

“A School in Zion”

JEFFREY R. HOLLAND

Late last winter I was feeling pretty blue about something or other that didn't seem quite right at the university and found myself wondering if all the effort was really worth it. As is so often the case with such monumental matters, I don't even remember now what it was—but whatever it was, it made those winter days a bit darker than usual.

That led to a question I found myself asking late one night in the darkened study of the President's Home: “Should the Church even have a university at all?” Did it justify the effort, the expense, the toil, the tithing—and was it worth the pain? After all, the Church had disengaged from a number of operations, which included not only hospitals and hotels but, of far more interest to us, schools. Should the Church, I wondered, continue to fund BYU if resources are limited, if an increasing number of students cannot attend, and if individuals at the university—or in any way the university collectively—could not measure up to the expectations that so many generations have had for us?

I sat there that night thinking of what I said on August 26, 1980, when you were kind enough to sit through the very first of these nine messages from me.¹ I said then that I was gambling everything I

had, in whatever the Holland administrative years would be, on one single and preeminent principle. That cardinal supposition, that consuming vision, was that we could be an excellent university, indeed a truly great university, an “educational Mt. Everest,”² if you will, and still be absolutely, unequivocally, forever faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ and to his restored Church that sponsors us. In fact, we would accomplish the one *because* of the other, never *in spite* of it. My presidential belief—the only one that seemed to me to justify BYU's existence—was that we could have it both ways, that superb scholarship and rock-solid faith were as inextricable in our future as they were essential to it. I spoke that day of “scholar-saints”³ who could make this university one of the latter-day wonders of the world.

From that first meeting to this very hour I have believed that such idealism, such passion for the ultimate possibility, was incumbent upon us all. “'Tis but a base ignoble mind That mounts no higher than a bird can soar,” Gloucester reminded

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Suffolk.⁴ I believed we could somehow, someway mount higher, and I was certain God expected our minds to soar. Henry Thoreau had mused by the side of his woodland pond that “in the long run men hit only what they aim at.”⁵ So not failure but low aim would be the most severe indictment of a Latter-day Saint fortunate enough to be at BYU.

Surely we of all people are moved by that “indomitable urge”—that’s Ortega y Gasset’s phrase⁶—to expand life, to enlarge it, to improve it. That is our hope, our heritage, our theology. From the beginning ours has been a soul-stretching belief. “Thy mind, O man!” said the Prophet Joseph Smith, “if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost heavens, and search into and contemplate the darkest abyss, and the broad expanse of eternity.”⁷ Only then, he said, could we “contemplate the mighty acts of Jehovah in all their variety and glory.”⁸

“The mighty acts of Jehovah”? I have believed that *BYU* should be one of the mighty acts of Jehovah. To be less than that for his purposes and his people seemed to me a blasphemy.

With such aspirations for us all, I suppose it isn’t surprising that sometimes in the dark of the night I feel we are not measuring up. Soaring is, after all, difficult work. And yes, I did remember that Nauvoo, the city of Zion, had been laid out to feature two Latter-day Saint monuments: a temple and a university. But I also knew that scholastic tension between the sacred and profane had marked most of this world’s history, and if the dream weren’t *really* attainable, then why have a *BYU* at all? The fraction of the Church’s youth we can serve decreases dramatically each year; we have a fixed *BYU* student numerator and an exploding Church membership denominator. So the only challenge we can ever address is the qualitative one. And if we can’t win that war—if Jerusalem really can’t find and fellowship Athens and seal her firmly into the family group sheet⁹—then let’s stop holding all these cottage meetings in Provo.

Would it not, I wondered, be better to use the tithing resources of the Church in a more fundamental way—missionary work or temple building or humanitarian aid, say—and let our

students attend any one of a thousand other universities that don’t pretend to such millennial aspirations? If *BYU* were ever to look and act just like any other university, who needs it? Not, I was certain, the tithe payers of the Church.

Those are very dark thoughts—but then I’ve learned that most thoughts at 1:00 or 2:00 in the morning are pretty dark. (Thank heavens for sleep. Surely the Lord knew what he was doing when he put a night between two days. But back to the study in the President’s Home.)

Thanks to my wife, I long ago established the habit of reading at least some scripture every night before retiring, however late it might be. So after such dark thoughts, I turned a lamp back on and reached for my scriptures. For whatever reason I decided not to pursue the sequential reading that I do most nights. I simply felt inspired to open the scriptures at random and find something fresh and unfamiliar. Now I don’t believe every time anybody opens a scripture it is necessarily an inspired act. Sometimes it is, but I am equally confident that sometimes it isn’t. Certainly those evenings when the book has fallen open to the book of Numbers or the Bible Dictionary I have felt less inspired than others. But this night I opened the book without prejudice and with, I think, a special measure of hope in my heart. Literally and truly the first words on which my eyes fell were these in section 97 of the Doctrine and Covenants: “Behold, I say unto you, concerning the school in Zion, *I, the Lord, am well pleased that there should be a school in Zion*” (D&C 97:3; emphasis added).

