
The 2004 Doha International Conference for the Family yielded this collection of papers presented at venues around the world. If for no other reason, these volumes are valuable as proof that the family is a concern that unifies nations regardless of politics, religion, culture, and economic standing. And that proof gives hope to those of us who might otherwise despair at the rapid onslaught of antifamily forces.

The preface by Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al-Missned, Consort of His Highness the Emir of Qatar and President of the Supreme Council for Family Affairs of Qatar, establishes some of this collection’s basic themes. First, the family, as a school, plays an irreplaceable part in safeguarding “social stability and security” (1:ix). It is therefore critical that the family be recognized “as part of the solution rather than part of the problem” (1:x). For example, the family can prepare people who can dialog respectfully and rationally to forestall social disintegration and establish peace. Her Highness challenges the global society to cooperate in researching and adopting “references and standards that will safeguard the rights of the family and ensure its integration as an effective and constructive factor in all national, regional, and international development programs” (1:x).

This is high-minded rhetoric; however, it stems not from naïve optimism but from the urgency expressed in almost every article—that the natural family must be actively safeguarded. To that end, the global community is called upon to create policies and practices that will buttress and enhance the family.

Based on some of “the finest available scholarship” (1:xiii), these papers detail the many trends weakening the family, from aging populations to family-punitive taxes to the below-replacement fertility rates of sixty-one countries. But the research does not stop there. The causal factors for these trends are explored, as are—and this is even more eye-opening—the ways these trends interact.

Where other books present only the problems (often in less depth), these volumes also present solutions and showcase countries that recognize the crisis and are establishing policies to counter threats to the family. It is heartening to learn that Latvians, for example, faced “the grim realities” of their “demographic catastrophe” (3:341–42). They have developed a sixty-step plan to increase the chances of family survival, including special tax incentives, housing credits, changes in the adoption policies, aid to dysfunctional families, and various subsidies.

Although scholarly, the papers are readable and interesting. They are organized so that each complements the papers around it, yet a person can dip in anywhere for an enlightening read.

—Doris R. Dant

A Twenty-Something’s Guide to Spirituality: Questions You Hesitate to Ask, Answers You Rarely Hear, compiled by Jacob Werrett and David Read (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2007)

A Twenty-Something’s Guide to Spirituality is a collection of ten essays by various Latter-day Saint authors.
ranging from the late Elder Neal A. Maxwell to Truman G. Madsen, emeritus professor of philosophy at Brigham Young University. The subtitle, “Questions You Hesitate to Ask, Answers You Rarely Hear,” is a bit of a misnomer. The questions are actually asked over and over again by many adults in their twenties. Each chapter begins with a question, posed by a twenty-something Latter-day Saint, which raises issues that are then discussed for a few pages. The responses were selected and edited by two LDS law students, Jacob Werrett and David Read.

The book reads like a friendly dialogue—one could picture a group of people sitting around for lunch and discussing such topics. The questions are genuine and sincere, and the authors give sound and sage advice. The topics range from women in education to maintaining activity in the Church, and all are about important issues facing young adults in the Church today. Because of the question-and-answer format, it is easy to find an essay that will address a particular issue—a quick perusal of the question (no more than a page or two) yields the essence of the issue.

This book is ideally suited to young single adults or those who work closely with them. To anyone who is embarking on his or her college years, has a child who is doing so, or is in a young single adult bishopric, the essays and talks in this book will be valuable. As an example, in response to the question of how to choose between two good options, Virginia H. Pearce mentions Doctrine and Covenants 111, the Lord’s response to Joseph’s trip to Salem to find hidden treasure, as an example of how God can turn our bad (or even just not so good) choices into marvelous results. James Jardine talks about honesty in today’s competitive world, using examples from his own life and from the character Sir Thomas More in the play A Man for All Seasons. Truman G. Madsen gives nine reasons to learn how to learn—not just going to school but actually understanding how to grapple with issues and continue learning as a lifelong pursuit. The answers to such questions will be a great aid to young adults and those around them.

—Carl Cranny


In eight hundred pages filled with sixteen generally chronological chapters, each including several historical documents and various essays written by recognized authorities, this volume ambitiously attempts to comprehensively cover critical issues in American religious history from its colonization to 1980. But even such coverage is necessarily selective. From my LDS perspective, I noticed right away that chapter 5, on American religion in the early republic, is silent on the subject of early Mormonism. The essays in chapter 5 cover millennialism, Charles Finney, and Adventism. Each of these rich topics is deserving of its place, and each could be profitably compared with Joseph Smith and early Mormonism.

I hoped Mathisen would have let Joseph Smith speak for himself by featuring his brief 1832 history. Instead, Mormonism first appears in chapter 6, where Brigham Young’s 1845 statement announcing the exodus from Illinois is featured. Is not the Brigham Young document insignificant by comparison? Mormonism disappears again until the final chapter, where a slice of Sonia Johnson’s 1979 autobiography is featured. This feature of an obviously