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Church History in the Fullness of Times

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Church History in the Fullness of Times. Salt Lake City: Corporation of the President, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989. 643 pp. Paperback. \$5.55.

Reviewed by Dennis L. Lythgoe, columnist for the *Deseret News* in Salt Lake City and adjunct professor of history at the University of Utah.

This attractive volume gives the initial impression that it is a pathbreaking, progressive, one-volume account of Latter-day Saint history. Even though it is a manual for a religion course, it is formidable in appearance, suggesting substantive content. Although a paperback, it is aesthetically designed with numerous impressive photographs and illustrations. One highlight, for instance, is the photograph of the stained glass window of the First Vision from Salt Lake's 17th Ward chapel. Unfortunately, the manual's ultimate value is confined to the layout and the photographs because its content is surprisingly shallow and its scholarship disappointing.

Having been prepared by a committee, this volume lacks depth. The style is pedestrian, overly simplified, and spotty in its coverage of important material. But the most serious problems are found in the consistent lack of scholarship from beginning to end. For instance, few of the important scholarly works of Latter-day Saint history are used in any visible way in this volume. The end notes for each chapter cite the works used, but in most cases they are disappointing and do not reference authors with critical insights into the topics considered.

It is impossible, for instance, to definitively tell the story of Joseph Smith without using such important books about the Prophet's life as Donna Hill's monumental but not problem-free biography and Richard Bushman's more recent and more insightful book about Joseph Smith and the beginnings of the Church. Similarly, telling the story of the First Vision without recounting and explaining its various accounts as detailed by such scholars as James B. Allen and Dean Jessee shortchanges the reader.

A study of Nauvoo's history calls for the interpretations of T. Edgar Lyon, Glen Leonard, and Robert Flanders. A study of Kirtland or of the Kirtland bank fiasco should not be made without consulting Larry Wimmer. Nor can one properly analyze the contribution of Brigham Young without sampling generously the definitive work of Leonard Arrington (cited once in 643 pages).

In the modern phase of Church history, such prominent figures as J. Reuben Clark, Jr., and Spencer W. Kimball are analyzed without using the work of the major historians who have treated their lives. D. Michael Quinn wrote an indispensable book on President

Clark, and the biography of President Kimball by his son and grandson is a major contribution to Latter-day Saint biography, yet neither is consulted. Ronald Walker continues to work on a full-length biography of Heber J. Grant and has already contributed several trailblazing articles, but none of them are consulted for this volume. Instead, the reader is left with minor references from the *Ensign* and the *Church News* and lightweight accounts of minor Latter-day Saint writers to teach us about Lorenzo Snow, Heber J. Grant, and David O. McKay.

Essentially, this manual is an attempt to telescope the major events in Church history without giving them proper perspective or adequate explanation.

Such an important event as the Mountain Meadows Massacre, immortalized in print by the definitive pen of Juanita Brooks, is treated lightly and inaccurately, without any of Brooks's interpretations. The Kirtland Bank and Joseph Smith's role in it is glossed over and rationalized away without any attempt to put it in context with the economic problems of either the early Church or early America. Masonry is passed over as one of the ways we can understand the assassination of Joseph Smith at Carthage. The Council of Fifty, about whom scholars such as Klaus Hansen, D. Michael Quinn, and Andrew F. Ehat have written perceptively, is short-changed and misunderstood.

In short, the history of the Church becomes bland through the pages of this volume. The blandness is a natural consequence of attempting to write what some define as "faith-promoting history"—an approach that endeavors to avoid raising questions or creating controversy. Since the Church can stand on its own without any attempt to whitewash its history, this approach is a disservice to students of religion who may use it in a course on Latter-day Saint history.