

Towards 2000: Mormonism in Australia

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IN APRIL 1994 SOME SIXTY LDS PROFESSIONALS and business people from around Australia were invited to meet with the Pacific Area presidency in a Sydney conference unique to the Mormon church in this country. Quite startling in its departure from normal LDS practice, the conference was designed to recruit influential members to work towards bringing the church "out of obscurity" (D&C 1:30) as Australia moves into the twenty-first century. In a sincere and moving address, area president Rulon G. Craven urged those present to help achieve this by working outside, as well as inside, the institutional framework. "It is imperative that we become pillars of influence in the community," he said. "Latter-day Saints need to be actively involved in community and government affairs. If we don't participate, we deserve what we get in the way of a deteriorating society."¹

The conference was inspiring, as refreshing as a cool "southerly buster" after a Sydney heat wave. We were encouraged to be frank and candid in our comments and suggestions, and discussion was vigorous. Few concrete plans were made, for such was not the intention; but most of those who attended have responded to the challenge with enthusiasm and energy.

I found the conference fascinating, as much for the *implications* of what was said as for the explicit message we were given. Here were members of the hierarchy tacitly acknowledging that the LDS church is still perceived as an obscure sect in Australia; that the priesthood and missionary programs of the church are inadequate to redress this perception; but that if we add to the institutional efforts the influence and example of good, intelligent members in extra-curricular service (duly publicized by the Public Affairs Department), the moral climate of the

1. *Ensign* 24 (July 1994), Australia/New Zealand Insert, 83.

Australian community will improve and, it is hoped, Australians will come to see the LDS church for what it is and be more willing to investigate and accept its message.

GROWTH IN AUSTRALIA: PROJECTIONS AND REALITY

While at present Mormonism is largely irrelevant to Australian society, some members predict an enormous increase in numbers, prestige, and power in the early decades of the twenty-first century. It could happen; but other Latter-day Saints are beginning to apprehend a different picture of the future. The area presidency's suggested initiatives are timely and needed; but unless radical changes are made in other policies and procedures, the outlook for the LDS church in Australia in the twenty-first century may be less than rosy. There are deep, underlying problems to be addressed if the hoped-for rise in numbers and reputation is to occur.

Our membership base is very small. After 150 years of proselytizing in Australia, the church has only 90,000 members out of a population of 18 million.² To those who have seen the church in Australia grow from a single mission with 3,000 members in January 1955 to twenty-two stakes and six missions forty years later, the growth seems enormous, even if not as spectacular as that in South America.³

However, leaders are aware that some of this has been paper growth. While the official membership figure was 78,000 in 1991, the Australian census that year showed only 38,372 Latter-day Saints. A letter from the area presidency urging members to respond to the voluntary census question on religious affiliation was read in every ward sacrament meeting before the census, making it unlikely that many active Latter-day Saints would have refused to answer. When we consider that the census figure also includes those of the 4,000 RLDS members who responded (the Australian Bureau of Statistics does not distinguish between the two churches), the conclusion seems inescapable that well over half the nominal Mormons in Australia no longer regard themselves as Latter-day Saints. The combined LDS and RLDS census figure represents less than .25 percent of the population.

Until recently I subscribed to the optimistic view. I witnessed the phenomenal growth during the post-World War II decades as membership figures increased by 2,000 percent in forty years; the Australian national population merely doubled in the same period. On the basis of

2. As of 31 December 1994. Membership figures supplied by Membership and Statistical Records Division of the Presiding Bishopric's Office, Pacific Area.

3. In Brazil, for example, membership rose from 5,000 to 500,000 over the same period. See *Ensign* 24 (June 1994): 79.

1990 figures, I calculated that by the year 2020 there would be 1.5 million Latter-day Saints in Australia, reducing the ratio from 1:235 to 1:30. This projection, of course, assumed continuation of the same growth rate. Instead, however, that rate was only 18 percent between 1990 and 1995. Elsewhere I have suggested reasons for the slow growth of Mormonism during its first century in Australia and the sudden spurt after World War II.⁴ Here I am contemplating reasons why the growth has so markedly slowed again.

