

“Who Shall Sing If Not the Children?": Primary Songbooks, 1880–1989

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Who shall sing if not the children?
Did not Jesus die for them?
May they not with other jewels,
Sparkle in his diadem?
Why to them are voices given—
Birdlike voices, sweet and clear?
Why, unless the songs of heaven
To begin to practice here?¹

IN 1989, THE PRIMARY ASSOCIATION released a new songbook for Mormondom's children, its first since 1969. Evaluating it for a professional hymnody publication, one reviewer commented: "This handsome volume's 8½ x 11" pages exude a special kind of coziness. . . . The plentiful decorative illustrations use pastel colors exclusively—and so, in their way,

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1. J. P. Olsen, *Primary Association Song Book* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1920), 28.

do most of the songs. . . . [F]or every song about a specifically Mormon doctrine or practice, at least four would fit into practically any Christian, indeed any civilized context."²

This review of the 1989 *Children's Songbook*, cited approvingly in an official history of the Primary,³ suggests a degree of acceptance by the "sectarian" world which would have been unimaginable to the compilers of the first Primary songbooks. When Eliza R. Snow compiled the first book of songs for Primary children in 1880, Mormons were generally regarded as neither Christian nor civilized. In trying to understand the remarkable assimilation of Mormons into American culture during the twentieth century, scholars have rarely turned to hymnals and even more rarely to children's songs as sources of evidence that could illuminate this study. Yet in a church with a profound investment in the links between generations, what is taught to children is surely a useful index of which doctrinal commitments are most important to Church members at a given time.

Within the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, hymnals and songbooks occupy a unique place as sources of doctrine and theology. The Church has a relatively small body of truly official doctrine, augmented by a large body of authoritative pronouncements accorded varying doctrinal weight. Precariously balanced between these two poles is an enormous body of folk doctrine and unofficial exegesis. It has been argued that the Church's emphasis on continuing revelation renders it essentially "atheological," so that every member, besides being a missionary, is under some obligation to be a theologian.⁴ Hymns and Primary songs provide a useful common basis for this type of lay theologizing, and are accorded quasi-doctrinal status. Elder Dallin H. Oaks made this connection explicit in a 1994 general conference talk: "The singing of hymns is one of the best ways to learn the doctrine of the restored gospel."⁵ Thus, hymns and chil-

2. Hugh D. McKellar, *The Hymn* 40, no. 4 (October 1989): 37-38.

3. No author, *Primary History 1988-1994*, typescript, 18, Archives, Family and Church History Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter LDS Church Archives).

4. See, for instance, Mark Leone, *Roots of Modern Mormonism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 171-72.

5. Dallin H. Oaks, "Worship through Music," *Ensign*, November 1994, 9.

dren's songs published with the imprimatur of the Church bridge the gap between official Mormondom and lived Mormonism.⁶

The Primary songbooks also represent a specific, little-studied aspect of women's experience in the Church. If we hope to develop an historical understanding of the intellectual contributions women have made to the Church, we will have to look at unconventional sources like the Primary songbooks, because women have often been too busy with traditional "woman's work" to participate in scholarly discourse and, furthermore, because they are excluded from some avenues of theological contributions since they are not ordained to priesthood office. While women's deep *feelings* about the Church have been evident from their devotion and dedication to doing the work of the Church, it has been harder to discover what and how they have *thought* about the Church and the gospel. Primary songs, both those written by LDS women and those composed by others but selected by officers of the Primary for inclusion in the songbooks can, with some probing, yield insight about women's intellectual life in the Church. Primary has been—from its beginning until the Church correlation movement from the late 1960s on—an almost exclusively female province: women have been the teachers, the writers and editors of instructional materials, and the architects of the Primary song books. Although the 1951, 1979, and 1985 songbooks were prepared in conjunction with the Church Music Committee, the Primary General Presidency, and members of the Primary general board were still heavily involved in the selection and, in many cases, the composition of the songs included.⁷ Women are dramatically overrepresented as composers of songs in the Primary songbook as compared with the hymnal, and women have usually had the responsibility for teaching the songs to children in weekly

6. My terms "official Mormondom" and "lived Mormonism" follow Gary Shepherd's and Gordon Shepherd's "official" and "common religion," as they use the terms: "Everywhere and always common religion is the shadow of official religion. It is the personalized, practical side of religion as interpreted and implemented by individual believers in their everyday lives. . . . If the Mormons are prone to displays of the common religion, they are also closely supervised by and typically submissive to the directives of the official religion." *A Kingdom Transformed: Themes in the Development of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1984), 11–12.

7. Primary general president Dwan J. Young and Virginia B. Cannon, in conversations with me, described this process. See also Vanja Y. Watkins, Oral

Primary meetings. LDS women contributed more than 50 percent of the songs in the 1989 Primary songbook, compared to just 16 percent of the hymns in the 1985 hymnal. In the selection of songs for inclusion in Primary songbooks, we can discover the doctrinal points that have seemed most salient to Mormon women; and in their composition of Primary songs, we have an invaluable record of their efforts to poetically articulate and explicate their theological understandings.

In this essay, I will use evidence from the Primary songbooks to explore women's and children's roles in changing doctrinal understandings and cultural practices throughout the twentieth century. These changes are illuminated by reference to the theoretical framework outlined by Armand Mauss in *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994). Mauss reads the history of the Church in the twentieth century in terms of cyclical movement between "assimilation"—the Saints' attempt to gain acceptance in the wider American culture and "retrenchment"—a defensive emphasis on Latter-day Saint uniqueness and separateness from "the world." The Primary songbooks offer an interesting case study in the effects of the cycles of retrenchment and assimilation Mauss describes, while also offering evidence which seems not to fit this framework, at least not in an uncomplicated way. I focus on three key topics: the adoption and gradual rejection of progressive educational theories in the Primary, the articulation of the principle of reverence in response to the felt incursions of the "acids of modernity"⁸ into Latter-day Saint life, and finally the transformation and "spiritualization" of millenarian and utopian expectations about the kingdom of God. First, however, I will briefly summarize the publication history of the songbooks.

Publication History

In 1878, the Primary Mutual Improvement Association⁹ for Latter-day Saint children was founded. Aurelia Spencer Rogers, the mother of twelve children, five of whom died in childhood, in Farmington, Utah, and Eliza R. Snow, a plural wife of Brigham Young and president of the re-

History, interviewed by Gordon Irving, January 31 and February 7, 1986, James H. Moyle Oral History Program, LDS Church Archives.

8. Walter Lippman, *A Prelude to Morals* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), 178.

9. The Church's organization for children has been variously called the

vitalized Relief Society, had discussed their concern about the children of Deseret and determined to establish an organization that would provide religious and civic instruction for them. At first, the organization was intended exclusively for boys; however, Rogers soon decided that "singing was necessary" and that girls' presence would help the singing. So both boys and girls were gathered for weekly instruction in Farmington beginning in August 1878.¹⁰ A further aid to singing was the first compilation of songs for use in the Primary organization, collected by Eliza R. Snow and published in 1880.¹¹ It was a tiny (approximately 3"x4") book, lengthily titled *Hymns and Songs, Selected from Various Authors, for the Primary Associations of the Children of Zion*, by Eliza R. Snow (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1880). It contained 121 texts, divided into "Hymns" and "Songs." In the same year, the Juvenile Instructor office issued the *Tune Book for the Primary Associations of the Children of Zion*, also collected by Eliza R. Snow, which contained about forty pages of songs with words and music, as well as suggestions for other texts which could be paired with the given tunes. This collection was reprinted in 1888. The first songbook prepared by a Primary General Board, *The Primary Songbook*, was pub-

Children's Primary, the Primary Association, the Primary Associations of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and simply Primary. Early documents suggest varying local usages, sometimes referring to a local ward Primary, but to the "Primary Association" of the Church at the general level. Others use "Primary Associations" to denote the general organization. Moreover, the songbook titles do not consistently use the organization's official title. The songbook currently used in Primary, for instance, contains no reference to "Primary" in its publication information or introduction, and is called *Children's Songbook of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. To avoid confusion, I have therefore used "Primary" to refer to the organization throughout this paper and used the titles of the songbooks as printed. For a brief history of the Primary, see Naomi Shumway, "Primary," *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1992), 1146-50.

10. Carol Cornwall Madsen and Susan Staker Oman, *Sisters and Little Saints: One Hundred Years of Primary* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 5-7.

