Book Notes

Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom. *Is the Reformation Over? An Evangelical Assessment of Contemporary Roman Catholicism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008. 272 pp., with annotated bibliography of further reading and index. $21.99 (paperback).

Mark Noll, a prominent historian, and Carolyn Nystrom, a journalist, describe both the past quarrels and recent shifts in evangelical-Catholic relations, with attention to the dreary past where Protestants have a sordid history of hostility toward Roman Catholicism. They begin with an account of the post-Reformation antagonism between the two communities and then describe the changes in Catholicism since the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), as well as formal and informal negotiations between Catholics and Protestants. The negotiations discussed by Noll and Nystrom include official Roman Catholic dialogues with Disciples of Christ (pp. 76, 81–82), Anglicans (pp. 77–78), Methodists (pp. 78–79), Pentecostals (p. 80), Reformed (p. 80), Lutherans (p. 81), evangelicals (p. 82), and Baptists (p. 83). The authors offer a rather positive assessment of the results of these efforts to see what could be agreed upon, with the ultimate goal being unity (see pp. 83–114).

Noll and Nystrom focus on the negotiations leading to publication of four joint public statements (see pp. 153–78) generated by a group known as Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT). They examine these statements in detail, as well as the mixed reaction of evangelicals to these endeavors. ECT appears to have begun as a response by Protestants and Catholics who shared a political ideology, but it soon morphed beyond that initial impulse. The ECT negotiations rest on and manifest significant changes in the relations of Protestants and

Catholics. In the 1950s Catholics were told not to attend Billy Graham's meetings, and Graham despised Catholics. But by the 1980s Catholics were participating in Graham's "crusades" and Graham had shifted radically away from his earlier stance toward Catholics. Much has changed since Vatican II. There has been, as Noll and Nystrom demonstrate, at least a modest reconciliation, though there are still serious differences. Noll and Nystrom's book is a fine source of information on the recent history of evangelical-Catholic relations, especially on how things have changed at the level of cultural elites since Vatican II. Latter-day Saints can learn much about sophisticated Protestant and Roman Catholic theological wrangling from this volume.

Has there really been a rapprochement? Is unity possible, especially given the anarchy that is Protestantism? On the crucial question of justification by faith alone, Noll and Nystrom aver that "Catholics and evangelicals now believe approximately the same thing" (p. 232). Much equivocation is hidden in the word *approximately* since Catholics still insist that sanctification and justification are a long process of rebirth and extend even beyond the grave, given that purgatory is still believed to often be necessary to complete the process. What Noll and Nystrom seem to mean is that churchmen and theologians have been able to issue cautious, diplomatic statements on this issue. Does this appearance of agreement signal the end of the Reformation? In coming to a series of very tentative conclusions, Noll and Nystrom do not entirely slight the profound differences that remain but tend to either downplay or ignore their significance.

The joint statements produced by ECT, which are described in some detail, have yielded a spectrum of responses ranging from full acceptance to outright rejection. Noll and Nystrom mention the negative responses to ECT by the bizarre Jack Chick (pp. 73–74, 187), but they neglect to mention such belligerent anti-Catholics as "Dr." James White and Dave Hunt, who make a living blasting away at Roman Catholics. Noll and Nystrom also call attention to the prominent evangelicals who have "gone home to Rome" (p. 200). These include Thomas Howard (pp. 200–201), Dennis Martin (pp. 201–2), Peter Kreeft (pp. 202–3), and Kimberly Hahn (pp. 203–5), but Francis

Beckwith could be added to the list. Noll and Nystrom also recognize that Calvin and Luther were fond of some Roman Catholic theologians (pp. 50–55), "above all, Augustine" (p. 51, compare pp. 195, 232). They stress the common ground shared by Catholics and Protestants.

