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The Foundation for Ancient  
Research & Mormon Studies  
at Brigham Young University

# INSIGHTS

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD

November 1999

"by study and also by faith" (D&C 88:118)

## Elder Pinnock, Professor Nibley to Speak on Temples

On 4 December FARMS will sponsor a conference at BYU titled "Temples through the Ages." The three-hour event will comprise four presentations, including a keynote address by Elder Hugh W. Pinnock and a concluding lecture by Hugh W. Nibley.

In an address titled "Temples Then, Now, and Forever," Elder Pinnock, a member of the First Quorum of the Seventy and president of the North America Central Area, will discuss the temple in the New Testament, the current building of the Nauvoo Temple, LDS temple building in general, and related items.

BYU emeritus professor of ancient scripture Hugh Nibley will speak on the topic "Temples



Elder Hugh W. Pinnock

Everywhere." Those familiar with Nibley's extensive knowledge of ancient temples will surely appreciate his remarks on one of his favorite topics.

The conference will also include presentations by FARMS scholars Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks. Parry, an associate professor of Hebrew language and literature at BYU, will address the topic "He That Hath Clean Hands and a Pure Heart': Three Biblical Temple Entrance Hymns." He will examine three Old Testament hymns or poems that list the

moral qualities of those who were permitted to enter ancient temples. In "Prayer with Uplifted Hands in the Ancient World," Ricks, a BYU professor of

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## Book on Romans 1 Launches New Series

*Romans 1: Notes and Reflections*, by James E. Faulconer, is the inaugural volume in FARMS's new Ancient Texts and Mormon Studies series. The aim of this series is to explain the historical origins and purposes of ancient religious texts and to show their main points of value to modern religious readers. Like forthcoming volumes in the series, *Romans 1* includes the ancient text, a readable English translation, and general commentary.

Although the series will cater primarily to working scholars, *Romans 1* has a wider appeal. Faulconer explains in the preface that he wrote the book in response to two concerns: the book of Romans can be difficult to understand, and it is

used more than any other biblical book to challenge LDS doctrine. "When we understand Romans, it is obvious that not only need we not fear having others discuss Paul's teachings, but we can use those very teachings to teach the truthfulness of the gospel understood through latter-day revelation," he writes. "When understood correctly, Romans and the Book of Mormon teach the same things."

In commenting on Romans 1 verse by verse, Faulconer touches on such topics as faith, holiness, obedience, service to Christ, personal conversion and repentance, and becoming true saints. Concerning the latter, Faulconer writes: "There is more to being a saint, to taking Christ's name upon

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## FARMS through the Years, Part 1: A Conversation with John Welch and John Sorenson

*FARMS's 20th anniversary this month gives reason to reflect on the Foundation's past progress and future promise. The following article begins a three-part series, each installment featuring comments from two people who figure prominently in the history and ongoing work of FARMS. John W. (Jack) Welch and John L. Sorenson were involved with FARMS since its inception, Stephen D. Ricks and Noel B. Reynolds were administrative officers during the organization's middle years, and Daniel C. Peterson and Daniel Oswald are current administrative officers at FARMS. This first segment presents responses from separate interviews conducted by Don Brugger, managing editor of INSIGHTS, with FARMS founder John Welch, who is Robert K. Thomas Professor of Law at BYU, editor of BYU Studies, and a member of the FARMS Board of Directors from 1979 to the present; and BYU emeritus professor of anthropology John Sorenson, who served on the FARMS board from 1981 to 1991 and continues his work for FARMS as a senior resident fellow and editor of the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies. The responses have been editorially combined because they cover the same time period and address the same or related topics.*

*How did FARMS begin?*

*Welch:* Very modestly. In the 1970s I practiced law in Los Angeles, working in the tax area. Speaking often at firesides, I saw a great need for an organization that could coordinate and distribute research on the Book of Mormon. One day, after doing the legal work to form two nonprofit corporations, I put together a set of articles of incorporation for a third. The name for this organization, FARMS, was selected while I was riding home that day in a car pool. My two car pool friends, Lew Cramer and Clark Waddoups, agreed to serve with me as the initial board of directors.

