



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

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## New Translation Launches METI's Library of the Christian East Series

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# Insights

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD VOLUME 26 | 2006

Number 1

<http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu>

## ISPART Renamed Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship

Brigham Young University's Board of Trustees recently approved the renaming of BYU's Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts (ISPART) to the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship.

"By renaming ISPART, BYU honors the memory and life's work of Elder Maxwell," said BYU president Cecil O. Samuelson. "This change firmly sets the future direction of the Institute, which is to promote profound scholarship supporting the restored gospel of Jesus Christ—something Elder Maxwell cared about deeply."


Elder Maxwell served The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for 23 years as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. "He was an articulate voice of reason and revelation—the consummate disciple-scholar who served the Church and the people of the world," said Andrew C. Skinner, executive director of the Maxwell Institute.

## New Translation Launches METI's Library of the Christian East Series

One of the misconceptions that many Westerners have is that all Arabs are Muslims and that all Muslims are Arabs. In fact, many of the major Islamic countries in the world (e.g., Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Malaysia, and the most populous of them all, Indonesia) are not Arab, and large minorities in some Arab countries are not Muslim. Christianity is a Near Eastern religion, not a European one, and it has been in the Near East since its origin. (An Egyptian Christian friend once complained to

"The scholars associated with the Maxwell Institute are honored to come under the umbrella of Elder Maxwell's name," Skinner added.

Cory Maxwell, son of Elder and Sister Maxwell, said his family is pleased by this development and honored that Elder Maxwell's name is being associated with that to which he devoted his life.

For more than 25 years, the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) has been conducting research and publishing books and periodicals that have both furthered scholarship and made friends for the university and the Church of Jesus Christ. Five years ago FARMS was joined by the Center for the Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts (CPART) and the Middle Eastern Texts Initiative (METI) to form ISPART.   
—BYU press release, 1 March 2006



Elder Neal A. Maxwell © IRI

me about how tired he had become of Americans and Europeans asking him whether his family had been converted by the Germans, the French, or the British. His ancestors, he pointed out, had been converted by Mark, the writer of the Second Gospel, in the first century AD. My own forebears, in Scandinavia, didn't accept Christianity until roughly a millennium later.)

Another common misconception is that Christendom can essentially be divided between Protestants and Catholics. In fact, though, Protestantism is a fairly recent religious minority in the Christian world. The much older division is that

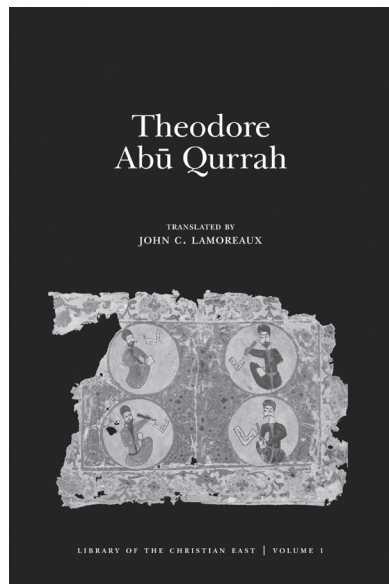
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between Western Christianity (essentially the Roman Catholic Church for many centuries) and Eastern Christianity (including, but not limited to, such groups as the Greek Orthodox and the Russian Orthodox). There is, and always has been, an entire world of Christianity, rich and full of variety, beyond the (to us) more familiar realm of Protestants and Catholics.

A new book just published by Brigham Young University's Middle Eastern Texts Initiative (METI) may help to overcome both misconceptions. *Theodore Abu Qurrah* is the first volume in METI's newest publication series, the Library of the Christian East, which now joins three sister ventures—the Islamic Translation Series, the Medical Works of Moses Maimonides, and Eastern Christian Texts. (Unlike them, this new series is monolingual—English only—lacking the original-language text on the facing page.) The series editor of the Library of the Christian East is David G. K. Taylor, of the University of Oxford.

*Theodore Abu Qurrah* is an anthology of essays by the earliest Christian Arabic writer whose name we know. Living between roughly AD 750 and 820 or 825, Abu Qurrah was a monk at the important Mar Saba monastery in the Judean desert, although, for a time, he served as




the Melkite bishop of Haran, in northern Mesopotamia. (The Melkites—the term comes from a Syriac word meaning “imperial”—were Syrian and Egyptian Christians who sided with the patriarch of Constantinople, the capital city of the Byzantine Empire, in the disputes that arose after the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451. They were, thus, the “Emperor’s men.”)

Abu Qurrah’s native language was Syriac, the Christian form of Aramaic (the language that Jesus and the first apostles spoke). But he also spoke and wrote in Greek, a language first brought to the region via the conquests of Alexander the Great, as well as in Arabic, which had arrived in Syria with the coming of the Muslim Arabs in the middle of the seventh century. Abu Qurrah spent his life defending not only his own form of Christianity against rivals, but Christianity itself against Judaism and against the rising challenge of Islam—which would nonetheless, over the coming centuries, largely but not entirely absorb the ancient Christian

communities of North Africa and the Near East.

This new book, the work of Southern Methodist University’s John C. Lamoreaux, represents a nearly complete collection of Abu Qurrah’s surviving writings; most of the essays included have been translated into English for the first time from their original Arabic and Greek.

Nineteen essays follow a very substantial introduction, by the translator, that discusses Abu Qurrah’s life and ministry. Among them are such titles as “That Christianity Is from God,” “Against the Jews,” “On the Characteristics of the True Religion,” “On the Death of Christ,” “On the Trinity,” “On Free Will,” and “Refutations of the Saracens [i.e., of the Muslim Arabs].”

*Theodore Abu Qurrah* is available from the University of Chicago Press as well as via the BYU Bookstore ([www.byubookstore.com](http://www.byubookstore.com)).  —reported by Daniel C. Peterson, director and editor-in-chief of METI

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