

writers will also enjoy Terrence Szink's "The Personal name 'Alma' at Elba." The explanation in this article of another link between the Book of Mormon and the peoples of the Near East is easy to understand and singularly persuasive. Ammon's missionary experiences have inspired generations of readers of the Book of Mormon. Robert Line's "The Middoni Principle" culls lessons from Alma 20 that will enhance teachers' and students' understanding of how obedience to God affects their lives.

Why does Nicodemus appear only in the Gospel of John? Which lessons does John intend to teach the world through Nicodemus? In Keith Wilson's "The Message of Nicodemus," readers will find the answers to these questions and find themselves rethinking their own relationship to Jesus.

The New Testament is also the setting for Andrew Skinner as he takes readers back to a time and place in which olives were fundamental to life. Readers of "Autumn, Olives, and the Atonement" will learn that the olive symbolizes life-changing principles that apply regardless of where a person lives.

Paul Peterson's article reminds us how the Lord accomplishes his purposes through his children. President Heber J. Grant "knew such people . . . and never [forgot] their sacrifices, their contributions, their dedication." President Grant reminds us how essential we all are in building the kingdom of God.

Richard Bushman has studied how the revelations to Joseph Smith were put together. He is "impressed with how effective the revelations are. . ." and curious about their rhetorical impact upon believing readers. Professor Bushman's treatment of this seldom explored topic in "The Little, Narrow Prison of Language: The Rhetoric of Revelation" will interest everyone studying The Doctrine and Covenants.

Laura Card has studied the lives of the early settlers in the mountain west by reading thousands of pages from their journals. The thoughts and impressions these first-hand accounts brought to her mind inspired three poems that provide readers a unique view of life on the frontier: "Homesteading," "Writing Lesson, 1874, Great Basin—No Paper," and "The Garden of Sarah DeArmon Pea Rich."

The Religious Educator has the same goal that all Latter-day Saints have for themselves, their families, and their neighbors: reinforcing a personal assurance through the Holy Ghost that God lives, Jesus Christ is his Son and our Savior, and that Joseph Smith and all the prophets who have followed him were commissioned by Christ to direct the kingdom of God on earth. It is the hope of the editorial board and the authors of this issue's articles that readers' testimonies and understanding of the gospel will grow as they read these pages.

Gospel Scholarship and Gospel Teaching

Larry E. Dahl

Every field of learning has accepted rules of scholarship for those who wish to be acknowledged and respected by their peers. The so-called pure sciences have carefully defined procedures known as the "scientific method," beginning with a hypothesis and proceeding through evidence, experimentation, conclusion, and verification. The social sciences have some variations of that method, but still employ rather strict standards of procedure for any who wish to be taken seriously in their field. Anyone trained in history, for example, is well schooled in the rules for evaluating evidence—primary versus

secondary; private versus public; documentary versus hearsay; nearness in time to the events; fitting everything into a broader context; personal involvement versus "objective" observation, etc. The humanities also have their own, somewhat unique, standards of acceptability. Here, rather than trying to duplicate and verify another's work, creativity and new twists are valued. The point to be made is that "scholarship" is not a monolithic enterprise. It is defined somewhat differently in various fields of learning, yet good work in any of the fields is accepted under the label "scholarship."

My thesis is that there is a legitimate field called "gospel scholarship," every bit as worthy of the label as are the other areas of study. Gospel scholarship assumes many of the same tools and standards as other disciplines and has the same expectation of rigor and integrity. It also has some unique features. For example, it does not "bracket" God, as do many other disciplines. God and revelation are not only acceptable in gospel scholarship; they are critical and central to it. And in gospel scholarship pertaining to the Restored Gospel of Jesus Christ through the Prophet Joseph Smith, there is a hierarchy in terms of relative value of evidence. Preeminent is the voice of God through his living Prophet, by way of official declarations from himself, or in concert with other members of the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles. Next is canonized scripture. Then come the inspired teachings of those we sustain as prophets, seers, and revelators, who have the special call to "build up the church, and regulate all the affairs of the same in all nations" (D&C 107:33). After that, there is available to anyone who is desirous of learning gospel truths an abundance of inspired gospel teaching, verbal and written, from local leaders, teachers, and writers, both men and women. Also available are teachings, both verbal and written, which are not inspired, some of it promulgated in ignorance, and some of it deliberately intended to mislead or deceive. It is important, therefore, that we seek diligently for and live worthy of the companionship of the Holy Ghost in order to discern truth from error. And it is also important to weigh carefully the teachings of anyone, measuring them against the standard of prophetic utterances and scripture.

