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Reviewed by Mauro Properzi

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REVIEW – THE DEVELOPMENT OF LDS TEMPLE WORSHIP

Reviewed by Mauro Properzi

Devery S. Anderson, ed. *The Development of LDS Temple Worship, 1846–2000: A Documentary History*. Salt Lake City: Signature Press, 2011. Hardback: \$49.95

The Development of LDS Temple Worship (DLTW) is the third volume in a remarkable documentary history that focuses on Mormon temple practices from the year 1842 through the end of the last century. The first two volumes, also edited by Devery Anderson with the assistance of Gary J. Bergera, are more narrow in temporal focus as they deal with *Joseph Smith’s Quorum of the Anointed: 1842–1845* and with *The Nauvoo Endowment Companies: 1845–1846* respectively. Conversely, DLTW spans over 150 years of Mormon policies, questions, adjustments, and explanations, which are related to temple admittance, ordinances, clothing, construction, functioning, etc. The wealth of information it contains, collected in almost 500 pages of text, and the focus on primary sources as opposed to their interpretation, combines to create a reference volume which is likely to be widely used and studied for many years to come.

Yet, this is not a book for scholars only, whether historians, theologians, or Mormon Studies analysts; Latter-day Saints from most walks of life will find its content accessible, enlightening, and highly engaging. Indeed, any initial concern that Church members may experience in approaching this book, given the sensitive and sacred nature of the topic, should soon be resolved through the recognition that the editor’s intention is not to create an expose of LDS temple worship. For example, readers will find no description of signs and tokens, or of specific wording in ordinances like initiatories and sealings, which “temple-endowed” Mormons would not discuss publicly. At the same time, the editor does not shy away from including excerpts from personal diaries and correspondence of individuals who have since passed on, omitting full names when the nature of the issue is considered to be sensitive. In other words, Anderson has tackled the difficult task of navigating the fuzzy realm of the “permissible” in Mormon discussions of temples. Although it is inevitable that both sceptics and believers will take issue on his specific setting of boundaries I believe that he has

largely succeeded by showing both courage and sensitivity in espousing a reasonable middle ground which will not alienate either dispassionate scholars or faithful Latter-day Saints.

As a documentary history DLTW does not present a specific argument nor does it suggest an interpretative framework within which to place the sources it makes use of. It is descriptive rather than prescriptive and it is a collection of voices rather than a single mind at work. Still, where there is no thesis to evaluate there is an internal organization to assess. Furthermore, although it employs a variety of sources DLTW brings them together into a coherent whole, thus painting one distinguishable picture of Mormonism's approach to the temple and its practices. After all, the editor frequently cites "official" LDS sources, including "Messages of the First Presidency," the "History of the Church," the "Church Handbook of Instruction" as well as excerpts from the diaries of the highest Church authorities, namely Presidents Brigham Young, Wilford Woodruff, Heber J. Grant, and David O. McKay, to name only a few. In short, if there is any overarching conclusion about 'the' Mormon view and experience of temples it is likely to be drawn from these very sources. In the very least, the picture that emerges from DLTW suggests some theological implications which are worth a thoughtful analysis.

The book's organization is quite straightforward and strictly chronological. Eight chapters comprise the bulk of the text, each covering about two decades of documentary history with the exception of the first (1846-1880) and the sixth and seventh chapters, which narrow their focus to a single decade each. Within each chapter the organization is also strictly chronological so that sources are listed according to the date associated with their production or publication. Footnotes with brief biographical information as well as useful clarifications by the editor assist the reader in perusing the wealth of transcribed documents. A twenty-two-page photograph section is included between the third and fourth chapters of the volume and a list of abbreviations of the most frequently cited sources as well as twelve pages of short biographies of principal characters precede the introduction to the book. A detailed index amounting to seventeen pages completes the collection.

Clearly, the editor has attempted to make the volume as reader friendly as possible. Since reading documentary history can feel like a tedious endeavour at times this is indeed a welcomed characteristic of

the book. Yet, I believe Anderson could have succeeded even further by internally organizing each chapter in some form of thematic fashion rather than strictly chronologically. Indeed, since some cited sources appear as either completely identical or very similar in content the strict chronological order employed sometimes separates the same quotations by a few pages. The reader is then led to wonder whether he/she has already read that particular passage. Instead, a thematic organization could facilitate the reading experience by always placing very similar or identical transcriptions right next to each other. Moreover, subsequent reference searches would also benefit by subcategorized citations about garments, temple recommends, sealing questions, second anointing, etc. within the specific chapter in which they appear. The few citations, which do not fit a clear thematic category, could be placed into a final “miscellaneous” section within each chapter. This is the only criticism I have for the organization of the volume, which is otherwise impeccable.

