

First Presidency Message

The Continuing Pursuit of Truth

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This is an edited version of a talk President Hinckley delivered 18 June 1983 at the BYU—Hawaii commencement exercises.

There is incumbent upon each of us as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints the responsibility to observe the commandment to study and to learn. Said the Lord: “Seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith.” (D&C 88:118.)

He further made it clear that our search for truth must be broad, that we are to learn “of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms.” (D&C 88:79.)

What a charge has been laid upon us to grow constantly toward eternity! None of us can assume that he has learned enough. As the door closes on one phase of life, it opens on another, where we must continue to pursue knowledge.

Ours ought to be a ceaseless quest for truth. That truth must include spiritual and religious truth as well as secular. As we go forward with our lives and our search for truth, let us look for the good, the beautiful, the positive.

I try to read newspapers, two or three a day. I sometimes read the columnists. I occasionally listen to commentators on television and radio. The writers are brilliant. They are men of incisive language, scintillating in expression. They are masters of the written word. But for the most part I find their attitude is negative. Regardless of whom they write about, they seem to look for failings and weaknesses. They are constantly criticizing, seldom praising.

And this spirit is not limited to the columnists and the commentators. Read the letters to the editor. Some of them are filled with venom, written by persons who seem to find no good in the world or in their associates. Criticism, faultfinding, evil speaking—these are of the spirit of our day. From many directions we are told that nowhere is there a man of integrity holding political office. Businessmen are crooks. Utilities are out to rob you. Everywhere is heard the snide remark, the sarcastic gibe, the cutting down of associates. Sadly, these are too often the essence of our conversation. In our homes, wives weep and children finally give up under the barrage of criticism leveled by husbands and fathers. Criticism is the forerunner of divorce,

the cultivator of rebellion, sometimes a catalyst that leads to failure. In the Church it sows the seed of inactivity and finally apostasy.

I am asking that we stop seeking out the storms and enjoy more fully the sunlight. I am suggesting that as we go through life we “accentuate the positive.” I am asking that we look a little deeper for the good, that we still voices of insult and sarcasm, that we more generously compliment virtue and effort. I am not asking that all criticism be silenced. Growth comes of correction. Strength comes of repentance. Wise is the man who can acknowledge mistakes pointed out by others and change his course.

What I am suggesting is that each of us turn from the negativism that so permeates our society and look for the remarkable good among those with whom we associate, that we speak of one another’s virtues more than we speak of one another’s faults, that optimism replace pessimism, that our faith exceed our fears. When I was a young man and was prone to speak critically, my father would say: “Cynics do not contribute, skeptics do not create, doubters do not achieve.”

Looking at the dark side of things always leads to a spirit of pessimism which so often leads to defeat. If ever there was a man who rallied a nation in its time of deepest distress it was Winston Churchill. Bombs were then falling on London. The Nazi war machine had overrun Austria, Czechoslovakia, France, Belgium, Holland, Norway, and was moving into Russia. Most of Europe was in the grasp of tyranny, and England was to be next. In that dangerous hour, when the hearts of many were failing, Churchill spoke:

“Do not let us speak of darker days; let us speak rather of sterner days. These are not dark days: these are great days—the greatest days our country has ever lived; and we must all thank God that we have been allowed, each of us according to our stations, to play a part in making these days memorable in the history of our race.” (Address at Harrow School, 29 October 1941.)

Following the terrible catastrophe at Dunkirk, many prophets of doom foretold the end of Britain. But in that dark and solemn hour this remarkable man said, and I heard him say these words as they were broadcast across America: “We shall not flag or fail ... we shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender.” (Speech on Dunkirk, House of Commons, 4 June 1940.)

It was this kind of talk, which saw victory distantly through the dark clouds of war, and not the critical faultfinding of cynics, that preserved the people of Britain and saved that nation from catastrophe.

I have little doubt that many of us are troubled with fears concerning ourselves. We are in a period of stress across the world. There are occasionally hard days for each of us. Do not despair. Do not give up. Look for the sunlight through the clouds. Opportunities will eventually open to you. Do not let the prophets of gloom endanger your possibilities.

This counsel also relates to us as members of the Lord's Church. We seem to have a host of critics. Some appear intent on trying to destroy us. They mock that which is sacred. They belittle that which we call divine. Some have said that we are trapped by our history, others have worked with great diligence seeking flaws in our early leaders. We are accused of being opposed to reason and rational thought.

These are serious accusations against a church which teaches that "the glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth." (D&C 93:36.) These are serious charges against a Church which each year spends millions of dollars of its resources on the education of its youth. Those who criticize us have lost sight of the glory and wonder of this work. In their cultivated faultfinding, they see not the majesty of the great onrolling of this cause. They have lost sight of the spark that was kindled in Palmyra which is now lighting fires of faith across the earth in many lands and in many languages. Wearing the spectacles of humanism, they fail to realize that spiritual emotions, with recognition of the influence of the Holy Spirit, had as much to do with the actions of our forebears as did the processes of the mind. They have failed to realize that religion is as much concerned with the heart as it is with the intellect.

George Santayana once said:

*O World, thou choosest not the better part!
It is not wisdom to be only wise,
And on the inward vision close the eyes,
But it is wisdom to believe the heart.*

We have critics who appear to cull out of a vast panorama of information those items which demean and belittle some men and women of the past who worked so hard in laying the foundation of this great cause. They find readers of their works who seem to delight in picking up these tidbits, in chewing them over and relishing them. In so doing they are savoring some small morsel, rather than eating a beautiful and satisfying dinner of many courses.

