

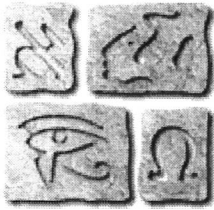


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Transcript

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The Marketplace of Ideas

Elder Henry B. Eyring

An address delivered at the annual FARMS banquet, 13 October 1994.

For fifteen years, FARMS has been creating and publishing ideas, primarily about the Book of Mormon. There are now hundreds of people, almost all volunteers, who are part of this independent and thriving enterprise. Not only have you prospered in the gifted people who have joined with you, but you are being recognized as a resource by others with interests as diverse as the Dead Sea Scrolls and the archaeology of Meso-America. Your organization's history is to me a series of miracles, not the least of which is that it does not include a bankruptcy. You must know the failure rate of new ventures which have tried even to approach your rate of growth. The double-meaning of "talents" in the scripture has been true for you: your faithfulness has allowed heaven to multiply both your personal abilities and your financial accounts. I hope you never cease to give thanks for a generous Providence. I join you in that.

In fact, your history seemed so remarkable to me that I was ready to declare it a miracle. But then I thought better of that, because of what you do. Your primary work is to study the Book of Mormon. The origin of that book fits the definition of a miracle: it surpasses human powers and must be ascribed to God. So, I realized that I was talking to people who have learned how to make wise assertions about miracles. I've pondered what you have written and tried to see what you have done well. Here is my report.

In the first place, you have clearly realized that the Book of Mormon's power to change lives stems from the method of proof it contains within it, in the tenth chapter of Moroni:

"And I seal up these records, after I have spoken a few words by way of exhortation unto you.

"Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall receive these things, and ponder it in your hearts.

"And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost.

"And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things.

"And whatsoever thing is good is just and true; wherefore, nothing that is good denieth the Christ, but acknowledgeth that he is.

"And ye may know that he is, by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore I would exhort you that ye deny not the power of God; for he worketh by power, according to the faith of the children of men, the same today and tomorrow, and forever" (Moroni 10:2-7).

You have seen not only that the book requires no other proof but that its power to change lives comes to those who read it and apply that method of testing. It would have less value if some method of proof were available which did not require personal, submissive communication with God, since the reader might then miss the experience of learning how the Holy Ghost leads to knowing the truth of all things.

You have recognized the value which physical evidence and its thoughtful use can add. What you have done and are doing so well follows closely the experience the Church has had with the accretion of physical evidence about the Word of Wisdom, contained in what is now the 89th section of the Doctrine and Covenants. It is described as a revelation given to Joseph Smith the Prophet. It is dated 27 February 1833. Here is part of it:

"Behold, verily, thus saith the Lord unto you: In consequence of evils and designs which do and will exist in the hearts of conspiring men in the last days, I have warned you, and forewarn you, by giving unto you this word of wisdom by revelation-

"That inasmuch as any man drinketh wine or strong drink among you, behold it is not good, neither meet in the sight of your Father, only in assembling yourselves together to offer up your sacraments before him.

"And, behold, this should be wine, yea, pure wine of the grape of the vine, of your own make.

"And, again, strong drinks are not for the belly, but for the washing of your bodies.

"And again, tobacco is not for the body, neither for the belly, and is not good for man, but is an herb for bruises and all sick cattle, to be used with judgment and skill.

"And again, hot drinks are not for the body or belly" (D&C 89:4-9).

In the absence of organized physical evidence, people of faith were left to follow living prophets in accepting those warnings as the will of the Lord. Even though reason might have led them to think it could be true, they tried the test in Moroni and learned that the assertion was from God and was true. As the physical evidence accumulated, more people had grounds to think it might be true and so to pray about it. Now the physical evidence is so compelling that laws limit smoking and many choose not to smoke because of the evidence alone. The accumulation of evidence has been a blessing to those whose health is now at less risk. They get the physical benefit. But those who from the physical evidence have felt a desire to ask God about it have received both the physical and a far greater blessing. They are far more likely to get this remarkable result:

"And all saints who remember to keep and do these sayings, walking in obedience to the commandments, shall receive health in their navel and marrow to their bones;

"And shall find wisdom and great treasures of knowledge, even hidden treasures" (D&C 89:1-19).

