



2022

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Recommended Citation

Hilton, John III; Vincent, Jesse; and Harper, Rachel (2022) "Last at the Cross," *BYU Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 61: Iss. 3, Article 3.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol61/iss3/3>

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“Last at the Cross”

Teachings about Christ's Crucifixion in the *Woman's Exponent*, the *Relief Society Magazine*, and the *Young Woman's Journal*

John Hilton III, Jesse Vincent, and Rachel Harper

An article in the 1921 issue of the *Relief Society Magazine* states, “Sisters of the Relief Society, . . . answer to your hearts one question: Have I secured to myself the Pearl of Great Price, the great gift of God to man, which is eternal life, and which can be secured only through first obtaining a testimony of the mission and crucifixion of the Savior, with the added testimony that Joseph Smith was a prophet of the living God, and that he revealed anew the gospel of Jesus Christ in this the last dispensation to the children of men?”¹ Note that in this unsigned editorial, the author emphasized the importance of securing a testimony, specifically of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Previous studies have clearly indicated that the scriptures,² Joseph Smith,³ and Church leaders whose words were spoken in general conference or printed in the *Journal of Discourses*⁴ have heavily emphasized the atoning significance of Christ's Crucifixion. While the Savior's gift from Golgotha is unquestionably important, little has been written regarding

1. “No Man Can Be Saved in Ignorance,” *Relief Society Magazine* 8, no. 9 (September 1921): 538.

2. See John Hilton III, “Teaching the Scriptural Emphasis on the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ,” *Religious Educator* 20, no. 3 (2019): 132–53.

3. See John Hilton III, “Joseph Smith, Gethsemane, and the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ,” in *How and What We Worship: Christology and Praxis in the Revelations of Joseph Smith*, ed. Rachel Cope, Carter Charles, and Jordan Watkins (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2020), 303–29.

4. See John Hilton III, Emily Hyde, and McKenna Trussel, “The Teachings of Church Leaders Regarding the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ: 1852–2018,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (2020): 49–80.

how early Latter-day Saint women treated this topic in their writings. This is a critical omission, given the perspectives offered by female authors and editors. Amy Easton-Flake's recent comparison of how male and female Latter-day Saint authors used Bible verses reconfirms "the necessity of bringing women's employment of scriptures into any study that seeks to understand how individuals read scriptures."⁵

In the present study, we apply this insight from Easton-Flake to explore how female members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints perceived the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. We do this by examining what the authors and editors in the *Woman's Exponent*, the *Relief Society Magazine*, and the *Young Woman's Journal* wrote about and selected for publication on this topic. These editors (exclusively female) and authors (primarily female) provide powerful insight and needed perspective on a "fundamental"⁶ principle of our religion.

Method

The specific corpus we used was created for the purposes of the present study and includes the contents of three early Latter-day Saint periodicals.⁷ The first is the *Woman's Exponent*, published from 1872 to 1914. This periodical "was one of the earliest periodicals for women in the United States."⁸ It was expressly published for women and run by women. Although not an official publication of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, it was "loyal to church leaders and policies."⁹ The second journal in our corpus is the *Relief Society Magazine* (1914–1970); its beginning coincided with the discontinuation of the *Woman's Exponent*. Like the *Exponent*, the *Relief Society Magazine* was run by

5. Amy Easton-Flake, "The Bible in the *Millennial Star* and the *Woman's Exponent*," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (2021): 41.

6. Joseph Smith taught, "The fundamental principles of our religion is the testimony of the apostles and prophets concerning Jesus Christ, 'that he died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended up into heaven;' and all other things are only appendages to these, which pertain to our religion." "Elders' Journal, July 1838," 44, Joseph Smith Papers, accessed August 13, 2019, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/elders-journal-july-1838/12>, emphasis added.

7. This corpus is available to other researchers via the WordCruncher bookstore. For more information about WordCruncher, or to download a copy, visit <https://wordcruncher.com>. Researchers interested in obtaining the corpus should contact Jesse Vincent (jesse_vincent@byu.edu).

8. Sherilyn Cox Bennion, "The *Woman's Exponent*: Forty-two Years of Speaking for Women," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (1976): 222.

9. Bennion, "Woman's Exponent," 223.

women and was specifically for a female audience. Unlike the *Exponent*, the *Relief Society Magazine* was an official Church publication.¹⁰ The third periodical included in our corpus is the *Young Woman's Journal*, published between 1889 and 1929. This magazine was sponsored by the Young Ladies' Mutual Improvement Association, analogous to the current "Young Women" program.

Digital versions of these periodicals have been collected by sources such as the Brigham Young University (BYU) Digital Collections and the Internet Archive; however, these resources have used only basic optical character recognition (OCR) technology to make the transcriptions and do not allow search results to be easily extracted and analyzed. Jesse Vincent and Jeremy Browne from BYU's Digital Humanities Office used Python and Google's open-source OCR tool, Tesseract, to convert the images of the materials that were digitized by BYU Digital Collections into text. This technology to convert images to text is not perfect, but Browne used a method of changing the brightness of each page multiple times and counting how many dictionary words are on each brightness change. The iteration that had the most dictionary words on it was selected and added to the corpus.

This method converts text more slowly but tends to show better results in the output of digital text than traditional OCR technology. The corpus of this scanned text was housed within the program WordCruncher, which allowed for search terms and their surrounding texts to be exported to other programs, such as Excel, for streamlined analysis. Across all three periodicals, our corpus contained approximately fifty-four million words.

To identify what authors in this corpus taught concerning Christ's Crucifixion, we employed a variety of search terms. We searched for the words "Crucify" (in all variant forms), "Crucifix," "Crucifixion," "Cross," "Calvary," "Golgotha," and "Lay down . . . life." We also searched for the words "Die," "Death," "Sacrifice," "Slain," and "Lifted Up" that occurred within ten words of "Jesus Christ" (or one of the titles "Messiah," "Redeemer," "Lord," "Lamb," "Savior," or "Son of God," or the word "sins").¹¹ Our primary data comprised the fifty words spoken before and

10. For more details about the *Relief Society Magazine*, see Patricia Ann Mann, "A History of the Relief Society Magazine, 1914–1970" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1971).

11. Our methodology leads to undercounting, given that we did not search other titles (for example, "Jehovah"). Thus, a phrase such as "Jehovah died for the sins of the world" would not have appeared in our search results.

after each use of the search term.¹² We used WordCruncher to extract the key word hits (along with the preceding and following fifty words) and move them to an Excel document to analyze and code the data.

We note that because our methodology relied on computer searches, there are some limitations. Some teachings regarding the Crucifixion might not have used one of the key words we identified; in addition, the OCR output was not perfect. For example, if the OCR read the phrase “Our Captain, Christ the Crucifcd” (the OCR incorrectly included a “c” rather than an “e” as the second-to-last letter in “Crucified”), it would not have been recognized in our search. Such errors in the OCR are an admitted weakness of our study and have led to an undercounting of the results presented. However, we believe this weakness is mitigated by the fact that we were able to digitally search a large corpus that has hitherto been unsearchable in this manner.

Many of our search results did not relate to the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. For example, several instances of the word “cross” were completely unrelated (for example, “Parents should not be cross with their children”). Statements that did not directly relate to the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ were eliminated from our corpus, including statements about humans bearing crosses, when they were metaphorically used to describe trials. We also eliminated instances in which our key words were used multiple times in close proximity,¹³ as well as times when they appeared in a header or the table of contents. After this refinement, we had 1,903 passages across all three publications to analyze.

