

RACIAL INTEGRATION AND THE CHURCH — A COMPARATIVE NOTE

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This note reports an interesting new perspective on relations between different races within the L.D.S. Church. Glenn M. Vernon is Professor and Head of the Department of Sociology at the University of Maine and a Sunday school teacher in the Bangor L.D.S. Branch. His most recent book is HUMAN INTERACTION and he has written articles for professional journals and the IMPROVEMENT ERA.

The Mormon position on certain racial issues is being given attention in the popular press and has become a matter of concern to various segments of the whole nation — Mormon and non-Mormon alike. There is a possibility that the issue may get involved in political campaigns at the national level. The concern centers around the fact that in the Mormon Church the Negro is prohibited full participation, since racial identification is taken into account in decisions as to who can hold the priesthood. In this setting, it is of more than just passing interest to note the findings of a study done in New Zealand with reference to racial integration in religious activities there.

The study was done by Dr. Hans Mol for the National Council of Churches in New Zealand and reported in his recent book, *Religion and Race in New Zealand*. Methodological limitations in the study prohibit accepting the findings as rigidly determined facts, but the general conclusions are sufficiently substantiated to merit giving them serious consideration.

The study concerned the entire religious configuration in New Zealand. Here, however, we will report some of the findings concerning the Mormon Church. The pertinent conclusions are as follows:

(1) It was found that in New Zealand the clergymen who were Maori or who worked among Maoris were more inclined to favor separate Maori services and organizations. Mol indicates that each Anglican, Methodist, and Presbyterian clergyman studied indicated that this was true of his group. Roman Catholics were more favorable to integrated activities, but for various reasons separate activities were the usual pattern. Mol indicated, however, that

the only denomination for which this generalization was not true was the Church of Latter-day Saints. All church services are integrated in this case. It appears that the Mormons are successful both in maintaining their hold on the Maori and in maintaining their own way only Catholics to some extent and particularly the Mormons are capable of directing and instigating policies of integration.

(2) In commenting upon the continued increase in Mormon membership, Mol concludes that the increase can be traced partly to the functional social organization of the Church. He says:

It has a neat internal system of checks and balances for its membership. Its demands of tithing, church-going, abstinence of stimulants are commensurate to what it supplies to its membership: belonging to a cohesive group, where equality is practiced, where performance is rewarded (hierarchy of officers and committees), where non-conformity