

Toward Intellectual Anarchy

Encyclopedia of Mormonism: The History, Scripture, Doctrine, and Procedure of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. 4 vols. Daniel H. Ludlow, editor in chief. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992. 1,848 pp., index, maps, illustrations, appendices, and glossary.

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THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF MORMONISM provides a great wealth of information on the history and social character of Mormonism and the structure and administration of the LDS church and its institutions, but, on the whole, as a scholarly work it is severely flawed. It is an "in-house" publication, largely the product of Brigham Young University, and in many respects has an apologetic if not actually a propagandistic character. This is to be expected of what is essentially a church project, but it is something of a mystery why a publishing house of the stature of Macmillan would be identified with it.

This is not to suggest that of the agglomeration of more than a thousand articles that comprise the *Encyclopedia* there are not large numbers of high quality, useful to anyone interested in their subjects, or that many of them are not excellent as careful scholarly research and writing. Any publication that includes articles by Thomas Alexander and Leonard Arrington can't be all bad. But the reader should be advised that

the work is a carefully sanitized partisan affair that, while having many strengths, is quite uneven in quality and, though it appears to face many difficult issues head on, clearly omits, distorts, and compromises wherever necessary to advance and protect a positive image of Mormons, Mormonism, and the church.

Those interested in the *Encyclopedia* should read the excellent reviews by Richard D. Poll and Eugene England. Poll's review, which appeared in the *Journal of Mormon History* (Fall 1992), gives a good account of the history, structure, and editing of the publication, as well as some of the pitfalls encountered in its production. England's review, which gives special attention to the arts and literature, is in *This People* (12 [1991], 4).

The editor-in-chief of the *Encyclopedia* was Daniel H. Ludlow, who was executive secretary of the Church Correlation Committee. Apostles Neal A. Maxwell and Dallin H. Oaks provided supervision from above. Almost all members of the large editorial board are at BYU and, according to Poll, 49 percent of the articles came from BYU.

As might be expected, the articles on social issues and church structure and the biographies are the most useful. An impressive number of biographies are of women prominent in church history and in the leadership of church organization. There are some excellent pieces on historical subjects, but in some cases pertinent information that could

be embarrassing to the church is carefully omitted—as, for instance, the problem of several differing accounts of Joseph Smith’s first vision, acknowledgment of the temple borrowings from Free Masonry, the involvement of Masons in the assassination of Joseph Smith, local Southern Utah officials’ involvement in planning the Mountain Meadows Massacre, or the officially sanctioned polygamous marriage ceremonies in Mexico after the 1890 Manifesto. Of course, we are accustomed to this kind of distortion of history in church publications, but this *Encyclopedia* should not have to be judged on the level of Sunday school literature.

The articles describing the sociological facets of Mormonism, giving vital statistics, populations, extent of missions, etc., are very well done and certainly useful, especially the extensive material by Tim B. Heaton; and, as might be expected, the articles by Leonard Arrington on economic history are excellent. The material on temples by Hugh Nibley is vintage Nibley, and the long piece on the Doctrine and Covenants by several authors should be useful for students of church literature.

The intellectual life of Mormonism does not come off as well in the *Encyclopedia* as the historical and socioeconomic. There are some good pieces on the arts and a fine article on Mormon scientists by Robert Miller, but far too little space is devoted to these subjects. But it seems to me that the *Encyclopedia* simply adds to the confusion that already exists in the church in matters pertaining to Mormon philosophy and theology. The article on philosophy by Chauncey C. Riddle, which consists of one page in a text of approximately 2,000, tells the reader very little about Mormon philosophy beyond what it is not, and beyond pointing to a variety of

philosophical positions with which Mormonism finds agreement. It advocates seeking the answers to metaphysical problems in the scriptures and finding the solution to the great questions of life through prayer and personal revelation, with the possibility of seeing God face to face.

I find it difficult to make sense of such statements as “Questions about the natural world are answered by one’s culture as corrected by personal revelation.” Now, just what does that mean? Or, “The equivalent of epistemology in an LDS frame is the ORDINANCES, focusing on the ordinance of PRAYER.” The reader interested in Mormon philosophy would be well advised to read the all-too-brief entry on “Metaphysics” by Dennis Rasmussen. Riddle’s entry on “Devils” is twice as long as his piece on philosophy. I’m afraid this is a reflection of an intellectual malady that is infecting today’s Mormonism. Certainly it is a commentary on the editorial policy of the *Encyclopedia* board.

But to turn to the entry on theology by Louis Midgley, here is a somewhat longer piece; with bibliography included, it covers almost two whole pages. It would require a quite uncommon talent to write a more confused or more confusing commentary on Mormon theology. Midgley vacillates back and forth on whether there is such a thing as Mormon theology. It’s difficult to tell what he is driving at. His point that the Latter-day Saints’ faith rests on historical events, revelation, and personal inspiration rather than on a rationally constructed philosophical system is good, and obvious. Midgley wastes part of his valuable space criticizing others who have attempted to describe and define Mormon ideas by rational methods—something which he fails to understand or appreciate. He quotes a

ridiculous definition of theology by Parley P. Pratt but fails to mention or include in his text or bibliography such major thinkers in Mormon philosophy and theology as Orson Pratt, Brigham H. Roberts, James E. Talmage, and John A. Widtsoe—writers to whom all Latter-day Saints are indebted for the rational formulations of the dominant ideas among their beliefs. Without the work of these and others interested in reasonableness in beliefs, Mormonism might well have become a vacuous affair of emotion and enthusiasm. I suppose the strange references by Riddle and Midgley and others to "LDS epistemology" refer to the belief in personal revelation which is now so prominent in the church and which runs throughout the *Encyclopedia*—a belief that already accounts for much of the lunatic fringe of the church and could very well expand into an irrationalism quite uncharacteristic of Mormonism, which could produce a kind of intellectual anarchy in the church.

