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BOOK NOTES

Julian Baggini. *Atheism: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003. x + 119 pp., with index. \$9.95.

Baggini's brief essay is one in an extensive "Very Short Introductions" series designed for those who want an easy access to a new subject. Baggini's atheism is mild; it lacks the kind of evangelizing zeal manifested in the recent atheist best-selling potboilers by Richard Dawkins (*The God Delusion*), Sam Harris (*The End of Faith*), and Daniel Dennett (*Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon*). Baggini begins his *Atheism* by explaining that as a child he "attended a Roman Catholic primary school. It would," he opines, "serve the cause of militant atheism well if I could report beatings by nuns and fondlings in the sacristy by randy priests, but neither gaudy tale would be true. On the contrary, I was raised in what could be seen as a gentle, benign religious environment" (p. 1). It is certainly true that contemporary militant atheism loves to place the blame for the evils in the world on belief in God. This is not, however, Baggini's tack. Instead, he reports that he shifted in his youth from benign Roman Catholicism to Methodism and then, by the time he left school, he "had become an atheist, a person who believes there is no God or gods" (p. 1). His shift away from faith was without trauma or wrenching.

Baggini's rather mild atheism, he avers, should not be seen as something at all dark, sinister, or threatening. Instead, for him atheism

is merely the rational default position one would and should hold if one had not been set upon by people who insist, without proof, that there is a God; it is merely the obvious naturalism that follows from inductive reasoning about every question one can possibly ask. He is one who would, he grants, without a sense of irony, *believe* in God if there were sufficient *proof*, which he concludes there is not.

Baggini insists that all one could possibly want out of life is an interesting job and enough money to live comfortably and some amusements. What more could one possibly ask for? His is the atheism now very common in Europe. Since he and presumably many others now have these finer things, thanks to a burgeoning economic system supplemented by government welfare schemes, why should rational beings be troubled by doubts, religions, churches, and especially Bible-thumping fundamentalists? He disagrees with those who believe in God, but this disagreement does not, he contends, imply hostility, merely disdain or a bit of indignation. He just does not care to take faith in God seriously until someone produces proof that will fit snugly within his dogmatic naturalism. So it appears that he has his comfortable religion, he just does not know it as such. His moral motto seems to be mere comfortable living, of course, entirely without redemption, barren of faith and hence without hope.

Randall Balmer. *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*, revised and expanded edition. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2004. viii + 781 pp. \$34.95.

Balmer's compilation of items for this volume, which is useful and not merely a collection of exotica, demonstrates that what falls under the label *evangelical* is enormously diffuse, held together with only the most general family resemblances. Balmer believes that in both its origin and variety it is the dominant folk religion in America. Evangelicalism, broadly or loosely defined by Balmer, is both an American manifestation of Protestant religiosity that is increasingly stretching out to other parts of the world in "various manifestations of evangelicalism: fundamentalism, neo-evangelicalism, the holiness move-

ment, pentecostalism, the charismatic movement, and various forms of African-American and Hispanic evangelicalism” (p. viii).

Though Herbert W. Armstrong’s *Worldwide Church of God* (pp. 767–68) is included, presumably because it was a manifestation of outlandish conservative Protestant religiosity, there are appropriately no entries under Mormon or Joseph Smith. However, Balmer manages to mention Joseph Smith in the entry dealing with the Burned-over District (upstate New York known for camp meetings and revivals) (p. 112).

This volume is a highly useful source of basic, generally sound information on a very large number of topics, individuals, concepts, practices, churches, parachurch movements, and so forth, all of which is organized alphabetically. Latter-day Saints are likely to be fascinated by the accounts of such bizarre evangelical notables as Jimmy Swaggart, Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker, John Ankerberg, Jack Chick, Benny Hinn, or Kenneth Copeland, as well as David Berg and his strange Children of God movement, the Christian Research Institute, and the National Association of Evangelicals, with a bland mention of Ted Haggard, its now exposed and deposed leader. There is no mention of the countercult movement or virtually any of its luminaries such as “Dr.” Walter Martin, Ed Decker, James White, or other curious figures familiar to those Latter-day Saints who have encountered sectarian anti-Mormonism. However, there are entries on Ravi Zacharias (p. 777), Richard Mouw (pp. 475–76), Norman Geisler (pp. 284–85), the Denver Seminary (p. 209), and Calvinism and its five-point version (pp. 122–23).