*How did you first become involved in the work of FARMS, and what attracted you to the organization?*

*Sorenson:* In 1980, when John Welch came to BYU for interviews before accepting an offer from the law school, he visited me (I was then chair of the anthropology department) to explain about FARMS. I had not previously met him, but I was

very impressed with both the concept and with him. I had been involved for years in similar activity. I was one of the earliest activists in the Society for Early Historic Archaeology (from 1950) but had parted ways with that effort and subsequently discussed possible organizational formats to further Book of Mormon research. I had concluded that no viable prospect for an organization existed. What Jack and FARMS promised was a large, ambitious, inclusive vision plus, particularly, the prospect of successful fund-raising due to Jack's standing as a tax attorney. I immediately wrote out a to-whom-it-may-concern letter giving my unequivocal support to FARMS and recommending that others do so too.

*How would you describe the status of Book of Mormon studies when FARMS came to Provo in 1980?*

*Sorenson:* The field of Book of Mormon studies was tiny and fragmented into little enclaves, each focusing on different areas of endeavor. Moreover, there was no effective communication among the various camps or individual scholars.

*Welch:* Looking back, it is hard to realize how far the discipline of Book of Mormon studies has come in the last 20 years. In 1980 the library of significant Book of Mormon scholarship was very small. Today that body is large, and it is still growing at a rapid pace. One of the main differences between then and now is that we have come to appreciate the profound depths and subtle complexities of this amazing book, and we allow ourselves to be surprised and instructed by this book in many ways. I think we have learned in recent years to read the Book of Mormon more carefully and to place greater value on its every detail, word by word.

*How was the move to Provo congenial to the aims of FARMS?*

*Sorenson:* It promised intellectual energy by moving to the center of the church, plus the prospect of tapping into practical resources such as secretarial support and work space.

*Welch:* And it allowed us to work together on a daily basis. As Stephen Ricks has often said, "There was something providential in the group of young scholars who found themselves together in Provo in the early 1980s."

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*What were the first big publishing projects undertaken once FARMS was established in Provo?*

*Sorenson:* The first thing we needed was a product that would meet important needs of potential readers. We concluded that that ought to consist of a library of reprints chosen for reliability of content. Jack and I particularly made the choices until we had some scores of articles we thought we could recommend without serious qualms. The selecting of reprints, instead of merely asking people to write something prospectively, meant that we were actually forming the nucleus of an inclusive yet selective scholarly community. The second priority was to put out a newsletter to begin to wave a banner.

*Welch:* In short order, we also published a first cut of a Book of Mormon bibliography (arranged on a computer alphabetically and chronologically). Soon we produced a slide show, "The Lands of the Book of Mormon." Several preliminary reports appeared, and in 1984 we put out our first catalog. John Sorenson's book *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, our first major publication, was a landmark in 1985.

*In those early years, how was FARMS received?*

*Welch:* Different people reacted very differently. The core group of interdisciplinary scholars at BYU who got behind FARMS in 1981 received the idea of FARMS with a burst of creative enthusiasm. Early



John W. Welch. Photo courtesy [www.ucjournal.com](http://www.ucjournal.com).

readers found our initial newsletters a bit informal, but because the articles were innovative, reliable, and informative, people kept coming back. Donors were a little scarce at first, but checks, large and small, came in at just the right times, usually from family and friends, but sometimes from people we didn't even know.

Not everyone, of course, was enthusiastic about our fledgling efforts, but most people were happy to give it a chance.

*What were some of the big issues facing FARMS during your years as a member of the board of directors?*

*Sorenson:* Survival! How to get enough work

done to claim valuable results with so few hands to help. Another concern was how to incorporate diverse researchers and supporters. The work tended to be concentrated among the few who would actually perform the work, but that gave an impression of cliquishness; others viewed the effort with suspicion—too apologetic in orientation, not apologetic enough, too "intellectual," not approved by the Brethren, and so on.

*Welch:* I have served on the board for all 20 years. Dynamic issues have been discussed and decided in every board meeting. If by "big issues" you mean controversial matters, I can't remember any decision that wasn't unanimous.

*It would appear that, despite such challenges, FARMS was successful in its early years.*

*Welch:* I believe so. Many keys combine to explain the rapid success of FARMS. A few come readily to mind.

