

CHAPTER 3

One Nation Under God

*Mormon Theology and
the American Continent*

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The notion that the United States is a unique nation with a particular destiny has long been a staple of American rhetoric; moreover, this notion of American exceptionalism is often couched in religious discourse. The idea that America is a New Jerusalem is especially prominent in discourses surrounding American exceptionalism. As Bellah (1991) put it, "Europe is Egypt; America, the promised land. God has led his people to establish a new sort of social order that shall be a light unto all the nations" (p. 175). Such views of the American continent can be seen in early colonial sermons such as Samuel Danforth's (1670/1995) sermon, "A Brief Recognition of New England's Errand in the Wilderness." The significance of America transcended the events that transpired on that continent; America had a special role to play in the events of the world. As Hietala explains, "Americans believed that their progress provided a beacon light to a world in darkness" (2003, p. 257).

Such discourses are generally metaphorical, but there are some that consider the American continent to be the literal site of the New Jerusalem. Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), commonly referred to as Mormons,¹ believe that the American continent itself is a choice land, chosen by God. In Mormon theology, American exceptionalism is not a product of the United States government, democracy, or even religion. Rather, American exceptionalism is rooted in the land itself. As O'Dea (1957) observed, "The Mormon church saw in the discovery of this continent and its settlement the preparation for the restoration of which it claimed itself to

be the institutional embodiment" (p. 169). N. Eldon Tanner (1977), who served as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, proclaimed, "The discovery of the Americas was not an accident. The event had been foreordained in the eternal councils" (p. 36).²

The belief that the American continent is a choice land has had implications for the church's theology and its relationship with the government. This essay explores how such a conception of the land has influenced religious discourse in the LDS church up to the present day, examining the intersection of Latter-day Saint theology and space as it relates to the North American continent and the United States government. Considering the land itself, rather than the people on it, as sacred provides an interesting counterpoint to other discourses of American exceptionalism, most of which place the distinction on the people or on the form of government. Foregrounding the role of the land also provides a way to understand more fully the role of religious discourse in constructing the idea of American exceptionalism.

*Basic Tenets of Mormon Theology Relating to the
American Continent*

Unlike most other religions practiced in the United States, Mormonism is a distinctly American religion. Latter-day Saints believe that the *Book of Mormon*, a core book of scripture in Mormon theology, was written by prophets who lived on the American continent. The book was hidden in upstate New York and ultimately given to Joseph Smith, Jr., in 1827 by the angel Moroni, the last prophet to write in the *Book of Mormon*.³ Smith translated the *Book of Mormon* and, as he organized the church, pronounced many revelations, which are found in the *Doctrine and Covenants*.⁴

According to Latter-day Saint theology, the *Book of Mormon* contains a record of Israelites who were led to the American continent by God through the prophet Lehi. The followers of Lehi consisted mostly of his extended family and were later split into two groups—the Nephites and the Lamanites. The lighter-skinned Nephites were generally more righteous than the Lamanites, who were cursed with a darker skin; both lived together on the continent from approximately 590 B.C. until A.D. 421. In addition to the records of wars and prophecies, the *Book of Mormon* contains an account of Jesus Christ's ministry on the American continent after his resurrection (*BM*, 3 Nephi 11–28). During this time, Christ related many of the teachings found in the biblical Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 5–7 and *BM*, 3 Nephi 12–14). Around A.D. 421 the Lamanites and the Nephites had a great battle in which

the Nephites were completely destroyed (see *BM*, Mormon 1–9; *BM*, Moroni, 1, 9). Mormons believe that the indigenous peoples of North and South America are descendents of the Lamanites.

The followers of Lehi were told that they would be led to a promised land: “And inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper, and shall be led to a land of promise; yea, even a land which I have prepared for you; yea, a land which is choice above all other lands” (*BM*, 1 Nephi 2:20). Similar notions were also held by other groups of people discussed in the *Book of Mormon*. Before Lehi led his family to the American continent, another group, the Jaredites, had also been guided there.⁵ Their record, found in the book of Ether, states: “For behold, this is a land which is choice above all other lands; wherefore he that doth possess it shall serve God or shall be swept off; for it is the everlasting decree of God. And it is not until the fulness of iniquity among the children of the land, that they are swept off” (*BM*, Ether 2:10). The notion of freedom is connected with serving the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ (*BM*, Ether 2:12). The book of Ether serves as a cautionary tale for those who would inhabit this land; the Jaredites were eventually destroyed in war amongst themselves when they became wicked.

