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Letter to the Editor

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Letter to the Editor

Response to Review of Reaching the Nations

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WE APPRECIATE THE SELECTION OF OUR WORK, *Reaching the Nations: International Church Growth Almanac*, for review in the *Mormon Studies Review*,¹ and also the importance accorded by the editors to international LDS studies. We value the reviewers' recognition of our work as containing accurate and reliable data on the international LDS Church but wish to respond to what we view as inaccuracies in the review article.

The review claims that “*RTN* contains factual inaccuracies pertaining to LDS church units,” but this claim is not substantiated. Eustache Ilunga states that “the Kinshasa Mokali Stake was created in 2012, not 2013,” and alleges that *RTN* fails to mention branches in Uvira, DR Congo. *RTN* correctly specifies that “stakes have been organized in . . . Kinshasa Mokali (2012)”² and notes that “cities that had their first independent LDS congregations established after 2005 included . . . Uvira (2011).”

Marcello Jun de Oliveira alleges that “more updated data from the 2010 Brazilian Census are entirely ignored,” yet the release of full census data was “postponed . . . to 2013,”³ when *RTN* was in press. He claims

1. Charles Carter et al., review of *Reaching the Nations: International LDS Church Growth Almanac, 2014 Edition*, by David G. Stewart Jr. and Matthew Martinich, *Mormon Studies Review* 3 (2016): 147–62.

2. Stewart and Martinich, *Reaching the Nations*, 2:358.

3. “Calendar 2012,” Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística, accessed 23 July 2016, <http://www.ibge.gov.br/english/estatistica/populacao/censo2010/calendario.shtm>. Census data at <http://censo2010.ibge.gov.br/apps/atlas/>.

that our demographic data for Brazil are “outdated and wrong,” as we reference 2012 US State Department data. Jun de Oliveira may not have noticed *RTN*’s 2013 publication date nor considered the logistics of publishing a work of nearly a million words.

Carter Charles queries the provenance of our ethnic data for France and claims that collecting such data is illegal. Yet the law cited refers to censuses, not surveys and polls,⁴ and exempts government agencies, including INSEE,⁵ which publishes data on the origins of first- and second-generation immigrants.

Gina Colvin advises that *Maori* is “always” written with a macron, yet the usage of *Maori* without a macron is standard in English outside New Zealand.⁶ *RTN* contains thousands of ethnic and place-names for which we have omitted diacritics per standard English for searching, editing, and portability.

Marcello Jun de Oliveira complains that more diverse resources should be cited for country data and claims that “other data mentioned, such as membership in other Christian denominations, are never sourced.” As mentioned in *RTN*’s introduction, these data are sourced in the bibliography at the end of each volume. Similar statistical data are best cited from consistent sources to avoid discrepancies. Other reviewers questioned some of the ethnicity and language statistics, which, as we have noted, derive from sources listed in the bibliography. *RTN* contains 4,715 footnotes, primarily on LDS history; most almanacs have few or none.

Although most reviewers made few or no claims of substantive error in *Reaching the Nations*, Wilfried Decoo disputed numerous items. Decoo alleges that we have “muddled” the title of an *LDS Church News* article, “The Church in Belgium: Membership has international

4. Michael Cosgrove, “How does France count its Muslim population?” *Le Figaro*, 4 July 2011, accessed 6 August 2016, <http://plus.lefigaro.fr/note/how-does-france-count-its-muslim-population-20110407-435643>.

5. Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques, accessed 26 July 2016, <http://www.insee.fr/>.

6. “Maori Language,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed 7 January 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Maori-language>.

flavor in Church version of United Nations,” and claims that the final six words are our invention. In fact, we have correctly cited the title.⁷ Decoo claims that “note 93 on page 65” is not correlated with the preceding sentences, yet there is no footnote 93 on page 65 of our printed book, PDF, ePub, or Kindle versions.

Mr. Decoo denies that Belgium colonized the Congo during the nineteenth century. Our section on the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) notes: “The region became known as the Congo Free State in 1884, although in fact it was controlled by the King of Belgium. The Congo was annexed to Belgium in 1908 as the Belgian Congo.”⁸ Belgian King Leopold II was recognized as the sovereign of the Congo Free State, organized on the territory of the modern DRC,⁹ at the Berlin West Africa Conference of 1884–85.¹⁰ The deaths of millions of Congolese have been attributed to nineteenth-century colonial atrocities brought to Western attention by Joseph Conrad’s 1899 novel *Heart of Darkness*. The Congo was primarily colonized by Belgians and was administered from Belgium in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, first by the Belgian Head of State and then by the Parliament. Decoo also disputes that Belgium fell under Spanish control in 1519, and he places the event with the ascension of Philip II in 1556. The relocation of the seat of power and hereditary title of the Burgundian lands to Spain, where Charles V appears to have spent most of his reign, under his personal union of the houses of Valois-Burgundy, Hapsburg, and Tramastara in

7. Chris Miasnik, “The Church in Belgium: Membership has international flavor in Church version of United Nations,” *LDS Church News*, 7 December 1996, accessed 26 July 2016, <http://www.ldschurchnewsarchive.com/articles/28181/The-Church-in-Belgium—Membership-has-international-flavor-in-Church-version-of-United-Nations.html>.

