

# Mormon Catechisms

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One of the most compelling obligations felt by early members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was that of preaching the gospel to others. Above all else, the Saints were to carry the message to the world. They were also instructed to teach the gospel to their children. Both audiences could learn through the scriptures, sermons, tracts, and personal testimonies of others, but it soon became apparent that more effective results could be obtained if the message were studied systematically. To this end, various published aids began to appear. One of the most useful of such aids to teaching the gospel during much of the nineteenth century was the catechism. In the broad sense, a catechism is a prepared series of questions and answers intended for instruction in the basics of the faith.<sup>1</sup> Although such an approach may not have been enjoyed by everyone, it had the enormous advantage of making preparations specific and “testable.” Since catechisms were used widely by the Protestant and Catholic communities in the nineteenth century, it is not surprising that their Latter-day Saint contemporaries began to develop their own.

One of the earliest examples of using the question-and-answer approach to study the restored gospel was the *Lectures on Faith*, printed in the front of the first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants in 1835 and in subsequent editions down to the early twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> Five of the seven lectures are divided into two parts: in the first, a series of numbered paragraphs sets forth the teachings on the topic; and in the second, the same material is reviewed, as it were, by means of a series of questions and answers. “It was found,” explained the official church newspaper, “that by annexing a catechism to the lectures as they were presented, the class made greater progress than otherwise.”<sup>3</sup>

The starting section includes the following basic questions:

Q.What is faith? A.It is the “assurance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (JST Heb. 11:1); that is, it is the assurance we have of the existence of unseen things. And being the assurance which we have of the existence of unseen things, it must be the principle of action in all intelligent beings. “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God” (Heb. 11:3; Lecture 1:8–9). Q.How do you prove that faith is the principle of action in all intelligent beings? A.First, by duly considering the operations of your own mind; and secondly, by the direct declaration of scripture.<sup>4</sup>

The next section deals with God as “the object in whom the faith of all other rational and accountable beings centers for life and salvation.”<sup>5</sup> Following a long series of questions on the generations of “begats” from Adam to Abraham, the subsequent questions deal with the existence of God:

Q.What testimony did men have, in the first instance, that there is a God? A.Human testimony, and human testimony only (Lecture 2:56). Q.What excited the ancient Saints to seek diligently after a knowledge of the glory of God, his perfections, and attributes? A.The credence they gave to the testimony of their fathers (Lecture 2:56). Q.How do men obtain a knowledge of the glory of God, his perfections, and attributes? A.By devoting themselves to his service, through prayer and supplication incessantly, strengthening their faith in him, until, like Enoch, the brother of Jared, and Moses, they obtain a manifestation of God to themselves (Lecture 2:55).<sup>6</sup>

God is described in the lectures as merciful, gracious, long-suffering, unchanging, and truthful; he is no respecter of persons. Knowledge, faith or power, justice, judgment, mercy, truth—the lectures discuss all these traditional attributes. Finally, the lectures proclaim, God is love.<sup>7</sup>

The sixth section draws a connection between faith and sacrifice. Faith, or unshaken confidence, is necessary if the Saints are to endure the expected persecution, and this faith cannot come except on the basis of sacrifice—a willingness to give all, even one’s life. “This lecture is so plain, and the facts set forth so self-evident,” the section concludes, “that it is deemed unnecessary to form a catechism upon it: the student is therefore instructed to commit the whole to memory.” The statement clearly implies that the previous lectures did have a “catechism” intended to be memorized. The final lecture, on the effects of faith, is also without appended catechism.

The Articles of Faith, a series of “We believes,” originally written in 1842 as part of Joseph Smith’s answer to editor John Wentworth, were an implicit catechism.<sup>8</sup> That is, they can be viewed as answers to specific questions:

Q.What kind of God do Mormons believe in? A.We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost. Q.Do Mormons believe that men will be punished for Adam’s sins? A.We believe that men will be punished for their own sins and not for Adam’s transgression. (see Articles of Faith 1–2)

The questions, of course, are not part of the original document. The eventual popularity of the Articles of Faith as simple statements worthy of memorization by Latter-day Saint children suggests that they occupied a functional position very close to that of the memorized catechism.

In 1845, in Orson Pratt’s *Prophetic Almanac for 1845*, a broad range of doctrines was presented in short questions and answers.

What is man? The offspring of God. What is God? The Father of man. Who is Jesus Christ? He is our brother. What is man in embryo? He is a helpless babe. What is man in progress? He is man. What is man perfected? He is as Christ, and Christ is as the Father, and they all are one. ... What is his [man’s] final destiny? To be like God. What has God been? Like man. What is man without revelation? A vessel in a fog without a compass. ... What is Mormonism? It is all truth. How old is it? Without beginning of days or end of years.

