

Out of Your Experience Here

GORDON B. HINCKLEY

It is a wonderful opportunity to be with you this beautiful autumn morning. It is a tremendous challenge to say something that will be helpful to you as you begin, for some of you, a new school year at this institution. For others, as freshman, welcome.

First, I bring you the love and blessing of President Ezra Taft Benson, who serves as chairman of the board of trustees.

As all of you know, he has been seriously ill in the hospital for some time. He is much better than he has been, and it is anticipated that he may come home tomorrow. That will be good news for all of us. He loves this school, which he attended at one time. He has so indicated on many occasions. We pray that the Lord will continue to bless him, that he will be comforted and strengthened and experience a renewal of vitality.

A Great Privilege and Blessing

For more than twenty-five years I have served as a member of the board of trustees of this university. I have served as vice chairman of the board for almost a decade. I have served as chairman of the executive committee of the board for longer than I can remember.

I say this only to indicate that I feel a great appreciation for this university. What a wonderful place it is. This beautiful campus is the envy of administrators across the nation and across the world. I remind each of you that it is a precious experience to walk through the beauty of these grounds and to live a very important part of your life in the excellent facilities that have been provided for you.

It is a wonderful thing to be on a campus where there are winners. I congratulate the football team and every other achiever on this campus.

You study under a great faculty, a unique and different faculty. They are people who are academically qualified. And beyond this they

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have a quality that I think is unmatched in any other university in the world, a quality of the Spirit.

You have here the opportunity for a wonderful social life. Each of you is one of a great congregation of friends. What an exhilarating thing to be involved every day with bright and personable and good associates.

BYU is wonderful because of its sponsoring institution. It is becoming increasingly unique among large universities in the strength and loyalty and generosity of its sponsor. It enjoys a security because of this, relying not upon tax monies that are mandated by politicians, but on tithing funds that come from the consecrations of good people and are administered by men and women who feel a direct responsibility to the Lord.

I compliment you, each of you, on the great privilege and blessing you have in being here. I am grateful for the opportunity to be associated, in some measure at least, with this remarkable institution.

But this responsibility is not without worries and concerns. I remember many years ago, when Ernest L. Wilkinson was president, we had an important discussion in our board meeting. For some years prior to that, the university had vigorously recruited students, with General Authorities at stake conferences being a part of that effort. Then, suddenly, there were more applicants than could be accommodated, and there was much discussion concerning enrollment ceilings. There was talk about who should be eligible to come and what should be the qualifying factors. That meeting was conducted by President Harold B. Lee, who was then serving as a counselor in the First Presidency. As the discussion went on, I remember saying, "The basic question we face now and will continue to face is simply this, 'Who will the Church educate, and who will it turn away?'"

The question was faced then, and it has troubled us ever since. We discussed it during

the administration of President Wilkinson. We repeated that discussion during the administration of President Oaks. It was a recurring subject during the administration of President Holland. Now, in past months, during the administration of President Lee, we have spent hours talking about this same question.

The problem will continue, and I fear a clear-cut answer will elude us in the future as it has in the past. In fact, the problem grows more serious through the years simply because the Church is growing. There is an ever-increasing number of young people who desire to come to this great and unique university. In terms of character and in terms of faithfulness in the Church, they are qualified. Their parents and ecclesiastical leaders are confident that they have the ability to handle the work. They may not have done exceptionally well in high school, but this does not necessarily mean that they do not have the potential to make it at the university level.

Many and pathetic are the letters we receive. A stake president recently wrote concerning a young man who had been denied admission. He had done reasonably well in high school, but apparently not well enough. His parents have been faithful and active in the Church. They have been full-tithe payers throughout their lives. They have sent their children on missions. They have done everything the Church has asked them to do. If the major portion of the costs of operating BYU come from the tithing funds of the Church, then why are not the children of longtime faithful tithe payers eligible to attend as long as they meet reasonable qualifications?

In his letter, the stake president continued, "Is it our objective to turn out of this school an elitist group, snobbish about their intellectual superiority?"

These are difficult questions to answer. There *is* an injustice. This is the single most expensive entity funded by the tithes of the Church. Should not all who are honest and

generous in their tithing be eligible for its benefits?

As the Church continues to grow, there will be an increasingly smaller percentage of its young people who will have the opportunity of attending this university.

Somehow, each of you who is here today has that remarkable opportunity. I need not remind you that you are a highly favored group. I do not dispute your assertion that you earned the right to be here through very diligent study and hard work. In your high school years you met certain stringent requirements that many of your associates did not work to achieve. You kept yourselves morally clean and met other criteria. But the fact remains that there are thousands of others across this world who would enjoy this privilege but are denied primarily because a way had to be found to deny them.

