

Notes and Comments

Edited by Joseph H. Jeppson

In the first essay, B.Y.U. senior student Don Hicken explains how the Church's image in Asia might be improved. Readers may recall that an earlier note by Peter Houghton (Autumn, 1966) said that much of "Mormonism" appeared to be merely "Americanism" to Britons. Hicken indicates that it seems even more so to Asians. And the situation is not improving: Church manuals now emphasize American teen-age dating systems and American leadership training rather than more reflective and universal and religious subjects such as where did man come from and where is he going. Furthermore, Americans are less appreciated in Asia than in Britain because the American seen by the Asian is not usually a tourist or a near-countryman. He is most often typified as a drunken, lecherous GI.

W. Roy Luce's "Tea and Sympathy" has nothing whatever to do with the relationship between a professor's wife and a student who admires her. Instead, it concerns humanitarian non-Mormon money-raising activities on the east coast, designated to help Mormons move west from Nauvoo in the 1840's.

Grace Vlam's note is an attempt to prove that the proper age at which Christians should present themselves for baptism is age eight. Her conclusion rests in part on the frequent use of the number "eight" in the vicinity of places where people were regularly baptized.

THE CHURCH IN ASIA

Don Hicken

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As the only missions of the Church to major non-Christian cultures, the missions of Asia (with the exception of the Philippines, which is predominantly Catholic) are of special interest and present unique problems to those concerned with the development of Mormonism as a world religion. Many of the problems which arise in Asia are also found in other missions, but in a non-Western,



non-Christian culture these difficulties are frequently of greater magnitude and require more effort to reach a solution.

One of the major problems facing the Church in Asia is that of accommodating other cultures. As a corollary of our liberal belief that all men are created equal, we Americans often tend to confuse equality with similarity, assuming that given proper guidance people from other cultures will, in time, come to think like and resemble ourselves and that this is not only desirable, but inevitable. As a result of this culturo-centricism many American Mormons take too literally the words of Paul to the Ephesians, "Therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." These Asian "strangers and foreigners" are expected upon baptism to become "fellow (American) citizens with the (Utah) saints" and to lose no time in reaching the same level and kind of social and cultural development as their counterparts in western North America.

In the filmstrip introduction to the Church which we used as missionaries in Japan, the narrator makes the proud claim that "Anywhere in the world, the Mormon Church is the same." To implement this goal the Church has in recent years launched a program of standardization and coordination of teaching manuals, with the apparent purpose of having the same lesson given on the same day in every Mormon chapel around the world. From the standpoint of administration, this plan has many advantages; but a lesson manual written for a group of college-age students in Salt Lake City, all born and raised in the Church, may be of questionable value for new converts of the same age from a non-Christian, non-Western society. There should be more important criteria in determining the spiritual and informational needs of the members of the Church than chronological age.

In Taiwan, where I attended a Chinese branch in Taipei for a year, this problem of cultural gap was especially evident. The Melchizedek Priesthood manual

was a word-for-word translation of our 1965 manual, "Magnifying the Priesthood in the Home." As the title indicates, the book deals largely with the priesthood holder's role as head of the family and teacher of his children; but in this particular class in the largest branch in Nationalist China, only the teacher and one class member were married, one with all his children grown before he joined the Church, and the other with a three-year-old daughter. The rest of the class were either missionaries or college-age Chinese youths. Such lessons as "The Relationship of the Priesthood Holder to his Children" or "Family Councils" could well have been omitted from the curriculum. Even within a Mormon family, still a very rare institution in Asia, the nature of the particular society would provide a vivid contrast with the American-oriented "case studies" of family problems presented in the lesson manual. For example, such valid problems (for Americans) as a fifteen-year-old girl wanting to have some friends over to dance, or a seventeen-year-old boy announcing that he plans to marry his sixteen-year-old girl friend, would cause many less precocious societies than our own to recoil with the same horror we would exhibit if our own ten-year-old wanted to invite his buddies over to smoke pot. The manual poses questions which could well be asked in Mormon families anywhere, but the inescapable tie-in of the lesson material to approaches which are strictly business for American society severely limits its usefulness. Topics such as "Helping Children Select Their Mates" (with only 8,000 Mormons in a population of one hundred million in Japan and a heavy preponderance of women); "Providing Educational Opportunities" (in countries where children begin as early as age ten to struggle for a place in the fiercely competitive examinations which determine the lucky few who will go to high school and the fewer who will go to college); "Providing Family Recreation" (in societies rent by a generation gap of astounding proportions); "Finding Occupational Opportunities for Teenagers" (in countries where even college graduates are forced to take menial tasks because of the economic structure); and "The Joy of Having Children" (in an area where overpopulation is a major social problem) simply cannot be treated adequately within the confines of a manual written exclusively for Americans.

