

that Roberts bring his work up to date and that the Church publish it for the centennial.

Published in handsome bindings with numerous illustrations, the work was impressive. But to the reader of today its importance lies beyond its format. Roberts was pointing the way to a new approach; he wanted Church history to avoid apology and indiscriminating defense of the faith. For example, he was skeptical of including any myths parading as history: "I find my own heart strengthened in the truth by getting rid of the untruth, the spectacular, the bizarre, as soon as I learn that it is based on worthless testimony" (Madsen, p. 363). He treated the difficulties of the Saints in Missouri objectively, assigning some elements of blame to both sides.

Roberts was willing to deal with sensitive topics. His analysis of the MOUNTAIN MEADOWS MASSACRE was fairly exacting. He was also willing to press his editors to get what he felt was fairness; he insisted on including Joseph Smith's KING FOLLETT DISCOURSE despite urgings to the contrary by some members. In some ways Roberts's *Comprehensive History* was an act of courage; certainly it was his magnum opus.

Though not trained as a historian, Roberts was well known as an orator and as a theologian. He read widely and was a vibrant politician, a noted missionary, and a popular Church leader. His theological writings continue to attract attention. All of this energy, even charisma, flows into his writing, producing rhapsodic prose that sometimes overshoots the mark. He wrote in the Romantic style, accepting Prescott and Parkman as his models.

The *Comprehensive History* is the high-water mark of studies produced before academic scholars undertook the writing of Church history after 1950. Roberts shows a faithfulness to documentary sources and rules of evidence. The six-volume set is a worthy monument to the Church's first century and still attracts serious attention.

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DOUGLAS D. ALDER

COMPUTER SYSTEMS

For many years The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints used mechanical punched-card systems for accounting and other administrative purposes. These were replaced by modern computers. In 1962 the Church's computer systems were expanded to help provide names for temple work. They also were applied to managing the large and rapidly expanding genealogical information base. Church computer resources now serve every level, from general Church administration to the individual member.

In Church TEMPLES, computer systems are used to record biographical information of individuals, living and dead, who have received temple ORDINANCES. Family history computer systems maintain growing catalogs of worldwide genealogical records, a lineage-linked ANCESTRAL FILE, and an index of completed ordinances and other lists to help interested persons pursue family history work.

Computers also aid in the administration of various Church programs, including the international MISSIONARY program, where computers are used to track all missionaries and route individual requests for missionary visits. FINANCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS are recorded on computers by clerks at the WARD level, making possible regular reports to contributors and to the Church. All central budgeting and financial transactions are managed by computer. The Church maintains detailed membership records which are created on computers in the wards and are regularly updated and forwarded to central computers at Church headquarters or region/area offices (*see* RECORD KEEPING).

The Church uses computers to prepare, print, and distribute a wide range of materials through its DISTRIBUTION CENTERS in various parts of the world. SCRIPTURES, lesson manuals, handbooks, forms, and Church MAGAZINES are prepared with the use of computers. These materials are printed in as many as eighty-one languages, and computers are used extensively in the translation process.

PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS uses computers to monitor public response to Church media. Computer systems also manage information in areas such as Church welfare, historical records, physical facilities, magazine subscriptions, and purchasing. The SEMINARIES and INSTITUTES track potential and enrolled students throughout the world by computer.

Large numbers of Latter-day Saints use personal computers in their homes to facilitate religious activities. Many use disk versions of the scriptures to enhance individual scripture research and study. Personal genealogical research has moved to a personal computer format that will allow exchanges of information with the large genealogical data bases in Salt Lake City.

DARWIN A. JOHN

CONDESCENSION OF GOD

The Book of Mormon prophet Nephi₁ (c. 600 B.C.) was asked by an angel, "Knowest thou the condescension of God?" (1 Ne. 11:16). Nephi was then shown in a vision a virgin who was to become "the mother of the Son of God, after the manner of the flesh" (verse 18). He next beheld the virgin with a child whom the angel identified as "the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father" (11:21). Then Nephi understood that the condescension of God is the ultimate manifestation of God's love through Jesus Christ (11:20–22). Such condescension denotes, first, the love of GOD THE FATHER, who deigned to sire a son, born of a mortal woman, and then allow this Son to suffer temptations and pain (Mosiah 3:5–7), "be judged of the world," and be "slain for the sins of the world" (1 Ne. 11:32–33). Second, it signifies the love and willingness of God the Son (Jesus Christ) to die for mankind.

The word "condescension" implies "voluntary descent," "submission," and "performing acts which strict justice does not require." This definition is particularly applicable to Jesus in the portrayal of him by prophets who lived before his birth and who affirmed: "God himself shall come down" to make an atonement (Mosiah 15:1); "the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, yieldeth himself . . . into the hands of wicked men" (1 Ne. 19:10); "the great Creator . . . suffereth himself to become subject unto man in the flesh" (2 Ne. 9:5); and "he offereth himself a sacrifice for sin" (2 Ne. 2:7). "The Lord Omnipotent," said King Benjamin, "shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay" (Mosiah 3:5).

In fulfillment of these prophecies, Jesus descended from the realms of glory for the purposes of experiencing mortal infirmities that he might

have mercy and compassion according to the flesh and of taking upon himself the sins, transgressions, pains, and sicknesses of men in order to satisfy the demands of justice and gain victory over death, thereby redeeming his people (Mosiah 15:8–9; Alma 7:11–13). Christ's selfless sacrifice merits profound gratitude and endearing love from all who are recipients of his supernal offering.

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BYRON R. MERRILL

CONFERENCE REPORTS

Since 1899, the Church has published official reports of its annual (April) and semiannual (October) General Conferences, commonly called *Conference Reports*. These reports are distributed in booklet form only to Church leaders (bishops and higher), Church employees, and libraries, but because other members of the Church wanted to study the conference addresses, the IMPROVEMENT ERA began in 1942 to devote two issues a year to conference reports. The *Ensign* has followed that pattern since replacing the *Era* in 1971. Those issues have made reports of conference addresses available to the world by subscription or single issue bookstore or newsstand purchase. The talks as printed in the Conference Report volumes (see below) and in the Church magazines have mostly been identical. Those publications are significant resources for the study of the theology, progress, and development of the Church.

When the Church first began holding conferences, many attending the meetings recorded in their private journals what was said and done. These personal records now constitute the primary sources available on the various conference addresses in the early years because no official Church publication printed much more than a list of conference events. It appears that the first full report of any Church conference address was published in the *Deseret News* in 1850, even though several partial reports were published in *Times and Seasons* from November 1839 to February 1846, in Nauvoo. The *Deseret News* was able to print word-for-word transcriptions because a young reporter, George D. Watt, had learned