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Title Mormonism on the Internet II

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Abstract Websites for and against the Latter-day Saints proliferate. Some of them are, of course, better than others.

Mormonism on the Internet II

Reviewed by Gregory Taggart

Last year I wrote a brief review called "Mormonism on the Internet: Now Everybody Has a Printing Press."¹ A couple of months ago, FARMS asked me if I was interested in doing an update and in reviewing Lauramaery Gold's book, *Mormons on the Internet*² for good measure. With an eye toward keeping my name in print in hopes that someone would mistake me for a writer, I accepted and began my review of Gold's book.

I soon discovered that not only had Gold written a fine guide to the church on the Internet, she was constructing a web site that would feature all of her reviews, *****s and ✓s included. I saw no reason to duplicate her efforts. On her site—when it is completed—you will find all her reviews and a link to each site reviewed.³ I also discovered that I had been reviewed, not by Gold but by the webmaster of one of the web sites I had reviewed.⁴ What a thrill: A review of something other than my backhand!

My joy was short-lived, however. The webmaster, in response to my published comments, said, "It's probably safe to say that FARMS is not in favor of freedom of information."⁵ Now, I have

¹ Gregory Taggart, "Mormonism on the Internet: Now Everybody Has a Printing Press," *FARMS Review of Books* 9/1 (1997): 161–74; see www.farmsresearch.com/frob/frobv9_1/taggart.htm.

² I assure you that, in spite of the similarities in the title of my review and Gold's book, neither finds its origin in anything written by Solomon Spaulding.

³ See members.aol.com/MormonNet/index.htm. You will need a password to enter the site.

⁴ See www.california.com/~rpcman/FARMS.HTM.

⁵ See FARMS.HTM, pg. 1, where Mr. rpcman writes of my review, "In his first paragraph we read, . . . any . . . html-literate with time on his hands and a bone to pick with the Latter-day Saint Church can set up shop right across the superhighway from the Church Office Building. Sadly, there is no way to eradicate this blight on the highway, so you are going to have to deal with it or learn to ignore it."

never considered myself a big enough tail to wag that dog, but there it was in print. Sorry, FARMS. I got carried away with . . . well, let me quote what I tried to e-mail the webmaster, Mr. rpcman:

Dear Mr. rpcman,

I just read your response to my review of your site in the *FARMS Review*. Your point about my blight metaphor is misguided but appreciated nonetheless. I am not big on suppression, though I grow very tired of what passes for knowledge these days among those pointing their fingers at the church I love. Still, I may have been too caught up in the cuteness of the super-highway/blight metaphor to realize that it would be interpreted the way you did. That said, it amazes me how many times FARMS (or anyone else) can spray *Weed Be Gone* on some of the blight. It never dies. Like morning glory, its interlocking roots spread all over the place. Stomp it out here, and it grows over there. What you get is nothing new, just more of the same old weed. (So you don't mistake my point: There are a ton of arguments used against Mormonism that have been thoroughly discredited. Do they go away? No. Should they? In the name of Honest Intellectual Inquiry,⁶ I think they should.)

Your response to my statement that "answers exist to everything you read out there" was a little self-serving. To infer from what I wrote that just any old answer would do is not accurate. I agree that correct answers are needed. My guess is that you knew that. (And who but you said anything about "hid[ing] the 'answers'" anyway?)

By the way, I do know what "<g>" means. I just found the juxtapositioning—intentionally or otherwise—of your (tongue-in-cheek?) jab at FARMS and the nearby link to *ad hominemizing* too rich to ignore.

⁶ This phrase appears as a banner at the bottom of Mr. rpcman's pages; therefore, he must be engaged in it.

One of the drawbacks of the written word in general and Internetspeak like <g> in particular is that they are generally not up to the task of conveying all the nuances of emotion and humor. Your <g> could easily be read as “doesn’t this make FARMS look silly?”

Now, I quote this to give you an idea of my frame of mind when I stumbled on to some of the best Mormon web sites out there. I was frustrated. I was tired of sites posing as honest intellectual inquiry, when they were little more than efforts to vent against Mormonism. I was not really interested in reviewing them. And then it happened: I stumbled onto Wade Englund’s site, Anti-LDS Point/Counterpoint at www.aros.net/~wenglund/frame2.htm. To quote Monty Python, “And now for something completely different.”

Where the Web Shines

Englund’s site, and two others mentioned below, take responding to online critics to a new level. Englund’s site is interesting for a number of reasons. First, he takes on thirteen anti-Mormon sites by mirroring them on his site—mirrors like those in a fun house, I should add. For example, you can visit both Ed Decker’s site www.saintsalive.com and Englund’s mirror site from Englund’s site. On the Decker site, you can read the truth according to Decker. On Englund’s mirror of it, you can read the truth about Ed. Fair enough? But Englund doesn’t stop there. He provides links to Daniel Peterson’s review of *Decker’s Complete Handbook on Mormonism*,⁷ James Carver’s review of *To Moroni with Love*, and a variety of responses to the movie, *The God Makers*.

