

# *The Searching Mind*

MARTHA MOFFITT PEACOCK

It seems to me that one of the greatest protections we can have in the world of reason and knowledge is a carefully cultivated questioning mind—a mind that is not easily swayed by every idea thrust forward at it and one that stops to ponder and thoughtfully examine in the context of gospel principles all that is presented. This carefully cultivated questioning mind is what I would call the searching mind. It is an intellect energized by the challenge of a good problem or a significant task; when so engaged, it is led to probe deeply and ponder carefully all aspects of the problem or task. Easy answers from supposed or self-promoting authorities are not readily adopted. Rather, the searching mind questions deeply to produce genuine, grounded understanding. Such questioning is not, therefore, done randomly, willy-nilly, nor is it performed simply with the intention of questioning everything or undermining all understanding. The searching mind questions, probes, and ponders with direction

and purpose. The principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ provide this direction and purpose. Such a foundation keeps the questioning mind focused on those questions and modes of understanding that are most likely to produce fruitful outcomes. More than providing easy answers, such a focused, searching mind is led to grow, develop, and expand by paying attention to significant questions and fruitful modes of answering those questions.

Students frequently come to me in my art history classes and say that they have read two opposing sides of a particular scholarly debate and that they are equally convinced by both positions. I routinely tell them that they have not read carefully enough, nor have they allowed time for their minds to rigorously sift through the evidence and draw their own conclusions. One episode of neglectful reasoning over an art historical debate will certainly not produce dire results for the student's life (except perhaps for

---

*This is an excerpt of a BYU devotional address delivered by Martha Moffitt Peacock, a BYU associate professor of art history, on May 21, 1996.*

an art history grade), but if the individual never learns how to exercise the ability to judiciously question, probe, and evaluate ideas presented, the long-term consequences on a lifetime journey may indeed be harmful, perhaps endangering its entire course. I would suggest, therefore, that developing a thoughtfully questioning and evaluative mind—right now, while so many of you have such great opportunities as students at this university—is vital to your capacity to weather storms along your own journey. . . .

In conclusion, I end by returning to my original question: “How do my religious beliefs inspire my scholarship?” They are so intertwined that I can scarcely separate them. So much of

what I am as a scholar is built upon my faith in an eternal plan. It is this faith and my many opportunities of applying it to art history at this university that give me the strength to critically evaluate the opinions of others in my field. When those opinions do not seem valid or constructive, it is frequently the gospel and the understanding it provides that motivate me to search more deeply and inspire me with the logic to thwart such arguments. I am grateful for the many experiences Heavenly Father has given me to develop a questioning, searching mind. Clad in the protection of a searching mind informed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, our journey will be productive, even though challenging.