

David Chidester. *Christianity: A Global History*.

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Adrian Hastings, ed. *A World History of Christianity*.

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Philip Jenkins. *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity*.

New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

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Unbeknownst to most residents of North America and Europe, Christianity is currently undergoing a transition of historic proportions. Within the next few decades, Christianity will almost assuredly become a religion primarily of the Southern, rather than the Northern, Hemisphere. Africa and South America will each surpass Europe in total numbers of Christians. Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, of course, are well aware of their church's impressive growth in Oceania, Latin America, and, to some extent, Africa. But few recognize that such gains are part of a larger, dramatic watershed in the overall evolution of Christianity.

As Christianity spreads across the world, scholars are devoting increasing attention to its global dimensions. Accordingly, I find it worthwhile to examine three recent studies of global Christianity—two that focus on the past and one that looks at the present and the future. I will begin with a discussion of the importance of Christian history for Latter-day Saints. I will then examine the ways in which a worldwide perspective changes the story of Christian history. Next I will compare the three books and analyze their respective treatments of the historical Jesus and the definition of *Christianity*. I will follow the comparison with a discussion of various antecedents and parallels to Mormonism found in these books and conclude with suggestions for Latter-day Saint scholarship on Christian history.

Christian History and the Latter-day Saints

A central assumption of Mormonism is that something went fundamentally wrong with Christianity that only a new dispensation of divine revelation could put right. It is the *sine qua non* of Latter-day Saint doctrine.

Specifically, Mormons declare that after the deaths of the Apostles, ordinances were corrupted or lost, original gospel knowledge fragmented, and divine priesthood authority died out. Individuals from John Wycliff to Pope John XXIII tried to reform Christianity, but despite their good intentions and the assistance of the Holy Spirit, they could not restore the fullness of true and living Christianity; only a new dispensation of revelation could do so. And this new dispensation began, the Saints testify, in the 1820s through Joseph Smith, the Prophet.

The notion of a general Christian apostasy followed by a divine restoration is unusual, if not entirely unique. Older Christian bodies like the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches insist that they have maintained the truth and authority of Christ uninterrupted to the present. Protestants, on the other hand, agree with Mormons that Christianity went wrong but assert that Martin Luther and other reformers corrected course by returning to the Bible. The Pentecostals, a twentieth-century offshoot of Protestantism, share many beliefs with other Protestants but stress the contemporary role of the Holy Spirit in reforming Christianity. The older churches thus claim unbroken continuity, while Protestants and Pentecostals claim continuity through reform. Only scattered seekers and a few groups like the Quakers have proclaimed anything resembling the Latter-day Saint belief in a general apostasy and restoration. And their views of the matter differ in many specific ways from those of Mormons.

Latter-day Saints are reasonably familiar with the history of the Restoration, but most are less knowledgeable of the rest of Christian history. Should they bother to study Christian history? If it's largely a tale of apostasy, one might dismissively ask, what is the purpose of learning it, except perhaps as a cautionary tale or as a mere prologue to the Restoration?

There are good reasons for Latter-day Saints to study Christian history. In fact, the Church has from time to time explicitly encouraged its members to do so. In 1960, for instance, Melchizedek Priesthood quorums studied Christian history using T. Edgar Lyon's *Apostasy to Restoration*.¹ The manual's foreword points out that the study of Christian history can provide evidence of the Apostasy and of the necessity for a restoration. Some additional reasons also come to mind. First, an understanding of Christian history can foster civil dialogue with other denominations and faiths, as recent Latter-day Saint interreligious exchanges impressively demonstrate.² Second, a better understanding of the history, appeal, and shortcomings of Christianity among the peoples of the world may facilitate more effective Latter-day Saint proselytizing.³ Finally, Christian history can shed light on facets of Mormonism that, when viewed in isolation, may be overlooked. Without reading the scholarly exchange between Evangelical Craig L. Blomberg and Latter-day Saint Stephen E. Robinson,

for example, one might not realize that in general Christian terms, Mormons are “subordinationists,” meaning that they consider Christ subordinate to the Father because his divinity derives from the Father. The point is not stressed in Latter-day Saint theology, and its distinctiveness may become apparent only against the backdrop of Christian debates on the subject.⁴ For these and other reasons, the study of Christian history can benefit the Saints.