Once our corpus was in place, we read each passage, looking for common themes. A process of emergent coding¹⁴ led to nine themes that we used to code each reference. Table 1 summarizes our coding structure.

12. In some instances, such as when parts of the OCR were illegible, we analyzed additional portions of the original article.

13. If a second reference appeared within fifty words of the first, it was considered a duplicate and was deleted from the corpus.

14. Emergent coding refers to the process of repeatedly reading qualitative data to identify themes contained in the dataset.

Table 1. Thematic coding structure

Code	Description	Sample Quote
Love	Christ and/or God manifested love through the death of Jesus Christ	"His, our Elder Brother's, life was an example of the divine love of the Father, who so loved the world that He gave His well-beloved Son to be a sacrifice for sin, that we might obtain eternal life." ¹⁵
In-depth description	The Crucifixion of Jesus Christ is the main topic of the text: detailed descriptions of Christ's trial before Pilate, the walk to Calvary, or the Crucifixion itself.	"At last Golgotha was reached, Jesus was crucified, and the card was nailed above His head. The two sinners were crucified on either hand of the Savior. As He hung upon the cross, His enemies mocked Him, and asked Him now to save Himself or call upon God to do it. To these mockeries Jesus replied nothing." ¹⁶
Women at the cross	The focus of the passage is that women were with Christ at the cross.	"Then came the day when with Mary of Bethany and Mary of Magdala, the women who understood the mission of Jesus, she stood by the cross on Calvary. 'These women who were the last at the cross and the earliest at the grave.'" ¹⁷
Christ's final seven statements	One of Christ's seven statements from the cross is either explicitly stated or referenced.	"Keep the picture of Christ being crucified before you, remember these words 'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do,' or if you have been injured, you know that you are happier than they who have wronged you, for it is better to suffer wrong than to do wrong." ¹⁸

15. Ina, "The Power of Love," *Woman's Exponent* 34, no. 4 (September 1, 1905): 18.

16. "Junior Lessons: The Life of the Savior: Lesson XVII: The Crucifixion, Resurrection, Burial, and Ascension," *Young Woman's Journal* 25, no. 3 (March 1914): 196.

17. Maude Beeley Jacob, "Woman as an Interpreter of the Faith," *Relief Society Magazine* 26, no. 7 (July 1939): 437.

18. R. A. S., "Great in Small Things: How to Forgive," *Woman's Exponent* 29, no. 16-17 (January 15, 1901): 73.

Code	Description	Sample Quote
Poetry	The author refers to, quotes, or writes poetry.	"With the morning light came soldier[s], / On their cruel errand sent. / To the crown for Him they plaited / Its sweet charm the flower lent. / When upon the cross they crowned Him." ¹⁹
The cross as a physical object	Description of floral arrangements or other representations of a cross, physical cross at a church.	"The first to make their appearance were the little children, girls about six years old, who led the march in two single files, about ten feet apart. Between the files, and distant a hundred feet from each other, were little girls, scarcely able to walk, carrying an anchor, a cross, or a picture of some patron saint." ²⁰
The atoning power of Christ's Crucifixion	We receive redemption/salvation through the death of Jesus Christ.	"Through his life and ministry upon the earth, and through his death upon the cross, He atoned for the sin in the Garden of Eden, and gained the victory over death, so that man, though he must die, shall yet have life everlasting." ²¹
Narrative	Christ's Crucifixion is mentioned as part of a general narrative of his life, or only mentioned in passing. ²²	"I thought of Jesus being baptized in the Jordan by John, which after was followed by His crucifixion, and of the approach of His second coming in the near future; and I questioned who will be prepared for His coming?" ²³

19. Faith, "The Legend of the Passion Flower," *Woman's Exponent* 15, no. 1 (June 1, 1886): 1.

20. T., "St. John's Day in Constantinople," *Woman's Exponent* 15, no. 5 (August 1, 1886): 33.

21. "The Story of the Restoration: Second Year: Lesson XVI: The Resurrection of the Body," *Young Woman's Journal* 23, no. 2 (February 1912): 104.

22. Any quote that received any other code was excluded from the narrative code.

23. Dr. Elvira S. Barney, "Dr. Barney's Travels in Colorado," *Woman's Exponent* 26, nos. 11–12 (November 1 and 15, 1897): 210.

Code	Description	Sample Quote
Miscellaneous	All of the statements that did not fit into the above categories.	"To become a son of perdition, one must reject the fulness of the light of the everlasting Gospel; one must defy the power of God after having known it and partaken of it; one must deny the Holy Spirit after having received it; one must consent to the crucifixion of the only Begotten Son of the Father, and to the putting of Him to open shame." ²⁴

Each reference received at least one code; however, a quote could receive more than one code depending on its content. For example, the following lines from a poem by Lydia D. Alder received two codes, "Atoning Power" and "Poetry": "This is the Lord, who groaned upon the cross; / And yielded up his precious life, our souls to cleanse from dross."²⁵

Two independent researchers read each reference and assigned codes based on the above descriptions. Their assignments were compared; in cases of disagreement, a third researcher reviewed their work and made a final determination of the codes assigned.²⁶

References to Christ's Crucifixion

Within our corpus, there were 1,903 references to the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ or the cross. Chart 1 shows the frequency with which the Crucifixion of Christ has been discussed over time in the *Woman's Exponent*, the *Relief Society Magazine*, and the *Young Woman's Journal*. To account for the variance in the number of words in each periodical, chart 1 is normalized for the occurrences of our search terms relative to the total number of words appearing in the periodicals each year.²⁷

There is no clear directional trend shown across the nearly one-hundred-year period contained in our corpus; rather, the variances between individual years exceed the variances between decades or longer periods of time. The higher frequency of mentions in individual

24. "The Story of the Restoration: Lesson XVIII: The Vision of Glories," *Young Woman's Journal* 38, no. 4 (April 1927): 276.

