

Virtus et Veritas

JEFFREY R. HOLLAND

Welcome to BYU. I'm back for my sophomore year; and while that won't impress the seniors, it ought to be stunning to the freshmen, evidence one again of life after death. One of the great things about your year, this year, at BYU is that you're going to share it with my wife, Pat Holland. I'd like her to step up here and say, "Hi," to you. We do this sort of business together throughout the year. The Proverbs say, "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing" (18:22), and I found a really, really good thing. In fact, just this morning I heard her down fixing breakfast. Our youngest came in and said, "Mom, did you wake up grumpy this morning?"

And she said, "No, I'm just letting him sleep in. It's school today."

Sweetheart, would you give them a greeting?

Patricia Holland

Jeff is kidding you. We really have a perfect marriage. My father told me we would have even when we were dating. Just a few nights before we were to be married, we had some kind of a little lovers' quarrel, and I was really upset with Jeff and said, "Please take me home." He brought me home and I ran into the house, slammed the door, ran into my father's

bedroom, woke him up out of a dead sleep, and said, "Daddy, you've got to call this wedding off. This marriage just won't work."

My father in all his wisdom sat up in bed and said, "I will not call this marriage off. This marriage was made in heaven." When I stopped crying long enough to find out why, he said, "Because the rocks in Jeff's head will fill the holes in yours."

President Holland

This business with my father-in-law is real. I had a real challenge. It took me a while to win him over, but I knew I was home free in one of the most difficult moments of all. It was, in fact, at the very hour I had come in my best LDS fashion to ask for her hand. He just went to pieces. He ranted and raved and charged around and said she was too young and why did I think I'd be able to marry her and on and on and on and finally said, "Do you think I want her tied to an idiot for the rest of her life?"

Jeffrey R. Holland was president of Brigham Young University when this devotional address was given on 8 September 1981.

I said, “No; that’s the reason I’ve come to ask for her hand.”

Patricia Holland

In a kind of friendly, family way, I am happy to have this opportunity to welcome you back to the university at the beginning of a new year. And I would like to extend a very special warm greeting to those of you who are new to the university. As my husband mentioned, we have been here just a year now, and we have learned so many things this past year—both through our challenges and through our blessings that have come from being at this university. One of them is that Security will stop you on campus no matter whose wife you are, and the other is that the university does have a mission. We hope that everyone here at BYU can realize that.

President Kimball said in my husband’s inaugural:

As the Church continues to progress, BYU will be thrust forward.

He also said in a recent general conference that

*There is a tide to be taken now in the affairs of the Church in all the earth which will lift us up and carry us forward as never before. [“Let Us Not Weary in Well Doing,” *Ensign*, May 1980, p. 80]*

You, my young friends, are part of that tide. We are all part of that tide. And BYU is one of the greatest instruments the Lord has to prepare you for that service. So let me strongly encourage you that while you’re here you take advantage of every opportunity there is here at this university to grow.

Some have worried whether the idealism that is here at BYU really prepares you to adjust to the harsh realities that you will be facing in the “real” world. But the vision that we have for you, the vision that my husband and I have for you, is that by the time you leave BYU you will

have become so healthy and so strong and so well nourished, intellectually and especially spiritually, that the world will have to adjust and conform to you.

My hope for you today is that you will work for, and especially pray for, and that you will reach to know and understand, your full potential. And I promise you that potential will come when you are then ready and willing to return that full capacity back to the purposes of our Father in Heaven. Of that I bear testimony and leave my love with you today, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

President Holland

Well, now you know why it’s easy for me to do this job.

There are many things I would like to say to you in a setting like this, and yet obviously by the very nature of our first devotional hour with you, we don’t have that time. Perhaps later in the year, when things are a little less hectic, I can have an hour with you to talk about things of mutual importance. Let me at least say this morning that we love you, that we welcome you to BYU, and that you’re needed here. May I suggest briefly some of the hopes we have for you.

