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Religious Space in Transition: A Comparison of Latter-Day Saint and Nonconformist Worship in Victorian England

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A Comparison of Latter-day Saint and Nonconformist Worship in Victorian England

by

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July 19, 1837 was not a day to remember for the majority of the residents of Liverpool, England. For one small group of men, however, this was a day they had been anticipating for months. After a record breaking Atlantic crossing, the men hired a small boat to take them ashore rather than wait for the passenger steamer. Just before the boat reached the pier, several of the men jumped out and waded to shore, anxious to reach land and begin their work. These men were the first missionaries from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to arrive in England, and each felt he had been given a special mission to preach to the people of that country. While the British Mission of the Latter-day Saints has received a great deal of scholarly attention, the specific locations the missionaries chose to preach from have yet to be fully examined.[1] These locations are particularly interesting, as they reflect the larger trends in English religion at the time, and provide insight into how the Latter-day Saints appealed to specific groups of converts. Examining Latter-day Saint concepts of religious space in context with the ideas of similar Nonconformist groups such as the Primitive Methodists reveals significant similarities between these groups.[2] While preaching in unorthodox locations was not something new, holding religious meetings in public halls, private homes, and even outside was contrary to the practices of established religion and reflected the desire of some Nonconformist groups to return to a more primitive, and in their minds purer, form of religious worship. The thesis and purpose of this paper is to explore the tactics of early Latter-day Saint missionaries to

[1] The major works covering the history of the British Mission include: Richard L. Jensen and Malcolm R. Thorp,eds., *Mormons in Early Victorian Britain* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1989), a collection of essays which situate Latter-day Saint converts and missionaries in the larger picture of Victorian religion; Ronald W. Walker, "Cradling Mormonism: the Rise of the Gospel in Early Victorian England," in *Coming to Zion*, eds., James B. Allen and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1997) and P.A.M. Taylor, *Expectations Westward: the Mormons and the Emigration of their British Converts in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1965) which discuss the experiences of LDS converts; and Cynthia Doxey, Robert C. Freeman, Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, and Dennis A. Wright, eds. *Regional Studies In Latter-day Saint Church History: The British Isles* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brightam Young University, 2007), a general history of the mission.
[2] For the purposes of this paper, the term "nonconformist" refers to religious groups outside of the Anglican tradition.

England, and compare them to the experiences of other Nonconformists like the Primitive Methodists. Such an exploration will show how the experiences of these small groups and their converts reflect the larger currents of English society and religion in the nineteenth century. In particular, comparing the types of locations in which these missionaries chose to preach and meet with their congregations will show how these choices directly responded to the changing religious needs of the converts they sought. [3]

The paper will explore this thesis by first examining the religious climate of England in the nineteenth century. The paper will then examine the evolutions in the concept of religious space which had occurred up to and during this period. Next, the paper will explore the Anglican response to this changing religious environment. Finally, the paper will explore the Nonconformist response, focusing specifically on the efforts of Primitive Methodists and Latter-day Saints to gather converts, and the specific locations in which they chose to preach and worship.

In order to narrow the scope of the project, this paper will focus on the missionary efforts of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints beginning in 1837 with the arrival of the first missionaries, up until 1880 when conversions had slowed and the majority of the British converts had immigrated to the United States. A comparison between other Nonconformist groups, such as the Primitive Methodists, will better situate the efforts of the Latter-day Saints in the religious culture of the period. Nineteenth century Primitive Methodists and Latter-day Saints had many similarities, so much so that Ronald W. Walker stated that the former group

[3] For the purposes of this paper, the process of conversion will be simplified to the act of formally joining a specific religious group. For a more in depth discussion of the experiences of a Mormon convert, please see Ronald G. Watt's biography of George D. Watt, Ronald G. Watt, *The Mormon Passage of George D. Watt: First British Convert, Scribe for Zion,* (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2009). For a more psychological examination of the conversion process, see Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion,* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1993).

seemed to "foreshadow" the latter.[4] These similarities included biblical literalism, a lay ministry, a largely working class following, and a liberal approach to preaching locations. The Primitive Methodists, like the Latter-day Saints, also believed in a need to restore the religious principles of the Old and New Testaments to be able to return to the truth and purity of ancient Christianity. These similarities make the comparison of these two groups both interesting and informative. However, while these similarities are significant, the differences between Primitive Methodists and Latter-day Saints are also considerable. The most noteworthy differences are the Latter-day Saint practice of polygamy, temple ordinances, and the church's tightly organized hierarchy and leadership structure, none of which were practiced by Primitive Methodists.[5]

To begin, it is important to establish the environment that Latter-day Saint missionaries encountered in nineteenth century in England. This period is one of particular interest in the study of religious history because of the intense religious and social upheaval that marked this period. Throughout the nineteenth century, advancements in scientific understanding about geology and biology caused many people to question their traditional beliefs, such as a literal interpretation of the Creation story in the Bible. Scholars refer to this period of religious upheaval as the Victorian Crisis of Faith which manifested itself in all aspects of nineteenth century culture.[6] Victorian poetry and literature in particular exemplify this preoccupation with religious questioning and doubt. Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South*, published in the 1855,

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[4] Ronald W. Walker, "Cradling Mormonism: the Rise of the Gospel in Early Victorian England," in *Coming to Zion*, eds., James B. Allen and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1997), 265.
[5] Edwin Scott Gaustad and Philip L. Barlow, *New Historical Atlas of Religion in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 234.
[6] This topic and it's consequences in British society is discussed extensively by multiple works, including K.S. Inglis, *Churches and the Working Classes in Victorian England* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), Gerald Parsons, ed., *Religion in Victorian Britain,* Vol. 1-4 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), Timothy Larsen, "The Regaining of Faith: Reconversions among Popular Radicals in Mid-Victorian England." *Church History* 70:3 (September 2001), A.N. Wilson, *God's Funeral* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1999), and E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966).

features both working class and middle class individuals discussing their concerns over religion, including a priest who gives up his living over his doubts about the Book of Common Prayer.[7] Poets illustrated the same feelings in works such as Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach," which depicts a receding "sea of faith":

> The Sea of Faith
> Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
> Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
> But now I only hear
> Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar[8]

Additionally, the Industrial Revolution dramatically changed the landscape of Britain in both population distribution and religion due to the mass migration of many individuals from their rural homesteads to industrial cities, forming the working class. These new arrivals often uprooted their religious traditions when they left their familiar homes and communities, creating a large number of religiously apathetic residents in the rapidly expanding cities. In response, numerous religious groups increased their efforts to better nurture the spiritual wellbeing of these displaced peoples and address the particular spiritual and sometimes temporal needs of the working class.

