
REVIEWS

LAIE AND POINTS
SOUTH

UNTO THE ISLANDS OF
THE SEA: A HISTORY OF THE
LATTER-DAY SAINTS
IN THE PACIFIC

by R. Lanier Britsch

Deseret Book, Salt Lake City, 1986. 585 pp. \$16.95



Reviewed by Ian G. Barber

R. LANIER BRITSCH'S NEW book is yet another independent volume from the cancelled multi-volume sesquicentennial history of the LDS church, proposed in days when scholarly historical research seemed to be almost respectable. Since secular history is now considered a means of separating the wishy-washy from the faithful, it is a little ironic to consider that the volumes which have appeared from the cancelled series are generally characterized by faithful interpretation and tremendous sensitivity. Britsch's book is no exception.

In terms of published scholarship, Britsch's work breaks new ground by examining a hitherto little studied area of LDS history. The fascinating and the mundane are all here: there is the self appointed king Walter Murray Gibson, preparing for world dominion in Hawaii. There are the disappointments and frustrations of the early Tahitian missionaries dealing with the Catholic and French authorities and occasional incarceration, as well as different Polynesian cultural concepts vis-a-vis religious commitment. There is discrimination by local gov-

ernments against indigenous LDS converts in Hawaii and Tahiti, leading to bloodshed on occasion. There are the inroads made in Tahiti and Australia by the RLDS missionaries, in the former case after years of absence by Utah missionaries, resulting in occasional tension and crossfire. There is the growth of Mormonism in Samoa and Tonga to the status of a major religious tradition, and the greater acceptance of Mormonism by the Maoris of New Zealand than by European majority there, a situation now changing.

The historical merits of this wide ranging and extensively researched work are readily apparent. Yet there are also two areas where, in my opinion, Britsch's book does not quite meet the expectations of a scholarly study of Mormonism in the Pacific. Firstly, Britsch seems overly reliant upon the mission histories prepared by Andrew Jenson and the annual mission financial and statistical reports. I do not wish to underrate these sources; Jenson's Church-wide mission histories are an invaluable historical resource, often citing information not generally available elsewhere, while the mission and financial reports in the LDS Church Archives are presently unavailable for

general research, rendering Britsch's data from this source particularly valuable. Yet a survey of the sources cited in Carol Cornwall Madsen's recent article on female LDS missionaries in Polynesia indicates that Britsch has ignored a number of relevant primary source documents. The same is also true of New Zealand missionary journals, including the papers of mission president Gordon Claridge Young in LDS archives, which would have supplemented data from Young's oral history with more contemporary insights. Britsch, in short, relies on institutional historical data at the expense of social history or alternative/unofficial institutional sources. On occasion his sources are inconsistently or unclearly cited; this is most egregious when he fails to give a citation for George Q. Cannon statement that Hawaiians were descended from the Book of Mormon peoples (pp. 97-98). Britsch refers to this incident again on pages 150-51, where the source is hinted at but still not explicitly cited.

Britsch's treatment of issues of culture conflict and assimilation raises more complex problems. To Britsch's credit, he deals with a number of specific issues in this regard, including the management of the Laie plantation in Hawaii and conflict involving traditional Polynesian concepts of land ownership, culture conflict in New Zealand involving such traditions as funerary practices, and differing cultural interpretations of sexual mores in a number of Polynesian contexts. Britsch also documents the paternalism inherent in the largely exclusive appointment of Caucasian missionaries to local priesthood and administrative positions, bolstered by an apparent hesitancy to ordain local members, a practice that continued into the earlier twentieth century in many areas of Polynesia (see Britsch, pp. 283, 388, 406). He even deals with the sensitive issue of racism against the Maori people in early twentieth century New Zealand (see especially pp. 292-93).

