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Elder Neal A. Maxwell on Consecration, Scholarship, and the Defense of the Kingdom

Daniel C. Peterson

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ELDER NEAL A. MAXWELL ON CONSECRATION, SCHOLARSHIP, AND THE DEFENSE OF THE KINGDOM

Daniel C. Peterson

The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, or FARMS, was organized by John W. Welch in California in 1979 and then moved to Provo when Professor Welch joined the law faculty at BYU the following year. In 1997, while I was serving as chairman of the FARMS Board of Directors, Gordon B. Hinckley, President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and chairman of the Board of Trustees of Brigham Young University (BYU), invited the Foundation to become a part of the University. “FARMS,” President Hinckley said at the time, “represents the efforts of sincere and dedicated scholars. It has grown to provide strong support and defense of the Church on a professional basis. I wish to express my strong congratulations and appreciation for those who started this effort and who have shepherded it to this point.”¹

In 2001, FARMS was rechristened as the Institute for the Study and Preservation of Ancient Religious Texts (ISPART), but then, mercifully, in 2006 we received permission to change its name to the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship. Elder Maxwell, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of the Church since July 1981, had passed away in late July 2004.

¹ “FARMS Becomes Part of BYU,” *Ensign* (January 1998), 80; online at <https://www.lds.org/ensign/1998/01/news-of-the-church/farms-becomes-part-of-byu?lang=eng&query=hinckley,+%22FARMS+represent%22>.

On 27 September 1991—years before the Foundation’s affiliation with the University, a decade prior to the first of those name changes, and long before he became something of a patron saint to my Islamic Translation Series—Elder Maxwell addressed that year’s “FARMS Annual Recognition Banquet,” as it was then called, in the Wilkinson Student Center on the BYU campus.

I had joined BYU’s Department of Asian and Near Eastern Languages in the fall of 1985, and then, in 1988, had been invited to launch and edit the *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*—which eventually became the *FARMS Review of Books* and then, simply, the *FARMS Review*. Our first issue was published in 1989, and, for the first few years, the Review appeared only annually. In 1991, if I’m not mistaken, I was not yet a member of the FARMS board. I was very junior, and a very minor player.

Still, for what little it’s worth, I was present at that banquet, and, as it happens, I played a slightly embarrassing role, perhaps forgotten by the others who were there but still acutely memorable to me:

I had been invited to offer the invocation and the blessing on the meal. Immediately after I said “Amen,” Hugh Nibley called out “He didn’t bless the food!” A whispered but perceptible disagreement broke out among the audience about whether I had or hadn’t—I thought I had—and, after thirty seconds or so, a bit chagrined and determined to put the matter behind me, I took it upon myself to return to the lectern and offer a second prayer—an addendum, in which I most definitely *did* bless the food. For a still relatively new faculty member and associate of FARMS, the evening hadn’t begun altogether well. (At the conclusion of the program, though, Elder Maxwell sought me out and assured me that I had indeed blessed the food the first time. He was, among many other things, a remarkably gracious man, and I miss him very much.) But any embarrassment that

I felt was soon forgotten in the sheer pleasure of being in the presence of, and hearing from, a living apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I have received permission from Elder Maxwell's family to reproduce here the transcription of Elder Maxwell's remarks at the banquet that was made from a recording by my friend and former Maxwell Institute colleague Matthew Roper on 5 October 1991, slightly more than a week after the event.² While a more polished version of the speech eventually appeared in *BYU Studies*, it was considerably shortened and the references to its specific audience were largely eliminated. So far as I am aware, Elder Maxwell's full banquet remarks have never before appeared publicly.³

I have, for clarity and exactness, modified some of the punctuation in the transcription and two or three cases of capitalization, but I have made absolutely no changes in its wording. I have also inserted a few footnoted references and explanations. (The scriptural references inserted into the text itself were supplied by Matthew Roper as he transcribed the talk.) In some cases, Elder Maxwell's quotations (very likely made from memory) vary slightly from his sources; I have not corrected these variations. Elder Maxwell was a sophisticated wordsmith, but the version of the speech reproduced here retains its informal, slightly rough, oral, off-the-cuff style. I did not feel that I had the right to alter that, and neither did I think it important to do so. The prophetic voice of this modern apostle can still be plainly heard through these transcribed remarks. Indeed, as I read these words, I can hear Elder Maxwell's literal

2 I also sought and received Matthew Roper's permission to reproduce his transcription in this introduction. Unfortunately, as far as we have been able to discover, the recording is no longer extant.

