

Blending Research and Revelation

NEAL A. MAXWELL

It is always a privilege for me to be at Brigham Young University, and it is a particular privilege to be with you today. You deserve thanks and deep appreciation for what you do to provide means and where-withal to this University. And so the well-worn words *thank you*, which are smoothed by the passage of time, are nevertheless appropriate. I include not only you but also donors of the past.

Also in my gratitude I include the distinguished faculty-scholars of BYU. It is their role that I wish to touch on today. We could have the aspirations and the appropriations and still not have the faculty. At BYU the combination of requisite faculty is here—thanks to you and your predecessors and to President Samuelson and his predecessors.

In a way LDS scholars at BYU and elsewhere are a little bit like the builders of the temple in Nauvoo, who worked with a trowel in one hand and a musket in the other. Today scholars building the temple of learning must also pause on occasion to defend the Kingdom. I personally think this is one of the reasons the Lord established and maintains this University. The dual role of builder and defender is unique and ongoing. I am grateful we have scholars today who can handle, as it were, both trowels and muskets.

Our scholars' work must be respectable, and it must be effective over the long haul. In the revelations it is clear that the Lord is concerned about "the rising generations" (D&C 69:8). So whatever is done today in the Church is done in goodly measure for those who will follow. The rising generation needs to be, in the words of Peter and Paul, "grounded," "rooted," "established," and "settled" (Colossians 1:23; Ephesians 3:17; and 2 Peter 1:12). BYU and its scholars have a role to play in this effort. Of course testimonies are a gift of the Spirit, but the youth of the Church are blessed by what happens here.

I've thought several times in recent years: Who would have ventured to say 30 years ago that BYU would become a focal point for work on the Dead Sea Scrolls? And who would have guessed 30 years ago that we would have a key role with regard to certain Islamic translations? Who would have foreseen the extensive work we do on ancient texts?

Neal A. Maxwell is a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This is an adaptation of his remarks at the Brigham Young University President's Leadership Council Meetings on 19 March 2004.

I do not think anybody would have guessed that all that is happening would happen so quickly and so demonstrably. The Lord's hand is in it. I do not presume to know in all its dimensions or implications, but it is not accidental.

I have been impressed with the response of Islamic diplomats with whom I have visited at receptions and other functions where the works of the Islamic Translation Series are presented. They are pleased and pleasantly puzzled with what has happened—but mostly pleased. It is interesting to see these of our 1.3 billion brothers and sisters, the seed of, Abraham, finding kinship and scholarship as they emanate from BYU.

In addition to these examples from the work of the Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts, there are other examples—such as, though not centered here, the forthcoming publication by Oxford Press on the Mountain Meadows Massacre.

New knowledge takes the conjoining of generous people like you and some remarkable scholars. LDS scholarship has come a long way in the last 30 years, and our scholars are now honored and esteemed by their colleagues in the world. We should pause and look back from whence we have come. It should fill us with a sense of gratitude to God.

At a time around 30 years ago when our enemies were after us over something, I or someone with me said in a moment of frustration—“No more slam dunks!” meaning that our enemies' easy, even sloppy criticisms had seen their day—it was time to move to a new level of spiritual and academic scholarship. Since then there has been a gathering of capacity and competency. Our scholarship *has* moved to a new level. Our enemies, likewise, are more clever, but our message is so unique and hopeful that it deserves to be articulated in the best possible and most responsible way. It is happening, and I remain a cheerleader for it.

I quote from Austin Farrer, who wrote:

For though argument does not create conviction, the lack of it destroys belief. What seems to be proved may not be embraced; but what no one shows the ability to defend is quickly abandoned. Rational argument does not create belief, but it maintains a climate in which belief may flourish. [“The Christian Apologist,” in *Light on C. S. Lewis*, ed. Jocelyn Gibb (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1965), 26]

At BYU we unashamedly blend research and revelation, and that is why this whole undertaking—apart from any particular project—is so special. The blending of revelation here, the Spirit, and scholarship has never been better!

Otherwise it is interesting to note that the smaller the revealed database, the greater our reliance is upon supposition, extrapolation, and speculation. But by combining scholarship with a revealed database, we can be in full friendship with logic and reason.

Logic does not solo very well. It performs many tasks, but logic can be morally weightless. It is a blend of revelation, reason, and research that serves the Kingdom well. Again and again, the men and women involved prove that the Spirit and scholarship can enhance each other.

I have great respect for the scientific method insofar as I understand it. It has guided President Cecil O. Samuelson in his medical work, as it has many of you in your specialties. But we can also go to Alma 32 and its formula for the spiritual verification method. Both the scientific method and the process of spiritual verification are open to us! Both are needed.

Combining scholarship and the Spirit sometimes pushes us outside the envelope. There are a lot of things that are understood only with the Spirit. The doctrine of resurrection, for instance, is outside what logic alone can verify. It was so for the early disciples. I read from Mark: “But they [the disciples] understood not that saying, and were afraid to ask him” (Mark 9:32).

And then again in John: “These things understood not his disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of him, and that they had done these things unto him” (John 12:16).

I love the line from Moses, when he was overwhelmed by God’s disclosures. Moses recorded that he learned things he “never had supposed”—things really outside the envelope (Moses 1:10)!

All of this places a great premium on meekness. In any case, I treasure these lines Professor John Sorenson gave me, written by Mary Karr:

*My friend the Franciscan
nun says we misread
that word meek in the Bible verse that blesses them.
To understand the meek
(she says) picture a great stallion at full gallop
in a meadow, who—
at his master’s voice—seizes up to a stunned
but instant halt.
So with the strain of holding that great power
in check, the muscles
along the arched neck keep eddying,
and only the velvet ears
prick forward, awaiting the next order.*

[“Who the Meek Are Not,” *Atlantic Monthly* 289, no. 5 (May 2002), 64]

Do you see a new picture of meekness being at “full gallop” but with “velvet ears”? That of course is a prescription for all of us in terms of life.

Even so, I close with this set of lines from C. S. Lewis:

*Meanwhile, little people like you and me, if our prayers are sometimes granted, beyond all hope and probability, had better not draw hasty conclusions to our own advantage. If we were stronger, we might be less tenderly treated. If we were braver, we might be sent, with far less help, to defend far more desperate posts in the great battle. [“The Efficacy of Prayer,” *The World’s Last Night and Other Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1960), 10–11]*

Meekness and the sense of proportion in these quotations speak to me of the spiritual and intellectual posture that scholars should have.

And again, to all of you: thank you. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.