Modern revelation by the prophet Joseph Smith also describes the American continent as a choice land:

Hearken, O ye elders of my church, saith the Lord your God, who have assembled yourselves together, according to my commandments, in this land, which is the land of Missouri, which is the land which I have appointed and consecrated for the gathering of the saints. Wherefore, this is the land of promise, and the place for the city of Zion [*D&C*, 57:1–2].

However, the idea of America as a chosen land was not unique to LDS scripture and, in fact, was quite widespread even before the church was founded. Barlow (1989) notes in his study of Joseph Smith’s use of the Bible that “he read its narratives with presuppositions about the immutability of truth and the direct relevance of prophecy (the imminent millennium, America as chosen) that were common to his place and time” (p. 741).

Yet few had been so specific concerning why America was a chosen land. For Mormons, Missouri is not only the site of future dealings with the Lord; this land has been foreordained from the beginning of time. In May 19, 1838, Joseph Smith prophesied that “Spring Hill is named by the Lord Adam-ondi-Ahman, because, said he, it is the place where Adam shall come to visit his people, or the Ancient of Days shall sit, as spoken of by Daniel the prophet” (*D&C*, 116:1). Heber C. Kimball, who served as an apostle, reinforces the idea that Adam lived on the American continent after he was cast out of the Garden of Eden (quoted in Whitney, 1945, pp. 208–209). Smith also took this knowl-

edge to the larger public, writing in a letter to the editor of a newspaper in Rochester, New York, “The City, of Zion, spoken of by David in the 102 Psalm shall be built upon the Land of America and the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to it with songs of everlasting joy upon their heads.” (1833/1989, p. 77).

The church has worked to protect the land of Adam-ondi-Ahman that they hold sacred (Gentry, 1973; Matthews, 1972). However, it is not only Spring Hill in Missouri that is held sacred by the Lord. Joseph Smith declared that “the whole of America is Zion itself from north to south, and is described by the Prophets, who declare that it is the Zion where the mountain of the Lord should be, and that it should be in the center of the land” (quoted in Church of Jesus Christ, 1948, vol. 6, pp. 318–319). He later clarifies this and states, “I have received instructions from the Lord that from henceforth wher-ever the Elders of Israel shall build up churches and branches unto the Lord throughout the States, there shall be a stake of Zion” (quoted in Church of Jesus Christ, 1948, vol. 6, p. 319).

As the church has spread around the world and therefore no longer remains a strictly American religion, there has been an emphasis on the idea that Zion is anywhere the Saints gather, rather than a specific geographical location. For example, in 1972, the apostle Bruce R. McConkie stated,

The place of gathering for the Mexican Saints is in Mexico; the place of gathering for the Guatemalan Saints is in Guatemala; the place of gathering for the Brazilian Saints is in Brazil; and so it goes throughout the length and breadth of the whole earth. Japan is for the Japanese; Korea is for the Koreans; Australia is for the Australians; every nation is the gathering place for its own people [quoted in *Church History in the Fullness of Times*, 2003, p. 576].

Yet McConkie (1985) also reaffirmed the centrality of the American continent: “Let every land be a Zion to those appointed to dwell there.... But still there is a center place, a place where the chief temple shall stand.... And that center place is what men now call Independence in Jackson County, Missouri” (p. 595). Thus even while expanding the definition of Zion to include all Saints in all lands, the American continent remains the most important, the most blessed — the capital of Zion itself — by virtue of containing within it the land of Adam-ondi-Ahman.

Mormons see themselves as part of a chain of prophecy beginning with Adam, through the prophets of the Old and New Testaments and the *Book of Mormon*, up to the present day. The idea of a restoration makes sense in a new place — this was no mere reformation; rather, this was a completely new movement. Much as America was no longer simply Europe on this continent, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was not a reformation, but

rather a restoration of the one true church that no longer existed. Yet this was still placed within a context of existing religious traditions; as Barlow writes,

Substantially before the organization of the Mormon church, Smith began to see events in his own life as a continuation of Bible narratives. It was not simply that the canon was to be extended, but that the whole biblical narrative had come to life again, as endings were put on stories that had their beginnings in the scriptural text [1989, p. 752].

