

## Chapter Nine: “The Song of the Righteous Is a Prayer Unto Me” - Four Founders of Latter-day Saint Hymnody

*This was originally written for a non-Latter-day Saint audience - hymns quoted and historical items discussed were catered for that audience. This is a modified version of the submitted manuscript.*

Whenever hymnals are compiled, the end product gives great insight not only into the collective mind and heart of those compiling it, but into the hearts and minds of the individuals in the congregation. Although they may all believe and adhere to the same beliefs and principles, their perspectives are still as varied as the individuals themselves, and as a group they also set a foundation for those who follow. The purpose of this article is to introduce four founders of hymnody in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,<sup>1</sup> the part they played, the views they gave us, and the direction each took in their work and calling: a prophet’s wife, a printer and civic leader, a fire-and-brimstone preacher, and a meticulous, practical-minded New Englander. Each is worthy their own article, but when seen together the reader is given a good view of how early Latter-day Saint (LDS) hymnody laid a foundations for those who followed.

To understand LDS hymnody, however, the reader needs to know a just little of where Latter-day Saints came from and where they are headed, as both have great bearing on the hymns they have contributed to Christianity’s vast hymnody library.

In 1820 fourteen-year-old Joseph Smith knelt in a secluded grove on his father’s farm to pray. A family of eleven, they were divided over religion, family members having joined at least three different denominations. Joseph didn’t think a ‘God of Order’ could countenance such confusion, and, following the instructions of the Apostle James – “*If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering...*” (James 1:5-6) – he retired to a private place to pray and expected through faith some sort of answer. Latter-day Saints unashamedly proclaim that God the Eternal Father and His Son Jesus Christ appeared to Joseph, and the boy was told to ask his question. Joseph asked which church he should join, and the divine reply was that Christianity in general had wandered too far from the purity and simplicity of the church Christ established while in mortality and, if the young man lived worthily, Christ would restore His former church in these ‘latter-days’ through him, with all its knowledge, gifts, and divine authority. Joseph organized this church in 1830 in upstate New York, amid constant persecution most often led by local ministers. In search of the religious freedoms guaranteed in the U.S. Constitution, the growing church fled to Ohio, then to Missouri, then Illinois, and finally to the barren wilds of the Great Salt Lake Valley. There the seed germinated and grew until today Latter-day Saints are found around the world.

According to divine instruction, the purpose of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is to act as “*the voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God*” (Isaiah 40:3), preparing the world for the Savior’s Second Coming and His subsequent Millennial Reign. This re-establishment of Christ’s ancient church includes the

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<sup>1</sup> - After Joseph Smith’s death the church splintered into several churches, most of which still retain some form of ‘Latter-day Saint’ in their name. This article follows the main body which retained the full name of the church, sometimes referred to as the ‘Utah Church’ among other restorationist churches that trace their beginning back to Joseph Smith.

eventual restoration of the House of Israel, with all those who are righteous being gathered and ‘adopted’ into the House of Israel; it no longer representing just the seed of Abraham but the entire community of the righteous - thus LDS hymnody will refer to the community of believers as ‘Israel’.

The divine commission for Latter-day Saints is to build a community made up of a ‘Zion people’, Zion being defined in LDS theology as those who are ‘pure in heart’. The Latter-day Saint goal is to establish an outpost of ‘Zion’ wherever they find converts. Because of this divine commission, Latter-day Saints appear to have a few extra topics on which to sing. They see the prophecies of the early Apostles as being fulfilled in regards to a restoration – a “restitution of all things” (Acts 3:21) - and they see themselves thick in the middle of it, whether they like it or not. They see themselves as having been commissioned to prepare the world for Christ’s triumphant return. They also see, especially with the family of Judah currently returning to their ancient lands, the coming of the day that the gospel will be returned not only to the Jews but to the other eleven tribes that make up the House of Israel.

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### Emma Hale Smith

In July 1830 the Lord instructed the prophet Joseph Smith to appoint his beloved wife Emma to *‘the calling’ of creating the first LDS hymnal*:

*“And it shall be given thee, also, to make a selection of sacred hymns, as it shall be given thee, which is pleasing unto me, to be had in my church. For my soul delighteth in the song of the heart; yea, the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads.”<sup>2</sup>*

What qualified Emma Smith for the task of compiling a hymnal? What special talent did she have? The few clues found in history contradict each other,<sup>3</sup> and Heaven has kept the secret these many years.

