

*Early Christians in Disarray: Contemporary LDS Perspectives on the Christian Apostasy*. Edited by Noel B. Reynolds (FARMS and BYU Press, 2005).

A much-anticipated book exploring the root causes of the early Christian apostasy is now off the press. *Early Christians in Disarray: Contemporary LDS Perspectives on the Christian Apostasy* is the culmination of several years' work by BYU scholars who used manuscripts from the first few centuries of Christianity (some not discovered until the last century) to reevaluate the formative research on the apostasy that has already been performed by James E. Talmage, Joseph Fielding Smith, and B. H. Roberts.

Following them, most Latter-day Saint scholars and leaders previously understood the Christian apostasy through the findings of nineteenth-century Protestant historians and the claims of eighteenth-century anticlerical writings. Both sources provided a seemingly endless array of evidences of apostasy in Christian history. This reliance on Protestant writers produced in LDS accounts of the apostasy a heavy emphasis on the late-medieval corruption of the Catholic Church, typically described as having occurred during a time of severe spiritual darkness and intellectual backwardness.

Over the last century, a wealth of new material and scholarship has been made available, giving a clearer picture of what the Christian experience was like during its first centuries. One result has been the view, set forth in *Early Christians in Disarray*, that the apostasy began much earlier than supposed—as early as the first century AD.

Noel Reynolds argues that a principal cause of the apostasy was the abandonment or breaking of sacred covenants by the Christians them-

selves. “The more we learn about the first decades after the passing of Christ, the more we can see internal rebellion against God’s covenants and against his authorized servants—much like the rebellions against Moses in the wilderness, or against Joseph Smith in Kirtland in 1836,” he writes. “The rebels were members of Christ’s church, sometimes leaders, who sought for earthly power, glory, and even justification for their own sins.” In examining the second-century transformation of covenant-based ordinances into Christian sacraments, Reynolds illuminates Nephi’s statement that many of the covenants were taken away (see 1 Nephi 13:26).

Readers will be interested in the insights the contributors provide regarding such questions as why there was an apostasy, how it came about, what it means, and what the significance is of new discoveries. Contributors include Noel B. Reynolds, Eric R. Dursteler, Richard Bennett, John W. Welch, James E. Faulconer, John Gee, Daniel W. Graham, James L. Siebach, David L. Paulsen, Barry R. Bickmore, Adam W. Bentley, and Ryan G. Christensen.

According to Reynolds, *Early Christians in Disarray* is “designed to support and encourage further systematic research on [the apostasy]. It is not designed to be a comprehensive or final treatment of any of [the] issues. The goals of the authors and editor will be achieved if Latter-day Saints find its contents helpful for understanding this important topic and if it provokes some of them to pursue these and related questions with further research.”

—Alison Coutts