Yet the extent and significance of culture conflict is generally downplayed and considered anachronistic in the contemporary Church. Unfortunately for both the Church and European-dominated political administrations in Oceania, that is clearly not the case, as resurgent and increasingly vocal indigenous peoples movements have demonstrated in this region since the late 1960s. However, Britsch seems content to dismiss the problem, offering such observations as "the Church demands that Maoris [in New Zealand], like everyone else, conform to what might be called the Mormon cultural pattern" (p. 338), as well as an unfor-

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Britsch's otherwise thorough, incisive and balanced analysis seems compromised on occasion. Overall, there is simply nothing else like Britsch's work, and it generally stands as a sound historical source of much higher quality than several generations of less critical and somewhat condescending works. *Unto the*

Islands of the Sea will serve as an essential starting point for further regional studies of Mormonism in Oceania, and I for one am anxious that it become known as such among Church members and interested scholars in the Pacific.

stranger! The force of his character lifted and drew me, carried me through my talk, though I had been aware of no such need.

I had arrived in Cambridge some months earlier to study religious history and to think about my own faith and values. Perceiving a soul who had something to teach me, I watched the man in the pew. I watched him for two years after that Sunday service, for as long as we both lived in New England. I observed and listened to him more carefully than he knows, in ways of which he remains unaware.

Among other things, I observed one particularly astonishing fact: *this man focused his intense, intelligent love on just about everyone he met*, or, as in my case, on people he hadn't exactly met. Often this love moved them as I had been moved. I found as I watched him that it was a little easier to imagine an even more potent love, the uniquely pure strength of soul that enabled the mortal Jesus to say simply to some fisherman, "Come, follow me," and they followed.

The name of the man in the pew was Jae Ballif, then president of the Massachusetts Boston Mission, currently provost and academic vice-president at Brigham Young University. He has now written his first book dealing with religious values.

THE MAN IN THE PEW HAS WRITTEN A BOOK

IN SEARCH OF
TRUTH & LOVE

by Jae R. Ballif

Bookcraft, 1986. 143 pp.



Reviewed by Philip L. Barlow

I SPEAK OFTEN before groups and was therefore not particularly nervous that Sunday morning as I addressed the Saints of the Cambridge, Massachusetts First Ward. The congregation was reasonably attentive (for a Mormon sacrament meeting), though the numerous infants, produced mainly by the ward's graduate student couples, squawked their impatience with my abstractions.

As this ordinary scene unfolded, the extraordinary abruptly occurred. I had scarcely begun my talk when I was somehow made aware that someone in the audience *loved* me—loved me with uncommon power and without personally knowing me. A very odd time, I thought, for such a revelation. I glanced behind me at those on the stand. My wife, who sat awaiting her turn to speak, was not the source of this unusual new love. It was someone in the congregation itself. I felt the force of a personality new to me, a personality who, for whatever reason, *cared*. Moreover, the personality pos-

sessed the awesome strength to make its care known from the anonymity of a crowded pew, near the rear of a large, packed chapel.

I scanned the audience, found the man, engaged his eyes. I saw wisdom as well as love in those eyes, the same rare sort of intelligent goodness that one discerns by looking into the face of Lowell Bennion or at pictures of David O. McKay.

For a moment I dismissed my impression, guessing the "love" I felt derived merely from the man's interested facial expression. Perhaps I had unconsciously noticed it before. But others, at least a few, seemed also to be listening carefully. While I assumed their good will, I did not feel nor expect this compelling empathy from them. And in any case, what I was saying was not going to change the world; even by flattering myself it was hard to imagine the man was *that* interested in my sermon. No, this was something more and different. This man loved *me*. He cared about what I was saying in part because I cared about it—so simple can love be. And yet, again, he did not know me. What draining exertion to expend—unasked—on a

In Search of Truth & Love is a slightly dangerous title to give a serious work. Thin, maudlin porridge is not a pressing need in the LDS literary diet just now, and a volume that accents terms like "love" and "truth" risks dismissal as literary junk food by "serious readers" who may never actually engage the book. It also risks what may be a worse fate: achieving stature as a kind of religious valentine by sentimental givers of gift-books.

But discriminating readers should look more closely. Ballif's mind is as acute as his soul is capacious. His "love" is not pathetic sentimentalism, his "truth" not a mere series of platitudes. What is more, in Ballif's own life the gap between rhetoric and behavior is thin. This voice ought not be ignored.

