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Abstract Introduction to the current issue, including editor's picks. Midgley explores such topics as Tertullian's distinction between human wisdom and the "wisdom of God"; Augustinian traditions; evangelical and Roman Catholic views of God; Calvinism; freedom; and Book of Mormon teachings on redemption.

Editor's Introduction
**THE WEDDING OF ATHENS AND JERUSALEM:
AN EVANGELICAL PERPLEXITY
AND A LATTER-DAY SAINT ANSWER**

Louis C. Midgley

Mormonism rejects the pure gifts of faith, forgiveness, and salvation that Jesus desires to give to them. This biblical teaching of justification is categorically rejected by the Mormon religion.

The Reverend George Mather¹

Those writers familiar with St. Augustine (AD 354–430) tend to grant, in the words of one commentator, that he “appears if not as the originator at least as the foremost exponent in ancient times” of the “attempt to fuse or reconcile elements derived from two originally independent and hitherto unrelated sources, the Bible and classical philosophy.”² Roman Catholics, as well as some Protestants, have seen this as both a worthy endeavor and a large accomplishment, while Latter-day Saints have held that it was a miscalculation that began after an early fatal falling away from the primitive faith. Why?

1. George A. Mather, foreword to Wayne L. Cowdrey, Howard A. Davis, and Arthur Vanick, *Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon? The Spalding Enigma* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2005), 11. Mather is a Lutheran pastor of Our Savior’s Lutheran Church in St. George, Utah (see p. 429 n. 1, where he is also described as “a noted authority on religion and the occult”). He was trained by the notorious “Dr.” Walter Martin.

2. Ernest L. Fortin, “St. Augustine,” in *History of Political Philosophy*, 3rd ed., edited by Joseph Cropsey and Leo Strauss (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 177.

Athens and Jerusalem Revisited

Tertullian (ca. 160–225), writing in Latin, followed the apostle Paul’s radical distinction between a sophisticated human wisdom and “the wisdom of God” now incarnate in Jesus Christ, whom God raised from the grave. With this distinction in mind, he asked, “What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church?”³ Tertullian’s prime target was the Academy, or “Plato’s school,” which then offered some version of Neoplatonism. He very much wanted to put an end to “all attempts to produce a mottled Christianity of Stoic, Platonic, and dialectic composition.”⁴ Referring to the two competing claims to wisdom, Tertullian asked in florid language,

What is there, then, about them that is alike, the philosopher and the Christian—the disciple of Hellas and the disciple of Heaven—the dealer in reputation and the dealer in salvation—one occupied with words and one with deeds—one creator of error and its destroyer—friend of error and its foe—the despoiler of truth and its restorer—its robber and its warden?⁵

There are indications that some of the most influential Christian theologians borrowed the categories and concepts found among the disciples of Plato, the Stoics, and then later Aristotle. Evangelicals Norman Geisler and Ralph MacKenzie, in *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals*,⁶ do not hide their own fondness for the fruit of such endeavors. They correctly see Augustine’s effort to meld the two competing claims to wisdom as highly influential. Elsewhere I have argued that Augustine and others made a wrong turn when they invoked the categories and methods of pagan writers as a vehicle for grounding

3. Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum* 7.9. This essay can be found in English translation as “On Prescription against Heretics,” in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 3, *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (1885; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 246.

4. Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum* 7.11.

5. Tertullian, *Apologeticus* 46.18.

6. Norman L. Geisler and Ralph E. MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995).

and setting forth their understanding of Christian faith.⁷ Such endeavors, I believe, damage the integrity of both the quest for wisdom by unaided human reason and the longing for a wisdom revealed from the heavens.

The Augustinian Interpretive Tradition

Roman Catholics and Evangelicals, among other things, provides an assessment of Augustine's endeavors, stressing his crucial role in the subsequent development of both Roman Catholic and Protestant theology. How do contemporary moderate Calvinists describe and evaluate efforts to reconcile Christian faith with pagan philosophy? In setting forth their understanding of Augustine's key influence on evangelical ideology, Geisler⁸ and MacKenzie are not at all concerned about Augustine's dependence upon the wisdom of Athens and hence on an essentially pagan philosophical culture. This is understandable, if not laudable. Why should they tackle the perplexing question of whether violence is done to either or both types of wisdom by fusing one or another brand of philosophy with what they find in the Bible? This issue is not the focus of their book. Instead they examine the similarities and differences between Roman Catholic and current evangelical and earlier Protestant theologies.

God as First Thing

Evangelicals in the pulpits and pews, in addition to those who parade in protest before Latter-day Saint temple dedications and who now

7. See Louis Midgley, "Directions that Diverge: 'Jerusalem and Athens' Revisited," *FARMS Review of Books* 11/1 (1999): 37, 63, 65–66, for commentary on Augustine; see also Midgley, "The Utility of Faith Reconsidered," in *Revelation, Reason, and Faith: Essays in Honor of Truman G. Madsen*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 140–46.

8. For a lavish appreciation of Norman Geisler's efforts as apologist, theologian, and social critic, see Francis J. Beckwith, William Lane Craig, and J. P. Moreland, eds., *To Everyone An Answer: A Case for the Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004). This volume is a *Festschrift* honoring Geisler. It contains information on his educational background; his academic appointments, honors, and recognitions; and a list of sixty-three separate books or pamphlets that he has contributed to, written, or edited. See pp. 376–80.

clutter the Internet with diatribes against the faith of the Saints, may be stunned to discover that much of the core of their ideology can be traced back to Augustine. They may also be distressed to learn that Augustine was deeply influenced by academic philosophy, which, prior to his famous “conversion,” allowed him to brush aside what he had previously mocked Christians for believing in that he was able to read as equivocal the teachings he thought were unsavory in the Bible. It would be difficult not to have noticed that, in stressing that God is incorporeal, he not only “placed” God above or outside of space but also made him timeless—that is, with no past or future, and in that sense “eternal.” God is not seen as a living being who responds to the dire situations in which humans find themselves, nor as being genuinely open to pleas for help, since everything was presumably fixed at the moment of creation. One of the divine attributes in classical theism is passivity or a kind of apathy. This and other elements of classical theism have led to concern among some evangelicals, especially for those known as “Open Theists,” who have come to see serious flaws in what has been attributed to the divine, especially following Augustine.⁹

For Augustine, both space and time were created in an instant by God, who is neither anywhere nor “anywhen.” At the moment of creation, everything that ever will happen was both present and frozen in God’s mind. Though the created “nature” of man is good, at the

9. For a brief, easily accessible introduction, which stresses the mistakes (many of which are traceable to Augustine) that beset classical theism, see Gregory Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000). For a brief review of Boyd’s book, see the Book Note in *FARMS Review* 16/2 (2004): 405–6. Geisler confidently informs his readers that classical theism was “embraced by St. Augustine, St. Anselm, Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin,” among others; see Norman L. Geisler, “Neotheism: Orthodox or Unorthodox? A Theological Response to Greg Boyd,” found on the Web page entitled “Dr. Norman Geisler” at <http://www.normangeisler.net/articles.htm> (accessed 23 October 2009). Geisler complains that those like Boyd who advance an Open Theism attack “God’s attributes of Pure Actuality (with no potentiality), Immutability, Eternality (Non-temporality), Simplicity (indivisibility), Infallible Foreknowledge of everything (including free acts), and Sovereignty (complete control of the universe and the future).” Geisler defends this way of picturing God on the grounds that this is what Augustine and others have taught, and not that this is what Jesus taught or what can be found in the Bible. Open Theists insist, much like Latter-day Saints, that the scriptures be taken seriously even or especially when they fly in the face of classical theism.

