

## On Becoming a Universal Church: Some Historical Perspectives

*James B. Allen*

Remember all thy church, O Lord, with all their families, and all their immediate connections, with all their sick and afflicted ones, with all the poor and the meek of the earth; that the kingdom, which thou hast set up without hands, may become a great mountain and fill the whole earth. (D&C 109:72)

IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN TOWNSHIP OF SOWETO lives Julia Mavimbela, a seventy-three-year-old black woman. In 1955 her husband, John, died, leaving Julia with five children under the age of ten. After moving from Johannesburg to Soweto, she took up organic gardening in the rocky soil on the hillside outside her home to raise food for her family. Soon she began not only to redeem the soil but also to redeem downtrodden local children, teaching them how to raise successful gardens in areas often no larger than doorways. She also became an expert in natural remedies, somehow found time to obtain a formal education, became fluent in seven languages, and became a teacher. She has also owned several businesses, including a restaurant, a bakery, a butchery, and an herb shop.

In addition, Julia has been deeply involved in social action. She organized the Junior Gumboots, a youth club for boys eight to fourteen years old. After the brutal 1976 race riots in Soweto, she organized groups to help repair not only the physical damages but also the painful mental and moral injuries. She was a founding member and eventual co-national president (1984–86) of Women for Peace, which eventually grew to fifteen thousand members worldwide. She has fought for prison reform and integrated playgrounds for children ("South African" 1989; LeBaron 1990, 141–52).

In 1981 this remarkable black woman met two white Mormon missionaries from America. She invited them to her little home and was especially touched by their teachings about salvation for the dead. She soon joined the Church and eventually became Relief Society

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*JAMES B. ALLEN is the Lemuel H. Redd, Jr., Professor of Western American History at Brigham Young University. This essay was originally delivered at the annual meeting of the Mormon History Association, Laie, Hawaii, 11 June 1990.*

president of her little branch in Soweto. Later she became an ordinance worker in the Johannesburg South Africa Temple.

The story of Julia Mavimbela is just one dramatic illustration of how far the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has come since 1950. Forty years ago, missionaries were discouraged from working among blacks anywhere and, despite Church leaders' stated disapproval of racial prejudice, the priesthood policy not only helped justify some members' biases but also created a public image of a discriminatory Church. Today official racial barriers are gone, a black was recently named as a General Authority of the Church, and a black woman can be a Relief Society president in apartheid-ridden South Africa. This is not to imply that there are no racial problems in the 1990s Church, but it is a dramatic reminder that we have made considerable progress in the past forty years.

#### CHANGES AND DIRECTIONS SINCE 1950

Julia Mavimbela's conversion also epitomizes the modern effort of Latter-day Saints to fulfill Joseph Smith's vision that the gospel eventually would be taught "unto all nations, kindreds, tongues and people" (D&C 42:58) and that the kingdom would fill the world. President David O. McKay spelled out that vision again, though in a different way, in April 1955. After traveling extensively to the missions of the Church in Europe, Africa, Latin America, and the South Pacific, he stressed in a general conference address the need "to put forth every effort within reason and practicability to place within reach of Church members in . . . distant missions every educational and spiritual privilege that the Church has to offer" (CR, April 1955, 25). The Church was embarking upon an irreversible effort not only to convert people around the world but also, at long last, to be more effective in persuading them to remain in their homelands.

Problems, however, kept the Church from achieving the full potential of that vision. Among them was a kind of cultural imperialism; missionaries and other American Saints often had difficulty distinguishing between the *essentials* of their faith and the cultural baggage they were carrying. The priesthood policy inhibited missionary work among blacks worldwide, and political realities as well as frequent strong exhortations against Communism by prominent Church leaders made it practically unthinkable that the Church could gain recognition or even approval to function in at least a third of the world.

The spirit, nevertheless, was there, and the mark of President McKay's administration, historian Spencer Palmer has observed, "was a conscious effort to give dignity and strength to the Church in areas

outside the United States" (1978, 39). Stakes were organized under his direction in the South Pacific and Europe; temples were constructed in New Zealand, Switzerland, and England; missions were organized in several nations where they had never been before; and the physical gathering of the Saints to the "Utah Zion" came almost to an end. A constant theme in the 1960s and 1970s was that the essence of the gospel transcended national and cultural boundaries. The 1970s saw a noticeable decline, and finally a disappearance, of political utterances that could offend other governments, particularly socialist governments. In the 1980s the Church gained recognition in many countries behind the so-called "iron curtain" and even built a temple in the German Democratic Republic. Finally, the dramatic revolutions of 1989-90 opened many iron curtain countries, and it suddenly became apparent that at last Mormon missionaries would be free to come and go—even in the Soviet Union.

Change within the Church came in many ways, but numerical and geographic growth was the most outwardly apparent symbol of what was happening and presented the most easily observable challenges. "No longer might this church be thought of as the 'Utah Church,' or as an 'American church,'" said President Harold B. Lee in April 1973, declaring that "this greatly expanded Church population is today our most challenging problem."

That challenge has continued, and the comparative statistics for the past four decades are enlightening. Church membership grew from about 1,100,000 in 1950 to 7,300,000 in 1990 (Watson 1990). The number of organized stakes jumped from 180, about 47 percent of them in Utah, to 1700, over half of which had been created since 1978 and only about 23 percent of which were in Utah (Watson 1990; *Deseret News* 1989-90 *Church Almanac*).

In 1950 the Church functioned in less than fifty nations or territories, but forty years later it had expanded to 128 nations. In 1950 some 7.7 percent of Church members lived outside the United States and Canada. By the end of 1989, this had changed to 40.5 percent.<sup>1</sup>

In 1950 less than six thousand missionaries served in the field, but in 1990 there were nearly forty thousand. In 1950 most missionaries received a minimum of formal training during the ten days or so they spent in a mission home in Salt Lake City. Today they receive intensive language and missionary training in fourteen missionary training centers around the world, and 23 percent of all the missionaries trained go to centers outside Provo, Utah.

