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STUDENT REVIEW

IN THIS ISSUE:
How well do you know Cecil?
Honor Code Police
Saving the Provo Library
Out at BYU

Terrible Questions
History of African-Americans
within the LDS Church
America's Political Legacy



CELEBRATING LEGACY

The Terrible Questions

A Review of *The God Who Weeps: How Mormonism Makes Sense of Life*

WRITTEN BY STEPHEN SMOOT

Hugh Nibley, one of Mormonism’s most towering intellectual figures of the last century, often spoken about what he called the “terrible questions” of existence: Where do I come from? Why am I here? What is my role in the universe? What happens after death? Is this material existence all that there is? Do I have free will? Is there a God? How can I know? How will all this end?

These questions take center place in Mormon metaphysics. The Plan of Salvation, as it is now called in modern Mormon discourse, is a unique Mormon metaphysical cosmology that attempts to answer these questions. Drawing from both scripture and the teachings of their modern leaders, Mormons try to situate themselves in the universe with this eternal, cosmic worldview.

But how does Mormon cosmology compare and contrast to the cosmologies of other religious and philosophical worldviews? For example, what does Mormonism offer to the discussion of the relationship between free will and

determinism? How do Mormons account for an all-loving God allowing evil and suffering to exist in this world? How does the Mormon teaching of a pre-mortal existence answer contradictions non-Christians have observed in traditional Christian theology? How does the Mormon teaching of posthumous salvation at once cut a significant soteriological Gordian knot that has long plagued the greatest Christian thinkers?

Enter Terryl and Fiona Givens with their new book *The God Who Weeps: How Mormonism Makes Sense of Life*. Terryl Givens has written extensively on Mormonism, ranging from books on the Book of Mormon, Mormon culture, and the concept of a pre-mortality in Western thought. His wife Fiona joins him in writing *The God Who Weeps*, which reads with marked erudition and intelligence and is yet neither stuffy in its tone nor overwhelming with its content.

Terryl and Fiona Givens posit five central propositions relating to Mormon cosmology, which they argue are

“compelling, inspiring, and reasonable.” These propositions are:

1. “God is a personal entity, having a heart that beats in sympathy with human hearts, feeling our joy and sorrowing over our pain.”
2. “We lived as spirit beings in the presence of God before we were born into this mortal life.”
3. “Mortality is an ascent, not a fall, and we carry infinite potential into a world of sin and sorrow.”
4. “God has the desire and the power to unite and elevate the entire human family in a kingdom of heaven, and, except for the most stubbornly unwilling, that will be our destiny.”
5. “Heaven will consist of those relationships that matter most to us.”

In exploring and elucidating these propositions, the Givenses don’t just restrict themselves to Mormon scripture or the teachings of General Authorities. Rather, they actively engage in dialogue with different western theologies and philosophies. Philosophers from Aristotle to Bertrand Russell, theologians from St. Augustine to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, poets from Dante to Robert Frost, and even scientists like Charles Darwin all receive attention from the Givenses, and are either synthesized or contrasted with Mormon thought. Ultimately, the Givenses argue that Mormonism has significant contributions to offer in the great discussion raging around the terrible questions.

For instance, the Givenses compare Mormon soteriology (or the theology of salvation) with that of traditional Christianity, and argue that Joseph Smith’s teaching of the opportunity for posthumous salvation and eternal progression for those who never had an opportunity to accept the gospel in this life answers a really tough question for creedal Christianity: how do we reconcile the fact that Jesus is the only way to salvation, and yet untold legions have come and gone from this world without even so much as knowing Jesus existed, let alone having had a chance to accept his gospel?

Likewise, the Givenses argue that Mormonism’s answer to the so-called “problem of evil” is more logically, emotionally and spiritually satisfying and compelling than the answers given hitherto by the great religious thinkers of the west. The question of theodicy, or how to justify belief in God in the face of evil and suffering, is perhaps the greatest challenge to belief in God that faces traditional theism. The Givenses argue that Joseph Smith’s revelation about the weeping God (Moses 7:28–30) and our relationship to him sheds much needed light on this all-important question.

