

# *A Unique and Wonderful University*

GORDON B. HINCKLEY

President Benson was scheduled to be here this morning. He spoke wonderfully in the general conference just concluded, but it was wearisome for him. He is now in his ninetieth year and does not have as much energy as he once had. Neither will you when you reach that age—if you ever reach it. I bring you his love and blessing. He asked me to fill his assignment this morning, and that is what counselors are for. I hope and pray for inspiration to say something that will be helpful to you because I believe that we all need help.

## **A Great and Singular Institution**

I have been thinking of this great institution that you have the rare privilege to attend. This is a unique and wonderful university. It is unique because of its Church sponsorship. It is wonderful because of its quality. A number of universities in this nation were begun under the sponsorship of various churches. They so continued for a season, but most of them have drifted far from that mooring post. Some might have within their framework a school of theology, but its influence is scarcely felt in the secular day-by-day operation of the larger institution.

Here, in contrast, the board of trustees is chaired by the President of the Church. It is chaired by him whom we sustain as a prophet

of God. I know of no other university in all the world, certainly not in this nation, whose governing board is chaired by a prophet. And I, with you, can sing, “We thank thee, O God, for a prophet to guide us in these latter days” (*Hymns*, 1985, no. 19).

This is certainly a major element in qualifying BYU as a unique university. The spirit of that direction filters down through the board of trustees, the administration, the faculty, and the student body. As one who has sat on the board for many years, I know and testify that the inspiration of the Lord is manifest in the deliberations of that governing council.

The board is made up of men and women who serve not because they sought office or received a political appointment but because they were “called.” And they bring to that service only one desire—that is to consider policies that impact you, the students, in such a way as to bless your lives with enrichment of opportunity and enlargement of understanding. In the meetings of the board there is freedom of discussion. Each member comes from a different

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background. But there is commonality in one thing, and that is that this is a Church-sponsored institution designed and operated to stimulate and encourage the acquisition of both secular and ecclesiastical knowledge in an environment of spiritual values.

I am satisfied that, as the years pass, and as we continue to pursue this course, this university will become increasingly unique among the universities of the nation and the world. We must never lose that uniqueness. We must hold tenaciously to it. Without it there would be no justification whatever for sponsorship by the Church and the use of the tithing funds of the Church to support it.

The courses in religion that you take are all part of this designed program. I hope you feast upon this opportunity to grow in a knowledge of the great, eternal things of God.

The honor code to which you subscribe is also related to this. It is designed to insure the presence on this campus of a student body of young men and young women with standards above the cut of the world at large, ideals that are conducive to spiritual relationships and a social atmosphere of respectability. I hope you will not resent this code of honor and its requirements. Rather, I hope you will subscribe to it wholeheartedly. In so doing you will affect in a very positive and meaningful way the distinctive quality of this university.

I said at the outset that I regard this as a unique and wonderful university. I use that word *wonderful* in its literal sense—that is, full of wonder. Represented in this faculty is the accumulated wisdom of all of the ages of mankind. Whether their learning be in the sciences, the humanities, theology, the law, or whatever, these people have qualified themselves in the accumulated wisdom of the ages. It is not necessary that you experiment and stumble by personal experience through mistakes and accomplishments of the past that have resulted in a vast accumulation of knowledge. The sum total of all of this is here for you

to acquire in a relatively short time under the direction of able and dedicated teachers.

This is the chief purpose of this wonderful institution—to pass on to students in a stimulating and provocative and effective way the wisdom of the ages in all fields of man’s endeavors. The process is at times difficult. I know the pressures are painful. The stress is unremitting. But the rewards are tremendous. When the Lord in revelation invited us, yes, even commanded us, to “obtain a knowledge of history, and of countries, and of kingdoms, of laws of God and man, and all this for the salvation of Zion,” he set the broad parameters of the wonderful curriculum of this great and singular institution (D&C 93:53). He also declared:

*Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that are expedient for you to understand;*

*Of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms. [D&C 88:78–79]*

We must never diminish that broad expanse of learning. We must constantly add to it as the knowledge of mankind increases across the world. This university must be in the forefront of such learning because the Lord himself has marked the breadth and depth of that field that is as vast and as complex as the human personality.