To get into that, let me just imagine that some of you are wondering about how the Hollands feel after their first year. I can tell you in one word—we feel terrific. We’ve never had a more rewarding or exciting experience than the chance to be with you in this greatest of all universities. Our children have to walk a mile to see their next-door neighbors, but they believe the game room in the Wilkinson Center makes up for that. We’re grateful for your kindness to them as they mow you down with their bicycles on their way to Wasatch Elementary.

There have been some peculiar aspects to our experience, however, one of which saw its most dramatic realization about four weeks ago. You may not have thought about it, but it

is an interesting challenge for the president of BYU, particularly when living on campus, to have some semblance of a private life in a very public word. We have had student visitors call and ask if our dog would bark into their family home evening microphone, if my wife would play the Cougar Fight Song on the piano to fulfill scavenger hunt obligations. We have been asked to hold in safekeeping pumpkin pie until an unsuspecting Mr. Wonderful was contacted, anonymously of course, and informed that his would-be eternal flame had left such a token with us for him and for him alone. We've had couples want to get engaged in our living room; we've had families want to have their pictures taken on our balcony; we have untold requests for moonlight dinners for two in our garden gazebo (we assume not to be catered by us). Now, because I hear all kinds of new wheels turning, I hasten to add that we have declined such requests, not because we wouldn't like to be part of every scavenger hunt on campus, but because we can't be. In spite of their father, I believe my wife hopes for some reasonable normality in our children so that only he, and not they, will be institutionalized upon release from the presidency of this university.

Another aspect of that constant challenge has been to go off campus. Our family loves pizza. My wife ate so much pizza when she was expecting our second son that his first words upon entering the world were not "mama" or "dada" but rather "pepperoni and mushroom, and keep the crust thick." But in my quest for anonymity, I have discovered that it is difficult to eat pizza through a ski mask, especially if you order Canadian bacon. We slip into a restaurant somewhere near campus, and there's a low buzz as if to say, "Surely they don't eat food." When we order a local Big Mac or Whopper, the main topic of conversation for a week is, "Did he hold the pickles?" I occasionally stun them, eat the pickles, and hold the onions. Of course, if I really want to be

stunning, I eat the onions and hold the rest of the burger. But it does make one a little self-conscious to have his cheeseburger analyzed and then watch a brief entry being made in a Book of Remembrance. Oh, the price one pays for public life!

Going to the Movies

Now all of this, slightly exaggerated, is only to set the stage for this most dramatic moment about four weeks ago. The Hollands actually decided to go to a movie. We don't go to a lot of movies. We venture out about once a year, and then we hit the Varsity Theater. That's more our speed, and the price is better. But our children prevailed upon us for a family home evening activity that would actually take us into the outside world for an honest-to-gosh movie. We weighed carefully the kind of movie we were going to, found one that seemed appropriate for the family, and went. It was one of those new combined theater arrangements where sixteen people and a keg of popcorn make a full house, so we knew it was going to be cozy, but we didn't realize how cozy.

We came a little late; the movie was more popular than we had supposed, and the lines were long. By the time we bought tickets, there were, by actual usher's count, only seven seats left in the house. Now, there are five of us. That left two. We said we'd take the five wherever they were and agreed as a family to regroup under the nearest streetlamp after the movie. As luck would have it, on one of the back rows of the theater where we entered were two seats together with a third nearby. We quickly inserted our children into those seats and thought at least they would enjoy the movie.

Now, out of a total of seven, that should have left four, but somebody must have been hiding them as we began our long march down the aisle. It didn't appear to me that there was an extra arm in the room, speaking, of course, of movie seats and not human flesh. We were

looking for arms without fingers on the end. Then the comments started—first a kind of low hush, growing but increasingly audible to us and, I assume, to everyone else in the theater. I was a little embarrassed. “Oh, they’re coming to a movie, an actual movie, and I’m here in this very movie with them.” Well, I didn’t think our arrival deserved all of that; I mean I know we’re famous, but I suppose President and Sister Oaks went to movies. We kept walking. “Oh, look, they bought popcorn. I want to talk to the girl who sold them that popcorn. I wonder if it’s buttered or plain.”