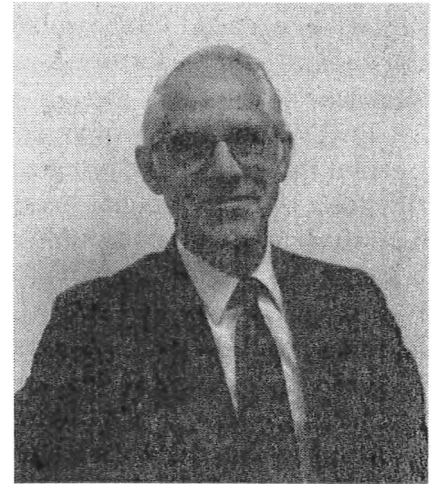
First, volunteerism: FARMS was nurtured by a rare cadre of dedicated volunteers, scholars, and office workers. Some of the earliest included Kirk Magleby, Bob Smith, Gordon Thomasson, Stephen Ricks, Don Norton, and Paul Hoskisson, each serving crucial roles. Our initial board of advisors included Hugh Nibley, Truman Madsen, Charles Tate, Robert Thomas, and Merrill Bateman. We will always be grateful for their contributions.

Second, providing needed services: FARMS did not create an artificial need; it served to fill already existing needs. The Book of Mormon was under academic attack in those days, especially in the media. FARMS offered needed answers.

Third, originality: FARMS blazed new trails; it gladly left room for others to do their things, while FARMS moved over to do what no one else was doing.

Fourth, credibility: FARMS documented everything carefully and thoroughly, and proceeded cautiously and articulately.

Fifth, in addition, the time was right for FARMS



John L. Sorenson

## Conference Focuses on Book of Abraham

A FARMS-sponsored conference held at BYU on Saturday, 16 October, highlighted recent research on the Book of Abraham. Titled "The Book of Abraham: Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant," the half-day event represented a broad, interdisciplinary approach to deepening understanding of the content and backgrounds of the Book of Abraham.

FARMS board chairman Daniel C. Peterson opened the conference by remarking that although the Book of Abraham has been neglected in scholarly studies, significant publications will be forthcoming. The first session, on Abrahamic astronomy, began with a presentation by Jared W. Ludlow, a doctoral candidate in Near Eastern religion at UC Berkeley and Graduate Theological Union. Ludlow compared Abraham as an astronomer with similar noncanonical Abrahamic traditions from the *Apocalypse of Abraham*, *Pseudo-Eupolemus*, *Jubilees*, and works by Philo, Josephus, and Artapanus. Noting the cluster of ancient texts that include material similar to that in the Book of Abraham, Ludlow concluded that those parallels are a "nudging confirmation" of the authenticity of Joseph Smith's translation and that skeptics should seriously consider such evidence.

Michael D. Rhodes, an associate research professor in BYU's Department of Ancient Scripture, reported on his joint research with J. Ward Moody, BYU associate professor of physics and astronomy. Stating that "true religion agrees with true science," Rhodes proceeded to compare Abraham's descriptions of the heavens with modern science. After touching upon the age of the earth, the advent of mankind, fossil remains, evolution, the conservation of matter, and other topics related to astronomy and the creation, he concluded that there is "a remarkable degree of agreement" between science and the Book of Abraham account.

Daniel C. Peterson, an associate professor in BYU's Department of Asian and Near Eastern Languages, presented a paper he coauthored with BYU associate professor of history William J. Hamblin and FARMS assistant research professor John Gee. The paper argued that Abraham 3:1-11 refers to the visible heavens and reflects the ancient

geocentric astronomy traceable to the Middle Kingdom of Egypt of Abraham's time. Addressing the question of why the Lord chose to teach Abraham a limited, geocentric view of the heavens, Peterson cited D&C 1:24 and emphasized that geocentric astronomy is not necessarily incorrect. He then discussed six items in the Book of Abraham that make sense only if seen from a geocentric perspective.

John Gee, an Egyptologist and assistant research professor at FARMS, debunked the commonly held notion that Facsimile 3 in the Book of Abraham represents the judgment scene from the Book of the Dead. He explained that many of the elements that the Egyptians thought were essential to the judgment scene are missing from Facsimile 3. He also demonstrated that Facsimiles 1 and 3 are not vignettes from the Book of Breathing.

