

Zeal Without Knowledge

by Hugh Nibley



Hugh Nibley (1910-2005) was one of the most accomplished scholars of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Nibley joined the history department at BYU in 1946. For more than four decades, his writings covered an array of topics: ancient history, politics, classics, education, science, Egyptology, early Israel, Christian origins, The Book of Mormon, and temples. “Zeal without Knowledge” originally appeared in Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought (1978) and was reprinted in Classic Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless: Essays of Hugh Nibley (1978).

In one of his fascinating scientific survey books, this time dealing with the latest discoveries about the brain, Nigel Calder notes, “Two of the most self-evident characteristics of the conscious mind are that (1) the mind attends to one thing at a time, and (2) that at least once a day the conscious mind is switched off.”¹ Both of these operations are completely miraculous and completely mysterious. I would like to talk about the first of them. You can think of only one thing at a time!

If you put on a pair of glasses, one lens being green, the other being red, you will not see a frey fusion of the two when you look about you, but a flashing of red and green. One moment everything will be green, another moment everything will be red. Or you may think you are enjoying a combination of themes as you listen to a Bach fugue, with equal awareness of every voice at a time, but you are actually jumping between recognition first of one and then another. The ear, like the eye, is, in the words of N. S. Sutherland, “always flickering about. . . the brain adds together a great variety of impressions at high speed, and from these we select features from what we see and make a rapid succession of ‘models’ of the world in our minds.”² Out of what begins as what William James calls the “great blooming, buzzing confusion” of the infant’s world, we structure our own meaningful combination of impressions, and all our lives select out of the vast number of impressions certain ones which fit best into that structure. As Neisser says, “The model is what we see and nothing else.”³ We hold thousands of instantaneous impressions in suspension just long enough to make our choices and drop those we don’t want. As one expert puts it: “There seems to be a kind of filter inside the head which weakens unwanted signals without blocking them out. Out of the background of the mind constantly signals deliberate choices.”⁴ Why the mind chooses to focus on one object to the exclusion of all others remains a

mystery.⁵ But one thing is clear: the blocked-out signals are the unwanted ones, and the ones we favor are our “deliberate choices.”

This puts us in the position of the fairy-tale hero who is introduced into a cave of incredible treasures and permitted to choose from the heap whatever gem he wants—but only one. What a delightful situation! I can think of anything I want to—absolutely anything! With this provision, that when I choose to focus my attention on one object, all other objects drop into the background. I am only permitted to think of one thing at a time, that is one rule of the game.

An equally important rule is that I must keep thinking! Except for the daily shut-off period I cannot evade the test. “L’ame pense toujours,” says Malebranche: We are always thinking of something, selecting what will fit into the world we are making for ourselves. Schopenhauer was right: “Die Welt ist meine Vorstellung.” And here is an aside I can’t resist: What would it be like if I could view and focus on two or more things at once, if I could see at one and the same moment not only what is right before me, but equally well what is on my left side, my right side, what is above me and below me? I have the moral certainty that something is there and as my eyes flicker about, I think I can substantiate that impression. But as to taking a calm and deliberate look at more than one thing at a time, that is a gift denied us at present. I cannot imagine what such a view of the world would be like, but it would be more real and correct than the one we have now. I bring up this obvious point because it is by virtue of this one-dimensional view of things that we magisterially pass judgment on God. The smart atheist and pious schoolman alike can tell us all about God—what he can do and what he cannot, what he must be like and what he cannot be like—on the basis of their one-dimensional experience of reality. Today the astronomers are harping on the old favorite theme of the eighteenth-century encyclopedists who, upon discovering the universe to be considerably larger than they thought or had been taught, immediately announced that man was a very minor creature indeed, would have to renounce any special claim to divine favor, since there are much bigger worlds than ours for God to be concerned about, and in the end give up his intimate and private God altogether. This jaunty iconoclasm rested on the assumption that God is subject to the same mental limitations that we are; that if he is thinking of Peter, he cannot hardly be thinking of Paul at the same time, let alone marking the fall of the sparrow. But once we can see the possibilities that lie in being able to see more than one thing at a time (and in theory the experts tell us there is no reason why we should not), the universe takes on new dimensions and God takes over again. Let us remember that quite peculiar to the genius of Mormonism is the doctrine of a God who could preoccupy himself with countless numbers of things: “The heavens they are many, and they cannot be numbered unto man; but they are numbered unto me, for they are mine” (Moses 1:37).

