

A House of Dreams

JOHN S. TANNER

BYU is built of brick and mortar. It comprises libraries and laboratories, classrooms and cafeterias, well-groomed grounds and cluttered faculty offices. It is built of impressive financial resources and of remarkable human capital. But, above all, BYU is and ever has been built of dreams and ideals. Our house of learning is also a house of dreams.

In the early days of the Brigham Young Academy, the building that housed the school burnt to the ground. Many thought the fire signaled the end of the Academy. Reed Smoot lamented to Karl G. Maeser that the school had been destroyed. But Brother Maeser knew better.

On Sunday, January 27, 1884, flames erupted from the second floor of the building. The cause of the fire was never determined, but it didn't matter. Provo had no fire department and the Academy had no insurance. Townspeople rushed to form a bucket brigade, but their efforts were futile. They removed what books and furniture they could, then they just stood and watched the building burn. Reed Smoot, one of the school's first 29 students, was among them. He would later become a U.S. senator and an apostle of the Lord. He approached Karl Maeser grief-stricken that the Academy had burned down.

But Karl set his jaw. "No! Fire has destroyed the house, but the Academy lives on."¹

Brother Maeser knew that BYU, like Zion, exists as an idea, an aspiration, and indeed a prophetic injunction to "seek learning, even by study and also by faith"² and to "not . . . teach even the alphabet or the multiplication tables without the Spirit of God."³ Such ideals are hardy; fire cannot destroy them, for they reside not in buildings alone but in the minds and hearts of the Latter-day Saints.

Even so, it took a prophetic dream regarding BYU's future to persuade President Maeser to stay here during those difficult days and years that followed the fire.

Nevertheless, despite Karl's determination, the next eight years were dark indeed. The school occupied several temporary buildings, including the Smoot Drugstore, and finally settled into a warehouse leased from ZCMI. But facilities were makeshift and supplies depleted. Karl struggled to pay

John S. Tanner was academic vice president when this address was delivered at the BYU Annual University Conference faculty session on 28 August 2007.

the rent. At first the faculty were fiercely loyal, but then their families began going hungry. There was talk of closing the school. Even Karl himself wrote of giving up the cause: "I am worn out and sick in spirit, . . . and with all my love for this Academy, I feel that I owe it to my very life, which is needlessly wearing itself out here in an apparently hopeless task, to accept any change that will promise me opportunities for permanent usefulness."

With that he told his wife and his daughter that because there seemed to be no real support or future for a school here, he was going to accept a position at the University of Deseret, where he could get a regular salary and at least adequately provide for his family. Accordingly, his wife and daughter got things packed and then sat on their trunks for several days, until his daughter finally mustered enough courage to ask her father when they were moving. His response was: "I have changed my mind. I have had a dream—I have seen Temple Hill filled with buildings—great temples of learning, and I have decided to remain and do my part."⁴

Such divinely sent dreams have punctuated our history, and the dream that BYU will become in time a great Latter-day Saint university if it remains true to its mission is woven throughout our institutional history. This dream preceded us. It overarches our current imperfect attempts to realize it. And it will outlast our brief contribution to it. Though all else changes, this dream endures. As Karl G. Maeser observed near the end of his tenure here:

Amid the ever-changing scenes of development which the Brigham Young Academy has passed through, whether holding forth in one single room under makeshift arrangements, or enjoying the benefits of more suitable facilities: whether in rented premises . . . , or in her own palatial habitation; . . . there must go through it all, . . . "one thing constant": the spirit of the Latter-day Work. As long as this principle shall be the mainspring of all her labors, whether in teaching the alphabet or the multiplication tables, or unfolding the advanced

truths of science and art, the future of the Brigham Young Academy will surpass in glory the fondest hopes of her most ardent admirers.⁵

BYU's history abounds in such seemingly hyperbolic, visionary statements about its future. Such visionary hopes for BYU can seem daunting as well as exhilarating, especially when bogged down in the mundane tasks of grading, resource allocation, assessment, rank advancement, and the like. Yet even amid the quotidian cares and controversies that beset us, the extraordinary truth persists that great expectations envelop this university. The halls here echo with prophetic utterances, such as John Taylor's prophecy:

You will see the day that Zion will be as far ahead of the outside world in everything pertaining to learning of every kind as we are today in regard to religious matters. You mark my words, and write them down, and see if they do not come to pass.⁶

Such statements are the stars that must guide the good ship BYU as it tacks across academic seas. Quoting Carl Schurz:

Ideals are like stars; you will not succeed in touching them with your hands. But like the seafaring man on the desert of waters, you choose them as your guides, and following them you will reach your destiny.⁷

Over the years thousands of individuals have contributed to the dream of BYU. Every year new students and faculty add their particular hopes and dreams to our collective vision. This past year many of you participated in a process of defining and refining the dream for your programs by developing expected learning outcomes. Some years ago I was privileged to participate in a similar exercise when I was asked to draft the Aims of a BYU Education.