If psychiatrist Scott Peck is right (I think he is), genuine love is always a form of work or courage—specifically, work or courage directed toward the nurture of our own or another's spiritual growth (see *The Road Less Traveled*, N.Y.: Simon and Schuster, 1978). Love's "work" is in opposition to the inertia of laziness, its "courage" in opposition to the resistance of fear. Peck goes on to argue, like Rollo May, that the principal form the work of love takes is attention: an active shift of consciousness against the lethargy of our own minds, enabling us to

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tunate over simplification and dismissal of *Maoritanga*, or tradition (eg. pp. 286-87). In fact, it is interesting that Britsch documents the anti-Mormon apparatus set up in New Zealand by two former Church members in 1981, while completely ignoring the defection of literally hundreds of Polynesian Mormons in Wellington and Auckland in the same year, after local ecclesiastical leaders disbanded Polynesian-speaking wards in a mistaken attempt at assimilation. The policy was reversed in 1983 by Church headquarters in Salt Lake City, but not before creating serious rifts in the Mormon communities of Auckland and Wellington along ethnic and even family lines. In my opinion, this poses a far more serious long-term problem than the anti-Mormons; it is an issue of culture conflict and assimilation that simply cannot be brushed aside with the acknowledgment that local leadership of the Church in the Pacific has now passed largely into indigenous hands.

Related to this problem are such interesting interpretative developments as the assimilation of bowdlerized colonial British, Polynesian, and American Mormon mythology into new Mormon Pacific traditions of prehistoric settlement in the Polynesian region. These frequently stand at odds with the findings of contemporary anthropology, archaeology, linguistics and ethnobotany, and I am a personal witness to the wrenching struggle of a number of Polynesian students to deal with this perceived dissonance while following the Church's dictum to pursue formal education (a struggle complicated in New Zealand, at least, with the resurgence of Maori awareness and identity, and an awareness of historical injustice on the part of the European colonialists). Yet Britsch's reference to the Mormon Polynesian tradition of Oceanic settlement by descendants of American Israelites is completely uncritical, and includes the unexplained assertion that the Polynesians appear to be Lamanites rather than Nephites (p. 278).

These problems do not devalue Britsch's book for scholars of Mormon or Pacific religious history; furthermore, in a work of this scope and intended audience, one cannot realistically expect a detailed and critical social-anthropological analysis. Yet it is worth considering whether anyone (including the Church itself) ultimately benefits from an analysis which seems to underplay social and anthropological issues as they affect contemporary populations, especially in the long-term perspective. However, this criticism should be seen as a reflection of the value of Britsch's work to both scholars and the general Church membership of Oceania, for it is clear when

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attend to our own or another's growth.

Although he may not remember me personally, I have experienced first-hand Ballif's intensely focused "attention." He understands love deeply, and my knowledge of this fact made me work harder at comprehending *Truth & Love* than I otherwise might have—a strategy I commend to others. The "charity" or "pure love" Ballif describes attempts to help readers past the distracting superficialities of abused and vulgar notions of "love," and toward an understanding similar to Peck's. Unlike Peck, however, Ballif's understanding exists in a Mormon context, and is thoroughly based on Mormon assumptions. The Mormon context is important, Ballif contends, because the principles and institutions of Mormonism foster love and truth uniquely well, a view also expressed by Eugene England in the title essay of *Why the Church is as True as the Gospel*. Ballif's love is not synonymous with emotion, much less with a sexual act. "People do not 'fall' into pure love, they must climb up to it" (p. 78). Love entails emotions, surely, but involves much more. It possesses, for example, the quality of endurance through time. It also promotes strength, not vulnerability to temptation or weakness.

This love involves the mind: "To love perfectly we must know truth perfectly" (p. 79)—an interesting insight, given the false dichotomy between spirit and intellect so frequently asserted in Mormon culture. More specifically, love involves wisdom ("truth in perspective") and is the opposite of ignorance and selfishness, the two principles Ballif considers the ultimate sources of conflict and problems in relationships. Wisdom is second to love as the most important attribute of godliness, but, for Ballif, wisdom is also a prerequisite for real love. This wise love allows one to appropriately give priority to "which 'should' I should" when dealing with the actual complexities of life:

To love as God loves, we must understand the needs of others, understand the true principles that apply in the situation, understand the priority of both the needs of those involved and the truths that apply, and then act, think, and feel in such a way as to provide maximum opportunity for others to improve themselves as a result of what is done. (p. 80)