Those words hit me like a jackhammer. I chilled and blushed and chilled again. I stood up and walked around the room. I’m not embarrassed to tell you I was emotional—you know me well enough to have assumed that; I blubber if the sun comes up. And there across the street just a few yards from our home I thought I saw the statue of Karl G. Maeser smile. (Karl actually wears a pretty stern look all day there atop his pedestal, so perhaps he smiles every morning at about 1:30 just to relax, but *I* hadn’t seen him do it before!)

So I took something of a lightning strike that night, and I almost felt required to apologize:

“Lord, I really *don’t* harbor doubts about why we have BYU, even on the bad days. Think of it as a joke, a kind of bad joke, I was playing on my neighbor over there, President Maeser. *Please* don’t garnish my wages or my salvation. And *please* don’t send me with President Cluff to search on horseback for Zarahemla.”¹⁰ I even considered singing the school song. “There has to be ‘a school in Zion,’ you idiot, because *there can be no Zion without it!*” By this time I suspected that the Brigham Young statue was smiling too.

Now I know the school referred to in section 97 is technically *not* BYU. But BYU *is*, nevertheless, a legitimate academic descendant of the School of the Prophets, and I got a pat on the backside that night that suggested I stop whining and go to work; there was an inheritance to be claimed.

So today I stand before you a repentant man and now presume to answer in some detail my own dark and fleeting question. I would like to suggest why I think the Lord is well pleased that there be “a school in Zion” and why his servants have kept a Brigham Young University when almost all other Church academies are gone, why I think we need it yet, and why I am committed more than ever to its rightful destiny, a university worthy to place before the all-searching eye of God.

As I have already said, the most conspicuous *and* fundamental reason for “a school in Zion” is plainly and simply because it is our theology. You know the verses:

Do the work of printing, and . . . selecting and writing books for schools in this church, that little children also may receive instruction before me as is pleasing unto me. [D&C 55:4]

Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in . . . 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; . . . a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms. [D&C 88:78–79]

Seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith. [D&C 88:118]

Study and learn, and become acquainted with all good books, and with languages, tongues, and people. [D&C 90:15]

Such knowledge would rise with us in the Resurrection, we were told, and most sobering of all was the warning: “It is impossible for a man to be saved in ignorance” (D&C 131:6), for “the glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth” (D&C 93:36), and “light and truth forsake that evil one” (D&C 93:37). I will come back to that line later.

So part of the message of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ, part of the light now shining into what had been dark ages indeed, was the divine counsel that “to be learned is good if [we] hearken unto the counsels of God” (2 Nephi 9:29).

Surely the most powerful and compelling of all the glorious principles to reenter the world by way of Palmyra was the doctrine of inherent deity. Dare we think it? Could we say it? Would we be labeled blasphemers and heretics for believing it—that we are all literally the spiritual offspring of God, his rightful daughters and sons, who through a kind of divine DNA and the atoning mediation of that greatest of all heirs, the Lord Jesus Christ, have been given the chance to somewhere, someday by “diligence and obedience” (D&C 130:19) know what God knows and do what God does? From those most humble beginnings in Fayette to the magnificence of the final Follett sermon, the Prophet Joseph kept rolling back the firmament, kept letting us glimpse, however myopically, into the vast expanse of our own eternity.

“God has created man with a mind capable of instruction,” he wrote, “and a faculty which may be enlarged in proportion to the heed and diligence given to the light communicated from heaven to the intellect.”¹¹ No wonder we would be “ardent friends of learning,” as President George Q. Cannon described the Latter-day Saints. No wonder we would be “true seekers after knowledge.”¹² No wonder Joseph would leave warning, “A man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge.”¹³

It would be axiomatic that some truths matter *much* more than others, but an educated LDS mind would know that and, having circumscribed all truth into one great whole, it would order and integrate and prioritize truth, mixing knowledge with virtue, love, and the saving ordinances of God. In reflecting on the atrocities of the Holocaust, George Steiner observed:

*We know now that a man can read Goethe or Rilke in the evening, that he can play Bach and Schubert, and go to his day's work at Auschwitz in the morning. . . . [What grows] up inside literate civilization [that seems to lead to] barbarism?*¹⁴

"What grows up . . . is information without knowledge, knowledge without wisdom, and wisdom without . . . compassion."¹⁵ So a Latter-day Saint would read Goethe at sundown, play Bach in the evening, and the next day *die* for his fellowmen, if necessary.

"The Lord requireth the heart *and* a willing mind," Joseph taught (D&C 64:34; emphasis added). Your mind and heart must expand together. "You must enlarge your souls towards each other," he pled. "Let your hearts expand [as you learn], let them be enlarged towards others."¹⁶ "The heart and a willing mind."

And what of Brigham Young? The longer I live and the more I read, the more fitting I find it that this largest and nearly last remnant of the academies established under his pioneer leadership still bears and perpetuates his name. As his advocate Hugh Nibley says, "There never was a man more undeviatingly consistent and rational in thought and utterance."¹⁷

Brigham Young's metaphor for life was the academy, and the principal schoolmaster was his beloved Joseph Smith. Of Joseph he said, "He took heaven, figuratively speaking, and brought it down to earth; and he took the earth, brought it up, and opened up, in plainness and simplicity, the things of God; and that is the beauty of his mission."¹⁸ How plain was that view of life? How simple? To Brigham Young, quite simple. "What are we here for?" Brigham asks. He answers: "To learn to enjoy more, and *to increase in knowledge and in experience.*"¹⁹

Brigham taught:

The object of this existence is to learn. . . .