Appreciated for its succinct answers, this Orson Pratt catechism, called “The Mormon Creed,” was published in the *Millennial Star* in 1848.<sup>9</sup>

Another early question-answer presentation was “Good Tidings” by Parley P. Pratt. Written before 1857, it may have first circulated through the newspapers he edited—the *Millennial Star* in England from 1840 to 1842 or *The Prophet* in New York City in 1845. This catechism concludes with the following:

Q.—Is it not uncharitable to consider the Christian world all wrong, except such as obey the fulness of the Gospel? and still more so to tell them of it? A.—No. The man who tells his generation the truth, according to the “law and the testimony,” is more charitable to them than ten thousand men who cry, Peace and safety, and prophesy smooth things, when sudden destruction is near at hand. Q.—But what will become of all the people who have lived and died since the Gospel was perverted and before it was restored again? A.—They will be judged according to their works, and according to the light which they enjoyed in

their day; and, no doubt many of them will rise up in judgment against this generation, and condemn it; for, had they enjoyed the privileges which we enjoy, they would, no doubt, have gladly embraced the truth in all its fulness. They desired to see the latter-day glory, but died without the sight.<sup>10</sup>

Nothing is said about preaching the gospel in the spirit world or performing vicarious ordinance work for the dead. Pratt may have considered the subject too advanced to treat in an elementary question-answer format.

Not so reticent, and delightful in its unapologetic directness, was a rhymed catechism entitled “The Angel’s Gospel” by Welsh convert John S. Davis:

What was witnessed in the heavens? Why, an angel earthward bound. Had he something with him bringing? Yes, the gospel, joyful sound! It was to be preached in power On the earth, the angel said, To all men, all tongues and nations That upon its face are spread. Had we not before the gospel? Yes, it came of old to men. Then what is this latter gospel? ‘Tis the first one come again. This was preached by Paul and Peter And by Jesus Christ, the Head. This we latter Saints are preaching; We their footsteps wish to tread. Where so long has been the gospel? Did it pass from earth away? Yes, ‘twas taken back to heaven Till should dawn a brighter day. What became of those departed, Knowing not the gospel plan? In the spirit world they’ll hear it; God is just to every man.<sup>11</sup>

Evan Stephens set it to music and published it in the 1889 *Latter-day Saints’ Psalmody*.<sup>12</sup>

About the same time, in 1848, Thomas Smith published a series of questions and answers in the *Millennial Star*. “I was in hopes that some more able person would have taken this in hand,” Smith wrote, “as I have seen the want of something of the kind for some time past; the question being often put—what books can I give my children? how am I to teach them?” Smith’s questions and answers are brief and to the point:

Q.What Sunday school do you attend? A.The Latter-day Saints.’ Q.Why are they called Saints? A.It is the name by which the people of God were known in all ages of the world ... Q.You said Joseph Smith was called by present revelation? A.Yes. Q.What do you mean by revelation? A.It means the communication of God’s will to man.

In the hostile setting of Great Britain, the Latter-day Saints expected to be challenged. To assist them, Thomas Smith sometimes included scriptural proofs, as in the following:

Q.How are the sick healed? A.By the laying on of hands, and anointing of oil. Q.Can you prove this? A.Yes, Mark, c. 6, v. 13; Mark, c. 16, v. 18; James, c. 5, v. 30.<sup>13</sup>

One wonders whether young children readily memorized or understood such references.

David Moffat, a Scottish laborer, had also recognized a need. The following year he wrote:

Being a father of four children and a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I am desirous that my children should be taught in their youth the rudiments of those principles that I now entertain. But whether I should be able to abide by the principles of the above church or not, I am willing that my children should, and continue therein. Having asked counsel from the council of the branch, I was permitted to form a Child’s Ladder, whereby they may ascend to a greater height than their progenitors,

in the scale of intelligence and truth. I have, therefore, furnished you with about 100 questions and answers, if you deem them worthy let them form a little book, so as a mother can teach her children when she sitteth down, and when she walketh by the way. I have endeavoured to render them as short as possible, in order that they may be attained by the weakest mind; and where a proof was long and tedious, I have shortened it without removing its sense.<sup>14</sup>

There followed in three pages “The Child’s Ladder, or a Series of Questions and Answers Adapted for the Use of Children of the Latter-day Saints.”

Much longer than the catechism of Thomas Smith, the Moffat catechism poses such questions as What is your name? Who is the father of Jesus Christ? Hath all the fowls of the air names and the cattle of the field? Did ever any man speak face to face with God? Can this Being (God) occupy two distinct places at once? Is revelation available to every man? Who was the first Apostle in this dispensation? What does the system of the Saints embrace? The last question had a short, if not modest, answer: All truth in heaven, in earth, or in the universe.<sup>15</sup>

It would not be surprising if some readers found the opening section, with its emphasis on the names of man, God, unclean spirits, and so forth, somewhat tedious. And there was at least one doctrinal error, according to later definitions, in the statement that the name of God Almighty, the father of Jesus Christ, was Jehovah. Nevertheless, one assumes that quite a number of young Latter-day Saints, especially in Great Britain, used the Moffat catechism during the early 1850s.

