

## *Excellence, Charity, and the University*

TODD A. BRITSCH

Speaking to the faculty always frightens me, and so I have approached this task with the technique that I almost always use when I am scared—by putting it off. Thus, as always, you will hear thoughts that have been put together at the last moment. But the topic I will address has occupied my mind a good deal for the past year. It has been stimulated by events in my personal life that have required me to think quite soberly about how I spend my time and about my association with Brigham Young University. Because my personal experiences have stimulated my reflections, this talk will refer to these events. I apologize for this approach, but it is the only way that I can get to some of the things that I want to say. Moreover, much of the tone of these remarks will be somewhat like a Church address, but I assure you that even my high council talks are a bit more coherent than this is going to be.

Last year, just as we were beginning our fall semester, my father discovered that he had cancer. His surgery, in September, was followed within about six weeks by the deaths of our son and my mother-in-law. Then, in early July, weakened by his struggle with his lymphoma and its treatment, Dad's heart and other organs quit functioning, and he too passed away. In experiencing these losses, I joined many of you who have undergone

sorrow and struggles in recent times. For me, these events forced a reexamination of much of what I do, including my professional life. Also, in very different ways, I associate each of those I lost with BYU. If I may be allowed to use my experiences in a somewhat paradigmatic way, I would like to talk about some of the principles that I think really matter at BYU and then discuss some specific issues within the context of these principles.

My mother-in-law, Alicia Crofts, was one who never would have allowed herself even to dream about attending college. She walked across Salt Lake City to attend West High School because there was a commercial program there, and employment in an office was all she hoped for. But when her four daughters reached college age, she and her husband made sure that they could all attend here. The girls' graduation tassels still decorate their parents' bedsteads. After moving to Utah, Alicia became a BYU sports fan, experiencing genuine sorrow when we lost—even though she had no interest in sports. But BYU was her

---

*Todd A. Britsch was academic vice president at Brigham Young University when this Annual University Conference address was delivered on 23 August 1994.*

university, and she celebrated every triumph and mourned every setback.

My dad, on the other hand, did study here—transferring after two years at Snow College. Except for a few years teaching high school, he spent the rest of his life at BYU. In his early days on the faculty, Dad taught four or five composition classes per quarter. Some of my earliest memories are of him sitting at a card table in the middle of the living room, red pencil in hand, going through immense stacks of what he then called “themes.” And he never really recovered financially from the \$1,500-per-year salary that he began with; he was near 80 when he first owned his home outright. But he could not understand anyone who did not think that working for BYU was the greatest privilege in the world. He showed no interest or amusement when I would tell him of job offerings in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Across more than 60 years, BYU was his true vocation.

Like these two fine, devoted people, I too have a passion for Brigham Young University. I have a deep desire for it to be excellent, for everything about it to be exemplary. But as I have been forced by circumstances to think beyond football victories, academic prizes, important publications, or brilliant lectures, I have returned to the conviction that for BYU to be excellent, it must first be good. That is, that we will never maintain or improve any important standard of academic achievement if we do not first attain the Lord’s standards of virtue. This also implies that we must do what would be shocking to many other institutions: acknowledge the Lord’s hand in all of our accomplishments. Ultimately, I am convinced that our value as a university is dependent on our capacity to live together in charity.

Three times in the scriptures, in the 12th chapter of 1 Corinthians, in the 10th chapter of Moroni, and in the 46th section of the Doctrine and Covenants, the Lord’s servants give us a list of the gifts of the Spirit. In each case, God

makes it clear that no one of us will receive all of the gifts. In the Doctrine and Covenants version we read: “For all have not every gift given unto them; for there are many gifts, and to every man is given a gift by the Spirit of God. To some is given one, and to some is given another, that all may be profited thereby” (46:11–12). What is clearly indicated here is that if we wish to enjoy all of the gifts of the Spirit, we will have to receive them through each other. Thus Paul continues his discussion of these gifts with his famous analogy of the Church as one body, and he reminds us: “And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you” (1 Corinthians 12:21).

On a number of occasions, yesterday included, our leaders have likened the university to this same body. I believe that this comparison is apt. As I have had increasing opportunity to become acquainted with the incredibly complex diversity of just the academic operations of this institution, I have come to believe that we simply would be incapable of functioning if we did not acknowledge each other’s unique contributions to the whole body. We will benefit from all gifts as we take advantage of what each can offer.

