



6-1-2014

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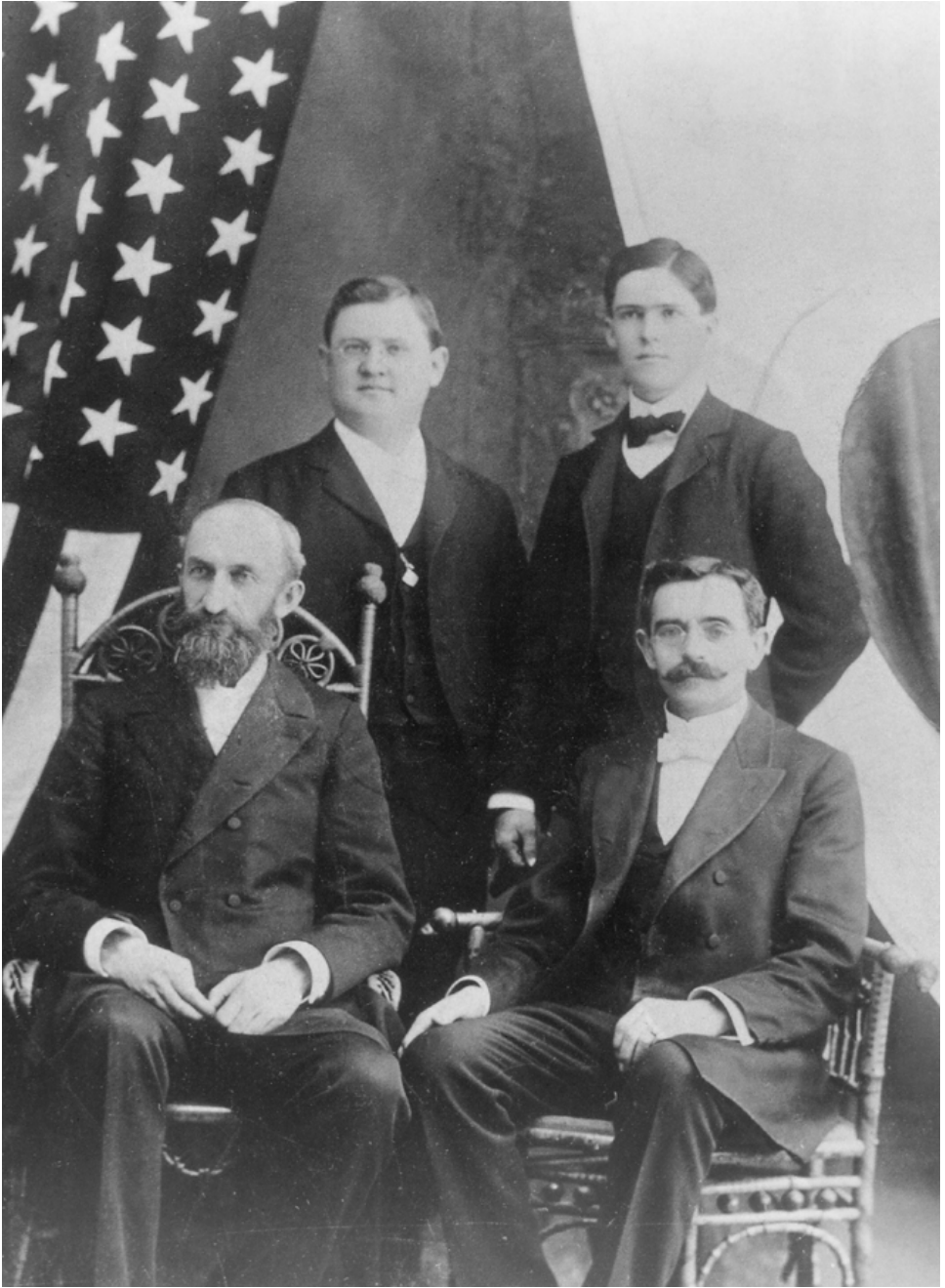
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Recommended Citation

Neilson, Reid L. (2014) "A Mormon and a Buddhist Debate Plural Marriage: The Letters of Elder Alma O. Taylor and the Reverend Nishijima Kakuryo, 1901," *BYU Studies Quarterly*: Vol. 53 : Iss. 2 , Article 11.
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol53/iss2/11>

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The first four Mormon missionaries to Japan at a missionary benefit dinner in Salt Lake City in summer 1901. Standing (*left to right*): Horace S. Ensign, Alma O. Taylor. Seated (*left to right*): Heber J. Grant, Louis A. Kelsch. Courtesy Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

A Mormon and a Buddhist Debate Plural Marriage

The Letters of Elder Alma O. Taylor and the Reverend Nishijima Kakuryo, 1901

Reid L. Neilson

Christian missionaries began evangelizing in Japan in 1873,¹ but missionaries of one denomination, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, waited nearly three decades—until 1901—to commence proselyting among the Japanese. Moreover, Mormon leaders made no attempt to missionize the East Asians, including a small number of Japanese, living in their midst in the American West during the nineteenth century. While social, linguistic, and political realities all seemingly factored into this decision, so did Mormon theological conceptions of race and lineage. It took a dramatic drop-off in missionary success in the North American and Western European mission fields, coupled with a renewed sense of millenarian urgency, to persuade LDS leaders to finally look to the East instead of the West at the end of the nineteenth century.²

Following the death of President Wilford Woodruff, Apostle Lorenzo Snow was sustained as the Church's fifth prophet-president in September

1. Christianity was introduced to Japan in the sixteenth century but was essentially obliterated by feudal rulers in the seventeenth century. Commodore Perry's two trips to Japan in 1853 and 1854 started the process of opening the country. It was not until 1873 that sanctions against Christianity were formally lifted. Even then, though persecutions ceased, "freedom of religion" was not granted to the Japanese people until the Constitution of 1889.

2. For a history of the nineteenth-century Mormon encounter with Asia and the early LDS Japan Mission, see Reid L. Neilson, *Early Mormon Missionary Activities in Japan, 1901–1924* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2010); and Reid L. Neilson and Van C. Gessel, eds., *Taking the Gospel to the Japanese, 1901–2001* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2006).

1898.³ During his short administration (1898–1901), the Church’s financial crisis concluded,⁴ and Church leaders began thinking about new international evangelistic opportunities. Under President Snow’s direction, the Church entered the twentieth century with 283,765 members, 967 wards and branches, 43 stakes, and 4 temples.⁵ In addition, nearly a thousand men and women were evangelizing in over a dozen mission fields.⁶ However, the vast majority of these members, congregations, and edifices were located in North America, and they did not represent the world’s population. Up to this point, Mormon missionary work and resources were focused mainly on the nations of North America and Western Europe, while the countries of Asia, for example, languished in spiritual darkness, in the Mormon mind.

Unsatisfied with the status quo, President Snow determined to shift the Church’s attention to East Asia, South America, and Eastern Europe. Church authorities felt an urgent need to fulfill the Great Commission in lands untouched by Mormon missionaries. They had not sent missionaries on an evangelical errand to Asia, the world’s most populous continent, since the 1850s. In President Snow’s mind, the central responsibility of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles was “to warn the nations of the earth and prepare the world for the coming of the Savior”;⁷ it was not to busy themselves unduly with stake and ward duties, which were

3. Davis Bitton, *George Q. Cannon: A Biography* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1999), 423; Maureen Ursenbach Beecher and Paul Thomas Smith, “Lorenzo Snow,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 3:1369–70.

4. Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 3–6; Boyd Payne, ed., “Rudger Clawson’s Report on LDS Church Finances at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 31 (Winter 1998): 165–79.

5. *Our Heritage: A Brief History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1996), 104.

6. During 1900, there were 438 missionaries in the US and Canada, 289 in Europe, and 63 in Australia and the Pacific. Gordon Irving, *Numerical Strength and Geographical Distribution of the LDS Missionary Force, 1830–1974* (Salt Lake City: Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1975), 14–15.

7. Joseph F. Smith, “The Last Days of President Snow,” *Juvenile Instructor* 36 (November 15, 1901): 689–90.

the responsibilities of stake presidents and bishops.⁸ Mormon Apostles had been much more involved in foreign missionary work before external and internal stresses forced them to retreat to the Great Basin during the 1880s and 1890s. President Snow believed that to fulfill their errand to the world, the Apostles needed to refocus their energies outward, not inward, just as their apostolic predecessors had done for much of the nineteenth century.

Japan loomed on the horizon of new evangelizing possibilities for Mormons during the year 1900. Rather than organizing missionary efforts to take the gospel to hundreds of Chinese and Japanese immigrants living within miles of their offices at Church headquarters in Salt Lake City, however, Snow's First Presidency determined to take the gospel directly to East Asia. A series of nineteenth-century encounters with East Asians both at home and abroad convinced Mormon authorities that Japan, not China, should be the Church's Eastern priority. Accordingly, on February 14, 1901, during a weekly meeting of the Council of the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve, President George Q. Cannon announced the establishment of the Japan Mission and called Heber J. Grant, an Apostle and second-generation Latter-day Saint, as its president.⁹

Over the next several months, Elder Grant selected three missionary companions: Horace S. Ensign, Louis A. Kelsch, and eighteen-year-old Alma O. Taylor. The Mormon errand to the Asian world had commenced. Even before leaving for Japan, the mission's youngest elder, Taylor, began a sobering correspondence with a Japanese Buddhist priest that foreshadowed the challenges he and his companions would face once they arrived in Tokyo Bay. The Mormon practice of plural marriage would become the sticking point between the two missionaries, one a Mormon and the other a Buddhist. Their letters expose the lack of knowledge both men had regarding the other's religion and showed the passionate defense but also limited understanding Taylor, still a teenager, had of his

8. B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Century One*, 6 vols. (Provo, Utah: Corporation of the President, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1965), 6:375–79; Rudger Clawson, Diary, June 26, 1901, in *A Ministry of Meetings: The Apostolic Diaries of Rudger Clawson*, ed. Stan Larson (Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1993), 287–89; “A Farewell Reception,” *Improvement Era* 4 (August 1901): 795–97.

9. See Heber J. Grant, *A Japanese Journal*, comp. Gordon A. Madsen (n.p., 1970), 5; Rudger Clawson, Diary, February 14, 1901, 247.

own faith's history and theology. The letters document the defenses of polygamy circulating in Mormon society in 1901.

A Mormon-Buddhist Encounter

Alma Owen Taylor was born on August 1, 1882, in Salt Lake City. He was the second of two children born to Joseph Edward Taylor, a British convert and well-to-do undertaker, and Lisadore Williams, a school-teacher from Illinois. He served in the Salt Lake Temple with his mother and followed his father into the undertaking business, graduating first in a class of apprentice morticians who studied in Chicago, Illinois, in the summer of 1899. Educated at the Eighteenth Ward Seminary and at Latter-day Saints College, Taylor was an attractive candidate for a mission. Alma's call to serve in the Japan Mission came the following year. Heber J. Grant, the Apostle who issued the call to serve in Japan, seems to have been aware of Taylor for some time. Elder Grant and the Taylor family lived in the same ward. Joseph Taylor was a counselor in the Salt Lake Stake presidency, and he and Elder Grant were close friends. Alma Taylor had socialized with Elder Grant's daughters for many years. By the time Elder Grant called Taylor to serve in Japan, he knew the kind of missionary the young man would be.¹⁰

Determined to familiarize himself with Japanese before arriving in the Land of the Rising Sun, Taylor contacted Paul Carus, a Buddhist sympathizer and founder of Open Court Publishing, whom he had met the previous year while studying in Chicago to be a mortician. Carus had been instrumental in introducing many Americans to Eastern faiths like Buddhism and Hinduism through his publications. Carus encouraged Taylor to contact the Reverend Nishijima Kakuryo, a leader of the recently created Buddhist Mission of North America, who was then living in San Francisco. Nishijima and his mentor, Sonoda Shuye, had arrived in northern California in September 1899 as missionaries for their Jōdo Shinshū Buddhist faith, opening the Hongwanji Branch Office on 807 Polk Street in San Francisco. Over the next several months,

10. For more on Alma O. Taylor, his mission preparations, and his feelings about Asia, see Reid L. Neilson, *The Japanese Missionary Journals of Elder Alma O. Taylor, 1901–1910* (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies and Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Latter-day Saint History, 2001); Reid L. Neilson, "A Priceless Pearl: Alma O. Taylor's Mission to Japan," *Ensign* 32 (June 2002): 56–59; and Reid L. Neilson, "Alma O. Taylor's Fact-Finding Mission to China," *BYU Studies* 40, no. 1 (2000): 176–203.

the two Japanese priests offered study classes and public lectures on Buddhism, eventually organizing Young Men's Buddhist Associations in nearby Sacramento, Fresno, and Vacaville and issuing a newsletter. For their efforts, Nishijima and Sonoda are regarded as the founders of the Buddhist Churches of America.¹¹

On June 14, 1901, Taylor followed Carus's suggestion and wrote to Nishijima, hoping that the Buddhist priest might help him locate some Japanese study materials.¹² The young Mormon missionary explained that neither he nor Carus could locate suitable Asian language primers in Salt Lake City or Chicago. Could Nishijima help? Taylor made clear why he needed to learn Japanese—so that he and his missionary companions could teach the Mormon message of salvation to Nishijima's Buddhist countrymen once they arrived in Japan. This was the first of five letters that Taylor and Nishijima exchanged during the summer of 1901.

A few days later, Nishijima responded to Taylor's first missive by first apologizing that he was unable to provide the requested language study materials from San Francisco. The Buddhist priest then discussed Taylor's pending missionary assignment to his fellow Japanese. Nishijima expressed concern that the Church, widely despised by Christians in America, "teaches men the unlawful life of polygamy which will debase them instead of lifting." He warned Taylor that if he and his Mormon missionary companions were to advocate plural marriage in Japan, both Christians and Buddhists alike would meet them with "severe condemnation." Nishijima enclosed a copy of his periodical, *Bukkyō Seinenkai Kaihō* (Young Men's Buddhist Association Newsletter), in his first letter to Taylor.¹³

11. "Shuye Sonoda, Buddhism in the Kingdom of Liberty (1899)," in "East to America: Immigrant Landings," in *Asian Religions in America: A Documentary History*, ed. Thomas A. Tweed and Stephen Prothero (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 78–82; *Buddhist Churches of America*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Nobart, 1974), 1:43–48; Rick Fields, *How the Swans Came to the Lake: A Narrative History of Buddhism in America* (Boston: Shambhala, 1986), 143–45.