Like University of Chicago philosopher Allan Bloom (*The Closing of the American Mind*) and like Mormonism in general, Ballif argues for the existence of true principles whose existence is independent of the human mind. He therefore argues against the hoary argument that all true principles are "relative" (meaning, in common usage, provisional and dispensable; in its

most degenerate democratic form, all ideas and values are held to have equal worth). But, writes Ballif, the utter relativity of moral principles "is a position taken when we tend to confuse the existence of true principles with the possession of true principles" (p. 4). Ballif's book—a kind of personal life-philosophy and synthesis of the plan of salvation—explores the process by which these principles may be known, and then links them to the notions of faith ("sufficient to move one to action"), repentance ("a self-directed change toward the truth"), divine organizations (families and the church), and other gospel essentials.

While I do recommend *Truth & Love*, I am not persuaded by every assertion it makes. For instance, the author writes that "God exists in space and time; therefore, it is possible to come to know God" (p. 48). Now it may be that God exists in space and time, and it may be that one can know God. But it is not obvious that the latter pronouncement follows logically from the former, as the author's "therefore" suggests. Similarly, the seemingly simple claims made for the scriptures (p. 124) or the role of prophets (p. 123) actually entail extremely complex issues that separate books could be used to examine. Appended so briefly to the thoughtful

discussions about the nature of truth and love, such claims left me wondering whether they were the equally sophisticated but unelaborated theses of the author's reflective soul, or merely standard bits of popular Mormon theology thrown in as an affirmation of his thoroughly LDS perspective. Furthermore, in the worthy effort to balance profundity and simplicity, Ballif's book appears to me to have been overedited, some of its color thereby blanced.

There is also a certain abstractness about this book, arising, perhaps, from the natural difficulty in discussing something like love without doing so as a poet or storyteller. The book could have used more real life case studies, like "the Samoan brother" (pp. 98-99). Love may finally lend itself more easily to showing than explaining, and not everyone will be anxious to labor to understand with the mind as well as the heart.

But abstract or not, Jae Ballif, the man, possesses what the world most deeply yearns for. Since his narrative's simple prose belies its depth and worth, really comprehending *In Search of Truth & Love* demands concentration—hard work indeed. But this search is worth the bother. The kind of love and truth Ballif practices has never come easily.



"But enough of my unique Mormon theology, tell me about yours."

A LESS PECULIAR PEOPLE

MORMON NEO-ORTHODOXY: A CRISIS THEOLOGY

by O. Kendall White Jr.

Signature Books, 1987.

196 pages. \$11.95 (paperbound).



Reviewed by Armand L. Mauss

I SUSPECT THAT MANY Mormons my age or older can remember when the Church had a different "feel" to it. People seemed more tolerant of variety in doctrinal viewpoints and less disposed to look to an encyclopedia like *Mormon Doctrine* for what they were supposed to believe. God seemed more like one of us (or we like one of His), not so remote or all powerful, more "Heavenly Father" than "Elohim." Other Latter-day Saints were not so often stiff, sanctimonious lawyers or businessmen bucking for bishop. They were more often ordinary, unpretentious folk working out their own salvation "in fear and trembling," not only about how far they had to go toward perfection in the next world, but also about how long they'd have a job in *this* world!

Who took my church away? What happened to that church whose cultural ambience was once permeated with a recognition of the finiteness of our God, the fundamental goodness of human nature, the perfectibility of common people, and a process of salvation based upon spiritual and ethical *merit*, rather than upon grace for a favored lineage or heritage? In this book, Kendall White offers a partial answer: Latter-day Saints have come to be influenced by a "neo-orthodoxy" much more akin to conservative Protestantism than to the innovative (if heretical) religion taught by Joseph

Smith in Nauvoo. This Mormon variety of neo-orthodoxy emphasizes divine sovereignty and otherness, human depravity, and salvation by grace. That may not be quite what "the Brethren" teach (at least not all of them), but that is what a lot of today's Saints believe.