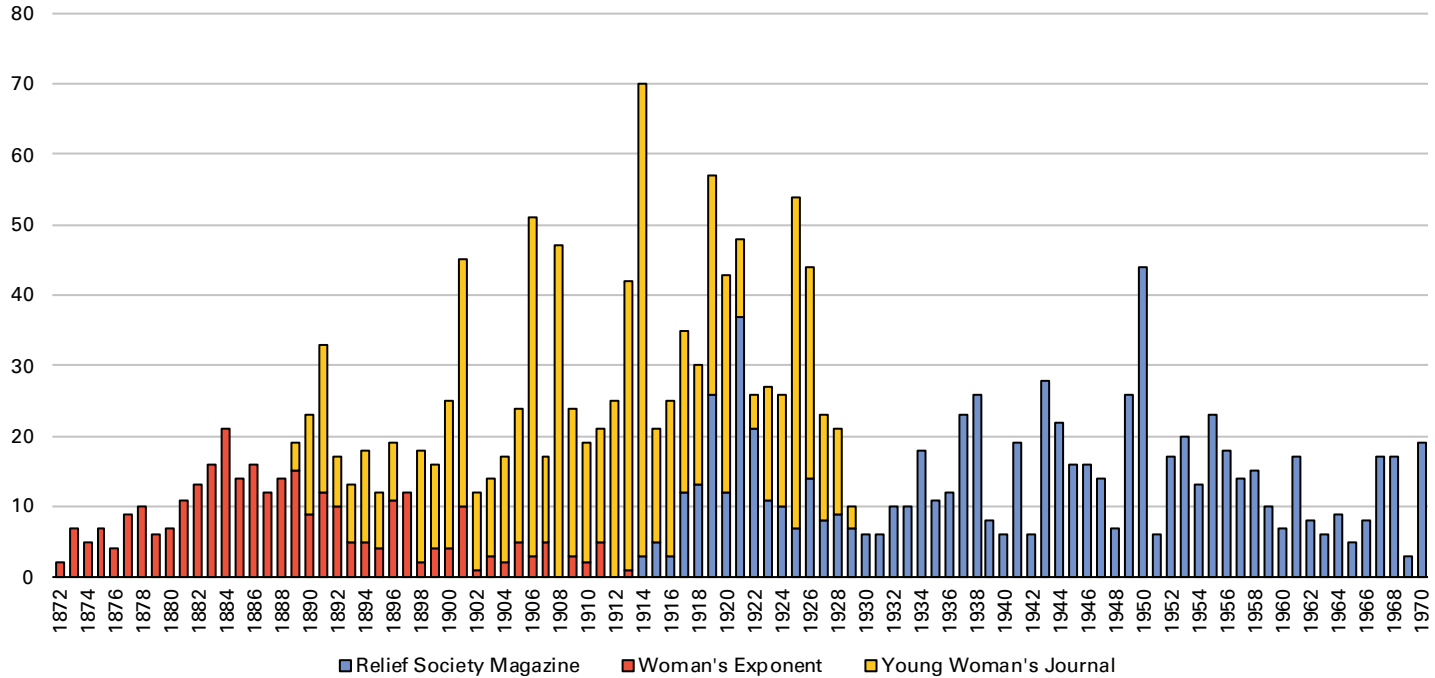
25. Lydia D. Alder, "A Vision," *Woman's Exponent* 27, nos. 3-4 (July 1, 1898): 11.

26. Jesse Vincent and Rachel Harper did the initial coding; John Hilton III reviewed the coding process and resolved discrepancies in the codes.

27. The raw data was similarly shaped; for precision and to avoid duplication, we include only the normalized chart.

Chart 1. Discussion of the Crucifixion by source and year

Relief Society Magazine, Woman's Exponent and Young Woman's Journal



years likely stems from more Crucifixion-themed articles, lessons, and poems in a particular year, but there does not appear to be any systematic trend, other than the fact that the *Young Woman's Journal* referenced Christ's Crucifixion substantially more than the other two periodicals.

Because each quote could receive multiple codes, the 1,903 statements we analyzed received a total of 2,093 codes. Table 2 shows how frequently each statement received each code.

Table 2. Frequency of themes

Code	Description	Percentage of statements that received this code
Love	Christ and/or God manifest love through the death of Jesus Christ.	3.7%
In-depth description	The Crucifixion of Jesus Christ was the main topic of the text: detailed descriptions of Christ's trial before Pilate, the walk to Calvary, or the Crucifixion itself.	4.6%
Women at the cross	The focus of the passage is that women were with Christ at the cross.	4.6%
Christ's final seven statements	One of Christ's seven statements from the cross is either explicitly stated or referenced.	7.7%
Poetry	The author refers to, quotes, or writes poetry.	8.9%
The cross as a physical object	Description of floral arrangements or other representations of a cross or a physical cross at a church.	11.9%
The atoning power of Christ's Crucifixion	We receive redemption/salvation through the death of Jesus Christ.	14.1%
Miscellaneous	All of the statements that did not fit into the above categories.	16.7%
Narrative	Christ's Crucifixion is mentioned as part of a general narrative of his life or only mentioned in passing. ²⁸	37.8%

Some the themes we uncovered yielded less-interesting insights than others. For example, the "Narrative" quotations, which made up just over one-third of total occurrences, mentioned Christ's Crucifixion only

²⁸. Any quote that received any other code was excluded from the narrative code.

in passing, often as a time marker. For example, Christine H. Robinson wrote, “Yet, after the Savior’s crucifixion, his disciples apparently forgot the instructions he had given them and some of them returned to their former occupation as fishermen.”²⁹ Because these narrative statements do not provide insight into Christ’s Crucifixion, we do not examine them in the present study.

The statements we coded as “In-depth description” were typically a summation of what the scriptures teach about Christ’s Crucifixion, often as part of prescribed lessons. Such lessons were also often accompanied by a series of questions that reviewed the lesson material, such as “1. Where was Jesus crucified? 2. What inscription was written above his head? 3. Who were crucified at the same time? 4. What did his enemies say to Jesus as he hung upon the cross? 5. Who of Jesus’ friends were at the cross? 6. What promise did Jesus make to the believing sinner? 7. What were the words of Jesus while he hung upon the cross?”³⁰ When we exclude the statements that are lists of questions, most of the statements coded as “in-depth description” also received another code; therefore, we have not included a separate section for “in-depth description” in this article. In the present study, we focus on the following themes (organized in order of appearing from the least to most frequent): love, women at the cross, Christ’s final seven statements, poetry, the cross as a physical object, the atoning power of Christ’s Crucifixion, and miscellaneous.

Love

We identified seventy-three instances in our corpus where there was a focus on the love that Jesus Christ or Heavenly Father demonstrated in connection with the Savior’s death. The most frequent connection (appearing about fifty times) was a specific mention of the love Jesus Christ manifested for humanity by laying down his life for them. On eighteen different occasions, all or part of John 15:13 was quoted: “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” For example, Clara Farnsworth elaborated on this verse, stating that Jesus “died not only for the righteous, but for sinless and sinful

29. Christine H. Robinson, “Visiting Teacher Message: Truths to Live By from the Doctrine and Covenants,” *Relief Society Magazine* 52, no. 7 (July 1965): 541.

30. “Junior Lessons: The Life of the Savior: Lesson XVII: The Crucifixion, Burial, Resurrection, and Ascension,” *Young Woman’s Journal* 25 no. 3 (March 1914): 198.

alike. 'Greater love than this hath no man, that he lay down his life for his friend.' But Christ was more than man; mortal man could not do what He did. He gave His life for enemy as well as friend. Here was the supreme merit of His sacrifice."³¹

Many of the statements describing Christ's love on the cross were both powerful and poignant.³² Consider these statements about the love Christ expressed in his death—collectively they illustrate that many Latter-day Saints viewed the Savior's Crucifixion not as a topic to be avoided, but rather as a manifestation of his love:

- "His life was lived to fulfill his Father's will and was offered on the cross because of his great love for you and me."³³
- "See the cross and bleeding feet, / Hear the cry of pain and anguish, / Hear the message, tender sweet, / Hear him calling, gently calling / All mankind to Him above, / For He gave His life a ransom, / From the depths of perfect love."³⁴
- "Jesus . . . loved to the extent of laying down his life for each individual."³⁵
- "Jesus in his mighty love, Came from the courts above; And died on Calvary's awful cross."³⁶
- [At the cross] "of anguish Love was born"³⁷

A second love-related theme that appeared was how the love of Heavenly Father was manifested in the death of Jesus Christ; this type of statement occurred seventeen times. In a short dialogue, written in the form of a script, M. Elizabeth Little paraphrased John 3:16 to say, "The Bible

31. Clara Farnsworth, "Gifts and Giving," *Young Woman's Journal* 35, no. 12 (December 1924): 653.

32. In addition to the quotations cited in the body of the text, we highlight one statement which was unusual in that it highlighted how the Savior's love for *his Father* was a key part of Christ's death. Alice Colton Smith wrote, "Jesus as he hung on the cross sacrificing his life for the love of God and his purposes." Alice Colton Smith, "Visiting Teacher Message—Truths to Live By: Message 2—Love—a Way to Salvation," *Relief Society Magazine* 54, no. 8 (August 1967): 624.