This one manual is not an isolated case. The MIA manual in use for fifteen-year-old girls when I was in Taiwan was on the subject of proper dating manners—fine for American fifteen-year-olds, but most Chinese do not even begin dating until after high school and then only very infrequently, and any fifteen-year-old who dated would create a minor scandal. Failure to adapt to local mores can often be quite embarrassing for the Church. Several major newspapers in Taipei attacked the Church for its MIA-sponsored dances, which the papers felt had a corrupting influence on Chinese youth. Many older Chinese still feel that social (Western) dancing is immoral and are unwilling to let their children join or participate in an organization that sponsors such activities.

There is no lack of subject matter which could be used more profitably in teaching Asian converts. Six cottage meetings are hardly sufficient to give a new convert of any country a full knowledge of the gospel, and when the new member is equally unfamiliar with the doctrines and traditions of Christianity, his ignorance, while certainly excusable, is often incredible (to us). The lack of a program to introduce the fundamentals of Christian doctrine and tradition often produces members who are staunch Mormons, but not really Christians. As a missionary in

Japan, I served in the same branch with a Japanese elder, a fine person and a good friend with a strong testimony of the Church. One day in passing I happened to mention Noah to him. “Who?” “You know, Noah, the prophet of the Old Testament who built the ark and put all the animals in it and only he and his family were saved when the earth was flooded.” “No, I never heard of him.” Of course, later in his mission he read the Old Testament, but an ordained minister of the gospel who had never heard of Noah is surely a significant comment on the need for special treatment of new members from outside the Christian cultural tradition. Why didn’t he learn about Noah in Sunday School? Because the class for his age group was using the same text (in Japanese) that my own age group was using in Salt Lake City when I returned home shortly afterward. Of course he could have studied the scriptures on his own, as many Asian Mormons do regularly, but he was not the only member of the Church who has yet to read the standard works from cover to cover. The difference in his case was that he had not heard the stories of the Bible and Book of Mormon from his mother’s knee and that the Bible has hardly had the influence on Japanese culture and literature that it has had on our own. An American could scarcely avoid a knowledge of the Bible stories and characters which pervade our literature, regardless of whether or not he subscribed to their authenticity.



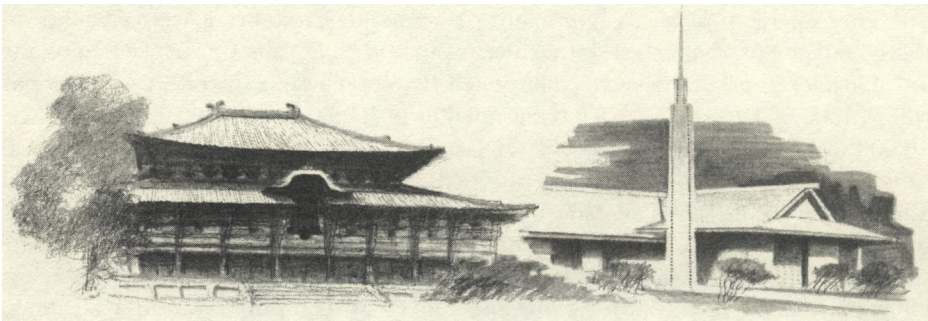
Even when an Asian convert is willing to approach the scriptures directly, he meets with major obstacles. The difficulty of the written Chinese and Japanese languages is such that a high school education and a knowledge of 2,000 characters or more is necessary to read the Bible or Book of Mormon. The religious terminology used in both (although not interchangeably) is usually incomprehensible to neophytes. The Bible in both languages has been translated by Protestant missionaries and many interpretations of doctrine differ from the English version and from Mormon teachings. (For example, the word “priesthood” does not appear in the Japanese Bible.) One of my Chinese instructors at the Stanford Language Center in Taiwan who was investigating the Church told me that the Chinese Book of Mormon was such a literal translation of the English that he felt it was only his knowledge of English sentence structure which allowed him to comprehend it. The Japanese Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price (Japanese is the only Asian language into which these two works have been completely translated) are written in an extremely formal style of Japanese which was abolished by the Japanese government’s post-war language reforms, and as a result are understood only by those educated before World War II, or by those who have a college education.