The element of nineteenth century religion that this paper will focus on is the conception of religious space and how that conception changed with the religious fracturing of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As each of the different Nonconformist groups came into being, including the Primitive Methodists and Latter-day Saints, the perception of what were acceptable spaces in which to hold services and preach became much more liberal. An additional factor for many of these groups was the desire to create a stronger feeling of

[7] Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2005), 35.
[8] Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach," in *The Longman Anthology of British Literature, Third Edition*, eds. David Damrosch and Kevin J.H. Dettmar (New York: Pearson Longman, 2006), 1662.

community within the congregation, to encourage individuals to form closer bonds with other members and between the individual and God. These meetings took different forms and were held in many different locations, including private homes, assembly halls, theaters, barns and open fields and hillsides. This shift to less traditional religious spaces had roots as far back as the Protestant Reformation, and the reformers' rejection of the ornate and, as they saw it, idolatrous decoration of Catholicism. In rejecting the stained glass and gilt images seen in Catholic churches, Protestants wished to emphasize the importance of the Word in the service and scriptures over the physical surroundings of the congregation. As historians have noted, "for all who sought to purify their religion, the simplicity of their architecture reflected the simplicity of their practice," thus simple preaching locations further emphasized this search for pure religion and emphasis on the Word of God.[9] Furthermore, many Protestant denominations chose to increase their ideological distance from the Catholic tradition by changing the very language they used in referring to their buildings, calling them "meetinghouses" or "chapels" rather than churches or cathedrals, a tradition that carried on with nineteenth century Nonconformists.[10] To increase the sense of community involvement in these structures, Nonconformists also opened their meetinghouses to all kinds of community events in addition to their religious services, thus making them multipurpose structures.

The sense of intensity behind the need to reform religious practice was further spurred by a growing sense among the upper and middle class that the laboring class was drifting ever farther away from religious worship. It has long been argued that the advance of the Industrial Revolution and the migration of workers from rural communities to industrial towns created a "rootless proletariat" for whom "traditional religious ties were rapidly abandoned, along with the

[9] Daniel K. Newsome, "Reflections of Mormonism: The History and Development of LDS Meetinghouse Architecture" (master's thesis, Oregon State University, 1997), 50.
[10] Newsom, 50; Jensen and Thorp, 35.

rest of the culture of pre-industrial society."[11] These fears were heightened as the gap between the upper and lower classes widened, and the lower classes began to develop a separate identity and culture, which the upper classes viewed as dangerously secular. The Church of England watched these developments with growing concern, realizing that if they "failed to participate in the formation of the new working-class culture [they] risked losing what remained of [their] traditional position" and authority.[12] Worries over the religious state of the working class were so constant throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, that contemporary writer Friedrich Engles recorded in his *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* that "all the writers of the bourgeoisie are unanimous on this point, that the workers are not religious, and do not attend church."[13] Concern over these issues finally prompted a governmental response at the midpoint of the century with the Census of 1851, which detailed the religious affiliation of the people along with their occupation and place of residence. Though both government and church leaders had some idea of what this census would show, the numbers themselves proved to be shocking. Out of a population of just over twenty million, approximately five million people reported that they did not attend any worship service on a regular basis.[14] The official report that accompanied these numbers stated that, "even in the least unfavorable aspect of the figures…it must be apparent that a sadly formidable portion of the English people are habitual neglecters of the public ordinances of religion."[15] The report also identified those most guilty of neglecting worship services as "the masses of [the] working class [who were] never or but seldom seem

[11] Mark Smith, *Religion in Industrial Society: Oldham and Saddleworth 1740-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 32.
[12] Smith, 33.
[13] Inglis, 1.
[14] Julie Jefferies, "The UK Population: Past, Present, and Future" in *Focus on People and Migration: 2005*. 3-4. http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_compendia/fom2005/01_fopm_population.pdf. (accessed April 12, 2011); Smith, 1.
[15] Inglis, 1.

in…religious congregations."[16] In the aftermath of this confirmation of the establishments' worst fears about the religious state of their countrymen, different religious groups began searching for answers as to why the working class were absent from worship services and to find ways that would allow them to better reach these individuals. The first reason most reformers identified for the lack of working class people in worship was the clear class distinctions that existed in most congregations. Such distinctions were made obvious whether from the differences in clothing between the upper and lower classes, or more significantly the considerable number of churches that required the congregation to pay pew rents, which excluded the poorer members of the congregation from attending. A second major factor reformers pointed to for lack of attendance was that there was often simply no where to go; the rising population was quickly outpacing efforts to build new churches.

In response to these issues, both Anglicans and Nonconformists attempted to institute reforms to allow more outreach for the working class. For Anglicans, the best solution was to increase the availability of traditional church services through an increased building program, the commissioning of thousands of additional priests, and additional services in the existing churches. New church buildings were financed in several ways, often with a grant from the Church Building Commissioners combined with donations from the congregation that would meet in the new building. Soliciting donations from local individuals was an ideal way for the church to create community support and investment in the new building and the religion it represented. While a new church was being built, members of the local community could secure seats for themselves and their family through monetary donations to the building or through trading materials and labor. Such a system of appropriation meant even the poorest members of

[16] Ibid.

the village would be assured seats whenever they chose to attend services.[17] Additionally, priests in older churches which had neither this system available to them nor any "free seats" set aside for the poor, encouraged members of the congregation to open their own seats to the lower classes if they would not need their full allotment during a given service.

