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“Play It Again, Sam”: The Remarkable “Prophecy” of Samuel Lutz, Alias Christophilus Gratianus, Reconsidered

Paul B. Pixton

I recall traveling, as a brand-new missionary in Germany in the summer of 1960, with my senior companion by train from Freiburg to several cities in and around the Black Forest which made up our mission district. On one such occasion, I acquired a most intriguing note from a fellow missionary: a “prophecy” by a Catholic monk named Lutius Gratus from the year 1739, the original of which was said to be found in the library of the University of Basel in Switzerland. This amazing document foretold the coming forth of the true church of God within one hundred years, a church which would be led by prophets and elders bearing the priesthood of old; the tiny band of faithful followers of these divinely ordained men would be persecuted and killed until at length they found refuge in the valley of a great salten sea; there they would cause the land to burst forth in blossoms, build a temple of indescribable beauty, and gather the righteous from the four corners of the earth, all in anticipation of the day when the Lord God would visit the wicked with his destructive fury.

I had never heard of such a prophecy before, but to a twenty-year-old Mormon elder it was further proof of the validity of the message I had come to Germany to proclaim. It was exciting to know that almost a hundred years before the Restoration through Joseph Smith a vision of that great event and of associated circumstances had been vouchedsafed to a righteous monk. This notion was consistent with other pre-Restoration statements made by Roger Williams and Thomas Jefferson which had been printed in LDS publications and are still used in visitors’ centers throughout the Church.

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Appreciation is expressed to Vicki Lynn Bryce and Russell K. Durrant, as well as to Linda Haslam of the LDS Church Historical Division Archives, for their assistance in researching this study.
In discussing this remarkable piece of information with the other missionary, I also learned that the rumor around our mission was that a German Mission president had recently been forced by ill health to withdraw from the rigors of his church calling. While convalescing, he allegedly traveled to Basel where he was said to have located the source of the "prophecy" in the university library. Upon returning a second time, however, he found that the document had mysteriously disappeared.

During the remainder of my mission, I doubt that I ever looked at that quotation again; certainly I never referred to it in the course of my proselyting. Over a decade later, however, as a professional historian, I was discussing Mormon folklore with a graduate student when the topic of the "prophecy" of Lutius Gratus came up. The student mentioned that he had run across references to this curious item while researching the papers of President Heber J. Grant. Realizing that the "prophecy" was not new to my generation of missionaries and that it might have an interesting history of its own, I once again turned to a consideration of it, the results of which are presented here.

The first mention of the "prophecy" seems to have occurred in 1893 when the *Juvenile Instructor* and *Der Stern*—two periodicals published by the LDS church—featured an article in English and German respectively, written by Jacob Spori. Entitled "True and False Theosophy," the article quoted the "prophecy" much as I had received it, claiming that it was contained in a work called *Die Hoffnung Zions* (The Hope of Zion), written by Lutius Gratianus and published at Basel, Switzerland, in 1739. Speaking of the entire work, Spori remarked:

I cannot give in English the terrific power that peals forth from Gratianus' original (German). The healings and wonderful doings of this unique man were so outstanding, his preaching so powerful, that he was invited all over the land to preach, and even today old men in the Swiss mountains remember having heard their sires talk about the man.¹

¹Jacob Spori, "True and False Theosophy," *Juvenile Instructor* 28 (1 November 1893): 672–74: 

Another [theosophist], Lutius Gratiano, in his "Hope of Zion" (printed 1739, in Basel) says: "The old true gospel and the powers thereof are lost. False doctrines prevail throughout every church and all the lands. All we can do is to exhort the people to fear God, to be just, to shun evil, to pray, pray, pray. Prayer and purity may bring an angel to visit a deeply distressed soul. But I tell you, that in 100 years God will have spoken again; He will restore the old Church again. I see a little people led by a Prophet and faithful Elders. They are persecuted, burnt out and murdered, but in a valley that lies towards a great lake they will grow up, make a beautiful (herrlich) land, have a temple of magnificent splendor, have all the old Priesthood, with Apostles, Prophets, Teachers and Deacons. From every nation the believers will be gathered by swift messengers, and then God, the Omnipotent, will speak to the disobedient nations with thunder, lightnings and destructions never heard of in history." (Italics in the original.)

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The rather stunning nature of the “prophecy” undoubtedly aroused curiosity among Latter-day Saints from the outset, but especially among the missionaries then serving in Switzerland. One of those who read Spori’s article in Der Stern was Elder Christian Hyrum Muhlestein from Provo, Utah, who claimed over fifty years later that he became excited to the point of searching for the original source which was located in the Basel University Library. Muhlestein asserted that he and his companion, Elder Theodore Graf of Santa Clara, Utah, located a copy of Die Hoffnung Zions—measuring about 5” by 7” by 1–1/2” and published at Basel in 1739 just as Spori had stated—and that they also found the “prophecy” contained therein. He recalled that he saw the book but once and that he had referred to the “prophecy” on a subsequent occasion in a sermon which he delivered to a large gathering in Basel, in consequence of which the inhabitants of that city became aware that there was a book in the university library which lent prophetic support to the Mormon church.2

Whether as a result of the version printed in the Juvenile Instructor or of that in Der Stern, the “prophecy” found its way into many corners of Mormondom, including a hometown newspaper in southern Idaho. In January 1908 Rulon S. Wells of the First Council of Seventy responded to that notice, asking in tones of reproach:

