

Thinking Globally: Explorations into a Truly International, Multi-Cultural Church

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With this issue, *Dialogue* begins a special series which, rather than filling a single issue, will present a number of articles in successive issues. Under the supervision of guest editor Ethan Yorgason, this series will focus on different facets of the Mormon experience and identity outside the usual Anglo-American cultural realm. Our first offering is Walter van Beek's intriguing "Mormon Europeans or European Mormons? An 'Afro-European' View on Religious Colonization."

Dialogue has a long-standing interest in international and multi-cultural expressions of Mormonism. In fact, a random search through back issues from its inception shows it perennially popping up.¹ In 1996, a special issue under Armand Mauss's guest editorship was devoted to "the assumption that the future of Mormonism in the next century depends largely on what happens outside North America."² Among the many fine articles Mauss solicited was Thomas Murphy's on the future of Mormonism in Guatemala, in which Murphy sees as inevitable the mingling of Mormonism as Utah Mormons know it and the traditional native Mayan religion. "Mormonism in the next century," says Murphy, "is apt to be in-

1. For example, see Wesley W. Craig Jr., "The Church in Latin America: Progress and Challenge," 5, no. 3 (Fall 1970): 66-74; Garth N. Jones, "Spreading the Gospel in Indonesia: Organizational Obstacles and Opportunities," 15, no. 4 (Winter 1982): 79-90; and Douglas F. Tobler, "Before the Wall Fell: Mormons in the German Democratic Republic, 1945-89," 25, no. 4 (Winter 1992): 11-30.

2. Armand Mauss, "Guest Editor's Introduction," 29, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 5.

creasingly characterized by diverse understandings of what it means to be Mormon. Diversity can be fostered or it can be suppressed, but it will never disappear.”³ In 2001, *Dialogue* devoted an issue to comparative studies of Mormonism written in part by non-Mormon scholars, a number of whom chose to focus upon the Church in foreign settings. In his introduction, guest editor Douglas J. Davies, who is not Mormon, asserts that if “Mormon Studies is ever to flourish as an identifiable field, then the comparative aspect is vitally important.”⁴

Other recent papers reflecting on Mormonism’s international and multicultural aspects include Gary Lobb’s study of membership trends among Europeans of color, first presented at the Mormon History Association’s 2000 conference in Denmark.⁵ Under my own editorship have appeared anthropologist Jennifer Basquiat’s exploration on the interface of Mormonism and Vodou in Haiti and articles by David Knowlton and Mark Grover on measuring membership growth in Latin America.⁶ The offerings by R. John Williams, Devyn M. Smith, and Adrienne Baadsgaard Cope, though not expressly solicited for this series, also touch upon this theme.

At my request, Ethan Yorgason is serving as guest editor of the series. His successful session on Mormonism’s international and multicultural aspects for the 2004 MHA conference in Provo featured van Beek’s original presentation. I appreciate Ethan’s efforts in soliciting and editing the articles for this series. When the series is completed, probably toward the end of next year, we anticipate his summary retrospective. Following the series, *Dialogue* will undoubtedly continue to publish the explorations of those who think globally about a universal gospel being preached by what is still an American church.

3. Thomas W. Murphy, “Reinventing Mormonism: Guatemala as Harbinger of the Future?” 29, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 192.

4. Douglas J. Davies, “Mormon Studies in a European Setting,” 34, nos. 3–4 (Fall–Winter 2001): 8.

5. Gary C. Lobb, “Mormon Membership Trends in Europe among People of Color: Present and Future Assessment,” 33, no. 4 (Winter 2000): 59–68.

6. Jennifer Huss Basquiat, “Embodied Mormonism: Performance, Vodou, and the LDS Faith in Haiti,” 37, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 1–34; David Clark Knowlton, “How Many Members Are There Really? Two Censuses and the Meaning of LDS Membership in Chile and Mexico,” 38, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 53–78; Mark L. Grover, “The Maturing of the Oak: The Dynamics of Latter-day Saint Growth in Latin America,” *ibid.*, 79–104.