

## HOW TO READ A MORMON SCHOLAR

Samuel W. Taylor

*Mr. Taylor, a professional writer living in Redwood City, California, author of FAMILY KINGDOM and numerous other books and articles on Mormon topics, has a book being published soon on the uranium boom in Mormon country and another on Nauvoo which will be out next year; he has advised us before on how to be a Mormon scholar and how to write for the Mormon market.*

Learning how to read the works of Mormon scholars takes a bit of doing, but the rewards are well worth the effort for those who get the hang of it. You must not suppose that you simply can read them for what they say, for this has never been true in any period of Mormon history. From earliest times we have said one thing and meant another. The history of plural marriage provides a prime example of double-talk, where absolutely everything said about it actually meant the opposite of what the words apparently stated. The people of that earlier day took enormous pride in knowing the true coin from the counterfeit, and inasmuch as many of our scholars still practice double-talk, I hereby append the Taylor System for reading them, the result of exhaustive research over many years. You, too, can know the true coin. But you'll have to dig for it.

To begin with, you must learn which scholars to accept, which ones must be read with care and in special ways, and which must be rejected out of hand. As a rough guide, watch the manner in which the scholar refers to Joseph Smith.

The *either/or* scholar will almost invariably refer to the founder of the Church as (capital) The (capital) Prophet (no comma) Joseph Smith. He can be recognized by resounding alternatives: Either The Prophet Joseph Smith was the greatest Prophet of all time, or he was the greatest fake in history. Either you must accept the First Vision exactly as now told (ignoring other versions), or you must reject Mormonism *in toto*. Either every word of the Book of Mormon was exactly dictated by God, and no word was ever changed, or the book must be rejected as completely false (and never mind the fact that through revelation we are told that it was translated by inspiration, not word-by-word, and that there have been some 2,000 changes). Either The Prophet Joseph Smith acted as a prophet 100% of every moment of every day (despite his own denial of it), or he was 100% phony. Either he practiced the Word of Wisdom exactly as interpreted today, or he was a complete hypocrite. And so on, and on, and on; the *either/or* defender of the faith takes the position that the entire gospel rests upon each and every smallest detail of the simplified, streamlined, homogenized, censored, edited and prettified version of the Sunday School lesson or the missionary tract. Thus to question any slightest item of this uninspired version is to attack the whole, and the *either/or* scholar must defend this precarious position at all costs. While you may be amused at his astounding gymnastics of logic as he quibbles, shifts ground, seizes upon irrelevancies and beclouds the issue

with wonderful nonsense, you must consider him as a writer of fiction and not as a scholar at all. What he writes can be judged only upon its entertainment value; factually, it is completely worthless.

You must understand that the aim of the *either/or* scholar is not to tell the truth, but to keep people happy. The newest sin of Mormonism, and possibly the greatest, is to be Negative (which is even more immoral, if possible, than drinking coffee). Heaven help the scholar accused of this heresy. He is in danger of having his picture turned to the wall, his buttons cut off, and being drummed out of the Positive Thinking Corps. The *either/or* craven has completely capitulated; he is knight-errant of the citadel. But the threat of the Negative label affects the work of all but a valiant few.

In rejecting the *either/or* apologist, you must not make the mistake of throwing out the *pseudo-either/or* scholar as well. He is simply adopting the protective coloration, while actually having a concern for the truth and devising ingenious methods for inserting the real scoop without endangering his status (of which more later). The *pseudo-either/or* scholar sometimes reveals his position by his reference to "the Prophet Joseph," or simply "the Prophet." However, the real test is the extent of his astounding alternatives.

The *objective* scholar (bless him) can generally be recognized by his use of the terms "Joseph" or "the prophet," the degree of objectivity roughly depending upon whether the word *prophet* is or is not capitalized. Of late years a few hardy souls have laid claim to complete objectivity by calling the prophet "Smith." But don't be entirely fooled by a single word. A *Smith* scholar may be objective in presentation of fact but not entirely so in its selection. Also, there is the *pseudo-Smith* pretender, who actually is a high-level *either/or* type, the more dangerous by reason of greater care in disguising his propaganda.

On the highest level, the *lower case-prophet* and *Smith scholars* are dedicated to follow facts where they lead. They neither minimize nor emphasize facts disturbing to our far-righteous, but tell it as it was. This rarefied summit is occupied only by an extremely select few, and in between it and the intellectual bargain basement of the *either/or* group, is the great body of Mormon scholars, who by reason of overwhelming pressures are required to employ attitudes and terminology required of our propaganda literature, but who have devised stratagems for slipping the truth in edgewise, upside-down, and backwards. What you have to do is learn the tricks and keep a sharp eye peeled.