Peter C. Nadig, research assistant for an institute of history in Aachen, Germany, reviewed the amicable relationship between the Jews and their Persian and Ptolemaic rulers in Egypt from the sixth to the first centuries B.C. Well regarded by those foreign administrations, Jewish immigrants to Egypt were allowed to worship freely and to even build temples there, a great contrast to the bondage of the children of Israel in Egypt during Pharaonic times.

Andrew H. Hedges, assistant professor of church history and doctrine at BYU, discussed American perceptions of Abraham from 1800 to 1850. He noted that whereas Abraham was commonly invoked in Colonial religious discourse, his importance was diminished after the Revolutionary War, an event that led Americans to see themselves less as a New Israel concerned about its covenant relationship to God and more as the seed of Abraham concerned about deliverance from England. Hedges concluded that because Abraham was at an

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“all-time low” in the 1835–42 period, the Book of Abraham would have been a very different book if it were based, as critics contend, on the American cultural milieu of Joseph Smith’s time.

E. Douglas Clark, a student of the ancient Near East and a lawyer from Mesa, Arizona, pointed out commonalities between the Book of Abraham and ancient sources such as the Dead Sea Scroll material known as the *Genesis Apocryphon*.

Janet C. Hovorka, a student of the ancient Near East and a librarian from American Fork, Utah, explored Sarah’s and Hagar’s relationship to the Abrahamic covenant and compared that covenant to LDS temple marriage. She observed that although scripture does not state that Sarah and Hagar entered into a joint covenant with Abraham, they appear to have done so, because they all received the three blessings of that covenant: numerous posterity, land for their descendants’ inheritance, and the companionship or presence of the Lord.

Jennifer C. Lane, a doctoral candidate in early and medieval Christian thought at Claremont (California) Graduate University, discussed the meaning of a phrase from Isaiah 29:22: “the Lord who redeemed Abraham.” Lane explained her view that this redemption was physical and spiritual, the latter not because Abraham was spiritually unregenerate, but because he desired to be a greater follower of righteousness and thus sought a new relationship with God. The resulting covenant, Lane said, represented an adoptive *relationship* more than a contractual arrangement.

The three sessions were moderated by John Gee, Michael D. Rhodes, and Brian M. Hauglid, an assistant research professor in BYU’s Department of Ancient Scripture and one of the principal investigators, along with Gee and Brian L. Smith, on the FARMS Book of Abraham project. The nine papers presented at the conference will appear with others in a forthcoming volume published by FARMS.

## New Book Probes Ancient Near Eastern Backgrounds of Book of Mormon

*The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar*, a new book by John A. Tvedtnes, associate director of research at FARMS, provides more than 45 insights into the text and teachings of the Book of Mormon. Published by Cornerstone, the book deals with linguistic, historical, cultural, and theological matters that underscore the accuracy and internal consistency of the Book of Mormon.

The result of more than 10 years of research and writing, the book presents a wealth of information drawn from the Bible and other ancient Near Eastern texts. For example, in a chapter on the Jaredite ocean voyage, Tvedtnes considers where the brother of Jared may have gotten the idea to light the enclosed barges with crystalline stones touched by the Lord. Tvedtnes points to several early Jewish accounts of Noah’s ark in which God told Noah to suspend precious stones or pearls inside of the ark. “The gems would glow during the night and dim during the day so Noah, shut up in the ark, could tell the time of day and how many days had passed,” Tvedtnes writes.

Tvedtnes suggests interesting correlations between the Book of Mormon narrative and aspects of culture, beliefs, and history of Semitic people in the Middle East around the time of Lehi. For example, building on the work of Hugh Nibley, Tvedtnes considers Laban’s possible role in a conspiracy to slay the prophets Jeremiah and Lehi. “There is, in fact, evidence from the Bible that there was such a secret combination in Jerusalem in Lehi’s time,” he writes. Part of the ensuing discussion suggests that the secret works of darkness among the Nephites may have originated in Jerusalem and then were carried to the New World by Laman and Lemuel or the sons of Ishmael.

Tvedtnes also examines the timing of the Savior’s visit to the Nephites, explores the backgrounds of untranslated words like *ziff* in the Book of Mormon, reviews discoveries since the time of Joseph Smith that support the ancient existence of a kind of “reformed Egyptian” script, and discusses many other little-known aspects of the Book of Mormon that further confirm its authenticity and inspired origin.