3 See Neal A. Maxwell, "Discipleship and Scholarship", *BYU Studies* 32, no. 3 (1992), 5-9.

voice again in my mind, and I hope that others who knew and loved him will have the same experience.

I believe that they are important historically, but also because of the light they shed on the position that this very reflective special witness took toward the kind of work that FARMS was then doing and that *The Interpreter Foundation* now seeks to further.

Thank you very much, Jack.⁴

I've never made any secret of my appreciation for FARMS. As I see you grow larger and become more significant, I'll never have any greater appreciation than I did a few years back when our enemies were lobbing all sorts of mortar shells into our Church encampment, and among the few guns that were blazing away were the guns of FARMS. That meant that Jack and Sister Welch and a few of you here were running mimeograph machines, pasting mailing labels on, yourself. I thank you and salute you for that kind of devotion. As big and wonderful as you will become—and I hope you do—my memories are always nurtured by those moments when so few stood up to respond, and among those who did were scholars who have taken the lead in FARMS. Really, that's why I've come to pay thanks to all of you, individually and collectively. This organization, independent as it is, is nevertheless committed, as I see it, to protect and to build up the Kingdom of God and I thank all of you who have any part in it.

4 Jack, here, refers to John W. Welch, the founder of FARMS. Immediately prior to Elder Maxwell's remarks, he had discussed where the Foundation was headed during the coming year. He is, at the present time, the Robert K. Thomas Professor of Law at Brigham Young University and the editor of *BYU Studies*. Professor Welch recently contributed an article entitled "Toward a Mormon Jurisprudence" to *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 6 (2013): 49-84, online at: <http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/toward-a-mormon-jurisprudence/>.

I want to thank, while I'm here, also so many of you in this room who have contributed to the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*. Those like Jack and Dick Bushman and others not only wrote articles, but did yeoman service as editors. Of that project, people said it couldn't be done or, if it got done, it would take ten years. It took three. They said it couldn't be done. Ever so many things were issued in the way of jeremiads, but it's been done and will be off the press in November. Again, that could not have been accomplished without the men and women in this room and so many others.

I hope you don't underestimate the significance of what you do as articulators of the faith. In praising C. S. Lewis, Austin Farrer said the following (and, when I think of this quote, I think of FARMS), "Though argument does not create conviction, the lack of it destroys belief. What seems to be proved may not be embraced, but what no one shows the ability to defend is quickly abandoned. Rational argument does not create belief, but it maintains a climate in which belief is possible."⁵ An excellent quote.

One recent example of your being at the cutting edge, of course, is the discovery of certain passages in some papyri that bear a potentially significant relationship to the Book of Abraham and its facsimiles.⁶ So that you'll get a sense of my response to that, I've been in a little correspondence with the ambassador of Egypt to the United States. Having met him a few months ago and talked with him about Abraham and Egypt, he's quite fascinated by it, so off went one of your FARMS

5 Austin Farrer, "Grete Clerk," in *Light On C. S. Lewis*, ed. Jocelyn Gibb (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1965), 26.

6 See "References to Abraham Found in Two Ancient Egyptian Texts," *Insights: An Ancient Window* 11/5 (September 1991); online at http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/insights/11/5/S00013-Insights_An_Ancient_Window.html. At the time, *Insights* was the regular newsletter, aimed at a broad general audience of FARMS and of its successor organizations, ISPART and the Maxwell Institute.

newsletters to that ambassador. There's not been time for him to respond. And then an LDS man who works for a big bank in Saudi Arabia had presented me with a beautiful replication of the facsimile, framed and done in Cairo by an Egyptian artist. It's hanging on the wall in my office. The artist in Cairo said, "What are you Mormons doing with these things about Abraham?" We're in the middle of significant things, and at the cutting edge is FARMS, for which I express my appreciation.