I would like now to discuss briefly what I believe are some essential characteristics for those engaged in gospel scholarship. Before listing and discussing those characteristics, however, I want to say just a word about the relationship of scholarship and teaching. I believe scholarship and teaching are inextricably intertwined. Although there may be some unusual examples of acknowledged scholars who do not communicate their learning effectively in the classroom and popular teachers who may not fit easily into the category of "scholar," I am persuaded that the very best teachers are also good scholars, and that good scholars are, for the most part, good teachers. I maintain that many of the same principles, including all those discussed below, govern both endeavors. I invite each of us to reflect honestly and carefully upon this list of characteristics and ask, "How well am I doing in this regard?" "What do I need to do to become more effective in my gospel scholarship and teaching?" "Do I really want to improve?" "What are the first steps I need to take?" And "when will I begin?"

Now to the characteristics:

1. Zeal for truth. There must be an ache to know, a hunger for answers and resolution, even if the resolution must be tentative, a divine discontent over fuzzy answers or lack of information or simplistic solutions to grave and complex issues. Such a zeal will compel us to read and read, to attend and listen, to share and discuss with our colleagues, to welcome and give careful attention to another's views, critically (in the best sense of the

word) evaluate that which we read and hear, compute and assimilate and grow in knowledge. Real gospel scholars have an insatiable appetite for learning.

2. Critical thinking skills. There must be an awareness of the interplay of assumptions, evidence, logic, and conclusions. So often we concern ourselves with our differences in conclusions, wondering whether someone is unaware of the evidence, or if there is something lacking in their powers of reason and logic, when the real difference lies in the assumptions we bring to the question and the evidence. To illustrate, consider the question of whether documents which contain similar ideas and language have an interdependency. It is generally agreed in academia, by those who adopt the historical method, that if two or more documents contain the same ideas or wording, the documents have interdependency, or derive from a common source document. Confidence that such interdependency exists increases with every added similarity of ideas, diction, and style. The principle is reasonable, and seems to work well in the world of secular scholarship as one attempts to sort out the interdependency and source of written documents, the provenance of which is not clearly known. And the principle works as well in the world of gospel scholarship, if one is willing to accept revelation from God as the original source of several interdependent documents, or just as possible, the independent source of a number of documents which contain similar ideas, words, and style.

Conclusions about the interdependency of the Bible, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the JST, etc., are greatly affected by what assumptions are brought to the discussion table, though the evidence is the same for all.

3. Conservation of evidence and living with ambiguity. There must be a willingness, even a determination, to examine all the relevant information that bears on an event or issue. Sometimes data may appear to challenge cherished notions or accepted historical events, or put Church leaders in an unfavorable light, saying things and doing things that seriously violate our sense of right or propriety. Even such a significant challenge does not justify denying or ignoring the evidence. We may have to shelve it and visit it later as we bump into it again, or learn bits of new information that shed light upon it. Living with some ambiguity is a reality for anyone who reads and thinks very much. But that ambiguity does not need to be spiritually disconcerting or faith destroying. If we know by the whisperings of heaven that the gospel is true, that Joseph Smith was indeed the Choice Seer of whom the Book of Mormon speaks, and that the keys of the kingdom of God are held by living prophets, we can live at peace amidst ambiguity on certain matters. We can know that when all the facts are in, our concerns will be resolved. We can enter into what the scriptures call "God's rest." Listen to the testimony of President Joseph F. Smith:

The ancient prophets speak of "entering into God's rest"; what does it mean? To my mind, it means entering into the knowledge and love of God, having faith in his purpose and in his plan, to such an extent that we know we are right, and that we are not hunting for something else, we are not disturbed by every wind of doctrine, or by the cunning and craftiness of men who lie in wait to deceive. We know of the doctrine that it is of God, and we do not ask any questions of anybody about it; they are welcome to their opinions, to their ideas and to their vagaries.¹¹

President Smith continues with this same theme after quoting Moroni 7:3 about the peaceable followers of Christ obtaining sufficient hope to enter in the rest of the Lord, "from this time henceforth until ye shall rest with him in heaven."