Mormonism is often called “the American religion” and not solely from its place of birth. Many fundamentals of Mormonism find their echo in American cultural and intellectual traditions, especially those traditions prevalent during the organization and early days of the Church before its removal to Utah. Such ideas as the ultimate perfectability of man, the worth of the individual, working out one’s own salvation, development of the individual with stress on talents and leadership capabilities, response to challenge, conquering one’s environment, individual responsibility to the community, and free agency are basic tenets shared by Americanism and Mormonism. The American desire to “get ahead” and Max Weber’s Protestant Ethic have their counterpart in the Book of Mormon, which clearly shows that when the people are righteous they prosper and that (their) material prosperity is a sign of God’s approval. (The analogy is not meant to be carried beyond this point.) The point is that Mormonism has been strongly influenced by its environment—not to say that L.D.S. philosophy is a product of the environment in which the Church grew up, but rather that we have tended to give greater emphasis to those aspects of the gospel which correspond most closely to our own culture. Many thoughtful Asians are quick to perceive this “Americanization” of the gospel and fear a loss of their own cultural identity through association with the Church. The stress laid on Western concepts foreign to Asia, such as assuming personal responsibility, development of leadership potential, public speaking ability, ready expression of opinions, the value of “giving one’s word,” reverence for “reason,” response to “challenges,” and a host of other strange and difficult ideas, when introduced in conjunction with the teachings of America as a “land choice above all other lands,” celebration of American holidays, English classes in MIA, linguistically handicapped American administrators, literally translated missionary lesson plan and teaching manuals causes Asians to ask a question we should perhaps put to ourselves: “How Americanized do you have to be to be a good Mormon?”

There is ample room within the framework of the gospel for those from divergent cultures—such eminent foreigners as Abraham, Moses, John the Baptist, and even an Asian called Jesus attest to that. There is also room within Mormonism for those from a non-Western culture, but the question of whether or not they may bring their culture in with them has not yet been decided. The problem of syncretism has always been a challenge to developing religions, especially in the East where the inclusive approach of “all roads lead to the top of the mountain” supplants our own exclusive “the only true Church” approach to God. We cannot very well allow Jehovah to be adopted into the Buddhist pantheon, as some Asian syncretics have done, nor are we likely to emulate the early Jesuits in China, who substituted firecrackers for bells in the Mass. Even the suggestion of some prominent Asian saints that we “wink” at tea-drinking because of its prominent place in Asian culture, is perhaps too great a compromise. On the other hand, the rigid attitude of too many Americans in Asia (and other places) that “these people must learn our ways” often conveys not only the feeling that our ways are perfect, but that anyone who does not have a flush toilet in his home and wear a white shirt and tie to church will not get to heaven. As an example, in a no doubt well-intentioned effort to reproduce “Christianity” as they knew it at home in America, the missionaries have introduced Santa Claus and Christmas trees at MIA parties, Halloween



goblins and Easter bunnies on other occasions. These European pre-Christian customs are tolerated by the Church in spite of their pagan (albeit European pagan) origin and provide excellent insight into the paradox at hand, i.e., how can we justify the importation of these European pre-Christian customs into a non-European, non-Christian society, while refusing accommodation to indigenous cultural traditions such as the Bon festival of Japan or Tuan Wu Chieh of China? It is difficult to see the purpose in sponsoring foreign Christmas trees and Santa Claus while frowning on even such innocuous customs as bowing (in favor of the good old "Mormon handshake") or removal of shoes before entering the chapel in Japan. To be sure, this cultural "double standard" is partly the result of inexperience in a foreign culture and is motivated more by a desire to please the members and to firmly establish the gospel with all its "trappings" than by a smug attitude of cultural superiority, but it is a serious and often unrecognized problem, nonetheless.