Even the Saints' migration to Utah can be seen in biblical terms. Belk (1992) observes, "It was not lost on the Mormons that the ancient Israelites were also cast into a desert wasteland" (p. 343). Yet despite the familiarity of the biblical and social contexts from which the Mormons drew, one cannot help but observe the boldness of the statement found in the first section of the *Doctrine and Covenants*:

And also those to whom these commandments were given, might have power to lay the foundation of this church, and to bring it forth out of obscurity and out of darkness, the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth, with which I, the Lord, am well pleased, speaking unto the church collectively and not individually [*De&C*, 1:30].

Few denominations, even today, make the claim of holding absolute truth. This statement radically departs from the commonly held narratives surrounding religion. Mormonism is not merely one possible path to God, but rather the *only* path to God. Moreover, the founding of the church was so important that it could not take place just anywhere—it had to take place in a land divinely appointed by God, the land on which God himself created the first man in the Garden of Eden. This was truly an exceptional church founded in an exceptional land.

The Church and the United States Government

Flake (2004) remarked that "if proto-sociologist Alexis de Tocqueville had lived to see the Mormon kingdom, he probably would have been amused that the nation with the soul of a church had given birth to a church with the soul of a nation" (p. 27). Scholars have noted the inherent tensions in maintaining a theocratic kingdom of God on earth within the confines of a secular democracy. This tension is built into the core beliefs of Mormon theology, whose twelfth Article of Faith states, "We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law" (*PGP*, Articles of Faith 1:12). Mormons have attempted to work within the law, much to the dismay of those who opposed them. For example, Joseph

Smith was a candidate for the United States Presidency in 1844 (*Church of Jesus Christ*, 1948; Hinckley, 1988) and in 1903, Reed Smoot, who was also a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, was the first Mormon to be elected to the United States Senate and, after a protracted debate, seated in the legislature (Flake, 2004). Mormons also attempted to redress their grievances to the authorities, with Joseph Smith even meeting with President Martin Van Buren regarding the persecution of the Saints in Missouri (*Church of Jesus Christ*, 1948).

Yet it is this tension between theocracy and democracy that caused many to distrust the Mormons, in much the same way that some opposed John F. Kennedy's candidacy for president because they feared that he would be under the control of the Vatican. Such concerns persist even today; when Mitt Romney, a Mormon who had previously served as governor of Massachusetts, ran for president in 2008, some simply feared his beliefs, while others worried that he would be beholden to the Prophet (see Weisberg, 2007). In some ways, these concerns should come as little surprise. Despite the presence of the First Amendment, which ostensibly grants freedom of religion, Flake (2004, p. 15) notes, "Religious liberty did not come naturally to Americans.... Only gradually did the failure of any one church to dominate convert all churches to the principle of tolerance." Because the political landscape, as well as the religious landscape, of the United States is heterogeneous, people tend to fear those who would reduce the influence of their faction. Thus we can see an uneasy alliance among the adherents of various evangelical Protestant faiths, who, despite their differences, conclude that they have more in common with each other than they do with groups such as Catholics, Mormons, Jews and others who do not fall under their banner.

Even in the face of persecution Mormons have, from the beginning, held fast to the belief that the United States government was ordained of God and established in order to bring forth the restoration of His true church. Orson Hyde (1860) proclaimed,

With the view of raising up a church pursuant to the doctrine contained in these records of a fallen people, a government has to be established on this *chosen* and *promised* land whose provisions should be liberal enough to allow and tolerate every principle, precept, and doctrine of the new Church which then existed only in prophetic vision. The Constitution of the United States forms the basis of that government, extending protection to all, and showing especial favour to none [p. 108].

For the Mormons, the founding of the United States was necessary for the gospel of Jesus Christ to be restored to the earth. Marion Romney (1980) provides a larger chronology of events that spans two and a half millennia and in which the founding of the Constitution is only one element:

Jesus Christ, the God of this land, led Columbus to it. He led the Pilgrims to Plymouth. He sustained and gave victory to the colonists. He established the Constitution of the United States. Over a period of some twenty-six centuries he directed the writing of the Book of Mormon, which contains the record of the former inhabitants of this land. At his command, Moroni finished the record and hid it up in the Hill Cumorah, where, under his surveillance, it was safely preserved for some fourteen hundred years [p. 6].

