

Notes and Comments

Edited by Joseph Jeppson

THE DISCIPLES OF MORMONISM

Elder B. H. Roberts, a member of the First Council of Seventy of the Church, in writing the 1906 course of study for the seventies, proposed a new understanding of the manner in which Joseph Smith may have used divine instruments in translating the Book of Mormon. He received many letters challenging or agreeing with his theory and a lively exchange with his critics was printed in the IMPROVEMENT ERA during the first part of 1906 (Vol. IX); the following excerpts appear near the end of one of his responses (pp. 712-713).

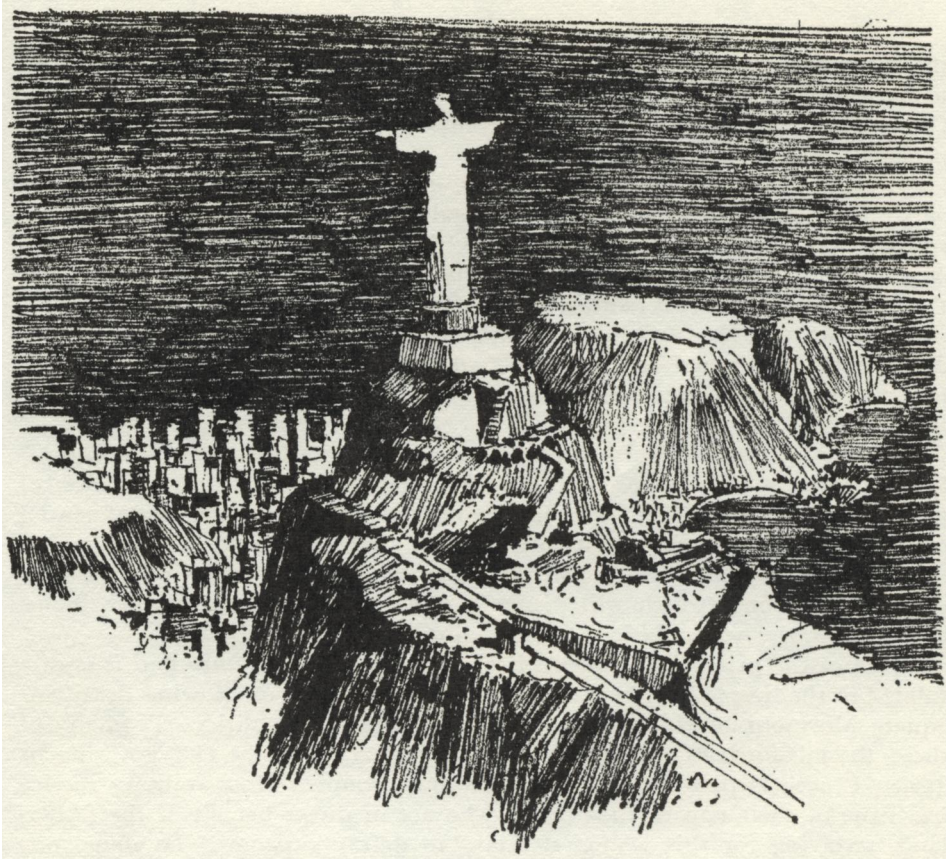
These latter reflections bring to mind some observations I remember to have read some time ago in the philosophical works of John Fiske respecting two classes of disciples or partisans in the world of religious and philosophical opinion, which I think with profit may be reproduced here. By the way, I see the passage occurs in the introduction of *Fiske's Work*, written by Josiah Royce, and is as follows:

Disciples and partisans, in the world of religious and of philosophical opinion, are of two sorts. There are, first, the disciples pure and simple — people who fall under the spell of a person or of a doctrine, and whose whole intellectual life thenceforth consists in their partisanship. They expound, and defend, and ward off foes, and live and die faithful to the one formula. Such disciples may be indispensable at first in helping a new teaching to get a popular hearing, but in the long run they rather hinder than help the wholesome growth of the very ideas that they defend: for great ideas live by growing, and a doctrine that has merely to be preached, over and over, in the same terms, cannot possibly be the whole truth. No man ought to be merely a faithful disciple of any other man. Yes, no man ought to be a mere disciple even of himself. We live spiritually by outliving our

formulas, and by thus enriching our sense of their deeper meaning. Now the disciples of the first sort do not live in this larger and more spiritual sense. They repeat. And true life is never mere repetition.

