

plete without that tension. Cracroft and Bringhurst offer sensitive and revealing portraits of people who produced literary works of great value from their sense of religious disillusionment. Stan Larson's essay on Thomas Stewart Ferguson, by contrast, seems somehow out of place. Although Larson produced a brilliant book on the same subject, Ferguson comes across in this piece as less a maverick than a rather sad, shattered, pathetic man. Unlike that of many others profiled in the volume, Ferguson's dissent seems to be born of a certain center-less-ness, and as a result he is never able to make sense of his disillusionment enough to qualify as a true maverick. Brigham Madsen's ode to Sterling McMurrin, while rich in personal detail, is simply too personally involved. Madsen and McMurrin's intimate friendship leads Madsen into a sentimental and even apologetic mode, both of which present an obstacle to a truly insightful interpretation of McMurrin's complex religious thought. Lavina Fielding Anderson

has a similar problem in her discussion of D. Michael Quinn. Quinn, a true maverick and perhaps one of the most polarizing and enigmatic figures in recent Mormon intellectual culture, is paid tribute to in this very moving essay, but one gets the sense that perhaps Quinn's ordeal is too recent, too raw, to be included in this book.

But that gets back to my initial quarrel with the editorial style. The editors are not clear about whether this collection is an anecdotal celebration of dissent in the Mormon tradition or a scholarly examination of what it means to be a dissenter within a religious tradition that is averse to such a stance. As is evidenced in the essays, of course, it functions in both capacities. A more methodologically sophisticated introduction, one that explores issues of orthodoxy and dissent, center and margins, and the history of dissent within Mormonism, would have aided the book immensely. As it stands the collection is a useful, if far from groundbreaking, approach to dissent in Mormonism.

No Other Way?

Rescue for the Dead: The Posthumous Salvation of Non-Christians in Early Christianity, by Jeffrey A. Trumbower (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 206 pp.

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WHEN CHARLES THE HAMMER conquered Friesland in 692 C.E., he generously offered baptism into the Christian religion to the defeated Frisian chief Radbod. Just as he was stepping into the font, Radbod hesitated, won-

dering aloud what had become of his dead forefathers. Bishop Wolfran, presiding at the ceremony, answered forthrightly that they were "in Hell, with all other unbelievers." Radbod, not spiritually mature enough to take this strong doctrine, drew back from the water. "Very well," he replied, "then I will rather feast with my ancestors in the halls of Woden, than dwell with your little starvling band of Christians in heaven" (p. 148). Radbod obstinately remained loyal to his pagan ancestors his entire life.

Had Radbod lived a few centuries

earlier, he might have had some hope of finding his ancestors in heaven or even been instrumental in getting them admitted. For nearly four hundred years Christians had speculated on the problem of salvation for those outside the church, especially those who had already died. What could Christ do for the righteous of the Old Testament, for one's own ancestors, for catechumens ('investigators') who died before baptism, or for pagans who had lived according to the best they knew? If, according to I Tim. 2:4, God desires that everyone receive salvation, how could he exclude the dead, particularly those who had no chance to hear Gospel while they lived? Christian scripture referred to Christ's descent into Hades to do just that for those who had rejected a biblical prophet (I Pet. 3:19-20; 4:6); and Paul even cited approvingly vicarious baptism for the dead (I Cor. 15:29). Stories and visions about the prayers of fervent Christians being efficacious for saving the dead flourished in early Christianity.

Eventually, however, the idea that this life alone is the time to prepare to meet God won the day, particularly in western Christianity. As with many crucial doctrines in the early church, it was Augustine, Bishop of Hippo in North Africa from 395 to 430, who rationalized and solidified what became the orthodox position in the church in the West: nothing can be done for an unbaptized person after death, there is no escape from the eternal fires of hell, and prayers for the dead and even purgatorial suffering for one's own sins are only efficacious for baptized Christians.

Trumbower's treatment of salvation for the dead, focusing on "those traditions wherein the living undertake specific actions to benefit the

dead," (p. 11) is fairly comprehensive, if not in great depth, for the first four centuries of Christianity. He mentions earlier Greek, Roman, and Egyptian actions to benefit the dead, including libations or offerings of food left on the grave, coins placed in the mouth or on the eyelids, and ritual 'trials' of the deceased. Jewish piety generally rejected such practices although scattered apocryphal writings from the intertestamental period refer to intercessory prayers and atoning sacrifices to ensure the resurrection of individuals who had died. Christianity was born in a Jewish milieu which debated whether repentance after death is possible, whether suffering for sins is eternal, and whether pious sons can rescue their fathers from Gehenna.