## FARMS through the Years (continued from page 3)

in the early 1980s, when President Benson was emphasizing the Book of Mormon so heavily. At that time many scholars at BYU were uniquely prepared and willing to make serious contributions to Book of Mormon research, and the BYU administration strongly supported the work of FARMS.

*What do you consider to be the most notable achievements of FARMS in the past 20 years?*

*Sorenson:* In the first decade, probably the beginning of book publishing (which often involved a research conference preceding publication). Also, the development (chiefly under Brent Hall) of an organization capable of practical fulfillment in publishing and distributing products reliably and building a core of faithful members. Another notable stride forward was the establishment of standards and mechanisms for publishing quality products (especially involving Mel Thorne). A major development in late 1980s was the rise of the notion (among the FARMS membership and beyond) that

critical evaluation of published work is desirable. This led to FARMS's issuance of the *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* in 1988 (now the *FARMS Review of Books*); without Dan Peterson's adroit management and pen, this effort would probably not have succeeded.

The 1990s saw the publication of some basic media to inform a broader LDS audience about the findings of scriptural scholarship (this was attempted from the beginning but was not very successful). Acceptance and respect for FARMS's scholarly efforts increased in non-LDS scholarly circles, especially as a result of the Dead Sea Scrolls project. Another stride forward was the establishment of an apparatus for evaluating and supporting research through grants under the direction of M. Gerald Bradford.

*How did FARMS ensure the quality of its publications? How is this done today?*

*Welch:* I was lucky to have served on the law review while I was at Duke law school. There I learned to source check every footnote and to require solid support for every claim. Moreover, publishing a law review is a highly collaborative effort. At FARMS we followed the same procedures: every footnote checked, every article reviewed by many people. We still follow the same procedures today.

*How reliable is FARMS research? How have the quality procedures worked out?*

*Welch:* The results have been very gratifying. Sure, mistakes happen now and then, but I think we have achieved an extremely high reliability rating. Very few publishers these days can afford to check their products as closely as FARMS does. But we believe that the effort is worth it. The Book of Mormon deserves nothing but the best we can give.

*Did you sense initially what FARMS could become?*

*Welch:* While we had a strong sense of purpose for this organization from its inception—namely, to do the best possible faithful research and make it available as widely and as inexpensively as possible—we had no idea where this little operation would in fact eventually end up.

*Were there times when it looked as though it wouldn't succeed?*

*Welch:* Sure. I remember one day when the bank balance of this little organization had three digits in it, and two of them were to the right of the

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## Temples (continued from page 1)

Hebrew and Semitic languages, will discuss ancient texts that deal with that worship practice.

"The Latter-day Saints have always been temple building people," Donald Parry observes. "Our first constructed buildings were temples, and temple building continues to increase, an evidence of the importance of the temple to the church. The meaning, power, and significance of the temple are presented in literally scores of scriptural texts where we learn about the temple as a place of holiness, prayer, sacred ordinances, revelation, and power. The temple has been called the connecting link between heaven and earth. This conference will touch upon these and other interesting topics that pertain to the temple."

The conference, which is open to the public without charge, will be held in the Joseph Smith Building Auditorium. It will begin at 9:00 A.M. and close at noon. Those who attend may wish to park south of the Joseph Smith Building, in the lot on the corner of 800 North and 400 East.

decimal point. I wasn't sure how we would pay our only half-time employee. I also remember some awkward times with campus politics. FARMS was a start-up upstart. But things always had a way of working out.

*Why is FARMS a nonprofit corporation?*

*Welch:* Mainly to allow tax deductions for contributions, to provide stable rules for leadership, and to avoid any personal profiteering. FARMS has always been a nonprofit organization. When money is not an issue, people are much more willing to devote time and talents to the work. From the very start, the articles of incorporation have provided that, upon liquidation, all of the money and assets of FARMS would be donated to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

*In what ways is the work of FARMS distinctive?*

*Sorenson:* It is largely cooperative. There is room under the FARMS umbrella for diverse, individually-decided-upon research and writing efforts, without much heavy-handed direction from a governing board or administrators as to who will write or what will be the foci. But equally important is that the cooperative dimension coexists with quality control of the product.