In Mormon theology, the founding of the United States is merely one step in a chain of events that were necessary to bring forth the true church. The discovery of the American continent by Columbus and the later arrival of the Pilgrims were simply fulfillments of Lehi's prophecy that "there shall none come into this land save they shall be brought by the hand of the Lord" (*BM*, 2 Nephi 1:6). Indeed, even the Revolutionary War is described by Nephi, another *Book of Mormon* prophet (see *BM*, 1 Nephi 13:17–19), and held up as evidence that the nation established by the hand of God cannot be destroyed except through iniquity.

Mormons have also held the American founding fathers in high regard because they are seen as instrumental in the founding of the LDS church. Wilford Woodruff (1897), then prophet of the church, called the founding fathers "the best spirits the God of heaven could find on the face of the earth" (p. 89). One element in Mormon theology that is considerably different from other strands of Christianity is the idea of vicarious work for the dead. Mormons believe that saving ordinances such as baptism must be done on the earth and cannot be done in the world of spirits (see 1 Corinthians 15:29; *Do&C*, 124:29–30, 127:5–9, 128:1–18, 138:32–34). These ordinances are performed by proxy in temples (Packer, 1980). In 1877, Woodruff related the following experience with the spirits of the founding fathers:

I will here say, before closing, that two weeks before I left St. George, the spirits of the dead gathered around me, wanting to know why we did not redeem them. Said they, "You have had the use of the Endowment House for a number of years, and yet nothing has ever been done for us. We laid the foundation of the government you now enjoy, and we never apostatized from it, but we remained true to it and were faithful to God." These were the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and they waited on me for two days and two nights.... I straightway went into the baptismal font and called upon brother McCallister to baptize me for the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and fifty other eminent men, making one hundred in all, including John Wesley, Columbus, and others; I then baptized him for every President of the United States, except three; and when their cause is just, somebody will do the work for them [1878, p. 229].⁶

Thus, according to Mormon theology, even the signers of the Declaration of Independence ratified the founding of the church from beyond the grave and wished to be a part of it. Such a narrative reinforces the connection between

the establishment of the church and that of the United States. Moreover, there is also an explicit connection between the founding of the government and remaining faithful to God. After all, Mormons believed that no one could come to the Promised Land unless they were led by God. Thus, by definition the founders were righteous and inspired men. Moreover, the inclusion of John Wesley places the church within a long line of reformers and truth-seekers.

The Constitution is also held in high regard in Mormonism. Ezra Taft Benson (1987), then prophet of the church, stated, "I reverence the Constitution of the United States as a sacred document. To me its words are akin to the revelations of God, for God has placed His stamp of approval upon it" (p. 4). On July 4, 1854, Brigham Young, second president of the Church, declared that the Constitution "will be held inviolate by this people; and, as Joseph Smith said, 'The time will come when the destiny of this nation will hang upon a single thread. At that critical juncture, this people will step forth and save it from the threatened destruction.' It will be so" (1860, p. 15). Such narratives reinforce the notion that the founding of the United States was God's will and thus link it to the establishment of the church. Young also placed the destiny of the nation in the hands of the Saints as protectors of the Constitution.

Present day church leaders have continued to emphasize connections between the church, the Constitution, and the notion that America is a promised land chosen by God. Shortly after the attacks of September 11, 2001, Gordon B. Hinckley, then president of the church, reported in General Conference that he had met with the President of the United States. Later in his address, he reinforced the connection between theology, the government, and the land:

Great are the promises concerning this land of America. We are told unequivocally that it "is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven, if they will but serve the God of the land, who is Jesus Christ" (Ether 2:12). This is the crux of the entire matter—obedience to the commandments of God. The Constitution under which we live, and which has not only blessed us but has become a model for other constitutions, is our God-inspired national safeguard ensuring freedom and liberty, justice and equality before the law [Hinckley, 2001, p. 73].

Here we see a conflation of the commandments of God and the Constitution, a document that itself is also inspired of God. Yet Hinckley's words also contain an implicit warning that if the nation is *not* righteous, its people will *not* be free from bondage, captivity, and other nations.