FACTORS INHIBITING LDS GROWTH

Australia-U.S. Tensions

Five years ago, I regarded culture-conflict—American cultural imperialism, “Coca-colonization,” call it what you will—as the biggest problem facing the church in Australia.⁵ I still believe that cultural differences are important and should be accommodated, but I now believe that the relatively superficial culture-conflict will become less and less relevant in the twenty-first century. In common with youth around the globe, young Australia is leaping to embrace all things American. “Our children play baseball instead of cricket,” wrote journalist Richard Guillatt recently. “Their heroes are basketball superstars; their clothes, music and slang are straight off the streets of LA; this is a generation consumed by US culture.” There may be a reaction to this as today’s youth become twenty-first century adults, but many older Australians doubt it. “I think it’s game, set, and match,” commented national TV and radio personality Phillip Adams to Guillatt. “I love American culture, I’m mad about it—in America. I’m just not quite so mad about seeing every kid in Australia osmosing before my eyes.”⁶

In the meantime along with the spread of the “McDonald’s culture,” anti-American sentiment in Australia is a fact of missionary life. The post-World War II honeymoon between Australia and the United States ended abruptly with the Vietnam war. Perversely, Australian fascination with American pop culture has grown in inverse proportion to Australian disenchantment with American global imperialism, both economic and military. In recent years American dumping of agricultural products

4. Marjorie Newton, *Southern Cross Saints: The Mormons in Australia* (Laie, HI: Institute for Polynesian Studies, 1991).

5. Marjorie Newton, “‘Almost Like Us’: The American Socialization of Australian Converts,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 24 (Fall 1991): 9-20.

6. Richard Guillatt, “U.S. eh? Why Young Australia is so smitten with American Culture,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 June 1994.

has had detrimental effects on the Australian economy, as our traditional wheat markets have been poached, and our farmers, still the backbone of our economy, disadvantaged. "As of now, the US is Australia's No. 1 trade enemy," declared Bruce Lloyd, deputy leader of the National Party, at a conference in Canberra in September 1992.⁷

While the Australian government supported operation "Desert Storm," many individual Australians soon became cynical about American involvement in the Gulf War. They remembered when East Timor, just off the Australian coast, was invaded by Indonesia in 1975. Despite a U.N. Security Council resolution calling on all states to respect the territorial integrity of East Timor and the inalienable right of its people to self-determination, the United States didn't feel any idealistic obligation to help the East Timorese; but then, Australians are quick to point out to each other, there are no commercial oil-fields in East Timor.⁸ None of this has made American Mormon missionaries more popular in Australia.

Lack of Religiosity

Australia has been a secular society from the beginning of European occupation. Added to secularism are a deep and abiding anti-authoritarianism and a tradition of anti-institutionalism. All three attributes are generally assumed to have been brought to Australia by its convict pioneers who were sent from the slums of industrial England two hundred years ago. Whatever the source, this combination of attitudes is a formidable barrier to the growth of any authoritarian institution. Some willingness to change basic policies and practices in the church may be needed to obtain the desired growth.

It could be argued that the nature of the environment itself has also contributed to the lack of religiosity in Australia. In most of Australia there is no tradition of Sabbath observance. The temperate-to-sub-tropic climate fosters an outdoor lifestyle. All year round Sunday is the day for the beach and the barbecue, the sports field, and the plentiful national parks. Conversion has to be real to change this way of life.

Surveys have shown that the population of Australian adults attending church at least once a month declined from 41 percent in 1960 to 24 percent in 1983-84. The International Social Science Surveys, 1991-92,

7. *Sun-Herald*, 6 Sept. 1992, 1; see also "US wheat sale stuns Australian growers" and "Dairy war looms over US subsidies," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 Sept. 1992, 23 Jan. 1995. The United States has also drastically cut imports of Australian beef and sugar.

8. Senator Peter Baume, Professor Manning Clark, et al., *The Australian*, 15 Jan. 1991. See also *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 May 1992. Ironically, the Australian government is the only one which has officially recognized the Indonesian occupation of East Timor. Even more ironically, this recognition is linked to recent oil discoveries in the Timor Sea.

found that only 17 percent of Australians attended church weekly, compared with 34 percent in the United States.⁹ While most Americans appear to us to be interested in discussing religion and politics, both topics are considered taboo in Australian society. Those few Australians who discuss religion or who change churches are often classed with the "lunatic fringe." Anyone willing to talk about his or her spiritual experiences is regarded as abnormal and embarrassing in Australian society, even, to some extent, in Australian Mormon society.

