

# Of Education

## THE ADVENTURE OF LEARNING

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A professor is not one who knows, but one who professes to know, and [thus] is constantly in the position of inviting challenge.

He professes publicly where everyone is invited to come and challenge, [and] at any time he must be willing and able to defend it openly against all comers. The degree was originally a chivalric device—a gauntlet of defiance to all rivals—and not a safe rampart or dug-out for a scholar to hide behind in safe immunity from any challenge.

“Fact and Fancy in the Interpretation of Ancient Records,” 24

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In the study of ancient things . . . it is just the fantastic and incongruous which opens the door to discovery. Never forget that. In scholarship as in science, every paradox and anomaly is really a broad hint that new knowledge is awaiting us if we will only go after it.

“There Were Jaredites,” *CWHN* 5:365-66

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There are those who deplore the study of [Egyptology] as “esoteric” and “exotic.” By very definition the unknown is always exotic and the little-known is always esoteric; the terms are relative—to the departmental philosopher even Latin may be esoteric and Greek positively exotic. Now the office and calling of scholarship and science is to investigate the unknown, and people who engage in such work are not ashamed of admitting that it intrigues them. It is exciting and even romantic stuff; the motion is always away from the commonplace and familiar to the strange and wonderful. The established academician with his tried-and-tested platitudes and truisms is welcomed to his world of preaching and posturing, but the greatest appeal of the gospel in every age has been that it is frankly wonderful—one glorious surprise after another.

“New Look at the Pearl of Great Price” (May 1970): 86

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Things that appear unlikely, impossible, or paradoxical from one point of view often make perfectly good sense from another.

“Before Adam,” *CWHN* 1:65

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True knowledge never shuts the door on more knowledge, but zeal often does.

“Zeal Without Knowledge,” *CWHN* 9:71

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Is an open mind, then, a negative thing—an empty mind? It is, unless it is a searching mind.

“The Prophets and the Open Mind,” *CWHN* 3:128

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No matter where we begin, if we pursue knowledge diligently and honestly our quest will inevitably lead us from the things of earth to the things of heaven.

“Educating the Saints,” 243

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Must you learn everything? Yes, for if you leave anything out, how will you know that it is not the most important of all, “the stone which the builders rejected” (Matthew 21:42)? This journey may last for ages, and it holds forth the anticipation of wonders and delights that grow as ever-increasing knowledge heightens our capacity to comprehend what we are experiencing. This has nothing to do with the learning of the schools. The tradition of Western education is rhetorical, success oriented, and concerned wholly with appearances; it cost Socrates his life to show the Sophists just how superficial and dishonest their system was.

“But What Kind of Work?” *CWHN* 9:271

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Doctors and trainers often see perfectly developed bodies, but nobody can even begin to imagine what a perfect *mind* would be like; that is where the whole range of progress and growth must take place.

“But What Kind of Work?” *CWHN* 9:277

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All scholarship, like all science, is an ongoing, open-ended discussion in which all conclusions are tentative forever, the principal value and charm of the game being the discovery of the totally unexpected.

“Common Carrier”

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Only if you reach the boundary will the boundary recede before you. And if you don't, if you confine your efforts, the boundary will shrink to accommodate itself to your efforts. And you can only expand your capacities by working to the very limit.

“Brigham Young as Educator,” 1

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Knowledge can be heady stuff, but it easily leads to an excess of zeal!—to illusions of grandeur and a desire to impress others and achieve eminence. . . . Our search for knowledge should be ceaseless, which means that it is open-ended, never resting on laurels, degrees, or past achievements.

“Zeal Without Knowledge,” *CWHN* 9:70

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There are three factors involved: intelligence, revelation, *and* hard work; and if the spirit may help in earthly learning, the mind is required to operate in celestial matters.