33. Marguerite J. Griffin, "Echoes of Hope," *Relief Society Magazine* 33, no. 4 (April 1946): 226.

34. Grace C. Jacobsen, "Gently Calling," *Relief Society Magazine* 22, no. 8 (August 1935): 528.

35. "Theology and Testimony," *Relief Society Magazine* 11, no. 8 (August 1924): 427.

36. Sarah J. Austin, "Lines," *Woman's Exponent* 19, no. 14 (January 1, 1891): 111.

37. Faith, "The Legend of the Passion Flower," 1.

says that God so loved the world, that He gave His only Begotten Son to die for the sins of the world, that through the shedding of His blood we may be saved.”³⁸ One editorial states that “Christmas should hold a deeper meaning” for Latter-day Saint youth because they “think tenderly of Him whose birthday it represents and their hearts will be lifted in adoration to their Father for the divine love which sent a Savior into the world to live and die for men.”³⁹

A beautiful poem published in the *Woman’s Exponent* in 1878 combines these first two ideas by describing the love of both Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ: “Our Father loved his children, Oh! so well. / He gave the noblest, best beloved of all, / And through the One saved millions from the fall; / And when we doubt his love could we but turn / To Calvary’s cross where love doth purest burn.”⁴⁰

Although not nearly as frequent as the preceding themes, there were five occasions in which specific reference was made to the cross itself as an emblem of love. An unattributed editorial in the *Young Woman’s Journal* acknowledged that the cross had negative connotations prior to the Savior’s sacrifice but asserted that Christ’s death changed this meaning. The editor wrote, “The cross that was then a sign of disgrace has become a symbol of love and salvation.”⁴¹

Women at the Cross

Throughout our corpus, we found eighty-five statements emphasizing the presence of women at the cross and identified four commonly appearing themes. First, occurring in twenty-five instances, was Mary’s feelings during the Crucifixion. These passages included the idea that women can sympathize with how Mary felt at the cross. An author identified only as Vina wrote, “There is none who can more deeply sympathize with that mother’s broken heart who was borne away fainting from the cross where hung her darling son; than mothers themselves.”⁴² Vina’s observation enhances the concept of mothers’ divine characteristic of sympathy for their children.

38. M. Elizabeth Little, “A Dialogue,” *Woman’s Exponent* 12, no. 20 (March 15, 1884): 158.

39. “The Sacred Birthday,” *Young Woman’s Journal* 30, no. 12 (December 1919): 677.

40. Hope, “A Reverie,” *Woman’s Exponent* 6, no. 15 (January 1, 1878): 115.

41. “The Drawing Power of the Risen Redeemer,” *Young Woman’s Journal* 26, no. 4 (April 1915): 260.

42. Vina, “Mother and Son,” *Woman’s Exponent* 19, no. 14 (January 1, 1891): 109.

A second theme, appearing twenty-one times, was the idea that women were known to be the last and the first in ways that demonstrate their devotion to Jesus Christ—particularly that women were “last at his cross, and earliest at his grave.”⁴³ Consider these other remarks that elegantly portray women’s faith and devotion:

- “Women were last at the cross and first at the sepulchre, and it was to a woman that He first revealed Himself after His resurrection.”⁴⁴
- “First to greet lovingly man at his birth, Last to forsake him when dying,
First to make sunshine around his hearth, Last to lose heart and cease trying.
Last at the cross of her crucified Lord, First to behold him when risen,
First to proclaim him to life restored; bursting from death’s gloomy prison,
First to seek knowledge, the God-like prize, Last to gain credit for knowing.”⁴⁵
- “‘Do to others as ye would they should do to you,’ that is ever helpful. It is that element which made her last at the cross and first at the sepulchre.”⁴⁶

From these statements, we can see that women were frequently portrayed as first to join Christ and last to leave his mortal body. Those who wrote these statements used this point to demonstrate the depth of faith possessed by women.

A third theme regarding the presence of women at the cross, occurring on twelve occasions, was a specific focus on the fact that Christ gave attention to women while he was being crucified. An editorial in the

43. This phraseology seems to be based on a poem titled “Woman” by Eaton Standard Barrett. In this poem, Barrett writes, “Not she with trait’rous kiss her Master stung, / Not she denied Him with unfaithful tongue; / She, when apostles fled, could danger brave, / Last at His cross, and earliest at His grave.” “Woman” (London: Cox and Baylis, 1819), 34. This poem was both quoted and paraphrased within the corpus and has at times been misattributed to Elizabeth Barrett Browning. See “Lesson III: Literature,” *Relief Society Magazine* 9, no. 10 (October 1922): 548; and John Bissell Trowbridge, “The Hymns of Fanny Crosby,” *The King’s Business* 19, no. 3 (March 1928): 157.

44. Phebe C. Young, “Woman and Her Sphere,” *Woman’s Exponent* 17, no. 18 (February 15, 1889): 139.

45. Lu Dalton, “Woman,” *Woman’s Exponent* 21, no. 14 (January 15, 1893): 107.

46. “Thoughts,” *Woman’s Exponent* 27, no. 14 (December 15, 1898): 76.

Woman's Exponent asked, "Were not some of his latest expressions of thoughtful tenderness, addressed to the *women*?"⁴⁷ This idea was also emphasized in a list of topics given to teachers in the *Relief Society Magazine* emphasizing that "Christ manifested great love for his mother. Two of the few recorded utterances [Christ gave] when on the cross had reference to his mother."⁴⁸ As discussed later in this paper, twenty-eight different statements in our corpus directly referred to Christ's words to his mother from the cross.⁴⁹

A fourth theme, appearing eleven times, praised women for uniquely demonstrating spiritual strength at Christ's death. Ella F. Smith wrote, "Woman followed him shedding tears of sympathy and pity. Woman alone pressed her way to the very foot of the cross, and there poured out her prayers and tears in behalf of the world's dying martyr."⁵⁰ Hannah T. King said, "There stood by his cross Mary, his mother, and Mary, the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene; true unto the death were these most remarkable and highly favored women; they wait and watch all through those tremendous sufferings."⁵¹ Those who wrote these statements attributed remarkable spiritual strength to the women at the cross and likely hoped to inculcate this same faith within their readers.

Christ's Final Seven Statements

Christ's final statements from the cross were collectively quoted or alluded to 147 times in our corpus. Table 3 shows the frequency of references to these statements. The statements appear in the approximate order in which Christ gave them.⁵²

47. A. B. C.s, "Woman's Influence," *Woman's Exponent* 18, no. 1 (June 1, 1889): 1, emphasis in original.

48. "Teachers' Topic for May," *Relief Society Magazine* 10, no. 3 (March 1923): 158.

49. Not all of the statements about Christ's words to his mother were coded as "Women at the cross." This code was reserved for statements that emphasized the presence of women at the cross, while statements Christ made to Mary from the cross often had a different focus than the presence of women at the cross.

