

Great Books or True Religion?: Defining the Mormon Scholar

By Eugene England

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MY BROTHERS AND Sisters, I greet you at the beginning of the last twenty-five of this second thousand years after Christ. I greet you who will be the generation of leaders—certainly the intellectual leaders—of the Church as it prepares a people for Christ's second coming.

You have been honored tonight because you have magnified a gift that the Lord has given you. I should remind us all who have been honored in various ways for our intellectual gift that it is just that—a gift—and it is only one of the many different gifts that the Lord enumerates in the 46th section of the Doctrine and Covenants (in addition to organizational ability, good judgment, spiritual receptiveness, etc.). He reminds us there that our intellectual gift—what he calls “the word of knowledge”—does not make us better than others, but only possessed thereby of a way and a special responsibility to be of service—that all may be taught to be wise and to have knowledge,” he says, “that all may be profited thereby.” But nevertheless you should be honored for accepting and using your gift, and I am pleased to be able to wear a Phi Kappa Phi pin with you tonight.

I address you tonight in terms of your special gift; I propose to explore what it might mean in these last days to be a Mormon Scholar, a Latter-day Saint intellectual. Perhaps some of you flinch at the label, “intellectual”; it isn't always a complimentary term in our society—or even in the Church. I use it in an essentially neutral way, as descriptive of your gift from the Lord that makes you delight in ideas, alive to the life that goes on in your mind as well as outside it, that makes you question set forms and conventional wisdom to see if they really are truth or only habit, whether they endure because right or merely because of fear or sloth; I use the term intellectual to refer to the gift from the Lord that makes you curious about why as well as how, anxious to serve Him by being creative as well as obedient. You, more than most people, have it in you to exemplify Sir Thomas More's phrase in *A Man for All Seasons*, when he says God made animals for innocence and plants for their simplicity, but humans he made “to serve him wittily, in the tangle of our minds.”

The Restoration has been characterized from the first by such people as you, by intellectuals, though our histories have so far tended to slight them as such. Take Joseph Smith, founder of the School of the Prophets, student of Hebrew in frontier Ohio in the midst of desperate struggles of the fledgling Church to survive. Read his King Follett funeral sermon, where he proposes the most intellectually exciting as well as spiritually satisfying vision of man's nature and destiny in human history. Then he says:

This is good doctrine. It tastes good. I can taste the principles of eternal life, and so can you. They are given to me by the revelations of Jesus Christ; and I know that when I tell you these words of eternal life as they are given to me, you taste them, and I know that you believe them. You say that honey is sweet, and so do I. I can also taste the spirit of eternal life. I know that it is good; and when I tell you of these things which were given me by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, you are bound to receive them as sweet, and rejoice more and more.

That is the perspective and language of an intellectual, one to whom ideas taste sweet. Or read Section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants, which Joseph Smith gave a special name, "The Olive Leaf." It is an incredible revelation of how God relates to the physical universe, how physical light relates to intelligence. Think of the kinds of questions Joseph must have asked to move the Lord to give it. Surely that man was an intellectual, as well as a charismatic leader, a fine husband and father, a city-planner, and a Prophet of God. Think of the Pratt brothers, Parley P. and Orson, one a marvelously creative theologian and writer, the other a first-rate mathematician and astronomer. Many of you, I hope, have seen the calendar published by the Sunstone Foundation, a group of your peers, young LDS intellectuals who are selling the calendars to raise money to publish a journal in which to explore and express their gifts; the cover picture is of Temple Square in 1875, with the temple walls just starting up, and in the corner of the Square is Orson's observatory, a witness of the amazing intellectual vitality of that pioneer community still struggling to survive in a desert frontier. Think of Eliza R. Snow, accomplished poet, fine thinker, energetic leader in the late nineteenth-century women's movement, or her niece, Louisa Green, first editor of *The Women's Exponent*, or Eliza's brother, Lorenzo Snow, an early graduate of the experimental Oberlin College and himself a poet and writer of skill as well as a courageous and inspiring president of the Church during the darkest hours under the polygamy persecutions. Think of Orson Spencer, appointed first president of the University of Deseret by Brigham Young, and Emmeline B. Wells, and Brigham Young himself (whose lesser known qualities as a thinker and writer are perhaps best revealed in his letters, such as those to his sons just recently published), or of B. H. Roberts or James Talmage—or of Juanita Brooks. (I recently heard Sister Brooks praised in a totally non-Mormon group as a supreme example of the historian's ideal because she was able, in her book on the Mountain Meadows Massacre, to attain a remarkable degree of objectivity despite a clear continued loyalty to her own people and faith.) These are our intellectual heroes—or ought to be. But let me remind you of something about all of them. Juanita Brooks served