#### **Dr. Boyer’s Appraisal**

I was not here for August commencement. I was out of the country at that time. As you know, Dr. Ernest L. Boyer was honored and spoke to the congregation. Dr. Boyer is president of the Carnegie Foundation for the

Advancement of Teaching and former U.S. Commissioner of Education. At the risk of repeating some of the significant things he said on another occasion, I wish to add a few comments from his observations growing out of his experiences here at Brigham Young University. He is reported to have said,

*These days at BYU have been for Kay and me a time of special inspiration and renewal. During our time together, I have been profoundly moved by the openness and candor of your communication, by your commitment to the highest of academic standards, and by your love of God and your reverence for all of his creation and, above all, by your willingness and the willingness of your children to bring a message of hope and reconciliation to a needy world. [Ernest L. Boyer in an address to the BYU General Education Workshop, Provo, Utah, June 1988]*

I submit that this is a tremendous appraisal of this unique and wonderful university. I think Dr. Boyer would be the first to say that his experience on this campus was different from that experienced anywhere else.

I repeat that I did not hear his enlargement of those observations. But I am going to take the privilege of making my own comments on his outline.

He stated that he had been “profoundly moved by the openness of your communication.”

That says a great deal about the spirit of this institution. It speaks of the true atmosphere of a university where there is free and open discussion and candor in expression. We are sometimes accused of being narrow and secretive. Nothing could be further from the truth. We have nothing to be ashamed of, nothing to be embarrassed about. Our history, our actions, our programs are not such as to cause us embarrassment when and if they are discussed in the full and true context of the environment and time of their occurrence.

Of course there are some things that are sacred to us that we do not bandy about in open forums. We are under no obligation to discuss these in a secular atmosphere. We are, as a matter of fact, under strong obligation to hold them sacred and not expose them before the world.

However, these are few, and of no substantial concern to the world. But in matters that appropriately may be of concern to the world as well as to ourselves, there can be openness and candor with the full and certain assurance that when and if all the facts are known there will be no reason for embarrassment and much cause for pride.

If Dr. Boyer, out of his experience on this campus, was led to compliment us on “the openness and candor” of our communication, then I am greatly heartened. I am grateful for his observation and his expression. It is evident that we are achieving one of the basic purposes of a unique and wonderful university.

He next observed “your commitment to the highest of academic standards.”

That is a tremendous compliment. And it says a remarkable thing worthy of note by university officials across the land. It says that the pursuit of secular knowledge in an environment of spirituality is a feasible and possible and desirable objective.

On this campus we must have the highest of academic standards. We must be second to none. That does not mean we are trying to copy some other great institution. It does mean that in the pursuit of our academic goals we must not be sullied by lack of integrity as scholars, but rather that we must pursue our quest for truth in a diligent and excellent way without forsaking the perspective that comes of recognition of God as the eventual source of all truth. We must acquire learning “by study and also by faith” as the Lord has instructed us (D&C 88:118).

In speaking of the highest of academic standards, has anyone a more inspiring

yardstick by which to measure the acquisition of learning than that given by the Lord himself? “The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth” (D&C 93:36). Is not that what we are after? Light and truth become the *summum bonum* of all true learning. One of my favorite verses of scripture is found in section 50 of the Doctrine and Covenants:

*That which is of God is light; and he that receiveth light, and continueth in God, receiveth more light; and that light groweth brighter and brighter until the perfect day. [D&C 50:24]*

I submit that in that one verse is found an expression of the whole purpose of light and truth. I am grateful that Dr. Boyer felt constrained to compliment the university on our commitment to the highest standards of academic excellence. In so doing he placed this institution in the company of the great institutions of learning in all the world. We must never let down nor slacken our pace. We must go forward in our unending search for light and truth, whose author, I repeat, is the God of heaven whom we worship “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

I move now to Dr. Boyer’s third statement: “Your love of God and your reverence for all of his creation.”

