

Understanding the Community of Christ's Doctrine and Covenants

Dale E. Luffman. *Commentary on the Community of Christ Doctrine and Covenants. Volume 2: The Reorganization—Community of Christ Era*. Independence, Mo.: Herald House, 2020. 515 pp. Paperback: \$44.95. ISBN: 9780830917310.

Reviewed by Chrystal Vanel

Even though with nearly 200,000 members worldwide Community of Christ (CofC) is the second-largest denomination finding its roots in Joseph Smith's Restoration movement, publications on CofC history and theology are much less numerous than publications tackling the sixteen million members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, headquartered in Salt Lake City. Thus, any new publication about CofC should be more than welcome among specialists of the Restoration movement, and clearly Dale Luffman's book is already an important contribution to a more precise understanding of a pluralistic Restoration movement and its development in various denominations and theologies.

Out of transparency and honesty, I need to make it clear that I personally knew Dale Luffman. While doing my PhD thesis, I worked as a translator for CofC, and I had the opportunity to work alongside Dale Luffman. Dale passed away in 2020 after ministering as an apostle for nearly twenty years and serving on the governing board and the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches (USA). As many others in CofC, I remember him as a very kind and considerate apostle, calling people easily but heartfully "friend." I remember fondly laughing out loud with him in the CofC Independence Temple and also learning a lot from our discussions, as Dale was an intellectual apostle, and maybe foremost a preacher and a teacher.

Dale's teaching skills are apparent in his commentary on CofC Doctrine and Covenants, as his writing is clear, precise, and easy to understand. The first volume of the commentary was published in 2020 and covers revelations of CofC Doctrine and Covenants received by Joseph Smith. This second volume, with 515 pages, covers the "Reorganization—Community of Christ era" from section 114, presented by Joseph Smith III to the RLDS Church in 1861 to section 165, presented to Community of Christ by president Stephen M. Veazey in 2015.

Each section is presented through the same pattern: "introduction," "historical and theological context," "commentary and exegesis," and "the significance of this text for its readers and today's readers." At the beginning of the volume, Luffman deals with "the role of Scripture in Community of Christ" (1–10), making it clear that the commentary is for "preachers and teachers in the church" (11–12), and tackles the issue of canonization through the Doctrine and Covenants (13–30). Having a PhD from a presbyterian seminary and being in alignment with CofC's current American Christian progressive theology, Dale's exegetical methods reflect mainline progressive protestant exegesis, here applied to Doctrine and Covenants: "traditional exegetical methods are employed in this commentary; they reflect Community of Christ's scripture statement. These methods are intended to lead to understanding through historical criticism, literary criticism, textual criticism, textual comparisons, and redactions criticism" (11).

Even though scholarly criticism and critical scholarship is clearly promoted, still the commentary is primarily made for "preachers and teachers" in CofC, and so one shouldn't be surprised by the somewhat faithful approach of a book published by Herald House (the official CofC publishing house) and having the CofC logo on its cover. Even though the commentary stills brings important and insider insights about recent developments in CofC theology, practices, and ethics—such as commentaries on section 156, which opened the priesthood to women, and section 165, which enabled LGBT marriages in CofC in

some nations—the global historical and American context is somewhat lacking development whereas the institutional RLDS/CofC context is well explained. For example, commentaries on sections 156 (from 1984) and 165 (canonized in 2010) could have given a more detailed historical context of American Christianity’s various responses toward women’s ordination and LGBT rights, as those sections could partly be explained as direct responses to those societal issues. It may also have been difficult for Dale to be critical of CofC leaders he worked closely with and may have considered friends. Thus, one shouldn’t be surprised that Grant McMurray’s resignation as CofC president in 2004 is only quickly and quietly mentioned through a footnote referring to Mark Scherer’s CofC history (468n1393). While RLDS/CofC historians and theologians have been critical of Joseph Smith and the early years of the Restoration movement, such scholarly criticism is lacking when it comes to more contemporary events and prophets.

Even though a “faithful history” is somewhat present in the commentary, historians will learn a lot about CofC’s peculiar theological history and development from Luffman’s book, as the more recent RLDS/CofC still suffers from a lack of publications (despite the tremendous work being done by the John Whitmer Historical Association). And the commentary’s faith-promoting tone could also be considered as a strength: as CofC is lacking a clear worldwide common identity, the commentary will enable CofC members, priesthood holders (male and female, Black and white, heterosexual and LGBT), and leaders to learn and ponder more about their faith and their peculiar canon of scripture. Surely translations of the commentary in languages such as French, Spanish, Tahitian, Haitian Creole, and Lingala would be useful for the institution and its diverse worldwide membership, which needs a common identity. And one would hope that future editions in English would give a quality binding (presently of poor quality) to such a book. Dale Luffman’s commentary gives much-needed information about RLDS/CofC history and theology.

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Mormonism's Inside-Outsider

Gordon Shepherd and Gary Shepherd. *Jan Shippis: A Social and Intellectual Portrait: How a Methodist Girl from Hueytown, Alabama, Became an Acclaimed Mormon Studies Scholar*. Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2019. 254 pp. Paperback: \$24.95. ISBN: 978-1-58958-767-0.

Reviewed by Cristina Rosetti

Jan Shippis is Mormonism's "inside-outsider" who transformed the field of Mormon studies and paved the way for many who followed in her footsteps. Her book *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* remains one of the most widely read and assigned books about the Mormon Restoration, offering a concise introduction to the faith from someone on the outside of it. Her status as an outsider who earned the respect and trust of insiders lent credibility to both her writing and a field that was insular and dominated by believing historians. Drawing on previously published autobiographical writing, oral history interviews by the Church History Department, and lengthy personal interviews, Gordon and Gary Shepherd's biographical sketch of Shippis's life welcomes readers into the life of one of Mormon studies' pioneering voices.