instant that it was called into existence out of nothing, all actual, finite human beings became “fallen”—that is, totally depraved—although a few individuals are arbitrarily predestined to salvation. God, for Augustine, is thus not merely a being, even a highest, benevolent, most powerful being, but is instead Being-itself, the is-ness that is in or beneath everything that is. To the degree that something is, it is good. This means that evil is merely the privation or absence of being, and hence evil isn’t really real but merely the absence of reality. Geisler and MacKenzie trace this explanation directly back to Augustine’s turn away from Manichaeism following his adoption of a version of Platonism (see p. 83).¹⁰ They point out that

this new philosophical orientation convinced [Augustine] that the existence of evil could be reconciled with the doctrine of creation. His understanding that evil was not a positive, created thing, but a privation or lack in things proved to be of great theological significance. Hence, concerning substance and evil, he wrote: “Therefore, as they are, they are good; therefore whatsoever is, is good. That evil, then, which I sought whence it was, is not any substance; for were it a substance, it would be good.” Further, “When accordingly it is inquired, whence is evil, it must first be inquired, what is evil, which is nothing else than corruption, either of the measure, or the form, or the order, that belong to nature.” (p. 83, quoting Augustine’s *Confessions*)

Geisler and MacKenzie do not try to explain away Augustine’s dependence upon Platonism. Instead, they grant that one will find, for example, in Augustine’s *Confessions*, an abundance of Neoplatonism (p. 393), and they also stress the role of Platonic language in Augustine’s theology (p. 92).

Some evangelicals may be dismayed to discover that Augustine’s theology was more or less framed with categories and explanations borrowed from pagan sources and that he read the Bible through a

10. This and subsequent parenthetical page references are to Geisler and MacKenzie, *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals*.

lens provided by an alien ideology. Geisler and Mackenzie do not deny the fact that Augustine sought “to fuse or reconcile . . . the Bible with classical philosophy.”¹¹ But some evangelicals may disagree. Why? They may doubt that such efforts are necessary or that they are sanguine, or they may have realized that these efforts were not successful. Geisler and MacKenzie simply skirt these issues even as they recognize some of the details.

When describing God, Geisler and MacKenzie agree with unidentified Roman Catholic scholars who they report as having argued that “Greek philosophers introduced a higher concept of God. In Plato, the concept of the ‘supreme being’ became more prominent” (p. 36). Apparently these unnamed writers believe that Plato’s speculation about the divine was actually close to what they attribute to the Bible. But Plato’s God still “falls short of Judeo-Christian monotheism, since for him God is limited and is subject to the Good which is beyond him” (pp. 36–37). As he works out his version of natural theology (a theology fashioned entirely by unaided human reason), Augustine simply conflates Being-itself and the Good in such a way that evil is seen as merely a privation of Being—that is, as Non-Being.

“Later Augustine, using Platonic terms, and Aquinas, using Aristotelian concepts,” Geisler and MacKenzie point out, “would develop arguments for the existence of one supreme God. Of course, whatever the philosophical language used to express their convictions, Catholic theologians believe that their concept of God is based on His self-revelation in Scripture” (p. 37); but they also claim that Aristotle found a proof for God in change or motion, and hence God was for him “the ‘Uncaused Cause’” (p. 37), or actually an “unmoved mover.” Theologians have assumed that their own concept of God, though set out in the categories of pagan philosophy, was consistent with what is found in the Bible. They managed this in part by attributing to the Bible the very notions they borrowed from a philosophic culture. If the Bible is sufficient, which Protestants stress, is it necessary to draw upon alien categories to set forth the Christian understanding of the divine? Is a

11. Fortin, “St. Augustine,” 177.

wedding between the wisdom of Athens and the wisdom of Jerusalem necessary or even possible without doing harm to both?

The World of Sectarian Theological Speculation and Controversy

Contemporary evangelicals tend to see themselves as the guardians of orthodox Christian faith. The reason is that they believe that they have access to the essential teachings set forth in the Bible. Much like Latter-day Saints, Roman Catholics face conservative Protestant critics who insist that strict conformity to notions of theological orthodoxy determines whether one can even be considered Christian. Along with hostility toward Latter-day Saints, anti-Catholicism is one of the less endearing activities found on the margins of American evangelical religiosity.

Roman Catholics and Evangelicals has buried in its pages a curious discussion of the sources of both the background assumptions and primary nostrum held by evangelicals. While insisting on biblical sufficiency, Geisler and MacKenzie also argue that evangelicals must turn to the speculation of theologians for crucial elements in their ideology. A corollary is, of course, that the Bible is not alone, since evangelicals also draw upon the creeds and speculation of theologians like Augustine, which are clearly not summoned merely from the Bible *alone*. The Bible must be understood their way. Conservative Protestants thus sense that the Bible is not alone, but it is still sufficient even if their interpretation of it is potentially frail and fragile. Theologians and churchmen tend to proof-text the Bible to support dogmas that were fashioned by theologians and set down (often following intense and sometimes violent quarrels) in the crafting of the creeds and then affirmed, elaborated, and qualified in subsequent confessions.¹²

In *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals*, Geisler and MacKenzie seek to avoid a naive bibliolatry that tends to ignore the complex story of the formation and radical transformations in Christian theology. In addition, they do not deny that both Roman Catholic and Protestant

12. For a remarkable account of the often unseemly, typically violent and brutal conduct of those who fashioned the creeds and confessions, see Ramsey MacMullen, *Voting for God in Early Church Councils* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

theologies, in all their vast variety and contentious complexity, are buttressed by attempts to meld concepts and categories borrowed from a pagan philosophical culture to what is found in the biblical narrative. Nor do they deny that there have been some significant shifts in both Roman Catholic and Protestant theology, or that within both traditions there have been and still are competing understandings of the contents and grounds of faith.¹³ In addition, they stress their own fondness for the large figures of Roman Catholic theology, whose views would seem virtually unknown to the bulk of their fellow evangelicals who turn up in the pews on Sundays presumably to hear messages from the Bible alone.

A Moderate Evangelical Appraisal of Roman Catholicism

Geisler and MacKenzie describe the dependence of the magisterial Protestant Reformers, especially Martin Luther (1483–1546) and John Calvin (1509–1564), on the theology of Augustine. They set forth these opinions in an effort to convince their fellow evangelicals that Roman Catholics, at least the more “traditional” (rather than liberal) elements in that tradition, though not entirely in harmony with what they consider fully orthodox Christianity, are fellow Christians and hence worthy of a certain admiration and respect. With the powerful secularizing forces at work in the world, they argue that “the time is overdue for Catholics and Protestants to hang together before we hang separately” (p. 16).

I applaud the willingness of Geisler and MacKenzie to see beyond a polemical past separating various brands of Protestants from Roman Catholics. This past is obviously strewn with numerous bitter conflicts. In assessing the agreements and differences between those they understand as evangelicals and the more faithful faction of Catholics,

13. They identify a “nominal Catholic culture” (p. 389); “folk, cultural, or liberal varieties” of Roman Catholicism set over against “traditional Roman Catholicism” (pp. 15–16); “Liberal Catholics” (p. 473; compare p. 475); “cultural Catholics” (p. 474); “orthodox Roman Catholics” (p. 431); and so forth. They also identify both “fundamentalists” and “liberal churches and denominations” (p. 410), “mainline evangelicals” (p. 16), “secular Protestants” with their “liberal posture” (p. 427), and so forth.

they move somewhat beyond a history plump with sometimes willful misunderstandings and the usual ignorance that quarreling factions manifest toward each other. They have striven to describe both the “agreements and differences” between contemporary evangelicals and informed, faithful Roman Catholics. It is useful to have a book available in which evangelicals are lectured on these matters by two of their own spokesmen.