Legacy of Missionary Excesses

During the late 1970s and for some years to follow, the LDS church was one of the fastest-growing in Australia.¹⁰ Though there were numeric gains, those years left a decided distaste for Mormonism on the Australian palate; for what was obviously intended by mission leaders to be a highly spiritual conversion process was, as time went by, transformed into a "hard sell" proselytizing program. This officially-approved pilot program condensed all discussions into a single presentation (at first named "The Day of Pentecost Discussion") which was given by missionaries to groups of contacts in LDS meetinghouses.¹¹ The font was filled beforehand, and those attending were urged to be baptized then and there. Those still not touched by the "Pentecostal" spirit at the end of the discussion were ushered into classrooms and encouraged to kneel and ask for a witness. Stories of locked doors and long prayer sessions began to circulate. On 5 November 1977, at the request of missionaries, I drove a woman whom they had met that day to our ward meetinghouse, where we listened to the "one discussion" and she agreed to be baptized. Not anticipating baptism, she had not brought a change of clothing. A white frock and towel were provided from the Relief Society supply, and she was baptized without underwear because the missionaries would not agree to postponing her baptism. Friends in my own and other wards assured me that this procedure was not unusual.

During regular "Wilford Woodruff Weeks" missionaries tracted ninety hours per week, sometimes for an entire "special" month.¹² Such a schedule required them to knock on doors at extremely early and late hours. Newspapers published many complaints; questions were asked in the Federal Parliament; and one city council even appealed to the New

9. Peter Kaldor, *Who Goes Where? Who Doesn't Care?* (Homebush West, Sydney: Lancer Books, 1987), 23; Nick Richardson, "Soul-searching times," *The Bulletin*, 18 Apr. 1995, 30.

10. Hans Mol, *The Faith of Australians* (Sydney: George Allen & Unwin, 1985), 219.

11. See *Australia Sydney Mission News*, various issues including 24 Oct., 19 Dec. 1977; 20 Mar., 18 June 1988.

12. See, for example, *ibid.*, 14 Aug., 4 Sept. 1976; 28 June, 13 Sept., 4 Oct. 1977.

South Wales Attorney-General, who, however, was powerless to intervene.¹³

The long hours also meant that missionaries quickly "traced out" their assigned areas, and to maintain the required "stats," they had to re-trace the same streets several times over within a matter of weeks. Resentment among the public rose. My husband was a bishop during this period, and by some quirk of fate his name one year appeared first in the Sydney telephone directory under the general heading for the LDS church. My entire family to this day exhibits a pathological reluctance to answer the telephone. We handled so many abusive phone calls from all over Sydney that, in a conditioned response not unlike that of Pavlov's dogs, I eventually had to bolt for the bathroom whenever the telephone rang. On one occasion an extremely angry caller threatened to shoot the next missionaries who knocked on his door but refused to give me his address so that I could tell them not to call there. Sobbing with worry and frustration, I called the mission office to beg them to change the program. I could not get past the mission secretary who predictably assured me the program was inspired. A shiftworker rang from his job at 2:00 a.m. He also refused to identify himself but told my husband that we were going to find out what it was like to have our sleep disturbed. Thereafter the phone rang every hour all night, every night, for several weeks. Few of the irate callers, once having reached us, would accept the number of the mission office to make direct complaints.

I used to think it would take about ten years for the public to forget, but now I think a generation will have to pass away before the disrepute of this era fades. Church members were also affected, and most of us who lived through this time are still wary of introducing our friends to the missionaries. Missionary behavior for some years since then has been exemplary, and this has helped; but there are ominous signs that a new push for increased numbers of baptisms, as against converts, is beginning in at least one Australian mission. A member of a stake presidency told me of two recent incidents in his stake: a male investigator was baptized at midnight, despite official church prohibition of baptisms at unusual hours; and a woman was baptized in a green dress. In both instances the missionaries refused to wait for a more convenient hour or for more appropriate clothing to be provided in case the "converts" might change their minds. What kind of conversion has taken place in such cases? I worry that a repetition of earlier excesses may undo the good that has been done by more moderate and acceptable proselytizing methods in recent years.

