



7-1-1980

Mormonism: A Faith for All Cultures F. LaMond Tullis, ed.

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Recommended Citation

Stagner, Ishmael (1980) "*Mormonism: A Faith for All Cultures* F. LaMond Tullis, ed.," *BYU Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 20 : Iss. 3 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol20/iss3/8>

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Book Reviews

TULLIS, F. LA MOND, ed. *Mormonism: A Faith for All Cultures*. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1978. 365 pp. \$8.95.

Reviewed by Ishmael Stagner, assistant professor of education at Brigham Young University—Hawaii Campus, Laie, Hawaii.

Mormonism: A Faith for All Cultures is a book that ought to be read by all adult members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, even though it has some problems. It is too long in parts that could be cut, too short in parts that should have been expanded, and too academic throughout, almost making it unreadable for the average member of the Church. This is unfortunate because it is one of the most provocative, informative, faith-promoting, and intellectually stimulating church books I have read in a very long time. Too little is written in the Church about the "Mormon" experience outside the white, English-speaking Wasatch Front. When we hear about pioneers, we immediately think of handcarts, oxen, and Conestogas trekking across the American Plains. Yet, if the gospel of Jesus Christ is to cover the earth and is to be appreciated for the universality of its message, then, somehow, we must recognize and acknowledge contributions made by other people of other times, of other places, of other languages. Tullis's book makes such an attempt, and it is a mighty one.

Because it attempts to do so much—in such a short space, with so few people, in the absence of any definitive precedent—the book has some drawbacks. It is actually three books in one: an academic Christian history, an institutionalized LDS Church history, and a book of personalized individual histories and testimonies. To the student and scholar, the insights given by contributors such as Hugh Nibley, Arthur Henry King, Noel Reynolds, and Douglas Tobler are most instructive and informative. But they are so weighty as to be almost entirely boring to the academically uninitiated. If the gospel is to be for all cultures, hopefully it will also be for all members, written in non-academic language with simple nouns, verbs, adjectives, and sentences.

The selections on the history of the Church in various parts of the world (i.e., Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, France, Scandinavia, Latin America, Philippines, Korea, and Japan) are most fascinating and among the most readable portions of the book. Of particular interest to me is the testimony of Bishop Orlando Rivera, especially his explanation of Mormonism and the Chicano. It is a scholarly, yet a very human, discussion of one of the great paradoxes in the Church: why Chicanos are not joining the Church in the numbers that their brethren in Mexico, and Central and South America are.

Without a doubt, the section of the book which has the greatest poignancy and spiritual uplift is the one containing personal testimonies of local leaders involved in Church growth. While all the testimonies and comments are outstanding, the one that I like most is that of President Rhee Ho Nam of South Korea. His account of his search for prospective Church-member spouses for his children is simultaneously hilarious and sobering. It reminds me of a statement I once heard from a Church member of a culture different from mine: "The trouble with you is that you want me to be your brother, but not your brother-in-law." President Rhee's presentation and subsequent testimony cogently remind us that the gospel doesn't change: it is people and their attitudes that do, or ought to.

President Augusto Lim's explanations of the humbleness of the typical Filipino budget should remind us that among the strengths of early Mormonism were hard work, frugality, and thrift. We need to remember these values when we attempt to place our designed-for-Utah buildings in places where they don't fit, or where the local Saints cannot even afford to use them.

Given the time frame for the presentation of these lectures and discussions in the bicentennial year, and the logistical considerations for assembling any type of international group, the twenty-five participants and contributors have done a Herculean initiatory work. But much has been left out of *Mormonism: A Faith for All Cultures*. Areas such as the Pacific, and people such as the American Indians, are totally ignored. Yet, there must be something that could be learned from the Church's spectacularly successful experiences with these cultures and peoples. Even more importantly, if the gospel is still to be taken to the great masses of the Indian sub-continent, the African continent, the Chinese mainland, and the Arab world, it would seem that we would want to know more of the things we have done right in the past in order to explore the ways we might be more successful in the future. Perhaps one of the perspectives we might

take is that rather than view the gospel as being threatening to culture or peoples, we might see it as being compatible with and supportive of society. If the gospel can be seen in this light, then, perhaps, we can accelerate even more spectacularly the missionary work for which the Church is already known. And in this respect, what LaMond Tullis has done—incomplete, tentative, and skewed though it appears—is still a most promising beginning. Hopefully, this book is just that: the beginning of more thought-provoking and faith-promoting discussions of a church whose message is universal and loving because its God is universal and loving.