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FARMS Researchers Present Papers at Apologetics Conference

Four members of the FARMS staff spoke at an apologetics conference held 17–19 June 1999 in Ben Lomond, California. The conference was sponsored by the Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research (FAIR) and addressed the theme “Mormonism and Early Christianity.”

Daniel C. Peterson, chairman of the FARMS board and director of the FARMS Center for the Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts (CPART), was the keynote speaker. His address, titled “What Has Athens to Do with Jerusalem? Apostasy and Restoration in the Big Picture,” discussed similarities between the mindset of Latter-day Saints and that of Jews and early Christians before they became hellenized. Peterson went beyond detailed specifics to focus on how these groups are similar in their overall approaches to religion. For example, early Christians focused on behavior rather than theology, and Latter-day Saints do much the same. Expanding on that idea, he discussed how the Sermon on the Mount was the centerpiece of the early Christian faith and noted that it was not until several centuries later that the Nicene Creed, a theologically oriented statement, was adopted, reflecting a shift of emphasis in the Christian faith. Peterson also noted that the LDS Church has historians rather than theologians, a situation similar to that in the scriptures, which relate historical events rather than debate theology.

John A. Tvedtnes, FARMS associate director of research, discussed “Early Christian and Jewish Rituals Related to Temple Practices.” Citing a number of early Jewish and Christian documents, including pseudepigraphic and apocryphal works, texts from the Nag Hammadi library, lectures from Cyril of Jerusalem, and Gnostic and Ethiopic Christian documents, Tvedtnes discussed sources that mention ancient initiations, the clasping of hands while revealing secrets, secret words, prayer circles, guardians at the heavenly veils, and entering the presence of the Lord.

John Gee, assistant research professor at FARMS, spoke on “The Corruption of Scripture in the Second Century.” He presented three main points: (1) the scriptures of the early-second-century Christians were different from the scriptures of the late-second-century Christians; (2) each second-century Christian sect accused the other Christian sects of having corrupted the scriptures; and (3) only one New Testament manuscript potentially dates before this time of corruption, but it only contains 10 words. Gee concluded that virtually all New Testament manuscripts were thus written after the second-century corruption of scripture, a situation that is corroborated in Nephi’s vision in 1 Nephi 13.

Matthew Roper, a research assistant at FARMS, delivered two presentations. The first, which compared early and medieval Christian traditions about Adam and Eve with LDS teachings, highlighted significant correspondences regarding the creation, the fall, and Adam and Eve’s struggles with Satan. In his second presentation, which noted positive correlations concerning salvation for the dead as taught in early Christianity and by the Latter-day Saints, Roper defended the LDS doctrine against certain evangelical criticisms.

FAIR intends to publish the proceedings of this conference. Those interested in obtaining a copy of the book can watch for further details by visiting FAIR’s website at www.fair-lds.org.

New Journal Studies Ancient Transoceanic Travel

The inaugural issue of a new scholarly journal of interest to students of the Book of Mormon has recently become available. Volume 1 of Pre-Columbiana: A Journal of Long-Distance Contacts is a double issue (June and December 1998) of 160 pages. The journal is the product of two distinct streams of interest in the topic of ancient transoceanic travel. On one hand, the key contributors are senior academic scholars who have a long record of research and publication on this subject. Believing there is substantial evidence for such early voyages, these people have long contradicted the orthodox view that no significant contacts from the Old World

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