

## REVIEWS

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### Universalizing Mormonism: The Mexican Laboratory

*Mormons in Mexico: The Dynamics of Faith and Culture* by F. LaMond Tullis (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1987), 250 pp., \$22.50.

Reviewed by Davis Bitton, professor of history at the University of Utah and co-author (with Leonard J. Arrington) of *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (1979).

THE APPEARANCE OF *Mormons in Mexico: The Dynamics of Faith and Culture* is cause for celebration. For one thing, another volume in the beleaguered sesquicentennial series sees the light of day, accompanied by a refreshingly frank explanation by its author, F. LaMond Tullis, of some of the frustrations of being a scholar working in Mormon history. As he explains in the preface, one publisher rejected the work because it mentioned sensitive problems of the Church in Mexico. Finally, after his work was accepted by his current publisher, Tullis had to revise his manuscript in order to communicate with a general, not only a Latter-day Saint, audience.

More important, *Mormons in Mexico* provides a model of how studies of the Church in other countries can be carried out most fruitfully, providing not superficial cheerleading but genuine understanding. Since we will doubtless be seeing a long string of publications — Mormons in Korea, in the Philippines, in France, in Finland, and so on — it is important to have something like Tullis's work, which is neither a pageant nor "yearbook," to show the way.

The first six chapters tell the story of early exploring and colonizing, the ups and downs of missionary proselytizing, the exodus of many Anglo-American Mormons

during the Revolution of 1912, the subsequent development of relative isolation, and the shattering challenge of the Third Convention in the 1930s.

Essentially a nationalist movement, the Third Convention was a pathetic experience stretching from the mid-1930s to the mid-1940s. Some Mexican members, feeling neglected and patronized, petitioned among other things for a mission president of Mexican nationality. A schism resulted but was eventually healed largely through the efforts of mission president Arwell L. Pierce, an unsung hero. A better goal, argued Pierce, was a stake with a Mexican president. At the time of President George Albert Smith's visit to Mexico in 1946 some 1200 Conventionists returned to the Church. Unity was restored. Eventually, in one way or another, all of the basic goals of the Third Convention — Mexicans in leadership positions, young Mexicans on missions, increased educational opportunities, and more chapels — would be achieved.

Especially valuable in Tullis's book are two chapters on current conditions. The generation since World War II has seen incredible growth as Church membership in Mexico climbed from several thousand to over 300,000 in more than eighty stakes. Young Mexicans by the hundreds, even thousands, have served as missionaries. Though the Church by law may not sponsor schools directly, they have enhanced educational opportunities by indirectly sponsoring schools through an educational society that meets legal requirements. Rapid growth occurring simultaneously elsewhere in Latin America has raised the percentage of Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking Church members from 1.5 to 20. By the end of the century, Tullis estimates,

"the mother tongue of one out of every four Mormons may be Spanish or Portuguese" (p. xiii).

Tullis neither exaggerates nor glosses over problems and challenges. Local leadership is still a problem. Accepting Mormonism often leads to tensions with inherited cultural standards. Although much has been achieved, education, which creates expectations, is both a blessing and a source of frustration. Also, occasionally Anglos, insensitive to Mexican pride, talk as if the Church is somehow linked to American imperialism and conservative political ideology. And, like other areas with many baptisms, approximately one-half of Mexican converts do not remain active.

Recognizing that there are different perspectives, Tullis deftly presents each of these problems from the point of view of those experiencing them and in his final paragraph leaves open questions as to whether they will be resolved in the future. While his tone is optimistic, it is clear leaders must proceed carefully, showing sensitivity to Mexican identity.

Tullis's bibliography is extensive, benefiting particularly from oral history inter-

views conducted by Tullis himself or by others, such as Gordon Irving of the Church Historical Department. But I was disappointed that Eduardo Balderas was not listed in the index: Balderas, whose lifetime work was translating scores of Church works and hymns into Spanish, deserves mention, even if he performed his labors in Salt Lake City.

Familiar with the literature on modernization, social change, and conflict, Tullis has written a book that simply could not be produced by a less informed amateur, however diligent and well intentioned. A case study of the challenges and rewards "in the meeting of diverse cultures with a common religion" (p. 209), *Mormons in Mexico* is recommended reading for General Authorities and Regional Representatives concerned with similar problems elsewhere in the world, for those who want to inform themselves of some of the exciting developments away from the traditional Mormon centers, and for anyone open to a thoughtful analysis of the interrelations of religious, national, and class loyalties and aspirations.

## Sorting Out Mormon Theology

*Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy: A Crisis Theology* by O. Kendall White, Jr. (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 1987), 196 pp., \$11.95.

Reviewed by Kent E. Robson, professor of philosophy, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.

IS MORMON THEOLOGY a radically novel theology or is it akin to Catholic-Protestant, orthodox theology? White's new book on Mormon theology asks this question. White lays out two distinct ways of looking at Mormon theology. First, he describes what I call traditional Mormon theology, which emphasizes the themes that Joseph Smith articulated toward the end of his life and

that Brigham Young, Parley P. Pratt, Orson Pratt, Orson F. Whitney, and B. H. Roberts promulgated in Utah. Second, it can develop into what White calls neo-orthodox theology similar to Catholic-Protestant, orthodox theology. To do this it must reject the latter ideas of Joseph Smith expressed most conspicuously in his famous King Follett Address.

According to the Joseph Smith tradition, God is an organizer, not a creator *ex nihilo* (out of nothing). God is powerful, has great knowledge, and is the very embodiment of goodness; but God cannot prevent all evils and human travails. People are eternally necessary beings with inherent freedom that is a part of their eternal intelligences and not "given" them by God.