

Spiritual Searchings: The Church on Its International Mission

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I

Shall we not go on in so great a cause? Go forward. . . .
Courage . . . and on, on to the victory (D&C 128:22. Quoted
by Spencer W. Kimball, October conference 1982).

EARLY IN THE 1950s, PRESIDENT DAVID O. MCKAY took forthright steps to move the largely domestic church into the international world. Within months after assuming his presidency, he embarked on a series of world tours, much as Pope John Paul of today's Catholic Church has done, visiting places and lands where the Church remained strong — Europe, New Zealand, the South Seas, and the Hawaiian Islands. The work-missionary program and other interesting innovations were introduced. With an increased financial base, the missionary effort moved vigorously into Latin America and Pacific Rim nations in the 1960s. Other prospective fields were tested in the Middle East and South Asia, but the greatest expansion occurred in Mexico and Latin America — still the most productive areas today.

Within this same period, the position of blacks in the Church received increased and increasingly anguished attention (Mauss 1981). In 1978, a new

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Acknowledgments: Writing this essay has been a painful process. It started in late fall 1982 at Mary Bradford's urging. A much different version was presented at the Mormon History Association meetings in Omaha, Nebraska, May 5–8, 1983. I discussed basic concepts at length with L. Jackson Newell who urged continued thought on the subject. It was torturously written and rewritten under the sharp eye of Lavina Fielding Anderson who forced me to rethink many concepts. It required deep soul-searching and endless discussions with my wife, Marie, and my three sons, Edward, Kevin, and Drew. In substance this essay embodies twenty years of my life spent in the Third World countries or at international agencies (United Nations, World Bank, U.S. Agency for International Development, Ford and Rockefeller Foundations).

pronouncement of the General Authorities admitted black males to full priesthood. A whole new subculture in North America with a population of some 28 million was now included in the Church's proselyting activities. Even more important, the Church's message now became truly universal in intent.

Although no Church president failed to emphasize missionary work, it received great impetus from Spencer W. Kimball, who made universalizing the gospel a consistent theme. "The day . . . is here. . . . We must come to think of our obligation to share the message rather than our own convenience" (1982, 5). "The 'grand and glorious objective' of the Church is to assist 'to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of men'" by "proclaiming the gospel, . . . perfecting the saints," and "redeeming the dead" (1981, 96).

As of 1 January 1984, Church membership numbered 5,385,125; 90 countries had organized wards or branches; 189,419 converts had been baptized in the previous twelve months; and 112,000 children had been born to members. There were 31 temples in use and 16 under construction, several of which have since been finished; the Book of Mormon had been translated into 67 languages; 24,503 missionaries had been called during the previous year with another 1,031 couples also serving; and 389,258 young people were enrolled in seminary or institute classes (Deseret News 1984, 6). While Church members report these statistics proudly, sometimes claiming that the Church is the fastest-growing religious body in the world and using exponential projections to show that soon the world will be filled with Mormons, a different statistical context creates a less optimistic picture. The 5 million members contrast with 5 billion inhabitants of the earth. Against 300,000 new members added annually are the 122 million children born each year. In the next decade in Asia alone, every second of the day a child will be born — 3.5 new human beings every second globally. Of this number, some 15 million children annually die — more than 40,000 a day! Still, the world's population by 2110 will be 10.5 billion, or nearly two and a half times the present number (Hunger 1985, 22–35; "Population" 1983, 2).

In Africa where high birth rates and famine go hand in hand, the number of Muslims has more than doubled in the last two decades. Soon, one out of every three Africans will be Muslim (Jones 1986, 39). Catholicism has increased from being a localized church in non-Christian Indonesia of about 250,000 members to 3 million in the last seventy-five years (Jones 1982, 82). In recent years, Buddhism and Hinduism, two of the other great faiths, have experienced strong revivals. Even in the western Soviet Union are found stirrings of Christian revivalism. Only Western Europe seems untouched.

Liberation theology in Third World societies became an element after World War II, with heightened expectations for improved living conditions. Violence and revolution have scarred the last two decades, and the Church has also experienced political turbulences in South Vietnam, Lebanon, Iran, and Nicaragua.

