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### Donald W. Hemingway, *Christianity in America before Columbus?*

Bruce W. Warren

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**Title**

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**Abstract** Review of *Christianity in America before Columbus?* (1988),  
by Donald W. Hemingway.

Donald W. Hemingway, *Christianity in America before Columbus?* Salt Lake City: Hawkes, 1988. 225 pp. \$12.95.

Reviewed by Bruce W. Warren

In *Christianity in America before Columbus?* Donald Hemingway points out that Christianity originated in the Mediterranean world, but its message eventually spread to Europe, Africa, and Asia in the Old World. But was the message of Christianity taken to the New World before the voyages of Columbus? This question is the subject of the book under review.

An attractive gloss cover packages the book. The content of the book is presented in 256 pages of text, 10 pages of references, 8 color plates, and 13 black-and-white illustrations. The descriptive material comes mainly from Mesoamerica, 225 pages, but 27 pages of description come from Peru in South America and 4 pages from North America. All the illustrations are from Mesoamerica.

The author, Donald W. Hemingway, "is an attorney, teacher, musician and author. He has practiced law in Nevada and Utah and worked many years in the office of the Staff Judge Advocate in the United States Air Force. . . . The collecting of original manuscripts dealing with the history and genealogies produced by ancient civilizations has been an avocation of his for many years."

Information used in the text comes from authors writing in the sixteenth through twentieth centuries. They are all non-Mormon authors. Even his material on the Book of Mormon, pages 240-45, comes from the non-Mormon historian Hubert Howe Bancroft's five-volume series *The Native Races* published in 1883. Three Mormon writers are listed in the references. One is Charles E. Dibble (an expert on the writings and language of the Aztecs), whose lecture on "The Conquest through Aztec Eyes" is cited; and the other two (Warren and Ferguson) are the coauthors of *The Messiah in Ancient America*, whose book is used to date a couple of the illustrations from the Maya site of Palenque.

Hemingway has divided his book into four main sections: (1) Symbols of Christianity; (2) Practices of Christianity; (3) Beliefs and traditions; and (4) Where did these symbols, practices, and beliefs come from? There is a lot of fascinating discussion coming from many different authors covering a

period of nearly five hundred years. The reader will find this compilation of material useful and conveniently available in one volume.

What is lacking in the book is a critical evaluation of the writings consulted. A growing body of literature is available that deals with the efforts of the native Americans and the Spaniards in their attempts to understand and synthesize their respective belief systems. Contemporary historians, anthropologists, archaeologists, and linguists have much to contribute to the proper interpretation of the various sources of information. For example, the final four illustrations from the Codex Borgia are interpreted by Lord Edward King Kingsborough in a very suspicious manner. Kingsborough uses the Old and New Testaments to explain the meaning of these paintings in the light of Christ's death and resurrection. He did not use any of the native writings or ethnographic materials in his efforts. Most scholars are certain Kingsborough went too far in his interpretations. The reader may wish to look more closely at the illustrations and be his own judge. If that is not satisfactory then one should immerse himself in the appropriate literature.

I would think that students of ancient America and the Book of Mormon would want this volume on their bookshelves. It is a handy resource.