the Church devotedly, as a Stake Relief Society President among other things, for many years, and she then remained an unembittered and faithful Latter-day Saint wife and mother despite the almost total rejection of her and her husband by her own people because of that book on Mountain Meadows. Not only Joseph Smith gave his life for the Church; Parley Pratt bled to death after being stabbed by an assassin while serving a mission for the Church, dying, as he said in his last testimony, “a martyr to the faith.” Orson Spencer was a cultivated, sensitive intellectual, whose equally cultivated and sensitive wife died in a tent in Iowa when the Saints were driven from Nauvoo; after teaching for a time in the new University of Deseret, he humbly accepted a mission call from Brigham Young in 1856 and died of tuberculosis while serving in St. Louis. And B. H. Roberts, whose combination of commitment to historical truth with a clear sense of ultimate values and a conviction of the divinity of the Restoration shines through his *Comprehensive History of the Church* in a way that remains a standard for all LDS historians, this B. H. Roberts, man of conscience and integrity, after real struggle humbled himself to the authority of the Presidency of the Church when that authority came into conflict with his political convictions and ambitions. What is my point? These intellectual heroes I hold up to you tonight were also spiritual and moral heroes; these men and women pursued the truth with courage, and new ideas and creative expression with delight, but they finally put their faith in the Lord and loyalty to his Church over everything—over their pride, their comfort, health, lives—even their gift itself, when it came to that.

So I propose to you tonight the Mormon Scholar, the Latter-day Saint intellectual of the last generation before the year 2,000: a person whose standards and mission will of course best be formed and expressed by your generation itself—perhaps with some little help from what report I can give you tonight of the past and of the stir and struggle in myself and in my own generation. My call to your generation is that you help establish a new tradition of intellectual service to God and his Kingdom, a new style founded in part on the great tradition of the pioneer intellectuals and with the benefit of the example of the successes and an understanding of the failures of some in this past generation or two. I call you both to affirm your gift with courageous integrity and fullness of heart and to develop and manifest your loyalty to the gospel and the Restored Church in such a whole-souled and creative way that you can have that measure of acceptance you need—it will never be total, of course, given the critical edge of the intellectual enterprise—enough to allow you to serve the Lord as he intends with a minimum of apology, of being on guard. I call you to be loyal to true religion, not merely great books, especially when it comes to a choice, as sometimes it does. Of course, what I’m really doing is trying to chart a new course for myself, because I span these two periods—I have been part of the growing pains and mistakes of the recent past, of improperly resolved loyalties and defensiveness and uncertain role in the Kingdom, but I have also had some experiences, especially these past few years, including a reacquaintance with the pioneer intellectual tradition, that are changing me and make me want to be part of what I hope for your generation to define and exemplify—the new Latter-day Saint intellectual life.

Since I was in my teens I have loved the gospel with my mind—rejoicing in the great concepts of God and man, of our uncreated, eternal existence, our divine parentage, and our endless journey of increased knowledge and power and joy that lies ahead. But I have in recent years, while serving as a branch president in Minnesota, learned again to love the Church, as well as the gospel, and with both mind and heart: I have both a broadly based intellectual conviction and a deep spiritual witness that the Church structure, informed by Restored Gospel principles, is the means that the Lord has given us to bring us to Christ—to involve us in a saving struggle with the great moral and spiritual imperatives from God for attaining the possible Godhood within us. I am convinced that the Church is the *only* place we can really do that, partly because of the very challenges that human association in the Church context provides and which are sometimes so upsetting to us intellectually.

One of Martin Luther’s great statements is helpful here. He said, “Marriage is the school of love.” I believe that is true (in even more ways than Luther meant, of course, if we consider eternal marriage), but the statement is also true of the true Church: it is also the school of love—the place where, through being given assignments to serve, while being taught true principles by which to understand and act in the world, we are continually confronted with the personal and social challenges that can teach us how to love in that unique, unqualified way Christ showed us and taught us was the only way to salvation.

One reason I can quote Luther is that I have been teaching at a Lutheran college, and that has also helped change my perspective on the Mormon intellectual in the past five years. St. Olaf college encourages its teachers, just as Brigham Young did the teachers here, to deal openly and continually with the religious and moral implications of their subject matter. I didn’t need any particular encouragement for that, but I did find at St. Olaf, compared to Stanford or California State University, much greater freedom—from legal and professional as well as social pressure—to be forthright about my convictions. Incidentally, some of you may have felt or imagined that being at a Church school *decreases* your freedom and that of your teachers—and it may in some ways. But you have a much greater amount here of what is the most important academic freedom, in my opinion, the freedom to express and discuss openly your *positive* religious and moral views and convictions rather than merely your negative ones or your criticism. (That is a freedom you have in much greater abundance here than there is, for instance, at the University of Utah.)

In this process of exploring openly with my students the religious and moral dimensions of literature, the principal subject I teach, I have been forced to consider certain things much more directly than ever before—the intellectual perspective and moral vision of the authors, and the qualities of the societies they describe or from which their writing emerges. I have also been more forcefully confronted with the effect on my students’ thinking and life decisions of all those things I expose them to. And I have come to be increasingly uneasy with the perspectives of formalist literary criticism in which I was trained under some of the great masters of such criticism. Over the past few years I have become increasingly uneasy about the inadequacy of formalist criteria (I mean those concerned with aesthetic qualities—

structure, style, organization, etc.) to account for the experiences of my students—and myself—with certain literature, especially some which powerfully affected us despite its obvious lack of formal or aesthetic perfection.

