

A Brighter Day

MERRILL J. BATEMAN

Brothers, sisters, and friends, this is a wonderful gathering in the Marriott Center to honor the graduates of 2001. I am grateful for the presence of President Boyd K. Packer, acting president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and our presiding officer. It is also wonderful to be in the presence of Elder David B. Haight, a member of the Twelve and an inspiration to all. On behalf of the trustees, faculty, staff, and administration of Brigham Young University, I welcome our honored guests, Kim B. Clark and Lucile C. Tate, who will receive honorary doctorates, and Ben E. Lewis and Leon “Pete” and Arline Harman, who will be honored with presidential citations.

Today the summer graduating class consists of 2,756 students—the largest summer class in BYU’s history. When the December and April graduates are combined with the summer total, the number of graduates for this academic year is 9,180—again, the largest ever. As I have noted in previous

commencement exercises, BYU students are more determined to complete their studies than ever before. With almost the same size student body, today’s graduating class exceeds the 1990 total by 2,748. Women account for a large part of the increase. In 1990 men made up 57 percent of the total and women 43 percent. Today the percentages are near even, with about 50 percent each.

Today’s graduates come from 49 of 50 U.S. states—only the state of Delaware is not represented—and from 48 foreign countries. The youngest graduate is fifteen years old and is receiving a degree in business management. The oldest is sixty-five and is graduating in chemistry. More than half are married: 62 percent of the men and 45 percent of the women.

During the past summer I have reflected on the BYU experience, prompted by the results of a recent alumni survey of the class of 1997. This is the first in a series in which each class will be surveyed three years after graduation.

Merrill J. Bateman, president of Brigham Young University, delivered this commencement address on August 16, 2001.

Consequently, this year's graduating class will be approached in the year 2004 and asked to evaluate its BYU experience. The purpose of the survey is to determine the extent to which the university is successful in achieving the BYU aims, which are to "be (1) spiritually strengthening, (2) intellectually enlarging, and (3) character building, leading to (4) lifelong learning and service" (*The Aims of a BYU Education* [1 March 1995]).

The results of the first survey are interesting. With respect to the spiritually strengthening aspects of a BYU education, the survey explored changes in the students' relationship with God, their understanding of Church doctrine and history, and their religious identity. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest, the class of 1997 gave the university a score of 5 across these questions.

In the intellectual arena, scores averaged a 4, as did those in the area of lifelong learning. Ninety-four percent of those who went on to graduate school indicated that they were very well prepared. The university's effort to instill a desire toward community service received a score of 3. I might add that the class of 1997 did not have the advantage of working with the Jacobsen Service and Learning Center, created in 1999, which now organizes and provides students with thousands of service/learning opportunities. Finally, most students expressed a wish that they had taken more advantage of university resources to receive a broader education while here. This was true for both graduates and undergraduates.

As one might suspect, the highest-ranking activity in the spiritually strengthening category was the BYU devotional. Courses in one's major

proved to be the most important intellectual experience. It is interesting that BYU's religion courses scored high in both the spiritual and intellectual areas.

Now the hour has come when you will leave the university. What has been your experience? Even more important, what will you do with the investment that the Church—through the university—has made in you? Will you live your lives in a manner that will allow the investment to flourish? If you are true to the spiritual principles you have been taught, your wisdom and intellectual understanding will continue on an upward path. But if you abandon spiritual truths learned, intellectual growth will falter.

The university and the Church have added light to your being, but none has received the fulness that lies ahead. I recently read an interesting statement to this effect by the Apostle Paul. He said: "For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest" (Hebrews 12:18). In other words, no one has been to the mount wherein we receive a fulness of light, nor are we in total darkness. All of us walk the path of mortality in half-light with occasional flashes of illumination added by the Holy Ghost. Those flashes help us see, for a moment, markers along the path and assure us of acceptance as we strive to live our lives and live the commandments. It is my prayer that as you walk into the future, the spiritual and temporal light received at BYU will provide assurance of who you are, of your relationship with the Father, and of your preparation to serve. I say this in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.