Emma was born on July 10, 1804, in what was then Harmony Township (now Oakland), Pennsylvania.<sup>4</sup> Her parents, Isaac and Elizabeth Lewis Hale, were the first permanent white settlers in the valley. The seventh of nine children, she spent her childhood working the farm, learning to ride horses, and canoeing on the nearby Susquehanna River. She also completed a year past a normal grammar school education.

Emma met Joseph when he and his father arrived in Harmony to work a season for an acquaintance of the Hale family. Joseph twice asked for her father’s permission to marry Emma and was twice refused. Emma took matters into her own hands and married without her father's permission at the then-spinster age of twenty-two, and she moved to Manchester, New York to live with the Smith family.

Late in 1827 Joseph, accompanied by Emma, obtained the gold-metal plates from which he was to

2 - Doctrine and Covenants 25:11-12 (The Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints [Salt Lake City: Corporation of the President of the Church, 1981])

3 - Some historians claim Emma was music leader in her father’s church; others claim her religious background forbade music.

4 - Biographical information on Emma Smith gleaned from: Daniel H. Ludlow, ed, Encyclopedia of Mormonism (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1322.

translate the Book of Mormon. Never permitted to see the plates per divine instruction, Emma still handled them many times while in the protective cover she had sewn for them. She was first in assisting her husband in protecting and hiding them against many violent attacks by townspeople who sought them for the fortune they saw in the gold. Emma's hometown became a refuge for the young couple, Joseph hoping to translate in peace. He bought a small farm from his father-in-law and engaged in periodic farming, but the translation work was his priority. Emma became the first of several scribes who wrote for Joseph as he dictated. On June 15, 1828 Emma gave birth to their first child, a son who only lived a few hours. When Harmony residents began to hinder Joseph's work and Emma's safety, they moved to Fayette, New York, where they were taken in by family friend, John Whitmer. There Emma was cared for during her recovery from childbirth while the Book of Mormon translation was completed.

On April 6, 1830, Joseph Smith officially organized the 'Church of Christ', as it was first called. By June Joseph had been arrested numerous times for the dual crimes of preaching from the Book of Mormon and claiming revelation – both seen as sources of public disturbance. Emma endured each arrest with the aid of the extended Smith family and the Whitmer family, with whom she and Joseph were still residing.

Joseph and Emma returned to Harmony in July of 1830, and it was there that the revelation calling Emma to compile the first hymnal was given. Two months later they were back in Manchester, New York, where Joseph was readying church members to move farther out onto the frontier in an attempt to escape persecution.

The church moved to Kirtland, Ohio in January of 1831. In April Emma gave birth to twins, both of whom died within hours. A friend, Julia Murdock, died after also giving birth to twins, and unable to care for them alone the widower, John Murdock, asked Joseph and Emma to raise his twins as their own. They gladly accepted, naming the infants Joseph and Julia.

No one could have understood Emma's faith as she stood beside her husband. Proclaiming that Christ had restored His church in its purity and simplicity and that a prophet once more directed Christ's church on earth did not sit well with most ministers and preachers any more than the idea that this same prophet had also brought forth a book of scripture to stand as a companion to the Holy Bible and as a second witness of Christ. Emma stood firm in her faith, keeping the family running while Joseph conducted church business or was under arrest at the complaint of another of many ministers who disagreed with 'Mormonism'.<sup>5</sup> In March of 1832 she was held back by a mob that broke down their door in the middle of a freezing night and dragged Joseph out, stripped him, then tarred and feathered him. Five days later they mourned the death of their adopted son Joseph – ill with a cold the night of the tarring and feathering, exposure to the freezing temperatures claimed his life. The Smith family came to understand that prophets do not suffer alone.

A month after the death of the child, Emma finished compiling the first hymnal for the fledging church. William W. Phelps, scribe to Joseph, was then assigned the task of editing and printing the volume.