As important as our contributions to the dream are, it is prophets who have ever

provided the fundamental vision that guides our course at BYU. Our theme this year comes from one such prophetic statement, a remarkable talk entitled “Education for Eternity”⁸ given by then Elder Spencer W. Kimball 40 years ago at an annual faculty conference just like this. Subsequently, as president of the Church, President Kimball explicitly returned to and developed themes in “Education for Eternity” for “The Second Century of Brigham Young University,”⁹ delivered in 1975 for BYU’s centennial, and then again in the charge given to President Holland upon his inauguration in 1980.¹⁰ Taken together, these three visionary discourses span three BYU administrations and 23 years. They constitute a major prophetic pronouncement upon the unfolding dream of BYU.

So on this, the 40th anniversary of “Education for Eternity,” I want to consider our current accomplishments and challenges in light of President Kimball’s talks, which articulate dreams that remain ours to fulfill. In doing so I recognize, of course, that we take our direction now from our living prophet and our current board and from the president they have selected. President Kimball himself frequently reminded us of our duty to follow the directions and policies set by the prophet and board if BYU is to fulfill its mission.¹¹ Nothing I shall say should be interpreted to diminish our duty to look to current prophets or their right to set the course for BYU. This said, I believe President Kimball’s call to excellence is consistent with President Hinckley’s challenge to “be excellent” and President Samuelson’s exposition of our “quest for excellence” this morning. In addition, we can learn much by reflecting on the words of a former prophet who had so much to say about BYU’s mission and destiny and whose teachings, coincidentally, are being studied by the Church this year.

I have put President Kimball’s talks on the academic vice president’s Web page so that you can read them in their entirety. Today I

shall simply cherry-pick a few ideas for consideration, which for purpose of analysis I have organized under three broad areas: students, programs, and faculty.

Students

A Refining Host for Brilliant Stars

I was not here when “Education for Eternity” was given in 1967, but I have spoken with those who were. The effect was electric. It was as if Elder Kimball lifted the veil on a destiny few had dared even to dream when he launched into the second half of his talk with these words:

*In our world, there have risen brilliant stars in drama, music, literature, sculpture, painting, science, and all the graces. For long years I have had a vision of the BYU greatly increasing its already strong position of excellence till the eyes of all the world will be upon us.*¹²

He then proceeded to enumerate at great length the names of notable men and women whom Latter-day Saints ought to emulate. And I use *emulate* here in its root meaning: “to strive to equal or surpass.” President Kimball believed that Latter-day Saint artists, scholars, statesmen, and scientists ought to outdo those who lack the grand doctrines of the Restoration and whose lives are sometimes unworthy of the companionship of the Holy Ghost. He said we should seek to emulate, among others, Wagner, Verdi, Bach, Handel, Paganini, and Liszt in music; da Vinci, Raphael, Michelangelo, Rembrandt, and Thorvaldsen in art; Goethe, Shakespeare, and Shaw in letters; Lincoln in statesmanship; and Pasteur, Curie, and Einstein in science. President Kimball’s words were so audacious as to seem almost unbelievable. Yet he repeated this extravagant expectation as Church president in his talk “The Second Century of Brigham Young University.” He expected “brilliant stars” to arise from BYU. “This university can be the refining host for

many such individuals who will touch men and women the world over long after they have left this campus.”¹³

As I reread “Education for Eternity” and the now-familiar charge to become a “refining host” for “brilliant stars,” it struck me that President Kimball was thinking primarily about the accomplishments of BYU students, not faculty. After all, it is our students whose achievements will bless the world “long after they have left this campus.” Likewise, it is our students who make up BYU’s orchestras, orchestras that President Kimball predicts will one day rival in quality the Philadelphia Orchestra and the New York Philharmonic.¹⁴ This does not mean that President Kimball lacks high expectations for faculty scholarship and creative work, as we shall see. It does mean that he anticipated that BYU’s greatest contributions will come through its students.