By now I was thinking, “Shucks, we’re just ordinary folks. Anybody could be president down there at BYU.” But the chatter went on. The farther down the aisle we went, the more the heads turned. Indeed, I was amazed at how impressed the younger crowd seemed to be. Some of the group were probably BYU students, but the larger part seemed to be younger—high school or junior high, sort of teenyboppers, if you will. I leaned over to Pat and said, “You’re causing quite a stir, dear. They want to know if you have butter on your popcorn.”

“This is ridiculous,” she whispered back. “I feel like Bonnie and Clyde after holding up a bank, and you’re Clyde.”

“Thanks,” I said, “but I prefer Chuck.”

“Chuck what?” she said.

“Just Chuck, you know, short for Charles—Prince Charles, and you’re Lady Diana. The carriage is just out by the fire hydrant, and we all turn into groundhogs at 10:00 p.m.” (That’s BYU curfew in advance of midnight. I just added that for you.)

“Don’t make fun of the royal wedding,” she said.

“I’m not making fun,” I replied. “I’m just asking you to keep your royal eye open for a vacant throne.”

By then it was obvious that not only were we not going to find two adjoining seats, but it looked doubtful whether we’d find any seat

at all, and we were near the front of the theater by now. “Oh, they’re not going to sit together,” someone moaned. Another girl, about thirteen, actually started to cry. It was obvious this whole thing was a very moving experience, but I didn’t think it should be that moving. “It’s okay,” I kept saying in a sort of large-stage whisper. “Don’t worry about it; it’s okay.” But the moaning and the wailing and the tears increased.

Just when it looked as if we were going to turn the whole theater into the downtown equivalent of the Relief Society nursery on homemaking day, we spied two vacant seats a couple of places apart. Some young woman, sensing our plight, moved over into one of them, leaving hers adjoining the other single, and we sank into them, safe, our noses eight inches from the screen. This was going to be a stereophonic experience with a vengeance. But interestingly enough, the moaning and the wailing and the whispering and the pointing went on. It continued to be directed generally toward us but with something of a glazed look now in the eyes of these young people. “This is ridiculous,” I said to my wife. “They don’t need to act like we’re from another planet.”

“Maybe they wouldn’t,” my wife said, “if you’d left your cap and gown home.” She was only kidding of course, but I gave her a little elbow in the ribs.

Well, the teenyboppers were still bopping, and I thought we certainly had some responsibility. Something had to be done; it was my moral duty. So I stood in my front row aisle seat to acknowledge their feverish applause and turned head on, face to face, nose to nose, into Steve Craig and Marie Osmond, who had been walking down the aisle stride for stride behind us.

Some of you who may be new to this campus won’t know Steve Craig or Marie Osmond. Steve is from our very successful basketball team of last year. Steve has the kind of handsome looks that make Robert Redford consider

plastic surgery. And Marie is a local working girl. (You certainly can't be expected to know everyone your first day on campus.) Well, so much for Prince Charles and Lady Di. Actually, we knew that Steve and Marie were behind us; we bribed them with the last two tickets. We thought it would look like we were on a double date. You can check with me afterward and I'll tell you whether they had butter on their popcorn.

Dress and Grooming

Well, to slightly more serious matters. I had hoped last year—and said so—after spending some considerable time in my first address to the students stressing why I thought clean, attractive dress and grooming were an important part of the mission of BYU, that I would never have to do it again, at least not at any length or at the repeated expense of other more important subjects. However, some redefinitions in our standards this year and the recent publicity about them suggest that I need to make it clear once again how we feel about this whole matter, and then I hope we won't need to belabor the matter again. It is important that no one misunderstand our intents nor underestimate our firm expectations. Let me give you just a little history. (And may I pause editorially to say don't be nervous about the hour; class won't start until I let you go.)

