



BYU Studies: Into the 1990s

John W. Welch

For thirty-two years, *BYU Studies* has published scholarly materials by and for the LDS community. As it moves to the final decade of the twentieth century, this journal plans to expand the variety of its articles and the size of its reading audience. As *BYU Studies*, together with its sponsoring institution, grows and matures, I hope this channel can provide readers around the world with more information and more well-articulated conclusions and insights, while addressing significant subjects and pressing issues relevant to the work of God on this earth. *BYU Studies* can and should offer the world the best scholarly perspectives on topics of academic interest to Latter-day Saints.

The purpose of *BYU Studies* has long been stated on its masthead: “*Brigham Young University Studies* is a quarterly journal dedicated to the correlation of revealed and discovered truth and to the conviction that the spiritual and intellectual are complementary avenues of knowledge. Contributions from all fields of learning are welcome. Articles should reflect a Latter-day Saint point of view while conforming to high scholarly standards and should be written for the informed nonspecialist.” While I see no need to change this mission statement, how these principles may apply in the 1990s will require ongoing reevaluation with respect to what is said, how it is said, and why it is said.

As the bulk of this volume consists of lengthy indexes of *BYU Studies* from 1959 to 1991, one may wonder about the idea of addressing more issues in the future than we have in the past. Over the years *BYU Studies* has published some 1,585 items. Most are articles, but also included are almost 50 bibliographies, 330 book reviews, and 265 poems. A look at these items yields many interesting and sometimes surprising results. Several areas and disciplines are well represented, while others are conspicuously absent. Lots of work still needs to be done.

For example, art has been moderately represented, primarily in the form of notes and comments on artistic works that have been generously

published in *BYU Studies* over the years. Fewer entries have dealt with such subjects as drama, film, music, architecture, material culture, and symbolism. Awaiting development are such topics as the growing contribution of international art in the Church and thoughts about the risks and rewards inherent in the artistic abstraction of sacred experiences and emotions.

A significant collection of articles about the Book of Mormon has been published. They tend to focus on literary and historical topics. Only a few have dealt with the teachings of the Book of Mormon, interpretative issues, questions, or the relevance of contemporary biblical studies to the Book of Mormon. Little explicit effort has been given to thinking about *how* we think about the Book of Mormon. Methodologies and assumptions usually have gone unstated in Book of Mormon studies; these need to be articulated and examined if scholars who read and write in this area are to communicate effectively with readers in the future.

Conspicuously weak have been biblical studies. Aside from twelve book reviews and a few items on the Joseph Smith Translation or Isaiah, hardly any entries have dealt directly with the Bible. None have addressed the life or ministry of Jesus Christ. In light of all that Latter-day Saint religion and doctrine have to do with the Bible, the need for future attention here is obvious.

Several articles have been published about Brigham Young University. These articles should not give the impression that the scope of *BYU Studies* is local. Despite its name, *BYU Studies* is not a journal about BYU, nor is it written primarily to a BYU audience. Together with a considerable collection of articles on education in general, *BYU Studies* has offered many thoughtful pieces on the challenges and opportunities of combining the best of academic scholarship with the truths and values of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. But in the future, more academic departments should be involved. In addition to its "Historians Corner" (a regular feature of *BYU Studies* since 1971), I would welcome an occasional "Philosophers Corner," "Psychologists Corner," "Scriptorians Corner," and so on. More attention can also be given to doctoral dissertations and theses on LDS topics completed at various academic institutions around the world.

The vast majority of articles published by *BYU Studies* have dealt with Church history. Numerous articles have appeared on Joseph Smith or Brigham Young. The New York, Ohio, Missouri, Illinois, and pioneer periods have been minutely detailed, and the people, places, and events of the nineteenth century Church in lands around the world are vigorously represented. In recognition of this, the Mormon History Association gave a special letter of commendation to *BYU Studies* in 1969.¹ Begging now

for similar treatment are the accelerating developments of the more recent past, including the history of LDS responses to the intellectual trends of the times, with continuing attention to how and why written and oral history is kept and used by Latter-day Saints.

