

“All Those Books, and the Spirit, Too!”

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This month marks exactly 20 years since I began to work at BYU. In that time, I have sensed a stirring vision of what this university is becoming. Parenthetically, that word “vision” makes me conscious of certain risks. At a football game in Laramie, a BYU fan was supposedly seated behind a Wyoming fan who was wearing a 25-gallon cowboy hat. The BYU fan couldn’t see the playing field because of the Wyoming fan’s hat. So he tapped the man on the shoulder and said, “Excuse me, sir, but your hat is blocking my vision.” The Wyoming fan turned around and recognized the Cougar blue. Then he said, “Blocking your vision? I’m sorry—I didn’t realize you were having one.”

I first read Brigham Young’s teachings on education 20 years ago, including his injunction to “learn everything that the children of men know, and be prepared for the most refined society upon the face of the earth.” I thought then of those brave pioneers whose names adorn our buildings. They cared passionately for education. Here in the desert, they began building schools as soon as they began building temples. Can you imagine with me that perhaps on one of those pioneer evenings, some who loved books (or even Brigham himself, who loved books) might have sat beneath the stars and asked one another, “Do you think that one day there might be a great

university in Zion? A fine school, with books, and laboratories, and teachers, where the saints might come from all around the world to learn together? Just think—all those books and the Spirit too!” An impossible dream? They might have thought so. But the dream is coming true, the dream of true freedom: gospel-flavored education that liberates the mind and a religious life that frees the soul. “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, *there is liberty*” (2 Corinthians 3:17).

In 1957, Thomas O’Dea, a Catholic sociologist, published *The Mormons*. After describing us sympathetically, O’Dea addressed what he called the Church’s “sources of strain and conflict.” The major conflict he foresaw was that the Church had heavily committed its members to the pursuit of higher education, which fosters critical thinking; yet the Church also maintained an authoritarian, literalistic religion that seemed to discourage critical thinking. “Upon [the] outcome” of this conflict he wrote, “will depend in a deeper sense the future of Mormonism” (O’Dea, p. 240).

Bruce C. Hafen was the provost of BYU when this address was given during the Annual University Conference on 26 August 1991.

Now, over 30 years later, the conflict O’Dea described has hardly disappeared. Each new student, and each of us, must continually struggle with the natural tension between faith and skepticism. As Richard Bushman eloquently reminded us recently, those who “join the world of scholarship” will “henceforth never be entirely free from the dangers” of that world; for we cannot, nor should we, seal ourselves off from “the skepticism that underlies much of scholarship” (BYU August Commencement Address, 1991). Yet the dilemma of whether “all those books” are fundamentally compatible with “the Spirit, too” is now resolved. As evidence for that conclusion, look not only at Richard Bushman; look all across this campus. It is filled with faculty and staff who have grappled successfully with intellectual and professional world at its most demanding level, only to find that their literalistic religious commitments have been strengthened rather than weakened by the encounter. I see all around me partakers of Abraham’s covenant who earnestly desire just what Father Abraham did: “I sought for the blessings of the fathers, . . . desiring also to be one who possessed great knowledge, *and* to be a greater follower of righteousness” (Abraham 1:2). On the foundation of that resolution, despite or even assisted by its ongoing dynamic tensions, I sense for the 1990s a quantum leap of *quality* for BYU.

For me, four themes flow from this vision. The first I call authentic religion. This campus is a living monument to the religious and educational philosophy of President David O. McKay. In same ways the BYU, BYU—Hawaii, and Ricks College campuses we see today owe their very existence to his influence. His vision of higher education therefore deserves our closest attention. President McKay once told the BYU faculty that this is “primarily a religious institution. It was established for the *sole purpose of associating* with facts of science, art, literature, and philosophy the truths of

the gospel of Jesus Christ” (*Messenger*, BYU, October 1937). Thus, our religious education faculty does *not* constitute the largest institute of religion in the Church, situated “across the street” (symbolically or actually) from the largest secular university in Utah. the primary mission of the BYU religion faculty is to teach faith, testimony, and practical religion, but those faculty also nourish our commitments to serious, university-level education in all the academic disciplines. At the same time, all BYU faculty and staff must seek to integrate the gospel and its teachings into everything we do. We must all be truly bilingual, speaking fluently both the language of our disciples and the language of the scriptures, yet our priorities are clear: our professional credentials may have earned us passports to Athens, but our citizenship must always remain in Jerusalem.