Margaret Barker. *The Hidden Tradition of the Kingdom of God*. London: SPCK, 2007. xii + 144 pp., with notes on nonbiblical sources and indexes. £9.99.

Margaret Barker, English biblical scholar, has published a series of books and studies on what has come to be referred to as her “Temple Theology.” Her primary concern has been to improve the understanding of Christian origins, and her findings and interpretations would

call for much revision in the way Christian origins and Old Testament relationships are understood.

This, her most recent and twelfth book, is based on lectures given in London in 2006, in which she traces the concept of the kingdom of God by seeing its origins in the priestly traditions and practices of the First Temple—the Temple of Solomon. Much of this tradition was secret or reserved for the priestly class, and important aspects of the early Israelite religion are seen as being rejected by reformers known as the Deuteronomists and in the changes effected under King Josiah prior to the exile. Christianity is seen by Barker as restoring important aspects of this lost tradition. Barker holds that to “understand what was meant by the Kingdom of God it is necessary to recover what remains of that hidden tradition of the holy of holies and the high priesthood” (p. 2). In her wide-ranging studies she attempts to reconstruct the early ideas as preserved in the Enoch literature and many related writings. A brief but helpful identification of nonbiblical sources is included.

This book, in discussing the kingdom of God, provides the reader with an introduction to and summary of Barker’s work; the footnotes identify places in her earlier publications where various points and ideas are given in greater detail. Some topics in this book that should be of particular interest to the Latter-day Saints would be the First Temple and its traditions, the Enoch traditions and the idea of the human becoming divine (which is seen as an orthodox Christian concept), the rewriting of the Hebrew scriptures and development of the canon, the older priesthood, and the importance of the book of Revelation.

Alan Jacobs. *The Narnian: The Life and Imagination of C. S. Lewis*. New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005. xxvi + 342 pp. \$25.95.

C. S. Lewis died on 22 November 1963, the same day that Aldous Huxley (author of the famous dystopian novel *Brave New World*, among other titles) and John F. Kennedy went to their rewards. Since then, his fame has, if anything, continued to grow—most recently because of the Disney film *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, based on the first book of his seven-volume *Chronicles of Narnia*. But he was far more

than merely the creator of a beloved series of stories for children. An immensely learned teacher of medieval and Renaissance literature at both Oxford and Cambridge, a formidable and enthusiastic debater on philosophical topics, a superb writer of fiction for adults, and a close friend of such lights as Dorothy Sayers, Charles Williams, and J. R. R. Tolkien, Lewis (a former atheist) was also, arguably, the greatest Christian apologist of the twentieth century. (He has long been a favorite among Latter-day Saints, including the late Elder Neal A. Maxwell, who quoted him frequently.) In this book, Alan Jacobs, a professor of English at Wheaton College in Illinois (home of the finest collection of research materials on C. S. Lewis in the world) and director of its Faith and Learning Program, offers not merely a conventional biography of Lewis but a sketch of the development of Lewis's mind, of his philosophy, his theology, and his extraordinary imagination. Nothing can replace direct contact with C. S. Lewis's supremely lucid autobiographical writings, fiction, literary scholarship, and apologetics, but those interested in the man himself will find much here to deepen their understanding and appreciation of him.

Ramsay MacMullen. *Voting about God in Early Church Councils*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006. ix + 170 pp., with bibliography and index. \$30.00.