Reverence for the United States is always tempered by a knowledge that

the nation can only stand so long as it serves the God of the land. In the face of mounting persecution in the early history of the church, whether or not the United States would continue to prosper was sometimes called into question. In 1840, Joseph Smith wrote that "my heart faints within me when I see, by the visions of the Almighty, the end of this nation, if she continues to disregard the cries and petitions of her virtuous citizens, as she has done, and is now doing" (Church of Jesus Christ, 1948, vol. 4, p. 89; see also vol. 6, p. 116). Yet, even in the face of persecution, members of the church continued to believe that the Lord would protect them, not only because they were his chosen people, but also because the government itself had been established chiefly to bring about the establishment of their religion and was thus ordained of God.

An Exceptional Religion in an Exceptional Land

Boyer (2001) observes that Mormonism "offers the distilled essence" of the idea within American Christianity that America is God's chosen land (p. 248). Mulder (1957) likewise argues, "With its central theme of the continent as a favored land providentially preserved for the gathering of a righteous people, [the *Book of Mormon*] improved the American dream with scripture and endowed it with sacred myth" (p. ix). Yet the *Book of Mormon* was viewed with suspicion, and even today many denounce Mormonism as a cult, with some denying that its believers are Christians. Shupe and Heinerman note that "among the various interreligious hostilities in American history, probably none has been so violent or prolonged as that between Mormons ... and assorted Fundamentalist/Baptist (i.e., Independent and Southern) groups" (1985, p. 146). Despite protections under the First Amendment, the Mormons were plagued by mobs that burned their homes and crops, tarred and feathered leaders, murdered their prophet, and eventually drove them into the wilderness.

Tocqueville (1848/2000) remarked, "It was religion that gave birth to the English colonies in America. One must never forget that. In the United States religion is mingled with all the national customs and all those feelings which the word fatherland evokes" (p. 432). It is for this reason that the United States has always had an uneasy relationship with religious pluralism. D'Antonio and Hoge note that the colonists were much less tolerant of other religions and that "after adoption of the First Amendment, disestablishment of denominations proceeded slowly" (2006, p. 346). This provides some perspective concerning why Mormons were not welcomed as fellow Christians.

However, it was not only their difference, but the belief held by Mormons that all other religions were incorrect and that they alone held the true gospel of Christ that was likely jarring to the members of the other denominations (see *PGP*, Joseph Smith — History, 1:19).

Joseph Smith was imprisoned or indicted on many occasions, but the courts did not convict him; he was tried, convicted, and sentenced to death in the court of mob violence. John Taylor of the Council of the Twelve, who was a witness to the murder of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, proclaimed that "their innocent blood, with the innocent blood of all the martyrs under the altar that John saw, will cry unto the Lord of Hosts till he avenges that blood on the earth" (*D&C*, 135:7). As with other elements of Mormon theology, they saw the Smiths as just the latest links in a long chain of Christian martyrs who had died in defense of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Lord had long stated that his people would be a "peculiar people" (see Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 14:2, 26:18; Titus 2:4; 1 Peter 2:9–10). Mormons recognized that they were a peculiar people and accepted the fact that they would never be accepted by "a crooked and perverse generation," unless they repented and received the gospel (see *D&C*, 33:2, 34:6). They took solace in the Lord's admonition, "And if they persecute you, so persecuted they the prophets and righteous men that were before you. For all this there is a reward in heaven" (*D&C*, 127:4).

Mormons have woven together strands of prophecy and localized them such that they have re-envisioned the place of both America and themselves in the history of the world. In the Mormon vision, the new world is perhaps the oldest site of humanity's dealings with God. America is the location of the Garden of Eden and the place where Adam will return to visit his people. Christ himself visited the American continent to minister to his "other sheep" spoken of in John 10:16. God inspired Christopher Columbus, the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and the framers of the Constitution in order to ensure that the nation would be fertile ground for the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Most important, Mormons believe that this land is "choice above all other lands, which the Lord God had preserved for a righteous people" (*BM*, Ether 2:7). Such beliefs are prescriptive in that they significantly influence how Mormons interact with their fellow (non-Mormon) citizens. The tenet that the land is protected by God and that those who find it are led by Him, leads one (at least, if one is a Mormon) to reverence the founders of this nation as righteous men. If one sees the establishment of the Constitution as preliminary to the restoration of the gospel, then the Constitution becomes a sacred document in itself. If one sees the establishment of the government as the fulfillment of prophecy, one is much more likely to

attempt to work within the system rather than simply revolt, recognizing the nuances between unjust men within the government and an unjust government in itself, despite the many persecutions heaped upon the church both individually and collectively.

