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The British Contribution to the Restored Gospel

Bishop Robert D. Hales

The celebration of 150 years of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the British Isles provides an opportunity to recognize the contribution of the English to the laying of the foundation for the restoration of the gospel in the last days and the divine intervention in its history.

From that damp and foggy island in Western Europe sprang a tenacity for truth and freedom whose influence has been felt around the world. The influence of modern English is remarkable. The worldwide spread of the language has no precedent. Spanish and French, Arabic and Turkish, Latin and Greek have served their turns as international languages, but none has come near to rivaling English. Today, 330 million people throughout the world speak it as a mother tongue. Add to this those who use English as a second language, and you approach one billion English speakers. It is spoken in more countries than any other language. It is the language of international shipping and air travel, of science and diplomacy. How has this happened? Partly through the power of Britain in the nineteenth century and of America in the twentieth.

But who are the English and what is the source of their influence? The English language came before the country was called England. It was the name given to the dialect spoken by the Angles and Saxons in Britain during the fifth century A.D. By the eleventh century, the English were comprised of Celtic, Scandinavian, and Norman–French elements also. Just as in America today, this mixing of blood brought out unique qualities in the people.

The English have always been devout Christians. It has not always rested comfortably upon them. The conflicts between state and church hold center stage throughout English history but appear to have been essential in the preparation of an independent and free people. Christianity was introduced into Britain from the East in the second century and was well established by the fourth century. In the beginning,

Robert D. Hales is the Presiding Bishop of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This talk was presented at “The Church in the British Isles, 1837–1987,” a symposium held at Brigham Young University, 17 January 1987.
Christianity flourished in Britain because of a fruitful partnership between the state and Church. It was distinct and had no origins in Rome or associations with the universal organization of the Papacy. An attempt by Augustine in 597 to bring the renegade English into the Catholic fold failed to have the desired effect. The debate on the Roman and English views of Christianity persisted across the centuries. The poet William Blake suggested divine origins for the unique faith developed in England:

And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England's mountains green?
And was the holy Lamb of God
On England's pleasant pastures seen?

As the power of the English church grew, so did the stature of the English kings who nurtured and enriched it. It is not surprising, therefore, that the legend of King Arthur (ca. 539) as a defender of Christian virtue came from this period. And King Richard (ca. 1189) devoted his reign to fighting the Crusades.

But human nature being what it is, the power invested in one man—the king—was sooner or later bound to cause conflict between church and state. The first significant signs came in the reign of Henry II (ca. 1153). In a struggle to exercise control of the church, Henry had Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury, killed. Henry's son John had to face bitter opposition from the church. This, combined with the hostility of his barons, brought him down. In June 1215 at Runnymede, John was forced to agree to the Magna Carta. There, he signed away many of the monarch's powers.

Achieving the delicate balance between church and state gave birth to English common law, which is the bedrock of the British constitution and also the basis of the American constitution. Under this system both sovereign and subject were bound by common law, and the liberties of Englishmen were determined, not by any enactment of state, but by an immemorial, slow-growing custom declared by juries of free men. (It is interesting to note that the phrase "time immemorial" has its origins from this period in the thirteenth century.) This was the beginning of a transformation in government. By 1265, Henry III had set up England's first parliament—one of the greatest gifts that Britain has given the world. Early in the fourteenth century Parliament developed into two houses, the House of Lords and the House of Commons, which form of government was adopted by the American founding fathers as the Senate and House of Representatives.

Changes in the relationship between church and state continued on apace. Fanned by reformers such as John Wycliff (who translated the Bible into English) and William Tyndale (who translated and printed the
New Testament), reading of the Bible by ordinary people became a reality and increased the pressure for reformation. When Henry VIII (ca. 1520) broke his country's links with the Roman Catholic Church in order to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, the English Reformation was in full swing and abruptly altered the whole course of English history.