Clayne Pope has observed that many BYU personnel fall into one of two groups. One group “clusters in the familiar surroundings of their disciplines,” looking for “cues” to “the best graduate programs in [their] field.” This group sometimes views the Church with “embarrassment.” The other group “shuns the disciplines and gathers in the comforting shade of the Church,” where they at times “belittle the hard-won knowledge of the world,” implying to Church members that “there is nothing of much importance in all that scholarship.” “Neither of these groups,” he correctly continued, fulfills BYU’s mission, which “requires a *fusion* of the secular and the sacred into a mountain of truth” (Phi Kappa Phi Address, March 7, 1991).

Here is one crucial reason why this kind of fusion matters: Thomas O’Dea postulated that authentic religion and genuine intellectual inquiry simply may not be compatible. As our increasingly bright students struggle with that challenge, they will find their best resolution not in abstract debates, but in the lives of their teachers, their campus job supervisors, or the leaders in their student wards. BYU offers

something the institutes of religion cannot fully offer. LDS professionals highly trained in all the major fields who have worked through the O’Dea issues with wonderfully productive outcomes. This makes BYU the ideal place for the Church’s most promising young people to be tutored by role models who have achieved professional and religious harmony. Please let our students get to know your hearts as well as your minds. Share with them, build them. Reach out to touch them. Reach out to teach them.

No one at BYU is making a more significant contribution than those of you whose thoughts and example reach the hearts of BYU students in ways that stir them to a sense of the sacred. As one of Merlin Myers’ students said recently at Merlin’s funeral, “What was that feeling we sensed at times in his anthropology classes? It was not like sacrament meeting—it was almost like the temple because he made us forever conscious of the difference between the sacred and the profane.” The parents of these young men and women send them here for that very purpose. Many of those parents are on their knees every night, praying that you will touch their hearts. Thank God, literally, so many of you do. Many, many people in the permanent BYU community take the spiritual mission of this school with utmost seriousness. Whether in the boiler room, a dormitory, a counseling session, a faculty office, or a student ward, you work, you fast, and you pray for our students and for all the rest of us.

Because this element of the BYU experience is so crucial, people who have an anti-Church agenda really don’t belong here, no matter how able they may be in other ways. Those who accept employment here accept the responsibility of being role models for a life that combines the quest for intellectual rigor with the quest for spiritual values and personal character. Faculty and staff who are members of the Church also accept the spiritual and temporal expectations of wholehearted Church membership.

At the same time, I plead for our commitment to authentic religion. A friend from another faith reports that the main criticism he hears of BYU and its people is the charge of arrogance and self-righteousness. According to one apocryphal story, someone from Salt Lake City was talking with a longtime friend from BYU. The Salt Lake person said, “I really apologize for telling you this, but something bothers me: you are just too condescending and self-righteous.” The BYU friend replied cheerfully, “Oh, that’s okay—I forgive you.”

More seriously, I recall the question a little boy supposedly asked his grandfather: “Was that a true story, Grandpa, or were you just preaching?” I am haunted by the assumption behind that child’s innocent question, because it touches a point of terrible vulnerability for an institution so boldly identified with religion as this one is. In the minds of that little boy and many other people, “religion” is “just preaching.” Religion isn’t real life—it is mostly hypocrisy: an artificial facade of posturing and dogmatizing.

Herbert Schneider has described how the severe doctrines of Calvinism receded to the harmlessness of “just preaching” while the American Puritans lived out the “true stories” of their lives at another level: “The preachers continued to preach [Calvinism] and the laymen continued to hear it; not because either of them believed it, but because they cherished it. Beliefs seldom became doubts; they become ritual . . . themes of public celebration . . . cherished in the imagination long after [they have] been surrendered in practice” (*The Puritan Mind*, 1930, p. 98). May that never describe our condition. May we, rather, be as A.J. Cronin wrote: “You’ve got inquisitiveness and tenderness. You’re sensible of the distinction between thinking and doubting . . . and, quite the nicest thing about you, my dear boy, is this—you haven’t got that bumptious security which sprints from dogma rather than [truth]”

(A. J. Cronin, *The Keys of the Kingdom* [Boston: Little, Brown & Co.], 1941, p. 144).

