

## AN OLIVE LEAF

## THE WORD OF KNOWLEDGE

By Eugene England

*In March 1975, Eugene England presented “Great Books or True Religion: Defining the Mormon Scholar” as a speech to members of the BYU Phi Kappa Phi Honors Society. This excerpt, taken mostly from early in England’s remarks, affirms an intellectual inclination as one of the gifts of the Spirit, but also offers important advice for avoiding some of the temptations and pitfalls that often accompany this gift. This essay, and most of England’s other published works, are now easily accessible through the new website of the Eugene England Foundation: [EUGENEENGLAND.ORG](http://EUGENEENGLAND.ORG).*



I SHOULD REMIND US all who have been honored in various ways for our intellectual gift that it is just that—a gift—and it is only one of the many different gifts that the Lord enumerates in the 46th section of the Doctrine and Covenants (in addition to organizational ability, good judgment, spiritual receptiveness, etc.). He reminds us there that our intellectual gift—what he calls “the word of knowledge”—does not make us better than others, but only possessed thereby of a way and a special responsibility to be of service—“that all may be taught to be wise and to have knowledge,” he says, “that all may be profited thereby.” But nevertheless you should be honored for accepting and using your gift. . . .

Perhaps some of you flinch at the label, “intellectual”; it isn’t always a complimentary term in our society—or even in the Church. I use it in an essentially neutral way, as descriptive of your gift from the Lord that makes you delight in ideas, alive to the life that goes on in your mind as well as outside it, that makes you question set forms and conventional wisdom to see if they really are truth or only habit, whether they endure because right or merely because of fear or sloth; I use the term intellectual to refer to the gift from the Lord that makes you curious about why as well as how, anxious to serve Him by being creative as well as obedient. . . .

My call to you . . . [is] both to affirm your gift with courageous integrity and fullness of heart and to develop and manifest your loyalty to the gospel and the Restored Church in such a whole-souled and creative way that you can have that measure of acceptance you need—it will never be total, of course, given the critical edge of the intellectual enterprise—enough to allow you to serve the Lord

as he intends with a minimum of apology, of being on guard. I call you to be loyal to true religion, not merely great books, especially when it comes to a choice, as sometimes it does.

Since the intellectual endeavor is always easy to misunderstand and tends by its very nature—its emphasis on analysis, criticism, on ventures into the unknown—to threaten and alienate, you must find ways to show that, in the great phrase from the 121st section of the Doctrine and Covenants, “your faithfulness is stronger than the cords of death.” Your gift will make you inescapably aware of problems in the Church, and thus the burden of change will be on you, because

others, often those committing the errors, can’t see what is “wrong.” What you can do about such problems is not leave, desert, turn the Church over to those who in your point of view are perverting it, nor to remain within only to withdraw spiritually through self-righteousness. You must reach out in love, trying to help—and also trying to learn through your cooperation and common service, from the perspective and commitments of others with different gifts than your intellectual gift, including learning to see your own faults, such as lack of courage, perhaps, or lack of whole-souled commitment, failings which may be, in the long run, more destructive than the ones you naturally see in others. . . .

OUR history, our theology, our present selves do not need to be censored or dressed up in false clothes or cosmetics. Remember your own inclination to sin, to arrogance, to lack of proper appreciation of the different but equally valuable gifts of those who aren’t intellectuals. Remember the scriptural warning about milk before meat and not leading the innocent astray; remember the Apostle Paul’s humble example of not eating the food offered to idols, not wanting to do anything that might offend his brother who might not understand, even though he knew it was something harmless for himself. And remember the simplest, clearest and most effective formula for balancing faith and reason, given by Elder Marion D. Hanks, an intellectual who knows from experience—search the scriptures, seek the Lord in mighty prayer, and serve faithfully in whatever Church calling comes to you.