

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Haitian Mormons

May I add some thoughts to Jennifer Huss Basquiat's fine article ("Embodied Mormonism: Performance, Vodou, and the LDS Faith in Haiti," 37, no. 4 [Winter 2004]: 1-34)?

My own experience was more recent (2000-02), more rural (her focus was Port-au-Prince and the up-scale, by Haitian standards, Pétionville Ward), and more involved with organizational matters. My impressions do not counter hers. Indeed, they broaden the scope and deepen the implications of what she has stated so well.

Basquiat mentioned the visionary inclinations of the Haitians she interviewed. They have no problem with Joseph Smith and the First Vision. They themselves receive such manifestations or know someone right around the corner who does, and these personal manifestations play fast and loose with doctrinal purity. She mentions their "casting historical Mormon figures (including the present prophet) in an ancestor's role." They thus have a profound respect for authority figures—I would add, at a distance, and with a disdain for established hierarchies and procedures. They have adopted their own "definitional ceremonies" to which they have added,

since Basquiat's study, the temple in the Dominican Republic. I found a widespread fondness for the temple but for reasons that might startle mainline Mormons. The appeal is based on the love of secrecy, ritual, the feeling of being initiated into the mysteries. Basquiat could have a field day exploring this area, especially in light of her emphasis on Vodou.

You can imagine me, armed with my *Handbook of Instructions*, marching onto this playground. It was an administrative nightmare. But stepping back a bit, I came to realize that what I was witnessing was the Church of the New Testament or, if you will, the early days of the Restoration. In both cases, the challenge was to institutionalize an ideal, to channel the revelatory spirit into an organizational framework; in short, to reconcile the blinding vision with the need for survival.

The early Christian Church made the accommodation by adopting Greek philosophy and Roman organization and thus establishing doctrinal orthodoxy and its enforcing procedures (clergy and sacramental constraints). The Christianity inherited by the West, whether Catholic or Protestant, built upon this approach.

Now, however, traditional west-