John Jaques—who later became well known for his hymn “O Say, What Is Truth?”—published a “definitive” catechism serially in the *Millennial Star* in 1853 and 1854; the Jaques “Catechism for Children” was reprinted as a separate volume in 1854.<sup>16</sup> Only twenty-six years old, Jaques had been a member of the church for eight years, had labored as a traveling missionary, and was working in the office of the British Mission. At the time of its writing, he was not yet a father. In fact, the first installment of his work appeared about the time he married Zilpah Loader. An introductory statement explains:

My attention has been, for some time past, directed to the subject of a Catechism for Children, and I have given the matter serious consideration. Of the expediency, and, indeed, necessity which exists that the children of the Saints should be instructed in the doctrines of our most holy faith, I am persuaded that all Saints are well convinced. Upon the rising generation rest the hopes of those who are now industriously engaged in advancing the interests of the Redeemer’s Kingdom upon the earth. ... How necessary, then, that the children of those who are on the Lord’s side should be thoroughly instructed in the things of the Kingdom of God, and become competent and ready to step into the shoes of the parents, to prosecute the work which they have begun, to war a good warfare, and to carry on the truth to a glorious victory over error. Under a deep sense of the importance of these views, I have ventured to commence preparing some questions and answers, seeing that a suitable Catechism for Children is not extant. I have not the idea of preparing them for very young children exclusively, as I think it advisable to offer questions and answers of such a character as will render them not unworthy of the attention of children of riper years.<sup>17</sup>

Jaques was not hesitant in recommending his work. Having pronounced previous efforts unsuitable, he went on to say: “It is customary for persons to modestly acknowledge their unfitness for work they undertake. Instead thereof, I will simply say that, in the absence of abler hands at catechism-compiling, I will endeavour to do my best, and leave the result with the Saints and the Almighty.”<sup>18</sup>

The Jaques catechism apparently filled a need. A year after its original publication in the *Millennial Star*, it was published as a book in Liverpool. The first edition of 1854 quickly sold out, for in 1855 a new printing, “the tenth thousand,” was released. In 1870, according to the title page, seventeen thousand had been published. By 1877 the number of copies sold reached twenty-one thousand. Then the *Catechism for Children* began to be published in Salt Lake City, where it continued to sell steadily. The edition of 1888 claimed to be the thirty-fifth thousand. Translations appeared in Danish (1860, 1872), German (1872, 1882, 1892), Swedish (1871, 1873), Hawaiian (1882, 1907), Samoan (1895), and Dutch (1897). It seems likely that during the closing decades of the nineteenth century more Latter-day Saints studied this catechism than any other single work.

The opening section establishes the child’s identity through a series of questions: What is your name? Who gave you that name? On what day, and in what month and year, were you born? When were you baptized? After establishing the child’s position in the scheme of things in this way, the questions proceed:

Q.What duties should you perform? A.My duty to God, and my duty to my parents and to all mankind.  
Q.What is your duty to God? A.To love him with all my heart, and to keep His commandments. Q.Why should you love God, and keep His commandments? A.Because it is by His power and goodness that I exist, and am sustained day by day. Q.What is your duty towards your parents? A.To love and obey them.  
Q.Why should you love and obey your parents? A.Because it is a command of God, and because they were the means of bringing me into the world; they nursed and fed me when I was a little babe, and now continually love me, and provide food, clothing, and lodging for me. They watch over me in sickness, direct me in health, and teach me to be clean, neat, industrious, and orderly, so that when I have grown up I may be useful. Q.What is the reward of obedience to parents? A.A long life, with the constant favour and blessing of God, and eternal life and happiness in the world to come. Q.What is the punishment of disobedience to parents? A.A short life, with the constant displeasure and curse of God, and misery in the world to come. Q.What is your duty to all mankind? A.To love them, and to treat them with kindness.  
Q.Why should you love all mankind, and treat them with kindness? A.Because God commands it, and because all mankind desire to be happy, and unless they love and strive to be kind to each other, they cannot be happy. Therefore all persons should love each other, that they may live as happily as possible.<sup>19</sup>

In the next chapter Jaques explains that knowledge of God comes from three sources—tradition, reason, and revelation.

Q.Which is the best way of learning that there is a God? A.By revelation. Tradition and reason give indistinct and unsatisfactory ideas of God, and of His character and attributes. By revelation alone can a definite and satisfactory knowledge be obtained.<sup>20</sup>

Continuing the question-answer format, the catechism takes the child over the many revelations of God to man in the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the revelations to Joseph Smith. The plurality of Gods is established by quoting several biblical passages. But “Must we worship more than one God? No. To us there is but one God, the Father of mankind, and the Creator of the earth.”<sup>21</sup> Summarizing the character and attributes of God, the child answers: “God is a glorious Being, in the form of man; He is everywhere present; He sees and knows all things; He is full of wisdom, power, truth, justice, righteousness, and mercy: and He is an unchangeable Being.”<sup>22</sup>

The different churches and denominations of Christianity are acknowledged but are quickly dismissed:

Q. There are now on the earth a great number of religious societies, each professing to be the Church of Christ, which amongst them all is the true Church? A. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Q. Why is this called the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? A. To distinguish it from the Church that existed in former days, as these are the latter days in which we live. ...

