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Book Notice

Karen Todd

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Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior, edited by Paul H. Peterson, Gary L. Hatch, and Laura D. Card (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2002)

Sixteen chapters, originally presented at a symposium commemorating the 2,000th anniversary of the birth of Jesus, combine to offer forthright and stimulating answers to the question, “What do Latter-day Saints think of Christ?”

The keynote chapter by Merrill Bateman sets forth a paradigmatic Latter-day Saint answer: the premortal Christ was the Creator for each of us, the mortal Christ offered the eternal Atonement for each of us, and through our covenantal response he can welcome us one by one back into his presence. For Latter-day Saints, Jesus was, is, and will be not only divine and eternal but also personal and relational.

Three chapters deal with those who take issue with Latter-day Saint doctrines of Christ. Robert Millet explains how Mormons can affirm the New Testament Jesus while seeing him in a different light. The differences can be explained in that Latter-day Saints believe more than others believe. Gerald Lund and Jeffrey Marsh show that grace and mercy are key parts of Latter-day Saint doctrine, and they equally insist that mortals must do certain things to obtain those gifts of God and to receive his blessings.

Other chapters concentrate in depth on the premortal Jesus. Andrew Skinner gives clear expositions of Jesus’ past as the Firstborn and Creator; Roger Keller argues that the authors of the Gospels knew Jesus was Jehovah; Brent Farley details the ways the premortal Son was the promised Redeemer and condescending God; and Terry Ball demonstrates that Isaiah “knew and loved the Messiah” (97), foreseeing Jesus’ mortal and millennial ministries.

Several difficult and productive questions concerning the mortal ministry of Jesus are thoroughly addressed by Craig Ostler, Matthew Richardson, David and Jo Ann Seely, Thomas Sherry, and John Welch, respectively: How does one understand the divine nature of Jesus during mortality? What made Jesus an effective though unorthodox teacher? How did Jesus instantiate the varied roles of prophet, priest, and king? Why did many reject Jesus? What role did fear play in the trial and death of Jesus?

The future of Christ is the subject of three final studies. Robert Matthews expounds the doctrine of resurrection, its certainty, universality, and necessary role in eternal joy. Gaye Strathern examines Paul’s testimony, showing that Christ can change lives and that faith in him is well founded. Richard Draper explains why the passive voice is used so extensively in the book of Revelation; he shows how this grammatical construction demonstrates that God will keep evil within its bounds, operating behind the scenes—not indifferently or inactively, but encouraging patience and endurance.

Because “truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come” (D&C 93:24), knowing Jesus Christ requires a knowledge of his premortal past, his mortal presence, and his eternal future. Through its breadth and depth, this book will serve well all who ask or are asked, “What think ye of Christ?”

—Karen Todd