We could profitably examine many of our own practices before making hasty decisions as to what is heathen and what is Christian. The difference between placing flowers on the grave or food before the photograph of a departed relative seems to be too miniscule to allow the distinction we make between "respect for the dead" and "ancestor worship." A great deal of well-informed consideration must be given to the problem of the proper degree of accommodation of non-Western cultural traits to avoid condemning too freely or becoming too permissive. The Church cannot ignore the issue, and yet it cannot afford to become embroiled in a "rites controversy" like that between the ultra-liberal Jesuits and the ultra-conservative Dominicans and Franciscans over the same issues in China.

Certainly many facets of Asian society are in complete harmony with the principles of the gospel, more so than in our own society. The importance of the family as a unit of society, ignored by us until recently, has always been a fundamental concept of Asia in preserving the harmony of society and of the nation. Family ties, devotion to the welfare of ancestors and the notion that "we cannot be saved without our dead" present an example worthy of our admiration and emulation. The Asian intuitive approach to religious enlightenment (which we call "gaining a testimony") displays a profounder knowledge of the way to God than we sometimes exhibit in arguing scripture to "prove" the gospel by the mathematical process of Greek logic we call "reason." While stressing the gospel themes which are shared with Asian culture, we could supplement such necessary but locally weak elements as leadership training and development of initiative, all the time looking for indi-

vidual approaches that fit the particular society instead of trying to make the society fit the approach. Neither Asia nor the West has a monopoly on God or on the way He prefers us to live, and perhaps the Church can build the best bridge between the separate ways of West and East.

Another problem affecting the future of the Church in Asia, one much more immediate and difficult of solution, is that of the United State's presence in Asia. While this is not a problem caused by the Church or solvable by the Church, it, nevertheless, will have a profound influence on our future as "the American Church" in Asia. The fact that our missionaries and administrators in Asia are almost exclusively Americans, preaching American ideas, makes them natural targets for inquiry about American intentions in Southeast Asia. Not long ago in Japan our missionaries were confronted on every side by people opposing the war in Viet Nam and religious discussion was rendered almost impossible. The difficulty does not stop here, unfortunately.

The American public, government policy makers, and even Asian scholars are not in agreement about the relative merits pro and con of the war in Viet Nam, but one consideration almost never mentioned by either side is the effect of American troops (500,000 troops in Viet Nam, 40,000 in Thailand, 25,000 in Korea, over 10,000 in Okinawa, and thousands in Japan and the Philippines) on the societies of the countries in which they are stationed. American soldiers and dependents in almost every case are isolated in "American compounds," protected but not screened by chain link fences and armed guards. Within this protective wall (with the exception of combat zones) is a "little America" of supermarket PX's, bowling alleys, swimming pools, ladies' clubs, juke boxes, air conditioners, and TV dinners (the armed forces maintain their own radio and sometimes television networks). The American government spares no effort to try to reproduce the stateside standard of living wherever possible, and life would be almost intolerable for most service families without such amenities. Indeed, from the American standpoint, it is only fair that the government should do so. Unhappily, the matter is much more complex than that. To the Asian with a per-capita income of maybe \$250 a year the all-too-conspicuous display of American wealth and waste is often a slap in the face. Resentment is inevitable and so is the next step—the development of a special class of prostitutes, procurers, pawnbrokers, bartenders, scavengers, thieves, and