Some of these rather vague concerns were brought into focus last fall by Robert Scholes, the fine critic from Brown University. He spoke at St. Olaf in a symposium honoring Ole Rolvaag (who wrote his great novel, *Giants in the Earth*, fifty years ago, while a member of our faculty) and traced, in the work of Midwestern writers Rolvaag, Willa Cather, Sinclair Lewis and William Gass, the building of one “great” tradition of literature on pioneer vision that he characterized, in both its social and religious dimensions, as “deeply and tragically wrong” because it was “too limited, too material, too rapacious.”

Scholes calls the basic flaw in that vision “prairie consciousness”: the Midwestern pioneers had the illusion, facing those ever-receding plains, of a world that was limitless and which they could never use up. Worse, they rested in the arrogant assumption that they had the right, nay, even the religious duty, to exploit it as quickly and fully as they could. We know the moral consequences of such a vision in our polluted, tacky, alienated modern world, which derives directly from a frontier past in which a natural balance was destroyed and materialistic concerns took precedence over solving problems of human relationships and much of the literature in that great Midwestern tradition derives its power from brilliant satirizing of the quality of life that resulted.

In a private conversation after his address, Professor Scholes and I discussed other pioneer visions—I mentioned the Mormon and he generalized to other mountain peoples. He pointed out that most of these groups had avoided the arrogance of “prairie consciousness.” Why? Partly because they were forced to humility by more stringent physical circumstances in desert and mountain country. But the Mormons, I reflected, were saved from arrogance mainly by a sense of religious consecration and the prophetic leadership that took them to the mountains, rather than to the gold of California, and kept them there, continually facing new struggles and challenges. We then talked about the lack of a “great” literature among such mountain peoples, including the Mormons, a lack, that is, in terms of general fame and by traditional formalist standards. And Scholes risked a rather astounding conjecture: it might have been because their social vision was *more* successful that the literature of such peoples has been *less* successful than, say, that of the Midwest—at least less successful by those orthodox literary criteria.

Suddenly some things clicked together for me and I began to consider some new directions for defining a Mormon aesthetic, a set of principles upon which to assess and encourage our own literary tradition. I thought how often I had heard similar explanations for the lack of a great Mormon literature, though they were offered condescendingly by Gentiles and apologetically by Mormons, including myself; *many* have said that Mormonism answers so well so many basic questions and provides such a satisfying way of life for most of its people that there is not sufficient tension or tragedy. What I have finally clearly realized is that there is no need to apologize: religious success is infinitely preferable to literary success.

Of course, we may not have to choose, and I’m certainly not advocating that we

intentionally neglect the formal and other values of great literature, just because we rejoice in our religion and the comparative greatness of the societies it has produced. But we must more clearly and intelligently face that fact that there are values, even in literature itself, other than purely literary or aesthetic ones; there are social and religious and moral values, and they are not always intrinsically bound up in the formal perfections. In fact, it is somewhat sobering to reflect that, at least in America, Robert Scholes' conjecture seems all too accurate: the "great" literature of the past has almost invariably grown out of the religious failure of a group (e.g., *The Scarlet Letter*) or the religious despair of an individual (e.g., *Moby Dick*), and, at least in the twentieth century, the so-called "great" literature has mainly been content to describe a morally barren or depraved contemporary landscape or has been based on a vision that has itself been shot through with moral or philosophical error. To the extent we have to choose between great books and true religion—and you will discover increasingly, I believe, that the choice must sometimes be made—we should rejoice that we can choose true religion, and without apology.

But let me be more optimistic and back off a bit from the offensive (and *perhaps* false) dilemma that I posed in the title of these remarks—"Great Books or True Religion?" Of course there is value in great literature—in great books of all kinds that you have studied and will, I trust, continue to study. My point tonight is that they are not the most important things in your lives—even in the exercise of your special intellectual gifts—and that you have near at hand some great literature, great books and ideas of all kinds in your own tradition, that you perhaps have neglected, and for which you may even need to develop some special insights and criteria in order to appreciate properly. And these are things you should be less defensive, less apologetic about, should more anxiously pursue in the future than my generation has.