The Roman Catholic Church after Vatican II "articulates positions on salvation—even on justification by faith—that are closer to the main teachings of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation than are the beliefs of many Protestants, indeed, of many evangelical Protestants. Strange as it may seem to put it this way, the ECT documents present what can only be called a classically orthodox depiction of Christian salvation, primarily because they emphasize and build upon these official Catholic teachings" (p. 180). Noll and Nystrom argue that since there is no longer an essential difference between evangelicals and Catholics on this key issue, "if it is true, as was repeated frequently by Protestants conscious of their anchorage in Martin Luther or John Calvin, that *iustificatio articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae* (justification is the article on which the church stands or falls), then the Reformation is over" (p. 232). But this opinion seems flawed. One reason is that the carefully crafted diplomatic language of statements arising from exchanges between evangelicals and Roman Catholics both obscures real differences and does not and cannot speak for the anarchy that is Protestantism—certainly not for those who worship on Sundays.

In addition, Noll and Nystrom ignore N. T. Wright's views on justification. Wright has impeccable evangelical credentials. He argues that the apostle Paul did not teach what Augustine, Luther, and Calvin claim, namely, that justification is the imputation of Christ's righteousness to sinners when they confess Jesus. Noll and Nystrom assume that evangelicals are right in their understanding of justification and that Catholics have been inching toward an essentially Protestant understanding. Whatever the seeming similarities, as set out in the language of ECT, some profound differences remain. Noll and Nystrom point out that serious disagreements remain over questions of the church, and hence the papacy and magisterium (for example, the role of Mary in the divine economy, the sacraments, and

mandatory celibacy for priests). These are all church-related issues. According to Noll and Nystrom, "the central difference that continues to separate evangelicals and Catholics is not Scripture, justification by faith, the pope, Mary, the sacraments, or clerical celibacy—though the central difference is reflected in differences on these matters—but the nature of the church" (p. 237).

Catholics believe that Jesus established a visible, institutionalized extension of his own ministry and committed to it some of his power and prerogatives, including the forgiveness of sins and the consecration of the host in the mass, while Protestants tend to believe that the church has no such prerogatives. Instead, the church, for evangelicals, tends to be seen as consisting of those who are already justified by an alien "imputed righteousness" at the moment of conversion. Thus the church is only a fellowship of those who claim to have been justified in their sinful state, and not the fellowship of saints understood as those called out of the world by a covenant with God.

Noll and Nystrom include a useful guide to further reading from both Protestant and Catholic assessments of the various competing positions. This is a fine addition to the book. They describe, for example, Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. McKenzie's *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals* (1995) as "an especially solid and fair reading of modern Catholic theology, which takes into account developments since the Second Vatican Council" (p. 256).

Louis Midgley

John L. Sorenson and Carl L. Johannessen. *World Trade and Biological Exchanges before 1492*. New York and Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2009. viii + 593 pp. $39.95 (hardcover), $29.95 (paperback).

In this substantial book, emeritus BYU professor of anthropology and prominent Book of Mormon scholar John L. Sorenson teams up with an emeritus professor of biogeography at the University of Oregon to argue that the pre-Columbian "New World" was far from isolated and that, in fact, maritime trade between the Americas and the "Old World" was continuous from a very early period. Ancient sailors transported plants and animals (and diseases) to and from the

Americas—for instance, the authors provide eighty-four examples of Old World plants taken from the Western Hemisphere for cultivation in the Eastern Hemisphere—and did so very deliberately (except, of course, for the diseases).

Separate chapters discuss the topics "Plant Evidence," "Microfauna" (including bacteria and viruses), and "Other Fauna" (including dogs, chickens, and the "lesser mealworm"). These are followed by short summaries and conclusions, and then by a massive 366-page appendix entitled "Detailed Documentation," which takes the form of an alphabetized and annotated list of the species and provides the basis for the book's argument. Appendix 2 offers a list of the species "ordered by uses," while appendix 3 supplies species of American plants in South Asia arranged by "evidence type." The volume contains sixteen illustrations, seven tables, a 66-page bibliography, an index of species, and an index of authors.