The call for more clergy was particularly strong in industrial towns, where the growing population was quickly outstripping the existing clergy's ability to minister to their flocks. Despite the efforts of the Pastoral Aid Society and the Additional Curates Society to raise funds to support these clerics, there were few young men willing to take the smaller salaries offered in needy parishes. Shortage of clergy and the church's continued efforts to raise funds to supplement the poorer livings was a constant struggle throughout the rest of the century. As K.S. Inglis stated, there were few men willing to answer the advertisement "Wanted, a young curate. Hard work and no pay."[18] However, the church was able to convince a small number of clerics to work in some of the poorest parishes in England. The church encouraged priests to see serving in poor parishes as a divine calling, the same way they should view a calling to serve in Africa or India. One priest explained that, "we want a place of worship which the people shall feel to be *their own*: we want the sick to be visited; we want the poor to be specially cared for, and to be able to say amidst all their cares, 'Well, we have something in England, we have our own church and our own parson.'"[19] Finally, the number of services held in these churches was increased to help make the church more available to its members, with many priests holding at least two services each Sunday and some holding as many as three.[20]

[17] Smith, 38.
[18] Inglis, 36.
[19] Ibid., 37.
[20] Smith, 89.

In addition to increasing the number of services offered in each church, the structure of these services was also altered to encourage greater emotional commitment from the congregation. A common complaint of many priests was that even if they had a good turnout at their regular Sunday service, there were dramatically fewer individuals attending communion meetings. To the priests, this represented both a lack of commitment to the church, and more seriously, a lack of faith. In order to combat this, priests were encouraged to give their sermons a more evangelical feel, meaning an increased focus on emotion and bringing individuals into a closer relationship with the divine. The priests were told that if they would "preach therefore the cross of Christ, as the only and sufficient satisfaction for sin: and they who are drawn to the cross will not fail to value the ordinance which represents it."[21] Services were focused mainly on the sermon and music, with some priests offering evening prayer meetings and lectures.[22] To further mimic the more spontaneous, enthusiastic preaching of the evangelicals, many priests taught lengthy and passionate messages from memory or notes rather than from a written sermon. One example was Mr. Reynolds of Waterhead who "was like a steam engine when started, and did not stop till he was run down. Sometimes [the congregation] had to hurry home to get back in time for afternoon service."[23] Priests made many attempts to reach their congregations, and came up with numerous strategies to increase the devotion and attendance of the individuals under their care. Church attendance records from this period show that though not all of these efforts were successful, many priests were able to increase the number of people attending their communion meetings, therefore showing signs of greater devotion in the congregation.

Along with employing a more evangelical preaching style, priests often incorporated more music into the service than they had previously, and evidence suggests that this helped

[21] Ibid., 90.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid., 90-91.

increase the number of working class individuals attending services.[24] Many Anglican churches had organs by the end of the century and most also had choirs and church bands, which along with lay singing of hymns allowed for greater participation by the congregation in the worship service. One account of such a congregation can be found in a local newspaper called the *Oldham Chronicle* in 1858, which stated "the good old custom of having what used to be called 'a great sing' was revived at Saddleworth Church…Selections of sacred music were performed by a full choir accompanied by the organ and an effective array of instruments. The church was crowded on both occasions, every aisle and nook being made available."[25] The popularity of music in services is easy to see if this example can be taken to represent the norm.

Nonconformist groups also reacted to the news that many of the working class population were neglecting religious worship. While groups of Protestant dissenters were nothing new in nineteenth century England (the "Old Dissenters" such as the Quakers, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists go back to at least the seventeenth century) the majority of the groups known as the "New Dissent", the numerous groups that descended from the Methodists, appeared during the first half of the nineteenth century.[26] Wesleyan Methodists, however, did not see themselves as a part of the Dissenters, but rather a third party unassociated with either the Anglicans or the Nonconformists. As one author stated in the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* in 1854 "the Wesleyan is not committed to any opposition, and is never included under either the terms Churchman [or] Dissenter, (as these terms are understood by those to whom they primarily belong,) he stands in such a relation to both these parties as neither of them does to the other."[27] John Wesley's teachings provide some context for this ambiguous position, as they reflect

[24] Ibid., 93.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Timothy Larsen, *Friends of Religious Equality: Nonconformist Politics in Mid-Victorian England*, vol. 1 of *Studies in Modern British Religious History* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1999), 15.
[27] Larsen, 17.

elements of both Anglican tradition and the move toward reform. An example of this is Wesley's view of where the working class fit in Methodism. Like the Anglicans, Wesley wanted to maintain a strict hierarchy of leadership, not allowing the layman a voice "in choosing either stewards or leaders among the Methodists."[28] However, Wesley believed in equality in his congregations, denouncing reserved seating for the wealthy by making seats available "first come…first served…and the poorest have frequently the best places because they come first."[29] The groups that broke away from this main body of Methodists, however, do consider themselves solidly in the camp of the dissenters and include, among others, the Primitive Methodists, Bible Christians, and United Free Methodist Churches.

Not all Nonconformist congregations were equally committed to encouraging the religious worship of their working class brothers and sisters. One Congregational minister remarked in 1848 that the "special mission" of his denomination "is neither to the very rich nor to the very poor. We have a work to do upon the thinking, active, influential classes-classes which fill neither courts nor cottages; but which, gathered into cities, and consisting of several gradations there are the modern movers and moulders of the world,"[30] in other words, this minister wanted to target the middle class. These congregations were less likely to be involved in revival type preaching and proselytizing, which was a particularly effective method of reaching the working class. Despite examples like this, there is considerable evidence to show that many other Nonconformist congregations were actively preaching to and welcoming these working class individuals. The more humble preaching style and location of these

[28] Frederick Dreyer, "A "Religious Society Under Heaven": John Wesley and the Identity of Methodism," *The Journal of British Studies* 25:1 (January 1986), 64.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Larsen., 19.

