

# Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies

---

Volume 11  
Number 1 *Fall 2021*

Article 7

---

10-26-2021

## Book Reviews

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/imwjournal>

---

### Recommended Citation

"Book Reviews." *Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies* 11, no. 1 (): 61-62.  
<https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/imwjournal/vol11/iss1/7>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@usu.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@usu.edu).



## Book Reviews



Blythe, Christopher. *Terrible Revolution: Latter-day Saints and the American Apocalypse*. Oxford University Press, 2020. 348 pp. ISBN: 0190080280.

Christopher Blythe's *Terrible Revolution: Latter-day Saints and the American Apocalypse* takes a deep dive into the evolution of Mormon apocalyptic thought. Moreover, this text contextualizes the Mormon apocalyptic within biblical texts as well as the contemporary realities of the official and vernacular LDS visionaries who molded it. In many ways, this text shows how apocalyptic belief helped Latter-day Saints deal with their contemporary anxieties, deal with grief and hardship, and seek retribution against their persecutors, particularly in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Blythe deeply yet concisely backgrounds the early Mormon movement, facilitating what follows for the non-expert while also exploring the nuance of the movement's formation of beliefs. He further expands the scope of the book through analysis of the American political and social climate with which Mormons have had to engage, at times in conflict and at times through assimilation.

Seeking to combine folklore, religion, and American history, Blythe successfully navigates his subjects' vernacular experience in relation to their institutional church and the U.S. government over that span of nearly 200 years. Blythe is upfront about his methods and intentions and the choices and limitations in the

structure of this work. Though not strictly chronological, the narrative weaves together the complicated dichotomy of vernacular and institutional religion, often reminding the reader—and in some cases foreshadowing—how the apocalypse was perceived. His focus on the role of the laity in the formation and development of the Mormon apocalyptic is the significant thread through this work as he used many popular sources from beginning to end. While often "official" sources make up the bulk of the citations for an academic text, the lay voices used add to the complexity of Blythe's thesis. He also does not limit himself to voices of Mormons the current mainstream church officially recognizes as members. He begins to introduce other expressions of Joseph Smith's restoration in chapter three and continues throughout. Though not as in-depth—as it would take many volumes to do so—the various groups who claim a heritage back to Joseph Smith build on Mormon apocalyptic notions from the days of the martyrdom.

If any critique of the book is necessary, perhaps the minimal conversation on "Lamanite apocalypticism" and the possible conflation of Fundamentalist Mormon understanding of the apocalyptic would be points of note. Though mentioned in passing, the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (FLDS) has a robust apocalyptic history, not to mention that of their prophets before that particular group officially adopted that name in 1991. Still, considering the depth of the first five

chapters, Blythe's inclusion of Amerindians and Fundamentalist Mormons proves foundational in the continuation of discourse on those two topics. Blythe lays a significant groundwork for further scholarship on both Fundamentalist Mormon beliefs in "the destructions" as well as how the Lamanites of the *Book of Mormon* are considered in the mainstream LDS, "prepper" LDS, and Fundamentalist Mormon apocalyptic imagination.

Blythe's critique of media coverage on Mormon apocalyptic prophecy is yet another layer full of avenues for further scholarship. As he describes the conflation of the Constitution prophecy and the White Horse prophecy during Mitt Romney's presidential campaigns, the importance of public-facing Mormon Studies scholarship, including scholars who have never been a part of any Restorationist Mormon group, seems critical. With recent events, such as the 2016 Bundys' siege at the Malheur National Wildlife Preserve, and the breaching of the U.S. Capitol in 2021, both events having men portraying the *Book of Mormon's* Captain Moroni, Blythe's contextualization of 19<sup>th</sup> century Mormon apocalyptic, its evolution, and schismatic pockets become ever more relevant to the broader discussion of American religion and its political movements.

I would highly recommend *Terrible Revolution* to all scholars of Mormon Studies. This book would also be useful in upper-level undergraduate, and certainly, graduate courses on American religion. As alluded above, graduate students who work in Mormon Studies, American religion, and various topics having to do with Parousiamania would benefit from this text as they search for ways to engage with seldom explores topics.

Stephanie Griswold  
Claremont Graduate University