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Abstract Review of *Mormons on the Internet* (1997), by Lauramaery Gold.

Lauramaery Gold. *Mormons on the Internet*. Rocklin, Calif.: Prima, 1997. xix + 345 pp., with index. \$18.00.

Reviewed by Gregory Taggart

If a URL is all Greek to you, Lauramaery Gold's book, *Mormons on the Internet*, is an excellent resource for discovering what the Internet has to offer faithful Mormons and those with "a sincere heart and real intent." However, let me refer to an article in the Saturday, 9 May 1998, *Deseret News* to illustrate a couple of minor shortcomings that I find with her book. Titled "Bishop pays big bucks to buy, clean up 'Mormon.com' Web site," the article tells how Orem businessman "Warren Osborn paid tens of thousands of dollars to rescue the domain name Mormon.com" from the hands of its apparently anti-Mormon founder. Now that Osborn has removed what the *News* called "pornography and vile alterations of scriptures," www.Mormon.com is worth a visit by inquiring minds interested in Mormonism. Unfortunately, Gold doesn't mention the site since it only became a Mormon-friendly site in 1998 after *Mormons on the Internet* was published in 1997, and Gold chose not to review web sites "that appear to exist solely to trash what Latter-day Saints hold sacred."¹ Since the Internet is dynamic and changes daily, while the printed word is static, Gold's book already lags what is new on the Internet by almost a year.²

But even if Mormon.com were reviewed in her book, I defy you to find it without reading the entire book, paying close attention to each and every URL. The otherwise complete subject index is of little help since it only lists Gold's topics, not actual URLs.

¹ In spite of this standard, she did review some controversial web sites, mailing lists, and newsgroups, one of which she calls the "nastiest LDS site on the Web"; see news:alt.religion.mormon (p. 189).

² This defect may soon be remedied by Gold's web site of the same name at members.aol.com/MormonNet/index.htm. Though the site is apparently under construction, it promises a dynamic, ongoing review of Mormon web sites. I've bookmarked the site to follow its progress.

That is not entirely Gold's fault. URLs are often long, unwieldy, and don't fit neatly into a subject index. Still, if you want to see what Gold has to say about your favorite web site, it would be nice if you could "back into" the review from the subject index by using the URL. Fortunately, news groups—alt.genealogy, news:alt.genealogy, for example—and mailing lists—LDS-GEMS, www.xmission.com/~dkenison/lds/gems, for instance—are easier to find in the index.

Mormon.com also illustrates a problem that I would like to see Gold deal with in her reviews. For some reason, web publishers are reluctant, unwilling, or just forgetting to tell us who they are. Were it not for the *Deseret News* article, I wouldn't know that Warren Osborn was behind Mormon.com.³ Is it too much to ask that web publishers follow the example of their siblings in print and provide some information about the who, what, where, and why of their cyber offerings? An excellent example of such a site is SHIELDS, shields-r.simplenet.com/index.html, the acronym for Scholarly & Historical Information Exchange for Latter-day Saints.⁴ Gold should reserve her highest rating, *****✓, for those that follow this simple *netiquette*. Imitating SHIELDS would be a good start.

These problems aside, *Mormons on the Internet* is a great introduction to what is where with cyber Mormonism. From describing the many things a faithful member can do online to "proclaim, redeem, and perfect," to explaining how to log on and which search engines do the best job finding Mormon sites, Gold's effort of covering the power of the Internet as it pertains to the Lord's church is a good one.

³ Through the magic of e-mail, I learned that Osborn bought the site near the middle of March 1998. Now, Osborn's executive assistant, Greg Hahn, is the only person working on the site and then only part time. He promises to add a biography soon. Until then, you might want to know that Osborn is the bishop of the BYU 24th Ward, and Hahn is the ward clerk.

⁴ See the accompanying review in this issue, "Mormonism on the Internet II," pages 200–205.

Lead Me, Guide Me

Chapters 1 through 4 are a must for a Mormon new to the Internet. In fact, I found them useful, and I have been wandering around out there for over two years now. Chapter 1 covers the on-line Mormon experience in general. Through interviews, news-group postings, and mailing lists, Gold documents the online experience of a variety of faithful Mormons. Her correspondents explain how they have used the Internet to prepare Primary lessons, work on their genealogy, or, in a few cases, stay active. My favorite is the member in Kyrgyzstan, on China's western border, who uses the Internet to stay connected to the church by browsing LDS-oriented web sites on Sunday. "My mom's home teachers have been in touch with me by e-mail, as have friends from her home ward" (p. 10). Though he has no formal contact with the church because of his location, he carries on conversations with members on the AML-List⁵ and EYRING-List⁶ mailing Listservs, "which has been very helpful to me" (p. 10).

