

PREPARATION FOR THE KINGDOM

T. Edgar Lyon

American Religions and the Rise of Mormonism. By Milton V. Backman. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1965. 466 pp. \$4.95. T. Edgar Lyon is Associate Director of the Salt Lake Institute of Religion and Research Historian for Nauvoo Restoration, Inc.; he has written *Introduction to the Doctrine and Covenants* and *Apostasy to Restoration*.

This book will satisfy an intellectual need which has long existed in the L.D.S. Church and among all those who wish to investigate the "apostasy" from the Early Christian Church and the course of religious history which led to the restoration of the gospel. Within the framework which he set for his treatise, Dr. Backman has written with a remarkable degree of objectivity. His book is not a polemic against various Christian movements, sects, or theologies. Neither is it sheer propaganda from the Latter-day Saint point-of-view. Obviously the author is writing with a bias (and who is ever completely free from bias in his interpretations?), but in writing of the great movements of Christian history he has written with sympathy, trying to let the theologians, reformers, scribes, and religious leaders of previous centuries speak for themselves. In discussing contemporary religious movements, which have been the object of much ridicule from the long-established Christian churches, he has disciplined himself to avoid criticism of those phases of their teachings with which he cannot agree and refrains from sarcasm and contempt. His most obvious deviation from this objectivity is found in his selection of those elements from historic Christianity which bolster L.D.S. restoration concepts and doctrines.

The first chapter is the finest concise condensation with which I am acquainted of the history of Christianity from its founding in New Testament times to the rise of the Eastern Orthodox churches and the modern Roman Catholic Church. Similarly, the treatment of the sixteenth century reformation is well done, with the vital and lasting essentials of the period sorted out from the numerous side issues which usually becloud this important era.

When Mr. Backman turns to the complexity of the American religious scene, he covers the field with a discerning eye, stressing those religious currents which changed the religions imported from England. Tracing these changes, the appearance of new doctrine, and the concurrent rise of religious tolerance and later religious liberty in America, the author has written more and better on the backgrounds of Mormonism and the influences of contemporary Christian sects than any L.D.S. writer known to me.

Professor Backman is to be congratulated on the wealth of statistical information which he has condensed in this book. Drawn from the most reliable sources and carefully documented, and in some instances organized as charts, this information makes the book a valuable reference work for those seeking to understand the numerical growth of sects and the factors regulating their progress or retrogression. The author has used social, economic, political and religious history to explain the various facets of religious growth and expansion in the United States. After he gave such excellent coverage of some religious bodies, it is to be regretted that he passed over some of the most vigorous of the present-day Christian sects, such as the numerous Pentecostal bodies, without a word concerning the great religious movement in America of which they are symptoms.

To date no one has written a perfect book, and the present publication is no exception. I suggest that when another edition of this useful book is printed certain errors of fact and interpretation should be avoided. His treatment of the much-misunderstood phrase describing God as a being "without body, parts, and passions," needs elaboration and clarification for both Mormons and non-Mormons, few of whom know what the statement actually meant to those who framed it. What he has said by way of explanation is confusing and somewhat misleading. Furthermore, the extent to which this belief was formerly accepted needs to be qualified. The author fails to distinguish properly between the early camp-meeting revivals and the later camp meetings and revivals which followed. His theological explanation of the doctrine of the Trinity needs to be made clear by defining for modern Christians his use of the words "substance" and "essence." Otherwise the basis of the doctrine appears non-sensical. The discussion of the tax-supported colonial and state churches is well done, except that he states there were nine of them but ends up with ten in his discussion; one unfamiliar with American political history would be misled by this seeming contradiction. Furthermore, his treatment of the three names by which the L.D.S. Church has been known since its origin is confusing and needs clarification.

When Dr. Backman deals with the Missouri and Illinois periods of L.D.S. history he loses much of the objectivity which characterized his analyses in the earlier and later chapters. Little is explained about the part the Saints played in producing the trouble they encountered, and the unwise actions of Sidney Rigdon, which contributed greatly to the expulsion from Missouri, are ignored. The

weakest portions of the discussion of Mormonism deal with the Nauvoo period. Hearsay and long-standing traditions are given as fact, and little is said to explain why the most industrious people in Illinois were forced to vacate the largest city in the state. Nothing is said of the manner in which much of the land lost in Missouri was later sold or exchanged to assist in the acquisition of lands in Illinois and Iowa.

In spite of these and other shortcomings which need attention, the book is a magnificent "first" in its field. Mr. Backman has written with boldness and a very readable style. I look forward to further studies by this able historian.

SOME VOICES FROM THE DUST

John L. Sorenson

Papers of the Fifteenth Annual Symposium on the Archaeology of the Scriptures. Edited by Ross T. Christensen. Provo: Extension Publications of Brigham Young University, 1964. vii+120 pp. \$1.00. John L. Sorenson did his doctoral work at UCLA in anthropology and is presently Director of Behavioral Sciences for the Defense Research Corporation in Santa Barbara, California.

Any volume with "fifteenth annual" in its title requires placement in historical and sociological context before it can be evaluated properly. Sponsor of this symposium is the 800-member University Archaeological Society. (The name was changed in 1965 to Society for Early Historical Archaeology.) The society began in 1949, in affiliation with the Department of Archaeology at Brigham Young University, which had been organized two years earlier. The personalities and institutions related to these beginnings, or deriving from them, are responsible for most serious Mormon thought on the relation between archaeology and the scriptures.

Joseph Smith himself had views on this subject which were published at length, particularly in *The Times and Seasons*. Early in the development of Mormon tradition his views, considerably simplified, became so firmly established that they were hardly challenged for a century. Mormons usually considered that all Indians were Lamanites and that the "antiquities" of the New World were products of the Nephites, Lamanites, and Jaredites. As for the biblical area, that was of secondary concern; the little supplementary factual information utilized was simply borrowed from "Gentile" scholars.