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<sup>1</sup> The 1991-92 *Church Almanac*; p. 328, shows 4,343,000 in the United States and Canada and 2,958,000 in other countries.

In 1950 the Church operated eight temples, only one of which was outside the United States. By 1990 twenty-two of the Church's forty-three temples were outside the United States. In 1950 some 38,400 students were enrolled in Church educational programs, including seminaries, institutes, colleges, and Brigham Young University. By 1990 that figure had increased nearly twelvefold, to 442,500.

The number of General Authorities tripled during the same period: about thirty managed the administrative work of the Church in 1950, and ninety did the job in 1990. The First Quorum of the Seventy was organized in 1976 and the Second Quorum of the Seventy in 1989. In the 1950s the Church was administered through stake and mission organizations, with leaders reporting directly to the Quorum of the Twelve (though some broader units operated, such as the European Mission, with other missions as subdivisions). In 1991, after a complex series of changes, the Church was administered through twenty-two area organizations around the world, each presided over by Seventies, with stake and mission presidents reporting to them.

Such statistics dramatize some aspects of what has happened, including the logistical challenge of maintaining unified administration and of placing missionaries, buildings, and the full program of the Church among diverse peoples and cultures worldwide. All this has necessitated a number of significant innovations and suggests that the Saints should be prepared for additional changes in the future.

The most important changes, however, may be those that cannot be quantified or illustrated by administrative innovation. These are changes in attitude and perspectives that may, in fact, reflect not just numerical growth but an important spiritual thrust in the direction of more universal brotherhood and sisterhood. In 1950, for example, it might have been possible to identify the number of black members, and perhaps those of some other races, not just through estimates but through membership records. It was Church policy, at least in some areas, to identify some racial groups with a special letter on membership records. Though this only reflected the social realities of the time, I am happy that today it would be impossible to identify race through such records. The Church identifies its members as brothers and sisters, without distinguishing racial backgrounds. This was one result of President Spencer W. Kimball's momentous June 1978 revelation on priesthood. This revelation was a pivotal event in Church history, not because of what it did for Church growth but because of what it did to help build closer bonds of brotherhood and sisterhood within the Church and across racial barriers.

President Kimball also did much more to stimulate the international growth of the Church. He exhorted every young man to serve a mission and urged the Saints to study languages. Under his administration, area general conferences became regular occurrences (though they have subsided now), and the Church Educational System expanded worldwide. By 1988 seminaries and institutes operated in at least seventy-four nations or territories.<sup>2</sup> In 1973 President Kimball appointed David M. Kennedy as the Church's ambassador to the world. Kennedy drew upon his vast American diplomatic experience to help the Church gain recognition in many places and to open more doors for missionaries (Hickman 1987). President Kimball placed the main responsibility for the growth of Zion, however, squarely on the shoulders of the Saints themselves. In 1975 he called for a Churchwide prayer campaign, a "serious, continuous petition to the Lord" for two things: (1) enough missionaries to "cover the world as with a blanket," and (2) open gates, allowing those missionaries to carry the gospel to inaccessible nations ("Insights" 1975, 70).

The Church would hardly be ready for genuine universal brotherhood and sisterhood, however, without a great deal of soul-searching. All Saints, especially those living along Utah's Wasatch Front, would need to distinguish more clearly than ever before just which Church teachings and practices were really essential to the gospel and which were merely convenient reflections of particular cultures. Church leaders recognized this, and in 1971, at a "Korean Night" program, Elder Bruce R. McConkie of the Council of the Twelve reminded his mostly American audience of the "considerable difficulty and turmoil" faced in New Testament times when the apostles themselves "had been so completely indoctrinated with the fact that the plan of salvation was limited to a particular people and a particular nation that they found it exceedingly difficult to completely reverse the field and begin going to the gentile nations and to the ends of the earth." The process, he said, involved "conflict, turmoil, contention, difficulty, and differences of opinion," and he aptly applied the lesson to the modern Church as it grew to incorporate diverse peoples. "There are going to be some struggles and some difficulties, some prejudices, and some uncertainties along the way. There are going to be members of the Church who are prejudiced against this nation or that, because of the color of the people's hair, or their eyes, or their skin, or because of some social circumstance. . . . These things . . .

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the international growth of the Church Educational System, see William E. Berrett, *A Miracle in Weekday Religious Education* (Salt Lake City: William E. Berrett, 1988), chapters 14-17 and appendixes.

we will have to rise above,"<sup>3</sup> he forcefully declared to the American Saints.

Koreans have a different background than we have, of course, which is of no moment to the Lord[!] . . . What counts is whether we receive the gospel of Jesus Christ and live its laws. We're not trying to change the cultural background for anyone. . . . It is no different to have different social customs than it is to have different languages. . . . And the Lord knows all languages. . . . It ought to be one of the aims of the Korean people to preserve their culture, to keep their own dances, and their own dress, and their own mores and ways of life alive, as long as they are not inharmonious with gospel principles. This is what the Church is saying to the Koreans and to all the people of Asia today. (McConkie 1971, 138-9, 142-3, 147)

Other leaders demonstrated the same spirit. In 1985 Elder Boyd K. Packer said: "Now we are moving into those countries, but we can't move *there* with all the baggage we produce and carry *here*! We can't move with a 1947 Utah Church! Could it be that we are not prepared to take the *gospel* because we are not prepared to take (and they are not prepared to receive) all of the things we have wrapped up with it as extra baggage" (in Copeland 1988, 97). In addition, many general conference addresses in recent years have seemed to pay particular attention to defining Sainthood not just in terms of Church membership but, more particularly, in terms of what Elder M. Russell Ballard called in April 1990, the "small and simple things" (Ballard 1990). Love, service, home, family, and worship of the Savior: these universals constituted the essence of Mormonism so far as the message of that conference was concerned.<sup>4</sup>

### THE RESTORATION WORLDWIDE: SOME SELECTED BEGINNINGS

In a sense, taking the gospel to diverse nations might be thought of as a series of new restorations, roughly analogous to the restoration in

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<sup>3</sup> The last sentence was in the original manuscript of the talk, but for some reason was eliminated from the published version. It is included here for emphasis, however.

