

Reviews

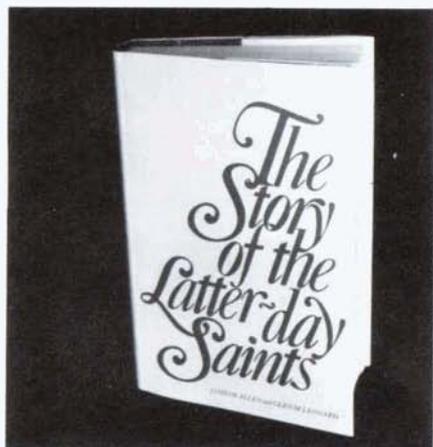


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The Story of the Latter-day Saints.
By James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard. 722+xi pp. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co. \$9.95. Reviewed by John N. Drayton.

For too long the LDS Church has weathered the charge that it would not voluntarily endure objective scrutiny. I am reminded of a passage in a letter from Bernard DeVoto to Jarvis Thurston, dated May 24, 1943. DeVoto writes,

It is lugubriously true that the orthodox Mormon mind cannot tolerate any objective treatment of Mormon history whatever. . . . All Mormon actions have always been pure and sanitary; all criticism of them has always been evil and mendacious. Who is not for them is against them. . . . This is what I have sometimes called the Mormon Inferiority complex. Something of the sort is, of course, a part of all religious orthodoxy. Yet it is perfectly possible for any writer to handle any other religion in

America objectively and be answered objectively in turn. It is not possible of the Mormons.¹

But this one volume by two prominent LDS historians goes a long way toward refuting that charge. The preface asserts, as we might expect, "the Saints were basically a religious people" motivated principally by their "hope of preparing a religious people for the millennial reign of Christ."² But one additional comment clearly sets this book apart.

Reminding us that "the Church was always influenced to some degree by the events of the world around it," the authors promise to treat "the dynamics of change within the Church." More specifically, they write, the book tries "to assert how and why new programs were adopted, old policies reevaluated and changed, and new doctrinal information presented to the Saints."³ This is impressive.

And the promise is fulfilled.

The book does lead the reader to the conclusion that the Saints' basic driving force was indeed their faith in Jesus Christ as their redeemer. But we are not led by the nose. There are few blatant assertions that the prophets were inspired to follow any particular course of action. What we do find is that in spite of a veritable catalog of setbacks and obstacles, the Church survived—and prospered. (Of course, for the average member of the Church, this information is somewhat gratuitous; but for the uninitiated, the information would surely be impressive.)

This survival is a phenomenon demanding explanation. Yet our authors—wisely, in my opinion—allow us to reach our own conclusions on the basis of the evidence. And witnessing the suffering of the Saints and their stubborn tenacity, even their positive creativity, we can hardly avoid the conclusion that these were people motivated by more than political or economic interests.

A significant sidelight is that this is more the story of the Church than of individuals within it. Although Joseph Smith figures prominently in the early chapters, by the time we read of his martyrdom, the Church has acquired a life of its own. None of the subsequent leaders—no, not even Brigham—contend seriously for the limelight. This is a record not so much of superstars and their devoted followers as of men and women struggling together to realize their common goals.

But by itself none of this demonstrates conclusively that the book is objective. Any reader knows that a skilled writer can slant his account by selecting the "right" facts and omitting the others. What about our authors?

Allen and Leonard tend to let the chips fall where they may. For some the results may prove disconcerting. For example, on the surface, this approach would seem to suggest that many doctrines were simply variations on contemporary themes. The answer that Joseph Smith obtained in answer to his prayer in the grove was not unlike the insights of other seekers in the Burned-Over District of New York. Prior to his discovery of the gold plates he had been involved in a mild craze that excited the farmers of New York in

the 1820s—seeking for buried treasure. What about the Word of Wisdom?

By 1833, the year the Word of Wisdom was given, the temperance movement in America had five thousand local societies claiming over a million members. Temperance articles were regular fare in the public press. Diet, too, was receiving considerable attention, with stress on fruits, vegetables, and moderation in meat.⁴

The modern temple endowment, too, followed closely the installation of a lodge of Freemasons in Nauvoo.

We also witness corrections of doctrine. Thus, in Nauvoo Joseph Smith taught the concept of the godhead as given in D. & C. 130:22 to correct a concept published in 1835 in the *Lectures on Faith*. In those lectures, we learn, the Prophet "had defined the godhead as consisting of two persons, the Father and the Son, and the Holy Ghost as the combined mind of the Father and the Son."⁵

Furthermore, we are made privy to the failure of the Kirtland Bank, the United Order, and the institution of plural marriage.