Plainly, we are dealing with two orders of minds. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are . . . my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9).

But why this crippling limitation on our thoughts if we are God’s children? It is precisely this limitation which is the essence of our mortal existence. If every choice I make expresses a preference, if the world I build up is the world I really love and want, then with every choice I am judging myself, proclaiming all the day long to God, angels and my fellowmen where my real values lie, where my treasure is, the things to which I give supreme importance. Hence, in this life every moment provides a perfect and foolproof test of your real character, making this life a

time of testing and probation. And hence the agonizing cry of the prophet Mormon speaking to our generation. (“I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing” (Mormon 8:35). He calls upon us, “Be wise in the days of your probation . . . ask not, that ye may consume it on your lusts” (Mormon 9:28); i.e., that you may use up or consume your probation time just having a good time or doing what you feel like doing—nothing could be more terrible than that: “But woe unto him . . . that wasteth the days of his probation, for *awful* is his state!” (2 Nephi 9:27, italics added.) It is throwing our life away, to think of the wrong things, as we are told in the next verse that “the cunning plan of the evil one” is to get us to do just that; trying, in Brigham Young’s phrase, to “decoy our thoughts,” to get our minds on trivial thoughts, on the things of this world against which we have so often been warned.

Sin is waste. It is doing one thing when you should be doing other and better things for which you have the capacity. Hence, there are no innocent idle thoughts. That is why even the righteous must repent, constantly and progressively, since all fall short of their capacity and calling. “Probably 99 percent of human ability has been wholly wasted,” writes Arthur Clarke, “even today we operate . . . most of our time as automatic machines, and glimpse the profounder resources of our minds only once or twice in a lifetime.”⁶ “No nation can afford to divert its most able men into such essentially noncreative and occasionally parasitic occupations as law, advertising, and banking.”⁷ Those officials whom Moroni chides because they “sit upon [their] thrones in a state of thoughtless stupor” (Alma 60:7) were not deliberately or maliciously harming anyone—but they were committing grave sin. Why do people feel guilty about TV? What is wrong with it? Just this—that it shuts out all the wonderful things of which the mind is capable, leaving it drugged in a state of thoughtless stupor. For the same reason a mediocre school or teacher is a *bad* school or teacher. Last week it was announced in the papers that a large convention concerned with violence and disorder in our schools came to the unanimous conclusion—student and teachers alike—that the main cause of the mischief was *boredom*. Underperformance, the job that does not challenge you, can make you sick: work which puts repetition and routine in the place of real work begets a sense of guilt; merely doodling and noodling in committees can give you ulcers, skin rashes, and heart trouble. God is not pleased with us for merely sitting in meetings: “How vain and trifling have been our spirits, our conferences, our councils, our meetings, our private as well as public conversation,” wrote the Prophet Joseph from Liberty Jail, —“too low, too mean, too vulgar, too condescending for the dignified characters called and chosen of God.”⁸

This puts a serious face on things. If we try to evade the responsibility of directing our minds to the highest possible object, if we try to settle for a milder program at lower stakes and safer risks, we are immediately slapped and buffeted by a power that will not let us rest. Being here, we must play the probation game, and we pay an awful forfeit for every effort to evade it. We must think—but what about? The substance of thought is knowledge. “The human brain depends for its normal alertness, reliability and efficiency on a continuous flow of information about the world . . . the brain craves for information as the body craves for food.”⁹ Both individuals and societies can become insane without sufficient stimulus.¹⁰ If the mind is denied functioning to capacity, it will take terrible revenge. The penalty we pay for starving our minds is a phenomenon that is only too conspicuous at the BYU: Aristotle pointed out long ago that a shortage of knowledge is an intolerable state and so the mind will do anything to escape it; in