“Educating the Saints,” 243

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Like other latent forces, intelligence is there and waiting to be released. Note the key words in this statement on the high estate of spirituality. It is peculiarly “powerful in expanding [1] the *mind*, enlightening [2] the *understanding*, and storing [3] the *intellect* with present [4] *knowledge*, of a man who is the literal seed of Abraham.” And if you do not happen to be that, “the pure [5] *spirit of intelligence*,” if one cultivates it, “will make him actually of the seed of Abraham.” It is “[6] the *spirit of revelation* . . . when you feel pure *intelligence* flowing into you, it will give you sudden strokes of [7] *ideas*” (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 149-51). It is the merit of the seed of Abraham, with all their stubbornness and backsliding, that above all people treasure the things of the mind. The first commandment given to the Church in modern times was “seek not for riches but for wisdom, and behold, the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto you” (D&C 6:7). It would be hard to imagine a program more repugnant to the present course the world is taking.

“But What Kind of Work?” *CWHN* 9:281-82

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Intellectual curiosity and esthetic feeling are nothing to be ashamed of.

“A Strange Thing in the Land,” *CWHN* 2:135

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At what point does one have “a right to an opinion”? I have never reached that point yet, and yet I go right on having opinions. I have been having them ever since I was a child and knew nothing at all; and I still go right on having them now that I am old and know nothing at all. The ideal thing would be to withhold opinions until all the returns are in, but as Karl Popper reminds us, that day will never come. So there is nothing for it but to go ahead and have our premature opinions, gratefully selecting in support of such the evidence we like best. . . . What is *not* permitted is to make one’s choice on the authority of someone *else*. If you are not concerned in the matter, don’t bother to take a position; but once you have decided to be concerned, you must make your *own* decision, *no matter how limited your knowledge*. All of us have eaten of the Tree of Knowledge, not just the Authorities, and each is

accountable for his own decisions: you cannot delegate your free agency even for a moment. You may go to the expert for information, and that is what he is good for, but not for a final opinion.

“Some Reasons for the Restored Gospel,” 3-4

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What makes a man an authority is not his confidence in giving an opinion, but his ability to supply us with proof that we can understand. And the better the authority, the clearer, the more understandable, the more conclusive the evidence he can give us.

“On the Pearl of Great Price,” 9

#### ABUSES OF SCHOLARSHIP

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The gas-law of learning: . . . any amount of information no matter how small will fill any intellectual void no matter how large.

“Historicity of the Bible,” *CWHN* 1:4

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The faculty [at Berkeley] had but one objective in life—to achieve eminence—and all labored under the pathetic illusion that mere association with a prestigious institution was the nearest thing to human satisfaction that this life could offer.

“An Intellectual Autobiography,” xxv-xxvi

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We are for the most part simply conscientious grinds who got good grades and stayed on at school, moving into departmental slots conveniently vacated by the death of older (and usually better) scholars; then traveling all over to exchange commonplaces and read papers with our peers abroad in the world. As to research, we paw over large deposits of neglected material until we find something that nobody has noticed for a long time. Then we write about it, and that is a contribution.

“An Intellectual Autobiography,” xxviii

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At UCLA I quickly learned the knack of getting grades, a craven surrender to custom, since grades had little to do with learning.

“An Intellectual Autobiography,” xxii

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I can see two totally different pictures of the BYU, each one a reality: From one direction I see high purpose, sobriety, good cheer, dedication and a measure of stability which in this unquiet world is by no means to be despised. Then by shifting my position but slightly I see a carnival of human vanity and folly to which only Gilbert & Sullivan could do justice, with solemn antics before high heaven that make the angels weep. Why take sides or contend? Both of the pictures are genuine!

“Some Reasons for the Restored Gospel,” 7

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Humanism is very ancient. It turns up regularly as an Ersatz for religion when religion goes sour. The settled tradition is that while humanism and science represent straight and honest thinking, religion is a primitive, pre-rational, emotional, wishful type of thinking, essentially superstitious, that humanism and science represent bold new thought while religion represents traditional, hide-bound uncritical thinking. What this view overlooks is the fact that the bold and original thinking of today inevitably becomes the hide-bound authoritarian tradition of tomorrow. So that the theory itself, the belief that we have a body of study that is fresh and forward looking and that we can easily spot it and give allegiance to it, is itself a hoary superstition.