This is a very significant passage. The rest here referred to is not physical rest, for there is no such thing as physical rest in the Church of Jesus Christ. Reference is made to the spiritual rest and peace which are born from a settled conviction of the truth in the minds of men. We may thus enter into the rest of the Lord today, by coming to an understanding of the truths of the gospel. No people is more entitled to this rest—this peace of the spirit—than are members of the Church. It is true that not all are unsettled. Not all need to seek this rest, for there are many who now possess it, whose minds have become satisfied, and who have set their eyes upon the mark of their high calling with an invincible determination in their hearts to be steadfast in the truth, and who are treading in humility and righteousness the path marked out for the Saints who are complacent followers of Jesus Christ. But there are many who, not having reached this point of determined conviction, are driven about by every wind of doctrine, thus being ill at ease, unsettled, restless. These are they who are discouraged over incidents that occur in the Church, and in the nation, and in the turmoils of men and associations. They harbor a feeling of suspicion, unrest, uncertainty. Their thoughts are disturbed, and they become excited with the least change, like one at sea who has lost his bearings.

Where would you have people go who are unsettled in the truth? The answer is plain. They will not find satisfaction in the doctrines of Men. Let them seek for it in the written word of God; let them pray to him in their secret chambers, where no human ear can hear, and in their closets petition for light; let them obey the doctrines of Jesus, and they will immediately begin to grow in the knowledge of the truth. This course will bring peace to their souls, joy to their hearts, and a settled conviction which no change can disturb. . . .

Happy is the man, indeed, who can receive this soul-satisfying testimony, and be at rest, and seek for no other road to peace than by the doctrines of Jesus Christ.ⁱⁱ²

I submit that our students, as well as those who read what we write, long to feel that peace and confidence radiating from us.

4. Honesty and candor. Closely linked to a willingness to look at all the available evidence is the willingness to deal with that evidence in honesty and candor. Is there information that doesn't seem to fit what you understand and believe? Say so! Acknowledge the complexities and seeming contradictions. Think about them. Discuss them with trusted colleagues. Study them out; pray about them. Even share appropriately some of your perplexities with students, but always in the context of faith—always communicating your own peaceful conviction that when all the facts are in, the perplexities will disappear. It is wrong to deny or twist or cleverly misuse evidence to make a point. How well I remember an experience as a young missionary in a discussion with a minister from the Church of Christ. He quoted Revelation 22:18-19 about adding

to or taking from the words of "this book" as scriptural evidence that the Book of Mormon could not be true. As young and as inexperienced as I was, I knew better than that. I looked at him incredulously and asked, "Are you serious?" He smiled a wry, mischievous grin, and answered, "It works with some people." I was stunned at his dishonesty and attempt to deceive. My respect for him vanished. Everything he said thereafter seemed hollow. Any chance of his influencing my mind disappeared. If we are viewed as not being authentic, we are "as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal" (1 Cor. 13:1), having little or no positive influence upon those we seek to help. Similarly, we can do a lot of damage if we are cynical or cavalier about matters of faith and testimony and the kingdom of God on earth.

5. Wisdom—common sense, sacred silence. In our attempts to be open and honest with what we know, there may be a temptation to tell more than is wise to share. Years ago, Frank Day, one of the administrators of Seminaries and Institutes, came one-half hour late to an Area Directors meeting. He came into the room shaking his head; he was obviously distraught about something. He looked at us and said woefully, "Brethren, how do you in-service wisdom?" He had been on the phone trying to assuage the feelings of an irate stake president who was fuming over some of the teachings of an institute teacher. Much of what the institute teacher had taught was indeed true doctrine and true history. But how unwise! He had done what Jacob was so loathe to do. He had wounded "tender and chaste and delicate" feelings. He had placed before his students informational "daggers" which pierced souls and wounded "delicate minds" (Jacob 2:7-9). As wonderful as truth is, it can be hurtful, and is to be carefully dispensed. The Lord commanded:

Remember that that which cometh from above is sacred, and must be spoken with care, and by the constraint of the Spirit; and in this there is no condemnation, and ye receive the Spirit through prayer; wherefore, without this there remaineth condemnation. (D&C 63:64.)

Martin Harris was shown and told much. He was also carefully instructed in what to say and what not to say, and why. The Lord said to him:

And I command you that you preach naught but repentance, and show not these things unto the world until it is wisdom in me.

For they cannot bear meat now, but milk they must receive; wherefore, they must not know these things, lest they perish. (D&C 19:21-22. See also D&C 5:23-27.)