I wonder if the editor of the local paper referred to really intended to stand responsible for the plain assertion that this wonderful prediction is to be found in [Die Hoffnung Zions]; or has he permitted himself to be imposed upon by some one else? Personally, I would be very much interested in learning who is really responsible for the foregoing statement, for, if it be true, it should be verified, and the name of Gratiano should become a household word, as one of the prophets to whom the future was unfolded with such clearness and detail as almost to rival the wonderful vision of Daniel, when the Lord made known to him the dream of Nebuchadnezzar and its interpretation. But if, on the other hand, it be untrue, the perpetrator of this fraud deserves severe reprimand. For my part, I am free to admit, that I regard it as a “fake” and a fraud.3

Wells’s skepticism was not without some basis, for he noted that about ten years previously, while visiting the Swiss and German Mission, and having already seen a copy of the “prophecy,” he had resolved to visit the library in Basel and, if possible, obtain a copy of the

2Ernst Staehelin, “Eine angebliche Weissagung Samuel Lutzens auf die Kirche Jesu Christi der Heiligen der letzten Tage,” Kirchenblatt für die reformierte Schweiz, Jahrgang 108 (Basel, 1952): 7–11; see also George F. Hilton, “How Valid Is the Prophecy of Samuel Lutz” (paper, dated September 1956), 2–3, a copy of which is on file in the Library–Archives, Historical Division of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives).

book. With the assistance of a local emigration agent named Romell, he succeeded in locating Zions Hoffnung by Lutius Gratiano, printed in the year 1739. Jointly with Elder Peter Loutensock, then presiding in that mission, he read the work from start to finish and much to his disappointment found in it no such prediction, and nothing that even resembled it. While recognizing that the book was written by a devout Christian, he concluded that it contained nothing that would justify its being cited as the source from which the “prophecy” was drawn.

President Wells further noted that in 1901 David L. McDonald, who then presided over the Swiss Mission, also visited the library, obtained the book, read it, and was equally disappointed in his hope of finding the alleged prediction. In summation, President Wells stated:

There is nothing in . . . Zions Hoffnung . . . that would warrant [its connection with the “prophecy”], and let us hope that it will not be used, either at home or abroad in the mission field, in support of the great work of the Master. There is enough real prophecy without using any that is bogus, to convince the honest in heart of the truth.

One would think that editors of newspapers and magazines would verify such remarkable statements before permitting them to be published.4

The diary which Rulon S. Wells kept as president of the European Mission commences with 1 January 1897 but is unhappily incomplete. It makes no mention whatever of his trip into Switzerland.5 But the Manuscript History of the Swiss and German Mission contains the notation for Saturday, 3 July 1897: “Presidents Wells, McMurrin and Loutensock having visited Basel and Mannheim, arrived in Frankfurt A.M.,”6 suggesting that between the Sunday (27 June) conference of the Church at Bern and their appearance at Frankfurt these men could have spent time in the Basel University Library looking for the “prophecy.” While President Wells affirmed that a copy of the 1739 edition of Die Hoffnung Zions existed in the library, he clearly contradicted the assertions made by Hyrum Muhlestein that the “prophecy” was to be found therein.

Accompanying President Wells on the 1897 tour of the European Mission was Elder James Learing McMurrin, who in 1901 served as counselor to Wells’s successor, Francis M. Lyman. In that latter

4Ibid., 164.
5Rulon S. Wells, Diary of European Mission, LDS Church Archives. The Reminiscences and Diary of Peter Loutensock are also preserved in the LDS Church Archives, but they make no reference to the search for the “prophecy” either.
6LDS Church Archives.
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capacity, McMurrin penned a note which appeared in the Millennial Star, telling of his own investigation of “The Swiss Prophet”:

Sometime ago I was handed an article purporting to be an extract from Gratiano’s “Hope of Zion,” a work said to be in the University Library at Basle. . . . Not being familiar with any such work, and finding the quotation from it contained a very remarkable prophecy, I concluded to investigate the matter, and ascertain, if possible, the truth relating thereto. . . . I at once communicated with President L. S. Cardon, of the Swiss Mission, soliciting his assistance, well knowing that it was within his power, and that of the missionaries associated with him, to give the matter a thorough investigation. He immediately instituted a search for the book, and happily his efforts were crowned with success. It was found in the library referred to, but a careful perusal of it failed to disclose any such declaration as the one above given. It contained no such prophecy. . . . It will be noticed that there is a little difference in the name of the author and the date given in the two articles. The first one has it: “Lutius Gratianus, 1739,” while the second one gives it as “Christophilus Gratianus, 1732.” It is unquestionably one and the same work, however, because the title, “Hope of Zion,” is the same in both articles, and there is but one work of that name in the library in which it was found, and to which I was directed.7

Unlike Rulon S. Wells and David L. McDonald, who claimed that a copy of a 1739 edition of Die Hoffnung Zion by Lutius Gratianus could be found in the Basel University Library, McMurrin asserted that such was not the case; what he found in that same library was a 1732 edition of Die Hoffnung Zion by one Christophilus Gratianus. He was equally emphatic that the labors of President Louis S. Cardon and the elders of the Swiss Mission had been unable to reveal the existence of any passages in the latter work which corresponded to the “prophecy.” Given the disparity between the reports of these several Church leaders, it is of no minor importance to investigate the identity of “Lutius Gratianus.”

A thorough search of the catalogues of books published in the eighteenth century fails to reveal a single author by that name.8 On the other hand, one does find the book Die Hoffnung Zion, which was...