These phenomena should give little difficulty to Saints mature in the faith, but the approach is nonetheless demanding.

On the other hand, this approach does not strain the reader's credulity. One can hardly avoid accepting this material at face value because this face has undergone manifestly little cosmetic surgery. Consequently, when we are told of the strengths of the Church and of its members, or of the shortcomings of its opponents, we are more favorably disposed toward that judgment.

The book makes no pretensions at completeness; it is an overview—a kind of skeletal framework that we may see fleshed out in the forthcoming sixteen-volume sesquicentennial history of the Church. Nevertheless, those wishing to probe more deeply into specifics need not worry about getting shortchanged. In the back of the book is a most impressive annotated bibliography.

And although this review tends to focus on the earlier history, the book is thorough from start to finish. Furthermore, the book brings the reader right up to the latest developments, referring to events as recent as the additions to the Pearl of Great Price announced in the April 1976 general conference.

Of course, if you can afford time and/or money to peruse the sesquicentennial history volumes, by all means wait. But for the rest of us, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* is a worthwhile investment.

1. *Improvement Era*, Vol. 49 (1946), p. 154.
2. "Preface," p. x.
3. "Preface," p. x.
4. p. 95.
5. p. 167.



Huebener, a play by Thomas Rogers, directed by Ivan Crosland, BYU, October 1976. Reviewed by Frederick Bliss and P. Q. Gump.

When we first heard about *Huebener*, we thought the idea was interesting, but frankly, we didn't have much hope for it. The author, Russian professor Thomas F. Rogers, seemed to be a dilettante, dabbling in theatre out of enthusiasm. Knowing the rigors of playwriting we were afraid of an amateurish outcome. But Rogers was no dabbler, and after many consultations with BYU directors Charles Whitman and Ivan Crosland about rewrites, the play was scheduled into the BYU season.

The result? Not a perfect script, to be sure. But by the end of the show we hardly cared about the script or the lighting or anything much except the boy Helmuth Huebener whose story had broken our hearts. And we are not that easily heart-broken by mere art. (How proudly we claim unearned cynicism.—PQG.)

Huebener touched us where no other Mormon play had ever

reached. In our testimony.

It is a story of a seventeen-year-old German lad who dared to listen to the forbidden BBC German-language broadcasts and realized that German radio was lying. He and a couple of friends decided that it was their duty to inform others, and they worked together to distribute anti-Nazi flyers all over Hamburg.

The only trouble was that Helmuth Huebener was a Mormon, and he used the duplicator in the branch president's office to run off his propaganda. The branch president, himself a Nazi, was torn between duty to God and the gospel and duty to his country and party.

But the overriding concern was the safety of the Mormons in Germany. Members of an American church, the Saints were suspect from the start. And so when Huebener was arrested, he was excommunicated from the Church to save the rest of the German Saints.

The rest of the play involves Huebener's struggle in prison, where, to protect a conspirator who was over eighteen, and thus could legally be executed under German law, Helmuth pretended that he was the only person involved. The result? His friend did not die. But the Nazi court, determined to set an example, "proved" that Helmuth, a brilliant boy, had the mind of a thirty-year-old and therefore was not a minor. He was beheaded.

A Mormon martyr? In a sense. But what reached us most powerfully in this play was not his struggle with the Nazis. Though the trial was not boring by any means, and the German soldiers smirking

through a priesthood meeting in order to arrest several priesthood holders afterward were chilling, the real conflict of the play was between Huebener, whose faith in God led him to rebellion, and the branch president, whose faith in God led him to loyalty to the government he lived under. Doctrines in conflict: our love of freedom versus our commitment to be subject to kings and governments.

Thus the climax of the play was not in court. It came when Huebener's mother came to visit him in jail, after his excommunication but before his trial. Emma Huebener—played beautifully by Maggie Blair, a sensitive and delicate actress who has been too little used by BYU's theatre department—came to persuade her son to forgive the branch president. Helmuth Huebener—created as a whole and believable young man by Russell Card, whose restrained performance won us over completely—refused to believe that the branch president had not denounced him to the Nazis.

"Respect President Zoellner as your priesthood leader," Emma urged her son.

"How," he answered, "when I do not hold the priesthood?"

"Then honor him as your church superior," she insisted.

He wept and turned away, saying, "How, when I am no longer a Latter-day Saint?"

We must confess that in all the martyrdoms, persecutions, and suffering we have seen in LDS drama, never has a play raised this question in our mind: What would we feel if, for any reason, we were no longer members of the Church?

Russell Card was Tom Rogers's vehicle for letting us know, and suddenly the humdrum routines of Mormonism became more precious to us than anything else in our life.