11. In this section, I rely extensively on Virginia B. Cannon's excellent history, published as "Appendix: A Brief History of Children's Music in the Church," *Our Children's Songs: Teaching the Gospel with the Children's Songbook* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 357-65.

lished in 1905.¹² It was a larger book (about 5"x8") and contained ninety-three songs with text and music printed together. This book was reprinted several times, at least in 1907, 1909, and 1912, although it is difficult to determine the precise number of reprintings.¹³ In 1920, a significant revision appeared called *The Primary Song Book, including Marches and Voluntaries*. This book was also reprinted several times, with minor editorial changes and the occasional addition of several new songs in the 1930 edition.

The next significant new edition was the 1939 songbook, published as *The Primary Songbook, including Marches and Voluntaries*. It was reprinted with minor changes in type font and indexes in 1946 and 1948. In 1951, *The Children Sing* was compiled, combining songs from the Primary song books and the Deseret Sunday School Union Songbooks into a single volume, with songs "selected to correlate with the lessons taught in the Primary Association and the Junior Sunday School and to provide valuable experiences in the building of complete personalities through music, verse, religious teachings and social activities."¹⁴

The first Primary songbook published after the 1960-61 formation of the Correlation Committees was *Sing with Me*, published in 1969, "under the direction of the First Presidency by a joint committee from the Deseret Sunday School and Primary Association general boards, in coop-

12. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *The Primary Songbook* (Salt Lake City, General Board of Primary Associations of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1905).

13. The songbooks were printed by different presses, often in different versions. Orson F. Whitney's personal copy of *The Primary Songbook*, printed in 1912 and preserved in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Lee Library, Brigham Young University, was in a deluxe leather binding. At least two different colors of cloth binding are also available, with subtly different typesetting styles. The contents seemed identical with the same number of songs in the same order. Similar variations exist with many of the printings, and this study was further limited by the limited holdings of various libraries. Though it is beyond the scope of this essay, a serious attempt to determine precise dates of publication, circulation statistics, etc., would yield useful insights into how widely known these songs were.

14. Preface to *The Children Sing* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1951). Another potentially fruitful area of further study would be a comparison of the early Primary songbooks with the many Sunday School songbooks published in the first decades of the twentieth century.

eration with the General Music Committee."¹⁵ *Sing with Me* seems also to have been the first songbook prepared with significant input from outlying Primaries, given through a survey conducted in 1967 to determine children's favorite songs. A general call for new compositions was also issued through the *Church News*, which yielded hundreds of submissions of original songs from throughout the Church. The 1989 *Children's Songbook* was produced by similar committees (with the exception of the Sunday School board members), with surveys conducted to determine children's favorite songs, as well as those most frequently sung, and those which were most familiar to the children. Although the Primary did not issue a general request for songs, several songs were commissioned on topics which were not addressed by existing numbers.¹⁶

This brief history suggests three important contextual points for this essay. First, significant changes in content and format of the Primary songbook have tended to occur every fifteen to twenty years. Second, the Primary songbooks have become steadily bigger, both physically and in terms of the number of songs they contain. Despite the strong drive throughout the latter half of the century to simplify and reduce the size of Church-published materials, the 1989 *Children's Songbook* is a large (8½x11") book with four-color illustrations, containing 255 songs, more than double the number in Eliza R. Snow's first compilation. Third, many of the changes in our view of children are clearly demonstrated by the physical aspects of the book. The current songbook's style is characterized by soft and sentimentalized illustrations of children and of members of the Godhead in pastels, while the earliest children's songbooks were essentially small versions of grown-up hymnals. In short, we now have a book that is clearly intended for young children.¹⁷

15. Cannon, "Our Children's Songs," 359.

16. *Ibid.*, 360.

17. One could argue that the adult hymnal, and perhaps even most Church curricular materials have undergone a similar sentimentalization and softening. Many of the more rousing and martial hymns from older hymnals have been removed over the century, and the new hymns that have been added have tended to be both more sedate musically and more sentimental in the tone of their texts (e.g., "Because I Have Been Given Much," "Each Life that Touches Ours for Good," etc.). Warrick Kear, "The LDS Sound World and Global Mormonism,"

**"O Come, My Little Playmates All":
Primary and Progressive Education**

O come, my little playmates all,
And you can learn the way,
The Gospel came upon the earth
In this the latter-day.
O, I can't stay away,
O, I can't stay away,
I love my little meetings so,
I cannot stay away.¹⁸

This song, included in Eliza R. Snow's 1880 compilation of songs for the Primary, hints at the combination of childish fun and serious gospel learning that characterized the Primary's early decades. However, the proper ratio of play and instruction was not arrived at immediately or without difficulty. Indeed, questions over the nature of the "little meetings" and their appropriate place in the lives of the Saints took decades to work out and were intricately bound up in the Saints' first struggles with assimilation. Primary was organized just as a serious debate about the correct methods of educating young Latter-day Saints began in earnest, intensifying as it became wrapped up in the conflicts over separation of church and state that marked the debate over statehood for Utah. Primary, Sunday School, and the weekday Religion Classes (1890–1929) all were attempts to respond to perceived threats of assimilation that came with statehood.

In *The Angel and the Beehive*, Armand Mauss vividly characterizes the situation of the Church in the decade just following the establishment of Primary: "As this [twentieth] century began, Mormons faced the predicament of disrepute to an extreme degree. The relative isolation of Utah during the entire second half of the nineteenth century had made possible the unrestrained development of [the charismatic element of Mor-

Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought, 34, nos. 3/4 (Fall–Winter 2001): 79–93, labels these changes the "feminization" of LDS music and helpfully situates them in the context of the Church's worldwide growth.

18. "Tis Meeting Day," *Hymns and Songs*, no. 33.

monism]. The Mormons, under their own prophetic inspiration and leadership, had self-consciously cultivated institutions, both religious and secular, that were uniquely their own."¹⁹

These institutions were perceived by non-Mormon Americans as simply too threatening to be tolerated. Thus, "as a condition for obtaining Utah statehood, and for enjoying peace and national toleration more generally, the Mormons were required to give up polygamy, theocracy, collectivist economic experiments, and any other flagrantly un-American institutions, and thus to abandon the path of charismatic peculiarity, except at the relatively abstract level of theology."²⁰

The Mormons were also forced to cede control of the public schools. The Edmunds-Tucker Act, which had as its primary aim forcing the abandonment of the practice of polygamy, also contained a provision requiring the appointment of the Territorial Superintendent of Schools by the Territorial Supreme Court, rather than by election as had been the previous practice.²¹ The predictable effect of this provision was that a non-Mormon was appointed, and Mormons gradually lost control over public education in the Territory. Church leaders feared that the rising generation of Saints would grow up ignorant of their religion. In an 1888 circular letter to stake presidents, Wilford Woodruff, then Church president, wrote: "We feel that the time has arrived when the proper education of our children should be taken in hand by us as a people. Religious training is practically excluded from the District Schools. The perusal of books that we value as divine records is forbidden. Our children, if left to the training they receive in these schools, will grow up entirely ignorant of those principles of salvation for which the Latter-day Saints have made so many sacrifices. To permit this condition of things to exist among us would be criminal."²²

So grave were Church leaders' concerns that they began a twenty-year project of creating a system of separate, Church-sponsored

19. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive*, 21.

20. *Ibid.*, 21-22.

21. Edmunds-Tucker Act, Section 25, cited in John D. Monnett Jr., *The Mormon Church and Its Private School System in Utah: The Emergence of the Academies, 1880-1892* (Ph.D. diss., University of Utah Department of Educational Studies, 1984), 88, note 10.

22. Quoted in *ibid.*, Appendix, 222.

academies. Sunday School took on new importance, and separate weekday Religion Classes were instituted in 1890, first taught in the public school buildings after school hours and later moved to private homes and nearby Church meetinghouses. While Sunday School, Primary, and Religion Classes all aimed at religious instruction, as early as 1900 the Primary had differentiated itself markedly from the other two organizations in its methods of instruction. Primary became a major locus of assimilation, as it incorporated educational theories from what would come to be called the "progressive" movement in American education, which held that children were natural learners, that purposeful activity was the most effective means of communicating ideas to young minds, and that children's needs should be honored by their teachers. Despite concerns about the secular content of public education, the newest methods developed for public education were welcomed in Utah; and many prominent American educators gave well-attended and enthusiastically received public lectures in Salt Lake City and Provo. Colonel Francis W. Parker lectured at Brigham Young Academy in 1892; Harvard President Charles W. Eliot spoke in Salt Lake City during the same year; G. Stanley Hall gave a series of lectures in 1897; and in 1901, John Dewey delivered a series of ten lectures at Brigham Young Academy summer school.