“Humanism and the Gospel,” 1

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The disillusionment of the honest humanist is swift and certain, but only today are we discovering how badly we have misjudged the religious tradition. We have put the whole thing into a single package and thrown the package out of the window. What we have failed to see is that the religion which disgusted the intellectuals was a dishonest religion—vitiated by human weakness and priestcraft.

“Humanism and the Gospel,” 4

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In this vagueness and all-pervasiveness, the term *rhetoric* came very close to our own “business,” or better, “public relations.” No one could say exactly what it was, yet no one had the slightest doubt about its real nature or its absolutely predominant place in the world. The rhetorician was a general promoter, ingratiating himself with powerful individuals or groups to run off with a handsome cut of the profits from clever deals engineered by himself, handling other people’s affairs in the law courts, guiding political opinion, generally flattering and running errands for the great. The god Mercury, the winged messenger and factotum with the money-bags, Hermes the thief, with the ready tongue and winning manners, shows how established the type really is.

“Victoriosa Loquacitas,” *CWHN* 10:255-56

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[The rhetorician] tells them [the audience] funny stories and improving homilies, he boldly rebukes their defects and excesses, orders the huge throng like a child to behave itself, or commends it on its good order and fine

appearance. He delights the city with an outsider's praise of its size and shining beauty or pours withering scorn on its luxury and immorality. He flatters his hearers' intelligence with his confidential manner as the great news commentator who knows the inside stuff, discussing big world issues in clever, conceited, short-winded discourses. And they listen to him for centuries on end because he represents civilization and saves them from boredom.

"Victoriosa Loquacitas," *CWHN* 10:248

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Simplifying, shortening, and spicing—the trade secrets of the ancient rhetor's, as of the modern journalist's success—do have absolute limits, and when these are reached the rhetorical process has done its work. The end-product is something once thought to be typically Oriental—the shadow theater of comic books.

In the typical Oriental romance the labor of reading is supplanted by the efforts of the graphic storyteller, whose American counterpart is a pen-and ink artist capable, like his Eastern colleague, of mass-producing amazingly vivid illustrations at great speed. The skill of both these craftsmen is readily explained by the fact that they are simply drawing the same pictures over and over again. The story is told in brief, repetitive episodes, all strangely alike and all richly spiced with sex and gore. A wanton and meaningless procession of extravagant images passes before us, exaggerated to the point of insanity yet hackneyed to the limit of dullness. . . . Like the passions and appetites it feeds on, rhetoric is one of the great constants in human history. Because it is a constant, nothing can tell us better the direction in which a civilization is moving or how far it is along the way. Like the residue of certain radioactive substances, rhetoric, leaving an unmistakable mark on all that it touches, may yet prove to be the surest guide to the history of our own times.

"Victoriosa Loquacitas," *CWHN* 10:273-74

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By the fifth century the learning and arts of the West present a horrible spectacle. As rhetoric had broken the back of philosophy by systematic sabotage and absorption, so one by one it had occupied every field in which money and fame could be earned.

"Victoriosa Loquacitas," *CWHN* 10:267

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In the business of scholarship, evidence is far more flexible than opinion. The prevailing view of the past is controlled not by evidence but by opinion.

"Historicity of the Bible," *CWHN* 1:4

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Toward the end of the seventeenth century, scholarship lost its former imagination and drive, thanks to the competitive skepticism of experts determined to demonstrate their solid conservatism to each other.

“A Strange Thing in the Land,” CWHN 2:101

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Psychology, being the science of behavior, is the equivalent to religion being the study of bells and steeples, or patriotism being the study of firecrackers. Only the external aspects of the thing can be studied. Therefore, for the sake of convenience, we assume that only the external aspects exist, and of course this leads to trouble.

“Science Fiction and the Gospel,” CWHN 12:511

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Many years ago this writer learned that if he could not make a thing clear to a five-year-old child it was because he did not really understand it himself. Professional jargon and phraseological mazes are the scholar’s refuge from the importunities and the too-searching questions of the layman, but they do have their purposes—they warn the idle onlooker to keep a respectful distance while the research is still going on, and they are a constant reminder to the professional himself that he has not yet got the answers that will make it possible to state the case in clear and simple terms.