What I see happening, brothers and sisters, is coming on the installment basis, in which there is vindication after vindication of the Prophet Joseph. And though he was not a perfect man, his bottom line about himself I read to you now: "I never told you that I was perfect, but there is no error in the revelations which I have taught."⁷ We will walk through a series of events, as we do now, in which, on issue after issue, he will be vindicated in terms of his prophetic mission. I remember, with many of you, years ago, having the Prophet criticized or at least disdained because he presumed to say that doctors had come to treat his leg when he was a boy. Doctors in rural New England? And then, as you remember, Dr. LeRoy Wirthlin researched the matter several years ago and discovered that the doctor who came to treat young Joseph was from Dartmouth and brought with him medical students. It turns out, as you recall, that this doctor was years ahead of the medical profession in his treatment of that particular ailment.⁸ So what the Prophet says is, for us, going to be incrementally vindicated, whether, in my judgment, it's a facsimile or who treated him, we will find

7 Joseph Fielding Smith, ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977), 368.

8 LeRoy S. Wirthlin, "Nathan Smith (1762-1828): Surgical Consultant to Joseph Smith", *BYU Studies* 17, no. 3 (Spring 1977): 319-37; LeRoy S. Wirthlin, "Joseph Smith's Surgeon," *Ensign*, March 1978, 59-60. ; LeRoy S. Wirthlin, "Joseph Smith's Boyhood Operation: An 1813 Surgical Success", *BYU Studies* 21, no. 2 (1981): 131-54.

this is a remarkable man and we will see this occurring again and again.

I mention also to you, in the spirit of appreciation, that I believe much of the vindication that will come to the Prophet and to this work of the Restoration will come by scholars who are committed to the Kingdom, who are unequivocally devoted to it. His vindication will often occur through your articulation, you and others like you. So thank you for providing the climate that Austin Farrer describes so well.

By the way, I think you're helping another group. I don't know the demographics of this group. They are a most interesting group and it isn't your primary constituency, but George MacDonald, who was C. S. Lewis's mentor *in absentia*, had a quote I share with you: "It is often the incapacity for defending the faith they love, which turns men into persecutors."⁹ Defenders beget defenders and one of the significant side benefits of scholars who are devoted, such as the men and women who are represented here tonight, is that we will at least reduce the number of people who do not have the capacity to defend their faith and who otherwise might "grow weary and faint in their minds" (Hebrews 12:3).

Even the title of your organization seems to be important along with what you've done. I myself would be reluctant if you ever moved away from what had become your traditional role. Enterprises of scholarship may be like some businesses who fail at enlargement or lose the essence of what they have been successful at doing. I appreciate what Jack and Steve delineated tonight, that shows a faithfulness at doing what you do best—and I would hope that you would always do this.¹⁰

9 C.S. Lewis, ed., *George Macdonald: An Anthology* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 108.

10 Steve refers, here, to Stephen D. Ricks, who was serving in 1991 as the president of FARMS. Earlier in the evening, he had reviewed the activities of the Foundation over the past year and presented awards to Lois Richardson, Michael

Now, I'm going to talk to you tonight because something has been on my mind, and it's not any more relevant to this audience than it would be to any other audience, but I speak, more than to you, rather to another audience, an audience of one. I'm talking to myself now, and I speak because it's on my mind.