In no area were these educators' ideas more welcomed than in the area of kindergarten and early childhood education. The University of Utah and Brigham Young Academy were among the first institutions to sponsor kindergarten training schools. An 1892 editorial in the *Young Woman's Journal* describes a class in the kindergarten department: "It is a lovely sight to see the tiny tots marching and singing with measured steps and folded arms, or sitting at play cutting papers, molding in clay, planting gardens or other diversions. Some ask what is the utility of having children play all the time; but if mothers once discover by experience the growth of discipline, gentleness and the awakening of the perceptive facilities engendered by this course of training they are ever after its firm supporters."²³

One of the earliest proponents of kindergarten and progressive methods for educating young children was Camilla Clara Mieth Cobb, who served for many years as a member of the Primary General Board and

23. Allan Dean Payne, "The Mormon Response to Early Progressive Education, 1892-1920" (Ph.D. diss., University of Utah, 1977), 107.

was a close friend of Louie Felt and May Anderson (the first and second Primary general presidents). Cobb was a German immigrant from a family of educators. Her oldest sister, Anna, married Karl G. Maeser, who became the superintendent of the Mormon academies and second president of Brigham Young Academy.²⁴ Cobb, like her brother-in-law, was influenced by the ideas of a prominent German educational reformer, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi. Among the fundamental educational principles that Maeser and Cobb adapted from Pestalozzi to fit a Mormon context were the concepts that school and life should be connected, that scholastic and domestic education are parts of the same whole, and that every pupil is a child of God with individual capacities that should be respected and nurtured.²⁵

After working with Maeser in the Fifteenth Ward schoolhouse and the Twentieth Ward Seminary, Cobb conducted her own school for a short time. Then John W. Young, a son of Brigham and Mary Ann Angel Young, asked her to start a kindergarten in Salt Lake City.²⁶ In 1874, she began teaching a kindergarten class in Brigham Young's schoolhouse.

Kindergartens quickly became popular and were the locus of Mormon-Gentile cooperation that was rare in turn-of-the-century Utah.²⁷ Cobb's kindergarten closed in 1876, but the second one opened in the basement of the Presbyterian Church in 1883.²⁸ In 1884, the Jewish synagogue in Salt Lake City also opened a kindergarten. Supporters of these kindergartens formed the Salt Lake Kindergarten Association in 1893. This group introduced a bill to the territorial legislature to incorporate kindergartens into public schools. Soon after the bill passed, several members of the Salt Lake Kindergarten Association formed a new group called the Free Kindergarten Association, whose purpose was to secure funding for the new kindergartens. In September 1894, this association persuaded Alice Chapin, a gradu-

24. Catherine Britsch, *Camilla Cobb: Founder of the Kindergarten in Utah* (Ed.D. diss., Brigham Young University, Dept. of Educational Leadership and Foundations, 1997), 81.

25. *Ibid.*, 86-87.

26. *Ibid.*, 100.

27. For a detailed study of the tensions surrounding public education in Utah, see Frederick S. Buchanan, *Culture Clash and Accommodation: Public Schooling in Salt Lake City 1887-1994* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), esp. chap. 1.

28. Britsch, *Camilla Cobb*, 139.

ate of the Boston Training School and an associate of Elizabeth Peabody, to stay in Salt Lake City after she had made what was to have been a brief stop en route from California to the East Coast. Louie Felt and May Anderson participated in Chapin's series of classes on kindergarten teaching and later operated their own kindergarten for several years.²⁹

I have detailed these examples because they demonstrate an important point in considering trends or movements within the Church: Such changes tend to arise from various and diffuse sources, often hastened by the initiative of one or a few members who are positioned to effect change. The enthusiastic embrace of ideas from the progressive movement in American education and their application in the Primary did not stem from any deliberate attempt at assimilation, but rather from the particular experiences as educators that a few influential women brought to their service in the Primary.³⁰

The songbooks published during Felt's (1880–1925) and Anderson's (1925–39) long tenure as general presidents of the Primary reflect

29. Ibid., 143.

30. A more recent example of this kind of change motivated by the efforts of a few people was the 1978 publication of *Activity Songs for Children*. *The Children Sing* and *Sing with Me* had virtually no activity or "fun" songs, since they were to be used in Sunday School as well as Primary. In 1978, however, the Church published *Activity Songs and Verses* to be used in Primary. Like some of the earliest publications of the Primary, this publication was largely motivated by the interest and enthusiasm of a single Primary General Board member, Mary Jolley, who was studying education at the University of Utah. According to Vanja Watkins, a long-time board member and composer of several Primary songs, Jolley "was working with Elliott Landau, who was a very open-minded supporter of children's rights. It was he who said 'Why are children forced to fold their arms when they walk? When they do that, they're not well balanced. They'll fall over. I mean, we do this for the sake of reverence, but let's forgo some of these things and think of the child. Let him walk with his hands free so he doesn't fall over.'" Landau also urged: "Let us have some activity songs. Children have been sitting there for a long time. They need to move. That's how they get their attention back to what they should really be listening to." So knowing that that was the latest thinking in educational circles, we felt that we could go ahead, as long as the songs were not rambunctious or irreverent in any way." Watkins, *Oral History*, 30. Again, the ideas and experience of a few individuals seem to have motivated the inclusion of these songs, rather than a considered decision to adopt particular educational philosophies or methodologies.

progressive ideals and contain many simple songs about things that would be within the realm of children's everyday experience. They contain fewer songs with abstract theological content, and fewer songs with explicitly "Mormon" content than Eliza R. Snow's compilations. All but three of the twenty-seven songs by Eliza R. Snow in the 1880 and 1888 songbooks disappeared from the 1905 songbook. Six patriotic songs were added, as well as one celebrating Utah's statehood. The 1920 and 1930 Primary songbooks each added at least one more patriotic song, a trend which continued until the 1951 printing of *The Children Sing*. In these years, then, it seems clear that Primary was instrumental in, and representative of, the remarkably rapid assimilation of the littlest Saints into broader American culture. The songs sung by Mormon children would have marked them as progressively educated Americans, rather than as "The Primary Army" of Eliza R. Snow's early songbooks.

"Quietly, Reverently": Correlating Children's Behavior

Besides marking the first decrease in the number of patriotic songs, the 1951 songbook, *The Children Sing*, reflected major changes within the Church, most importantly the beginnings of streamlining and systematizing Church publications that would eventually come to be known as correlation and of the attendant efforts to bring the auxiliary organizations firmly under the umbrella of priesthood direction. The progressive educational ideas that had been so important to Louie Felt and May Anderson were, if not in disfavor, at least no longer viewed as important. Anderson, the strongest proponent of progressive ideas about children, had not been active in Primary work for a decade, and many of the general board members with training and experience in "secular" education were released in 1951 when LaVern Watts Parmley became the Primary general president. This same year also saw the publication of *The Children Sing*.

While changes had been occurring gradually during the administrations of May Hinckley (1940-43) and Adele Cannon Howells (1943-51), Parmley accelerated the changes and forcefully gave new direction to the organization. Contributing to the changes was a widespread feeling among Primary workers that the activities had become excessive, a change in the funding of Primaries from their own fundraising activities to ward budgets, and vastly increased alternative recreational opportunities for children—radio, Walt Disney movies, a boom in publi-

cation of children's books. These forces fueled the movement of Primary toward specializing in "spiritual" education, rather than trying to meet the broader developmental needs of children.³¹

This new emphasis on specifically religious training included a return to the Primary's early concern with children's behavior. The contents of the Primary songbooks show how concerns about proper behavior were gradually incorporated into religious understanding, as well as being informed by ideas from secular educational theory. Early Primary leaders, adapting progressive educational principles, had tried to encourage proper behavior by providing wholesome activities and good examples, without specifically teaching that quiet, respectful behavior was a religious duty. By around the middle of the twentieth century, the influence of the progressive movement had receded, and decorous behavior began to be called "reverence." In the last few decades of the century, "reverence" became a more thoroughly articulated principle, grounded in scriptural interpretations and statements from latter-day prophets.

It was Aurelia Rogers's concern about children's (especially boys') behavior which had provided the impetus for establishing the Primary in the first place. Rogers wrote: "It may seem strange that in a community calling themselves Latter-day Saints, children should be allowed to indulge in anything approaching to rowdiness. But it must be remembered that the age in which we live is one that tends to carelessness in the extreme, not only in regard to religion, but also morality."³²

Characterizing contemporary times as extreme "carelessness" is repeated at various crisis points as the Saints have confronted modernity in different forms. One of the ways that Saints of the late twentieth century coped with modernity was articulating a doctrine of reverence. And while it has generally been taught that true reverence must be inculcated at home, Primary seems to have been as necessary as ever to correct lapses in parents' attention to their duties.