“Getting Ready to Begin,” 252-53

A PLEA FOR HUMILITY

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Being self-taught is no disgrace; but being self-certified is another matter.

“It Takes All Kinds,” 5

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Does life on the moon resemble life on Mars? It is a good question, but premature. When I was a little boy we used to sit in a tent on hot summer afternoons and debate loudly and foolishly on just such lofty themes as this one. I think we all felt vaguely uncomfortable about the whole thing, and that made us all the more excitable, dogmatic, and short-tempered.

The trouble was that we were not yet ready. We did not have the necessary knowledge. But when would we be ready? Are we ready yet? If not, we should stop playing this game of naughty boys behind the barn, smoking cornsilk and saying damn and hell to show how emancipated we are. It is much too easy to be a “swearing elder.” Knowledge is not so cheaply bought.

We are *not* free to discuss any imaginable question simply because we say we are. I am not *permitted* to discuss botany with anybody, at any time or place. It is not the jealousy of a reactionary society or the dictates of a narrow church that cramp my style—I just don’t happen to know anything about botany.

“Do Religion and History Conflict?” CWHN 12:448

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No man can learn enough in a lifetime to count for very much, and no one knows that better than the man who diligently seeks knowledge—that is the lesson of *Faust*. How then can any *honest* man believe that his modicum of knowledge can supersede revelation and supplant the authority of the priesthood?

“The Way of the ‘Intellectuals,’” CWHN 6:376

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The very helplessness of the public which makes it necessary for them to consult the experts also makes it impossible for them to judge how expert they are.

“It Takes All Kinds,” 1

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As knowledge increases, the verdict of yesterday must be reversed today, and in the long run the most positive authority is the least to be trusted.

“New Look at the Pearl of Great Price” (July 1968): 54

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The “evolutionistic bias” of modern scholarship has played havoc with ancient history, not only predetermining every reaction of the historian to his text, but also in most cases freeing him from any obligation toward the text at all. Many large college textbooks are brought forth by men who, it is painfully apparent, have never bothered to read through the documents on which their work is supposed to be based. Their confidence in a moth-eaten rule-of-thumb is simply sublime. Why should one waste precious eyesight examining moldy evidence when everybody knows already what the answer is going to be? . . .

The expert feels in his bones that what he says is what is right, unaware that his bones have been undergoing constant conditioning since the day of his birth. He is trained and intelligent. He means to be perfectly scientific and detached. He is constitutionally incapable of wanton error. How then can he be wrong?

Answer: simply by being human! Purity of motive is no guarantee of infallibility. The greatest of errors are by no means intentional and are often made by the ablest of scholars. . . . No scholar alive possesses enough knowledge to speak the final word on anything, and, as to integrity, let us rather call it vanity.

“The Way of the Church,” CWHN 4:234-35

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I refuse to be held responsible for anything I wrote more than three years ago. For heaven’s sake, I hope we are moving forward here! After all, the implication [is] that one mistake and it is all over with. How flattering to think in

forty years I have not made one slip and I am still in business! I would say about four-fifths of everything I put down has changed. Of course!

“The Facsimiles of the Book of Abraham,” 49

## RESPONSIBLE SCHOLARSHIP

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Significance is a relative value, measured by the interest of a writing to a reader. There are three types of interest that make a study significant: human interest, scientific interest, and vested interest.

“Writing and Publication in Graduate School,” 5

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Scholarship is an open-ended discussion in which things are never settled. The important thing, therefore, is not to be right on a particular point but to be able to enter into the discussion. It is for this purpose that scholarly journals exist. Until one gets onto the playing-field, one is not in the game—he is merely a spectator, who may cheer for this or that player or shout advice from his classroom bleachers, but never knows what it really is like in the arena. . . .

Every study should be: (1) authentic, (2) original, and (3) significant. Without all three of these characteristics no study should be published. With all three any study is certain to find publication without difficulty.

