

ALLEN, JAMES B., and GLEN M. LEONARD. *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*. Published in Collaboration with the Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976. 722 pp. \$9.95.

Reviewed by S. George Ellsworth, professor of history, Utah State University, and editor of the *Western Historical Quarterly*.

The publication of this one-volume survey history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is an event of some moment, long-awaited. No doubt the book will be of influence in the long line of Mormon historiography. The amount of work required for such a coverage is enormous, the task of synthesis is overwhelming, and there are more difficulties for the historian than any reader or writer of monographic history can imagine.

Basically a narrative history, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* attempts to cover essential themes from before 1830 to 1976. Four purposes for writing the book are listed by Church Historian Leonard J. Arrington: "to prepare a history that might serve the same needs that [Joseph Fielding Smith's] *Essentials in Church History* had provided for so many years" (p. vii); to use the "much new material" acquired by the Church Archives; "to record the important events that have taken place in recent years" (p. vii), and to offer, principally in narrative form, "a compact, introductory overview" (p. ix). There are also four outstanding themes in Mormon history named which may also be special interpretations: (1) the Latter-day Saints were a religious people, not "motivated largely by personal economic or political considerations"; (2) "the Church was always influenced to some degree by the events of the world around it"; (3) the Church "as a religious body" expanded "to claim an international membership," hence the how and why of its worldwide expansion; and (4) the "dynamics of change" exist within the Church, hence an interest in the how and why of new programs, the operations of "continuing revelation," as well as the "things that have remained constant" (pp. ix-x). The first and second themes are surely present in the book; the third is touched upon only lightly; the fourth shows up from time to time.

The authors "bear primary responsibility for their interpretation" (pp. vii-viii) and we presume for the body of the work as well. Yet a special debt is paid to readers and editor (p. xi). The authors acknowledge

“the valuable help” of eleven other persons, “under assignment of the Church Historian,” who “assisted us by providing research material and preliminary drafts in selected areas” (p. xi). With such a group getting into the act, it is a little difficult to refer to “the authors” with precision.

What sources were used? Notwithstanding the emphasis on “new material” in the Church Archives as a *raison d'être* for the book (pp. vii, ix) and a 62-page bibliography of the “principal sources we consulted” (p. ix), there is no indication in the bibliography that the authors took advantage of any “new material,” or for that matter, any old material in the Church Archives. There is no description of the Archives or groups of material there. Nor is there any indication of their having used blocks of materials, even the ready helps in the form of the “Journal History” or the innumerable manuscript histories of branches, wards, stakes, missions, and special topics. Direct quotations of length in the text are footnoted and indicate a decent use of primary source materials. But if the bibliography adequately indicates “the principal sources we consulted,” then we must conclude that the book is based mainly on secondary sources: published books, periodical articles, theses and dissertations, few diaries, and few Church periodicals or official publications. This cannot be altogether true, for they and their helpers must have used archival materials.

The book is divided into five parts and each part is introduced by a short essay that usually gives sound generalizations and identifies significances. The chapters cover an average of eight years, and each is divided into sections with headings, some meaningless (“Brighter Prospects,” “Four Important Years”), some much better (“Zion’s Camp,” “The Martyrdom”).

The historical narrative is standard for the period before 1847, while the period from 1847 to 1896 is chronicled in a manner reminiscent of general histories of Utah. In the treatment of the twentieth century significant new ground is broken, a period for which the historian has to gather his own straw, dig his own clay, and make his own bricks.

As to emphasis in the narrative, of the 159 sections in the chapters, the scene of action for 77 percent of them is Church headquarters, wherever that may have been, and 62 percent of those 159 sections narrate the activities of Church leaders. Hence, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* is, for the most part, the story not of the Latter-day Saints and their activities, but of Church leaders at Church headquarters. A tabulation of the subject matter of the sections indicates that 64 percent deal with general Church developments, and 36 percent deal with

the following subjects: Church organizations, organizations, and institutions (67 pages, 10.5 percent); Church doctrine, theology, teachings (17 pages, 2.7 percent); missionary activities, mission history, and the gathering (66 pages, 10.3 percent); the settlement of the Mountain West (15 pages, 2.4 percent); economic matters (30 pages, 4.7 percent); and political affairs (36 pages, 5.6 percent). No space is devoted to biographical data or character analysis and description of persons except in the case of the Prophet Joseph Smith and his family and the Prophet's religious experiences prior to 1830.

The physical makeup of the book is attractive and the type readable. Some 144 photographs (some old, some new) and illustrations are interspersed. Many newer photographs could have been chosen. The printing of the illustrations is of uneven quality. Ten maps are simply drawn, helpful as reference, though the decoration tends to detract from the instructional value.

The story is a contribution in many ways. Here is an essay, based upon the use of a large body of diverse monographic literature on Mormon doctrine, practice, and history. We are given an extensive bibliography of much of that literature. It has brought us closer to the reality of the Mormon past, as bits of folklore and myth are dissolved and a truer picture is presented. It has given us for the first time, in this perspective, an account of general historical activities in this century. New information, new views, new interpretations enrich the telling of the story. It is a worthy *apologia*.