For a member of the Church who grew up, as I did, in the 1970s, it is startling to discover that there were no songs about reverence in any Primary songbooks published before the middle of the twentieth cen-

31. Madsen and Oman, *Sisters and Little Saints*, 101-2.

32. Aurelia Spencer Rogers, *Life Sketches of Orson Spencer and Others, and History of Primary Work* (1898; reprinted, Grantsville, Utah: LDS Archive Publishers, 1998), 206.

tury.³³ None of the Primary songs published between 1905 and 1946 contain the word "reverence." Moreover, very few songs in these earlier books explicitly encourage quiet behavior. This absence of controlling children's physical movements and speech was not, apparently, due to the naturally subdued behavior of earlier generations. Indeed, many early Primary leaders complained mightily about the unruliness of their young charges. Historians Carol Cornwall Madsen and Susan Staker Oman quote a notation in the minutes of Salt Lake City's Seventeenth Ward Primary in 1880 when the president "decided that maintaining order and interest was too much for the presidency, and 'if the mothers could not take an interest in it, she felt it too much of a task, and wished to resign the position.' She was released and both of her counselors resigned within a month."³⁴

The 1905, 1920, and 1930 books include just one song which mentions the problem:

What can little bodies do
Like us little lispers,
Full of life and mischief too
And prone to noisy whispers?

The song, rather than admonishing the "little lispers" to be reverent, encourages them to

... come to school
And, with merry voices,
Sing about the golden rule,

33. The *Deseret Sunday School Song Books* contain two instances of the word "reverence": (1) Ebenezer Beesley's "Sunday School Opening Hymn": "With hearts prepared / With one accord / Our eyes with rev'rence close, / In prayer we come before the Lord" (1903 ed., 169) and (2) Louisa L. Greene-Richards's [sic]: "Lift, lift the voice in reverence meet / The heart in sacramental praise." "Hush! Be Every Sound Subdued," (1908 ed., 141). Both of these uses are consistent with typical usage of the word before midcentury, when it was reserved for ordinances or priesthood.

34. Madsen and Oman, *Sisters and Little Saints*, 24.

Till every heart rejoices.³⁵

This injunction is in keeping with the idea, borrowed from the progressive movement, that providing purposeful activity was the best way to control children's behavior.

Even *The Children Sing*, published in 1951, contains only six songs explicitly intended to promote reverent behavior. "Reverence" suggests that being quiet is a way to demonstrate gratitude: "Today, dear Lord, I'll try to show how quiet I can be, / To thank thee for the many things that thou hast given me." "This Is God's House" reminds children that God is present during their gatherings. Both songs were borrowed from a Protestant children's songbook.³⁶ In *The Children Sing*, these two songs appear in the section called "The Children Sing of Strength of Character," accompanied by the note:

Children like to listen to quiet music. Soft low sounds are restful. Usually loud music excites noisy behavior. Quiet times after the story, when waiting for a turn, or putting away materials, and before going home, afford relief for children. When little people appreciate the need for their being still, they will respond to quiet music. Carefully selected music can be skillfully used to induce the kinds of relaxation and quiet movement that are so essential to their emotional development.³⁷

The author of the note acknowledges that quiet might be a necessary component of an adult agenda but gives primacy to the children's needs. These instructions to teachers make no appeal to a doctrine or principle of reverence as the justification for encouraging quiet; instead, quiet behavior aids the children's "emotional development." The major focus is still on physical activity, rather than on children's attitude or any underlying spiritual content of stillness and quiet behavior.

Even as late as 1967, as advisor to the Primary, Gordon B. Hinckley, then an apostle, praised efforts focused on the physical, observable aspects of reverence, rather than on children's attitudes or feelings: "I am confident that because of your effort we are coming to have increased rev-

35. J. L. Townshend, "Little Lispers," *The Primary Song Book*, no. 80.

36. Frances Weld Danielson and Grace Wilbur Conant, *Songs for Little People* (Boston: Pilgrim Press, ca. 1915); Ruth H. Chadwick, "Reverence," and L. M. Ogilvie, "This Is God's House," *The Children Sing*, nos. 81, 82.

37. *The Children Sing*, unpaginated note following nos. 81 and 82.

erence in our church buildings. The simple song of reverence, the quiet example of officers and teachers, the orderly planning of meetings have slowly but wondrously borne good fruit. It was not perceptible as it happened, but as I have looked across fifty years from the time I first attended Primary until now, I note a difference almost miraculous. You have seen the need and accomplished a remarkable thing."³⁸

The "Reverence Programs" published during Parmley's administration commissioned many songs on the topic. It is easy to observe a gradual progression from an emphasis on behavior to a more subtle definition of reverence, including feelings of respect and awe in the presence of God or his spirit. Some of these songs were collected in *Sing with Me*, published by Deseret Book in 1969, toward the end of Parmley's presidency. The index lists eight songs on reverence.³⁹ Six contain the word "quiet." Several suggest that being quiet or reverent is a way to show gratitude to Heavenly Father. Probably the best known of these songs, "Reverently, Quietly," offers a nuanced understanding of reverence:

Reverently, quietly,
Lovingly we think of thee.
Reverently, quietly,
Softly sing our melody.
Reverently, quietly,
Humbly now we pray.
Let thy Holy Spirit dwell
In our hearts today.⁴⁰

Here quietness is a prelude to thinking lovingly of God, praying humbly, and feeling the Holy Spirit. This understanding is amplified in another nineteen songs, listed in the index under the heading "Prayer" and grouped in a section titled "Prayer Songs." For example:

38. Quoted in Madsen and Oman, *Sisters and Little Saints*, 159–60.

39. "Father, We Will Quiet Be," A-15; "Father, I Will Reverent Be," B-64; "Gladly Meeting, Kindly Greeting," B-80; "Hear Us, Heavenly Father," B-32; "I Will Try to Be Reverent," A-1; "Our Chapel Is a Sacred Place," A-3; "Quiet Song," B-27; "Reverently, Quietly," A-9; in Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Sing with Me: Songs for Children* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1969).

40. *Ibid.*, A-9.

I love my Heav'nly Father
And I will try to be
Reverent when I'm in His house.
Then he'll be near to me.⁴¹

Father, we will quiet be,
While we listen now to thee,
As we raise our heads we'll sing,
"Thank thee, Lord for everything."⁴²

Our chapel is a sacred place,
We enter quietly.
Dear Father, while we sing and pray
Our thoughts will be of thee.⁴³

These texts describe both the mechanics of reverent behavior and the appropriate spiritual understanding. Presumably younger children would understand the physical injunction to sit quietly, while older children would begin to understand the subtleties of a reverent attitude. However, a thoroughly articulated principle of reverence still does not appear in *Sing with Me*; it is not always clear, for instance, whether quiet behavior is itself equivalent to reverence, or whether quiet, respectful behavior is owed to the chapel itself, or, if so, whether it is required only during meetings when God's presence is invoked. The now dominant understanding that quiet behavior is a physical manifestation of an inward state called "reverence" would take several years to be fully developed and widely adopted.

In 1976, President Spencer W. Kimball wrote a pamphlet entitled "We Should Be a Reverent People," which generalized the concept of reverence articulated in the Primary reverence programs to the entire Church and offered scriptural undergirding for the principle. Printed in large type on the inside front cover is: "Ye shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord" (Lev. 19:30). President Kimball also alluded to Doctrine and Covenants 109 in the body of the pamphlet, asserting that meetinghouses ought to be accorded the same respect as tem-

41. Wilma Bunker "I Will Try to Be Reverent," *Sing with Me*, A-1.

42. Elizabeth Shields, "Father, We Will Quiet Be," *ibid.*, A-15.

43. Ruth H. Chadwick, "Reverence," *ibid.*, A-3.

ples: "In yet another area of extreme importance, the Lord has directed by modern revelation that we should have proper reverence for his holy house. . . . In a very real sense, what is said of the sacred temples of the Church is applicable to every 'house of the Lord,' whether it be a meeting-house or any place where the Saints worship, or, in fact, any Latter-day Saint home."⁴⁴

Other sections of the pamphlet are headed: "The Meaning and Importance of Reverence," "Reverence for God," "Reverence for the Name of Deity," "Reverence for the House of the Lord," "Reverence Involves Happiness," "Reverence and the Home," and "Reverence at Church." While many of these headings contain practical advice about behavior, in "The Meaning and Importance of Reverence," reverence is described "as 'a feeling or attitude of deep respect, love, and awe, as for something sacred.' To describe it as devotion to God is another way to express the meaning of reverence. Many of our leaders have expressed regard for reverence as one of the highest qualities of the soul, indicating it involves true faith in God and in his righteousness, high culture, and a love for the finer things in life."⁴⁵

This pamphlet appears to be both the earliest and the most complete attempt to ground prescriptions for appropriate behavior in Church meetings in doctrinal concepts. It was frequently cited in the following decades in general conference addresses and other public admonitions to reverence. Although this pamphlet offers a systematic treatment of the topic of reverence intended for a general Church audience—not just for Primary—more than half of its text consists of suggestions to parents about how to improve their children's behavior.

