A Center for Mormon Studies

by Richard L. Bushman
Howard W. Hunter Chair of Mormon Studies, Claremont Graduate University

We have used the phrase “a national center for Mormon Studies” since the Claremont program began. Perhaps it seems a little presumptuous considering the scores of scholars all over the world at work on Mormonism, and the much larger accumulation of Mormon scholars in Salt Lake City and Provo. At Claremont we have one full-time faculty member augmented by the capable adjunct teaching of Claudia Bushman and Armand Mauss. Twenty-five students at most are dealing with Mormonism in one form or another compared to hundreds in Utah and elsewhere in the country. And yet we persist in calling ourselves a national center. Why the chutzpah?

Partly it is a frame of mind. We believe that we can deal with the most pressing questions in Mormon Studies here as well as anywhere. As Joseph Smith said, we wish to gather all truth and make it our own. This act of gathering and reflection is the responsibility of the students as much as the faculty’s. We are like a hive of bees gathering in nectar from a wide field to make honey here in our own hive. We think our golden brew can be as succulent and nourishing as honey made anywhere.

But partly it is a matter of fact. Through experience as much as through calculation, we have found that Mormon scholars like to come to Claremont for their conferences. Sunstone West meets here every other year. The Society for Mormon Philosophers and Theologians held their annual conference here last spring and plans to come every third year. The Mormon Scholars in the Humanities will meet here in May for their annual conference, this year on the theme of the family in history, literature, and society. In addition we have held our own conference on Mormonism and Polities, Mormonism and Engineering, Mormon Women, and looking ahead to Spring 2010 on the state of Mormon Studies, and in spring 2011 on War and Peace from a Mormon Perspective.

We have probably overdone it in these first two years. We put inordinate strains on the School of Religion staff with our heaped over schedule of lectures and conferences, but the point remains: there is an interest among Mormon scholars nationally in presenting their work at Claremont. I am pleased with this desire to collect here. We want our students to feel that the best that is being produced is available to them not only through journals and books but in the persons of the scholars doing the work.

We will not have to continue at this hectic pace in the years to come. The point has been established. This is a place to confer and reflect on the major issues in Mormon Studies. Not only in our imaginations is Claremont a national center; it is now looked on that way around the country. My fondest hope is that this will give our students the courage and ambition to make their own work part of the great surge of ongoing scholarship in this burgeoning field of study.
Spring 2010 Semester Events

FEBRUARY 18

Grant Hardy
“The Deep Structure of the Book of Mormon”
8:00 p.m. at Mudd Auditorium
Claremont School of Theology

Grant Hardy, Associate Professor of History at the University of North Carolina Asheville, is best known to Mormons for The Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Edition, but he soon will be better known for his structural analysis of the Book of Mormon coming out with Oxford University Press this year. Hardy explains how the three major historians in the book, Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni constructed their narratives differently, making each of these writers a distinctive presence in the book.

MARCH 11

Daniel C. Peterson
“The Debate over the Book of Mormon”
8:00 p.m. at Albrecht Auditorium
Claremont Graduate University

Daniel Peterson, Professor of Islamic Studies and Arabic at Brigham Young University, is best known in the academic world as an expert on Islam. As editor of the FARMS Review of Books for many years, however, he is well informed on the controversies surrounding the historicity of the Book of Mormon. In his talk, he will report on the debate as it stands right now.

FEBRUARY 19

“The Life and Thought of Joseph Smith”
4:00 p.m. at Albrecht Auditorium
Claremont Graduate University

Jacob Baker
“Friendship is like Welding Iron to Iron”: The Sealing Power, the Welding Link, and the Grand Fundamental Principle of Mormonism

Shawn Bennion
Before Nauvoo: Restoring the Ancient Church

Nick Frederick
Joseph Smith and the Formation of the Prophetic Persona

David Golding
Sickles, Swords, and Servants: The Foundations of Joseph Smith’s Mission Theory

Elisa Pulido
Looking for a Cloud of Light: The Poetics of Prophethood

Christopher Smith
The Sacred Savage: American Indians in the Religious Vision of Joseph Smith

APRIL 15

Martha Bradley Evans
“The Fundamentalists Today”
8:00 p.m. at Mudd Auditorium
Claremont School of Theology

Martha Evans, Professor of Architecture at the University of Utah, also directs the Honors Program. She has written on the Utah controversy over the ERA and a joint biography of four Mormon women entitled Four Zinas: A Story of Mothers and Daughters on the Mormon Frontier. She gained insight into Fundamentalist polygamous communities doing research for her book Kidnapped from that Land: The Government Raids on the Short Creek Polygamists.