The flaws? Rogers needs to be more cruel to himself, and cut his script. The first scene was deadly dull, with the same facts coming out again and again during what seemed like an hour of exposition. We wanted to stand up and shout, "All right already, we got it, now let's see the play." Finally the scene ended and the rest was good enough that we almost forgot the first scene—until the entirely superfluous last scene with everyone jovially talking about whether Huebener's step-father will join the Church, which trivialized Huebener's story for us. Those scenes could have been cut with no violence to the play, and judicious trimming here and there throughout would have helped as well.

However, later productions can take care of these weaknesses, and though the script is not "literary," it plays well. Much of the credit for this goes to Ivan Crosland, an innovative director who tries very hard to emulate Brecht but fortunately doesn't succeed. Apart from an abortive effort to "alienate" the audience by irritating delays before the show and loud, obnoxious German music playing in the lobby, the epic theatre techniques were swallowed up in the frankly romantic nature of the rest of the play so that not alienation but identification was the order of the day.

Excellent ideas were: a completely metal backdrop with a swastika burnished on the steel; set changes performed by men in military uniform, emphasizing the harsh

and rigid setting of the play; an interrogation where the violence was suggested by throwing the actors noisily (but harmlessly) against the metal wall (if only they had refrained from obviously faked slaps!); the use of trunks as set pieces and furniture; the whining siren that opened the show.

But more important than directorial devices were excellent performances that in the key roles were far better than we are used to seeing from student actors. Besides Card's austere performance as Huebener and Blair's counterpoint as his mother, fine performances were presented by Corey Sprague as coconspirator Karl-Heinz Schnibbe; J.H. Stoddard as Huebener's delightfully nervous friend Rudi Wobbe; and Michael Bird as the non-Mormon conspirator, Jonni Duewer. These three, with Card as Huebener, made an excellent team, and whenever they were onstage in any combination the play was bright, alive, moving, and effective. Other solid performances were turned in by Tom Nibley, who departed from his customary comic roles to play the chief interrogator; David Sterago, who played the relentless prosecutor; and Paul Nibley, who played Hugo Huebener, Helmuth's father.

But the most difficult role was that of branch president Arnold Zoellner, who could have been played as an arch-villain. Instead Scott Wilkinson made him a flesh-and-blood character, a man tormented by the contradictions of his beliefs and his patriotism, of his personal love for bright and daring Helmuth Huebener and his responsibility for the safety of his congregation. Wilkinson walked a tightrope—and he didn't fall once.

Indeed, *Huebener* was an actors' show. Again and again rather ordinary dialogue became gut-punches to the audience as the actors gave depth to them. The prayer in priesthood meeting as with sweet-sounding words an elder masked his revulsion at having Nazis present; Helmuth's confession to his branch president; the above-mentioned meeting between Helmuth and his mother in his cell; the reaction of the boys to Helmuth's death sentence in the courtroom: handled badly, these moments could have been dull—or worse, maudlin. But they were handled well.

Huebener is not a play that could be marketed outside the Mormon community. We doubt that non-Mormons would be as affected by it as we to whom rejection by the Church would be the cruelest blow life could give us. But in its own way, *Huebener* is a milestone for Mormon theatre. Tom Rogers has given us a Mormon hero who was not a prophet, who is not semi-deified in the play; but instead of the debunking tendency that often shows up in playwrights' attempts to humanize martyrs in Mormon drama, we find a playwright saying that nobility is in all of us, that the pain of difficult decisions can touch all of us. Our brother can unwittingly become our persecutor, our friend can become our enemy, our consolation can become our scourge. And at the end of it we can still say with Helmuth Huebener that we love Christ and his gospel despite the suffering that can come to us in his name.

Helmuth Huebener was posthumously reinstated in the Church. It makes a difference to know that. But the dilemma is still here. We

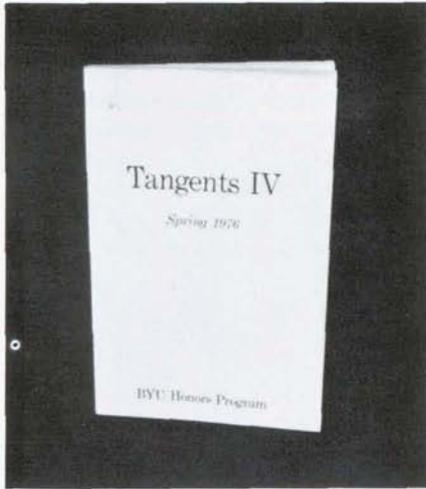
still have the same potential divisions in the Church. Don't we all know fellow-Mormons who sincerely believe they are serving God as they urge formation of Brown-shirt-like vigilante groups, or store weapons to guard their year's supply, or militate against any number of perceived domestic enemies? Circumstances someday might again find Latter-day Saints, all equally following their conscience, on opposite sides of a fence that bristles with danger. Was Huebener a hero by fighting for truth, or a traitor to his country in wartime? Was the branch president a hero by saving his congregation and the Church in Germany by bending to the Nazi regime, or was he a traitor to the gospel by embracing a government that was an enemy to God?

