

The Kingdom and the Third World—Best of Meridian

by James W. Lucas and Warner P. Woodworth

The typical church member in this new century will not be English speaking nor financially well-off.

Book Excerpt from *Working Toward Zion* by James W. Lucas and Warner P. Woodworth

Barring catastrophic or apocalyptic intervention, on Saturday, April 6, 2030, a gathering in the Salt Lake Tabernacle will celebrate the bicentennial of the restoration of the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ to the earth. Counting children, a majority of members of the Church alive today can reasonably expect to witness this glorious occasion. Projecting trends decades into the future can be hazardous in retrospect. Nonetheless, conservative estimates are that, at current growth rates, the Church will have from 75 to 175 million members on April 6, 2030. Elder Neal Maxwell has estimated 90 million. Approximately 70 percent of these will live in Latin America, and 15 percent will live in Asia. As few as 10 percent will live in North America and Europe combined. The vast majority, possibly 98 to 99 percent, will live in areas where Latter-day Saints will still constitute a small minority of the total population.

By the year 2000, at present growth rates, over half of all Latter-day Saints will speak Spanish or Portuguese. The days when the majority of Saints were white, English-speaking U.S. Citizens are rapidly coming to a close. The "typical" LDS person of the next century will be tan or dark-skinned, urban poor or working class, from a Latin cultural background, and will not speak English.

Juan and Elena Flores live with their seven children on the outskirts of Mexico City. Elena became a Mormon as a child when her parents were baptized, and Juan joined the Church in his twenties, so they are essentially a second-generation LDS family. Juan has served as a bishop twice, and the family is strongly committed to building the kingdom. In contrast to Elena's life growing up, when the family was able to enjoy a relatively simple, happy existence, Mexico City is a tough environment in which to survive.

The Flores parents both work to try to make ends meet. Juan has been laid off about a dozen times from various factory and construction jobs. Elena has worked in several markets in their *barrio* and now works three days a week at a neighborhood beauty shop. However, their combined wages are far below the minimum needed for a Mexican family to move up into the middle class. None of their three oldest children has actually graduated from high school, and the same bleak future appears before the other four.

Their LDS chapel is a twenty-minute bus ride away, and many times when Juan was bishop, he had to go to Church alone because he and Elena could not afford to pay the round-trip fare for the entire family. For the parents, Sunday was a special day when they tried to "splurge" on the children by giving them two regular meals on the Sabbath, perhaps with some fruit or *flan* dessert. Although Juan and Elena felt guilty about not taking their children to church when he was bishop, the stark struggle for survival seemed to override the luxury of Church meetings.

Half a world away, another Third World LDS family also strives to make ends meet. This is the Illagan family in Cebu, the Philippines. Missionary work in this island nation was launched in 1961. During the 1970's, Church researchers projected that the Church would grow to around 30,000 in the Philippines during the next two decades. In actuality, conversions mushroomed ten times faster than expected, to the present estimate of 300,000.

Reggie and Perla Illagan, their four children, and Reggie's aunt and uncle all live together in a five-room shack near the Cebu city dump. Smoke from burning refuse is always in the air, along with severe pollution from congested roads and factories in the area. The family speaks Cebuano at home, one of 87 native languages and dialects used in the country, but they are all fluent in English, which is often used in public. Filipinos enjoy a high literacy rate (99%) and the Illagans all have good educations.

The family's pride and joy is their 22-year-old son Ben, who recently returned from serving a mission in Manila. While on his mission, young Elder Illagan was supported financially by the Church. He wore a white shirt and tie, served in leadership positions, and had his own bed, a private room for him and his companion, and three meals a day.

But having returned home, Ben seems quite depressed because he is again forced to wear old clothes, eat only one or two meals a day, and sleep in a room with three brothers and sisters. He would like to finish high school and go on to college, but there is little opportunity to do this. On the other hand,

he also cannot get a job. So he waits and looks for new possibilities. Their house is on a rich landowner's parcel, like 20 percent of Filipino Latter-day Saints who are squatters. Some 68 percent of Latter-day Saints are completely unemployed. The average household income of approximately \$2,200 is not much for a family of eight people. Crime in the area is so great that someone must remain home, even during church, for fear the house might be broken into and completely cleaned out. Like about half of all LDS members in the Philippines, the family has no running water or indoor bathrooms.

Life is becoming increasingly hard in the Philippines. The islands used to have the second strongest economy in the Pacific Rim, but the country has slipped until now it is second from the worst. Things are so tough now that Perla has decided to seek work as a maid in Hong Kong. Some 15 other LDS mothers in their stake have done this recently, getting \$400 a month pay, compared to \$50 or so if they succeed at finding employment in Cebu. It would be difficult for her to leave the children, returning each year only during the Christmas season. The aunt could help out so Reggie could keep his job. But for the children it just will not be the same to sit around Monday night for home evening, and talk about how "Families Are Forever" with their mother way up north in Hong Kong.

The struggle to meet the physical needs of life is a universal characteristic of this mortal existence. The importance of the larger "temporal" society to individual spirituality and righteousness can be seen in the word of God. Many of God's commandments are social and economic in nature. For example, at least seven of the Ten Commandments relate in some way to economic activity.¹

One scholar has counted 28 percent of the lines of the Doctrine and Covenants as directly relating to economic matters.²

Of the . . . revelations that the Prophet Joseph received, some 88 deal at least partially with financial matters.³

At the October 1873 conference, Wilford Woodruff observed:

"Strangers and the Christian world marvel at the 'Mormons' talking about temporal things. Bless your souls, two-thirds of all the revelations given in this world rest upon the accomplishments of this temporal work. This is the great dispensation in which the Zion of God must be built up, and we as Latter-day Saints have it to build. We have it to do, we can't build up Zion sitting on a hemlock slab singing ourselves away to everlasting bliss; we are obliged to build cities, towns and villages, and we are obliged to gather the people from every nation under heaven to the Zion of God, that they may be taught the ways of the Lord. We have only just begun to prepare for the celestial law when we are baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints."

The celestial law to which apostle Woodruff referred is the law of consecration and stewardship.