

THE CHURCH TODAY

Leonard J. Arrington

The Latter-day Saints: The Mormons Yesterday and Today. By Robert Mullen. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966. xvi + 316 pp. \$5.95.

The Mormon Establishment. By Wallace Turner. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1966. 343 pp. \$6.00.

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The emergence of Michigan's Governor George Romney as a strong contender for the Republican Presidential nomination in 1968, the popular Mormon exhibit at the New York World's Fair, and the spread of Mormon buildings and missionary work into many parts of the world have aroused widespread interest in the beliefs and practices of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In recent months long articles on the Church have appeared in leading national newspapers and magazines. *The Latter-day Saints* and *The Mormon Establishment* are two important books which have been written to capitalize on this interest. Both are by leading non-Mormon writers; both are reasonably accurate portrayals of contemporary Mormonism; and both are written in a style that assures wide sale and distribution. However, the two books differ considerably in their approach and thus, in a sense, tend to complement each other.



A native of New Mexico and former editor of *Life*, Robert Mullen directs the world-wide public relations firm which was employed to publicize the 1955 European tour of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. He presents an undeviatingly favorable image of twentieth-century Mormonism. The principal theme is the "outward-thrust" of church membership due to stepped-up missionary activity. Indeed, *The Latter-day Saints* is the first

book by a non-Mormon which focuses on international Mormonism. There are separate chapters on the Church in England, Wales, Scandinavia, Latin America, and Oceania and Japan. As much space is devoted to some of these as to "Salt Lake City in the Jet Age."

In recognition of the fact that Mormonism cannot be understood except in terms of its history, author Mullen has eleven short chapters on "The Joseph Smith Period," and another nine on "The Times of Brigham Young." But the twelve chapters on "The Twentieth Century" represent the principal contribution of the work, with as much space devoted to "David O. McKay and the Great Acceleration" as to the life and times of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young. The "modern" section is based essentially on Mullen's personal observations and conversations, in many parts of the world, and on material furnished him by the Church Information Service. Thus, these chapters are the product of "primary" research.

On the other hand, the principal sources for the Joseph Smith and Brigham Young periods appear to be such texts and secondary works as Joseph Fielding Smith, *Essentials of Church History*; Thomas F. O'Dea, *The Mormons*; and Leonard Arrington's *Great Basin Kingdom*. Though he devotes considerable attention to Mormon immigration, his bibliography does not mention the works of William Mulder, P. A. M. Taylor, and Gustive O. Larson. Nor does he seem to know Nels Anderson, *Desert Saints*. He follows the custom, not unknown among L. D. S. writers, of incorrectly citing Joseph Smith, *History of the Church* as *Documentary History of the Church*.

Mullen uses history, not as an avenue for discovery of truth as to origins, but as a backdrop which lends drama and color to current programs. Thus, his discussion of the Joseph Smith period begins with a description of the Palmyra Pageant. Some of his history is not very sophisticated, as when he interprets the Mormon Battalion as resulting from an unfair ultimatum from an hostile government forced upon the hapless Saints in a moment of trial and desperation (p. 97). Several other myths which sometimes find their way into Sunday School and seminary classes also find expression in *The Latter-day Saints*.

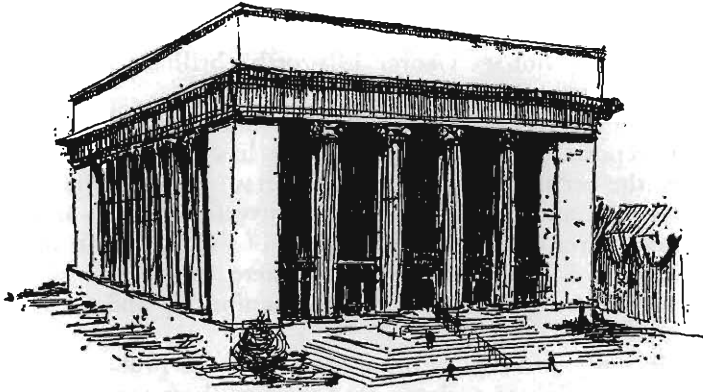
One of Mullen's favorite words is "thrust" — a Space Age word which he uses several times in describing important current missionary efforts and other programs. He correctly points out that internationalism came into the Church very early, with missionary assignments to Britain in 1830's, and the assignment of missionaries soon afterward to such widely dispersed centers as Stockholm, Italy's Piedmont, Santiago, and Singapore. Considering his desire to document and highlight this aspect of church activity, it is unfortunate that Mullen did not see George Ellsworth's brilliant Ph.D. dissertation on "A History of Mormon Missions. . . ."

It should be observed that, although missionary work is his principal theme, Mullen reports only the successes. He has not analyzed the degree of effectiveness, the occurrence of "paper converts," the considerable number of lapsed conversions, and the quality of the converts. There is also very little on the problems confronted by young members of the Church in metropolitan areas of the United States and elsewhere, where the Mormons are a tiny minority, and where the opportunities for companionship and marriage within the Church are seriously limited.

Those readers who tend to be impressed with the problems of the modern Church will be delighted to learn that most of these are really of no consequence. "Mormons," Mullen observes, "have never had the slightest reason to fear education" (p. 230); "theological dissents are virtually nonexistent" (p. 3); church leaders "will answer responsively questions about business affairs" (p. 283); and "the Church does not participate very much in politics" (p. 279). Readers will also be surprised to learn that a temple has recently been completed at Innsbruck, Austria (p. 199)! With respect to the oft-discussed "Negro problem" Mullen (quite correctly) responds: "Those who sometimes suggest that black people are not welcomed in the Mormon community should visit one of the churches in the Fijis. There they will find Mormons of darkest possible hue passing the sacramental bread and water" (pp. 270-271).