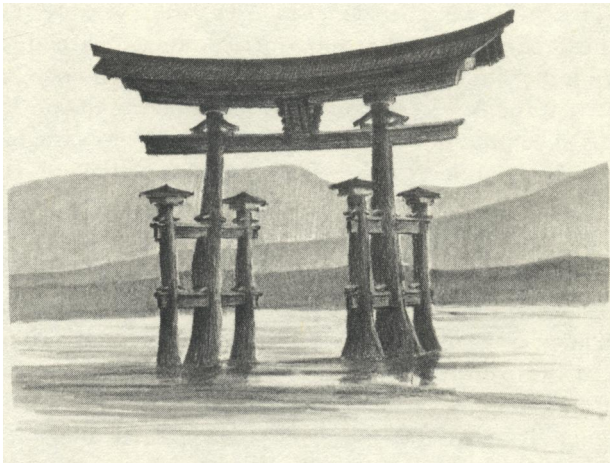


beggars which ring almost every American base in the Far East. In the underdeveloped societies of Asia (excluding highly modernized Japan) prostitution is often the only way to obtain the American luxury goods which stream from the PX in tantalizing profusion. American soldiers are not a great deal different from other armies of occupation, placed against their will in a foreign land where they understand neither the language nor the customs, isolated from all but "professional" members of the opposite sex, and with a lot of money and nothing to do. It is difficult to blame them entirely for patronizing what is so cheaply and readily available. On the other hand, in a society where poverty is a way of life and where filial duty is more important than chastity, it is not always easy to turn down an occupation which pays more in one night than an entire family could earn in a month of honest labor. It is unfortunate but true that the vast number of decent, well-behaved American service personnel in Asia rarely venture from their comfortable isolated compounds and that the American image abroad is being formulated by drunken lechers in the GI jungles of Saigon, Taipei, and Okinawa. (I am trying here to present the Asian point of view. Considering the mitigating circumstances of months of combat in the steaming jungles of Viet Nam, our troops' conduct, while often abominable, is better than we have a right to expect.)

American troops can be seen (it would be difficult to miss them) drag racing up and down the streets of Taipei after dark, easily outrunning the Chinese police whose jeeps are no match for new American cars (brought to Taiwan free, courtesy of the U.S. government). Soldiers on five-day "rest and rehabilitation" tours from Viet Nam spend an average of \$250, most of it on whiskey and girls, and do almost as much harm to the American image as they do to our balance of payments problem. Any night of the week the entrance to an American base is choked with taxicabs disgorging their drunken passengers, who shriek uncomprehended obscenities at the drivers and often refuse to pay them. No girl above ten is safe after dark from catcalls, obscene comments, and drunken advances. True, such disgusting behavior is typical of only a small percentage of our troops abroad, but the language and culture barrier being what it is, most Americans rarely venture off base, especially after dark. Living outside the American community provides a startling look at ourselves as others see us, and the picture is not enticing. The impression of most Chinese, Okinawans, and Southeast Asians of America is formed by the ugly Americans they see, rather than the typical Americans who remain within the seclusion of "little America," minding their own business. The Church, with its American representatives, is inextricably linked to the behavior of America and Americans in Asia by the simple notion that "all Americans are alike." After all, they all look alike (or so goes the common belief!). The unfortunate combination of political, economic, and social forces which placed over three-quarters of a million American troops in Asia is also contributing, through the presence of those troops, to the economic, cultural and moral decay of the countries in which they are stationed. The future of the Church in Asia is dependent not on a military solution to the threat of a Communist take over but on a moral solution to the growing threat of bringing discredit to all American institutions by our actions in Asia. The closing of the Japanese Mission in 1922 was a result of Japanese popular reaction to unfair treatment by the United States in its foreign and domestic policies dealing with Japanese naval strength and discriminatory laws against

Japanese immigrants in California. Similarly, the failure and rejection of Christianity in China was due in part to the very un-Christian actions of “Christian” nations and nationals in China, who treated the Chinese as “heathen dogs,” and practiced the Christian ethics of the pious Yankee skipper who refused to unload his shipload of opium on Sunday because it would violate the Sabbath.

As Americans and as Mormons we need to subject ourselves to a careful evaluation of how our proposed solutions relate to the very special problems of differing cultures. In both political and religious endeavors, the willingness to recognize and respect the unique values of cultures other than our own, rather than to demand universal adherence in American cultural patterns, seems not only in our best interests, but also in harmony with the highest ideals of the gospel and of America.



TEA AND SYMPATHY

W. Roy Luce

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When I say to you the Mormons must go, I speak the mind of the camp and country. They can leave without force or injury to themselves or their property, but I say to you, Sir, with all candor, they shall go—they may fix the time within sixty days, or I will fix it for them.¹

This statement, made in 1846 by Captain James W. Singleton, leader of an Illinois anti-Mormon group, is typical of the way many people felt about the Mormons during their forced exodus from Nauvoo, Illinois, to the west.

However, this was not the only reaction toward them. In the East there arose a great deal of sympathy for the “poor, distressed Mormons.” Several groups started relief activities. One of the most interesting took place in Washington, D.C., in

¹B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, 1930), p. 9.