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Mark A. Scherer. *The Journey of a People: The Era of Restoration, 1820 to 1844*. Independence, MO: Community of Christ Seminary Press (2013); *The Journey of a People: The Era of Reorganization, 1844 to 1946* (2013); *The Journey of a People: The Era of Worldwide Community, 1946 to 2015* (2016).

*Reviewed by Chrystal Vanel*

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SURELY MARK A. SCHERER’S THREE VOLUMES on RLDS/Community of Christ<sup>1</sup> history were much awaited by many scholars working on Mormonisms,<sup>2</sup> especially those who have a special interest in RLDS/CofC history. Furthermore, as volumes 1 and 2 were published in 2013, the eagerness grew stronger because one had to wait for the publication of the third and final volume in 2016. But the wait was worthwhile!

Scherer served as Community of Christ World Church historian from 1995 until 2016 and taught CofC history at the Community of Christ Seminary (Graceland University). In his three-volume history, Scherer takes us through what he labels “The Era of Restoration, 1820 to 1844,” “The Era of Reorganization, 1844 to 1946,” and “The Era of Worldwide Community, 1946 to 2015.”

Whereas those chronological delimitations make sense (the RLDS Church organized itself around the leadership of Joseph Smith III following the 1844 succession crisis and, following World War II, experienced some dramatic changes leading to today’s Community of Christ),

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1. Where appropriate hereafter, the abbreviation *CofC* will refer to the Community of Christ.

2. As Mark Lyman Staker shows, the terms *Mormons*, *Mormonites*, and *Mormonism* originally referred to believers in the Book of Mormon (*Hearken, O Ye People: The Historical Setting of Joseph Smith’s Ohio Revelations* [Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2010], 72–73, 87). I thus argue that Mormonism exists wherever there is belief in the Book of Mormon. With many denominations claiming belief in the Book of Mormon, I argue there are many Mormonisms.

some of the terms used also speak volumes about how the institutional Community of Christ historian might want to distance the Community of Christ from Mormonism: the term *Era of Restoration* was chosen to refer to what many scholars of Mormonism might refer to as part of “Early Mormonism,” which in the field of Mormon studies often delineates the history of the church that Joseph Smith founded up until his death.<sup>3</sup> One might wonder if Scherer’s preference for non-“Mormon” terms, including the neologism *Latter Day Saintism* (1:13, 19, 20, 26, 145, 146) and terms like *Restoration Era* (1:28, 460), even though they are still occasionally used (1:269), is an attempt to lessen CofC Mormon past. This would be in the same vein as Scherer’s predecessor Richard Howard, who seemed to have preferred the term *Restoration Movement* over the term *Mormonism*.<sup>4</sup> But by using the term *Restoration*, Mark Scherer also puts early RLDS/CofC history in the wider context of the various “restorationists” who endeavored to “restore the primitive Christian church” (1:xix) in the nineteenth-century United States.

Indeed, Mark Scherer brilliantly puts early Mormonism in its context, having made great use of the most recent research and numerous primary sources he had access to at CofC archives in Independence, Missouri (see, for example pictures of seer stones, 1:17). Mark Scherer’s first volume could be used as a very useful textbook for any university class on Joseph Smith’s singular primitive brand of Christianity.

The second volume is most interesting to those who have a special interest in Mormon fissiparousness, because chapter 1 is partly devoted to the competing claimants to church leadership following Joseph Smith’s death. Given that recent research on Mormonism(s) has been devoted to the relationship to Freemasonry,<sup>5</sup> an interesting aspect

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3. See, for example, Trevor Alvord, “Certainty to Distrust: Conversion in Early Mormonism,” *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 30 (2010): 133–55; Benjamin Park, “‘Reasonings Sufficient’: Joseph Smith, Thomas Dick, and the Context(s) of Early Mormonism,” *Journal of Mormon History* 38/3 (2012): 210–24.

4. Richard Howard, *The Church through the Years, Volume 1: RLDS Beginnings to 1860* (Independence, MO: Herald, 1992), xix–x.

5. See, for example, Michael W. Homer, *Joseph’s Temples: The Dynamic Relationship between Freemasonry and Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press), 2014;

presented in volume 2 is the relationship between the RLDS Church and Freemasonry. Scherer presents the debates of the 1907 RLDS General Conference on “secret societies” (2:402–4) and writes on RLDS Church president Frederick M. Smith’s relationship with Freemasonry (2:530–34). Because some recent research seems to have a special interest in the globalization of Mormonism(s),<sup>6</sup> chapters 15 and 16 on early efforts toward internationalization are of special interest: chapter 15 focuses on RLDS missions to the Pacific (Society Islands, Australia, Hawaii), and chapter 16 is devoted to missions to Europe (Scandinavia, Switzerland, Germany, the British Isles).

The history of the globalization of the RLDS Church/CofC continues in the third volume in chapters 10–12, where Scherer devotes considerable space to the birth and growth of the RLDS Church in Nigeria (3:198–206). Despite its subtitle (“The Era of Worldwide Community, 1946 to 2015”), the third volume also focuses on important changes occurring within the RLDS Church, which became the Community of Christ in 2001. Thus, chapter 13 is devoted to the doctrinal evolutions of the 1960s- and early 1970s-era RLDS Church as it revised its curriculum and some of its staff received theological training through seminaries. Chapter 17 deals with the opening of the priesthood to women and the “fundamentalist” reaction. Chapter 19 treats the installation of William Grant McMurray as successor to Wallace B. Smith in the RLDS presidency in 1996, thus ending the longtime RLDS tradition of linear presidency (3:502–4). Scholars on the LDS Church will surely enjoy reading chapter 3, which deals in part with RLDS president Israel A.