Less spectacular but even more horrifying is the prevalence of mass poverty in Third World countries where the Church attempts entry. The Church was born in poverty. It was immensely successful in the nineteenth and even into

the twentieth centuries in bringing socio-economic betterment to poor peoples. If the Church was not able to bring the faithful to historic Zion, it created smaller Zions elsewhere — Hawaii, Canada, New Zealand, the South Pacific, Great Britain, Germany, Switzerland, and Scandinavia. These outposts enjoyed more or less full programs of the Church including access to temples (Hawaii, 1919; Alberta, 1923; Switzerland, 1955; New Zealand, 1958; and London, 1958). Strategically, these Zions were located in countries with stable governments. Their operations constituted little or no drain on the treasury of the domestic church.

In the middle 1960s, the Church began baptizing significant numbers of the “poorest of poor,” which in several instances had rejected earlier conversion efforts (Tullis 1982, 302–6; Craig 1970, 66–70; Britsch 1986, 3–66). Many have compared this groundswell with the surge of British converts from the mines and potteries of England 150 years ago. The model of Mormons as upwardly mobile Americans has been problematic, since it presents an ideal of hard work and employability, stable marriages, and large families (Hicken 1968, 135–40; Barney and Wu 1976, 135–36).

However, intense poverty in nearly all societies fragments family structure. Husbands abandon their wives and children. Illegitimate births are high. About a fifth of all Latin American children — from 20 to 35 million — are abandoned, reports the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (“Deserted Children” 1983, 3). Because parents are poor, they are not educated. Because they are not educated, they do not have well-paying jobs or access to sophisticated agricultural techniques. As a consequence, they are malnourished and have inadequate medical care. Because infant mortality is high, parents have large families and die relatively young. The children who survive repeat the cycle, grow up ill-educated, suffering from endemic diseases, malnourished, and poor.

Although any set of generalizations so vast must suffer from inaccuracies in given areas, this picture is not overstated. A sort of matriarchal order evolves with the male role vaguely defined. A striking feature of these nascent congregations is the large numbers of female in contrast to male members. In some missions within this decade — for example, Taiwan and Indonesia, I have been told that the missionaries are specifically instructed to convert only families who are well off! The Church so far has insisted on acknowledging and accommodating only a conventional family structure. Countries with a strong Confucian base — Japan, Hong Kong, Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan — can meet this requirement. Countries like Brazil cannot, nor can such economically disadvantaged groups in the United States such as blacks and Hispanics.

Since the early 1980s, the world’s economy has stagnated. In Mexico and Brazil where the Church has significant numbers of members, high inflation, massive unemployment, and huge foreign debts are a serious problem. Since the mid-1960s, the American middle class has experienced a steady erosion of purchasing power (“Portrait” 1986, 30). At the same time, the percentage of families in the United States below the poverty line has increased from 10 to

12 per 100 families and from 12 to 14 persons per 100. Welfare and social security payments now constitute over 10 percent of all personal income. Utah is ranked forty-eighth in personal income, just above Mississippi and West Virginia (Utah Foundation 1985). Provo is ranked as one of the twenty-five poorest cities because of its large student population ("Richest" 1985).

Furthermore, there are no strong indications that the global economy will measurably improve. The Church and its members could become even more constrained by rising expectations and constricting financial resources. In the United States, the Church has taken drastic measures to strengthen its financial position by divesting itself of hospitals, some schools, and several businesses. It is dismantling its once massive welfare farms and ancillary enterprises — presumably freeing its financial resources for other purposes (Gottlieb and Wiley 1984, 17; Molen 1986, 34–35).

The Church is currently concentrating on souls (temples) rather than minds (schools) or bodies (hospitals or job-producing enterprises). Such an emphasis is somewhat reminiscent of the expansion of the Catholic Church during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the wake of European imperialism. Constructing cathedrals, even in extremely poor countries like the Philippines, took on high priority. In contrast, in China during the nineteenth century, most Protestant missionary groups concentrated on building hospitals and schools.

During the twentieth century, the Catholics also built impressive medical and educational facilities but usually only after the cathedrals and churches were in place.

Looking at 150 years of missionary efforts, which approach has been more successful? In Muslim Indonesia, at least, the answer is clear. The Catholic strategy has been immensely successful. Its history there of the last seventy-five years has typically followed a systematic pattern: (1) proselyting by doing good works (small schools, health clinics, simple agricultural development, (2) constructing elaborate churches for worship, (3) establishing parochial schools from elementary to university levels; (4) developing quality health-care facilities, and (5) helping converts find gainful employment. Thus, its institutional structure works toward a massive socio-religious uplift for its adherents in providing for a total way of life.