Nonconformist meetings seems to have been key in attracting members of the lower classes to worship.

While Nonconformists followed some of the same tactics as Anglicans to increase their influence with the laboring classes, they also developed some strategies of their own. These often differed depending on the beliefs of the individual sect, and differences in opinion over how churches conducted their efforts at outreach caused many groups to splinter. One of the issues Nonconformists sought to address was the lack of a real role or responsibility for the laity in the Church of England. One priest noted "the Church of England gives the working man nothing to do. He feels he forms no integral part of her, that he is in no vital Connexion with her, that he is not built into her structure, but is left, a loose stone, lying about for anyone to tumble over."[31] In most Nonconformist congregations, the laity were incorporated into the structure of the church; they could be called upon to minister, lead prayer meetings or otherwise be involved in their meetings and community no matter their social class.

A second crucial step Nonconformists took to provide the working classes greater access to their meetings was to begin holding at least some of their meetings in less imposing locations, which sometimes had not been built for a specific religious purpose, but were actually secular buildings. One such incident was a combined effort by both Anglicans and Nonconformists to rent out Exeter Hall in London for a series of religious lectures. The organizers proclaimed this to be a great success, that they were selling out the hall for months at a time and that a number of those in the audience "were habitual neglecters of worship."[32] While critics at the time doubted whether these events were as successful as the organizers claimed them to be, they were representative of a practice in which numerous Nonconformist congregations were engaged.

[31] Inglis, 60.
[32] Ibid., 65.

Congregations from the Methodist sects to the Latter-day Saints found that they gained success with those who were not used to worshipping in more traditional churches and chapels by preaching in secular buildings. As these groups held meetings in halls and other locations around England, the popularity and success of such meetings encouraged some building owners to begin organizing their own events. One such individual was a wealthy Congregationalist named Samuel Morley, who purchased the Victoria Theatre with the intent of creating a place where the working class could go for pious entertainment. The theater was renamed the Victoria Temperance Music Hall, with Morley defending his establishment by saying the reformers should not deny the working classes of other amusements unless they were willing to replace them with something better. He stated, "Can people conceive what is meant when told that husband, wife, and six children are living in a single room? These people will go somewhere in the evening to seek amusement. I hold it to be a Christian duty to give them amusement."[33] Morley soon expanded the services of the Music Hall to including sermons on Sunday evenings, hoping to make this a center of both worship and entertainment for the local working class community.

In addition to the responses by the Nonconformist and established churches, there were many new societies who chose to focus their efforts on specific aspects of religion they felt needed to be reformed. One such organization was the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon movement, which was technically non-denominational though many sections of the movement were associated with Wesleyan Methodists. The P.S.A. Society, organized in 1875, was aimed directly at the working class and promoted uplifting and wholesome Sunday meetings in order to discourage members of the community from spending the day in less than holy forms of recreation, such as sporting events or going to the pub. Members would gather to sing and pray

[33] Inglis, 77.

together, after which they listened to a series of short addresses, followed by more hymns and prayers. In total, the meeting was only an hour long, exemplifying the group's motto of "Brief, Bright, and Brotherly."[34] In addition to these Sunday meetings, most P.S.A. groups also promoted services to help the poor such as "a benevolent and sick provident fund, a savings bank, a poor man's lawyer, and a temperance society" all of which were aimed at bettering the lives of the individuals in the community. [35]

Many of the smaller Nonconformist groups took these less traditional meeting forms even further than simply gathering in lecture halls and theaters. These types of meetings were especially common in sects which had broken away from Methodism, and were attempting to recreate the more community and home based religion they felt the Wesleyans had moved away from. These groups formed "cottage societies" where preaching would take place in "barns, dye-houses, sheds, abandoned rooms, and open spaces outdoors" if they were unable to secure a private home from which to teach. [36] These diverse meeting locations not only recalled the simpler worship of the past, but allowed for a more community based democratic society. An additional benefit from meeting in a diverse number of locations was protection from persecution for those who attended the meetings. Cottage Societies "incorporated local and private affairs into religion in a way that institutionalized services could not," meaning the personal lives and circumstances of the members of the congregation were intricately woven into the religious fabric of the community. [37] This level of personal involvement was especially evident when the congregation was led by a lay preacher who could incorporate individual experiences of his or her congregation into the sermon. Though there were obvious benefits to this close religious

[34] Inglis., 81.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Deborah M. Valenze, *Prophetic Sons and Daughters: Female Preaching and Popular Religion in Industrial England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 23.
[37] Ibid.

community, there could be drawbacks as well. One such example can be seen in the events surrounding a sermon given by a lay preacher named John who attempted to speak on the topic "Owe Thou No Man Anything." A member of the congregation recorded that

> do what he could, our friend John could get no forrarder, and after struggling with it a long time with no better result, old Anthony Hoyle gave out a hymn. A prayer was said, then the pipes were brought out, and in the discussion which followed some one said, "Whatever did ta tak yond text for, John, because it is unkindly said that tha owes Jim Clay some money, and he cannot get paid."[38]

Though this was obviously a moment of some embarrassment for our preacher John, this incident provides a great deal of insight into the way these close religious communities functioned, and proves that the details of each individual's life were a vibrant part of the religious community as a whole.

Such tightly knit communities were one of the "primitive" features groups such as the Primitive Methodists wanted to restore to modern worship. One of the main goals of the Primitives was to return to the earlier, and as they saw it "purer," days of Methodism. One way that the group sought to do this was by returning to the preaching style of the past, when the preachers themselves "were little better…than beggars. Their places of preaching were under trees, in hovels, barns and other buildings very little better than barns…By degrees, they crept upwards…They quitted the tree, the hovel and the barn; and saw themselves elevated in elegant pulpits and stately temples" which the Primitives viewed to have been a negative event.[39] To Primitive Methodists, the ideal way to revive this simpler system of preaching was to gather together for large outdoor camp meetings.[40] This idea first came about as a congregation of

[38] Ibid., 24.
[39] Ibid., 21.
[40] For the purposes of this paper, the term "camp meeting" refers to large outdoor religious gatherings which feature enthusiastic revivalist preaching. For a discussion of the transatlantic nature of these meetings and their history please see Edwin Scott Gaustad and Philip L. Barlow, *New Historical Atlas of Religion in America,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) and Richard Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism: Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America, 1790-1865* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978).