Although this volume neither mentions the Book of Mormon nor directly addresses Latter-day Saints, the relevance of Sorenson and Johannessen's thesis to the claims of the Book of Mormon should be immediately obvious: If they are right, the old argument that the Book of Mormon cannot possibly be true because there were no oceanic crossings before 1492, when Columbus "sailed the ocean blue"—or, at least, before Bjarni Herjólfsson blundered upon "Vinland" in AD 985 or 986 and then told Leifr Eiríksson about it—is false. If their detailed and meticulously documented argument is correct, it can no longer be maintained that civilization emerged in the New World pristinely independent, in a state, virtually, of clinical quarantine. "No man is an island, entire of itself," wrote the great English poet John Donne (d. 1631). Nor, probably, is any culture or civilization.

Daniel C. Peterson

Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman, gen. eds.; Robin Scott Jensen, Robert J. Woodford, and Steven C. Harper, vol. eds. *The Joseph Smith Papers: Revelations and Translations, Manuscript Revelation Books*, facsimile ed. Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2009. xliii + 707 pp., with two

appendixes, chronology, scribal directory, and additional reference material. $99.95 (hardcover).

The facsimile edition of this first volume in the Revelations and Translations series is a magnificent second volume in the long-awaited Joseph Smith Papers Project, currently being undertaken under the remarkably able direction of Elder Marlin K. Jensen, Church Historian and Recorder. The contents of this volume reflect scrupulous attention to the highest editorial standards, years of labor, and the considerable resources of Larry H. and Gail Miller that made it possible to assemble people with the necessary academic and professional skills. *Revelations and Translations* is a stunning volume—immense, weighty, and expensive. It consists essentially of two manuscripts—Revelation Book 1 (the manuscript for the Book of Commandments) and Revelation Book 2 (the Kirtland Revelation Book), supplemented by other manuscripts where possible (for example, the "Appendix" intended for the Book of Commandments is included in Revelation Book 1). All of this is augmented by an array of scholarly apparatus and explanation.

Revelations and Translations covers the years 1828 to 1834, when the one known as "Joseph the Seer" was dictating a host of revelations. It includes the recently discovered manuscript for the Book of Commandments—Revelation Book 1, which contains 117 separate items. And, with some duplication, Revelation Book 2 contains 53 items. These are both published with high-quality color photographs on the verso and, on the recto, very carefully prepared line-by-line transcripts of each manuscript, including every stray mark. All the editorial changes are carefully identified in the transcript and are coded by the name of the scribe who made the change. These manuscripts contain a large number of changes, not at all unlike those one might expect on a manuscript taken by dictation and then being readied for publication. Joseph Smith sought whatever help he could find among his associates in preparing these textual materials for publication. Every mark on manuscript pages is carefully reproduced (see, for example, pp. 389–91). Joseph insisted that others exercise care not to

alter the meaning of the revelations as they strove to polish them for publication. He, of course, adjusted and modified them as he saw fit.

Revelations and Translations has an introduction, a volume introduction, and a series introduction. To further assist the reader, there is a full description of the editorial method and a note on the photographic facsimiles. Of course, the core of the volume is found in Revelation Books 1 and 2. What new information do they provide? The reader immediately notes that Joseph Smith is addressed by the Lord as "Joseph the Seer" (p. 9 and elsewhere). This seems to remind the reader that Joseph began his career as a seer by employing in some way, either at first the interpreters (see Mosiah 8:13–18) or his own seer stone. Only later did he receive revelations without the aid of an interpreting device. It is not clear why the little "prefaces" to the early revelations were not published as part of the revelation. Their inclusion would perhaps have made it clear to the Saints that being a "Seer" came prior to our current tendency to see Joseph only as a prophet (see Mosiah 8:15). There are, it seems, bits of information in *Revelations and Translations* that enlarge and complicate the horizon with which we are familiar. What is often not remembered is that a number of the earliest revelations were *seen* by Joseph in his seer stone, as witnessed by his scribes and others.