<sup>4</sup> See the conference addresses in the May 1990 *Ensign*, particularly those by M. Russell Ballard ("Small and Simple Things"), Rex D. Pinegar ("Home First"), Derek A. Cuthbert ("The Spirituality of Service"), Richard P. Lindsay ("Ye Have Done It Unto Me"), L. Tom Perry ("Family Traditions"), Joseph B. Wirthlin ("Personal Integrity"), Malcolm S. Jeppsen ("Who Is a True Friend?"), Thomas S. Monson ("My Brother's Keeper" and "A Little Child Shall Lead Them"), Marvin J. Ashton ("Neither Boast of Faith nor of Mighty Works"), Gordon B. Hinckley ("Blessed Are the Merciful"), Dallin H. Oaks ("World Peace"). This does not mean, of course, that general conference speakers have not also emphasized some things that are peculiarly American. Note the surge of American patriotic rhetoric that came in April 1991 as a response to the crisis in the Persian Gulf.

America in the 1830s, when particular social and political conditions made the time "just right."<sup>5</sup> In Japan, for example, early efforts to introduce the gospel were relatively unsuccessful, and the mission was closed in 1924. After World War II, however, conditions were ripe and missionaries returned to reintroduce the gospel in 1948. Forty years later, Japan had eighty-five thousand members, twenty-three stakes, and a temple.

As each new area has been opened, converts with little or no previous contact with Mormonism have had to learn the gospel from "scratch," with few helps in their own language. In many cases, only the scriptures have been available, but in some ways this may have been a blessing. The paucity of instructional materials has allowed the new Saints to learn the gospel in its simplicity, without the American cultural paraphernalia often added by a profusion of manuals, outlines, and built-in social attitudes.

Paradoxically, however, the American presence in several areas was what paved the way for missionaries and, in some cases, helped keep them there. English-born BYU professor Arthur Henry King once observed that the United States was the "matrix of the Church," and the gospel is spread to other nations largely because of its, and their, relationship to the United States (King 1978, 4). Scholars may debate the merits of this interpretation, but the historic relationship between America and the Church, and America's role as a catalyst in the spread of Mormonism, can hardly be denied.

South Korea is a case in point. Many LDS American servicemen were stationed there during the Korean War, and it did not take them long to organize and begin holding meetings. Some told their military buddies about the Church, and soon a few were baptized. The servicemen also became acquainted with Dr. Kim Ho Jik, a South Korean educator and government official who had been educated in the United States and joined the Church there. Through him they met other Koreans and taught the gospel to several. They also began holding English classes, which became the stimuli for many gospel discussions. On 2 August 1952, they baptized four Koreans, including two of Dr. Kim's children, in the ocean near Pusan.

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<sup>5</sup> In America the rise of democracy, the religious upheavals following the Second Great Awakening, the quest for the primitive gospel among many religious groups, and various other factors created conditions that, according to some historians, made that the only time and place where a religion such as Mormonism could arise. One American historian who takes this point of view is Gordon S. Wood, "Evangelical America and Early Mormonism," *New York History* 61 (October 1980): 359-86.

One person baptized that day was a Sister Han, a former student of Kim's. In the testimony meeting that followed the baptism, she mustered enough courage to stand and express her gratitude. Though she spoke in halting, broken English, she nevertheless elegantly captured what the gospel brought by these American servicemen meant to some people whose lives had been devastated by war:

It was the last December before last Christmas that I have been this church firstly. And at the time I was a real depressed refugee, as during the last two years I have seen a many tragic things with the result of war and I also have seen many guiltless people were killed by the Communists and numerous property burnt to ashes. Beside we had to run away from the old familiar city Seoul. At last we came down to the Southern extremity of Korea. The Communists have taken away my father and my mother-in-law died on the way. We came down to Pusan having nothing but our bodies. At first we didn't know any way to making money, but we didn't want to do wrong. I thought that if I had no children I should like to die, just at this time Brother Kim came back to Korea from his abroad States. He introduced this church to me and I knew this Church is truthful church. I knew nothing about the Gospel at all before I came here and was not even a Christian. I liked atmosphere of this church and I felt a great happiness in my mind attending to meeting of the Church. I knew every member of the church are sincere at their faith and their conduct are very truthful and clean. I wondered how much a wonderful church can be in this trouble days. I know many American soldiers are doing the ungraceful conduct at the front, though I wonder why there is big difference between other soldiers and LDS men, and finally I found out the reason of it and I say it is because LDS men have a strong faith and the conduct [?] thing with such a noble minds. I am thankful for God that he gave me a happiness even I have nothing for him. I feel a responsibility to making a good church by our Korean people ownself. (in Yardley and Jones n.d., 4-5)

By May 1953, the congregation in Pusan had twenty-seven Korean members and several investigators. All of them, however, were students at the Seoul National University, which had taken temporary refuge in Pusan. In September the university moved back to Seoul, and all the Korean Saints but one returned with it. The servicemen persisted nevertheless and soon baptized more converts and had more investigators attending their weekday meetings. In Seoul, meanwhile, the newly arrived Korean converts contacted servicemen there and before long found a meeting place off the military base, where they organized a Korean Sunday School and staffed it entirely with Korean Saints (Yardley and Jones n.d.; see also Choi 1990).

On 2 August 1955, President Joseph Fielding Smith of the Council of the Twelve, in the company of President Hilton A. Robertson of the Northern Far East Mission and others, stood on a hill overlooking Seoul and dedicated Korea for the preaching of the gospel. Later that

evening, President Smith set apart Elder Kim Ho Jik as district president of the New Korean District of the Northern Far East Mission.