There are at least two quite different objectives in presenting physical evidence. One is to eliminate the need for faith. The other is to lead people to exercise it. It seems to me that you have chosen the better way. And in the process you have developed a method of using evidence to make it more likely that people might choose to experience God's way of revealing truth, a way which changes people and lifts them towards Him.

That seems to me to have helped you reach the audience for whom you can do the most good. You have realized that those who know the Book of Mormon's origin by revelation find comfort in your work, but that the audience for whom you can do the most good are those who have not yet succeeded in using the test enjoined by Moroni. That has shaped the way you work. And it seems to me that your way of working not only blesses those who wish to know of the truth of the Book of Mormon but can be of great worth to the wider community of scholars who pursue questions far afield from the Book of Mormon. Let me set the stage to explain why I think this is so by telling you of an incident.

A few months ago, a professor from a university in the eastern part of the United States called me. I did not know him, but he knew that I was the Church's commissioner of education. I gathered that he was a member. He called to object to what he saw as the repression of free inquiry by the Church. I have forgotten the incident which raised his ire, but I have not been able to forget his closing argument. It was this: He admitted that whomever he was defending might be wrong, but then said, "Surely, the best way

to handle these things is to leave it to the marketplace of ideas." He was amazed when I expressed my doubt that the marketplace of ideas was working very well lately. His amazement led me to think long and hard about what troubled me in the very phrase "marketplace of ideas" and what scholars might do to improve the way they test ideas together.

Sadly, the marketplace of ideas in much of academic life has become just that—a marketplace. As a result, a recent article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* summarized the argument of two natural scientists who felt compelled to defend science against those demanding that it become more "democratic," opening up its rules of proof to the force of opinion. The two writers complained that the critics misunderstood the whole basis of science, which is the assumption that there can be statements made whose truth is subject to test which is independent of prejudice or personal opinion. They correctly described the shift of what they called the academic "left" toward a process like a marketplace, where the opinions of many buyers set the value for a product offered (see "The Perils of Democratizing Science," 5 Oct. 1994, B1).

Now, I see your work having in it an assumption which could benefit the broader community of scholars, as well as those seeking to know if the Book of Mormon is what we claim it is. You proceed on the basis that there is important objective truth to be discovered, that Joseph Smith either received plates from an angel and translated them by the gift and power of God or he did not. You show confidence that the truth can be discovered. And you show confidence that the truth can be known by a process as certain as repeated controlled experiments and of greater value. That is an important reminder to the larger community of scholars: there is objective, verifiable truth, not subject to opinion. They may not perform the experiment of faith correctly and so may not come to know the truth that matters most, but they will be blessed by the influence of your confidence that there is truth for the finding and that it is of inestimable worth.

You have, it seems to me, had your writing touched by your confidence in the existence and value of truth. In that, you have at your best followed the example of Joseph Smith, as described by Arthur Henry King, in a talk published in his book, *The Abundance of the Heart*. In that book, Professor King recounted his experience in first reading of the First Vision as it appears in the Pearl of Great Price. Arthur Henry King reminds us that he was not a member of the Church at that time and that his education had taught him to be critical. He thus represents the very people to whom you may be most helpful. This is what he said:

"I wasn't inclined to be impressed. As a stylistician, I have spent my life being disinclined to be impressed. So when I read his story, I thought to myself, this is an extraordinary thing. This is an astonishingly matter-of-fact and cool account. This man is not trying to persuade me of anything. He doesn't feel the need to. He is stating what happened to him, and he is stating it, not enthusiastically, but in quite a matter-of-fact way. He is not trying to make me cry or feel ecstatic. That struck me, and that began to build my testimony, for I could see that this man was telling the truth" (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1986, pp. 200-201).