Part of the reason for this defensiveness is that Mormons and Mormonism have had from the beginning a bad press, both at the popular and at the more sophisticated or academic levels. Our incredible history of physical persecution has carried over into various forms of misunderstanding and prejudice in the world of print and scholarship. It has been assumed, even by those like Wallace Stegner who have been able to praise some aspects of our achievement, that our beliefs are absurd and our perspective essentially anti-intellectual. This has been partly because of our superficial similarity to groups that developed on the American frontier that *were* rabidly anti-intellectual and partly because in some ways we *have* been anti-intellectual, or at least stressed other values more; but some of this rejection has been outright prejudice based on intentional ignorance and unscholarly assumptions by Gentile thinkers; and perhaps some of it is even a semi-conscious shying away from truth claims that, if they proved convincing, could not be dismissed as merely interesting ideas—as the ideas of most other churches and groups can. In contrast, the gospel assertions about history and about physical, moral and spiritual reality make absolute claims on the action and thinking of those who seriously entertain them. How else explain, for instance, the continued avoidance of serious consideration of the Book of Mormon by scholars of American history and literature? In its very existence, and the response of millions to it, it is a powerful and incontrovertible fact about

America, no matter what initial assumptions one makes about its origin. Or how explain the general avoidance in theological circles of Mormon ideas about the nature of God? Those ideas both precede and in important ways move far beyond the thinking of Alfred North Whitehead and the “process theologians,” which thinking has been hailed by many in America as perhaps the most exciting new development in twentieth-century theology.

Take Christopher Lasch, for instance, a fine historian, who, in a review of some literature on the Mormon experience in the *New York Review of Books* back in 1967, finds much to praise in our early ideals and achievements. He puts his finger squarely on what made the Mormon pioneer vision different from the Midwestern one that Scholes, you remember, characterized as materialistic, even rapacious: “In Utah, under Young’s leadership the Mormons created a self-sufficient, cooperative, egalitarian, and authoritarian economy devoted not to individual enrichment but to the collective well-being of the flock.” He cites our present Church Historian, Leonard Arrington, who in his landmark study of the Mormon economy, *Great Basin Kingdom*,

. . . shows how the Mormons accomplished, through a system of cooperative and compulsory labor, impressive feats of planning and development—irrigation, roads, canals, sugar beet factories, iron works—without generating the institutions or the inequalities elsewhere associated with industrial progress; indeed, without even developing a money economy.

Lasch concludes: “Cooperation and planning caused the desert to bloom, in marked contrast to the exploitive patterns of agriculture which on other frontiers exhausted natural resources and left the land a smoking waste.” But though Lasch recognizes that those practices of our ancestors were uniquely successful from a human and ecological point of view, like other Gentile intellectuals he fails to see the connection of those successes to our religious truth and consequent heroic devotion to correct principles; in fact, in obvious ignorance of its content, he characterizes our theology, surely the most comprehensively rational theology in existence, as inconsistent, even “grotesque.” And, like a number of recent commentators, including some of our own intellectuals who have left the Church and turned around to criticize, he sees no continuance in the twentieth century of those remarkable but for him inexplicable pioneer virtues; he claims that our accelerating growth rate is only possible because we have gradually sacrificed the Utopian, communitarian commitments, the very ideals which in the nineteenth century posed a challenge to the American way of life, that especially threatened exploitive, *laissez-faire* capitalism, posing such a challenge that the Church was hounded and driven and almost destroyed. Some of that charge is close enough to the truth to make me uncomfortable—the claim that we are no longer persecuted, are even courted by politicians and the popular press, because many of us are no longer a challenge but have become rather a *defense* of some of the most reactionary elements in American life: racism, individualistic economic conservatism, middle-class conspicuous suburbanism.

But nevertheless he is essentially wrong: That original inspiring vision that produced almost utopian success in our early societies was a direct result of a true

and in modern times unique religious vision, an egalitarian, communal ideal in which all of life—including the social order—is integrated and is motivated by religious faith rather than economic sanctions, etc. And that same ideal remains vital with us today, called to our minds and hearts each time we make our covenants of consecration in the temple, motivating much that we do as the Church expands in the third world, especially South America, where we are building—cooperatively—schools, churches, even whole colonies; it is lived out explicitly right here in capitalist America, even in East Bench Salt Lake City or Provo, by individuals who without coercion or even being asked give all beyond their basic needs to building up the Kingdom—in fact, it is maintained by all of us in the Church who see life whole, not divided between sacred and secular, as almost all other twentieth-century religion has done.

Our own literature has intuited this well. Take Maureen Whipple’s *The Giant Joshua*, which is, despite its flaws and the way its vision and artistic force weaken toward the end, probably our best piece of Mormon fiction to date. In writing about the colonization of St. George, Whipple examines the most crucial elements of our pioneer experience—the building of communities under prophetic direction, against private inclination, with the aid and challenge of the United Order and of polygamy. And she shows undergirding the search for effective group religious life and individual redemption. This passage gets at the heart of the struggle and achievement:

. . . [After one year of the United Order, Apostle Snow] surveyed his community and was not ashamed to uphold its accomplishments even to Brigham, whose face these days seemed more than ever like parchment, whose eyes could not hide their longing for proof that this work of his lifetime would stand.

“Enoch hats [i.e., hats produced in the United Order], a half-finished Temple, brush grubbed from the sidewalks and the square,” inventoried Erastus, “and above all, something you can’t see but is worth much more to a man—a sense of responsibility toward his neighbor, an armor against selfishness and greed. . . .”