But Paul extends his discussion of spiritual gifts with the following: “But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way” (1 Corinthians 12:31). It is interesting that Paul has just enumerated such gifts as tongues, prophecy, miracles, and healing, and instructed us to all benefit from and share them, yet he tells us that greater excellence must be sought in another way. This way, of course, is charity. Paul makes it clear that having even the greatest gifts is insufficient if we are lacking in the basic quality of love. (The Greek word for “charity” in the Nestle edition is *agape*, which is translated most other places as “love.” Mormon extends the concept to the “pure love of Christ” [Moroni 7:47].) In 1 Corinthians we read of the characteristics

that make charity more excellent than even the greatest spiritual gifts: “Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up. Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things” (1 Corinthians 13:4–7). As I reflect on these characteristics of charity they do not seem to match well with those of most universities I have known. Although some of the greatest scholars in my experience were people of profound kindness and humility, such virtues are not generally associated with the best-known institutions of higher education. But I believe that if BYU is to become excellent it must be the Lord’s, and that if BYU is to be the Lord’s we must be that in his own way. I am convinced that even if we had unlimited resources we could not go out and purchase the excellence that the Lord wants. Instead, I believe that he would wish us to become great by becoming one in charity. In saying this I do not wish to imply in the slightest diminution of rigor. Discipleship demands discipline, and I fear that too often when we talk of not doing something the world’s way we are really asking to be evaluated by some lower standard. But despite this caveat, I believe that our excellence will closely parallel our capacity to develop charitable relations with our students and colleagues.

Since I have had the opportunity to look at the structure of our institution from a college- or university-wide basis, I have been able to identify a few units whose successes clearly exceed the sum of their individual parts. Faculty of these departments, because of their concern for each other and for their students, often subordinate personal desire to the good of the whole. Their scholarship is often collaborative; when not, it is frequently focused on topics that will contribute to the department’s areas of emphasis or curriculum. They don’t

complain when a good, streamlined set of requirements does not include a course that matches their dissertation topic. They nominate their colleagues for awards and are genuinely delighted by the successes of others. They counsel at length with their students. They feel comfortable praying about hiring decisions or expressing their deepest religious beliefs to each other. They attend forums and devotionals, college and university lectures, and honor their students at commencement and convocation exercises. They read each other’s work and make helpful suggestions. In short, they have learned to live in charity. But remarkably, this charity has given their units such a high degree of excellence that it can be recognized by those who would never understand its origins. I invite you to think about your own relations to your colleagues and academic units and how greater charity might help you develop a higher degree of excellence.

I will return to this matter as I conclude my remarks, but I turn now to a number of specific matters that concern us at present. I think that they all have at least some relationship to charity, but I will leave it to you to think of how this is the case.

### **Salaries**

As you no doubt will have observed, salary increases awarded this past academic year were, on average, somewhat smaller than in previous years. Some rather far-fetched things have been said about this matter, but generally those who have expressed themselves have simply asked for more information. I would like to try to explain our procedures for those of you who are new and remind the others of the rather lengthier discussion of this issue given in a fall conference a few years ago by Robert Webb.

The budget for Brigham Young University is proposed by the board of trustees and approved by the Budget and Appropriations Committee of the Church. (Some members sit

on both boards.) The primary source of funding for our budget, including faculty salaries, is the tithing of Church members. Those funds that are designated for BYU diminish the amount of money available for other Church purposes. A number of years ago, the board decided to try to bring faculty and staff salaries into a proper relationship with those in peer organizations. The so-called “Hay” study was undertaken, in which BYU salaries were compared with those of ten large universities in the Rocky Mountains and on the West Coast. At that time a number of adjustments were made—some of them rather substantial—particularly in the upper ranks, which had lagged behind the others. The Hay comparisons were employed for a number of years, undergoing a couple of adjustments in the institutions used. But because the universities in the study were from one region and subject to localized economic conditions, it was decided several years ago to employ a survey of 44 large universities that is compiled by Oklahoma State University. Some of the universities in this group are not particularly well known, but more of them are strong academic institutions. These better-known institutions include the Universities of Colorado, Illinois, North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Texas at Austin, Michigan, Florida, Indiana, Utah, as well as Purdue and Texas A&M. Salaries at BYU are compared with the averages of these institutions, and this information is given to the board, whose members then set a general increase for the university. During the past five years, ending with 1993–94, salary increases at BYU have exceeded those of the comparison group by 6.4 percent. (We do not yet have data for 1994–95.)