In 1603, a new dynasty, the House of Stuart from Scotland, came to the throne. They misunderstood the beliefs of the English and underestimated the power of parliament. Even the efforts of James I (ca. 1604) to bring about national unity by having Puritan ministers and Anglican bishops make a new translation of the Bible backfired. The book was a great success and has endured as the most widely read Bible. It is the version used to this day by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. But its immediate impact was to encourage individual conscience, and that brought the Puritans into disfavor with King James. He told them that unless they conformed to the Church of England, he would "harry them out of this land." Finally, on 16 September 1620, the Mayflower sailed out from Plymouth and with her 101 passengers set course for a new life in a new land.

By 1649 the puritanical approach to Christianity had brought the church and parliament into direct opposition with the crown. The result was civil war, the execution of Charles I, and a government led by a Puritan, Oliver Cromwell. The very legal systems created by the medieval kings had signed the death warrant of absolute monarchy.

Although the monarchy was eventually restored with limited powers, parliament held the upper hand and democracy was born. The age of prosperity that followed expressed itself in the expanding British Empire. The Puritans who stayed at home were not all political pioneers; they also excelled in the arts (John Milton), the sciences (Isaac Newton), and engineering (James Watt). Their independence of thought and action gave birth to the industrial revolution. They prepared for that takeoff into the modern industrial world which England was the first country to experience.

Just as George III's government was starting to encourage settlement in the empire, Britain lost its oldest overseas settlements. Thirteen North American colonies broke away to declare their independence in 1776. Governing a worldwide empire without representation proved impossible. By the middle of the twentieth century, most of Britain's possessions had achieved similar independence. The United States formally embodied the principles of the Declaration of Independence in its constitution. This historic document was dedicated to the principles that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness." These words were written by
Thomas Jefferson, a lawyer schooled in English law. The nation so founded was thus based on English concepts of justice, law, and freedom—England’s legacy to the New World.

President Brigham Young said on one occasion:

The King of Great Britain . . . might also have been led to these aggressive acts, for aught we know, to bring to pass the purpose of God, in thus establishing a new government upon a principle of greater freedom, a basis of self-government allowing the free exercise of religious worship.3

We now recognize the great and significant contribution the English-speaking peoples of the world have made in the restoration of true Christianity to the earth, motivated by their indomitable pursuit for truth and religious liberty.

Joseph Smith, the architect of the Restoration, was born of British stock, descended on the paternal side from Robert Smith, who came from England to America in 1638, and on the maternal side from John Mack, an immigrant from Scotland to America in 1680. If ever a man was in the right place at the right time with the right credentials it was the Prophet Joseph Smith. Almost a thousand years of searching for the truth lay in his heritage.

Despite difficult financial times in Kirtland, the Prophet, through revelation, called the first missionaries to England. The missionaries left their Kirtland homes on 13 June 1837 and landed in Liverpool on 19 July. Thus commenced the restoration of the true gospel in the British Isles, and coincidentally in the same year that Victoria came to the throne.

In this year of 1987, we celebrate 150 years of missionary labors among those great people. As William G. Hartley has written:

English convert immigrants became part of a large infusion that gave Mormonism in America vitally needed new blood. By early 1841 . . . at least 1,000 English LDS converts had moved to America. By 1846, when Nauvoo was evacuated, more than 3,000 English Saints had settled there. By the turn of the century approximately 50,000 English Mormons had immigrated to the States. . . . Prophecies had received literal fulfillment. The Lord had told Joseph Smith to look to England for help for the church’s problems, and the help came.4

Among those early stalwart converts from this land were such men as John Taylor (third President of the Church), George Q. Cannon and John R. Winder (Counselors in the First Presidency), George Teasdale (Apostle), and B. H. Roberts (member of the First Quorum of the Seventy).

In England the missionaries immediately found that many souls were ready and waiting for their message. England in the mid-nineteenth century was at the zenith of the Industrial Revolution. Those most attracted by the missionary message were the casualties of social change, the poor, the unemployed, and the illiterate. The conditions that prevailed
among such people are well depicted in the novels of the time, such as Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House* and *David Copperfield*. Dickens’s vivid pictures of the life of the poor, huddled into airless factories, working dark and dreary mines, and living in city slums, are explanation enough of why many looked for relief in a new cause and a new country. The traditional reasons that promoted immigration of non-Mormons also promoted immigration of Latter-day Saint converts.