particular, it will invent knowledge if it has to. Experimenters have found that “lack of information quickly breeds insecurity in a situation where any information is regarded as better than none.”¹¹ In that atmosphere, false information flourishes and subjects in tests are “eager to listen to and believe any sort of preposterous nonsense.”¹² Why so? We repeat, because the very nature of man requires him to use his mind to capacity. “The mind or intelligence which man possesses,” says Joseph Smith, “is co-equal with God himself.” What greater crime than the minimizing of such capacity? The Prophet continues: “All the minds and spirits that God ever sent into the world are susceptible of enlargement. God himself, finding he was in the midst of the spirits and glory, because he was more intelligent, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself. The relationship we have with God places us in a situation to *advance in knowledge*.”¹³ *Expansion* is the theme, and we cannot expand the boundaries unless we first reach those boundaries, which means exerting ourselves to the absolute limit.

Now we come to a subject with which the Prophet Joseph was greatly concerned. To keep the Saints always reaching for the highest and best, the utmost of their capacity, requires enormous motivation—and the gospel supplies it. Nothing can excite men to action like the contemplation of the eternities. The quality in which the Saints have always excelled is zeal. Zeal is the engine that drives the whole vehicle, without it we would get nowhere. But without clutch, throttle, brakes, and steering wheel, our mighty engine becomes an instrument of destruction, and the more powerful the motor, the more disastrous the inevitable crackup if the proper knowledge is lacking. There is a natural tendency to let the mighty motor carry us along, to give it its head, open up and see what it can do. We see this in our society today. Scientists tell us that the advancement of a civilization depends on two things: (a) the amount of energy at its disposal, and (b) the amount of information at its disposal.¹⁴ Today we have unlimited energy—nuclear power, but we still lack the necessary information to control and utilize it. We have the zeal but not the knowledge, so to speak. And this the Prophet Joseph considered a very dangerous situation in the Church. Speaking to the new Relief Society, he “commended them for their *zeal*, but said that sometimes their zeal was not according to *knowledge*.”¹⁵ He advised restraint in an effort to keep things under control. The Society, he observed, “was growing too fast. It should grow up by degrees,” he said, and “. . . thus have a select society of the virtuous, and those who would walk circumspectly.”¹⁶ What good is the power, he asks, without real intelligence and solid knowledge? He gives the example of those Saints who were carried away at the thought and prospect of “a glorious manifestation from God.” And bids them ask, “a manifestation of what? Is there any intelligence communicated? . . . All the intelligence that can be obtained from them when they arise, is a shout of ‘glory,’ or ‘hallelujah,’ or some incoherent expression; but they have had the power.”¹⁷ Another time he warned the sisters against being “subject to overmuch zeal, which must ever prove *dangerous*, and cause them to be rigid in a religious capacity.”¹⁸ Zeal makes us loyal and unflinching, but God wants more than that. In the same breath, the Prophet said that the people “were depending on the Prophet, hence were darkened in their minds, in consequence of neglecting the duties devolving upon *themselves*.”¹⁹ They must do their own thinking and discipline their minds. If not, that will happen again which happened in Kirtland: “Many, having a zeal not according to knowledge,” said the Prophet, “. . . have, no doubt, in the heat of enthusiasm, taught and said many things which are derogatory to the genuine character and principles of the Church.”²⁰ Specifically, “soon after the Gospel was established in Kirtland . . .

many false spirits were introduced, many strange visions were seen, and wild, enthusiastic notions were entertained . . . many ridiculous things were entered into, calculated to bring disgrace upon the Church of God.”²¹ This was the time when some of the brethren in Kirtland were out to prove that they were smarter than the Prophet and produced the so-called *Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar* to match *his* production of the Book of Abraham.