The introduction is the most important section of the book for the hurried reader because the editor provides a fine summary of the several hundred pages of documentary history that follow it. In these pages Anderson presents a well thought-out collection of ‘highlights’, which are organized both chronologically and thematically. As a result, the introduction reads like a fascinating and dynamic story and the editor ensures both clarity and coherence by focusing on some of the central issues that emerge from the documents. For example, he traces the development of temple garments, beginning with the time when markings were cut on the initiate’s underclothing through the years of distinction between “ceremonial” garments worn in the temple and “modified” garments for daily wearing. He also highlights the increasingly restricted exposure of church membership to the ordinance of second anointing as both numbers of initiates decreased and as the “recommending” responsibility for these ordinances was ultimately placed exclusively in the hands of the Quorum of the Twelve and of the First Presidency. Anderson further discusses modifications of policies relative to black members’ ability to participate in temple ordinances as well as addressing the recent move toward a more egalitarian approach toward women in allowing them to be endowed when a spouse is not a member of the LDS Church.

Yet, what the introduction can do in highlighting dynamism it cannot quite do in conveying the low speed of its actualization. In other words, to read the introduction is to fast-forward the real progression

of the development of LDS temple worship, which is as fraught with resistance to change and attrition as it is open to modifications and adjustments. This tension emerges clearly from the documentary history itself and it is a theologically significant reality to consider because I believe it to lie at the very root of Mormonism's nature. Armand Mauss called it the tension "between the angel and the beehive," or the strain between the eternally ideal and the pragmatic, whereas Terryl Givens wrote of it in terms of a paradox, namely of the drive to search vs. certainty. Whichever terms are used to describe it, it is clear that Mormonism, like most other religions, has had to navigate the dangerous waters of *change vis-à-vis* the calmer but often unsatisfactory seas of the status quo. As a religion that has continued to expand *with its temples* in different times, places, and cultures, DLTW provides several illustrations of these very tensions.

For example, the recent focus on the "spiritually" protective nature of the garments versus a nineteenth century view about their power to shield from physical evil points toward greater resonance with Western cultural sensibilities and a move away from the "magical" milieu of early Mormonism. On the other hand, the fact that the full-length ceremonial garment remained in use in LDS temples for decades after the approval of the modified style indicates that any change in this department required a time of adaptation and transition. This is only one of several examples where it is apparent that Mormon authorities have attempted to balance the need for historical modifications with the security that comes from the rigidly unchanging. The preferred direction of explanation for any modification has generally involved the reduction of doctrine to core eternal principles while maintaining the symbolic expressions of those same principles as changeable. Still, DLTW points to the fact that most innovations have been accompanied by some difficulties thus underlining the fact that Latter-day Saints as a whole prefer to lean on the side of certainty as opposed to the searching end of the spectrum, to use Givens' terminology.

It is not surprising that temples should be places where Mormons expect to experience an unchanging reality. Indeed, they are believed to symbolize the eternal realm like no other places can on this planet. Yet, to return to Mauss' analogy, focusing on both the present human condition with one's eyes firmly looking upward to the eternities to come has involved several questions of "translation." For example, given the LDS belief in the eternal bond of a "sealed" family

union, how does one transpose that union to the hereafter when there have been second or third marriages, children from different spouses, excommunications, etc.? DLTW shows that Mormon authorities have gone at great length in addressing these questions but it also highlights that the same authorities recognize that some situations do not presently have an answer and that individuals must trust the love and mercy of an omnipotent God to make it all work out in the end. In other words, to wax theological for a moment, there cannot be certainty in all the details, but only in the overarching plan and in the plan's creator.

Furthermore, there is probably no better illustration of compromise between the ideal and the pragmatic than the early twentieth-century requirement to abide by the Word of Wisdom in order to qualify for a temple recommend. The requirement itself was accompanied by a call for leniency toward older individuals who had acquired habits involving tobacco and other prohibited substances. Similarly, from a socio-anthropological perspective much could be written about second anointings. Could their progressive "removal" from the general membership run parallel to shifting dynamics of authority, which have consolidated the separation between the hierarchy at headquarters and a worldwide membership? These and many others are the questions that could be explored in and through DLTW. For this and other reasons previously highlighted this is a book that will continue to be discussed, quoted, and referenced for the foreseeable future. Its malleability and theological potential, which is certainly characteristic of documentary histories, is even more pronounced by the fact that DLTW presently stands alone as a publication of its kind. In short, the book itself is the ultimate illustration of the sought for, somewhat resisted, and certainly slow in coming innovation, clarification, or modification related to the temple which its pages so aptly describe in many of its finer aspects throughout the history of the LDS Church.

Dr Mauro Properzi
Brigham Young University
mauro_properzi@byu.edu