Again, this is a tremendous recognition of a unique quality he found on this campus. That becomes, in effect, a restatement of the Lord concerning the great commandments:

*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind,*

*This is the first and great commandment.*

*And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. [Matthew 22:37–39]*

Love of God is basic. It is the very foundation of true worship. It puts heart and soul and spirit into our lives. It subdues arrogance and conceit and greed. It leads to love for all of

God’s creations. It leads to obedience to the second great commandment, love of neighbor. In the world in which we now live, that love of neighbor finds expression not only in Christian acts of charity and kindness to those in need, but in a larger sense includes a sacred regard for the environment in which all men as neighbors across the earth must live.

I am glad that Dr. Boyer recognized that spirit of love on this campus. We must give it preeminence. We must never downgrade it or belittle it or deny its importance. It is of the very essence of our faith and must be in the structure of all our thinking.

I come to his final comment, that he has been “profoundly moved . . . by your willingness and the willingness of your children to bring a message of hope and reconciliation to a needy world.”

We can never hold within ourselves the great blessings of light and truth that have come to us from the Almighty. Ours is an obligation, a serious responsibility to carry to the world not only the secular truth we acquire here, but also the great good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Ours is truly a message of hope and reconciliation. It is a word of hope for all mankind, a beacon of eternal truth to which men may look as they lift their eyes and souls to their Creator and in the process come to recognize their common brotherhood. That sense of brotherhood must bring reconciliation among those who differ and argue over their differences.

### **Ours Is a Mission**

This sick world cries out for healing. Christ, the Son of God, was the Master Healer, and he has shown us the way. It is his message of peace and reconciliation that we teach. His is the gospel of charity and peace and love. Ours is a mission of understanding, ours is a mission of teaching, ours is a mission of reconciliation. It is accomplished in substantial measure through our great missionary program. That

program is essentially concerned with carrying a message of hope and reconciliation to a needy world. This great university is part of it. As President Holland has indicated, thousands of you on this campus have so served in a hundred nations across the world. Thousands of others are now preparing so to serve.

The Book of Mormon, so widely taught on this campus, is a testament to the folly of men who forgot God and sank to war and degradation. And on the other hand it is a witness to the rich and marvelous blessings that come to those who recognize God and his Beloved Son and who walk in peace with one another.

We were in St. George Sunday and attended a sacrament meeting there. A young man, a missionary laboring there, spoke. He held in his hand a well-worn copy of the Book of Mormon. He told us of that book. It had been left in his parents' home years before by missionaries. It was put aside without being read. His mother, in cleaning the bookshelves, dropped it with other books into a box on the back porch to be put in the garbage. Her son saw the box and, out of curiosity, looked at its contents and found the Book of Mormon. He commenced reading it. He was intrigued with it. It eventually led to his finding the missionaries. They taught him and he was baptized. He is now serving in southern Utah—an effective missionary. He stated that this same Book of Mormon passed about for reading by his friends and led to the conversion and baptism of seven other young men who are now serving in the mission field. They, with their associates, are literally carrying “a message of hope and reconciliation to a needy world.”

From the halls of this great institution, this unique and wonderful university, there have

gone over the years literally hundreds of thousands of young men and women imbued with the gospel of Jesus Christ to carry its healing message to those hungering for eternal truth. The knowledge here acquired has become the seed stock of the great flowering of this work in many lands. To you who have been in the mission field, may your knowledge and understanding grow as you pursue your studies here on this campus, and may there be nurtured within you a love for mankind and a desire to help our Father's suffering children wherever they may be. To those of you who are here and preparing to go into the world as missionary teachers of eternal truth, may the knowledge you here acquire build your faith and understanding and your capacity to serve as teachers of the gospel, as messengers of hope, and as those prepared to lift up the distressed.

God bless you, my beloved associates, you of the administration, you of the faculty, and particularly you thousands of young men and women blessed with eager minds and open hearts who have come here to drink of the refreshing waters of light and truth offered at this unique and wonderful university.

Do not forget why you are here. Do not resist the rules and requirements that are necessary among so large a body of students. Do not compromise your standards and principles. This is one of the truly great and fruitful seasons of your lives. Be honest in all of your activities. Be virtuous in your words and actions. Stretch your minds and dig to master the studies you select. It may not be easy, but I promise you that you will then be happy, and to your happiness will be added gratitude. I say this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.