Englund’s site should appeal to all those interested in honest intellectual inquiry since the links to the anti-sites are side-by-side with their mirrors. A click here and another click there, and pretty soon you’ll have all the information you need to assess whether

⁷ See Daniel C. Peterson, review of *Decker’s Complete Handbook on Mormonism*, by Ed Decker, *FARMS Review of Books* 7/2 (1995): 38; see www.farmsresearch.com/frob/frobov7_2/dcp.htm.

Ed Decker, Sharon Doty, or Peter Elias, among others, fairly present Mormon beliefs.⁸

I am a little disappointed that Englund apparently is not going to do mirrors or counterpoints for a number of sites, including the Tanners'. Given the task he has taken on with his site, though, I can understand why. I am also bothered that Englund's frame setup makes it difficult to find the origin of some of the articles he links to. For example, his link to Daniel Peterson's article on Decker's book acknowledges Peterson's authorship, but someone unfamiliar with Peterson's writing wouldn't know that FARMS was the publisher.

Another positive feature on Englund's site is the section entitled "Similarities in Approach in Anti-LDS and Anti-Christians." There he sets up a series of paired links comparing the criticisms of Latter-day Saint and Christian beliefs on various subjects such as scripture, "what they don't tell you," and "strange sayings/teachings of." A review of any one of Englund's paired links ought to alert anti-Mormons that the same methods they use against the goose are being used to "discredit" the gander.

Englund links to a number of other satisfying and very well-organized sites that also deal in apologetics. My favorite is SHIELDS, or Scholarly & Historical Information Exchange for Latter-day Saints (www.shields-research.org). Click on the Topics box, then Critics Corner, and voila! You will find a hypertext list of ministries that maintain web sites, including John Ankerberg, Alpha & Omega, and Bill McKeever. As SHIELDS is quick to point out, "links below are not to critics' web sites. These links are to information and comments about the critics on the SHIELDS web site."

Click on Alpha & Omega and you are treated to the correspondence of William Hamblin, Louis Midgley, Daniel Peterson, and Eugene Seach with James White, the director of this ministry. You will also find Ara Norwood's review of White's book, *Letters*

⁸ At the time of this review, a number of mirror sites, including the mirrors of Bill McKeever's and Dennis Robbins's sites, were still under construction.

to a Mormon Elder.⁹ If your tastes run to the Tanners' Utah Lighthouse Ministry, a click will get you a bushel of reviews and a peck of letters, all very interesting.

If you are interested in what's new—and in some cases, what's old but still pertinent today—on the standard works, you might click on Scriptures and Apocryphal for a look at recent writing on the Book of Mormon and the Pearl of Great Price. I will soon be returning to the site to read B. H. Roberts's response to Theodore Schroeder's turn-of-the-century articles on the Spaulding theory. I have never read it before. Most of the articles on these pages are from *FARMS Review of Books*.¹⁰ You will also find links to articles by Jeff Lindsay, Kerry Shirts, and Mike Parker.

An interesting section and project is SHIELDS's response to appendix B of Walter Martin's book, *The Maze of Mormonism*. The appendix consisted of 42 "Unanswered Questions on the Mormon Gospel," according to Stanley Barker of SHIELDS. Now Barker is working to answer the questions. Again. This project may be of interest to the gospel author in search of a publisher. Barker would apparently appreciate your help.

Another nifty feature of the SHIELDS site is its index of authors. Functioning much like a bibliography for the site, the index lists each article and letter original to the site. It would be nice if authors of linked articles were also listed.

The last of the three sites belongs to FAIR, or Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research (www.fair-lds.org). Like SHIELDS, FAIR is the work of many people. Like both the Englund and SHIELDS sites, this effort is well-organized and offers some interesting and important information to help truth-seekers deal with online anti-Mormonism. I was glad to see Apologetics 101 featured on the site. A cram course in logic and apologetics, this page is a must for anybody who is a premise short of a syllogism.

The FAIR site also has an extensive list of links to various book reviews listed by author. Decker, the Tanners, McKeever,

⁹ See L. Ara Norwood, review of *Letters to a Mormon Elder*, by James White, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 5 (1993): 319; see www.farmsresearch.com/frob/frobv5/norwood.htm.

¹⁰ FARMS is required by our copyright policy to request a link to our site, rather than sanction copying our documents to other sites.

and Ankerberg are all there with more attention from responsible scholars than they probably hoped to generate.

What excites me most about each of these sites is the way they are organized and the effort they make to help people understand the tactics of those opposed to the Lord's work. Understand that each site is a fairly new effort. There is much construction left to do. Still, because of what is onsite already, I will be returning again and again to see what's up. I will say that I hope that the people behind these sites are supporting FARMS research (www.farmsresearch.com), since they rely heavily though hardly exclusively on it. They do contribute perhaps by essentially categorizing FARMS and other online articles according to various topics, be they ministry, question, or author.

Consequently, inquiring minds are generally just a click or two away from a researched and reasoned answer to virtually any question they find on the Internet about Mormonism. And if the answer is not on-site, an e-mail to the site owners would no doubt result in an answer.

There is much good happening on the Internet. Take some time to visit the sites I have discussed in this article, and I am certain you will agree that the rock cut out of a mountain is sure to fill the whole earth. Web sites such as these are there to help.