The first published version of what we now know as the Doctrine and Covenants—that is, the Book of Commandments—seems to have been drawn from Revelation Book 1 (pp. 8–405). The Saints now have available for the first time the manuscript from which one of their unique scriptures was published. The preface to the Book of Commandments (see pp. 223–27), which was dictated by Joseph Smith in Hiram, Ohio, on 1 November 1831 and serves as the first section of the Doctrine and Covenants, declares that the revelations it introduces are from God and are given to those who choose to serve the Lord "in their weakness after the manner of their Language that they might come to understanding & in as much as they erred it might be made known & in as much as they sought wisdom it might be instructed & in as much as they sinned they might be chastened that they might repent & in as much as they were humble they might

be made strong & blessed from on high" (p. 225). Is this the language of covenant blessing? If so, then the language with which the preface to the Book of Commandments begins takes on added significance, since the Saints are asked to "hearken" to the voice of the Lord, whose words are being set forth in some unexplained way through young Joseph Smith. For him to have dictated this language in the voice of Jesus Christ is a strange and wonderful thing. Readers are now privileged to almost hear Joseph speaking those words to his scribes and in the presence of others. This is a rich blessing to the faithful.

Since the Church of Jesus Christ is so intimately linked to concrete historical events, it is a profound blessing that the textual materials, even or especially in their weakness, have been preserved, uncovered, and now made available to the Saints and other interested parties. What is now available, of course, changes details but not the substance of the prophetic messages, though critics, if the past is any indication, may see in *Revelations and Translations* something that can be used to try to explain away the miracle of the gift we have from God. They may do this by talking about how this publication must challenge and even unravel the faith of the Saints. They may insist that in the past some of the Brethren, without access to the materials so lovingly collected by those serving as Church Historian and Recorder, either denied or did not stress in general conference and elsewhere the complex way in which the revelations were recorded and published. Or they may complain that the Brethren have downplayed the changes that one can see scribbled throughout these manuscripts. The fact that there are what most often amount to editorial efforts to polish and perfect the revelations prior to their publication (and in subsequent editions) should not be made the grounds for additional complaints that the faith of the Saints rests on sandy foundations, unless one is inclined to believe that the absence of immediate perfection on trivial matters demonstrates some profound problem with the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Such an opinion merely manifests a sectarian or secular fundamentalism that the Saints should learn to eschew.

Whereas the initial volume of the Joseph Smith Papers Project (*Journals: Volume 1, 1832–1839*) contained items already readily available

in several editions to both professional historians and the public generally, this truly wonderful facsimile version of the manuscript revelation books makes available much textual material previously unavailable. The manuscript that constitutes Revelation Book 1 appears to have been in the possession of Elder Joseph Fielding Smith as early as 1907. It went into the vault of the First Presidency in 1970 and resurfaced in 2005. Its careful preservation and now expert publication make this wonderful text available for all to study and savor.

Louis Midgley

Frederick M. Huchel. *The Cosmic Ring Dance of the Angels: An Early Christian Rite of the Temple*. Frithurex Athenaeum, 2009. xiii + 173 pp., with index. $16.99 (paperback at http://www.lulu.com).

Frederick Huchel, an independent Latter-day Saint scholar, has published a remarkable monograph on a topic that is surely of cosmic importance. Inspired and motivated by Hugh Nibley's notable essay "The Early Christian Prayer Circle," Huchel has continued research on many aspects of this practice related to the ancient temple, gathering evidence of its significance among the early Christians, as well as its influence earlier and in many times and places. Anciently, the prayer circle is attested in the Old Testament and in Babylonia, Assyria, Egypt, and elsewhere. Although an understanding of the practice all but disappeared in the West, Huchel shows its influence on many customs and practices, so that the traces of it make it "nearly ubiquitous."