It strikes me that one of the sobering dimensions of the gospel is the democracy of its demands as it seeks to build an aristocracy of saints. Certain standards and requirements are laid upon us all. They are uniform. We don't have an indoor-outdoor set of ten commandments. We don't have one set of commandments for bricklayers and another for college professors. There is a democracy about the demands of discipleship, which, interestingly enough, is aimed at producing an aristocracy of saints. The Church member who is an automobile mechanic doesn't have your scholarly skills and I'll wager you don't have his. But both of you, indeed all of us, have the same spiritual obligation, the same commandments and the same covenants to keep. The mechanic is under the same obligation to develop the attributes of patience and meekness as are you and as am I. What's different about this is that the world doesn't hold to such a view. Frankly the world would say, if one is a political leader or a scholar and is successful in politics or superb in his scholarship, that's enough, and no further demands are made. Thus one who is so gifted or so well regarded can then be as bohemian in behavior as he likes and it's excusable. But it's not so in the Kingdom, is it? Of course, we all enjoy the fruits of our secular geniuses and our world leaders, even when they are visibly flawed in some respect, and we would not diminish from

Lyon, and John Gee for their outstanding service to the organization. Dr. Ricks is Professor of Hebrew and Cognate Learning at Brigham Young University and is a member of the board of *The Interpreter Foundation* and a contributor to this journal. See <http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/author/stephen/>. Dr. Gee has become a significant contributor to *Interpreter*, as well: <http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/author/johng/>.

the significance of their contributions. A just God will surely credit them. However, God excuses no one, including us, from keeping his commandments, and, I think, most significantly no one is excused by him or his Son in the requirement they've laid upon us to become like them.

Recently, my wife took a friend to hear a presentation by a talented Latter-day Saint. The friend, who has had considerable grief and disappointment in her life, truly appreciated the presentation. When it was over, she said to Colleen, "I hope he's as good a person as he seems."¹¹ It's a shame, isn't it, that such reserve needs even to be expressed, but many have learned by sad experience that spiritual applause is sometimes given to the undeserving. (I hasten to add, from all I know in the case just cited, the applause was fully justified.)

Whatever our fields, including scholarship, the real test is discipleship. But how special, as in the case of so many of you here, when scholarship and discipleship can company together, blending meekness with brightness and articulateness with righteousness. But these desired outcomes happen only when there is commitment bordering on consecration.

I want to say, in closing, a few words about consecration.

You'll recall the episode in the fifth chapter of the book of Acts about how Ananias and his wife "kept back part" of the monetary proceeds from their possessions (Acts 5:1-11). We tend to think of consecration in terms of property and money. Indeed, such was clearly involved in the foregoing episode, but there are various ways of "keeping back part," and these ways are worthy of your and my pondering. There are a lot of things we can hold back besides property. There are a lot of things we can refuse to put on the altar. This refusal may occur even after one has given a great deal, as was the case with Ananias. We may mistakenly think, for instance, having done so much,

11 The reference is to Colleen Maxwell, Elder Maxwell's wife.

that surely it is all right to hold back the remaining part of something. Obviously there can be no complete submissiveness when this occurs.

Lately, as I have thought about consecration, it has seemed to me that, unsurprisingly, it's related to the Atonement in a way that is quite profound. I read to you three lines from that marvelous Book of Mormon which we rightly celebrate here tonight: "Yea, even so he shall be led, crucified, and slain, the flesh becoming subject even unto death, the will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father" (Mosiah 15:7). Marvelous imagery, and perhaps the ultimate demand made by discipleship. Willingness to have our selves and our wills "swallowed up" in the will of our Father. When pondering this concept and reading quite a bit from Brigham Young this summer, I was unsurprised to encounter this quote: "When the will, passions, and feelings of a person are perfectly submissive to God and his requirements, that person is sanctified. It is for my will to be swallowed up in the will of God that will lead me to all good and crown me ultimately with immortality and eternal lives."¹²

Scholars might hold back in ways different from those of a businessman or a politician. There's an almost infinite variety in the number of ways you and I can hold back a portion. One, for instance, might be very giving as to money, or in even serving as to time, and yet hold back a portion of himself or herself. One might share many talents, but hold back, for instance, a pet grievance, keeping himself from surrendering that grievance where resolution might occur. A few may hold back a portion of themselves so as to please a particular gallery of peers. Some might hold back a spiritual insight through which many could profit, simply because they wish to have their ownership established. Some may even hold back by not

12 B. Young, *Journal of Discourses*, April 17, 1853, 2:123.

allowing themselves to appear totally and fully committed to the Kingdom, lest they incur the disapproval of a particular group wherein their consecration might be disdained. So it is in the Church that some give of themselves significantly, but not fully and unreservedly.