Consequently, building temples first, even though they are mainly designed in Salt Lake City and paid for with American-Canadian tithing, may be the best strategy in perfecting the new Saints. Spiritual motivations have traditionally been more potent than material ones. The critical feature, however, is that spiritual motivations must develop from each person's desire to find the Savior. They can never be imposed by outside means.

How successful will the Church be in persuading, for instance, the Taiwanese Saints to endow their Utah-designed temple with the same religious significance and spiritual power that Utah Saints feel toward their pioneer temples? If the Church cannot perform this task and is unable or unwilling to allow the Taiwanese Saints to produce a temple in their own cultural vernacular — in architectural and spatial terms that are already endowed with sacral

feelings — then these new temples could become abandoned religious structures like those commonly seen in non-Christian areas that were once part of the British or Dutch empires. The transplanted religions flourished briefly when missionaries followed the imperial armies, but they never took root.

Who will pay for all these new temples, chapels, and missionary facilities? What about their maintenance and operational costs? Can the gospel message make these new “poor” converts, or at least their children — upwardly mobile and financially secure? How long will American/Canadian members be willing to make the financial sacrifices necessary to assist their fellow members?¹ They receive increasingly fewer socio-economic returns on their sizeable contributions. Church schools are not accessible to growing numbers of their children. BYU, BYU/Hawaii, and Ricks are filled to capacity. They must go to Catholic or other religious-supported hospitals or hospitals-for-profit for their medical care. In times of economic stress, they turn to government for assistance. Even their chapels are jammed full and operated on an assembly-line like basis. These examples should not be taken in a negative way. They indicate the massive socio-economic transformation of the Church as it moves from its idyllic village unity to a world organization. Not all of this change will immediately result in “good things” for the members of the traditional Church.

It has been many decades since the Saints have been called to pool material goods and to make actual personal and family sacrifices to advance the cause of the gospel. It could be that such a call may again be made. However, the arena in which such sacrifices may be called for will reflect the bureaucratic present rather than the communal past — not wagon trains supplied by the contributions of the faithful rushing out to meet the stranded handcart companies but the institutional church collecting surpluses from its more affluent families and distributing them in distant colonies of largely invisible Saints. Pictures, words, and electronic media may record this missionary activity, but it will still be far away from those whose contributions made the international church possible.

In short, the Church has now committed itself to expansion in the Third World but primarily on its own, still-American terms, thus incurring increasing financial burdens. It seems unlikely that it will be able to continue such a course indefinitely without some major socio-religious modifications. In this

¹ Business writer Greg Critser in his “Salt Lake City, Utah,” *Inc. The Magazine for Growing Companies*, January 1986, pp. 23–24, quotes several businessmen that finding money in Utah is impossible. “The nation outpaced Utah by six times in per capita growth of commercial bank deposits. The dollar size of commercial and industrial loans per capita is less than half the national average, and there is no local venture capital. Large family expenditures keep bank savings low. What’s more, many practicing Mormon families, who constitute 68 percent of the state population, give 10 percent of their annual income to the Church. Critics say that this is a drain on the state economy, since the Church exports much of the money to build temples and support missionary activities in other countries.” This matter is compounded by excessively high population growth. Ken Wells in his “As the Nation Ages, Utah Gets Younger Thanks to Mormons” (*Wall Street Journal*, 7 Nov. 1984, 1, 22), asserts that with its perennial baby boom Utah is, in effect, a Third World enclave.

regard, three questions become relevant as it grapples with organizational principles of transition:

1. How will it come to terms with its history as an American artifact?
2. How far can/should it adapt to powerful cultural diversities yet still retain its own socio-religious purity and identity?
3. Where can it make its greatest contribution(s) in spiritually uplifting masses of people living in a troubled world?

II

We Americans are the peculiar, chosen people — the Israel of our time (Herman Melville, 1850).

Our fingers will be in every pie (Senator Robert A. Taft, 1943).

Our frontiers are on every continent (John F. Kennedy, 1960).

No organization can deny or escape its history, and an organization's past experience powerfully shapes its future behavior (Greiner 1972; Bigelow 1980, 159–60). The Church was not the only new social or even religious movement to emerge from frontier America in the first half of the nineteenth century, but it is one of two or three which have survived (Foster 1984; Shipps 1985). Why?

Some scholars, studying the survival of organizations under desperate environmental conditions, have hypothesized that one source of energy and cohesion lies in group myths — stories so powerful in social context that historical exploits become legends that give meaning and order to a person's life and shape his or her relations to the world (Mitroff and Kilmann 1979, 189; King 1980).