Brigham Young and Willard Richards were certainly no strangers to poverty and privation. Brigham Young, so ill himself he could hardly walk, had left his sick wife and children without proper food and medical attention to go on his mission to England in 1840. But some of the conditions in England were still a shock. In a joint letter written to Joseph Smith and the other members of the First Presidency, Elder Young and Elder Richards called conditions

a mighty revolution, in the affairs of the common people. . . . The people have enough to do, to keep from dying with hunger without taking much thought for the improvement of the mind. Many of the people cannot read, a great many cannot write. . . . There [are] thousands & tens of thousands who cannot get one days work in a month, or six months, so they continue to labor 12 hours in a day for almost nothing rather than starve at once. Their miserable pittance is mostly oatmeal & water boiled together, & they would be quite content if they could get enough of that.5

But life for the new converts in the “promised land” was still difficult. Many of those early converts gathered at Nauvoo. Though the city eventually prospered, the first immigrants were faced with conditions equally trying as those they had left:

One notable characteristic of Nauvooers was their poverty. There was too little money available for investment, industry, or trade, so the economy was weak. Illinois, including Nauvoo, suffered the lingering after-effects of the devastating national depression of 1837. As Joseph Smith phrased it when inviting Saints to gather to the city: “Let all that will, come and partake of the poverty of Nauvoo freely.”

Moving across the Atlantic, being driven from one Mormon settlement to another, and then crossing the plains to the Great Basin entailed enormous hardship. They had not expected ridicule and persecution. It seemed outrageous to these immigrant converts to be treated with prejudice in a country so proud of its declared religious tolerance. Many lost property, money, family, friends, and also testimony. Nevertheless, the constant influx of enthusiastic new converts from Britain, arriving by the thousands, provided strength and encouragement to the Church.

But the British character has stoic qualities developed through centuries of similar privations in temporal and spiritual affairs. The English Catholics suffered terrible persecution under Protestant kings,
and the Protestants suffered in like manner under Catholic monarchs. Converts to Mormonism were also tested by the refiner’s fire, from which they emerged dedicated Saints.

Typical of the converts of that time was the Howells family of Wales. William Howells, his wife, Martha, then four months pregnant, their daughter Ann, their seven-year-old son William, and two-year-old son Reese began their journey to Zion on 4 March 1851. In spite of his longing to join the main body of the Saints in Salt Lake City, William Howells was saddened at the prospect of turning his back on his beloved Wales, “shuddering at the thought of having his death bed surrounded by strangers, and his grave in a foreign land.”

Despite these feelings, the Howellses embarked on a voyage crossing the Atlantic, a voyage during which the Mormon immigrants baptized twenty-one fellow shipmates, using a platform thrown overboard and lowered into the sea. There was no reason to expect anything but good fortune in crossing the plains, but before they could complete the journey William Howells was stricken with sickness. His frail constitution was not able to throw off the illness, and he died 21 November 1851, age thirty-five. Martha was left with the enormous task of getting herself, her babe-in-arms, and her three other children a further fifteen hundred miles. She was forced to sell what few possessions she had to raise money for the journey. During the wagon trek toward Utah, Martha suffered yet another personal tragedy—the death of nine-year-old William. He had fallen asleep beneath a wagon wheel and was crushed when the wagon started again. Martha, a true stalwart in every sense of the word, continued faithful to her conviction of the truthfulness of Mormonism right up to her death nearly thirty years later in 1879. After ten years of harsh existence in Utah, she made a one-year visit to Wales where she received her share of her father’s estate.

