



# Insights: The Newsletter of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship

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## Maxwell Institute Well Represented at FAIR Conference

Several scholars associated with the Maxwell Institute spoke at the FAIR conference held in Sandy, Utah, in August. As explained on its Web site ([www.fairlds.org](http://www.fairlds.org)), FAIR (the Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research) is a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to providing well-documented answers to criticisms of Latter-day Saint doctrine, belief, and practice.

Daniel C. Peterson, editor in chief of the Maxwell Institute's Middle Eastern Texts Initiative (METI) and professor of Islamic Studies and Arabic at Brigham Young University, was the concluding speaker at the meeting, which was FAIR's tenth annual conference. A popular speaker known for his wit, Peterson entitled his presentation "Humble Apologetics" and announced, "I am offering myself as the model of that," a comment that brought laughter from the audience of about three hundred people.

Peterson noted a key reference to humility in 1 Nephi 11, where an angel asks Nephi, "Knowest thou the condescension of God?" Nephi replied, "I know that he loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things" (vv. 16–17). "I am struck by the modesty of Nephi's claim," said Brother Peterson. "As apologists, we need to remember the constraints and the limitations of the knowledge we have." He added that most things cannot be proven. "The best that apologists can do sometimes is just to suggest things, give alternative interpretations, or show how some things might make sense." In terms of our own faith, we should remember that "testimony doesn't come on our schedule. The proper response is to trust in the Lord."

Striking a similar chord, Brian Hauglid, associate professor of ancient scripture at BYU, emphasized a kinder approach to defending the gospel. Referring specifically to those with queries about the Book of Abraham, Hauglid recommended that apologists—

- Treat the person with respect. This is easier to do in face-to-face settings than it is on anonymous message boards. As the scripture states, "As all have not faith . . . teach one another words of wisdom" (Doctrine and Covenants 88: 118).
- Treat questions seriously. Responses like "That's a dumb question," or "Oh, that old thing?" can be

quite disheartening to sincere questioners. Also, sometimes we *do* need to say, "I don't know."

- Acknowledge that the critics are sometimes right. With the Book of Abraham, for example, "the papyrus attached to Facsimile 1 does not contain the Book of Abraham—we all know that." In such cases, we can say, "Let's talk about what that might mean and how we can explore that."
- Focus on the content of the Book of Abraham, not just on how we got it. Scholars have found at least thirty-five themes in the Book of Abraham that are also found in other ancient sources but not in Genesis. Sections on foreordination, priesthood, and the premortal existence also support the book's claim to be an ancient document.

"Personal experience shows that face-to-face conversations are the best way to help seekers," concluded Hauglid. "We need to treat those individuals with respect and take them seriously."

Other speakers included Michael R. Ash, Matthew Brown, James Faulconer, Craig Foster, Brant Gardner, Blake Ostler, and Larry Poulsen, all of whom have published with the Maxwell Institute. ♦

# INSIGHTS

Paula W. Hicken, Jacob D. Rawlins, *Editors*

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