

BOOK NOTES

W. C. Campbell-Jack and Gavin McGrath, eds. *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics*. Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006. xx + 779 pp., with index of names, subjects, and articles. \$45.00.

New Dictionary is a truly remarkable book. Assembled herein are the contributions of a host of distinguished British (and also American) scholars. The first part of this volume consists of six essays dealing with key issues in Christian apologetics, including the history of attempts to defend the Christian faith. The second part of this volume consists of very useful entries on a number of issues, topics, and important contributors to Christian apologetics. Nothing in this volume manifests the flaws found in the essentially miserable efforts of those on the fringes of the American version of conservative Protestantism to engage in apologetics or deal with the many interesting and important issues surrounding apologetic endeavors. This volume is definitely not something cascading from the countercult movement.

Examples of competently done essays in the *New Dictionary* include the entry by D. W. Bebbington on “History” (pp. 320–22), a useful treatment of the objectivity question and of postmodernism. In the same vein, the essay on “Modernism/Modernity” (pp. 437–40) by R. D. Geivett is a fine example of the kind of scholarship found in this volume. But these are merely samples of the wide range of expertly crafted, informative, and accurate treatments of topics and individuals

found in the *New Dictionary*, which can be very highly recommended to Latter-day Saints who wish to rise above the confusion found in the polemical literature currently flourishing on the margins of the American evangelical world. The Saints can learn much by consulting this volume, which can be recommended without restraint or qualification.

Allen J. Fletcher. *A Scriptural Discussion of Light*. Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2007. 263 pp., \$14.99.

In this book, Allen J. Fletcher, a Church Educational System employee for thirty-seven years, shares his understanding of the concept of light and how it might apply in the life of the reader. The author portrays an extended discussion between two couples as they investigate the principles involved in understanding light, and this portrayal allows Fletcher to raise questions that each of us might bring up if we were participating in a similar dialogue. Fletcher covers, in a very understandable and persuasive manner, what the concept of light teaches us of the nature of God the Father and Jesus Christ. He then relates those lessons to mankind and speaks of what they teach regarding the nature of man and how each of us can apply them. The author's liberal use of scriptural references and prophetic utterances gives readers the opportunity to make their own determinations regarding the validity of his conclusions. His discussion of the atonement and how an understanding of light helps us understand that magnificent event is particularly noteworthy.

Mark Lilla. *The Stillborn God: Religion, Politics, and the Modern West*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007. x + 334 pp., with bibliography and index. \$26.00.

Mark Lilla reminds us that religion is a perennial part of our lives. In spite of our success in secularizing society, we are still confronted with questions that are beyond our abilities and call for more assurance than our philosophical traditions allow. Political theology once dominated political life because its comprehensive answers provided a rational way of viewing the world. It is still dominant in many non-

Western parts of the world. Political theology is the attempt to legitimate and control political authority by appealing to divine revelation. It can be found in philosophers as diverse as Plato, Augustine, al-Farabi, Moses Maimonides, and Thomas Hobbes. Lilla recounts the transformation in thinking that broke with political theology and ushered in modern political philosophy. Thomas Hobbes, writing in response to the religious upheavals of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, argued that the basis of the state and religion was now to be found in human nature, specifically in the passions. To understand that nature is to know how to control it. Hobbes initiated the great separation; he argued that peace and stability within society are possible only if the foundations of social and political life are not based on divine accounts of authority. Legitimation of political authority would henceforth be a human task, a matter of reason and science. Hobbes also thereby set in motion the liberal tradition in politics and theology.