The cosmic ring dance was a prayer circle intended to place its participants in a ritual that had its counterpart with the angels in heaven, and its richest fulfillment provided an opening of the heavens with a vision of God and the worship of the angels. Huchel summarizes:

> In examining what can be reconstructed of the liturgy of the First Temple, and its apparent restoration in early Christianity, no loss can be more significant—or more poignant—than the loss of the sacred choral ring dance, which was seen to mirror the cosmic circle dance of the orders of the concourses of angels, in their concentric heavenly spheres—a dance which had the effect of opening up a conduit from the Holy of Holies, up through the

> planetary spheres, and unfolded a view of God Most High upon his celestial throne, in the highest Heaven. (p. 1)

Huchel explains how the ritual has a relationship to the heavenly ascent, or the visions of heaven experienced by prophets such as Isaiah, Ezekiel, John, Enoch, and Joseph Smith. A glance at some of the subheadings in the book will illustrate the range of study: "The Cosmic Dance," "Before Christianity," "The Circle Dance and the Crucifixion," "The Form of the Dance," "Scattered Fragments," "The Music of the Temple—and of the Spheres," "The Byzantine *Choros*," "The May–pole Dance," "Asherah," "The Living Creatures and the Wheels," "The Order of Heaven," "The Objective of the Circle Dance of Prayer," and "The Dance and the Heavens." Importantly, Huchel's discussion of how the ancients viewed the heavens and the cosmos helps put in perspective their astronomical concepts related to the heavenly order.

In conclusion, Huchel discusses the importance of the prayer circle for Latter-day Saints, showing its influence on Joseph Smith and his followers, especially in experiences during the dedication of the temple at Kirtland, Ohio. Huchel was invited to speak on this theme at the May 2009 symposium in London of the Temple Study Group, established by Margaret Barker and others. His address was essentially an abbreviated version of the present study.

George L. Mitton

Terryl L. Givens. *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-mortal Existence in Western Thought*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. x + 388, with index. $29.95 (hardcover).

Terryl Givens has published a small shelf of books and a number of interesting and important essays. These have made him a primary figure in Mormon studies. Much of his work has been published by Oxford University Press. He entered Mormon studies with a fine study of literary anti-Mormonism entitled *Viper on the Hearth*: *Mormons, Myths, and the Construction of Heresy* (Oxford, 1997). This comes the closest to constituting a history of anti-Mormonism, a crucially important topic that Latter-day Saint historians have avoided for reasons that are understandable if not laudable. *Viper* was eventually

followed by what is clearly the best single book currently available on the Book of Mormon: *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (Oxford, 2002). The next book by Givens from Oxford was *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (Oxford, 2007). His recent book *The Book of Mormon: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2009) is a stunning accomplishment. With *When Souls Had Wings*, released three months earlier than its 2010 copyright date, Givens has moved beyond a strictly Latter-day Saint topic.

The arguments set out in *When Souls Had Wings* should, of course, be of interest to the Saints since belief in the premortal existence of souls is central to their faith. Givens demonstrates that the idea of preexistence is not a quirky one known only to Latter-day Saints or found only in a very few places and times, Rather, versions of the belief are widespread. In addition, in some versions of this belief, the premortal existence of the soul links our being here below with the idea that we are sent here for a testing experience to arm us for further adventures in the future. For Latter-day Saints who are conditioned to believe that certain crucial elements of their faith have few if any parallels in antiquity, except perhaps with biblical peoples, *When Souls Had Wings* should be a pleasant eye-opener and even faith-deepener.

Whatever quibbles one might have with the selection and interpretation of the exotic literature from which Givens assembles his vast and impressive collection of belief in a preexistence of the human soul (or even with the inevitable lacunae in his collection), this is an important, interesting, and impressive collections of materials.