Again the question is asked: What skill or talent did Emma have that the Lord chose her for this work? Historians continue to debate and Heaven continues to keep its council. To many, her fulfilling

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5 - 'Mormon' is a nickname originally given to Latter-day Saints by their opponents, derived from their use of the Book of Mormon. Today it also differentiates between the 'Utah Church' and the other restorationist churches, as previously mentioned. But even the leaders of the 'Utah Church' discourage members from using that nickname and to simply call themselves 'Latter-day Saints' and 'Christians'.

of this calling is a reminder that oftimes no special talent is needed when the Lord calls – one simply responds and He opens the way for the task to be accomplished. As one ancient prophet said, *“I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded, for I know that the Lord giveth no commandments unto the children of men, save he shall prepare a way for them that they may accomplish the thing which he commandeth them.”*<sup>6</sup>

One thing that strikes me each time I read through Emma’s hymnal, however, is the principle of Hope. If one were to write an article on the hymnal itself, one would be able to quote hymns expressing hope in returning to the arms of a loving God; hope of being worthy of His love; and hope of seeing His return and Millennial Reign. Perhaps Hope was the gift Emma possessed that qualified her for this work.

Emma’s work for the Lord did not end with the publication of this first hymnal. She was later called to compile a second hymnal, published in 1841 in Nauvoo, Illinois which contained 304 hymns. She was subsequently called by her husband to head the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo when it was organized in 1842, putting her at the forefront of the charitable work of the women of the church. Upon the murder of Joseph and his brother Hyrum in 1844, she and their five surviving children remained behind as the bulk of the church headed west and settled in the Great Salt Lake Valley. Upon her death in 1879 her body was quietly laid to rest beside Joseph’s grave along banks of the Mississippi River.

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## **William W. Phelps**

William W. Phelps (better known as W. W. Phelps) was born at Hanover, New Jersey in 1792.<sup>7</sup> A well-educated man, he was seeking public office when he first heard of Mormonism and the Book of Mormon. He traveled to Kirtland, Ohio to further investigate and was baptized in 1831. He became a scribe to Joseph Smith and was given charge of nearly all editing and printing work for the church.

Phelps was called to edit and supervise the printing of Emma’s collection of ninety hymns - if authors’ names had been included the congregation would have seen the name of Isaac Watts sixteen times, John Newton three times, and twice each Charles Wesley and Samuel Medley. Out of these ninety hymns, thirty-eight were written by LDS composers; twenty-one verified as being penned by Phelps with another seven he either wrote or edited – no previous copies have been found for verification. Additionally, he edited twelve pre-existent texts to fit the restorationist, millennial theme so prevalent with church members of the time. For instance, Watts’ Christmas anthem became a millennial hymn by changing it to “Joy to the world, the Lord *will* come / *And* earth receive her King”. (The 1841 hymnal restored it to its rightful, original Christmas context.)

During this editing phase, Phelps moved his family to Independence, Missouri to help build the Latter-day Saint community there and to establish the church’s official printing press. They had lived there barely a year when an armed mob of four to five hundred men came upon the Latter-day Saint community and began to destroy it. They tore down the two-story brick building that housed the press and the Phelps family, destroying the press, the books and papers, and drove the family out into the

6 - 1 Nephi 3:7 (The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ [Salt Lake City: Corporation of the President of the Church, 1981])

7 - Biographical information on W. W. Phelps from: Richard H. Cracroft and Neal E. Lambert, comps. “A Believing People: Literature of the Latter-day Saints” (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979)

street as their home was literally demolished. Phelps himself was tarred and feathered. Over a thousand Latter-day Saints were forced from their property and into the forest – many whipped and beaten. They were allowed to take nothing with them.

Phelps wrote “**Now Let Us Rejoice**” following this experience. The frustration and defeat the church members felt – combined with the anticipated hunger and cold of the coming winter – were the impetus that caused him to write of better times ahead.<sup>8</sup>

Nine Phelps texts remain in the 1985 hymnal and are among the greatly-loved by church members. Between the three writers explored in this article, Phelps’ writing centered more specifically on the praising and celebratory aspects of the gospel, especially in the ‘Restored Gospel’ as taught in the LDS faith. His texts display rejoicing in the fact that the Heavens were once more open as well as a hope of things to come. Whereas Parley P. Pratt’s millennial hymns were more doctrinal in nature – not to mention dwelling on a vengeful Lord who will come in power, smite the wicked, and liberate the captive - Phelps chose to celebrate the joy and peace that would accompany the righteous upon the Lord’s coming.

**'O God, the Eternal Father'**, Phelps’ sacramental text, celebrates not only the sacrifice Christ made in atoning for our sins, but it also displays the beauty of the entire plan to redeem all mortals – to win us back with a love more infinite than we can presently understand. The only sacramental text from the 1835 hymnal in the current hymnal, it has nevertheless been reduced to only four of the original verses – while verses five through eight are beautiful witnesses for the Messiah and His mission, they were omitted in order to center the text more on the ordinance of the Sacrament itself.