In general, I am persuaded by White's contentions. They accord well with my own personal experience and research. Indeed, I came independently to a very similar conclusion, which I reported in my 1982 Redd Center lecture (Mauss, 1983). There I referred to the phenomenon as "borrowings from Protestant Fundamentalism," but I think that White and I are talking about essentially the same development. (In a footnote, he acknowledges that "neo-orthodoxy" may be a somewhat arbitrary and problematic term for what he is talking about, and that "fundamentalism" might be equally applicable if it did not carry such a specialized meaning for Mormons). White, however, goes far beyond the impressionistic argument I made to document convincingly the existence of a Mormon "neo-orthodoxy" and to identify the authors who are its chief purveyors. There are also some differences between White's ideas and my own, to which I will return later.

Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy has five substantive chapters, a conclusion, and a bibliography. Chapter 1 is a condensed course in the sociology and psychology of religion as of about 1970, including the ideas of Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Richard Niebuhr, Freud, Fromm, Festinger, and Cantril. These ideas are all inter-

woven to provide a theoretical framework for the "crisis" theme found in the subtitle of the book. "Crisis" in this case turns out to be a fairly dramatic term for the perennial confrontation with "modernity" and secularization which new religions usually face in the Western world.

Chapter 2 provides a very useful and informative overview of Protestant neo-orthodoxy and its chief proponents in Europe and America (Barth, Brunner, and Reinhold Niebuhr). It is written in ordinary language that is easy for non-theologians to understand. Chapter 3 reviews "traditional" Mormon theology, meaning the doctrines Joseph Smith taught toward the end of his life and which were propounded in the apologetic works of B.H. Roberts, James E. Talmage, and the like. Chapter 4 introduces *Mormon* neo-orthodoxy, which seems to have its origins mainly in the 1960s. McMurrin (1965) recognized the first stirrings of it, and its main proponents were Hyrum Andrus, Daniel Ludlow, Glenn Pearson, Rodney Turner, and David H. Yarn. The neo-orthodoxy "movement" seems to be carried primarily by lay authors within the Church, and General Authorities are not much implicated in it. However, occasionally a speech or an essay by Church leaders (e.g. J. Reuben Clark, Ezra T. Benson, Bruce R. McConkie, or Boyd K. Packer) has given aid and comfort to the movement.

Chapter 5 reviews the work of recent proponents of neo-orthodoxy, including Janice Allred, Donald Olsen, Paul and Margaret Toscano, and J. Frederic Voros, none of whom would likely be considered a household name in the Mormon culture. Interestingly enough, furthermore, their work has appeared primarily in the pages of *SUNSTONE* and/or at Sunstone Symposia. White quotes extensively from their work to show how they implicitly or explicitly promote such traditionally Protestant notions as the utter infinitude and incomprehensibility of God, the contingency, helplessness, and depravity of human beings, and thus the ultimate human dependence on the grace of God for salvation. In the Conclusion, White suggests some of the implications of such theological notions, particularly their reinforcement for the authoritarianism, anti-intellectualism, and political conservatism which he sees emerging in response to the crisis of modernity faced by today's Mormons and their church.

The book's strong points, in my opinion, are (1) its useful overviews (with ample examples and citations) of the different doctrinal orientations, including traditional Mormon doctrine (at least from the 1840s) and both Protestant and Mormon neo-orthodoxy; and (2) its

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attempt (if not entirely successful) to provide a theoretical framework to explain the neo-orthodoxy "movement" in Mormonism, rather than just describing it. The chapters reviewing the different theologies are particularly helpful to those readers not acquainted with the development of postwar Protestantism. The theoretical framework is a good introduction to the way social scientists tend to think about religious developments. White's particular theoretical argument, however, is much less persuasive on reconsideration than it is in an initial reading.

At some risk of oversimplification, White's basic theoretical explanation could be put this way: Modernity, with its secularization of nearly all traditional ideas and institutions, has presented Mormonism and other religions with a "high-intensity cultural crisis" by undermining of the traditional world view and basic assumptions of religion(s). The resulting sense of human contingency and powerlessness gives rise to a compatible theology that stresses the absoluteness of God, the depravity and helplessness of humankind, and the derivative necessity of total reliance on the grace of God for salvation. The same sense renders believers susceptible to an authoritarian leadership style, which demands strict obedience and celebrates irrationality in an effort to cope with secular rationality and desacralization.

