selves and in the process of their being recorded. His activity is thus one of the effects to be reckoned with in interpreting the events and in understanding the texts that record them.

2. Despite divine inspiration, the biblical text is not uninfluenced by human language and not immune to negative influences from its human environment, and there is no guarantee that the revelations given to ancient prophets have been perfectly preserved (cf. 1 Ne. 13:20–27). Thus, critical study of the Bible is warranted to help allow for, and suggest corrections of, human errors of formulation, transmission, translation, and interpretation of the ancient records.

3. Such critical scholarship, in addition to recognizing the divine origins of the Bible, must in its conclusions take account of the teachings of the BOOK OF MORMON and the other revelations to modern prophets included in the DOCTRINE AND COVENANTS and the PEARL OF GREAT PRICE, since for Latter-day Saints such sources not only have priority over revelations recorded in antiquity (cf. D&C 5:10) but also aid in interpreting the biblical text.

Latter-day Saints insist on objective hermeneutics, that is, they maintain that the biblical text has a specific, objective meaning and that the intent of the original author is both important and largely recoverable. For this reason, LDS scholars, like other conservatives, have tended toward the more objective tools of Bible scholarship, such as linguistics, history, and archaeology—recognizing that these tools themselves have to be evaluated critically—and have generally avoided the more subjective methods of literary criticism.

The most influential LDS Bible commentators include James E. Talmage, Bruce R. McConkie, Sidney B. Sperry, and Hugh W. Nibley, though Talmage’s work was completed prior to many important discoveries, and McConkie’s work is concerned less with critical exegesis than with understanding the New Testament within the overall body of LDS doctrine.

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STEPHEN E. ROBINSON

BIOGRAPHY AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY

From the earliest decades members of the Church have adhered to the Puritan tradition of writing spiritual autobiographies, often for reasons similar to those of their forebears, namely, to express their faith and to justify their actions in the light of that faith. New models and counsel also influenced the Latter-day Saints in this regard: the Book of Mormon, one of the first documents of the Church, begins autobiographically—“I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents . . .” (1 Ne. 1:1)—and it contains long sections of both biography and autobiography. A version of Joseph Smith’s autobiography is canonized in the PEARL OF GREAT PRICE (see JOSEPH SMITH—HISTORY), and the Doctrine and Covenants injunction that “a record [be] kept among you” (D&C 21:1) has been interpreted in practice to apply to Latter-day Saints individually as well as institutionally.

In 1977 the annotated Guide to Mormon Diaries and Autobiographies listed nearly 3,000 such documents published or available in various libraries and archives. About half are retrospective autobiographies, as distinguished from journals of daily entries. As a result of the general LDS interest in FAMILY HISTORY, encouraged especially by President Spencer W. Kimball, that number multiplied in the 1980s. In addition, countless personal accounts and family histories remain in family possession throughout the Church.

The variety of Mormon autobiographies is vast, ranging “from conscious virtuosity to self-conscious artifice, from unconscious brilliance to dull-minded monotony” (Lambert, p. 69). In the classic Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt (1874), Pratt artistically portrays himself variously as mystic, recluse, proselyte, jokester, preacher, acolyte, and apostle, each presented in form and language suited to the posture. In contrast, the equally well-known A Mormon Mother: An Autobiography, by Annie Clark Tanner, is less artful but more introspective, revealing a complexity of unresolved questions in its author. Mary Goble Pay’s short autobiography (in Cracroft and Lambert, pp. 145–53) well represents the life-writing
of a comparatively unlettered Latter-day Saint. In stark simplicity and with convincing sincerity, it tells her story as if to a child.

Biography is likewise a frequent LDS literary form (see literature, Mormon Writers of: Personal Essays). Drawing on the literary tradition of the previous three centuries, early LDS biographers took as models the “life and times” forms, depicting the public achievements of Church leaders. Usually the works reflected the double value placed on Latter-day Saint individuality and community by merging the life of the individual with the history of the movement. Often didactic, these works were defensive in tone, tending to conceal as much as they revealed about the character and experience of the subject. Sensitive facts were either omitted or passed over lightly: a man’s excommunication, his plural wives, an altercation with a fellow churchman, or an unsuccessful venture. Sometimes, of course, such facts were already known; in that case, the biographer’s role often became one of explaining them away.