APRIL 23–24

CMSSA Student Conference
“What is Mormon Studies? Transdisciplinary Inquiries into an Emerging Field”

Mormonism’s complexities suggest how this religious movement likely resists categorization. Is Mormon Studies a viable new field? Is it even a viable conceptual

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option for academic examination? From an academic standpoint, those who study Mormonism will in large part determine what Mormon Studies becomes and how it proceeds. What are the various competing visions for what should be studied and advanced under this rubric? This conference will explore these and other questions through scholar and student presentations. Jan Shipps will offer the keynote address to open the conference and a scholar panel including Brian Birch and Spencer Fluhman will conclude the event.

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MAY 21–22

Association of Mormon Scholars in the Humanities Conference

“The Family and Human Relationships in History, Literature, Art, and Philosophy”

The Association is now soliciting papers for the conference. Every story, it is said, is a family story. Yet in stressing the freedom and self-sufficiency of the individual, modern culture de-emphasizes the degree to which people are born in dependency, of specific parents, and develop in and through relationships with others, most closely in the family. By considering the family, family history, and human relationships, this conference will invite inquiry into changes in the culture of the family over time, inquiries into family memory, depictions of the family and the individual in art and literature, and philosophical investigations of the role of family, friends, and mentors in personal development.

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On the Mormon Trail, June 1848

A poem by Elisa Pulido

PhD student in Religions of North America

She needs a moment alone, away from the children, the husband, canvassed wagons, oxen. Without a good-bye, she vanishes into wind-waved prairie. Three days the company searches every bluff, rise, hole. Could have been a brave, who admired her blonde braid, her pale brow.

Maybe a broken leg. A quiet wolf. Perhaps she waded out to where tall grass grows overhead, and lost the horizon. Without chart or compass, with no knowledge of the stars, she stumbles on the edge of the known world, slips over its side. Her husband fears she has been bitten by a snake, fears she has fallen into the netherworld of the plains. He would make any bargain and never look back.

For years he sings of her—wandering, circled by coyotes, treading tall grass.

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Faculty and Students Contribute to Mormon Studies

We asked students and Mormon Studies faculty to provide some details about their recent academic work. Included here are some of their contributions to the field.

**FACULTY**

**Richard Bushman**


**Armand Mauss**

Commentator on the session “Contemporary Mormon Issues,” 2009 conference of the Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR), Salt Lake City.


**STUDENTS**

**Jacob Baker**

Research Fellowship, Joseph Smith Summer Seminar, Brigham Young University, 2007.


**Loyd Ericson**


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Research fellowship, Joseph Smith Summer Seminar, Brigham Young University, 2009.

DAVID GOLDSING


DEIDRE GREEN


“Should LDS Women Do Theology?” Mormonism Through the Eyes of Women: Envisioning New Spaces for Theology and Practice Conference, Claremont Graduate University, 2009.


RICHARD LIVINGSTON

Research Fellowship, Joseph Smith Summer Seminar, Brigham Young University, 2007.


PAUL MILLER

Research Fellowship, Joseph Smith Summer Seminar, Brigham Young University, 2007.


CHRISTOPHER SMITH


JORDAN WATKINS

Research fellowship, Joseph Smith Summer Seminar, Brigham Young University, 2009.

Scholars Lecture on Joseph Smith, American Religion, and Interfaith Dialogue

By David Golding
President, Claremont Mormon Studies Student Association

Audiences of nearly two-hundred gathered to Claremont Graduate University during the Fall 2009 semester to enjoy lectures presented by Daniel Walker Howe, Father Alexei Smith, Robert L. Millet, and Harry S. Stout. The speakers’ topics included Joseph Smith’s America, Mormon–Catholic dialogue, and a comparison of Mormonism’s founder and Jonathan Edwards.