The New Testament reflects similar controversies. The story in Luke 16:19-31 of the "great chasm" fixed between the rich man in Hades and Lazarus in Abraham's bosom, along with Paul's dictum that we will receive recompense at the judgment for "things done in the body," seem to preclude any change in one's saved status after death. The second century writer of 2 Clement declared, "Once we have departed this world, we can no longer confess there or repent any more" (8:3). On the other hand, the biblical references to preaching to the dead and baptism for the dead in I Corinthians and I Peter were not the discovery of Mormon missionaries. Early Christians were well aware of them, and subsequent Christian literature reflects the attempts to come to terms with them. Here Trumbower covers some of the same territory Hugh Nibley traversed fifty years ago in his exploration of baptism for the dead among early Christians. The second century *Shepherd of Hermas* speaks of "apostles and teachers" preaching to righteous

spirits who had died after they themselves had “fallen asleep” [died] and then going down with them into the water to receive the “seal” [baptism]. (*Sim.* 9.16.1-7; qtd. pp. 47f.). Although Hermas’s vision does not appear to portray vicarious baptism of the *living* in behalf of the dead, it expresses the same concern for the salvation of worthy souls who had died without baptism. A number of texts from this period focus on salvation for Old Testament heroes and other illustrious figures from earlier times, bolstering the paradoxical claim of the small sect of Christians to be a universal religion. “The analogy with early Mormon baptism of George Washington could not be more apt,” Trumbower notes (p. 49).

The author devotes a chapter each to two famous texts about women from the post-apostolic period who effected some measure of salvation for the dead: Thecla and Perpetua. The *Acts of Paul* tells the story of Thecla, whom the apostle converted to Christianity and chastity. Thecla humiliates an official in Antioch by rebuffing his embraces and is condemned to the beasts for “sacrilege.” While awaiting her ordeal, she converts Tryphena, a prominent woman in whose keeping she had been placed. Meanwhile, Tryphena was visited by her deceased daughter Falconilla in a dream and told that Thecla should “pray on my behalf and I might be transferred to the place of the righteous” (p. 61). Thecla complied, and the outcome was that she was protected from the other beasts in the arena by a lioness and then released. Christians already had a tradition that “confessors”—those risking martyrdom by refusing to compromise their faith—had the power to forgive sins. Thecla’s story carried this further by extending that power to benefit the dead, particularly one who

had died as a non-Christian. Although it did not address the issue of baptism for Falconilla, it did take a stand on controversies such as whether there was a separation of the dead according to their righteousness or religious affiliation, whether progression or repentance was possible after death, and whether “eternal punishment” could ever end for an individual.

Perpetua, martyred in 203 C.E. just after her conversion to Christianity, had her prayers similarly answered regarding her younger brother Dinocrates, who had died of cancer at age seven. While awaiting her ordeal with beasts in the arena, Perpetua had a vision of her brother in torment in what we would call ‘spirit prison.’ Following prolonged tears and prayers, she saw Dinocrates in another vision, no longer suffering, while apparently still in the same place. Although there was never any firm or uniform doctrine on the subject of salvation for the dead, the popularity of both of these stories attests to the concern of early Christians for dead relatives and others and the widespread belief that they were not beyond hope. Again, Trumbower sees a parallel with modern Mormon practice:

In all three cases the persons undergoing persecution for their faith find meaning and solace in their ability to rescue the dead, and the primary focus is on persons close to the one persecuted: the daughter of a friend, a long lost little brother, and for the Mormons, any person who can be specifically named, the majority of whom in the early years were deceased friends and relatives. (p. 86)

The author goes on to discuss the

history of the tradition of Jesus' descent into Hades (also a focus of Nibley), which shows a gradual shift in the thinking of the Church Fathers away from literal exegesis to the allegorical. By the later fourth century, the prevailing view was that neither repentance nor salvation were possible after death though this was by no means universal. Doctrines favorable to eternal progression and universal salvation similarly lost favor in this period. The *Apocryphon of John*, a Gnostic text dating to the second century C.E., provides for opportunities—though not guarantees—of salvation beyond death that are open to all except apostates. This is “strikingly similar to Mormon theology,” as Trumbower notes (p. 112). After Augustine such universalism survived only in eastern Christianity though even there it was controversial. The Council of Carthage in 397 expressly forbade baptism of dead bodies, a practice which was apparently the last vestige of vicarious baptism for the dead. By then Christianity had become so prevalent that few could claim that posthumous salvation was needed to preserve justice and equity. A favorite topic of sermons was the folly of postponing baptism until you were too old and infirm to enjoy sinning: get baptized now because your status at death cannot be improved afterwards.

Clearly, *Rescuing the Dead* will be of interest to many Latter-day Saints because, although Trumbower concedes that his scholarly expertise does not extend beyond the early Christian period, he is so struck by the parallels between early Christian and Mormon thinking and practices that he cannot resist bringing them up from time to time. His sources on Mormonism are solid if not extensive, indicative of the care he has taken even with minor points. Critics of the notion of salvation for the dead will find his well-reasoned and judicious conclusions difficult to criticize. He lays out the pros and cons for such historical practices dispassionately, and though he disavows taking sides on the issue, he notes in his conclusion:

Those Christians, like Augustine, who reject posthumous salvation find themselves in the paradoxical position of affirming the continued existence of the personality after death, but rejecting the idea that the personality of the unbaptized. . . might grow or change as they did throughout life. (p. 155)

By the way, has anyone done Radbod's work for him?