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Book Reviews

RENDELL N. MABEY and GORDON I. ALLRED. *Brother to Brother: The Story of the Latter-day Saint Missionaries Who Took the Gospel to Black Africa*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1984. 161 pp. \$7.95.

Reviewed by Newell G. Bringhurst, professor of history at College of the Sequoias.

In October 1978, two Latter-day Saint couples, Rendell and Rachel Mabey and Edward Q. (Ted) and Janath Cannon, arrived in Lagos, Nigeria, as the first Mormon missionaries assigned to work with that country's black African population. Although the Church had long been active in South Africa, missionary efforts had been restricted to people of European ancestry. *Brother to Brother* is based on Rendell Mabey's copious 1,305-page journal, compiled over the period from late 1978 until the fall of 1979, while the Mabeys were serving in Nigeria and neighboring Ghana. The transition from journal to book was achieved with the aid of Gordon Allred, a professor of English at Weber State College.

Written in a "faith promoting" style designed primarily for Latter-day Saint readers, *Brother to Brother* is a revealing account of a unique and challenging new phase of Mormon missionary activity. Almost from his arrival, Mabey could barely keep pace with the dozens of requests from Africans for information about Mormonism, and sometimes for immediate baptism. This overwhelming response was due in part to the earlier formation of many "unauthorized Mormon branches" in Nigeria and Ghana. These branches had been organized during the 1960s and early 1970s by black Africans who had heard of Latter-day Saint beliefs. In some cases, they had acquired various publications and tracts from Church headquarters, and had even assumed the official Church name: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Moreover, these self-styled African Mormons had secured legal recognition under this name in both Nigeria and Ghana. In addition to these unauthorized "grassroots" Mormons, Mabey found a second group of interested investigators among the leaders and members of several independent Christian congregations who had

learned of Mormon beliefs either through word of mouth or from Church tracts. When the missionaries arrived in their midst, they requested baptism en masse. This initial interest resulted in a total of 1,723 black Africans joining the Church during Mabey's one-year sojourn.

This phenomenal success did not come without some difficulties. Africa's tropical climate and general environment provided a series of "culture shocks" for the American missionaries. The intense heat and humidity made the mere thought of donning the typical Mormon missionary attire of a "suit and tie . . . torture." Mabey found slacks and a short-sleeved white shirt "the only tolerable but still respectable alternative" (23). He also had difficulty adjusting to the food and water. Living on the run, in often primitive conditions, with an irregular diet took its toll on the seventy-year-old missionary, causing him to lose twenty-five pounds in a six-month period.

Mabey also faced several challenges in dealing with those black Africans who embraced Mormonism. Their religious rituals frequently deviated from standard Church practice. For example, in some branches church services included clapping and chanting, complete with drums, musical sticks, gourds, and large blowjugs. The leaders of one Nigerian congregation solicited direct contributions by having members deposit coins in a large collection platter in a ceremony accompanied by "a crescendo of praise-the-Lords and hallelujahs" (71). In another branch, this one in Ghana, Mabey had to deal with a woman who had assumed the title "Mormon prophetess." Her position stemmed, in part, from the fact that she owned the building in which the branch held its meetings. Such problems, added to the pressure of converts requesting immediate baptism, caused Mabey to remark, "I really am concerned that we are extending our work too thinly now and must rest for a season to regroup and perfect our records and organization" (105). Since the Mabeys and Cannons were the only LDS missionaries in all of Nigeria and Ghana, there was clearly a pressing need for additional missionaries. At the same time, Church officials in Utah felt the environment was not suitable for the typical Mormon missionary, the young, single nineteen-to twenty-year-old male fresh out of high school. Instead, Church officials opted to send older married couples, such as the Mabeys. Mabey himself notes the need for "dedicated [missionary] couples well-seasoned in the gospel, capable of organizing, instructing, and providing sound leadership training" (77-78). But it was difficult to find "couples with the necessary temperament and background" (132).

On the whole, *Brother to Brother* is written in an interesting, engaging style and is well illustrated. It also contains well-drawn maps that are extremely helpful to the reader in locating the towns and villages described throughout the book. At the same time, the book glosses over or fails to deal with some crucial issues. Conspicuously absent is any mention of opposition or hostility to Mormon missionary activity in either Nigeria or Ghana. Despite Mabey's assertion that "the title *missionary* was an honored one, the passkey to nearly every door" (135), it is hard to believe the missionaries did not encounter some opposition from the leaders of other Christian denominations or from government officials. As Mabey himself notes, his fellow missionaries, the Cannons, experienced visa problems on at least two occasions in getting in and out of Ghana. Referring to these problems, Mabey states that upon his return to the United States "I discovered a real bottleneck in Washington" (152). But he does not explain what that "bottleneck" was. Also the reader is left wondering how African Mormons reacted to directives issued by Mabey that went against their established rituals and customs. Did any of them resist or even resent the restrictions imposed on the use of African music in church services? More important, how did they react to restrictions prohibiting black priesthood bearers "from baptizing and confirming except under direct [white] supervision" (142)? According to Mabey, this restraint was imposed to maintain order and prevent "our large but orderly processions toward the waters" from becoming "a stampede without adequate preparation or record keeping" (142). But this restraint must have seemed perplexing to at least some black priesthood holders as well as to the dozens of Africans clamoring for immediate baptism into the faith. Finally, Mabey's account would have benefited from a brief postscript on Mormon activities in Nigeria and Ghana in the five-year period subsequent to his departure. These problems notwithstanding, *Brother to Brother* is an enlightening account of a new and potentially significant phase of Latter-day Saint missionary activity.