My second theme is the need to foster student quality. President Lee will shortly tell us in more detail about a significant meeting of the BYU Board of Trustees last June 5, but I will make a few preliminary observations. It was not lost on any of us that day that we were meeting with a group that included those we wholeheartedly sustain as apostles and prophets. We had the blessing of a long and candid conversation with them regarding some fundamental BYU issues. I came away from that meeting with a strong sense that we understood one another, and that we now have a strong, clear mandate regarding our student admissions strategy and the role of our faculty—two issues that go a long way toward defining the very nature of the university.

As ever-growing numbers of students apply for admission here, the board has now authorized an approach that will inevitably result in the qualitative improvement of the student body, both academically and personally. The board has long been uncomfortable about admissions decisions made only on the basis of academic factors. Thus we have always required a bishop's endorsement, and for nearly a decade we have used a "reparation index" that favors applicants who enroll in demanding high school courses, regardless of the grades they earn.

We will now add further elements designed to identify those among the best academically prepared students who are *also* the most likely to contribute to the BYU environment and to see their education to influence others for good. These ideas build upon a concept urged by President McKay 70 years ago, when the Church first began the process of reducing its sponsorship of higher education. Having been both a faculty member and president of Weber Academy, President McKay knew that education on a Church campus was richer and more complete than a state-sponsored education

supplemented by religion courses. Thus, he told the board that the Church had sponsored schools not "merely because the state didn't [provide education]; rather, we *"establish[ed] the schools to make Latter-day Saints"* (Church Board of Education, 1964, Special Committee Report). But when it became clear in the 1920s that the Church couldn't afford to educate all the Saints, President McKay proposed an expansion of *teacher* education so that the students who *were* privileged to enjoy the fully integrated vision of "a BYU experience" could later extend the influence of that vision as public school teachers.

Our admissions office has drawn on a rich base of experience and creativity to project such an admissions strategy into the modern era. For example, the process used to select Benson scholars has helped us identify the personal qualities that incline young people toward altruistic service as well as toward spiritual and intellectual leadership. We also profited this past year from asking each applicant to submit a self-revealing essay, and we will be asking bishops and high school counselors to describe our applicants more fully. Academic preparation will continue to be the dominant single factor in admissions decisions, but these new criteria will provide enough additional basis for selection that we can safely predict future student bodies of increasingly strong educational *and personal* quality.

Now we must face the implications of such qualitative growth amid intense enrollment pressure. For instance, our inability to enroll all who would come here suggests the need for a creative vision of continuing education programs that will extend the influence of a BYU education. If we can't get the people into BYU, perhaps we can find better ways to get BYU into the people. Another implication is that we must address the issues of student attrition and low graduation rates. Given a strategy of educating those who will pass along the influence

of that education to others, persistence to graduation is critical.

We must also help students move through the university faster. The board underscored that need in unmistakable terms last June. We have begun an empirical study of the factors that slow student progress and will be reviewing anew all major and general education requirements. In addition, we must increase spring and summer enrollments to maximize our use of faculty and campus resources. We are already working on options that include financial incentives or perhaps requiring newly admitted students to attend during some spring/summer terms.

The increasing quality of our students also demands that we increase the educational quality of their experience here. Joseph Smith said, when the Spirit directed him to Newel K. Whitney's store, "Well, Brother Whitney, you've prayed me here—now what are you going to do with me?" These precious and gifted young people have the right to ask us the same question: we've prayed them here, now what *are* we going to do with them? As one step, we announce the creation of a new Faculty development Center. Stan Albrecht will tell the faculty more about the new center, but it is primarily a resource to the academic colleges to strengthen teaching, augmented by attention to faculty scholarship and professional development. Our vision of "a quantum leap of quality" has no more significant aim than the enhancement of teaching quality in the best, broad sense.

We are especially concerned about the experience of freshmen and sophomore students, who too often feel lost and overwhelmed by a mega-environment that can be intimidating and impersonal. We must examine our entire approach to "the freshman year," including student/faculty ratios. William Butler Yeats wrote, "Education is not the filling of a pail; it is the lighting of a fire." At BYU, we must ignite the sparks of that fire

within each entering student, then fan it to a roaring blaze.