A handy device is the *divided payoff*, or the broken stick of dynamite. If a scholar wishes to present data which would explode under the chairs of the Positive Thinkers, he breaks it in half, separating cause from effect. On page 16, for example, he puts half of it, the teaser, but doesn't finish. Then on page 78 he presents the payoff, but with absolutely no reference to the teaser. Only if you remain alert will you recognize it for the other half of the dynamite, which when put together causes a lovely bang.

Another method is the *irrelevant footnote* trick. The scholar keys his teaser on page 16 to an innocuous footnote giving a source so safe, secure

and authorized as to divert even the most positive protector of the status quote. But if you take the trouble to look up the reference, you may be baffled as to why it was cited, for it will only vaguely refer to the subject at hand. The actual purpose of the footnote is to protect the scholar by citing a source so absolutely secure that the reader will accept the teaser *without* checking the reference. Having thus shielded himself, the author drops the subject until page 78, when, apropos of an entirely different subject he makes another footnote. This footnote is entirely irrelevant, and you may pass on, baffled and confused (which is the whole idea), *unless* you have learned how to read and recognize that this footnote actually belongs to the material on page 16, but was separated to avoid explosion.

A common method of shoeorning in the real scoop is the *contradictory-appendix* device. On page 16 the scholar defuses his teaser by quoting a ringing testimony from some Church leader, with a footnote referring you to the original source, included in Appendix B. Appendix B will contain the ringing testimony, all right, but also, buried deeply within its many words, the other half of the dynamite.

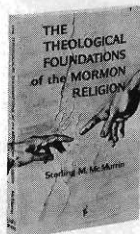
One of the most interesting devices, which was used by some of our earliest scholars and has of recent years been revived, is the *red herring conclusion*. Here the scholar boldly puts cause and effect together, laying it on the line in a manner to make you gasp at his audacity. And then in summary he pulls its fangs and protects himself by drawing a conclusion directly contrary to the evidence he has just presented. You realize, of course, why he had to make the red herring conclusion, so you ignore his interpretation while accepting his data.

These are just a few of the many and ingenious ways by which our scholars, confronted by monolithic opposition, valiantly chip away at the foundation of the pre-fab stronghold. Learning how to read them is not easy, but, then, nothing worthwhile comes free.



## University of Utah Press books of special interest to Dialogue readers.

This listing includes books that appeal to those concerned with the varied aspects of the Mormon heritage.



### **The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion**

by Sterling M. McMurrin

153 pages

\$2.00

In a comparative study that differentiates Mormon doctrine from classical Christian theology, Sterling McMurrin exhibits the distinctive character of Mormon theology that resides especially in the finitistic conception of God and the denial of the traditional doctrines of original sin and salvation by grace. According to Professor McMurrin,

*"Mormon theology is young and unsophisticated and is not over-encumbered with creeds and official pronouncements. Its structure has been virtually untouched by serious and competent effort to achieve internal consistency or exact definition. . . . It needs and deserves a new appreciation of the strength of those very heresies in the concepts of God and man which are the chief sources of its strength and should already have released it from its bondage to orthodoxy."*

Now in its second printing, **THE THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE MORMON RELIGION** is accompanied by a separate "Glossary of Philosophical Terms."

### **Mormonism's Negro Policy: Social and Historical Origins**

by Stephen G. Taggart

82 pages

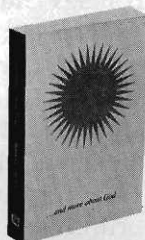
\$4.00

Stephen Taggart has examined the development of the Mormon Church's Negro policy in the volatile atmosphere of pre-Civil War Missouri, as adherents of the rapidly-growing sect struggled with earlier settlers in their effort to build Zion. In order to convince the Missourians that the Mormons were not fomenting a slave revolt, and to protect missionaries in the restless

South, Joseph Smith was forced to suppress the abolitionist tendencies of the membership and gradually to assume a more restrictive attitude toward Negroes. Taggart refers to this series of events as the "historical trap," from which the Church might have been extricated but for the untimely death of Joseph Smith.