“Writing and Publication in Graduate School,” 1-2

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Publication is especially important in a church university, for where the severe standards imposed by professional journals are not applied, scholars inevitably succumb to the occupational hazards of the religious teacher, easily lapsing into superficial pseudo-scholarship, irresponsible speculation, ill-informed controversy, and authoritarian pomposity.

“Writing and Publication in Graduate School,” 1

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Not to use all available evidence is to defeat the whole purpose of research, which is to add to the fund of existing knowledge. How can you add to it if you don't know what is already there and what is missing? No future progress is possible where past progress is ignored. What is the advantage of centuries of writing and research that others have put into my subject if I intend to consider only ten percent of it? By what right do I presume to ask others to give my work the respectful attention which I deny to theirs? We cannot honestly add a word to historical writing until we know what needs to be added.

“Writing and Publication in Graduate School,” 4

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It is better to be ignorant and interested than ignorant and not interested, and there's no alternative here.

“Apocryphal Writings,” CWHN 12:266

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All scholarship, like all science, is an ongoing, open-ended discussion in which all conclusions are tentative forever, the principal value and charm of the game being the discovery of the totally unexpected. . . . Confronted with the reality of the Book of Mormon and the Pearl of Great Price, whose mere existence is a miracle (what other performance can compare as a sheer tour-de-force?) those who set themselves to put us right confine their performance to demonstrating that these marvelous works were not produced in the conventional manner of the schools (whoever said they were?) and therefore must be a fraud. With endless protestations of integrity and virtue they manage from year to year to avoid all contact with the teeming sources by which these books must be tested, to flaunt with tireless repetition their two or three shopworn but hasty and unexamined charges of indiscretion on the part of the Prophet, producing as evidence the opinions of a mysterious “Mormon Egyptologist” whose credentials they prefer not to discuss. It is the purest Watergate.

“Common Carrier”

### PRODDING THE UNIVERSITY

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The formula for preserving order emerges with striking clarity from an ample mass of documents covering a long period of time. Whoever would avoid serious student protest or dangerous demands has simply to follow the rules of the sophist schools:

1. Free the student from the necessity of any prolonged or strenuous effort.
2. Give him a reasonable assurance that the school is helping him toward a career.
3. Confine moral discipline to the amenities, paying special attention to dress and grooming. The student will have his own sex life anyway.
4. Keep him busy with fun and games—extracurricular is the thing.
5. Allay any subconscious feelings of guilt due to idleness and underachievement by emphasis on the greatness of the institution, which should be frequently dramatized by assemblies and ceremonies. An atmosphere of high purpose and exalted dedication is the best insurance against moments of honest misgiving.

Here, then, was the secret of order and stability in the ancient schools.

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BYU will not prevent you from learning. But it won't make you learn anything either.

“Nibliography,” 56

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The student who tells me that if I refuse to accept his inspired interpretations of the Facsimiles, or the Anthon transcript, or of Book of Mormon geography, or [of] Indian glyphs, I am holding in contempt the doctrine of continued revelation is cheating too, just as is the one who accuses me of denying the power of prayer when I give him the “D” he deserved instead of the “A” he prayed for. What these people forget is that revelation is nontransferable.

“Prolegomena to Any Study of the Book of Mormon,” 175

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As administrative problems have accumulated in a growing church, the authorities have tended to delegate the business of learning to others, and those others have been only too glad to settle for the outward show, the easy and flattering forms, trappings, and ceremonies of education. Worse still, they have chosen business-oriented, career-minded, degree-seeking programs in preference to the strenuous, critical, liberal, mind-stretching exercises that Brigham Young recommended. We have chosen the services of the hired image-maker in preference to unsparing self-criticism, and the first question the student is taught to ask today is John Dewey's golden question: “What is there in it for me?”

“Educating the Saints,” 251-52

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What is the main weakness of our students? Undoubtedly the desire for recognition rather than interest in what they are doing. They are decidedly degree-seeking rather than knowledge-seeking. Eager to be successful, they want to rush into production without any foundation.