Domestic Mormonism has a history of saga: the courage of the young prophet, the faith and endurance of the people, the repeated persecutions and moves, the witness of divine intervention, and its present-day success. Adele Bannon McCollum, a historian of religions, observes: "I believe that it is this coming together of the historical and psychical in mytho-history which accounts for the great appeal of Mormonism" (1980, 112). The Church uses the myth of heroic struggles as theory to interpret its situations and formulate its strategies (Hedberg 1981, 8; King 1980, 102–7).

Will this hitherto successful myth enable the Church to function effectively in cultures that were not part of its historic past? Part of that myth is the struggle of an exclusive people against a hostile environment, surviving partially by social insulation and isolation as means of confirming the unity and conformity of its members. "Converts," as Jan Shipps has observed, "undergo a process of assimilation roughly comparable to that which has taken place where immigrants adopt a new and dissimilar nationality" (1977, 764).

It is possible to see Mormon exclusiveness simply as ultra-Americanism. During the nineteenth century, the concept of Manifest Destiny glorified the

United States as an exceptional land occupied by exceptional people who had a superior way of life which they were called to extend to others all over the world. God was on the American side (Delbanco 1982; Williams 1980; Ward, 1955, 136–37). J. Reuben Clark, Jr., in his definitive commentary on the Monroe Doctrine, wrote that America's great influence in the world would be by example rather than by conquest. In giving his defense for the United States's long tradition of isolationism, Clark forcefully wrote: "For America has a destiny — a destiny to conquer the world, — not by force of arms, not by purchase and favor. . . , but by high purpose, . . . by a course of Christian living. . . , in a reign of peace to which we shall lead all others by the persuasion of our own right example" (in Hickman and Hillam 1972, 45).

Until World War II, the Church concentrated on building Zion in the promised land very much within Clark's sentiments, with missionaries gathering the pure in heart out of the wicked world.

World War II effectively demolished the century-old international order established following the Napoleonic wars. Pax Americana replaced Pax Britannia. In a sudden shift of history, the United States inherited many international problems after the European empires collapsed, struggling with the new Soviet Union empire for hegemony. This sudden expansion of U.S. influence ushered the Church into a new international age. Hundreds, if not thousands, of devout Saints expatriated as part of their jobs in the American military expansion, foreign aid programs, private business growth, and voluntary association efforts. David O. McKay, a Church president who responded to the new internationalism in both his global tours and his heightened awareness, gave these members their new charter with his phrase, "Every member a missionary." Without specific instructions from higher authority and acting on their own, many LDS expatriates broke ground for subsequent missionary work and would later provide much of the networking to keep the missionary effort moving forward. Such beginnings have never been adequately explored and documented; nevertheless they are clearly evidenced (Jones 1980 and 1982, Hyer 1982; Tullis 1978 and 1980).

This spontaneous development is unique and special. Although the American government often provided these expatriates with the means of residing in their foreign lands, they acted voluntarily and innocently in carrying out their church obligations, apart from the U.S. government. They were again pioneers, engaged in the great cause. For the first time in their lives, many American Saints felt essential to the Church and experienced spiritual reawakenings. This was my family's experience as my wife and I raised our sons in a variety of Third World settings. Baptizing an entire Indonesian family from the slums of Jakarta was a powerful religious experience and an awesome social responsibility.

However, while successful missionary work is always intensely personal, institutional support is necessary to build a community of saints that will endure. Countless small beginnings have been snuffed out because this requirement was not in place. A Pakistani Muslim student who discovered the gospel at Brigham Young University has no future when he returns home. The truth

may make him spiritually free; but unless he has a network of support, he will never be physically free to live out the tenets and precepts. Some cultures are adamantly and militantly opposed to conversion. Some Mormons have been expelled by foreign governments, not for proselyting per se, but simply because their religion is perceived as offensive (“Americans Jailed” 1985; Mayfield 1969). The 1985–86 Israeli resistance to the BYU Center in Jerusalem is another example.

Now, the Church, rather than relying on spontaneous expatriate activity, purposefully sends exploratory missionaries into eastern Europe, builds a temple in East Germany, and prays for the day when it can enter the People’s Republic of China. It has infant establishments in India and attracts large numbers of black converts in Nigeria and Ghana. While the United States appears to be past its expansionistic phase, the Church is seeking an ever-wider field of influence in its efforts to become truly a world church. It has been transformed into the prime product of an affluent society. It is solely an American artifact, an international corporation. Its physical structures reflect power and social distance. Its operations are centralized and secretive. For example, financial statements are no longer publicly issued.