Augustine—“The Grandfather of the Reformation”

Geisler and MacKenzie stress what they believe are commonalities between faithful Roman Catholics and evangelicals. They also strive to let Catholics define themselves rather than fashioning a series of false images of the Other. They claim (correctly, I believe) that “both evangelicals and orthodox Protestants have a common creedal and Augustinian doctrinal background. Both groups accept the creeds and confessions and councils of the Christian church of the first five centuries. Both claim Augustine as a mentor” (p. 17). This point is made repeatedly in *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals*. In addition, they argue that Augustine was a primary source for key dogmas taught by the Reformers and by current evangelicals. What is unsaid is that Catholics went wrong when they turned away from their original Augustinian roots. But the authors also grant that some of their opinions “will come as a surprise to many evangelicals, particularly those of a more conservative bent, who are used to stressing differences with Roman Catholics” (p. 17).

Geisler and MacKenzie explain how conservative Protestant theology relies heavily upon Augustine. It is therefore not surprising to find them virtually ending their book with tributes to Augustine. They point out that

what is striking about Augustine is that, although a committed Catholic bishop, his writings are claimed by both evangelical Protestants and Catholics. Indeed, through both Luther and Calvin, Augustine is in a real sense the grandfather of the Reformation. To this day many of the best known, and

best worded, theological formulations of Christian truth used by orthodox Protestants are in the words of Augustine. (pp. 394–95)

By stressing the importance of Augustine for the theology of both Roman Catholics and Protestants, Geisler and MacKenzie are not, however, plowing new ground. Better informed evangelicals have, of course, recognized that much of Reformation ideology was the result of efforts by both Luther and Calvin to revive and thereby set in place some, but not all, of Augustine's teachings. A crucial question, then, is not how Augustine is seen by evangelical scholars but how he is seen by ordinary folks in the pulpits and pews. Are they aware that crucial elements of their faith have their roots in Augustine and not in the Bible?

Augustine and “the Major Soteriological Framework”

Geisler and MacKenzie want evangelicals to realize that “both orthodox Protestants and Catholics share the insights of the great troika of Christian theologians: Saints Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas” (p. 67).¹⁴ They also reassure their readers that this “troika of theological giants, Augustine, Anselm, and Aquinas, would stand fast on the proposition that God's grace is absolutely necessary for salvation” (p. 64). There is no doubt that this is true. But they later admit that this agreement is mostly formal. Behind this apparent agreement are a number of teachings that separate evangelicals from Roman Catholics. Where they identify these differences, they scold Roman Catholics for not being sufficiently in tune with their version of evangelical ideology.

Geisler and MacKenzie also acknowledge that, prior to Augustine, there were different and shifting views on certain crucial elements of Christian faith¹⁵ that are now considered essential by most

14. Geisler's doctoral degree is from Loyola University in New Orleans. He has published appreciative collections of selected essays by both Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.

15. For some readily accessible details, see Justo L. and Catherine Gunsalus Gonzalez, *Heretics for Armchair Theologians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008).

evangelicals. Augustine fashioned the notion that salvation is “by grace alone.” This explains why the authors argue that “Augustinianism was the major soteriological framework that informed Western Christianity” (p. 431). Though Augustine’s understanding of justification “underwent significant development,” he “came down decidedly on the side of grace alone (*solo gratia*)” (p. 84).¹⁶

But the formula “grace *alone*” does not address the crucial issue, nor does it do justice to the complexity of Augustine’s opinions. The reason is that whether divine mercy or grace is necessary for salvation is not the issue that an appeal to Augustine’s theology is meant to address. Few, if any, except nominal Christians, have been tempted to deny that salvation is ultimately a gift from God. And no one imagines that they can somehow save themselves from death or forgive their own sins. The problem appears when the word *alone*—a favorite limiting term for Protestants—is linked with the word *faith*, rather than merely with the word *grace*. When this happens, faith is often not seen as a choice or decision but instead as something entirely predestined by God. What is contested is whether God’s mercy is in any way conditional. If it is conditional, what are those conditions and how are they satisfied? By faith without repentance? Without baptism and subsequent signs of faithfulness? Without a genuine desire and hence striving to keep the commandments? Is sanctification necessary or merely optional? Is sanctification, if necessary, also something predestined, or does it require human effort? If sin is forgiven by God—that is, if righteousness is imputed to the depraved one—is it possible to fall from grace?

Tripping through TULIP; Augustine as a Proto Calvinist

Augustine ended up eventually arguing, according to Geisler and MacKenzie, that “it is totally by God’s grace that we are justified.

16. I wonder if Geisler and MacKenzie believe that Augustine thought he was saved by grace *alone* at the moment of his “conversion,” or was his opinion about justification worked out later in the context of quarrels with others? It appears that Geisler and MacKenzie hold that Augustine’s later theology did not match his initial experiences of conversion (p. 84).

Salvation is neither initiated nor obtained by human action. Even the faith by which we obtain salvation is the gift of God” (p. 84). This is a reasonably accurate summary of Augustine’s mature teachings on justification. He also taught that all those who are to be saved were predestined to salvation at the moment of creation. So it appears that Augustine taught what would now be considered Calvinism. Geisler sees Augustine as a “moderate Calvinist,” not as one who advanced an “extreme Calvinism” or “hyper-Calvinism,” except perhaps when he went off the rails at the very end of his life in his quarrel with the Donatists. However, according to Geisler, both the moderate and extreme version of Calvinism are committed to what is now known as Five-Point Calvinism, or TULIP.¹⁷ Augustine did not teach all of TULIP¹⁸ since he held that while confronting overpowering temptations and the subsequent terrors of this world, including the ever-shifting flux of evils, suffering, and death, only a few of those who are predestined by God to salvation may sense that they are numbered among the elect. There is, however, a prevenient grace that provides the predestined one the faith that yields salvation. Hence there is nothing anyone can do about faith one way or another. According to Geisler and MacKenzie, Augustine argued that

the human will is completely unable to initiate or attain salvation. This concept squares quite well with the later [Reformed] doctrine of total depravity—which surfaced more than a millennium later as the first point of the Reformed mnemonic device, TULIP: Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited

17. For his opinion on this and related issues, see Norman Geisler, *Chosen But Free: A Balanced View of Divine Election* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1999). Geisler drew a frenzied response from “Dr.” James White, who engaged in vigorous proof-texting of the Bible in an effort to support his version of extreme Calvinism. See James R. White, *The Potter’s Freedom: A Defense of the Reformation and a Rebuttal of Norman Geisler’s “Chosen But Free,”* foreword by R. C. Sproul Jr. (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press, 2000).

18. Five-Point Calvinism is often known by the acronym TULIP—Total depravity, Unconditional election (human decision or choice is neither necessary nor possible), Limited atonement (Jesus was only “lifted up” in death for those already predestined for salvation by God at the moment of creation out of nothing), Irresistible grace (given only to those predestined for salvation at the moment of creation), and Perseverance of the Saints (once saved, always saved).

atonement, Irresistible grace, and Perseverance of the Saints.
(p. 85)

“It seems clear that in spite of significant differences in their systems, Luther and Augustine were united in their belief that man is spiritually destitute and, apart from God’s grace, is incapable of producing any semblance of spiritual merit. Luther was, indeed (at least concerning the basic tenets of justification), a spiritual son of the bishop of Hippo” (p. 99). Geisler and MacKenzie also insist that Calvin (see p. 101) found in Augustine a convenient way of understanding salvation. The dependence of both Luther and Calvin on Augustine is not controversial. It is also not inaccurate to say that the Protestant Reformation is a return to dogmas first set out by Augustine, even if the Reformers were not committed to all the precise details of Augustine’s shifting opinions. To the extent that evangelicals now find themselves in agreement with the Protestant Reformers, they are also dependent in large measure upon Augustine’s theological speculation, which was grounded in a version of academic philosophy.

