

BOOK NOTES

Mark Lyman Staker. *Hearken, O Ye People: The Historical Setting of Joseph Smith's Ohio Revelations*. Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2009. xlii + 694 pp., with appendix, bibliography, and index. \$34.95.

To be well-informed, any student of Latter-day Saint history and doctrine must now be acquainted with the remarkable research of Mark Staker on the important history of the church in the Kirtland, Ohio, area. Staker, a researcher in the Church History Department, informs us with much additional detail on the background of Kirtland, before and after Latter-day Saint settlement, and on the circumstances surrounding the revelations received by Joseph Smith while in that area. Such background is essential to better understand the meaning of the revelations, for often it shows why Joseph inquired of the Lord and adds depth to our interpretation of the language and content of the revelations.

Following a useful chronology of events in the history of the church in Ohio (pp. xvii–xxxix), Staker divides his study into four parts. The first provides the background of Kirtland before the Latter-day Saints, describing the people in the area and the religious setting and practices there when the missionaries arrived. This is an illuminating discussion, which includes many events in the earliest history of the church. Part 2 has a thoroughgoing account of the law of consecration—how and why it was first implemented and how it was conducted. Part 3 treats happenings in nearby Hiram, Ohio, including the people concerned and problems of opposition and apostasy. It informs us on Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon's receipt of "The Vision" (now the very important doctrinal revelation in section 76 of the Doctrine

and Covenants), describing the remarkable reaction to it, both pro and con. The mobbing of Joseph and Sidney is discussed in detail. Part 4 of the book deals with the economy of Kirtland and the rise and fall of the Kirtland Safety Society, giving us a better understanding of that trying episode in church history.

An appendix to the book provides several important sermons by George A. Smith and Brigham Young that discuss significant matters concerning the history of the church in Ohio.

George L. Mitton

Christopher Catherwood. *The Evangelicals: What They Believe, Where They Are, and Their Politics*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010. 166 pp., no index. \$15.99 (paperback).

The Evangelicals is intended to situate contemporary evangelical politics, location, and beliefs. British scholar Christopher Catherwood, who is married to an American and “has talked about the issue of politics with [unidentified American] evangelical friends now for over thirty years” (p. 126), has “seen major shifts, from the years of President [Jimmy] Carter when evangelicals seemed to be Democrats, to the present, where meeting an evangelical Democrat is increasingly rare” (p. 126). He bemoans “the public failures of an elected American politician” (p. 127), and hence “the sheer ineptitude of the Bush Administration,” which he believes brought “damage to the reputation of the United States in the wider world” and also embarrassed the evangelical world as well (p. 127).

Catherwood’s own political ideology is a bit pink, which explains his quarrel with American evangelicals. He radically distinguishes fundamentalism, which he detests, from what he understands as evangelicalism. He tends to conflate fundamentalism with American-style evangelicalism. Other than Billy Graham, whom he praises for not having been involved in the usual scandals that seem to follow popular evangelical preachers, he detests politically conservative American evangelicalism, though he sees hope for evangelicals in the United States since “Bush is no longer President” and Jerry Falwell and James

Kennedy, on the “religious right,” have died and James Dobson has retired (p. 127).

The new evangelical bellwether, according to Catherwood, is Albert Mohler, who is “controversial for trying to reintroduce Reformed theology back into the Southern Baptist Convention” (pp. 127–28). Catherwood is pleased by this shift in the SBC since he approves of the of the “new Calvinism” that is catching on in the United States (pp. 145–57). The reason is that he believes that authentic evangelical ideology can be summed up in the acronym *TULIP*, or five-point Calvinism (see pp. 149–52 for details). Hence he believes that radical Calvinism “is becoming one of the hottest beliefs among students and twenty-somethings all over the United States, with Calvinist African-American rappers taking the music world by storm!” (p. 149). He is also pleased that Baptists, among others, are stressing absolutes and hence are not surrendering to postmodernism. He does not see this as a new fundamentalism.