A half-century after Lytton Strachey, the eminent Victorian biography writer, altered the fashion of biography by insisting on telling the whole truth about his subjects, Latter-day Saint writers began to include more in their accounts about the private lives of Church leaders. Marion G. Romney’s much-quoted directive, printed in the foreword of a jointly authored biography of J. Reuben Clark, Jr. (Fox, 1980; Quinn, 1983), states that “any biographer of President Clark must write the truth about him; to tell more or less than the truth would violate a governing principle of his life.” Romney, a counselor in the FIRST PRESIDENCY, advised the authors not to produce “a mere collection of uplifting experiences” or “a detailed defense of his beliefs.” He required of them “a biography of the man himself, as he was, written with the same kind of courage, honesty, and frankness that J. Reuben Clark himself would have shown,” including “his decisions and indecisions, sorrows and joys, regrets and aspirations, reverses and accomplishments” (Fox, p. xi). That statement, exemplified in the biography of Spencer W. Kimball (Kimball and Kimball, 1977), indicates a turn of tide in Mormon biography, wherein the bland, impeccably moral, and defensive biographies were replaced by studies reflecting flesh-and-blood reality.

Many have attempted to write the life of the Prophet Joseph Smith. His mother, Lucy Mack Smith, dictated the first serious study, Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet (1853), but it was as much her own autobiography as her son’s biography. On both counts, the book has held up as accurate source material, though not as a finished prose study. Subsequent Joseph Smith biographies by George Q. Cannon (1888), John Henry Evans (1933), Preston Niblcy (1944), Leon Harts horn (1970), and Francis M. Gibbons (1977), while appropriate to LDS audiences of the time, do not satisfy the recent taste for a complete embodiment of the subject.

In a more scholarly mode, though less than thorough or accurate in its use of sources, was Fawn M. Brodie’s No Man Knows My History (1945). Its appearance caused a furor among Latter-day Saints and issued a challenge to answering scholars, which contributed to historians paying increased attention to serious research in their writing of Church history. An alternative to Brodie is Donna Hill’s Joseph Smith, the First Mormon (1977), and her brother Marvin’s review “Secular or Sectarian History? A Critique of No Man Knows My History” (1974) in Church History.

None, however, has totally succeeded in vivifying Mormonism’s founder. Richard L. Bushman’s Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism comes close, but it deals only with the first years of the Prophet’s life. Nevertheless, it is a promising re-creation, striving to see people and events as the participants would have understood them. With the commencement of Dean J. Jessop’s publication of the Papers of Joseph Smith in 1989, it became possible for biographers to be even more rigorous and complete in their presentation of the full man in all his complexity.

With the growing interest in social history has come an increase in biographies of members of the Church other than General Authorities. People such as those covered in Leonard Arrington and DavisBitton’s Saints Without Halos: The Human Side of Mormon History and Donald Q. Cannon and David J. Whittaker’s Supporting Saints: Life Stories of Nineteenth-Century Mormons are being featured in separate biographical volumes. Juanita Brooks’s John D. Lee (rev. ed., 1972), for many years the exemplar of Mormon biography, and Leonard Arrington’s From Quaker to Latter-day Saint: Bishop Edwin D. Woolley (1976) demonstrate how universally interesting the drama of life can be when it is well written.

Latter-day Saint women have seldom been subjects of full-length biographies. The 1984 Newell-Avery study of Emma Hale Smith stands
alone as a full-length treatment of a woman leader, but biographies of Eliza R. Snow and Emmeline B. Wells are in progress. Of a lay Mormon woman, one biography of significance has been published, that of historian Juanita Brooks by Levi Peterson (1988).

A few autobiographical accounts of Latter-day Saint women are already available. Besides A Mormon Mother, there are the self-told lives of such people as Ellis R. Shipp, Mary Jane Mount Tanner, Sarah Studevant Leavitt, and Aurelia Spencer Rogers, though it must be recognized that few of these accounts were written for distribution beyond the author's family. Another nineteenth-century woman, Fanny Stenhouse, used the autobiographical mode to produce her Exposé of Polygamy in Utah (1872), later revised and widely published as Tell It All (1874).

Modern female novelists such as Virginia Soronson, author of Where Nothing Is Long Ago (1963), and Rodello Hunter, author of Daughter of Zion (1972), have published autobiographical material combined with some of the trappings of fiction. Several handwritten lives, such as that of Martha Cragun Cox, and others published to limited audiences, such as that of Louisa Barnes Pratt and Mary Ann Weston Maughan, remain largely untapped in obscure archives.


BIBLIOGRAPHY


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BIRTH

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches that every person experiences a series of "births." All were born as spirit children of God in a premortal life. Second, these individual spirit children received a mortal, physical body when