50. Ella F. Smith, "Woman's Mind Equal to Man's," *Woman's Exponent* 18, no. 22 (April 15, 1890): 177.

51. Hannah T. King, "Scripture Women," *Woman's Exponent* 6, no. 24 (May 15, 1878): 185.

52. Matthew and Mark each provide one (the same) statement from the Savior on the cross. Luke and John each give three statements from Christ; these statements are unique to their respective Gospels. Because all seven statements are not present in one account, it is difficult to determine their precise order.

Table 3. Frequency of references to Christ's final seven statements⁵³

Statement	Number of Appearances
"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."	70
"Today shalt thou be with me in paradise."	18
"Woman, behold thy son." "Behold thy mother."	28
"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"	19
"I thirst."	1
"It is finished."	20
"Into thy hands I commend my spirit."	13

The statement referred to most frequently in our corpus, with seventy occurrences (nearly half of the total), was "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Often it was quoted in the context of emphasizing Jesus's love or forgiving nature. A talk by Rosannah C. Irvine contains a typical example: "He spoke no word of bitterness or complaint. Even when he hung in agony on the cross, his never to be forgotten words, which have resounded through the ages, are the most marvelous example of forgiveness and love that the world has ever known: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'"⁵⁴ Ruth May Fox, known for composing the hymn "Carry On,"⁵⁵ wrote a poem that connects Christ's forgiveness from the cross with the power of the Atonement, saying, "They brought not flowers / They plaited thorns, / Wherewith to crown His Kingly Head; / They pressed them low upon His brow / Regardless of the throbbing pain: / And crimson drops / That fell like rain. / They spat upon Him / Mocked, reviled, / Maligned and scourged the blameless One: / Yea crucified the living God / The while He prayed, 'Forgive them, Father, O forgive, I die, I die that these may live.'"⁵⁶

The second most frequent statement, appearing twenty-eight times, was Jesus's entrusting of his mother into the care of the Apostle John (see John 19:27). This statement was often quoted or referenced to highlight

53. In addition to the references appearing in this chart, there were eight additional references that were coded under "Statements made from the cross" that, while discussing what Christ said from the cross generally, didn't explicitly refer to any of these statements.

54. Rosannah C. Irvine, "Relief Society General Conference," *Relief Society Magazine* 13, no. 6 (June 1926): 309.

55. "Carry On," in *Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 255.

56. Ruth May Fox, "He Is Risen," *Young Woman's Journal* 24, no. 4 (April 1913): 208.

Jesus's concern for women. Elna P. Haymond, writing while serving as a member of the Relief Society general board, pointed out, "Jesus, while on the cross in his hour of greatest trial, gave as one of his last considerations his concern for his mother."⁵⁷

The statement "Why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34) was mentioned nineteen times. This statement was primarily used to highlight the human emotions of Jesus Christ. Emily Hill Woodmansee, the author of the hymn "As Sisters in Zion,"⁵⁸ poignantly described how we sometimes "re-echo" Christ's cry of abandonment:

And was He not mocked by humanity's dross?—
 "Art thou the Christ? then come down from the cross."
 How many in anguish re-echo his cry—
 God, hast thou forsaken me, wherefore and why?
 Sometimes His presence our Father doth hide—
 To test us and prove us, as gold can be tried;
 Then whispers the tempter,
 "The Lord doth not care."⁵⁹

A lesson titled "The Dual Nature of Jesus Christ" reflects on the character of Jesus, saying, "Was it not his human nature that called forth the question on the cross, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?'"⁶⁰

The conversation with the thief (Luke 23:39–43) was referred to eighteen times, sometimes to portray an expression of comfort⁶¹ or forgiveness. A poem by Nina Burnham McKean reads: "In the sound of the bells the Savior's words live, / 'Yea, seven times seven, forgive, and forgive.' / But what is the hope the chiming can bring, / To the sinner so hardened he scarce hears the ring? / Yea, even may he, by the Master be shriven, / For thus on the cross the thief was forgiven."⁶² Other authors believed that the thief was not promised immediate salvation. One writer wrote that Jesus "administered comfort" to the thief but did not guarantee him exaltation, arguing that neither Jesus nor the thief

57. Elna P. Haymond, "Mother," *Relief Society Magazine* 42, no. 5 (May 1955): 288.

58. "As Sisters in Zion," in *Hymns*, no. 309.

59. Emily Hill Woodmansee, "Wherefore and Why?," *Woman's Exponent* 8, no. 22 (April 15, 1880): 169.

60. "The Dual Nature of Jesus Christ," *Relief Society Magazine* 13, no. 8 (August 1926): 426.

61. "The Story of the Restoration: Lesson XIV: The Salvation of the Dead," *Young Woman's Journal* 24, no. 1 (January 1913): 68.

62. Nina Burnham McKean, "The Message of the Bells," *Relief Society Magazine* 9, no. 12 (December 1922): 652.

immediately ascended to the Father, as Jesus later explained to Mary Magdalene.⁶³

The statements "It is finished" (John 19:30) and "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46) were often mentioned together, with a focus on Jesus's satisfaction with the completion of his mission at the very hour of his death. A lesson plan on Christ's death emphasizes the voluntary nature of his death, saying, "He exclaimed in triumph and supreme relief: 'It is finished.' Also: 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.' Then He voluntarily submitted to death. . . . Thus the great consummation on the cross had been wrought, even as the prophets of old, and particularly as Jesus Himself, had predicted. No man had power to take His life from Him; but now His hour had come, and His death was a voluntary surrender."⁶⁴

The statement "I thirst" (John 19:28) was mentioned only once, in a narration including several other statements. The only thing mentioned specifically about this phrase is that Jesus "gave one statement of his physical condition: 'I thirst.'"⁶⁵ Interestingly, this statement has also been quoted the fewest times in general conference addresses.⁶⁶

Poetry

Our corpus contained 169 references to poetry. While a few of these were brief mentions of a crucifixion-related poem that was recited at a meeting, most were published poems—some of which were quite intricate. We note that collectively the poetry within our corpus is moving and beautiful—it deserves much more in-depth treatment than can be afforded in the present study. Herein we present only a sampling of this poetry, noting that future studies could profitably focus entirely on this topic.⁶⁷

63. "Nailed to the cross, enduring patiently indescribable agony himself, the Lord Jesus administered comfort to the commiserating malefactor who hung by his side. 'Today,' said Jesus, 'shalt thou be with me in Paradise.'" "The Story of the Restoration: Lesson XIV: The Salvation of the Dead," *Young Woman's Journal* 24, no. 1 (January 1913): 68.

64. "The Divinity of Jesus of Nazareth: Senior Course of Study: Lesson 18—His Death," *Young Woman's Journal* 36, no. 2 (February 1925): 128.

65. Elder Don B. Colton, "Theology—the Life and Ministry of the Savior: Lesson 27—'Death and Burial' and 'In the Realm of Disembodied Spirits,'" *Relief Society Magazine* 37, no. 9 (September 1950): 628.

66. See John Hilton III, Megan Cutler, and Emily Hyde, "Teachings of Church Leaders on Christ's Final Seven Statements," *Religious Educator* 22, no. 1 (2021): 79–99.

67. While several studies have focused on poetry written by Latter-day Saint women, we are not aware of in-depth study of Latter-day Saint poetry related to Christ's Crucifixion. For examples of broader, related studies, see Kylie Nielson Turley, "Rhetoric

One theme that frequently recurred in Crucifixion-related poetry related to the feelings of women at the cross—particularly Jesus’s mother, Mary. In 1904, a panel of judges, including James E. Talmage, awarded Kate Thomas first prize for her poem “For Christmas.”⁶⁸ This illustrates how poetry was used to describe Mary’s feelings at the death of her son:

O beautiful mother Mary, O mother of croonings low,
Did you know more bliss in each fond kiss
Than we common mothers know?