Despite their deep reverence for the land, the founding fathers, and the Constitution, in maintaining the identity of a peculiar people that hold God's absolute truth, they embodied competing narratives of American exceptionalism while reinforcing the idea that America was indeed exceptional. Tuveson (1980, p. 176) notes that Mormons had a "uniquely American form of millenarianism," in that they recognized the importance of declaring the land itself as holy. Yet once a theology becomes fixated on a geographic space, it is difficult to alter the constraints of that belief. With a knowledge that the land is both a blessing and a curse, Mormons, perhaps more than others, believe that if the United States becomes too wicked, they shall be "swept off" the land (*BM*, Ether 2:10). Barlow notes that

the prophesied role of America in the Book of Mormon is hardly the one of unqualified celebration common in the nineteenth century. To the contrary, the overall theme of the book is the destruction that awaits even a chosen people in a promised land if they succumb as a society to evil [1989, p. 76].

Mormons can point to a continual cycle throughout the *Book of Mormon* in which the people enjoy prosperity, followed by pride and wickedness, then destruction, which leads the people to humble themselves and serve the Lord once more. It is because the land itself is blessed above all others that the Saints were compelled to spread the gospel; the survival of the nation was dependent on serving the Lord, and the Saints were the only ones who knew how to truly do so.

The Mormons' belief that they were a peculiar people that held the keys to salvation and absolute truth was at odds with mainstream society's notion of what it meant to be an American. Defining is a rhetorical process; as Black (1970) explains, "In all rhetorical discourse, we can find enticements not simply to believe something, but to *be* something" (p. 119). It is not simply enough to believe in the American system of government; it is clear by their beliefs and their actions that the Mormons held a deep reverence for the founding fathers, the Constitution, and the land itself. But one must also *perform* the role of American and, for better or for worse, mainstream Christian identity was a part of that role. Of course the idea that there was a cohesive Christian identity was, and still is, a historical myth (Boyer, 2001), but there were certainly established mainstream Christian religions whose presence provides at least anecdotal support for such a myth. By maintaining the tenets of their own religion, Mormons violated the American convention of assim-

ilation into the norm—a lesson that has implications for other groups who deviate from the norms of American society.

Conclusion

Religion and American exceptionalism have been intertwined from colonial times, but Mormons, more than any other religion, have continued to promote the idea of America as a chosen land, "choice above all other lands" (*BM*, 1 Nephi 2:20). However, this particular strand of American exceptionalism stands as both a blessing and a curse; America can be great only so long as they serve Jesus Christ, who is the God of the land (*BM*, Ether 2:12). Rooting the idea of exceptionalism in the land, rather than in the people, has had implications for Mormon theology, the relationship between Mormons and the United States government, and Mormons' attitudes toward history. It was the belief in the United States government as divinely inspired that allowed the early church to maintain its faith in the government even in the face of mounting persecution, rather than attempting to circumvent the government or actively fight against it. More important for the building up and protection of the church, the Mormons' belief that they needed to come to Zion provided a reason for European converts to migrate to the United States, and especially the Salt Lake Valley.

Mormon theology still holds to the doctrine that America is a choice land, protected by and ordained of God, yet this is always tempered by a belief that the land will be protected only so long as its people are righteous. Mormons see themselves as an integral part of this proposition and have mounted aggressive missionary efforts to draw people to the truth (*D&C*, 123:12–13). In Mormon theology, the future of America is wrapped up in the future of the church—if the people serve the God of the land, they will prosper, but if they do not, they will be swept off. Mormons believe that they have a great work to do, pronounced by God Himself: "And by your hands I will work a marvelous work among the children of men, unto the convincing of many of their sins, that they may come unto repentance, and that they may come unto the kingdom of my Father" (*D&C* 18:44). This is not simply a theological concern; if the prosperity of the nation depends on the righteousness of its inhabitants, bringing others into the kingdom of God is also a political concern.

Mormon exceptionalism is simply another strand of American exceptionalism. Mormons believe that they are the chosen people of God, placed on His chosen land, with a government established by His hand to bring forth

His one true church. All are interlocked—the United States, the founding fathers, the Constitution, the *Book of Mormon*, and the land itself—into one divinely appointed system. In scripture and in addresses given by the general authorities of the church, Mormons reinforce the idea that America is a chosen land. Thus, even as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints transforms from a quintessentially American faith to a worldwide religion, it continues to maintain its roots in the land that the Lord Himself has ordained as exceptional, a land choice above all others.