*How gladly would we understand every principle pertaining to science and art, and become thoroughly acquainted with every intricate operation of nature. . . . What a boundless field of truth and power is open for us to explore! We are only just approaching the shores of the vast ocean of information that pertains to this . . . world, to say nothing of that which pertains to the heavens.*²⁰

Hugh Nibley says, "The treasures of the earth are merely to provide us with room and board while we are here at school."²¹ And Brigham Young, speaking of property and possessions, said:

*They are made for the comfort of the creature, and not for his adoration. They are made to sustain and preserve the body while procuring the knowledge and wisdom that pertain to God and his kingdom, in order that we may preserve ourselves, and live for ever in his presence.*²²

*And when we have lived millions of years in the presence of God and angels . . . , shall we then cease learning? No, or eternity ceases.*²³

*We shall never cease to learn, unless we apostatize. . . . Can you understand that?*²⁴

Obviously that kind of effort would be a struggle, but it was a struggle Brigham was always willing to ask for. He must have anticipated all the demands on our time at BYU. Stay anxiously engaged, he said. Actually, what he said is:

*After suitable rest and relaxation there is not a day, hour or minute that we should spend in idleness, but every minute of every day of our lives we should strive to improve our minds and to increase [our] faith [in] the holy Gospel.*²⁵

*The more knowledge the Elders have the better.*²⁶

And, of course, for him knowledge meant knowledge of everything.

*This is the belief and doctrine of the Latter-day Saints. Learn everything that the children of men know.*²⁷

*Every true principle, every true science, every art, and all the knowledge that men possess, or that they ever did or ever will possess is from God. We should take pains and pride to . . . rear our children so that the learning and education of the world may be theirs.*²⁸

*Teach the children, give them the learning of the world and the things of God.*²⁹

*Mothers, . . . we will appoint you a mission to teach your children their duty; and instead of ruffles and fine dresses to adorn the body, teach them that which will adorn their minds.*³⁰

“We are trying to teach this people to use their brains,” he said.³¹ “Whatever duty you are called to perform, take your minds with you, and apply them to what is to be done.”³²

Apparently Brigham had an experience or two when someone must have forgotten that.

*In things pertaining to this life, the lack of knowledge manifested by us as a people is disgraceful.*³³

*I have seen months and months, in this city, when I could have wept like a whipt child to see the awful stupidity of the people.*³⁴

But that pain was the pain of a prophet, not merely a pedagogue. He knew *why* we needed to be intelligent.

*All our educational pursuits are in the service of God, for all these labors are to establish truth on the earth, . . . that we may increase in knowledge, wisdom, understanding in the power of faith and in the wisdom of God, that we may become fit subjects to dwell in a higher state of existence and intelligence than we now enjoy.*³⁵

“If men would be great in goodness, they must be intelligent,” Brigham would say.³⁶

So it was theology. But surely one need not have a school to learn. No, and many didn’t, including Joseph and Brigham themselves, but they knew

that made it harder and maybe a lot less likely. They wanted structure and synergism for their young scholars. They needed, in short, a place in which to assemble and intensify their education; ergo, reason number two: they needed “a school in Zion”—like we need BYU. It may be too much to call ourselves Zion in the 1980s, but we can be a place of gathering, not only for an academic family five times the population of the southern Utah city in which I was born, but a gathering place for the knowledge and “treasures surviving in the earth from every age and culture.”³⁷

Immediately after arriving in the valley, President Young initiated such a gathering. He told the Saints:

*[Secure] at least [one] copy of every valuable treatise on education—every book, map, chart, or diagram that may contain interesting, useful, and attractive matter, to gain the attention of children, and cause them to love to learn to read; . . . also every historical, mathematical, philosophical, geographical, geological, astronomical, scientific, practical, and all other . . . useful and interesting writings.*³⁸

*It is the business of the Elders of this Church . . . to gather up all the truths in the world pertaining to life and salvation, to the Gospel we preach, to mechanism[s] of every kind, to the sciences, and to philosophy, wherever [they] may be found in every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, and bring it to Zion.*³⁹

*All science and art belong to the Saints.*⁴⁰

*[They must] rapidly collect the intelligence that is bestowed upon the nations, for all this intelligence belongs to Zion. All the knowledge, wisdom, power, and glory that have been bestowed upon [all] the nations of the earth, from the days of Adam till now, must be gathered home to Zion.*⁴¹

And, of course, gathering the stuff of learning, the things of learning, or even the students of learning was not enough. So, reason number three. What any true Zion would need—and what the present world needs even more—are those educated and spiritual and wise who will sort,

sift, prioritize, integrate, and give some sense of wholeness, some spirit of connectedness to great eternal truths. At the turn of the twentieth century, Josiah Royce, writing about the great intellectual achievements of our time, observed that man has, through the richness of the intellectual quest, “become more knowing, more clever, . . . [and] more skeptical.” But we have not, Royce warned, become “more profound or more reverent.”⁴² Nor have we found a way to put our learning in the context of the eternal.