His baby step she taught him, she put him gaily down
And laughed with pleased, low laughter when his fingers clutched her gown.
She taught him his first ‘Our Father,’ and as he lisped the prayer,
She bended her face till her lips found place
In the soft sheen of his hair.

O beautiful mother Mary, O Woman of women wise,
Did you see the End? Or did Father send
A kindly veil for your eyes?

She watched him grow into boyhood, with innocent eyes like his own
That wept when He came into manhood and the Load He must carry alone.
For the way of the Hill was heavy, and the Cross on the Hill was high,
And ’twas hard to look where whose sins He took.
Were lusting to see Him die!⁶⁹

Another theme frequently occurring in Crucifixion-related poetry within our corpus concerns the atoning power of Christ’s Crucifixion. A portion of a poem by Sue S. Beatie states,

The Father of our spirits, in the glorious gospel plan,
Gave his precious Son, a ransom, on earth to die for man.
To take away the power of death, and for all our sins atone,
That we may claim his promise on the resurrection morn—
To dwell with him forever, in his kingdom, free from strife
Where we may be exalted in that grand eternal life.⁷⁰

A less-frequent theme, but one that still occurred in more than a dozen of the poems in our corpus, related Christ’s Crucifixion to

and Ritual: A Decade of *Woman’s Exponent* Death Poetry,” *Journal of Mormon History* 32, no. 3 (2006): 54–81; and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, “Poetry and the Private Lives: Newspaper Verse on the Mormon Frontier,” *BYU Studies* 25, no. 3 (1985): 55–65.

68. “Prize Christmas Poems,” *Young Woman’s Journal* 15, no. 12 (December 1904): 570.

69. Kate Thomas, “For Christmas,” *Young Woman’s Journal* 15, no. 12 (December 1904): 532.

70. Sue S. Beatie, “Our Gift,” *Relief Society Magazine* 54, no. 2 (February 1967): 151.

Christmas. An excerpt from a poem called "Our Christmas Tree" is indicative of how many authors related Christ's Crucifixion to an element of the Christmas season:

Time[']s curtain backward rolls and we can see
How He too gave to us our Christmas Tree,
Himself the gift—love's offering to the world,
Redemption's banner His dear hand unfurled.

And from that tree the lamp of life burned high,
But oh to light that lamp the Christ must die!
Must drain for man the deepest cup of woe,
Must feel the keenest pain mortals can know. . . .

Bright shines the memory of that far off time,
And Christmas trees now live in every clime,
Bearing love's gifts to friends and kindred dear
While merry bells are ringing far and near.⁷¹

The Cross as a Physical Object

We used the code "The cross as a physical object" to describe mentions of physical representations of crosses ostensibly associated with the Crucifixion but not mentions of the actual cross upon which Christ was crucified. Our corpus contained 227 such instances.

Most of these usages were neutral or slightly positive descriptions of various types of crosses. For example, on twenty-nine occasions, crosses were mentioned in connection with funerals or graves. Many describe floral arrangements or other decorations of coffins, such as the "immense passion cross of lilies" laid upon the coffin of a Catholic clergyman.⁷² Others depict grave markers in the shape of a cross. For example, one description reads, "Out in dear Mount Auburn, where so many precious dead lie, there is an exquisite cross, ornamented with ferns, which bears the name 'Fanny Fern.'"⁷³ Twenty-six instances describe decorative crosses, and in some cases, instructions are given for making such crosses. For example, a woman named Rosabel, in an article titled "A Few Hints about Flowers" wrote, "A very pretty idea is to . . . get some handy young man to make for you, a wooden cross ten or twelve inches high, and stick it in the pot with some one of your vines, and they will twine

71. Hope, "Our Christmas Tree," *Young Woman's Journal* 5, no. 5 (February 1894): 234.

72. "Washington Jottings," *Woman's Exponent* 14, no. 24 (May 15, 1886): 178.

73. E. Addie Heath, "Fanny Fern," *Woman's Exponent* 8, no. 24 (May 15, 1880): 192.

about it so thickly you will hardly be able to see the wood at all, and will be tempted to think you have a cross of living green.”⁷⁴

These descriptions of crosses included twelve reports of those hung in various cathedrals. In addition, there were twenty-three mentions of crosses as part of architecture, such as a church “built in the form of a cross.”⁷⁵ On thirty-one occasions, crosses were mentioned as awards or physical gifts intended to honor recipients. For example, one anecdote recounts how a Madame Dieulafoy “shocked Paris by appearing at the theatre in masculine dress, with the Cross of the Legion of Honor on her breast.”⁷⁶ Another describes “a gold cross . . . presented to Miss Anthony by the Citizen’s Suffrage Association, of Philadelphia, in a graceful speech by Mrs. May Wright Sewall, who characterized Miss Anthony as the ‘saint’ to whom the beautiful gift, with suitable inscriptions and date, was especially due.”⁷⁷

Instances of crosses worn as jewelry or in some other way appeared twenty-two times. Included in this number is a description of a meeting with the Pope, who “was dressed entirely in white cloth, a beautiful, fine, soft fabric, and he wore hanging on his breast a magnificent emerald cross.”⁷⁸ One poem, titled *Mary, Queen of Scots*, depicts the titular character approaching her death: “Rich were the sable robes she wore, her white veil round her fell, / And from her neck there hung the cross, the cross she loved so well.”⁷⁹

While many of the quotations connected with the cross as a symbol had a neutral or slightly positive tone, there were a few that spoke negatively about the cross. Eliza R. Snow, then serving as the second Relief Society general president, described being in Syria and observing people “kneeling and bowing before the cross.” She said, “I withdrew, feeling thankful to God for the gifts and ordinances of the Everlasting Gospel.”⁸⁰ On another occasion, Snow wrote of observing Catholics worshipping at church, “some crossing themselves, some reverently kneeling and others

74. Rosabel, “A Few Hints about Flowers,” *Woman’s Exponent* 8, no. 9 (October 1, 1879): 67.

75. “An Eastern Trip,” *Woman’s Exponent* 18, no. 13 (December 1, 1889): 100.

76. “Notes and News,” *Woman’s Exponent* 16, no. 2 (June 15, 1887): 16. The “shocking” part of the dress was not the wearing of the cross, but rather that Jane Dieulafoy wore men’s clothing, something that was illegal in France at that time.

77. “The National Suffrage Association,” *Woman’s Exponent* 10, no. 2 (June 15, 1881): 15.

78. G. B. W., “An Audience with the Pope,” *Woman’s Exponent* 41, no. 7 (May 1, 1913): 51.

79. “Mary, Queen of Scotts,” *Woman’s Exponent* 10, no. 12 (November 15, 1881): 89.