The Council of Nicaea is normally depicted as the meeting of great men with great minds to decide the most basic doctrine that Christians believed, but there is another side to the story. It is a tale of sound and fury, signifying much ado about nothing, a tale told not by an idiot but by a first-rate professor emeritus of Roman history. Ramsey MacMullen sets aside the great men to concentrate on the ordinary bishop attending the council. Eschewing the normal focus of the content of the creeds, the author concentrates on the process that produced them: ostensibly a democratic process through which the Holy Spirit was manifest, but which in reality was a carefully crafted power play. The politics, the backstabbing and betrayal, the dirty backroom deals, the mob violence, the political maneuvering and machinations, the forgery of proceedings and documents, and the threats of banishment for those who did

not tow the party line are all set forth. So, as it happens, the ordinary bishop did not really understand the content of the creeds, could not really hear and follow what was going on, and was scared to death (a real possibility) of what might happen if he said what he really thought. Interestingly, the more the church concentrated on the creeds and their content, the more divided and corrupt it became. This eye-opening book yields fresh insight into why God might consider the creeds to be an abomination in his sight and thus is essential reading for anyone interested in the church councils of the fourth through sixth centuries or in the creeds that they produced.

Peter McEnhill and George Newlands. *Fifty Key Christian Thinkers*. London: Routledge, 2004. xi + 297 pp., with glossary and index. \$26.95.

This is a fine book for Latter-day Saints who might be struggling to figure out who many of the leading lights in Christian theology are and something about what they believed or did not believe. The fifty “key” figures are listed alphabetically by their surname, but there is a useful “Chronological list of Contents” (pp. vii–viii). The entries are competently done. The choice of “key” figures is also acceptable, even if it is a bit odd to have an entry on Ludwig Feuerbach, who is described as an “anti-theologian,” meaning that he was an atheist. There are a few other similar oddities or anomalies, but this is common among those known as “theologians.” Among the fifty entries are writers like Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas. They are part of the antique world. Then there are also entries on later writers such as John Calvin, Søren Kierkegaard, Karl Barth, and Paul Tillich. Eight of the theologians whose views are described were still alive when the book was published.

Richard L. Mouw. *Calvinism in the Las Vegas Airport: Making Connections in Today's World*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004. 139 pp., with index. \$14.99.

The title of this book has its roots in a film entitled *Hardcore* in which a staunch Calvinist tries unsuccessfully to explain his beliefs

to a prostitute in the Las Vegas airport. This book is Mouw's effort to explain his faith both to himself and to those who are not enmeshed in his variety of Dutch Reformed Calvinism. Among other questions, Mouw strives to answer: "How does a human being get right with God?" (p. 26). The proper Calvinist response, he explains, is simply TULIP, which is the popular acronym setting out the five fundamentals of Calvinism—Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement (that is, Jesus redeemed only those predestined for salvation), Irresistible grace, Preservation of the saints (once saved, always saved). This is his basic Calvinist credo. The heart of TULIP, according to Mouw, "is a strong conviction about divine sovereignty. Not that only Calvinists believe in a sovereign God. To make that claim would be to bear false witness against many Christians of other theological persuasions" (p. 27). Latter-day Saints have become familiar with this language, which is a ploy Mouw uses in conversations with those with a different theology or with those he and others deny have genuine Christian convictions.

Mouw, who is a decent fellow, tries to explain his theology in a way that takes the blunt edge from what otherwise seems loathsome and aberrant about Calvinist tenets. He waffles about his commitment to TULIP, though he denies that this is the case. Take the following as an example: "Either God ordains/permits everything that comes to pass, and we simply have to accept that fact, or there are some things that happen even though God does not want them to" (p. 51). These would seem to be the alternatives, given the Calvinist insistence that everything was fixed at the moment of creation. Mouw insists that God fixed everything, "but we *don't* simply have to accept that fact. We can complain to God rather vigorously about the things we have a hard time accepting" (p. 51). But what Mouw does not explain is how, in his radical Calvinist world, such complaining would be possible or make any difference. Latter-day Saints should be aware that this kinder, gentler version of Calvinism is behind the recent so-called interfaith dialogues that Mouw and his associates are conducting with Robert Millet and his associates.