Lilla then traces the European response to this tradition beginning with Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant. These two thinkers saw human beings as marked by an internal struggle between good and evil. What set their work apart from other political philosophers was their attempt to set this inner struggle in the public arena. In order to allow the good within human nature to win out, it was necessary to cultivate a universal morality. But this required a community of faith. Christianity (or a civic religion) was considered the basis on which to cultivate this morality. This liberal temper eventually brought about a new interpretation of religion. Liberal theology reduced religion, both Christian and Jewish, to being the vehicle for the promulgation of liberal morality. World War I marked the end of the confidence in liberal theology and its morality. After that war, critics such as Karl Barth and Franz Rosenzweig emerged in this period challenging the claims of liberal theology. They argued that in draining religion of its particular claims to truth, liberal theology actually weakened the efficacy of the idea of a universal morality. The irony of this story is that the truth of their critique of liberal theology was illustrated in the way that the followers of Barth and Rosenzweig opted for Nazism and Stalinism.

Lilla's book ought to be of interest to Latter-day Saints if only for his account of the failures of modernity to adequately account for the claims of revelation and society in terms of political philosophy. Religion retains its significance for us because, among other reasons, it is a reminder of the limits of human understanding. But it also tells us that our sense of justice appeals to more than the inner life of the mind. Revelation proves to be the indispensable starting point for charting the boundaries of our moral life. Human life proves to be a continual process of returning to religion for direction in our moral and intellectual struggle to understand the world we live in.

Clay McConkie. *A Man Named Peleg: An Exploration into the Days of Peleg*. Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2007. 137 pp., with index. \$13.99.

This book sets out to provide an explanation for three “great floods” that the author discerns in scripture: (a) a flooded earth on the first day of creation, (b) the Noachian deluge, and (c) an extensive but nonglobal flood in the days of Peleg that resulted in the earth’s “division.” McConkie relies on a literal reading of Doctrine and Covenants 133:23–24 as the “key” to his interpretation. His theory is outlined in short, easy-to-read chapters that contain some repetition. The book claims that its theory will “show . . . a definite advantage over . . . other[s] . . . especially in regards to chronology and certain principles of modern-day science” (p. 12). Elsewhere, the author acknowledges that it “is questionable” whether “geologists or earth scientists would ever agree” (p. 31) with his theory but does nothing to engage such concerns. The book mentions alternative theories and explanations on a variety of points, but these alternatives are not engaged, discussed, or rebutted. The author merely mentions them and gives his own theory without explaining why the alternatives are less desirable. McConkie admits to knowing “very little about . . . the floods themselves” (p. xvii), and he shows little or no familiarity with the data upon which other points of view—both scientific and scriptural—are based.

The author does not include references to previous Latter-day Saint discussions of this topic. Significantly, his discussion of the Tower of

Babel would have been richer had he addressed Hugh Nibley's conception of the tower as a corrupted temple rather than as simply a high spot to avoid floods (see Hugh Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989], 108). Nibley likewise, in *Teachings of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1993, 1:423), points out that the Jaredite tower is not necessarily the Tower of Babel (contrary to what McConkie says on p. 106).

The style of argument is light and wide ranging, including appeals to scriptural exegesis, supposition, arguments about what "seems logical" to the author, the Septuagint's chronological variations, and Josephus. Unfortunately, many points that are asserted but not argued must be granted to sustain the author's point; in these instances, the book's brevity and its breezy style work to its disadvantage.

Readers favoring an extremely literal reading of scripture will be interested in the novel addition of a second, post-Noachian flood from "a strategic water system" "somewhere in the north" that acts like "a huge hydraulic network" (p. 39). Those who desire textual criticism, a discussion of the impact of ancient worldviews on scripture, biogeography, or any interaction with scientific concepts will be disappointed.

Larry A. Nichols, George A. Mather, and Alvin J. Schmidt, with Kurt Van Gorden, consulting editor. *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Cults, Sects, and World Religions*. Revised and updated ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006. 544 pp., with glossary, three appendixes, bibliography, and index. \$35.99.

Encyclopedic Dictionary is divided into two large sections entitled "World Religions" and "Dictionary Entries." There are also three appendixes and a bibliography. The entire package is typical of the literature produced by the countercult movement. Instead of being a source of accurate information, this book is essentially polemical sectarian propaganda; it is also grounded on slogans such as "cult" and much conceptual confusion about what might constitute a "world religion." There are ninety-nine entries under "World Religions," among them "Convince," "Hanuman Foundation," "Arica (Arica Foundation)," and "Freemasonry (Masonic Lodge)." But there are no

entries under the headings “Protestantism,” “Eastern Orthodoxy,” and “Roman Catholic Church.” Instead there are articles on “Christianity,” “Hinduism,” “Judaism,” “Islam,” “Mormonism; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; CJCLDS,” and “Community of Christ; Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.”