Q. How can the Church of Christ be known from other religious societies? A. By various characteristics, among which may be named, its Priesthood and organization; its being led by a Prophet having direct revelation from God; its enjoying the gifts and blessings of the Holy Ghost, and promising the same to all believers; its purity and consistency of doctrine; its unity and oneness of spirit; its gathering its members from amongst the wicked; its building of temples dedicated to the Lord, instead of building churches and chapels dedicated to men and women; its being persecuted and evil-spoken of by every other society and by every other people under heaven; and, lastly, men may know the Church of Christ by obeying its doctrine and obtaining a testimony for themselves by revelation from God.<sup>23</sup>

Such traits of the true church, common in such early Mormon pamphlets as Parley P. Pratt's *Voice of Warning*, could be expanded upon and supported by scriptural passages.

Continuing in the Jaques catechism, a section on the ten commandments precedes one on the Word of Wisdom. After several questions and answers summarizing the revelation, specific reasons are given for some of the proscriptions:

Q. Why are not hot drinks good for man? A. Because they relax and weaken the stomach, and indeed the whole body. Q. Why is it not good to smoke or chew tobacco? A. Because those habits are very filthy, and tobacco is of a poisonous nature, and the use of it debases men.<sup>24</sup>

Recognizing that the revelation (D&C 89) was given "not by commandment," the catechism asks what God must think of those who ignore his word. Answer: "That they despise His counsel, or at least do not appreciate it as they should."<sup>25</sup>

The different offices of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods are reviewed. And the child was expected to memorize the names of the General Authorities of the church—the different editions of the catechism updated the identifications—much as several generations of Primary children in the twentieth century have done.

The concluding chapter, "The Dispensation of the Fullness of Times," surveys the restoration of the gospel through the instrumentality of Joseph Smith. Originally published just ten years after Joseph Smith's assassination, the catechism stresses basic points about authority and succession:

Q. After Joseph Smith's death, on whom fell the responsibility of directing the affairs of the Church? A. On the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, with Brigham Young as their President. Q. Did Joseph Smith before his death bestow all the keys and powers of the Holy Priesthood upon the Twelve Apostles? A. Yes, every key that was necessary to save and exalt mankind in the celestial kingdom of God.<sup>26</sup>

The reorganization of the First Presidency in December 1847 is noted. Concluding sections of the catechism review the forthcoming judgments of God upon the wicked, the second coming of Jesus Christ, the millennium, and the final loosing of Satan to stir up men to war against the Saints. "But he and they who will obey him will be overthrown, and will receive their final judgment," the catechism concludes. "The heavens and the earth will pass

away, and a new heavens [sic] and a new earth will be created, on which the glorified immortal Saints will live and reign as Kings and Priests throughout eternity.”<sup>27</sup>

During the great revival of 1857–58, known as the “Reformation,” zealous preachers like Jedediah Grant fired questions at congregations, but soon people were interrogated individually. “Have you shed innocent blood or assented thereunto? Have you committed adultery? Have you betrayed your brother? Have you borne false witness against your neighbor? Do you get drunk? Have you stolen? Have you lied? Have you contracted debts without the prospect of paying? Have you labored faithfully for your wages? Have you coveted that which belongs to another? Have you taken the name of the Lord in vain? Do you preside in your family as a servant of God? Have you paid your tithing in all things?” The basic list was lengthened until some versions contained as many as twenty-six questions. But unlike catechisms, their purpose was not instruction in gospel principles but self-assessment leading to repentance.<sup>28</sup>

Another noninstructional catechism appeared in the *Deseret News* in 1862. Entitled “Catechetical Illustrations of the Faith and Teachings of the Saints,” it attempts to provide answers for frequently asked questions:

It is frequently asked, “What is the reason of your being driven from place to place?” Because we have the priesthood of the Son of God, and all the world is opposed to it. “For what were you driven from Jackson County, Missouri?” For preaching and trying to practice the gospel of life and salvation. “Were not your people abolitionists?” They were not. “Did they not spread an influence that slavery was not right?” They said, as they now say, that slaves are, in many instances, abused, and that masters will be punished for abusing their slaves. ... “Were you not driven from Illinois in consequence of believing and practicing the doctrine called ‘spiritual wife doctrine,’ or polygamy?” No. ... “For what were you driven from the State of Illinois?” For the same reason that we were driven from other places, viz.—because we preach and try to practice the gospel of life and salvation. ... “Is there no political reason why you have been driven from place to place?” Perhaps so, for probably the world fear[s] our political, as well as religious union, knowing that “in union there is strength.” We know of no other political reason.<sup>29</sup>

The formal organization of the Sunday School on 11 November 1867<sup>30</sup> created a need to provide reading materials, lesson aids, and a regular curriculum. Quite early in this development, starting in 1866 with the first volume of the *Juvenile Instructor*, a catechism was published “for our juveniles.” The questions were essentially study questions; the reader was to look up the answers. Then, in the following issue, the questions were reprinted along with answers. One long series of such questions was based on a biography of Joseph Smith published serially in the *Juvenile Instructor*.<sup>31</sup> When and where was he born? What were his father’s and mother’s names? How old was he when he went to the Lord to ask which of the sects was right? The questions continued, branching out to include other important aspects of early Mormon history:

Q.What was President [Heber] Kimball called, even by leading Elders, before leaving Kirtland, for going on the mission [to England in 1837]? A.He was ridiculed and called a fool for listening to Joseph and being willing to go on his foreign mission. ... Q.To what place did they [the Mormon Elders] proceed from Liverpool? A.To Preston. Q.What words were on the flag which they saw as they alighted from the coach in Preston? A.”Truth will prevail.”<sup>32</sup>

Early Church history had been traced up to 1838 when this series ceased publication in 1869.

Running simultaneously with the catechism on church history were Bible questions and answers and a series on the Book of Mormon entitled “Catechism on the History of the Indians.”<sup>33</sup> “From whom have the American Indians descended? Lehi. Was he a good man and a Prophet? Yes.”<sup>34</sup> And so on.

The intended age of the audience was not always clear in these early catechisms. “The catechism for children, exhibiting the prominent doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, should be in every family, school and Bible class,”<sup>35</sup> urged George A. Smith in 1872, probably referring to the Jaques catechism. Both children and adults could benefit, of course, but sometimes a mature understanding was assumed.

In 1874, a series entitled “Sunday Lessons for Little Learners” was prepared by George Goddard, first assistant superintendent over the Sunday Schools.<sup>36</sup> Goddard’s introduction acknowledged that the Jaques catechism and earlier issues of the *Juvenile Instructor* furnished lessons “applicable to all grades of the more advanced pupils.” By contrast, the new catechism, couched in short, simple sentences, was intended for younger children of four or five years of age.

Q.What has God made to give us light by day? A.The sun. Q.What has He made to give light by night? A.The moon and stars. Q.Who is God? A.Our Heavenly Father.<sup>37</sup>

Following this cadence, the questions move into the life of Jesus and then Joseph Smith, never straying far from a child’s level of understanding.

Q.What angels were sent by the Lord to give Joseph the power and authority of the Holy Priesthood? A.Peter, James and John. Q.We have spoken of these before, as men; who were they? A.Apostles of Jesus when he lived upon the earth. Q.How did they give the authority of the priesthood to Joseph? A.They laid their hands upon him and blest him. Q.After they had done so, what rested upon him? A.The Holy Ghost. Q.What is the Holy Ghost? A.The spirit of God. Q.If Joseph Smith had been a bad boy, would the Lord have sent His Holy Spirit to be with him? A.No. Q.Who, then, will the spirit of God be with? A.Good people. Q.What must people do to please God and keep His spirit with them? A.Pray often. Q.Who besides men and women should do this? A.Little children. Q.And will the Lord bless little children who pray often to Him? A.Yes. Q.What will He help them to do? A.To mind their parents and always speak the truth.<sup>38</sup>

The *Juvenile Instructor* also ran more advanced questions and answers based on the Bible and Book of Mormon.<sup>39</sup>

That catechetical material was used in Sunday School is clear from a description of the Tenth Ward Sunday School written by Benjamin Lang.<sup>40</sup> Four classes used the Bible and Book of Mormon, he said, while others used readers. In the higher classes the “Church Catechism”—the Jaques catechism—was used. Examinations were given on the ancient and modern history of the church, and prizes were offered. (One is reminded of Tom Sawyer squirming in front of his Sunday school.) For such a regimen, catechisms were obviously very helpful.

At the end of the century, an official history of the Sunday School acknowledged the contributions of the *Juvenile Instructor* through its “numerous helps to Sunday School workers in the way of catechisms suited to different grades of pupils.” In the list of publications offered was “a large number of catechism cards” that had received “a wide circulation.”<sup>41</sup>

Another organization that made use of catechisms was the Primary. In the early 1880s, after a vigorous project of establishing Primaries in different settlements, Eliza R. Snow published several books intended for Primary use.

One of these, a work of 120 pages, was *Bible Questions and Answers for Children*.<sup>42</sup> The person in charge should read the questions aloud, she explained. Another “appointee” would read the answer. Then the children would “repeat the answer in concert.” As soon as the children had mastered the answers, the “prompting may be dispensed with.” A chapter or part of a chapter would be taken for a lesson and “repeated week after week until it is well committed.”<sup>43</sup> From Genesis to Revelation, the catechism took the student over the essentials of the Bible story. Nine-tenths of the work would probably have been quite acceptable to most denominations of the time. But some questions had a Mormon twist, and some dealt with more recent issues.

