

## REVIEWS

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### Brief Notices

Gene A. Sessions

THE QUARTERLY BESTOWAL of a Milk the Mormons Award (the Elsie) for the most worthless book costing the most money sometimes goes to a real heavyweight. For example, this quarter's Elsie goes to an author who is not only just next to being a General Authority, but in the minds of people who would rather read Bookcraft than scripture he is also just next to being God himself. Stephen R. Covey, after popular canonization, thanks to his 1970 *Spiritual Roots of Human Relations*, has produced another panacea for life's questions. *The Divine Center: Why We Need a Life Centered on God & Christ & How To Attain It* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982, xiii+298 pp., index, \$9.95) easily outdistances its competitors for this issue's prize. Not only is it brimming with razzle-dazzle and two-bit words, but it reeks with the sourness of self-righteous pretention. As with *Spiritual Roots*, *Divine Center* attempts to translate profane personal management theories into sacred guidelines for living. Covey thus qualifies as a Mormon Bruce Barton who would have us believe that the path to transcendent righteousness leads through a modern landscape of checklists, charts, and cheesy "processes." His hero(es), whom he fashions as "God/Christ" (is that like saying "he/she" to cover your bets?), appear(s) only as executive incidental(s) on the great flowchart of modern Mormonism. (I can never tell whether such muddled Mormons are talking about Trinity, Unity, or Plurality, and I doubt if they can either.) But the book does contain a wealth of mealy anecdotes about mission, Relief Society, stake, and assorted other presidents — great stuff for youth speakers who have used up *Especially*

for Mormons. Our Elsie-winner is also about to go into paperback, and that's more than I can say for my last book.

In our last installment, we put forth a new recognition called the Pull the Latter-day Leg Award for the Mormon book that is most unlike what it claims to be. The second winner of the prestigious "Ahab" is James R. French's *Nauvoo, An Epic Novel* (Orem, Utah: Raymont Publishers, 1982, 305 pp., illus. \$?). It fails completely to be epic and probably does not even make it to the status of novel. A talk-show host in Seattle, French warns us in an author's note that he is not a historian. He could have saved the ink, because his silly story proves that point well enough. His portrayal of such characters as John C. Bennett lacks veracity in laughable ways. *Nauvoo* suffers from a common affliction in current Mormon historical literature calling for amputation, a tendency to make rambunctious nineteenth-century Saints into modern Mormons, replete with middle-class virtues and placid, business-like demeanors. After Bennett tries suicide, for instance, and the Prophet heals his hurt soul, the scoundrel calls after Smith and says, "God bless you, President." (p. 168) Now, if John C. Bennett ever called Brother Joseph "President," I will eat my shoe. Beyond its overbearing presentistic flavors, the book is just plain dumb, reminding me of why I never watch network television. Only Michael Landon could play French's hero Andrew Sharp, and the series should be called *Big House at the Ferry*.

Another novel doing well among the Mormons this year is *Pepper Tide* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1982, \$7.95), by Jack Weyland. We noticed another of

his little gems some time ago, something that read so much like *Love Story* it's a wonder he didn't hear from Erich Segal's lawyer. (Maybe he did.) This one seems a bit more original, telling the story of an inactive Mormon who is about to hit the big time as a comedian. Using flashbacks, Weyland paints a thoroughly melodramatic picture of his hero who eventually rediscovers his heritage and finds in it the strength to build a truly meaningful life. Anyone over fourteen who likes this book probably has the mind of a fourteen-year-old. Still, Weyland has hit upon a successful formula. His characters have straight teeth, likeable ways, and the good luck to find perfect love. Their lives bear stern witness to the truth of Alma 41:10, so his books, no matter how simple-minded they may seem, provide LDS kids with something better to put in their minds than KISS and Billy Idol. It seems a pity, though, that the Mormon book market cannot produce novels with more depth and power. But who cares about that anymore? To compete with television, Weyland may have to begin advertising Jabba the Hutt dolls on his back covers.

For young Saints more interested in reading history (all eleven of them), a new book edited by Richard Cottam Shipp entitled *Champions of Light: True Experiences from the Lives of Latter-day Champions* (Orem, Utah: Randall Book, 1983, xix+118 pp., maps, biblio. \$?) comes like a breath of fresh air. Included in the front and back of the volume, Shipp's computer grid maps of the United States are alone worth the price of the book. Designed to encourage Mormons to write personal histories, the text of *Champions* consists of the autobiographies of a dozen obscure disciples of early Mormonism. Shipp has painstakingly annotated the accounts, each of which contains exciting adventure and enough emotion to intrigue the reader of any age. While Shipp does not indicate to which extent he edited the manuscripts for spelling and grammar, his use of brackets seems to indicate some care in that direc-

tion. He selected "champions" of both genders, which also demonstrates some enlightenment. Despite its rather syrupy packaging and obvious attempt to attract the same readers as James French and Dean Hughes, *Champions* earns the "Brief Notices" seal of approval.