I submit, therefore, that there has been placed in each of you, as a privileged beneficiary, a great and sacred trust. You and we have entered into a covenant. Those of us who are responsible for the expenditure of the tithing funds of the Church have said to you in effect, "We are trustees of the funds of the Lord. We are willing to make a substantial portion of these funds available to you for your blessing provided you in return pledge certain efforts in your studies and meet certain requirements in your deportment." We will feel happy if you meet that trust. We will feel disappointed and embarrassed if you do otherwise.

I think there is not a student here, I hope there is not a student here, who does not know, in a general way at least, what is expected of him or her.

What Will You Take with You?

Presumably you have come here to follow a course that leads to graduation so that you may be the better qualified to take your place in the society of which you will become a part. For some of you graduation is relatively near, just a

few months away. For most of you it seems far away and an almost unattainable goal. I assure you, notwithstanding your fears, that it will come faster than you may think.

And so, as I speak to you in October, I would like to project your thinking forward to a future April or August commencement day, your own graduation day. I should like to ask, at this early day, *What will you take with you when you finally leave BYU?*

When that hoped-for commencement day comes, when you walk into this hall with a rented mortarboard on your head and a rented robe on your back to receive a diploma, and then, as you leave through these doors with that diploma in hand, I hope you will go forth with, in addition to your academic maturity, three acquired qualities, each of which I consider to be rooted in the gospel of Jesus Christ.

First is intellectual discipline. I hope that while you are here you will develop a degree of mental acuity that finds its expression in a mind that is alert, that is orderly in its processes, that is hungry for more of the kind of thing it has been fed while here. Already you have shown a marked disposition in this direction. Otherwise, you would not be here. As you moved through high school you saw many of your associates drop away, unwilling to pay the price of effort needed to finish the course. I congratulate you.

We are constantly reminded that there is cause for alarm in our nation. It is shocking to read, for instance, that illiteracy is on the rise. Firms that employ large numbers of workers are alarmed over the qualifications of some of those they hire. The Conference Board recently surveyed 163 large companies in a variety of industries. And now I quote,

Nearly 20% of surveyed firms say they are having problems finding workers who read well enough for entry-level jobs. Almost 50% say that between 15% and 35% of their current employees are not capable of handling more complex tasks, and 10% say that up to half of their current workers do not have the skills

needed for promotion. . . . Nearly a quarter of students currently entering high school will not graduate, and those who do will be less literate than their counterparts a decade ago.

That appraisal comes from a recent issue of the *Wall Street Journal* (9 October 1990, p. A2). Similar findings are reported in other business journals. One of the reasons for this condition lies in the way in which so many spend much of their time.

I deplore the terrible waste of the intellectual resources of so many people of this nation who devote countless hours watching mindless drivel. What a wonderful thing it is, on the other hand, to be found submersed, as you are, in a world of books wherein you can walk with the great minds of all time. Again, in the *Wall Street Journal* was a column written by the former editor of the *Chicago Tribune*. He wrote of certain aspects of television and then asked:

*What is the mystery. . . about a society that has the manners of a rock band, the morals of a soap opera, the decision-making ability of the Simpsons and wants to pay for government with Visa and American Express? Why should we be surprised that our underlying culture is constructed from the ratings-based, give-them-what-they-want, remote-controlled, quick-zap world of commercial television? [Jim Squires, "Television's Civil War," *Wall Street Journal*, 8 October 1990, p. A10]*

This old world needs straightening up. It needs leadership. If you doubt that, witness the fiasco we are seeing in Congress and the administration, where politics so obviously come ahead of principle.

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel once made a statement to the effect that those who do not read history will have to repeat it. The decay we witness seeping into our society becomes a repetition of the same decay that took down earlier civilizations.

My brethren and sisters, this is the greatest season of your lives to develop a familiarity with good books and great minds, the kind of familiarity that will lead to mental acuity and intellectual strength.

I had a delightful experience only last Saturday evening. I attended a dinner celebrating eighty-five years of the presence in Utah of immigrants from Greece. Seated at the small table next to me was a professor of cardiology at the University of Utah Medical School. He was born in Athens and educated at the University of Athens. Next to him was his wife, a professor in pediatric cardiology, also born and educated in Greece. Next to her was a professor of engineering born in Salonika. It was a stimulating experience to talk with these individuals whose minds had been stretched while they were students and who have never lost an opportunity for learning.

To you I say, don't be a couch potato. Be a man or a woman with a mind and a will and a bit of discipline, with a zest for learning that will be cultivated in this institution while you are here and that will be expanded through all the years to come.

I have been fascinated with reclamation projects, the great dams and canals built in many parts of America and across the world to take water from where there is plenty of it and put it where there is not enough. Men have learned to transfer resources, thereby preventing waste and adding to the comfort and blessing of uncounted numbers who otherwise might be denied.