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7 The Latter-Day Saints’ Millennial Star 63 (Thursday, 31 January 1901): 70–71. An entry in McMurrin’s journal, dated 28 January 1901, notes: “Wrote another Article for the Star entitled ‘The Swiss Prophet,’ [which] appears this week.” The journal entry of 5 February records: “I wrote an article for the Star of Jan 31st 1901 on ‘The Swiss Prophet,’ it contains some interesting items in a work called ‘The Hope of Zion,’ found in the University Library of Basle, Switzerland. This work is said to contain some very pointed prophecies that were supposed to refer to our people, so I hunted it up and proved that the prediction said to be in it could not be found, although some interesting items were found” (James Learing McMurrin Journals, 1899–1901, 122–23, 127–28, LDS Church Archives).

published in 1732 at Bern, Switzerland, by Christophilus Gratianus. It was this book which James L. McMurrin saw in about 1900 in the Basel University Library. As it turns out, however, "Christophilus Gratianus" was one of several *noms de plume* employed by Samuel Lutz (1674–1750), a member of the Swiss Reformed Church who was widely known as the "King of the Pietists." Prolific as a writer and as a preacher, he is credited with the authorship of over thirty-six works which were published during his lifetime and posthumously.

From 1723 until 1729 Lutz published under his own name. Then in 1732 he gave way to a literary convention of the eighteenth century, employing the Latinized form of his name, Samuel Lucius, and the pseudonym Christophilus Gratianus. In 1733 he returned to the use of Samuel Lutz, but when his work *Die Hoffnung Zions* was reissued in expanded form in 1737 as part of the volume *Ein Neuer Strauss von schönen und gesunden Himmels-Blumen* (A New Bouquet of Beautiful and Healthy Heavenly Flowers), he retained the previous *nom de plume*, Christophilus Gratianus. His sermons of 1743 and 1745 were published under the name Samuel Lucius once more, as were two posthumously printed works in 1751 and 1759 respectively. In 1756, *Die Hoffnung Zions* was again included in a second edition of *Ein Neuer Strauss*, bearing the authorship of Christophilus Gratianus or Samuel Lucius, while an expanded sermon was published in 1759 under the name of Christophilus Gratianus. On none of the known writings of Samuel Lutz does the name Lutius Gratianus ever appear.

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10 Representative of these are—

*Die unter der Kelter des Zorns Gottes ligende ... Wein Trauben* (a sermon published under his own name, Samuel Lutz, Basel, 1723).

*Lilien-Zweig der sanftmütigen und Alles erduldenden Liebe* (published under the name of Samuel Lutz, St. Gallen, 1728).

*Der aus Gottes Verheissung ... entstehende ewige Sternen-Himmel* (published under the name Samuel Lutz, Bern, 1728).

*Die Sonne der Gerechtigkeit—Predigt über Malachi 4, 2* (a sermon published under the name of Samuel Lutz, Bern, 1729).

*Die neue Creatur in ihrer eigentlicher Gestalt—Neujahrs-Betrachtung über Pauli 2. Cor. 5, 17* (published under the name Christophilus Gratianus, Zurich, 1732).


*Des Gratianus Christophilus Zeugnuss der Wahrheit oder Verantwortung auf wider ihn angegebene Lasternungen und Klagen* (Basel, 1732).

*Die paradisische Alte der jungfraulichen Keuschheit, welche Gott giebet allen, die da sind aus dem Glauben an den Herrn Jesus* (published under the name Samuel Lutz, Heris, 1733).

*Samuel Lucius Klee-Blat christlicher Tügenden als Glaube, Hoffnung, Liebe, welches ehemals in einer Predigt vorgetragen, nachber aber erweitert und vermehret dem Druck überlassen worden* (Zurich, 1759).
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And yet, Spori, Muhlestein, Wells, and McDonald all testified that the work *Die Hoffnung Zions*, published at Basel in 1739, bore such authorship. Since Spori is the ultimate source for this variant of the name, it is to him that we must now turn for a resolution of this seeming contradiction.

Jacob Spori came from the Swiss canton of Bern, where he was born 26 March 1847, the son of the teacher Jacob Spori of Oberwyl in Niedersimmental. The younger Spori also became a teacher, receiving his license on 4 April 1867, after completing his education at the seminary of Munchenbuchsee. In September 1871 he became the principal of the high school (Gymnasium) at Oberwyl. He was also interested in ecclesiastical matters, and at some time before 1876 he was elected to the synod of the Bern Reformed State Church. In early 1877, during a personal spiritual crisis, Spori was contacted by missionaries of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and was baptized into that faith the same year. Having already resigned his seat in the synod, he soon found it necessary to surrender his teaching position as well.

During the winter and spring of 1879, Spori labored in Switzerland as a missionary for his new faith, and in July of that same year he joined the Saints who were gathering to Zion in America. After five difficult years struggling as a farmer in Utah, he returned once more to Switzerland as a missionary and was assigned to the Bern Conference. Just over one month later he was transferred to Constantinople, and at the end of 1885 he was appointed president of the Turkish Mission. Following his release from that position, he returned to Europe, where he also served for a time in northern Italy with Elder N. G. Naegli.

Spori’s substantial academic training in Switzerland served him well during his mission and after his release. He wrote numerous letters to prominent acquaintances in the Bern region, explaining aspects of the restored gospel; he also authored tracts used in proselyting by missionaries. Shortly after his release in mid-1888, he settled in eastern Idaho where he became a member of the Bannock Stake Board of Education and the first principal of the Bannock Stake Academy (the future Ricks College). In 1891 his good friend Karl G. Maeser invited him to teach German, French, Latin, and mathematics at the Brigham Young Academy in Provo, Utah.11

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His letters, writings, and actions mark Jacob Spori as a man of broad interests, yet given at times to visionary flights. His investigations of religious movements in the region of Bern prior to 1877 undoubtedly brought him into contact with Pietists—and with them quite reasonably the writings of the Bernese native Samuel Lutz—before Spori himself became a member of the LDS church. It is thus probable that Jacob Spori, as a recent convert to the Mormon faith, drew on that earlier familiarity with Lutz as a means of persuading his former students and friends that one of their own had foreseen the church to which he now belonged.

