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Book Reviews

REED C. DURHAM, JR., and STEVEN H. HEATH. *Succession in the Church*. Salt Lake City, Utah: Bookcraft, Inc., 1970. 207 pp. \$3.25.

(Reviewed by Duane E. Jeffery, assistant professor of zoology at Brigham Young University and specialist in general and human genetics.)

Succession! What must be one of the most critical issues in all the doctrine of the priesthood has also been the subject of rather slow development in the presiding councils of the Church, perpetual speculation among the Church members, unparalleled opportunity for outside aspirants to the Presidency, and less-than-exhaustive scholarship in Church literature. The truly comprehensive analysis of the entire issue in this dispensation has not yet been written, but this new book by Durham and Heath is a major step in that direction. Indeed, these authors appear well qualified to eventually produce the *magnum opus*, when and if a market for such ever develops.

Up to now, literature on succession has taken the form of short missionary tracts, small books aimed at defending LDS views against those of some splinter group, or introductory sections in the many gospel synopses on the market. Durham and Heath now set out to trace for the LDS member the entire history of priesthood succession in this dispensation, and strictly from the LDS point of view. It is an attempt to demonstrate the development and application of the current LDS doctrine, and spends little time with the many opposing interpretations and concepts that have been devised over the years. The existence of such interpretations and groups is covered in less than two pages, with a rather extensive footnote to guide the reader to further literature in the area.

The subject matter is very wisely broken down into 13 major historical periods, each of which constitutes a chapter.

Joseph's developing concepts of succession and successors prior to the calling of the Twelve Apostles in 1835 receive the best coverage available in Church literature. Following the consolidation of the Quorum of the Twelve, the next major conceptual developments revolved around the issue of seniority in the Quorum, and herein lies the major contribution of the book. Quorum seniority has sometimes in our history seemed to be based on the members' respective age at ordination to the apostleship, at other times on their respective *dates* of ordination. A third consideration was whether seniority was based on the date of one's ordination as an apostle, or on the date of his being called into the Quorum of the Twelve—and the existence of apostles who were not members of the quorum created some interesting problems which, when solved, afford some critical perspectives. Durham and Heath succeed admirably in showing a consistent pattern through all these details, a pattern which in spite of its consistency underwent progressive development and expansion all through the 19th Century. Shuffling of sometimes long-standing seniority patterns testify to this progressive refinement of the issues, and Durham and Heath document the matter meticulously.

The book's major shortcoming is the demanding self-discipline imposed by the authors to keep strictly to business, thus preventing the pursuit of subjects that are inevitably suggested to the critical reader. Such an approach has its unquestioned strengths, and many of the possible questions clearly lie outside the authors' aim. A few do seem legitimately the book's business, however, and not all of them are resolved. One reads on p. 5 of Oliver Cowdery's assertions in 1847 to David Whitmer that he and David hold the keys and authority to preside over the Church—even though they had both been excommunicated approximately nine years earlier. Did not their excommunication remove all such keys and authority? The answer of course is yes, but the point is nowhere discussed. Why did Oliver, a critical witness in things of priesthood, entertain such feelings? Where they still his feelings just a year later when he returned to the Church? If the reader peruses the article by Richard Lloyd Anderson cited on p. 14 on another point entirely, he will find the answers, but the book gives no such information.

Later on, we learn of concern in the governing quorums that Orson Hyde and Orson Pratt were not in proper sequence

of seniority; that their position ahead of John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, and George A. Smith had been negated by their both having been estranged from the Quorum in earlier years. We learn of President Young's settling the question in 1875, and placing the two Orsons *behind* the three apostles above mentioned. One infers from the text that President Young just once-and-for-all came to grips with the issue in 1875, and that the 1875 story tells the whole matter. There is cogent evidence, however, that there were attempts to set this matter straight even before 1868, but for various reasons it was not resolved. Some have seen the move in 1875 as the result of personal differences between Orson Pratt and Brigham Young. That personal vindictiveness on the part of President Young was not involved in the matter has been argued by T. Edgar Lyon,¹ who discusses the situation both in the 1860s and in the 1875 resolvment, and avers that President Young defended Pratt's seniority. In fairness it must be asserted that Lyon does not make clear that Brigham Young *did* come to express the view central to the issue: that Pratt's earlier period of apostasy had modified his position of seniority. This is the point which Durham and Heath establish, and the omission of the pre-1875 activities are of concern only for historical, not doctrinal, accuracy.

Further discussion of the setting apart of the President would seem to be in order. We are informed that it is to be done by the Twelve, and on several pages are given leading statements from the brethren as to its purpose and propriety, but we are not given a discussion of it as a practice. Nor do we find any comment as to why the first president to be documentally set apart, Joseph F. Smith in 1901, requested that the Patriarch of the Church, not a member of the Twelve, act as mouth. There is good rationale for the request, but we are not given it. Similarly, we are convinced on p. 85 by a ringing speech from George Q. Cannon that a new Church president need not be *ordained* to that position; that ordination is, to say the least, superfluous. The word finds no further expression until p. 172, when we read the Deseret News report that President Joseph Fielding Smith was "ordained and set apart" Jan. 23, 1970. Is this merely newspaper rhetoric? Probably, but such

¹T. Edgar Lyon, *Orson Pratt—Early Mormon Leader*, Master's dissertation, Univ. of Chicago, 1932, pp. 159-162.

words in the past have been the turning point of major debates on succession; it would have been wise to clarify the situation.

But the faults are all minor. The book is a major and long-overdue contribution to the step-by-step detailment of this important subject. Due to its appearance shortly after the succession of President Joseph Fielding Smith to the Presidency, some Church members have been prone to dismiss it as a quickly-prepared volume to capitalize on a cresting wave of interest in things successional. Far from that, it is the product of several years' careful and responsible study and should deservedly become the touchstone for discussions of the topic. Indeed, the incontestable fact that this very fundamental doctrine has been progressively refined to its present state has implications that go far beyond succession; it applies with equal force to concepts of prophetic knowledge, revelation, and essentially the whole of our understanding of the gospel. That virtually all our gospel doctrines are best elucidated under this same developmental truth is a point that has not been appreciated by either Church members at large or many of our authors and commentators. It is to be hoped that Durham and Heath will contribute to the recognition of *that* concept as well as to an accurate understanding of succession. The book is highly recommended.