Mouw explains that he came from a Dutch Reformed background and once answered an altar call by Billy Graham, but he was eventually faced with jarring questions and, in his words, as he “searched for answers, I wandered for a while theologically, briefly flirting with both liberal Protestantism’s social gospel teachings and Roman Catholic social thought. I quickly discovered, however, that neither of those perspectives could satisfy me, neither in my soul or in my intellect” (p. 71). But, he explains, he eventually “discovered a form of Calvinism that struck me as a powerful way of dealing with the issues” (p. 71). Notice the stress on what he did and thought rather than on the radical sovereignty of God. Mouw’s version of five-point Calvinism does not have the sharp edges of his more ferocious associates, some of whom see him as waffling. Is this nice element merely a function of his gentlemanly personality or the logic of his theology? He claims to “love the TULIP doctrines,” but he admits that “they don’t make many puzzles go away.” Instead, for him, they help “discern the mysteries of how a sovereign God draws rebel sinners to himself, restoring them to the purposes for which they were originally created” (p. 121), presumably in the instant before the fall turned every soul into a totally depraved creature and also when some of them just happened to be saved.

Roger E. Olson. *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006. 250 pp., with name and subject indexes. \$25.00.

This is an attempt by one not enamored by Calvinism to explain and defend his own essentially Arminian understanding of divine things from the calumny of aggressive, intolerant, and poorly informed Calvinists who either hint or assert that Olson and those who share anything like his version of conservative Protestantism are not genuine Christians. He does this by describing ten myths about Arminian beliefs, devoting a chapter to each. He describes the impact on his own thinking when Clark Pinnock, who was one of his “theological mentors from a distance . . . very publicly switched from Calvinist theology to Arminianism” (p. 8). Olson describes in several places in this book the problem of Arminians having to hide their faith “in order to

avoid conflict and suspicion that might hinder their careers in teaching and publishing” (p. 9).

Olson concludes his argument by insisting that “evangelicalism is a multidenominational and transdenominational movement; it has no headquarters and no firm boundaries” (p. 245). He insists that both Calvinists of various stripes and Arminians need to keep in mind the things they share, especially “when they are in contexts where neither Calvinism nor Arminianism is the norm (as in the National Association of Evangelicals [NAE] and similar organizations)” (p. 245).

Latter-day Saints will undoubtedly find themselves sympathetic when they sense that Olson and others who are Arminian in their theology are deeply offended when they are treated as “barely Christian” or as “sub-Christians” merely because they hold views that do not entirely square with some version of Calvinism.

Daniel C. Peterson. *Muhammad: Prophet of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007. xi + 186 pages, with name and subject index and citation index. \$15.00.

Opening with a substantial chapter on the society and culture of pre-Islamic Arabia in the fifth and sixth centuries after Christ, this is a relatively concise narrative biography of Muhammad (AD 570–632), the founder of Islam. It was written for a non-Mormon audience by the editor of the *FARMS Review*, who, in his professional life, is a specialist on Islamic intellectual history. The book follows traditional Arabic sources for its general outline, interspersing comments and observations drawn from Western orientalist scholarship.

In his foreword, Khaleel Mohammed, of San Diego State University, calls it an “admirable book,” “written in a clear, fluid style that makes it suitable for both the scholar and the non-scholar.” Parviz Morewedge, director of Global Scholarly Publications in New York City, terms it “the best scholarly text on the prophet Muhammad written by a Christian. A must-read, especially for non-Muslims who are interested in a solid, compassionate treatment of Muhammad’s vision and accomplishments.”

Jeffery L. Sheler. *Believers: A Journey into Evangelical America*. New York: Viking, 2006. 324 pp., with suggested readings and index. \$24.95.

