those who dwell on it; and this earth will be Christ’s” (Doctrine and Covenants 130:9).

Brigham Young said, “This world so benighted at present, and so lightly esteemed by infidels . . . when it becomes celestialized, it will be like the sun, and be prepared for the habitation of the Saints, and be brought back into the presence of the Father and the Son. It will not then be an opaque body as it now is, but it will be like the stars of the firmament, full of light and glory; it will be a body of light. John compared it, in its celestialized state, to a sea of glass.”³⁷ Orson Pratt said, “God, Himself, will light up the world with His glory, making of it a body more brilliant than the sun that shines in yonder heavens.”³⁸

Parley P. Pratt assured the Saints that there would be plenty of inheritance for every faithful saint. “The stars which will fall to the earth, are fragments, which have been broken off from the earth from time to time, in the mighty convulsions of nature. Some in the days of Enoch, some perhaps in the days of Peleg, some with the ten tribes and some at the crucifixion of the Messiah. These all must be restored again at the ‘times of restitution of ALL THINGS.’ . . . When these fragments, (some of which are vastly larger than the present earth) are brought back and joined to this earth, . . . The earth will be many times larger than it is now.”³⁹ Eliza R. Snow expressed this same concept in Poetic form:

Thou, earth, wast once a glorious sphere

Of noble magnitude
That did with majesty appear
Among the Worlds of God.
But Thy dimensions have been torn
Asunder piece by piece;
And each dismember'd fragment borne
Abroad to distant space.
When Enoch could no longer stay,
Amid corruption here;
Part of thyself was borne away,
To form another sphere.
That portion, where his city stood,
He gain'd by right approv'd;
And nearer to the throne of God
His planet upward mov'd.
And when the Lord saw fit to hide
The "ten lost tribes" away;
Thou was divided to provide
The orb on which they stay [. . .]
A "restitution" yet will come
That will to thee restore,
By the grand law of worlds, thy sum
Of matter heretofore.⁴⁰

The earth will then become the eternal home of the faithful Saints. A revelation given through Joseph Smith in 1832 explained that the earth will “be crowned with glory, even with the presence of God the Father; that bodies who are of the celestial kingdom may possess it forever and ever; for, for this intent was it made and created; and for this intent are they sanctified” (Doctrine and Covenants 88:19-20). Heber C. Kimball said, “By observing strictly the precepts of the Gospel, we can learn how to live forever, and how to receive our tabernacles again in the morning of the first resurrection, to dwell on this earth for ever.”⁴¹ As Brigham Young put it, “Our business is not merely to prepare to go to another planet. This is our home. We are to purify our hearts, our habitations, our families, associations, settlements, states, and country, until improvement circumscribes the whole earth, and sanctifies it, and prepares it to be brought back into the presence of our Father and God.”⁴² At another time, Brigham Young said, “We are for the kingdom of God, and are not going to the moon, nor to any other planet pertaining to this solar system; but are determined to have a heaven here, and are going to make it ourselves, by the help of God and his angels. . . . This earth is the home he has prepared for us, and we are to prepare ourselves and our habitations for the celestial glory in store for the faithful.”⁴³

The lives of faithful Saints are eternally tied to the earth from the moment they are born on it. Brigham Young said, “The *terra firma* on which we walk, and from which we gain our bread, is looking forth for the morning of the resurrection, and will get a resurrection, and be cleansed from the filthiness that has gone forth out of her. This is Bible doctrine. What filthiness has gone forth out of her? You and I, and all the inhabitants of the earth; the human body, and all earthly bodies, both animal and vegetable; are composed of the native element that we breathe, that we drink, and that we walk upon; we till the earth for our bread, which is one of the

materials of which your body is composed, it comes forth from the native elements into an organized state; what for? To be exalted, to get a glorious resurrection. We are of the earth, earthy, and not only will the portion of mother earth which composes these bodies get a resurrection, but the earth itself.”⁴⁴