There are, of course, some differences between Augustine’s teachings and those of the Protestant Reformers. Certain of these are significant. For one thing, Augustine’s understanding of what constitutes the church was not adopted by the Reformers (see p. 87 for some details), though they tended to follow him on political theory¹⁹ by insisting that governments, with all of their attendant evils, were instituted by God as a just punishment for sin, and also as a means of preventing self-destruction by depraved humans driven by misplaced love.

Augustine did not radically distinguish, as did the Reformers, between the justification and sanctification of sinners. Geisler and

19. Geisler and MacKenzie claim that Augustine advanced a theory of moral natural law somewhat like that advanced later by Thomas Aquinas (p. 123). It is, however, not entirely clear what stance the Reformers took on moral natural law. What can be said with some confidence is that Protestants have been skeptical of natural theology, and also, for similar and related reasons, dubious that a moral natural law can be known by unaided human reason. Karl Barth is a good but by no means the only example of a Protestant theologian who rejected both natural theology and moral natural law. See Midgley, “Karl Barth and Moral Natural Law: The Anatomy of a Debate,” *Natural Law Forum* 13 (1968): 108–26.

MacKenzie are right on this matter. Despite or because of his belief in strict predestination, Augustine tended to see justification as a temporal process by which the predestined one becomes over time more of a genuine child of God as he is gradually sanctified (see p. 85). Certainly infants at baptism have not experienced nor are they aware of either process.

Protestants tend to see justification taking place when the sinner is “born again,” which presumably takes place at the instant the sinner confesses Jesus. Salvation is seen as a single event and not as a process. Evangelicals tend to insist that this event takes place at an “altar call,” or as a result of a prayer offered by the sinner. At that instant the “righteousness of God” is imputed to the totally depraved sinner; sanctification may subsequently take place with the assistance of the Holy Spirit after justification. Keeping the commandments of God is seen as something done out of gratitude for having been justified at the moment one confesses Jesus, or when one discovers that he was predestined to be saved at the moment of creation.

Augustine argued that salvation, understood as both justification and sanctification, is a process because he thought that salvation necessarily involved baptism and even began with infant baptism (see p. 85). Subsequently, Roman Catholics have tended to argue that the beginning of a process of sanctification hopefully commences at or with baptism.²⁰ And when baptism typically takes place, the infant is unable to know and hence assent to what has happened. So there must be a subsequent temporal process involving human deeds, or baptism is an empty form. In addition, Augustine granted that some who are thereby presumably regenerated at baptism may not persevere, since they may not come to know that they were even baptized. For this reason (and perhaps others) they may not end up being in any sense saved. How all this can be harmonized with predestination is unclear.

20. Augustine, however, maintained that, at least in some sense, regeneration takes place at baptism; otherwise it makes no sense to baptize infants. Evangelicals tend to deny this. Why is infant baptism necessary unless little children, if not baptized, are faced with damnation? (see p. 92). But if infants can be regenerated by baptism, then moral agency and conscious choice (and even faith) have little if anything to do with salvation, however understood.

Evangelicals, and especially those who stress what is called either “eternal security” or the “perseverance of the Saints,” brush aside baptism and focus instead on totally depraved sinners responding to something like an “altar call.” This is especially true of those who follow the formula “once-saved, always-saved,” which is not exactly what Augustine seems to have taught (see p. 86).

Freedom and Fatalism

Augustine’s insistence on a radical predestination in which there is nothing that anyone can possibly do to draw upon the blessings of the atonement if one was not already predestined to salvation seems to come close to what evangelicals draw from the wisdom of Athens—that is, classical theism—rather than from the Bible. Despite denials, they edge close to the fatalism common to the Stoics. Geisler and MacKenzie skirt these issues. They merely insist that “Augustine does not deny the freedom of the human will” because he “took great pains to distinguish between predestination and fatalism” (p. 89). This is undoubtedly true since Augustine seems to have insisted that the will is free to follow desire but that desire is wholly determined by God at the moment of creation, and hence humans have no control over their desires.

Augustine asked, is the will free? (see p. 445). Why ask such a question unless one is faced with a problem? And what might this problem be? Predestination wanders close to a strict determinism and hence raises questions about the possibility of moral agency. If humans are not genuinely free to choose either to accept or reject the gospel, then salvation becomes a form of fate. Augustine did not, of course, deny that humans are free to gratify their desires. What he denied is that they can do anything to change their destiny, access God’s mercy, or frustrate the strict providence of God. The will, while in one sense free, is in utter bondage to sinful desires. This is at least the way conservative Protestants have tended to read Augustine. This explains why Geisler and MacKenzie claim that Augustine, with perhaps one small caveat, subscribed to a version of TULIP. Subscribing to the core of TULIP raises questions about whether humans can be considered genuinely responsible moral agents, even if they are somehow free in

some trivial way to do what they may desire—and cannot help desiring—to do.

Sinners are saved, according to the Reformers, following Augustine, if and only if God has predestined them for salvation at the moment of creation; salvation is neither proximately nor ultimately dependent on their moral choices or decisions. Nor do infants have a choice in their regeneration. Predestination, however, does not explain the frenzy to baptize infants on the assumption that human failure somehow leaves a child exposed to damnation; “believer baptism” does not deal with the problem either.

When justification is believed to be predestined, then we face questions about the coherence of the theology being advanced. When the righteousness of God is believed to be imputed to the saved one by God, despite continuing depravity, sinners are then thought to be saved in and not from their sins. Why is baptism (or any thought or deed) necessary for the one predestined by God to salvation? If one is justified by faith *alone*, and even faith is predestined, why then bother to witness to anyone concerning Jesus Christ?²¹ If a strict predestination is assumed, then nothing can possibly change anything. How so? Salvation, including both justification and sanctification, may be thought to be determined once and for all by God at the very moment everything was created out of nothing, and hence it necessarily takes place despite the depravity brought on by the fall. Salvation is not conditional upon anyone ever having made a right choice, since the depraved one is incapable of turning to or recognizing the light, unless God has determined that this will happen. Righteousness is imputed to some but not all sinners despite their depravity.

The “Common Core” Came “Only Later”

Geisler and MacKenzie strive to show that Roman Catholics and evangelicals “share a *common core* of beliefs about salvation” (p. 81, emphasis added). They claim that this kernel has its roots “in the early

21. The soul must be competent to receive and act on a message, or there is no point in witnessing. This explains why Southern Baptists once denied strict predestination precisely because they thought that witnessing to pagans was otherwise pointless.

church fathers and flowered in Augustine” (p. 81). They also hold that the issues that originally and primarily confronted the church fathers concerned Christology—that is, how to understand the identity and role of the Messiah—and not salvation. The church fathers, they claim, were concerned about who Jesus was and how he was the Messiah or Christ.²² This was the primary issue and not justification. They therefore acknowledge that “it is *only later* that theologians addressed the doctrine of what Christ accomplished, agreeing that salvation is based on God’s grace” (p. 81, emphasis added). By *later* they mean when Augustine took up these issues. This seems to be their admission that the church fathers were not teaching Augustine’s notion of justification, predestination, prevenient grace, and so forth. There was no real semblance of TULIP prior to Augustine.