When the general increase comes to the university, we distribute this funding on the basis of the information that we have received. This information includes comparisons by rank, and, as you know, we had a substantial adjustment a few years ago for many full professors. Salary comparisons are also made,

where possible, on a college-by-college and department-by-department basis. I say “where possible” because universities are not all structured the same way. Some, for example, have a modern languages department, whereas we have four departments covering modern languages. But we try to achieve a close comparison. To this point we have distributed salary monies on a collegewide basis. The result of such distribution, however, has something to make everyone unhappy. As it happens, the three colleges that have the highest average salaries are also the three that are furthest behind their comparison groups. Those of us in disciplines that do not fare as well in the marketplace probably are disturbed that we are behind other fields, whereas those in the most competitive areas may feel that they should not be behind their market group. We have felt that it is important to try to respond both to market forces and to a need for some cross-university equity. We obviously cannot succeed completely at both.

We now have enough data about departmental comparisons that we will be able to provide deans information that will help them distribute salary increases between their units. It should be clear, however, that in the case of individuals as well as that of units, evaluations of performance are even more important than averages. (I should add, parenthetically, that the funds we use for special purposes, such as promotion increments, are taken from the annual appropriations we receive from the board. there is no special budget category for such raises.)

In years of smaller increases, we are faced with the dilemma of trying to bring some colleges nearer into line while providing close to a cost-of-living increase to others. In addition, we have been trying at least to understand the reason for any individual outliers, and we have undertaken a careful, discipline-by-discipline study to make sure there are no gender inequities. In short, we are attempting to be as careful

and fair as possible with the salary monies we receive. When we consider their source, we want to treat them with respect and justice.

I would like to mention one other thing about the financial status of the university. I have recently been studying the 1994 edition of *Campus Trends*, the annual survey of American universities published by the American Council on Education. This publication reports that while the financial crises of universities have lessened somewhat, 100 percent of public institutions and 92 percent of private institutions report financial issues as one of their major challenges for the next five years. Forty-five percent of those surveyed report across-the-board budget cuts, and an additional 13 percent report cuts for some units. Travel budgets have been cut at 51 percent of the institutions reporting. When we look at our overall situation, we find we are most fortunate. Each year we have received increases in our general budget, and we have never been forced to make cuts in important items. I am deeply grateful to our board of trustees and to our supporters that our situation is so stable.

#### **Promotion and Continuing Faculty Status**

One of the matters that causes the greatest stress at almost all universities centers on the processes used to evaluate candidates for promotion and for continuing faculty status. We share much of this stress. These processes are also topics about which some of our most unfortunate misunderstandings have developed. Several years ago, in order to clarify and normalize our expectations and practices, Dennis Thomson and many others spent hundreds of hours developing a new document for the university. After using the document for a couple of years, we asked Alan Wilkins to request faculty and administrators on all levels to help refine the initial work. Several committees of the Faculty Advisory Council were particularly helpful in this process. The final version was recently sent to all of us.

Let me make just a few comments about these processes. First, despite rumors to the contrary, the faculty council on promotions is not an insurmountable barrier, stopping promotions that have sailed through their departments and colleges. During the past five years, the university council *agreed* with the promotion decisions of departments 85 percent of the time, and when compared with college decisions, the agreement was a higher 90 percent. Agreement in the case of continuing faculty status was even higher: departments and the university agreed in 96 percent of the cases, and colleges and the university in 98 percent. When one considers the fact that in a few instances of disagreement the university committee recommended *for* advancement when a previous committee had not, the myth of an unsatisfiable university committee pretty well disappears.

Nonetheless (I'm to my second comment here), the review experience is causing unnecessary discomfort and pain. In a study done by our Faculty Center, we have found clear verification of the assumption that these processes are not only difficult, but also quite hurtful to many people. Part of the difficulty is, of course, a natural consequence of evaluation. When I was a bishop I sometimes saw the most righteous and pure individuals shake a bit at a temple recommend interview. In this respect, I wish that we could make evaluation a more normal part of our professional experience. I commend the J. Reuben Clark Law School for their practice of periodic evaluation of all faculty, regardless of rank or continuing status. But some pain could be alleviated through more careful mentoring, earlier preparation of materials, and closer adherence to our standards. As to the last of these, let me simply mention that university documents frequently acknowledge differences in discipline, assignments, and scholarly method; I fear, however, that some who are evaluating occasionally apply their own standards rather than those

of the university. Candidates should be able to count on being evaluated in relation to the standards that we publish.

Chairs and candidates should also work together to assure that individual assignments and expectations follow our documents. While we encourage flexible expectations, these must still conform with general standards. In other words, lead guitar playing in a rock band, even if world-class and approved by the chair, will not count much toward promotion in the Chemistry Department.

Let me turn to one related issue, that of peer review. Whenever greater flexibility is granted, the need for even more thorough review is heightened. This is also true when we are trying to demonstrate teaching excellence. While teaching is difficult to evaluate, this task is far from impossible. Multiple evaluations—from students, colleagues, supervisors—along with analysis of course outlines, handouts, examinations, etc., provide the strongest cases for excellent teaching. (One further comment: Poor teaching, even when done in abundance, does not make up for a lack in scholarly productivity.)

