

The note for 1 Nephi 10:3 indicates that "yea" is meant, but the contributors choose "ye" for the text because the OED lists it as an archaic variant of "yea" (1:43, n. 356). Notes for Mosiah 29:33 and Alma 18:37 indicate that "travails" is meant, but they choose "travels" for the text because the OED lists it as a variant of "travails" (2:513, n. 1230; 2:640, n. 57). They let Mormon 5:23 read "the earth shall be rolled together as a scrawl" because the OED lists "scrawl" as a variant of "scroll" (3:1163, n. 121).

The textual apparatus is particularly unhelpful in the portions of 1 and 2 Nephi paralleling Isaiah and 3 Nephi paralleling Matthew. There are many passages that are *almost* verbatim, but that *almost* is

important. Rather than writing out the Matthean parallel so the reader can see where the differences are, the notes give the chapter and verse numbers for that parallel, then write out the text of other less similar parallels.

Faults aside, this critical text is a truly valuable "Tool for Scholarly Reference." I used it as the basic text for my most recent Book of Mormon research, and I will probably find that its information can enhance each future Book of Mormon project I do. Scholars who need to be aware of textual changes or scriptural parallels will find it an essential reference. The F.A.R.M.S. team can be proud of their contribution.

The RLDS Conference

The Conferring Church by M. Richard Troeh and Marjorie Troeh (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1987), 232 pp., \$10.00.

Reviewed by Gary Shepherd, associate professor of sociology at Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan, and co-author (with brother, Gordon) of *A Kingdom Transformed: Themes in the Development of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City, University of Utah Press, 1984).

By the 1850s, general conferences of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had evolved from internal organizational meetings into inspirational gatherings in which General Authorities taught, exhorted, admonished, and defended the Mormon people. This ideological emphasis has characterized conference proceedings ever since. In contrast, general conferences of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints have retained much of the governance and business essence of original Mormon conferences (which in turn were based on a general Protestant model). While the structure and func-

tioning of modern RLDS conferences have become increasingly complex (and do include some "evening preaching" by General Officers), the major official purposes are to design and approve the church's operating budget, legislate new programs, sustain General Officers, and accept new revelation that may be presented by the president of the church.

In *The Conferring Church*, Richard and Marjorie Troeh present a detailed description of the RLDS conference process. This is not a scholarly analysis; it is a quasi handbook for conference delegates and an explanatory guide for RLDS church members based on a course taught by the authors in their home congregation. The Troehs have organized their clearly written material in a coherent and systematic textbook manner. Given their primary audience and objectives, we might expect the Troehs to present an idealized version of conference proceedings and functioning, which in fact they often do. For instance, they make little mention of contemporary difficulties; most notable is their silence about the controversial 1984 conference which, amid schismatic rumblings from opponents, finally

approved the ordination of women to the priesthood. At the same time, we see a fair amount of candor about certain human shortcomings associated with conferences, especially considering that this book was ultimately reviewed by the First Presidency of the RLDS Church.

A glorified church manual, no matter how well written, would not ordinarily be the subject of a *DIALOGUE* review. In this case, however, the Troehs' book may be used by both Mormons and interested outsiders to compare several key divergences between the RLDS and LDS churches. Most of these differences revolve around the tendency in RLDS thought and organization toward greater liberalization. After reading this account, it is apparent that Mark Leone's characterization of Mormonism as a "modern religion"—emphasizing individualism, changeability, relativism, and adaptability—might be better applied to the RLDS than the LDS church (see Mark Leone, *Roots of Modern Mormonism* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979]).

One specific illustration of this difference is the degree to which members are meaningfully involved in establishing churchwide policies. The majority of LDS readers will probably be most struck by the Troehs' portrayal of institutional revelation. The RLDS Church takes quite seriously the notion of "theocratic democracy" and regards its biennial world conference as the prime instrument through which ordinary members actively participate in the "prophetic mission" of the Church. The prophet may not always present a revelation to the conference. But when he does, the approximately 2800 elected delegates are expected, in prayerful but parliamentary fashion, to deliberate upon the merits of the prophet's written revelation and then vote to accept or reject this document as expressing God's will for the church. The prophet may amend his revelatory statement should a majority of delegates be dissatisfied with some portion of it. The conference, as a church body, thus becomes

the ultimate community interpreter of divine disclosure—a kind of complementary partner to the prophet in the revelatory process.

The conference also serves another corporate "prophetic" function through its broader legislative activities, especially those involving allocation of funds. Funded programs become priorities and presumably reflect a unified understanding of purpose, at a given time, about the church's "divine mission" in the world. The conference not only shapes and gives its blessings to new programs but also reviews budgetary expenditures of the previous two years to ensure that the directives of the last conference have been appropriately followed.

An unusual amount of both revelational flexibility and hierarchical restraint is evident in these and other conference functions described by the Troehs. As teachers of conference tradition and procedures to prospective delegates and the laity at large, the Troehs advocate these functions within a classic liberal theology of change. According to them, the role of the conference in expressing the "common consent" of members should be achieved by "prayerful involvement in the process of interpreting those truths already given (and even reinterpreting them from time to time) as life situations change" (p. 64). The most obvious situational factor recognized by RLDS conferences in recent decades is the diversity of cultures into which the church has expanded. The Troehs encourage those conference actions which "reflect [the] worldwide nature of the church and an understanding of their possible meanings in different cultures" (p. 141). They link these expressions of cultural relativism with official conference statements that support ecumenical movements "compatible with our vision of the Kingdom" (p. 96).

Important elements of the RLDS "vision of the Kingdom" are revealed in the structure, functioning, and substance of their biennial world conference, at least as much as in the biannual LDS counterpart. This seems reason enough to recom-