13. See, for example, *Liverpool Champion*, 26 Apr. 1978; *Sydney Sun*, 16 May 1979; *Bellingham Courier*, 14 June 1979; *Newcastle Herald*, 17 Oct. 1979; *Maitland Mercury*, 11 Oct. 1979; *The Sun*, Newcastle, 11 Oct. 1979; *Cessnock Advertiser*, 9 Jan. 1980; *Canberra Times*, 21 Feb. 1980.

Certainly church membership figures grew quickly in Australia during those "pentecost" years, but retention rates were low. For example, a study by one concerned branch president has shown that there were thirty-three convert baptisms in the Belconnen Branch of the Canberra District during the calendar years 1979 and 1980, when this program was at its height. Of these thirty-three, eighteen (55 percent) either never attended a Sunday meeting at all or attended no more than twice after baptism; twenty-four (73 percent) had ceased attending even occasionally within three months. Of the remaining nine, only one (representing 3 percent of the sample) made the transition into long-term church activity.¹⁴ I suspect these figures are probably no worse than those in other areas of the church; but they continue to affect the well-being of the church in Australia even today.

Of course, in the view of some missionaries, the low retention rates had nothing to do with their own failure to work towards sincere conversion, genuine repentance, and full understanding of the nature of the baptismal covenant by their contacts. If the "converts" were not retained, it was because the bishops and ward members failed to fellowship them. To some extent this was true. When there were several baptismal services each week, sometimes held during daytime at an hour's notice, it was impossible for bishopric members to attend every service. Bishops asked in vain for weekly, scheduled baptismal services so they could always attend. "We feel, as a bishopric, that if a convert cannot arrange his or her life to attend a regularly scheduled baptism that there is little chance of them being willing to rearrange their lives to fit in all the meetings and duties devolving on church members," protested one Australian bishopric.¹⁵

The first Australian stakes were created with minimum numbers (around 1,400) and barely adequate Melchizedek priesthood leadership. Divisions of wards and stakes had left the resources of all units overstretched even before this sudden influx. The Birks study has shown that in some areas, despite the numerous baptisms, total numbers attending meetings actually declined as busy leaders and home teachers had even less time to spend with already marginal members, and some active members stayed away in reaction to a missionary program they rejected.¹⁶

14. Edwin M. Birks, "The Mormon Missionary Program in Australia: Recruitment vs Retention," unpublished paper, 1995, 8.

15. "Report on Status of Newly Baptized Members," prepared by a Sydney ward bishopric, May 1977; copy in my possession.

16. Birks, 8.

Modern Societal Influences

Adherence to organized religion in Australia is frequently manifested only by attendance at Easter and Christmas services and by participation in the traditional rites of passage—christenings, marriages, and funerals. Even this tenuous connection with religion is disappearing for much of the population. The number of funerals and marriages conducted in churches in Australia has decreased enormously in recent years. In 1972 86 percent of the weddings in Australia were performed by a clergyman. Twenty years later the figure had dropped to 58 percent.¹⁷ Not only has the number of church marriages decreased in favour of garden ceremonies performed by civil marriage celebrants, but marriage rates in general are also declining.

The 1991 census revealed that the number of couples in *de facto* marriages increased by almost 50 percent between 1986 and 1991, and that 56 percent of couples now live together before marrying. Births outside marriage almost doubled from 13.7 percent in 1982 to 24 percent in 1992—meaning that one in four Australian children is now born to an unmarried woman.¹⁸ The degree of permissiveness represented by these figures makes missionary work difficult. While some Australians are responding to this situation by turning to religion, even those churches which are growing fastest—the charismatic Pentecostal churches—are too small to influence the quality of Australian society; and they, like the LDS church, are numerically insignificant.

Internal Policies

Historian Richard Bushman has identified three stages of LDS church development in areas outside Utah—pioneering, settlement, and entrenchment.¹⁹ Sociologist Armand L. Mauss suggests that assimilation into the larger society is most likely during the “entrenchment” stage. Despite the temple and numerous meetinghouses in Australia, it would be difficult to class many Australian church units as “entrenched.” Those that should be, for instance, the capital city wards first organized as branches between 1890 and 1930, are now often inner-city units with shrinking and transient memberships. The majority of the 260-plus units in Australia fall into Bushman’s “settlement” phase, with a few still in the pioneering mode. The church is perceived as a sect or cult and remains

17. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 May 1994; figures from report on social trends in Australia released by Australian Bureau of Statistics.

18. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 Aug. 1993, 27 May and 11 Aug. 1994.

19. Armand L. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 11.

far from assimilation, but, as illustrated by the recent meeting of LDS professionals, described at the beginning of this essay, there can be no doubt that church leaders here are actively seeking both entrenchment and assimilation.

Despite leadership preference for middle-class converts,²⁰ most Australian converts, like those in other missions, are still coming from lower socio-economic groups. Most are single or, if married, are baptized without their spouses. Few nuclear families are baptized in the English-speaking units; no one I questioned in my ward could remember the last time a whole family was baptized. In another Australian unit the last time a nuclear family joined the church was in January 1980.²¹

Most growth is occurring in ethnic units.²² Each of the five mainland capital cities has a large immigrant population, and immigrants are usually poor. Additional Samoan, Tongan, and Asian units are being organized in each region. Oddly, given the conversion rates in South America, the Latin American units are not growing at the same rate. In early 1995 a Latin American ward in Sydney was declared no longer viable and was disbanded, although Spanish-speaking units are still being created in other cities.²³

While there are many benefits of the consolidated meeting schedule, it does not foster community spirit under the best of circumstances.²⁴ The logistical problems with multi-ward buildings make it virtually impossible to promote sociality and unity, especially in city wards whose members have disparate racial and cultural backgrounds. Australian meetinghouses are commonly built of cement blocks, are small, and are not sound-proof. As in many other areas of the church, services are noisy, and it is impossible to create a reverent, worshipful atmosphere. I am not alone in my reluctance to invite friends to services in such chaotic conditions. Reducing the meeting block to two hours would avoid the necessity for overlapping wards. In practice, many members have already adopted this change and either come late, leave early, or skip the middle session. The corridors and courtyards are crowded with defaulters adding to the noise and confusion while classes and sacrament meetings pro-

20. Just last year a mission president urged an Australian ward to find prosperous middle-class referrals: "We have enough of the other kind" (reported by ward members, names and name of unit withheld).

21. Birks, 7.

22. This confirms trends in other areas of the world. Mauss gives a sociological explanation of this phenomenon in *The Angel and the Beehive*, chap. 213n1.

23. There are other factors at work here: Latin American converts do not come from homogeneous backgrounds as do Western Samoans and Tongans. They come from different nations (with long histories of mutual hostility in some cases) and are artificially brought together in Spanish-speaking units.

24. Mauss, 166-67.

ceed around them.

Many Australian Latter-day Saints are dismayed by the growth of the church bureaucracy in the Australian Area office. They look gloomily at the prospect that the new century will bring yet more technology needing yet more staff to operate the programs. This may not happen, of course; more and more missionary couples are being called to work in areas such as Public Affairs, the Family History Service Centre, and the Membership and Statistical Records Division. The bureaucratic arms of some church programs are being located in chapels in Sydney, where land prices have Manhattanized in recent decades. Some Church Education staff are located in a specially built addition to the Parramatta chapel; however, the Sydney Australia South Mission has recently taken over the existing stake office wing at the Mortdale Stake Centre. As a consequence, a large, busy Family History Centre was squeezed out of its already inadequate accommodation into a smaller room, which will serve only two-thirds of the previous number of patrons, to allow the stake presidency and high council to move into the classroom wing. The overall plan is, of course, a sensible use of expensive real estate that otherwise lies idle much of the week. Yet the decision to promote "preaching the gospel" at the expense of "redeeming the dead" is disquieting, especially as the Family History Centres are among the most positive images of the church held by the Australian public.