12. Alma O. Taylor to Nishijima Kakuryo, June 14, 1901, as found in Alma O. Taylor, *Diary*, July 28, 1901, pp. 40–41, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (see letter 1 herein), [available online through the BYU library website](#). Unfortunately, Taylor did not copy this initial letter to Nishijima into his journal as he did with their subsequent correspondence.

13. Nishijima Kakuryo to Alma O. Taylor, June 24, 1901, as found in Taylor, *Diary*, book A, July 28, 1901, pp. 41–44 (see letter 2 herein).

Taylor and Nishijima's letter exchange is the first documented debate between a Buddhist and a Mormon on the divisive theological and social issue of polygamy. Anti-Mormon antipolygamy sentiments were not novel for the early twentieth century. Long after the public practice of polygamy ended,¹⁴ it continued to capture the imaginations of other sectarians Mormons encountered, inevitably causing friction between competing religious understandings.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, Latter-day Saints summoned moral, theological, and sociological defenses of polygamy. Historian Davis Bitton summarizes these nineteenth-century justifications as follows:

1. "There was nothing inherently evil about polygamy; prejudice against it was the result of tradition."
2. "Plural marriage was the simplest, most realistic way of providing fulfillment of man's natural instincts within proper bounds."
3. "Plural marriage was a practical, honorable means of providing marriage and motherhood for thousands of deserving women who would otherwise be condemned to a life of spinsterhood."
4. "Plural marriage was an excellent means of improving the race, a program of practical eugenics."
5. "Plural marriage led to larger families."
6. "Plural marriage harmed no one."
7. "Plural marriage was an alternative to prostitution and other social evils."
8. "Plural marriage was part of Mormon religious belief."
 - a. "Polygamy was sanctioned by the Bible."
 - b. "Plural marriage was authorized by a divine revelation to Joseph Smith."
 - c. "Plural marriage was consistent with if not implied by Mormon theology."¹⁵

14. In 1852, Mormon Apostle Orson Pratt publicly acknowledged the practice of plural marriage, while the 1890 Manifesto issued by President Wilford Woodruff was the beginning of the end of plural marriage, which continued into the early twentieth century.

15. Davis Bitton, "Polygamy Defended: One Side of a Nineteenth-Century Polemic," in *The Ritualization of Mormon History and Other Essays* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 35–40.

In fact, these eight standard defenses of polygamy were seemingly so ingrained in the collective LDS mind that Taylor, an eighteen-year-old prospective missionary, used seven of them in his correspondence with Nishijima in 1901, eleven years after the Manifesto.¹⁶

In his second letter to Nishijima, dated June 28, Taylor replied to the Buddhist's concerns in typical missionary fashion: "I respond cheerfully to your question as to how the religion of 'Mormonism' will be a benefit to the people of your fatherland."¹⁷ He then extolled the basic tenets of the Latter-day Saints, including the sanctity of Mormon homes, the loving leadership of faithful parents, and the industrious, pioneering nature of his fellow Church members. After offering a general history of the LDS faith, Taylor addressed Nishijima's concerns about plural marriage. With his second letter mailed to California and his departure to Japan at hand, Taylor likely assumed his correspondence with Nishijima had come to an end.

Nishijima, however, sought further clarification on polygamy after receiving Taylor's apologetic defense of its practice. In his second letter, dated July 7, the Buddhist leader responded to Taylor's spirited defense of his faith.¹⁸ He thanked the young Mormon elder for sending along the newspaper clippings, Articles of Faith card, and *Improvement Era* issues and complimented him on his faith and discussion of the Mormon faith. Nishijima pointed out to Taylor that many "sincere and earnest" Westerners had found truth in the "so called heathenism of the Orient," resulting in greater tolerance and open-mindedness towards Buddhism. The Buddhist priest suggested to Taylor that a similar softening would occur for Latter-day Saints. Nevertheless, Nishijima confessed to Taylor that he did still not understand or appreciate plural marriage. He concluded his letter by asking Taylor to continue to send him issues of the *Improvement Era* on a regular basis so that he could "investigate" the Mormon religion, and he offered to do the same with his Buddhist publication if Taylor would kindly provide him with an updated mailing address when he arrived in Japan.

16. Of Bitton's eight documented defenses of Mormon polygamy, Taylor failed to employ only one—the pro-Mormon polemic that plural marriage increased family size.

17. Alma O. Taylor to Nishijima Kakuryo, June 28, 1901, as found in Taylor, Diary, July 28, 1901, pp. 45–67 (see letter 3 herein).

18. Nishijima Kakuryo to Alma O. Taylor, July 7, 1901, as transcribed in Taylor, Diary, July 28, 1901, pp. 22–26 (see letter 4 herein).

Back in Salt Lake City, Taylor and his three missionary companions were busy preparing for their departure to Asia. Taylor received Nishijima's second letter just days before he left Utah for Japan in late July 1901. They had purposefully scheduled their departure to coincide with Pioneer Day (July 24), a popular holiday in Utah commemorating the vanguard company of Mormon pioneers entering the Salt Lake Valley in 1847. That evening, after the Pioneer Day parades and fireworks, the missionaries and their families and friends assembled at the Salt Lake train depot to say their final goodbyes. Then the elders boarded the Oregon Short Line train bound for the Pacific coast. "It was quite an auspicious day to make a start; it being the 54th Anniversary of the pioneers entering the Salt Lake Valley. I felt that inasmuch as the Gospel had never been preached in Japan and that we were to be the first to sound the Gospel cry to that nation; that we were indeed going pioneering on pioneer day," Taylor noted.¹⁹ The train pulled out of the Salt Lake City depot at 11:10 p.m. The missionaries traveled north by train to Ogden, Utah, where they caught their rail connection to the deep-water port of Vancouver, British Columbia. The twentieth-century Mormon errand to the East had begun.

While Taylor and his three missionary companions waited for their trans-Pacific Ocean steamer in a Vancouver, Canada, hotel, Taylor replied to his Asian correspondent's missive on July 28.²⁰ He assured Nishijima that he would forward his address in Japan once he was settled so he could continue to receive Nishijima's Buddhist periodical. He also informed Nishijima that he had ordered a subscription of the *Improvement Era* to be sent to Nishijima's new address in Sacramento, California. Taylor then spent the bulk of his third letter to Nishijima responding to his query about plural marriage and about how the Latter-day Saints could have justified its practice in the "enlightened" nineteenth century: he offered five additional reasons for plural marriage that correspond with those listed in Bitton's article. As outlined in his letters to Nishijima, Taylor accepted the prevailing Mormon theological and social worldview, that plural marriage, as practiced both anciently in Hebrew Israel and recently in Mormon Utah, was an exalted religious principle. He ended with this note to Nishijima: "Should you have any further questions to ask about the 'Mormons' an[d] their doctrine I shall be pleased

19. Taylor, Diary, July 24, 1901, 5–6.

20. Alma O. Taylor to Nishijima Kakuryo, July 28, 1901, as transcribed in Taylor, Diary, July 28, 1901, pp. 27–40 (see letter 5 herein).

to answer them. If all that I have written is not plain to you I will try and make it so.” There is no record in Taylor’s journals or correspondence that the Mormon elder and the Buddhist reverend ever exchanged letters again.

