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## Book Notes

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## BOOK NOTES

**Wayne D. Arnett. *Defending the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: A Reference Guide*. Redding, CA: SHIELDS and FAIR, 2003. 48 pp. \$4.95.**

This brief pamphlet represents an effort by Wayne Arnett to provide a resource for the Saints to counter some of the anti-Mormon propaganda currently being circulated by countercultists and materials posted on a host of anti-Mormon Web sites.

**Gregory A. Boyd. *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000. 175 pp., with scripture index. \$12.99.**

Among Latter-day Saints some interest has recently developed in the remarkable new understanding of God currently being advanced by evangelical scholars who flatly reject the dogmatic foundations of classical theism. Boyd does not focus on abstract theoretical issues but instead on showing how the open view of God can be seen in the Bible, once one has come to see that classical theism got it wrong about God “under the influence of Hellenistic philosophy” (p. 17). Boyd argues that God is testing us to see if we will keep the covenant we have made with him. For this to be other than a game, we must be free and the future—our future as well as that of God—must be open and not fixed at the moment of creation. To accept this radically different understanding of divine and human things,

according to Boyd, we must “simply free ourselves from the Hellenistic philosophical assumption that God must be unchanging *in every respect* and that time is an illusion” (p. 85). We must reject “the Platonic notion that time and change were less real than timeless stability” (p. 107) if we are to understand what is really being set out in the Bible. Boyd insists that “the view of God as eternally unchanging in every respect (and thus as possessing an eternal unchanging knowledge of all of world history) owes more to Plato than it does to the Bible” (p. 109, cf. p. 115).

Boyd’s setting forth of an understanding of God in which he is not above or outside time and therefore has a mutually significant reciprocal covenant relationship with his children will be useful to Latter-day Saints.

**Newell G. Bringham and Lavina Fielding Anderson, eds. *Excavating Mormon Pasts: The New Historiography of the Last Half Century*. Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2004. xiv + 442 pp., with index. \$39.95.**

Some of the sixteen essays in this anthology—for example, those by Davis Bitton, David L. Paulsen, Craig L. Foster, and Glen M. Leonard—are both accurate and insightful. But several of these essays, much like the literature identified and assessed therein, end up merely contributing to the often confused and confusing conversation about how best to write about the Mormon past. For example, some authors assume that there is a genuinely “new Mormon history” (pp. ix–xiv) and that since 1950 there is a single distinctively new and fundamentally different way of writing about the Mormon past. Unfortunately, no one examines the partisan use of this label by historians advancing revisionist, ideologically driven, essentially secular accounts of the Mormon past. Other than Davis Bitton’s essay (p. 351), there is simply no critical reflection in this volume on the use of that label. Would it not have been appropriate for the editors or someone else to have included a carefully drafted history of the slogan “new Mormon history” in a collection of essays focused on describing, in the LDS context, *The New Historiography of the Last Half Century*?

A central question for all historians is that of objectivity. Can history be objective? On this question, several of the authors who use this term neglect to indicate the lack of agreement over whether “objectiv-

ity” is possible or even a meaningful concept, nor do they describe the debate over the use of such language going on among Mormon historians. This and other flaws mar the essays by Roger D. Launius, Newell G. Bringhurst, Klaus J. Hansen, and a few others, whose summary remarks contain various unfortunate potshots aimed at the faith of the Saints.

**Stephen T. Davis. *Risen Indeed: Making Sense of the Resurrection*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993. xii + 219 pp., with bibliography and index. \$24.00.**

Stephen Davis, a respected professor of philosophy at California’s Claremont McKenna College, has written a fine book of both biblical exegesis and philosophical argument defending traditional Christian belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ and the future resurrection of the dead. In a wide-ranging but deeply informed and intelligent discussion, he treats common objections and covers such topics as physicalism, dualism, and the nature of personal identity. Latter-day Saint readers will be particularly interested in his brief reflections on the prospects for the salvation of the unevangelized, those who have not heard the message of Christ during mortal life (see pp. 159–65). In the course of his examination of that topic, he not only invokes such passages as 1 Peter 3:18–20; 4:5–6; and 1 Corinthians 15:29, so familiar to Latter-day Saints, but, without any apparent knowledge of Mormon doctrine on the subject, comes to a tentative position (a “conjecture” that he titles “postmortem evangelism”) remarkably like that taught by Joseph Smith and further elaborated in the vision of the redemption of the dead granted to President Joseph F. Smith on 3 October 1918 and now recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 138.