At this point let me insert one related comment. We are a university that emphasizes teaching while realizing the critical importance of research and other scholarly and creative activities. Bevan Ott and his associates have spent a good deal of time clarifying the role of such work at BYU. The Research Model that was recently published gives us excellent guidance on this matter and should be read in conjunction with our promotion document.

I would like to summarize my thoughts on this matter: evaluation will always be with us. We can make it less painful by careful mentoring and preparation, conscientious adherence to standards on the part of candidates and evaluators, and an elimination of the myth of adversarial relations between different levels of the university.

### **Combating False Ideology**

When we talk about the future of Brigham Young University, we rarely fail to mention the two talks given by Spencer W. Kimball—“Education for Eternity” (1967) and the “Second Century Address” (1976). It is from these talks that we have taken the term “educational Everest” and heard the challenge “I am both hopeful and expectant that out of this university and the Church Educational System there will rise brilliant stars in drama, literature, music, sculpture, painting, science, and in all the scholarly graces.” Here he let us know that we must match, even exceed, the good qualities of other institutions of higher education.

Sometimes, however, we fail to remember that it was also in these talks that President Kimball warned us that a gap was widening between us and other universities. He said: “BYU, in its second century, must become the last remaining bastion of resistance to the invading ideologies that seek control of curriculum as well as classroom. We do not resist such ideas because we fear them, but because they are false. BYU, in its second century, must continue to resist false fashions in education, staying with those basic principles that have proved right and have guided good men and women and god universities over the centuries.” President Kimball did not specify which ideologies would challenge us, but in his next paragraph he warns us not to “counsel the Board of Trustees to follow false ways.” After inviting all to make suggestions about improving BYU, he continues: “I hope none will presume on the prerogatives of the prophets of God to set the basic direction for this university” (all from “Second Century Address”). It seems clear, then, that prophets will continue to point out the errors and false teachings of the world and that this university should take its direction from those prophets.

I expect that this prophetically required resistance to false ideology will occasionally be

challenging for us—separating us from professors, colleagues, and institutions whose approbation we have sought in the past. But in my view such resistance will increasingly become a mark of our excellence, an excellence, I add, that will eventually be recognized by many others of good will and honesty. That which is good and true has a way of emerging in time.

May I add my hope that at least 90 percent of our resistance to false ideology will take place within our own minds. It is our individual responsibility to weigh the principles we are teaching and discover whether they are found wanting when compared with eternal gospel truths. Another 50 percent or more of this resistance should take place when faculty, carefully remembering the mote-and-beam principle, talk privately and compassionately with colleagues who may be struggling with ideological challenges. Only on rare occasion should chairs, deans, and university officers (in that order) be required to take any official action.

This is a matter that will require considerable courage on the part of some. It will be rewarded by the Lord's blessings on this institution. As then Elder Kimball said in his "Education for Eternity" address, "This institutions and its leaders should be like the Twelve as they were left in a very difficult world by the Savior: 'The world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil'" (John 17:14–15).

### **Self-Study**

In our meetings this week, we have heard a good deal about the university-wide self-study we are undertaking. Ten years ago, as we embarked on our last full-scale accreditation study, I was a member of the faculty team that coordinated our efforts. The amount of work we put into the project was considerable, yet the scale of this year's undertaking exceeds

that of past studies by a good deal. This study will result in strategic plans and planning methods that will guide the university into the next century. It is easy to become cynical about such undertakings. They take immense effort, and expectations for change that develop often outrun resources.

I would urge a positive attitude toward this work. Just as we need occasions on which to measure our own individual performance, so, too, do we need the opportunity to evaluate our programs, disciplines, and general effectiveness. We really need to know how well we are doing and how we can improve our performance. I am particularly concerned that we not let the increasingly high quality of our students become a crutch that supports less effective university performance. All of us have many reasons to be optimistic: in most areas (I find writing skills to be an exception), our new students are well prepared, and they certainly have impressive native capacities. No doubt we will continue to see an increase in the number of our national merit scholars, students with AP course preparation, highly gifted artists and musicians, etc. After all, this past year we had 580 qualified students who applied for Benson Scholarships, and the minimum requirements for that award are a high school GPA of 3.85 and an ACT score of 31 (this is in the first percentile nationally). And our graduates will undoubtedly continue to win prestigious scholarships, gain admission to excellent graduate and professional schools, and be employed by the best American and international firms.

