

REVIEWS

Other Voices, Other Mansions

Mormonism: A Faith for All Cultures.
Edited by F. LaMond Tullis. Provo:
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A future B. H. Roberts writing the history of the Church of our times will point out that the decision to carry the Mormon gospel and culture beyond the traditional confines of language, boundaries and race had altered the essential character of the Church in unimagined ways. He would equate the decision to expand "the work of the Lord over the earth" as being of equal significance in scope and direction to that of Brigham Young's inspired decision to secure the holy kingdom in the fastness of the Rockies. He would argue that the decision to universalize the Church set in motion forces and events that went counter to Church policies that were tested, tried and forged during the first century and a half of its existence. He would ascribe the transformation of the Church from a unilingual, unicultural, ethnocentric, American-centered church to a pluralistic, more secularized, and an "un-American" church to this single decision to internationalize the Church. He would argue that, in a sense, the Church had reversed the direction of the vital forces that had nourished and sustained it. He would say that if the all-encompassing activities of the Church including, for example, its missionary work and its sanctification of the U.S. Constitution were centripetal in nature, were a process of fusion, of gathering the brethren into the bosom of Zion, of encouraging an exodus not merely from the heartlands of the United States, but also of converts from outside the continent, then the impulse to expand the Church was a diametrically opposite process.

Even though the future historian would have an advantage over us, the

perceptive among us cannot be blind to the changes that are already working their way into traditional Mormon thought and action, causing unease and concern among a segment of the brethren. Nowhere are these sentiments better discussed than in *Mormonism: A Faith for All Cultures*. The work, which is a record of a significant symposium held in April 1976 on the subject of "transnational and transcultural problems" of Mormon expansion, distinctly captures the polarized points of view between those who are in tune with the new and emerging order and those who would rather see the status quo maintained. Even though the volume includes some excellent and perceptive articles and several excellent introductory essays to the different sections by F. LaMond Tullis, its significance lies elsewhere.

For the first time Mormon scholars and intellectuals are openly undertaking a dialogue on "the relation of secular culture to the gospel of Jesus Christ and the expanding Church." It was heartwarming, says Tullis, "to hear of the growth of the Church, to see the quality of leadership exemplified in the participants, to listen to them speak of the bonds that unite us in the spirit of the gospel, to note their affirmation of the spiritual substance of those bonds." Many also spoke of alien rituals, symbols, languages, economic and political systems, racial prejudices, and national pride as inhibiting factors that stood in the way of the expansion of the Church. Some were obviously uncomfortable with the openness of the exchange of views. Indeed, a questioner did point out that "he had the feeling that these meetings could not have been held ten years ago." Likewise, LaMond Tullis reports he was asked why "some really tough questions were not addressed, why more was not said, why it was not said more vigorously." In keeping with the thrust of this review essay, these questions need to be raised to further

continue the dialogue in order to seek a greater understanding of the problems that will arise as Mormonism spreads to new lands.

The questions are many but all of them result essentially from this new centrifugal thrust to convert the world to Mormon faith. One of the major concerns of the Church before long is going to be with sheer numbers. Within the next half century, for instance, the Spanish-speaking people will form the largest single segment of the Church membership and Spanish, not English, will become the first language of the Church. As Tullis points out that, whereas in 1960 the Spanish-Portuguese speaking members accounted for only one and a half percent of the total Church membership, by 1990 they will grow to "nearly 17% or one of every six members" would be Spanish-speaking. Though such large scale conversion is the very essence of the Church's *raison d'être*, the dynamics of numbers will exert their own sway on the traditional leadership and government of the Church.

The earlier infusions of members—say, up to the end of the Vietnam War—were needed to achieve "critical mass." Certain homogenizing factors kept increasing membership in conformity with the Wasatch Front traditions and norms. The converts came freely, leaving behind a country and heritage, to create for themselves a new life in a land of their choosing. By choosing to become Mormons they were also becoming Americans, and like other emigrants they Anglicized their last names, gave up their native tongues, adapted themselves to a new landscape. When they became Mormons they became part of the great American dream. A belief in the land and faith in its manifest destiny were underlying concomitants to their newly acquired religion. Similarly when they gained a new religion they also gained a new country. The Church was an American church, and they had no trouble believing that the Constitution was divinely in-