This was the beginning of Mormonism in Korea—the restoration, if you will, of the gospel in a new land. Many Koreans were especially well prepared for Mormonism, partly because it gave them hope after the hopelessness they had experienced during the war, and partly because elements of their traditional culture prepared them for the gospel message (Choi 1990, 76). The American matrix, however, played an essential role in laying the foundation before the first full-time missionaries arrived in 1956. The Korean mission was organized in 1962, and by the end of 1987, the country had 44,000 Saints, fourteen stakes, four missions, a temple, and a missionary training center. With the exception of the temple president, all local leadership positions were filled by native Koreans, and a significant portion of the missionary force was Korean.

Asia was not the only place where an American presence helped pave the way for the introduction of Mormonism. In 1962 an American Latter-day Saint, John Duns, Jr., was working on a Lockheed Aircraft project at the Fiat plant in Torino, Italy. Other American Mormons, including several servicemen, also lived in the area. Italy was under the jurisdiction of the Swiss Mission, and at the first opportunity the new mission president, John M. Russon, went to Torino and set apart Duns as district president and servicemen's coordinator. Leavitt Christensen, a civilian employee of the military, was sustained as one of Duns's counsellors, and Captain Paul Kelley of the United States Air Force became the other. These and other Americans formed the nucleus of the Church in Italy. They felt deeply their responsibility to instruct and fellowship Italians who were eventually converted. At President Russon's suggestion, some of them even learned to speak Italian (Russon 1975, 22–33).

Ironically, a certain kind of inter-European cultural tension, unfortunate as it was, also contributed to the growth of the Church in Italy. Both Switzerland and Germany were experiencing labor shortages, and the respective governments allowed Italian laborers to emigrate and work for up to six months. Such workers often stayed as long as possible, returned briefly to their families, then came back again. They did not assimilate well into the non-Italian cultures, however, and in Switzerland President Russon assigned missionaries with Italian surnames to learn their language and work among them. Several baptisms resulted, and the new converts eventually took the gospel message home to Italy with them. Something similar happened in Germany, where the Bavarian Mission, the South German Mission, and the North German Mission each created Italian zones. In some

cases, then, it was Italian converts from Switzerland and Germany who, working with American businessmen and servicemen in their homeland, helped lay the foundation for the growth of the Church in Italy itself.

Early in 1965, President Russon sent twenty Italian-speaking missionaries into Italy—the first full-time missionaries to go to that country in over a hundred years. His successor, Rendell Mabey, expanded the work and finally, on 2 August 1966, Elder Ezra Taft Benson organized the Italian Mission. John Duns, Jr., who by then had returned to California, came back as the first mission president. Two decades later, at the end of 1987, Italy had two stakes, three missions, and thirteen thousand Saints (Russon 1975, 16–22; MH 1966).

Mormonism found its way into new areas in other ways too. In Ghana and Nigeria, American Mormons sometimes visited as scholars, business representatives, or in other capacities. Before 1978 these visitors were not at liberty to proselytize among the blacks, but they often left literature with interested people and did whatever else seemed appropriate. At the same time, hundreds, perhaps thousands, of blacks in these two countries received literature about the Church through various other sources, believed what they read, and corresponded with the Missionary Department in Salt Lake City. LaMar S. Williams, an employee of that department, sent out literature when requested and kept up correspondence.

Requests continued to pour into Church headquarters from African people, pleading for missionaries or for the establishment of the Church among them. When the Church did not respond, some blacks organized their own churches with the name “Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” or with very similar names. In the early 1960s, the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve finally agreed to open a mission in Nigeria, so that people there pleading for the gospel could at least be organized and, under the direction of white priesthood holders, receive the sacrament and other blessings of the Church. The plan was aborted in 1963 after bad publicity about the priesthood denial to blacks caused the Nigerian government to refuse visas to any prospective Mormon missionaries (see Allen 1991; Mabey and Allred 1984; Lebaron 1990; Morrison 1990).

Almost immediately after the 1978 revelation, however, missionary couples were sent into Nigeria and Ghana. Convert baptisms were immediately overwhelming. After a year or so, however, new missionaries were instructed to take their time and consolidate before expanding too rapidly. One American couple, who arrived in 1979, found twenty-six branches with about 1000 to 1500 members who

knew virtually nothing about Church procedure. Some had not even been visited after their baptisms and were, according to these missionaries, still "Pentecostal Protestants." This couple set about encouraging the new African Saints to hold sacrament meetings that at least "reasonably" resembled those the Americans were used to. They also translated Joseph Smith's story and other basic gospel information into the native languages, using tape recorders rather than the printed page to communicate the material because of widespread illiteracy. In addition, they attempted to provide agricultural training for the new Saints (Bartholomew 1983, 20-25, 30). It took some time for the African Saints to catch the full vision of what the Church was all about, but it also took time for some American Saints to catch the vision that the gospel may not include everything they once thought it did.

The Spirit was also brooding behind the so-called "iron curtain" in eastern Europe, where in most places missionary work completely stopped after World War II. Mission presidents in Switzerland and Austria, however, and other Church members and representatives maintained contact as well as they could, and by the late 1980s, the Church enjoyed at least an open presence in Poland, Yugoslavia, Hungary, and East Germany (Condie 1989). Significantly, the Communist East German government even allowed the Church to build a temple in Freiberg, and the building was dedicated in 1985. The government also allowed East German Latter-day Saints to serve as missionaries, even outside their country. These seemingly amazing concessions resulted from good relations built by General Authorities, who convinced the government that Latter-day Saints would be good citizens, would not leave their country permanently, and would always, in the spirit of the twelfth Article of Faith, obey, honor, and sustain the law.

Then, in 1989, the world was stunned as a series of democratic revolutions swept eastern Europe. "Iron curtain" countries began to move away from Soviet domination, freedom of speech and of the press became realities, religious restrictions were lifted, and the Berlin Wall, that frightful symbol of the separation and suppression that had been forced on East Europeans for nearly half a century, came tumbling down. For the Church, this meant a sudden new opportunity, but one it was prepared for. In March 1990, Czechoslovakia opened its doors to the Church, and of the eight new European missions announced that month, three were in East bloc countries: Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. Ironically, however, East Germans now felt a hint of disfavor toward the Mormons who, in the minds of the non-Communists, had in their quest

for acceptance drawn too close to the Communists.<sup>6</sup> Change plays strange tricks on a people who are trying only to be at peace with their neighbors and spread the gospel message.