After the mob violence in Independence, it was two years before a press was secured to print the book. Edited and finalized a final time in 1835, the manuscript for the hymnal was sent to press and copies were in the hands of the Latter-day Saints in August of 1835 – well in time for the dedication of the Church’s first temple in Kirtland, Ohio in March of 1836.

Without question the most-loved Phelps text was written for and sung at the dedication of the temple in Kirtland, and it has become a standard at most chapel dedications and all temple dedications throughout the church, the final hymn in the 1835 hymnal, **'The Spirit of God Like a Fire is Burning'** celebrates the restoration of Christ’s church, the future Millennial times, and the restoration of the House of Israel. In this particular text, Phelps’ genius in covering subjects while remaining a praise hymn and not turning into a doctrinal essay is clearly displayed. Verses four and five have been dropped in the current hymnal, concentrating the theme more on the restoration of Christ’s church and His future Millennial Reign. The tune used in the current hymnal is Assembly, Anon.

Although excommunicated for a two-year period, Phelps returned to full fellowship while the church was in Nauvoo, Illinois and remained faithful the rest of his life. In Utah he became one of the first regents of the University of Deseret (now the University of Utah) and was a representative in the Utah territorial legislature. He died in 1872, leaving not only a large portfolio of hymns but a lifetime of service as his marks in life.

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8 - based on material from: Karen Lynn Davidson, “Our Latter-day Hymns: The Stories and the Messages” [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1988], pg 31

## Parley P. Pratt

Considered one of the most significant missionaries, writers, poets, and thinkers in the early years of the church, Parley Parker Pratt was one of the central figures in expounding the doctrines of the Restored Gospel before the world. Born on April 12, 1807, in Otsego County, New York, he was the third son of Jared and Charity Pratt.<sup>9</sup> He married Thankful Halsey in 1827, and they established themselves in Lorain County, Ohio. There Parley became a member of the Reformed Baptist Society (Campbellite). Within a few years Parley came in contact with a Baptist deacon who introduced him to a copy of the Book of Mormon. As a result he investigated the church and was baptized in September of 1830.

Pratt spent most of the rest of his life as a proselyting missionary. He was ordained an apostle on February 21, 1835, and sustained as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, one of the top-most governing bodies of the church. Emma's hymnal included three Pratt texts, and later that year while on a mission to the eastern states, he published eleven more in conjunction with a long narrative poem in six chapters entitled '**The Millennium, A Poem**' - becoming the first known published book of LDS poetry. While two Pratt texts were included in the 1835 hymnal, with another three he may have written, they are no longer in the LDS hymnal, while eight other Pratt texts have taken their place.

As mentioned earlier, Latter-day Saints were brutally driven from Independence in Jackson Country, Missouri. They fled north across the Missouri River to Clay County, where they were received on condition that they leave when asked. The body of the Church moved north once more to the newly-created Caldwell County, establishing several communities. In the winter of 1838-39, they were driven again from their homes, farms, and businesses and found refuge across the Mississippi River in Quincy, Illinois in order to escape an extermination order drafted and signed by Missouri Governor Wilburn W. Boggs. In all nearly two thousand Latter-day Saints died in Missouri due to mob violence. As Missouri Senator Christopher Bond so adequately expressed,

*"Treatment of the people of the Mormon Church in Missouri during the late 1830s and beyond was barbaric. Women were raped and tortured. Men were killed by mobs or driven out of the state. Their property was stolen. The lucky ones were the ones who were left alive with nothing and were forced to make their way into a more hospitable state.*

*"What makes it so difficult to understand is that this barbarism was state-sanctioned and even state-ordered. Governor Lilburn Boggs issued the extermination order making it legal to kill anyone who belonged to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."*<sup>10</sup>

Pratt suffered persecution with the rest of the Saints in Missouri and spent nine months imprisoned on false charges before escaping to Illinois in July 1839. It was during this time of finding refuge in Illinois that Parley P. Pratt wrote "**Come, O Thou King of Kings**"<sup>11</sup>. First published in 1840, it is plea

9 - Biographical information on Elder Pratt is gleaned from "Encyclopedia of Mormonism", pg 1116.