Making the Familiar Appear Unfamiliar

The three books reviewed here explore the history, and in one case the future, of Christianity. To some extent, each breaks new scholarly ground. They are part of a minor wave of recent global Christian histories. In contrast to earlier surveys that typically focused on the churches of the ancient Mediterranean, western Europe, and North America, these newer titles devote more attention to Christianity in other lands.⁵ They do not assume that European Christianity is the norm against which all other regional Christianities pale in orthodoxy and importance. This incipient, promising historiographical shift is the result of at least four converging factors: greater Western awareness of non-Western peoples; enhanced recognition of popular, often “unorthodox,” religion; the continued decline of Christianity in Europe; and, as mentioned earlier, explosive Christian growth in the Southern Hemisphere. The center of gravity in the Christian world has moved southward, and the historiography is beginning to follow.

Integrating non-Westerners into the Christian story alters it subtly yet substantially. For example, in *A World History of Christianity*, editor Adrian Hastings deliberately intersperses the chapters on non-Western Christianity throughout the text, roughly in the order that Christianity reached each region, rather than placing them at the end of the book as a sort of afterthought. Since Christianity reached India and Africa nearly fifteen centuries before the age of Columbus and Martin Luther, the chapters on India and Africa precede those on North America and the Reformation. Christian globalization therefore appears less as a modern phenomenon than as the continuation of an ancient pattern. (The sequence would be radically different, of course, were the “pre-Christian” Christians of the Book of Mormon and the Book of Moses acknowledged.)

In this narrative scheme, the West comes across as not quite so central to the Christian story. The effect of this emphasis on non-Western cultures would be analogous to prioritizing the spread of Mormonism among indigenous Pacific islanders in the late 1800s over the Church’s concurrent struggles with the U.S. government. Narratives in which non-American Saints play dominant, rather than secondary, roles already exist among var-

ious Latter-day Saint communities outside the U.S., and those members will become only more influential as the Church grows ever more international.⁶ Perhaps reading about the globalization of Christianity from a non-Western perspective would help American Saints become less ethnocentric in preparation for the Church's continued expansion.

The reader of these three books will encounter myriad events, places, and peoples known to few Western Christians. There are the Christians of the Middle East and northeastern Africa—some of the oldest Christian communities in the world—that have for centuries struggled for survival in the face of Islamic expansionism. There are India's "Thomas Christians," who trace their beginnings to their namesake Apostle. There are the Nestorians, who, after being declared heretics in A.D. 431, founded the first Christian communities in China and perhaps even in Southeast Asia. And there are the followers of the Liberian prophet William Wadé Harris, who reportedly converted 100,000 West Africans to Christianity in the 1910s. The list goes on, and it will be a source of continual, rewarding fascination for many readers.

The editor and authors of these three books are all Westerners inclined by background and intellect to view the familiar in unfamiliar ways. American-reared David Chidester has taught comparative religion for two decades at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. He is one of the most energetic, original, and wide-ranging scholars of religion writing today, having produced works on such varied topics as Augustine, Jim Jones, and African religious violence.⁷ The late Adrian Hastings of the British Isles also spent many years in Africa, first as a Catholic priest and later, after an ecclesiastical falling out, as a theologian. Hastings produced magisterial surveys on Christianity in Africa and England and served as general editor of *The Oxford Companion to Christian Thought* (2000).⁸ Philip Jenkins, Distinguished Professor of History and Religious Studies at Penn State University, is perhaps the broadest and most unpredictable thinker of the three; he has authored provocative books on cults, child molestation, and erroneous claims about the historical Jesus. The unifying theme of his work seems to be the unfounded bases of various popular beliefs and panics.⁹ Since non-Westerners may one day be the primary historians of Christianity, these books could represent an interim moment wherein non-Western Christianity is finally recognized but the historians remain mostly Westerners.

The Global, the Popular, and the Imminent

What these three books have in common, then, is a global perspective that de-emphasizes Western Christianity. However, a comparison of the

books shows that they are also dissimilar in many ways. For example, Jenkins's *The Next Christendom* focuses on the twentieth century and offers projections for the next. Chidester and Hastings, on the other hand, stick to the history of Christianity and are more readily comparable. Although their two studies are in some ways the antithesis of one another, Chidester's and Hastings's histories also complement each other rather well. Both have distinct gaps and emphases, and readers should not confuse their respective purposes.

