



12-1-2011

Confessing History: Explorations in Christian Faith and the Historian's Perspective

Rachel Cope

John Fea

Jay Green

Eric Miller

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq>



Part of the [Mormon Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Cope, Rachel; Fea, John; Green, Jay; and Miller, Eric (2011) "Confessing History: Explorations in Christian Faith and the Historian's Perspective," *BYU Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 50 : Iss. 4 , Article 11.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol50/iss4/11>

This Notice is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in *BYU Studies Quarterly* by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

Confessing History: Explorations in Christian Faith and the Historian's Perspective, edited by John Fea, Jay Green, and Eric Miller (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010).

George Marsden's 1994 book *The Soul of the American University* ended rather unusually for an academic work—this well-respected historian suggested that religious faith should have a place in the academy. Such a bold assertion sparked a number of heated discussions within and without the intellectual world. Three years later, Marsden responded again to his critics by producing a volume that explored this topic, which he aptly titled *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*. As a result of this book, additional conversations ensued in which Christian and non-Christian scholars grappled with Marsden's proposition. More recently, the contributors to the edited volume *Confessing History: Explorations in Christian Faith and the Historian's Perspective* have added to the ongoing discussion about religion's role in the historical profession and have assessed the relationship between faith and learning in today's academy.

Like their predecessors, the predominantly young scholars contributing to this volume are broaching and responding to the same important topics, and yet they are also attempting to build upon and transcend prior works. While Marsden and others have proposed that faith commitments inspire Christian questions that result in "Christian interpretive insights," the scholars whose essays are included in this text are attempting to explore what has remained unanswered: how? How might the historical profession affect those committed to Christ? In what ways does the idea of calling come into play? Indeed, how does a Christian's

faith influence how she approaches her calling as a historian? And how might a disciple's responsibilities shape how he works in and responds to his professional objectives and settings? Does being Christian determine how a person writes, teaches, advises and speaks? Or should the two be mutually exclusive, as those looking through a more secular lens have suggested?

Although written by a group of scholars who share common values, their theological and professional perspectives are diverse. The book is divided into three sections that examine the concerns, experiences, questions, and desires of a new generation of Christian historians: Identity (How do we define ourselves in a world that seems to require dualism?); Theory and Method (How can we approach our work from lenses of intellect and faith?); and Communities (How do we teach from both a secular and a spiritual perspective, and how might we contribute to both our career and our church simultaneously?). Woven throughout each chapter are suggestions about how believing historians might work within the intellectual expectations of the field, as well as an acknowledgment of the challenges that will be faced as they attempt to do so.

Although edited and written by Evangelical scholars who are grappling with their own theologies in a professional context, this book will resonate with any scholar of faith. Quite simply, the questions posed and the challenges addressed are relevant, indeed, thought provoking; the authors challenge readers to consider how they might take their callings as Christian historians more seriously than the training they received to become secular historians. Therefore, they encourage readers to think differently than graduate school trained them

to think, while also acknowledging how difficult it is to make this transition. For those who study Latter-day Saint history and other related topics, this book may ring particularly familiar and should become a springboard into similar conversations of their own.

—Rachel Cope

The Book of Moses, paintings by Linda Etherington (Mormon Artists Group, 2010).

Since Linda Etherington graduated from BYU in 1991, her paintings have been exhibited in numerous local and international shows in places such as New York, California, Virginia, Utah, Idaho, Washington, and Mississippi. Her work is also in the permanent collection of Brigham Young University Museum of Art and the Springville Museum of Art.

In 2008, at the invitation of the Mormon Artists Group, she began a project of creating thirteen large-scale paintings to illustrate the Book of Moses. The process of painting required two years and reflects Etherington's point of view that this book of scripture is about extended family. Etherington creates a series of vibrant, colorful works that concentrate on the relationships of people, one to another, often in family groupings—the artist is a mother of seven daughters and brings her firsthand experience to highlight the beauty of domestic life.

The Book of Moses is the twenty-first project of the Mormon Artists Group, an organization based in New York City that creates limited edition books, music, collaborative projects, and visual artworks by members of the Church. The book is large and luxurious, measuring 14.5" by 11.25". It is printed on heavyweight BFK Rives mould-made paper with deckle edges. It is sewn and bound by hand and covered in white silk moire bookcloth. The book was designed by Cameron King.

The text used for the publication is the 1878 edition of the Book of Moses revised by Orson Pratt that placed the work in chronological order and reconciled the manuscript between various sources. This was the edition accepted by the Church as part of the standard works in 1880. It is the last edition before the book was divided into chapters and verses in 1902 by James E. Talmage. The design and format of the new publication enhance a reading of the Book of Moses as a single narrative—propulsive, exciting, and ultimately tragic. It is published in a limited edition of 100—signed and numbered by the artist. Mormon Artists Group issued a smaller, paperback edition of the book in full color which is available on Amazon.com and through the publisher. Additional information can be found at mormonartistsgroup.com.

—Glen Nelson