This illustrates another point—that knowledge can be heady stuff. It easily leads to an excess of zeal—to illusions of grandeur and a desire to impress others and achieve eminence. The university is nothing more nor less than a place of show off: if it ceased to be that, it would cease to exist. Again, the Prophet Joseph is right on target when he tells us that true knowledge can never serve that end. Knowledge is individual, he observes, and if a person has it, “who would know it? . . . The greatest, the best and the most useful gifts would be known nothing about by an observer . . . There are only two gifts that could be made visible—the gift of tongues and the gift of prophecy.”²²

Our search for knowledge should be ceaseless, which means that it is open-ended, never resting on laurels, degrees, or past achievements. “If we get puffed up by thinking that we have much knowledge, we are apt to get a contentious spirit,” and what is the cure? “Correct knowledge is necessary to cast out that spirit.”²³ The cure for inadequate knowledge is “ever more light and knowledge.” But who is going to listen patiently to correct knowledge if he thinks he has the answers already? “There are a great many wise men and women too in our midst who are too wise to be taught; therefore they must die in their ignorance.”²⁴ “I have tried for a number of years to get the minds of the Saints prepared to receive the things of God; but we frequently see some of them . . . [that] will fly to pieces like glass as soon as anything comes that is contrary to their traditions: they cannot stand the fire at all . . .”²⁵ [If I] go into an investigation into anything, that is not contained in the Bible . . . I think there are so many over-wise men here, that they would cry ‘treason’ and put me to death.”²⁶ But, he asks, “why be so certain that you comprehend the things of God, when all things with you are so uncertain?”²⁷ True knowledge never shuts the door on more knowledge, but zeal often does. One thinks of the dictum: “We are not seeking for truth at the BYU; we have the truth!” So did Adam and Abraham have the truth, far greater and more truth than what we have, and yet the particular genius of each was that he was constantly “seeking for *greater* light and knowledge.”

The young, with their limited knowledge are particularly susceptible to excessive zeal. Why do it the hard way, they ask at the BYU, when God has given us the answer book? The answer to that is, because if you use the answer book for your Latin or your math, or anything else, you will always have a false sense of power and never learn the real thing. “The people expect to see some wonderful manifestation, some great display of power,” says Joseph Smith, “or some extraordinary miracle performed; and it is often the case that *young* members of this Church, for want of better information, carry along with them their old notions of things, and sometimes fall into egregious errors.”²⁸ “Be careful about sending boys to preach the Gospel to the world,” said Joseph Smith. Why? Certainly not because they lacked zeal, that’s the one thing they had. The Prophet explains: “Lest they become puffed up, and fall under condemnation . . . beware of pride . . . apply yourselves diligently to *study*, that your *minds* may be stored with all necessary *information*.”²⁹ That is doing it the hard way. Can’t the Spirit hurry things up? No—there is no place for the cram course or quickie, or above all the superficial survey course or quick trips to the Holy Land, where the gospel is concerned. “We consider that God has created

man with a mind capable of instruction, and a faculty which may be enlarged in proportion to the heed and diligence given to the light communicated from heaven to the intellect . . . but . . . no man ever arrived in a moment: he must have been instructed . . . by *proper degrees*.”³⁰ “The things of God are of deep import; and time, and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts . . . stretch as high as the utmost heavens.”³¹ No short-cuts or easy lessons here! Note well that the Prophet makes no distinction between things of the spirit and things of the intellect.

Many years ago, when it was pointed out that BYU graduates were the lowest in the nation in all categories of the Graduate Record Examination, the institution characteristically met the challenge by abolishing the examination. It was done on the grounds that the test did not sufficiently measure our unique “spirituality.” We talked extensively about “the education of the whole man,” and deplored that educational imbalance that comes when students’ heads are merely stuffed with facts—as if there was any danger of that here! But actually, serious imbalance is impossible if one plays the game honestly: true zeal feeds on knowledge, true knowledge cannot exist without zeal. Both are “spiritual” qualities. All knowledge is the gospel, but there must be a priority, “proper degrees,” as he says, in the timing and emphasis of our learning, lest like the doctors of the Jews, we “strain at a gnat and swallow a camel.” Furthermore, since one person does not receive revelation for another, if we would exchange or convey knowledge, we must be willing to have our knowledge *tested*. The gifted and zealous Mr. Olney was “disfellowshipped, because he would not have his writings *tested* by the word of God,” according to Joseph Smith.³²