How can we judge?

Perhaps we should judge as *Huebener* urges us to judge: that all men, following what they believe is right, are justified, and that God is the only just judge.

Huebener has closed, though we doubt we have seen the last production of it. Later productions may lack sensitive direction and acting, may lack the force this first version of it had. But *Huebener*, in this BYU production, despite its flaws, did what art is meant to do: it changed our life. We will remember Helmuth Huebener as clearly as if we had lived through his experiences ourselves, for we have felt the emotions that come with them.

We know more than a few artists who could die happy if they knew they had done that even once.



Tangents IV,
Robert Garrick, editor
(BYU Honors Program, Spring 1976)
Reviewed by Neal Kramer.

BYU has long been embroiled in a difficult battle to upgrade its level of scholarship. To the Honors Program in particular has fallen the task of helping bright, young, LDS students begin to realize the possibilities and responsibilities of good scholarship. Since getting undergraduate papers published is at best extremely difficult, the Honors Program instituted *Tangents*, a journal providing students with an open forum—an opportunity to publish their papers and to compare their work with the work of others. It now includes creative work as well.

This year's edition, *Tangents IV*, is typical of previous editions, with some exceptions and additions. Robert Garrick, this year's editor, expressed the need for a readable publication, something for the readers as well as the writers. *Tangents IV* is a definite move in this direction; however, in some cases readability has been achieved

at the expense of solid scholarship. Two of the best papers, Ralph Hancock's "The Summary of '42, or Alma's Reply to Ivan," and John Zackrison's "Toward a Reformulation of the Demand for Medical Care," are hardly "readable" in the sense of today's popular journals and magazines.

Both Hancock and Zackrison demonstrate better-than-adequate ability to handle the idiom of their particular disciplines. It is sadly true that the areas of philosophy and economics require the use of specialized language and that papers in these areas will not be accessible to the general reading public (even at a major private university).

The same is true of the poetry in this issue. Stanley Absher is a gifted poet and it is most appropriate that his work is included in a journal which purports to represent some of BYU's best scholarship, even though it may not appeal generally to the student body. On the other hand, Stephen Miller's paper, "Writing in Style," is the most readable of all the selections (as it ought to be, considering its subject). However, it is not a very scholarly effort; it merely reports research without reaching any new or significant conclusions. It is stimulating and its content is of special importance to honors students generally, but it is hardly the quality of either Hancock's or Zackrison's work.

Other papers were condensed or cut to fit the journal and were made much less readable and coherent in the process. Both Bruce Porter's "The Middle Classes and the Rise of Nazism" and Steven Smith's "Movement Within A Movement: The Progress of Progressivism"

appear much less scholarly and ordered in the journal than they were when submitted. It may be argued that prohibitive length made publication of the entire papers impossible, but the disservice done both authors can scarcely be denied.

The impression may have been given that *Tangents IV* is a low-quality publication. It has some problems, but it compares quite favorably with most BYU publications. Mr. Garrick is to be commended for having put together the various papers as well as he has. The variety of material in the magazine and his goal of readability overlap rather than coincide. Selections such as "The Merchant of Venison" by Karen Bishop are delightfully readable, if not exactly works of scholarly superiority. Nicholas Bourbaki, Jr.'s, scholarly sounding "Tell Al-laquimi Fragment A: Translation and Textual Notes" will have the freshmen buzzing for some time. Parody has its place and it is most pleasant to note that the Honors Program has the ability to laugh at itself.

No BYU publication can be complete without something dealing with the LDS way of life, or papers from religion classes. *Tangents IV* fills in with papers by Anthony Hutchinson, "LDS Scripture Study—Some Notes," and Nancy Ann Maas, "The Wilderness," which complement Hancock's paper on Alma and agency. Both represent the kind of questions honest LDS students ask of the gospel and of their roles in the Church.

Tangents IV is a good example of what BYU can produce. If one believes the introduction, there is a lot more where this came from. There is high quality work being

done by undergraduates which compares quite favorably with other publications such as *Perspectives* and *Wye Magazine*. There is always room for improvement in such endeavors and Garrick's attempt to change the *Tangents* format and broaden its appeal speaks highly both of him and the *Honors Program*. It demonstrates most effectively the Honors Program's desire to maintain high standards as well as to serve more than a "university elite."