One of the primary targets of the *Encyclopedic Dictionary* is the faith of Latter-day Saints. Evidence of this focus can be found in the bibliography, where there are ninety-three items listed under “Mormonism.” The only category with more items listed is “General Books,” with ninety-nine items, including books by critics of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints such as Walter Martin, Dave Hunt, and Bob Larson. All other “world religions” get less bibliographic attention than the Church of Jesus Christ. Even though Larry Nichols boasts that “Kurt van [sic] Gorden . . . read each of the articles and dictionary terms carefully and edited the entire manuscript” (p. 13), *Encyclopedic Dictionary* is larded with mistakes and anomalies. In the bibliography on “Mormonism,” the names of authors are often garbled. Jan Shipps becomes “Schipps” (p. 503), James E. Talmage becomes “Talmadge” (p. 503), and Richard Abanes becomes “Albanes” (p. 501). These and numerous other related mistakes, both small and large, mar *Encyclopedic Dictionary*. Though the authors of this volume cite the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (p. 502), they seem not to have consulted it. If they had done so, they could easily have avoided much confusion and a host of errors. A striking but rather typical example of an erroneous assertion can be found in “Appendix 2: Orthodox Christology and Heresy” (pp. 469–71), where the “capsule summary” of the heresy wrongly attributed to “Mormonism” is found in the bald assertion that Latter-day Saints actually believe that “Jesus’ deity is no more unique than all of humankind” (p. 470).

Some of the most bizarre portions of *Encyclopedic Dictionary* are found in the section entitled “Dictionary Entries” (pp. 355–465). These might be what one could expect to find in notes taken by one struggling to sort out the vocabulary of others or in a replication of the slogans used against the faith of others. The word *cult* is one of these words (p. 381). Striving for a definition of *cult* that is presumably

not “relativistic and subjective” or “transitory,” the authors of *Encyclopedic Dictionary* cultivate an ad hoc definition that simply ignores the term’s origin and curious history. They provide, instead, “a model that is theological and doctrinal in nature.” This yields a label with which they can blast away at the beliefs of those they dislike or do not understand. Sixty-nine of the definitions provided turn out to be tendentious attacks on the faith of Latter-day Saints. Many of these are also garbled.

Encyclopedic Dictionary is described on the back cover as an “extensively revised edition,” with “new topics, updated information, and a brand-new format,” of the *Dictionary of Cults, Sects, Religions, and the Occult*, published by Zondervan in 1993. The authors of *Encyclopedic Dictionary* thank the following: “Keith MacGregor and MacGregor Ministries, Kurt van [sic] Gorden, Jill [Martin] Rische [the stridently anti-Mormon daughter of the notorious “Dr.” Walter Martin], Paul Carden, Arthur Vanick, and Dale Broadhurst for their reviews and remarks on Mormonism” (p. 9). In addition, the Reverend George A. Mather, one of the authors of *Encyclopedic Dictionary*, had earlier provided a flawed foreword to Wayne L. Cowdrey, Howard A. Davis, and Arthur Vanick’s *Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon? The Spalding Enigma* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2005) in an effort to revive the moribund Spalding theory of the Book of Mormon. Reverend Mather, much like Van Gorden, Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick, got his start under the tutelage of “Dr.” Walter Martin.

Christopher Partridge, ed. *Dictionary of Contemporary Religion in the Western World: Exploring Living Faiths in Postmodern Contexts*. Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 2002. x + 390 pp., with indexes of names, subjects, and articles. \$25.00.