**Ethan E. Harris. *The Gospel According to Joseph Smith: A Christian Response to Mormon Teaching*, with foreword by Bill McKeever. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001. xx + 184 pp., with indexes of scriptures and persons. \$11.99.**

P&R (formerly Presbyterian and Reformed) Publishing Company publishes books with a radically reformed bias, that is, from the perspective of TULIP (five-point Calvinism). After eight years in the

U.S. Army, the author, Ethan Harris, served as resource consultant and director of conferencing at Ligonier Ministries. He is currently the Webmaster of the Reformed Library, and he also promotes Homestead College of Bible and Graduate School, which grants correspondence degrees at all academic levels, including the doctorate. *A Christian Response* is introduced by Bill McKeever of Mormonism Research Ministry. The book is essentially derivative. Harris draws his contrasts between what he calls the “LDS view” of various topics and “the biblical view”—that is, a fundamentally Calvinist reading of the scriptures from Sandra and Jerald Tanner, John Ankerberg and John Weldon, Bill McKeever, Robert Morey, Latayne Scott, and Marvin Cowan, all part of the countercult stable of anti-Mormon writers. Nothing seems to indicate that Harris has consulted reliable LDS scholarship.

**Alister McGrath. *The Twilight of Atheism: The Rise and Fall of Disbelief in the Modern World*. New York: Doubleday, 2004. xiii + 306 pp., with list of works consulted and index. \$23.95.**

While not mining the literature by atheists in America but focusing, instead, on British and European literature, Alister McGrath challenges the widely held assumption that the world is steadily becoming more secular. This distinguished British evangelical theologian and historian argues, in a book easily accessible to a popular audience, that the opposite is now the case. He traces the history of atheism from the eighteenth century and shows that atheists have linked their ideology to a dream of ameliorating the pressing evils from the world. They have hoped that, as dangerous superstitions were progressively removed by enlightenment, the sciences, narrowly understood, could be invoked to relieve the plight of humankind.

Such dreams, according to McGrath, who began his career as an atheist and also one full of trendy political illusions, have fallen on hard times. Modernity, fueled by such illusions and resting on atheism, has come under increasing criticism. The illusions spawned by political programs grounded in atheism have evaporated; modernity is currently in full flight. McGrath argues that this has opened a space in which new manifestations of faith have been able to flourish. But it

is, according to McGrath, among the half a billion adherents of Pentecostalism and similar movements, and not among the old Christian denominations, that the revival of religiosity has flourished and both theoretical and practical atheism has faded. This is a book worthy of careful attention.

**Michael A. Signer, ed. *Memory and History in Christianity and Judaism*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001. xv + 231 pp., with index. \$23.95.**

Since the publication of Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's magisterial *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* in 1982 by the University of Washington Press (reissued in 1989), there have been additional scholarly reflections on remembrance in the scriptures, as well as a vigorous conversation among Jewish intellectuals over the role of memory in maintaining Jewish identity. And Christian scholars have also taken an interest in remembrance in the Old and New Testaments. Signer's anthology of fifteen essays is an important reminder of the relevance of biblical concepts for faith and also a significant contribution to the conversation among and between Jews and Christians over these issues. Latter-day Saints seem to have first had access to the "ways of remembrance" as set out in the Old Testament in Yerushalmi's book. They thereby discovered the important role of remembrance as set out in the prophetic teachings in the Book of Mormon, and also in LDS liturgy and ritual, and might wish to give this anthology some attention.

**Diane E. Wirth. *Parallels: Mesoamerican and Ancient Middle Eastern Traditions*. St. George, UT: Stonecliff, 2003. 211 pp., with bibliography and index. \$17.95.**

Though not specifically mentioning the Book of Mormon, Diane Wirth builds a solid case for pre-Columbian transoceanic contacts. She presents many detailed similarities found among Middle Eastern and Mesoamerican myths and traditions, such as bearded figures, creation myths, fish traditions, the king and the world tree, and scribes. Alternate theories of diffusion (borrowings from one culture

by another) or isolationism (with independent invention) might account for such similarities, but Wirth's evidence suggests that, long ago, transoceanic voyages were made from the Middle East to the Western Hemisphere.