There are still many areas where the Church cannot send missionaries but which have a Mormon presence nevertheless because active Latter-day Saints work there as businessmen, American government officials, foreign employees of local governments, or in special service capacities. Although these people are not authorized to do missionary work, they usually create positive images for the Church. A number of Church members, for example, teach English in Chinese universities, under an agreement between the government of the People's Republic of China and the David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies at Brigham Young University. Usually retired couples who have volunteered to live and teach in China for a year, these people clearly understand that they are not missionaries but have been chosen because they will represent Brigham Young University well. Clearly, their presence in China has the potential also of doing good for the Church. In addition, beginning in the late 1980s, Elders Russell M. Nelson and Dallin H. Oaks of the Council of the Twelve became personal ambassadors of good will as they held many discussions with Chinese leaders. They were assured that the Latter-day Saints could practice their religious beliefs freely, though missionary work is still not allowed. In February 1990, Elder Nelson presented the Chinese ambassador to the United States a check for \$25,000, on behalf of the Church, to assist in reconstruction after a disastrous earthquake.

### PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

Opening the door to the world, however, has unleashed a myriad of challenges and problems, many of them unanticipated, that the Church may wrestle with for generations. One such challenge can be seen in the experience of Winfield Q. Cannon who, in 1979, was finishing a term as mission president in Singapore. Early in September, he received a sudden visit from James E. Faust of the Council of the Twelve, who had been sent by President Kimball to ordain Cannon to the office of patriarch. Cannon was to spend the last part of his mission traveling throughout Southeast Asia giving patriarchal blessings to whoever needed them. About a month later, he started on a series of tours throughout Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, and even to India.

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<sup>6</sup> This according to BYU historian Douglas Tobler, who maintains close contact with people and events in Germany.

The days were incredibly long for the itinerant patriarch, who flew or used whatever transportation was available to reach the eager Saints waiting in each city or town. During one week in Indonesia, he visited seven or eight cities and gave seventy-six blessings. On Sunday, December 2 in Bangkok, Thailand, he gave twenty-four more blessings. From there he went to a small town near the northeastern border of Thailand where, almost in the midst of the war between the Vietnamese and the Laotians, he gave twenty-four more blessings, listening all the while to guns roaring only ten or fifteen miles away. The people had traveled forty to fifty miles to see him, some after paying what might have been a month's wages to ride in an old flatbed truck that they called a bus.

Cannon's patriarchal tours lasted through November, December, and January, though not always at the same dizzying pace. By the time he finished, he had given a total of 176 blessings. To record the blessings for transcription and later translation, he carried with him "stacks of tapes" and a tape recorder capable of operating on anything between 110 and 250 volts. He was only hoping, he said, "that the thing would not konk out in the middle of somewhere and I'd be stranded."

Only about 20 percent of the people Patriarch Cannon blessed were even "somewhat conversant" with English. Moreover, the translator who introduced him to the people was never present in the room during the blessing, so most members heard their blessings given in a language they did not understand, no doubt felt the spirit of what was happening, then waited for the day when the translated blessing would arrive. Before he left for America, Cannon made sure that every blessing was translated. He then checked each one for accuracy and had it sent to the proper individual.

Even so, a few people did not receive transcripts of their blessings. A young BYU student from Thailand later visited Cannon at his home in Provo and told him she had never received her transcript. Fortunately he had a copy. As he reviewed it, he found that she was one of the twenty-four who had received blessings on that hectic day in the little village near the northeast border. He had promised her that she would go to the temple and receive her endowments, fulfill a mission, then be married in the temple. "Now I don't know why I made promises like that," he said later, "but you stick your neck out sometimes." True to the promise, however, she eventually obtained financial backing to go to school at BYU-Hawaii and went through the temple while she was there. Later she was called on a mission to Arcadia, California, and it was in preparation for that experience that she found where Winfield Cannon lived and went to get a copy of her blessing. Still

later she returned to BYU in Provo and married in the temple (Cannon 1989).

Cannon's story is not unique; people both before and after him have been called to do the same thing. His experience is significant, however, for it illustrates the unique challenges confronting the Church as it attempts to take its full program to the Saints in diverse parts of the earth. It also shows that, despite cultural differences, some things are universal among the Saints—in this case, the desire for a patriarchal blessing. Future historians looking for illustrations of continuity amid change could find no better example.

In 1976 many of the problems related to becoming a worldwide Church were aired at an important three-day symposium at Brigham Young University. The thirty-eight participants themselves symbolized the Church's new international posture; they included Church leaders from Salt Lake City, academics from Brigham Young University and elsewhere, and Church members from Britain, France, Germany, Guatemala, Japan, Korea, Mexico, the Philippines, Sweden, and the United States. Two years later, the essays resulting from that symposium were published in a book that is still perhaps the most important introduction to the problems involved in the internationalization and interculturalization of the Church. (See Tullis 1978).

In a general discussion, BYU philosophy professor Noel B. Reynolds provided some telling examples of the fact that the cultural challenges facing the Church include a variety of value conflicts, largely connected with the American terms with which the gospel is often interpreted and transmitted:

A Melchizedek Priesthood manual exhorts a husband to observe the highest standards of modesty and chastity and to treat his wife with love and respect. But when the instruction is elaborated to include kissing his wife as he leaves the house or returns, it raises a serious problem, for example, in a Japanese home where the children protest, demanding to know why he is "biting" their mother.

The Saints in Latin American countries are less enthralled with capitalism than the Americans, who link it with the universal values of personal freedom and work. Capital in these countries is often identified with a protected wealthy upper class and the absence of what we would call free markets. (Reynolds 1978, 15)

A Mexican convert, Reynolds said, once asked: "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 has been restored?" Such thoughts sent this convert "scurrying back to the simplicity of the gospel: Christ and Him crucified," and caused him to plead that "this wholesale exportation of cultural/collective neurosis has to be stopped. Let each heal himself of the traditions of his

fathers without having to adopt a whole new set of hangups as a prerequisite to discipleship in Christ" (in Reynolds 1978, 18).