Hastings's *A World History of Christianity* is a reliable reference work for scholars, libraries, and students. It is the product of thirteen scholars, mostly British. Quite conventionally, they focus on the leaders, missions, and political and intellectual disputes of the mainline churches rather than on popular or nontraditional Christianity. Yet with only six of its thirteen chapters centered on Western Christianity, the book stands as perhaps the most global of Christian histories. With one exception, the essays are all fine summaries of contemporary scholarship, an unusual consistency rate for an edited work. This book would serve well for a senior undergraduate seminar or a more advanced class. The book was marketed to a popular audience, but it is not suitable for novices. The essays are rather dry and dense, and references to assorted figures and controversies presuppose some familiarity with Christian history. For newcomers, it would be a terrific *second* book to read—only after going through a more readable, if less thorough, text such as Chidester's *Christianity: A Global History*.

While the great attribute of Hastings's volume is its global scale, Chidester's primary contribution is his attention to popular, often unconventional, Christianity. If Hastings travels the middle of the ecclesiastical road, Chidester hurtles toward the ditch. He minimizes institutions and highlights the common and the fringe. The papacy and some other key institutions are discussed sparingly, if at all, yet he carefully details the ways ordinary people and idiosyncratic elites cultivated the sacred with and without official approval. He demonstrates that the boundaries distinguishing Christianity from paganism, orthodoxy from heterodoxy, and the sacred from the profane have frequently blurred. Assuming little knowledge on the part of his readers, he employs remarkable stories like the tale of St. Guinefort, the holy greyhound, to propel the narrative. This approach compensates in many ways for what his impressionistic style lacks in comprehensiveness. Not that Chidester neglects the global dimension: while the first two-thirds of the book cover assorted topics related to European Christianity, the last third traverses the continents. Though Chidester does not integrate non-Western regions into his narrative as fully

as Hastings does, he still devotes more attention to them than most Christian histories.

Despite the high quality of these two books, Jenkins's *The Next Christendom* is the most stirring and captivating of the three. Combining the best aspects of the others, Jenkins's book is both a thorough analysis and a good read. It is, in some ways, a rejoinder to secularists who herald the death of Christianity, to modernists who warn that Christianity must liberalize or die, and to commentators who envision a two-sided clash between Islamic and Western civilizations. This book will jog many readers.

Jenkins demonstrates that even as Christianity gasps for breath in Europe and struggles to retain relevance in North America, it is exploding in most parts of the world, particularly the Southern Hemisphere. Christianity is no longer a Western religion imposed upon colonized peoples; on the contrary, it has become a faith primarily of the developing, rather than the developed, world. As historian Mark A. Noll aptly stated in a review of the book: "The 'average' Christian in the world today is not a well-dressed Caucasian suburban male but a poor, brown-skinned woman living in a Third World megacity."¹⁰ Christianity stands today, more than ever, as the most global of religions. "Amazing as it may appear to a blasé West," Jenkins concludes, "Christianity exercises an overwhelming global appeal, which shows not the slightest sign of waning" (39). Consider some of Jenkins's numbers and projections:

The Christian population of Africa mushroomed from 10 million in 1900 to 360 million in 2000 (4).

Christians constitute a majority of South Koreans who declare their religious affiliation and about a quarter of the population altogether (71).

By 2025, the Christian populations of both Africa and South America will surpass that of Europe. Their active participation rates are already much higher (3).

Pentecostals will surpass one billion before 2050, roughly equal to the Hindu population and double that of the Buddhists. And yet the membership of the Catholic Church will remain even larger (8).

In the Southern Hemisphere, Christian/Muslim violence, already terrible in places like the Sudan, will probably worsen. Projections indicate that ten of the world's twenty-five most populous countries in 2050 will be torn between Muslims and Christians. (That "inter-religious violence in recent years tends to be initiated by Muslims against Christians" (171), Jenkins adds, goes largely unreported in the West.)

Perhaps none of these projections will come true, of course, based though they are on verifiable trends. But as an introduction to contemporary

Southern Hemisphere Christianity, this book is worth reading. Jenkins shows that Christians of the Southern Hemisphere are anything but liberal modernists, despite their concern for racial and economic justice. Their literal, apocalyptic, supernatural, and morally conservative faith resembles, if anything, that of the early Christians. Many Christians of the Southern Hemisphere, in fact, experience the signs and wonders of the apostolic age and, particularly in Africa, embrace various Hebraic elements of the Old Testament. The terrible conditions in which many of them live make biblical accounts of war, plague, poverty, and persecution much more real to them than to Northern Hemisphere Christians. As scholars have observed of the early Mormons, so Jenkins recognizes of Southern Hemisphere Christians: They do not read the Bible; they relive it.¹¹

As for the Northern Hemisphere, Jenkins shows that most church-going Christians in Britain and France are now Southern Hemisphere migrants and their families. In 1998, Anglican bishops from the Southern Hemisphere defeated Northern efforts to liberalize church policy on homosexuals. And in a reverse of the traditional pattern, Asian and African missionaries now go to Europe to spread the gospel.

