

upstate New York culture and wove them into the Book of Mormon story, the author deals with anti-Masonry, Republicanism, and Ethan Smith but does not address archeological questions; the issue of the presence of Christian terminology, practices, and institutions in what is presumed to be a pre-Christian setting; and the phenomenon of automatic writing.

Textual flaws are few; I have noted less than a dozen typographical errors. Reference to Marlow, "a southern New Hampshire town just west of the Connecticut River," (p. 13) does not agree with the map; and in light of the evidence that the

work titled *Defence in a Rehearsal of My Grounds for Separating Myself from the Latter Day Saints*, attributed to Oliver Cowdery, is a nineteenth-century anti-Mormon hoax, its use is questionable.

In an area of history where the sources are highly complex and contradictory, Richard Bushman has made a profound contribution to the understanding of Mormonism at its most critical juncture. Written with style and felicity, a product of Bushman's superb analytical powers, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* is a major work in Mormon historiography.

To Sustain the Heart

Preface to Faith: A Philosophical Inquiry into RLDS Beliefs by Paul M. Edwards. Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1984.

Reviewed by Sterling M. McMurrin, professor of history at the University of Utah and author of *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1965).

PAUL EDWARDS is a man of uncommon talents, generously endowed with wit and wisdom, who possesses his share of good sense and good will and justifiably enjoys the confidence and esteem of his colleagues and friends. As the intellectual leader of the Reorganized LDS Church, he has obviously done much to shape its current thought and attitude. Not the least of his credits is his influence in the effort to overcome the mutual animosity which has plagued the LDS and RLDS churches for more than a century, a positive movement toward a better understanding and sympathetic concern that is one of the best things that has happened in Mormondom in recent decades.

Preface to Faith is not simply an exposition of the philosophical foundations of RLDS beliefs, though it is highly informa-

tive. It is, rather, an essay on the philosophy of religion that, while critically assessing those beliefs, expresses Edwards's personal thought on fundamental issues while he seeks and probes for ideas that might function normatively in the doctrine of his church. I have the impression that this is not a simple task for him, for he seems to find considerable ambiguity and lack of consistency and perhaps even some contradiction in the accepted beliefs of the Church. It is perhaps fair to say that Edwards's work is almost a pioneering effort in defining and systematizing the basic ingredients of RLDS philosophy. In his preface he says, "As the RLDS Church becomes increasingly involved in the lives of people outside the Western world, we find cultural differences that make communication difficult. As we try to tell them our story, we naturally fall back on basic concepts — only to discover that the unspoken assumptions in which our beliefs are rooted are unexamined and undefined" (p. xi). If this is indeed the case, Edwards's book is no doubt overdue, for the strength of a theology depends on its philosophical foundation; and in a society that places a high value on reason and rationality, theology is of major importance to religion.

Although his study is critical as well as expository, Edwards's intention, as he says in his preface, is "to suggest that there is strength in the mind to sustain the heart, that the perspective of far-ranging inquiry gives significant dimensions to our own religious heritage" (pp. x-xi). In providing direction for a positive rational treatment of the fundamentals of religious thought in his church, he is eminently successful.

Edwards's primary interest, as it should be in a treatise of this kind, is in those metaphysical problems that are basic to any rational theology: the ontological status of universals and particulars, being versus becoming, unity and plurality, time and eternity, and necessity and contingency. But he gives some attention to the problem of religious knowledge, with emphasis on mysticism, which, I surmise, is for him a very special interest. Of course he deals with the question of the existence and nature of God and that persistent nemesis of religion and theology, the reality of evil and suffering. In all of this, he exhibits both learning and analytical skill, and throughout he treats his heavy subject with an admirably light touch.

I must confess that the work of Kierkegaard, Barth, and some of the neo-orthodox theologians has prejudiced me against the principle of paradox in metaphysics and theology. Edwards has called attention to numerous paradoxes in RLDS theology involving such matters as God's eternity and involvement in time, his absoluteness and relation to particulars, his omnipotence and the reality of evil, etc. Here, I am sure, he is identifying crucial issues in the theology, but at times it is difficult to tell whether he is of the opinion that the paradoxes should or can be resolved or are simply given in the structure of reality.

As he has done elsewhere, in this volume Edwards has described Joseph Smith as a mystic and his work as in some degree a product of his mysticism. Now the concept of mysticism as it is ordinarily encountered is somewhat ambiguous, but I

personally fail to see that Joseph Smith was much of a mystic as that term is commonly employed in technical discourse or in religious biography.