Methodists lead by Hugh Bourne began to struggle with the "excessive formalism" of their Old Methodist Connexion meetings.[41] Bourne's congregation preferred more enthusiastic forms of worship and prayer, which did not fit with the atmosphere of a chapel. The answer to this problem came with an evangelical preacher from America named Lorenzo Dow, who Bourne had heard speak encouraging ministers to employ camp meetings as a revival tool.[42] As a result the first English camp meeting was held on a nearby hill called Mow Cop on 31 May, 1807.[43] Bourne and his followers believed that by meeting out in the open air the members of the congregation would be able to feel a special connection to God and more fully express their exuberant prayers.[44] The meeting would be a day long event, with "singing, prayer, preaching, exhortations, speaking experience, [and] relating anecdotes" which would highlight the participation of members of the congregation rather than a particular preacher.[45] Camp meetings also "substituted popular speech and traditional folklore for conventional religious rhetoric" by allowing individuals to address the congregation in whatever style they wished.[46] Such a unique preaching style allowed even the most unlearned member of the congregation to feel that his experiences were valid and of use to the larger congregation. In this way, Primitive Methodists highlighted the culture and thoughts of all members of the congregation, allowing them to feel they were being valued as individuals, and that their culture was being valued as well, all of which would further endear Primitive Methodism to the working class.

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[41] Valenze., 85.
[42] Carwardine, 107.
[43] For a fuller discussion of the founding and history of the Primitive Methodists, please see H.B. Kendall, *The Origin and History of the Primitive Methodist Church*, Vol. 1-2 (London: Edwin Dalton, 1906), Julia Stewart Werner, *The Primitive Methodist Connexion: It's Background and Early History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), Geoffrey E. Milburn, *Primitive Methodism* (Peterborough, Epworth Press, 2002), and R.W. Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists, and Reformers: Primitive Methodism and Rural Society, South Lincolnshire, 1817-1875* (Hull: Hull University Press, 1989).
[44] Milburn, 2, 6.
[45] Valenze, 88.
[46] Ibid.

Camp meetings were not universally accepted, however. Clergyman of the Anglican Church saw the Primitive's traveling preachers and their camp meetings as "agents of social unrest" who were actively stirring up the countryside into rebellion against tradition. One priest charged these preachers of being

> heralds of disaffection…traversing the country in all directions…under the specious pretext of religion, the peace of society is disturbed, mobs are collected, and a great number of the lowest rabble concentrated by imposing novelties…the Church is openly assailed by an organized banditti of strolling Methodists, vociferating Ranters, and all that impious train…who without either the substance or form of Christianity, nestle under the wings of toleration, and hurl defiance at all constituted authorities…[47]

Clearly, the traveling preachers and those who gathered at their meetings were seen as a threat to both the established church and England itself. What is also clear is that the Wesleyan Methodists wanted nothing to do with the image that the Methodist sects were creating for themselves, fearing a loss of respectability. In the Conference of 1807, the Wesleyans formally denounced camp meetings, stating that "even supposing such meetings to be allowable in America, they are highly improper in England, and likely to be productive of considerable mischief…"[48] Because the sects would not give up their camp meetings and the Wesleyans would not accept them, the groups most supportive of these meetings (the Camp Meeting Methodists and Clowesites, led by Hugh Bourne and William Clowes respectively) joined in 1811 to form the Primitive Methodists. In choosing this name, Bourne and Clowes were reemphasizing that the movement's "intended character and purpose was to renew the mission for the conversion of England begun by Wesley seven decades earlier and, as far as possible, to employ the evangelical strategy and methods of Wesley's earlier period, adapted to changing

[47] R.W. Ambler, *Ranters, Revivalists, and Reformers: Primitive Methodism and Rural Society, South Lincolnshire, 1817-1875*, (Hull: Hull University Press, 1989), 46.
[48] Valenze, 90.

times and circumstances."[49] One of the evidences of the changing times was, of course, the large numbers of the working class who lived their lives outside of organized religion and who the Primitives believed would be best served through the methods they employed.

The Primitive Methodists seemed to be specially prepared to meet the needs of the working class. One historian of the movement has compiled a list of specific characteristics which made the Primitives particularly appealing, including their "proletarian character, charismatic enthusiasm, lively hymns and songs, simplicity and directness, vivid…preaching, fervent prayer meetings and love feasts, and open air gatherings."[50] This movement was so adept at meeting the needs of the working class that the overseer of the 1851 Census, Horace Mann, commended them for teaching those members of English society "who were 'as ignorant of Christianity as were the heathen Saxons…and are in need of missionary enterprise to bring them into practical acquaintance with (Christian) doctrine."[51] Numerous reports of Primitive Methodist meetings highlight the attendance of lower class individuals, and draw the connection between the movements' preaching locations and their popularity among this group. One example is the story of a female preacher named Mary Taft, who though not a member of the Primitive group, utilized their preaching tactics on her tours of the countryside. Wherever she stopped to preach, she chose humble locations such as simple cottages or the outdoors and drew in flocks of "striking miners, distressed agricultural laborers, and rural migrants" to hear her message. [52]

The structure of Primitive Methodist meetings was as vital to their success among the lower classes as the location of their meetings. As with other Nonconformist groups, the

[49] Milburn, ix.
[50] Ibid., 21.
[51] Ibid., 26.
[52] Valenze, 62.

