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The Mormons: An Illustrated History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

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Roy A. Prete, editor. *The Mormons: An Illustrated History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*.

London: Merrell Publishers, 2013.

Reviewed by Herman du Toit

Many predicted that the printed book would be doomed by developments in digital media. Far from it. This sumptuously illustrated “coffee table” hardcover publication by Merrell, an independent British publisher, testifies to the value of the printed book. The materiality of the medium emphasizes the synthesis of the complex visual and textual content of this publication—stressing the fact that this is a book and not a digital file after all. Stephen Hales Creative Inc., a design company in Provo, Utah, was responsible for the appealing visual design and layout of the book. The hard cover and dust jacket are both chrome coated to provide the luster of a high-end publication, and the pages are printed on pearlescent, high-quality paper for the same reason. Using a landscape format, the book is illustrated in full color recto and verso, and a two-column and sidebar layout allows the eye to play easily over both text and image without the need to flip pages unnecessarily to find related illustrations. The text is set in fairly conservative Mercury Text typeface from the Hoefler Foundry; this choice resonates with the dignity of the book’s subject while at the same complying with the space and legibility requirements of a news column, for which this typeface was originally designed. The subheadings are set in Gotham, a sans serif typeface that imparts a more contemporary look to the printed page.

For this book, more than 250 photographic illustrations have been tastefully selected from a wide range of sources, including Getty Images, *Deseret News* Archives, Brigham Young University, and the proprietary images used by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for illustrating its published materials. Fine contemporary images by individual photographers such as Val Brinkerhoff and Stephen Hales are also represented. The photographs are spread throughout the publication in various scales and sizes, not only as illustrations for the text but also

to provide variety and hold visual interest. They document the various operations of the Church as an institution, but they also provide some insight into the lives and activities of its members. These illustrations have a warm “human-interest” appeal in their contemporaneity and colorful visual impact. They collectively project the image of a dynamic organization in keeping with the times, with members who appear to be happy, fully engaged, and even fun-loving—a feature that speaks to the positive promotional interests of this book’s publisher, editor, and authors.

The most significant aspect of this anthology is that, in reaching out to an intelligent nonmember audience, it is *not* published by a Church- or BYU-affiliated publisher. The book provides an accurate, factual, and lucid account of a variety of topics, including the origins of the Church, its phenomenal success in recent decades in becoming an international Church, its core beliefs, and the lifestyle of its members. This is one of the few publications from any international publisher of repute to overtly and objectively expound the factual history and achievements of the Church, serving as an informative introduction and wide-ranging overview to both members and nonmembers alike.

Merrell has a reputation for publishing books of exceptional editorial and design quality, focusing on secular subjects such as architecture, fashion, graphic design, and interior and garden design. The company publishes only a careful selection of new titles each year. Significantly, this is one of only two books of a religious nature that Merrell has published to date, the other being Judith F. Dolkart’s *James Tissot: The Life of Christ* (2009), which is a classic in its own right.

The Mormons: An Illustrated History is edited by Roy A. Prete, who is a retired professor of history at the Royal Military College of Canada, Kingston, Ontario, and has published widely on Anglo-French military relations in World War I. He is editor or coeditor of six books, including *Window of Faith: Latter-day Saint Perspectives on World History* (2005).

The book comprises contributions from a formidable panel of fourteen Mormon writers who tell the story of Mormonism “as seen through the eyes of those who practice it every day” (vii). Each is an authority in his or her respective field and has contributed to one or more of the fourteen chapters. The writers include Susan Easton Black, Richard O. Cowan, John P. Livingstone, Lloyd D. Newell, Craig J. Ostler, Kip Sperry, Brent L. Top, and Mary Jane Woodger, all of whom are professors of Church history and doctrine at Brigham Young University. Additional

contributors are Michael J. Clifton, a prominent lawyer, businessman, writer, and teacher; Neil K. Newell, a long-term employee of LDS Welfare Services and a prolific writer; Carma T. Prete, a former high school teacher and writer; Brent W. Roberts, the managing director of the Meetinghouse Facilities Department for the Church; Helen K. Warner, who is well published and actively involved in family and Church history research; and John W. Welch, who holds a prestigious professorship in the J. Reuben Clark Law School at BYU, is the editor of *BYU Studies*, and is an eminent scholar of biblical and Latter-day Saint scriptures. Notwithstanding the diverse contributions from so many individual writers, the style of writing is remarkably consistent and there are no glaring transitions or dislocations in voice or tone from one chapter to the next.

