

## HOW TO READ A MORMON SCHOLAR

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*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 shoehorning 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.