My plea is that as we continue our search for truth, particularly we of the Church, that we look for strength and goodness rather than weakness and foibles in those who did so great a work in their time.

We recognize that our forebears were human. They doubtless made mistakes. Some of them acknowledged making mistakes. But the mistakes were minor when compared with the marvelous work which they accomplished. To highlight mistakes and gloss over the greater good is to draw a caricature. Caricatures are amusing, but they are often ugly and dishonest. A man may have a wart on his cheek and still have a face of beauty and strength, but if the wart is emphasized unduly in relation to his other features, the portrait is lacking in integrity.

There was only one perfect man who ever walked the earth. The Lord has used imperfect people in the process of building his perfect society. If some of them occasionally stumbled, or if their characters may have been slightly flawed in one way or another, the wonder is the greater that they accomplished so much.

I mention these things because I hope that we will cultivate an attitude of looking for positive elements which lead to growth and enthusiasm. We are not trapped by our history. That history contains the foundation of this work. It sets forth in some detail the circumstances and the events connected with the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. If the picture is not always complete, or if there are various versions differing somewhat concerning certain events, intellectual honesty would point out that there is nothing new in this. For instance, the New Testament includes four gospels. The tone of each is the same, but the various writers made particular choices of what they wished to emphasize, and only by reading them all and harmonizing them do we get the fullest possible picture of the Son of God who walked the roads of Palestine.

I do not fear truth. I welcome it. But I wish all of my facts to be in their proper context, with emphasis on those elements which explain the great growth and power of this organization. I have felt the need to say these things because there are those today who are emphasizing the negative and seem to miss entirely the great inspiration of this work.

This leads me to say a few words on intellectualism. A scholar once expressed the view that the Church is an enemy of intellectualism. If he meant by intellectualism that branch of philosophy which teaches “the doctrine that knowledge is wholly or chiefly derived from pure reason” and “that reason is the final principle of reality,” then, yes, we are opposed to so narrow an interpretation as applicable to religion. (Quotations from the *Random House Dictionary of the English Language*, p. 738.) Such an interpretation excludes the power of the Holy Spirit in speaking to and through men.

Of course we believe in the cultivation of the mind, but the intellect is not the only source of knowledge. There is a promise, given under inspiration from the Almighty, set forth in these beautiful words: “God shall give unto you knowledge by his Holy Spirit, yea, by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost.” (D&C 121:26.)

The humanists who criticize the Lord’s work, the so-called intellectualists who demean, speak only from ignorance of spiritual manifestation. They have not heard the voice of the Spirit. They have not heard it because they have not sought after it and prepared themselves to be worthy of it. Then, supposing that knowledge comes only of reasoning and of the workings of the mind, they deny that which comes by the power of the Holy Ghost.

The things of God are understood by the Spirit of God. That Spirit is real. To those who have experienced its workings, the knowledge so gained is as real as that which is acquired through the operation of the five senses. I testify of this. And I am confident that most members of the Church can so testify. I urge each of us to continue to cultivate a heart in tune with the Spirit. If we will do so, our lives will be enriched. We will feel a kinship with God our Eternal Father. We will taste a sweetness of joy that can be had in no other way.

Let us not be trapped by the sophistry of the world, which for the most part is negative and which so often bears sour fruit. Let us walk with faith in the future, speaking affirmatively and cultivating an attitude of confidence. As we do so, our strength will give strength to others.

On one occasion when the Savior was walking among a crowd, a woman who had long been sick touched his garment. He perceived that strength had gone out of him. The strength that

was his had strengthened her. So it may be with each of us.

Said the Lord to Peter:

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:

“But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.” (Luke 22:31–32.)

Let us not partake of the negative spirit so rife in our times. There is so much of the sweet and the decent and the beautiful to build upon. We are partakers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel means “good news!” The message of the Lord is one of hope and salvation! The voice of the Lord is a voice of glad tidings! The work of the Lord is a work of glorious accomplishment!

In a dark and troubled hour the Lord said to those he loved: “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” (John 14:27.)

These great words of confidence are a beacon to each of us. In him we may indeed have trust. For he and his promises will never fail.

Ideas for Home Teachers

Some Points of Emphasis. *You may wish to make these points in your home teaching discussion:*

1. Ours ought to be a ceaseless quest for truth—spiritual and religious truth as well as secular.
2. As we search for truth, let us look for the good, the beautiful, the positive. Let us turn from negativism that so permeates our society.
3. Critics demean and belittle some men and women of the past. Let us look for strength and goodness rather than weakness and foibles in those who did so great a work in their time.
4. Many of us are troubled with fears concerning our own futures. Do not give up. Do not let the prophets of gloom endanger your possibilities.
5. We believe in the cultivation of the mind, but the intellect is not the only source of knowledge: “God shall give unto you knowledge by his Holy Spirit, yea, by the unspeakable gift of the Holy Ghost.” (D&C 121:26.)

Discussion Helps

1. *1. Relate your personal feelings about pursuing truth and cultivating a positive outlook. Ask family members to share their feelings.*

2. Are there some scriptures or quotations in this article that the family might read aloud and discuss?
3. Would this discussion be better after a pre-visit chat with the head of the house? Is there a message from the quorum leader or bishop?