But let me make my point more clear by discussing briefly a piece of Mormon literature that it is quite certain none of you has read; I do this in part because there has been some reaction among Church members against *The Giant Joshua*, because of its frankness about such things as polygamy and Mountain Meadows that may color your reaction to it. This other example is a good one also because it, even more clearly than that novel, helps make another point that must be considered in our Mormon aesthetic—that a literature such as ours, which I have suggested may be inferior in *form* to that conventionally recognized as great but which is superior in *content* and *vision*, shows to best advantage in certain genres, those characterized by personal witness to faith and experience, ones in which the truth of actual living and of direct confession is at least as important as aesthetic or metaphorical truth—I mean journals and diaries, letters, sermons, lyric poetry (especially hymns), autobiography and autobiographical fiction, and the personal essay. We should look more closely at our rich heritage in these genres.

The diary of Joseph Millett, which I came across last year in the Church Historical Department, is to me a prime example, a major exhibit in the reevaluation I am suggesting. Joseph Millett's father was converted by Brigham Young and called to take charge of the masonry work on the Kirtland Temple, where he invented an extraordinarily hard exterior plaster that glittered with the pieces of china dishes that the women sacrificed to be broken up in it. (That plaster, by the way, is a perfect symbol for our religion and literature because it is rooted in real experience and expresses concisely and precisely the difference between Mormon colonists and, say, Rolvaag's Midwesterners; rather than accumulating and clinging to the material objects of civilization, the Saints gave their treasured china dishes and precious porcelain ware to be crushed up in the plaster used to adorn the walls of their Temple to God.) After the Saints were driven from Nauvoo, the Millett family stayed in Iowa helping others move on until they went to Salt Lake in 1850 and settled, under Brigham Young's direction, in Manti. In August of 1852 Brigham Young convened a special conference that was an unprecedented occasion on the American Frontier. Only three years into a colonization effort that had barely escaped disaster and which still existed on the bare edge of survival, he called together 2,000 of the Elders of Israel and reminded them of their *greater* task—to take the gospel to all nations. And he sent ninety-eight of them, including a number of general authorities, and also Joseph Millett, then eighteen years old, on missions to literally the four quarters of the earth, including Europe, Africa, the West Indies, China, Siam, India—young Joseph to Nova Scotia. Elder Millett's diary tells of his father's blessing, the setting apart by Apostle Jedediah Grant, and then his journey, essentially alone and literally penniless—without purse or scrip—across a continent that was still mainly a wilderness frontier, to his field of labor. But now listen to his own voice, certainly unsophisticated and lacking the formal graces but with some of that intuitive sense of significant detail and forthright revelation of self that are certainly at least as important to good literature as those other qualities—and more important to true religion:

Apr. 13, 1853. I went to Cranberry Head, near to Yarmouth. Here I found Brother John Robinson and Brother Benjamin T. Mitchell at Mr. Moses Shaw's. The Brethren (Robinson and Mitchell) said that they were going to travel together. The Brethren both said I was too young and inexperienced to travel with either of them. They said I had better go to Halifax and see Brother A. D. L. Buckland and get counsel from him

Apr. 14. I went in to Yarmouth. Came back to Mr. Grace's. He treated me kindly. I stayed until Saturday. Started for Halifax. Left Cape Sable to my right hand. Traveled two hundred ten miles around the coast capes and bays to get to Halifax. I had to rely upon Him whose business I was on. I felt my weakness. A poor ill-clothed ignorant boy in my teens, thousands of miles from home, amongst strangers. The promise in my Blessings, the encouraging words of President Young to me, with the faith I had in the Gospel, kept me up. Many a time I would turn in to the woods and brush in some desolate place,

with a full heart, wet eyes and face, to call on my Master for strength and aid. I believed the Gospel of Christ. I never had preached it. I knew not where to find it in the scriptures. I had to give my Bible to the boatman [at the channel] for passage across.

From that low point of loneliness and rejection and lack of confidence in his ability, the journal records a growing self-confidence as Elder Millett obtains books and tracts at the branch in Halifax and studies the gospel, decides, because a prophet has called him to Nova Scotia, not to return to the states with the other missionaries (who had become discouraged at their lack of success), crosses over to nearby Cape Breton Island and, after being joined by a locally called missionary, begins to teach and baptize. He organizes a branch, and starts to have extraordinary experiences such as the following (notice the simple but effective narrative skill and sense of drama, combined with sincere, almost humorously direct reliance on the Lord):

June 30, 1853. At the brothers Bagnal's they were starting out to fish. I said, "Success to you; you must catch a whale," just in a foolish, joking way, and thought no more about it until I went down to Brother John McGilvery's. After a while one of the girls came down and said that Brother Millett had promised that Uncle Joseph's folks would get a whale and the Gentiles said that now you see he is a false prophet, for any fool would know that they can't get a whale. I overheard the girls talking about the whale. It then came to my mind what I had said. I then ran to the woods and thought how foolish I was to say such a thing. I prayed the Lord to forgive [me], that I desired to do right. I felt the position we were in. I couldn't keep back the tears. I called on the Lord to help me in his cause.

