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Brief Notices

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Brief Notices

The Story of the Book of Abraham: Mummies, Manuscripts, and Mormonism, by H. Donl Peterson (Deseret Book, 1995)

Like a wagon-train scout of the American West, H. Donl Peterson has gone before us and done much of the work in tracing the history of the Book of Abraham. In *The Story of the Book of Abraham*, he has provided a guidebook for those who follow. Writing for both the first-time traveler and the seasoned veteran, Peterson gives the general lay of the land as well as indicates points of departure for new territory.

With an open and candid style, he includes background information on ancient Near Eastern culture, copious notes, and precise details of his research. He also adds many of his personal insights, opinions, questions, and stories about the Book of Abraham. *The Story of the Book of Abraham* reads like a personal notebook that not only allows us to learn what the explorer has learned, but also lets us see the man behind the work. H. Donl Peterson's love of the gospel, the scriptures, and his research area can be felt throughout the book.

At times the details may be a bit overwhelming for the general reader, and the background might seem elementary to those acquainted with the field. But these elements work together to produce a book

for everyone. The overall presentation is balanced and engaging. Peterson creates a work that explains past discoveries and points the way for further exploration.

—David K. Geilman

Plain and Precious Truths Restored: The Doctrinal and Historical Significance of the Joseph Smith Translation, edited by Robert L. Millet and Robert J. Matthews (Bookcraft, 1995)

In this collection of papers presented at the 1995 BYU Symposium, "As Translated Correctly," participants emphasize the value of the Joseph Smith Translation (JST) and its relationship to the standard works. Much of this information will be new to most readers.

Elder Dallin H. Oaks warns against the "spiritual dangers of ignoring or neglecting the prophetic teachings" in the JST and advocates its use in personal scripture study, Church teaching, and scholarship (4).

Larry E. Dahl shows that 50 percent of the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants came as a direct result of the Bible translation. This relationship is displayed in a detailed chronology.

Thomas E. Sherry contrasts the LDS and RLDS views of the JST. While the RLDS Church has moved

away from foundational beliefs regarding the JST, the LDS Church has become progressively more committed to them. Many early LDS Church members saw the Inspired Version as a divinely guided, yet unauthorized, publication, mainly because of its incompleteness. However, since the 1950s, scholars, primarily Robert J. Matthews, have compared the published Inspired Version with the manuscripts and verified its integrity. Furthermore, the LDS edition of the Bible—the standard Bible of the Church—includes JST references and excerpts.

Robert J. Matthews discusses the eternal worth of the JST as well as its role in the Restoration. He answers questions regarding the use, completion, and translation of the JST. Matthews asserts that a knowledge of the JST will increase the perception “of the nature of scripture, of the nature of revelation, and of the value of reading scripture to obtain revelation from God” (38).

—Michelyn Lyster

Creatio ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of “Creation Out of Nothing” in Early Christian Thought, by Gerhard May (T & T Clark, 1994)

The original German text of this book appeared in 1978 with the title *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts: Die Entstehung der Lehre von der creatio ex nihilo*. Only minor changes occur in the English text. The thesis focuses on the origin and roots of the doctrine of creation “out of

nothing.” However, Gerhard May also emphasizes the interplay between ideas about creation and other facets of theology. The key players in the debates are philosophers, theologians, and clerics.

In the second century A.D., many Christian doctrines were unsettled. Even God’s omnipotence and the question of whether he existed alone or in company with other gods were debated. Was the creator the supreme God or a lesser god? Would an omnipotent god create evil? Similar debates concerned the nature of creation. Are man and the cosmos evil or good? Could matter be eternal without itself possessing godhood? If matter is eternal, isn’t God merely an artist? Each of these issues impacted on the doctrine of creation.

Christian Gnostics, under the leadership of Basilides, advanced the concept of creation out of nothing in a form that closely resembled the doctrine later adopted by the mainline church. Gnostic ideas about creation, however, contained other elements that were offensive to a majority of church leaders. Shortly before A.D. 200, an orthodox approach to creatio ex nihilo was initiated by Theophilus of Antioch and was expanded upon by Bishop Irenaeus of Lyons. Irenaeus refuted gnostic philosophy with clear, simple statements about God and His powers but joined Theophilus and the Gnostics to proclaim that God created earth and the cosmos out of nothing. With the blessing of orthodoxy, the doctrine spread quickly throughout the church.

Although Gerhard May's style is scholarly, any interested reader can gain much from this volume. The topic remains central to LDS studies of the doctrinal changes that occurred in early Christianity.

—R. Grant Athay

Turning Hearts: Short Stories on Family Life, edited by Orson Scott Card and David Dollahite (Bookcraft, 1994)

This collection of stories written by LDS authors provides readers with ideas about how healthy families function and how parents and children can resolve problems in positive ways to strengthen individuals, heal schisms, and bind families together. It is also a collection of stories about adults acting in adult roles.

These are in many ways faith-promoting stories. The protagonists come away with new insights about their lives: parents and children face intergenerational misunderstandings; widowed adults find a second opportunity to love; fathers and sons as well as mothers and daughters are forced to examine their relationships; a young African American convert struggles to find her place both at church and within her family.

Instead of ending in divorce court, sexual infidelity, family dissolution, or abandonment, these stories end with healing, repaired misunderstandings, and new ways to interpret difficult family situations. They offer patterns for living: fulfilling obligations to aging

parents, repairing wounds from childhood, teaching teenagers to keep the Sabbath, and dealing with the struggles of being overworked young mothers and fathers.

Still, these heroes are not larger than life: a bishop begins with arrogance in his new calling; a father is, at least initially, full of self-pity and quick to anger; a girl is a self-absorbed teenager. These are authentic stories. The events, the situations, the people—while sometimes a little contrived or one-dimensional—for the most part ring true. By turning the hearts of readers, these stories give hope for family life.

—Stefinee Pinnegar