Why did the Mormons arouse so much hostility? America was founded by devout Christians looking for a place to avoid persecution. Religious tolerance was incorporated into the Bill of Rights and later strengthened by its inclusion into individual state constitutions. Yet unlike other minority religions, the Latter-day Saints attracted animosity everywhere they went. At one point, at the height of their suffering in Kirtland, Ohio, they were persuaded to write their own “Declaration of Belief Regarding Governments.” This is contained in section 134 of the Doctrine and Covenants. In giving the background for this declaration, Joseph Smith wrote:

The reason for the article on “Government and Law in general” is explained in the fact that the Latter-day Saints had been accused by their bitter enemies, both in Missouri and in other places, as being opposed to law and order. They had been portrayed as setting up laws in conflict with the laws
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of the country. This bitterness went so far that an accusation was brought against them, on one occasion in a Missouri court, of disloyalty because they believed that at some future time the Lord would set up his own kingdom which would supersede the government of the United States, and so believing that the time would come when such a kingdom would be established, they were disloyal to the United States. Every pretext that could be imagined against the Saints to try and show them disloyal and rebellious against established government, was brought into use.⁹

And so we see that the Mormon experience is just a continuation of the age old supposed conflict between the kingdoms of this world and the kingdom of heaven. It is hard for man to differentiate the struggle to save his eternal soul from the struggle to survive in the temporal world.

The “Declaration of Belief” suggests there need not be a conflict: “We believe that religion is instituted of God” (D&C 134:4) and “governments were instituted of God for the benefit of man” (D&C 134:1). “We do not believe it just to mingle religious influence with civil government” (D&C 134:9). The Church, therefore, holds to the view of separation of church and state: no interference of church authority in political matters and the freedom of the individual to pursue his political opinions. “We do not believe that human law has a right to interfere in prescribing rules of worship to bind the consciences of men, nor dictate forms for public or private devotion” (D&C 134:4). However, “to the laws all men owe respect and deference, as without them peace and harmony would be supplanted by anarchy and terror” (D&C 134:6). From an eternal perspective, it must be realized that although it is not appropriate for the Church to aspire for political supremacy, the Saints are looking forward to the time when he “whose right it is to reign” (D&C 58:22), even the Lord Jesus Christ, will rule the earth. In the meantime, they are to “be subject to the powers that be” (D&C 58:22).

Today this declaration helps the Church retain its presence in a restricted political climate and gain entry into countries for proselyting that might otherwise be denied. We as a Church and people have come so far in our understanding, our freedoms, our religious liberty; and our standing in the world today is influenced by our English heritage. In this memorial year, we express our gratitude for it.

In conclusion, as part of giving my testimony of the significance of the missionary work in England and the faithful English immigrants who joined the Church after reaching America, I would like to give you a few stories from my own family genealogical history. On both the mothers’ and fathers’ sides of Sister Hales’s family and my own, all of our family lines lead back to England.

Here are some typical stories from our ancestors:
John Crandall came to America from England in 1634 and helped to settle Rhode Island. Seven generations later, David Crandall was born. In 1833 he was the first of the Crandalls to join the Church, when two missionaries came to his home. The missionary enthusiasm for the gospel was so great that the Presbyterian and Baptist ministers gave the Latter-day Saint missionaries an opportunity to speak in their assemblies, resulting in a number of baptisms. In 1835 the David Crandall family moved to Kirtland. From there, they moved to Pike County, Missouri; Quincy, Illinois; La Harpe, Illinois; and finally Council Bluffs, Iowa. In 1850 many of his children traveled on to Salt Lake City.

Joseph Holbrook’s grandfather and two brothers came from England to Plymouth Colony as Pilgrims. They settled in Massachusetts. Joseph’s father died when Joseph was only seven years old. It was his father’s dying wish that Joseph go to live with his grandfather in Massachusetts in order to have an opportunity to go to school. Joseph’s grandfather taught him much. He was a moral man. He never indulged in any kind of vice, went to meetings on the Sabbath, believed in fulfillment of prophecy, prayed with his family, asked blessings at meals, and did not allow profanity. This set the background for what was to happen in the life of Joseph Holbrook.

Joseph was ready to receive the gospel when the elders preached in a town where he was living. He asked them where he could get a copy of the Book of Mormon. They did not know. Joseph told the two young men that he would walk a distance of fifty miles in order to obtain a copy if only they could direct him there. They said they could not tell him where he could find a copy. Joseph finally obtained a copy from his cousin. In two days and three nights he read the book through. Facing opposition from many friends and family members, he could not deny the truthfulness of the gospel, and he and his wife were baptized. They later crossed the plains to the Great Salt Lake Valley.