Unlike many Catholic or Protestant missionary endeavors, the Church’s efforts are adequately financed. Its missionaries live in decent housing. Mission headquarters are clean and respectable. Mormon missionaries abroad are not expected to live like Peace Corps volunteers. They project the image of good, clean-cut, affluent people — all of which is very American.

But behind all of this corporate protection, a sensitive Mormon living in a Third World society will spiritually cry out in the words of Boris Pasternak’s poem, “Hamlet”:

Take away this cup, O Abba, Father.
 Everything is possible to thee. . . .
 But the plan of action is determined,
 and the end irrevocably sealed.
 I am alone; all round me
 drowns in falsehoods;
 Life is not a walk across a field.

III

[Accept a doctrine, and allow it] to go on and grow, you will awaken some day to find it standing over you, the arbiter of your destiny, against which you are powerless, as men are powerless against delusions (William Graham Sumner, 1903, 7).

Verita pontius emergit ex errore quam ex confusione (Truth can no more easily emerge from error than from confusion) (Francis Bacon 1625, 818).

To universalize Mormonism is the primary challenge of today’s Church. Here is found its contemporary dilemma: How can it perform effectively in a

broad range of cultural settings yet maintain its socio-religious purity and identity? If the beauty and power of the gospel message derive from its privileged status as a particular communication of God the Father and the Savior, then how can it arbitrarily be shaped to fit diverse cultural demands?

Of the great religions, only Roman Catholic Christianity and Sunni Islam have been globally successful. Both unequivocally seek to be universal religions, the first following the highly organized institutional model of the Roman Empire and the second following a highly congregational approach received from tribal communitarianism. After an intense struggle, Roman Catholicism now accepts a separation of the sacred and secular in governmental affairs while Islam, engaged in the same struggle, has thus far rejected any such separation (McMurrin 1979; Madsen 1979).

Mormonism, especially since the turn of the century, has adopted the corporate model with excessive dependence on institutionalization and bureaucratic behavior (Nibley 1979; Shepherd and Shepherd 1984, ch. 5; Wiley 1985). As business professor Stahl Edmunds observes, "We Americans are great institutionalists. Like the Romans, we prefer our society tidy, secure, and well-kept by someone else" (1979, 7). In a system that stresses the integrity of the organization above all — even at the expense of individual integrity — Church members frequently suffer from trained incapacity. They are unable to act without orders and are absolutely secure in their convictions. This is, granted, a sweeping generalization; but the best documentation comes from points of sufficient pressure to spark protest: architecture, the activity of contemporary historians, and the fate of the *Seventh East Press*.²

Although sensitive Mormons may not agree with the warning of anthropologist Mark P. Leone, they should at least consider it. He notes that Joseph Smith gave his people a modern and sophisticated understanding of the world and of its changing processes in the discernment of truth:

Mormons were to stand in opposition to all things; God was a man and was contingent. Thus Mormonism began with the idea that truth is relative . . . a product

² See, for instance, Martha Sonntag Bradley, "The Cloning of Mormon Architecture," *DIALOGUE* 14 (Spring 1981): 20–31; Dennis L. Lythgoe, "Battling the Bureaucracy: Building a Mormon Chapel," *DIALOGUE* 15 (Winter 1982): 69–78; J. Bonner Ritchie, "The Institutional Church and the Individual: How Strait the Gate, How Narrow the Way?" *Sunstone* 6 (May/June 1981): 28–35; Davis Bitton, "Like the Tigers of Old Time," *Sunstone* 7 (Sept.–Oct. 1982): 44–48; Rebecca Hall, "BYU Sends Student Newspaper Walking," *Sunstone Review*, March 1983, pp. 2–3. Levi S. Peterson's delightful short story, "The Christianizing of Coburn Heights," in his *The Canyons of Grace* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), pp. 79–101, is a hilarious and disturbing parable about the power of conformity in the Church. The official position and a rationale are expressed in Boyd K. Packer, "The Mantle Is Far, Far Greater than the Intellect," *BYU Studies* 21 (Summer 1981): 259–78, while research documentation, scholarly examination, and personal protests against the results of such a position are expressed in Scott D. Miller, "Thought Reform and Totalism: The Psychology of the LDS Church Missionary Training Programs," with a response by C. Jess Groesbeck, "Thought Reform or Rite of Passage?" *Sunstone* 10 (No. 8, 1986): respectively 24–29 and 30–31; R. Lanier Britsch, "Mormon Missions: An Introduction to the Latter-day Saints Missionary System," *Occasional Bulletin of Missionary Research* 3 (Jan. 1979): 22–27; Scott Dunn, "The Dangers of Revelation," and Kent Dunford, "The Limits of Revelation," *Sunstone* 7 (Nov.–Dec. 1982): respectively 25–29 and 30–31; and Richard J. Cummings, "Quintessential Mormonism: Literal-Mindedness as a Way of Life," *DIALOGUE* 15 (Winter 1982): 92–101.

