

Among the Mormons

A Survey of Current Literature

Edited by Ralph W. Hansen

With all thy getting get understanding.

Proverbs 4:7

*When Fate destines one to ruin,
it begins by blinding the eyes
of his understanding.*

James Fraser

Are Mormons Christians? The official name of the Church includes the words "Jesus Christ" within it, and we consider Him our Savior. Our scriptures include the Bible, and, as Anthony Hoekema suggests, "Many people have the impression that the Mormon teachings are not basically different from those of historic Christianity." Yet Dr. Hoekema has decided that "The Christ of Mormonism is not the Christ of Scripture." The good doctor came to this conclusion by asking — and himself answering — the following ten questions:

1. Is the Bible the final source of authority for Mormonism?
2. Does Mormonism teach the spirituality of God?
3. Does Mormonism believe in one God?
4. Does Mormonism teach that men may become gods?
5. Does Mormonism accept the fall of man?
6. Does Mormonism teach equal opportunity for all races?
7. Does Mormonism teach the unique incarnation of Christ?
8. Does Mormonism teach the vicarious atonement of Christ?
9. Does Mormonism teach the biblical view of the way of salvation?
10. Does Mormonism teach that all men will be saved?

"On each of these ten questions the teaching of the Mormon church," says Dr. Hoekema, "is contrary to Scripture. Although there is much in Mormonism that we may admire — the tremendous welfare program, the ability to get members involved in the work of the church, the willingness to sacri-

fice — we cannot classify Mormon teachings with those of historic Christianity. The Christ of Mormonism is not the Christ of Scripture."

Regardless of the degree of Christianity others may thus assign to Mormonism, there is a general agreement on the role Mormons have played and are playing in American history. In his thoughtful article "The Mormons as a Theme in Western Historical Writing," Rodman W. Paul explores this role and the oft-expressed complaint that courses in western history devote too much attention to "cowboys and Indians." Likewise, historical writing about the West, according to Paul, "deals only with surface appearances" and is limited to narrative and simple description of isolated dramatic episodes rather than having as its purpose "to seek to achieve by analysis and interpretation fundamental explanations" and "meaningful patterns."

Dr. Paul's answer to this problem is "to take up, one by one, some of the major topics in western history and subject them to a reflective examination." Because of Mormonism's "obvious importance, its provocative character, and the difficulty inherent in any serious study of it," Mormonism is a prime candidate for reflective examination. Notwithstanding the influence of Mormonism in the Rocky Mountain West and elsewhere before the western exodus, it has taken a long time to accumulate the respectable body of first-rate scholarly writing about the Mormons necessary for analysis and interpretation. According to Dr. Paul, some of this neglect can be attributed to the failure of scholars "to recognize that Mormonism was no longer seriously controversial, in a political sense, and thus was a fit subject for research."

Another deterrent to adequate Mormon historiography is the inability of interested scholars to obtain access to the Church Archives, for reasons which are familiar to Mormon historians. Dr. Paul suggests these reasons are, if not invalid, at best more deleterious to church history than protective. Nevertheless, Dr. Paul agrees with other critics who lay the blame for shortcomings in the area of Mormon history on "too much emotion, too much description and too little interpretation," rather than on failure to obtain access to the archives. The same criticism is made of western historical writing generally.

The failure of the historian to explore Mormon history has not resulted in a complete knowledge gap, for, as Dr. Paul points out, "social scientists have rushed in where historians have only hesitantly trod." Dr. Paul explores some of the ideas of the social scientists and the contributions they have made to an understanding of Mormon society. He concludes his exposition on a somber note by agreeing with Wallace Turner (*The Mormon Establishment*) that present-day Mormon society is incapable of adjusting to the changes of modern life.

In view of Dr. Paul's statement regarding access to the Church Archives and similar comments previously made in *Dialogue*, an article, "The Church Historian's Office," in the October issue of *The Improvement Era* is of more than passing interest. Without comment, herewith are selected excerpts from that article:

Q. Is the CHO designed to be used by members of the Church?

A. Our first responsibility is to obtain Church records so that they

can be preserved. Our second responsibility is to make the records available for use and to service the needs of members of the Church.

- Q. Are nonmembers free to use the facilities of the CHO?
- A. Yes. We make no distinction between members and nonmembers as far as the use of the library-archives is concerned.
- Q. How do you respond to the image of suppression of materials that in the past has been identified with research at CHO?
- A. Certainly some researchers have been displeased because we have not made some of the records as freely available as they would like. But many archives have problems in these areas. For example, certain original documents have to be restricted in usage because of their inherent value, age, or condition.

Some of these original records have been microfilmed and can be seen on microfilm, but others have not yet been microfilmed. So far we have done little microfilming of original documents and letters, and comparatively few diaries. As time and budget allow, we will microfilm many of these in order that researchers may read them. We have an additional problem with journals. Years ago, journals were filed with the understanding with the donors that they would be made available only to descendants of the writer. We try to avoid such agreements now, but are bound by past agreements. However, we hope that in time families will release many of the journals for research. Also, we have a ruling that those persons who are writing or who have written to discredit the Church are denied access to our facilities.

- Q. Are there types of records that are not available to any researcher?
- A. Yes — minutes of stake presidency, high council, and bishopric meetings, high council trials, or bishops' trials. These and similar records involve personal status of individuals that we feel researchers have no right to read. Our view is shared by others, even in business and industry. Many companies do not open their confidential board of director minutes to researchers. One can understand the reasons for such a policy.
- Q. How extensively should CHO records be used?
- A. A record is of no use if it isn't used. Historical records are beneficial to all people, and the doctrinal records are a blessing to all mankind.

As in previous issues "Among the Mormons" is primarily concerned with as complete a listing as possible of the current literature on the subjects "Mormons and Mormonism." The listing is divided into three categories, i.e., books, theses and dissertations, and periodicals, and reported in successive issues of *Dialogue*. The following bibliography is concerned with periodical articles that appeared in print primarily during the twelve months preceding November, 1968.

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