Early Christians in Disarray: Contem-
porary LDS Perspectives on the Christian Apo-
stasy. 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 Apo-
stasy is the culmination of several years’
work by BYU scholars who used manu-
scripts from the first few centuries
of Christianity (some not discovered
until the last century) to reevaluate
the formative research on the apos-
tasy 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 anticleri-
cal writings. Both sources provided a
seemingly endless array of evidences of
apostasy in Christian history. This reli-
ance on Protestant writers produced in
LDS accounts of the apostasy a heavy
emphasis on the late-medieval corrup-
tion 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 pic-
ture 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 sup-
posed—as early as the first century AD.

Noel Reynolds argues that a prin-
cipal cause of the apostasy was the
abandonment or breaking of sacred
coventants 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 reb-
els were members of Christ’s church,
sometimes leaders, who sought for
earthly power, glory, and even justifi-
cation for their own sins.” In examin-
ning the second-century transformation
of covenant-based ordinances into
Christian sacraments, Reynolds illu-
minates 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 regard-
ing 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. Gra-
ham, 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 sys-
tematic research on [the apostasy]. It
is not designed to be a comprehen-
sive 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