While withholding is obviously a function of selfishness, I'm rather inclined to think, brothers and sisters, that some of the holding back I see here and there in the Church, somehow gets mistakenly regarded as having to do with our individuality. Some presume that we will lose our individuality if we are totally swallowed up, when actually our individuality is enhanced by submissiveness and by righteousness and by being swallowed up in the will of the Father. It's sin that grinds us down to a single plane, down to sameness and to monotony. There is no lasting place in the Kingdom, the ultimate ranges of that Kingdom, for one who is unsubmissive, or for unanchored brilliance. It too must be swallowed up. And our obvious model is always Jesus himself, who allowed his will to be swallowed up in the will of the Father.

Those of you I know here tonight, I am so happy to say, seem to me to be both committed and contributive in an unusual degree. In any case, ready or not, you serve as mentors to a rising generation of Latter-day Saint scholars and students. Among the many things you will teach them and write for them, let them see the eloquence of your examples of submissiveness, and being swallowed up in the will of the Father. Just today, I was with someone who wanted me to know that he felt quite in tune with consecration and the concept of being swallowed up, "but," he said, "that doesn't apply to such and such," and then described to me what he had chosen to hold back. It's interesting how that happens so often.

May I close by citing to you what has become to me a focus for this summer's reading. In an attribute—cited again, unsurprisingly, in the Book of Mormon, as also Isaiah and

the one-hundred and thirty-third section of the Doctrine and Covenants—is the attribute of Deity which is laid upon us as something we are to develop, and it is described in the word *loving kindness*. Coverdale first used that, I think, in 1535, in time for it to make its way into our biblical literature. When Nephi describes why Jesus did what he did for us, he said it was “because of his loving kindness and his long-suffering towards the children of men” (1 Nephi 19:9). When David made his great plea for forgiveness, he appealed to God’s loving kindness (Psalm 51:1). When Jesus comes again (and in the one-hundred and thirty-third section, it details how he will descend from regions not known, in red apparel, obviously to remind us of his having shed his blood for our sins), we are told that there will be dramatic solar displays, that stars will be hurled from their places, and we will witness that, for he has told us that all flesh shall see him together, and those living then indeed will. What’s striking about that is, in verse fifty-two of the one-hundred and thirty-third section, the thing that we will remember, or at least which we will speak of, is not the dramatic solar display, but we will speak of his loving kindness. How long? “Forever and ever” (D&C 133:52). The more you and I know of him and his glorious atonement, the more marvelous it will become, and we will never tire of declaring how we feel about his loving kindness and we will do it forever and ever.

And I salute him as I do you for his great sacrifice for us, and the marvelous Prophet Joseph who was processing words and concepts and doctrines which were, bright as he was, beyond his capacity to immediately and fully comprehend. Indeed, there is no error in the revelations which he has taught to us. Thank you for what you do to articulate these precious things of the Kingdom to help us all, including those who are not able to defend the Kingdom and who might thereby turn against it, some of whom you will deflect and keep them, in the words of the Book of Mormon, “in the right way” (Moroni 6:4).

My salutation, my appreciation, to you all for what you do. May God continue to bless you. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Daniel C. Peterson (PhD, University of California at Los Angeles) is a professor of Islamic studies and Arabic at Brigham Young University and is the founder of the University's Middle Eastern Texts Initiative, for which he served formerly as editor-in-chief. He has published and spoken extensively on both Islamic and Mormon subjects. Formerly chairman of the board of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) and an officer, editor, and author for its successor organization, the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, his professional work as an Arabist focuses on the Qur'an and on Islamic philosophical theology. He is the author, among other things, of a biography entitled Muhammad: Prophet of God (Eerdmans, 2007).

Elder Neal A. Maxwell was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from 1981 until his passing in 2004.