On the other hand, there are disciples of a second sort. They are men who have been attracted to a new doctrine by the fact that it gave expression, in a novel way, to some large and deep interest which had already grown up in themselves, and which had already come, more or less independently, to their own consciousness. They thus bring to the new teaching, from the first, their own personal contribution. The truth that they gain is changed as it enters their soul. The seed that the sower strews upon their fields springs up in their soil, and bears fruit — thirty, sixty, an hundredfold. They return to their master his own with usury. Such men are the disciples that it is worth while for a master to have. Disciples of the first sort often become, as Schopenhauer said, mere magnifying mirrors wherein one sees enlarged all the defects of a doctrine. Disciples of the second sort cooperate in the works of the Spirit; and even if they always remain rather disciples than originators, they help to lead the thought that they accept to a truer expression. They force it beyond its earlier and cruder stages of development.

I believe "Mormonism" affords opportunity for disciples of the second sort; nay, that its crying need is for such disciples. It calls for thoughtful disciples who will not be content with merely repeating some of its truths, but will develop its truths; and enlarge it by that development. Not half — not one-hundredth part — not a thousandth part of that which Joseph Smith revealed to the Church has yet been unfolded, either to the Church or to the world. The work of the expounder has scarcely begun. The Prophet planted by teaching the germ-truths of the great dispensation of the fullness of times. The watering and the weeding is going on, and God is giving the increase, and will give it more abundantly in the future as more intelligent discipleship shall obtain. The disciples of "Mormonism," growing discontented with the necessarily primitive methods which have hitherto prevailed in sustaining the doctrine, will yet take profounder and broader views of the great doctrines committed to the Church; and, departing from mere repetition, will cast them in new formulas; cooperating in the works of the Spirit, until they help to give to the truths received a more forceful expression, and carry it beyond the earlier and cruder stages of its development.



FROM THE MISSION FIELD — BRAZIL

Eldger G. Benson Whittle, a missionary for the L.D.S. Church presently serving as District Leader of the Porto Alegre First District in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, has sent this account of his mission. We hope that essays such as this one, which report and analyze the social conditions and state of mind of people in places around the world where missionaries are attempting to preach, as well as describing the effects new beliefs have on these people, can become a regular feature of DIALOGUE. We encourage the writing of such essays, by present or former missionaries or members of the Church in various countries, or suggestions as to who might do so.

From rather scanty beginnings in Sao Paulo and in the German town of Joinville, Santa Catarina, the Church in Brazil has grown to respectable proportions. After almost four decades, which saw, among other setbacks, the withdrawal of the elders during World War II, the Church and its 26,000 Brazilian members witnessed in May of this year the long-awaited organization of Sao Paulo Stake — the first Stake of Zion in South America. During the past couple of years, the Church has reached such a point that it may be safely predicted that within a few more years bearers of the good news of the Restoration will literally fill Brazil.

I look upon the organization of Sao Paulo Stake as a new beginning for the Church in Brazil. It is the natural tendency of the average Brazilian to brand Mormonism as the "American religion." He often looks upon the Church as being just one more of the myriad of American-controlled social, political, and economic institutions by which his country has been beleaguered for the past half-century or so. Stakehood, however, means autonomy and relative independence. Stakehood means that there are local brethren who can handle just about any task the Church has to offer. With the organization of stakes in this country, then, we look into the future and see the burden of the work shifting onto Brazilian shoulders. As this occurs, many of our non-Mormon brethren will begin to catch the vision of the kingdom which is destined to "consume" all other kingdoms, and which "shall never be destroyed," but which had to have its origin someplace — the place being North America.

But most citizens of this country have not yet heard the word "Mormon," let alone Mormonism's message. Brazil's eighty-two wards and branches of the Church of Jesus Christ are admirably active, but not nearly influential enough to reach Brazil's eighty-two million citizens. There is much to be done before the people in Brazil can be served by missionaries of their own ethnic background, which will dissipate the fears of nationalistic Brazilians, but I repeat, the new stake is an encouraging start. . . .

One of the principal problems is of a quasi-political nature and is encapsulated in the simple fact (mentioned above) that many unknowing Brazilians equate Mormonism with "Americanism" — with U.S. politics. To many of these, the missionaries are some sort of representatives of the U.S. government (spies, Peace Corps workers, etc.), who are exempted from military service by virtue of their trip to Brazil, and who act in direct benefit of the fatherland, receiving for this a modest salary to defray expenses. To some, our active missionary spirit is the outgrowth of a national superiority complex, which has led us to believe that we must give spiritual orientation to the rest of the world. One anti-Mormon pamphlet of Protestant origin reads, "Let us try to understand the Mormons: They, as members of the strongest people in the world, certainly feel that they have the responsibility of protecting the world spiritually and of saving it from eternal perdition. For this purpose they send their messengers to all nations" (P. Alcides Juksch, *A Seita dos Mormons A Luz do Evangelho*, Editora Sinodal, Sao Leopoldo, Rio Grande do Sul, 1965, p. 55; translation mine). Both of these misconceptions are damaging to the work.