The gospel is only for the honest in heart, we are told; to others it shows an infinitely exalted but also remotely distant goal for which they have not the diligence to work or the patience to wait, but whose allure they cannot resist. So they anticipate the goal, sometimes in forms and ceremonies (we take our academic ritual in deadly earnest), sometimes by cultivating an invincibly cocky self-confidence, and sometimes in mental and emotional crackups.

We want to be rewarded and recognized for our study, and that is not a proper motive for learning.

“Writing and Publication in Graduate School,” 7

## KEEPING PERSPECTIVE

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It is important to specialize. It is sound professional policy to deal with something that nobody else understands.

But there are natural limits to specialization. Inevitably one reaches the point at which the study of a single star cannot be pursued further until one has found out about a lot of other stars. The little picture starts expanding into a big picture, and we soon discover that without the big picture the little one cannot be understood at all.

In the study of the ancient world the big picture, long ignored by scholars, has been coming into its own in recent years. For generations students worked with meticulous care on their little specialized pictures in the confident hope that in the end each little piece would fit together with others to give a larger and clearer picture of the world and all that's in it.

The idea worked. The separate studies did show a tendency to fit together and fall into patterns. Instead of gratifying the scholars, however, this alarmed most of them, fearful of the dissolution of sacred departmental bounds. Within the limits of his specialty, the expert is lord and master. Small wonder if he treasures and defends those limits.

"New Look at the Pearl of Great Price" (May 1970): 84

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We are beginning to realize that the Cartesian ideal of breaking things down into discrete particles and measuring mathematical units will not give you the ultimate explanation.

"Bibliography," 56

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Blindness to larger contexts is a constitutional defect of human thinking imposed by the painful necessity of being able to concentrate on only one thing at a time. We forget as we virtuously concentrate on that one thing that hundreds of other things are going on at the same time and on every side of us, things that are just as important as the object of our study and that are all interconnected in ways that we cannot even guess. Sad to say, our picture of the world to the degree to which it has that neatness, precision, and finality so coveted by scholarship is a false one.

I once studied with a famous professor who declared that he deliberately avoided the study of any literature east of Greece lest the new vision destroy the architectonic perfection of his own celebrated construction of the Greek mind. His picture of that mind was immensely impressive but, I strongly suspect, completely misleading.

"New Look at the Pearl of Great Price" (May 1970): 85

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Knowing a lot is not enough. We have heard moving stories of wandering Arabs who have died of thirst in the night only a few feet from water. It makes no difference how far one has come or how near one may be to the water. He

who has not gone all the way cannot drink.

“New Look at the Pearl of Great Price” (May 1968): 55

#### THE SAINTS’ RESPONSIBILITY

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We are under obligation not to become the helpless victims of scholarly attacks on the Church or lose by default whatever advantages are presented in new discoveries. If a new find seems to support or refute a position or claim of the Church, it is sheer imbecility not to point out the connection and discuss its significance. As an open-ended discussion, historical scholarship cannot withhold comment until all issues are settled and agreed on, since things are never settled. The student does not gather information with the mechanical impartiality of a vacuum-cleaner but sees every bit of information as fitting into some pattern or other. Frankly taking a position as his frame of reference, the student unblushingly tries to prove or disprove things; don’t avoid taking a position, but don’t resent it if all the world takes an opposite position. Remember, in order to be original, your contribution should contain something which has never been accepted before, because it has never been known before.

“Writing and Publication in Graduate School,” 6

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It is very important for Latter-day Saints to keep pace, more or less, with the fast-moving developments in the fields of Bible and related studies. By failing to do this we run the risk of laboring to accommodate our religion to scientific and scholarly teachings that have long since been superseded, altered, or completely discarded.

“An Age of Discovery,” 1

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*Expansion* is the theme, and we cannot expand the boundaries unless we first reach those boundaries, which means exerting ourselves to the absolute limit. . . .

To keep the Saints always reaching for the highest and best, the utmost of their capacity, requires enormous motivation—and the gospel supplies it. Nothing can excite men to action like the contemplation of the eternities.