One of the most valuable contributions of *BYU Studies* has been its publication and analysis of hundreds of historical documents and bibliographies. As one of the richest repositories of church historical documents, *BYU Studies* has published more than a hundred valuable letters, diaries, sermons, memoranda, and journals. In many cases this is the only place where these primary historical documents have been printed. By collaborating with the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History at BYU, we plan to publish at least one new document in each future issue. Beginning in 1992, the annual Mormon Bibliography will also include annotations giving subject information beyond that contained in many titles.

BYU Studies began as a literary publication, and the tradition of publishing fine articles on literary criticism and the image of Mormonism in various artistic contexts has been admirably perpetuated. Poetry has been especially strong and attractive. A smattering of personal essays and short stories has been published, evenly distributed over the years. In the future, we hope that a greater number of essays dealing with the life of the mind will deal with personal and spiritual responses to academic experiences, intellectual choices, values, responsibilities, and methods.

Most of the articles on philosophy appeared in the first decade, while a bundle of later articles discuss issues in political science, psychology, sociology, and organizational behavior. But the need is evident for more LDS scholars to research and analyze contemporary social concerns, popular trends, and academic orientations in relation to gospel perspectives.

In the sciences, many of the distinguished faculty lectures delivered annually at Brigham Young University have been published in this journal. *BYU Studies* plans to continue its quasi-official role as publisher of the distinguished faculty lectures. As the frontiers of science are pushed back, from molecular biology to intergalactic astronomy, new issues compel our attention from biomedical ethics to metaphysical conceptualizations.

In the areas of Church doctrine, religion, and theology, a fascinating collection of articles has appeared. Several have dealt with the development of doctrinal themes in specific decades of Church history; about a dozen have focused principally on the Doctrine and Covenants. Much useful scholarly work, however, remains to be done in gathering LDS doctrinal sources, placing them in their respective contexts, reflecting on

their logical and moral ramifications, considering how they are interconnected and interdependent, and comparing them with their counterparts in other Christian and world religions.

As *BYU Studies* moves into the 1990s, the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*² may provide a useful springboard for many topics. As we organized and edited the *Encyclopedia*, my fellow editors and I became acutely aware of the fact that many topics of great interest to Latter-day Saints still wait to be approached rigorously, thoroughly, and explicitly in a scholarly publication. We found that, compared with many other religions, Mormonism is relatively young. It was not in the nature of that publication to plow new ground, and most of the topics listed in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* still need to be given further attention. *BYU Studies* is a place where scholarly perspectives can contribute to that process.

We also could think more about how we as Latter-day Saints think and how we use language. We, too, are vulnerable to trends, comparable to the recent “politically correct” movement, that tend to advance within Latter-day Saint speech certain language that is “religiously correct.” Many such linguistic pressures are beneficial and promote the progress of civilization and culture, but not all of them are salutary.

Equally important to content is tone and purpose. Scholarship is like any other tool; it can be used either for good or for evil. A hammer can be used to build up or tear down, to help or hinder. A tool can even injure the person using it, if the person does not know how to use it correctly and carefully. Knowledge confers a type of power that inevitably will be exercised either righteously or unrighteously, and indeed the natural tendency is to misuse any power that is given (D&C 121:39). Thus I would think that all who venture to speak and write in Church circles must morally confront certain responsibilities that may be said to comprise a sort of academic code of professional conduct. Some important components of such a code would embrace at least the following precepts.

1. Unity. The Lord has clearly stated: “If ye are not one ye are not mine” (D&C 38:27). This principle stands as a beacon for all who strive “for the perfecting of the saints . . . till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God” (Eph. 4:12–13). In a shifting world that necessarily and fortunately features diversity, individuality, heterodoxy, and change, the goal of unity with God and our fellowbeings must be continually cultivated and nourished.³ The goal of unity does not imply that all scholarly methods or personal views must be the same. As Paul explained, we are “many members, yet but one body” (1 Cor. 12:20). Indeed, even those members “which seem to be more feeble” turn out to be among the “necessary” (1 Cor. 12:22).