The Mormons’ Reception in Buddhist Japan

Within days of sending his third and final letter to Nishijima, Taylor and his three Mormon companions continued across the Pacific Ocean to begin missionary work in Japan. From Vancouver, British Columbia, the quartet boarded the *Empress of India*, a six-thousand-ton steamship operated by the Canadian Pacific Railway Company. This steamer, together with the *Empress of Japan* and the *Empress of China*, sailed routes connecting Vancouver to Hong Kong, Yokohama, Kobe, Nagasaki, and Shanghai. After two weeks at sea, the elders finally saw the Japanese coastline on August 12, 1901. The new sights and sounds they encountered dazzled the men. Taylor captured a number of observations in his journal that first day. From the veranda of his hotel he looked out over the Tokyo Bay and was entranced by his surroundings. “Seeing also the apparel and manners of the people, I indeed felt ‘A Stranger in a strange land.’”²¹ Fellow missionary Louis A. Kelsch likewise recalled his first observations of Japan. “It seemed to us when we arrived that we were indeed strangers in a strange land, for everything was strange unto us. The people, their customs, their habits, their food—all were strange. We could not speak to the people, only through interpreters, except to those who were able to understand the English language.”²² But the elders were excited to be on Japanese soil; they were poised to preach the gospel in a new land.

Missionary work among the Japanese, however, would prove difficult and frustrating to Taylor and his companions. The four Latter-day Saints were stunned by the controversy their arrival in Japan stirred up in the Japanese press. Nishijima had predicted this exact kind of response. A number of magazine and newspaper articles had already been written in opposition to the Church in the decade before missionaries arrived in Japan. As Japanese studies scholar Sarah Cox Smith documents, the LDS faith “was portrayed as ridiculous and indeed

21. Taylor, Diary, August 12, 1901, 95.

22. Louis A. Kelsch, in *Seventy-third Semi-annual Conference of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1902), 35.

laughable in its doctrine but with an uncanny, almost eerie, power to attract believers. Many perceived it to be a threat to Japanese culture. In a sense, the Latter-day Saint doctrines had been translated—or rather, mistranslated—by Japanese and resident Christian writers long before the missionaries ever set foot on Japanese soil.” Some Japanese were afraid that the Church, specifically its teachings and practice of plural marriage, would set back the recent social advancements of Japanese women and threaten Meiji enlightenment.²³

Printed pieces on the Latter-day Saint missionaries formed a trickle in the summer of 1901. Following the missionaries’ arrival in Yokohama, the trickle became a flash flood of editorials and essays opposing and supporting them and their religion. “More than a dozen newspapers in the capital city of Tokyo, two nationally influential newspapers in the dominant commercial city of Osaka, and no less than twenty major regional newspapers throughout the country devoted considerable space—often on front pages—to articles and editorials reporting or otherwise commenting on the arrival of this new Christian sect with unusual doctrines,” scholar Shinji Takagi chronicles. Between August 13 and September 10, 1901, at least 160 newspaper pieces were written about the Latter-day Saint elders boarding in Yokohama and evangelizing in the surrounding neighborhoods.²⁴ Taylor and his companions were surprised by the level of attention. Although most newspapers cast the Mormons in a very negative light and focused on the oddities of the Church, especially plural marriage, the missionaries “felt to thank God for the prospect of persecution for we felt that it would be the means of bringing us to the front and attracting many who otherwise would not take enough interest in us to investigate the cause which we represented.”²⁵

American history is replete with fascinating encounters between the religious majority, members of an astounding variety of Christian sects, and the religious minority, members of numerically smaller faiths like Judaism, Hinduism, and Islam. Scholars have documented and analyzed these historical relationships in countless articles, dissertations,

23. Sarah Cox Smith, “Translator or Translated? The Portrayal of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Print in Meiji Japan,” in Neilson and Gessel, *Taking the Gospel to the Japanese*, 129.

24. Shinji Takagi, “Mormons in the Press: Reactions to the 1901 Opening of the Japan Mission,” in Neilson and Gessel, *Taking the Gospel to the Japanese*, 179, and *BYU Studies* 40, no. 1 (2001): 141.

25. Taylor, Diary, August 13, 1901, 98–99.

and monographs.²⁶ The 1901 correspondence of Taylor and Nishijima represents a different kind of religious encounter—that of the representatives of two minority faiths meeting each other in the heyday of the Protestant Establishment. Neither Latter-day Saints nor Buddhists occupied a position of social power or authority in America at that time. The great majority of Christians viewed both groups with suspicion and distrust through the exoticizing lens of orientalism—the disciples of Buddha because they were from the Orient and the followers of Joseph Smith because they embraced polygamy.²⁷ Protestants and Catholics saw both religions as outsider faiths. Both Buddhism and Mormonism tested the limits of dissent and difference in American religions; neither religion emerged from the predominantly held Protestant national narrative of faith that was familiar to citizens of the republic. As a result, both men felt free to share their religious beliefs and questions with remarkable openness and curiosity. From their correspondence we learn that the two men had a basic grasp of each other’s spiritual tradition but lacked real understanding. Fortunately, Taylor and Nishijima sought to learn from each other while still wearing their respective missionary hats.

Correspondence between Alma O. Taylor and Nishijima Kakuryo

Mormon missionary Alma O. Taylor began corresponding with Buddhist priest Nishijima Kakuryo on June 14, 1901, as described above. Unfortunately, neither his original letter nor a transcription of its content exists. Taylor likely did not fully appreciate the historical importance of their forthcoming letter exchange. It was not until their fourth letter exchange (Nishijima to Taylor) that Taylor determined to copy his entire extant correspondence with Nishijima into his handwritten journal. On July 28, four days after departing from Utah for Japan, the young Mormon elder recorded, “Most of the day was spent in writing letters to my friends.

26. For example, see Jonathan D. Sarna, ed., *Minority Faiths and the American Protestant Mainstream* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), especially Jan Shippo, “Difference and Otherness: Mormonism and the American Religious Mainstream,” 81–109.

27. Terryl Givens writes about Western fiction writers casting Mormons in the role of Asian oddity. Terryl L. Givens, “Caricature as Containment: Orientalism, Bondage, and the Construction of Mormon Ethnicity in Nineteenth-Century American Popular Fiction,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 18, no. 4 (1995): 385–403. See also Timothy Marr, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

One or two days before leaving home [July 22 or 23], I received the following letter from the president of the Buddhist Mission in America.”²⁸ Taylor then transcribed the missive from Nishijima (dated July 7) as context for his response to the Buddhist priest. He also then copied his response into his journal, along with their previous correspondence.

Since none of their original letters have survived, I have relied upon Taylor’s journal transcriptions of their letters. Thankfully, the young Mormon missionary was a conscientious journal keeper. Taylor began his regular, generally daily, record of events and feelings with honesty and surprising maturity on July 24, 1901—the very day that he and his three missionary companions departed from Salt Lake City to open the Japan Mission. For the next eight years and eight months, Taylor wrote regularly in his ever-expanding collection of missionary journals. He often recorded events that his companions failed to note. No other set of personal, mission, or Church records documents the events of the LDS Japan Mission between 1901 and 1910 with Taylor’s consistency, thoroughness, and insight.²⁹ Thus, Taylor’s records can be trusted and appreciated by historians.