This is an account of evangelical religiosity by a journalist for *U.S. News & World Report*. It is not serious, careful scholarship. Instead, it is impressionistic, full of anecdotes gathered from interviews and observations. Sheler begins his account with the bizarre—“television evangelist Jim Bakker had,” he reports, “resigned in disgrace from his \$130 million a year PTL (Praise the Lord) ministry after confessing to an illicit sexual encounter with Jessica Hahn” (p. 1). And then Sheler mentions Jimmy Swaggart and his affairs, as well as Oral Roberts, who “told his own [TV] viewers that God would ‘call me home’ unless he raised \$8 million within three weeks” (pp. 1–2). But these bits of sensationalism constitute merely an attention-getting “prologue” (pp. 1–17). What follows is Sheler’s trek from place to place and hence also from the interviews he had with various evangelical personalities.

For example, Sheler describes a mosaic of contrasting and competing evangelical factions often struggling to become the emissary of proper evangelical faith. Among many others, these include “the neo-evangelicals—the Billy Graham wing if you will, represented by the NEA [National Association of Evangelicals], *Christianity Today*, Fuller Theological Seminary, and the like” (p. 65). Sheler interviewed Richard Mouw, president of Fuller, whom he describes as “one of American evangelicalism’s leading progressive voices” (p. 281). He reports that Mouw has “been criticized by some evangelicals for warming up to Muslims and Mormons, and for a general advocacy of genial interfaith relations” (p. 282). Sheler also describes the conflict that once seethed in the Southern Baptist Convention that eventually led to what he calls a “‘fundamentalist takeover’—in the nation’s largest Protestant denomination” (p. 65). He has some wry comments about Southern Baptists and their struggles. He describes the rise of R. Albert Mohler Jr. (pp. 274–81), a staunchly conservative Southern Baptist who has managed to assert himself as the primary SBC polemicist. Sheler also encountered Ted Haggard, the rising star of evangelical

churchmen—then head of the National Association of Evangelicals and also pastor of an immense Colorado Springs megachurch.

For those Latter-day Saints who would like to read a generally accurate and insightful journalistic account of the internal pressures and politics of the contemporary essentially American conservative Protestant world, *Believers* is a fine book. One needs to be cautious, of course, about the soundness of religious journalism, even when it is a generally sympathetic account.

Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. x + 346 pp., with appendixes and index. \$25.00.

This sociological look at the religious and spiritual lives of American adolescents (ages 13–17) is based on telephone survey responses made in 2002 and 2003 and on in-depth face-to-face interviews with a subsample of those respondents. The researchers “address all of the major American religious traditions and two minority religious traditions, Mormonism and Judaism” (p. 7). A few of the findings pertaining to Latter-day Saints include (1) “Mormon teens are the most likely among all U.S. teens to hold religious beliefs similar to their parents” (p. 35); (2) considering retention of youth, “conservative Protestant and Mormon parents are doing the best job” (p. 36); (3) “seventy-one percent of Mormon teens . . . attend weekly or more” (p. 38); (4) “Mormon teens are the only group that clearly attend only one congregation (or ward)” (p. 38); (5) “more than half of Mormon . . . teens attend religious services with both of their parents” (p. 39); (6) “forty-four percent of Mormon . . . teens say they feel very or extremely close to God” (black Protestants and conservative Protestants rank highest in this regard) (p. 39); (7) Mormon teens appear to have fewer doubts about their religious beliefs (pp. 40–41); and (8) Mormon teens rank high on beliefs in the existence of angels, in divine miracles from God, in life after death, and in the existence of demons or evil spirits, as well as ranking low in beliefs in reincarnation, in astrology, in communicating with the dead, and in psychics and fortune-tellers (p. 43). Other

results report on religious experiences, religious practices, religious group activities, religion in relationships, and evaluations of religious congregations. This book seems to support an optimistic view of the involvement of U.S. teens with religious beliefs and practices.