Catherwood, who lectures on Balkan and Middle Eastern history, with an emphasis on the struggles between Christianity and Islam, at St Edmund’s College, Cambridge, stresses the enormous diversity among contemporary conservative Protestants. His “evangelicals” are thus “very cosmopolitan,” “multinational, multicultural, interdenominational” (pp. 9–10), as well as “genuinely global” (p. 19–20). He has learned this from observing his own Anglican congregation in Cambridge, and from the work of Philip Jenkins, who has alerted him to a “global evangelical renaissance” (p. 10). He knows the American evangelical movement from conversations with some unidentified Americans. For his understanding of the remarkable growth of conservative Protestantism in the Southern Hemisphere, he turns to Philip Jenkins (see pp. 71, 75ff., 81), and for estimates of the size of various Christian denominations, he turns to David Barrett (p. 83), a respected source. For his understanding of “evangelical,” he relies on David Bebbington (pp. 92–3).

Catherwood insists that his “evangelicals” all accept the Trinity (p. 15) and hence see Jesus as “part of the Trinity itself” (p. 16), and they also hold to the Bible alone (pp. 16, 28), an essential idea going

back to the Reformation (p. 17). They also believe in total depravity (p. 17, compare p. 53)—that is, an innate (or by nature) sinfulness (p. 18), as well as justification by faith alone, whereby “only our faith in [Jesus’s] saving action *justifies* us, or declares sinners like us righteous in the eyes of God” (p. 21). None of these “central truths” (p. 15) are explained in any detail, but are merely asserted as givens. Catherwood is profoundly impressed by the enormous growth of Christian faith in China (pp. 87–89), much of which has taken place under a Communist regime that has been officially, and very aggressively, atheist. He cites statistics reporting eighty to a hundred million Christians now in China. Without knowing what these new Chinese Christians believe, he merely assumes that their faith is “evangelical in tone” (p. 88)—that is, they hold solidly to contemporary American or British understandings of that label. For obvious reasons, Latter-day Saints should find Catherwood’s comments on the rise of Christian faith in China the most interesting part of this slim book. The growth of some measure of faith in Jesus Christ in China seems to me to be the preparation for the introduction to the fulness of the gospel to that strange and wonderful land.

Louis Midgley

Royal Skousen. *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009. xlv + 789 pp., with appendix. \$35.00.

Professor Royal Skousen, an internationally respected linguistic theorist based at Brigham Young University, has also devoted more than two decades to intensive, meticulous study of the textual history of the Book of Mormon. His recent Yale University Press edition of the book is a very important product—though not the only product—of that dedicated engagement. *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* represents the bottom-line results of one of the most impressive and sustained individual scholarly undertakings in the history of Mormonism. The multiple volumes already published by Professor Skousen through the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS, now part of BYU’s Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship) are indispensable for serious scholars of the

Book of Mormon. But they're also very large, rather expensive, and . . . well, multiple. In other words, they're unwieldy for speedy reference when one simply wants to see the text quickly in order to know the likely original reading of this or that passage. There has long been a need for a single, convenient volume that would make the fruit of Professor Skousen's labor readily accessible, and now it's here. Moreover, with its "sense-lines" and its superb physical characteristics (e.g., it easily stays flat on a table or a desk, even when opened virtually to the front or the back of the volume), *The Earliest Text* is a wonderful version for simply reading the book through. It's a great study edition.

What are "sense-lines"? With the help of the national-award-winning typographer Jonathan Saltzman, Professor Skousen has laid out the text in a page-wide column on each of the volume's wide pages. The text has then been divided into the standard verses, with the verse numbers placed visibly but unobtrusively in the left-hand margin. But, more than this, the verses have been divided into multiple lines, each line representing a significant, separate unit of thought. This may seem a small thing, and in some ways it is, but it substantially clarifies the flow of the text and greatly eases reading.

It's instructive to read the responses to the Yale edition of the Book of Mormon that appear on Amazon.com. "This format," writes a Virginia woman, "makes my autistic daughter feel like she is reading shorter verses. She'll read huge chunks, as long as they are composed of 'short verses.'" A reader in California reports that he has particularly enjoyed the sense-lines. "I have read the Book of Mormon many times, but after reading a couple of chapters I was always ready to quit. With the Earliest Text, I started to read it at the beginning—and before I knew it, I was at Chapter 4. . . . I didn't feel [the] stress in my reading which I usually feel while reading the double-column version in the standard edition. . . . I plan to always use the Earliest Text for my daily reading."