In his commentary to the “prophecy” as printed in 1893, Spori remarked that “I cannot give in English the terrific power that peals forth from Gratianus’ original (German).” It is probable that one reason for this inability was that he did not have a text of Gratianus’ “prophecy” before him as he wrote; rather, the citation printed in the *Juvenile Instructor* and *Der Stern* was a reconstruction of ideas which Spori had read prior to his emigration in 1877 (or, less likely, during his brief missionary activities in Switzerland during 1884). The puzzling aspects of the “prophecy” can thus be explained as the result of a faulty memory.

Supporting this contention is the fact that Spori gives the author of the work *Die Hoffnung Zions* as Lutius Gratianus. We have noted above that this pseudonym was never employed by Samuel Lutz. What appears to have happened is that Spori inadvertently combined elements of Lutz’s Latinized real name (Samuel Lucius) and his pseudonym (Christophilus Gratianus) to produce the hybrid Lutius Gratianus. Such a mistake would have been most unlikely had an actual copy, or even notes, of Lutz’s work been before Spori as he wrote his article in 1893; but it would have been altogether possible for someone who was well acquainted with the writings of Lutz under his various pseudonyms, yet forced to rely on the faded memory of his earlier years for details. The choice of the publication year 1739 at Basel was likewise an honest mistake, inasmuch as Spori hadforgotten the actual dates of 1732 (at Bern) and 1737 (at Basel). It does not appear, therefore, that Spori set out intentionally to fabricate a “prophecy” which others took to be a literal excerpt from the writings of one Lutius Gratianus.

But what are we to make of Hyrum Muhlestein’s claims? Muhlestein did in fact serve a mission in Switzerland between 1891 and 1894, and the lecture which he claimed to have given in Basel can be documented from independent sources. For the actual contents of the lecture, however, we are forced to rely on Muhlestein’s own testimony.
given years after the event itself. Of all those who sought to find the "prophecy" after the publication of Sporti's article in 1893, he is the only one who claimed to have actually found it word for word. Muhlestein noted that the "prophecy" was contained only in the 1739 Basel edition of Die Hoffnung Zions. He had been able to purchase a secondhand copy of the 1732 edition and agreed with others that there was no information concerning the controversial predictions in this Bern redaction. He assumed that this 1739 edition disappeared from the Basel library after his lecture there as a missionary in 1894, and yet Rulon S. Wells claimed to have seen the same book three years later, albeit without the "prophecy."

On the surface, Muhlestein's detailed description of the 1739 edition of the book appears impressive and lends credence to his assertions. But it is exactly that description which is troubling: the book was said to measure 5" by 7" by 1–1/2". Had the writing been just a pamphlet, it is plausible that only a few copies of it were printed and that these were successfully removed from the library shelves of Basel and other Swiss cities as a reaction against the Mormons' use of Samuel Lutz's speculative theology in their own proselyting. But a work which measures 1–1/2" in thickness is clearly no pamphlet and would thus not have been printed in such limited numbers. It obviously must have been a book which (given Lutz's popularity) would then have been found in the libraries of Switzerland (and presumably in a few neighboring countries), and reference to it must also have been made in the catalogues of books published before 1800. We have noted above, however, that in no instance is this the case. Are we to assume that the efforts to remove all evidence of the "prophecy" went so far as to alter even the catalogues? Such an idea stretches our credulity much too far. Even if the people of Basel had made a concentrated attempt to suppress the "prophecy" by one of their landmen, why would other Swiss cantons be so cooperative? Muhlestein's assessment of his own impact upon Basel in 1894 thus appears to be an exaggeration. In fact, his insistence that the book was removed following his sermon in 1894 seems to be a belated explanation of why all subsequent attempts to locate the "prophecy" had failed.

Christian Hyrum Muhlestein, whose forebears also came from the canton of Bern, thus appears to be the one most responsible for the perpetuation of the confusion surrounding the "prophecy" of Lutius Gratianus. Not only did he insist that there was in fact a 1739 edition of Die Hoffnung Zions, but he also clung to the erroneous notion of its

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authorship. Moreover, he appears to have originated the idea that the source for the "prophecy" was to be found only in the Basel University Library, an idea to which Spori never alluded in his article. Muhlestein's statement given in 1950/1951 claims that many others had seen the passage in question in the alleged volume, but this declaration loses virtually all its force when he names only Spori, who by then was dead. This assertion is also in contradiction to Muhlestein's claim that the 1739 edition was removed from the library shelves shortly after his 1894 lecture. Since there never was a 1739 edition of the book, we must conclude that Rulon S. Wells, Peter Loutensock, and David L. McDonald never saw such a copy of the work but confused it with the editions of 1732 or 1737. Their preoccupation was primarily with the quotation, not with the year of publication. They furthermore appear to have paid little attention to the name "Lutius Gratianus," regarding it as merely another pseudonym for Samuel Lutz. Not until James L. McMurrin sorted out the various aspects of the problem in 1901 was this incongruency drawn to the general attention of the Church.