Notes

1. In this essay, I will use the terms "Mormon," "LDS," "Saints," and "member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" interchangeably. Although there are offshoots, in this essay I refer only to the main church.

2. In the church hierarchy, Apostle is one step below the Prophet, who is the earthly leader of the church. When the Prophet dies, the president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles becomes the next Prophet. The Prophet and his two counselors, chosen from the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, make up the First Presidency of the church. There are other general authorities of the church, such as the Quorum of the Seventy and area representatives. Local leaders, called bishops, are over wards, which consist of members of a congregation that live within specific geographic areas. Groups of wards are called stakes. Each stake is presided over by a stake president. Members of the Quorum of the Twelve and the First Presidency are considered to be "prophets, seers, and revelators," thus, when they speak, they speak for the church as a whole. Members of the Quorum of the Twelve hold the title "Elder," and the Prophet is referred to as "President." For the purposes of this essay, I will omit these titles.

3. The Book of Mormon was first revealed to Joseph Smith in 1823, but he was forbidden to take them until 1827 (see *PGP*, Joseph Smith—History, 1:53).

4. There are four major books of scripture in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: the King James Version of the Bible, the *Book of Mormon*, the *Doctrine and Covenants*, and the *Pearl of Great Price*. I will cite scripture using the standard conventions of book, chapter, and verse. The *Book of Mormon* and the *Pearl of Great Price* follow similar conventions, but I will preface quotes from those texts with the abbreviated titles of the scriptural works (*BM* and *PGP*, respectively), followed by the book, chapter, and verse. The *Doctrine and Covenants* follows similar citation conventions, but rather than books, it is divided by section; these will be cited as *D&C*, followed by the section and verse numbers.

5. The Jaredites were led by the brother of Jared and had come to the American continent shortly after the time of the tower of Babel.

6. The three for whom baptism was not performed were James Buchanan, Martin Van Buren, and Ulysses S. Grant. Although there seems to be no authoritative reason, there is speculation that this is because of Van Buren's and Buchanan's actions against the Saints. When seeking protection from mob violence, Joseph Smith reported that Van Buren responded to his entreaties by stating, "Gentlemen, your cause is just, but I can do nothing for you," and "If I take up for you I shall lose the vote of Missouri" (Church of Jesus Christ, 1948, vol. 4, p. 80). Buchanan had ordered troops to Salt Lake City to quell a supposed insurrection and install a secular government by deposing Brigham Young, who was also the prophet at the time, from the governorship (see Mulder, 1957, p. 275). However, baptism and other ordinances were subsequently performed for both Buchanan and Van

Buren (see Newell, 2000, p. 221). Grant was still alive at the time of the speech, and thus would not have been eligible for vicarious work.

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CHAPTER 4

Re-Contextualizing Americanism

The National Association of Manufacturers' Jeremiad for Free Enterprise During the Roosevelt Era

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By the mid-1930s, American business, still struggling with the lingering effects of the Depression, also perceived that the free enterprise system itself was at risk. Economic distress brought increased union activity, the consumer movement, increasingly vocal social reform advocates and the Roosevelt Administration's active approach to addressing the nation's economic challenges. Industry, formerly the benefactors of a widespread *laissez-faire* attitude toward business, was concerned, said Stuart Ewen, that "the long term balance of power seemed to be shifting" (1996, p. 292). Accordingly, during the late 1930s, the National Association of Manufacturers (henceforth, NAM) accelerated a propaganda campaign in defense of industry. "Silence may be golden, but more often than not it is damning in the face of repeated accusation," it said in a pamphlet for its members. "Few groups are more often under attack ... few groups are more misrepresented before the public" (NAM, n.d.a., p. 3). In particular, NAM was concerned that government had stepped forward to assume leadership on economic matters mainly because manufacturers have "not told the facts about industry to the public. They have let others speak to America while they remain silent," the group said (NAM, n.d.a., p. 3). It continued:

American Industry today must make its position clear and appealing to the American public. Nothing more clearly proves the necessity of reselling to the people the industrial system that has given them by far the highest standard of