AUSTRALIAN PERCEPTIONS OF THE CHURCH TODAY

While leaders continue to grapple with these issues, other problems remain unsolved. Perhaps the missionary program itself needs to be revised. In 1990 public relations experts were hired to survey the image of the church in Australia. They reported that missionary tracting was both the best known and most disliked feature of Mormonism in Australia. "There is no doubt that doorstep religion is very unpopular in Australia," reported the Public Affairs Department to the area presidency.²⁵ Scarcely a week passes but Mormon missionaries are lampooned on television (the recent "Early Mormon Warning" noted in *Sunstone* is suggestive).²⁶ A friend told me that his non-LDS father-in-law summed up the situation with typical Aussie irreverence as they discussed recent efforts to improve the image of the church in Australia. "They might as well pee on a bushfire [forest fire]," his father-in-law observed, "if they don't stop tracting."

25. Pacific Area Public Affairs Department, "Images of the Church: A proposal to the Pacific Area Presidency," *Newsbrief: Pacific Area*, Mar. 1991, 3; copy in my possession.

26. "Scattered Tracts and a 30% Chance of a Dinner Appointment," *Sunstone* 16 (Feb. 1994): 88.

Interestingly enough, a second public perception of Mormons is their “stand-offishness” and lack of involvement in the community.²⁷ Until recently this feature, not tracting, was the issue that was being addressed. Members were urged to get involved in the community and missionaries required to donate four hours each week to community service. Perhaps both objectives might be obtained simultaneously if tracting were abandoned and missionaries taught only by appointment, devoting the rest of their time—not just a token four hours—to community service.

In 1994 a member of the Quorum of the Twelve urged Australian priesthood leaders to use full-time missionaries in home teaching and reactivation. However, in many localities this is still not enough to fill the missionaries’ working hours, and tracting continues. Although tracting is now the proselytizing “method of last resort” in official church policy, a check with missionaries labouring in four of the six Australian missions showed that they are still required to tract between twenty and twenty-five hours per week. Street meetings were abandoned as inappropriate for the times some fifty years ago; perhaps it is time tracting was similarly abandoned.

In contrast to the Mormon church, the Salvation Army is held in the greatest of affection and goodwill by the Australian public, since they stopped holding street meetings and concentrated on good works in the community. It must be conceded that few Australians actually want to *join* the Salvation Army, but at least it is held in such esteem as to be no longer the butt of ridicule and jokes. Also the public gives generously—millions of dollars—to the “Salvos” each year.

WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

The approach of the twenty-first century seems filled with both promise and problems for the church in Australia. Most of the problems could be solved with vision and imagination. The present area presidency has shown unprecedented willingness to listen, but the steps needed to be taken may be too radical. Another problem is that we will soon lose this particular area presidency. I have previously argued that historically growth and stability have followed the change from missions to stakes, as stable local leaders have taken over from frequently-rotating American mission presidents. Now we have the earlier mission instability writ large: frequently-rotating American general authorities serving in the Pacific Area presidency. Most have done a superb job. Yet if American mission presidents can only just begin to understand one country and

27. “March of the Mormons,” *Australasian Post*, 20 Mar. 1980, 4; *Public Affairs Newsbrief*, Mar. 1991.

culture when their three-year terms end, how much more difficult is it for American general authorities to understand some twelve or fifteen Pacific Area cultures in a similar period? Indeed, in actual practice only six of fifteen general authorities assigned to serve in the Pacific Area presidency, from its inception in 1985 to the present, actually remained here for a full three-year assignment.²⁸

Mauss suggests that assimilation brings “the predicament of respectability”—that is, “the movement has taken on so many traits of the surrounding culture that it is not readily distinguishable from the establishment. Accordingly, its very identity as a separate people is in jeopardy.”²⁹ For some years interested observers of the LDS church have noted a growing conservatism in church policy and in doctrinal interpretation. Mauss suggests that, having achieved entrenchment and then assimilation into American society, church leaders since the 1960s have been consciously fostering a period of *retrenchment*—the process of re-establishing the church’s nature as a “peculiar people.” If Mauss is right, and the retrenchment in the U.S. is extended to Australia, problems here may escalate. That is, if directives from Salt Lake City undermine the efforts in Australia toward assimilation and entrenchment, we might be trying to achieve both entrenchment and retrenchment simultaneously. This raises pertinent questions. Is it feasible for less-developed areas of the church to skip the “entrenchment” stage? Is it possible to retrench without first becoming somewhat assimilated? Can stable growth be achieved without some entrenchment?