8. Stewart and Martinich, *Reaching the Nations*, 2:355.

9. Matthew G. Stanard, “Belgian Colonial Rule,” Oxford Bibliographies, accessed 7 January 2015, <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199846733/obo-9780199846733-0107.xml>; and “Leopold II, King of Belgium,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed 7 January 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Leopold-II-king-of-Belgium>.

10. Congo Free State,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed 9 July 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Congo-Free-State>.

1519,¹¹ is often taken as the date of Spanish control of Belgium, notwithstanding Charles's frequent visits and favor toward Flemish nobles.

Decoo denies that tobacco consumption rates are high in Belgium. The American Cancer Society cites 2014 tobacco use in Belgium as one of the highest rates in Europe, at 2,353 cigarettes smoked per person over age fifteen;¹² it also attributes many male deaths in Belgium to tobacco use.¹³ We have followed other sources in listing tobacco as a "major crop" of Belgium.¹⁴ Decoo claims that in the Ardennes "there are no real 'mountains.'" The Ardennes has long been designated by geologists as a mountain range, formed in the Givetian state of the Devonian period¹⁵ and older than the Alps and Rockies. Nowhere do we state that the Ardennes region constitutes a formal political division or nonoverlapping area with Wallonia. Decoo critiques our omission of Bruges among "several . . . large economic centers . . . towards the end of the Middle Ages," yet our text ("cities . . . such as") indicates that our examples are not comprehensive, and Bruges is less than half as populous as the smallest of the three cities listed. Our data on "speakers of other languages" is consistent with estimates in Omniglot.¹⁶ Estimates

11. "Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed 7 January 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Charles-V-Holy-Roman-emperor>.

12. Michael Eriksen et al., *The Tobacco Atlas*, fifth ed. (American Cancer Society, 2015). An interactive summary version is available at <http://www.tobaccoatlas.org/topic/cigarette-use-globally>, citing per capita cigarette consumption in Belgium at 2,353 in 2014 (accessed 6 December 2015).

13. Eriksen, *Tobacco Atlas*, 15, http://3pk43x313ggr4cy0lh3tctjh.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/TA5_2015_WEB.pdf (accessed 8 January 2016).

14. "Belgium: Economy," *Infoplease Almanac*, accessed 7 January 2016, <http://www.infoplease.com/encyclopedia/world/belgium-economy.html>. See also "Belgium," *CIA World Factbook*, accessed 7 January 2016, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/be.html>.

15. "Middle Rhine Highlands," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed 7 January 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/place/Middle-Rhine-Highlands>; and "Givetian Stage," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed 3 July 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/science/Givetian-Stage>.

16. "Walloon," Omniglot.com, accessed 9 July 2016, <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/walloon.htm>.

vary widely for languages with few monolinguals in multilingual areas due to varying definitions¹⁷ and levels of proficiency, limited survey quality, and controversy in distinguishing between languages and dialects.¹⁸ We are aware of the continued decline of the Walloon language. We have made no claims regarding the speakers' proficiency and have opted toward the higher estimates to be inclusive. These data in *RTN* are all consistent with appropriate reference sources and within the range of mainstream scholarship. On none of these items have we introduced error through our own confusion or fabrication, as Decoo claims. Scholarship often involves different interpretations that can be supported by evidence and reasoning. We wish that we had space for expanded and nuanced discussions, yet our text is consistent with the style of an almanac.

We are unable to assess Decoo's remarkable claim that centuries-old Belgian tobacco cultivation "is to disappear," as his URLs are defunct and lack academic referencing. We agree with Decoo's critique that the administrative region of Wallonia includes southern as well as central Belgium. Although the annexation of Belgium by France in October 1795 is listed in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* under the heading "The Napoleonic Era,"¹⁹ we agree that this occurred before Napoleon's coup.²⁰ This leaves only two minor items as potentially valid out of Decoo's numerous allegations: one factual error (Belgium's annexation

17. "Limburgish," *Ethnologue.com*, accessed 9 July 2016, <https://www.ethnologue.com/language/lim>.

18. "The Limburgish language is officially recognized by the provincial government of Wallonia, but not by the Belgian national government. See "Limburgish (Limburgs)," *Omniglot.com*, accessed 9 July 2016, <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/limburgish.htm>.

19. "Belgium: The Napoleonic Era," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, accessed 10 July 2016, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02395a.htm>.

20. We differ with Decoo's assertion that Belgium was already "well-integrated" into France when Napoleon took power, as the leaders of the revolt against the French (termed the Peasants War or *Boerenkrijg*) that began in the Low Countries in October 1798 were executed in the summer of 1799, not long before Napoleon's November coup. See "Belgium: The Napoleonic Era" and "The Flemish Peasants War of 1798," accessed 10 July 2016, <http://www.zum.de/whkmla/military/napwars/boerenkrijg.html>.

by France occurred before Napoleon's rule) and one omission (Wallonia includes southern as well as central Belgium). Our actual error rate appears to be well below that of the reviewers, even on items they disputed. We believe that *RTN*'s accuracy meets or exceeds the standards of comparable works.