Nearly two years ago, President Oaks and others at BYU began long, thoughtful conversations with the commissioner's office and the Board of Trustees about updating BYU's dress and grooming code. After several months of review and counsel, the Board of Trustees invited President Oaks to redefine and, in so doing, reemphasize two particularly important elements in our dress and grooming expectations. Shortly after that directive was given by the board, President Oaks was released, and I was appointed to succeed him. I then began to work with President Kerr and Deans Sorenson, Mouritsen, and Halvorsen and others in the

Student Life area on this important matter.

Last spring I then issued a memorandum to the university from which I now quote in part:

Our individual and collective image has to do with the very mission of the university and the Church which sponsors it. By asking us to maintain a modest, neat, and clean appearance, our Board of Trustees are inviting us to aid them in making a deeper statement to the world about our beliefs, our convictions, our civility, and our discipline.

In [that] spirit, . . . may I say something of the two areas in our dress and grooming code which seem to cause the most difficulty—hair length for men and wearing apparel for women.

Regarding men's hair length, the Trustees have said, "Hair must be styled so as not to cover the ears and must be above the collar in the back." Neither the Trustees nor the administration intend this to mean that men's hair cannot touch the ear. If clean, well-groomed hair brushes over the top of the ear, a student is not in violation of the spirit of this code. However, it is clearly stated that the ear is not to be covered. If the brushed "touch" at the top of the ear progresses to "covering" a major portion of the ear, we ask that the hair be trimmed.

[Furthermore, if a young man has managed to limit the hair on his ear but the rest of his locks look as if they or he had been electrocuted, then we ask that the hair be trimmed, or at least better groomed.]

As for women's wearing apparel, the Trustees and the administration have always stressed clean, modest attire. The intent of the code is to encourage attractive and appropriate women's wear which avoids a quasimale or unisex dress standard. This spirit should govern women's dress on the campus rather than endless debate as to whether a "designer jean" is also a slack or whether the fabric is cotton, polyester, or denim or whether it is colored red or white or blue. [Some modest, dressy jeans seem to be very appropriate. Grubby, faded, frayed, sloppy-looking jeans are not—whatever the fabric and whatever the color. And that goes for men's wear as well.][Jeffrey R. Holland,

“Dress and Grooming Standards at Brigham Young University.” Unpublished memo, 10 April 1981]

Now, in the spirit of love and friendship and as an adult to an adult, we ask your support. We have given our University Standards Office the responsibility and authority to interpret and apply our definitions. Most of you look terrific; most of you look perfect. I was delighted as I watched you coming on campus this morning. But a few of you will need to attend to this soon. Last Saturday night at the talent show, I saw several young men who needed to get their hair trimmed or ironed, I don’t know which. I also saw several young women in jeans hardly fit for a car wash. We ask your help in conveying a positive and appropriate image to a world that watches us even more closely. These slightly more generous redefinitions have been made as a courtesy to you. We will always adjust anything that is adjustable if it can further the purposes of the university and make you that much happier here. But as we do so, the spirit of our standards must be firmly maintained. We have tried to be helpful to you; we ask for your support in this effort. Now, having said all of that, I really do hope that I never again have to use precious time with the greatest audience in the world on this subject. I hope we can accept, implement, and move beyond it to much more important tasks. It does seem important to have said this in a year of some adjustment and change.

Mission Statement

Now let me briefly note two such tasks that are indeed more important to me. I will mention them here; I can only mention them; then I will find other ways to visit with you about them in the months and years ahead. Our entire BYU family of faculty, staff, and administrators were together last week in preparation for your arrival and the beginning

of another school year. I tried to give them something of an accounting, a stewardship report, if you will, of my first twelve months in office. I reviewed some changes, documented what I thought were at least some accomplishments over the past year, and then read them a draft of a mission statement for BYU over which I have labored for hours and days and weeks. I tried to read almost everything that had been said about BYU and then attempted to reduce that down to a single statement, a brief outline in about 500 words, as to why BYU exists and what it should try to do in the decade ahead. I will not take time to read that this morning, but after it has been finalized by our Board of Trustees, we will publish it and distribute it to you so that you know what our faculty, staff, and administrators are aiming for in providing you with and education. Suffice it to say here that it focuses strongly on academic excellence in the context of religious faith and the broad, balanced development of the total person.