Individual chapters deal with a wide range of topics that provide for a comprehensive understanding of the formation of the Church, its core beliefs, and its members. The context for the book is quickly established by Lloyd D. Newell, Craig J. Ostler, John P. Livingston, and Susan Easton Black through engaging chapters on Temple Square; Salt Lake City and Utah; and Joseph Smith, the restoration of the priesthood, and the Mormon migration.

Brent L. Top lays out the plan of salvation and the role of Jesus Christ with clarity, conviction, and with the support of well-chosen scriptures. This chapter references the Church's 1995 statement: "The Family: A Proclamation to the World." Top also contributes a chapter on the foundation of prophets and apostles. In response to the question "What Do Mormons Believe?," Top provides the Church's Articles of Faith.

John W. Welch carefully delineates the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and the additional LDS scriptures. The complementary role of these additional scriptures to the Bible is explained, concluding with a tacit invitation to the reader to invoke the promises of the scriptures that explain how one might gain wisdom and "know the truth of all things" (57). The extensive growth of meetinghouses and other Church facilities in many countries is explained by Brent W. Roberts, who highlights their function in helping families and individuals come to know Christ and his teachings.

John P. Livingstone addresses the Mormon lifestyle with its emphasis on the family and activities such as family home evening, scripture study, and family prayer. In addition to providing an informative account of the nature and blessings of the Church's health code—the

Word of Wisdom—this chapter also gives the most definitive and rational statement about the practice of polygamy during the early years of the Church that this reviewer has ever come across.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has always placed a high priority on education, and the book devotes an excellent chapter by Mary Jane Woodger to the history and development of the Church Educational System, seminaries, higher education, institutes of religion, and continuing education, including Education Week, Especially for Youth (EFY), and the Perpetual Education Fund. This chapter also succinctly references the honor codes that students at Church-sponsored universities agree to live by.

The welfare system of the Church is addressed by Neil K. Newell, who establishes the scriptural basis for the Church's extensive humanitarian outreach to millions of people across the world in these times of great temporal need. Newell states, "It is impossible to understand The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints without understanding its commitment to reach out, lift, bless, and heal the lives of others" (99). He enumerates the Church's extensive worldwide facilities for welfare relief and also stresses the members' belief in self-reliance and reaching out to their neighbors in times of distress.

Richard O. Cowan contributes a chapter on the phenomenal growth of Mormon temples in most parts of the world and answers the question, "Why Do Latter-day Saints Do Vicarious Work for the Dead?" (111). Kip Sperry has authored the chapter on family history and genealogy work that establishes the Church as the foremost leader in this field, taking full advantage of the dramatic technological advances of the digital age. Cowan then contributes a chapter on the burgeoning missionary work of the Church, highlighting the exponential growth of Church membership since the 1960s that has made the Church one of the fastest growing Christian churches in the world. Cowan quotes a non-Mormon sociologist in saying, "Mormonism may be the first important new religion to arise since Islam" (134). The book concludes with a chapter by Helen K. Warner, Carma T. Prete, and Michael J. Clifton on "Mormons Who Have Made a Difference" (137), highlighting various scientists, sportspeople, entertainers, business leaders, and politicians who are members of the Church and have made major contributions in their respective fields.

This is a timely publication that answers key questions that non-members might be prompted to ask in their investigation of the Church. It is informative without being overtly didactic or doctrinaire, serving as

a fine and accurate introduction to the Church. Of noteworthy mention is the forthright and candid treatment of potentially contentious topics, such as historical polygamy and the universal ordination of worthy men to the priesthood. Ultimately, it is sure to find a place on the bookshelves of discerning readers in much of the English-speaking world.

Herman du Toit retired as head of museum research at the Brigham Young University Museum of Art in Provo, Utah, in 2011. He has enjoyed an extensive career as an art educator, curator, administrator, critic, and author, both locally and abroad. He is a former head of the Durban Art School and founding director of the Cecil Renaud Art Gallery at the Durban University of Technology in South Africa. He holds postgraduate degrees in art history and sociology of education from the former University of Natal. While at BYU, he was awarded a J. Paul Getty Fellowship for his PhD study of interpretive practices at some of America's leading art museums.