

This volume fits in the long and excellent Latin American tradition of the private publication of personal memoirs. As such the authors made the determination of what to include and not an editor whose primary interest is often the marketability of the volume. In it are delightful descriptions of missionary life and member activity, copies of family letters, and quotes from personal blessings. The authors do provide a limited historical and cultural background of Latin America that sets the Church's evolution in the context of the environment in which it developed. The book, however, is primarily a personal memoir of Williams's experiences in South America; consequently, important events in the history of the Church are discussed only if the Williamses were involved. The appendix includes valuable lists of converts and missionaries along with biographical descriptions of early missionaries, members, and presidents. Unfortunately the book includes several typographical and editorial errors that detract from the flow of the story.

The authors have provided the Church with an important document of twentieth-century history. Not only is it a discussion of an interesting but neglected area of Church history, but the Williams's have also provided future historians with invaluable source materials for future research. Furthermore, the book will assist in understanding current issues faced by the Mormon church in Latin America such as political problems, leadership development, and cultural conflicts.

KAREN LYNN DAVIDSON. *Our Latter-Day Hymns: The Stories and the Messages*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1988. ix; 486 pp. \$17.95.

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The Apostle Paul wrote that the Saints should be filled with the Spirit, "speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Eph. 5:19). We sometimes forget this: hymnody is not only a prayer to God, it is a way of speaking to ourselves. And because it is not always obvious what we are saying to ourselves in our hymnody, hymnbook companions become necessary. Such works not only expound the hymns but also tell their histories, on the premise that a hymn's origins may say something about the people who sing it.

The publication of a new Latter-day Saint hymnbook in 1985 made Davidson's book necessary. Originally a General Music Committee project undertaken in connection with the new hymnbook, this book attempts to appeal both to scholars and novices, indeed anyone who might ever sing an LDS hymn. By and large, it substantially improves

upon its predecessors, George Pyper's *Stories of LDS Hymns* (1939) and Spencer Cornwall's *Stories of Our Mormon Hymns* (1963). It is more attractively designed, better researched, and more comprehensive than those books. Aside from the traditional hymn-by-hymn commentaries, the work offers a well-illustrated biographical appendix, a concise history of LDS hymnbooks, and a miscellany of facts that, while humbly labelled "hymnbook trivia," illuminates the character of the 1985 hymnbook.

The book's airy beige cover suggests its tone. The hymn commentaries are optimistic, generous in their appraisals, and occasionally facile in their exegeses. Yet the book strives to be candid even when candor may seem to tarnish some cherished misconception. For example, Davidson notes the errors in attribution that for years unjustly credited certain hymns to LDS authors: "As the Dew from Heaven Distilling," "God Is Love," and "Come Thou Glorious Day of Promise" are three notable examples. In clarifying these hymns' origins, Davidson reaffirms that the Church has consecrated much of its distinctive tradition from the surrounding Christian culture. While that may seem a small blow to our sense of exclusivity, it unites us to a larger fellowship of believers.

Despite the book's evident strengths, weaknesses of two sorts remain: inconsistency and inaccuracy. Perhaps because of its committee origins, the book lacks the singleness of vision that illuminates the finest reference works. The hymn commentaries fluctuate in style and method; the sort of information that will be supplied for a hymn follows no coherent plan. For example, only a few entries concerning borrowed hymns tell when (much less why) a given hymn formally entered Mormon hymnody. Is that information one should expect or not? And the entries are disproportionate. The new hymn "A Key Was Turned in Latter Days" gets a longer treatment than does the venerable "Praise to the Man." Shouldn't readers assume that a more prominent hymn will get a more comprehensive treatment? Such small inconsistencies are aggravated by Davidson's modest but cloying habit of quoting large chunks of Pyper and Cornwall (not to mention McConkie's *Mormon Doctrine*). Had Davidson, a capable writer, relied exclusively on her own narrative and expository gifts, the book might have gained a sense of unity which it now lacks.