ENGLISH MISSIONARY

The Porter family originally immigrated to the United States in the 1700s. Nathan Tanner Porter was born in Vermont in 1820. His family moved several times, settling in Ohio in 1828. While there, they joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In 1832 they joined the Saints in Jackson County, Missouri. They were among those driven by mob violence from their possessions in the fall of 1833.

Nathan passed through the trying ordeals of the times, ending with the expulsion of the Saints from Missouri and their settlement in Illinois.
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He was serving a mission in the Eastern States when the report of the Carthage Jail horror reached him. Along with other family members, Nathan left his possessions in Nauvoo and traveled west, reaching the shores of the Great Salt Lake in October 1847. He helped his father cultivate a small piece of land, built a home, married, and shared with his sweetheart the toils and hardships incident to the times.

Four years later he was called to serve a mission at the Rock of Gibraltar. He once more crossed the plains with mule and horse teams, traveled to New York, then sailed to Europe. The government did not allow him to stay in Gibraltar, so he served four and a half years on his mission in England, returning in 1856. Nathan crossed the Atlantic in the company of three hundred Saints and once more traversed the plains, leaving on 10 August 1856. His company reached the Platte on 1 November. They met many experiences of suffering and death and were finally rescued by men and teams from Salt Lake, bringing much needed supplies and aid. The handcart pioneers were now conveyed the remainder of the way in wagons, as comfortably as circumstances would permit. Nathan was reunited with his family in the Salt Lake Valley on 15 December 1856. He lived to serve two more missions in the United States.

ENGLISH IMMIGRANTS

Henry William Hales was born 7 August 1829, in Rainham, Kent, England. In 1832 his father and family immigrated to Canada. They settled in Toronto where they accepted the gospel of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They traveled from Toronto to Kirtland and on to Far West. They experienced all of the persecutions of the time. It was at Far West that Henry William Hales first saw the Prophet Joseph Smith as he was betrayed into the hands of a mob. He heard Joseph Smith sentenced to be shot without having the opportunity for a hearing.

They were expelled from Missouri with the rest of the Saints and went to Quincy, Illinois, remaining there until 1841 when they moved to Nauvoo. It was there they heard the Prophet Joseph say, “I am going like a lamb to the slaughter; but I am calm as a summer’s morning; I have a conscience void of offense towards God, and towards all men. . . . and it shall yet be said of me—he was murdered in cold blood” (D&C 135:4). Henry saw Joseph and Hyrum in their coffins. He knew they were men of God.

Henry William Hales moved west to the Salt Lake Valley in the spring of 1851. There he experienced Indian trouble, the grasshopper war, shortages of commodities (especially flour), differences between the U.S. government and the people of Utah, floods, and finally peace and freedom.
Another example was Jennette Bleasdale, born in 1826 in Lancashire, England. Her parents were proud and happy with this new little baby girl. They wanted for her the very best that could be had, but times were hard, food and money were scarce, and the Bleasdales were very poor. For nine years the family struggled to remain together, but now there were three children and the expenses were too high. One of the family must leave and work elsewhere to relieve the burden. It was decided that Jennette should go. Although she was only nine years of age, she was very mature in her ability to work and to take responsibility. It was hard to leave her family and go to the strange farm to live. Jennette didn’t feel quite so grown-up or mature when saying good-by, but she realized her responsibilities and accepted them. She worked hard, often getting up in the middle of the night to start the washing or to feed the pigs.

When Jennette was ten years old, the Mormon missionaries visited her family. They brought with them not only a new gospel but also hopes for a new and better life in America. With their conversion to the Church, the Bleasdales, along with others, began making plans to emigrate to America. After raising all the money he could by selling his possessions, Jennette’s father found that he lacked enough money for all of them to emigrate. Someone would have to remain behind. Again, it was decided that Jennette would remain in England, and this time it was with real heartbreak that she waved good-bye to her loved ones.