*Welch:* I think the work of FARMS is readily recognizable on library shelves. Its publications are frequent, thorough, textually oriented, highly collaborative, extensively grounded in ancient languages and cultures, copiously documented, meticulously edited, and insightfully Latter-day Saint. I hasten to add that other LDS scholars do equally fine and useful work, but FARMS has a niche that has become recognized as its specialty.

*Has the work of FARMS scholars been sufficiently understood and appreciated through the years?*

*Sorenson:* I wish more people in the church knew about the work of all researchers on the Book of Mormon and related topics whether they consider themselves "FARMS scholars" or not. I also wish more people understood the value of critical scholarship in improving the position of the scriptures in the minds of members and nonmembers alike. Great progress has been made, but there is a long way to go. I have always had special concern that FARMS publications have not been widely available to speakers of languages other than English. I would like to see that remedied.

*Describe a typical FARMS researcher.*

*Welch:* Nothing is very typical around FARMS. We have professionals and amateurs, retired emeri-

tus professors and freshmen research assistants. The group includes men and women, full-time scholars and part-time adjuncts. Many have multiple advanced degrees. We have people who specialize in Greek and Hebrew, and others who specialize in Syriac and Arabic. They belong to many professional scholarly organizations. People from almost every department on campus have worked with FARMS. So I guess the only thing typical about them is that they all love and have a testimony of the Book of Mormon and desire to use their scholarly training in ancient studies to enrich our understanding of the text and to build the kingdom.

*In the early days, was the purpose of FARMS misunderstood?*

*Welch:* Yes, it was then and it still is misunderstood sometimes today. From the beginning, people thought we were trying to "prove" the Book of Mormon to be true. We often quote B. H. Roberts to the effect that no evidence, however skillfully presented, can ever take the place of the Holy Ghost in bearing witness to the souls of men and women that the Book of Mormon is true. By using scholarly tools to find circumstantial corroborations for the Book of Mormon, FARMS strives only to gather up truth wherever it may be found in the world of scholarship and bring it home for the upbuilding of Zion.

*Then "proof" is not of primary concern?*

*Welch:* No, it's not, and for many reasons. For one thing, it is futile to try to get people to agree on what constitutes "proof" in any event. For example, what qualifies as "proof" of the resurrection of Jesus in Jerusalem? Our methodology is aimed more at understanding and appreciation. We assume that the Book of Mormon is an ancient book and then look for insights by seeing it in terms of ancient language, culture, and history. In this regard, it more than rewards the sensitive reader. On top of all that, the book is literarily eloquent and beautifully artistic, when gauged by ancient standards. So these secondary characteristics confirm our original assumption, but more than that they enhance our understanding of the text.

*What role can such secondary evidence play in nurturing belief?*

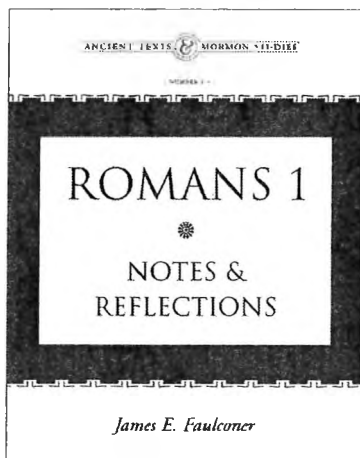
*Sorenson:* It can clear away obstacles in the minds of those prejudiced by unfriendly scholars or bigots so that the honest will give belief a chance. In addition, it opens up differing dimensions along



## Romans 1 (continued from page 1)

ourselves, than membership in the formal organization of the church. We become saints by being called and set apart for God's purposes, and we remain saints by striving to meet the obligation of purity that such a calling entails. . . . We can become pure only through Jesus Christ."

Faulconer explains that because the first chapter of Romans sets the stage for the rest of Paul's epistle, it is important for understanding the book of Romans as a whole. His notes and commentary are both detailed and personal, containing helpful insights into linguistic



and cultural matters but also including ideas developed during his personal study. "My efforts are intended to stimulate thinking and conversation about Romans," he notes.

*Romans 1: Notes and Reflections* can be a valuable tool for those who are studying the book of Romans or looking for new ways to study other scripture. By sharing numerous insights and details about Romans 1, Faulconer models the kind of in-depth examination and reflection

that facilitates understanding and appreciation of any scriptural text.