Davidson also has relied uncritically on others' scholarship, particularly that of the generally tenacious Bruce David Maxwell. In doing so, she neglects some important sources. For example, she apparently did not consult *The Dictionary of American Hymnology: First Line Index* (1984), arguably the most valuable single hymnological sourcebook. Had she consulted it she would have found the following information:

1. “Love at Home” appeared in a hymnal in 1865, a year before the first publication date she gives it (297). (The song actually had appeared in sheet form by 1859.)
2. Both “Scatter Sunshine” and “Count Your Blessings” were published two years before the dates she assigns them (240, 249).
3. The text to “God Is in His Holy Temple” appeared in no fewer than ten different hymn collections before the 1864 date she gives it (158).

Other scholarly sources would have shown her that “All Is Well” was published with music as early as 1838, not 1841 (59), and that the original title of the poem that begins “A poor wayfaring man of grief” was “The Stranger and His Friend,” not “The Stranger” (57).

Ironically, given the nature of the book and the accessibility of LDS sources, the Mormon hymns suffer most from errors of citation. Davidson credits the first publication (words and music together) of “For the Strength of the Hills” to the *Latter-day Saints’ Psalmody* (1889)—but it appeared on the Sunday School Music Card no. 20 (c. 1878), in the *Juvenile Instructor* (1880), and in the *Jubilee Songster* (1885). She credits “Zion Stands with Hills Surrounded” to the *Deseret Sunday School Union Music Book* (1884)—but it appeared in *A Collection of Hymns and Anthems Set to Music by Home Composers* (1883). She traces “God Is Love” to the 1889 *Psalmody*—but it too appeared in the 1883 *A Collection of Hymns and Anthems*, as well as in the *Improvement Association Song Book* (1887). “Today While the Sun Shines,” credited to the Primary Association’s 1880 *Tune Book*, actually appeared in the *Juvenile Instructor* (1877) and on the Sunday School Music Card no. 24 (c. 1878). “Come Along, Come Along,” “How Great the Wisdom and the Love,” and “Gently Raise the Sacred Strain,” all credited to the 1884 *Sunday School Music Book*, all appeared earlier in the *Juvenile Instructor* (1878, 1879, and 1883, respectively). “Great Is the Lord” and “O Say, What Is Truth?” were both included in the 1887 *Improvement Association Song Book* before their appearance in the 1889 *Psalmody*. In these and other instances, Davidson has left a good object lesson in the definition of research: always check for yourself.

Davidson also misleads the reader in several more recent matters. She refers to “Adam-Ondi-Ahman” as being “retained from the 1950 hymnbook” (24–25). But the song was not in the 1950 hymnbook. Indeed, that omission prompted the First Presidency in 1959 to ask that the song be restored to the hymnbook in its next printing (which is why the song appears on the last page of editions since then). Concerning “For the Strength of the Hills” she writes that “the 1950 hymnal omitted a verse from the 1948 hymnal” (64). Actually the verse in question was in all printings of the 1950 hymnal until President McKay had it deleted in 1965. Davidson writes that the text of “I Am a Child of God” came to Naomi Randall by inspiration in the middle of the night and that

“the general board approved the words the next morning” (303). While this is essentially true of the song’s three verses, the chorus evolved through several versions, the first of which ran:

Teach me all that I must know
This is my earnest plea!
I am a child of God
Please show the way to me.

Only after a good deal of tinkering did the chorus arrive at its much stronger “final” form:

Lead me, guide me, walk beside me,
Help me find the way,
Teach me all that I must know
To live with Him someday.¹

A clearer rendering of this song’s origins would only serve to bolster Davidson’s observation in the preface that “inspiration and revision are not mutually exclusive processes” (5).

One hopes that Davidson will take a cue from that maxim. Her book, a labor of love and, I believe, inspiration, still lacks a bit in that fragile human quality known as craft. For all its admirable traits, the book is not finished. As it stands, it deserves and undoubtedly will get a wide audience. But like many books, it deserves—and probably will not get—a critical reading, except by a few scholars. And like it or not, the dearth of critical reading may say as much about us as do the hymns we sing.

NOTE

¹See Naomi Randall to Mildred Pettit, 29 January and 5 February 1957, holographs in Library-Archives, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.