Mormons already know something about the influence of the Southern Hemisphere. Latter-day Saint convert baptisms in Europe and North America occur disproportionately among immigrants from the Southern Hemisphere.¹² More strikingly, when President Spencer W. Kimball prayed about the priesthood racial restriction in the 1970s, one of the issues weighing on his mind were the prospective temple blessings of countless racially mixed Brazilian Saints. The Southern Hemisphere has, in this sense, already profoundly influenced the entire Latter-day Saint church.¹³

Holding It All Together

One dominant lesson of these books is that Christianity, despite the usually exclusive truth claims of its various ambassadors, has developed an astonishing diversity. Hastings reminds us that Christianity has been alternately apolitical and imperial, persecuted and persecuting, activist and contemplative, centralized and fissiparous, pacifistic and militaristic, capitalistic and mendicant, celibacy-centered and marriage-centered, anti-ritual and almost ceaselessly ritualistic. And these are just some of the *social* contrasts; other areas, like theology, would dramatically multiply the variations. Hastings concludes, “It is of the nature of Christianity to relate its beliefs to the culture and needs of every age, to be a translating community, rather than a fundamentalist one, confined to repeating the formulas of the past” (47).

Such diversity raises an obvious question: Does anything unify the myriad forms of Christianity? Hastings thinks something, or rather someone, does: “The centrality of the figure of Christ, however variously portrayed, holds it all together, combined with the acceptance of the scriptures of the New Testament” (2). Jenkins and Chidester probably would not disagree. A history of Christianity should therefore, almost by definition, include a satisfactory discussion of Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, neither Chidester nor Hastings meets this need. Their chapters on Jesus are, in fact, the weakest of their books.

Martin Goodman, a professor of Jewish Studies, wrote the chapter on early Christianity for Hastings. He skillfully analyzes its Jewish and Roman context, yet he says surprisingly little about Jesus. In a chapter on the founding of Christianity, the founder is more absent than present. Goodman explains his neglect with three observations: Paul rarely cited Jesus’ teachings, the gospels were written decades after Jesus, and the teachings they describe were not all that unusual. This rationale is, however, unpersuasive. The gospel portraits of Jesus are probably Christianity’s most influential texts, and their contents need to be discussed. Goodman’s extreme historical skepticism, furthermore, would leave little to say about countless ancient figures from Alexander to Buddha, since what we know of them is usually based upon biased posthumous texts. Goodman should have taken the approach of Buddhist scholar Donald S. Lopez Jr., who, while noting the difficulty of describing the historical Buddha with any precision, at least values communal memories and stories of the Buddha enough to recount them.¹⁴

And Goodman is no better on the Resurrection. Acknowledging that accounts of the risen Christ appeared early, he nonetheless half-heartedly drags out the theory of “cognitive dissonance” to explain early Christian conviction. Christianity comes across as an accident, the offspring of Paul’s unique zealotry. It is a strange beginning to a book about the global legacy of Jesus Christ.

Chidester’s portrait is similarly flawed. Skeptical of the gospels, he conversely places too much confidence in some of the shaky conclusions of the Jesus Seminar, a small group of scholars who loudly debunk traditional understandings of early Christianity. Specifically, Chidester relies on Burton Mack’s reconstruction of the hypothetical communities responsible for the “Q Source” (the passages common to Luke and Matthew but absent in Mark) and the recently discovered, noncanonical Gospel of Thomas.¹⁵ These original “Jesus movements,” Chidester says, remembered Jesus simply as a miracle worker, teacher of wisdom, and messenger of the kingdom of God. (He all but ignores Jesus as rabbi, messiah, and apocalyptic prophet; Mack

and the Jesus Seminar interpret these Jewish images of Jesus as later accretions.) A few years later, however, Paul's "Christ congregations" emerged, "imagining" Jesus as a divine Lord and Savior. These Christ cults, Chidester argues, subsequently overwhelmed the alleged Jesus movements, prompting him to assert what Goodman implies, namely, that "Paul was the founder of Christianity" (30). Christianity again comes across as an accident or a social delusion.