## FARMS through the Years (continued from page 7)

which readers may consider the scripture in new ways.

*Welch:* I wrote a 50-page article a couple years ago on this subject, so in 50 words or less I'll just say here that incidental details can sometimes be of first-rate importance. For most people, the big picture is usually enough, but God is also to be found in the details. Circumstantial bits and pieces combine to get people to the point where they are willing to admit that the Book of Mormon cannot be explained as the work of human hands alone.

*Has your faith been markedly strengthened through your research?*

*Welch:* Yes. Faith involves trust, confidence, love, and obedience, as well as a hope for things not seen. My research has enhanced my trust in the Book of Mormon and my devotion to its teachings. Through careful research, I have seen God operating through the Book of Mormon on many occasions. All this has clearly enriched and deepened my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Sorenson:* It has been a privilege to be stimulated by seeing how many new discoveries have been made beyond the few I would know about were I working alone. My faith in the Book of Mormon has not been "markedly strengthened" so much as "enriched."

*What has motivated your decades of research bear-*

*ing on correlating Book of Mormon places and events with a geographical setting in Mesoamerica?*

*Sorenson:* My own curiosity. The geography constitutes an ultimate crossword puzzle. Another stimulus is my desire to consider the Nephite record in the brightest, richest light possible; thus I welcome all new light that promises to give me new perspectives on our central sacred book. I also desire to be among those claiming the blessing of Moroni: "whoso shall bring it to light, him will the Lord bless" [Mormon 8:14].

*What have been the major milestones in the organizational history of FARMS?*

*Welch:* I look back on five salient milestones.

First, hiring our first employee. When we hired Janet Twigg in 1981 as our bookkeeper, we took on new responsibilities and had to deal with the fact that some people at FARMS would be paid while the rest of us would need to give our time freely.

Second, in 1984 we linked up with Deseret Book. In this valuable relationship, we produced the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley series, John Sorenson's *Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, and several other significant volumes. These books put FARMS on the map for good.

Third, when Stephen Ricks became the second president of FARMS in 1988, we proved that lead-

ership of the organization could be passed around. Noel Reynolds and I needed to spend most of three years working on the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, and Stephen and others had to pick up a lot of the slack. Their success galvanized many scholars as committed FARMS participants.

Fourth, major financial donations from Alan and Karen Ashton, Richard Winwood, and others in the early 1990s allowed FARMS to buy its buildings, produce Dead Sea Scrolls databases, publish its own books, hire editors, give grants, and expand in many ways. With this transition, the scholars on the FARMS board suddenly took on a vast array of responsibilities for a very large and active organization.

Fifth, most recently, another big change at FARMS has come with our formal affiliation with Brigham Young University.

Of course, many other important things have happened along the way: key hires, major conferences, television broadcasts, academic recognition, research expeditions, and so on. Almost every inch of the way seems worth mentioning.

*Why was FARMS invited to become a part of BYU?*

*Welch:* In 1980, when I came to BYU, I asked Academic Vice President Robert K. Thomas if I should terminate FARMS or bring it with me. He said, "By all means, bring it." Ever since, FARMS and BYU have been closely intertwined. Soon BYU gave us some unused space in the basement of the law school and then some offices in the old Amanda Knight Hall. As FARMS grew, it became obvious that sooner or later BYU and FARMS would need to define their mutual relationship. After prolonged discussions back and forth that involved many people, no one at FARMS or at BYU knew what should be done. I remember saying to President Bateman in a private conversation, "As far as I am concerned, we can go either way, on campus or off. What we need is an answer that will stick. If President Hinckley will tell us what he sees as best, we will do it." Two months later, President Hinckley invited FARMS to become a part of BYU. He gave no explanations but saw a bright future for this work under the university umbrella.

*Now that FARMS is part of BYU, what opportunities or challenges does this open up?*

*Welch:* Time will tell. So far, everything looks good. There's so much to do. The challenge will be to marshal resources and guide this work systematically.

*Will the affiliation with BYU change the kind and quality of FARMS research?*

*Welch:* I don't think so. BYU wants FARMS to succeed, and as the old pioneer adage goes, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." After 20 years, we both know what works. The patterns and methods are in place. We now need to carry on. Mormonism is still a young religion by world standards. We have much work yet to do.