Everyone in this room knows as well as I that from Royce’s day to this, the problem with higher education has been the perpetuation of dividedness, separateness, departmentalization, specialties, subspecialties, and subspecies of subspecialties. Universities in this nation are informational Nagasakis, higher educational Hiroshimas. The “watchmen on the tower”⁴³ cry out for those who will integrate, coalesce, clarify, and give both order and rank to important human knowledge. This generation has students who may not dare to ask the great human questions because their answers appear to be somewhere in the bottom of an academic dumpster, one nearly exploding at the seams from curricular cramming. “The connectedness of things is what the educator [must pursue],” said Mark Van Doren. “No human capacity is great enough to permit a vision of the world as simple, but if the educator does not aim at the vision no one else will, and the consequences are dire when no one does.”⁴⁴

So I am convinced that the Lord needs “a school in Zion” now, even more than a century ago, to help a generation, indeed to help an entire Church membership, sort through much intellectual nonsense that is inevitably in an inert swamp of facts. More than any time in human history our students need—like Matthew Arnold needed—a Latter-day Saint Sophocles to teach them, to whom they would gladly give “special thanks [for an] even-balanced soul, . . . Who saw life steadily and saw it whole.”⁴⁵

Is not BYU the restored gospel’s designated place to see “life steadily and [see] it whole”? Shouldn’t it be here that no less an intellect than Albert Einstein could find what he called that

“vivid sense of the [truly] beautiful, [that vivid sense] of the morally good”?⁴⁶ Could that not be one of the functions of the Zion of the mind, as Professor Allen Bergin referred to the university in light of his own conversion to the Church and decision to come to BYU?⁴⁷ A place not only to love the truth and gather it but a place to organize and integrate it as well. A place for connectedness, for true community. A place for “even-balanced soul[s].”

But even as I make this appeal for us to help our students and ultimately our church, I fear that we often can hardly help ourselves toward such wholeness and integration. Whether we are plumbers or professors, clerks or clinicians, we find it very hard to transcend our departments and specialties. Heaven only knows we find it hard to transcend the trivia of administration. Let me use a homely example.

Last year in this setting I referred to a book on education by Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, which has since been on the *New York Times* best-seller list, hard cover and paperback, for some sixty weeks. I said then that it was perhaps the most unlikely best-selling book of modern times—filled with philosophy and erudite allusions and written on a dull subject like the responsibility of university presidents and professors. Whoever else might be interested in such matters (and apparently a surprising number were), the provocative title *The Closing of the American Mind* and the even more provocative subtitle *How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today’s Students* could not, I think, be more compelling or insistent to the eye of a university population.

On the basis of the title *alone*, would not our professional loyalties, or just the immensely heated discussion the book has stimulated for more than a year, almost *force* us to read it—at least a chapter or two? Without being either patronizing or prescriptive, may I just wonder aloud how many in our community have sampled it. I realize it is not required reading. I also realize its scope doesn’t fall neatly into a department. Indeed, the writer may have a background and behavior that do not square with ours. Best of all,

I realize that one might argue *against* the book at least as vigorously as one would argue *for* it, but how are we supposed to know?

Great Scott! We are, you and I, accused in a runaway best-seller of closing minds, of failing democracy, and of impoverishing souls! Those are terrible indictments. People have been pouring into bookstores in unprecedented numbers to watch one man slap, for all intents and purposes, every university in the nation with a gigantic slab of tuna. What are we to do? Hunker down deeper into our departments? I wonder.

The author says the book is “a meditation on the state of our souls.” Does it succeed?

- Is, as he says, the crisis in the university “the profoundest crisis” modern nations face? Why?
- What of his argument that the U.S. Constitution is something more of “moral order” than of “rules of government”?
- What does he mean when he says, “Nature [is] the standard by which we [must] judge our . . . lives”? Isn’t the natural man an enemy to God?
- Does he believe science can or cannot deal with issues of “the good”?
- Is every Frenchman—and perhaps every human being anywhere—born either Cartesian or Pascalian, and why on earth would it matter?
- What of his principal tension in the book, that of freedom vs. openness? Do such distinctions amount to anything?
- How does he feel about the home and family? Would Latter-day Saints generally agree or disagree?
- Is watching a PBS program “the high tide [of American] intellectual life”?
- What distinctions, pro or con, does he give to phrases like “moral instinct,” “moral reasoning,” “moral training,” “moral education,” and “moral action”?
- Why does he say it is easier to “grasp the condition” of a student’s soul in the Louvre than in a university classroom? How so?
- Is our critic for or against more movies about Sir Thomas More and Mohandas Gandhi?
- What course at the university is most likely to give a student the lasting “image of a perfect soul”?
- What role does music play in what the author calls the one “regularly recognizable . . . distinction between [the] educated and uneducated in America”?
- Of what does he speak when he quotes Saul Bellow saying it “is a kind of ghost town into which anyone can move and [immediately] declare himself sheriff”?
- What is the unique significance the author gives to the word *modesty*, and how does it reflect on a fictional character like Anna Karenina or a real one like St. Augustine?
- Is it, in fact, any big deal that America has never had to “kill a king” or overthrow a church?
- How does he feel about psychologists and psychoanalysis? Do they rank higher or lower than economists and economics? Does he have the slightest idea what he is talking about in either field?⁴⁸

Well, enough of this. Okay, so we’re not particularly interested in this book. Maybe we don’t need to be. It certainly isn’t the lost 116 pages of the Book of Mormon manuscript, and no one needs to tell me how precious time is. Choices are inevitable.