About one o'clock P. M. the people noticed six boats coming in the Bay towing something. Some said it was the hull of a schooner; others said no, that it was the whale that the Mormon promised about.

The brothers Bagnal's was the first boat going out of the Bay. They heard the report of a cannon and saw the flag and topmast of the packet steamer circling around, [which] fired their third gun as soon as they saw that the fishermen were coming; the steamer went on and Brother Bagnal was the first to the prize.

And it was a lucky day for alt of them that assisted in getting the prize in. The whale I believe was above seventy feet long, the biggest fish I ever saw. ... I never have ceased to thank the Lord for his goodness.

And notice the well-controlled humor and the sense of effective diction in this passage:

July 27, 1853. Elder Adamson and myself went to Mr. Gibbon's a rich infidel. He said he was an astronomer and philosopher. Said that Mormonism was more reasonable than the rest of the religions and as for polygamy it was the only thing to regenerate the human family.

Or witness the self-effacing but clearly communicated sense of a life lived in great spiritual beauty in this:

July 31, 1853. Brother Allen Adamson says he must go to Halifax and perhaps on in to the States. Wants to make fitout for the Valley. Anxious to gather with the Saints. He was from Dundee, Scotland. So I will be left alone with almost every door closed against me. Elder Adamson has been with me pretty near 2 months. . . . Some was ready to be baptised at Gabarouse when Brother Adamson came to me but I had never baptised. So when he came we were ready to commence. After I saw him baptize, I could then baptize. Oh, must I part with a good companion in him.

August 1. Elder Allen Adamson left me for Gabarouse after I blessed him and he blessed me. I went about 3 miles with him. Then we parted not to meet again in this land. In the last two weeks I have held two meetings in private houses. I have to depend on the Lord, not on Brother Adamson. I have felt rather shy about asking favors of people; had rather go into the woods, pick blueberries, bless them and eat, and felt myself welcome. I find myself in rather straitened circumstances, although I have some friends.

Despite those few friends, opposition from the Protestant clergy was very severe: Elder Millett's handbills were torn down, schools and halls were closed to him; finally a Reverend McLeod comes directly to a home where he is staying and confronts him; notice the sense of well-paced dialogue and of dramatic timing, which conveys both humor and the steady seriousness of conviction:

"Are you that imposter that has come to lead the people astray?" "No sir, I am a servant of the living God and I am preaching His Gospel." Says he, "Brother McArthy, what does the scriptures say? 'Though we or an angel from Heaven preach any other gospel than we have preached, let him be accursed.'" Says Brother McArthy, "This young man has preached the same gospel that Paul did. But you are preaching another gospel."

The dinner was just ready. . . . As he went to sit down he said, "There is a sick woman in the other room and you people profess to do miracles. Heal that woman; then I will believe in your doctrine." Just then the door opened and the woman came out and said, "I am healed." He said, "Yes, the devil can do miracles."

Believe me, these are only a few samples of the quality of this record of the life of a Latter-day Saint.

Near the end of his journal, when he is looking back over his life as an old man, Joseph Millett shows what seems to me extraordinary ability to summarize a life in one anecdote, to capture the central moral vision and sense of self acquired by one who has lived a true religion, when he concludes with an experience from many years before in 1871. He and his wife had been called in 1856 to that same constantly struggling Dixie Mission that Maurine Whipple tells about, and then later to the

even more harsh life in the Mormon Settlement in Spring Valley, Nevada, where their oldest daughter died of typhoid and many suffered great sickness and hunger. This lifelong servant of the Lord, who learned on his mission, and never forgot, what it is like to be in need and how to give, leaves us with this final picture of himself:

. . . one of my children came in, said that Brother Newton Hall's folks were out of bread. Had none that day. I put. . . our flour in sack to send up to Brother Hall's. Just then Brother Hall came in, Says I, "Brother Hall, how are you out for flour." "Brother Millett, we have none." "Well, Brother Hall, there is some in that sack. I have divided and was going to send it to you. Your children told mine that you were out." Brother Hall began to cry. Said he had tried others. Could not get any. Went to the cedars and prayed to the Lord and the Lord told him to go to Joseph Millett. "Well, Brother Hall, you needn't bring this back if the Lord sent you for it. You don't owe me for it." You can't tell how good it made me feel to know that the Lord knew that there was such a person as Joseph Millett.

I have to call that great literature, though, as I've suggested, to do so offends to some degree my formalist training and convictions; so, I have to come up with some new criteria and a new ranking of the old, some means of judgment and appreciation that will recognize that the power of Joseph Millett's journal derives in large part from the true religion that he and his people knew and lived, that will factor in the moral and social truth of the author's vision and his effect on our own vision as we put ourselves in his hands as readers.