The Earliest Text changes no doctrines, but it will almost certainly change the way even experienced readers of the Book of Mormon perceive and understand the book's sense and style. They will notice aspects of the book that they have previously overlooked. Their

understanding will be enhanced. In fact, although Professor Skousen (himself a believer) has been a consummate scholar who has followed the evidence where it leads, never trying to skew or spin things in a faithful direction, many who study *The Earliest Text* carefully will find this edition faith promoting—as well they should. For one thing, it illustrates the remarkable consistency of the text as Joseph Smith dictated it, and it even contains Hebraisms that have been edited out of official editions over the years because, although they exemplify good Hebrew style, they're odd English. As a reader from Michigan observes on the Amazon website, the book “allows us to stand a bit closer to the words of the original revelation.” For those who believe that God intervened to restore lost scripture through Joseph Smith in the early nineteenth century, there can scarcely be any higher commendation than that.

Daniel C. Peterson

Kenda Creasy Dean. *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010. x + 264 pp., with five appendixes, notes, and index. \$24.95.

A Methodist minister and professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, Kenda Creasy Dean is no fan of Mormon doctrine. “It may be difficult for a ‘gentile’ or non-Mormon to read Mormon views on God, community, vocation, and eschatology without raising an eyebrow,” she writes in her book *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church*, “but it is just as difficult to read the data on Mormon teenagers without feeling a hint of awe” (p. 59).

Professor Dean, a collaborator on the well-respected National Study of Youth and Religion, indicts her own mainstream Christianity: The religious faith of most American adolescents is inarticulate and shallow, she declares, and “we’re responsible” (p. 3). She fears that emphasis on “a do-good, feel-good spirituality” (p. 4) at the expense of real discipleship—she calls it “Moralistic Therapeutic Deism”—may lead to the loss of the next generation.

“American young people,” she says, “are, theoretically, fine with religious faith—but it does not concern them very much, and it is not durable enough to survive long after they graduate from high school” (p. 3). She condemns what she terms a “Christian-ish” pseudo-faith, “the Cult of Nice,” a “diner theology,” “a bargain religion, cheap but satisfying, whose gods require little in the way of fidelity or sacrifice” (p. 10).

“Teenagers tend to view God as either a butler or a therapist,” she explains, “someone who meets their needs when summoned (‘a cosmic lifeguard,’ as one youth minister put it) or who listens nonjudgmentally and helps youth feel good about themselves (‘kind of like my guidance counselor,’ a ninth grader told me)” (p. 17).

“The problem,” writes Professor Dean, “does not seem to be that churches are teaching young people badly, but that we are doing an exceedingly good job of teaching youth what we really believe: namely, that Christianity is not a big deal, that God requires little. . . . What if the blasé religiosity of most American teenagers is not the result of poor communication but the result of excellent communication of a watered-down gospel so devoid of God’s self-giving love in Jesus Christ, so immune to the sending love of the Holy Spirit that it might not be Christianity at all?” (pp. 11–12).

In fact, the passage from early Methodist leader George Whitefield (d. 1770) that appears on the book’s frontispiece (and supplies its title) strikingly echoes the language of Joseph Smith’s first vision, defining an “almost Christian” as somebody who “is fond of the form, but never experiences the power of godliness in his heart” (p. vi).

Nevertheless, according to Dr. Dean, “A minority of American teenagers—but a significant minority—say religious faith is important, and that it makes a difference in their lives. These teenagers are doing better in life on a number of scales, compared to their less religious peers” (p. 19). “Decades of research consistently link high levels of adolescent religiosity with prosocial behavior and success in both academics and social and familial relationships” (p. 16). Such youth are more likely to succeed in school, have a positive outlook on life, and even wear their seatbelts.

Conservative and black Protestant adolescents do well in the data, followed (in decreasing order) by mainline Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish, and nonreligious youth. But one group really shines: “Mormon teenagers attach the most importance to faith and are most likely to fall in the category of highly devoted youth. . . . In nearly every area, using a variety of measures, Mormon teenagers showed the highest levels of religious understanding, vitality, and congruence between religious belief and practiced faith; they were the least likely to engage in high-risk behavior and consistently were the most positive, healthy, hopeful, and self-aware teenagers in the interviews” (p. 20). In fact, chapter 3 of *Almost Christian* is entitled “Mormon Envy.”