Virtus et Veritas

As a result of pursuing that university goal, I developed several personal goals of my own, two of which I combined into a little phrase *Virtus et Veritas*—virtue and truth. As for truth, that goal ought to speak for itself. I hope we all understand that this is a university for which you have spent good money—yours and other people’s—to attend. It is not a young adult conference nor a missionary reunion nor a dating bureau nor an intramural athletic depot, though it may incidentally bless us with elements of all those activities and many more. But it is first, and foremost, and forever a university which has taken the very pursuit of godly knowledge and divine intelligence as its motto. We can have the fun and the football and the firesides and the Frisbees if we don’t forget that a century of human life and hundreds of millions of dollars have been devoted to us—to you and to me—so that we could

learn everything we can learn in this ideal but fleeting moment, which moment, like a mission, will never ever quite be ours again. I ask you the way the mission presidents plead with their missionaries: Don't miss this opportunity. It won't come again. It is here, we reach for it, and all too soon it will be gone.

I speak from experience, my young friends. It seems only about twenty minutes ago that I sat in those seats as a student and must have heard something very much like this same speech, and I, too, smiled and knew I had all the time in the world. Well, I don't have any time now, and twenty minutes or so from now, neither will you. Give it everything you have now, this semester, lest, like Oliver Cowdery, you realize too late that the opportunity of a lifetime has to be taken in the lifetime of the opportunity. We are moving out and we are moving up at BYU, and we ask you to do the same in your attempt to learn all that you can of what God knows and is anxious to make known to you. Learn how to learn; learn to love it. Learn to use it to bless lives in time and eternity. The truth will make you free. As a personal goal, I intend to join with you in that lifelong quest.

My other linked Latin goal, along with truth, is not in this case *lux*, or light, as in the 93rd section of the Doctrine and Covenants, but *virtus*, or virtue. In our theology light is synonymous with and inseparable from the truth. Virtue, on the other hand, is all too often separated from both. Indeed, Lucifer was a son of the morning, a bearer of light (that's what his name means), but somehow he got light without getting virtue. I do not ever want us to be guilty of that here. To be ignorant is pitiable, and to be mistaken is unfortunate, but to know the truth and not conform our life to it is a crime which heaven and earth condemn. We are not interested at BYU in an alchemy which would adulterate the truth simply because that is easier than purifying the soul. The secularization of the western world has robbed

education of what was once its chiefest and most important characteristic. "Education in virtue," said Plato in his *Laws* 2400 years ago, "is the only education which deserves the name." Dallin H. Oaks fought to keep our institutional independence intact. If I am free to pick my battle, then I wish to fight to keep our institutional virtue intact. There are schools enough that have it. I want us value laden and moral. I want us a veritable rod of iron in what is too often a dark and misty ethical void. How dark and misty? Consider this fictional observation from one contemporary writer:

This is the story of an imaginary teacher: One of his students, living off campus, vandalized her apartment to the tune of several thousand dollars and [then] refused to reimburse the landlord. As the college did nothing to encourage her to pay for the damages, a professor took the matters into his own hands. He gave her an "F" in the course [she was taking from him] and told her that he would not change it until she had paid the landlord. He justified this, he told the college, "on the solid Socratic ground that if a student did not know right from wrong, she should not pass a college course." [Alston Chase, *Group Memory* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980), p. 180]

Does that have meaning at BYU? Why is it necessary to lock a bicycle on this campus? Can anyone here help me with this personal dilemma? Why do my children or you have to lock bicycles on this campus? Convince me that it is really only because of a non-BYU group that might come on campus. Why do I see Smith's Food King Grocery carts upside down in a ditch six blocks from the store, often very near a student apartment? Is that a new program implemented by local store managers? Why do some merchants post signs for all the world to see reading "No checks cashed for BYU students"? Why do some large telephone bills go unpaid or get left for the last roommate in the apartment to assume?