This fact can serve as a salutary reminder for us about the fundamental purpose of scholarship at BYU. It is not, and must never be, to satisfy our own vainglory nor to advance our own careers. Nor even is it solely to advance truth and knowledge, though this is a worthy purpose and one specifically endorsed by BYU’s institutional objectives. The primary purpose for the Church’s large investment in faculty scholarship and creative work at BYU is to enable us to be a refining host for our students. Hence, we must strive for excellence, as President Kimball says, “not in arrogance or pride, but in the spirit of service.”¹⁵

So how are we doing in realizing the dream of becoming a refining host for brilliant stars? I see exciting indicators that we are making progress up the slopes of the “educational Everest”¹⁶ we are supposed to become. For example, BYU is ranked 10th nationally in terms of where new PhDs received their undergraduate degrees. And some subdisciplines are ranked in the top five as undergraduate incubators for new PhDs.¹⁷ Likewise, BYU is one of the top feeder schools for law, medicine,

and dentistry, and in every case our students have acceptance rates well above the national average.¹⁸ To be sure, BYU draws upon a very large undergraduate base, which affects these rankings. Still, the figures are impressive and certainly consistent with President Kimball’s charge to become a refining host.

Similarly, our students in the fine arts are finding great early success. Many of you have read that our animation students have won multiple “student Emmys” the past four years running. In addition, students in illustration, music, theater, dance, and communications have been similarly recognized with prestigious national and international awards. The success of our young artists bodes well for the extravagant expectation President Kimball dared to dream 40 years ago. Maybe the dream is not so far-fetched after all. A senior faculty member in music, after listening to a performance by a student orchestra recently, told me that he felt he was witnessing the fulfillment of President Kimball’s dream that someday BYU’s student ensembles would rival in quality the great orchestras of the world.

And so it goes for student performance in many colleges across campus. I shall leave it to your deans to brag about student accomplishments in your areas. It is heartening and humbling to receive reports of our students’ achievements. The eyes of the world are indeed beginning to rest upon us through them, as President Samuelson discovered when accosted by the president of another university who incredulously asked him if it was true that one of our life-science students had really published in *Nature*. It was indeed true, said President Samuelson. Moreover, he told a dumbstruck fellow president the student was an undergraduate.

But we can do better. In order to strengthen our efforts to become a refining host, the university has reorganized and relocated the Preprofessional Advisement Center, developed initiatives to help BYU students compete

more successfully for major scholarships, and focused significant resources on mentored learning. This latter program has been remarkably effective in enhancing the quality of undergraduate education. We intend to continue to fund and foster it.

However, no amount of reorganization or resources will ensure BYU's preeminence as a refining host without your commitment. This dream depends on the quality of your interactions with students. Above all, we need you to continue to look for ways to help your students see their potential and stretch to achieve lofty dreams. When I interviewed our Rhodes candidates this year, they all said that having a faculty member believe in them enough to encourage them to compete was the single-most important factor in their competing. But they also said that had they been encouraged earlier, as were the successful candidates, they might have been more prepared to win. We can and should become even more effective refining hosts and mentors for our students.

Quality Teaching and Learning

President Kimball felt that "the true measure of an institution of learning [is] the impact it makes on the total lives of its students" and that BYU stood preeminent "when measured with the true measuring rod" of greatness.¹⁹ Note that even 40 years ago President Kimball adduced student outcomes as the best measure of success at BYU. He also cautioned BYU to continue to foster quality teaching and learning:

While the discovery of new knowledge must increase, there must always be a heavy and primary emphasis on . . . quality . . . teaching at BYU. Quality teaching is a tradition never to be abandoned. It includes a quality relationship between faculty and students. . . .

*We must be certain that the lessons are not only taught but are also absorbed and learned.*²⁰

I think about this injunction often. I quoted it to Russ Osguthorpe when giving him his charge as director of the Center for Teaching and Learning. The center is charged to work with faculty to support quality teaching and quality learning in the spirit of President Kimball's injunction. Our students deserve quality teaching in *every* class! I am troubled when evaluations are consistently low for a course or for a teacher for years and no remedial action is taken. We can do better. We must do better than this.

In aggregate, it is difficult to know whether our students are being better taught or learning more now than they did 40 years ago. As Derek Bok observed, no one knows whether we are educating students better now than we did in my generation.²¹ Despite huge increases in funding for higher education, we simply don't have the data to know if college students are better educated. I am hopeful that our effort to define, measure, and improve student learning outcomes will help us better understand how well our students are learning. More important, I hope that these efforts will help us actually get better. It is not enough to define objectives and collect data. We must close the assessment loop by making data-driven improvements. Let me again encourage you to seize the mandate from Northwest to make meaningful, cost-effective improvements.

I'm convinced that significant improvements can result from rather simple, low-cost, low-tech strategies like giving frequent feedback. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* reported recently on a study by memory researchers that confirmed the not-surprising findings first published in the late 1930s that frequent quizzing greatly increases long-term learning.²² Measuring what students know not only increases retention but changes what they know. I have found the practice of asking students to write "captures" during the first five minutes of class about the readings, or the last five minutes of class about the lectures, to be a

simple but effective learning technique. It not only helps my students learn, it helps me learn what they are learning. I encourage you to do something this semester to improve teaching and learning in your classes.