The quality in which the Saints have always excelled is *zeal*. Zeal is the engine that drives the whole vehicle. Without it we would get nowhere. But without clutch, throttle, brakes, and steering wheel, our mighty engine becomes an instrument of destruction, and the more powerful the motor, the more disastrous the inevitable crack-up if the proper knowledge is lacking. There is a natural tendency to let the mighty motor carry us along, to give it its head, to open it up and see what it can do.

“Zeal Without Knowledge,” CWHN 9:68-69

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The young, with their limited knowledge, are particularly susceptible to excessive zeal. Why do it the hard way, they ask . . . , when God has given us the answer book? The answer to that is, Because if you use the answer book for your Latin, or your math, or anything else, you will always have a false sense of power and never learn the real thing. . . . No short-cuts or easy lessons here!

“Zeal Without Knowledge,” *CWHN* 9:71-72

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In 1833 the School of the Prophets at Kirtland adopted a basic curriculum of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and for a time some of the brethren, following the example of the Prophet, seriously came to grips with those languages. The program was violently interrupted, but it was enough to serve notice that the Mormons intended to study the hard way and to take advantage of all the resources that are available for the study of the scriptures.

God had told Oliver Cowdery in no uncertain terms that revelation follows study and may never be claimed as a substitute for it (D&C 9:7-8). The bringing forth of the papyrus fragments in 1967 was a reminder to the Saints that they are still expected to do their homework and may claim no special revelation or convenient handout as long as they ignore the vast treasure-house of materials that God has placed within their each.

“New Look at the Pearl of Great Price” (May 1970): 91

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[Study] Greek at a time like this? This of all times, for Greek is the toughest and most enduring monument to the human spirit. After three thousand years of competition it still holds all the top prizes in such things as epic literature, tragedy, comedy, lyric poetry, history, philosophy, fairy stories, hymns, love-songs. . . .

When everything is passing away in an apocalyptic climax, it is comforting and strengthening to get close to something which—itself formed in the crucible of terrible crises and trials—has survived as fresh and vigorous as ever, setting before us the treasures of the other dispensations in the greatest spread of intellectual, artistic, and spiritual nourishment the human race possesses.

We do not study ancient languages in order to translate from them, but to read, ponder, savor, and if possible, sound the depths of those things which cannot be translated but only tentatively paraphrased. Nowhere are they more enticing and challenging than in that most subtle, vivacious, and sensitive of idioms: Greek. . . .

Those who think “practical matters” are more worthy of their time—who would reverse the first commandment given to the Church in this dispensation: “Seek not for riches, but for wisdom: (D&C 1:7)—should be notified that while by common consent the Greeks are indisputably “number one” in wisdom literature, they have also produced an unrivalled gallery of filthy rich tycoons in our own day, and have left us the standard guidebooks and commentaries on matters of politics, business, social problems, and law. If you want to get serious in almost any field of study you cannot escape the Greeks. Every student at some time or other should at least give them a try.

Foreword to *Learn Greek*

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A discussion with God is not a case of agreeing or disagreeing with him—who is in a position to do that?—but of understanding him. What Abraham and Ezra and Enoch asked was, “Why?”

Socrates showed that teaching is a dialogue—a discussion. As long as the learner is in the dark he *should* protest and argue, and question, for that is the best way to bring problems into focus, while the teacher patiently and cheerfully explains, delighted that his pupil has enough interest and understanding to raise questions—the more passionate the more promising. There is a place for discussion and participation in the government of the kingdom; it is *men* who love absolute monarchies.

“Beyond Politics,” 284

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I am mainly working with the inspired works, the scriptures. The woods are crawling with people who can do research on the early Church. I won't spend time on that. But what excites me is when Joseph starts to give us books of Abraham and Enoch and Adam and apocryphal writings and reconstruction of the New Testament and inspired translations of the Bible. Then you can go back to old sources and see if that is comparative, see if he has a leg to stand on. Once you start comparing, there is no end but it gives you such marvelous control over Joseph Smith and his critics. His timing was so perfect.

“Nibley Talks about Contemporary Issues,” 14