

# REVIEWS

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## *State-of-the-Art Mormon History*

*The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints.* By Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979, xiv, 404 pp., illus., maps, appendix, bibliographical essay, notes, index. \$15.00.

*Reviewed by Richard D. Poll, professor of history at Western Illinois University.*

For years Latter-day Saints yearned for a one-volume history of the Church which could be recommended to members and non-members alike as factually sound and not so fervently partisan as to "turn off" the critical reader. Now there are two such works. James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard's *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976) has already passed the acid test: it has been praised and criticized by both LDS and Gentile reviewers. *The Mormon Experience* will almost certainly provoke similar responses. The virtues of both books commend them to every serious student of Mormonism and every library interested in history, religion or Americana.

Leonard Arrington, who needs no introduction to *Dialogue* readers, first agreed in 1967 to write what became *The Mormon Experience*. Not long afterward he was appointed Church Historian. The demands of that administrative calling—through which he has been responsible for a veritable revolution in Mormon historiography—required him to seek help with the Knopf project. Assistant Church Historian Davis Bitton, whose scholarly credentials are also impressive, is listed as joint author. It is apparent that the research assistants and

other Historical Department personnel named in the preface have also contributed to the marshaling of the material in the book.

*The Mormon Experience* is divided into three parts: "The Early Church," "The Kingdom in the West" and "The Modern Church." The sixteen chapters include standard historical narratives, interpretive historical essays, and sociological, theological and economic analyses. Their content reflects the "state of the art" in Mormon history and social studies as of early 1978, when the book went to press.

The four-chapter treatment of the background, appeal, and persecution of Joseph Smith and his followers is as sophisticated as has appeared from Mormon authors. Analogies to Luther and Swedenborg are used, and representations of sinless saints and diabolical villains are not. Among diverse explanations of difficult historical problems, it is not surprising that one compatible with the canons of "faithful history" is always included and often endorsed. For example: "If the latter version [of the first vision] was different, this was not a result of inventing an experience out of whole cloth, as an unscrupulous person might readily have done, but rather of reexamining an earlier experience and seeing it in a different light" (p. 8). So preoccupied are these chapters with interpretation that they provide less narrative history than some uninitiated readers may need.

Beginning with Carthage events the book moves into a more conventional historical mode, which is maintained through chapters on the exodus from Nauvoo, the colonization in the West, nineteenth century immi-

gration, relations with the Indians and the "Americanization" of Utah Territory. The salt-and-peppering of quotations from recently accessible journals and other documents adds flavor here, but no new ground is broken. Indeed, the traditional approach in "Mormons and Native Americans" probably needs revising in terms of what Howard Christy and Lawrence Coates have shown about the persistence of "good Indian-dead Indian" attitudes among Mormon leaders and followers. The account of Mormon involvement at Mountain Meadows is apologetic and leaves the impression that John D. Lee was the chief perpetrator.

"Marriage and Family Patterns," "The Nineteenth Century Ward," and "Mormon Sisterhood: Charting the Changes" are social history, replete with human foibles and frailties. Plural marriage receives more attention than in Allen-Leonard or earlier general histories; it is suggested that up to 5 percent of married Mormon men, 12 percent of married Mormon women and 10 percent of Mormon children were involved in "the principle" during the four decades of its active practice. This reviewer finds the women in "Mormon Sisterhood"—which carries its subject down to the present—more real than those in the earlier chapter on nineteenth century family life. This may be in part because his own wife is particularly intrigued by the conclusion of the "sisterhood" essay: "... their own past is complex enough and populated with enough strong, achieving female personalities that they are able to continue pushing on the boundaries, trying different options, and resisting an excessively narrow conception of their role".

Part Three begins with a chapter on the transition in church policies which followed the Woodruff Manifesto. The authors prefer "creative adjustment" to "surrender" as a label for the changes which brought the Church into the mainstream of Americanism while it maintained unique group characteristics and solidarity. The last three chapters are interpretive essays on twentieth century developments. "The Temporal Foundation" dispels some popular rumors about the wealth and economic power of the Church and informatively describes present ties with business and civic enterprises. "In the World—Institutional Re-

sponses" is a good survey of present structure and programs. The suggestion that as many as 50 percent of all church members may be inactive confirms what mobile life-long Mormons have suspected. Most disaffection is attributed to social rather than ideological disillusionment.