Although the vast majority of Taylor’s journal writings are very legible, occasionally the original ink has faded, or Taylor complicated the text by inserting editorial corrections. I determined to stay true to Taylor’s original journal entries and letters and have therefore retained all Taylor’s spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. This involves preserving his emphasis on certain words or letters (such as underlining); enclosing his insertions above the normal text in forward slashes in the body of the text where it makes grammatical sense; and placing in brackets and crossing out underlying words that Taylor wrote over with other

28. Taylor, *Diary*, July 28, 1901.

29. Taylor’s thirteen journals vary in physical size. With the exception of his Journal B (typescript), all the volumes are holographic journals. Fortunately, he had excellent penmanship and wrote in beautiful cursive characters. Thanks to Taylor’s family and the staff at the L. Tom Perry Special Collections, all thirteen journals are well preserved. Journal A (July 24 to August 31, 1901) measures 6½ x 4½ inches. It is written in a blue-lined cardboard-bound notebook that opens vertically and numbers 186 red-edged pages. The cover is textured and light brown, with a navy blue border design and red corner protectors. The back cover continues the border design but is blank. The handwriting in Journal A is especially large and clear.

My Brigham Young University master’s thesis on Alma Taylor and his record-keeping efforts was published as *The Japanese Missionary Journals of Elder Alma O. Taylor*. However, I excluded the 1901 Taylor-Nishijima correspondence from this earlier publication of his diaries.

words, following them in plain text with the revisions. I have occasionally placed in brackets an interpretation of a distracting word. Interested readers may view the complete Taylor-Nishijima correspondence [online](#) or in person at the L. Tom Perry Special Collections at Brigham Young University's Harold B. Lee Library in Provo, Utah.

Letter 1: Alma O. Taylor to Nishijima Kakuryo, June 14, 1901³⁰

[*Editor's note:* Although Taylor never copied his initial letter to Nishijima into his journal, he did summarize its content in this entry.]

In my search for text books in the Japanese /language/ I was finally recommended by Dr. Paul Carus of Chicago to write to the Rev. K. Nishijima who then lived in San Francisco Cal. whom he thought would be able to find some for me, if there were any in the United States. I did so and after putting Mr. Nishijima to considerable trouble, which ended in a failure to find the books I concluded to tell him why I was so anxious to secure them. I wrote him a letter on June 14th telling him that myself in company with three others were going to Japan as representatives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints commonly called "Mormons" and that we were desirous of doing what studying /of the language/ we could while on our journey.

Letter 2: Nishijima Kakuryo to Alma O. Taylor, June 24, 1901³¹

807 Polk. St
San Francisco Cal

June 24" 1901

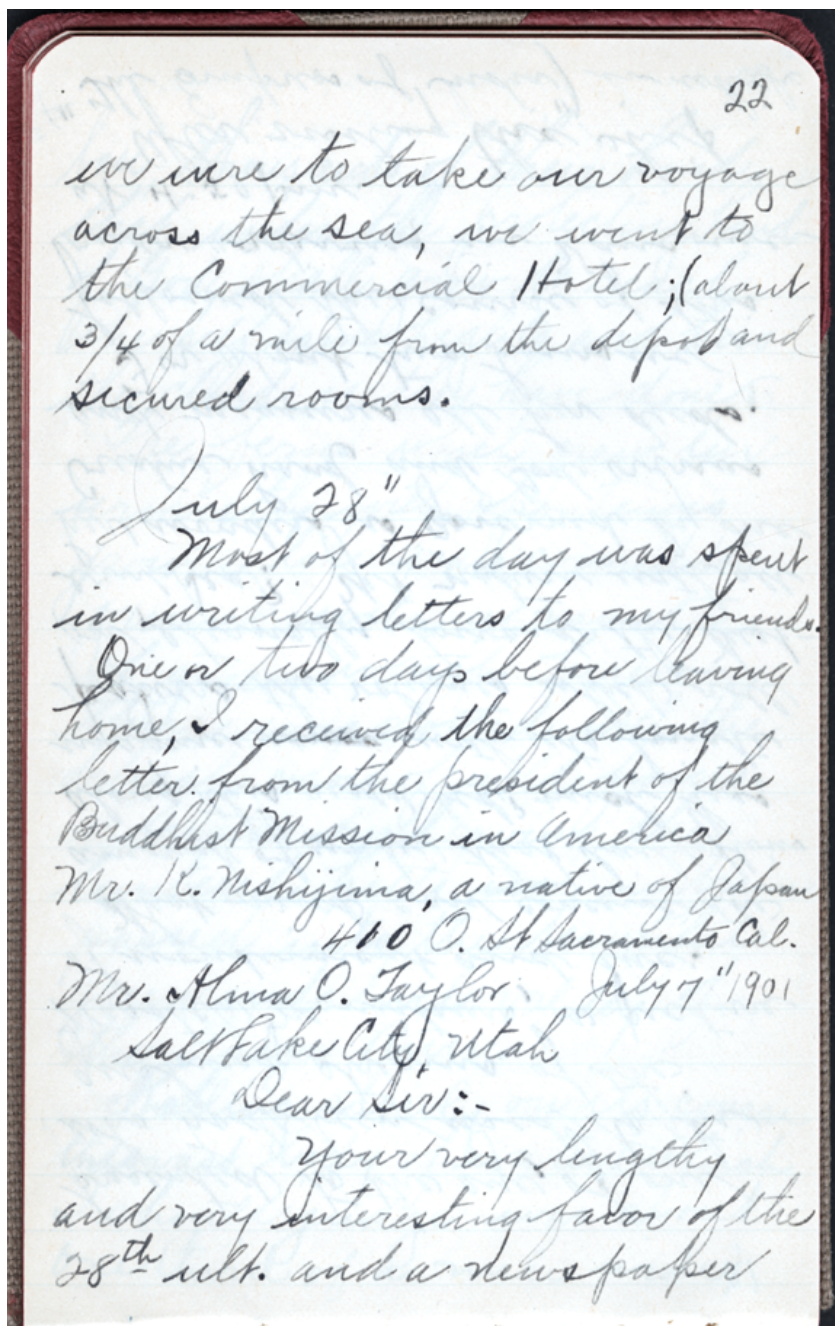
Mr. Alma O. Taylor
Salt Lake City, Utah

Dear Sir:—

Your letter of the 14th inst. was received and I feel very, very sorry for my being unable to get for you and your friends the text-book of the Japanese Language. If there were plenty of time before you left this country I would have sent to some book store in Tokyo for the books.

30. Taylor, Diary, July 28, 1901, 40–41.

31. Taylor, Diary, July 28, 1901, 41–44.



Page 22 of the diary of Alma O. Taylor, on which he begins his record of correspondence with Nishijima Kakuryo. Courtesy L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Brigham Young University.

You say in your letter that you are about to go to Japan to teach our people with the true Spirit of Christianity which is not taught by the hundreds of so called Christian sects upon the earth to-day; and I am very glad for it. I have no prejudice toward other religions, and I think that all the religions in the world should be just as brothers and sisters, and be in harmony and peace, since they all have to lead mankind to a better state and condition by the teachings of love and righteousness equally for all beings.

I have heard very often of Mormonism which is always despised and condemned by all other Christian sects in this country; simply on this point, as far as I know, that it teaches men the unlawful life of polygamy which will debase them instead of lifting. It being so, it is quite certain that any one who intends to introduce this Mormonism to Japan will meet with the severe condemnation, not only of the Christians, but the Buddhists there. I, myself, have not yet /thoroughly/ studied the principles of Mormonism; of its real influence upon the people, and I don't know at all what is the beauty and excellency of it.

