



Elder Statesman: A Biography of J. Reuben Clark

By D. Michael Quinn

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J. Reuben Clark was all of these prior to his call to the LDS First Presidency. As a counselor to three church presidents—Heber J. Grant, George Albert Smith, and David O. McKay—he served longer than any other member of this high church council.

Already controversial before he assumed his church duties, his blunt, independent style created even more ripples at LDS headquarters. Still, his impact, intellectually and administratively, was immense. His most important legacy may well be the professionalization of church government; where apostles previously met and decided issues based mostly on their collective years of experience, Clark drew from his secular training to introduce outside research, position papers, and extended discussion, all of which, for better or for worse, added to the administrative bureaucracy.

In this impressive study of the “elder statesman,” as reporters labeled Clark, D. Michael Quinn considers what it meant for a Latter-day Saint to attain such national and international stature, although Quinn never loses sight of Reuben’s very human qualities either. This fresh, intimate approach presents Clark on his own terms and draws readers into Clark’s world in the context of the larger society of his time and place.

From the dust jacket:

Life is never quite what is portrayed in inspirational books about famous people’s experiences. One aspect that is rarely told about President Clark’s life is his near-embrace of atheism in the 1920s. This period of his intellectual development is interesting and informative and ultimately as inspirational as Clark’s conclusion that belief may be irrational but is essential. If nothing else, one admires the future church leader’s rigor and honesty in exploring the fringes of faith. One also admires his biographer for the even-handed, frank treatment of the subject. Clark’s commitment to a successful career similarly came at a sacrifice in other areas of his life. He chose work over family whenever the option presented itself.

Two issues that stand at the forefront of Clark’s headstrong manner are his views

on pacifism and race. Both were significant to his overall world view and have much to say about the complexity of the issues and about the fallibility of human judgment.

For most of his life, Clark was a military enthusiast. He served as the assistant Judge Advocate General during World War I and earned the Distinguished Service Medal. But he changed his mind and thereafter became known as fiercely anti-war. When the United States bombed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Clark accused his nation of barbarism and said that it had forfeited its right ever again to speak with moral authority in the world. That he also distrusted American propaganda and was sympathetic to National Socialism may come as a surprise to some readers.

Similarly, readers may shudder to learn of Clark's views on race. He was partly responsible for the LDS Hospital's segregation of the blood of "whites" and "Negroes," his logic being that since anyone with as little as "one drop" of African blood was ineligible for LDS priesthood ordination, a transfusion from a black donor to a white recipient would render the latter incapable of exercising priesthood authority. Such a racist view—in part a reflection of the time—is tempered by the disclosure that Clark was one of the first among the church leadership to advocate steps toward giving blacks the priesthood.

Other ideological quandaries and soul-searching on Clark's part could be enumerated, but suffice it to say that anyone who picks up this volume will live Reuben's life with him. One may not ultimately understand why Clark said or did what he did in every instance, but there is a palpable sense of a life lived—with all the quirks and ironies that real lives are made of. *Elder Statesman* speaks to larger issues, but the spotlight remains on the man himself; readers are left to draw their own conclusions about whether Clark was a hero or villain in any given circumstance.

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Editorial Review

From the Publisher

U.S. State Department Solicitor, Undersecretary of State, and Ambassador to Mexico--J. Reuben Clark was all of these prior to his call to the LDS First Presidency. As a counselor to three church presidents--Heber J. Grant, George Albert Smith, and David O. McKay--he served longer than any other member of this highest church council.

Already controversial before he assumed his church duties, his blunt, independent style created even more ripples at LDS headquarters. Still, his impact, intellectually and administratively, was immense. His most important legacy was the professionalization of church government. Where apostles and presidents previously met and decided issues based mostly on their collective years of experience, Clark drew from his secular training to introduce outside research, position papers, and extended discussion, all of which (for better or worse) added to the church's bureaucracy.

"Reube," or "Ruby," as he was known, was born in Grantsville, Utah, in 1871. By eighteen, having exhausted what opportunities there were for him there, he moved to Salt Lake City and began his academic career. He graduated from the University of Utah as his class's valedictorian, and his intellectual gifts carried him from there through Columbia Law School and on to the State Department.

In this impressive study of the "elder statesman," as reporters often labeled him, D. Michael Quinn considers what it meant for a Latter-day Saint to attain such national and international stature, while never losing sight of Reuben's very human qualities either. This fresh, intimate approach presents Reuben on his own terms, drawing readers into Reuben's world in the context of the larger society of his time and place.

About the Author

D. Michael Quinn (Ph.D., history, Yale University) is an Affiliated Scholar at the University of Southern California's Center for Feminist Research. He has been a full-time researcher and writer, a professor of history at Brigham Young University, and a visiting professor of history (2002-03) at Yale. His accolades include Best Book awards from the American Historical Association and the Mormon History Association.

His major works include *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View*, *Elder Statesman: A Biography of J. Reuben Clark*, the two-volume *Mormon Hierarchy* series (*Origins of Power*, *Extensions of Power*), and *Same-Sex Dynamics among Nineteenth-Century Americans: A Mormon Example*. He is the editor of *The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past* and a contributor to *American National Biography*; *Encyclopedia of New York State*; *Fundamentalisms and Society: Reclaiming the Sciences, the Family, and Education*; the *New Encyclopedia of the American West*; *Under an Open Sky: Rethinking America's Western Past*; and others.

He has also received honors—fellowships and grants—from the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Council of Learned Societies, the Henry E. Huntington Library, Indiana-Purdue University, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. In addition, he has been a keynote speaker at the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture, the Chicago Humanities Symposium, Claremont Graduate University, University of Paris (France), Washington State Historical Society, and elsewhere, and a consultant for television documentaries carried by the Arts and Entertainment Channel, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the History Channel, and the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS).

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From reader reviews:

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Sabra Fitzgerald:

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Dorothy Pierce:

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