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More Faith than Fear: The Los Angeles Stake Story Chad M. Orton

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Book Reviews

CHAD M. ORTON. *More Faith Than Fear: The Los Angeles Stake Story*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987. xi; 372 pp. \$12.95.

Reviewed by A. Gary Anderson, associate professor of Church history at Brigham Young University.

Few areas pulsate with more raw energy, excitement, and excess than Los Angeles, California. While early Church leaders possibly never envisioned God's kingdom flourishing amid miles of pavement and masses of people, the Los Angeles Stake has become an important and influential hub of Zion. In this regional study, Chad Orton has traced the history of the growth of the Church in the Los Angeles region.

This is far more than just the history of a single stake. The first three chapters detail the beginnings of the LDS church in California. Among other things, Orton recounts the arrival and subsequent shenanigans of Sam Brannan, the coming of the Mormon Battalion, and the planting of the colony at San Bernardino. He also notes less familiar episodes such as the contributions of Utah polygamists in nurturing the early California church and the diverse (and often inspired) events and happenings that undergirded the establishment of missions and branches. The emphasis is on people, and Orton obviously enjoys detailing the remarkable faith and notable achievements of such people as Henry and Eliza Woollacott and Joseph Robinson. In all of this Orton demonstrates a familiarity with the basic themes and settings of both Church and California history. The volume gives evidence of considerable research and while the writing is not always scintillating, it is solid enough.

The title of the book, *More Faith Than Fear*, is appropriate, referring to various Latter-day Saint leaders and members who, in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds and obstacles, refused to allow fear to override faith. The phrase is applicable both to early pioneers and to later visionary leaders such as John Carmack. In 1974, Elder Carmack, then a stake president, was inspired to preserve the Wilshire chapel. In later years the chapel served many Spanish-speaking wards and was a center of Hispanic activity.

In a very real sense the Los Angeles Stake, the first and oldest urban stake, has served as a prototype and even crucible for such stakes throughout the Church. As a small strand in a large inner-city web, stake leaders have had to meet varied challenges seemingly inherent in a complex urban setting. The Great Depression created

especially acute welfare challenges with the influx of Church members seeking employment. World War II brought the challenge of meeting the needs of hundreds of servicemen. The 1950s were characterized by large numbers of members moving to suburbs as blacks moved into the inner-city areas. The so-called “white flight” presented logistical challenges for stake leaders. The 1965 Watts riot transpired in the stake boundaries. During this era the Los Angeles Temple and the LDS institute of religion received bomb threats. By the 1980s the diverse stake membership made it a microcosm of the worldwide Church. In the Hollywood Ward alone, twenty-seven different languages could be heard. At a typical sacrament meeting, one would see not just blacks, whites, or Hispanics, but Armenians, Filipinos, Chinese, Koreans, and many others. In dealing with the perplexities of urbanization and cosmopolitanism, stake leaders have established procedures and practices that have benefited other urban stakes.

Indeed, the Los Angeles Stake has pioneered many programs that the Church later implemented worldwide. One such program had to do with missionary work among American Jews. Because of the large Jewish population in the Los Angeles area, LeGrande Richards and Rose Marie Reid, a descendant of Orson Hyde, instigated in 1954 special programs for Jewish people interested in the gospel. The book *Israel! Do You Know?* by Elder Richards was perhaps the most notable result of this venture. Another program or practice in which the Los Angeles area anticipated the worldwide Church was the consolidated meeting schedule. The Los Angeles Stake introduced a consolidated meeting schedule after Pearl Harbor was bombed. With the possibility of meeting disruption due to air raid alerts and the reality of gas rationing coupled with the long distances many had to travel to and from meetings, it seemed practical to lump meetings together. This practice was later abandoned. With the development of a Spanish branch in the 1970s, the Los Angeles Stake moved Primary from Fridays to Sundays, again because of travel distance, thus reimplementing the consolidated meeting schedule. When the Church inaugurated the consolidated schedule worldwide, the only adjustment the Los Angeles Stake had to make was to shorten the time branch members spent in Sunday meetings. The Los Angeles Stake also anticipated the Church in creating single-adult wards and wards for the deaf.

Perhaps the most captivating chapter for general readers would be the one about the Los Angeles Temple. Nearly everything Orton recounts about the temple—from the prophetic utterances concerning its erection to the eventual selection of the site, from the concern about the designation, “Hollywood Temple,” to the insight

given temple artist Joseph Gibby by President McKay that the Savior had “chestnut hair, hazel eyes, and fair complexion”—evokes and strengthens faith, and suggests that the Lord indeed had an investment in its completion.

Orton’s book may not become a best-seller because of its comparatively narrow historical focus. But to anyone interested in the development of the Church in California or even the western United States, it fills an important need. Certainly it would find a happy and enthusiastic readership in Southern California. But I would hope Orton’s study motivates as much as it instructs, inspiring others in branches, wards, and stakes throughout the world to “go and do likewise.” Every branch and stake, from Sanpete County to Santiago, Chile, has its own version of stellar Saints such as Joseph E. Robinson and Eliza Woollacott or John K. Carmack and Ella Farnsworth. For many reasons, not the least of which is determining how and where we link up in a great chain of family and gospel continuity, we need to learn about them.