Of a far different order is *The Mormon Establishment* by Wallace Turner. Authored by an Alabama-born *New York Times* correspondent in San Francisco, *The Mormon Establishment* is far more critical — though not always adversely critical. Having won a Pulitzer Prize for journalism and served as a Nieman Fellow at Harvard, and having covered race riots in Alabama and the student riots at Berkeley, Turner was asked to prepare a series of articles for *The Times* on the Mormons. These appeared in December, 1965. The present book is based on interviews conducted in Salt Lake City and elsewhere in 1965 in connection with the preparation of those articles.

Unlike the Mullen book, which reports on the Mormon presence in such faraway places as Hong Kong, Wales, and New Zealand, the Turner volume focuses primarily on Salt Lake City. And whereas *The Latter-day Saints*, as befits a work by a public relations expert, views church affairs in terms of sweetness and light, *The Mormon Establishment*, in the journalistic tradition, find more news value in clash and conflict than in quiet progress and consensus. Turner's book comes closer to being a pathological report on the cancers and viruses of Mormonism. The focus is on "divisive forces," on disagreements, stresses, and strains. At least two-thirds of the book deals with "Polygamy Today," "The Anti-Negro Doctrine," and "The Rightists and the LDS Church." There is a fine appreciation of George Romney, whom Turner obviously admires, and of the political liability to that devout member of the Church's timid stand on Civil Rights.



For journalistic effect, Turner sometimes uses expressions that will alienate his L.D.S. readers. For example, he refers to the pioneers as "the group of religious fanatics who followed a man named Brigham Young . . ." (p. 2). On the other hand, he also uses words like "dynamic, forceful, successful, and selfless," describing the Saints (pp. 32, 59); and "strong, vigorous" in describing the religion (p. 45). The book is not always well-digested. Various passages and facts are repeated, creating the impression that each chapter was written in the form of a separate news story.

Such misstatements and misconceptions as occur seem to be principally the result of the failure to "check out" statements which cropped up in conversations. For instance, it will surprise Sam Weller to know that he dare not exhibit a copy of Fawn Brodie's *No Man Knows My History* in his book-

store: He must keep it under the counter and put it in a bag as one might do a bottle of "hootch" (p. 10). Turner also uncritically repeats tales of the "Avenging Angels" (p. 18), and declares that a faithful Latter-day Saint "must give 10 percent of his *gross* income to the bishop" (p. 40). Turner declares: "Every important action taken in Salt Lake City is shaped by the realization that the Mormons own the town" (p. 3). This will be news to the tens of thousands of Saints who have had to endure the cross of J. Bracken Lee — eight years as governor and going-on eight years as mayor. If not anti-Mormon, Lee has never been accused of being pro-Mormon!* Turner also accepts the far-fetched estimate that "as many as 30,000 men, women and children are living in polygamous marriages in the 1960's" (pp. 168, 214). Finally, Bryant Jacobs, who is something of a landmark on the Brigham Young University campus, will be shocked to read that it was really University of Utah faculty members who wrote the English literature lessons for the Relief Society.



Such lapses can be forgiven in the face of Turner's accuracy on other topics over which other reporters have stumbled. Turner has good perspective on the church's relation to the political and economic life of the region, and his data on Church finance seem sound. Disposing of many myths about church wealth, Turner points out that "the 'great financial empire' of the LDS Church would begin to fall on its face within thirty days if the tithing income were cut off" (p. 132).

Turner finds the chief defect in Mormonism today to be the tendency of the Church to use its "dynamism to solve little problems when it could try to solve the big ones" (p. 60). In this connection Turner quotes with obvious approval Ed Moe, a University of Utah sociologist and community planner:

In the early days, the church devoted its fundamental strength to solving the practical problems of living, such as land settlement, irrigation, and building. These things had a sacred nature to them, and the things that were ordered done were ordered done in the name of the Lord. All of this gave a strength and vitality to the day-to-day life. Today . . . the community suffers because of the emphasis on such things as genealogical research when the time could be better spent trying to work out a means of keeping pollution out of the Great Salt Lake. . . . People seem to spend eighty per cent of their available time on church projects and have no time for the real problems (pp. 84-85).

In the long run, writes Turner, the greatest problem facing the Mormon Church is "the need for an accommodation for the growing numbers of intellectuals" (p. 311). For the immediate future, however, "far and away the

* Many readers of this journal will surely agree with Turner that Lee "stood up against almost every liberal thought since the abolition of slavery. (The record does not show if he was questioned about abolition of slavery)" (pp. 277-278).

major problem" is "the Negro question" (p. 311). On this matter Turner is far from clinically analytical. In an emotion-tainted outburst he writes:

The LDS church practices racial discrimination. It clings to that practice in a nation which is going through terrible struggles to overcome the pernicious influence of other organizations with anti-Negro bias. The philosophy is completely unAmerican. It resists the American view that no man should be penalized for his race. So long as the LDS church clings to this racist practice, it is a political and social cancer. . . . the overwhelming Mormon response to the current drive by Negroes to better their condition in American life has been indifference, inattention, irritation and smug self-satisfaction that few Negroes live in the Mormon centers (pp. 228, 229).

Basically, however, Turner finds the Mormons to be "fine people." "Their contribution to American life," he concludes, "has been considerable. With a few exceptions, . . . I find their doctrine to be humane, productive of progress, patriotic, wholesome and praiseworthy" (p. 331).