Geisler and MacKenzie also claim that, in the struggle against Gnostics, the church fathers “stress[ed] the freedom of the human will” (p. 83), or what the Saints, following language found in the Book of Mormon, understand as agency or moral agency. Was this because certain Gnostics, following the intellectual fashions of the time, argued that salvation was somehow determined by forces entirely beyond human initiative? Was it that some Gnostics denied the possibility that humans can make morally significant choices because their spirits are trapped in an alien world? This seems to be what Geisler and MacKenzie believe to have been the case. Hence they argue that writers like “Justin Martyr and John Chrysostom argued that good and evil come *not from the individual’s nature but from the will and choice*. In response to the Gnostic libertarians[,] Tertullian focused on the importance of works and righteousness, going so far as to say that ‘the man who performs good works can be said to make God his debtor’” (p. 83, emphasis added). They call this an “unfortunate phrase,” but they grant that it “set the stage for centuries to come” (p. 83).

What Geisler and MacKenzie neglect to indicate is the extent that stress on moral agency dominated the thought of early Christians. They allow that what they label a “‘works-righteousness’ concept,

22. That is, how Jesus of Nazareth could be a living human being and also divine, and so forth.

which seemed to be so ingenuous in combating Gnosticism, was popular for the first 350 years of the church's history" (p. 83). This is a casual way of granting that the now-popular teaching that justification is by "faith *alone*," coupled with the notion that those who have faith are predestined that way, was fashioned by Augustine and was not found among the early church fathers. Apparently the slogan "Bible *alone*" does not preclude, among other things, the Bible as understood through the lens provided by Augustine, with the assistance of certain books of the Platonists with which he was familiar.

Frozen Abstractions . . .

In part because contemporary conservative Protestant preachers tend to operate from within a partisan setting that is sometimes intensified within seminaries and Bible schools, and hence mostly outside the mainstream of university based scholarship, and perhaps for other reasons, they tend to ignore the complex history of Christian theological disputation and biblical interpretation.²³ They merely assume, of course, that their beliefs are drawn from the Bible *alone*. As a corollary, they may also assume that their opinions have not been influenced, and hence compromised, by the complicated web of post-biblical Christian dogmatic and confessional history.²⁴ They may assume that their hoary tradition must be correct since the clearing of the cobwebs from Christian faith by the Reformation is now fin-

23. For a remarkably candid account from an evangelical perspective of the variety of evangelical opinions, see Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *Twentieth-Century Theology: God and the World in a Transitional Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992); Roger E. Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002); and Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy, *Across the Spectrum: Understanding Issues in Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002). See my commentary on this literature in "On Caliban Mischief," *FARMS Review* 15/1 (2003): xxiv–xxxii.

24. For fine accounts of this crucial and remarkable history, written from an evangelical perspective, see Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999); Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, 2 vols. (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1984); and Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, 3 vols, revised ed. (New York: Abingdon, 1987).

ished. Furthermore, they may not have given attention to the actual historical roots of their own ideology.²⁵

... or Living the Story?

The distinguished American church historian Martin E. Marty recently explained that when Protestants do theology they “combine the language of the Hebrew scriptures with mainly Greek philosophical concepts as filtered through academic experiences in Western Europe, most notably Germany.”²⁶ However, the faith of the Latter-day Saints rests on the *narrations of actual events*, on variations of these stories and the symbols these stories invoke, and then on the *praxis* grounded on these stories. The scriptures are not to be read by the Saints as awkwardly set out, unstoried, timeless ideas, nor as a system or philosophical worldview. They are instead a veritable beehive of stories that contain, frame, and constitute the core of the messages from God, and hence hopefully also what is remembered and recorded in the hearts and minds of the Saints. These stories are not childish expressions of some purer abstract truth that, with the help of Plato or Aristotle, can be fashioned into a tight, finished system. The Saints do not do theology that way. Instead, they see in such endeavors the result of the falling away that made a restoration necessary. The Saints read the scriptures as essentially narratives setting out both God’s purposes and plans and the halting human responses at this stage in a great, ongoing drama. The Saints also tell stories about their own encounters with the divine in the present.

If one insists on using the word *theology*, then what the Saints do is a kind of *narrative theology*. The Saints find themselves in a network

25. For an explanation for why this seems to be so, see my essay “Knowing Brother Joseph Again,” *FARMS Review* 18/1 (2006): xiv–xx.

26. Martin E. Marty, foreword to *Mormonism in Dialogue with Contemporary Christian Theologies*, ed. Donald W. Musser and David L. Paulsen (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007), vi. For an analysis of the significance of this radical difference between both Protestant (including contemporary evangelical theologies) and Roman Catholic ways of doing theology, and the primarily narrative and experiential mode of understanding divine things, see my essay “Debating Evangelicals,” *FARMS Review* 20/2 (2008): xxiv–xxvi.

of narratives about divine and human things, with their own personal story as yet unfinished, since they see themselves on probation and hence being tested and instructed by God.

The apostle Paul warned of mere human wisdom, which he contrasted sharply with the wisdom of God as found in the Holy Messiah or Christ (see 1 Corinthians 1:17–25; 2:6–16). He placed what he witnessed being taught in Athens in the various schools of philosophy—that is, by the students of Plato, the Stoics, and so forth—in the category of empty and deceptive human traditions. Paul also contrasted being in Christ to such vain and foolish things (Colossians 2:8).

The faith of the Saints is thus Mantic and not Sophic, for it sides with the wisdom of Jerusalem and not Athens, and it rejects the notion that the two must be melded into a single ahistoric system of thought. To attempt such a melding damages both. When witnessing or testifying, as well as they can, the Saints give reasons for the faith that is in them. They do not begin with syllogisms proving a First Thing that created everything out of nothing and at that moment determined everything that will ever happen in exact detail. Instead, they tell the story of their own immediate encounter with divine things, and they link their story to the restoration of the fulness of the gospel through Joseph Smith, to the recovery of the Book of Mormon, and then to the Bible and to a salvation history running back to events in the heavens prior to the world as we now know it.²⁷

“According to Human Tradition”²⁸

Despite Geisler’s fondness for Roman Catholic theologians who endeavored to fashion a formal, systematic theology by invoking categories borrowed from the various schools of philosophy, he is very much aware of the dangers of what he describes as “alien systems of thought that have invaded Christianity down through the centuries.”²⁹

27. See Louis Midgley, “Two Stories, One Faith,” *FARMS Review* 19/1 (2007): 55–79.

28. This phrase is borrowed from Colossians 2:8 (NRSV, AMSB, NAB).

29. Norman L. Geisler, “Beware of Philosophy: A Warning to Biblical Scholars,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42/1 (1999): 3. This was a presidential address to the Evangelical Theological Society, 19 November 1998.

He does not see Roman Catholic theologians like Augustine and Thomas Aquinas borrowing from Plato and Aristotle as instances of the nefarious impact of “alien systems of thought.” The reason is that he insists that at least some “alien systems” are useful because they provide the conceptual foundation for evangelical theology. “The truth is that Aristotle and his distant pupil Aquinas,” according to Geisler, “have been of great service to evangelicals.” The reasons he offers are that Aristotle “believed in the correspondence theory of truth, the fundamental laws of logic, and the historical-grammatical hermeneutic—all of which are essential to the preservation of evangelical theology.”³⁰ None of this is explained, but merely asserted.

Geisler grants that he is “aware of the errors of Aristotle,” none of which he mentions. Instead, he asserts “that Thomas Aquinas, known for his use of Aristotelian concepts, rejected all the errors of Aristotle. In short, the Aristotle he used had to repent, be baptized and catechized before he was serviceable to Christian thought.”³¹ He does not explain what he thinks was going on with Augustine’s vigorous effort to blend a form of Platonism with the Bible. Was Augustine able to baptize Plato? It seems that the “alien systems” are merely the ideologies Geisler finds objectionable. The others get a pass, and hence jumbling together two competing types of wisdom—that is, of Athens and Jerusalem—is fine, if the results ground evangelical theology.