80. Eliza R. Snow, “Correspondence of Miss Snow,” *Woman’s Exponent* 1, no. 24 (May 15, 1873): 190.

bowing, first to a golden crucifix then to the Archbishop, my heart responded—How long, O Lord, shall these, thy children be bound in the dwarfing chains of traditional superstition and ignorance?"⁸¹ Ruth May Fox wrote that the "Pilgrim Fathers" had viewed the cross of St. George as standing "for the worship of saints" and being "of papalistic origin."⁸²

In contrast to the handful of negative statements about the cross as a symbol, several statements were very positive. An editorial stated that "Christ changed the cross into a symbol of Glory,"⁸³ and in "An Allegory," Susa Young Gates, the founder of the *Young Woman's Journal* and the first editor of the *Relief Society Magazine*, lamented, "How few there be that fly the pennon of peace, and fewer still that carry at their mast-head the Figure on the Cross."⁸⁴

An article about San Francisco also presents a positive view of the cross as a symbol, saying, "It is reassuring of a morning to see the sun bring the golden cross to life. It peacefully gives confidence to see of an evening, the shadowed crucifix immovable against the flaming sky."⁸⁵ One essay claimed it was because "a sign of the cross" appears on "every bough" of the balsam fir that it "was selected as the favorite Christmas tree."⁸⁶ Sarah Granger Kimball, who served as a ward Relief Society president for forty-two years, also had positive connections with the cross. Writing while serving as Relief Society general secretary, she reminisced that her final memory of her grandfather was seeing him "in a log school house . . . worshipping at the cross of Christ, and trying to lead sinners to repentance."⁸⁷

The Atoning Power of Christ's Crucifixion

Our corpus contained 268 references relating the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ to his atoning power. All these statements in one way or another describe the truth that Christ died for the sins of the world. For example, Ethel R. Smith stated, "We can know that Jesus Christ . . . is the Redeemer

81. Eliza R. Snow, "Correspondence of Miss Snow," *Woman's Exponent* 1, no. 19 (March 1, 1873): 150.

82. Ruth May Fox, "Flags of the Allies," *Young Woman's Journal* 28, no. 7 (July 1917): 373.

83. "The Light of the World," *Relief Society Magazine* 20, no. 4 (April 1933): 235.

84. Susa Young Gates, "An Allegory," *Woman's Exponent* 29, no. 15 (January 1, 1901): 67.

85. Fromade, "The City That Beckons the World," *Young Woman's Journal* 26, no. 7 (July 1915): 435.

86. "Mutual Messages," *Young Woman's Journal* 37, no. 11 (November 1926): 742.

87. S. M. Kimball, "Phelps Centennial," *Woman's Exponent* 18, no. 7 (September 1, 1889): 50.

of the world, and that he died on Calvary that you and I might live. We can know this, sisters, and to know these things is life eternal.” She continued later in the same article, speaking of being in the Sacred Grove and picturing in her mind a series of events connected to the life of Joseph Smith. She wrote, “I pictured another scene in which I saw that . . . sacrifice offered on Golgotha. I saw there my Savior in all his majesty and his dignity, after suffering ignominy, insults and death, cruelly crucified, dying that we might have eternal life, and I resolved in my heart that I would do all in my power to further this great cause for which these sacrifices were made.”⁸⁸

An emphasis on Christ’s atoning sacrifice occurred in a variety of contexts. For example, it was often referenced in connection with the sacrament. An anonymously written column as part of the “Lesson Department” in the *Relief Society Magazine* states,

While, of course, all the ordinances of the Church of Jesus Christ are sacred and should always be regarded as such, still . . . the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper is undoubtedly the most sacred. A little reflection will show that this is so. For one thing, the central fact in the religion of Jesus Christ is the death and resurrection of Christ. “He died that we might live” in a real sense, both in this life and in the next. . . . The death and resurrection of Christ being the central fact in revealed religion, everything in our faith revolves around it and takes its meaning from that fact. . . . We eat the bread in remembrance of the body which He gave up in death for us, and we drink the wine (water) in remembrance of the blood which He shed for our sins, that we might not have to suffer in like manner for them. Thus, in the most literal way, we are reminded, every time we partake of these emblems, of the great sacrifice which Christ made for us.⁸⁹

Many other settings were used to discuss the importance of Christ’s Crucifixion. For example, an author identified only as Annie wrote the following as part of her column on celebrating Christmas: “Let us pause in the midst of our fun and rejoicings, and spend a few moments in sweet thanksgiving for this blessed day. We will think of Him who gave us light, who brought the pure knowledge of Christianity, and of the One who was crucified to redeem the world.”⁹⁰

88. Ethel R. Smith, “Relief Society General Conference,” *Relief Society Magazine* 13, no. 6 (June 1926): 318.

89. “Mission Lessons: Latter-day Saint Hymns,” *Relief Society Magazine* 28, no. 10 (October 1941): 723–24.

90. Annie, “Christmas,” *Woman’s Exponent* 10, no. 14 (December 15, 1881): 105.

In addition to the consistent emphasis on the atoning efficacy of Christ's death, two other themes relating to the Savior's Atonement emerged. First, a common description in our corpus was that Christ's Crucifixion led to the destruction of death. Grace Ingles Frost wrote, "He, betrayed by evil's subtle power, / Was nailed upon the contumelious cross. . . . / He proved not only over death and hell / Victorious, but of Himself as well, / The King."⁹¹ An unidentified author further draws on the imagery of a battle by writing, "The Son planned the play in which He, the hero of the great drama, must give to each and all of humanity more than they could give to Him. They should with freedom become helpless captives of death; Christ should ransom and give new life to all; He should suffer and die and descend into the pit, open the prison doors, and provide a Gospel dispensation for the dead."⁹²

A second recurring theme was that the Savior's Crucifixion would draw all people to him. Many authors included the Savior's statement from John 12:32: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." An unsigned editorial expounded on this proclamation by saying, "The civilized world hail him as King. The source of his drawing power is his divine love, and so his prophecy is constantly being fulfilled—he was lifted up and he is day by day drawing more and more men unto him."⁹³

Miscellaneous

Outside of the specific categories discussed thus far, there were 318 quotations that we classified as miscellaneous. Several of these quotations clustered together into themes; in this section we discuss those that appeared most frequently.

Artwork

There were forty-one references to works of art. Most frequently these came from authors who provided descriptions of what they were seeing as they visited cathedrals in different parts of the world—often mentioning Crucifixion paintings in conjunction with other artwork they viewed. One of the most detailed descriptions of a Crucifixion painting came from Lutie H. Fryer, who wrote about *The Descent from the Cross*

91. Grace Ingles Frost, "The King," *Relief Society Magazine* 10, no. 12 (December 1923): 583.

92. "Vital Problems of Life," *Young Woman's Journal* 32, no. 4 (April 1921): 241.

93. "The Drawing Power of Christ," *Relief Society Magazine* 19, no. 4 (April 1932): 238.

by Peter Paul Rubens. Fryer writes, “In arrangement of line and shade this picture is unexcelled. Every figure in the composition has either beauty of grace or of character, and the most beautiful is the Savior’s, to which all the principle [*sic*] lines of the composition lead. Start where you will and follow along the direction of the figures, your eye finally centers upon the Savior’s head. It is the focus point.”⁹⁴

Hymns

There were also forty-one references to hymns. Often these were titles of hymns mentioned in passing as part of programs that were being reported on. Some of these hymns remain in our current hymnbook (for example, “While of These Emblems We Partake”⁹⁵), whereas others, such as “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,” do not. In several instances, lyrics from various hymns were directly quoted. While many of these were sacrament hymns, on four occasions lyrics from “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” were recorded: “As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free, While God is marching on.”⁹⁶ Lyrics were also shared from the hymn “Rock of Ages,” including stanzas not appearing in the current Latter-day Saint hymnal: “Nothing in my hand I bring; Simply to thy cross I cling; Naked, come to thee for dress; Helpless, look to thee for grace; Vile, I to the fountain fly; Wash me, Savior, or I die.”⁹⁷

One of the most interesting references to hymns within our corpus was one composed by Susa Young Gates, simply called “Sacrament Hymn.” This hymn states:

Our Lord and Master called the feast,
He blessed the bread and brake—
Remember my great offering
When of this ye partake.