of the situation in which it is defined. . . . Gradually Mormonism was transformed from a religion whose central truth was a method of perceiving a changing world based on the maintaining of contradictions, to a religion whose truth became fixed and isolated. . . . [As a consequence], while Mormonism possessed a modern and sophisticated understanding of the world, namely the changing nature of truth, it failed to perpetuate the insight. Later generations . . . did not retain Joseph Smith's understanding of change. They passed up Darwin for Linnaeus, Marx for Jefferson, and Freud for the Holy Ghost. They passed up the best insights of the nineteenth century, including those of their own founder. . . .

And by accepting immutable doctrine, Leone concludes, the "church has not given its faithful a handle on the modern world as it has given the world a handle on its faithful" (1979, 221–22, 224).

Certainly there are dangers in responding too fluidly to change. However, when changes reach a threshold stage, a too-rigid response will prevent the transformation necessary if the organization is to survive. Astute students of American organizations have argued since the mid-seventies that the age of management within the corporate model is no longer effective (Reich 1983; Thompson 1975; Waldo 1980). H. Edward Wrapp, professor of business at the University of Chicago and a person of considerable corporate experience, concedes that schools of business in particular and universities in general are not producing good general managers — thinkers and doers who are capable of "getting things done, choosing a strategy and backing that choice, and moving the organization forward" (in Jones 1982, 25–26). In his inimitable way, Hugh Nibley (1983) ascribes this growing organizational frustration to a fatal shift from relying upon leaders to managers. Lester Bush, in his "Valedictory" marking the conclusion of his co-editorship of *Dialogue*, observes: "The Church is in an era of administrative development and growth, requiring administratively gifted ecclesiastical leaders." He adds that when "men of comparable theological sophistication" are again included in the hierarchy, "we will probably see one of the most important reconstructions of the faith since the Restoration" (1982, 30).

A possible direction for change is taking place, not within the official structure, but among the Church's intellectuals, as typified by the writing of the *New Mormon History*. Although the hierarchy appears to tolerate this new direction as witness the fact that such writers as D. Michael Quinn and Thomas G. Alexander are BYU faculty members, it has also taken steps to officially distance itself from this movement and to take pains not to be seen endorsing it, as witness the closing of Leonard Arrington's productive publishing division when he was Church Historian and its transfer to BYU as the Joseph F. Smith Institute, the long lapse between the selling-out of the first edition of *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* by James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976) and its second printing in 1986, and speeches warning against history that does not engender faith.

The important thing about the Church's position toward *New Mormon History* is not its ambivalences but rather than its leaders sometimes take seriously what is being written. In organizational dynamics this intellectual activity forces the Church leaders, even though the inevitable bureaucratic forces are

in the direction of distance, to strive to remain close to the membership and listen. Mormon intellectuals may not take kindly to remarks of General Authorities who come down hard on their scholarship, but such actions are evidence that their presence is being felt. As often heard in the Islamic world, "The power of the pen is many times more powerful than that of the sword." Church leaders must weigh the cost of alienating its growing community of intellectuals, for the future of any organization is always written by those who think and care. The New Mormon History numbers many among its practitioners whose sole purpose is not to weaken but to strengthen Mormonism's being.

Robert Flanders, a former member of the Reorganized faith, states it very well: "[New Mormon History] differs from 'Old Mormon History' principally in the shift of interest from polemics, from attacking or defending assumptions of the faith. It is a shift from an evangelical towards a humanistic interest. As the Mormon historian Richard Bushman put it, it is 'a quest for identity rather than a quest for authority'" (1974, 34).