John Taylor's prophecy refers to the day when Zion will lead the world "in everything pertaining to *learning*."²³ Calling attention to this phrasing, Russ Osguthorpe has suggested that there may be deeper meaning in this prophecy about BYU's destiny as a house of learning than we have heretofore considered.

Dividends Through Service and Dedication

President Kimball was keenly aware that, given the growth of the Church,

*a smaller and smaller percentage of our LDS college-age students will attend BYU. . . . More and more, it will be a privileged group who are able to come here. Those who are blessed to attend BYU have a great responsibility to make certain that the Church's investment in them provides dividends through service and dedication to others as they labor in the Church and in the world. Your challenge is to assure that this investment does bear fruit.*²⁴

This continues to be a challenge, albeit one ameliorated for international students somewhat by the emergence of an inspired Perpetual Education Fund program. We have a heavy responsibility to ensure that we are doing the best we can to admit students who will take advantage of the investment the Church is making in them. To this end we have modified our admission process to look more carefully at the personal characteristics of applicants in the hope of not passing over those who promise both to enrich our environment here and to yield the dividends President Kimball refers to after they graduate. Moreover, although the students we admit are indeed "a privileged group,"²⁵ admission to BYU ought not to favor those from economi-

cally privileged backgrounds. Therefore we are augmenting needs-based scholarships to help those most in need of help. The largest scholarship every BYU student receives, however, remains a "tithing scholarship." It is my hope that over time we will foster a spirit of giving back to BYU comparable to the ethic that prevails in the Perpetual Education Fund.

Given the growth of the Church and the ever-smaller percentage of youth who can attend BYU, we in the central administration feel a heavy responsibility to be judicious about any request for additional resources from the Church. We thus continue to look first internally to meet our needs and ask colleges and departments to do the same, recognizing that even without making requests for new funding, BYU receives generous guideline increases year in and year out amounting to millions in new funds each year. Under President Samuelson's able and frugal leadership, I expect this pattern of internal reallocation to continue.

Programs

Peaks and Planks

President Kimball urged BYU to become an "educational Everest."²⁶ He felt that, while BYU was a great university, "a much greater one it can yet become!"²⁷ Such aspirations for BYU to get better coincide with President Hinckley's charge for BYU to be the best it can be.

Yet neither then nor now should the need for BYU to grow in stature be confused with a mandate for BYU to grow in size. Even in 1967 there were enrollment caps. President Kimball predicted that these will actually help BYU channel "energy formerly given to growth and expansion" into "making our dreams come true."²⁸ The same principle holds today. If BYU is to become an educational Everest, it will not be by getting bigger but by getting better. We must do more by doing less.

The metaphor President Kimball repeatedly used for the painful work of reallocation is that of a ship that must be kept seaworthy by taking out old planks:

*The BYU must keep its vessel seaworthy. It must take out all old planks as they decay and put in new and stronger timber in their place. It must sail on and on and on.*²⁹

I have used the metaphor of pruning.³⁰ Whether the metaphor is planks or pruning, BYU must engage in the discipline of ongoing reallocation of resources. “These changes do not happen free of pain, challenge, and adjustment,”³¹ President Kimball remarked, commending the university for its efforts to change the academic calendar, manage the curriculum, and realign disciplines.

I commend you, too, for your efforts to reallocate and focus. During this year and next, the academic side of the house will have reallocated 30 FTEs and about 12 million dollars. This represents very hard work. Thank you! Our colleagues on the support side of the university are doing the same hard work. We are the beneficiaries of six new faculty FTEs that were made available through their belt-tightening. They have done this out of a desire to enhance student learning and in a spirit of consecration. I am profoundly grateful for their sacrifice, as I know you are.

President Kimball believed that there must be ongoing pruning for BYU to become more fruitful. We are trying to do this at the central level for university-wide programs and institutes. But it is departments and colleges that can best ask and answer questions about whether you have the right focus and the right number of programs. You know best if you are spread too thin or if a degree program is weak. I commend colleges and departments that are asking hard questions in order to get better—such as the College of Life Sciences, whose heroic restructuring the president praised this

morning; sociology, which eliminated its PhD to concentrate on undergraduate programs where BYU enjoys greater competitive advantages; education, which has proposed eliminating two doctoral degrees in order to create one much stronger one; management, which is consolidating its centers and institutes to focus on serving students in a targeted way around core college goals; and engineering, which is focusing its work around five imperatives needed to offer world-class engineering programs in the 21st century—to cite only a few examples of many.