Orlando A. Rivera's discussion of the dilemma of American Chicanos in the Church provided a powerful illustration of another dimension of cultural difficulties: intercultural problems within the United States. In Mexico, he observed, the Church was growing rapidly; in one mission, a handful of missionaries baptized a thousand people in a month. In the United States, however, the Church was making few converts from among those same Latin-Americans. The reason, Rivera speculated, was two-pronged. At first immigrants left their old ways behind and tried to assimilate into American culture. As they discovered that Americans would not accept them, however, the Mexican-Americans became culturally entrenched and began to resent anything that seemed alien to their traditional culture. "Consequently," Rivera said, "when something as American as Mormonism is presented to us, my people do not find in it anything to embrace very readily." At the same time, he observed, Anglo-American Mormon missionaries find it hard to cross the cultural boundaries, partly because of their own built-in psychological barriers and partly because of the suspicions of the Mexican-Americans themselves. In Mexico a missionary could learn to understand, love, and teach the people effectively, but in the United States "when the Anglo-American hangups are coupled with the inherent environmentally induced suspicion and cultural retrenchment that exists among Mexican-Americans . . . , it is nearly impossible to bridge the barriers" (Rivera 1978, 121).

Rivera, who once served as bishop of the all Mexican-American Lucero Ward in Salt Lake City, also raised the issue of whether there exists a distinctive Mormon culture that transcends all other cultures. Partly deferring to other participants in the symposium, who had implied as much, he conceded that there may be, for just as Mormon Americans seem different from non-Mormon Americans, so Mormon Chicanos seem different from non-Mormon Chicanos. The Mormon way of life partially bridges the cultural gap but, he also observed, "even on the bridge we encounter cultural tension and misunderstanding." "LDS" is not a complete culture, independent of anything else, he argued, for

we still have those old traditions and certain cultural characteristics that we simply do not want to leave behind. This raises conflicts with the Church between us and some Mormon Americans who perceive their own total cultural package as somehow being synonymous with the "LDS culture." This uncritical assumption prescribes that we "foreigners" should change culturally but that no such requirement is imposed up on those of the "central Mormon culture." (1978, 122-23)

Perhaps Rivera judged too harshly, for today, at least, Church leaders seem to speak out with complete unity against such cultural imperialism. His feelings, nevertheless, were based on long experience with reality at the level of ordinary Saints, and he knew whereof he spoke. It was for this reason, he said, that Chicanos generally felt more comfortable in their own wards, where they could maintain their cultural heritage along with their Mormonism.<sup>7</sup>

Some people have suggested that separating Spanish-speaking people, blacks (Embry 1990), or other ethnic groups into their own wards and branches defeats the purpose of the gospel; the practice smacks of segregation and allows no opportunities for different peoples to mingle and get to know each other. On the other hand, the enhanced opportunity for leadership as well as the blessing of keeping alive one's distinctive cultural heritage "on an island in a vast sea" argues the other way. Orlando Rivera summarized it this way:

The many lines of discussion I have laid out in this essay illustrate some of the reasons why we preserve and strengthen our own culture on an island in a vast sea. And it is interesting to me to see that some of the best of our own youth who are in college are some of the first to go back and learn about their own traditions and their own culture and their own heritage. I wonder if we have the

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<sup>7</sup> Though Rivera used his Salt Lake City ward as an example, he could also have referred to the Spanish-speaking members in the Los Angeles area. As their numbers slowly grew, they tried for years to integrate with the Anglo wards. They met with mixed success, partly because of some unfortunate prejudice among Anglo Latter-day Saints and partly because the Spanish-speaking Saints also wanted to attend services where they could worship and be taught in their own language and where they could preserve some of their own cultural traditions. By the end of 1964, they were holding their own sacrament meetings, and eventually a small dependent branch was created for them. Unfortunately, however, even then a few Anglos publicly objected to incorporating the Chicanos into the Los Angeles Stake in any way. A few members of the Wilshire Ward even advised the bishop not to accept Chicano tithing. During all this time, however, other enlightened leaders in the stake did what they could to stamp out prejudice and to strengthen the Spanish-speaking members, including opening a seminary program for their young people.

Finally, in 1984, a Spanish-speaking stake, the Huntington Park West Stake, was created. This did not, of course, solve all the problems. As young members became well integrated into the Anglo way of life, they had less desire to attend Spanish-speaking wards and branches. For those parents who wanted to pass on their cultural traditions, and especially those who did not speak English, this presented a particularly difficult dilemma. Nevertheless, the historian of the Los Angeles Stake has noted, even though the organization of a Spanish stake was controversial, "everything that has happened so far suggests not only that it will work, but also that it was the desirable thing to do." Chad M. Orton, *More Faith than Fear: The Los Angeles Stake Story* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987): 308. Chapter 12 of this excellent book, "A Vision That We Must Cause to Be Fulfilled," deals in detail with the history of the Spanish-speaking people in the Los Angeles area.

capacity in this country—or the capacity within the Church in this country—to have the mutual respect for one another that does not require us all to be alike, that permits us to enjoy one another's association despite our diverse backgrounds.

Success in the lines I have laid out will take a lot of thought—even changes in what we are doing. I talked to a sister who came to general conference; she says that in her area they no longer have a Spanish-speaking branch. They go to church with the rest of the people but sit in the corner and put earphones on in order to receive a translation of the proceedings. I do not know if that reflects full participation in the Church. It may be the best we can do. I hope not. (Rivera 1978, 125)

Besides such problems related to integration, another challenge confronting the Church in its quest for worldwide acceptance is that of creating a more positive public image. The fact that it is viewed as an American Church, for example, creates problems in areas where anti-Americanism is rampant. Incidents of violence against Church members or buildings in Latin America may be less attacks upon the Church as upon a visible sign of American influence. In May 1989, for example, two missionaries were killed in Bolivia; in July a group of Saints were held hostage in a chapel in Chile; and the same month a chapel in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, was bombed. All of these were perceived as the work of anti-American terrorists (*Daily Universe*, 13 July 1989). In Bolivia, Church leaders responded by drastically reducing the number of American missionaries and greatly increasing the role of local missionaries, all in an effort to change the Church's public image.