That the readership of the Millennial Star was limited, or that having read McMurrin's statement some still chose to regard the "prophecy" as a legitimate prediction of the coming forth of the Restored Church, is apparent from the continued interest in Lutius Gratianus. Every few years a new search into the authenticity of this passage was launched, provoked by missionaries in the field and by the general membership of the Church. President Hyrum W. Valentine of the Swiss and German Mission, for example, received a letter dated 13 July 1912 from one Norman Lee of Brigham City, Utah, which contained the following note:

First I want to call your attention to an extract from a book that is supposed to be in the library of Basel City University. I suppose you have seen the same there many times but I insert a copy herewith, and ask that you make it a point when you visit Basel to look up this book and verify the correctness of this excerpt. It will be worth using if it is found to really exist in the book that is referred to. If it is not in the book of course the excerpt would be of no use.13

No reply to this letter is found among the numerous items in the Valentine Collection at the LDS Church Historical Division Archives, nor is reference made to it in the Manuscript History of the Swiss-German Mission for this period, leaving one to wonder whether in all his efforts to preside over the mission during the troubled years from

13Hyrum W. Valentine, Swiss-German Mission Correspondence, LDS Church Archives.
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1911 until 1916 Hyrum Washington Valentine ever found time to pursue the matter of the "prophecy." 14

With the resumption of full missionary activities in Germany and Switzerland after the Great War, the question of the "prophecy" was raised once again. On 6 April 1922, Elder Oskar Keith Winters, 15 then serving as secretary to the president of the Swiss-German Mission, wrote a letter to President Heber J. Grant, informing him of the results of an investigation which Winters had carried out at the leader's request:

Dear President Grant:

I am taking this opportunity of answering your letter regarding a prophecy purported to be in a book in the Basel University Library. I am registered as a student in the Basel University, where I studied German for two semesters and using my privileges as a student I have searched and had the librarian search quite thoroughly and have reached the following conclusion:

The reference has evidently become confused going through so many hands and in order to be sure of the book it will be necessary to have another inquiry made of the person who furnished you with the same. I was successful in finding an old book entitled Hope of Zion (Hoffnung Israels) by Theophile Gratianus printed in Bern in 1732. This book is rich in prophecies concerning the restoration of the gospel and is remarkable in that it mentions a church with prophets and patriarchs and that the Urim and Thummin would be restored, etc, etc. The prophecy that you quote is not to be found in the book in its entirety but could perhaps be a synopsis of the whole book or perhaps a summary of someone's thoughts as he read the book. The book is in German and very old as the date would indicate. The Basel University Library is rich in such antiquities and if proper reference were given it would perhaps be possible to locate the exact text. I have had three different references given me. The one from you read "Titus Gratiana" which name I could not find; another missionary gave me the name "Lentus Gratus" as he received it from someone; and I found the name "Theophile Gratianus" after much searching through hundreds of "Gratianus" cards and which was really a pseudonym for Samuel Lucius the author of the original book. I am sorry I was

14 "Humanity's Vineyard," a newsletter of the LDS Mojave Stake, published a copy of the "prophecy" sometime in the 1970s, said to have been obtained by Samuel T. (more correctly, Samuel Enoch) Bringham while on a mission in Switzerland. Bringham served a mission 1909-1912 (see Andrew Jensen, LDS Biographical Encyclopedia 4 [Salt Lake City, 1971]: 443) and is thus the apparent source of the further statement found in the above-noted issue of "Humanity's Vineyard" that "a one time President of the Swiss-German Mission, Hyrum W. Valentine, and his wife, Ella B. Valentine, both testified to having read this same prophecy in the Library in Basel, Switzerland" (copy of the newsletter is preserved in the LDS Church Archives).

15 General information on Oskar Keith Winters is found in the Manuscript History of the Swiss-German Mission, vol. 2, Index; Winters's letter is found in the First Presidency Letter-Press Copy Books, Heber J. Grant (6 April 1922), p. 61. LDS Church Archives.
unable to locate the exact text and will be glad if the correct reference would be obtained from P.N. Watts of S. Weber.

Sincerely, your Nephew

It is clear from this letter that the "prophecy" which Jacob Spori attributed to Lutius Gratianus in 1893 had by 1922 been spread by various means among many members of the Church. Missionaries came into the field with garbled copies of the text, the result of inaccurate copying or of oral transmission. This condition had made it impossible for Winters to locate any writings by either "Titus Grationa" or "Lentus Gratus." It is equally obvious that the original version of the "prophecy" as printed in the *Juvenile Instructor* and Der Stern had been forgotten. Without knowing it, Winters had located the same book at Basel as previous searchers—namely, *Die Hoffnung Zions* (incorrectly cited by him as *Hoffnung Israels*, perhaps due to an unconscious substitution of the title of a well-known Mormon hymn) by Theophile Gratianus, or more correctly Samuel Lutz.

Following the suggestion of his nephew, President Grant wrote P. N. (more correctly, Robert N.) Watts of South Weber, Utah, on 28 April 1922, declaring:

Some time ago I was furnished with a copy of what is styled "Strange Prophecy Regarding Church," which I understand you located among some old papers left by your father. It is stated that this prophecy had been copied from a book by Robert H. Watts, your father, who came to Utah in 1850, and that it bears the notation that the book which contains the same can be found in the University Library at Basel. . . . The following reference was given: "Titus Grationa, in his Hope of Zion, printed in Basel City, Sw., 1739, which is as follows: . . . " [President Grant then cited the text of the "prophecy" as he had received it, noting that] I sent a copy of this to Pres. Serge F. Ballif, of the Swiss and German Mission, who, in turn, asked Elder O. K. Winters to see what could be located in the Basel University Library. I am enclosing herewith a copy of the letter just received from Bro. Winters of date April 6th, 1922, which I thought would be interesting to you, and if you can furnish any other reference or more information with reference to this matter, I should be glad to receive the same and give Bro. Winters the opportunity of further research.16

The Robert H. Watts of South Weber mentioned in President Grant's letter emigrated from Council Point, Iowa, with his wife Elizabeth and their seven children in 1850, settling first at Brown's Fort and later at South Weber in Utah. The elder Watts died 28 March 1879 at South Weber,17 so that if the facts of the letter are correct, he must

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17 See film 422, 352, Patrons Section 1962, Library, Genealogical Society of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.
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have been aware of the "prophecy" of Lutius Gratianus years before it was published by Jacob Spori in the *Juvenile Instructor*. Such can hardly have been the case, however, inasmuch as it seems clear that Spori himself was the author of the "prophecy." Supporting this view is the fact that there is no mention of Robert H. Watts as a missionary to Switzerland between his arrival in Utah and his death three decades later.\(^1\) That in turn casts doubt on his ability to have access to and to read the works of Samuel Lutz. Equally puzzling would be the matter of there being no record of public disclosure of the "prophecy" prior to Watts's death in 1879 and no attempt to connect him with it until an apparent note to that effect was sent to President Grant about 1920 by Robert N. Watts.