Q. Who made this world? A. The Gods. ... Q. Where was the Garden of Eden? A. In Jackson county, Missouri. ... Q. Upon whom did Joseph [Smith] confer them [the keys]? A. Brigham Young. Q. In what manner? A. He sealed upon the heads of the Twelve Apostles all the Priesthood, keys and powers that had been conferred upon him by the angels of God.<sup>44</sup>

As an indication of how this catechism was used, Eliza R. Snow attended a Primary conference in Morgan, Utah, and asked the children “all the questions contained in one of the chapters. ... They were greatly entertained by it, and their little faces brightened up and their eyes sparkled with the pleasant pastime.”<sup>45</sup>

We can never know how many Latter-day Saints learned the rudiments of the restored gospel by means of these catechisms. Two prominent General Authorities, both of whom became presidents of the church, acknowledged learning from a catechism: Presidents Heber J. Grant and Joseph Fielding Smith.<sup>46</sup> Certainly many other people did the same.

By the end of the century some Mormon leaders, like educators elsewhere, were questioning the value of rote learning. “In day schools and Sunday Schools there is too much recitation, too much machine study being done,” said James E. Talmage at the Sunday School convention in 1898. “Parrots can recite, but they do not study, they do not comprehend, they do not see the relation between the parts.” Talmage was emphatic: “Rote work I should discourage under all conditions.”<sup>47</sup> Other institutional and curricular developments just before and after the turn of the century included the religion class movement, the rise of church academies, challenging courses of study prepared for the seventies quorums and the Mutual Improvement Associations, and new lesson manuals written for Sunday School and Primary, all of which may have found the old catechisms inadequate.

Nevertheless, the ideal of committing certain things to memory was not abandoned. One prominent leader of thought, William James, did not rule out all such learning. “Constant exercise in verbal memorizing must still be an indispensable feature in all sound education,” wrote James. “In every branch of study there are happily turned, concise, and handy formulas which in an incomparable way sum up results.”<sup>48</sup> For young Latter-day Saints, these included certain passages of scripture, the Articles of Faith, and the names of the General Authorities. Having committed them to memory, students were to be “passed” on these before being promoted to the next class. In addition to the Articles of Faith, educator George H. Brimhall advocated memorizing the Lord’s Prayer and the Ten Commandments. “I am not one of those who believe that a child should understand everything before it commits it to memory,” he explained.<sup>49</sup>

In the twentieth century, the term *catechism* disappeared from the Mormon lexicon.<sup>50</sup> Yet some memorization continued to be required. “Memory gems” were recited in Sunday School, and scriptural themes were selected each year for the Mutual Improvement Association and recited aloud by the group. Children continued to memorize the Articles of Faith and for many years the names of General Authorities. At present, in a program called “Scripture Mastery,” seminary students are encouraged to memorize twenty-five scriptural passages each year. But the extensive rote learning common among young Latter-day Saints in the past century has been abandoned.

Bearing some similarity to catechisms has been an approach to studying the gospel by posing specific questions and then giving answers. As already mentioned, this was the organization of *Lectures on Faith*. As early as 1840, in England, Elder Parley P. Pratt responded to doctrinal questions in the pages of the *Millennial Star*.<sup>51</sup> Later in the nineteenth century, George Q. Cannon and George Reynolds answered questions in the editorial pages of the *Juvenile Instructor*, and in the twentieth century such articles were published in the *Improvement Era* by Elder John A. Widtsoe and President Joseph Fielding Smith. Less authoritative, perhaps, but also valuable were the “Q and A” articles by non-General Authorities that appeared in the *Ensign* and *New Era*, some of which are compiled in a useful book entitled *A Sure Foundation: Answers to Difficult Gospel Questions*.<sup>52</sup> Not intended to be memorized, these articles, which continue to appear in the church magazines, may be the closest Latter-day Saint equivalent to the movement after World War II known as the “new catechetics.”<sup>53</sup> Similar to earlier catechisms in following a question-answer format were missionary plans. Designed to teach the rudiments of Mormonism to nonmembers, such plans proliferated after World War II.<sup>54</sup> During the 1950s, *A Systematic Program for Teaching the Gospel* was published for use in all the missions of the church.<sup>55</sup> Questions were designed to elicit the “correct” answers: “If man has flesh and bones and is in the image of God, then God has a body of esh and what, Mr. Jones?” Although the investigator—the catechumen—did not memorize answers, the missionary did as part of his preparation, and the teaching sessions were not regarded as free-wheeling discussions in which every opinion had equal validity. Moving from premise or scriptural passage to conclusion, using questions to elicit “correct” answers, the plans were intended to “teach the gospel.”

In the manuals used today in priesthood, Sunday School, Relief Society, Young Men and Young Women, Primary, family home evening, and seminary and institute classes, as well as in church magazine articles used for home teaching and visiting teaching, questions are employed to engage the listeners. Teachers are cautioned against asking only “factual” questions. Discovery learning is highly valued. On the other hand, “correct” answers are given in some manuals for the benefit of the teacher.<sup>56</sup> In the same tradition, songs for Primary children help them learn by rote the Articles of Faith and the books of the Bible and Book of Mormon. Another song, “Latter-day Prophets,” helps children learn the names of the presidents of the church.<sup>57</sup> The Mormon catechetical tradition, even though not so denominational, thus continues in vestigial form.