Such work is not “free of pain,” but, wisely done, it can produce much good. Limits force us to think seriously about what we do best and where we must do better. They force us to focus, which is the necessary prelude to developing what President Kimball calls “peak[s] of educational excellence”³² on an educational Everest.

Not an Educational Factory

President Kimball admonished, “We do not want BYU ever to become an educational factory.”³³ This is another phrase that frequently comes to my mind as I observe trends at BYU and in the academy generally. The warning seems ever more timely as higher education drifts toward consumerism and commodification. Education is no mere commodity, nor are students merely consumers. President Kimball quoted President McKay, who observed that “a university is not a dictionary, a dispensary, nor is it a department store. It is . . . an exercise in thinking, preparing, and living.”³⁴ Similarly, President Kimball observed that BYU “must concern itself with not only the dispensing of facts but with the preparation of its students to take their place in society as thinking, thoughtful, and sensitive individuals.”³⁵ Unless we approach the assessment movement wisely, seizing it to serve our own mission and aims, we risk introducing a factory mentality into BYU. Let us keep these

principles in mind as we assess our programs and teach our students.

It is difficult to resist a mass production mentality when we must teach so many students. But resist it we must. Elder Ballard forcefully admonished chairs and deans just yesterday to remember in all we do the worth of the individual. Each soul is precious. Somehow we must attend to the one while we also serve the many. As President Kimball said:

*We can do much in excellence and, at the same time, emphasize the large-scale participation of our students, whether it be in athletics or in academic events. We can bless many and give many experience, while, at the same time, we are developing the few select souls who can take us to new heights of attainment.*³⁶

Frankly, I do not quite know how to bless the many and the one. I am impressed by faculty who teach large sections well and somehow find a way to connect with struggling individual students. My daughter had such faculty in her introductory physiology and chemistry courses. I know of faculty who teach the masses yet still manage to know students by name and make time to meet with them individually out of class. This is truly commendable, as is the decision by the College of Life Sciences to move from mega-section Biology 100 courses to simply very large section courses in an effort to find a scale that balances its need to serve both the many and the one. Again, I don't know how to solve all the problems of scale at BYU, but I'm persuaded that remembering President's Kimball's warning that BYU must never become "an educational factory" will help. We must never forget that education is "not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire."³⁷ We must never forget the one as we teach the many.

Faculty

In Pursuit of Excellence

President Kimball held out high expectations for the faculty as scholars, teachers, and citizens. His vision admits no place for mediocrity.

*As [LDS] scholars you must speak with authority and excellence to your professional colleagues in the language of scholarship, and you must also be literate in the language of spiritual things.*³⁸

We must be "bilingual." Religious commitments "do not excuse you from reasonable achievement in your chosen field."³⁹ In "pursuit of excellence" at BYU, "we must do more than ask the Lord for excellence. Perspiration must precede inspiration; there must be effort before there is excellence."⁴⁰ "We must be professional, . . . reaching out to the world of scholars . . . who share our concerns" while remaining "willing to break with the educational establishment" where it has lost its way.⁴¹

Likewise, as previously noted, faculty must be superb teachers. We should care deeply enough about our students to pray for them daily.⁴² As those with dual citizenship in the academy and Church, we should be examples of "individuals who have blended successfully things secular and things spiritual in a way that has brought to you earned respect in both realms."⁴³ President Kimball spoke pointedly and at great length about our responsibility as citizens to be faithful, devout, and loyal to the Church and its leaders: "Here there should be loyalty at its ultimate best."⁴⁴

You get the point. For President Kimball the dream requires excellence in every area of faculty responsibility. Our written hiring and rank-and-status standards do as well. By policy, the standard for CFS (continuing faculty status) and rank advancement is "high quality" citizenship, teaching, and scholarship. This standard of high quality applies equally to the

rank of assistant, associate, and full professor. Yet sometimes we endorse candidates of modest or even dubious quality for essentially lifetime appointments. This does not serve the dream of BYU, nor even conform to stated guidelines. We need to uphold the standard of high quality in all areas if we are to fulfill President Kimball's dream for BYU. And this standard needs to be upheld at the department level.

Bathed in the Light of the Gospel

President Kimball also challenged "every professor and teacher [to] keep his subject matter bathed in the light and color of the restored gospel."⁴⁵ This challenge still needs attention. Few of us come to BYU knowing how to fulfill the prime directive issued by Brigham Young to Karl Maeser to teach our subject matters with the Spirit. Graduate school certainly does not prepare us to teach our subjects with the Spirit. It often does not prepare us to teach at all. So where do we learn, and what does it mean, anyway, to teach the alphabet and multiplication tables with the Spirit of God?