Current restrictions on LDS General Authorities' papers which are preserved in the Historical Division Archives prevent further research into President Grant's investigation of the "prophecy." But mission presidents also continued to receive requests from members of the Church, asking that they verify something which had never existed. Hugh J. Cannon, for example, included in the quarterly report which was submitted from the Swiss Mission in 1927 a response to one such request by Bishop David A. Smith:

> You refer in your letter of the 10th of June, 1926, to a prophecy supposed to have been made by one Lutius Gratiano in his book "Zion's Hoffnung," or "The Hope of Zion," printed in the year 1739 and at present to be found in the library of the University of Basel, Switzerland.

> As this question has come to our attention frequently of late, we are prepared to answer your inquiry without any trouble. In the Improvement Era for January, 1908, and on page 161 of that issue you will find an article entitled: "A Fraudulent Prophecy Exposed." This article was written by Elder Rulon S. Wells with the intent of doing exactly what the title says. We refer you to this number of the Era for first hand information on the matter. I might add that since Brother Wells looked into this matter, one of our brethren had the book in hand, and very carefully read it through, with the same result that Brother Wells and others had.\(^1\)

A similar note was contained in the 12 June 1928 edition of the *Liabona—The Elders' Journal*, a biweekly publication of the LDS missions in America. The editor, Elder Hugh Ireland, commented:

\(^{18}\)This conclusion is based on a search of the Manuscript History of the Swiss, Italian, and German Mission 1861-1867, vol. 4, LDS Church Archives, which contains a list of those elders who labored in these missions between 1850 and 1883; see also the Supplement to vol. 1, which gives biographical data on many missionaries of the nineteenth century but fails to list anyone named Robert H. Watts.

\(^{19}\)Manuscript History of the Swiss-German Mission, vol. 8, 1921-1930 (under date of 30 September 1927).
Our attention has been called to the following statement, which has appeared in print several times in recent years, and we deem it a duty to make known the truth regarding it, as it is sometimes quoted in the mission field as a divinely inspired prophecy: . . .

Following the citation of the “prophecy,” Ireland noted:

That the prophecy is a bogus one is conclusively shown by Elder Rulon S. Wells, of the First Council of Seventy, in an article entitled “A Fraudulent Prophecy Exposed,” appearing in the Improvement Era of January 1908.20

It is thus evident that, despite official attempts to discourage the use of the “prophecy” by the missionaries throughout the Church since at least 1901, this artifact of Mormon folklore had developed a life of its own.

Folklore tells us much about the collective hopes and fears of a particular social group, and such is clearly the case with the persistence of the “prophecy” of Lutius Gratianus.21 Each generation of Mormons since the time of Jacob Spori has had to deal with this spurious report, often totally oblivious to previous attempts to disprove it. Like myself, many readers must have assumed that the discovery of this prediction was contemporary to themselves. Along with other items of Mormon folklore, this tale had a certain “faith-promoting” quality which assured its perpetuation. And some have doubtless felt that even if it were of suspect origin, it ought to be true; certainly an event so vital to the salvation of mankind as the restoration of the true gospel of Jesus Christ could have been revealed to righteous men of a preceding age. This thought spurred Church members to continue their enquiries concerning the mysterious 1739 edition of Die Hoffnung Zions, until finally the University of Basel Library requested that one of the most esteemed members of the university faculty conduct an independent investigation.

In a memorandum published in 1952, Professor Ernst Staehelin, a specialist in ecclesiastical history, confirmed what others had previously stated, namely, that a 1739 edition of the work by Lutz cum Gratianus was not to be found. “Despite all our searching,” he noted, a Basel edition of 1739, as mentioned in the articles in “Juvenile Instructor” and in “Stern,” has not yet been found. And even if it should exist, it would be, considering Samuel Lutz’ mode of viewing things, very unlikely, nay as good as impossible, that it should contain the alleged reference to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

Commenting on the details of the "prophecy" as rendered by Spori, Staehelin continued:

Neither the first edition of the work nor the enlarged edition contain any indication of the one hundred years of which J. Spori speaks, and also no indication of a prophet who would then appear, nor an indication of the "valley that lies towards a great lake," the temples, and the renewed priesthood.

According to this evidence, one is inclined to believe that the writer of the article of 1893 would mean the Basel edition of 1737, and that he tried consciously or unconsciously, to pick out an indication of the Church of the Mormons from the long-winded and not always lucid writings of Lutz.22

Staehelin stopped short of actually branding Jacob Spori as the fabricator of the "prophecy" attributed to Samuel Lutz, realizing from a review of Spori's life that he was a man of ability who enjoyed public trust both in Switzerland and in the Intermountain regions of America. Spori did not appear to have been the sort of man who would knowingly deceive his readers. In fact, Staehelin proposed an elaborate scheme for verifying the validity of Spori's contentions, all of which seems unnecessary in the light of our discussion.