Some reviewers may not have understood the nature of our work. Gina Colvin implies that we did not engage local researchers because we spelled *Maori* without a macron. Taunalyn Rutherford claims that *Reaching the Nations* "should be seen as no more than what it is: an encyclopedic reference."²¹ Colvin and Rutherford's assumption that our work is a piece of library research compiled without local insight or input is inconsistent with vast original church-related data in *RTN* that reviewers have acknowledged as accurate. Although we turned to reference sources for country profile data and church histories, the core of our work consists of original church-growth research. Decoo dismisses our analysis without consideration, alleging that the scholarly basis for our analysis of factors associated with church growth is "extremely weak" because we have not cited interpretive historical scholarship published in eclectic journals that, he claims, would be referenced in "any serious approach." To Decoo, the fact that we have implemented a systematic research methodology, have conducted field work in over forty countries, have interviewed thousands of Latter-day Saints and current and former missionaries worldwide, have engaged an extensive network of local contacts, and have received over seven thousand completed surveys does not qualify our work as real scholarship. We believe that our findings add new insights to many topics.

As our analysis of church-growth issues for each country is the result of extensive original research, our findings do not depend on the citation of other authors for validity. We are obviously familiar with this literature, as David Stewart has cited Decoo's two essays ten

21. We appreciate her acknowledgment that *RTN* is more on par with an encyclopedia than with an almanac.

times in a prior publication,²² as well as numerous other authors. We have cited this literature abundantly in other academic publications we have contributed to on the international LDS Church.²³ As we compiled *RTN*, our survey of LDS-related scholarly journals suggested that this literature was too sparse to provide more than a few historical data points about a minority of the 219 countries and territories we covered. With few exceptions, this literature consists of historical or observational essays that lack formal study design, are uneven in coverage and content, and require further interrogation. Statistics on LDS member activity and convert retention are sparse, dated, and tentatively represented as “estimated” and “about.”²⁴ Decoo’s pieces, as the titles “Issues” and “Reflections”²⁵ announce, are interesting anecdotal-observational essays.

One of the few journal articles with formal research methodology reports a 25 percent response rate on a survey of two wards,²⁶ which the author acknowledges is “much too small to be more than barely suggestive of certain recurrent traits in these wards.”²⁷ With such works among the most rigorous studies available, the evidence for many claims in this literature is inconclusive. Exceptions might include practices like

22. David G. Stewart Jr., *The Law of the Harvest: Practical Principles of Effective Missionary Work* (Henderson, NV: Cumorah Foundation, 2007), 461.

23. See Seth L. Bryant, Henri Gooren, Rick Phillips, and David G. Stewart Jr., “Conversion and Retention in Mormonism,” in *Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion*, ed. Lewis R. Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 756–85. See also David G. Stewart Jr., “Growth, Retention and Internationalization,” in *Revisiting Thomas O’Dea’s The Mormons: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. C. Jacobson, J. Hoffman, and T. Heaton (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2008), 328–61.

24. Wilfried Decoo, “Issues in Writing European History and in Building the Church in Europe,” *Journal of Mormon History* (Spring 1997): 164.

25. Wilfried Decoo, “Feeding the Fleeing Flock: Reflections on the Struggle to Retain Church Members in Europe,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 29/1 (Spring 1996): 97–113.

26. Henri Gooren, “Analyzing LDS Growth in Guatemala: A Report from a Barrio,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 43 (Summer 2000): 97–115.

27. Gooren, “Analyzing LDS Growth in Guatemala,” 99.

the rushed-baptism periods in the UK,²⁸ Australia,²⁹ and Japan;³⁰ *RTN* cites the latter two. Seeing a need for independent original research on church growth, we primarily cited sources presenting raw data rather than interpretive scholarship. Although additional items from this literature could be cited if we decide to pursue further editions, we believe that a large dose of humility is in order in describing extant scholarship on the international LDS Church and the scope and quality of evidence it provides. We believe that systematic, evidence-based research design and large-scale data collection are necessary to achieve findings of optimal rigor, and we hope to see increased utilization of such methods by other authors.

We appreciate the reviewers' time and effort in reviewing our work. We also thank the editors for their consideration of our work in *MSR* and for providing us the opportunity for us to respond.

—David G. Stewart Jr. and Matthew Martinich

28. D. Michael Quinn, "I-Thou vs. I-It Conversions: The Mormon 'Baseball Baptism' Era," *Sunstone* 16/7 (December 1993): 30–44.

29. Marjorie Newton, "Towards 2000: Mormonism in Australia," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 29/1 (Spring 1996): 193–206.

30. Jiro Numano, "Perseverance amid Paradox: The Struggle of the LDS Church in Japan Today," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 39/4 (Winter 2006): 138–55.