Primitives had a high level of involvement by lay individuals in the service and allowed these individuals to have greater responsibilities within the religious community. The way the camp meetings themselves were structured reflected the camp meetings of the American revival movement, which they were descended from, including a great deal of enthusiastic involvement by the members of the congregation. One historian has described the average camp meeting as follows:

> Camp meetings were said to be: 'diversified; consisting of praying, singing, or exhortation. The praying was conducted at times by individuals, who took the lead alternately; and at other times, the whole of the more active members of the fraternity were engaged together, working upon each other's enthusiasm, and presenting to the astonished ears of the passengers whom chance or curiosity brought to the spot, a very Babel of broken exclamation with cries and groans and shrieks that rent the air.'[53]

Camp meetings kept a remarkably similar structure to the original meeting conducted on Mow Cop, growing in popularity and size as the years went on. One example of this continuity is a camp meeting held in Caistor, Lincolnshire in 1819. Contemporaries estimated that this meeting was attended by approximately three to four thousand people, the majority of whom were "farmers' servants, day-laborer, and village mechanics" which reemphasizes the mass appeal of these meetings for working class individuals, as well as demonstrating the sheer size of the event.[54] By keeping the size and enthusiasm of camp meetings in mind, it becomes easier to understand why Wesleyan Methodists, conscious of their image and anxious not to be associated with such extreme outbursts of enthusiasm, would want to distance themselves from camp meetings.

Another key ingredient to the success of Primitive Methodism was its preachers. There were several types of preachers who regularly gave sermons in Primitive gatherings, with the most common being either a regular paid minister or a local preacher, who was a member of the

[53] Ambler, 39.
[54] Ibid., 47.

community who continued to pursue their regular secular occupations while at the same time preaching and conducting services. Most of these preachers (who could be male or female) were unpaid but could be hired to preach full time after they had gained experience and notoriety.[55] By taking preaching out of the traditional churches and into places more often frequented by the working class, Primitive Methodist preachers provided a more inviting atmosphere for worship services and were able to reinforce the community and individual nature of each gathering. Many of these preachers were lay members of the movement, meaning they often had little formal training or education. One Primitive preacher named John Oxtoby was described by contemporaries as being, "'often crude' while in 'his pronunciation and attitude, he was uncouth', as he 'had no wish to add to his strong faith, ceaseless prayer, and deep piety, those mental stores which embellish the man...'"[56] The lack of formal education or training was often seen as a benefit by the congregations that filled Primitive Methodist meetings. The fact that preachers often had the same humble background and education as those who heard them is what many historians claim gave Primitive Methodism its most potent incentive for conversion, the ability of preachers to "relate to and provide a relevant religious dimension to the lives of country workers at a time when rapid social change was eroding older values and attitudes."[57] In other words, these preachers were able to use their sermons to provide comfort and context to the changes that the working class saw happening in all aspects of their lives because they had experienced the same things.

Though more than twenty years had passed between the founding of the Primitive Methodists and the arrival of the Latter-day Saints in Liverpool, conditions in England remained remarkably similar. The numbers of working class individuals moving into cities like

[55] Ibid., xi.
[56] Ibid., 47.
[57] Ibid., 46.

Manchester was rising while living conditions deteriorated. When Heber C. Kimball, Orson Hyde, Willard Richards, and their fellow missionaries first arrived in the city, they were immediately struck with the disparity in wealth they saw in Liverpool. Kimball recorded that the missionaries "wandered in the streets of that great city, where wealth and luxury, penury and want abound. I there met the rich attired in the most costly dresses, and the next moment was saluted with the cries of the poor, without covering sufficient to screen them from the weather."[58] The missionaries recorded a similar scene in Manchester, where in asking why the people looked so haggard, the locals replied that they "ware famished for the wont of food. Say they to me thare are hundreds that are starving for the wont [of] food and other things. I thought thare was misry a nough in Preston. It is nothing to compare with Manchester…You may know by this that it is hard times in old England."[59] Wilford Woodruff, who arrived with the second group of Latter-day Saint missionaries in 1839, recorded his thoughts on the industrialized towns of Britain in his journal. After touring the iron foundries near Birmingham, Woodruff wrote that he "never saw anything that comes so near the description of the Lake of fire & Brimstone…one universal mass of coal pits & Iron mines…while thousands of human beings are under ground at work…"[60] Woodruff's statement, along with those of the other missionaries, showcases the affinity that these men felt for the men and women that they came in contact with. As with the Primitive Methodists before them, the majority of Latter-day Saint converts (60.7% in 1840) were members of the working class from large manufacturing towns.[61] As can be expected from the similarities in their converts, the Latter-day Saints had many qualities in common with

[58] James B. Allen, Ronald K. Esplin, and David J. Whittaker, *Men with a Mission: the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the British Isles, 1837-1841* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1992), 28.
[59] Allen, Esplin, Whittaker, 15.
[60] Thomas G. Alexander, *Things in Heaven and Earth: the Life and Times of Wolford Woodruff, a Mormon Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1991), 88.
[61] Allen et all., 18.

the Primitive Methodists that made them appealing to working class individuals. Like the Primitives, Latter-day Saint missionaries usually had little religious training and were able to build upon the similarities between themselves and those they taught. The Latter-day Saints also chose to preach in locations similar to those of the Nonconformist groups that came before them. As Heber C. Kimball recorded in his journal, he and other missionaries "labored both night and day…[speaking] in small houses, to very large congregations, or else, to large assemblies in the open air" as the Primitive Methodists were continuing to do. [62]

The similar social class and religious background the Latter-day Saint missionaries and their converts shared were essential elements in their missionary efforts. As the authors James Allen, Ronald Esplin, and David Whittaker have explained, many of the missionaries sent to England in the early years of the Latter-day Saint's missionary effort had themselves been "seekers" before their conversion. Allen, Esplin, and Whittaker go on to explain that like many of their future converts, these men "were believers in God and Christ but were not satisfied that traditional Christian churches taught or practiced the ancient gospel of Christ in its simple purity, and they were seeking a restoration of that gospel."[63] These missionaries were just as dissatisfied with traditional religion as their converts were, which allowed them to connect to those individuals in much the same way that the Primitive Methodist preachers had.