2. Harmony. *BYU Studies* is committed to seeking truth “by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118). It proceeds on the premise that faith and reason, revelation and scholarly learning, obedience and creativity are compatible and harmonious. One of the great strengths of Mormonism, in my opinion, is its ability to harmonize and transcend in a spiritual, intellectual, and practical unity elements of this mortal existence that appear to most people to be incompatible contradictions. Traditional dichotomies such as mind and body, God and man, spirit and matter, time and eternity, are not viewed in the gospel of Jesus Christ as competing opposites but as companions on a spectrum of degrees of refinement or as opposites whose existence is unified in higher intents and purposes.⁴ The objective is to embrace both: ancient and modern, word and deed, intellectual and spiritual, research and teaching, reason and revelation, the “ought” and the “is,” community and individuality, male and female, nature and custom, induction and deduction, analysis and synthesis, rights and duties, subjectivity and objectivity, theory and practice, even mortality and godhood. We can grow beyond issues over which is greater, the spirit or the intellect, the *liahona* or the iron rod. For Lehi, both symbols were concurrent. For purposes of the spirit, the spirit is greater; and for purposes of the mind, the mind is greater. For Latter-day Saint study and faith, the one is not without the other. As Elder Boyd K. Packer has stated, “Each of us must accommodate the mixture of reason and revelation in our lives. The gospel not only permits but *requires* it.”⁵ Kierkegaard offered the world an Either/Or; Joseph Smith, a Both/And.

3. Honesty. As a primary trait of character, “we believe in being honest” (A of F 13). Accuracy and reliability are of the essence of scholarship. All scholars worth their salt have wrestled long with the questions of what can and cannot, what should and should not, what must or must not be said. They acknowledge and evaluate data both for and against their ideas and theories. They eschew all forms of plagiarism and generously recognize their indebtedness to other scholars. They guard on all sides against the covert influences of unstated assumptions, bias, and esoteric terminology. They describe shades of grey where they exist. They identify clearly their personal opinions as such. They avoid material omissions, for often what is not said can be as misleading as what is said.

4. Thoroughness. “If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things” (A of F 13). *BYU Studies* welcomes contributions from all disciplines, addressing “all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that are expedient for you to understand; 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, . . . that

ye may be prepared in all things when I shall send you again to magnify the calling whereunto I have called you" (D&C 88:78–80). This is a fulfilling but sobering mandate.

5. Humility. Pride has been identified as the pervading sin of our day. As scholars, we have more than our share of exposure to this problem. Arrogance, disdain, overconfidence, dogmatism, and many other manifestations of intellectual and spiritual pride may well be the main occupational hazards of academia. But the perspectives of scholarship and the gospel can also provide the antidote. First is the acknowledgment that all people are at different stages in the eternal journey toward the glory of God which is intelligence. No person says or understands everything perfectly, and a variety of opinions on a shared scale of progression are expected. Hence, a person's direction is more important than his or her present stance. Second is the humble awareness that scholarship is not an end in itself. Research cannot create faith; it can only set the stage for greater light and knowledge. As B. H. Roberts once wrote, "The clearer and more complete the statement is, the better opportunity will the Holy Spirit have for testifying to the souls of men that the work is true."⁶

6. Charity. In order for communication to occur, there must be charity, for no statement exists (including this one) that cannot be misconstrued. If fellowship and goodwill does not exist, especially in an academic setting, we will not communicate with each other. Paul's confession comes to mind: "Though I have the gift of *prophecy*, and understand all mysteries, *and all knowledge* . . . and have not charity, I am nothing" (1 Cor. 13:2, emphasis added). Charity is essential to avoid disputation. Left untempered by love, scholarly debate and critical inquiry will be divisive and unhealthy.⁷ Charity is also necessary to avoid offending even the weakest of the saints. Jesus said: "It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged around his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones" (Luke 17:2).⁸ Perhaps this is part of what Jesus meant when he told his disciples: "Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves" (Matt. 10:16).