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught "it is not always wise to relate all the truth,"ⁱⁱⁱ3 and said of himself, "I know much that I do not tell."^v4 He also explained, "I could explain a hundred fold more than I ever have of the glories of the kingdoms manifested to me in the vision, were I permitted, and were the people prepared to receive them."^v5 I commend to you an address by Elder Russell M. Nelson, entitled "Truth and More," delivered at B YU' s Annual University Conference, 27 August 1985.

All this is to say that there is need for wisdom in writing about and teaching the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I know of no foolproof guide, except the promptings of the Holy Ghost. And that requires humility and worthy living.

6. Accepting revelation as the preeminent source of truth. We are all familiar with Jacob's classic statement about the relationship of the counsel of God and being learned, but it deserves repeating:

O that cunning plan of the evil one! [Isn't it interesting that he would ascribe the source of this notion to the devil's influence?] O the vainness, and the frailties, and the foolishness of men! When they are learned they think they are wise, and they hearken not unto the counsel of God, for they set it aside, supposing they know of themselves, wherefore, their wisdom is foolishness and it profiteth them not. And they shall perish.

But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsel of God. (2 Nephi 9:28-29.)

I have always been intrigued by the assessment of Samuel the Lamanite prophet concerning the Nephites of his day. He tells us that they hardened their hearts against God, "and began to depend upon their own strength and upon their own wisdom . . . And they began to reason and to contend among themselves, saying: That it is not reasonable that such a being as a Christ shall come." Because of their "boastings in their own strength, they were left in their own strength." And what was the result? "Therefore they did not prosper, but were afflicted and smitten, and driven before the Lamanites, until they had lost possession of almost all their lands" (Helaman 4:13; 16:15-18). The possessions lost by the self-sufficient Nephites were of this earth, but there is a lesson here about how to lose an even more precious commodity—spiritual "ground."

Elder Boyd K. Packer spoke of what might be called the "gospel rule." He said:

There is almost a universal tendency for men and women who are specialists in an academic discipline to judge the Church against the principles of their profession. There is a great need in my mind for us, as students and teachers, to consciously and continually subjugate this tendency and relegate our professional training to a position secondary to the principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In other words, rather than judge the Church and its program against the principles of our profession, we would do well to set the Church and its accepted program as the rule, then judge our academic training against this rule. This posture is remarkably difficult to achieve and sometimes even more difficult to maintain.ⁱⁱ⁶ [p.10]

Could I for a few moments apply this concept to a subject that is tender among some. It has to do with the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. Just how are we to view the JST in relationship to the biblical texts? We begin with the words of a revelation to Sidney Rigdon through the Prophet Joseph Smith. These verses are found in D&C 35:20-21:

And a commandment I give unto thee—that thou shalt write for him; and the scriptures shall be given, even as they are in mine own bosom, to the salvation of mine own elect;

For they [the elect] will hear my voice, and shall see me, and shall not be asleep, and shall abide the day of my coming; for they shall be purified, even as I am pure.

Questions: 1) Does this mean that the most ancient texts available to us now have been seriously tampered with, and that the JST represents the way the texts were originally written? 2) Does the JST therefore invalidate the biblical texts? There does not seem to be a clear yes or no answer to those questions, because there are several factors to be considered. First, the Book of Mormon clearly states that someone "has taken away" from the Bible "many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants

of the Lord" with the deliberate attempt to "pervert the right ways of the Lord" (1 Nephi 13:26-27). It maybe reasonably argued that the phrase "taken away" means omitted, and/or perhaps "interpreted away." Therefore, currently available biblical texts may, in many instances, be viewed as more incomplete than inaccurate representations of what was originally written. Secondly, I do believe the JST at times, quite a few times in fact, does indeed restore original text. At other times, however, I am convinced the JST adds information beyond what the original writers recorded, true information about events and even conversations, that may or may not show up if and when the original manuscripts are found. I believe also that the JST contains clarifying prophetic commentary on the original texts. Accepting the message of D&C 35, therefore, does not require that we disregard or devalue biblical texts. On the other hand, I am disappointed when I hear people, sometimes our own people, dismissing the JST as if Joseph Smith played free and loose with biblical texts all on his own. If we believe that Joseph Smith truly received revelations from God, and that D&C 35 is one of those revelations, then what the JST contains represents what the Lord would have us know, or, as the Lord himself said, "the scriptures ... as they are in mine own bosom" (D&C 35:20). And that is true whether or not what is in the JST conforms to ancient, or even original biblical texts.