94. Lutie H. Fryer, “Peter Paul Rubens,” *Young Woman’s Journal* 37, no. 9 (September 1926): 561–62.

95. “While of These Emblems We Partake,” in *Hymns*, nos. 173 and 174.

96. Julia Ward Howe, “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” *Atlantic Monthly* 9, no. 52 (February 1862): 10. Also cited in Howard R. Driggs, “America as Reveled in Its Literature: Lesson 7—America through Testing Years,” *Relief Society Magazine* 34, no. 1 (January 1947): 61. Note that this hymn was written by Julia Ward Howe. Along with other modern versions of this hymn, the 1985 Latter-day Saint hymnbook changes Howe’s original lyrics from “let us die to make men free” to “let us live to make men free.” “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” in *Hymns*, no. 60.

97. Augustus Toplady, “A Living and Dying Prayer for the Holiest Believer in the World,” *Gospel Magazine* (March 1776): 132, cited in “Lesson III—Literature: ‘Rock of Ages,’” *Relief Society Magazine* 9, no. 9 (September 1922): 498.

He raised aloft the sacred cup
 And as He blessed the wine
 He said, drink this in memory,
 Of this sacrifice of mine.

I am that promised Paschal Lamb,
 Our fathers long have known
 I soon shall hang upon that Cross
 This feast has ever shown.
 Henceforth no priest shall slay a lamb;
 No rites shall offered be
 For in this dreadful night these signs
 Will be fulfilled in Me.

O wondrous Lamb of God who died
 That men might live again
 Who wrought salvation for the race
 Through suffering and pain.
 Accept our pure devotion now
 And grant we may be true
 For as we eat and drink the cup
 We covenant anew.⁹⁸

Particularly noteworthy in this hymn are the idea that Christ's institution of the sacrament was directly connected to his Crucifixion and the assertion that the Passover had always pointed to the cross.

The Sign of the Cross

There were thirty references to the sign of the cross, meaning the hand gesture. Such references are included in descriptions of ceremonies, sacraments, and ordinances of other branches of Christianity, such as masses, baptisms, and even exorcisms. M. J. Tanner recounts in her journal the experience of attending a Catholic mass, describing the experience as "very new and strange to [her]." She writes, "While standing in the vestibule we saw people pass the font or basin of holy water and make the sign of the cross before entering church."⁹⁹ M. B. Crandal describes chapelgoers in Dublin who "cross themselves and tell their

98. Susa Young Gates, "Sacrament Hymn," *Young Woman's Journal* 33, no. 4 (April 1922): 193.

99. M. J. Tanner, "Leaves from My Journal," *Woman's Exponent* 17, no. 14 (December 15, 1888): 111.

beads for a short time and go out again, just as sincere as they can be, for they know no better way of serving God.”¹⁰⁰

Soldiers of the Cross

There were twenty-four references to “soldiers of the cross.” This phrase was often used to describe individuals who engaged in missionary work; for example, Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball are referred to this way.¹⁰¹ An unusual use of the phrase came from an anonymous article titled “Selfishness,” in which the author decried “people who pity themselves.” The author counseled that “all have troubles of their own, and the recital of yours will not make theirs easier to bear. Don’t be a spiritual piker! Be a brave soldier of the Cross. Get busy doing or saying something for others. Forget self. Shut the door on your complaints, open the windows of your soul to let in health and peace.”¹⁰²

Pain and Suffering

Twenty-two of the references to Christ’s Crucifixion emphasized the pain and suffering he endured. Some contrasted the terrible nature of his suffering and death with his own glorious and sinless nature. An essay titled “Mission and Suffering of Christ” elaborates,

Three hours of agony! With the cruel nails driven through the stainless hands, that had never wrought evil deeds, piercing the quivering flesh of the holy feet that had never trodden forbidden paths, with lips of anguish that had never uttered words of guile, a heart unsullied with evil intents, throbbing beneath the cruel pain, a mind unspotted with wicked designs, and a life pure in the sight of all the myriad hosts of earth and heaven, and yet crucified, wounded and bleeding. He was put to death in open shame, a holy sacrifice for the sin of the benighted and fallen world, whose inhabitants could never hope to regain the presence of their Father and God without a Savior’s atoning blood.¹⁰³

100. M. B. Crandal, “Reminiscences of Dublin,” *Young Woman’s Journal* 7, no. 1 (October 1895): 51.

101. Susa Young Gates, “History of Modern Temple Building,” *Young Woman’s Journal* 20, no. 1 (January 1909): 26.

102. “Selfishness,” *Relief Society Magazine* 5, no. 11 (November 1918): 646.

103. “Mission and Suffering of Christ,” *Woman’s Exponent* 13, no. 1 (June 1, 1884): 1.

Baptism

Baptism was mentioned in connection with Christ's death twenty-one times. Of those references, twelve included Romans 6:3–4, which compares the ordinance of baptism to Christ's death and Resurrection. A lesson plan on baptism advises, "The earnest Latter-day Saint girl . . . should recall the day of her baptism often and each time it should bring to her mind the great sacrifice made on Calvary. As Christ's body was covered or buried in the tomb, so her body was completely covered or buried in the watery grave, and as He arose to a glorious immortal life, so she came forth from baptism to a new life in His Church."¹⁰⁴

Conclusion

Our analysis of quotations in the *Woman's Exponent*, the *Relief Society Magazine*, and the *Young Woman's Journal* indicates that the women involved in writing and selecting articles found Christ's Crucifixion to be an essential part of their theology. The Crucifixion and its surrounding events were used to provide insights into the character of Christ, underscore the devotion of his female disciples, and teach about the nature of the Atonement, among other important principles.

This study represents only a beginning of analysis on what early female Latter-day Saints wrote about Christ's Crucifixion. The three periodicals we examined comprise only a portion of the writing and sermons of Latter-day Saint women. Additional research could be conducted on discourses or other writings by women across the decades of the Church. Moreover, our corpus did not include references to Gethsemane or to the Savior's Atonement more broadly. Further study is needed to form a more complete picture of Latter-day Saint women's perspective on Christ's Atonement as portrayed in the three periodicals we analyzed.

The women whose writings we have discussed in the present study interacted with the theology of the Crucifixion and the symbolism of the cross in a diversity of ways. Some wrote of seeing cross-related worship and viewing it as similar to idolatry, while others wrote of giving, receiving, displaying, or wearing the symbol of the cross. Some emphasized the importance of Jesus's death to the resurrection of the body, and many also focused on the direct connection between his Crucifixion and the

104. "Baptism, It's Efficacy and Symbolism," *Young Woman's Journal* 34, no. 11 (November 1923): 623.

Atonement for our sins. Jesus's behavior and attitude during and before his Crucifixion was given as an example to us all—of forgiveness, humility, obedience, meekness, and love. Although the Crucifixion is a painful topic to consider, many of these faithful women also found it inspiring. As Ila Fisher wrote, “His death—dear Lord, the thought of Calvary / Makes our afflictions easier to bear.”¹⁰⁵

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105. Ila Fisher, “My Christmas Prayer,” *Relief Society Magazine* 4, no. 12 (December 1917): 704.