If you really belong to this sect and intend to teach it to our people, I wish you would be so kind as to tell me how you will benefit our people who are in the state of dullness and ignorance, by your own way of living of which all other Christian sects are so much dispising?

I have sent you a copy of our journal and I need not say that I shall be very pleased to hear from you

With best wishes, I remain,

K. Nishijima

Letter 3: Alma O. Taylor to Nishijima Kakuryo, June 28, 1901³²

Rev. K. Nishijima

My Dear Sir:—

Your letter of the 24th inst. was duly received and read with pleasure. I respond cheerefully to your question as to how the religion of “Mormonism” will be a benefit to the people of your fatherland.

“Mormons” is a nick-name given to our people because of their belief in the Book of Mormon, but it makes no difference what the enemies of our church desire to call us; we still proudly lay claim to being the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and while we accept the term “Mormons” as it is thrust upon us, yet we refuse to sail under any banner

32. Taylor, Diary, July 28, 1901, 45–67.

of man-made fabric; repudiating the name of mortals as part of our title, differing therefore from the Weslyans, Calvinists and others, all of whom, though perhaps worthy organizations, declare themselves the followers of men. Ours is not the church of Moses Paul, John, Joseph Smith (though he was its founder) or Brigham Young (though he was its leader during its trying exodus to the west), but it is the church of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God. And being the Church of Christ it should and does /in its creed and practice/ follow strictly the teachings of the Savior. The "Mormon" church claims and proves from the Bible that Christ taught the following doctrines: Faith in God and Jesus Christ; Repentance from sin; baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; the Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Spirit which Spirit leadeth into all truth and enables man to live the higher principles of Christianity which are; virtue, knowledge, temperence, patience, godliness, brotherly-kindness and finally charity and love which principles are exhaulting in their character and which will revolutionize the world, establishing peace on earth and good-will in the hearts of all men, and will hasten on the day spoken of by Isaiah a prophet of the Old Testament: "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the Kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and the little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the suckling child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the cocatrice's den." "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all God's holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the mighty deep." Nor is it our belief that this condition of peace can come as long as there are so many creeds professing to teach the plan of salvation, yet at the same time warring with each other. Unity cannot exist in confusion; neither can there be more than one Christian road to Eternal Life, and that is the one straight and narrow way which leadeth to the final goal and Christ commanded us to walk therein, for it was the way prepared by him for all mankind. Whether the Latter-day Saints (Mormons) are walking in that path or not, let their teachings and their actions answer.

Step into any "Mormon" home where lives a faithful Latter-day Saint, and you will find a peaceful spirit there; a love existing between every member of the family; never will they partake of a meal, without first thanking God for it and asking his blessing thereon. Always before retiring to rest for the night and before entering upon the labors of the day the family will be brought together in a circle and upon bended

knees they will express their gratitude to the Lord for his blessings and solicit a continuation of his kindness and mercy; praying for power to be humble and true, virtuous and pure, walking in all holiness before their God. You will see the mother teaching her children from their infancy to their majority to be kind and gentle, loving all mankind and exhibiting charity to their companions. Chastity and virtue are the greatest lessons taught. How well do I remember my mother telling me when I was a little boy, to value my virtue more than my life. How often have I thanked God for such a mother and such a father for he is an exemplary man teaching his children by precept and example to be men, true men; refraining from the use of tobacco and all intoxicating liquors; dealing honestly with our fellows in all things. The “Mormon” children and people are taught to love God and remember the Sabbath Day; to put forth every effort and to use every talent with which they have been blessed in endeavoring to do good to their fellow men and in assisting others to actions of righteousness.

The Latter-day Saints are a frugal and industrious people who in spite of persecution, mobbing, and drivings, have built up beautiful homes and have made the desert places blossom as the rose. The marvelous growth of our fair State of Utah is an imperishable monument to the industry and honesty of the “Mormons” who were the pioneers of the Rocky Mountain Country. The governors and leading men of Wyoming, Arizona, and other surrounding States are sending requests for our people (the despised “Mormons”) to come and colonize in the unoccupied valleys of their States. Why are they doing this? Are not the “Mormons” a licentious, dishonest, thieving, and murderous set? Have they not plundered many a peaceful home and ravished many a virtuous maiden? These are the reports which are given out concerning us, but it is well to remember the words of Shakespeare “Rumor hath many tongues but most of them lie.” No! the world is beginning to understand the “Mormon” people and recognizing them to be honest, true, industrious, peace-loving and God-fearing men and women; possessing ability to build beautiful homes and establish hamlets, towns, cities, and states wherein lives a people as true as ever lived upon the earth. I do not desire to convey to you the idea that there is no transgression on the part of the “Mormon” people, for it is with us as with all others; some who profess to be Latter-day Saints do not keep the commandments of God, but do wickedly, yet you can be assured of this fact, that when wickedness is discovered and he who has sinned does not repent he will be excommunicated from the church, for our teachings

do not tolerate men in sin. It is because of the evil actions of professed “Mormons” that we have been harshly judged, but any candid mind will recognize the truth, that a creed or community cannot be judged by the actions of transgressors. “Mormonism” is true, Christianity is true, truth is truth and /will ever remain so/ no matter what man may do. Moses desired to give unto the people of Israel the law which he received from the Lord on Mt. Sinai but the people chose to worship the golden calf. Their actions, however, did not destroy the law nor prove it to be a myth or a falsehood; the law remained but the people were cut off.

It seems to be the general idea that “Mormonism” has but one doctrine—the doctrine of polygamy. The people of the world who are not thoroughly acquainted with the “Mormon” idea of polygamy; and know of it only from circulated reports (which are mostly rumors) have the horrifying thought, that the “Mormons” are eaten up with passion; and that their homes are worse than the brothels of harlots; that their girls are given to men to satisfy their fiendish lust; indeed, that they are more like beasts than human beings.

It is true that the Latter-day Saints believe in polygamy but they hold it as a sacred principle revealed from God, not only in this day but anciently. While they believe it to be a true principle, yet there has been no polygamous marriages contracted with the sanction of the church since 1890, when the law against polygamy was declared constitutional.³³ The “Mormons” being a law abiding people, conformed to the law of the land; sacrificing the law which they held as true; leaving the result in the hands of their God. So if at this date or at any time since /1890 when/ the “manifesto” against polygamus marriages was issued by the President of the “Mormon” church, a man takes a second wife while the first is living he not only breaks the law of the land, but of the Church also. The opponents of our Church claim that polygamus

33. Taylor is mistaken on two points here. First, the U.S. law against polygamy was declared constitutional in 1879 (*Reynolds v. United States*), not 1890. Second, when Church President Wilford Woodruff announced the “Manifesto” (Official Declaration 1) in 1890, it marked the beginning of the end of plural marriage within the Church. But it would take several decades to completely end the practice by Latter-day Saints, who, following the “Second Manifesto” in 1904, faced ecclesiastical discipline if they entered into new plural marriages. As secrecy surrounded the post-Manifesto plural marriages performed between 1890 and 1904, it is not surprising that Taylor believed that no more marriages had been conducted.