But I think how wonderful it would be if, as a true community, we all read something together and talked about it, something broad and provocative and fun. If Bloom is too far down the alphabet, I’d settle for Aeschylus. I think it would be absolutely delightful if every person in this room would read tonight *Prometheus Bound*, *Agamemnon*, and *Seven Against Thebes*. That’s about forty-two pages—shouldn’t take us more than a couple of campaign speeches to do it—and then over a paintbrush or pizza or pair of pinking shears, wherever we gather together, we could discuss them, gospel insights and all. That sounds more fun to me than George Bush and Michael Dukakis meeting face-to-face at a charisma clinic.

How might we cultivate the larger sense of connectedness *and* community here? I *do* worry about faculty, staff, and administrative segmentation that keeps us from being a full-fledged “school in Zion.” Fortunately those aspirations I spoke of earlier work in our favor. The ennobling climb toward an Everest allows us—indeed requires us—to take the high ground and gives us a place to view the broader, more liberating, more eternal “general” education, if you will, that is so fundamental to the growth of the human mind and development of the human soul.

That is the *real* merging we someday have to do here—not only organizing and pruning and prioritizing the world’s knowledge all about us but also fusing gospel insights and gospel perspectives into every field and discipline of study. One faculty member recently wrote me, saying:

We need—without arrogance but with energy and daring—to try [to] integrate faith and scholarship in our writing and in our teaching and improve it until it stands on its own merit. . . . We especially need to get over merely trying to imitate others or win their approval. Too many [here] are still worrying whether what they write or say will pass the judgment of [a particular university] (of all places!).

*We ought to more fully find a way, a unique way, to combine the best of traditional scholarship with the religious and moral questions and perspectives **intrinsic** to that scholarship **and** to the restored gospel. That ought not to be an avocation but a central part of our scholarly work.⁴⁹*

The echo of President Spencer W. Kimball’s inaugural charge is in the air. “[Your] light must have a special glow. You [must] do many things [here] that are done elsewhere, but you must do them better.”⁵⁰

I would quickly note that some disciplines probably lend themselves a little more directly to gospel insights and influence than others, so please spare me the sardonic questions as to whether there is a Mormon mathematics or a consecrated chemistry. There probably isn’t, but I *would* say there are Mormon mathematicians and consecrated chemists and endowed engineers and

historians who are high priests. That *should* be an advantage to our integration of truth.

I am making an unabashed appeal for a distinctly LDS approach to education—an approach best featured on this campus by our present university-wide efforts in religion, honors, and general education.

Now I do not want my next statement misunderstood. Please, do *not* misunderstand. I do not believe that Brigham Young University, at least with current policies on both funding and mission, *will* or *should* ever aspire to be a great research university as the nation defines research universities. I do believe, however, with all my heart that we should aspire to become the finest undergraduate university on the face of the planet. Now the misunderstanding I don’t want is a knee-jerk, unwarranted assumption that we will therefore have no serious scholarship required of us nor have a significant, albeit careful selection of graduate and professional programs. I did *not* say we would be a four-year college. I said we would be a *university*.

But we will never, I think, be an MIT or a Cal Tech—nor should we. However, to be a world-class undergraduate teaching university, we have to be a lot smarter and a lot better than we are now. For the purposes of an absolutely unequaled liberal arts general and religious education, we have to have teachers who investigate and integrate and know something, who are ambitious about godly growth—what Joseph Smith would call “enlargement.”⁵¹ We have to have teachers who are growing in precisely the same manner we expect students to grow—and that means significant scholarship.

In this day and age, with books like Bloom’s and Boyer’s and Hirsch’s and a score of others lamenting the state of public education and laying the blame squarely at the feet of the universities and their colleges of education who train and place teachers in those public schools, isn’t there something here BYU can uniquely do, some way we not only can but should “stand and shine,” to refer to John Masefield’s description of a true university?⁵²

Don’t we have both the advantage *and* the duty to step forward and rally the whole country in this

time of national challenge? If BYU is to lend something unique to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in this last dispensation, something *we* can do that makes us a city set on a hill, a light that cannot be hid,⁵³ wouldn't it be to produce just such an unequaled—and unfragmented and undivided—"school in Zion"? To be known as *the* place where one can obtain a grand, consummate, unparalleled, and integrated undergraduate education, with whatever other graduate and professional programs we can afford, is a reputation I confess to coveting. That is the mission we wrote for BYU eight years ago, and it is our mission still.