The book was written by Latter-day Saints for Latter-day Saints. And while it does well in educating the reader to a broader and truer view of the Latter-day Saint past, yet the treatment has been softened to accommodate delicate feelings. Many accounts fall short of telling the whole truth, and subjects controversial in some minds are handled with tact and a certain gentleness, softened rather frequently with concluding expressions of confidence, faith, and moral lessons to be drawn from the telling.

The book is a decided advance in Mormon historiography, showing the divine operative in human affairs while fearing not the human element in religious history. Perhaps the authors had to write with imagined faces looking over their shoulders. There is too much fear among us that should a Church leader be found to be human, that might suggest a lack of inspiration. But the truer history of the Church can make the Latter-day Saints live more happily with their religion and their leaders. Of a score of Church friends of wide range of education who

have talked with me about the book, all have voiced delight with the book and its approaches.

Notwithstanding the decided “passing grade” given the book, it falls short of our higher expectations. There is little by way of description, analysis, or explanation. There is a failure to show causes sufficiently, interrelationships of events, impacts of major world events on Church affairs (in detail). There is seldom an attempt to explain the hows and whys. The event is named and then commented upon. There is no buildup from certain developments to a climax, even to a speech, or a declaration of importance. Apparently each event reported just happened.

There is always a problem of balance in a broad survey such as this, but a strict structural plan of the whole would have saved all sorts of troubles. Drawing the plan might take as much time as doing the research or the writing, and it would have needed to be revised from time to time to meet the problems of creating the final essay. While this book has a general plan (history determined that), it is obvious that the details were not planned against the available space. How are we to account for such a small portion of the book devoted to Church doctrine and teaching? For instance, Mormon revelation is discussed most fully in the paragraphs defending the Manifesto as a revelation. Does not the visitation of Moses, Elias, and Elijah in the Kirtland Temple deserve more than one sentence (p. 101, repeated on p. 166)?

The authors seem not to know quite what to do with religion, Church institutions, and practices. Treatments of these subjects are tacked onto other discussions. There is little or no disposition toward theological exposition. There is no delineation of the Mormon faith, as a whole, or as fundamental beliefs and practices were enlarged from time to time as the Restoration proceeded. There is little attempt at anything like a history of institutions. Nor is there any particular attempt to get inside the religious practice and life of the Latter-day Saints at any period—the worship, Church services, and Church activities.

“The growth of the Church from an obscure religion to one of world-wide magnitude is one of the themes of this volume” (p. 3). But it is a minor theme in this book. The coverage of missions is inadequate, often inaccurate and misleading. Besides failure to know the areas of the world proselytized, from the beginning through the years, missions are treated from a Salt Lake City point of view. It would be a great step forward if historians could realize that the Church exists in other lands, and its life and practice and experiences in those lands deserve equal

space with any other phase of Church history. After all, if Church history does not deal with people in church and in the practice of their religion, what is it all about? The authors are still thinking of the Church in its Utah and America political, economic, and social development.

The bibliography raises some questions. As mentioned above, it very nearly misses altogether mentioning primary sources. There is frequent mention of books written by non-Mormons and apostates, which makes us wonder to what extent they were really consulted; for example, the works of Inez Smith Davis, T. B. H. Stenhouse, William A. Linn, Wallace Turner, M. R. Werner (cited as Norris R. Werner, p. 651). Even forthcoming books are cited! One is a little disturbed to read the bibliography decry lack of study of some subjects when titles on those subjects come to mind. The bibliography appears to be an exercise in diplomacy—include everyone, deserving or not, used or not, believed or not, trusted or not.

While the book shows the consistent hand of the copy editor, the text is faulted by too many editorial errors. We believe it is baptism for the dead, not baptism of the dead (p. 99); it is San Luis Rey, not San Louis Rey (p. 232); it is William McGroarty, not McGorty (p. 342); appointees would have been better than appointments (p. 356); it is Struble, not Strubble (p. 413); it should have been liberal, not literal (p. 443); and Remy is correct without an accent (p. 715).

There is a problem of handling the written language. There is the bad habit of *telling about* an event rather than *telling the event*; this is subtle, but it is there (pp. 51–52, 99, 366–70, for examples). The essay lacks clear, direct narrative style which teaches by narrating the events themselves. Introductions to parts and to chapters (topic paragraphs) too frequently tell the end at the beginning, rather than leading the reader into the essay (pp. 103–04, 137–38, 173, 217–20, 295–96, for examples). Instead of creating suspense, we are told too early how it all turned out. For the most part, the language is colorless and pictureless. The essay is devoid of those vibrant quotations that clearly characterize the depth of the human experience. The dramatic in Mormon history is often rendered neutral. In short, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* is an excellent draft, ready to be polished by authors and editors.