But there’s plenty of room for improvement—I’ve been a bishop of a young single adult ward—and none for smug complacency. Nor can we forget how fragile things are. “This Church,” Elder Jeffrey R. Holland told a BYU Education Week audience nearly thirty years ago, “is always only one generation away from extinction. . . . All we would have to do, I assume, to destroy this work is stop teaching our children for one generation. Just everybody stop, close the books, seal up your heart, keep your mouth shut, and don’t bear a testimony. In one generation it would be 1820 all over again” (“That Our Children May Know,” 25 August 1981).

Daniel C. Peterson

N. T. Wright. *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009. xxiii + 114 pp., no index. \$14.00.

Following Jesus is an anthology of twelve of N. T. (Tom) Wright’s sermons delivered before 1994. In a clear, readily accessible form, his *Biblical Reflections on Discipleship*, first published by SPCK, are now available in an American edition. Wright is a fine writer. His style is bright and clear; he wears his learning modestly. In this collection of speeches, he explores the meaning of the “death of death” and the resurrection of Jesus. He seeks to understand more deeply what following Jesus means for us here and now. His sermons also provide a fine introduction to his more complex, dense scholarly works.

Originally delivered from the pulpit, the twelve speeches have been arranged in two parts. The first part, entitled “Looking to Jesus,” consists of sermons that unpack the basic meaning of six books in the New Testament (Hebrews, Colossians, Matthew, John, Mark, and Revelation) (pp. 3–62). The second part, entitled “A Living Sacrifice,” consists of thematic sermons—for example, “Temptation” (pp. 83–89), “Hell” (pp. 91–98), and so forth. I suggest that the reader begin with the second part of this book.

In the sermon entitled “Heaven and Power” (pp. 99–105), Wright argues that it was “Jesus himself, no abstract principle but a human person,” who was “exalted as the still loving, still giving, still generous Lord, to whom one day every knee shall bow, and whom we are today summoned to follow.” He insists that we who are the children of God “should take our own part in implementing his victory, the victory of the power of love over the love of power, throughout his creation. Those who commit themselves to following the ascended Lord Jesus are thereby signing on for this task (pp. 104–5). Unfortunately, our age, much like the past, “is dying for power, and that is in fact dying of power” (p. 102). Wright sees the death and eventual ascension of Jesus as a sign that the power of love is stronger than the lust for power. He insists that the death and resurrection of Jesus was not a defeat but a victory over the “powers that be.” Hence “the generous self-giving love of Jesus, giving himself for the sins of the world, has been vindicated and exalted as the supreme principle of the universe” (p. 104).

Even though there are areas where we might ultimately part company with Tom Wright, there are good reasons that Latter-day Saints should enjoy his works and also learn from him. The most obvious reason is that this respected English evangelical New Testament scholar, and also sometime Anglican churchman, has many of the same rhetorical and literary gifts that made C. S. Lewis a favorite among the Saints, including especially Elder Neal A. Maxwell. In addition, Wright eschews what can be called *preacher prattle*—that is, among other things, the notorious *alones* (*faith alone*, *Bible alone*, *Jesus alone*, and so forth) that lard contemporary American Fundamentalist/evangelical rhetoric.

Wright has also challenged the idea that one is justified (saved) by confessing Christ. This idea is considered the very heart of the Protestant Reformation and hence is the core of much American Fundamentalist/evangelical religiosity. He rejects the notion that God justifies the sinner by imputing righteousness to the still totally depraved one; no one is “saved” in sin. Instead, much like the teachings set forth in the Book of Mormon, Wright contends that through the work of the Holy Spirit, with the full attention and effort of the new disciple, a cleansing, purging sanctification must necessarily take place before the final judgment, at which time those who are sanctified from sin, and hence are genuine Saints, will be justified. We all must seek to follow Jesus in deed and not merely in word as we undergo the long, difficult, often painful process of rebirth. Much like Elder Maxwell, Wright is eager to comprehend what it means to be a genuine disciple of the Lord.

I highly recommend *Following Jesus*. It is a solid introduction to Wright’s scholarship on the New Testament and related matters.

Louis Midgley