A clear declaration of the truth is powerful enough, because truth exists and there is a Spirit of truth to confirm it. Because you believe that, your writing shows a trust in the clear declarative statement, without jargon, that would bless scholars and their readers in every field.

And because you proceed from confidence in the power of truth, your work with the Book of Mormon also leads you to exemplify another quality of great potential value to the world of scholars. That is modesty. Because you know that the Book of Mormon does not require your proof, you have been far more cautious than you might have been in offering evidence in its support. You know that few things could harm truth more than to defend it with a bad argument. And that has led you to be careful both in the evidence you have presented and in the conclusions you have drawn from it. You have sublimated the desire for personal recognition, which so often leads people to claim too much too soon. Much time and wrangling could be saved in the world of scholars if they could avoid the controversy so often engendered by attempts to be first in the race for the rewards of possible recognition or even riches. You are blessed to sense the value in getting what you do right, which drives you to labor long, and the tragic price of getting it wrong, which gives you the patience to go back to check it again and again.

Because you know that the value of your work lies less in convincing and more in inviting people to seek truth by prayer, you have exemplified another virtue. You have tried to be models of kindness in your dialogue with others, especially with those with whom you disagree. You know that a spirit of contention will drive away the very influence by which they can know truth. That has led you to shun ridicule. It has led you to avoid the temptation of playing to the already converted, seeking their applause by trying to make your adversary appear the fool. It is easy to gain the laughter of an appreciative crowd who delight to see the truth defended with boldness and strength, but you have remembered that the heart you wish to touch may hear derision in that laughter and so turn away. Your civility and gentleness could bless all associations of scholars, whatever they may be studying together.

The Lord himself has described a company of students following such lofty and effective rules. Listen to his directions:

"And as all have not faith, seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith.

"Organize yourselves; prepare every needful thing; and establish a house, even a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God; . . .

"Appoint among yourselves a teacher, and let not all be spokesmen at once; but let one speak at a time and let all listen unto his sayings, that when all have spoken that all may be edified of all, and that every man may have an equal privilege.

"See that ye love one another; cease to be covetous; learn to impart one to another as the gospel requires.

"Cease to be idle; cease to be unclean; cease to find fault one with another; cease to sleep longer than is needful; retire to thy bed early, that ye may not be weary; arise early, that your bodies and your minds may be invigorated.

"And above all things, clothe yourselves with the bond of charity, as with a mantle, which is the bond of perfectness and peace.

"Pray always, that ye may not faint, until I come. Behold, and lo, I will come quickly, and receive you unto myself. Amen" (D&C 88:118- 19,122-26).

With confidence that there is truth which can edify, with humility which will protect your integrity, and with kindness toward each other and those you hope to invite rather than to vanquish, you will continue to prosper in receiving the help of heaven and you will be an example for good among scholars everywhere.

I testify to you that there is truth, that God our Father lives and loves us, that his Son is the Savior of the world, and that the Holy Ghost testifies to men and women of truth. Joseph Smith told the truth about the origin and purpose of the Book of Mormon. Howard W. Hunter is the Lord's prophet today. He holds the keys restored to Joseph by those who received them from the Savior. And because those things are true, you can continue in your work with confidence, with modesty, and with kindness.

Your work of highest value is to lead the children of God to discover the true origin of the Book of Mormon and thus let its message of Jesus Christ change their lives. Because of that, my hope would be that you will keep your focus on that scripture and on the aspects of it which are significant to the question: "Should I pray to know if this book is truly the word of God, written and abridged by prophets on plates delivered by an angel to a boy who could only have translated them by the power of God?"

Joseph Smith's account of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon is miraculous. The only place to go to verify a miracle is to God. I pray that your work and your example will lead many to go to Him in the earnest prayer of faith, in the name of his Beloved Son, Jesus Christ, amen.