10 - Unpublished opening remarks from "The Missouri Mormon Experience: A Conference of History and Commemoration," held Sept. 8-9, 2006 at the Missouri State Capitol. As Governor, Senator Bond rescinded this extermination order in 1976, when there was already a sizable population of 'Mormon' and other restorationist churches that had already returned, including the Community of Christ and the Church of Christ Temple Lot, both headquartered in Independence.

11 - Based on material from George D. Piper, "Stories of Latter-day Saint Hymns" (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret News

for the God of Israel to free His people from abuse and persecution. It appeals for an end to all sin in the world and looks forward to the day when all the righteous will join on Zion's Hill and fill the heavens with anthems of praise and rejoicing, ending with praise to the Prince of Peace.

A month after gaining his freedom, Pratt left on an apostolic mission to the British Isles, and at a conference in Preston, England, Parley was named editor of the newly created 'Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star', which became the Church's longest continuous periodical - 1840 to 1970. During this time he also assisted in compiling and publishing the first LDS hymnal in England – the 'Manchester Hymnal' - which contained fifty of his own texts. After the Saints' exodus from Illinois to what became the Utah Territory, this hymnal became the church's official hymnal until the 1927 hymnal was published.<sup>12</sup>

**“The Morning Breaks, the Shadows Flee”** was first printed in the 'Millennial Star' in 1840 and was included in the Manchester Hymnal later that year and has been a staple of LDS hymnals since. Some scholars believe Pratt might have been inspired by Charles Wesley's poem, "Wrestling Jacob," based on Genesis 32, wherein Jacob questions the heavenly visitor about his identity and then, in the poem, exclaims: "The morning breaks, the shadows flee: / Pure universal Love Thou art!"<sup>13</sup> This text stirs the hearts of many Latter-day Saints for an altogether different reason than that of the Wesley poem. They see the appearance of the Father and the Son and the restoration of Christ's church through the prophet Joseph as a glorious 'sunrise' of divine knowledge and power after the gloom of ages between Christ's death and the restoration of the gospel; the returning of a promised light to a world waiting for that light to shine. Not only does this text speak of the glorious dawning of a new era, but it stands as an invitation to all peoples – all the “ransomed children” are invited to gather once more by He who is making His arm bare so the world may know His power and majesty. It is a fitting hymn for a church whose perceived mission is to prepare the world for His coming.

After this mission, Pratt was called to preside over the church in New England and the Mid-Atlantic states with headquarters in New York City. Here he published a periodical entitled 'The Prophet'. In 1851 he was called to preside over a "General Mission to the Pacific" with headquarters in San Francisco. He, his wife Phebe, and another missionary sailed to Valparaiso, Chile, in September 1851. Frustrated by the language, poverty, the death of an infant son, as well as ecclesiastical and political opposition to their work, they returned to San Francisco in March 1852 to direct the work throughout the rest of the Pacific.

Pratt's first published missionary tract, 'A Voice of Warning' (1837), became a model for future LDS tracts. Other Pratt tracts included 'Late Persecutions of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, With a Sketch of Their Rise, Progress and Doctrine' (1840); and 'Key to the Science of Theology' (1855).

In 1856 Pratt was called on a final mission to the Eastern states. A year later he was killed

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12 - Properly titled "A Collection of Sacred Hymns for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Europe", the 'Manchester Hymnal' was officially compiled by Brigham Young, Parley P. Pratt, and John Taylor, but in reality is mostly Pratt's work while the other two were busy with other affairs of missionary work. Copies of this work were brought to Utah by European converts and, as there was not yet a press in Utah, it became the church's official hymnal as it was the only one available in sufficient quantity. New hymns were added with each edition until the final edition in 1890. In 1889 a supplement, "Latter-day Saints' Psalmody", was published. Both volumes were replaced by the 1927 "Latter-day Saint Hymns".

13 - Louis I. Bredvold, ed., "Eighteenth Century Poetry and Prose" [New York: Ronald Press Co., 1973], p. 693.

defending his wife against an attacker.

Besides the volumes published in his lifetime, a grandson also published a fifty-hymn volume titled “Millennial Hymns of Parley Parker Pratt” in 1913 through Cambridge University Press.