Another draw the Latter-day Saints and Primitive Methodists shared was their involvement of the laity in the religious activities of the movement. All Latter-day Saint preachers and missionaries were members of the laity who had been given a responsibility to fulfill a specific role within their congregation. Very few church members had received any formal religious training, and the fact that farm boys and tradesmen could be prophets and

[62]Heber C. Kimball, *The Journal of Heber C. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1882). Utah State University Special Collections. 27.
[63] Allen, Esplin, and Whittaker, 4.

apostles proved that this was unnecessary for the Latter-day Saints. The potential English converts were thus assured they would not be "loose stones" but rather they could be essential elements in the organization of the church. While Primitive Methodists also gave their members responsibilities within their own congregations, members of the Latter-day Saint congregations had an additional responsibility as well. The missionaries taught their converts that the Saints had been called to gather with their fellow members in America, and there build a righteous community that would welcome Jesus Christ at his Second Coming.[64] This calling to "gather to Zion" was exciting to those who had been influenced by the strong millennial traditions of nineteenth century religion. This sentiment was especially true for Wilford Woodruff, who told his fellow missionaries that he looked forward to the end of the world when he and the other apostles would gather with "our children or the thousands that may surround us" to discuss the end of the world and the great and terrible events of that day.[65]

Additionally, becoming a Latter-day Saint meant that one could not only hope for the Millennium to come, they could actively participate in preparing the world for that event. An article in the *Millennial Star*, the Latter-day Saints' long running periodical in Britain, summed up the desire of these converts to

> gather to build up the Zion of the last days, which the prophets have predicted will be a literal city. They gather to rear a temple unto the Lord…to more fully keep the commandments of the Lord than they can here in Babylon…that they may be near where the prophets and apostles of God reside, where they can hear the word of the Lord unsullied and pure.[66]

Critics of the Latter-day Saints charged the missionaries with winning converts through the promise of emigration to America, and this was partially true. Emigration, and the economic and social advantages that a member of the English working class could expect from moving to

[64] Ibid., 3.
[65] Alexander, 99.
[66] Taylor, 17.

America, was certainly a draw for converts but this was only one aspect of the desire to emigrate.[67] The records left by many of these English converts are filled with references to "building the kingdom" and "leaving Babylon," phrases which emphasize a deeply spiritual desire to go to America, rather than the opportunity for economic improvement.[68]

The location of "Zion" changed as the Latter-day Saints moved slowly westward across the United States, but most British converts encountered Zion in either Nauvoo, Illinois or later in the Salt Lake Valley. The essential element of Zion, gathering together with the rest of the Saints, remained the same no matter the physical location.[69] Interestingly, this emphasis on gathering with the rest of the Saints after conversion allowed for very little change in the religious spaces that the missionaries and converts used in England. The church was focused on building Zion rather than establishing a permanent presence in the other states and countries they traveled to. Thus, missionaries working in England in 1880 could largely be found preaching in the same types of locations that their forbearers had in 1837.

The Latter-day Saints also reflected other Nonconformists groups in their willingness to preach from rented secular buildings and other less traditional locations. When missionaries first arrived in Preston, England, they were invited to preach at Vauxhall Chapel, where the preacher was the brother of one of the missionaries. After several members of the congregation were baptized by the missionaries, the Latter-day Saints were no longer welcome to preach to the congregation and had to find other venues to spread their message.[70] As a result, the missionaries quickly adopted the preaching style of the Nonconformists, utilizing private homes

[67] Jensen and Thorp, xiii., 17.
[68] Ronald G. Watt, *The Mormon Passage of George D. Watt: First British Convert, Scribe for Zion* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2009), 34-35.
[69] A more complete discussion of the Latter-day Saint concept of Zion can be found in Edwin Scott Gaustad and Philip L. Barlow, *New Historical Atlas of Religion in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
[70] Allen, Esplin, and Whittaker, 33.

and available outdoor spaces. As the year progressed, the missionaries faced new challenges in finding places to teach. As the weather got colder, and the number of people attending meetings exceeded the capacity of any of the available homes, the missionaries made their first attempt to preach from a secular hall. The Latter-day Saints soon acquired a building in Preston, known as the "Cock Pit", in September of 1837. As the name implies, this building was originally designed to host cock fights and contained room for 800 people seated around a central, circular, dirt floor. Though the building had been remodeled to serve as a temperance hall in 1830, the original circular design of the seating remained, as did the building's name. Circular buildings were especially popular for Nonconformist religious gatherings, as the architecture enabled the audience to better hear the sermon, and reemphasized the importance of the Word in Nonconformist worship.[71] All of these things made the "Cock Pit" the perfect building for the Saints to meet in. Kimball wrote the following journal entry after the hall had been rented,

> we obtained a large and commodious place to preach in, "the Cock Pit" which had formerly been used by the people to witness cocks fight and kill one another , and where hundreds of spectators had shouted in honor of the barbarous sport that was once the pride of Britain. And now, instead of the huzzas of the wicked and profane, the gospel of Christ and the voice of praise and thanksgiving was heard there.[72]

The checkered history of this particular meetinghouse is a perfect example of how the Latter-day Saints, like other Nonconformist groups, were working outside of the normal religious venues to try and establish themselves among the working class.

As time went on, Latter-day Saint missionaries discovered it was far easier to receive invitations to speak at secular gatherings such as temperance meetings than to gain access to a pulpit. This practice was common for missionaries throughout the nineteenth century, and was promoted by leaders like Wilford Woodruff who personally spoke at a temperance hall in

[71] Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre: the Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 14.
[72] Kimball, 27-28.

