

Brief Notices

Catching the Vision: Working Together to Create a Millennial Ward, by William G. Dyer (Bookcraft, 1993)

Writing from his experiences as a husband, father, bishop, high councilor, general Sunday School board member, and stake president, the author adds his expertise as a professional sociologist to this serious look at what it would take to prepare the Saints, their families, and their wards for millennial living.

Dyer asks readers to consider the questions "Can the Millennium begin if the Saints are not prepared to live a millennial law?" (x) and "What will our own wards and stakes look like and how will they function if we are seriously dealing with the question of becoming a prepared people?" (xi).

He then presents a model through the fictional Bishop George Pratt and his Plainsville Second Ward. The bishop and the members of his ward may not exist in reality, but what happens to them transpires in almost every ward and branch in the Church. The fresh approaches to problems and the discovery of solutions to common challenges are stimulating, insightful, and even touching.

Dyer begins with a newly called bishop's development as he attains a vision of his calling and deepens his personal commitment and with

his efforts to enlist the support of his wife and family, his counselors and ward leaders, and eventually the members of his ward. Each chapter presents a principle such as developing stewardship, managing diversity, dealing with repentance and forgiveness, managing interpersonal conflicts, controlling competition, or meeting adversity. These principles are then taught through realistic and thoughtful narratives, which reflect the kinds of experiences nearly all members face sooner or later in their wards. A final discussion follows each narrative, summarizing and analyzing the experiences of the fictional ward members and providing practical conclusions.

Catching the Vision has many workable ideas for the perfecting of the Saints through callings afforded in wards striving to be a Zion community. It is enjoyable reading and well worth the investment of a few hours.

—Kathryn C. Gardner

Historical Dictionary of Mormonism, by Davis Bitton (Scarecrow Press, 1994)

While one of the greatest strengths of Mormonism is its missionary program, many public libraries lack objective and concise information for the curious

investigator concerning the Church. All too frequently the only offerings are anti-Mormon in tone and content—some of them subtly so—and are therefore very confusing for a seeker looking for a balanced view of a new religion. This information gap is exactly what the *Historical Dictionary of Mormonism* fills best. Its small size is much less intimidating than the four-volume *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), and its price is more affordable for public libraries.

Davis Bitton has done a great service by providing an introduction to the history of the Church and to its leaders and activities throughout the world. An initial perusal of the volume may indicate that the articles are similar to those in the *Encyclopedia*. However, Bitton presents the information from a fresh perspective, consistent with his lifelong ability to communicate clearly and concisely, whatever the topic. His explanation of the Mountain Meadows Massacre, the United Order, and the Utah period of the Church are the finest summaries I've seen anywhere, and the articles on feminism and the roles of women exemplify Bitton's clear understanding of current issues in the Church.

A chronology precedes the dictionary listings, 40 percent of which are short biographies of leaders and prominent members of the Church. Immediately following the main body of the book is a further hallmark of Bitton's exacting scholarship—an excellent bibliography, representing his years of research in Church history. The

volume closes with three appendices: a chronological listing of Church presidents, another of completed temples, and an interesting selection of "famous quotes" ranging from Joseph Smith to Chieko Okazaki.

Any weaknesses in the volume are minor, such as the choice of a few photographs that are too dark to be satisfactory. Without reservation I recommend the *Historical Dictionary of Mormonism* to members of the Church and encourage them, in the interest of missionary work and providing correct information for investigators, to recommend or donate Bitton's book to their local libraries.

—Gary Gillum

The Radiant Life, by Truman R. Madsen (Bookcraft, 1994)

Madsen, a master teacher, seeks here to lead Saints to a fuller spiritual life, to stir in them a new attitude about their thoughts and actions. This work is similar in style to his book *The Highest in Us* (Bookcraft, 1978)—both are intended for general readership and are designed to uplift and inspire.

Highly readable, the book contains a potent mixture of theory, anecdotes, and solid doctrine based on scripture. A chapter on the Sabbath draws heavily from Madsen's knowledge of Jewish tradition and from his time spent in the Holy Land. His discussion on forgiveness will prove to be genuinely helpful for those seeking forgiveness as well as those seeking to forgive.