This theological syndrome is called "neo-orthodoxy." Promoted by able theologians and intellectuals in Europe and America, it spread through much of Protestantism in the 1940s and 1950s. Starting in the 1960s, a version of it finally reached Mormonism, where it has been subtly undermining the traditional teachings of Joseph Smith about the finiteness of God, the perfectibility of humankind, and salvation by personal merit (or works).

Plausible as all that may sound at first, it raises a number of questions that are not satisfactorily confronted in the book. First of all, if the cultural crisis in question is so pervasive in Europe and America, why has it not affected all religions and/or believers in the same way? Why is it that some religions (like mainstream Protestant and Catholic denominations) have accommodated a great deal of secularization while others have chosen various ways of resisting it? The difficulty of answering such a question highlights the complexity of the relationship between religion and culture and the variability in the response of particular religions to the same "crisis."

It also points to the hazards of the kind of deterministic cultural or "environmental" explanation that social scientists like White are inclined to offer for religious developments.

This conventional explanation has been challenged in recent years by the work of scholars like Stark and Bainbridge (1985, not cited by White), who argue that secularization is a "self-limiting process" by its very nature. Far from sweeping traditional religion from the face of the earth, modernity itself is limited in its power to meet the kinds of human needs met by religion. Is neo-orthodoxy, then, to be understood as one of those responses limiting the spread of modernity? White's explanation does not engage some of these new ideas in the sociology of religion, which would seem to be relevant to his argument.

Another important question has to do with the *extensiveness* of the neo-orthodoxy "movement" within Mormonism. White acknowledges (p. xxii) that he is not in a position to make any claims about how many Mormons are influenced by neo-orthodox thinking. That is, however, a damaging demurrer. If neo-orthodoxy is a response to a pervasive cultural crisis, and only a handful of Mormons subscribe to it, then there is either not much of a crisis or not much of a response. What does that do to the major thesis of the book?

Indeed, this turns out to be a serious issue in evaluating White's work here. As one reviews the literature of Mormon neo-orthodoxy cited by White, one is struck by the relative obscurity of the authors, both from the 1960s and more recently. Neo-orthodoxy does not seem to have been an important feature of the preaching or writing of the General Authorities of the Church, who would seem to be the ones who matter the most in authority and influence. Instead, the neo-orthodox literature (such as it is) comes mainly from a handful of conservative academics, most connected in one way or another with the religion department at BYU, at least in the formative period of the 1960s. The reader is entitled to have doubts about the influence of Mormon intellectuals, whether conservative or liberal, upon either the General Authorities or the body of the Saints! So what, exactly, is the constituency to which Mormon neo-orthodoxy has its appeal and makes its inroads? It may be even smaller than the constituency of *Dialogue* or *SUNSTONE!* There certainly is not much evidence here that it has made more extensive inroads.

Having said all that, however, I must confess to sharing White's suspicions that many Latter-day Saints at the grass roots are influenced to some degree or another by what he calls neo-orthodoxy and what I call Protestant fundamentalism. I offer a somewhat different explanation for the phenomenon: I see it less as a response to modernity *per se* and more as a response to the *accommodations* to modernity

that Mormonism has already made throughout the twentieth century. These accommodations have undermined the constant Mormon claims to peculiarity as Mormon culture has come increasingly to resemble that of middle America (and/or vice versa). This sense of loss of a unique identity has created a public relations problem at the institutional level and a problem of self-concept at the individual level. The response at both levels has been to search for boundaries at more distinctively conservative points on the social and religious spectrums. Meanwhile, converts from middle America (perhaps themselves attracted by these new "boundaries") have increasingly made the average social and intellectual ethos of American Mormons more conservative.

This explanation is not necessarily incompatible with White's, but it places greater emphasis upon internal Mormon developments (not just reactions to external ones). To verify empirically the theoretical notions of either White or myself, we will have to do some systematic analyses of Church lesson manuals and of teaching at the local levels, and also get more survey data on the actual beliefs of Mormons across the country. Until then, we will not know how extensive is the neo-orthodoxy "movement" which White sees in the works of the authors which he examines. Meanwhile, however, he has directed us to an important body of exegetical literature which may very well loom much more important in the Church eventually than it seems to now. In the process, White has written a very important and interesting book, which I strongly commend to the readers of these pages.

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