Then why aren't we doing better than we are? Well, in many ways we are doing superbly. I am thrilled, for example, with the increasingly vigorous contributions in Religious Education. Our colleagues there have developed a strong core curriculum founded on the standard works, have been very diligent in not letting it get watered down, have a truly dramatic array of symposia and publications coming out of the Religious Studies Center, and perhaps most gratifying of all have designed an absolutely scintillating Book of Mormon seminar for transfer faculty who teach that course. A whole fistful of our finest faculty around the campus have written to tell me that this seminar ranks among the most stimulating and rewarding faculty experiences they have *ever* had. That is wonderful news to me, to Religious Education, to the students who take those classes, and to the integrating general education climate on our campus. Indeed, our fourteen hours of religious education ought to be seen as the very heart of our general education experience. I have always viewed it that way in the years I have been an administrator at BYU. I commend and applaud all those who are helping to make that happen.

As for the Honors and General Education programs themselves, I consider them to be crown jewels at the very heart of the most important contributions BYU can make to the world of higher education. A great deal that is very exciting to me is happening in these university-wide programs, and more will happen. Our sisterhood and brotherhood and gospel-based goodwill here give us a distinct GE advantage at BYU in our ability to

cross disciplinary and departmental lines. We simply have a very muscular leg up on the rest of the academic world that way. We must seize that advantage. Having focused for several years primarily on structural arrangements, curricular issues, and winning faculty support, we should be free to pursue informed, inspired, liberating education.

To do so, we must organize, encourage, evaluate, and reward good teaching. You will have noted that in addition to our Alcuin awards, we have recently awarded professorships to strong scholar-teachers who have made a major commitment to undergraduate education. I have announced today the creation of a Distinguished Teacher Award to be one of the university's two *highest* faculty honors. Exciting, demanding, stretching, challenging, well-organized, and well-taught courses are at the heart of what we do here. No amount of structural fussing or regulatory tinkering will compensate for stale, sterile lectures.

In the curriculum we must constantly resist the centrifugal force that habitually plagues GE programs and target our limited resources on a relatively small number of very significant offerings. Furthermore, we need to guard carefully against the tendency to let general education offerings become mere introductory courses to a discipline. They simply must remain more universal than that.

May I suggest that we also must do a better job of communicating the very practical value of general education—to our students and to the public. I think it is very important for us not to create an unnecessary cleavage between the world of the academy and the world of work, especially not in the minds of tuition-paying parents and higher education's increasing number of critics. We need to do a better job of showing the crucial link between general education and vocation.

Professor Steven M. Cahn writes:

If . . . members of a democracy are to be . . . effective contributors [to the community], each should be provided with the necessary skills, social orientation, and intellectual perspective to succeed in some wide field of occupational endeavor. But such [true] vocational education must not be confused with narrow

*job-training. Animals are broken in and trained; human beings ought to be enlightened and educated. An individual [trained but not educated] . . . is unable to adjust in the face of changing conditions and is thus stymied by a world in flux. Sidney Hook has observed: "There is a paradox connected with vocational training. The more vocational it is, the narrower it is; the narrower it is, the less likely it is to serve usefully in earning a living." . . . [Therefore] broadened vocational preparation is not only of use to the future worker himself; its benefit to society is apparent to anyone who has ever been forced to deal with the mechanized mind of a bureaucrat.*⁵⁴

Professor Douglas F. Tobler once said to me, "A good general education is the most practical thing I know. How to use the mind may be the ultimate vocational skill."

Lastly, across the breadth of our university effort we must respect and elevate the status of the students themselves. They must be seen as more than what Henry Rosovsky called at Harvard "the lumpenproletariat." She is someone's perfect daughter, he is someone's precious son, and they are certainly brothers and sisters to us all. Furthermore, they are coming to us better prepared than ever before, so we need to expect more of them and of ourselves while they are here.

Missionary-like, we need to make this the best four years of their lives. We need to give them personal attention and treat them with great respect, not only in class but in administrative and staff contacts as well. We need to advise them thoughtfully and mentor them professionally as an earlier generation of educators used to do. That may be difficult with some of our larger classes and challenging student-teacher ratios, but a good experience in a large class surely beats a bad experience in a small one. I speak from personal experience.

I have always loved Elder Marion D. Hanks' telling of the John Trebonius story. John Trebonius used to take off his hat on entering the classroom when it was the Germanic custom of the day for professors to keep them on. When asked why he was so needlessly kind to his pupils, he replied, "These little boys will some day be men, and I do not know but that there sits among them one who

will change the destiny of mankind. I take off my hat in deference to what they may become." Sitting in his classroom, watching the ways of that gentle man, was the young and future Martin Luther.⁵⁵

A fourth and, for today, last reason for "a school in Zion" is essentially a symbolic one, but a symbol with genuine substance. Elder John A. Widtsoe once wrote:

*The whole of life is education. . . . No wonder, therefore, that in the correct philosophy of life, schools and other devices for the training of man's powers are foremost. Education is and must be carried onward fully and abundantly in the Church of Christ. The support of education is, indeed, one test of the truth of the Church.*⁵⁶

That is a stunning affirmation of our earlier comments about the LDS doctrine of learning. But what happens when the true Church grows so large and has such call upon its resources that it can perhaps support only the idea, only the concept of education, rather than actual schools in which to provide it?

