

FORWARD

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In his 1975 benchmark “Second Century Address,” LDS Church President Spencer W. Kimball advised the faculty of Brigham Young University that if the university were to fulfill its promises in its second century, its faculty would have to become “bilingual.”

The faculty has a double heritage which they must pass along: the secular knowledge that history has washed to the feet of mankind with the new knowledge brought by scholarly research-but also the vital and revealed truths that have been sent to us from heaven. . . . Your double heritage and dual concerns with the secular and the spiritual require you to be “bilingual.” As LDS scholars you must with authority and excellence to your professional colleagues in the language of scholarship, and you must also be literate in the language of spiritual things.

Blake Ostler’s important new book, *Exploring Mormon Thought: the Attributes of God* is fluently bilingual. It is competently couched in the language of scholarship, but speaks powerfully the language of faith.

Besides providing a worthy model of bilingualism which LDS scholars would do well to emulate, this book is ground-breaking in another respect: is by far the most penetrating and comprehensive study of the LDS understanding of the nature of God yet undertaken. It ranges broadly over such issues as the meaning of “God” in Mormon thought, God’s relationship to time, His passability and mutability, and the nature of His power. It deals in depth with the nature of God’s knowledge, exploring among other issues a problem that has long vexed and perplexed many of us: the compatibility of divine foreknowledge and human free will. Finally, Blake begins to formulate for the first time ever a systematic Mormon Christology.

Blake does all of this comfortably and competently within the language of contemporary analytic philosophical theology. All who think and write within this tradition will be able to understand and respond to Blake’s interpretive presentations and explorations of Mormon thought.

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Despite the Church's sixty thousand missionaries, LDS insights on the nature of God remain among the world's best kept secrets—at least, in scholarly circles. Speaking so clearly and excellently the language of scholarship, Blake's book should contribute significantly to scholarly appreciation of and dialogic interface with LDS ideas. With the growing visibility and influence of the Church, this is an outcome whose time is come.

Blake thinks creatively and independently on the several issues which comprise his study, but his lodestar remains the Standard Works and the theological vision of Joseph Smith and his successors in the prophetic office. He speaks knowledgeably and with conviction the language of faith. Of course, not all Latter-day Saints will agree with Blake's provisional resolutions of theological questions that modern revelation leaves open. But no doubt his carefully thought out and argued viewpoints will (and should) become important thought-stuff in the discussions as Latter-day Saints seek for deeper theological self-understanding. My own personal self-understanding has been stretched and enriched as I've engaged with Blake in countless theological conversations. With the publication of this book, hopefully, many more, both Latter-day Saints and non-members, will join in these bilingual explorations. Welcome aboard.