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Chrystal Vanel, “Mormonismes et franc-maçonnerie,” paper presented at the seminar of the Groupe de Recherche et d’Étude des Mouvements Maçonneriques et Ésotériques (GREMME), Université Libre de Bruxelles, Bruxelles, Belgium, December 13, 2011.

6. Bernadette Rigal-Cellard, “Être français dans une Église d’origine américaine,” in *Les mutations transatlantiques des religions*, ed. Christian Lerat and Bernadette Rigal-Cellard, 279–308 (Bordeaux: Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2000); Chrystal Vanel “Converting to Mormonisms in France: A Conversion Both Religious and Cultural?,” in *Religious Conversions in the Mediterranean World*, ed. Nadia Marzouki and Olivier Roy, 139–61 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

Smith's visit to Utah in April 1951 and his cordial participation in the sustaining vote of LDS church president David O. McKay.

Needless to say, all three volumes are very interesting to read. They are well documented and make good use of oral histories for the most recent past (see the third volume). The writing is engaging, and there are many illustrations (readers might feel as though they are actually in the CofC archives) and beautiful maps, the latter created by John Hamer.

It is important to note that Scherer intends to write a history that is both "non-faith-promoting" and institutional. He makes it clear that he does neither "sanitized history" nor "official history" and that he departs from "early histories" that "made little attempt to be objective" and "whose accounts show only great people making great decisions" (3:xix). Yet, addressing "those who claim membership in today's Community of Christ," Scherer writes that his subject is "*our* story," which is "an amazing story of a people on a truly remarkable journey" (3:xix).

This "*our* story" Scherer has written sometimes still has a Manichean flavor, especially since the author uses but does not explain terms that sometimes have strong positive or negative connotations and whose meanings change through time. Such is the case with words like *fundamentalist*. Writing about the conflict between the institution and some of its most traditionalist members, Scherer calls the latter "fundamentalists" (briefly explaining the term in footnote 32, 3:329) but is shy to mention clearly that those fundamentalists tend to refer to themselves as "restorationists." Only one time is the word *restorationist* used to refer to traditionalist members—when Scherer quotes from a member opposing the RLDS protestantization in the 1970s (3:341). Maybe Scherer avoids the term in order to avoid the confusion with nineteenth-century restorationists. Even so, one is surprised he does not give voice to the restorationist/fundamentalist account of the conflict. In making use of oral histories, he could have interviewed restorationists/fundamentalists to take their perspectives into account. Thus we get only a one-sided view of the conflict, and that is the winners' view (because most fundamentalist/restorationist/conservative members—and those polysemous words need much more explanation—seem to have left CofC or to be on its margins, not in position of leadership).

True to the Community of Christ's current spirit, Scherer might sound easily critical of the Mormon/Joseph Smith past of CofC while verging on an apologetic tone when it comes to RLDS Church/CofC history. Although he underlines in the beginning of volume 1 that Joseph Smith was "a man of uncommon spirituality, but at the same time one of common humanity" (1:10), Scherer writes quite a lot in volume 3 about the "significant accomplishment," "progressive leadership," and "prophetic courage" of RLDS president Wallace B. Smith (3:499–500).

Scherer also sometimes seems to read the past in the lenses of today's CofC desire for a progressive identity. I was surprised to read that the RLDS Church participated in the "social Gospel movement" (2:198), which was part of the larger Progressive Movement.<sup>7</sup> Scherer does not adequately explain the "social Gospel movement," which counted as its main representative the Baptist preacher Walter Rauschenbusch (1861–1918),<sup>8</sup> and it is not clear whether the RLDS Church consciously took part in the movement. I was surprised to read that Becky Savage was chosen as counselor in the First Presidency because "the Church needed a voice and a physical presence as a reminder to be proactive in matters of gender and cultural bias that were still present in some areas" and that "women have been integrated at all levels of church leadership" (3:548). First, serious sociological research has shown that "masculine domination" is not only present in "some areas" but also in so-called modern societies,<sup>9</sup> and even though women are present at all levels of CofC leadership, most of its top leaders are males (two of three in the First Presidency, seven among twelve apostles) and most of the leadership is still white American; thus there is still white, masculine, American domination in the CofC. Moreover, Scherer presents the CofC's enduring principles that were introduced in 2009, yet we read that "these all have shaped the church story for nearly two centuries" (3:570). The author here seems to read the past through the lenses of the present.

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7. Klauspeter Blaser, *Le Christianisme social. Une approche théologique et historique* (Paris: Van Dieeren, 2003), 37–40.

8. Blaser, *Le Christianisme social*, 37–40.

9. Pierre Bourdieu, *La Domination masculine* (Paris: Seuil, 2002).

Although he is an institutional church historian, Scherer boldly and professionally tackles difficult historical issues: racism in the 1950s RLDS Church (3:64–74), the Mark Hofmann forgeries (3:454–60), and President Grant McMurray’s resignation from the CofC presidency in 2004 (3:528–32). In doing so, he makes good use of primary and secondary sources.

Scherer’s three volumes on RLDS/CofC already stand among the must-read books on Mormon studies, and his research on RLDS/CofC globalization and most recent history is often groundbreaking. Many sociologists of religion will surely agree with Scherer’s claim “Without awareness of an institutional past there can be no institutional future. . . . Institutional memory is required to maintain institutional viability” (3:574). Because the Community of Christ recently chose to limit access to its archives due to financial struggles and not to replace him following his retirement, Scherer’s books are precious to the CofC membership’s common identity. One might hope that the institution and its leadership will know how to make good uses of Scherer’s historical work.

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