Other image problems are connected with social changes in America. One is the Church's practice of restricting the priesthood to males, which draws criticism from feminists at a time when equal rights is a major political and social concern. The Church's public stance against the Equal Rights Amendment only added to the criticism. Utah's refusal to ratify the ERA was laid at the feet of the Church in the press; some groups even cited that refusal as a reason to cancel conventions scheduled in the state.

In black Africa, too, despite the amazing success of the Church, its public image has suffered. In 1989 Ghana suspended not only missionary work but all Church activity. Though the reasons were not clear, there seems to have been a suspicion that this American church was subverting the cultural and political loyalties of the Ghanaian Saints. By the end of 1990, however, confidence in the integrity of the Church was restored, and it resumed its full program. In the meantime, it has also grown in other black African nations, though cultural perceptions may still create stumbling blocks.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> R. Bay Hutchings, a retired physician from Provo, Utah, was the first LDS mission president in Zaire. An experience he had suggests that, at least in part,

Other challenges remain. If, for example, blatant racial prejudice were not a serious problem, stereotyping (which is, in fact, another form of bias) still would be. Many Americans are surprised to find that new converts in Africa and other third-world countries are not necessarily uneducated and unskilled, as they often expect, but can be well educated, highly skilled, with musical and artistic tastes similar to Americans. Some white Mormons continue to believe that all blacks share the same values and cultural traits. For example, when asked to "tell us how to approach black people," one black woman replied simply, "Which ones?" In another case, members of a ward talked down to a young black man, assuming that he had little or no education. In fact, he had more than one college degree. As Jessie Embry has observed, "Those in integrated wards who were unable to shed the old stereotypes might have turned blacks away from the Church just as certainly as those who were openly prejudiced" (Embry 1990, 32).

Music, and particularly the question of what music is acceptable for worship services, has been at the heart of some intercultural conflict. BYU professor Michael Hicks's recent book, *Mormonism and Music*, tells what happened as the musical traditions of Native Americans, Samoans, and Africans seemingly came in conflict with traditional Mormon values and perceptions. When BYU's director of Indian Affairs tried to stamp out Native American music on campus, some Native American students accepted the ban, but others fought it, and one even left the Church and became actively anti-Mormon. In Africa, a mission president's attempt to eradicate tribal music from the Church (on the assumption that it was satanic) had some success but, in the process, drove away hundreds of people. Then, according to Hicks, "as the church shrank in the bush areas, it flourished in port cities, urban centers where European- and American-trained blacks could lead the services" (Hicks 1989, 221). These more cosmopolitan, urban

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cultural misperceptions came from a curious mixture of African cultural nationalism and African Protestantism. In a letter to their family, dated 20 November 1987, his wife, Jean, told of a new Church member whose wife had received two missionary discussions and wanted to continue. Her older brother, however, refused to allow it. The Mormon Church was no good, he said, and raised several questions. "Why do we have a Casio for music rather than native drums and horns? The Catholic Church has pianos and organs and they don't teach the truth so pianos and organs are no good. How can women go into church without wearing a scarf? Paul said that women should cover their heads. And it is awful for women to wear any jewelry in church. Also this church works Magic!! For example the Urim & Thumim." Clearly these objections were based on mixed cultural perceptions: the man's reverence for native musical instruments on the one hand and ideas received from Protestantism on the other. Nevertheless, Jean Hutchings said to her family, "This is very interesting work!! You would love it like we do! Try it—you'll like it!"

blacks were less likely to be tied to their cultural traditions, but Hicks's summary succinctly captured the continuing dilemma of trying to become a truly intercultural church:

Mormons now aspire to penetrate further into the Third World and Communist Asia. As they encounter some of the world's most ancient musical traditions, they will grapple with a longstanding dilemma: whether to pry their converts away from those traditions or to preserve the traditions from cultural erosion. And as Zion implants itself in nations whose identities are inseparable from their music, it will find fresh dilemmas about its own music, its own identity. (1989, 222)

Still another facet of the complex problem of cultural tolerance was described in 1976 by Rhee Ho Nam, then president of the Seoul Korea Stake. Korean marriages are traditionally arranged by parents, who base their selections on certain astrological and zoological signs. If the signs for the prospective couple do not match positively, the marriage is forbidden. Rhee noted, however, that this often conflicts with the Church's effort to encourage young people to marry within the faith. One young couple fell in love through their Church association but were forbidden to marry because the practitioner the young man's parents consulted told them that if they married, the bride would become a widow. "In our society," observed Rhee, "this traditional way of thinking, the *kunghap* idea, prevents us from freely doing what we may want" (1976, 166). Such experiences suggest that, in some cases, the emphasis on respecting ethnic and national culture may be modified as native Saints themselves begin to view some traditions as being partly in conflict, not with American Mormonism but, rather, with the essential and unchangeable values of the gospel itself. Social historians may well be interested in how far such inroads into cultural traditions can go.

### SOME POSITIVE THINGS

The difficulties unloosed in the quest for universalism are almost endless, but historians should examine not only the problems, but also the positive achievements and possibilities. No doubt there will be many, and I would like to conclude by commenting on just a few.

First, an inherent flexibility in Mormonism, connected to the doctrine of continuing revelation, makes changes easier than some people have expected. After the 1978 revelation on priesthood, for example, Elder Bruce R. McConkie, in a significant statement to religion teachers in the Church Educational System, put the revelation in historical perspective, then commented on various statements made by Church leaders prior to its reception:

There are statements in our literature by the early brethren which we have interpreted to mean that the Negroes would not receive the priesthood in mortality. I have said the same things, and the people write me letters and say, "You said such and such, and how is it now that we do such and such?" And all I can say to that is that it is time disbelieving people repented and got in line and believed in a living, modern prophet. Forget everything that I have said, or what Brigham Young or President George Q. Cannon or whomsoever has said in days past that is contrary to the present revelation. We spoke with a limited understanding and without the light and knowledge that now has come into the world.