Others acknowledge the legitimacy of our objectives and motives but allow their inborn distrust of all that descends upon their country from the north to preclude an unbiased examination of Mormon doctrine. These are generally not communists (though some are undoubtedly one-time communists or unregistered communists who were silenced by the present government after Joao Goulart was deposed), but are often advocates of a new "human economy" championed by French liberals, whose works are being widely read in Brazil — principally by students and professors of economics, political science, and sociology. They claim the proposed "human economy" to be a system in which the evils of neither capitalism nor communism will be present, and they view U.S. economic interests in Brazil as a more serious immediate threat to their country's sovereignty than the much talked of evil

aims of Red China or the Soviet Union. The following statement was prepared for us by a group of students from the College of Philosophy, Science, and Letters of Ijuí, who are in some degree or other exponents of this ideology, and I believe it to be representative of the thought of a strong majority of Brazilian students and professors:

We think that the North American people are well meaning. We cannot, however, think the same way with respect to all North Americans, principally the captains of industry and those who direct U.S. politics in relation to Latin America. The attitudes of some and of others are proof that there are clandestine desires of utilization, of domination of Latin America, as a rich source of cheap raw materials and as a North American dike to deter the advance of communism. Our opinion is that if U.S. leaders desire to continue as friends to the Latin Americans, they should change their politics and their attitudes of exploitation of our people. Imperialism has many means at its disposal. The Pentagon is powerful and the State Department is directed by intelligent men, but the Latin American people are invincible. Our yearning, for which we shall struggle until the end, is total liberation from all economic and political domination, in order that we be a people that directs itself, and that plans its development according to its own interests and necessities. (translation mine)

It should be added that, though many do have a nebulous or even apprehensive view of the Church because of the Mormonism-Americanism misconception mentioned above, the majority of the Brazilian people do not share the opinions of the students and professors. In fact, a significant segment of the population is interested in our message and in us only *because* we are Americans.



A more serious problem, in my opinion, is the missionaries' chronic failure to understand and adapt adequately to Brazil's predominantly Latin culture. We extol North American scientific achievements and attribute Brazil's technical underdevelopment to laziness. We condemn the moral laxity of the Roman Church, failing to realize that we are obligated by our own interpretations of Catholic history to impute any blame for such to priests of long ago and to coercive missionary techniques employed anciently (namely, political conquest), rather than to Catholics of today. We are also slow to acknowledge that there are many Catholic men who observe an absolute moral standard (most women do). We fail to give credit to Brazil for her art, music, and literature, which in some areas are far superior to our own.

Indeed, some elders seem to interpret their station as a calling to proclaim the virtues of the eclectic culture in which they were raised, rather than the eternal Gospel of Jesus Christ. Among these, there is little understanding of or respect for the contributions of the Latin culture to the progress and happiness of humanity. They suffer from a superiority complex, and it is detected at times by the people of Brazil.

Other errors which widen the gap between missionaries and Brazilians, but which stem more from carelessness and indiscretion than from lack of understanding are also important in this regard. The most notable of these is the general levity demonstrated by some elders, which, truly enough, may stem more from their age than anything else, but which is looked upon with disapprobation by the populace, nonetheless. Another is the perpetual tourism to which some elders are addicted, despite requests of the Mission Presidency for moderation in sight-seeing and picture-taking. (A recent student demonstration or *passeata* in Passo Fundo, treating divers matters, featured a couple of freshmen dressed as Mormon elders, complete with cameras, sunglasses, briefcases, etc., bearing a sign which said, "*Missionarios Bossa Nova.*") In the minds of Latin observers, these foibles are motives for doubt with respect to the seriousness of our intentions as well as to the very meaning of our religion. "If the mission and the message of the Mormons are so important," said a journalist friend of mine, "the missionaries should demonstrate it through more serious behavior."

The factors mentioned above are all significant, I think. But there is another factor which I believe to be more important than any of them. It is the difference in temperament between North Americans and Latin Americans. By their nature, Latin Americans are more sensitive, more emotional, more "romantic" than their neighbors to the north. They are very expressive in this respect, and their nature demands reciprocation. We elders, new at "true religion," and even newer at the art of being Latin, have had difficulty in comprehending these facts. We have not reciprocated thoroughly, because we haven't known how. The sisters know how and haven't had the struggle we have had, but we have maintained a separation between ourselves and the genuine goodness of many sincere people. In our zealous efforts to convert, we have at times caught ourselves being more interested in the ordinance than in the catechumen. On our way to the font with one individual, we have walked on the feelings of others.