At least through the 1970s, this emphasis on children's behavior appears in almost all sermons and articles about reverence, and it is repeated often. Just a few months after the publication of the Kimball pamphlet, the First Presidency message in the October 1976 *Ensign*, written by Marion G. Romney, the second counselor, was titled simply "Rever-

44. Spencer W. Kimball, *We Should Be a Reverent People* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1976), 2.

45. *Ibid.*, 1. The internal quotation is unattributed in the original.

ence.”⁴⁶ Romney asserted that “reverence is the soul of true religion,” and further defined reverence as “worshipful adoration coupled with a respectful behavior toward [God] and all that pertains to him.” Components of this respectful behavior include “order . . . cleanliness of person, of apparel, of speech, of action, and of thought and impulse . . . courtesy, respect for one another, and kindred virtues.” As examples of this far-reaching virtue, Romney cited Jesus’s veneration of the Father in the Lord’s Prayer and reported: “It is said of President Wilford Woodruff that while the sacrament was being passed, his lips could be observed in silent motion as he repeated to himself over and over again, ‘I do remember thee, I do remember thee.’”⁴⁷ Up to this point, Romney’s message fits with early twentieth-century uses of “reverence.” It most often appeared in conjunction with the names of Deity, ordinances, priesthood, or priesthood office. However, Romney continues with what seems to be a new understanding of the term:

Some time ago, a custodian of a recently dedicated meetinghouse was proudly showing me through it. When we came to the rest room, I commented on its cleanliness. Whereupon, he told me that on the day of dedication he had come to the rest room and found the floor littered with paper towels. As he stood surveying the situation, the President of the Church entered and immediately began to pick up the towels. “Imagine my embarrassment,” he said; then he added, “It will never be disorderly again.”⁴⁸

The equation of disorder with irreverence and the idea that the physical components of “God’s house” require reverence appear only in the latter half of the twentieth century. Moreover, there is still some confusion about whether “reverence” is primarily a matter of outward observance or of inward attitude. This confusion becomes acute when Romney describes reverence among children: “Home training or lack of it is strikingly apparent in the conduct of children. In some homes when the children are called to breakfast, from the youngest to the eldest, they come in with their faces washed, their hair combed, ready for prayer. When after

46. Marion G. Romney, “Reverence,” *Ensign*, October 1976, 2.

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Ibid.*

prayer they take their seats at the table for breakfast, they respectfully wait for the blessing to be asked."⁴⁹

Here not only behavior, but even proper grooming, becomes evidence of "reverence." Largely a doctrine of the twentieth century, this particular interpretation of reverence had a particular application to children and to Primary meetings. Although respect and awe have long been regarded as the proper attitudes toward God, the word "reverence" began to appear frequently in general Church rhetoric only in the 1970s, about a decade after the concept becomes prominent in Primary materials, especially Primary songs.

It is significant that this rhetoric about children's behavior intensified at precisely the point when the Church faced another crisis in its ongoing struggle with assimilation. Just as Aurelia Spencer Rogers and her colleagues undertook to teach the children proper deportment and behavior at a time when the Saints were sufficiently well established and prosperous to begin buying and enjoying "worldly" goods and entertainments, the rhetoric of "reverence" emerged at a time when the Church had shaken off the reputation of being aberrant, become fairly well established in the United States, and was experiencing impressive international growth. In short, it was at this moment that the Church faced what Armand Mauss has called "the predicament of respectability,"⁵⁰ as well as widely increasing prosperity, which allowed more indulgence in the luxuries of "Babylon." Calls for reverence thus clearly functioned as a means of retrenchment, separating the Saints from the corrupting influences of an irreverent modern world. As Romney's breakfast table illustration shows, reverence is a nostalgic idea, recalling a time when it did not seem remarkable for families to have time to gather for prayers around the breakfast table as well as the dinner table and when children were still generally expected to be seen rather than heard. It is not surprising that this rhetoric emerged at a point in the Church's history where contact with the outside world rapidly increased, when "modern" notions of streamlining, professionalizing, and bureaucratizing became the hallmarks of Church administration, and when a frightening "modern" American youth culture which seemingly despised all forms of authority and tradition emerged. Modernity, for all of the helpful ideas and technologies it

49. Ibid.

50. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive*, 5.

offered the growing Church, was a distinctly irreverent condition—faster, louder, and more democratic than an earlier era when the family order was more stable and the parents more firmly in charge of their children.

It was also predictable that the nostalgia for a more ordered age should be projected onto children. Children are potent symbols. When they are well-behaved, as when they are singing, they represent all that we hope for the future and much that we cherish about our past. When they are not well behaved, they remind us of all of our past failures and our deepest insecurities about what is to come. In a church as strongly connected to the past as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a church with astonishingly rich and detailed hopes for the future, it is inevitable that children should function as carriers of meaning, and perhaps be overburdened in moments of uncertainty.

From “In Our Lovely Deseret” to “I Am a Child of God”

A careful examination of the way children are used as symbols reveals much about changing LDS ideas and hopes for the future of the Church and even about its most important theological understandings. In this section, I compare songs from the beginning and the end of the twentieth century to identify shifts in understanding and emphasis about home and family life, the nature of the kingdom of God, and the proper relationship of human beings to Jesus Christ and God the Father. These songs demonstrate a general sentimentalization of home and family (and particularly of children) and the “spiritualization” of the Church during the twentieth century. By “spiritualization” I mean the gradual distancing of religious duties from secular ones and a growing emphasis on the blessings of love, joy, and faith over the immediate physical blessings that were so crucial to the Saints during their westward migration and the early years in Utah.

Comparing songs from the two ends of the century offers illuminating contrasts: Early songs generally presume that children can play a significant role immediately, while later songs suggest that childhood should be devoted to preparation for future contributions. Early songs give more weight to quotidian, physical contributions children should make, while later songs emphasize prayer, scripture study, and more abstract virtues. Early songs suggest that home is a good place to practice kindness and learn righteousness, but important work is to be done in the world, while later songs emphasize “love at home” as an end in itself. Early songs tend

to emphasize God's favor toward the Saints as a group, while individual relationships with God are highlighted by the later songs.

Sentimentalizing the Family

Songs about home and family are sparsely represented in the song books compiled by Eliza R. Snow during the 1880s. In part, this lack likely reflects her own childlessness and, hence, limited experience with the daily care of children and opportunities to observe their activity. The songs about families include a few heartwrenching (sometimes near-maudlin) songs about the deaths of children and songs intended for children's funerals, passing references to children receiving righteous training in the home, and some sentimental songs about "My Mother Dear" and "My Father Dear."⁵¹ However, much of this sentimentality is devoid of religious content, possessing only the tone of popular songs about hearth and home that were published for a general audience during that era.

The songbooks published between 1905 and 1939, in contrast, contain many songs about families as part of children's lives and daily activities. This increased emphasis is partly due to the idea, adapted from progressive educators, that children learn a great deal by simply participating in the daily life of a household and that their own daily activities are the best place from which to begin teaching abstract principles. Thus, these songbooks contain verses about adorable but mischievous baby siblings, the work done by mothers and fathers to keep a household running, and even very specific children's tasks like setting the table or washing the dishes.⁵² Songs like these reflect the new luxury for the Saints of being able to settle into relatively comfortable domesticity, put the struggle over polygamy and statehood behind them, and rely on an established, if still

51. Snow, *Hymns and Songs for Children*, 1880, 79, 81; also "Angel Whisperings to a Dying Child," 104; "My Own Home," 122.

52. Among these intriguing songs are "Tooth Bugs" and "The Scrubbing Song." "Little Brother Vegetable" promises: "Little Brother Vegetable, brings good health to you, / Cheeks grow red as any rosebud, / Eyes will sparkle, too. / If you want lots of vim and pep / For your work and play, / Better eat your vegetables / Ev'ry single day!" Maryhale Woolsey, *The Primary Song Book*, 151. Alice Baldwin authored another instructive verse: "In a right way or a wrong way / Washing dishes may be done, / And we'll teach you now the right way; / Listen, children, ev'ry one. / We will take the glasses first, / And put them in the shining foam, /

struggling, system of agriculture and industry to sustain them. Songs about children's deaths and numbers for their funerals could be replaced by songs exhorting the children to proper behavior in a somewhat less exaggerated and glorified sphere. These songs were not, for the most part, composed by Latter-day Saints; instead, they demonstrate the Saints' new concern with adopting the progressive, civilized ways of the nation they were finally beginning to belong to.⁵³

The virtues of gentility and refinement were explicitly understood as hallmarks of the kingdom of God which the children, along with their parents, were building. Orson F. Whitney and Edward P. Kimball's 1920 song, "The Upward Path," combines the martial rhythm of early songs like "Children of God" or "The Primary Army" (discussed below) with specific instructions to children about how they are to contribute to the work of the kingdom-building:

Children of the Saints of God,
Born and reared in truth's abode,
Shun the broad and downward road,
Pure and blameless be.
Climb the upward path of right.
Find in virtue your delight,
Put the tempting friends to flight

Then we rinse them, next we polish; / We can practice this at home." "Washing Dishes," *ibid.*, 110.