In such a time of growth and need, could not the *one* true Church profit magnificently from at least *one* gleaming evidence of the Church's "support of education"—*one* university sparkling, however distantly, for those Saints who now cluster in their localities with a somewhat altered sense of gathering than Zion once had? Could not BYU, both symbolically and substantially, be an unparalleled, incomparable blessing to *every one* of those Saints, from Nigeria to Newfoundland, who may never, ever set foot on BYU soil, let alone dream of having one of their own? Could it not be a house of hope and glory to every member of the Church everywhere who is trying to grow, trying to learn, trying to be strong and safe and spiritual in a very secular world? I should surely think so. We could, for the whole Church, provide what the doughboys called "pride in the outfit." And we could provide for them an increasing array of leadership, example, service, and protection in the process.

Without deifying him prematurely, consider what our own Hugh Nibley has done to

strengthen faith for people far, far away from Provo—a place from which he almost never travels. And consider, if you will, his fairly biting indictment of some of the rest of us as he praises the university’s namesake:

[We are] *only too glad to settle for the outward show, the easy and flattering forms, trappings and ceremonies of education. . . .*

As a result, whenever we move out of our tiny, busy orbits of administration and display, we find ourselves in a terrifying intellectual vacuum. Terrifying, of course, only because we might be found out. But that is just the trouble: having defaulted drastically in terms of President Young’s instructions, [some of us] stand as a brainless giant, a pushover for any smart kid or cultist or faddist or crank who even pretends to have read a few books. . . . We . . . stand helplessly and foolishly by dangling our bonnet and plume while hundreds of students and missionaries, [hundreds] of members and enemies of the Church alike, presume to challenge and reject the teachings of Joseph Smith on evidence so flimsy that no half-educated person would give it a second thought. . . . No one has ever told them what it means to lay a proper foundation essential to any serious discussion of the things they treat so glibly and triumphantly. . . .

. . . Whether we like it or not, we are going to have to return to Brigham Young’s ideals of education; we may fight it all the way, but in the end God will keep us after school until we learn our lesson.⁵⁷

And defending the faith intelligently is only one kind of aid we might offer our far-flung brothers and sisters, albeit surely the most important one. There are, it seems to me, scores of other kinds as well, in virtually every discipline of the university. And it will not require our physically going to them or bringing them physically here to us. We cannot do much of that. No, in most cases it means *writing*—good writing, strong writing, in all of our disciplines. Please let us never, ever separate “skillful writing” from “good teaching” at BYU.

Let me close by returning to that original “school in Zion” and, in so doing, come full circle. To do that, we have to go to the upper room just moments before Gethsemane and Golgotha.

As part of the strengthening preparation the Savior provided for his apostles—apostles who did not and could not comprehend what lay immediately ahead of them—Christ rose from that paschal meal and, girding himself with a towel, poured water into a basin. He then knelt, alone, and washed the feet of the Twelve.

There is, of course, a profound gesture of humility and love in this act on the very face of it. During what would be the most anguished evening in human history, when someone might well have attended a bit more to him, the Prince of Peace knelt serving others, leaving an unforgettable lesson on the real meaning of “Master.”

But there was something else going on in the performance of that ordinance, hinted at when Peter tried to resist the Lord’s selflessness. “Thou shalt never wash my feet,” he recoiled—to which Jesus simply replied, “If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.” And, of course, marvelous Peter then pleaded, “Lord, not [then] my feet only, but also my hands and my head” (John 13:8–9).

“If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me.” What could that *possibly* have to do with schools and education and learning? Maybe everything.

As the Lord issued the commandment to organize the School of the Prophets, he prefaced it all with what must have been the first of these worthiness interviews that are still a part of the BYU tradition for faculty, staff, administrators, and students. You must “sanctify yourselves,” the Lord said, “yea, purify your hearts, and cleanse your hands and your feet before me, that I may make you clean” (D&C 88:74).

No one was to be in this apostolic academy unworthily.

Ye shall not receive any among you into this school save he is clean from the blood of this generation;

And he shall be received by the ordinance of the washing of feet, for unto this end was the ordinance of the washing of feet instituted. [D&C 88:138–39]

Commenting on that experience, the Prophet Joseph Smith said:

*We have not desired as much from the hand of the Lord through faith and obedience, as we ought to have done. . . . We must . . . call our solemn assembly as the Lord has commanded us, that we may be able to accomplish His great work, and it must be done in God's own way. [Remember, he is speaking, at least in part, of an educational work.] . . . It [the washing of the feet] is calculated to unite our hearts, that we may be one in feeling and sentiment, . . . that our faith may be strong, so that Satan cannot overthrow us, nor have any power over us here.*⁵⁸

Gathering, uniting, learning. Community, cleanliness, communion. One in feeling and sentiment and purpose—a basin, a circle, a bond. Humility and service. Strong faith and order. The house of the Lord. A school.

Why have a temple of learning? How *dare* I ask Why? I will tell you why: “So that Satan cannot overthrow us, nor have any power over us here.” Remember: “The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth. [And] light and truth forsake that evil one” (D&C 93:36–37).

May it be so for us this year and always, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Notes

1. See Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Bond of Charity,” BYU annual university conference address, 26 August 1980.

2. Spencer W. Kimball, “Installation of and Charge to the President,” at the inauguration of Jeffrey R. Holland as president of BYU, in *Inaugural Addresses*, 14 November 1980, Brigham Young University, 9; see also Spencer W. Kimball, “The Second Century of Brigham Young University,” BYU devotional address, 10 October 1975.