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### Eliza R. Snow

Born January 21, 1804 in Becket, Massachusetts, Eliza Roxey Snow was two years old when her family moved to Mantua, Ohio, bringing with them their New England ethics of hard work, self-reliance, self-discipline, and a detailed, meticulous quality in all you do.<sup>14</sup> Eventually growing to a family of seven children, the girls were award-winning seamstresses and straw weavers. Eliza had a special affection for her brother Lorenzo, ten years her junior, with whom she shared a love of literature and patriotism. Her father held several public offices, and she often assisted him with clerical duties, which brought her into contact with community leaders and helped her develop organizational and verbal skills she would use in support of the Lord’s work for the rest of her life.

Active Baptists, the Snow family embraced the same Campbellite movement Parley P. Pratt had embraced. In 1831, when the church moved to Kirtland, Joseph and his small family were residing on a farm some five miles from the Snow family. Upon hearing the ‘Restored Gospel’ being preached, most of the family embraced it without hesitation. Two holdouts, however, were Eliza and Lorenzo. Although Mormonism was all she had hoped for in a religion, Eliza was determined *not* to rush into anything that seemed to her to be too good to be true. It wasn’t until 1835 that she became a member of the church, encouraging Lorenzo to follow. (He later became an apostle and then fifth president and prophet of the Church.) Hired by the Smiths, she became school teacher for the extended Smith family, which led to work as editor and copyist for Joseph and his council, and, although not stated as such in history, became what is today called the office manager. She would continue this association with Joseph and his counselors for the rest of Joseph’s life.

Joseph Smith referred to Eliza as ‘Zion’s Poetess’. Nothing happened that she didn’t write at least a ten-verse poem to commemorate. Current events, events in the church, deaths of prominent leaders – very few things escaped her pen. Times of jubilation were recorded right along side times of hardship and trial. Consider her single verified text in the 1835 hymnal, **'Great is the Lord'**.

A striking contrast to this hymn are words penned shortly after the Saints were driven out of Missouri. While Pratt’s “Come O Thou King of Kings”, written at the same time, was pleading to God to relieve the Saints, Eliza’s text turned instead towards the people to remind them that Peace was still there for the taking. **'Though Outward Trials'** may throng their way, there was still peace in their hearts and in the fact the Lord was leading them. Eliza’s practical mind rightfully concluded that wallowing in self-pity would get the Saints nowhere - they needed to pick themselves up and move forward while looking towards the day when all persecutions would cease and God and His Son would eventually triumph.

When the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo was organized in 1842, Eliza was called as secretary.

14 - Biographical information on Eliza R. Snow gleaned from: "Encyclopedia of Mormonism", pg 1366; Leonard J. Arrington and Susan Arrington Madsen, “Mothers of the Prophets” [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1987]; Barbara B. Smith and Blythe Darlyn Thatcher, ed., “Heroines of the Restoration” [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997]; Janet Peterson and LaRene Gaunt, “Elect Ladies” [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1990];

Her meticulous notes were a blessing to the Church as they detailed the charity and service of the women of the city. In 1866, when Brigham Young, successor to Joseph Smith, reorganized the Relief Society as a church-wide auxiliary, Eliza was called to head the organization, a post she held for twenty-one years.

To do justice to Eliza as Relief Society president is an enormous task - entire books have been written on her administration. To summarize: she not only organized the women to care for their own families and then for the poor, sick, and needy, but to do so she became editor of the first woman's newspaper in the world, the 'Women's Exponent'. She edited the first women's magazine, helped found Utah's first hospitals, assisted in the organization of: the first LDS Sunday School (including the publishing of Sunday School hymnals); a Young Ladies' auxiliary and magazine; and the children's auxiliary, magazine, and hymnal. She oversaw a women's cooperative store through which women could sell their crafts to earn finances to help with their families. She saw to the creation of a silk industry run by LDS women. She oversaw Brigham Young's program of sending LDS women East for medical educations with the intent of staffing medical offices and hospitals throughout the Utah Territory - Brigham's goal was three medically-trained women in each congregation.