We get our truth and our light line upon line and precept upon precept. We have now had added a new flood of intelligence and light on this particular subject, and it erases all the darkness and all the views and all the thoughts of the past. They don't matter any more. . . . It is a new day and a new arrangement. (McConkie 1978)

At the same time, flexibility has its limits, which raises the question again of separating the essentials from the non-essentials. Historians should study not just what has changed, but also what has remained constant.

If Mormonism is becoming truly universal in spirit, then one would expect even the Saints in Utah to feel the impact, and I believe some noteworthy things are happening. For one thing, Utah Mormons seem to be increasingly aware of the Church elsewhere and willingly participate in the Church's foreign missionary fund which supports missionaries from other countries who simply cannot afford to support themselves. Many members donate generously every year; in 1990 members of the Orem, Utah Sharon Stake alone contributed approximately \$80,000.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the Wasatch Front Saints, who are generally more affluent than members in some other parts of the world, are directly affected by the Church's new policy of paying 100 percent of the cost of construction of all new chapels. It cuts two ways: as building needs have burgeoned outside America, smaller, more austere chapels are being erected, and even more affluent wards are beginning to get by with less elaborate facilities in their new buildings. In addition, the budget program implemented in 1990 in the United States and Canada is part of an over-all reform in Church financing designed to promote more equal spending throughout the Church. Church members no longer pay annual budget assessments to maintain buildings and support ward and stake activities. Rather, all expenditures come from the tithing funds of the Church. The impact will be considerable

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<sup>9</sup> A special foreign missionary fund drive is conducted early each year in this stake, and this figure represents the total from this drive and other money that had come into the fund by the end of May 1990. Information received from President Robert J. Parsons of the Orem, Utah, Sharon Stake.

belt-tightening in some areas of the Church and considerably more program support in others.

All this, and more, is the result of stepped-up efforts to spread the gospel worldwide; but that desire was also seen in the enthusiasm of many private, voluntary activities. One example was the remarkable family-to-family Book of Mormon program, which had its beginnings along the Wasatch front. One pioneer was Arlene Crawley, a Kaysville, Utah, Primary teacher. In 1969 she told hosts at the Visitor's Center on Temple Square of her family's and her Primary class's desire to "send the Book of Mormon on a mission" by placing copies in the Visitor's Center. Each book contained a picture and address of the donor, as well as a special message. The delighted hosts helped the Primary children place copies of the Book of Mormon with various missionaries and families in different parts of the world. As a result, at least three children received letters from missionaries and at least one family, in Holland, joined the Church.

The program grew as members of the Church in several countries began to donate books, and in 1975 it was adopted Churchwide. Wards and branches all over the Church began to support it and appointed representatives to take the donations, photograph the donors, place pictures and messages in the books, and get the books to Salt Lake City for distribution. At first Church-service missionaries in Salt Lake City took care of the work, but as enthusiastic responses poured in from around the world, the project became so huge that a full-time employee of the Missionary Department was placed in charge. By 1990 the program alone was annually placing over two million copies of the Book of Mormon around the world (England 1989, 5-7; Crawley 1989, 10-19). The program was discontinued in 1991 because of the complexity of the administrative burden. However, during its lifetime it was a remarkable example of Sainthood enthusiasm for promoting missionary work around the world.

With all this new cultural awareness and desire to reach out to brothers and sisters throughout the world, it is only natural to ask, what, then, is the Church becoming? With this question in mind, I found myself going through an interesting evolution as I tried to title this essay. I began with "The Worldwide Church," then changed to "International Church," then to "Intercultural Church." Certainly the Church is striving to become all of these, but do any of these expressions describe the *essence* of Mormonism, or its divine potential? Gospel essentials begin with faith, repentance from sin, baptism by immersion, and then the gift of the Holy Ghost. These steps should lead to a change in nature, moving all of us closer to becoming the kind of people described in the Book of Mormon: those who are "willing to

bear one another's burdens, that they may be light; Yea, and are willing to mourn with those that mourn; yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort" (Mosiah 18:8-9), and also those who "will not have a mind to injure one another, but to live peaceably, and to render to every man according to that which is his due," and "will not suffer your children that they go hungry, or naked . . . [nor] transgress the laws of God, and fight and quarrel one with another . . . [but] walk always in soberness; . . . [and] love one another, and . . . serve one another" (Mosiah 4:13-15). It is these things that make the gospel universal, and one test historians of the future may well apply to our generation is how well the Saints succeeded in applying them everywhere.

These thoughts finally led me to the term "universal" to characterize what I think the Church is trying to become. "Including or covering all or a whole collectively or distributively without limit or exception" is Webster's formal definition of the word. It captures, I believe, the spirit with which the modern Church is attempting to promote its expansion worldwide. In the process, instead of expecting converts to melt into the American pot, as was the case a hundred years ago, it seems to be adopting the more realistic image of a cultural salad bowl. Today's Saints have clearly identifiable differences, both as individuals and as cultural groups, though they are held together by certain common boundaries. What's more, there is a growing recognition that these differences are desirable; part of the essence of the salad is that each element contributes something distinctive to the whole. If any one element is missing, the salad will be that much less desirable. Just as our unity in essentials is to be treasured, so are our differences in nonessentials, for they help keep us from imagining that someday we will be part of a huge, undiversified nirvana where we would have no individual consciousness at all.

I hope that some future historian will look back on this evolutionary time and maintain that not just new policies but, more important, new perspectives and attitudes among the Saints worldwide helped Mormonism to become a truly universal church: one where people like Julia Mavimbela, Rhee Ho Nam, Orlando Rivera, Seiji Katanuma, and Arthur Henry King were comfortable in their diversity, delighted in their unity, and exemplary in their Sainthood.

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