Even in death, humans are tied to the earth. In 1843, Joseph Smith said that the spirits of the deceased enter the “world of spirits” and “are not far from us.”⁴⁵ Parley P. Pratt wrote that the spirit world is “here on the very planet where we were born; or, in other words, the earth and other planets of a like sphere, have their inward or spiritual spheres, as well as their outward, or temporal. The one is peopled by temporal tabernacles, and the other by spirits.”⁴⁶ Brigham Young said, “When you lay down this tabernacle, where are you going? Into the spiritual world ... Where is the spirit world? It is right here. Do the good and evil spirits go together? Yes, they do. Do they both inhabit one kingdom? Yes, they do. Do they go to the sun? No. Do they go beyond the boundaries of the organized earth? No, they do not. They are brought forth upon this earth, for the express purpose of inhabiting it to all eternity.”⁴⁷

Conclusions

Latter-day Saints of the nineteenth century viewed the earth as going through a plan of salvation paralleled with the plan of salvation for the spirit children of God. The earth was formed spiritually before it was formed physically. The physical elements of the earth were given a birth when the waters rolled back and the land appeared. In the days of Noah, the earth was baptized. Following the millennium, the earth will die. The earth will be resurrected into a celestial body that will be an eternal home to the resurrected Saints.

Nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints believed we could learn much from our mother earth. Orson Pratt said, “Who, in looking upon the earth as it ascends in the scale of the

universe, does not desire to keep pace with it, that when it shall be classed its turn, among the dazzling orbs of the blue vault of heaven, shining forth in all the splendors of the celestial glory, he may find himself proportionately advanced in the scale of intellectual and moral excellence?”⁴⁸ Brigham Young said, “Fields and mountains, trees and flowers, and all that fly, swim or move upon the ground are lessons for study in the great school our Heavenly Father has instituted for the benefit of his children. Let us explore this great field of information that is open before us in good books and in the great laboratory of nature.”⁴⁹ An article in the *Liahona The Elders’ Journal* stated, “How little we realize that this earth is one vast kindergarten, and that a great lesson is locked up in every leaf, a poem in every flower! It is through these natural objects that the Creator communicates with us. We ought to live near enough to the Infinite Mind to be able to read His handwriting in the rocks.”⁵⁰ Leaving the nineteenth-century for a moment, we can find a similar reverence for the earth’s teachings from the current president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Gordon B. Hinckley said, “I have looked at majestic mountains rising against a blue sky and thought of Jesus, the Creator of heaven and earth. I have stood on the spit of sand in the Pacific and watched the dawn rise like thunder—a ball of gold surrounded by clouds of pink and white and purple—and thought of Jesus, the Word by whom all things were made and without whom was not anything made that was made.”⁵¹

By studying the worldview of Mormons living in the nineteenth century, we can better understand their interpretation of nature and their relationship to it. For Mormons of that era, the earth was alive and deeply affected by the attitudes and actions of the humans living upon it. “We should love the earth,” said Brigham Young. “We should love the works which God has made. This is correct; but we should love them in the Lord.”⁵² He also said, “Let me love the world as He loves it, to make it beautiful, and glorify the name of my Father in Heaven. It does

not matter whether I or anybody else owns it, if we only work to beautify it and make it glorious, it is all right.”⁵³ Heber C. Kimball said, “I have told you a great many times that our faithfulness and goodness and oneness would have an effect upon . . . the earth, the air, the mountains, the valleys”⁵⁴ Heber C. Kimball also said, “I want us to obtain power to dedicate and consecrate the earth unto God, that his Spirit may continue upon it for ever; that by this means the earthly may partake of the attributes of the heavenly, and become sanctified and prepared to enter the presence of God.”⁵⁵ Brigham Young said, “Let the people be holy, and the earth under their feet will be holy.”⁵⁶ Perhaps this nineteenth-century perspective on the earth will prompt us to reflect on our sacred responsibility to love and care for the earth upon which we depend for life.

Notes

¹ Joseph Smith, “Try the Spirits,” *Times and Seasons* 3 (1 April 1842): 745.

² Benjamin F. Johnson, Letter to George F. Gibbs, 1903, Church Archives, Salt Lake City, quoted in E. Dale LeBaron, “Benjamin Franklin Johnson: Colonizer, Public Servant, and Church Leader” (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1966), 331.

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⁶ Orson Pratt, “Formation of the Earth,” *Elders’ Journal* 3 (15 January 1906): 162.

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¹¹ Orson Pratt, 25 July 1852, *Journal of Discourses* 1:281.

¹² Brigham Young, 23 March 1856, *Journal of Discourses* 3:276.

¹³ “The Gathering,” *Times and Seasons* 5 (15 January 1844): 408.

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- ³⁶ Ibid.
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