The God Who Weeps, then, is an invitation for us to discuss these and other terrible questions which face humanity. Though the questions may be terrible, they are also answerable, if only somewhat. Quoting Paul, the Givenses stress in their book that during this mortal sojourn we “see through a glass darkly” (1 Corinthians 13:12), or, in the words of Keats, who is also quoted by the Givenses, we “strain at particles of light in the midst of great darkness.” As such, the Givenses do not presume to have all the answers to the terrible questions. Rather, they discuss how the Mormon understanding of the Plan of Salvation in many ways draws us closer to answers to the terrible questions than competing theistic and atheistic metaphysics.

Latter-day Saints who take their faith seriously should read this book. If ever there was a book from which we could learn “by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118), this is it. ■

How does Mormon cosmology compare and contrast to the cosmologies of other religious and philosophical worldviews?

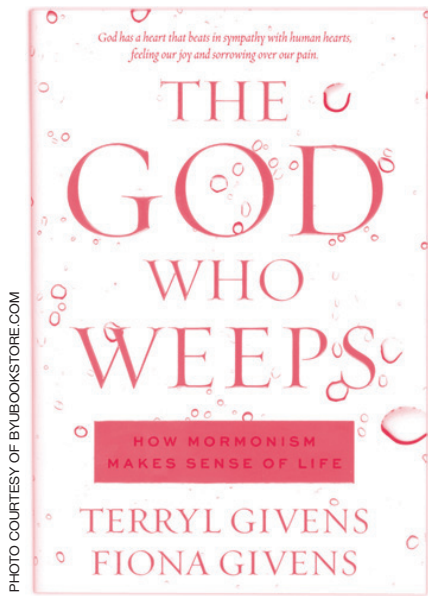


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The Legacy of Legacy

WRITTEN BY ARIEL LETT’S

If you are a connoisseur of Mormon film, have visited the Joseph Smith Memorial building between the years 1993 and 2000, or watched a church movie with your family every Sunday while growing up, you are probably familiar with the film *Legacy: A Mormon Journey* (1990). In this 53 minute mini-epic, written and directed by Kieth Merrill, we are exposed to almost 20 years of church history, including the persecution in Missouri, the building of the Nauvoo temple, Joseph Smith’s martyrdom, the call for the Mormon Battalion, and, of course, the trek west to Utah.

It is surprisingly hard to find a complete list of cast members who appeared in the film. Who are they and what are they up to now? The world wants to know, or at least a small part of the Mormon community does. Extensive research, completed by accessing IMDB, Wikipedia, and the official websites of

the actors involved, reveals a few things:

KATHLEEN BELLER (ELIZA WILLIAMS/WALKER) Born in 1956 and started her acting career when she was 15. She was on the daytime soap opera *Search for Tomorrow* from 1971-74. Her film debut was *The Godfather Part II* (1974) where she had a small role. She was nominated for a Golden Globe as Best Supporting Actress in 1979. The last thing listed on her IMDB page is some voice work for the video game *Cyberia* in 1994. She seems to have disappeared from the public eye, preferring, I assume, to spend time with her husband and three children.

MARCUS GILBERT (DAVID WALKER) Not to be confused with the football offensive lineman for the Pittsburgh Steelers, Gilbert was born in 1958 in the U.K. It is unclear whether his roles in *Rambo III* (1988), *Doctor Who* (1989), or his work in numerous other TV series and movies prepared him for the role of David in *Legacy*. Gilbert has since appeared in *Army of Darkness* (1992), an episode of *Murder, She Wrote* (1994), and other TV series episodes. He also created his own production company,

Touch the Sky Productions, and makes travel and adventure documentaries. He is married and has two children.

BENTON JENNINGS (GOVERNOR BOGGS) While Jennings did not have a major role in the film *Legacy* he seems to be doing all right in the acting world. After *Legacy* he went on to work on *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992), *Power Rangers Lightspeed Rescue* (2000), *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* (2005), *Dexter* (2006), *Scrubs* (2007), *How I Met Your Mother* (2010), and *General Hospital* (2013), among other projects. It is clear that he is the go-to choice for Jimmy Kimmel when he needs help with one of his skits; Jennings has played Hitler, Alex Tribeck’s body, a cab driver, and “guy shot with arrow by Ted Nugent.” Jennings also has a Twitter account, @bentonjennings, that is fairly active. If you’re feeling so inclined, I am sure he would welcome a shout-out.

Although everyone else from *Legacy* has kept a pretty low profile, they will always have a place in our hearts as the beloved characters they portrayed in the film. ■