If indeed gospel scholars are to accept revelation as the pre-eminent source of truth, then clearly established revelation should take precedence over the learning of men, whether that learning relates to ancient manuscripts or to a multitude of other concerns. It has been my experience that real spiritual power attends the teaching and writing of those who use the revelations of the Restoration, including the JST, as a source and standard. Since we have talked of the JST, perhaps we could use it to summarize this section of our discussion. The KJV of Matthew's record at the end of the Sermon on the Mount reads as follows:

And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine.

For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

(Matthew 7:28-29.) [p.12]

The JST reads:

And it came to pass when Jesus had ended these sayings *with his disciples*, the people were astonished at his doctrine;

For he taught them as one having authority/*row God*, and not as *having authority from* the scribes. (JST, Matthew 7:36-37, italics added.)

Message: We appeal to revelation from God for authority and approbation, rather than appealing to the learning and methods of men. That same principle is clearly taught in D&C 50:13-24.

7. Personal worthiness. If we are to teach the gospel as directed by the Spirit, we must of course learn the gospel and have the companionship of the Spirit. We are to learn "by study and also by faith" (D&C 88:118). How do we learn by faith? President Harold B. Lee taught that "learning by faith requires the bending of the whole soul through worthy living to become attuned to the Holy Spirit of the Lord, the calling up from the depths of one's own mental searching, and the linking of our own efforts to receive the true witness of the Spirit."ⁱⁱⁱ7 It appears that to learn by faith is to learn by revelation from the Holy Spirit. And the Lord has made it clear that elders, priests and teachers of the Church are to teach "as they shall be directed by the Spirit." In fact, they are told "if ye receive not

the Spirit ye shall not teach" (D&C 42:12-14). I have often wondered if the "shall not teach" means you will not have permission to teach, or if it means you simply will not be able to teach, even if you go through the motions. Does the same instruction as given to the elders of the Church apply to us as gospel teachers? I believe it does. I also believe that the pattern against being deceived by false teachers given by the Lord in D&C 52:14-19 applies to us. The pattern is that even if one "prayeth, whose spirit is contrite," or "speaketh, whose spirit is contrite, whose language is meek and edifieth" that person is not of God unless he or she obeys "mine ordinances" and brings "forth fruits . . . according to the revelations and truths which" the Lord has given. Such a principle is in harmony with Alma's instruction to his little band of believers as they fled from King Noah: "And also trust no one to be your teacher nor your minister, except he be a man of God, walking in his ways and keeping his commandments" (Mosiah 23:14). We radiate and teach what we really are, not what we pretend to be.

We have considered seven characteristics that I believe are important in the lives of those engaged in the business of gospel scholarship and teaching. Undoubtedly each of us can think of other characteristics, just as important, or perhaps more important than some of these. My hope is that each of us will consider carefully what it means to be a gospel scholar and teacher, and ponder what we can do to be better at it.

I testify to the truthfulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ and to the importance of the work in which we are engaged. We do indeed have an "errand from the Lord" (Jacob 1:17) to be true to our personal and collective covenants, to learn and teach and write and bear witness—"to stand as witnesses of God at all times and in all things and in all places that ye may be in, even until death" (Mosiah 18:9). Making and keeping gospel covenants is an integral part of gospel scholarship and teaching. That we will be true to our sacred privileges and covenant obligations is my prayer.

Notes

1. *Gospel Doctrine* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1970), 58.
2. *Ibid.*, 126-28. [p.14]
3. *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1 vols.*, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1957), 6:608.
4. *Ibid.*, 6:244.
5. *Ibid.*, 5:402.
6. "A Dedication—to Faith," *1969 BYU Speeches of the Year* (Provo: Brigham Young University Publications, 1969), 6.
7. Conference Report, April 1971, 94.

A Teacher—The Gospel Guide

Matthew O. Richardson

An officer from the court of Candace, Queen of Ethiopia, came to Jerusalem to worship. Following his devotional service, he returned to his country by way of Gaza. As he was sitting in his chariot reading from the book of Isaiah, Philip was inspired to approach him. When Philip heard the officer reading from the scriptures, he inquired: "Understandest thou what thou readest?" The faithful and honest Ethiopian replied: "How can I, except some man should guide me?" (Acts 8:26-31). As his guide, Philip helped