It is significant and gratifying to me that Church leaders in South America seem to be aware of the problems mentioned in the paragraphs above. Late in 1965, Elder Kimball, who presides over the South American missions, advised mission presidents under his jurisdiction that all missionaries were to begin living with families in private homes as soon as conditions would permit. If I interpret it correctly, this move was to have two effects — that of reducing levity by splitting large groups of elders into groups of two (only two elders may live with each family), and that of forcing the missionaries to know and understand at close range the feelings and customs of the Brazilian peoples. Early in 1966, President C. Elmo Turner of the Brazilian South Mission included as one of three immediate goals for all missionaries his admonition to "learn to love the people of Brazil." Mission publications have carried information on Brazilian history and customs.

Before this topic is abandoned, the Language Training Mission must be

highly commended. Here again, the Brethren have shown wisdom and familiarity with the exigencies of the work in foreign lands. In Brazil, few foreigners speak Portuguese better than the Mormon missionaries. Generally speaking, not even American pastors and missionaries of other Christian churches who have been in Brazil for several years can rival the fluency of those missionaries who have studied diligently in Provo at the Language Training Mission.

The poverty in South America of which so much has been said is a reality. It is confined, in southern Brazil, at least, to Lamanites, Negroes, and Mulattos, but it is still an extremely serious problem, because these groups account for a large portion of the population. The minimum wage for the state of Rio Grande do Sul (which is one of the better-developed states in the country) is 76,000 cruzeiros per month, or roughly, thirty-five dollars. It is true that food prices, bus fares, etc., are lower than those which North Americans are accustomed to paying, but not as much lower as the difference in salary would seem to demand. The Brazilian housewife pays forty cents for a pound of butter, fifty cents for a pound of passable beef, and thirty-five cents for a dozen eggs. Automobiles, telephones, washing machines, water heaters, furnaces (it does get cold here in the south), etc., are far beyond the reach of the average family, because, paradoxically, prices on these articles are once and again as high as on similar articles in the United States, due to tariff barriers erected to protect nascent native industry. But the gravity of the situation is not fully comprehended until it is realized that in Brazil the people who earn the minimum wage are the semi-skilled and at times even skilled laborers. These are not housewives trying to help out by taking a job as saleslady in a department store; these are husbands and fathers upon whom a wife and four or five children depend entirely for their sustenance. And after subtracting fifteen dollars from the monthly check to pay for rent, electricity, and firewood, the husband has little to take home to his wife. If the man is a drinker (and many, many are), he takes home next to nothing.

Economically speaking, there is a class just under the one mentioned above. It consists of the millions of homeless transients who roam barefoot through city and country — begging, drinking, borrowing, stealing, starving — from the day they are born until the day they die. They are seen alone, or in groups of two or three, or often even as a family (a woman and several children) without a father, for there is an almost complete sexual promiscuity among these people. Where there is a marriage, it is what we might call a common-law marriage, and no man among them is bound to any one woman. This is not merely an underprivileged class; this is a decadent, indolent, impotent, drunken, and completely ignorant people.

The two classes of people just mentioned are the most apparent direct cause of the lag in Brazil's economy. They will become meaningfully productive only when they become educated. Members of the former group have less than a primary education, while members of the latter group have virtually no education. Education is not compulsory, needless to say. This is not the place for suggestions as to solutions of national problems, but it seems obvious to me that education is the key. And it is notable that all second generation Church members are educated or being educated; the Church is extremely school conscious.

The Church's proselyting efforts here have been successful among all

social and economic divisions except the vagrant element referred to above. The larger congregations have their doctors and professors, who have assumed responsibility, and who move with ease among the more numerous members from the middle and poorer classes. Other branches are still struggling for want of capable leadership since most of their members, coming from the less affluent economic sectors, lack initiative and refinement. . . .

It is not only the Mormon Church that has felt a lack of able leadership in its congregations. In fact, the Church is in better condition than anyone else in one respect, for it does not depend upon vocational options for its ministers. An increasingly lower percentage of Catholic parents are sending their sons to the seminary; an increasingly higher percentage of young men are dropping out of the seminaries before ordination. Other churches have even worse problems in this area. Virtually all of them have many American or German pastors watching over the many flocks which aren't fortunate enough to have a native minister. Also, many congregations can't afford to have a pastor, for the scarcity has rendered the vocation of a professional minister quite lucrative, and money is scarce. An interdenominational magazine announced in January of this year that "the greatest necessity of the evangelical churches of Brazil in the next five years" is the need for a "national clergy" (*Mundo Cristao*, Janeiro-Fevereiro, 1966, page 13). Foreign ministers are available, but expensive.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints seems to be the most promising institution now functioning in or out of Brazil. It is the only "vital religion" in the country, and it has just begun to make its harvest in a land in which the field is indeed ready. Joseph said that "the whole of America is Zion" (*Teachings*, page 362). Working here in Brazil, I have good reason to believe that he spoke the truth.

