

WARNER, JAMES A., and STYNE M. SLADE. *The Mormon Way*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976. 173 pp. \$25.00.

Reviewed by Todd A. Britsch, chairman of the Department of Humanities and Comparative Literature at Brigham Young University.

The most common reaction of LDS readers to *The Mormon Way* will probably be one of surprise. Few would expect to see a full-fledged coffee-table book on the subject of Mormon history and modern-day Mormon life. It seems even less likely that two non-Mormons, one of them black, would work on such a book. But author/photographers James A. Warner and Styne M. Slade, along with the editor of Prentice-Hall, have produced a high-priced, artistic volume, with excellent binding, high quality paper, and seventy full-page color pictures. It is a little difficult to assess the authors' intended audience. The book is a national publication, but the text reads much like the material that is found in such books as *Meet the Mormons*. Indeed, it would be hard for Mormon authors to lavish more praise upon the Church than do Slade and Warner.

The book has the following format: A two-page introduction that tells how the authors became interested in Mormons; a beautifully set copy of the Articles of Faith; and two major sections of text and photographs. The first section is entitled "The Way West," and contains a six-page essay on the history of the Church and twenty-nine photographs relating to the progress of the Church from Sharon, Vermont to Salt Lake City. The second section is entitled "The Ways of the Mormons." It consists of a ten-page essay on current Mormon life-style and practices and forty-one photographs. The book is concluded with a two-page glossary of Mormon terms that defines such words as "prophet," "sustain," and "Deseret." Facing each of the photographs is a page with an extended title and a quotation—generally from one of the Church scriptures or leaders. The leaders quoted include General Authorities, BYU leaders (including Dallin Oaks and Chauncey Riddle), and one or two men and women whose names I do not recognize. The text of *The Mormon Way* seems to be the work of Ms. Slade; the photographs are by both authors.

As is typical of picture books, the text is very limited and speaks largely in generalities. The statements made about Church history and doctrine, however, are almost always accurate and unfailingly approving.

The history section covers some of the major events from the First Vision to the entrance into the Salt Lake Valley. Its space limitations make it somewhat elliptical and may cause a little confusion for nonmember readers. (Another problem is the use of Mormon terminology which is so thorough and accurate that even the glossary will not entirely satisfy those who are not acquainted with special Mormon terminology. It is striking to think that a nonmember could so completely adopt Mormon ways of speaking.) The text of the history section could be strengthened by leaving out two long lists, one of buildings, businesses, etc., in Nauvoo, and one of supplies that Brigham Young recommended for pioneers. The space might have been used to discuss Mormon history from 1847 until the present—a period that is completely ignored.

The text of the “Ways of the Mormons” centers its discussion on the Mormon family, welfare and compassionate service, missionary work, and temples. Ms. Slade is particularly pleased with family home evening, genealogy work, and the concept of eternal marriage. She is impressed by the way Mormons face contemporary problems:

With all the different problems plaguing our country today, it's quite clear to me that the Mormons do have some answers for a lot of things—welfare, prison reform, juvenile delinquency and a lower cancer rate (or, rather, generally better health), to name but a few. Our nation would do well to take a look, a serious look, at all that the Mormon Church has done and will do in the future. This Church and these people are dedicated to setting the world in order, and their world is our world. Whether or not we join them, we must look at them. They do have answers. (p. 87)

Ms. Slade only twice brings up issues that might reflect negatively on Mormons and then it is to defend the Mormon point of view. She reports that some people accuse Mormons of clannishness, but she explains that when a group has been misunderstood and rejected, it is natural for its members to stick together. On the black issue she never mentions the priesthood, but reports that she feels more at home with Mormons than she does with many other groups. Her feelings about Mormons and blacks are reinforced by two slightly disingenuous photos, one of which shows two missionaries at an NAACP picnic and the other which shows a black in front of the Salt Lake Temple with the caption “A Mormon in front of the Salt Lake City Temple.” The quote on this same page is from LeGrand Richards: “With our concept of universal brotherhood it is untenable that we as a people should entertain prejudice and ill will against any of our Father’s children.”

It is the photographs that form the body of the work, and they produce a mixed reaction. Several of them are very beautiful and well composed. The framing and balance of "The 'martyr's window' at Carthage Jail" (p. 63) fit their subject masterfully, and produce a moving work of art. A view of the Salt Lake Temple at sunset (p. 91) and another of missionaries walking through a field (p. 125) show excellent treatment of color. Some of the other photographs are not as successful. Part of the problem comes from a strange mixture of photojournalism and art photography. A large number of the photographs are consciously posed and thus those photographs that are in a reporter's style seem out of place. To some, this mixture of styles will not be readily apparent, because Warner and Slade have chosen to finish almost all of their pictures in a hazy "impressionistic" style. But the style really does not fit such pictures as "Missionaries visit a picnic" (p. 127), or a photograph of the First Presidency seated in the Tabernacle (p. 99). Most of the art photos work quite well. My personal taste does not lean toward a whole book in the granular finish of these photographs, but one cannot question the artists' skill with the camera.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of the book is its least obvious characteristic. Even though a major portion of the photographs deal with modern-day Mormonism, the general tone of the book is surprisingly rural. When such subjects as the information center at Lincoln Center or a bride and groom outside of a modern temple are shown, the photographic techniques tend to lend a nineteenth-century flavor. This feeling is even stronger in photographs of homemade wheat bread or of a bottle of tomatoes set by a small spring. Mr. Warner has previously produced a book on the Amish and a little of the feeling of those photos carries over into the present volume. Perhaps the essay on modern Mormon life will dispel some of the tone of the photographs, but I suspect that despite the text, a casual reader of *The Mormon Way* would receive the impression that the Mormons are farther outside of modern American society than is the case.