So it must be with you who have come to learn in this great institution. You must pick up knowledge now available to you and at the same time cultivate a continuing thirst for knowledge to be added to throughout your lives and to be shared with others for their blessing and benefit. Such is the opportunity and the responsibility you have as a student at Brigham Young University. What will you take with you when you leave here? I hope it will be

an intellectual hunger, a mental sharpness, a mental discipline, a substantial body of knowledge to which you will wish to add all the days of your lives.

Second, I hope you will develop a spirit of fellowship, a social ease, the capacity to mix and mingle with people wherever you meet them, of low caste or high caste, recognizing their strengths and powers and capacities and goodness.

That facility can be developed on this campus. It can come of the pro and con discussions you have in your classes and that you have as you sit together in small groups talking with one another, even arguing over matters. This is one of the great blessings of university life, to learn to speak together and think together in a kind of challenging environment.

A vibrant personality that comes of the capacity to listen and learn, that comes of the ability to contribute without boring, that comes of a talent for mingling and mixing with people in a constructive way is something very precious, indeed, that can come as a part of your life on this campus. The cultivation of such will keep you from the moral traps that catch so many.

I wish to emphasize that I hope you are so busy studying good books that lead to productive thinking and so pleased with the opportunity that you have to mix with others of your kind and to perhaps verbally scrap and argue together over public issues and matters of broad interest that you have no time to waste on the filth and rot we call pornography, the production and peddling of which has become a multimillion-dollar industry where a few get rich and multitudes become enslaved and debauched.

I submit that you have no time for such. I submit that you will never in all your life have time for such. I submit that it is neither necessary nor desirable. I submit that you must live above it. You can switch stations on the television set. You need not rent or buy the videotapes. You can stay away from the shows that

peddle this rubbish. You can avoid all of this kind of filth, and you will be so much the stronger for it. If you do it now, you can establish habits of avoidance that will carry you throughout your lives. You can establish habits of doing the better thing for as long as you live.

If you have been touched by this, put it behind you. Develop the social ease that gives you the capacity to mingle with others and talk with others in a stimulating and uplifting manner. Social grace is so important a quality—it can be developed on campus and will bless you throughout your life.

Third, when you walk out of this hall, with your diploma in hand, I hope you will take with you an unassailable spiritual strength. I repeat that this is a unique and remarkable university. It is an institution where you may learn the secular things of the world as well as you might learn them anywhere else on earth. And then there is a spiritual value that undergirds all that is done here. How marvelous a thing in the human character is a certain and solid assurance that God our Eternal Father lives. How richly blessed is that young man or woman who knows that he or she can approach the Almighty in quiet and humble prayer. How enriched is the individual who, as he or she goes out into the world, knows that all men and women are sons and daughters of God, each endowed with a divine birthright. How beneficial to come to the realization that, since we are all children of God, we all are brothers and sisters in a very real sense.

There is too much intolerance in the world. There is too much of it in our own society.

I listened to a beautiful prayer the other evening, offered by a Greek-American in the manner in which he had been taught to pray. It was an expression of gratitude to the Almighty and a plea for his favor. It was concluded in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. His phrasing was not as

my phrasing might have been, but I recognized his sincerity and told him of my appreciation.

I sat one evening at the table of a Jewish friend. The prayer he uttered upon his guests and upon the table at which we sat was beautiful and moving. I was grateful for what I heard.

We can be appreciative in a very sincere way. We must not only be tolerant, but we must cultivate a spirit of affirmative gratitude for those who do not see things quite as we see them. We do not in any way have to compromise our theology, our convictions, our knowledge of eternal truth as it has been revealed by the God of Heaven. We can offer our own witness of the truth, quietly, sincerely, honestly, but never in a manner that will give offense to others.

The strength of our position as we understand it will become clearer and more precious as we allow others the same privilege of conscience that we so highly prize. We must learn to accord appreciation and respect for others who are as sincere in their beliefs and practices as are we.

This great institution of which each of you is now a part is maintained by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on the premise that out of your experience here will come a love for God, our Eternal Father, and his Only

Begotten Son, the Savior and the Redeemer of the World.

His is the matchless life we have been taught to emulate. He gave that life for each of us. He is our Redeemer and our Lord. These two, the Father and the Son, revealed themselves in these latter days to the boy who became prophet, seer, and revelator and president of this Church. The ancient priesthood is upon the earth with all of its powers and glories. It is all here, not to be boasted of, but to be quietly acknowledged with gratitude, to be shared where there is a desire to know, never to be forced but to be spoken of with conviction and love and gratitude.

None of these things that I have spoken of will be mentioned on the diplomas you carry from this institution on graduation day. But they are all implicit in the purposes and design of this university. If you carry them with you, your lives will be blessed. Your experiences will be challenging, but they will be sweet and enriching, and you will become the means of bringing good to all whose lives you touch. To this end I humbly pray, as I invoke the blessing of the Lord upon you and express my love and appreciation and good wishes in the great experiences that lie ahead of you, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.