Geisler lists thirteen types of dangerous “philosophies” that evangelicals must now avoid. When he lambasts presumably dangerous philosophies, his notion of what constitutes “philosophy” is remarkably loose. One of these alien systems is actually “Aristotelianism,”³² but not, of course, the Thomist version of Aristotle. Geisler sometimes identifies a writer commonly recognized as a philosopher in his catalogue of dangerous ideologies. For example, he mentions Benedict Spinoza, David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Georg Wilhelm Hegel, Martin

30. Geisler, “Beware of Philosophy,” 12. Geisler cites his book *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985). Compare with his book *What Augustine Says* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1982).

31. Geisler, “Beware of Philosophy,” 12. It seems that Geisler believes in a kind of forced baptism of the dead.

32. Geisler, “Beware of Philosophy,” 12.

Heidegger, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and William of Occam. But some of those he names are simply not philosophers. Examples include Karl Barth,³³ the great Swiss-German Neo-Orthodox theologian whom some but not all evangelical scholars draw upon.³⁴ Geisler's fundamentalist proclivities glisten in his diatribe about what he calls "evolutionism," where his targets are Herbert Spencer and Charles Darwin.³⁵ He issues dire warnings about "historical criticism," "anthropological monism," "Platonic allegorism," or "conventionalism." Geisler's list of evil "isms" seems to be his way of settling accounts with evangelical authors whose orthodoxy he disputes. His so-called "intellectual and spiritual advice" to fellow evangelicals is an attempt to stem the tide of heresy sweeping through the ranks of evangelical scholars.³⁶ The evangelical center does not seem to hold; bickering over the fine points or the foundational issues continues to plague evangelicals.

Only God Can Save Us . . .

Those who preach what they believe is the "orthodox religion," if they are Protestants, claim that God is necessarily limited to the Bible *alone*. But of course they simply cannot mean only the Bible since they also have in mind the creeds, the speculation of theologians and the deliberations of councils, and so forth—that is, the traditions of men, and not, from their own perspective, divine special revelations, because the canon and also the heavens are closed. They are faced with reading the Bible from a variety of interpretive frameworks that the authors of *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals* admit are grounded in what amounts to the wisdom of Athens. They also face an array of sometimes bitter internecine squabbles within and also struggles with Roman Catholics without, as well as with a host of competing, often secular faiths with no Christian pretensions. And they face in Europe

33. Geisler, "Beware of Philosophy," 9.

34. For an example of a prominent evangelical theologian in thrall to Karl Barth, see Bernard L. Ramm, *After Fundamentalism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983). Other evangelicals have had a low opinion of Barth, for example, Carl F. H. Henry, an early influential editor of *Christianity Today*, and also Cornelius Van Til.

35. Geisler, "Beware of Philosophy," 7–8.

36. Geisler, "Beware of Philosophy," 14–19.

and elsewhere the ebbing away of the sea of faith.³⁷ They call for an alliance with Roman Catholics, whatever their differences, in the hope that this might help stem the tide. Geisler has none of these generous prudential sentiments when he turns toward the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. When that happens, and it has happened, he appears to ally himself with unseemly anti-Mormon countercult bottom-feeders.³⁸

The Story of Salvation: An Alternative View

During the Messiah's visit to the Nephites, he explained that he had, with his death and resurrection, fulfilled the old covenant he had made with Moses. Animal sacrifice and the other ritual indicators of covenant identity were henceforth to be replaced with a "broken heart and contrite spirit" (3 Nephi 9:20) manifest by faithful obedience to the new testament or covenant. He promised to justify before his Father those who have shown by their deeds that they have endured well their probationary mortal test. This justification does not commence the journey of faith since it comes after one has been true and faithful by yielding to the sanctifying, purifying, cleansing work of the Holy Spirit. It is at the final judgment, when the books are opened and we are all judged by our deeds, that the final justification takes place. If one has turned to God, repented of sin, put one's trust in the Holy One of Israel, entered into a covenant with him beginning with baptism, and then subsequently sought and accepted the spiritual cleansing or purification known as the baptism of fire or of the Holy Spirit, then one can hope to be vindicated in that final court scene.

Justification is what takes place, if and only if one has been sanctified, which is not an event but a long, difficult process in which one is gradually purged of sin and built up little by little through repentance and obedience to God. The virtues of faith, hope, and love are

37. See Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach."

38. See Norman L. Geisler et al., *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1998). For my comments on the quirks in Geisler's criticisms of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, see my essay "Orders of Submission," *FARMS Review* 18/2 (2006): 193 and especially note 14.

educated habits that come through sometimes bitter experience and much pleading for God's mercy. One must, of course, have relied upon the merits and mercy of the Lord and thereby have been separated to God—that is, sanctified from the ways of the world so as to become a Saint or Holy One (*hagioi*). Mercy, which is entirely necessary, simply cannot rob justice (Alma 42:25). Our justification is possible only through the merits and mercy of the Holy One of Israel, whose seed or children we seek to become through the painful rebirth we all should desire above mere worldly goods.

In virtually the closing words in the Book of Mormon, after mention is made of the covenant that the Eternal Father has made with the house of Israel, we find these words: “Come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness.” Then we are admonished to “love God” without reservation. If these things are done, “then is his grace sufficient for you” (Moroni 10:32). This affirmation is then followed with this additional conditional statement: “If ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye *sanctified in Christ by the grace of God*, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become *holy, without spot*” (Moroni 10:33).

The blood of the Christ, the Holy One of Israel, covers or hides our sins. We use the English word *atone* for this covering of sin. To be numbered among the seed or children of Jesus Christ, one must have been initially cleansed of the sins of the world. An initial cleansing (or remission) takes place at baptism. Then through obedience to the terms of the covenant made with God, and with the mercy of God forgiving sins, one may become a genuine Saint. One has then been delivered or rescued—that is, saved (*soteria*)—from the disease and distress of this world, delivered from the chains of darkness and brought into the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.³⁹

We are also told that at the final judgment, when we all will be judged by our deeds or works, those who have genuinely “come unto

39. Preachers sometimes ask the Saints, “When do you know you have done enough?” The answer is that we are all beggars before God (Mosiah 4:18–20).

Christ” will be acquitted or declared righteous before the Most High God. Mercy cannot rob justice. Only if we have been true and faithful will the Lord declare to the Most High God that we are justified. All will receive what they truly deserve. The faithful—through their repentance, subsequent faithfulness, and the mercy of the Lord—will avoid the justice that awaits those who refuse to turn to the Holy One of Israel and seek his mercy. Justification in this scenario follows sanctification.

The Gospel according to Jesus

The scriptures do not teach that one becomes a disciple of Jesus Christ by being justified *in one’s sins* at the moment one confesses Christ through the imputation of an *alien* righteousness upon depraved sinners. Instead, we become part of the community of Saints or People of God by making a covenant with him and bearing faithfully his name in the world. Christ saves us by rescuing us from the spiritual prison and darkness we have created for ourselves by our own sins, for which we are accountable as responsible moral agents. He does this as one might rescue a sailor on a sinking ship or heal a person with a deadly disease. Christ saves us from spiritual death by atoning for (or covering) our sins with the blood he sacrificed to fulfill the ancient covenant. We flourish in the kingdom of God as his covenant people by obedient faithfulness. It is Christ who forgives us, sanctifies us, and then also gives us the glorious gift of eternal life, or the fullness of life, if and when we are eventually fully sanctified and finally justified.