Over the years, I have followed *BYU Studies* closely as a reader and writer. As a student at BYU in the 1960s, I enthusiastically supported this publication, to the point of selling subscriptions to students as they finished registering in the old Smith Fieldhouse. I remember wondering if its name wasn't really a sentence, affirmatively asserting that "BYU studies!" As I look back on those years, still today I consider myself very fortunate to have studied at BYU under extraordinary teachers such as historians George Addy, Jim Allen, Richard Anderson, Marvin Hill, and

Ted Warner; philosophers Truman Madsen and Terry Warner; linguists Reuben Clark, Hugh Nibley, Robert Patch, Doug Phillips, and Max Rogers; Ed Morrell in political science; Don Robinson in mathematics; and Robert Thomas in English; and to have worked with versatile colleagues like John Sorenson, Stephen Ricks, Noel Reynolds, and many others. Because of this experience, I wonder why, at this time in history, we as a people have learned certain things, have made certain discoveries, have established contacts with engaging people, and have had interesting academic experiences. I do not know the answer, but I suspect that such experience was not intended simply for our amusement.

More than ever before, as *BYU Studies* goes into the 1990s, I believe that Brigham Young University has a vital mission to fulfill and that *BYU Studies* is an important vehicle to disseminate studious works to help accomplish that mission. We live in dynamic times. The gospel gives needed orientation as the world faces a steady stream of new challenges. Brigham Young University is uniquely poised to be an active contributor in these developments, offering insights that emerge from the interaction of faith and scholarship. Joseph Smith fully expected the gospel of Jesus Christ “to revolutionize and civilize the world, and cause wars and contentions to cease” and to cause all people “to become friends.”⁹ *BYU Studies* hopes to fill a helpful supporting role in these eternal purposes.

Since its inception, *BYU Studies* has been in good hands. Section 89 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Word of Wisdom, is usually thought of as a physical health code, but in the end it not only offers health but wisdom: It promises “wisdom and great treasures of knowledge” (D&C 89:19). Clinton Larson, with a creative genius for sensing meaning, contributed the passion for finding treasures, “even hidden treasures”; Charles Tate, for sixteen years, “ran and was not weary”; and Ed Geary, when faced with hard choices, “did not faint.” I only hope that *BYU Studies* in the 1990s can continue to walk in wisdom’s paths.

NOTES

¹ Mormon History Association, “Special Citation to *BYU Studies*,” *BYU Studies* 10 (1969): 3.

² Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan, 1992).

³ For interesting discussions on these topics in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, see Howard M. Bahr, “Individuality,” 2:680–82; M. Gerald Bradford, “Orthodoxy, Heterodoxy and Heresy,” 3:1054–55; and F. Neil Brady, “Unity,” 4:1497–98.

⁴ David L. Paulsen, "Doctrine: Harmonization of Paradox," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:402–3.

⁵ Boyd K. Packer, "'I Say Unto You, Be One' (D&C 38:27)," BYU Devotional Address, February 12, 1991; italics in original.

⁶ B. H. Roberts, *New Witnesses for God*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1909), 2:vii.

⁷ Dallin H. Oaks, *The Lord's Way* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 138–52.

⁸ Jesus gave this saying on several occasions. Matthew places it in the context of offending a little child (Matt. 18:6); Mark uses it to caution disciples against restraining anyone who does any good deed in the name of Christ (Mark 9:42); and Luke makes it a general instruction.

⁹ Joseph Fielding Smith, ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979), 316.

THE Mormon History ASSOCIATION

SPECIAL CITATION


The Mormon History Association presents
to

*The Publisher, Editors and Writers
of the Encyclopedia of Mormonism*

A special Citation
for

*A Significant Achievement in the Compilation
and Dissemination of L.D.S. History*

Presented this 15th day of May in the year 1992


President of the Mormon History Association


Chairman of the Awards Committee

Citation presented May 15, 1992, by the
Mormon History Association to those who
produced the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*.