Latter-day Saints should realize that Givens does not begin with the version of this belief that comes from Joseph Smith. Instead, he mentions this midway through his book (pp. 212–20). He emphasizes that "Smith made a career of promulgating ideas that were outrageous affronts to Christian orthodoxies—his radical critique of conventional notions of God's sovereignty," which is a crucial part of the Latter-day Saint belief in a preexistence, "was no exception" (p. 213). Givens deftly sketches the other heresies, or what are seen as dangerous heresies from the intellectual horizon of classical theism, which ended up scrubbing from the

hearts and minds of early Christians a belief in the preexistence of their souls. He explains why classical theism, with its extreme stress on the absolute sovereignty of God, could not tolerate the idea of preexistence of souls—namely, because the mere existence of anything other than the absolute God of classical theism would undermine what is attributed to that simple, timeless, self-sufficient, impassive, absolute, infinite Being that created everything out of nothing, including time and space. This is exactly not the kind of deity that is the object of the faith of the Saints. The basic outlines of the arguments Givens sets out should be familiar to Latter-day Saints. But the reasons he offers for how radically Joseph's version of Christian faith differs from classical theism and hence also from creedal Christianity are somewhat novel, if they are not entirely new.

The survey Givens provides begins with fragments found in the poetry of very ancient Mesopotamian mythology and poetry as set out in Akkadian (see pp. 9–20). After briefly setting out the ancient Near Eastern roots of the belief, Givens describes its classical varieties as found in the pre-Socratics (pp. 21–26) and then Plato (pp. 26–37). He describes the early Christian versions of a belief in a premortal existence of souls, as well as the specifically Jewish version set out by Philo of Alexandria (pp. 39–70).

Givens next traces the profound influence on early Christianity of a version of Platonism generated in Alexandria and spread widely among Christian apologists and then churchmen and theologians (pp. 71–98). His attention is focused on beliefs in a premortal existence of souls as set forth in Plato's highly enigmatic and even esoteric dialogues, which Givens sees as relatively straightforward when compared with the later Neoplatonic philosophy that comes into play with the church fathers—that is, specifically Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria (pp. 83–87). Givens sees the end of a belief in preexistence stemming directly from the first great Latin Christian writer, Tertullian, who railed and ranted against Platonists and demanded to know exactly what Athens had to do with Jerusalem (see headnote on p. 71 and the subtle and interesting discussion on pp. 87–90). Instead of picturing Tertullian as essentially challenging the coherence of efforts to meld the method of phi-

losophy—that is, the search for knowledge of First Things by unaided human reason—with prophetic wisdom, as others have done, Givens sees Tertullian as challenging the Platonic notion of a preexistence of souls when he inveighs against Plato and philosophers.

Givens sees Augustine's shifting opinions (see pp. 99–122), which were heavily influenced by Neoplatonism, as a struggle over the preexistence of souls, which eventually led to an anathema on such a belief. Givens does not see Augustine's affection for a version of Platonism as a tool with which he could eliminate the even then popular beliefs among Christians in a preexistence of souls as well as a corporeal deity.

Without describing the riches found in the entire book, one can say that Givens is able to identify a host of different and even conflicting versions of belief in the preexistence of souls. And he is also able to offer a learned and intriguing commentary on the struggle, especially in Christian circles over preexistence. What should be most interesting for both Latter-day Saints and sectarian Christians is the extent to which the preexistence of souls was a popular belief in the primitive Christian church and how it lingered among Christians, as well as how late and for what reasons Christian theologians abandoned the belief. The urge to turn God into an unconditional, ultimate, absolute Wholly Other ground for existing things, including human beings, seems to have been the reason for the rejection of the preexistence of souls by both theologians and churchmen of various stripes. The urge to emphasize the otherness of God, as well as his absolute power, and the total depravity of human beings, has gotten in the way of a coherent theodicy, which could account for a loving God and both moral and natural evil, which the non-absolutizing belief in the preexistence of souls affords the believer. The stress on God being Wholly Other also seems to explain that decline in the idea of *theosis* that was prominent among the earliest followers of Jesus and that persisted in curiously truncated form right down to Calvin, which was so much the core of the faith of writers like C. S. Lewis.

When Souls Had Wings is remarkably lucid and learned; it is highly recommended.

Louis Midgley