Not infrequently, Latter-day Saints tell me that they have translated a text or interpreted an artifact, or been led to an archaeological discovery as a direct answer to prayer, and that for me to question or test the results is to question the reality of revelation; and often I am asked to approve a theory or “discovery” which I find unconvincing, because it has been the means of bringing people to the Church. Such practitioners are asking me to take their zeal as an adequate substitute for knowledge, but like Brother Olney, they refuse to have their knowledge tested. True, “it needs revelation to assist us, and give us knowledge of the things of God,”³³ but only the hard worker can expect such assistance: “It is not wisdom that we should have all knowledge at once presented before us; but that we should have little at a time; then we can comprehend it.”³⁴ We must know what we are doing, understand the problem, live with it, lay a proper foundation – how many a Latter-day Saint has told me that he can understand the scriptures by pure revelation and does not need to toil at Greek or Hebrew as the Prophet and the Brethren did in the School of the Prophets at Kirtland and Nauvoo? Even Oliver Cowdery fell into that trap and was rebuked for it. (Doctrine and Covenants 9.) “The principle of knowledge is the principle of salvation. This principle can be comprehended by the faithful and diligent,” says the Prophet Joseph.³⁵

New converts often get the idea that, having accepted the gospel, they have arrived at adequate knowledge. Others say that to have a testimony is to have everything – they have sought and found the kingdom of heaven; but their minds go right on working just the same, and if they don’t keep on getting new and testable knowledge, they will assuredly embrace those “wild, enthusiastic notions;” of the new converts in Kirtland. Note what a different procedure Joseph Smith prescribes: “[The] first Comforter or Holy Ghost has no other effect than pure intelligence [it is not a hot, emotional surge]. It is more powerful in expanding the mind, enlightening the understanding, and storing the intellect with present knowledge, of a man who is of the literal

seed of Abraham, than one who is a Gentile.”³⁶ “For as the Holy Ghost falls upon one of the literal seed of Abraham, it is calm and serene; and his whole soul and body are only exercised by the pure spirit of intelligence.”³⁷ “The Spirit of Revelation is in connection with these blessings. A person may profit by noticing the first intimation of the spirit of revelation; for instance, when you feel pure intelligence flowing into you, it may give you sudden strokes of ideas . . . thus, by learning the Spirit of God and understanding it, you may grow into the principle of revelation.”³⁸ This is remarkably like the new therapeutic discipline called “biofeedback.”

The emphasis is all on the continuous, conscientious, honest acquisition of knowledge. This admonition to sobriety and diligence goes along with the Prophet’s outspoken recommendation of the Jews and their peculiar esteem and diligence for things of the mind. “If there is anything calculated to interest the mind of the Saints, to awaken in them the finest sensibilities, and arouse them to enterprise and exertion, surely it is the great and precious promises to . . . Abraham and . . . Judah . . . and inasmuch as you feel interested for the covenant people of the Lord, the God of their fathers shall bless you . . . He will endow you with power, wisdom, might and intelligence, and every qualification necessary: while your minds will expand wider and wider, until you can . . . contemplate the mighty acts of Jehovah in all their variety and glory.”³⁹

In Israel today, they have great contests in which young people and old from all parts of the world display their knowledge of scripture and skill at music, science, or mathematics, etc., in grueling competitions. This sort of thing tends to breed a race of insufferably arrogant, conceited little show-offs—and magnificent performers. They tend to be like the Jews of old, who “sought for things that they could not understand,” ever “looking beyond the mark,” and hence falling on their faces: “they needs must fall.” (Jacob 4:14.) Yet Joseph Smith commends their intellectual efforts as a corrective to the Latter-day Saints, who lean too far in the other direction, giving their young people and old awards for zeal alone, zeal without knowledge—for sitting in endless meetings, for dedicated conformity, and unlimited capacity for suffering boredom. We think it more commendable to get up at 5:00 a.m. to write a bad book than to get up at nine o’clock to write a good one—that is pure zeal that tends to breed a race of insufferable, self-righteous prigs and barren minds. One has only to consider the present outpouring of “inspirational” books in the Church which bring little new in the way of Knowledge: truisms, and platitudes, kitsch, and clichés have become our everyday diet. The Prophet would never settle for that. “I advise you to go on to perfection and search deeper and deeper into the mysteries of Godliness . . . It has always been my province to dig up hidden mysteries, new things, for my hearers.”⁴⁰ It actually happens at the BYU, and that not rarely, that students come to a teacher, usually at the beginning of a term, with the sincere request that he refrain from teaching them anything new. They have no desire, they explain, to hear what they do not know already! I cannot imagine that happening at any other school, but maybe it does. Unless we go on to other new things, we are stifling our powers.