It wasn't all auxiliaries, magazines, and hymnals, however - these were merely the tools used to further build the Kingdom of God. By the end of her first ten years in office she had not only rallied the women to care for their families and neighbors, but she was able to report to Brigham Young that between 1866 and 1874 the women of the Relief Society had raised and disbursed over \$82,000 to aid the poor among them, raise church and other buildings, help financially-destitute converts emigrate to Utah, and for other miscellaneous charities and missionary work."<sup>15</sup>

Eliza's constant theme was for Latter-day Saint women to reach for their divine nature and nurture it. Her words still echo from pulpits today:

*"It is the duty of each one of us to be a holy woman. We shall have elevated aims, if we are holy women. We shall feel that we are called to perform important duties. No one is exempt from them. There is no sister so isolated and her sphere so narrow but what she can do a great deal towards establishing the kingdom of God upon the earth."*<sup>16</sup>

Eliza emphasized the need for women to first set in order their own homes and families so they would have the time and ability to reach out and assist others. In a day and age when Women's Emancipation was sweeping across the country, she was vocal in reminding women they were merely their husband's equal and *not* his superior.

In Eliza's lifetime three volumes of her poetry were published, and from those volumes have come texts still sung as hymns by Latter-day Saints. Two of her texts appeared in Emma's hymnal, but many more have been set to music and included in hymnals since that time.<sup>17</sup>

Eliza once said that "words are the weakest as well as the strongest things on earth. They are weak when they betray our spirits, and they are strong when they obey an intelligent will."<sup>18</sup> Nowhere is this

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15 - Susan Easton Black and Larry C. Porter, eds., "Lion of the Lord" [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1995], 325; Salt Lake City: *Woman's Exponent*, 15 Sept. 1873, pg 62

16 - Salt Lake City: *Woman's Exponent*, 15 Sept. 1873, pg 62

17 - Since this was written, a joint project between Brigham Young University Press and University of Utah Press has produced a complete works volume.

18 - "Young Woman's Journal" (Salt Lake City, 1893) vol 4:426.

shown better than in two greatly-beloved sacramental texts she penned. With words obedient to her ‘intelligent will’, she captured the agony Christ endured with the majestic love He displayed for those whose sins He purchased. Some have suggested the purpose of **“Behold the Great Redeemer Die”** was to bring attention not only to the suffering of Christ but to the purpose and meaning of His sacrifice. To do this it takes us step-by-step through the Crucifixion. Then, as a conclusion, declares with both joy and simplicity: ‘He lives - he lives.’<sup>19</sup> For many this text stands as an eloquent statement of Christ’s true manliness and divinity. He knew His mission must be fulfilled to bring about the redemption promised by the Father, so He endured the humiliation heaped upon Him by those who were daring Him to ‘prove’ He was the Son of God by saving himself. Fulfilling the commission from the Father was more important than personal pride or ‘manhood’ as the world might define manhood. He thus became the true symbol of Manliness.

**“How Great the Wisdom and the Love”**, another sacramental hymn, opens with Christ, the ‘Anointed One’, in His Father’s court, receiving His divine commission. It celebrates both His sacrifice and His obedience, then goes on to remind us that He “marked the path and showed the way” for us to follow. Thus we celebrate His life, mission, and sacrifice – acknowledging our need to follow Him.

When the Primary Association, the children’s auxiliary, was formed, Eliza R. Snow helped compile and edit their first hymnal. Recognizing the need for an upbeat marching song, she penned **“In Our Lovely Deseret”**<sup>20</sup> to George F. Root’s great marching tune 'Sheffield' as a song to remind children of many of the do’s and don’ts of life. Still in today’s hymnal, many Latter-day Saints believe this text to be a relic. The only thing outdated, however, is that Latter-day Saints no longer gather to one place – otherwise the habits and practices it reminds the children of are still as valid today as when they sang these words on their way to school and church a hundred-plus years ago. Some relics are worth dusting off and keeping alive.

During the last half of the nineteenth century hundreds of thousands of converts left the persecution occurring in the eastern United States and Europe and ‘gathered to Zion’. Many historians claim it was the largest religious migration since the Israelite exodus from Egypt as recorded in the Old Testament. Comparison of the two religious migrations was natural to many, and soon converts seeking Zion were comparing their goal of the Utah Territory to the ancient Israelites seeking their Promised Land, complete with flowing milk and honey (Exodus 3:8) and a vine and fig tree under which the weary wanderer would repose for the remainder of their day (Micah 4:4). Knowing that a ‘Zion Society’ was being reared in Utah’s valleys, many expected a *completed* Zion to be waiting for them – a perfect society they mistakenly interpreted to be a world in which they would be taken care of without having to care for themselves or for others. And, they also began to believe there would no longer be any trials, temptation, or persecution once they arrived in Zion. Many immigrants were disappointed Zion wasn’t everything they wanted it to be when they finally arrived.