3. Holland, “Bond of Charity,” 9.

4. William Shakespeare, *King Henry VI, Part 2*, act 2, scene 1, lines 13–14.

5. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (1854), I, “Economy.”

6. José Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968), 24.

7. Joseph Smith, *Teachings*, 137.

8. Smith, *Teachings*, 163.

9. See James Nuechterlein, “Athens and Jerusalem in Indiana,” *American Scholar* 57, no. 3 (Summer 1988): 353–68, for a more thorough treatment of the Athens-Jerusalem metaphor.

10. See Ernest L. Wilkinson and W. Cleon Skousen, *Brigham Young University: A School of Destiny* (Provo: BYU Press, 1976), 151–62.

11. Smith, *Teachings*, 51.

12. George Q. Cannon, *Gospel Truth: Discourses and Writings of George Q. Cannon*, sel. Jerreld L. Newquist, two volumes in one (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 461.

13. Smith, *Teachings*, 217.

14. George Steiner, *Language and Silence: Essays on Language, Literature, and the Inhuman* (New York: Atheneum, 1976), ix–x.

15. Ernest L. Boyer, in response to George Steiner’s question in “Closing Remarks,” BYU faculty general education seminar address, 16 June 1988, 1; see also Steiner, *Language and Silence*, ix–x.

16. Smith, *Teachings*, 228.

17. Hugh W. Nibley, “Educating the Saints,” in *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless: Classic Essays of Hugh W. Nibley* (Provo: Religious Studies Center, BYU; Salt Lake City: Publishers Press, 1978), 230.

18. Brigham Young, *JD* 5:332 (7 October 1857).

19. Young, *JD* 14:228 (16 September 1871); emphasis added.

20. Young, *JD* 9:167 (26 January 1862); emphasis added.

21. Nibley, “Educating the Saints,” 233.

22. Young, *JD* 8:135 (29 July 1860).

23. Young, *JD* 6:344 (31 July 1859).

24. Young, *JD* 3:203 (17 February 1856).

25. Young, *JD* 13:310 (17 April 1870).

26. Young, *JD* 8:54 (25 April 1860).

27. Young, *JD* 16:77 (25 May 1873).

28. Young, *JD* 12:326 (10 January 1869).

29. Young, *JD* 14:210 (13 August 1871); emphasis added.

30. Young, *JD* 14:220–21 (27 August 1871).

31. Young, *JD* 11:328 (10 February 1867).

32. Young, *JD* 8:137 (29 July 1860).

33. Young, *JD* 11:105 (15 May 1865).

34. Young, *JD* 2:280 (27 May 1855).
35. Young, *JD* 13:260 (6 October 1870).
36. Brigham Young, *Manuscript History of the Church*, 22 September 1851, vol. 21, 88, LDS Church Archives, Salt Lake City; also Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Willard Richards, "Sixth General Epistle of the Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," *Millennial Star* 14, no. 2 (15 January 1852): 22.
37. Nibley, "Educating the Saints," 236.
38. Brigham Young, "General Epistle from the Council of the Twelve Apostles," *Millennial Star* 10, no. 6 (15 March 1848): 85.
39. Young, *JD* 7:283–84 (9 October 1859); emphasis added.
40. Young, *JD* 10:224 (April and May 1863).
41. Young, *JD* 8:279 (3 June 1860); emphasis added.
42. Josiah Royce, "The Rediscovery of the Inner Life: From Spinoza to Kant," lecture 3 in *The Spirit of Modern Philosophy: An Essay in the Form of Lectures* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1893), 68.
43. See D&C 101.
44. Mark Van Doren, *Liberal Education* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1943), 115.
45. Matthew Arnold, "To a Friend" (1849), lines 9, 12.
46. Albert Einstein, in interview by Benjamin Fine, "Einstein Stresses Critical Thinking," *New York Times*, 5 October 1952, News section, 37. See also *Einstein on Peace*, ed. Otto Nathan and Heinz Norden (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960), 310.
47. See Allen E. Bergin, "Bringing the Restoration to the Academic World: Clinical Psychology as a Test Case," *BYU Studies* 19, no. 4 (Summer 1979): 449–73.
48. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Souls of Today's Students* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 19, 22, 32, 38, 58, 61, 63, 67, 69, 85, 160; see also 36–39, 52, 64, 108, 172; see also Mosiah 3:19.
49. Eugene England, letter to Jeffrey R. Holland; emphasis added.
50. Kimball, "Installation," 9.
51. Smith, *Teachings*, 354.
52. See John Masefield, "The University," a poem written for an address delivered on the occasion of Masefield receiving an honorary degree at the installation of the chancellor of the University of Sheffield, 25 June 1946.
53. See Matthew 5:14.
54. Steven M. Cahn, *Education and the Democratic Ideal* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1979), 11; quoting Sidney Hook, *Education for Modern Man: A New Perspective* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), 203.
55. Marion D. Hanks, *The Gift of Self* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1974), 126.
56. John A. Widtsoe, *A Rational Theology: As Taught by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1937), 176.
57. Nibley, "Educating the Saints," 251–53.
58. Joseph Smith, *HC* 2:308–9.