Since 1908, no general publication of the Church had published the text of the "prophecy." Numerous "missionary" copies of it existed, however, and these appear to have circulated widely. Continued reference to it after the publication of Staehelin's study may have been the result of its inclusion in popular collections of "gospel-related" thoughts, such as the small volume entitled Story Gems which Albert Zobell, Jr., published in 1953.23 From this and similar works, the LDS generation of the 1950s drew ideas for "2–1/2 minute talks" in Sunday School, talks in priests' cottage meetings, and other occasions. The uncritical acceptance of the "prophecy," however, prompted a serious attempt to deal with the nagging questions pertaining to it. Unfortunately, George F. Hilton's paper entitled "How Valid Is the Prophecy of Samuel Lutz?" served only to muddy the water once again. Rather than seeking to establish the validity of the book from which Spori claimed the citation was taken, Hilton accepted the existence of the 1739 edition of Die Hoffnung Zions, resting his thesis upon the fact that both Spori and Muhlestein occupied positions of importance and trust in the Mormon community in their later lives, thus suggesting that

22Staehelin, "Eine angebliche Weissagung." 7–11. The suggestion that the definitive study would involve searching the archives of East Germany (the current headquarters for the Pietists) for unpublished writings by Lutz was followed by Christianson, who notes, "In Search of the Sensational." 38, that such do not exist.
23Story Gems, comp. Albert L. Zobell (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1953), 41–42.
they must have been truthful men. He likewise subscribed to the conspiracy theory of history which Muhlestein had proposed, drawing an analogy with the antagonistic clergy who in former times are said to have removed portions of holy writ which were not to their liking: "It is within the realm of possibility that enemies of the Church removed 'the prophecy' from the book and later removed all copies from circulation. This is of course conjecture, but certainly possible." 

Hilton’s entire argument is specious. He uses the "authority" of Hyrum Muhlestein (who later become a patriarch in the LDS church) to quell any opposition to the possible existence of a 1739 edition of the book. He would have us believe that the "prophecy" was first removed from that edition, accounting for the inability of Wells, McDonald, McMurrin, and others to locate it after Muhlestein's public lecture in 1894. He would then argue that all copies of the 1739 edition were ultimately removed from the shelves of all the libraries in the world in a concerted attempt to thwart the efforts of the Mormons in using it for their own purposes. To argue from the analogy of Jewish and Early Christian scholars' removing eschatological writings from the canon of scripture is to ignore the fact that the suppression of a handful of manuscripts was relatively simple when compared to the task of eliminating several hundred copies of printed volumes. Why, after expunging the "prophecy" itself, was it thought even necessary to eliminate the books in which it allegedly was to be found? Why did those who looked for the "prophecy" between 1897 and 1922 find no evidence of mutilated books? Even more fundamental is the question of why there is no mention of a 1739 edition in the catalogues of books printed before 1800. Why have no copies of the 1739 edition which might have been overlooked in the bookburning (be they in private collections or misfiled) ever been located?

The integrity of Jacob Spori as principal of the Bannock Stake Academy, reinforced by the testimony of Patriarch Muhlestein, has thus deterred serious inquiries into the authenticity of the "prophecy." Members of the Church refused to accept the possibility that such men would intentionally deceive their coreligionists. Three generations of missionaries had obtained copies of it, had referred to it in their proselyting activities, and had apparently ignored counsel from their leaders against its further propagation. In 1959 it became the common property of the five thousand and more missionaries then serving throughout the world through its inclusion in the Missionary Pal, which was compiled by Thomas Keith Marston. The version of the

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"prophecy" in this instance was somewhat different from those which had previously appeared in print, however. The spelling of the author's name had gone almost beyond recognition, and for the first time to my knowledge, "Lutius Gratus" was identified as a Catholic priest.25

Mormon missionaries in Germany and Switzerland were undoubtedly also influenced by the presence of Samuel E. Bringhurst, who served as the first president of the Swiss Temple and, briefly during 1960, acted as president of the South German Mission. The version of the "prophecy" attributed to him gives the author as "Lutius Gratus," the same spelling as contained in the German translation which I copied later that same year. It is thus reasonable to assume that the notation in my fellow elder's black notebook owed its existence to some statement made by President Bringhurst.26

Further spreading of the "prophecy" tradition occurred during early 1961 when Ned Redding made mention of it in the column "Doings" of the California Intermountain News, a publication for Mormons in Southern California:

PROPHECY . . . The following statement was handed to us recently and is supposed to have been written by one LUTUS GRATING in the year 1739. We are told the original document may be found in the Switzerland University at Basil, Switzerland.27

The carelessness in transmitting the tradition is seen in the garbled author's name and location of the original document. Some minor details of the "prophecy" itself had also been altered.

Redding's column drew a quick response from Ronald G. Somers of Pasadena, California, who noted that

I heard this same document given by a seminary student at a Sacrament Meeting in South Pasadena Ward. I wrote to President Joseph Fielding Smith March 23, 1960 to ask him about this prophecy by a Swiss monk. He wrote back the following: "Tell this young man and everyone else to forget all about his story. It is not so." I hope that you will let everyone know in your column so that the truth may be known.28

While expressing appreciation for Somers's comments, Redding appeared unwilling to let the issue drop at that point. Revealing the same lack of editorial responsibility which Rulon S. Wells had criticized in 1908, he naively asked: "Has anyone checked the Switzerland

26See note 15.
University Library at Basil? . . . We are told the original, dated in 1739, may be found there.”