Through his analysis of the social forces at work on the Mormons because of their embroilment in the larger North-South sectional struggle, Taggart suggests a possible solution to the problem of Negro priesthood denial. The practice — and a key point of Taggart's book is that priesthood denial is a practice and not a doctrine — was begun in response to social pressures in the 1830's. Let it now be changed in response to the realities of the 1970's.

Taggart's scholarly and objective approach to this emotionally charged question is intended as constructive criticism and should further stimulate rational discussion on the Church's Negro-exclusion policy and practice.



### **... and more about God**

by Lewis M. Rogers and

Charles H. Monson, Jr., Editors

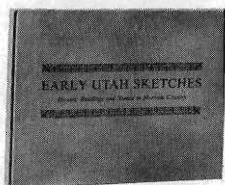
363 pages

\$3.25

The aims of this book have arisen out of the editors' experience with teaching the introductory course in philosophy of religion. There they have learned that the reading material should begin, at least initially, with the student's own level of thinking about religious matters, and that the selections should provide provocative ideas to discuss rather than comprehensive analyses to remember. This book is a collection of non-technical—but philosophically respectable—discussions of the main problems in the philosophy of religion. It is not intended to be a competitor to the several fine anthologies in the philosophy of religion which have appeared during the last five years. Nor is the book a substitute for a regular text. The editors believe that these readings can be used best

in conjunction with either a text or an anthology.

Lewis M. Rogers and Charles H. Monson, Jr., are currently on the faculty of the University of Utah's Department of Philosophy.



## Early Utah Sketches

by A. Russell Mortensen

Drawings by Carlos Andreson

61 pages \$7.00

The Utah-Mormon architecture illustrated in this book depicts the early cultural and civic hopes and expressions of a people building a civilization on the frontier. Many of the buildings are gone now, a few remain, and some have been restored in the original or in replica, but all fill a niche in the history and memory of life in an earlier day in Mormon Country.

Included in the twenty-four 8 by 10 inch charcoal sketches are: Street Scenes, Government Buildings, Public Buildings, Brigham Young's Houses and Buildings, Forts, Mills, and Miscellaneous Houses. The history of each building, its origin, purpose and eventual destiny is told with clarity and warmth.

## A Mormon Mother

An autobiography by  
Annie Clark Tanner

294 pages \$4.00

Here is a case history of the institution of plural marriage as taught and practiced by the Mormon religion during the second half of the nineteenth century. Social insights of such a difficult marriage practice are revealed with amazing objectivity. Mrs. Tanner was one who loved the truth with all her might, mind and soul, but she came to know that truth has its price. The basis of her authority for truth gradually shifted from the sacred scriptures to scholars and universities.

This transition from the warm and trusting security of a religious foundation to a less certain and more tentative base is the provocative part of her story.

Dale L. Morgan, Mormon historian, says: "*Annie Clark Tanner's A MORMON MOTHER is one of the monuments of Mormon literature, and thus far it is almost totally unknown in that literature. If by saying this much and no more, I persuade others to search out the book and savor its quality, I shall have done well.*"

## Selected Back List

### Mormon Village

by Lowry Nelson

296 pages \$5.00

Lowry Nelson, one of the nation's foremost rural sociologists, discusses the highly organized communal forms which aided in the pioneers' successful establishment of cities and towns. He explains the basic patterns of land settlement, showing the origin of the Mormon village—in some respects, unique—and discussing its place within the all-encompassing organization of the Church.

The volume is fully illustrated and includes old and recent town plats graphically demonstrating the advantages to growth of a tightly-knit social order inherent in the Mormon village—an important pattern of life in America.

### Ballads and Songs from Utah

Collected and Edited by  
Lester A. Hubbard

475 pages \$5.00

"To sing, dance, and rejoice before the Lord was regarded almost as a religious duty, but only those must rejoice whose hearts were pure and clean," said H. H. Bancroft in discussing the social life of the Mormons. Folk songs, folk tales, and local narratives provided entertainment and instruction in the days before modern music supplanted them, and this collection is a rich source of material for the folklorist, the sociologist, and all others interested in the culture and religious history of a people.

### Of a Number of Things

by Parley A. Christensen

306 pages \$4.00

OF A NUMBER OF THINGS consists in the main of essays, addresses, eulogies, written for special occasions. Always Dr. Christensen brings to the occasion a mind sensitive, imaginative, informed and deeply concerned. There is appreciation for the human inheritance of knowledge and of beauty. There is protest against the materialization—almost dehumanization—of contemporary world society. But in it all the dedicated teacher is at work, reaching for the reader's mind, not so much to change it as to deepen and brighten its insight.

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