In our limited time here, what are we going to think about? That is the all important question. We’ve been assured that it is not too early to start thinking about things of the eternities. In fact, Latter-day Saints should be taking rapid strides toward setting up that eternal celestial order which the Church must embody to be acceptable to God. Also, we are repeatedly instructed regarding things we should *not* think about. I would pass this negative thing by lightly, but the scriptures are explicit, outspoken, and emphatic in this matter; and whenever anyone begins to talk about serious matters at the BYU, inevitably someone says, “I would like to spend my time thinking about such things and studying them, but I cannot afford the luxury. I have to think

about the really important business of life, which is making a living.” This is the withering effect of the intimidating challenge thrown out of all of us from childhood: “Do you have any money?” With its absolute declaration of policy and principle: “You can have anything in this world for money!” and its paralyzing corollary: “Without it, you can have *nothing!*” I do not have to tell you where that philosophy came from. Somebody is out to “decoy our minds,” to use Brigham Young’s expression, from the things we should be thinking about to those which we should not care about at all. The most oft-repeated command in the scriptures, repeated verbatim in the Synoptic Gospels, the Book of Mormon, and in the Doctrine and Covenants⁴¹ is “Take ye no thought for the morrow, for what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, or wherewithal ye shall be clothed. For consider the lilies of the field . . .” We cannot go here into the long catalog of scripture of commandments telling us to seek for knowledge in one direction but not in another. “Seek *not* for riches, but for wisdom”; “lay not up treasures on earth,” but in heaven, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. You *cannot* serve two masters, you must choose one and follow him alone: “Whatsoever is in the world is not of the Father but is of the world,” etc.

We take comfort in certain parables: for example, “Which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost . . .” (Luke 14:28-30), as if they justified our present course. But the Lord is not instructing people to take economic foresight in such matters—they already do that: “Which of you does not?” says the Lord. He points out that people are only too alert and provident where the things of *this* world are concerned and says, to their shame: “If you’re so zealous in such matters, why can’t you take your eternal future seriously?” And so he ends the parable with this admonition: “Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.” That is the same advice, you will observe, that he gave to the rich young man. The Lord really means what he says when he commands us not to think about these things; and because we have chosen to find this advice hopelessly impractical “for our times” (note that the rich young man found it just as impractical for his times!), the treasures of knowledge have been withheld from us. “God [has] often sealed up the heavens,” said Joseph Smith, “because of covetousness in the Church.”⁴² You must choose between one route or the other. If we go on “lusting after the groveling things of this life,” says Brigham Young, we remain “fixed with a very limited amount of knowledge, like a door upon its hinges, moving to and fro from year to year without any visible advancement or improvement . . . Man is made in the image of God, but what do we know of Him or of ourselves when we suffer ourselves to love and worship the God of this world—riches?” “I desire to see everybody on the track of improvement . . . but when you so love your property as though all your affections were placed on the changing, fading things of earth, it is impossible to increase in knowledge of the truth.”⁴³

What things should we think about then, and how? Here the Prophet is very helpful. In the first place, that question itself is what we should think about. We won’t get very far on our way until we have faced up to it. But as soon as we start seriously thinking about that, we find ourselves covered with confusion, overwhelmed by our feelings of guilt and inadequacy—in other words, repenting for our past delinquency. In this condition, we call upon the Lord for aid and he hears us. We begin to know what the Prophet Joseph meant about the constant searching, steadily storing our minds with knowledge and information—the more we get of it, the better we are able to judge the proper priorities as we feel our way forward, as we become increasingly alert to the promptings of the Spirit which become ever more clear and more frequent, following the

guidance of the Holy Ghost: and as we go forward, we learn to cope with the hostile world with which our way is sure to bring us into collision in time. That calls for sacrifice, but what of that? Eternal life is not cheaply bought.