Here and there I have difficulties with Edwards's statements. I can accept his assumption that metaphysics is a "valid and legitimate inquiry," but to assume, for instance, "that God exists" (p. xiv) is to beg the most crucial question. The assumption that God exists may be acceptable in theology, but God's existence is a basic problem of metaphysics. And I am bothered by such occasional expressions and ideas which he employs as "metaphysical experience" (p. 4) or "existence both is and is necessary" (p. 14). But these matters are of secondary importance in assessing the worth of the book.

In this volume, as elsewhere, I greatly admire the honesty and forthrightness of Paul Edwards. His honesty shines through time and again in his direct statements relating to his church and its beliefs. "This study indicates that the metaphysical foundations of the RLDS Church are often confusing, unrelated, and sometimes exclusive" (p. 3). "Inasmuch as we are in search of new insights, new visions of leadership, and new paths for understanding, it is nothing less than sinful to permit situations which stifle our creative resources and the power to see fresh and new characteristics" (p. 4). "The message of the RLDS Church centers in events which are abridgments of the span of history and thus affronts to natural process. We explain the Church as though it had emerged as a sudden unrelated event and ignore its relationship to the unfolding of history" (p. 13). "Reorganization history leaves us wide open to claims that we have distorted our own historical antecedents (*sic*)" (p. 24).

Needless to say, Edwards exhibits a competent knowledge of current LDS philosophy and theology. For typical LDS readers, a major reward of his book is the pointed comparisons and contrasts of LDS and RLDS beliefs. Important examples: RLDS theological absolutism/LDS finitism;

RLDS *ex nihilo* creation/LDS preexistent spirit and matter; RLDS eternalism/LDS temporalism; RLDS being/LDS becoming; the greater RLDS emphasis on grace and determinism/the LDS commitment to works and free will; RLDS immateriality/LDS materiality in the conception of God; RLDS trinitarianism/LDS tri-theism; RLDS monism/LDS pluralism.

It is not surprising to find Edwards writing that “the LDS view is one of the few—if not the only—philosophically distinctive religions that exist in any large following in America with the exception of Christian Science” (p. 87), or that “there are more theological differences . . . between the Reorganization and the Latter-day Saints than between the RLDS and the Protestant, Catholic, or Jew” (p. 87). But he continues with the observation that “the affinity of RLDS theology for the American mainstream is strengthened by lack of a genuinely official RLDS theological position—and the even more conspicuous lack of an attempt to identify and formulate such a position” (p. 87). It is not clear whether this is intended simply as a descriptive report on the Reorganization or also as a negative judgment on the state of its doctrine. I suspect that it is both.

On a number of metaphysical issues— for example, the divine infiniteness, pre-existence, predestination and free will, or the materiality of God—Edwards seems to regard the current LDS position as being more in keeping with the Doctrine and Covenants and Joseph Smith’s later thought than are the typical corresponding RLDS

beliefs. At least in this matter his position is somewhat ambiguous. In its emphasis on the divine absolutism and immanence, he even sees the RLDS theology in a flirtation with pantheism. It is apparent that Edwards is not a captive of either Joseph Smith or the Doctrine and Covenants. He seems to have far more freedom to pursue his ideas without restraint than has typically been the case with LDS theologians. All in all, he strikes me as being an admirably free soul. This is very evident in his comment that Joseph Smith “gathered his own teaching into the Book of Mormon, a speculative work that gives the story of his experience, and the truths he arrived at from considering the experiences” (p. 33).

Here as elsewhere Edwards’s humor ranges from the sophisticated to the earthy. A sophisticated sample: “In a twelve-page discourse by the Basic Beliefs Committee, people are represented as those who are free and loved, but so beset with crime, corruption, sin, and apathy that it would make an existentialist weep” (p. 80); or, the RLDS “assumption that people are good but being a person is an awful condition to be in” (p. 80). Or on the earthy side: “We have a long tradition of ignoring our history because we somehow feel it is impossible to open a closet without revealing a skeleton” (p. 87); “Most [RLDS] commentaries of the past fifty years discuss evil only in terms of behavior; trying to get some official statement on the nature of evil and its place in God’s world is akin to milking a steer” (p. 69). It is comforting to know that somewhere in the high places of Mormondom, laughter is still tolerated.

The Secular Side of the Saints

America’s Saints: The Rise of Mormon Power by Robert Gottlieb and Peter Wiley (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1984), 278 pp., sources, index.

Reviewed by L. Jackson Newell, professor and dean, University of Utah, and co-editor of *DIALOGUE*.

IT WASN’T written primarily for a Mormon audience. And it wasn’t expected to sell well in Salt Lake City. But Bob Gottlieb and Peter Wiley, both outsiders to the LDS Church and to Utah, have written a book of profound interest to Mormon readers. Over 15,000 copies of *Amer-*