We need to mentor each other in teaching with the Spirit and have more sustained and serious conversations about this fundamental dimension of BYU. To facilitate such conversations, the Faculty Center, under Jim Faulconer's able leadership, will redouble attention to its faith and intellect initiatives. Likewise, we have taken steps to reinvigorate the former "adjunct," now "transfer," religion professor program. It is my experience that teaching religion courses on a college level can have a spillover effect on how one approaches teaching other disciplines.

Beyond this, however, every faculty member can do at least two simple things urged by President Kimball to fill our classrooms not just with facts but with faith and testimony: (1) We can "teach the gospel . . . by example";⁴⁶ (2) We can "grasp the opportunity occasionally to bear formal testimony of the truth"⁴⁷ in our classes.

I invite all of us, whether we attend Faculty Center seminars on faith and intellect or teach religion classes as transfer faculty, to put into practice this counsel this semester.

No Place for Mercenaries

Finally, let me say something about salaries and sacrifice. President Kimball is clear and direct about faculty salaries: they should be "adequate" but "incidental [to] your grand and magnificent obsession [for] the youth and their growth."⁴⁸ "This university is not the place for mercenaries,"⁴⁹ he asserted. At the same time he quoted approvingly John Taylor's statement: "Some people say, we cannot afford to pay [teachers]. You cannot afford not to pay them."⁵⁰

We are continuing to monitor and, where possible, make adjustments to faculty salaries—particularly for new and junior faculty in relatively low-paid disciplines, who are hardest hit by the steep rise in housing prices in the valley. We are doing this with targeted internal reallocations that preserve historic differentials from merit decisions.

Whatever we do regarding salaries, however, we will not entirely keep up with the Joneses in the academic marketplace, especially in the full-professor ranks. Nor should we try. The spirit of sacrifice and consecration must continue to attend our employment at BYU. When I think of the sacrifices made by the founding generation of faculty, who sometimes got paid—if they were paid at all—in turnips, I am deeply grateful for the generous and stable financial support we receive. I have always felt at BYU that I am paid more than I'm worth to do things I love—like teach and learn. And I am sobered by President Kimball's prophecy that "it will take just as much sacrifice and dedication . . . in the second century of BYU—even more than that required to begin this institution in the first place."⁵¹ For BYU to meet this impending test, we must keep alive the spirit of sacrifice and consecration.

Conclusion

Let me end these remarks by recounting three remarkable visions of BYU. The first is the well-known story of Alfred Kelly, the student commencement speaker who was asked to promote a scheme to sell Upper Campus. Here is a dramatization of his remarkable vision, which altered the destiny of BYU by preserving the land on which we sit—then called Temple Hill—from being sold for a subdivision.

By 1913, a new wave of financial problems was threatening the university's future. BYU faced mounting debt. Faculty salaries were so low the teachers ran farms to survive, returning home to irrigate between classes. Its cornerstone laid in 1907, the Maeser Memorial Building sat silent and unfinished for years. Finally, it seemed, the only way to finance its completion was to divide the land on Temple Hill into housing lots and sell them. A student named Alfred Kelly was selected to promote this idea during a commencement speech, but the assignment troubled him. Early one morning he walked to the top of Temple Hill to pray. What he saw that morning as he looked out across the valley left an unforgettable impression upon all who heard him relate it the day of his address, because what Kelly saw was you.

"Gradually the morning light advanced across the valley floor toward the spot where I stood. I closed my eyes partially to the advancing light and was startled by the strange vision that seemed to appear before me. The advancing sunlight took on the appearance of people, thousands of young people who approached me, their arms laden with books. I turned around to find the area behind me illuminated as well. In that light I saw hundreds of buildings, large and beautiful temples of learning. Those young people passed by me and entered in. Then, with cheerfulness and confidence, they turned toward the east and lifted their eyes heavenward, where, again becoming part of the sunlight, they gradually disappeared from my view."

Kelly sat down to a stunned silence. Suddenly Jesse Knight leaped to his feet, pledging several thousand dollars to BYU. Others followed suit. Eventually, under the direction of President Joseph F. Smith, the Church assumed the school's remaining debt. Finally, the future of the university had become secure.⁵²

The Lord evidently had a plan for the ground the campus now occupies—as He always had for BYU. He would not let even its leaders prevent its divine destiny. Such divine intervention on the things that matter most to the Lord is a comfort to me, knowing He can intervene to correct my lapses in judgment or vision.

Also deeply comforting to me is a less well known but equally dramatic vision that came to President John Taylor during another financial crisis in our early years. Zina Young Williams, the dean of women at the Brigham Young Academy and daughter of Brigham Young, came to President Taylor very distraught because the financial troubles of the school were so severe that they threatened to close it.

