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Editor's Introduction

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Abstract Introduction to the current issue, including editor's picks.

Editor's Introduction

Daniel C. Peterson

A recent issue of a Protestant magazine that I rather admire (even though I frequently disagree with it) contains the following editorial:

One of our ~~pet peeves~~ concerns has to do with how ~~judgmental~~ readers ~~always~~ sometimes conclude that we at *Credenda* are arrogant simply because we seek to write, teach, and publish with confidence. ~~Well, all we have to say to them is . . .~~ This concerns us. As brothers in Christ we should always assume the best about others even if they are being meatheads.

~~We can't remember all the times~~ Sometimes readers have ~~popped off~~ expressed their conviction that it seems like we "always think we're right." ~~And we suppose they suggested this to us because they thought they were wrong, hey?~~ But of course, we would like to suggest, *everyone* is in this position. We are created in such a way that no one says things because they believe them to be false. ~~At least not anyone we know.~~

~~We are really being humble, and we wish everybody would just lay off, see?~~ We really appreciate your insights and comments ~~except for the really dumb ones.~~ We invite readers to differ, and we expect them to express their differences with confidence. ~~They're just wrong, that's all.¹~~

Obviously, the authors of the editorial are poking fun at themselves. No reflective person can fail, at least from time to time, to be acutely and even painfully aware of his or her fallibility. Although we make every effort to do the best work we

¹ "Sharpening Iron," *Credenda/Agenda* 7/4 (n.d.): 6. I reproduce this as originally printed.

can do, this is certainly true of those of us associated with the *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* and with its sponsor, the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies.

Picasso was once accosted on a train by a stranger who recognized him. The stranger complained: Why couldn't he draw pictures of people the way they actually were? Why did he have to distort the way people looked? Picasso then asked the man to show him pictures of his family. After gazing at the snapshot, Picasso replied, "Oh, is your wife really that small and flat?" To Picasso, any picture, no matter how "realistic," depended on the perspective of the observer.²

Books and reviews, too, are products of individual human beings, with all the limitations of perspective and knowledge and experience and insight implied in that fact. We are not yet granted access to that "great Urim and Thummim" and the "white stone" by which all things will be made known (D&C 130:8–10). In this world, we continue to "see through a glass, darkly" (1 Corinthians 13:12). That is why finding the truth here is often a matter of sifting, evaluating, comparing, contrasting, and a matter in which multiple opinions and perspectives can be of immense help.

Appropriately, the *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* is very much a collaborative effort. I am, as always, grateful to those who have assisted in the production of this issue of the *Review*. Dr. Shirley S. Ricks prepared the volume for publication. Prof. Davis Bitton, Dr. M. Gerald Bradford, Alison Coutts, and Dr. Melvin J. Thorne each read and commented upon one or more reviews and offered valuable suggestions (although they are not responsible for my final editorial decisions). Alison Coutts, Robert Durocher, and Matthew Roper helped me to track down important sources. Brent Hall offered useful suggestions. Professors W. Cole Durham and John W. Welch responded kindly to last-minute questions. My

² Michio Kaku, *Hyperspace: A Scientific Odyssey through Parallel Universes, Time Warps, and the 10th Dimension* (New York: Anchor Doubleday, 1995), 61.

research assistant, Amy Livingstone, was consistently helpful. Most of all, of course, I thank the reviewers, whose efforts make the whole thing possible.

Once again, as I did in the previous number of the *Review*, I append here a brief list of the items that we can recommend from this issue. Such a list is necessarily a blunt instrument, but I hope that it will prove helpful to those who want a quick overview.

Editor's Picks

- **** Outstanding, a seminal work of the kind that appears only rarely.
- *** Enthusiastically recommended.
- ** Warmly recommended.
- * Recommended.

Overview of the Book of Mormon. Independence, MO: Zarahemla Research Foundation, 1991. This brief pictorial overview would be useful to new students of the Book of Mormon. **

First Nephi: Study Book of Mormon. Independence, MO: Zarahemla Research Foundation, 1988. This has the complete text of the first book of the Book of Mormon (in RLDS versification) with accompanying commentary, notes, appendices, and study aids. *

LDS Collectors Edition CD-ROM (PC version). Provo, UT: Infobases, 1995. This is a computerized selection of over 500 LDS books. ***

LDS Collectors Edition CD-ROM (Mac version). Provo, UT: Infobases, 1994. The Macintosh version was less well developed than the PC version at the time this review was written. **

Jan Shippo. *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition.* Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985. This book has received quite positive reviews from historians of Mormonism. Our judgment is simply that it is inadequate in its treatment of the Book of Mormon. **

Postscript

At the very moment of finishing this "Introduction," on the evening of 14 August 1995, I happened (as I occasionally do) to tune in to a portion of the Christian Research Institute's "Bible Answer Man" radio broadcast—just in time to hear a former missionary to Brazil named "Nick" tell of his resignation from the Church during the previous week. What writings did "Nick," calling from California, mention as having influenced him? Those of Dick Baer (a former accomplice of Ed Decker), and *Decker's Complete Handbook on Mormonism*, which I review in this issue. ("Praise the Lord!" responded the show's host, Hank Hanegraaff.)

Stories like this are not only sad and painful, but intensely frustrating. One ardently wishes that one could locate "Nick" and discuss with him the works of Ed Decker. When certain people ask why some of us at FARMS spend so much time and effort responding to books of little or no merit (like Decker's), I can only respond that we are thinking of people like "Nick." While we try to have a little fun with what we are doing, we know that, deep down, the issues are very serious. And they have profound consequences.