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Scholars Represent Maxwell Institute in Education Week Lectures

During Education Week, noted Maxwell Institute scholars presented a series of well-attended classes titled “The Work of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute at BYU,” focusing on aspects of the Institute’s ongoing work.

John W. Welch, editor in chief of *BYU Studies* and founder of FARMS, led off this series speaking about the guidance that Elder Maxwell gave to all LDS scholars and serious students. He was a great supporter of gospel scholarship, giving to the Maxwell Institute a legacy of guiding principles that form the pillars of its identity. Welch encouraged everyone to read Bruce C. Hafen’s biography of Elder Maxwell, *A Disciple’s Life*. In it one finds living examples of principles of academic outreach, mentoring, service, intellectual empathy, and consecration.

Welch spoke about how Elder Maxwell was especially good at fostering mutual trust between scholars and Church leaders, being “incomparably fluent in both the language of faith and the language of scholarship,” and about his “love affair with the world of words.” One recalls such felicitous phrases as “intellectual bungee jumping” and proverbial wisdom such as “the pronoun *I* has no knees to bend, while the first letter in the pronoun *we* does.” Scholars can appreciate the fact that, as is usually the case with highly polished publications, he would take his typical general conference talks through a dozen drafts.

In addition to telling a number of personal stories about Elder Maxwell’s involvement with FARMS and *BYU Studies*, Welch featured key passages from the writings of Elder Maxwell, especially his 1974 volume, *Deposition of a Disciple*, where Elder Maxwell spoke of an LDS scholar’s primary citizenship in the kingdom. He encouraged the building of bridges to outside scholarship in confirmation of revealed truths, being concerned with “those who struggle less successfully,” and realizing that “absolute truth calls for absolute love and absolute patience,” principles that continue to guide the work of the Maxwell Institute.

In a presentation entitled “The Best of the *FARMS Review*: No More Uncontested Slam Dunks,” Daniel C. Peterson, the editor of the

FARMS Review since its inception in 1989, shared some history and highlights of the *Review*. The *Review* has had three titles throughout its history: *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* (1989–95), *FARMS Review of Books* (1996–2002), and the current title of the *FARMS Review* (from 2003). In his inimitable fashion, Peterson explained that the change in titles reflected his interest in varying and expanding the contents of the journal (to whatever he happened to be interested in). Originally, the *Review* was intended to examine all materials published in a given year on the Book of Mormon, but it now reviews books and articles about other topics such as the Book of Abraham, Church history, and attacks on our faith. In fact, some of the best responses to critics of the Church have appeared within the pages of the *Review*. Peterson has felt a personal mandate to respond to one Church official’s comment that there should be “no more uncontested slam dunks” when it comes to criticisms directed at the Church, its leaders, and its doctrines.

Peterson recognized associate editors Louis Midgley and George Mitton, who have assisted since 2001, and production editor Shirley Ricks, who has prepared the *Review* for publication for all 31 issues to date. Over the 19 years of its existence, the *Review* has published contributions from over 250 different individuals, many of them with distinguished academic careers and many from outside the BYU community. Recently, the *Review* has moved to incorporating articles of lasting significance that have either been previously unpublished or needed a more accessible venue; it has also begun including book notes to call attention to significant books.

Sharing some of his favorite reviews over the years, Peterson noted John Clark’s “A Key for Evaluating Nephite Geographies” (which began a rich tradition in which the review essay was often more significant than the book being reviewed), several of Midgley’s review essays, and even some of his own reviews. Peterson’s sense of humor came through as he read excerpts of his review of Loftes Tryk’s *The Best Kept Secrets in the Book of Mormon*, a “literally incredible volume, a gaudily painted Volkswagen disgorging dozens of costumed clowns to the zany music of a circus calliope.”

Kristian Heal, director of the Center for the Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts, presented

on the use of ancient texts in the Book of Mormon. He first reviewed three instances in which the Book of Mormon discusses the acquisition of ancient texts, specifically, Nephi's disturbing experience with obtaining the plates of brass (1 Nephi 4:14–18), Mormon's use of the plates of Nephi (Words of Mormon 3–7), and the discovery and translation of the 24 plates found by the scouting party sent out by Limhi (Mosiah 8:5–14). Of particular interest in this latter episode is the extraordinary interest that Limhi and his people had in these records and their earnest desire to have them translated (Mosiah 8:19; 28:11–12, 17–18).

In the remainder of his presentation, Heal discussed the reuse of biblical and Nephite stories in later Book of Mormon sermons. He focused in particular on the recitals of the story of the brazen serpent by Nephi, and the reuse of this story and Nephi's story of the Liahona by Alma. In discussing the Liahona, Heal observed that Alma emphasized that it worked “according to their faith” and that inasmuch as they had faith that “God could point the way they should go, behold, it was done” (Alma 37:40). However, “because those miracles were worked by small means . . . they were slothful, and forgot to exercise their faith. . . . Therefore, they tarried in the wilderness . . . and were afflicted with hunger and thirst” (Alma 37:41–42). Alma then draws the spiritual message or type from this event, and teaches that if we will faithfully follow the words of Christ then they shall “carry us beyond this vale of sorrow into a far better land of promise” (Alma 37:45). Nevertheless, we are warned not to “be slothful because of the easiness of the way” (Alma 37:46).

Heal then argued that Alma's vocabulary indicates that he saw the brazen serpent and the Liahona as two complementary types. For example, the word “slothful” occurs only in these two passages in the entire Book of Mormon (cf. Alma 33:21; 37:41, 43, 46). We also find the phrase *easiness of the way* appearing only in connection with this story and the story of the brazen serpent, and incidentally providing another link between Alma's instruction to his son and Nephi's record (1 Nephi 17:41; Alma 37:46). Again, the combination of the words *look* and *live* stands in the Book of Mormon, with one exception, only in this passage and the story of the brazen serpent (cf. Numbers 21:8; Alma 33:19; Alma

37:46, 47; Helaman 8:15). The exception is perhaps more significant: During his sermon to the Nephite remnant, Jesus admonishes the congregation to “Look unto me, and endure to the end, and ye shall live” (3 Nephi 15:19). The appearance of these two words, *look* and *live*, may suggest a connection back to the stories of the brazen serpent and of the Liahona, and point to Jesus as being the true type foreshadowed in each.

Drawing on information included in *Oliver Cowdery: Scribe, Elder, Witness* (published by the Maxwell Institute in 2006), Larry E. Morris, writer and editor with the Maxwell Institute, concluded the series by speaking of the life and work of Oliver Cowdery, who was renowned as Book of Mormon scribe, recipient with Joseph Smith of restored priesthood power, witness with David Whitmer and Martin Harris of the visit of Moroni, and cofounder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Morris noted that although Oliver was excommunicated from the Church in 1838, his friend and brother-in-law, Phineas Young, made consistent efforts over the next decade to help Oliver return. During that time, Oliver maintained a friendly relationship with Brigham Young (Phineas's brother) and other members of the Quorum of the Twelve. Then, in 1848, one of the Twelve, Orson Hyde, rebaptized Oliver at Council Bluffs, Iowa. Oliver died of tuberculosis in 1850 but reaffirmed his testimony of the Book of Mormon on his deathbed.

Journey of Faith: The New World, the sequel to *Journey of Faith*, premiered to packed audiences at BYU Education Week. A full report will appear in the next issue of this newsletter. The DVD will be available mid-October. 📺