After listening to Sister Williams's plea for help, President Taylor took her hand "in a fatherly way" and said:

"My dear child, I have something of importance to tell you that I know will make you happy. I have been visited by your father. He came to me in the silence of the night clothed in brightness and with a face beaming with love and confidence told me things of great importance and among others that the school being taught by Brother [Karl G.] Maeser was accepted in the heavens and was a part of the great plan of life and salvation; . . . there was a bright future in store . . . and that Christ himself was directing, and had a care over this school."⁵³

I earnestly hope that BYU today is still accepted in the heavens! It is frankly astonishing to me to think that BYU has a place in the

“great plan of life.” And it is deeply consoling to learn that Christ Himself has “a care over this school.” Gratefully, from time to time I have had sacred personal experiences that have reassured me that heaven still directs this school. These moments of grace have renewed my sense of love and hope for BYU.

I know many of you have had similar moments of vision and grace. These may have led you here or kindled your love for BYU and hope for its future. Let me share one final such sacred experience. It happened to one of our faculty only weeks ago—again near the Maeser Building, on what seems to be sacred ground. With permission, I quote from a note the president and I received a week ago Friday from an admired faculty colleague:

It is just about 8:30 p.m. on Friday evening. I have enjoyed watching from my office the brief thunderstorm that passed over campus . . . and thought I would write you a short note. I recently met with my department chair and received my letter of appointment. This occasion always makes me feel grateful and introspective about my weaknesses and failings.

Not too many weeks ago I was working late and left the Grant Building to walk to my car parked by the former presidents’ home. As I left the Grant Building I walked past the Karl G. Maeser statue. It was a beautiful night, and the Maeser Building looked spectacular as it stood on the edge of our campus highlighted by the lights that make it almost glow as a sort of beacon.

My wife’s great-great-grandparents . . . hosted the Maeser family during their very first months in Utah. Later, my wife’s great-grandfather . . . worked on campus and helped build the Maeser Building and initiated student employment on campus. His daughter . . . was one of the first women to receive an MA at BYU. As a result, I always feel a special feeling when I see this building because of her family connection to this place.

I do not think there was anyone nearby—it was almost 1:30 a.m.—yet I felt a presence of many

people. I do not know what exactly I was experiencing, but there seemed to be other people present. Past students, faculty and staff, or future students? I do not know.

As I stopped at that very moment and looked at Karl G. Maeser, I was overcome and began to weep. I felt happy to be at BYU. I know there are many people who could replace me (someday someone will, and they will sit in my office and not even know that I ever sat there), but, for whatever reason, I am at BYU now, and I feel like I need to do better. . . .

My heart was full that night, and I feel some of that right now.⁵⁴

May all of us be filled with a renewed sense of gratitude to be here and a determination to do better. The lofty dream of BYU provides no occasion for pride or smug self-congratulation—only a clear call to try humbly to be the best we can be. We are indeed blessed to work and teach in a house of dreams. Let us resolve to do our part to put a foundation underneath so that the dreams that have inspired generations may become realities.⁵⁵

Notes

1. Excerpt from DVD *Passport to Destiny*, BYU history documentary, September 2005 update; see Ernest L. Wilkinson and W. Cleon Skousen, *Brigham Young University: A School of Destiny* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1976), 74–76.

2. D&C 88:118.

3. Brigham Young, quoted in Reinhard Maeser, *Karl G. Maeser: A Biography* (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1928), 79.

4. Excerpt from DVD *Passport to Destiny*; taken from Wilkinson and Skousen, *School of Destiny*, 84–85; emphasis in original.

5. Karl G. Maeser, “History of the Academy,” first Founders Day exercises, 16 October 1891, in Reinhard Maeser, *Karl G. Maeser*, 131–32; see also reprinted version in John W. Welch and Don E. Norton, eds., *Educating Zion* (Provo: BYU Studies, 1996), 4.