To his credit, Chidester uses the New Testament more fruitfully than Goodman, capably fleshing out some of the various images of Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, he never informs his readers that most New Testament scholars would probably find his portrait of early Christianity at best rather speculative and at worst just plain wrong. Jenkins, for example, offers a terrific critique of the Q-Thomas hypothesis in his book *Hidden Gospels* (2001). Rather than simply pushing a controversial interpretation with the certainty of a scholarly consensus, Chidester should have at least referred readers to other interpretations.

Defining Christianity

These books raise a second question as well: Besides the figure of Christ (variously understood), is there an unshakeable core to Christianity? Is everything about it negotiable? What, in other words, is the definition of *Christian* and *Christianity*?

Chidester stresses the chameleon character of Christianity. For him, Christianity has never stood outside of human history; it has always been a negotiable cultural product. "The notion of a 'pure' Christianity," he remarks, "certainly cannot be sustained" (431). Chidester, in fact, almost leaves the impression that Christianity becomes more, not less, authentic whenever it absorbs a region's indigenous religious elements: the alien import thereby transforms into a local production. Mayan Catholicism and African Zionism are thus in his eyes as legitimate as Pauline Christianity. Yet if he finds all, or most, Christian variations "orthodox"—to use a concept that really has no place in his book—he nonetheless finds the unconventional groups more fascinating.

Chidester accordingly provides an impressive, brief sketch of the Latter-day Saints in his chapter on the United States, "American Zion." For him, nineteenth-century Mormons "embodied" such characteristic features of American Christianity as restorationism and millenarianism. Yet his surefooted descriptions of the Book of Mormon and the doctrinal innovations of Nauvoo make it abundantly clear that the Saints nonetheless remained a people apart. Mormonism thus resembled and differed

from the rest of American Christianity—no shocks here. But it is not Chidester’s thesis that makes his account stand out; it is the manner in which he presents it. A few minor errors aside, he avoids the major, embarrassing gaffes that too often characterize descriptions of the Saints. Rather than commit the common mistake of attributing disproportionate significance to any single facet of early Mormonism, moreover, Chidester balances its various elements nicely. His tone is sympathetic, as he more or less takes Joseph Smith’s revelations at face value. This is just the sort of generous depiction of a heterodox movement that characterizes his book and distinguishes it from most surveys of Christianity, including that of Hastings.

As its institutional focus would suggest, the Hastings volume has a narrower definition of Christianity than Chidester’s. Indeed, Hastings has criticized Chidester’s book for its “preoccupation with border areas and fringe movements.”¹⁶ Hastings’s contributors tend to portray syncretism, the mixing of Christianity with different beliefs, as legitimate, but only if the result does not conflict with traditional Christianity. Gnosticism, Manicheanism, and Taiping Christianity are all dismissed as illegitimate variations, and so too, it seems, is Mormonism: Robert Bruce Mullin’s chapter on North American Christianity virtually ignores the Saints. There is irony here. Mormons, given their concern for truth, might feel more comfortable with Hastings’s somewhat narrow definition of Christianity than with Chidester’s open-ended approach. And yet it is Chidester who includes the Saints in Christian history. Of course, he also includes Jim Jones and Sun Myung Moon, so Latter-day Saint readers may find the honor dubious.

Whereas Chidester and Hastings merely imply certain definitions of Christianity, Jenkins is explicit: “A Christian is someone who describes himself or herself as Christian, who believes that Jesus is not merely a prophet or an exalted moral teacher, but in some unique sense the Son of God, and the messiah” (88). The Trinity, the Resurrection, the Bible as the word of God—*specific* doctrines like these, he says, are too complicated to be useful in a definition. Better to stick to *general* doctrines, such as Christ’s unique role, to provide a rough litmus test for Christian identity. He cites the Tarahumara of Mexico as an example of a group that would not qualify as Christian. Their worldview, he contends, bears little resemblance to Christianity, despite its veneer of Catholic symbolism.

Interestingly, Jenkins uses Mormonism to explore the boundaries of Christian identity. After placing the non-Christian population of the U.S. at 4–5 percent, he remarks that the figure would rise to about 7 percent “if we take the controversial step of excluding Mormons from the Christian community” (104). Many evangelicals do not consider Mormons

Christian, he notes, because of their additional scripture and non-traditional doctrines. Jenkins may feel some sympathy with this position, as his book *Hidden Gospels* depicts the Book of Mormon as one of many spurious, “rediscovered” secret gospels of Jesus. Unfortunately, his failure to fully integrate the Saints into *The Next Christendom* cuts short what might have been some instructive insights, given Rodney Stark’s calculation that Mormons will number at least in the tens of millions by 2080, most of them living in the Southern Hemisphere.¹⁷

Elsewhere, though, Jenkins strongly implies that Mormons *are* Christian. Denying them Christian status because of their differences with traditional Christianity, he says, would require us to do the same with many Southern Hemisphere Christians, something Jenkins thinks would be wrong, and not just because it would affect his thesis. Jenkins has informed me by email that he “would NOT take the ‘controversial step’ of excluding Mormonism from the Christian tradition.”¹⁸ Perhaps he might actually feel comfortable applying what he says of Southern Hemisphere Christians to the Mormons as well: “Even in some of the areas in which they might seem odd or deviant, they are not so much departing from the Christian mainstream as emphasizing some aspects that have become unfamiliar” (132).

