

Let me introduce the real Book of Mormon to Britain

Credo
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For a long time, the supposed outlandish antics of priests, prelates and proselytisers — whether comedic or tragic — have lined publishers’ pockets and packed theatres. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s *A Study in Scarlet*, with its depiction of early members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, then referred to as Mormons, helped to launch his literary career.

In the 21st century edgy comedy about religion is commonplace. The adult humour of *The Book of Mormon* musical continues to pull in the crowds on both sides of the Atlantic. The production’s characterisation of Latter-day Saints serving African missions is excessively inaccurate. The faith’s real-life missionaries stand outside British theatres after the show to bust myths about a church that has been pigeonholed and stereotyped.

Latter-day Saint theology is distinctive and many of its tenets are not taught within traditional Christianity. A key aspect is the belief that there is an open canon of scripture. The Book of Mormon (the publication rather than the musical) is seen by members of the church as “another testament of Jesus Christ”, a companion to the Bible. Latter-day Saints regard it as a sacred work, translated from metal plates by Joseph

Smith — seen by adherents as a modern-day prophet — after he claimed to have

found them on a hill near his home in Manchester, New York, in 1823 having been directed there by an angel. They were first printed in English in 1830. Christ is the central figure in The Book of Mormon and its pages advocate Christian living: “We talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ.”

Another example of doctrinal difference is the nature of the Godhead that had been advocated by Christian authorities after the 4th-century Nicene Creed. Whereas traditional Christianity embraces the belief of a literal oneness of the Trinity, Latter-day Saint doctrine holds that God, his son Jesus Christ and the Holy Ghost are separate and distinct divine beings who are one in purpose.

What about polygamy? Actually, the leadership of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints announced an end to the practice in 1890. Isn’t it an American religion? No, the majority of its over 17 million global membership live outside the US. And, unexpectedly, the church’s oldest extant chapel in the world is in the English countryside, near Pendock, Worcestershire. Its missionaries first arrived in the UK in 1837; the faith’s 191,000 modern-day members in Britain and Ireland are apt to point out that Latter-day Saints here buoyed up Victorian-era congregations even before Salt Lake City, Utah, was built. Large numbers of early converts

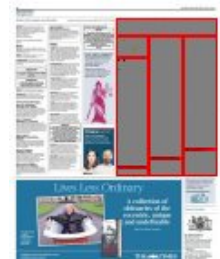
went to the US and it was the church’s British pioneers who were the mainstay immigrants helping locals to establish that desert city.

Fast-forward to 2023 and we observe Latter-day Saint

adherents as contributing members of the British interfaith community. There is greater need now more than ever to respect and embrace the rich diversity of faiths. During the 19th century, the governor of Missouri, Lilburn Boggs, ordered Mormons to be expelled from the state or, if necessary, “exterminated”. Today the faith’s believers advocate freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) for all.

Worldwide, religious hatred is on the rise. The advocacy group Open Doors estimates that the latest annual number of Christians killed for their faith is 5,898, up from 4,761. There is no place for antisemitism, Islamophobia, anti-Christian attacks, or victimisation of any other group. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a stakeholder in many global bodies supporting freedom of belief, including the UK FoRB Forum and the all-party parliamentary group for international freedom of religion or belief.

Latter-day Saints agree that we need to look beyond theological differences to serve humankind. The church works in partnership with a range of humanitarian agencies. Last year, it spent £820 million in providing support for needy individuals globally. We make an impact in an increasingly divided world. Standing shoulder to shoulder with others of all



**faiths and beliefs is a
manifestation of our common
humanity and our own
Christianity.**

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