relations have not ceased among our people, and that children are being born to the plural wives. What else could they expect? Let me ask you Mr. Nishijima as a liberal thinking man, would my father (who has more than one wife) be justified or be acting like a man if he were to throw off his plural wives like dirty rags and make orphans of his children; treating them as some rich man might do, by sending food to them, yet at the same time kicking them from off his path? He took his wives before any law was enacted against polygamy and he did so feeling that he was keeping the law of God.³⁴ The fact that the men in our church continue to honor those sacred covenants is, to me, a very strong evidence that the marriage relations are considered in the “Mormon” Church as the most sacred of ties and an evidence that the plural wives are loved and cherished as dearly as the wife of any man in the world. No man with charity or love in his heart could ask that those wives and their children be thrown off and those sacred ties be broken, because the law of society demanded it. We may be beasts, but not so brutal as to stifle and kill the natural affections between husband and wives, and parents and children. I question whether the men who criticise the marriage relations of the “Mormons” would go to prison and suffer confinement for 6 months, one year, yes two and three years rather than sacrifice their wives and children. The very fact that the men of “Mormondom” have thus suffered for their plural wives and families is an evidence that they are sincere in their belief and true in their devotion far beyond that devotion which passion would create.

We are not going to Japan to preach polygamy, for it is a dead issue, and new polygamus relations are not being entered into among the “Mormons.” The only agitation which this subject has is from the “Anti-Mormons,” and it is used by them as a weapon against us. But Christendom must hold her peace for the standard which she presents to the world—the Bible must be thrown away if polygamy is not a true principle. If you have read the Bible you will understand the following passages: Genesis 16:1–3, 17:1–8, 29:16–29, 36:1–5, Exodus 2:21, 22, Numbers 12:1, I Samuel 1:2, II Samuel 12:8, 11, Isaiah 4:1. The Bible

34. Actually, the U.S. Congress passed the Morrill Anti-Bigamy Act, providing heavy fines and prison terms for polygamy, in July 1862, more than a decade before Taylor’s father married his mother. But the Latter-day Saints felt that this law was unconstitutional and disregarded its provisions, and the law was not generally enforced.

tells us that David was a man after the Lords own heart, who would fulfill all his will. All Bible students know that Christ the Savior of the world came through the lineage of this man—David—yet he was a polygamist. Again, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets were to be in the Kingdom of God (Luke 13:28) and yet most of them according to the Bible were polygamists. Now if polygamy is such a terrible sin why should these polygamist prophets be so favored of the Lord. I quote you these Biblical passages that you might know that the Christians who may criticise the “Mormons” for believing in polygamy, are unconsciously trampling on their own scriptures. Again let me say to you, that while we believe the principle of polygamy to be true, yet it is not practiced, and to form new polygamus relations would be violating the laws of the church as well as of the land.

Mr. Nishijima, as a polygamus child, being born of a woman who is a plural wife to my father, I testify that the virtue of the “Mormon” people is held most sacred; and as thousands can bare me witness, I say that the “Mormon” boys and girls are as pure youths and maidens as ever crossed the threshold of a mother’s home. In going to your countrymen with the message of “Mormonism” we go representing a virtuous, temterate [temperate], honest, kind, and industurious people; carrying a message characterized by charity and love—the message of the Gospel of Salvation as it is taught by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and which labors for the exhaltation of mankind, irrespective of color or race.

I have this day sent to you five copies of the “Improvement Era” a monthly periodical published by the Young Men of our Church. In these magazines you will find articles which I have marked. If you will read them as I have marked them you will get a systemic outline of the “Story of Mormonism,” Philosophy of Mormonism,” and “Evidences of the divinity of the mission of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

After you have read this letter and the articles refered to you may answer for yourself the question, whether “Mormonism will benefit your people or not.

I bare my testimony to you that it is the truth, and that it will elevate man to the highest possible standard. I also know that he who will seek with a prayerful heart and with a desire to understand its principles, shall know for themselves that the doctrines are true; for the Savior hath said: “He who will do the will of my Father in Heaven shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God,” or whether it be of man. To all who knock with earnestness, it shall be opened to them.

Enclosed you will find a newspaper clipping which may interest you also a card containing the Articles of our Faith. These Articles are not a complete code of our faith for as you will see by one of them (9) we accept the principle of /continuous/ revelation by which we receive new light /and further truth/ as a characteristic feature of our belief.

The headquarters of the California Mission of our Church is located in San Francisco at number 938 Golden Gate Ave. Joseph Robinson is the President of the mission and he or any of the Elders traveling in California whom you may chance to meet will be glad to answer any question or give any information concerning the “Mormons” or their doctrine.

Thanking you for all the kindness you have shown me, I remain,
Yours truly
Alma O. Taylor

Letter 4: Nishijima Kakuryo to Alma O. Taylor, July 7, 1901³⁵

One or two days before leaving home, I received the following letter from the president of the Buddhist Mission in American Mr. K. Nishijima, a native of Japan

410 O. St Sacramento Cal.
Mr. Alma O. Taylor July 7th 1901
Salt Lake City, Utah
Dear Sir:—

Your very lengthy and very interesting favor of the 28th ult. and a newspaper clipping and a card of the Articles of your faith enclosed in it, were duly received; and also the copies of “Improvement Era” which you so kindly sent me. I thank you very much for the same.

My friend, I am greatly impressed to learn from your letter that there are so many similarities between the warm and pious “home” of the Buddhists and the Mormons. And I found really many misunderstandings and misrepresentations by the opponents of your faith concerning the life of your people as is also the same case with our own faith and people. Our faith, as you know, with all other religious systems of the Orient, was classed by the Western people in one group that they termed heathenism; and all the Asaitic races as heathen. But now, by

35. This letter is the first one that Taylor recorded in his journal. Taylor, *Diary*, July 28, 1901, 22–26.

the indefatigable zeal and industry of the most prominent scholars of Europe and America, the Sacred Books of the East are made accessible to the Western world and those who become familiar with them are very deeply interested in the Oriental teachings—especially Buddhism.

The people who were sincere and earnest in their search after truth, found the truth they sought for, in the so called heathenism of the Orient and consequently their minds became much broader and impartial towards heathens

I believe that the time will come ere long, when the people who are used now to despise your faith and its followers, will fully understand them, and appreciate highly the beauty and excellency of “Mormonism” There is one thing, however, that I could not understand after all your explanation of your faith and it is the principle of polygamy which your people deem a sacred covenant.

I wish to comprehend clearly from pure ethical and phylosophical point of view, instead of theologically, why the principle of polygamy should be deemed sacred for us, mankind.

My friend don't think me a man who has a cross intention to criticise your faith, but think me as a student, and kindly give information when it will not inconvenience you.

I shall be very pleased if you send me the copy of “Improvement Era” regularly, so that I may have an opportunity to investigate your faith, and I shall send you regularly the copy of our journal, if you only let me know your address.

Hoping you good health, I remain,
Yours fraternally,
K. Nishijima

Letter 5: Alma O. Taylor to Nishijima Kakuryo, July 28, 1901³⁶

Vancouver, B.C.
July 28"

Rev. K. Nishijima
Sacramento, Cal.

My Dear Sir:-

36. Taylor, Diary, July 28, 1901, 26–40.

Your favor of the 7th came duly to hand, but owing to the great amount of work I had to do preparatory to leaving on my trip to Japan, I have been unable to answer it before. I am[e] now in the hotel at Vancouver awaiting the departure of the steamer.