53. Klaus J. Hansen, *Mormonism and the American Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 88–89, suggests another, broadly American context for these songs. A growing number of antebellum Americans believed that "the state of their bodies and their souls was as much in their own hands as that of God. Hence, if someone became ill or died, it might well be his or her own fault. This, perhaps, is one reason why nineteenth-century Americans were less willing than their predecessors to accept the inevitability of death. . . . As more and more of the mysteries of nature were being unraveled in the nineteenth century and as this process increasingly captured the popular imagination, the idea began to grow that nature, both physical and human, could be controlled." The drive to teach children to keep house and be orderly and clean, according to this view, is not just a necessity in building a civilization in the wilderness, but also the manifestation of an emergent American belief that human beings could (and should) be partners with God in managing their destinies.

On to victory.
 Be to ev'ry creature kind,
 Patient, gentle and refined.
 Clean in body and in mind,
 Scorn iniquity.
 Firm with feet upon the rock.
 Fear no storm nor battle shock.
 Christ will shield His precious flock,
 Safe eternally.⁵⁴

Kindness, patience, gentleness, and cleanliness are virtues that LDS children could easily share with their Christian neighbors in the rest of the country. Such an emphasis is not surprising at a time when the Saints were concerned with fitting in, and did it so successfully that they seemed to "out-American" all other Americans."⁵⁵ What is noteworthy is that this assimilation begins, at least for children learning Primary songs, as a turn inward, away from the battle between the armies of Zion and its external foes and toward the building of a physical kingdom of God in Utah, then changes again from industry, cleanliness, and order, to more outward-directed virtues of kindness, patience, and gentleness. The physical virtues of gentility change gradually, almost imperceptibly, into the spiritualized and somewhat diluted virtue of "niceness," which characterized many expressions of Protestant Christianity at mid-twentieth century. The songbooks mark this gradual change, with the physical and spiritual existing side by side in slightly varying proportions until midcentury, when the balance tilts toward the spiritual side.

From Kingdom to Hearth and Back

By the second decade of the twentieth century, building a genteel society in Utah became invested with the same kind of religious significance that had been built on the imagery of conquering armies and great battles between good and evil in the decades when the Saints were struggling (both literally and figuratively) to find their place in America. "Children's

54. Orson F. Whitney and Edward P. Kimball, "The Upward Path," in *The Primary Songbook*, 80. Terminal punctuation added.

55. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive*, 22.

Song" from Eliza R. Snow's 1880 songbook describes the task of children in the following lines:

How bright have been parental hopes
About what we shall do,
In rolling on Jehovah's work,
And helping put it through.
We'll stem the tide of wickedness,
That deluges the world,
That Zion may appear in all its glory.
The Savior we'll prepare to meet
When He shall come again,
To wield the power of government,
And o'er the nations reign. . . .⁵⁶

By 1912, doing the Savior's work is described in much less exalted language:

Jesus bids us shine,
With a clear, pure light,
Like a little candle,
Burning in the night.
In this world is darkness,
So we must shine
You in your small corner,
And I in mine.⁵⁷

While the differences between the two visions are partly explained by the preoccupations and pedagogical views of the compilers of the two songbooks, they also reflect a real shift in expectations and beliefs about the kingdom of God. Between 1880 and 1912, not only the composers of Primary songs, but many of the Saints were abandoning ideas of Christ's imminent return "to wield the power of government" and beginning to view the kingdom of God as something which could be created in a "small corner," or, at least, in a single region of the United States. By the time of

56. Snow, *Hymns and Songs*, 76.

57. No author identified, "Jesus Bids Us Shine," *Primary Song Book*, 32.

the publication of the 1912 songbook, the transformation of expectations was complete: Saints had gone from expecting to reign with Christ over the world, to expecting to establish Zion in Utah, to working to create a spiritual kingdom of God that could exist in any corner of the world, regardless of the Saints' political situation.

The change in expectations about the kingdom of God is related to the changing representations of family life. While songs from the first part of the century invest doing one's duty and being kind to family members with religious significance as demonstrations of Christlike character and practice, the mere existence of a family did not yet elicit the kind of religious ardor which it would invoke just a few decades later in songs like "Love Is Spoken Here" (1989), which present family prayer and a righteous home life as ends in themselves, not just as training grounds for doing one's duty in the wider world:

Mine is a home where every hour
Is blessed by the strength of priesthood power.
With father and mother leading the way,
Teaching me how to trust and obey;
And the things they teach are crystal clear,
For love is spoken here.
I see my mother kneeling with our family each day
I hear the words she whispers,
As she bows her head to pray.
Her plea to the Father quiets all my fears
And I am thankful love is spoken here.⁵⁸

The shift toward an individual subject or to a nuclear family as the locus of God's favor is an important element of the gradual retreat from the idea that the establishment of "Zion" in the tops of the mountains would, more or less imminently, usher in the last days. It preserves the notion that Latter-day Saints are the favored people of the Lord by allowing God's favor to be evident in the home lives of individuals and families rather than in God's advancement of the Church. These songs also subtly distance God; He is addressed in "whispers" and blesses the child through

58. Janice Kapp Perry, "Love Is Spoken Here," *Children's Songbook*, 190.

“the strength of priesthood power,” rather than by “wield[ing] the power of government.”

More importantly from a doctrinal standpoint, the children’s hope is shifted from reigning with Christ during the millennium to being with Heavenly Father, presumably after the millennium. As historian Grant Underwood has noted:

Early Mormons basked in John’s promise of being made “kings and priests” to rule and reign with Christ during the thousand years. Toward the end of his life, Joseph Smith began stressing the eternal implications of this concept, but before that, the Saints projected all their enthusiasm and expectations for the afterlife on the millennium, rather than on the far-off future state. . . . Whereas modern Mormons anxiously await the day in which they will be crowned with an inheritance in the “Celestial Kingdom,” early Saints longed for their millennial inheritance.⁵⁹

Although Underwood (and others) note that this shift began during Joseph Smith’s lifetime, I would argue that, like all doctrinal adjustment in a church with multiple avenues of doctrinal transmission, it takes at least a generation, and often even longer, for new doctrinal understandings to take root. Evidence from the Primary songbooks suggests that pre- and post-millennialist understandings of the Saints’ role in Christ’s reign on the earth persisted into the twentieth century, with the post-millennialist understanding finally becoming dominant in the second and third decades of the century.

In her remarks during a celebration of the publication of the *Children’s Songbook* in 1989, Primary General President Michaelene Grassli expressed this new understanding of the kingdom of God:

As children share the universal language of music, they can experience great joy singing about the gospel. The children of the Church worldwide are unified through their primary music. Though skin colors differ, cultures and languages are many and varied, nevertheless, the songs of the children of Zion unify the children of the world. They gain great strength through this unity, knowing their brothers and sisters worldwide learn the same principles and the same songs. This commonality will continue to be a strengthening, unifying influence to them, as they grow older and spread through the world. Enemy soldiers on opposing battle lines whistle strains

59. Grant Underwood, “Mormons and the Millennial World-View,” in *Mormon Identities in Transition*, edited by Douglas Davies (London: Cassell, 1996), 139.

of "I Am a Child of God" across the foxholes because children of the Church worldwide know the same songs. Who can tell what good may be wrought in the hearts of men through music?⁶⁰

Grassli's remarks reflect a clear assumption that today's children will grow up in a world much like this one, an expectation that conditions of the world will continue much as they are, and the belief that individual Latter-day Saints' lives will be spiritually, rather than materially, transformed by understanding the gospel.

A favorite song from the 1989 *Children's Songbook* will serve as a final illustration of the changing views of the kingdom of God and children's roles in building it. Janice Kapp Perry's "We'll Bring the World His Truth: The Army of Helaman" was an instant "hit" upon publication and remains a favorite among Primary children:

We have been born, as Nephi of old,
To goodly parents who love the Lord,
We have been taught, and we understand
That we must do as the Lord commands.