As we’ve seen, Mormonism is a good barometer of the way these books define Christianity. Chidester has the broadest definition and offers a satisfying treatment of the Mormons. Hastings defines Christianity rather narrowly, and his book barely mentions the Saints. Jenkins presents a more nuanced understanding of Christian identity and accordingly offers ambivalent, tantalizing, and incomplete comments on Mormons.

Antecedents and Parallels to Mormonism

Chidester and Hastings make certain statements supportive of Latter-day Saint doctrine and historical understanding. One of these is the assumption (shared by Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox) that divine authority passed from Christ through the Apostles to local bishops through successive ordinations. Many scholars, Chidester included, dismiss the notion of apostolic succession as the invention of second- and third-century bishops trying to buttress their authority. Hastings, however, defends the plausibility of apostolic succession: “There is really no compelling reason to deny the core of it” (31).

Chidester, on the other hand, describes the doctrine of *theosis*, or human deification. “During the first four centuries,” he writes, Christians affirmed that “Christ became human so humans could become divine” (156). This bears a strong resemblance, of course, to Lorenzo Snow’s couplet: “As man

now is, God once was; As God now is, man may be.”¹⁹ This doctrine of deification, Chidester remarks, became a central tenet of Eastern Orthodoxy, whereas the Western church went on to stress redemption rather than deification. Later, in his comments on the Mormons, Chidester observes that Joseph Smith revived the idea of deification and even went so far as to imply the existence of a plurality of gods. How ironic it is, then, that many Christians today should deny the Mormons “Christian” status in part because they espouse an early Christian teaching that mainstream Western Christianity simply abandoned.

Hastings also acknowledges some of the changes that Mormons see as indices of the Apostasy. Once Constantine turned Christianity into the favored religion of the empire, he writes, Christians were too taken in by their turn of fortune to recognize the dire costs of imperial patronage. The church became wealthy, powerful, and corrupt. Mercurial emperors rendered ecclesiastical decisions. Church leaders and emperors employed imprecise Greek terms and concepts such as *homoousios* (consubstantial) to form creedal doctrines like the Trinity. But *homoousios*, Hastings charges, was “not scriptural” (48). Hastings would not agree that a full-fledged apostasy occurred, but he also would not deny that Christianity had changed significantly in some rather unfortunate ways.

Jenkins’s study, by contrast, offers a remarkable contemporary parallel to the Latter-day Saints. No student of Latter-day Saint history can read his account of Southern Hemisphere Christianity and not think of the early Saints. The parallels are particularly striking between nineteenth-century Mormonism and late twentieth-century African Christianity (as found in both Africa and African diaspora communities). Broadly speaking, both identified with the Bible in a radically experiential manner. Both imposed a biblical geography upon their native landscapes. Both practiced an unusual mixture of Christian primitivism and Hebraic restorationism. Both suffered hardships like destitution and persecution. Both challenged traditional definitions of Christianity because both emphasized visions, healings, prophecy, and revelation, things that many Christians relegated to the biblical era. Mormons like to look to the ancient past to find parallels to themselves; who would have known that contemporary Christianity, indeed even the future of Christianity, may offer as many parallels?

Conclusion

Collectively, these three studies look backward into the past and forward into the future. It would be appropriate to conclude with a glance in both directions.