Eliza’s practical mind came into play. **'Think Not When You gather to Zion'**, she wrote, that all is well and that you are going to be pampered by those of us who arrived before you. She reminded the gathering converts that if they were to have a vine and fig tree they would be expected to build

19 - Based on information in “Our Latter-day Hymns: The Stories and the Messages”, 205.

20 - Before Congress officially named the Utah Territory, Latter-day Saints called it ‘Deseret’ (dez-er-et), the Book of Mormon name for the honey bee. A strict New Englander, Brigham Young appreciated the idea of the hard-working bee and the beehive as a symbol for industry in the territory. Hence the beehive appears in such diverse places as the Utah state symbol and flag as well as the balustrades for the entrance steps of the LDS temple in Saint George. It was also one of the three final designs for the Utah Quarter in the U.S. Mint’s 50-State Quarter Project.

irrigation ditches and plant and nurture the crop; if they wanted a perfect society they would have to help build it – Utah was full of mere mortals still striving to build the promised Zion Society; it was not yet a completed project, and all would be expected to work to make it happen.

This text remained in LDS hymnals until 1985, the timeliness of its message having faded – since 1900 converts have been encouraged to remain where they live and build up Zion in their corner of the world. However faded by history, the words still ring true for those building their own Zion outpost. Calling upon images such as the refiner’s fire (Malachi 3:2) and the gathering and separating of the wheat from the tares (Matthew 13:24-30), Eliza painted the picture that perfection was still a process and that the end product had not yet come about. She went on to assure them that “the great prince of darkness” still held sway over the hearts of all men and women and that resisting temptation was still part of the perfection process.

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### Parting Thoughts

Occasionally a people pause to look back at where they've been to better orient themselves for where they're going. When LDS hymnists look back they see Parley P. Pratt, W. W. Phelps, Eliza R. Snow, and Emma Smith standing among many others who began the path today’s LDS hymnists are still blazing. So many are pausing to look back that some LDS-oriented recording studios are resurrecting some of the old hymns, one even releasing “Greatest Hymns” albums celebrating the texts of Eliza R. Snow and Parley P. Pratt.<sup>21</sup> And, after this look back, they press forward with fresh hymns that tell of where they’re going. The current hymnal has lost hymns that speak of building Zion only in broad, general terms while it has gained significant hymns reminding us ‘how-to’ build a Zion Society: Love, Charity, and Service. Hymns such as **“Because I Have Been Given Much”**, **“Called to Serve”**, **“Have I Done Any Good?”**, **“Each Life that Touches Ours for Good”**, **“As I Have Loved You”**, and **“Dear to the Heart of the Shepherd”** mark the emphasis on serving our fellow beings that is one of the few things people readily and *correctly* understand about today’s ‘Mormons’.

Each of the writers explored in this article looked forward to the same day in the world’s time when the Messiah would return, hatred and wickedness would cease, and He would reign personally on the earth. Though they all looked in the same direction, they still gave us views as different as their personalities and life experiences. And the first person explored here - the quiet, unassuming prophet’s wife - was able to gather texts from these diverse writers and establish what is still a firm foundation for today’s LDS hymnists.

LDS hymnals praise and celebrate the divinity and ministry of Jesus Christ and call to remembrance many points of mutually-believed Christian doctrine. They contain hymns written by hymnists of other religions which teach these dearly-held ‘common ground’ principles. But, they also contain home-grown hymns celebrating the restoration of Christ’s church as taught by Latter-day Saints and celebrate His future return. Unlike many Christians who sing these hymns by way of anticipation, however, for Latter-day Saints they are a reminder of the *responsibility* the Lord has put upon them to prepare the world for His coming.

21 - “Hoffman House Studios” at <http://www.hoffmanhouse.com/> ... See also “Fiddlesticks Celtic and American Folk Music” for their ‘Return to Nauvoo’ and ‘Farewell to Nauvoo’ albums at <http://www.fiddle-sticks.com/FSListen.html>

If, as the Lord told Emma Smith, the “the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me, and it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads”, then these writers have selflessly shared their prayers with us, that we might join our voices with theirs in commemorating not only the mortal ministry of Jesus of Nazareth but also in anticipation of the His return. Just as Latter-day Saints celebrate the many ‘common ground’ truths, let us pause and, though hymns unique to the Latter-day Saint movement, discover what else there is to celebrate - and anticipate.