I believe Flanders is correct in his assessment. I believe Church authorities constantly search out their variegated constituencies. The new history provides an important organizational means to mold socio-religious thought into evolving patterns of constructive social action. As Aristotle held in *The Nicomachean Ethics* (especially 120–24) and Joseph Smith taught, to be fully human a person must participate in the ordering of his/her society's affairs. Anyone who does not is, to a greater or lesser extent, less than fully human. A beauty and a strength of Mormonism is that it enlarges individuals in just this fashion. Never before, however, has this process been so difficult. The "Great Cause" is now global in character. Professor L. Jackson Newell (1982) rightfully observes that an "enlarging of the Mormon vision of Christian ethics" is imperative in these global times.

Some persons may despair that this enlarging of ethics is not occurring; that neo-orthodoxy is too dominant; that the Church's leaders are too parochial in attitude and experience to see the needs of a complex world. Mormonism is so encased in its own provincial history (or myth) that it has nothing to offer non-Western cultures. In reading the Book of Mormon, one African chief commented skeptically, "If that really happened, then why did not my grandfather tell me about it?" Making Mormon scriptures and Mormon history too contemporary can, in fact, destroy their very credibility. The instinctive attempt to transpose its gospel messages into non-Mormon contexts must be avoided, even though those receptors are not fully versed in the nuances of Mormon history. Historical accounts of God's entrance into these latter days cannot be altered to fit some African chief's beliefs, perpetuated by oral tradition, or conform to the specious theories of some scholar seeking academic promotion. These sacred accounts must be preserved to maintain the integrity of Mormonism. The important thing to remember is that God has spoken through his chosen prophets; and he will speak again. Flanders insightfully identifies one strand that runs through all of Mormon history, now found in renewed concern — *humanistic interest*. This interest the African chief could understand and accept.

IV

How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?
(Ps.137:4).

The idea of the missionary is attractive in America. As one scholar notes, its role "draws on deep commitment to the message, as a sense of devotion to transmit that message, and a willingness — indeed, an eagerness to encounter the daggers of an alien culture" (Schon 1971, 59). Mormon missionizing is wholly a part of this general American proselyting zeal. For the last thirty years, the Church has sent several tens of thousands of younger and older missionaries to "strange lands." A sizeable percentage of its financial resources are now being spent on maintaining foreign missionary programs. The financial burden is steadily increasing since those who accept the gospel are mainly the dispossessed and the underprivileged.

How successful the Church has been in transforming these new converts' lives for socio-religious betterment remains to be written. This much can be said: The Church through its missionary program has given hope to many people living under deplorable conditions. It has pointed the basic way toward which human progress can take place, by cultivating spiritual growth in each person. With the building of a number of temples in foreign lands, the new converts can experience the fundamentals of the Gospel.

Meeting their temporal needs possibly constitutes a more difficult problem. Perhaps the best solution is to work in concert with others. In these "strange lands," the Church has no choice but to work with "strangers," requiring new policies of widening organizational perspectives. Mormonism's socio-religious exclusiveness must give way to open, sought-for, cooperation. It must project a new image in the positive terms of formulating a new social creed, a creed that spreads scriptural holiness over those "strange lands" which it seeks to enter. In the words of Amos, "But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (5:24).

The crying need in the world is a sense of shared humanity, a unity of purpose that lets people meet each other across political, social, economic, and religious boundaries. The way toward meeting this need is clear. The world's most urgent practical need is for food. The facts are staggering. "Hunger has killed more people in the last five years than have been killed in all the wars, revolutions, and murders in the past 150 years" (*World Development Forum* 1983, 3). "More than one billion people are chronically hungry" (*Hunger* 1985, 7). The worst earthquake in modern history occurred in China in 1976 where some 242,000 people perished. Hunger kills that many people every seven days (*Hunger* 1985, 7). Added to these haunting statistics must be the debilitating effects of malnutrition where lives of countless people are maimed.

The developing nations with two-thirds of the world's population produce less than one-third of the food (*Hunger* 1985, 156–57). By the year 2000 reputable agricultural scientists predict that famine on a global scale will have overcome our current productive ability (Brown 1984, 383–84). Even the United States has a sizeable population of the hungry.

Reverence for food — the holiness of bread — is a quasi-theologic concept to Mormonism. The monthly fast gives the faithful an opportunity to share their resources with others in need. The special fasts in January and February 1985 on behalf of Ethiopian famine victims were a landmark event in sharing with others not of our faith.