My third theme is faculty quality. As I tried to say last year, high-quality faculty scholarship and creative work are essential if we are to have a first-rate teaching institution. Therefore, every faculty member should energetically pursue a creative scholarly agenda designed at a minimum to keep him or her intellectually alive and current in the field. Natural constraints at BYU will necessarily limit the fraction of our collective time given to scholarship, which unavoidably limits the *quantity* of our creative output. But we need not limit our aspirations for scholarly *quality*. These constraints include our high student/faculty ratio, our high percentage of undergraduate students, our comparatively low level of total expenditures per student, and the sheer variety of our academic programs.

Hoping to open a campus dialogue on this subject last year, I suggested several steps designed to ensure both realism and fairness in meeting our scholarly aspirations. These steps included a more flexible definition of scholarship, an emphasis on scholarly and creative work that enhances teaching, customized faculty load arrangements, and the rewarding of individual assignments equally when performed with equal quality. We have enjoyed a spirited and constructive campus dialogue on these issues since last year, including an all-faculty conference in January on the meaning of "scholarship," a series of meetings between university administrators and small groups of faculty, a study and discussion by the Faculty Advisory Council, a seminar for department chairs, and, finally, our recent discussion with the BYU Board of Trustees. As one result of this interaction, the academic vice-president's office will soon distribute for review a proposed new statement of policy and procedures for rank advancement and continuing status. This will go first to department chairs and deans, to be followed by an open hearing for all faculty. A

final document that reflects this intensive process of input should be effective by next spring.

One other significant outcome of this discussion was the response of our trustees in June. We described for the board the university's academic development over the past generation. Before 1960, BYU was essentially a "comprehensive college" with a focus that was more regional than national, and the faculty did only occasional scholarly work. We have now become a "major university" with a national and even international focus for both students and faculty. Scholarship and teaching now interact to create a professional quality that is nationally competitive. However, we also showed the board how we can fulfill this role without creating the expectation of becoming a "research university." We can do this by stressing both the flexible definition and the teaching orientation we propose for faculty scholarship. We explained the concept of variable faculty loads and noted that, although we need significant additional faculty-related resources to serve our students better, we can continue our present level of research without massive increases in external government funding.

After full discussion, the board unanimously endorsed this understanding of our faculty's mission. A "major university" occupies a legitimate middle ground between a comprehensive college and a research university. Cultivating that ground with the utmost quality is our faculty agenda for the '90s. This perspective matches the emerging quality of our faculty with the emerging potential of our students.

My fourth theme is our need to continue building a campus work environment full of professional competence, harmony, and personal nurturing. Regarding competence, I express my gratitude for the overall quality of the staff and administrative support services on this campus. We aren't perfect, but this massive and complicated institution shouldn't operate successfully for fifteen minutes without the dedication and attention to detail that

typically characterize BYU personnel. Time magazine said recently that "Utah now boasts the nation's youngest, best-educated, and most productive work force" (July 19, 1991, p. 22). It occurs to me that the cream of that very impressive crop works right here on these 638 acres. Along with our other aspirations for higher quality, we must continue aspiring to uncompromising professional quality in everything we do, from repairing the air conditioning and keeping track of student files to serving delicious food and monitoring the expenditures of BYU funds. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell once said, we cannot let the world condemn our value system by pointing to our professional mediocrity.

Let us also work in harmony together. Our vision seeks not only "all those books" but "the Spirit, too"; thus the Savior's teachings to the Nephites have special meaning for us: we desire his influence and even his presence here. We must therefore be very cautious about "disputations" and "contentions" that arise from hearts stirred up in anger. This does not mean we expect a suffocating conformity. As to matters of personal style and choice, the Lord clearly has more than one cookie cutter. For me, the ideal metaphor is a musical one: with our many voices, we could all sing in unison, in harmony, or in dissonance. Of these three, I prefer harmony, because it enables a variety of voices to blend into a fuller, richer sound than mere unison.

In the spirit of that harmony, I invite our attention to the matter of diversity and gender. BYU's mission supports the mission of the Church in teaching the crucial importance of marriage and family life, not only as a matter of social desirability but as a matter of religious doctrine. At the same time, our mission and the doctrines of the gospel affirm the inherent worth of female and male alike. The status of both women and men here should therefore reflect our twin commitments to family life *and* individual worth. Thus the day-to-day

speech and behavior of university personnel must demonstrate the value of women in every facet of campus life. It is our policy to follow up on any reliable report alleging that BYU personnel have engaged in demeaning behavior toward women employees or students. As then-President Dallin Oaks said here in 1975, “We make no distinction between young men and young women in our conviction about the importance of an education.” In every way, we value the contributions of women and men equally at BYU, and we are committed to an environment and a reward system that reflects what we value.