This may sound very impractical to some, but how often do we have to be reminded of the illusory and immoral nature of the treasures we are seeking on earth? Even without the vast powers of destruction that are hanging over our heads at this moment, even in the most peaceful and secure of worlds, we would see them vanishing before our eyes. Such phenomena as ephemerization and replication, once dreams of the science-fiction writers, are rapidly becoming realities. Speaking of the ephemerization, of technological obsolescence, Arthur C. Clark wrote that within the foreseeable future all the most powerful and lucrative callings in our world will exist no more. Because of new process of synthesizing, organizing, programming basic materials of unlimited supply into the necessities of life, we shall soon see “the end of all factories and perhaps of all transportation of raw materials and all farming. The entire structure of industry and commerce . . . would cease to exist . . . all material possessions would be literally as cheap as dirt . . . Then when material objects are intrinsically worthless, perhaps only then will a real sense of values arise.”⁴⁴

Yes, you say, but meantime, “we must live in the world of the present.” Must we? Most people in the past have got along without the institutions which we think for the moment, indispensable. And we are expressly commanded to get out of that business. “No one supposes for one moment,” says Brigham Young, “that in heaven the angels are speculating, that they are building railroads and factories, taking advantage of one another, gathering up the substance in heaven to aggrandize themselves, and that they live on the same principle that we are in the habit of doing . . . No sectarian Christian in the world believes this; they believe that the inhabitants of heaven live as a family, that their faith, interests, and pursuits have one end in view—the glory of God and their own salvation, that they may receive more and more . . . We all believe this, and suppose we go to work and imitate them as far as we can.”⁴⁵ It is not too soon to begin right now. What are the things of the eternities that we should consider even now? They are the things that no one ever tires of doing, things in themselves lovely and desirable. Surprisingly, the things of the eternities are the very things to which the university is supposed to be dedicated. In the Zion of God, in the celestial and eternal order, where there is no death there will be no morticians, where there is no sickness there be no more doctors, where there is no decay there will be no dentists, where there is no litigation there will be no lawyers, where there is no buying and selling there will be no merchants, where there is no insecurity, there will be no insurance, where there is no money there will be no banks, where there is no crime there will be no jails, no police; where there are no excess goods there will be no advertising, no wars, no armies, and so on and so on.

But this happy condition is not limited to celestial realms of the future; it actually has been achieved by mortal men on this earth a number of items, and represents the only state of society of which God approves. All the things that are passing away today are the very essence of “the economy,” but they will be missing in Zion. They are already obsolescent, every one of them is made work of a temporary and artificial nature for which an artificial demand must be created. Moreover, few people are really dedicated to them, for as soon as a man has acquired a super-quota of power and gain, he cuts out and leaves the scene of his triumphs, getting as far away as he can from the ugly world he has helped create—preferably to Tahiti. The race has shown us often its capacity to do without these things we now find indispensable. “The Devil has the

mastery of the earth: he has corrupted it, and has corrupted the children of men. He has led them in evil until they are almost entirely ruined, and are so far from God that they neither know Him nor his influence, and have almost lost sight of everything that pertains to eternity. This darkness is more prevalent, more dense, among the people of Christendom that it is among the heathen. They have lost sight of all that is great and glorious—of all principles that pertain to life eternal.”⁴⁶ “Suppose that our Father in heaven, our elder brother, the risen Redeemer, the Savior of the world, or any of the Gods of eternity should act upon this principle, to love truth, knowledge, and wisdom, because they are all-powerful,” says Brigham Young, “they would cease to be Gods; . . . the extension of their kingdom would cease, and their God-head come to an end.”⁴⁷