In terms of the study of the past, Latter-day Saint scholarship on Christian history needs improvement. The breadth of Mormon studies on the Apostasy has declined noticeably since 1960. The need for a contemporary, updated interpretation of the Apostasy is clear: Eric Dursteler has shown that older, standard Latter-day Saint works on the Apostasy reflect a long-outdated, nineteenth-century historiography.²⁰ Plenty of articles and book chapters have been written on the subject, but few book-length works. In recent decades, only Barry R. Bickmore's *Restoring the Ancient Church* (1999) can stand alongside such aging Latter-day Saint classics on the Apostasy as James Barker's *Apostasy from the Divine Church* (1960) and Hugh Nibley's *When the Lights Went Out* (1970). Yet Latter-day Saint scholars are more capable than ever of producing a seminal book (or even series of books) on the Apostasy—something that is grounded in ancient languages, speaks to audiences both inside and outside the Church, and engages the best historical scholarship and Christian apologetics. The energy that Latter-day Saint scholars have devoted to the Book of Mormon and other subjects would undoubtedly yield great rewards were it turned toward the Apostasy as well. Perhaps the sophistication of several recent articles and conference papers are harbingers of good things to come.²¹

But Latter-day Saint audiences also need histories of Christianity that, while taking stock of the Apostasy, look beyond it. Christian history is too rich, varied, important, and instructive to always be reduced to this one issue. Even assuming that a great apostasy did occur, God apparently saw fit to allow Christians in various forms to continue for centuries before the Restoration. Even in a “fallen” state, so to speak, Christianity preserved many things that were “of great worth” (1 Ne. 13:23) and has spoken powerfully to the spiritual yearnings of countless millions; it still does today. As yet, however, no contemporary Mormon scholar has produced a comprehensive history of Christianity for Latter-day Saint readers.

It is also time for a Latter-day Saint scholar to produce a history of Christianity quietly infused with Mormon sensibilities but directed toward a general, non-Mormon audience. Catholic, Protestant, and secular historians write histories of Christianity for the general public; why not a Mormon?²² All historians approach their subjects with certain biases, concerns, and understandings that at least implicitly shape their research and writing. Such biases can be a detriment, but in skilled hands, they are often a strength. A historian with ears attuned to certain sounds may hear something that another does not. Thus historians such as Mark Noll and George Marsden, because of their evangelical commitments and professional skill, have provided us with highly regarded histories of American religion and culture written from an evangelical point of view.²³

Hugh Nibley is instructive here. *When the Lights Went Out* is a compilation of three earlier articles published in scholarly journals, citing sources accessible to all scholars, yet with an unannounced Latter-day Saint understanding of the past running throughout. The articles were professional to the point that they are still cited by non-Mormon historians of Christianity,²⁴ and yet they are so implicitly “Mormon” in their assumptions that one article provoked a debate within the pages of the academic journal *Church History*.²⁵ What might a Mormon history of Christianity see that other histories of Christianity have not? What sorts of debate might it inspire? This waits to be seen.

Turning now toward the future, Jenkins raises questions about Latter-day Saint fortunes in the Southern Hemisphere. Nineteenth-century similarities aside, the modern Latter-day Saint Church, particularly in Africa, seems somewhat removed from charismatic Southern Hemisphere Christianity. The latter is malleable and indigenous, while Latter-day Saint organizational structure sharply limits indigenization and local innovation. Southern Hemisphere Christianity experiences unruly and spontaneous spiritual gifts, while Latter-day Saint spiritual gifts are subdued and organizationally constrained. Charismatic Christianity attracts the poorest, while the Saints tend to be more middle class. These contrasts derive in part from the youthful, sectarian character of Southern Hemisphere Christianity and the older, institutional ways of the Church. (Strange to describe Mormonism as the more established religion.) Still, are these differences an advantage or disadvantage to the Church? Should it revive some of its earlier, charismatic spontaneity to broaden its appeal, as the Catholic Church has done to some extent? Or should it stay the present course—probably gaining fewer members than it otherwise could—and cultivate stable institutions and structured congregations? This, too, waits to be seen.

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1. Eric Dursteler points out other instances in his article “Inheriting the ‘Great Apostasy’: The Evolution of Mormon Views on the Middle Ages and the Renaissance,” *Journal of Mormon History* 28 (fall 2002): 25–26.

2. Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1997); Raphael Jospe, Truman G. Madsen, and Seth Ward, eds., *Covenant and Chosenness in Judaism and Mormonism* (Denver: University of Denver, 2001). Two publications include responses to the Blomberg-Robinson exchange: *FARMS Review of Books* 11, no. 2 (1999) and *BYU Studies* 38, no. 3 (1999); *BYU Studies* 40, no. 4 (2001) is a special issue devoted to Islam.

3. Two articles provide glimpses of the impact that knowledge and ignorance of a region's Christian background can have on Latter-day Saint proselytizing. See Peter Lineham, "The Mormon Message in the Context of Maori Culture," *Journal of Mormon History* 17 (1991): 62–93; and R. Lanier Britsch, "The East India Mission of 1851–56: Crossing the Boundaries of Culture, Religion, and Law," *Journal of Mormon History* 27 (fall 2001): 150–76.

4. Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?* 114–42.

5. These titles include Paul R. Spickard and Kevin M. Cragg, *A Global History of Christians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 2001); David L. Edwards, *Christianity: The First Two Thousand Years* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997); and John McManners, ed., *Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity* (N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1990).

6. See Thomas W. Murphy, "Other Mormon Histories: Lamanite Subjectivity in Mexico," *Journal of Mormon History* 26 (fall 2000): 179–214; and Thomas W. Murphy, "Reinventing Mormonism: Guatemala as Harbinger of the Future?" *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 29 (spring 1996): 177–92.

7. Two examples of Chidester's work are *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996) and *Salvation and Suicide: An Interpretation of Jim Jones, the Peoples Temple, and Jonestown* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

8. See, for instance, Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa, 1450–1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); and his massive edited work, *Oxford Companion to Christian Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

9. Among Philip Jenkins's books are *Hidden Gospels: How the Search for Jesus Lost Its Way* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); and *Moral Panic: Changing Concepts of the Child Molester in Modern America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

10. Mark A. Noll, "Turning the World Upside Down," a review of *The Next Christendom*, by Philip Jenkins, *Books and Culture* 8, no. 2 (March–April 2002): 32–34.

11. See Jan Shippo, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985).

12. Lowell C. "Ben" Bennion and Lawrence A. Young, "The Uncertain Dynamics of LDS Expansion, 1950–2020," *Dialogue* 29 (spring 1996): 27–28.

13. Armand L. Mauss, "The Fading of the Pharaohs' Curse: The Decline and Fall of the Priesthood Ban against Blacks in the Mormon Church," *Dialogue* 14 (fall 1981): 10–45; Mark L. Grover, "Religious Accommodation in the Land of Racial Democracy: Mormon Priesthood and Black Brazilians," *Dialogue* 17 (autumn 1984): 23–34.

14. Donald S. Lopez Jr., *The Story of Buddhism: A Concise Guide to Its History and Teachings* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 7–9, 37–102.

15. Compare Chidester's portrait of early Christianity with the similar account found in Burton L. Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament? The Making of the Christian Myth* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995). Mack is a prominent contributor to the Jesus Seminar.

16. Adrian Hastings, "A Slant on the Church," *Times Literary Supplement*, November 17, 2000, 28.

17. Rodney Stark, "The Rise of a New World Faith," *Review of Religious Research* 26 (1984), 18–27.

18. Philip Jenkins to Richard D. Ouellette, February 28, 2003.

19. Quoted in Stephen E. Robinson, *Are Mormons Christians?* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991), 60.

20. Dursteler, "Inheriting the 'Great Apostasy,'" 23–59.

21. See, for example, Daniel C. Peterson, "'What Has Athens to Do with Jerusalem?' Apostasy and Restoration in the Big Picture," *FARMS Review of Books* 12, no. 2 (2000): xi–liii; David L. Paulsen, "The Doctrine of Divine Embodiment: Restoration, Judeo-Christian, and Philosophical Perspectives," *BYU Studies* 35, no. 4 (1995–96): 6–94; Stephen E. Robinson, "Early Christianity and 1 Nephi 13–14," in *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, the Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center, 1988), 177–91; and C. Wilfred Griggs, "Rediscovering Ancient Christianity," *BYU Studies* 38, no. 4 (1988): 73–90. Five Latter-day Saint scholars (S. Kent Brown, John W. Welch, John F. Hall, Noel B. Reynolds, and John Gee) presented papers on early Christian history at the annual meeting of the Classical Association of the Middle West and South in April 2001.

22. Latter-day Saint scholar C. Wilfred Griggs has written a well-received study entitled *Early Egyptian Christianity from Its Origins to 451 C.E.* (Boston: Brill, 2000). My cursory look at the book detects no obvious Latter-day Saint point of view.

23. For example, George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); and Mark A. Noll, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).

24. See, for example, Robert L. Wilken, *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 97.

25. Hugh Nibley, "The Passing of the Church: Forty Variations on an Unpopular Theme," *Church History* 30 (June 1961): 131–54; Hans J. Hillerbrand, "The Passing of the Church: Two Comments on a Strange Theme," *Church History* 30 (December 1961): 481–82; Robert M. Grant, "The Passing of the Church: Comments on Two Comments on a Strange Theme," *Church History* 30 (December 1961): 482–83.