Drawing on the work of several excellent committees on women and gender over a number of years, we seek to implement this commitment through normal campus channels. For example, we have conducted internal salary reviews to ensure gender-based equity. And to raise our awareness of gender issues, we have invited professors Kate Kirkham and Marie Cornwall into an ongoing series of conversations with Assistant Vice President Carolyn Lloyd, Associate Vice President Dennis Thompson, and members of the President’s Council. We hope deans, chairs, and directors will find similar opportunities to talk with women colleagues.

Our desires for competence, harmony, and nurturing apply in everything we do here, but they apply especially in the relationships each one of us has with students. The most important part of any organization is its “customers”—those for whom the institution was created. For us, that group is our students and, ultimately, their families. As Page Smith said in a paper quoted by BYU’s Don Jarvis: “If we do not love and care for [our students], if we do not place them in the center of our thinking and doing, if we persist in thinking that they are merely incidental to or distracting from our [other serious] concerns, then there is, quite literally, no hope for higher education” (*Junior Faculty Development*, p. 68).

With thousands of students bustling constantly around the campus in more directions than we can comprehend, and with hundreds more hammering on our doors and telephones because we cannot admit them to study, it is all too easy for us to develop callouses around the entry to our hearts. A frustrated mother whose child was turned away from a full BYU program said to me in tears, “When you people turn us down, you could at least no seem so smug about it.” Perhaps the sheer number of people paying attention to BYU makes some BYU personnel pay less attention to the feelings of those people. In a recent survey, one BYU graduate expressed his sadness at having sensed here “an attitude that it is not important to treat people with respect.”

When we hear complaints—and I know in some offices that seems like all you hear—I hope we can view each concern as an opportunity to learn how to improve our routine processes. I realize how difficult it is when people have unrealistic expectations of us. I still remember an irate phone call I received at home late one evening from a father in a faraway state. We had just implemented a new computer program in some phase of registration, and a bug in the program had fouled up the paperwork for this man’s daughter. After listening to me briefly, the man said, “I might have expected that kind of problem someplace else, but this is a Church school!” What could I say? I just replied, “I’m sorry. We buy our computers the same place as everybody else does.”

Those are the four themes that for me flow from that pioneer vision of Brigham Young University: all those books, and the Spirit, too. I conclude with one thought about our relationship with those early pioneers and with today’s Saints of the latter days. When Joseph Smith went to Washington, D.C., to seek redress for the Saints’ grievances, he and Elias Higbee wrote a letter to the Church members in Nauvoo. They opened that letter with a phrase that suggests what it means to

be at BYU: “Your fellow laborers and servants, sent by you to perform one of the most arduous and responsible duties, and *to labor in the most honorable cause that ever graced the pages of human existence*” (*History of the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 39, 40).

It is our blessing, sustained by the tithes and the prayers of the Saints all across the world, to work in “the most honorable cause that ever graced the pages of human existence.” In an inescapably significant sense, we *belong* to the Church. We sometimes say to one another, “Yes, I belong to the Church.” Ordinarily that means “I’m a Church member. I belong to the Third Ward.” But there is quite another meaning to the phrase, and it applies to only a select few people who serve on a daily basis, as we do, the interests of the entire Church. In an almost sacred sense, we *belong* to the Church.

Who are those people we serve? Some would say they are just a friendly bunch of

college students. But they are also the Saints of the Most High, the true followers of Christ, those for whom he pleaded to his Father as “those whom thou hast given me.” Our relationship with them is more than a simple business contact. Our highest desire should be to think of them—and of each other—even as the Savior does. Remember his words: “He that is not the shepherd, [but an hireling] whose own the sheep are not, [he] seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth . . . because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep . . . [But I,] I lay down my life for the sheep” (John 10:12–15).

May his love for his sheep fill each of us, no matter where we work on the campus. May we lay down our lives for those sheep, a day at a time, in a service that partakes of the most honorable cause that ever graced the pages of human existence.