Pulitzer Prize winning author of What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815–1848 (Oxford University Press, 2008), Daniel Walker Howe, met with Claremont graduate students prior to the evening lecture. Part of his interest in Mormonism, he said, came from his family and childhood environment. Born in Ogden, Utah, he was raised in a family that he described as “part Mormon, part Gentile.” He admonished students to always remember the “literate public” in their writing and to avoid overly technical language.

To the evening audience, Howe summed up the religious and industrial atmosphere of Joseph Smith’s world with an explanation of his book’s title. “What hath God wrought” was the phrase, derived from Numbers 23:23, that Samuel F. B. Morse used as the content of the first telegraph message transmitted from Washington D.C. to Baltimore in 1844. The period in which Smith was born, raised, and founded a religion experienced significant advancements in technology similar to the Internet revolution of recent times, Howe said. Such advancements affected religious attitudes about the spread of Christianity and the workings of God in American industry.

Father Alexei Smith, who handles interfaith dialogue for the Los Angeles diocese, and Robert L. Millet, Abraham O. Smoot University Professor from Brigham Young University, presented lectures on the current state of Mormon–Catholic dialogue. The two explored the topic of priesthood and the sacraments as understood by Catholics and Mormons, respectively.

Smith emphasized the role of the priest in representing Christ to the people. Through the administration of the sacraments, the grace of God is communicated, in part, as “efficacious symbols” of divine love.

Millet discussed how Mormons claim legitimate authority when performing the sacraments and how such a claim occupies a central location in their understanding and interpretation of the Bible. He also described the role of the sacraments in Mormon soteriology, and why a “legal administrator” is required for such ordinances to be efficacious before God.

The Fall 2009 Lecture Series concluded with Harry S. Stout of Yale University who is also a member of the National Advisory Board of the Joseph Smith papers and editor-in-chief of the Works of Jonathan Edwards. In his lecture, he compared Joseph Smith and Jonathan Edwards.

Stout felt that the two men were at times polar opposites and in other respects very similar. Edwards prided himself on his English heritage and thought of himself as a colonial Englishman. Smith espoused American values and is known as a builder of a distinctly American Religion. The two had strikingly different lifestyles and skills.

Both, however, saw themselves as builders of a sacred nation. Smith engaged in founding a Zion society; Edwards speculated that the Americas would be the site for Christ’s return. Smith and Edwards both actively promoted evangelizing Native Americans, Stout noted.

Stout concluded by describing an effort to build a platform that will combine and make accessible the papers of Edwards, John Wesley, Martin Luther King, and others. He renewed an invitation he had previously extended for the Joseph Smith Papers project to join the consortium.
Mormon Studies and the “Overflowing Surge”

by Jacob Baker
Vice-President of the Claremont Mormon Studies Student Association

The Prophet Joseph Smith famously said, “It is my meditation all the day, and more than my meat and drink, to know how I shall make the Saints of God comprehend the visions that roll like an overflowing surge before my mind. Oh! How I would delight to bring before you things which you never thought of! But poverty and the cares of the world prevent” (History of the Church, 5:362).

Though poverty might be a problem for those LDS students who come to study religion at Claremont Graduate University, visions of the possibilities and potentialities of Mormonism and Mormon studies surely has not been.

Though I cannot claim, like Joseph, multiple visions from God, his description of the “overflowing surge” is evocative of what I have seen can be done here. It is something that seems to bind us together here as LDS students (and non-LDS students who participate in our Association) engaged in the study of religion.

Many (and probably most) of us have come here as believers of varying degree, but more importantly we come as students eager to understand, dedicated as believers or non-believers to grasping the possibilities of the religion and culture of which we have a passionate interest. This, I think, can accurately be described as visionary.

Former Danforth Chair in the Philosophy of Religion at the School of Religion, D.Z. Phillips, considered it the task of the intellectual not to be for or against religion, but instead as one of understanding it. I would add that it is critical that a thorough understanding of any religion must include an adequate appreciation of the intellectual, theological, and even spiritual possibilities and prospects that such a religion offers through its texts, rituals, and lives of its practitioners.

This task of obtaining a thorough understanding is not always easy to accomplish. But I have been immensely impressed by the students involved in the Claremont Mormon Studies Student Association in the various ways they go about engaging in this intellectual undertaking. I have learned more about my religion and the task of the intellectual, even the believing intellectual, from these students than from anyone or anything else.

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