By way of personal histories, Steven A. Cramer's *The Worth of a Soul: A Personal Account of Excommunication and Conversion* (Orem, Utah: Randall Book, 1983, 123 pp., biblio. \$?) is anything but light and pleasant reading. Apparently intended as a gift book for those poor devils about to submit themselves to the new Holy Inquisition, it pulls no punches. Cramer's "fall" through adultery (about the only way to get ex-ed anymore) and his subsequent route through the Church court system to rebaptism make for serious story telling. Why anyone would want to submit himself to such self-flagellation remains a mystery, but the agony and feeling of his experience come through graphically. Whether the book has the power to assist a wandering soul across the borders of hell also awaits judgment. One thing in this area is certain: in the LDS system of punishment and retribution, many are culled but few are chastened. In Cramer's case, the "court of love" worked perfectly. In so many others, it serves rather as a rack of anguish leading only to added pain. In any case, *Worth of a Soul* represents an important first-hand account of the system working properly.

Prior to Cramer, every masochist who confessed his "grievous" sins received as required reading a copy of Spencer Kimball's *Miracle of Forgiveness*. Tough and uncompromising, *Miracle* laid down the law in no uncertain terms, but it also displayed the prophet's sense of compassion. After studying his life in his authorized biography, most readers could readily perceive the sources of that compassion, although the book contained precious little of Elder Kimball's actual teachings. To fill that gap, one of its authors, Edward L. Kimball, has edited a companion volume,

*The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball, Twelfth President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982 xxiii+620 pp., index, biblio. \$11.95). Kimball has done a splendid job of selecting and organizing his father's teachings, which retrieve nicely, thanks to a comprehensive topical index. Of a similar genre but not of the same quality is Donald Q. Cannon, ed., *The Wisdom of Joseph Smith* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book Company, 1983, viii+52 pp., index, \$?). Assuming that Joseph

actually said everything in the *History of the Church* he supposedly said, Cannon organizes the Prophet's sayings under topics à la the Richard Evans *Quote Book*. Inasmuch as he relies heavily upon sources derived from the *History*, Cannon thus perpetrates much of the same mythology about Joseph's personality and thinking that misled Fawn Brodie. His book is still worth having, especially if its owner is a high councilor or other perennial church speaker. Most of them need all the help they can get, even if their quotes are of dubious origin.

## Frustration and Fulfillment

*Mormon Women Speak*, edited by Mary Lythgoe Bradford (Salt Lake City: Olympus Publishing Co., 1982), 237 pp., \$9.95.

Reviewed by Richard J. Cummings, professor of languages and director of the Honors Program at the University of Utah. He has served on the Annual University of Utah Women's Conference Steering Committee for the past four years and cochaired the Women's Conference on Managing Multiple Roles in October 1980.

I WAS INTRIGUED by the cover design of this collection of twenty-four essays by Mormon women. It reminded me of a circular stained glass window with a gently smiling woman's face in the center surrounded by four compartments containing women's hands in various symbolic postures. This design is described by Mary Bradford in her introduction as the "graphic symbol of the mandala" which depicts "the self, the wholeness of personality . . . which cannot tolerate self deception." The hands depict the four aspects of the Mormon woman's life—home, service to others, development of her own talents, and church. This simple design not only summarizes the contents of the book, it also serves as an ingenious device for organizing the twenty-four

heterogeneous essays chosen from more than a hundred submissions.

Reading these essays was a moving experience. Certain essays stand out because of a more dramatic approach or certain stylistic felicities. Despite some qualitative differences, all twenty-four authors expressed themselves so honestly and in such intensely personal terms that I am uncomfortable singling out specific essays for special praise. Still, I would like to give the prospective reader a sense of what to expect by discussing a representative sample.

The first section, introduced by the face with the hesitant smile, includes four essays which set the tone for what is to follow. These essays offer distinctive attempts at self-definition which strive to preserve personal integrity while retaining some semblance of traditional Mormon womanhood. I found them to be gripping statements in which pain and triumph alternate, displaying an admirable open-endedness befitting a struggle which will not settle for the facile solutions suggested by general conference rhetoric. Helen Candland Stark describes "An Underground Journey Toward Repentance" in which she recognizes in the assertive, angry side of her nature "an irascible witch" who must "learn to accept injustice, para-