All must eventually “come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny [themselves] of all ungodliness, and love God” (Moroni 10:32). Then and only then is his grace “sufficient” for us. Through his grace—his gift given to us in return for our gift of diligently striving to love and obey him—we can be declared “perfect in Christ” (v. 32) at the final judgment and allowed to enter into his presence and peace. In this scenario we find the core elements of the plan of redemption (or happiness). We begin the necessary rebirth by making a covenant that has conditions, obedience to which ultimately determines whether

we are blessed or cursed, and hence whether we are justified in the final court scene. If we are true and faithful to the covenant we have made with him, then Jesus Christ, our advocate against the demonic accuser, will vindicate (justify) us in the final judgment. We must turn (or return) to God, place our trust in him alone, open ourselves to the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, genuinely seek to *remember and keep* his commandments, and endure to the end. This is what Jesus Christ himself set out as his doctrine (see 3 Nephi 11:31–40). This he called the rock upon which we must build, or we build on sandy foundations that will not withstand the fury of the inevitable storms of life or the wiles of the devil (v. 40).

Christ urged the Nephites to take upon themselves his name—that is, be known by their discipleship (see 3 Nephi 27:3–5). He also admonished them to “endure to the end” so that they could “be saved at the last day” (v. 6). His true and faithful disciples build upon the rock of his gospel (vv. 8–9). If this is done, then the Father will “show his own works” in our community (v. 10). Christ then described his gospel. He “came into the world,” he indicated, “to do the will of my Father, because he sent me” (v. 13). He then sketched salvation history: he was sent to be “lifted up upon the cross” so that afterwards he could draw all unto him (v. 14). “As I have been lifted up by men,” he said, “even so should men be lifted up by the Father, to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil,” which statement is repeated twice (vv. 14–15).

Those who repent and are baptized will be filled with the Holy Spirit, and if faithful, they will be cleansed and purified—that is, made Saints. If they endure the tests of mortal probation “to the end,” then they will be held guiltless at the final judgment. They are those who, according to the Messiah, will have “washed their garments in my blood, because of their faith, and the repentance of all their sins, and their faithfulness unto the end” (v. 19). The Messiah cautioned us that no unclean thing can enter into the kingdom of God, only “those who have washed their garments in my blood” (v. 19). They will have been “sanctified by the reception of the Holy Ghost” and thus made fit to “stand spotless . . . at the last day” (v. 20) and be justified.

We are constantly being told by our evangelical critics that we believe in what they call “works righteousness”—that is, that we can save ourselves through works, and hence that we deny the necessity of divine mercy or grace. This is rubbish. Instead, our scriptures teach that deeds or works are necessary, even if they are not sufficient for our entering into God’s presence and becoming one with him. When we are ultimately judged by our works, we must rely on the merits and mercy of the Holy One of Israel to justify us. This is possible if we have been sanctified by yielding to the purifying, cleansing work of the Holy Spirit, whose influence we seek as we renew our covenants. I testify that we must all rely on God’s tender mercies as we strive to love and obey him as obedient children to their parents, or as servants are wont to do to gain favor in the sight of their masters. This is the wisdom of Jerusalem unblemished by that of Athens.

The New Birth as a Covenant Cleansing

I have, I believe, provided evidence from the Book of Mormon that without the redemption from both sin and death made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus of Nazareth, and also without his mercy, we are all lost. The Saints have absorbed these teachings sufficiently to see a very large place for the sanctification that must precede the final justification, when everyone will be judged by their works rather than merely their words. What is not sufficiently well known is that the Saints now have strong support for their stance on these issues from a highly regarded evangelical scholar and churchman, N. T. (Tom) Wright, who has, much like Latter-day Saints, stressed the necessity of entering into and participating in salvation history so that one’s own story is drawn from and also melds with salvation history.

Wright’s compelling challenge to the foundational claim of the Protestant Reformation—that is, justification by faith alone—has been set forth in a series of books and essays.⁴⁰ Latter-day Saints should be

40. See the following works by N. T. Wright: *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009); *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005); *What Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997); and a host of similar and related

pleased with Wright's opinion (which rests upon a careful study of the New Testament in its Jewish setting) that becoming a disciple of Jesus Christ does not begin with getting oneself saved—that is, justified once and for all, come what may—but begins when one genuinely enters into a covenant with God and is henceforth governed by its conditions. Among other things, Wright argues that Paul was profoundly misunderstood by Augustine, and hence later by both Luther and Calvin. Why? The idea that one is saved—that is, justified in one's sinful, depraved state by the imputation of an alien righteousness—is exactly not what Paul taught, if Paul is correctly understood in his profoundly Jewish context.

I have sought to popularize Tom Wright among Latter-day Saints.⁴¹ The reason is that I believe it is unnecessary for the Saints to be pestered and berated and otherwise ridiculed and shoved around by evangelicals whose faith is fastened to the slogan “justification by faith alone.” Wright has managed to put evangelicals on the defensive on precisely the primary intellectual issue that the better-informed evangelicals, rather than countercultists selling their snake oil, see as either deficient or even missing in the faith of the Saints.

Evangelicals are simply wrong in believing that we become disciples of Jesus Christ by answering an altar call. Instead, we must covenant with God, beginning with baptism, in which we symbolically are born again as the seed of Jesus Christ. Then and only then can we be eventually justified if we genuinely experience the baptism of fire or the Holy Spirit and endure in faith to the end. If and only if our feet are solidly planted on the narrow path can we hope and even expect that a forgiving, merciful, and loving Lord will have good and sufficient reason to present us eventually to his Father as true and faithful and hence worthy of being in the presence of God. But now, here below, we must constantly strive to keep the commandments as well as

essays. Tom Wright has drawn sufficient attention that a major effort is under way to try to salvage what amounts to the primary defining element of Protestant theology. Wright has appended to *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* a useful listing of his own works and other relevant and related literature, including criticisms of his stance (see pp. 264–69).

41. See note 42 below.

we possibly can as we undergo the painful new birth that will cleanse and purify and sanctify us as his Saints if and only if we rely on the Holy One of Israel, whose gifts are always good. I see Tom Wright as a gifted, articulate ally on these crucial issues.⁴²

Some Comments on Contents

We are pleased to make available the most recent Neal A. Maxwell Lecture, in which Richard L. Anderson provides a retrospective look at the many reasons he has for his deep affection for both Jesus of Nazareth, the Holy Messiah or Christ, and Joseph Smith, the seer through whom the Lord restored the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We have also included a variety of essays in this issue, some of which I will highlight here.

One can be excused for wondering what can be found in Margaret Barker's *Christmas: The Original Story*. But it turns out that there is much in this volume of interest to Latter-day Saints. In a remarkably able review, John W. Welch has assembled a summary and commentary on the wonders and riches found in Barker's latest book. Barker finds evidence that the Christmas story has roots reaching back to a deep past, even before the organization of this world. In addition, Welch makes the many links between the Jewish temple cult and the entrance of the Holy Messiah into mortality clear and accessible. If only a portion of the rich detail Barker has amassed from various sources and traditions is sound, she has opened some wonderful belvederes revealing much of interest and importance to Latter-day Saints.

42. See my comments on Tom Wright's version of the so-called New Perspective on Paul found in my essay titled "Debating Evangelicals," *FARMS Review* 20/2 (2008): xxxvi–xxxviii. Also the Book Note on Wright's *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* in the *FARMS Review* 20/1 (2008): 260–63; compare the Book Notes in the *FARMS Review* 21/1 (2009): 216–20 with the Book Note on John Piper's *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright*, found on pp. 223–24, which is an impassioned but civil effort to defend the Augustinian/Reformation dogma on justification by faith alone. In some volumes responding to Wright's New Perspective on Paul, we even have some tasteless, inaccurate anti-Mormon commentary. See Gary L. W. Johnson, "The Reformation, Today's Evangelicals, and Mormons," in *By Faith Alone: Answering the Challenge to the Doctrine of Justification*, ed. Gary L. W. Johnson and Guy P. Waters (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006).