This volume is essentially a collection of essays on various religious topics by British scholars. The first part contains a host of essays on topics such as “Mysticism,” “Religion (Definitions),” “Religion and Philosophy,” “Religion and Psychology,” “The Study of Religion,” and twenty-nine other related general topics. These essays are generally both insightful and competently done.

The second part of *Dictionary of Contemporary Religion* consists of numerous entries on specific “contemporary religions.” For example, G. W. Trompf, who teaches history at the University of Sydney, provides a reasonably accurate account of Aboriginal and Maori religiosity in “Aboriginal Religion in Australia and New Zealand” (pp. 155–58). There is also, as might be expected, an article on the “Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the (Mormons),” by A. H. Anderson (pp. 210–13), who is the director of a research unit in the Department of Theology at Birmingham University. This essay, even with the mistake in the name of the Church of Jesus Christ in its title, is moderately accurate, though a bit tendentious. Christopher Partridge would have done better to have invited Douglas Davies, who has a Mormon studies program at Durham University, to write an essay on the faith of Latter-day Saints.

This volume should be of interest to Latter-day Saints genuinely interested in religion in all its varieties and manifestations, as seen from an academic perspective.

Ben Witherington III. *The Problem with Evangelical Theology: Testing the Exegetical Foundations of Calvinism, Dispensationalism and Wesleyanism*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005. xi + 294 pp., with bibliography and index. \$29.95.

In this book Ben Witherington, a Methodist New Testament scholar, laments that all of the theology that makes the various evangelical denominations distinctive is in fact unbiblical and based on egregious misreadings of biblical texts. According to Witherington, “Evangelicalism is a many-splintered thing with more denominational expressions than one can count, and like much of the rest of the church is to a large extent biblically illiterate or semiliterate” (p. ix). “We need to stop creating churches that essentially serve ourselves and nurture our own way and style of living” (p. 248). “The world is laughing at us [Evangelicals] because our witness is so divided and we speak with forked tongues” (p. 247). “It is time to recognize that denominations are a result of Protestant differing and bickering. They are children of the Protestant Reformation. They are also the result of profoundly weak ecclesiology

on our part, and they reflect and are based upon the biblically weakest aspects of our theology—namely our distinctives” (p. 247).

First Witherington goes after the Reformed theology commonly expressed as “TULIP,” which stands for Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, and the Perseverance of the saints. “If one believes that God has predetermined from before the foundation of the world people to be saved, then of course election is unconditional, grace is irresistible, and perseverance is inevitable. These three linked ideas do not necessarily require the notion of total depravity or limited atonement” (p. 5). Witherington traces this theology back historically to misreading of biblical texts by Calvin, Luther, and Augustine: “For example, the idea of ‘once saved always saved,’ or the idea that it is impossible for a ‘saved person,’ a true Christian, to commit apostasy, is simply not an idea to be found in the N[ew] T[estament]. More to the point, much in the NT flatly contradicts such an idea” (p. 4). “The especially crucial notions of the influence of Adam on all humanity in terms of total depravity, the bondage of sin, the necessary predetermining of some of the lost for rescue, the imputation of righteousness come from Luther’s reading (and sometimes misreading) of Augustine and his indebtedness to Erasmus” (p. 9). “It must be stressed that Augustine’s interpretation of Romans, and especially Romans 7, seems to be in various regards an overreaction to Pelagius who argued that sin comes from human beings’ free imitation of Adam, and can be overcome by imitating Christ. Pelagius also suggested that justification, at least final justification, is through determined moral action” (p. 7). This forces Witherington to ask: “Should our teachers be Augustine and Luther?” (p. 6). “The tulip begins to wilt when one reads Romans in light of the Pastorals rather than through the much later lens of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin” (p. 16). Unable to find any of the elements of TULIP supported by the Bible, Witherington concludes that “it is time to stop reading Romans 7:14–25 through the lens of Augustine and Luther” (p. 31).