*What will be the future research emphasis at FARMS?*

*Welch:* We will always keep the Book of Mormon at the core of our work. In addition, future research will branch out into Old Testament, New Testament, and the Book of Abraham, particularly as the scriptures all are interwoven into one great whole.

*Does FARMS try to cultivate rising scholars?*

*Welch:* Yes. We give Nibley Fellowships to about a dozen young scholars each year. We also employ many BYU students as research assistants. Over the years, a large intellectual community of faithful LDS students has passed under the tutelage of FARMS. They may be the greatest legacy of our first 20 years.

*How did you personally become interested in scripture research?*

*Welch:* I started into scripture research as an undergraduate. When I was a freshman at BYU, Hugh Nibley was my Honors Book of Mormon teacher, and as a missionary in Germany in 1967 I discovered chiasmus in the Book of Mormon. I published my first article on that subject in *BYU Studies* while I was still an undergraduate at BYU. My teachers at BYU gave me tools and taught me to see many exciting ways to use them. And the rest is history, as they say. I've been at it ever since.

*How are you able to be so productive?*

*Welch:* Just by keeping at it. And keeping my eyes open. The Lord wants to show us all more than our eyes have ever seen. Productivity is seeing through things and then seeing things through. Only the support of good friends, bright colleagues, and skillful assistants such as those at FARMS makes any of this possible.

*Do you see a bright future for FARMS and its ongoing focus on Book of Mormon research?*

*Sorenson:* I am hopeful, but a bright future is not inevitable. The possibility exists that the wrong cooks may mess up the kitchen by trying to impose

### Forthcoming publications

*FARMS Review of Books*, vol. 11, no. 2. This issue focuses on a book by Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation*, and a critical response to it (published in this issue of the *Review*) by evangelical scholars Paul L. Owen and Carl A. Mosser. Two essays review the book, and four others reply directly to Owen and Mosser. Available mid-November.

*The Temple in Time and Eternity*, edited by Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks. This long-anticipated second volume in FARMS's "Temples through the Ages" series features 11 chapters by 12 scholars who explore oaths and oath taking, baptism for the dead, temple prayer, the keeper of the gate, a Sumerian temple, and other topics related to temples. Available early December.

*Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon* (audiotape version). Lloyd Newell, voice of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir's weekly "Music and the Spoken Word" broadcast, narrates selections from the recent book of the same title, which combines the FARMS Research Updates of the 1990s with similar items from the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*. Available early November.

*Insights and Evidences of the Book of Mormon* (audiotape). Six audiocassettes feature an array of interesting topics—each illuminating the Book of Mormon and confirming its authenticity—from four FARMS publications: *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, *Book of Mormon Authorship*, *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, and the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*. Available early December.

## FARMS through the Years

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a predetermined rigid policy instead of letting scholars find their own pragmatic way to the light.

*Welch*: I am convinced that we have only scratched the surface. We are still a young church, and Book of Mormon scholarship is an even younger discipline. So the opportunities are great. But truth comes forth only according to our heed and diligence, as Alma 12:9 says, so we must give strict heed and be more diligent or we can't expect to receive further light and knowledge. In Christ, the future is perfectly bright. Assuming that the work of FARMS or of others is useful to Him, I have full faith that it will flourish for many years to come.

# INSIGHTS

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD

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### The Purpose of FARMS

The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) encourages and supports research about the Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ and other ancient scriptures. It also works to preserve ancient religious documents.

FARMS is a nonprofit educational foundation affiliated with Brigham Young University. Its main research interests include ancient history, language, literature, culture, geography, politics, and law relevant to the scriptures. Although such subjects are of secondary importance when compared with the spiritual and eternal messages of the scriptures, solid research and academic perspectives alone can supply certain kinds of useful information, even if only tentatively, concerning many significant and interesting questions about the scriptures.

The Foundation works to make interim and final reports about this research available widely, promptly, and economically. These publications are peer reviewed to ensure scholarly standards are met. The proceeds from the sale of these publications, including most royalties, are used to support further research and publications on the scriptures. As a service to teachers and students of the scriptures, research results are distributed in both scholarly and popular formats.

It is hoped that this information will help all interested people to "come unto Christ" (Jacob 1:7) and to understand and take more seriously these ancient witnesses of the atonement of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.