In this issue of the *Review*, William Hamblin examines a curious book entitled *god is not Great*. Its author, christopher hitchens,⁴³ is perhaps the most outlandish in the stable of New Atheists. Why focus on such an author?

It is not entirely a secret that atheists in the ancient world were a rather shy and retiring lot. There were several reasons for this. In addition to possible dire consequences from those anxious to defend regimes grounded on opinions about divine things and the moral/legal order, premodern atheists also seem to have been keenly aware of the dire consequences for the social order of a bold public atheism.⁴⁴ The ultimate reason for their reticence was a recognition that belief in divine things, however understood, provided a necessary mandate or sanction for the moral and legal order. Premodern atheists were thus fully cognizant of the utility of belief in the Gods, which they recognized afforded an ultimate sanction for their regimes, as well as a proximate vehicle for an indoctrination in a salutary public morality, and thereby provided a palliative taming of otherwise unruly desires and passions.⁴⁵ Without such a salutary *pharmakon*, they often understood that a civil society was replaced by war not only in words but in dreadful deeds.

It is only in the modern world that a public atheism has been made fashionable among social elites, taught or assumed in universities, celebrated by the media, and thereby shouted from the rooftops. Modern public atheism has tended to claim that faith in God is now an unnecessary consolation for diseases for which some government program does or could provide well-being or some science could provide a therapy or even a cure. Currently, especially in Europe, we see the toadstooling of secular regimes, where talk of divine things is

43. I have chosen to style this name in lowercase because this famous author has established his own rule of not capitalizing the proper noun *God*.

44. For a wise introduction to this matter, see Leo Strauss, "Preface to Spinoza's Critique of Religion," in Strauss, *Liberalism: Ancient and Modern* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 255–57; and compare Louis Midgley, "The First Steps," *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): xxi–xxv.

45. For some details, see Louis Midgley, "The Utility of Faith Reconsidered," in *Revelation, Reason, and Faith*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002).

excluded from the public square. And we also see in America a flush of very belligerent, blunt, bold atheism. This so-called New Atheism is hardly of the same intellectual quality as the earlier, robust atheism proclaimed by Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and others who saw all talk of divine things as a justification for enslavement and as either an illusion or delusion. Instead, it is rude and crude, vulgar and overconfident. However, even with their idiosyncrasies, the New Atheists seem to me to be more intellectually interesting than Protestant preachers with a desire to attack the faith of the Saints. In addition, those Saints who for whatever reason go missing enter a vacuum and hence must find a new, secular religion to justify their treason. They are much more likely to turn to some version of atheism. This explains why we have included Professor Hamblin's examination of Christopher Hitchens's bizarre book.

Those who might otherwise put down roots in the gospel of Jesus Christ are unfortunately sometimes tilted away from doing so by sectarian anti-Mormon preachers whose idea of witnessing to their own faith is to launch promiscuous attacks on the genuine faith of others. One of these, the Reverend Shawn McCraney, has a weekly call-in show on KTMR-TV20 in Salt Lake City. Those who have witnessed McCraney's performances or who have read his book may wonder at the very gentle but also devastating response by Blair Hodges. McCraney, who appears to be both sponsored by and also a disciple of Chuck Smith's Los Angeles-based Calvary Chapel countercult, treats his TV audience to a rash of unseemly diatribes aimed at the faith of Latter-day Saints. Hodges has provided a modest, kindly response to a dreadful, self-published book by McCraney, who was once, he boasts, a very flawed, highly hypocritical Saint, until he came to believe that he had suddenly managed to get his seat locked up in heaven. He could then justify being a truly eccentric critic of his former faith.

We have also included the following in this issue of the *Review*: (1) some observations by Stephen Ricks on elements of *Journey of Faith*, a remarkable film produced by the Maxwell Institute on the Book of Mormon; (2) Brant Gardner's close and, I believe, helpful look at John Lund's popular treatment of the Book of Mormon—whatever flaws

Gardner finds in Lund's book are, from my perspective, rather minimal, especially when compared with the recent and rather bizarre, amateurish efforts to sell the idea that the events described in the Book of Mormon took place either around the Great Lakes or in Peru; (3) Stephen Smoot's thoughtful examination of Michael Ash's most recent book, which is an effort to set out evidences for the truthfulness of the restoration; and (4) Grant Hardy's learned reflections on two of the newly published versions of the English text of the Book of Mormon.

And, finally, we have included Matthew Roper's very detailed examination of the claim that there once was a second and entirely lost second novel by Solomon Spalding that somehow became the historical basis for the Book of Mormon. This claim is being revived in various ways by quarreling sectarian and secular critics, both of whom are anxious to breathe new life into the rather moribund Spalding explanations of the Book of Mormon. Latter-day Saints, and most of their critics, now see any version of the Spalding theory as the least plausible naturalistic account of the Book of Mormon. But this fact only energizes those who are deeply into conspiracy theories. Though the idea that Joseph Smith, in league with various others, especially Sidney Rigdon but also Oliver Cowdery, was involved in a dark conspiracy to somehow fashion the Book of Mormon by borrowing from a lost manuscript for a novel has, since World War II, been rather routinely rejected even by those not at all sympathetic to Joseph Smith. There are, however, now two competing if not warring factions who have dedicated their lives to reviving the Spalding corpse. One faction, composed of sectarian critics of the Church of Jesus Christ, got its initial sectarian indoctrination from the notorious "Dr." Walter R. Martin, the father of the countercult industry in America.⁴⁶ This faction clings to the hope that they can find a way to pull the Church of Jesus Christ from its historical foundations by building a case for the Spalding theory. These detractors, currently being led by Arthur Vanick, after falling flat with their first attempt, have been struggling to rise from the ashes with a heavily revised, more

46. The fruit of this indoctrination can be seen in the remarks in the Reverend George A. Mather's foreword to the 2005 version of *Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon?* See note 1 above for details.

detailed, and somewhat less bizarre version of their earlier stunningly flawed effort. This explains why we have published still another long, detailed examination of some of the textual debris and the assumptions with which they are read. Matthew Roper has become the authority on Spalding speculation.⁴⁷

Editor's Picks

It is, of course, difficult to assign exact levels of merit to worthwhile books. And, as we have previously done, we have included in our ranking a few publications that are briefly reviewed in our Book Notes section.

This is the scale that we use in our rating system:

- **** Outstanding, a seminal work of the kind that appears only rarely
- *** Enthusiastically recommended
- ** Warmly recommended
- * Recommended

And now for the results:

- **** *The Joseph Smith Papers: Revelations and Translations, Manuscript Revelation Books*
- *** Margaret Barker, *Christmas: The Original Story*
- *** Terryl L. Givens, *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-mortal Existence in Western Thought*
- *** S. Kent Brown and Peter Johnson, eds., *Journey of Faith: From Jerusalem to the Promised Land*
- ** Michael R. Ash, *Of Faith and Reason: 80 Evidences Supporting the Prophet Joseph Smith*
- ** Frederick M. Huchel, *The Cosmic Ring Dance of the Angels: An Early Christian Rite of the Temple*

47. See Matthew Roper, "The Mythical 'Manuscript Found,'" *FARMS Review* 17/2 (2005): 7–140, in which the work of Vanick and his associates is dissected.

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