For three years Jennette lived with an uncle, working and saving to buy her passage. Her uncle owned a mill which he sold in order to obtain enough money for their passage. After giving Jennette enough money for her passage, he started to town to buy his own but was robbed of all his money. Jennette was very despondent at the thought of leaving her relatives behind and traveling to America alone, but she was so homesick for her family that she decided to come anyway. On her thirteenth birthday, three years after her parents had come, she started for America. The voyage was difficult and lonely for the thirteen-year-old girl. Water was rationed out to each passenger, and young Jennette, being very seasick, used nearly all of her rations in the first few weeks of the trip. Her scanty remaining portion of water couldn’t be stretched out very far, and she nearly died for want of water. After nine long, hard weeks, the vessel at last arrived in New Orleans instead of New York as planned. It had been blown off its course during severe storms at sea.

In New Orleans she located an uncle who had come to America earlier. It was comforting to the lonely girl to see a familiar face and to be warmly received into his home. She was disappointed, however, to learn that he had not heard from her parents or even knew that they had left England. So, restless and homesick, she started out alone once more. The trip up the Mississippi River to Nauvoo seemed very slow to the
anxious Jennette. The boat was old and sluggish, and at times the passengers were required to walk part of the way. The days dragged by for Jennette, whose thoughts raced ahead to the arrival in Nauvoo, the reunion with her family, and the hopes and dreams of a new life with the people of her faith in this promised land.

At last came the long awaited day of arrival at Nauvoo, but Jennette was to be disappointed once more. Her family had not yet arrived. Disappointments and discouragements could not be kept for long, however, for the Saints were a busy, dedicated, and happy people. Jennette soon found work at the home of Joseph Young, the brother to Brigham Young. Out of her earnings of seventy-five cents a week, she managed to save enough to buy a cow and a calf for her mother.

Months later her parents did arrive in Nauvoo, and there was a joyous reunion. They had been working in New York, trying to save enough money for the trip to Nauvoo. The family was soon to be separated again, however, for her parents left Nauvoo with the intention of settling in Iowa and working for the Poole family. Jennette decided to remain with Brother Young and to continue to work. She journeyed with the Youngs to Winter Quarters when she received word that her parents wanted her to come to Iowa. Although thirty miles from where her folks were, she started back, working her way and often walking along by the wagon which carried her trunks and belongings. After a month’s journey, she arrived at the Poole farm in Iowa.

This was a very happy time for young Jennette. She was reunited with her family; they were all well, strong, and happy; and there was plenty of food and clothing for all. It was here that Jennette met young John Rawlston Poole. After a year elapsed they were married. John was converted to the Church and disowned by his father. This was a trying time for the young couple, and after their baby girl was born about one year later, they made preparations to leave for Winter Quarters and there join the Saints in their trek to Utah. Joseph Young was their leader, and with a cow and a team of oxen they started on their journey across the plains.

The trip to Salt Lake was long and hard, full of suffering and sorrow. Cholera raged through the camp, taking as victim their baby girl. She was buried on the plains—and they went on. John Rawlston also contracted the disease but was healed through a blessing given by Joseph Young. On the last leg of their journey the Indians were so plentiful that they couldn’t build a fire, and the nights were long, fearful, and black. One of their oxen died, but they were able to finish their journey by using the cow in its place.

They were unable to remain in Salt Lake long, for there were many new frontiers to settle. So Jennette and John Rawlston packed their belongings and set out for Centerville in Northern Utah. This country
was so sparsely populated that Indians roamed it freely. For Jennette, who had faced all the hardships and suffering of pioneer life, this was just another problem to be accepted and managed as well as possible. She was responsible for providing a home for her husband and family, and this she intended to do.

These stories of pilgrims, converts, pioneers, child immigrants, and pioneer missionaries show the devotion, sacrifice, and dedication of our forebears. Is anything less required of us to meet today’s challenges and endure to the end?

May we give thanks for our English heritage and live lives worthy of our English tradition of the law of consecration is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

NOTES

6Hartley, Kindred Saints, 20.
8Abridged from Supporting Saints.