Now, don't misunderstand me; I am not suggesting didacticism as an adequate or even good criterion for literature; I'm not advocating a return to the pious moralizing that plagued Victorian literature. In fact, it could well be argued that the decline in quality of the content—the moral and philosophical vision—in most recent literature, especially poetry, is a direct result of intentional neglect of form. What we must remember is that, all other things being equal, the more skilled and effective the formal elements the better and more powerful the literature. But if the moral goodness or intellectual truth of the author's vision is flawed, the formal beauty and power will only make the writing more effective for evil—more able to take possession of the reader. Moreover, the truth and goodness of the author's vision must be weighed into our assessment and will sometimes compensate for formal inadequacy or even give rise to more intuitive formal achievements; especially will this latter happen in unsophisticated and confessional forms like letters and journals, where the writer is able to project the fundamental and ultimately exemplary quality of life lived day by day—as Joseph Millett does.

What, then, about you, whom I have characterized, at least potentially, as the new Latter-day Saint intellectual? How might you generalize what I have said about literature to other great books and ideas that you are and will be dealing with, in a variety of fields? You must develop your own vision of what, as an intellectual, your contribution to the Kingdom might be, of how you might love the Lord as he commanded—with all your mind, as well as your heart, might and strength. You

must develop your own style and your own standards, not with arrogant indifference to the standards and resources of the Western intellectual tradition which has helped form you, but with the courage to go creatively beyond that tradition in finding a way to be properly loyal to your special gifts and to the Church and the Restored Gospel.

Let me read you one remarkable manifesto for Mormon intellectuals, one with which some of you are familiar and which I think ought to inspire and give some direction to us all. This is B. H. Roberts, member of the First Council of Seventy, writing in 1906 in an interesting context: in creating a course of study for the Church's Seventies, he had proposed a new and more naturalistic understanding of the manner in which Joseph Smith may have used divine instruments—the Urim and Thummim, etc.—in translating the Book of Mormon. He received many letters challenging or agreeing with his theory and a lively exchange with his critics was printed in the *Improvement Era*. The following appears near the end of one of his responses:

I believe "Mormonism" affords opportunity ... for thoughtful disciples who will not be content with merely repeating some of its truths, but will develop its truths; and enlarge it by that development. Not half—not one-hundredth part—not a thousandth part of that which Joseph Smith revealed to the Church has yet been unfolded, either to the Church or to the world. The work of the expounder has scarcely begun. The Prophet planted by teaching the germ-truths of the great dispensation of the fullness of times. The watering and the weeding is going on, and God is giving the increase, and will give it more abundantly in the future as more intelligent discipleship shall obtain. The disciples of "Mormonism," growing discontented with the necessarily primitive methods which have hitherto prevailed in sustaining the doctrine, will yet take profounder and broader views of the great doctrines committed to the Church; and, departing from mere repetition, will cast them in new formulas; cooperating in the works of the Spirit, until they help to give to the truths received a more forceful expression, and carry it beyond the earlier and cruder stages of its development.

President Roberts, of course, is not suggesting that the intellectual's task is to create new doctrine, but rather to take revealed doctrine and give it new formulations that will relate to the changing world we live in, that will enable us, for instance, to more effectively criticize our flawed social, political, artistic and intellectual environment by using the great germ-truths of the gospel. We need to respond, affirming where we can, denying where we must, to such things as the women's liberation movement, which is significantly altering our perspectives and lives in this country, or to the twentieth-century sense of the challenge of evil, focused in the holocaust in which six million Jews were destroyed, an event which has destroyed much faith in our world because for many it calls into serious question the intentions and nature of a supposedly good and all-powerful God. We have the resources in the gospel to respond profoundly to these challenges, both for our own people and for others.

What am I saying? As a first principle for Mormon intellectuals, you should know and use your own great intellectual traditions and the resources of your own true religion, before you get too impressed with the great books and great ideas from other sources. Know and use them both, in constant dialogue.

As a second principle, I call you to a proper sense of self-consciousness as intellectuals and a loyalty to each other and to your own loose community within the Church, but only as part of, and ultimately second to, your commitment to full communion with the full Church. Consider a young Mormon intellectual, a college teacher in a small ward that badly needs leadership. He has been in the ward a number of years but has had no significant effect on it, because his career is apparently more important to him. He once agreed to serve as bishop, but insisted in advance on limiting his service to a certain period, served efficiently and well enough to show how much difference he really could make, and then returned to his scholarship and teaching and to semi-activity. He will likely succeed fairly well in his scholarship and teaching, but he has failed to serve the Lord with his gift—and he may truly have lost his soul, and his family's future, for that mess of honors and publications. Many of you will be called into similar situations where you might strengthen a branch or ward—by the natural opportunities all over the world that will come to you, in academic life, business, government, etc., because of your intellectual and other gifts, or perhaps by the whisperings of the Spirit in your heart, as I have felt, or even by direct call from the Lord's servants. May you meet the challenge—the opportunity provided by the Lord—better than this young intellectual.