However, in a less public way, the Church or individual members had already established networks of social concern through the Ezra Taft Benson Agricultural and Food Institute, a nonprofit organization in Provo, Utah, which studies new ways to produce more food on small family plots, Food for Poland, the Food Bank in Phoenix, Friends of West Africa, and Collegium Aesculapium, also centered in Provo, Utah (Pinborough 1986; England 1985 and 1986; "Mesa Saints" 1983; Clegg 1986; MacMurray 1983).

Part of the problem that Mormonism has faced in being a bonding factor across boundaries and in uniting with other organizations for good has been a fundamental question about its identity as a religious institution among other religious institutions. A First Presidency message of 15 February 1978 was a landmark in setting a cooperative tone: "The great religious leaders of the world such as Mohammed, Confucius and the reformers, as well as philosophers including Socrates, Plato, and others, received a portion of God's light. Moral truths were given to them by God to enlighten whole nations and to bring a higher level of understanding to individuals" (in Palmer 1978, v).

Tancred King sees that this "partial fulfillment position allows the Church to approach non-Christians with a positive, unvindictive message, recognizing and using the unfulfilled truth in other religions" (1983, 30). He finds this new tone one reason for the Church's recent successes in proselyting. However, because the Church insists that it is neither Protestant nor Catholic, "one cannot be sure," as Sidney F. Ahlstrom, historian of religions, writes, "if the object of our consideration is a sect, a mystery cult, a new religion, a church, a people, a nation, or an American subculture" (1972, 508). Thomas O'Dea characterized Mormonism as "a movement that developed from 'near-sect' to 'near-nation'" (1957, 115; see also Michaelson 1977; Oman 1982; "Are Mormons" 1982). Many other religions classify Mormonism as a cult (Barlow 1979). Two sociologists appraised Mormonism's bad popular image, citing the 1977 Gallup report that "Americans were five times as prone to say they disliked Mormons as they were to indicate dislike of Methodists, Lutherans, and Presbyterians, and almost twice as likely to dislike Mormons as Jews" (Stark and Bainbridge 1980, 1385). Jan Shipps breaks new ground by calling Mormonism a "distinct religious tradition in its own right," a fourth major American religion joining Judaism, Catholicism, and Protestantism (1985, preface). Before the Church can play a greater role in advancing humanity's interests, its identity must be more clearly understood.

While Church leaders have not sat in conference with leaders of the great faith communities (Islam, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Catholic, and Protestant), they have authorized sizeable financial contributions to select voluntary associations for international use — the American Red Cross, Catholic Relief Services, Africare, and Care, Inc. ("Day" 1985). Such cooperation and commitment

to charity constitute small but significant steps in becoming a participant in the decade's greatest issue, beyond the Church's traditional activities. Food is a religious issue, not strictly an economic or political one. Each human life is a precious gift of God to which no economic or political value may be ascribed. When human lives are treated as expendables, to be wasted according to political and economic values, then the prospect for humanity dims.

The twentieth century is a tragic century. It has been preoccupied with the destruction of human lives. A correction in this conduct of human affairs is long overdue.

The making of a new Mormon social ethic is clearly being evidenced. Mormons are basically kind and sympathetic people. In sizeable numbers, they join in community activities and seek out good causes. They will make material sacrifices when presented with sensible logic. In the past, the Church has been a remarkable institution for socio-economic uplift.

Nevertheless, venturing into this sad world of the disadvantaged will not be without personal costs. There is a high risk that the poverty of the inflicted societies will vividly reveal the tragic sense of life (Hunsaker 1983). Those who enter this cruel world must be prepared to bring courage to those masses of poor people without losing confidence in themselves or their own hope for the future. It is very easy to sink into a feeling of fatalism and thus justifying social inaction. More horrifying is that those in advantaged positions may become emotionally corrupted into believing that the poor represent subhuman beings without the same human capacity to understand pain and sorrow, or to achieve progress. They are imprinted with lower "brain capacity" to their kind of life — incidentally once a justification for the "white man's burden" (in religious terms, see Von Der Mehden 1985, 21-42).

The more blessed Mormon now stands, or soon will, with Christian in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, who when warned of impending danger, said, "You make me afraid, but whither shall I fly to be safe? I must venture" (in Hunsaker 1983, 35). So be it with the Church and its American affluent members. Its days of an exclusive but diminishing halcyon dominion is now ended. It is off to new spiritual searchings.

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