Chorus:

We are as the army of Helaman,
We have been taught in our youth.
And we will be the Lord's missionaries
To bring the world his truth.

...

We know his plan, and we will prepare,
Increase our knowledge through study and prayer.
Daily we'll learn until we are called
To take the gospel to all the world.⁶¹

While Primary children love to sing this song, and sing it with great energy

60. Michaelene P. Grassli, Address, Celebration of *The Children's Songbook*, Salt Lake City, May 1989, my transcription of a videotape of the celebration, loaned to me courtesy of Virginia B. Cannon.

61. Janice Kapp Perry, "We'll Bring the World His Truth: The Army of Helaman," in Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Children's Songbook of*

and enthusiasm, the song ultimately leaves their energy frustrated; there is nothing heroic, or even active, for this "army" to do. Children who sang the martial songs from the earliest songbooks might easily have imagined themselves to be an army defending their homes and temple in Utah. Later songs, up until about the middle of the twentieth century, suggest very concrete and active ways that the children will contribute: going to school, being polite, eating vegetables, washing dishes, brushing their teeth—in short, the things that children could do to contribute to the growth of civilized and genteel society in Utah. By the end of the century, most of these songs about children's immediate and concrete duties are gone, replaced by more abstract, conceptual songs about the contributions children can make in the future "when [they] have grown a foot or two."⁶² These efforts are no longer to be directed inward, to the physical building up of a firmly located "Zion," but outward, to the spiritual kingdom scattered through the world. Unfortunately for children, the kinds of things required for building such a spiritual kingdom are largely outside the scope of children's everyday experience, so that their current contributions seem limited to being nice, doing their chores at home, and learning in preparation for their *future* service to the Church. On the one hand, this change feels like a loss. Children's activities are no longer defined as making real or significant contributions; on the other hand, children's future contributions are more thoroughly defined, and certainly more critical as part of the mission of the church, so in some ways children's status is increased.⁶³

All of these changes—from a collective to an individual subject, from practical family duties to the abstract joys of an eternal family, from a God who is immediately involved in day-to-day life to a God whose in-

the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 172–73.

62. Newel Kay Brown, "I Hope They Call Me on a Mission," *ibid.*, 169.

63. Another significant change in this song is the firm grounding in Book of Mormon stories—even though the Mormon genius for rewriting sacred history is fully evident here. Missionary work bears little resemblance to what the army of Helaman was up to. The number of references to the Book of Mormon has steadily increased throughout the century, and the 1989 *Songbook* incorporates the Book of Mormon more fully than any of the previous songbooks or even the current hymnal for adults.

fluence is felt more subtly—can be observed by comparing “In Our Lovely Deseret” with “I Am a Child of God.” The former seems to have been the anthem of the Primary Association for its first few decades. It was performed at ceremonial occasions, during birthday tributes to Aurelia Rogers, and at many pageants and public performances. “I Am a Child of God” has become similarly important in the latter half of the twentieth century. “In Our Lovely Deseret” maintains a corporate subject throughout (the “multitude of children” is never individualized), whereas “I Am a Child of God” begins every verse (and almost every line) with the first-person singular. “In Our Lovely Deseret” is concerned exclusively with outwardly observable behavior, while “I Am a Child of God” focuses on the psychology of its individual subject: the child’s knowledge and understanding of his or her relationship to Deity. The rewards for understanding and doing the Lord’s will also vary in the two songs. Keeping the workaday commandments of “In Our Lovely Deseret” has immediate benefits (“the children may live long, and be beautiful and strong”), while in “I Am a Child of God,” the blessings of understanding “all that I must do” are abstract and distant (“to live with Him someday”). The shift in emphasis which is evident in the Primary songs spanning the twentieth century reflects the changes that have occurred as the Church has matured and refined its understandings of foundational doctrines.

Jesus as Leader, Friend, and Savior

It shouldn't be hard,
Even though I am small,
To think about Jesus,
Not hard at all.⁶⁴

Along with these changed understandings of children’s roles in building the kingdom of God, Primary songbooks reflect major changes in Latter-day Saints’ understanding of the role of Jesus Christ. Early songs, like the “Children’s Song” (discussed above) and “The Primary Army” of 1880 portray Christ as leader of the children’s band of the church militant:

64. Mabel Jones Gabbott, “To Think about Jesus,” *Children’s Songbook*, 71.

Who riseth like the light enrolled
 O'er all the landscape fair and wide?
 . . . We are the hope of Israel.

...

An army for the Lord enrolled—
 The snow-white robes of peace we wear
 Fort Zion is the fort we hold,
 And righteousness the sword we bear.⁶⁵

Eliza R. Snow's 1880 compilation includes eleven songs specifically referencing Jesus Christ. Several refer to Christ's millennial reign and portray Christ as a political or military defender of the Saints. Three refer to Jesus as a shepherd and describe his gentle, tender care of his followers. Four refer specifically to the incident when Christ uttered the phrase "Suffer the children to come unto me" (Matt. 19:13-14; Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16). The Christ presented is a personal friend of little children. The songbooks published between 1905 and 1946 retain some of these songs and add a few others, but all have the same general theme of Jesus as a friend of little children and tender shepherd of his flock. Most of the songs with specific reference to Christ's millennial reign or his role as military leader disappeared after 1905. In short, the songbooks published from 1905 until 1946 portray Christ as a gentle friend of little children, who is aware of their daily activities and who wishes them to follow His example by being kind to their families and their neighbors.

The Children Sing, published in 1951, contains sixteen songs that are primarily about Jesus. Most of these are contained in the section "The Children Sing of the Lord," which also includes songs about God the Father and/or the "Lord" and "God." While many of these texts still have Jesus's kindness to and friendship with little children as the dominant message, a few refer to a more distant "Lord," a being to be worshipped. A few songs even suggest praying to Jesus.⁶⁶ Thus, Christ is not only distanced from the daily affairs of Mormons but is no longer understood in distinctively Mormon terms. Except for Evan Stephens's "Christ and His Little

65. Augusta Joyce Crocheron, "The Primary Army," in *Hymns and Songs*, 75.

66. For instance, the final verse of "Tell Me the Stories of Jesus" has the following text: "Yet still to his footstool in prayer I may go, and ask for a share of his

Ones," which describes the Book of Mormon scene of Christ blessing the children of the Nephites, no texts suggest any uniquely Latter-day Saint doctrines about the Savior. *Sing with Me*, published in 1969, contains sixteen songs under the Topical Index heading "Jesus Christ" (and another eleven sacrament songs), about half written by Latter-day Saints. Like the texts in *The Children Sing*, these songs focus on Christ as a benevolent example for children to follow and as a focus for reverence. As in *The Children Sing*, there are fewer songs in *Sing with Me* which suggest Christ's involvement with or awareness of children's day-to-day activities.

These thematic emphases fit well into Mauss's timeline of assimilation. After comparing the religious beliefs of Mormons with those of non-Mormons in the 1960s, Mauss concluded: "By the sixties, the Mormons were pretty well assimilated; that is, that they could not claim many distinctive religious beliefs, practices or experiences that mattered to others enough to make them seem truly 'peculiar' to those others."⁶⁷ According to this model, it seems unsurprising that Latter-day Saint Christology, at least in a version simplified for children, would by midcentury have become nearly unremarkable within the broad mainstream of Protestant Christianity. However, the changes between the 1969 *Sing with Me* and the 1989 *Children's Songbook* cannot be simply explained within Mauss's framework as a "retrenchment" or a return to more distinctive Latter-day Saint understandings of Christ. If anything, those changes indicate an approach to certain Protestant understandings of Christ.

The 1989 *Children's Songbook* lists forty-nine songs under the headings "Jesus Christ—Birth (see Christmas)," "Jesus Christ—Savior," "Jesus Christ—Baptism," "Jesus Christ—Blesses Children," "Jesus Christ—Example," "Atonement," "Jesus Christ, Second Coming," and "Jesus Christ, Son of God." In part these entries represent deliberate padding, with several songs now indexed in relation to Jesus Christ instead of (or in addition to) other topics, like "Book of Mormon" or "Beautiful World," as they were in *Sing with Me*. However, the 1989 *Songbook* contains many new songs about Jesus Christ, most of which were written and published in

love. / And if I thus earnestly seek him below, / I shall see him and hear him above." This verse and a few others containing confusing references about prayer were removed from the 1989 *Children's Songbook*.

67. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive*, 43.

