

Mormon Christianity: What Other Christians Can Learn from the Latter-Day Saints. By Stephen H. Webb. New York: Oxford University, 2013. Pp. ix + 217. \$27.95.

In this volume Catholic theologian Webb elaborates on a chapter-length argument in his *Jesus Christ Eternal God* (2012), where he posits that Mormonism's theologizing on the materiality of spirit positions it to better respond to modernity's naturalist challenge to religion. This is not, as the subtitle unfortunately suggests to the polemicist, an argument for Mormonism's veracity. Rather, W. uses Mormonism's "bigger set of ideas" (182) to prod those who resist any thought of "materialist metaphysics" for fear of undermining divine sovereignty.

Although the Calvinist–Mormon debate frames the book, it is not W.'s real interest. His ultimate objective is to show Christianity's historic susceptibility to a materialistic metaphysic and the need to recover it. Mormon heresy is rooted in this countertradition, he argues, and usefully provides a model for restoring the ideal that "nature is already thoroughly supernatural right down to the smallest atom, and the supernatural is nothing more than nature in its most intense and concentrated form" (148). Such a recovery is, he writes, necessary to counter a contemporary scientific naturalism that has become so commonsensical as to make religion appear nonsensical and irrelevant.

W. artfully and accessibly describes both sides of this metaphysical debate. In doing so, he has written one of the best summaries of Mormon cosmology and theological anthropology in print and provided a useful primer for the classroom. The weight of his argument, however, is carried by an equally insightful critique of historical Christian theology, both Protestant and Catholic. Much of this criticism is hidden in appendixes A and B, perhaps because of editorial fear of the general reader's low tolerance for theology. Reading these, as well as the accompanying critique of Mormon theology, is necessary for realizing the full, thought-provoking potential of this slender book.

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Reinventing Liberal Christianity. By Theo Hobson. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013. Pp. viii + 322. \$30.

Hobson's book offers a significant attempt to rejuvenate a liberal Christianity that affirms the deep affinity between the gospel and political and cultural freedom (i.e., the liberal state). Hobson examines with clarity and conviction the theological and philosophical roots that led to imagining and creating the liberal state in the mid-17th century, distinct from the intentions of the radical reformers (chiefly Anabaptists). H. is a British theologian who, at the beginning of this volume, distinguishes between the "good" tradition of liberal Christianity (or liberal Protestantism) and its "bad" counterpart, where Christianity presents itself as an essential rational worldview that loses the

very concept of revelation, as well the importance of religious and cultic practice where “God’s authority is acknowledged and the story of his salvation is told and performed” (111). Without this “core” of Christian faith, liberal Protestantism lacked the inner resources to resist a secularizing mutation. In an interesting manner, H. describes the development that goes from the Christian rationalism of Defoe’s novel *Robinson Crusoe* (a religious style that marginalizes sacramentalism as the troublemaking part of religion [132]) to Deism as an alternative form of faith in divine reason and “a profound disaster to Protestant theology” (142). Deism, with its “sacraphobia,” was born at the beginning of the Enlightenment. It was able to survive Romanticism without replacing the Enlightenment, becoming its dialogue partner, as Charles Taylor pointed out. Chapter 5, where H. analyzes the rhetoric of the Christian deist influence used by the first US presidents and probes the meaning of American disestablishment, is well worth reading.

After decades of study on the relations between liberalism and Catholicism, I can say that this book has turned out to be challenging and even provocative to me. I would invite H. to learn more about the Catholic tradition through, for instance, the great figure of John Courtney Murray and his impressive historical review of the roots and foundations of religious freedom and the suitable relation—separation and cooperation—between church and state. Murray’s writings would clarify some of H.’s statements.

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The Oxford Handbook of Theology and Modern European Thought. Edited by Nicholas Adams, George Pattison, and Graham Ward. Oxford: Oxford University, 2013. Pp. xiv + 699. \$150.

This volume’s 31 articles by prominent scholars, along with a substantial introduction and afterword, aim at identifying questions and issues common to theology and modern European thought. “Modern thought” is taken in a very wide and multifaceted sense. Organized by themes in six unequal sections (Identity, The Human Condition, The Age of Revolution, The World, Ways of Knowing, and Theology), various articles address literature, sociology, and politics as well as philosophy. Curiously lacking is a separate treatment of theoretical science, although “technology” is given a chapter.

Each essay stands as a separate entity, generally with little explicit connection to the other essays. This has the benefit of allowing any article to be read on its own. But it also means that there is considerable overlap, as well as differences in method. Some articles begin with substantial attention to premodern thinking (as far back as ancient Greece and the Hebrew Scriptures). Others begin with the Enlightenment (Kant is discussed in multiple contexts). Many authors extend their considerations into “postmodernity,” which is generally treated simply as an extension of “modern”