6. John Taylor, *JD* 21:100; quoted in Spencer W. Kimball, "The Second Century of Brigham Young University," *BYU devotional*, 10 October 1975, excerpted in "Climbing the Hills Just Ahead: Three Addresses" in Welch and Norton, *Educating Zion*, 55.
7. Carl Schurz, 18 April 1859, address in Faneuil Hall, Boston; quoted in Kimball, "Second Century"; see *Educating Zion*, 67.
8. Spencer W. Kimball, "Education for Eternity," pre-school address to faculty and staff, Brigham Young University, 12 September 1967; excerpted in "Climbing the Hills Just Ahead: Three Addresses" in Welch and Norton, *Educating Zion*, 43–63.
9. Kimball, "The Second Century of Brigham Young University"; see *Educating Zion*, 63–75.
10. See Spencer W. Kimball, "Installation of and Charge to the President," *Inaugural Addresses*, 14 November 1980, Brigham Young University, 9–10; excerpted in "Climbing the Hills Just Ahead: Three Addresses" in Welch and Norton, *Educating Zion*, 75–78.
11. See Kimball, "Education for Eternity," "Second Century," and "Installation of and Charge"; see *Educating Zion*, 51–52, 65–66, and 78, respectively.
12. Kimball, "Education for Eternity"; see *Educating Zion*, 55.
13. Kimball, "Second Century"; see *Educating Zion*, 67.
14. See Kimball, "Education for Eternity"; see *Educating Zion*, 57.
15. Kimball, "Second Century"; see *Educating Zion*, 70.
16. Kimball, "Second Century"; see *Educating Zion*, 63.
17. Survey of Earned Doctorate Recipients, National Science Foundation, <http://webcaspar.nsf.gov>.
18. BYU Preprofessional Advisement Center, 3328 WSC, Provo, Utah, from password-protected links at <http://lsac.org>; <http://www.aamc.org>; and <http://aadsas.org>.
19. Kimball, "Education for Eternity"; see *Educating Zion*, 45.
20. Kimball, "Second Century"; see *Educating Zion*, 68.
21. See Derek Bok, *Our Underachieving Colleges* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 30.
22. See David Glenn, "You Will Be Tested on This," *Chronicle of Higher Education* 53, no. 40 (8 June 2007): A14–A17.
23. John Taylor, *JD* 21:100; quoted in Kimball, "Second Century"; see *Educating Zion*, 69; emphasis added.
24. Kimball, "Installation of and Charge," 10; see *Educating Zion*, 77.
25. Kimball, "Second Century"; "Installation of and Charge," 10; see *Educating Zion*, 74, 77, respectively.
26. Kimball, "Second Century"; see *Educating Zion*, 63.
27. Kimball, "Education for Eternity"; see *Educating Zion*, 62.
28. Kimball, "Education for Eternity"; see *Educating Zion*, 55.
29. Kimball, "Education for Eternity"; cf. "Second Century"; see *Educating Zion*, 62, cf. 67.
30. John S. Tanner, "Pruning," 21 March 2007, <http://avp.byu.edu/pages/speeches.html>.
31. Kimball, "Second Century"; see *Educating Zion*, 67.
32. Kimball, "Second Century"; see *Educating Zion*, 73.
33. Kimball, "Second Century"; see *Educating Zion*, 69.
34. David O. McKay, *Gospel Ideals* (Salt Lake City: Improvement Era, 1953), 346; quoted in "Second Century"; see *Educating Zion*, 69.
35. Kimball, "Second Century"; see *Educating Zion*, 69.
36. Kimball, "Second Century"; see *Educating Zion*, 73.
37. Attributed to William Butler Yeats; cited in Scott Evenbeck and Sharon Hamilton, "From

'My Course' to 'Our Program,'" *Peer Review* 8, no. 3 (summer 2006): 17.

38. Kimball, "Second Century"; see *Educating Zion*, 64.

39. Kimball, "Education for Eternity"; see *Educating Zion*, 44.

40. Kimball, "Second Century"; see *Educating Zion*, 71–72.

41. Kimball, "Second Century"; see *Educating Zion*, 72.

42. See Kimball, "Education for Eternity"; see *Educating Zion*, 50.

43. Kimball, "Education for Eternity"; see *Educating Zion*, 45.

44. Kimball, "Education for Eternity"; see *Educating Zion*, 51.

45. Kimball, "Education for Eternity"; see *Educating Zion*, 54.

46. Kimball, "Education for Eternity"; see *Educating Zion*, 49.

47. Kimball, "Education for Eternity"; see *Educating Zion*, 54.

48. Kimball, "Education for Eternity"; see *Educating Zion*, 50.

49. Kimball, "Education for Eternity"; see *Educating Zion*, 50.

50. John Taylor, *JD* 24:169; quoted in "Second Century"; see *Educating Zion*, 68.

51. Kimball, "Second Century"; see *Educating Zion*, 71.

52. Excerpt from DVD *Passport to Destiny*, BYU history documentary, September 2005 update; taken from B. F. Larsen, "Fifty Years Ago," speech given at a BYU alumni meeting, 25 May 1962, B. F. Larsen biographical file, BYU Archives, 4–5.

53. John Taylor, in Leonard J. Arrington, ed., *The Presidents of the Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 109.

54. Faculty e-mail sent to John S. Tanner, 17 August 2007.

55. See Kimball, "Education for Eternity": "Can we not build dream castles in the air and build foundations solidly under them?"; see *Educating Zion*, 55; see also Henry David Thoreau, "If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them" (*Walden* [1854], Conclusion).