"Group Personality: The Unsponsored Sector" cites the accomplishments of individual Latter-day Saints in government and arts and letters and particularly in the sciences to confirm the quoted characterization from the *Boston Globe* (1967): "... once the outer layers are peeled away, both Mormons and artichokes are most likeable". This chapter, like several others in *The Mormon Experience*, invites comparison with Thomas F. O'Dea's *The Mormons* (1957). Such an exercise confirms the expected—that when a sympathetic and knowledgeable outsider and an informed and committed insider describe the same institution, the two pictures are not mirror images.

The book is attractively packaged, with a pictorial section and two helpful maps. The bibliographical essay is highly selective; it appropriately calls attention to the exhaustive bibliography in *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*. The notes are more extensive for some chapters than others; where informational tidbits are tucked among the source citations the fact that the notes section contains neither chapter titles nor page cross-references is mildly frustrating. The index is almost complete; neither Orderville nor Brigadier General William S. Harney is listed, and in the text the first Utah Expedition commander is rechristened Stephen Harney (p. 166).

The most disappointing feature of *The Mormon Experience* to this reviewer is the lack of cohesion. Each chapter is virtually an autonomous essay, and within some chapters the blocs of material are not well integrated. Stylistic differences, and differences in perspective are discernible. The fact that the same language from the Woodruff Manifesto appears on p. 183 and then again two pages later as an introductory quotation for the following chapter illustrates the apparent lack of a final editorial overview by either the authors or the publisher. Deseret means "honeybee" on p. 114; on p. 162 it means "beehive." Amy Brown Lyman's Hull House experience is reported

in two chapters. Post-Manifesto polygamy is discussed on p. 184 and then more adequately and with some duplication on pp. 245–6. There is anomaly in the fact that *Valley Tan* and the *Salt Lake Tribune* appear in Part Two while the *Deseret News* is not introduced until Part Three.

Both *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* and *The Mormon Experience* incorporate recent research. Both are products of the talented staff of the LDS Historical Department, whose mobilization of historical resources and productivity in publication recall the accomplishments of Hubert Howe Bancroft a century ago. Allen-Leonard is a narrative history of the Church, aimed primarily at the Mormon audience. Arrington-Bittton is an interpretive history aimed primarily at non-Mormons. The first work fulfills its objective. The second falls a little short of its mark, described on its striking dust jacket as becoming “the standard one volume history of the institution and its people.” It is an important work, and some of its chapters are outstanding. A second printing is already correcting discrepancies of the type noted above. (It is to be hoped

that the Allen-Leonard volume—already out of print—will be accorded a similar opportunity.

When O’Dea wrote about “sources of Strain and Conflict” in the 1950s, he quoted a “Salt Lake City Mormon intellectual” as saying, “Only the questioning intellectual is unhappy.” (*The Mormons*, p. 224) In dwelling at some length on the pre-World War I Chamberlin-Peterson controversy at B.Y.U., and then saying virtually nothing about subsequent intellectual tensions, *The Mormon Experience* may leave the impression that O’Dea’s observation is no longer germane. This reviewer is flattered that his *Dialogue*-launched symbolism about “Iron Rods” and “Liahonas” is used on the last two pages of the book to support the up-beat thesis that “The checks and balances inherent in the two traditions and types of membership give Mormonism both stability and progressivism”. A rather persuasive case can be made, however, that the institutional Church is today less tolerant of intellectual questioning than at any time in the past generation.

## *Out of the Slot*

*Patriarchs and Politics: The Plight of the Mormon Woman.* By Marilyn Warenski. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1978. 104 pp. \$10.95.

*Reviewed by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Ph.D. candidate at the University of New Hampshire and member of the board of Exponent II. She is preparing a book-length study on female roles in early New England.*

Mormons who believe feminism is deeply subversive will find confirmation in Marilyn Warenski’s *Patriarchs and Politics*. Her argument can be simply stated: Feminism and patriarchal religion are incompatible. Mormonism is a patriarchal religion. Therefore, there can be no such thing as Mormon feminism. For two hundred pages she reinforces her point by referring to Latter-day Saint “feminists” in quotes.

Warenski opens with a description of two

mass meetings of Utah women. The first, held in 1870, has been called “the most remarkable women’s rights demonstration of the age.” The second, the International Women’s Year conclave of 1977, became “one of the greatest anti-feminist demonstrations of our time.” The author’s interpretation of these two events sets the theme for the rest of the book. In her view, the seeming contradiction between Mormon suffragists of the nineteenth century and Relief Society activists of today is explained by the one constant in the history of Latter-day Saint women—devotion to the brethren.

The Relief Society, Warenski concludes, has always been little more than a “Sisterhood of the Brotherhood.” Although it made notable contributions to the development of the early west, even then its activities reflected “a complex mix of female strength and resourcefulness with female