Next Witherington goes after dispensationalism, which for Evangelicals means beliefs about the rapture, an unbiblical doctrine that

says that Christ's return will come in two stages (first to receive the faithful before seven years of tribulation on earth and then, after that period, to usher in the Millennium). Witherington traces the doctrine historically: "In 1830 in Glasgow, Scotland, a young girl named Margaret MacDonald attended a healing service. She was said to have received a vision on the occasion of a two-stage return of Christ. . . . The matter might have fallen into obscurity except that a British Evangelical preacher named John Nelson Darby heard the story and spread it far and wide. . . . Darby made numerous evangelistic trips to America between 1859 and 1877 and won many American converts to the rapture theology" (p. 94). "Dwight L. Moody became enamored with this theology and began promulgating it on both sides of the Atlantic, furthered by the founding of the Moody Bible Institute, and eventually by Moody Press and by a radio network. But by far the single most enduring tool for spreading this theology was a reference Bible, put together by one Cyrus I. Scofield and first published in 1909. . . . What few know about him [Scofield] today is that he was an embezzler and forger who abandoned his wife and children and did time in jail even after his conversion to Christianity. Never mind all this; his Bible had a life of its own, due in large part to the promotion of the Moody Bible Institute and a very wealthy Chicago businessman named William E. Blackstone, who himself had already cashed in on the rapture theology" (p. 95).

Continuing this history, Witherington notes that since Lewis Chafer founded Dallas Theological Seminary in 1924 to promote dispensational theology, the school "has produced the likes of John Walvoord . . . , Charles Ryrie, Hal Lindsey, and many names familiar to Evangelicals who have been readers of popular Evangelical theology. These leaders and their writings have impacted Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Timothy and Beverley LaHaye, and a host of Dispensational televangelists who will remain nameless" (p. 96). ("In Evangelical theology today, it is hard to tell who the players are without a program," p. 3.) Witherington also tries to link Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon with dispensationalist theology (see p. 255 n. 1), although besides a hint-and-run footnote he does not pursue this dead

end. Despite how influential dispensationalism has been, “there is no theology of the rapture to be found in the New Testament anywhere, never mind the term itself. But if this is so, what then are the implications? Well, if there is no rapture, much of the Dispensational system falls down like a house of cards” (p. 130).

Witherington also attacks his Wesleyanism. The root of these problems is found in the evangelical approach to the Bible, which (like any other scriptures for that matter) is not a handbook on theology. “What we do not have is Jesus’ *Institutes*, or Paul’s *Institutes*, or John’s *Institutes*. Their material is not arranged according to modern ways of framing theological discussions, nor do they address all the topics we might find helpful or interesting” (p. 245). Far from accepting *sola scriptura* and pretending merely to let the text speak for itself, we need to “realize that we are active readers of these texts, that we bring our own training and education and biases with us when we read them, and frequently we are guilty of anachronism, of reading things into the text, especially when we start trying to systematize and order the theological content we find in these documents” (p. 245).

Witherington lays out rules that he feels are necessary for those dealing with the sacred text, among which are the following:

You need to be able to read the text in its original language, since every translation is already an interpretation. (p. 246)

You need to have studied the text in its original contexts (literary, historical, archaeological, theological, rhetorical). (p. 246)

If you are an Evangelical, then it is imperative that you interact with non-Evangelical treatments of the text, and also listen to what was said about the text by church fathers, who studied it in the original Greek before the time of Augustine and the Latinizing of the church. (p. 246)

The text needs to not be watered down or dumbed down. Rather, one needs to ratchet up one’s attention level and

degree of devotion to the text, not to mention one's attention to detail. (p. 246)

But the biggest problem may be simply in the desire to do theology itself:

We need to get beyond both ancient and modern ways of handling the text that strip away the story, leaving a mass of quivering ideas and concepts that we then are free to rearrange in any order that pleases us. That may be an intellectually satisfying exercise for some, but in fact it turns out to be a way of neutralizing the story, and not allowing it to have its effect on us. It is in fact a power trip, an attempt to take control over these stories before they fully take hold of us. If that is what thinking theologically and doing theology amounts to, we need a moratorium on thinking and doing theology. (p. 239)

Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi. *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, with a preface and postscript by the author and a foreword by Harold Bloom. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005. xix + 154 pp., with index. \$14.95.

Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory is the most recent version of a remarkable volume that was first published in 1982. This book is recognized as a classic of modern Jewish scholarship. Yerushalmi's theme is the communal, shared memory that for ages obsessed Jews and founded their identity. He calls attention to the challenges posed by the millennial tension between the age-old Jewish commandment—and tradition—of remembrance and the tragic tale of the disobedience of the covenant people and by the new Jewish passion for history. Yerushalmi builds on the widely recognized imperative given to Israel in her sacred texts to remember God's mighty acts and on a recognition that God is always faithful in remembering his covenant people, even when they have turned against him by not remembering (and hence not keeping) his commandments. Remembering (or forgetting) the covenant with God grounds the controlling metanarrative found in Jewish sacred texts. This includes the story of the creation,

at first unspoiled, and then the fall, which is followed by God calling his people and making a covenant with them that includes promised blessings and also the demand that they always remember him and keep his commandments or suffer cursings—the dire consequences for disobedience (or forgetting).

The imperative to remember makes Israel, more than any other people, intensely conscious of the past, since the sacred texts are primarily historical texts filled with accounts of the sins of rebellious Israel. These stories are blunt and also highly selective. They do not conform to modern fashions in historiography. Yerushalmi provides a brilliant analysis of the selectivity and meaning of memory in Jewish religious tradition. Moving directly from the imperative to remember, which grounds the faith of Israel, he argues that recent secularization has radically transformed memory and identity for Jews by moving away from the traditional account of the covenant people of God. With the rise of modern Jewish historiography in the nineteenth century, “for the first time it is not history that must prove its utility to Judaism, but Judaism that must prove its validity to history, by revealing and justifying itself historically” (p. 84).

Put another way, essentially secular notions of the past have replaced the earlier memories of covenants made with God, the often halting efforts of the covenant people to keep the commandments, and the profoundly tragic consequences of disobedience to divine mandates.

Yerushalmi describes the biblical roots for recording and remembering the covenant with God, as well as the forgetfulness of his people and God’s steadfast covenant love. At first remembering was directly connected with participation in God’s mighty acts and also in recording them. But during the Second Temple period, direct participation in this story ended, and subsequently Jewish memory was preserved through ritual and religious practices not linked to ordinary historical events. From the end of the Second Temple period onward and especially during the Middle Ages, Jewish identity no longer depended on historical events—that is, Jewish identity no longer involved, as it once had, recording the tragic history of the covenant people. The writing

of history was even dismissed as a low form of intellectual endeavor. Remembrance was, after all, subsequently achieved through holidays that sustain Jewish memory and hence identity.

Yerushalmi shows that, with the Enlightenment, Jews again began to take an interest in their own postbiblical past. This new interest in the wide range of the Jewish past is driven by profoundly secular assumptions. And it appears to be a large element in the collapse of Jewish identity as a distinct community of faith. Yerushalmi does not examine in detail the current crop of conflicting narratives of the Jewish past. Instead he provides the setting in which this can and has been done.

In a brilliant introduction, Harold Bloom sketches some of the consequences of the entry into Jewish historiography of an essentially Epicurean critique of religion that Yerushalmi argues has had a devastating impact on Jewish memory and identity (pp. xii–xi). Among other things, Bloom argues that even a pleasure-seeking Epicurean atheism ignores the past, recalling it only if and when it is pleasurable. “Nothing could be more un-Jewish, and one sees again why the great rabbis used ‘Epicurean’ as a term of the greatest abuse. An Epicurean attitude toward memory is antithetical to Judaism” (p. xiv).

Yerushalmi argues that Jews today construct different kinds of narratives of Jewish history as a whole. The result is that they no longer share a common memory or identity. A new Jewish history now challenges and replaces the traditional memory. The problem is not amnesia. Instead it is the variety and the diversity of assumptions upon which contemporary Jewish history is grounded.