The Friend or as special supplements to the annual Primary sacrament meeting programs in the late 1970s or 1980s.⁶⁸ Since the committee creating the new songbook did not issue a general call for songs as it had in preparing *Sing with Me*, I assume that most of these songs were written independently, long before Church President Ezra Taft Benson gave his 1987 talk "Come Unto Me,"⁶⁹ which is often cited as the beginning of a move toward highlighting the Church's Christian character in public discourse. It is unlikely, probably impossible, that the composition of these songs could have been directed by correlation committees or any other group or individual from Church headquarters, although the final song selections and the creation of the list were certainly approved through the correlation process. It is possible that a new emphasis on Christ, along with other elements which O. Kendall White has labeled "Mormon neo-orthodoxy," was already finding a place in materials published by the Church Educational System (CES) or by quasi-official presses like Deseret Book by the late 1970s, and thus filtering into grassroots consciousness.⁷⁰ Still, the evidence of these songs' apparently independent composition over two decades complicates the attempt to determine where this new emphasis on the figure of Christ came from.

It is not only the increased number of songs about Jesus which is striking in the 1989 songbook. The attributes and facets of Christ's personality which are emphasized also shift quite dramatically. Among songs retained from *Sing with Me* are "Jesus Once Was a Little Child," "Jesus

68. Since 1970, the Primary has presented an annual sacrament meeting, consisting of presenting songs and readings focused on a year's theme and usually highly scripted in booklets issued for that purpose. In 1980 when Primary meetings shifted from a weekday to the Sunday three-hour meeting block, the outlines for these programs have also served as guides for the curriculum of Sharing Time, a segment of Primary (usually during opening exercises) when several classes meet together, rather than in age-separated classes. Because learning the songs for the sacrament meeting presentation takes up a good deal of the time available for singing practice, it is much easier to determine which songs of the many contained in the songbook have been widely learned and frequently sung in the last twenty years. The sacrament meeting program effectively functions as a kind of "microcorrelation."

69. Ezra Taft Benson, "Come unto Christ," *Ensign*, November 1987, 83.

70. O. Kendall White, *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy: A Crisis Theology* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987).

Said Love Everyone," and "I Think When I Read that Sweet Story of Old."⁷¹ These, like most of the songs in the older songbooks, emphasize Christ's kindness as an example for children to follow, and several quote Christ's commandment to "suffer the children to come unto me." Except for the sacrament songs, no texts mention the crucifixion, Gethsemane, or the role of Christ's atonement in the plan of salvation. In fact, only three of the twelve sacrament songs in *Sing with Me* contain a specific reference to Christ's death, and only one mentions the cross. Two of the sacrament songs from *Sing with Me* are retained in the *Children's Songbook*, and these are the most specific about Christ's death:

Before I take the sacrament,
I sit so quietly.
I know that Jesus came to earth
And died for me.⁷²

Help us, O God, to understand
Our Savior's love for us.
He paid the price for all our sins
And died upon the cross.

Help us to love him more each day,
Though him we cannot see,
His teachings and his loving heart
Will lead us back to thee.⁷³

Although this dramatic change coincides with Mauss's chronology of retrenchment, in this case it seems that the Jesus presented in the Primary songbooks is becoming more, rather than less, assimilated with the Protestant Jesus. This is not to say that there are no distinctly Mormon elements in this 1989 collective image of Christ, however. Several new songs

71. *Children's Songbook*: James R. Murray, "Jesus Once Was a Little Child," 55; Moïselle Renstrom, "Jesus Said Love Everyone," 61; Jemima Luke, "I Think When I Read That Sweet Story," 56.

72. Mabel Jones Gabbott, "Before I Take the Sacrament," *Children's Songbook*, 73.

73. D. Evan Davis, "Help Us, O God, to Understand," *ibid.*, 73.

firmly situate Christ's atoning function in a Book of Mormon context, thus emphasizing distinctly Mormon elements for the first time in several decades. These four new songs about Christ in the Book of Mormon are: "Samuel Tells of the Baby Jesus" (describing events in the Americas at the time of Christ's birth), and "This Is My Beloved Son," "Easter Hosanna," and "Had I Been a Child" (all describing Jesus's post-resurrection visit to the Nephites).⁷⁴ Also for the first time, a majority of these songs are composed by Latter-day Saints, rather than being borrowed from Protestant sources, a fact that could certainly fit into the retrenchment theme of separateness from the religious mainstream.

Perhaps the best possibility for explaining this apparent contradiction comes from O. Kendall White's model of Mormon "neo-orthodoxy." White suggests that the emerging emphasis on human alienation and distance from God, in contrast to the earlier Mormon emphasis on human beings' godlike potential and God's personal involvement in the Saints' day-to-day affairs, marks a shift among the Mormons from one Protestant view of Jesus to another. That is to say, around the mid-twentieth century, Mormon views were becoming more like those of liberal mainline Protestant churches, while in later decades, Mormon views moved closer to those of evangelical Protestants. Mauss also describes this realignment in his chapter on folk fundamentalism among Mormons, where he demonstrates that Mormons have moved closer to Southern Baptists, for example, in their beliefs on scriptural inerrancy and the authority of ecclesiastical leaders.⁷⁵ One of the major parallels to evangelical Christianity which White notices in Mormon teachings of the late 1960s through the early 1980s is a move to define God as thoroughly other than, and incomprehensible to, human beings: "By emphasizing the differences rather than the similarities between God and humanity, Mormon neo-orthodoxy aligns itself more closely with Protestant neo-orthodoxy than with traditional Mormon thought. For instance, traditional Mormon theology

74. Mabel Jones Gabbott, "Samuel Tells of the Baby Jesus," *Children's Songbook*, 36; Marvin K. Gardner, "This Is My Beloved Son," 76; Vanja Y. Watkins, "Easter Hosanna," 68-69; and Mabel Jones Gabbott, "Had I Been a Child," 80-81. These songs have all been included in the annual Primary sacrament meeting programs.

75. White, *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy*; Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive*, 180-82.

teaches that humans were created in the physical and spiritual image of God and may themselves become gods. In contrast, [Mormon neo-orthodox theologians have] lamented the Mormon preoccupation with anthropomorphic descriptions of God, [urging Mormons] to acknowledge divine uniqueness, or God's otherness."⁷⁶

The emphasis in the Primary songbooks on Christ's atoning role in eternity, rather than on his kindness to human children during his sojourn on earth, demonstrates the redefinition and distancing White observes. Like the God of "I Am a Child of God," Jesus as Savior, rather than as friend of children or leader of the children's army, is accessible only through abstractions that may be beyond the cognitive ability of children.

Obviously, a full consideration of White's thesis and its application to children's curriculum is beyond the scope of this essay. However, I suggest that it is precisely in the effort to evaluate hypotheses such as White's or Mauss's that evidence from the songbooks can be most useful. Considering songs from across the twentieth century makes it clear that the refinements of Latter-day Saint Christology in the late twentieth century cannot be understood as an imitation of Protestant theology, even if both theologies arrive at similar understandings on some points.⁷⁷ It is evident from a consideration of other themes in the songbooks that many Mormon teachings—on family life, proper attitudes and behaviors for children, the building of the kingdom of God on earth, and even the nature of God the Father and God the Son—have undergone a process of "spiritualization" during the twentieth century, as the Saints became more confident about the survival of the Church, began to take a longer view of the Church's future, and were able to further clarify and articulate essential doctrines.

The songbooks are also able to demonstrate, in a way that few historical sources or survey results could, that people can and do believe conflicting, even contradictory things. A Primary songbook can contain abstract songs about a distant Father who sent Jesus as part of a grand plan ("How could the Father tell the world of sacrifice and death? / He sent his Son to die for us and rise with living breath"⁷⁸) and, just a few pages later, present a vivid portrait about Joseph and Mary going to Bethlehem, with

76. White, *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy*, 89.

77. I am indebted to Armand Mauss for this insight.

78. Mabel Jones Gabbott, "He Sent His Son," *Children's Songbook*, 35–36.

concrete, earthy details like Joseph carrying “bread and goat cheese in a little linen sack.”⁷⁹ While children may now sing more about “the Savior” than about “Jesus” in Primary, they still sing “Tell Me the Stories of Jesus,” which has been in every songbook since 1905. Primary songbooks are able to show that the development and articulation of principles and points of doctrine in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a magnificently complex process in which General Authorities, Primary presidents, poets, composers, and even children, in all their wiggly humanness, participate—a process informed by cultural imperatives both within and without the Church. As scholars try to uncover the traces of this process, hymnals and songbooks offer a rich and still largely unexplored repository of the thoughts, beliefs, and hopes of generations of Saints. More than many other sources of historical evidence, they capture the gorgeous admixture of exegesis, folklore, doggerel, committee work, genius, and inspiration that created and creates Mormonism.

79. Bessie Saunders Spencer, “When Joseph Went to Bethlehem,” *Children’s Songbook*, 38–39.