In chapter 4, Gold performs a great service for new converts to the Net by listing Mormon-friendly sites full of links to other good Mormon sites. Yes, if you want, you can use *Yahoo*, *Excite*, or one of the other search engines to find web sites about Mormonism. But if you do, the results of your search are as likely to be anti-Mormon as they are Mormon. For someone new to the Internet, this can be a real shock, distraction, and time waster. Trust me, your time is better spent linking from quality sites like www.mormons.org and www.ldsworld.com/index.asp, than it is reading the rehashed, recycled, and ridiculous anti-Mormon arguments you are bound to stumble into with a search engine.⁷

⁵ Send subscription requests to aml-request@cc.weber.edu.

⁶ Send subscription requests to majordomo@majordomo.netcom.com.

⁷ Although I do not wish to press on this point too hard, it took me three tries to find a URL listed on pages 49 and 53 of *Mormons on the Internet* before I found one that worked for purposes of this sentence. The URL for LDS Web Ring (page 53) no longer worked, and the new URL for PEARLS www.ldschurch.net/pearls/ (the one on page 49 is old) was apparently having problems the day I checked it. Again, the Internet changes daily. A book does not. Also, note that on pages 47-49, Gold makes a pitch for her own web site, *Mormons on the Internet Registry* members.aol.com/MormonNet as "absolutely the best site for locating information on LDS Web sites." She then names it as one of her "Top

Gold's discussion of search engines in chapter 4 is also helpful. For example, I did not realize that *+Mormon +Zion -Moab* "will return documents containing the keywords Mormon and Zion, but only if those documents do not contain the word Moab." I am logging on the Internet right now to see what *+Mormon -Jerald -Sandra -Tanner* will return. This may be happy news indeed!

Dewey Has Nothing on Lauramaery Gold

Mormons on the Internet is well-organized. Other than the subject index not listing URLs, the book's contents are easily accessible. If Gold does the same on her web site, the Saints will be able to find the ***** ✓ sites easily on the Web.

The Church's Three-fold Mission

Part 2 has one chapter each for the subjects of proclaiming the gospel, perfecting the saints, and redeeming the dead. In each chapter one will find a further breakdown of the church's mission. For example, under proclaiming the gospel, web sites are listed and reviewed under such topics as testimonies, introduction to the church, responses to criticism, and missionary pages, with further subcategories under each. Gold not only reviews web sites in each category, but she also often shares stories to illustrate what is available in a particular area. For example, in the "Missionary Pages" section she includes Priscilla Staines's conversion story found on the LDS gems web site at www.xmission.com/~dkenison/lds/gems (pp. 97-98). She also laces her book with sidebars, containing e-mail she has received from webmasters, websurfers, and other sundry online Mormons. For readers with no experience on the Internet or without e-mail, this is a nice and instructive touch.

"Twenty Sites" on pages 322-25. As I have explained above, the site is still under construction as of the date of this review. If she follows through, her site will surely rank in everyone's top twenty for links. Right now, it is just another site.

Living a Latter-day Saint Life

Part 3 covers such topics as the living church, auxiliaries, interest groups, pursuit of excellence, "the glory of God is intelligence," and what's missing. If you want help with your Primary lesson, Gold's book lists a number of sources, including a mailing list, LDSPRIMARY www.panix.com/~klarsen/ldsprimary.html (p. 198), and a web site she calls Primary Idea Page www.primarypage.com (p. 199). If home schooling is your passion, Gold suggests what she calls the LDS Home Schooling Page home1.gte.net/shannon2/index.htm (p. 234). If your heart is heavy, she recommends www.sas.upenn.edu/~dbowie/armlc/armlc.htm (p. 268), among others, for some good old Mormon humor.

Conclusion

Gold covers a lot of cyberspace and hundreds of sites in her book and performs a service to the reader in the process. From her rating system, explained on page 24, to her top twenty sites on pages 322–25, she offers her reader a fairly comprehensive look at web sites, newsgroups, and mailing lists devoted to things Mormon. Yes, she may give short shrift to those web folks who work so hard to lead Mormons to the light, but she doesn't ignore them. To my knowledge, Gold is the only person to catalogue web sites devoted to Mormonism. Her book has some drawbacks, some of which she can remedy in her next edition. Others are inherent with the web. Most drawbacks she can correct on her web site when it is up and running.

After reading Gold's book and wandering around the Internet, I agree with her conclusion on page 320, in which she lists a number of topics that are not covered well enough by Mormon sites: The life and mission of Jesus Christ, including the atonement and the plan of salvation, faith, repentance, baptism, the Godhead, and the nature of God. If she is right, then we need to repent of our need for constant response to critics and our penchant for dealing in the auxiliary matters of the church and give more attention to testifying of Jesus and his gospel.