I shall be pleased to have you send me your journal and I will send you the address of the mission when it [we] becomes permanently established. In the last number which you sent me, I found an article on Mahayana and Hinayana³⁷ Texts which was very interesting. I have always been impressed with the principles of temperance, peace, and good-will that are the themes of many articles written by the disciples of Buddha. When I realize that I am going to preach the Gospel plan of Salvation to a people having in their creed many of the virtues of true Christianity, it becomes indeed a pleasant thought and gives encouragement, which, in itself, is inspiring.

Regarding the doctrine of polygamy from an ethical and philosophical standpoint, I will say; that like all the other laws of God, polygamy is both moral and natural.

Let me ask you why man and woman were created? Why was it necessary for there to be more than one sex? Why did not the human family consist of males, alone or of females alone? The answer is unmistakably this; because it would have been impossible for the human race to have been perpetuated. Man in himself, could not have produced his kind; woman in herself, could not have produced her kind; and the laws of nature which regulate all animal life would have been perverted and annulled. Therefore, man and woman were created for the purpose of producing their kind and in peopling the earth with an honest and a righteous seed. Unto them was given a law, governing their relationship to each other. What is that law? It is a law which has contained in it, resolutions, making the marriage covenant sacred and divine. The general assent of mankind, ever since the earliest history of his race, unto this law is an evidence that a marriage ceremony is in harmony with the feelings of humility [humanity?] and absolutely necessary in obeying the social law, (which in this instance is a law of God). But the question of marriage

37. Mahayana, one of the main Buddhist traditions, began in the first century and is widely practiced in the East Asian countries of China, Japan, and Korea. It is the more liberal branch of modern Buddhism, as opposed to more conservative Hinayana Buddhism, popular in the Southeast Asian nations of Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar.

being a moral and ethical law is so generally accepted in all the world, that it may need no further comment.

If marriage in itself is ethical, moral, natural, devine, and proper from every standpoint; where can you find an ethical law which would make a plural marriage immoral so long as the ceremony is performed in exactly the same manner as when the first ties were made, and where a perfect love and devotion exists between the parties concerned? It cannot be called adultery, because the parties are married just the same as any other man and woman might be. It cannot be called brutal or for the sake of gratifying passion, for there exists a perfect mutual love just as perfect as exists between any husband and wife. It is true, that society has a great deal to do with the establishment of moral law, and society has said that polygamists are guilty of the crime of bigamy. Let us see which is the productive of the more good and the greater morality—society or polygamy.

Is it an uncommon thing for a man who commands a high position in social circles and who has a wife and family, to have also a mistress with whom he is associating in adulterous relations, regularly? Which is the more honorable and the more moral, for a man to have /two/ wives whom he loves and recognizes as the mother's of his children, or to have one wife whom he recognizes, and a mistress with whom he is secretly committing sin? The polygamist takes unto himself women to whom he gives children for the purpose of perpetuating his seed, (for which he was created), but the mistress keeper takes unto himself harlots who cause abhorptions [abortions] and the extinction of human life. Which, Mr. Nishijima of the two, the lover of his families or the betrayer of his family (for any one who will turn from virtue, wife, and children, unto harlots is a betrayer of his family), is the best able to establish the moral laws?

Let us look at polygamy from another standpoint, that of nature.

As you will undoubtedly concede, it is the destiny of woman to be a mother of children. The census of the United States shows nearly one fourth more unmarried women than men. Three years ago, quite an agitation was created by the question as to how these maidens were going to get husbands. In the eyes of the world this still remains an perplexing problem with no hope of its being solved. But in the eyes of the "Mormon" people and nature there is a solution, and it is this: nature has so formed woman that she cannot develop the germ of life as rapidly as it is formed by man, therefore, in spite of the much larger number of

women than there are men, there are sufficient to supply the germ of life as rapidly as /the/ women can develop it; hence, "Mormonism" presents to the world, polygamy, a system of honorable marriage and family raising, as a solution to the problem and claim it to be better than to allow virtuous maidens to grow old and die barren and fruitless, or that they should be driven in despair into some brothel to become the mistresses of men instead of their honorable and lawful wives.

While I was in Chicago two years ago, I studied under Dr. Carl A. Barnes the Sanitary Physician of that city and Prof in the Harvey Medical College. One evening after a long talk on the doctrine of polygamy, as viewed by the "Mormon" people he said: "Mr. Taylor, I am much impressed with your statements of the "Mormon" idea of marriage, and as a Doctor of Medicine /knowing the laws of health/ I must confess that if two thirds, yes three fourths of the men in this city had more than one wife they would be better off physically, say nothing of the improvement it would make morally." Dr. Barnes is not the only man to see the virtue of this doctrine, but any who will look with an unbiased mind, from either a scientific or theological standpoint, will discover as Dr. Barnes did, that polygamy cannot be dismissed as a beastly practice, used only to satisfy the lusts of men, but that it demands the respect and carefull invistigation of all.

It is true that the tradition of the age is opposed to polygamy but such opposition has been raised against practically all truth when first proclaimed. When Gallaleo announced that the world was round the people with one united voice pronounced him insane and he was forced to lie on the ground at the foot of the steps leading into the church and allow the people as they came out to step on him, but after the last man had stepped on him he jumped to his feet and cried: "The earth is round all the same." So the "Mormons" though persecuted for their belief in the doctrine of polygamy will in some future day be honored for the sacredness of their marriage relations, as Galleleo is now honored with the admiration of the civilized world.

Polygamy is natural, hence, phylosophical; when lived with earnestness and truth it is moral, hence, ethical; and as you can see by my last letter it is Biblical, hence, theological.

Before leaving home I subscribed for the "Era" in your name and had it sent to #410 O. St. Sacramento, Cal. As a great many articles which will appear in that magazine will be written to believers and from a believers standpoint you may not be able to understand them perfectly

but there will undoubtedly be many articles which will interest you in an investigation of “Mormonism.”

Should you have any further questions to ask about the “Mormons” an[d] their doctrine I shall be pleased to answer them. If all that I have written is not plain to you I will try and make it so.

Yours respectfully
Alma O. Taylor

Reid L. Neilson received a bachelor’s (international relations) and two master’s degrees (business management and American history) from Brigham Young University and a PhD in Religious Studies (American religions) from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In 2006, he became Assistant Professor of Church History and Doctrine in Religious Education at BYU, where he received the University Young Scholar Award.

Neilson is the author and editor of over twenty books, including *Exhibiting Mormonism: The Latter-day Saints and the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair*, published by Oxford University Press; *Early Mormon Missionary Activities in Japan, 1901–1924*, published by University of Utah Press and reviewed in *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 3; and *Taking the Gospel to the Japanese, 1901–2001*, published by BYU Press. He published Alma Taylor’s 1910 report to the First Presidency in “Alma Taylor’s Fact-Finding Mission to China,” *BYU Studies* 40, no. 1 (2001): 176–203. He and Terryl Givens are coeditors of the recently published university textbook *The Columbia Sourcebook of Mormons in the United States* (Columbia University Press).

Neilson was named the managing director of the Church History Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 2010. He oversees all department operations, including the Church History Library, the Church History Museum, and the Granite Mountain Records Vault. He serves on the editorial boards of the Joseph Smith Papers Project and Deseret Book Company.