The *Encyclopedia* has a good entry on Orson Pratt, but it does not deal with Pratt's ideas. There are no entries on Roberts, Talmage, or Widtsoe, although pictures of Roberts and Talmage, along with one of Bruce McConkie (with minimal factual data), appear in the piece on "Intellectual History" by Richard Haglund and David Whittaker—a good article, but one with comparatively little substance. A good piece on religion and science by Erich R. Paul gives attention to Roberts, Talmage, and Widtsoe and also to Richard R. Lyman and Joseph F. Merrill. Of course, through the index, references to the work of these writers and others can be found, but there is no substantial treatment of their ideas. The most competent of all LDS scholars to undertake serious work on Mormon philosophy, W. H. Chamberlin, one-

time professor at BYU, is not mentioned in the *Encyclopedia*.

Despite Midgley's disclaimer, there are several articles on Mormon theology: subjects such as atonement, revelation, repentance, plan of salvation, and plan of redemption. Fortunately, a quite comprehensive statement by Truman G. Madsen describing the teachings of Joseph Smith is a summary of Mormon theology. But Madsen's bibliography ignores the extensive essay by B. H. Roberts on the same subject that appears in Volume Two of the *Comprehensive History*, entitled "The Prophet's Work—The New Dispensation, a System of Philosophy."

On the philosophical side, there is a fine piece by Kent Robson on time and eternity. There are articles on "God," "Godhead," and "Godhood," and competent treatments by David Paulsen of the Mormon views on divine omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. A rather strange article on truth by Terry Warner defines truth as a way of life "exemplified, prescribed, and guided by Jesus Christ." The article on "Epistemology" is both confused and confusing, but there is a worthwhile piece on "Evil" by Paulsen. I mention these simply as examples of the good and bad. The article entitled "Evolution" ignores the subject of evolution and simply reiterates the church's stand that Adam is the primal ancestor of the human race. The great 1911 fracas on evolution at BYU and the well-known hassle between Joseph Fielding Smith and B. H. Roberts, both important factors in the intellectual history of the church, are ignored.

Unfortunately, many otherwise competent articles fail to address important items. The piece on the Polynesians, for instance, ignores the fascinating Skull Valley episode; the article on Hebrews makes no mention of the impor-

tant problem of authorship. Often the reader must follow the cross-referencing and look elsewhere for the information that seemed to be promised by the title. Forcing the reader to look elsewhere is one of the *Encyclopedia's* main problems. A person interested in Mormonism's view of the second coming of Jesus Christ, for instance, can find that title, but the entry simply refers the reader to fourteen different articles which touch on the subject. This splintering results in some consternation on the part of the reader and considerable confusion and repetition of subject matter.

Several distinguished non-LDS scholars of religion have added a touch of lustre to the *Encyclopedia* as authors or co-authors of pieces on non-Mormon subjects: among them, W. D. Davies, James H. Charlesworth, Huston Smith, John Dillenberger, Frank Moore Cross, and Krister Stendahl. An excellent piece by Jan Shippo summarizes her position that Mormonism is a new religious movement. The editors have wisely included articles by members of the Reorganized LDS church.

The *Encyclopedia* is saturated with references to the Book of Mormon, reflecting the recent church movement to give that work greater attention. In his excellent Sunstone lecture, "The Book of Mormon as Seen in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*," which should be read by anyone interested in the nature of the *Encyclopedia*, George D. Smith has indicated that the *Encyclopedia* contains about 200 articles dealing with the Book of Mormon. In his treatment of this subject, Smith writes that "editorial selectivity favoring orthodoxy prevails throughout the encyclopedia."

Apparently, the *Encyclopedia* editors and authors assumed that their readers had no questions about the literary orthodox interpretation of the

Book of Mormon and the Bible. The authenticity of the Book of Mormon is taken for granted. The references to Jesus Christ and his teachings centuries before his birth, for instance, don't raise an eyebrow, and the most conservative fundamentalists would be at home with the treatment of Genesis. As a matter of fact, that treatment would be a bit too fundamental for Protestant fundamentalists, because here Christ is the Creator and Adam had the gospel.

An article on Isaiah which explains at length why Jesus Christ is both the Father and Son in the Book of Mormon mentions the scholarly claim of multiple authorship, but settles firmly on the one Isaiah position essential to the Book of Mormon.

The treatment of the Bible is a reading of Mormonism into both the Old and New Testaments. The *Encyclopedia* contains an entry entitled "Bible Scholarship" which has nothing to do with Bible scholarship in the usual sense—no recognition of the countless problems faced in the serious study of the Bible and the immense scholarly work done in pursuing their solutions. Rather, it is concerned primarily with what conservative Mormon writers do to and with the Bible. The *Encyclopedia* as a whole is entirely innocent of any influence whatsoever from the field of serious biblical scholarship. It clings stubbornly to the naive acceptance of traditional literalism.

LDS readers will feel at home with some of the *Encyclopedia's* Mormon titles, such as: "Magnifying One's Calling," "Joining the Church," or "Following the Brethren." The appendices are extensive and useful, reproducing a number of important official documents, and there is a good index. The fifth volume is a collection of the LDS scriptures. Considered overall, the