spired. They believed as they were told: that the Lord "had established the constitution of this land by the hands of wise men whom [He] had raised up to this very purpose." Today, in contrast, the Church encourages new members to stay in their homelands. The American dream is shattered and it is hard to tell a Peruvian, an Indonesian, or Japanese that the United States Constitution, not theirs, is divinely inspired. Salt Lake City, like Rome, like the Mecca, like Banaras, should be a sacred place as well as a symbol, the holy of holies, but the Church by expanding worldwide in theory and practice, is demanding extra-territorial allegiance to the United States. Could, for instance, American missionaries go to the Philippines and ask its citizens to subscribe to the belief in the United States Constitution as divinely ordained? Or, worse still, could a Mexican missionary in Sweden ask the Swedes to enshrine a respect for the United States Constitution in their hearts? It is certain that the Church by going international will increasingly have to cut itself from its American nationalistic moorings. Even as Noel Reynolds approvingly quotes: "How much of what has through the years evolved as 'LDS doctrine' is merely the expression of the collective neurosis of that culture to which the gospel was restored?" The doctrinal implications underlying the problem are obvious.

Expansion will also bring the Church face to face with a horde of problems. LaMond Tullis discusses a number of these in his fine introduction to the section on "Church Development Issues Among Latin Americans." One of the most crucial, of course, is the problem of how to translate and communicate in languages other than in English, one of the most alive and fluid of languages. Could we ask the ever increasing non-English speaking members to learn English, as they were indeed exhorted to do at the conference in Munich in 1973? They were told that they should "learn English so that the General Authorities would not

have to try to communicate with them in multitudinous languages." To press the point further, there are other cultures where the mode of communication is differently structured. Seiji Katanuma informs that the Japanese have a "culture of sight," in which it is easier to communicate through visual aids than by way of the printed word. He insists that visual materials should accompany printed communication if the Japanese are to become enlightened. As if these obstacles to better communication were not enough, he flatly asserts: "It is true that some concepts in Mormon doctrine are so unfamiliar to the Japanese people that they are difficult to fit into the Japanese way of thinking and understanding." Rhee Ho Nam, in contrast, avers that it is almost impossible to keep the Korean brethren from incorporating time-honored customs of ancestral worship into their professions of Mormon faith. Perhaps, as Noel Reynolds argues, these problems "might gradually fade away" as Mormonism begins to take root in other cultures and begins to "subvert" them. He states: "All worldly cultures are false gospels in the sense that they perpetuate beliefs and behaviors incompatible with the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Conversely, the gospel will therefore be subversive in the context of any worldly culture." Though Reynolds' argument may be a legitimate one for a true believer to espouse, its logic is hard to sustain.

The arguments adduced so far in no way erect an insurmountable barrier to communication; they only affirm the problem of carrying a gospel across transnational and transcultural lines. All the same, the gospel should be preached despite the fact that the world cannot be blue-printed into Zion. The Mormon gospel should be taught, the message carried, and converts made. The new members should be asked to affirm as well as deny; they should be asked to affirm the doctrines even as they are required to abjure their erstwhile "false" beliefs that undercut their new faith.

It was easy for the earlier Mormon emigrant who came in search of the American dream to affirm the "official Church posture that emphasizes patriotism to America and respect for its officials, its political and economic system, its foreign policies, and the freedoms of conscience and liberty of choice that, for Americans, have historically accompanied them." False gods they might be expected to give up, but it is a human impossibility to relaunch oneself to fit the cultural specifications as laid down by doctrinaire Mormons. Increasingly it will be hard, in the words of Tullis, to convince converts that "middle class American culture, politics, economics, and language are the Lord's ideal way." Increasingly, too, the Church will be forced to preach the restored gospel without working middle class American values into it.

The Mormon Church will be able to succeed on the world stage only if it embraces pluralism and adopts the model of the Roman Catholic Church, says Sterling McMurrin in a recent article in *Sunstone*. He is however certain "that the Mormon leadership would not intentionally move in a direction that would encourage or allow the measure of diversity which not only exists in Catholic worship but which the Catholic Church apparently finds acceptable." In essence, McMurrin is right in what he advocates; where he is wrong is in his assumption that the Mormon Church has an option in the matter. The model on which the Catholic Church is organized was not drawn in the papal offices; the model instead is the evolutionary creation of the Church's historic growth as it spread to other lands. The Catholic Church, almost inexorably, was molded by the dynamics of assimilating diverse people into its fold. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will evolve on the lines of the Roman Catholic Church and will become pluralistic because it is in the very nature of the centrifugal forces on whose wheels the Church expansion program is now rolling.