The answer to Redding’s question was swift in coming. That a great many members of the Church had checked with the Basel University Library became evident from a form letter received by one Liselotte Haertl, sent by the chief librarian at the library under date of 4 May 1959. The letter presented the contents of the investigation conducted by Ernst Staehelin, which due to the lively interest in the “prophecy” had been translated into English. Haertl in turn provided Redding with a copy of that correspondence. The intrepid Redding was not fully satisfied with the response, however, and he appended to the library’s reply this editorial comment:

(Note to Ernst Staehelin, D.D.: We do not expect Lutz’s writings to spell out the name of the Church, nor are we concerned with the year 1739, give or take a few years. What we want to know is this: Did Lutz write in the volumes of “Die Hoffnung Zions” anything like the English translation of the story printed two weeks ago in this column?)

Had he but known it, Redding had touched upon the crux of the entire issue of the “prophecy” by Samuel Lutz. It was precisely the matter of the date 1739 which had been central since Jacob Spori first insisted that the prediction was to be found in that edition of Die Hoffnung Zions.

Redding’s repeated raising of the issue of the “prophecy” at length resulted in a response from Lauritz C. Peterson, assistant librarian of the Church, who noted that

several have checked with the University Library of Basel . . . but have failed to find the prophecy recorded. Those who have checked were President Rulon S. Wells, of the First Council of Seventy, President David L. McDonald, President of the Swiss Mission in 1901, and Elder Max Zimmer . . .

The prophecy was introduced to the Saints by Elder Jacob Spori . . . It was written by memory sometime after Brother Spori returned from his mission.

The Church Historian’s Office holds no credency to the prophecy, and its circulation should be discontinued.

Renewed and prolonged preoccupation with the “prophecy” led to its inclusion in an M.A. thesis by Don L. Penrod, entitled “Critical

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29Ibid.
30Ibid., 26 January 1961, 1, 6. As late as 29 September 1976 copies of this form letter were being sent to those who requested information on the “prophecy” of Lutius Gratianus; under that date a response was sent to an unnamed person at 326 Kingston Road, Ashford, Middlesex, England (copy in the possession of this writer).
31Ibid., 2 February 1961, 1, 8.
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Analysis of Certain Apocryphal Reports in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as Related by Members of the Church.”²² Despite this impressive title, however, Penrod’s treatment of the “prophecy” is not as critical or analytical as it should be; content to cite the comments of Rulon S. Wells regarding Spori as the inventor of the story, he adds nothing to our understanding of its history; certainly he fails to come to grips with the problems which had arisen since its first publication in 1893.

There is no reason to doubt the integrity of Jacob Spori. It seems obvious that his enthusiasm for the writings of Samuel Lutz caused him to write the “prophecy,” which was a summary of the former’s writings as refracted through the mind of a convert to Mormonism. Without the actual text of Die Hoffnung Zions before him, Spori unconsciously superimposed Mormon ideas upon the rather rambling notions which he could recall from memory of the Bernese Pietist. Unfortunately, his giving of the date of publication for the work as 1739 at Basel has led many a searcher after the “prophecy” on a wild-goose chase. A 1739 edition does not now exist because it never did. Had Spori been totally candid with his readers in 1893, he would have also revealed that the text of the “prophecy” was not to be found anywhere. Rather, it was at best a paraphrasing of Lutz’s writings. Even the garbled name has added to the confusion and the prolongation of the debate over the validity of the “prophecy.”

It is more difficult to find an excuse for Christian Hyrum Muhlestein, who in his zeal to uphold the integrity of Spori—whom he perhaps knew from the Brigham Young Academy and as an honorable member of the Church—maintained that the 1739 edition of Die Hoffnung Zions actually existed. His description of that book makes it totally improbable that this was the case. It is simply inconceivable that all the libraries of the world would have responded to the request by some threatened Swiss Protestants and that all existing copies of the 1739 edition would have been removed from circulation, from the card catalogues, and from the published catalogues of books printed before 1800.

Other accretions to the tradition of the “prophecy” have occurred since Spori wrote it. Muhlestein seems to be the source for the notion that the book in which it was to be found was located only in the Basel University Library, as well as for the charge of a conspiracy to prevent further access to the book by Mormons. This same motif was associated

²²Presented in August 1971 to the Department of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University; see pp. 42-45.
with the “prophecy” at the time I copied it in 1960 but had been modified to fit a new set of circumstances. And whereas Spori must have known that Samuel Lutz was a Protestant, by 1956 (when Keith Marston died) the author of *Die Hoffnung Zions* had become a Catholic priest; references to him in 1959/1960 have transformed him into a Catholic monk. Just where these latter ideas originated is presently unknown, however.

**POSTSCRIPT**

In March 1980, the French-language magazine of the LDS church, *L’Étoile* (The Star), published an item of interest in the column “Nouvelles de l’Église” (Church News):

(Article écrit par un prêtre catholique à Bale, Suisse, 1737) ... (Cet article se trouve dans la Bibliothèque de Bale, en Suisse. Écrit par Lutius Gratianus en l’an 1737, et publié dans son ouvrage: “Hope of Zion” [L’Esper de Sion] 33

Like the phoenix of mythology, the “prophecy” of Lutius Gratianus continues to rise from its own ashes and to be spread wherever missionaries and members of the Church seek to buttress scriptural references to the Restoration with evidence from secular sources. With the appearance of this apocryphal writing in France, the curious history of the “prophecy” has come full circle: the publication date is now given as 1737, whether as a conscious effort to deal with the numerous statements that a 1739 edition does not exist, or as a mere scribal error; the spelling of the author’s name has become even more convoluted (perhaps deriving from that found in the *Missionary Pal*); and, consistent with references since at least 1956, he is presented as a Catholic priest from Basel.

Truly, the words of a wise man of old ring clear even today:

> The thing which hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.

> Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old times, which was before us.

> There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those things that shall come after.

(Ecclesiastes 1:9–11)