Will there ever be another Mormon catechism? The new “catechisms” now in use elsewhere in Christendom demonstrate the value of a standard work that sets forth the basics in a systematic fashion, and the Latter-day Saint equivalent might well be the four-volume *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, portions of which have been reprinted in handier format. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a landmark work, avoids the simplified, question-answer format still used for instructional purposes by other Protestant and Catholic catechisms.<sup>58</sup> It seems doubtful to me that a lengthy Mormon work structured around questions and answers will ever again become widely used, as was the Jaques catechism in the past century, but I may be wrong, for catechisms have obvious advantages where

rudimentary instruction is required, where speculative discussion is not encouraged, and where a trained corps of teachers is lacking.

## Notes

**This article is a revised and improved version of an earlier article by the same title published in 1976 in a mimeographed series entitled *Task Papers in LDS History*; the earlier version had extremely limited circulation.**

1. The term *catechism* originally meant systematic instruction in Christianity for those preparing to be baptized but came to be used for the “written or printed summaries of the principal doctrines of the Christian faith, intended for the instruction of the unlearned and the young.” *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, 12 vols. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1908). Accepting as a working definition of *catechism* “a manual of religious instruction usually arranged in the form of questions and answers” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. “catechism”), I here examine works within the Latter-day Saint tradition that are thus arranged.

2. Now most readily available in Larry E. Dahl and Charles D. Tate Jr., eds., *The Lectures on Faith in Historical Perspective* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1990). In addition to the text of the lectures, this volume contains an analysis and discussion of each of the lectures by (in order) Dennis F. Rasmussen, Joseph Fielding McConkie, Rodney Turner, Robert L. Millet, Robert J. Matthews, and Ardeth G. Kapp. Authorship of the lectures has also been discussed by Noel Reynolds, “The Authorship Debate Concerning *Lectures on Faith*: Exhumation and Reburial,” in *The Disciple as Witness: Essays on Latter-day Saint Doctrine in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000), 355–82.

3. *Messenger and Advocate* 1 (May 1835): 122.

4. Dahl and Tate, *Lectures on Faith*, 35.

5. *Ibid.*, 52.

6. *Ibid.*, 63–64.

7. *Ibid.*, 85–89, and Robert L. Millet, “The Supreme Power over All Things: The Doctrine of the Godhead in the Lectures on Faith,” in Dahl and Tate, *Lectures on Faith*, 221–40.

8. The classic analysis of the Articles of Faith as responses to questions of the day is T. Edgar Lyon, “Origin and Purpose of the Articles of Faith,” *Instructor* 87 (August–October 1952): 230–31, 264–65, 298–99, 319. Best in placing them in historical context is David J. Whittaker, “The ‘Articles of Faith’ in Early Mormon Literature and Thought,” in *New Views of Mormon History: A Collection of Essays in Honor of Leonard J. Arrington*, ed. Davis Bitton and Maureen U. Beecher (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), 63–92.

9. *Latter-day Saints Millennial Star* 10 (1 August 1848): 238 (hereafter *MS*). Orson Pratt’s fondness for the question approach is also demonstrated in “Questions on the Origin of Man,” “Mormon Philosophy: Space, Duration, and Matter,” “Questions on the Present State of Man,” and “Angels” (in two parts), published in the *New York Messenger*, 6, 13, 20, and 27 September, and 18 October 1845. He publishes answers only for the second article, and of course they could scarcely have been intended for memorization. David J. Whittaker, ed., *The Essential Orson Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 29–47.

10. *Scrapbook of Mormon Literature* (Chicago: Etten, 1911), 1:529–32. This work is a collection of tracts and pamphlets compiled and privately published by Ben E. Rich. According to bibliographer Chad J. Flake, *Good Tidings; or the New and Everlasting Gospel* was published as a four-page flyer in the *Millennial Star* office in the 1860s and again in about 1874. Chad J. Flake, ed., *A Mormon Bibliography, 1830–1930* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1978), 522.

11. *Hymns of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (1985), no. 11 (though it is not often sung by congregations today); the original version in *MS 9* (15 December 1847): 380, has some minor changes in punctuation and wording and includes an additional verse: “Where so long had been the gospel? Didn’t it ever ‘fall away? What became of those neglected? ‘God is just’—that’s all we say. Seek no crop where ’twas not planted, Nor a day where reigns the night; Now the sunshine bright is beaming, Let all creatures see aright.”

12. Karen Lynn Davidson, *Our Latter-day Hymns: The Stories and the Messages* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 40.

13. *MS 10* (15 June 1848): 183–84.

14. David Moffat, “The Child’s Ladder, or a Series of Questions and Answers Adapted for the Use of Children of the Latter-day Saints,” *MS 11* (1 March 1849): 73–76.

15. *Ibid.*; these questions all appear in the catechism.

16. John Jaques, “Catechism for Children,” *MS 15* (1853): 756–60, 795–96, 810–12, 827–31, 837–40, 851–52; 16 (1854): 27–29, 45–47, 58–59, 113–14; John Jaques, *Catechism for Children* (Liverpool: Richards, 1854). For other editions, see Flake, *A Mormon Bibliography*, 338–39. About Jaques, see Stella Jaques Bell, *Life History and Writings of John Jaques* (Rexburg, Idaho: Ricks College Press, 1978).

