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By What Authority? The Vital Questions of Religious Authority in Christianity

Alonzo L. Gaskill

Robert L. Millet

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BOOK NOTICES

By What Authority? The Vital Questions of Religious Authority in Christianity, edited by Robert L. Millet (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2010)

It appears that I have stumbled upon the answer to Juliet's timeless question, "What's in a name?" (*Romeo and Juliet*, act 2, scene 2). While a rose, by any other name, may have smelled as sweet to Juliet, the name of a book can make a significant difference for a reader.

By What Authority? is a compilation of papers delivered at a 2006 Brigham Young University conference on religious authority. The subtitle of the book (*The Vital Questions of Religious Authority in Christianity*) and the preface (authored by Robert L. Millet) imply that the text is an ecumenical examination of how various traditions—Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Seventh-day Adventist, and Latter-day Saint (to name a few)—perceive authority, priesthood, hierarchy, and the like. As evidence of what appears to be the book's intended goal, one chapter's author writes: "For nearly two millennia, meetings have convened to discuss authority in Christian traditions" (124). Another chapter indicates: "In one way or another, most of the theological issues that divide Christians today end up reflecting our different conceptions of authority" (36). Consequently, I was initially drawn to this text because I had hoped that through reading its pages I would come to a clearer understanding of how various Christian traditions answer "the vital questions of religious authority." Certain chapters accomplished that goal—although others have as their purpose something different.

The book's strength lies in Millet's ability to pull together the *who's who* of a subject so that the reader can learn

from the brightest and the best in the field. This volume is no disappointment in that regard. Gerald McDermott, Roger Olson, and the late Richard John Neuhaus are but a few of the significant theological minds of our era who contributed a paper to this volume.

By What Authority? also offers some important points of clarification on matters often misunderstood. For example, in Peter Huff's article on "Authority in the Catholic Tradition," the text points out that Catholic authority rests *not* in the two-dimensional model of scripture + tradition (as it is so often explained) but, rather, in a four-dimensional model combining tradition, scripture, episcopal authority, and the influence of the Holy Spirit. Likewise, in Bradley Nassif's article "'Authority' in the Eastern Orthodox Tradition," an important point of clarification is made regarding the sense in which Eastern Orthodox Christians believe in "apostolic succession"—namely through "communion ecclesiology" or the "succession of communities" rather than the succession of "apostles" or "bishops" (42–43, 44–45). These are important points of clarification, establishing why a book on this topic is important.

However, readers expecting an ecumenical exploration of religious authority may be somewhat frustrated with parts of the book. Several chapters have almost nothing to do with what appears to be the intended subject: for example, Robert Randolph's article on the Church of Christ (96–107), and David Neff's paper on reading the Bible for application (162–79). While these articles were well written and interesting, they strayed from the subject of authority.

Likewise, some of the articles break from the ecumenical spirit that prevails in much of this book. For example, Richard John Neuhaus's article sought to explain the dichotomy between papal infallibility and the individual Christian's need for autonomy. However, as a convert to Catholicism, Neuhaus seemed more interested in defending the Catholic position than he was in simply explaining it. Likewise, I felt that Stephen Ricks's article did little to establish what the orthodox LDS position is on authority. Rather, the article felt more like a polemic designed to gently debunk the contemporary Roman Catholic doctrine of apostolic succession through bishops.

While the inevitable typos and a somewhat inconsistent tone cause some chapters to feel very academic while others feel rather folksy, overall this book is well worth reading. For Latter-day Saint readers, one of the benefits they will gain from reading this book is an awareness that many people in other Christian traditions see some of the questions posed by Mormons on the subject of religious authority as nonissues.

—Alonzo L. Gaskill

Days Never to Be Forgotten: Oliver Cowdery, edited by Alexander L. Baugh (BYU Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2009)

Days Never to Be Forgotten presents the fruits of the 2006 BYU Church History Symposium on the life and work of Oliver Cowdery in honor of the two hundredth anniversary of his birth. Eleven scholars of Mormon history contributed essays about various aspects of Cowdery's life and involvement in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Ultimately, the contributors have two goals: to honor Cowdery's memory and to inform believers who

may not be aware of Cowdery's importance in the founding of the Church.

This book gives a good sense of Cowdery's extensive presence and activities in the earliest days of the Church. His conversion, his roles in the restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthoods, and his participation in the transcription and publication of the Book of Mormon are covered in detail. Cowdery was also centrally involved in disseminating Church doctrine by editing the Book of Commandments, by writing the earliest known version of Joseph Smith's initial visions, and by serving as editor of the *Messenger and Advocate*. Underscoring Cowdery's significance, authors in this book declare: "No one was more involved in the key events of the restoration than Oliver Cowdery" (15), and "excluding Joseph Smith, no other person is mentioned more often in the Doctrine and Covenants than Oliver Cowdery" (91). Cowdery's importance to Mormon history could not be clearer.

This book also addresses a number of events and experiences in Cowdery's professional and personal life. Significant new information is presented about Cowdery's involvement with the financial affairs of the Kirtland Safety Society and the Bank of Monroe, as well as facts about his life working as a lawyer during the 1840s in Tiffin, Ohio. The allegation that Cowdery practiced polygamy is discussed and rejected. Two additional essays provide information about Cowdery's wife, Elizabeth Ann Whitmer Cowdery, and about the monument built in honor of Cowdery at Richmond, Missouri, in 1911.

Because this book was produced near the same time as a second bicentennial collection, entitled *Oliver Cowdery: Scribe, Elder, Witness* (published in 2006 by the Neal A. Maxwell