Now, these are problems that I hope are the exceptions and not the rules. I believe the BYU family, speaking collectively and by comparison, are more honorable in such matters than any other in education, but in today's world that could be damning with faint praise. "He gave her an 'F' in the course...and justified it...on the solid Socratic ground that if a student did not know right from wrong, she [or he] should not pass a college course."

My beloved young friends, we have a chance at BYU. We have a chance to make a difference, to stand for something. A recent writer in the *New York Times* said:

The gut issue in the United States today is the lack of quality from top to bottom in American life.

Well, we have an answer to that frustration. If we miss this chance, some future historian will ask why we became part of the world's ethical drift rather than seeking to shape it by our own strengths and scholarship and moral convictions. Such a historian will conclude that ours will not have been a failure of opportunity but of seeing opportunity, not a failure of wisdom but of the will to use the wisdom God has given our dispensation for a century and a half, a failure not of training but of purpose and integrity.

The moral qualities of higher education in this country are now a little like Louis XIII in the last year of his life. His doctors didn't know exactly what to do with him either, so they bled him 47 times, purged him 215 times, gave him rebeneese from a pharmacopia, which included the left foot of a tortoise, the urine of a lizard, some elephant dung, a mole's liver, blood drawn from the right wing of a white pigeon, an elixir of quicksilver, and an elixir of arsenic. They didn't lengthen his life; they just made it seem longer. He died at 41 years of age.

Now, we have some answers at BYU, answers to questions now being asked. We have a contribution to make. We can offer truth

and virtue to a world which desperately needs them both. But we have got to demonstrate both here, in our personal lives at BYU. I ask you to join in this call this morning to high adventure.

A Privilege, Not a Right

Now, I tried to begin the hour in a light way, commenting on what it is like to be the president of BYU. When asked how I like it, I said "Terrific; I love it," and I meant it. But I need to say to you that I love it with one exception.

The part I don't love about this job is that it appears I will be the first president in the 106-year history of this institution to tell an increasingly larger number of prospective students that they cannot come to BYU. I had been in office only a matter of hours late last summer when I began to understand what real personal pain it would mean to families, friends, alumni, and high school graduates throughout this Church to be told that there was no available space remaining at Brigham Young University. The frustration and disappointment and anger many feel over this has been the most difficult part of my year; and without going into that detail, I do need to say to you that it is in every way a privilege and not a right to be at BYU. I say that of myself, I say it of Sister Holland, I say it of colleagues in the administration, faculty, and staff. But certainly it must also be said of you. What I am sure you don't need to be told in light of the pain of so many parents and prospective students is that I'm going to be pretty unsympathetic with a student who comes to BYU in this decade to play, to goof off, to loaf in and out of class, to defy our standards and our expectations and our values, whether those be moral values, whether those be moral or academic or otherwise. By the same token, we never wish to be cold or unkind. We certainly will not be unfair. Where honest help is needed, honest help will be given. But a carelessness—and I

use that word specifically and literally—on your part about what BYU intends to stand for will not be impressive to me at a time when 4,500 students every year are being turned away. We are going to be as fair and as equitable in our retention policy. But it will be with the assumption that students who come to BYU and who stay at BYU will be those who love learning, who love Christian living, and who want to make a constructive contribution to their world.

Please know that you are loved; please know that you are needed. It is for you that this university has been established. There is an investment on the part of tithepayers the length and breadth and history of the Church devoted to what you will become. I join hands with you to stand by that trust and give honor to the meaning of it.

Now, last night I was restless. And late—because I wanted to and we needed to—Pat and I left the house and the children in bed and walked. We walked across the campus—around it, through it—and looked at it and thought of you. We saw some of you scurrying here and there, anxious to get home, ready to start a new year. And I did indeed think in the beauty of the night and the grandeur that is this campus—I did indeed think about what the Prophet Joseph Smith said about Nauvoo. Of it he said and of you I say that it was the best place on earth, and you are indeed the best people in it. May this be your highest, healthiest, happiest year, the best of your life, in the search for self-discovery and in the discipline of matters of both truth and virtue that will be important for your contribution now and forever. I pray that for you and for us all in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.