17. Jaques, “Catechism for Children,” *MS 15* (19 November 1853): 756.

18. *Ibid.*

19. Jaques, *Catechism for Children*, 6–7.

20. *Ibid.*, 9.

21. *Ibid.*, 13.

22. *Ibid.*, 19.

23. *Ibid.*, 53–54.

24. *Ibid.*, 63.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*, 81.

27. *Ibid.*, 84.

28. Howard C. Searle, "The Mormon Reformation of 1856–1857" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1956), 43–45. For a list of questions and a description of Brigham Young's use of them in a sermon, see John Moon Clements *Journal*, 4 November 1856, Family and Church History Department Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter Church Archives).

29. *Deseret News Weekly*, 6 August 1862.

30. Richard Ballantyne organized it informally on 9 December 1849.

31. *Juvenile Instructor* 1 (October–December 1866): 76, 80, 88, 92; 2 (January–December 1867): 8, 24, 28, 40, 44–45, 60–61, 68, 76, 92–93, 100–101, 124, 133, 148, 165, 180 (hereafter *Jl*).

32. *Jl* 3 (15 August 1868): 128.

33. *Jl* 3 (January–April 1868): 16, 28, 40, 56, and *passim*.

34. *Ibid.*, 28.

35. George A. Smith, in *Journal of Discourses*, 14:376.

36. George Goddard, "Sunday Lessons for Little Learners," *Jl* 9 (February–July 1874): 59, 65, 84, 94, 102, 120, 132, 144, 149, 168, 173; 10 (January–December 1875): 12, 24, 33, 48, 57, 72, 77, 96, 132, 156, 168, 188, 204, 216, 228, 237, 252, 257, 276, 285, 300; 11 (January–December 1876): 12 and *passim*. George Goddard's journal, containing many references to the use of catechisms in Sunday Schools, is housed in the Church Archives. See Davis Bitton, *Guide to Mormon Diaries and Autobiographies* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1977), 124–25.

37. Goddard, "Sunday Lessons for Little Learners," *Jl* 9 (28 February 1874): 59.

38. *Ibid.*, 168.

39. *Jl* 9–12 (1874–1877): *passim*.

40. *Jl* 2 (1 January 1867): 8.

41. *Jubilee History of the Latter-day Saints Sunday Schools, 1849–1899* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1900), 42. Several examples of these catechism cards are preserved in the Church Archives: Catechism on Reward, Catechism on the First Principles of the Gospel, Catechism on Prayer.

42. E.R.S.S. [Eliza R. Snow Smith], *Bible Questions and Answers for Children* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1881; 2nd ed., 1883).

43. *Ibid.*, 3 (1883 ed.).

44. *Ibid.*, 5, 6, 78 (1883 ed.).

45. *Woman's Exponent*, 1 November 1881.
46. Ronald Walker, "Young Heber J. Grant's Years of Passage," *BYU Studies* 24/2 (1984): 134; Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 4:vi.
47. *Proceedings of the First Sunday School Convention of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1899), 29, 32.
48. William James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology: And to Students on Some of Life's Ideals* (1899; reprint, New York: Dover, 1962), 65.
49. *Proceedings of the First Sunday School Convention*, 43.
50. *Catechism* is one of the terms said to be "conspicuously absent from LDS language, or used infrequently." Robert W. Blair, "Vocabulary, Latter-day Saint," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4:1537.
51. MS 1 (September 1840): 120–23; (February 1841): 256–59.
52. *A Sure Foundation: Answers to Difficult Gospel Questions* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988).
53. Useful surveys are found in such reference works as *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* and James Hastings, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* (New York: Scribners, 1913).
54. Jay E. Jensen, "Proselyting Techniques of Mormon Missionaries" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1974); Lewis C. Christian, "A Study of the Development of the Missionary Plan of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1950," typescript, paper for Religion 544, Brigham Young University, copy in Church Archives; Richard O. Cowan, "Richard Lloyd Anderson and Worldwide Church Growth," in *The Disciple as Witness*, 105–15.
55. *A Systematic Program for Teaching the Gospel* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1953), with many subsequent printings.
56. "Teaching with Questions," in *Teaching, No Greater Call: A Resource Guide for Gospel Teaching* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1999), 68–70.
57. *Children's Songbook* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989), 114–17, 119, 134.
58. *A New Catechism: Catholic Faith for Adults* [the Dutch catechism] (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967); *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Rome: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997); Bennet Kelley, *St. Joseph First Communion Catechism* (New York: Catholic Book, 1991); John A. Hardon, *Pocket Catholic Catechism: A Concise and Contemporary Guide to the Essentials of the Faith* (New York: Doubleday, 1989); Francis D. Kelly, *The Mystery We Proclaim: Catechesis for the Third Millennium* (Huntington, Ind.: Our Sunday Visitor, 1999).