My generation and the previous one have in many ways failed to meet the standard I am setting for you; I call you to join us in going beyond our failures and even our few successes. As one measure of our failure, I ask you to name those thinkers and writers who are now willing and able to appear in all four of our periodicals for expression of ideas, *Exponent II*, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, *BYU Studies*, and *The Ensign*. I ask you to reject the labels of this previous generation that have fragmented our intellectual community and to some extent the larger Church—I mean labels like “orthodox” and “unorthodox,” “liberal” and “conservative”; these are Gentile terms and have no place in a community of the Saints, if used to hold oneself apart and reject others from fellowship, love and forgiveness. And as one measure of a danger for failure that *you* may already be slipping into, evidence of your own degree of disloyalty to the Mormon intellectual tradition and community and your lack of awareness, I ask how many of you have read Juanita Brooks and Leonard Arrington as well as Bruce Catton and Samuel Eliot Morison; Parley Pratt's *Key to the Science of Theology* and Sterling McMurrin's *Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* as well as Karl Barth and C. S. Lewis and Nels Ferre; Joseph Smith's *Lectures on Faith* as well as Paul Tillich's *Dynamics of Faith*; Lowell Bennion as well as Martin Buber; *The Giant Joshua* as well as *Giants in the Earth or Main Street*; *A Believing People: The Literature of the Latter-day Saints*, edited by Professors Cracroft and Lambert of your English department, as well as the Norton anthologies of literature? Do you subscribe to *Dialogue*, *Exponent II* and *BYU Studies* as well as *Encounter*, the *New York Review of Books* or *Scientific American*? Will you read *Sunstone* as well as

Harper's or *Psychology Today*? The past generations have been a time of seed planting, of struggle and mistakes and losses. You can nurture and harvest what we have done if you will and can profit from our experience. You can be more Christian, better Saints than we have been, both helping and sustaining each other in the inevitable clashes you will have with uncomprehending or unsympathetic authority and with what you might consider ignorance or low-browism, in the Church as well as outside it. You can also act to reduce those clashes and their consequences by working loyally within the Church, both serving humbly in all its functions and moving wisely and courageously to increase understanding and acceptance of the role and contribution of the intellectual.

Since the intellectual endeavor is always easy to misunderstand and tends by its very nature—its emphasis on analysis, criticism, on ventures into the unknown—to threaten and alienate, *you* must find ways to show that, in the great phrase from the 121st section of the Doctrine and Covenants, “your faithfulness is stronger than the cords of death.” Your gift will make you inescapably aware of problems in the Church, and thus the *burden* of change will be on you, because others, often those committing the errors, can’t see what is “wrong.” What you can do about such problems is not leave, desert, turn the Church over to those who in your point of view are perverting it, nor to remain within only to withdraw spiritually through self-righteousness. You must reach out in love, trying to help—and also trying to learn through your cooperation and common service, from the perspective and commitments of others with different gifts than your intellectual gift, including learning to see your own faults, such as lack of courage, perhaps, or lack of whole-souled commitment, failings which may be, in the long run, more destructive than the ones you naturally see in others.

Be true to your special gift. Read the great books and learn to be critical of them. Learn to do without the agreement or approval of everyone in the world or even in the Church. Another great line from *A Man for All Seasons* is More’s response to Richard Rich, an ambitious young intellectual who ultimately betrays More, and loses his soul by selling out to that ambition. More, who intuits his problem and probable future, has told him to be satisfied with being a teacher; he can be a fine one. Rich asks who would *know* it if he were, and More replies, “You, your students, your friends, God. Not a bad public that.” Be satisfied with such a public. Be loyal to your peers; learn to help them and yourself find your place in the Kingdom. Be courageous and honest. God does not need your lies, even your shading of the truth, to build up His Kingdom. Our history, our theology, our present selves do not need to be censored or dressed up in false clothes or cosmetics. Remember your own inclination to sin, to arrogance, to lack of proper appreciation of the different but equally valuable gifts of those who aren’t intellectuals. Remember the scriptural warning about milk before meat and not leading the innocent astray; remember the Apostle Paul’s humble example of not eating the food offered to idols, not wanting to do anything that might offend his brother who might not understand, even though he knew it was something harmless for himself. And remember the simplest, clearest and most effective formula for balancing faith and reason, given by Elder Marion D. Hanks, an intellectual who knows from experience—search the scriptures, seek

the Lord in mighty prayer, and serve faithfully in whatever Church calling comes to you.

With what power I have, my power as your brother in Christ and the power of the priesthood we share, I bless you. May you succeed where too many of us have not and even go beyond where we have succeeded. May you be more self-confident, more accepting of the gift God has given you. At the same time may you be more loyal, both to your own intellectual tradition as Latter-day Saints and also to the true revealed principles and practices that have informed the lives of those who have built that tradition. And may you be, above all, committed to living such lives, loving and blessing your brothers and sisters with your gift, acting bravely to communicate its values to them and freely forgiving and asking forgiveness when your exercise of your gifts is misunderstood or mistaken. In these ways, and in others that He may help us discover, I ask the Lord to bless us all, in order that we might use his gift of intelligence as he would want us to. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

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