

Richard J. Mouw. *Talking with Mormons:
An Invitation to Evangelicals.*

Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012.

Reviewed by David Dominguez

As an Evangelical who has resided in Utah County since 1989 and as a law professor at BYU for the past twenty-four years, I read with great interest Richard J. Mouw's latest book, *Talking with Mormons: An Invitation to Evangelicals*. I was pleased that the author, president of Fuller Theological Seminary, helped me sort out my thoughts on countless conversations with LDS colleagues, students, and neighbors concerning differences in our religious traditions and, even more importantly, provided a structure for more fruitful dialogue. I encourage anyone who cares about building bridges between and among Evangelicals and Mormons to take time to read and thoughtfully consider Mouw's points.

That said, when I finished the book, I was left with the nagging feeling that while something very important was emphasized, something equally important was omitted. Mouw centers his discussion on the debate between Evangelicals and Mormons on theology ("Who is God? What is his nature?") and soteriology ("What is salvation? What must we do to be saved?"). He gives thoughtful, concise explanations of what Evangelicals believe and why there can be no compromise on the basics of mainstream Christian doctrine. While those tenets are non-negotiable, Mouw stresses that there is still plenty of room for Evangelicals to learn more about our faith by listening to and learning from Mormons when they give account of their faith and hope in Jesus. I can vouch for this; I have not wavered in my conviction that I am saved by grace. The atoning work of the Savior on the cross is complete. I add nothing to effectuate my salvation. Still, as Mouw points out, while the Atonement is complete, we Evangelicals do not have a complete understanding of it. For me, these past twenty-four years have made it clear that faithful Mormons have helped me along the Way, the Truth, and

the Life, deepening my commitment to God as an ongoing “mystery discerning enterprise” (76). I stand with Mouw and his overall theme: remain “open to God-given truths” (77).

Now to what was overlooked. I find it troubling to read this book or any other treatment of Evangelical–Mormon relations that myopically focuses on “talking.” Consider what difference it would have made were the title “*Walking with Mormons: An Invitation to Evangelicals . . . to Experience the Road to Emmaus*” (see Luke 24:13–35).

The Emmaus Road teaches us to approach each other gently, with the utmost of care for each other’s well-being. We are called to follow Jesus’s example, matching each other stride for stride, doing all we can to catch up with the hope and despair we all experience in the practice of Christian faith. Only after we have traveled miles together and given each other time to tell the whole story can we open up the Word in the here and now, among real brothers and sisters, rather than engage in debates over abstract doctrine. Even then, conversation can only go so far to turn us away from error and point us in the right direction; we must break bread together for our eyes to be truly opened to the Word made flesh.

My daily life among the Mormons has been all about walking the Emmaus Road in Utah County and on the BYU campus for twenty-four years. I know its transformative power. Ah, but you ask, are you the Evangelical suggesting that you are Jesus and the lost disciples are Mormons? No; we are called by God to play both parts, each of us answering his prompting to chase after the other as an angel in disguise.

Which then takes us to the book’s most glaring omission: why is there no reference to—let alone analysis of—church building? Is it because Evangelicals are notorious for bearing false witness against the Body of Christ, arguing among ourselves over the smallest of theological differences and then splintering into thousands of tiny groups? (Evangelicals “joke” that we are the only army that kills its wounded.) More to the point, is it because this is Mormons’ strong suit, the arena in which Mormons turn the tables on Evangelicals and testify to unity and common purpose? We Evangelicals have plenty to learn from Mormons when it comes to building a church that heeds God’s call to “enlarge the place of your tent” (see Isaiah 54:2), a church that reaches out to young and old, tax collectors and Zealots, prostitutes and Samaritans, all over the world.

As I said, Mouw does a great job providing a workable structure for Mormons and Evangelicals to begin speaking to each other concerning

fine points of classical theology and soteriology, both matters of central importance to Jesus and his ministry. But equally important to Jesus was ecclesiology: “I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18).

David Dominguez (who can be contacted via email at byustudies@byu.edu) is Professor of Law at Brigham Young University’s J. Reuben Clark Law School. He received a BA in religious studies from Yale in 1977 and graduated from law school at UC Berkeley in 1980. He has taught at BYU since 1989. His publications include “The Ecology of Cultural Justice in Legal Education: How Affirmative Action Can Become Race Neutral by 2028,” *University of Oregon Law Review* 88, no. 1 (2009), and “Community Lawyering in the Juvenile Cellblock: Creative Uses of Legal Problem Solving to Reconcile Competing Narratives on Prosecutorial Abuse, Juvenile Criminality, and Public Safety,” *Journal of Dispute Resolution*, 2007, no. 2.