What we need to understand and improve is the contribution we make to our students' growth and development. Are our curricula coherent and demanding? Do we have end results in mind? Do our graduates gain mature faith and understanding of the gospel? Can they write English with some skill? Do they have the quantitative abilities required to deal with increasingly complex problems?

Answers to such questions will not only help us to evaluate our present position, but will provide a basis upon which we can plan how best to employ our resources in the future. We should not expect the study to result in vast new resources or to see massive shifts between major units of the university. Most of these changes will be small. But colleges and departments may wish to make rather substantial *internal* changes. I expect that most of the departments who take the study seriously will find at least a few areas where they will wish to shift emphasis.

I have long felt that five-year plans and other kinds of planning need to be looked on with some degree of caution. President Kimball also said, "It ought to be obvious to you, as it is to me, that some of the things the Lord would have occur in the second century of BYU are hidden from our immediate view. Until we have climbed the hill just before us, we are not apt to be given a glimpse of what lies beyond" ("Second Century Address"). We will certainly have to anticipate surprises, many of which will be pleasing, some of which will not. No doubt we will want to vary many plans as we are confronted with unanticipated opportunities and problems. But it is exciting to think of a whole university reflecting seriously on what it is really about. Please join this effort with whole hearts.

### **Final Comments**

In the beginning of my remarks, I mentioned how I have thought of my mother-in-law and father in relation to BYU. I would like to be allowed to say something about my son. When Dan died at conference time last year, shortly after his 20th birthday, we held his funeral on a Friday. The next Monday, as you would have done, I returned to school and to a busy schedule. But family, Church, and BYU responsibilities so occupied my time that I felt I had not really had a chance to mourn his death. Finally, in November, I caught a mild case of flu that

forced me to stay home on a Sunday. After a morning filled with reflection, I fell asleep and had the following dream:

I was in a parking lot (probably by the JKHB) walking with my arms full of books and other materials. As I approached my 1967 Volvo, the car I drove to campus for 23 years, I noticed that exhaust was coming from the tailpipe. This concerned me, because I knew that the car keys were in my pocket. I opened the front passenger door because I wanted to put my books on the seat. As I did so, I saw Dan in the back seat, surrounded by his books, writing in a notebook. I told him that I had been surprised that the engine was running, and he replied that he wanted to heat the car while he was studying because it was cold to him. After an exchange about car keys, Dan said, "Just sit down there, I'll come up and drive." As he moved from the back seat and opened the driver's door, I realized that he was dead. I leaned forward, and we embraced. I felt his whiskers against my cheek and said, "I miss you so much." With that, I awoke, weeping but strangely and deeply comforted.

As I described this comfort to my wife, she remarked that it was very natural: "It's because he was at BYU. For years, one of your strongest wishes was for Dan to be a student here." Dorothy was right. Like many of you, I longed for the time that circumstances would be such that my son could enroll at BYU. It was here that I wanted him to learn the beauty of mathematical formulæ. It was at BYU that I hoped he could develop a profound understanding of the scriptures. It was from you that I wanted him to study humanities, biology, the fine arts, sociology, and all of the other wonderful things we get to deal with every day. I believed that his whole life could be changed if he could be a student here. For a moment, at least, it seemed that this had happened.

Now when I look across the campus, I see tens of thousands of students whose parents' wishes are much the same as mine. They see

in BYU the one place where their children's eternal education can take place. I hope that we will never take casually the extraordinary faith they place in us.

In the fourth chapter of his first epistle, John tells us of God's love. (The original term here is the same as is translated "charity" in other places.) John says: "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (1 John 4:7-8). Those who love each other learn to do things that otherwise seem impossible. A number of years ago I was moved by an account of the French mountain village of Le Chambon. The inhabitants there were ordinary people, but during the Nazi occupation they saved the lives of many Jews—keeping a number of them in their own homes, smuggling others across the Swiss border, sheltering young Jewish boys in their boarding school. Day after day and night after night they risked extreme danger to help people who were complete strangers to them. What is most amazing is that they never seemed to realize the extraor-

dinary nature of their acts. A whole community apparently believed that it was commonplace to perform acts of love. Above the entrance to their church were the same words of John: "Let us love one another." They could have followed this inscription with John's later passage, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear" (1 John 4:18).

We are not asked to do the heroic tasks accomplished by the people of Le Chambon. Theirs were the acts of extreme goodness done in the face of unmatched evil. But we can be filled with the same spirit when we undertake what the Lord asks of us. Much of that is clear now, some will emerge as we study ourselves in the next years, and important parts will be revealed to us only as we have climbed the hills that are directly ahead. I pray that we may climb those hills together in love, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