London, and helped arrange for other missionaries to do so as well.[73] Speaking engagements allowed missionaries to engage a wider variety of people and create opportunities to discuss their beliefs by delivering lectures on Joseph Smith or the history of the church. An example of this can be seen in the missionary diary of John Woodhouse. Woodhouse was serving a mission in England, when he was given the opportunity to present a lecture on the social and family life of members of the church at a local temperance hall. Woodhouse stated that he was unsure if he would be able to give a good lecture and represent the church as he would wish. On the morning he was schedule to speak, Woodhouse had a dream which both comforted him and showed him how lecturing at the temperance hall would impact his mission. Woodhouse recorded,

> As the time drew near I seemed to feel troubled more, but on Sunday morning I had a dream, that had a very comforting and assuring effect on my mind. As I lay in bed and apparently asleep, I saw in my dream, the streets of the town, deeply flooded with very dirty and muddy water. I was with the saints. I thought they had to go to work, in a boat or raft. I offered to go with them and help manage the craft…I thought we went standing in the stern and guiding the craft. On arriving at the place it seemed to be a very old and tall building. It was constructed of timber and mud, and of a rickety appearance. And there seemed to be no way into it, no entrance. The waters seemed surging and tearing around it. I said to the brethren, 'I do not see how you can work here, why you cannot get in, and besides the old place is in danger and might be washed away.' I saw in my dream a little way off a new, one story building with a platform in front. I called their attention to it and said 'There you might work for a while, until the floods go down.' I thought we went in the boat about four times, when the flood seemed all gone and only a small stream of clear water was running amongst the stones of the street.
> The first impression I had was that the dream had a meaning. And as I lay pondering on what it's meaning could be, the interpretation the Angel gave to John, flashed across my mind. 'The waters thou sawest are peoples and nations.' Then it all seemed plain and clear to me. I tell it as near as I can. The tall old rotten building built of timber, mud etc and to which we could find no entrance, represented the churches of the day, to which we were not admitted, and which at present are surrounded by a flood of popular glamour, disestablishment, etc, the church being the ministers' workshop. The other building of more recent construction and with the landing place to it, signified the Temperance place and platform and the opportunity we had of preaching there. And our going there until the flood passed, and the waters run clear, to me indicated the removal of prejudice and in

[73] Matthias F. Cowley, ed., *Wilford Woodruff*, *Fourth President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: History of His Life and Labors as Recorded in his Daily Journals* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964), 122-123.

> the clear stream, a favorable result of our labors…and the four trips we made in the boat, indicated the number of lectures I gave in this place…[74]

Woodhouse later recorded in his journal that his lectures went well, that there had been a large crowd which received his message well, stating, "we adjourned after being together three hours, but none seemed tired, none seemed weary, and none left."[75] The crowd was so receptive to the lecture that Woodhouse was invited to speak again in the near future, which he felt would help open doors for him to give more religious messages in the future. Woodhouse's dream and lecture series clearly illustrates how missionaries could use lectures in secular halls to draw attention to themselves and their message, creating inroads into communities that they may not have been able to reach otherwise.

Of course, the Latter-day Saints also continued to utilize private homes and outdoor preaching to spread their message. As previously mentioned, by taking religion out of separate religious spaces and bringing it into spaces that the working class was already comfortable in, missionaries were able to draw converts from this particular social group.[76] Not surprisingly, Latter-day Saint missionaries sometimes organized their own camp meetings, following the precedent set by the Primitive Methodists. One missionary named Edward Harding recorded two separate camp meetings that he personally led during his mission, one of which was attended by 800 people and was held in a public park named Culler Chapel Field. Harding states this location was "a place where people walk for pleasure in the summer season," an ideal location to gather a large number of people of all social classes to hear his message.[77] Harding appears to have branched out of the normal camp meeting form, however, for the members of his own

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[74] John Woodhouse, *Missionary Journal* (Salt Lake City: Elbert C. Kirkham Co., 1952), 44-45.
[75] Woodhouse, 49.
[76] Jensen and Thorp, 24.
[77] Edward Gilbert Harding, *Missionary Journals of Edward Gilbert Harding, 1848-1859,* (Utah State University Special Collections, 920 H219), 9, 20.

congregation. He recorded in his journal that he organized an entire day of activities similar to a camp meeting, but his intention was to draw the congregation together rather than inspire an atmosphere of enthusiasm and revival. Harding began the day with a "tea meeting" followed by an afternoon of sports and an evening "chapel meeting" to end the day with a spiritual message.[78] Despite these differences, this expanded version of a camp meeting obviously still had many of the same ideas at work as the traditional version, fostering both a community atmosphere and promoting the Latter-day Saint message. Harding's efforts also reflect those of other Nonconformist reformers, such as the Pleasant Sunday Afternoon society mentioned earlier, in the attempt to provide wholesome activities to all members of the congregation regardless of social class.

When the activities of the Latter-day Saint missionaries are put into context with the turbulent religious atmosphere of nineteenth century England, the connections between this group and the other Nonconformists becomes clear. The comparison is especially useful when the tactics used by the Latter-day Saints and Primitive Methodists are compared. Both groups had mass appeal among the working class, because of their lay clergy, opportunities for the congregation to be involved in worship, and humble, inviting preaching locations. These elements addressed the key reasons that many working class individuals had given for their previous lack of interest in organized religion. Though the Church of England made some reforms to better accommodate these individuals by hiring more preachers and building more churches, many of the working class continued to find Nonconformist groups more compelling and spiritually fulfilling. Additional spiritual and temporal benefits, such as the call to "gather to Zion" for Latter-day Saint converts, give a clearer image of the appeal of these groups. By addressing the needs of a class of people who were the source of so much concern by both the

[78] Ibid., 10.

established church and government, the activities of the Latter-day Saints in England reflect the larger religious and political conflicts of the nineteenth century. Studying the people, places, and ideas involved in the Latter-day Saint missionary efforts show that the patterns of Dissent and reform that were writ large in this period are clearly in place. Thus, studying these missionaries and their converts in relation to their historical surroundings provides a new way of looking at both the British mission of the Latter-day Saints and religion in general during the Victorian age.

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