The concomitants of retrenchment are, of course, that it will “cost” the individual member more—materially, emotionally, and socially—to belong to the church. This may—and Mauss has shown that it does³⁰—build stronger, more committed members. Yet belonging to the LDS church outside Utah already demands a significant degree of sacrifice, in addition to the stigma of belonging to a perceived cult or sect. My sister’s ward in Sandy, Utah, covers ten blocks, and no one has to go farther than three blocks on a visiting- or home-teaching round. My ward in Sydney covers eighteen suburbs. The time and financial burdens of home- and visiting-teaching and meeting attendance are very different. Perhaps in the American west the church, with its already strong power base, can afford retrenchment.³¹ In Australia, it seems to me, it cannot.

28. This has been somewhat counterbalanced by the assignment to the Pacific Area Presidency of New Zealander Douglas J. Martin and Australian Robert E. Sackley, plus four American area presidents who formerly served as mission presidents in New Zealand.

29. Mauss, 5.

30. *Ibid.*, 9-11.

31. *Ibid.*, 120.

TOWARDS A REVITALIZED MORMONISM

Most of the vitality of Mormonism in Australia today is to be found in the ethnic wards. They have enthusiastic new converts and no backlog of "less-active" members accumulated over decades. How can we revitalize stagnant city wards and recapture the impetus and enthusiasm we once had? Less frequent ward divisions, shortening the consolidated meeting time, and abandoning tracting in favour of good works would all help. There are other steps which might be taken, as well.

In many wards the number of inactive families hangs like a sword over the heads of the bishopric. I suspect that my ward is typical of many "old" Australian wards. Currently we have 173 "less active" families, thirty-five active "families," but only fifteen more-or-less active Melchizedek priesthood holders and three active Aaronic priesthood holders. This averages twenty-three families per home teaching pair—an impossible equation, given the area our ward covers. The simple arithmetic defeats the home teachers before they begin. Even missionary help does no more than melt the tip of the iceberg. What could we do? Target a few of these families at a time and work only with them? Assign families visiting *or* home teachers, but not both? Try to visit each "less active" family just once or twice each year with a warm invitation to come back or to contact us if in need? Official approval of any one of these suggestions would lift an intolerable burden of frustration and guilt from the Australian Saints and make us feel that our goals are attainable.

While the church does not officially release the number of members whose records are in the "lost" or "address unknown" file, about one quarter of the total Australian membership records appear to be in this category.³² A great many scarce resources are devoted to trying to track down, contact, and reactivate these people, who, by and large, do not want to be contacted. On a call-in radio program I heard a woman complain that she and her family, inactive Mormons, had migrated from England and hoped with the change of country they had "escaped" the reach of the Mormon network. To her horror, she said, within months they had been "located," their membership records assigned to the nearest ward, and they were again being regularly visited and importuned to resume association with the church. "Why would they do that?" marvelled the show host. Perhaps we should allow such people their agency to choose disaffiliation, as others were allowed to make such a choice in

32. Until the late 1980s the relevant figure for each year could be obtained by simply subtracting the membership total for Australia in the *Deseret News Almanac* (a figure presumably compiled by adding enrollment totals shown on activity reports for each stake and mission) from the total quoted by the Public Affairs Department for the same date (a figure which included all membership records, including those not attached to units).

our pre-mortal life.³³

THE COMING CENTURY

I am sure that the Brethren have just as much love and concern for Australians as they have for Saints anywhere else in the world. Yet unless there is dramatic growth here, we may become increasingly marginalized. Our numbers and conversion rates are too small to call for much attention from an overworked church hierarchy, nor does the church in Australia face dramatic problems like terrorism. So as church membership mushrooms elsewhere around the globe, and limited leadership and financial resources have to stretch even further, perhaps Australia may receive even less attention from Salt Lake City.

Herein may lie the solution. A period of benign neglect from Utah might allow the church in Australia to assimilate and Australianize. The middle of the next century may yet see Mormonism burst into a long-delayed full flowering as an Australian religion. I hope it will be so.

33. Of course, any church members wishing formal disaffiliation can simply write a letter to the local priesthood leader (usually bishop) asking that his or her name be removed from church records; but many inactive members seem unwilling or reluctant to do even that.