Are we here to seek knowledge or to seek the credits that will get us ahead in the world? One of the glorious benefits and promises of the gospel given the Saints in these latter days that “inasmuch as they *sought* wisdom they might be instructed; And inasmuch as they were humble they might be made strong, and blessed from on high, and receive *knowledge* from time to time.” (Doctrine and Covenants 1:26, 28. Italics added.) But they had to want it and seek for it. What is that state of things? The late President Joseph Fielding Smith wrote: “We are informed that many important things are withheld from us because of the hardness of our hearts and the unwillingness as members of the Church to abide in the covenants and seek divine knowledge.” “Our faculties are enlarged,” said Joseph Smith, “in proportion to the heed and diligence given to the light communicated from heaven to the intellect.”⁴⁸ “If [a man] does not get knowledge, he will be brought into captivity by some evil power in the other world, as evil spirits will have more knowledge, and consequently more power than many men who are on the earth. [We need] revelation to assist us, and give us knowledge of the things of God.”⁴⁹ There is indeed an order of priority. The things of God come first, and the seeker ever tries to become aware of that priority. “All science,” says Karl Popper, “is eschatology,” concerned fundamentally with the questions of religion. The most important question of all is that of our eternal salvation.

I once acted as counselor to students in the College of Commerce for a couple of years. Most of these students were unhappy about going into business and admitted that Satan rules this earth and rules it badly, with blood and horror, but they pointed out the intimidating circumstance that you cannot have money without playing his game because he owns the treasures of the earth. They could see he owns them as loot, and by virtue of a legal fiction with which he has, in Joseph Smith’s terms, “riveted the creeds of the fathers,” but still the students would ask me in despair, “If we leave his employ, what will become of us?” The answer is simple. Don’t you trust the Lord? If you do, he will give you the guidance of the Holy Spirit and you will not end up doing the things that he has expressly commanded us not to do.

May God help us all in the days of our probation to seek the knowledge he wants us to seek.

Notes

1. Nigel Calder, *The Mind of Man* (London: BBC, 1970), p. 25.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 169
3. *Loc. Cit.*

4. Ibid., p. 29.
5. Ibid., pp. 29, 184
6. Arthur Clarke, *Profiles of the Future* (N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 197.
7. Ibid., p. 96
8. DHC,3:295f.
9. Calder, p. 33.
10. Clarke, p. 83.
11. Lyall Watson, *Supernature* (N.Y.: Anchor Press, 1973), p 239.
12. Calder, p. 77.
13. Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1967), p. 354. Italics added. Hereafter cited as TPJS.
14. Carl Sagan, *The Cosmic Connection* (N.Y.: Dell, 1973), Ch. 34.
15. TPJS, p. 201. Italics added.
16. Ibid.
17. TPJS, p. 204.
18. TPJS, p. 238. Italics added.
19. Ibid. Italics added.
20. TPJS, p. 80.
21. TPJS, pp. 213,214.
22. TPJS, p. 246.
23. TPJS, p. 287.
24. TPJS, p. 309.
25. TPJS, p. 331.
26. TPJS, p. 348.
27. TPJS, p. 320.
28. TPJS, p. 242.
29. TPJS, p. 43. Italics added.
30. TPJS, p. 51. Italics added.
31. TPJS, p. 137.
32. TPJS, p. 215. Italics added.
33. TPJS, p. 217.
34. TPJS, p. 297.
35. Ibid.
36. TPJS, p. 149.
37. TPJS, pp. 149, 150.
38. TPJS, P. 151.
39. TPJS, p. 163.

40. TPJS, p. 364. Italics added.
41. Matthew 6:25ff, Mark 13:11ff, Luke 12:11ff, 3 Nephi 13:25ff, Doctrine and Covenants 84:81ff.
42. TPJS, p. 9. Italics added.
43. Brigham Young in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, 1855-86) 7:337; hereafter cited as JD.
44. Clarke, p. 16.
45. JD 17:117f.
46. JD 8:209.
47. JD 1:117.
48. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, Melchizedek Priesthood Manual, 1972-1973. p. 229.
49. TPJS, p. 217.