

A Light on a Hill

M. RUSSELL BALLARD

Thank you for giving me a second opportunity to speak to you. As most of you may remember, I missed this assignment last year because of open-heart surgery. President Boyd K. Packer graciously took my place. You were blessed abundantly to receive his inspired message, “The Snow-White Birds” (BYU Annual University Conference, 29 August 1995). It seems that the message from President Packer, after his 34 years as a member of the Brigham Young University Board of Trustees, was destined to be given to you upon his release from this distinguished service. Although all members of the Twelve have a vital interest in the educational affairs of the Church, it is currently the policy of the First Presidency to rotate our service on the Church Board of Education and other assignments. I thank my quorum president publicly for all that he has done for education, and I also thank him for his constant watch care over the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

May I share my personal testimony with you that President Merrill J. Bateman was called to serve as president of BYU through the inspiration of heaven. I had the privilege of witnessing firsthand the confirmation of the Spirit that came to each member of the search committee (with the possible exception of one—Bishop Bateman, who missed our last

meeting). In that meeting, the other committee members had the opportunity to discuss Bishop Bateman as a candidate to be the president of BYU. The search committee was united and pleased to recommend him to the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles to fill this most important assignment. Time has already proven the inspiration of his appointment, and the future will reinforce his selection as the right one to lead BYU at this time. You should understand that the direction taken in his administration is not of his own making. He is following carefully the commission given to him by the board of trustees. And he has their full support in what he is doing.

Mission and Aims of BYU

I appreciate the work of so many of you in producing this document *The Mission of Brigham Young University and The Aims of a BYU Education* (Provo: BYU, 1995). I assume all of you have read and accepted its contents. I suppose only at BYU would the main university mission be to “assist individuals in their quest

M. Russell Ballard was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this BYU Annual University Conference address was given on 27 August 1996.

for perfection and eternal life” (p. 1). To some academic institutions, this statement may seem to be pure nonsense. To Latter-day Saints, however, it encompasses the very purpose for our life here in mortality. This mission statement applies to all we are attempting to do in the Church. I, along with the other members of the board of trustees, wholeheartedly endorse *The Mission of Brigham Young University and The Aims of a BYU Education*. I am impressed with the inspired words in this pamphlet. The mission statement dates back to November 1981, and the “aims” were approved by the board of trustees in 1995. This pamphlet deserves careful, periodic reading and a commitment by all of you to fulfill these inspired objectives. The aims document was developed as part of a massive self-study project that many of you participated in. We gratefully acknowledge the tremendous work accomplished by the Self-Study Committee. As a member of the board of trustees, I look forward to reviewing the recommendations of that committee as they are brought forward by your president to be considered by the board of trustees.

The last paragraph of the mission statement reads:

We believe the earnest pursuit of this institutional mission can have a strong effect on the course of higher education and will greatly enlarge Brigham Young University’s influence in a world we wish to improve. [Mission and Aims, p. 2; emphasis added]

Let’s talk for a few minutes about the world that the graduates of Brigham Young University will face, with particular emphasis on the United States of America. From *The Index of Leading Cultural Indicators*, by William J. Bennett, which is the most comprehensive statistical portrait available of behavioral trends over the last 30 years, I quote several highlights that explain the shocking conditions in the United States.

Violent Crime

Since 1960, the increase in violent crime has been more than 500 percent (see William J. Bennett, *Index of Leading Cultural Indicators* [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994], p. 22).

“The fastest growing segment of the criminal population is our nation’s children” (p. 30).

“Twenty percent of high school students now carry a firearm, knife, razor, club, or some other weapon on a regular basis” (p. 31).

“In 1991, in Los Angeles, there was a greater chance that a citizen would die from a bullet wound than from a traffic accident” (p. 25).

“Today, 70 percent of the juvenile offenders in long-term correctional facilities grew up without a father in the household” (p. 32).

Breakdown of the Family

As President Lyndon B. Johnson said, “The family is the cornerstone of our society. More than any other force it shapes the attitude, the hopes, the ambitions, and the values of the child. And when the family collapses, it is the children that are usually damaged” (p. 45).

Since 1960, the number of illegitimate births in this country has increased more than 400 percent (see p. 46).

“In 1961 and 1991, roughly the same number of babies were born (about 4 million)—but in 1991, *five times* as many of them were born out of wedlock” (p. 47; emphasis added).

Author Charles Murray said that “illegitimacy is the single most important social problem of our time—more important than crime, drugs, poverty, illiteracy, welfare or homelessness *because it drives everything else*” (p. 48; emphasis added).

“Since 1972, there have been more than 28 million abortions in the United States. . . . Eighty-three percent of abortions are performed on white females, and 17 percent on minority women” (pp. 68–69).

“Approximately 40 percent of teenage pregnancies, about 400,000 a year, end in abortion. Teens account for more than one-quarter of the

total number of abortions in the U.S. annually” (p. 75). Even so, “the rate of births to unmarried teenagers has increased almost 200 percent since 1960” (p. 72).

“The United States has the highest divorce rate in the world” (p. 59).

“According to some projections, only 6 percent of black children and 30 percent of white children born in 1980 will live with both parents through age 18” (p. 51).

“Approximately 90 percent of single-parent homes are homes without a father” (p. 51; emphasis added).

“Half the single mothers in the United States live below the poverty line” (p. 52).

“More than one child in eight is being raised on government welfare through Aid to Families with Dependent Children” (p. 64).

Government officials say that “the best anti-poverty program for children is a stable, intact family” (p. 63).

The Family: A Proclamation to the World

Can you see why these concerns prompted the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles to issue a proclamation to the world on the family? Let me read to you the proclamation:

WE, THE FIRST PRESIDENCY and the Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, solemnly proclaim that marriage between a man and a woman is ordained of God and that the family is central to the Creator’s plan for the eternal destiny of His children.

ALL HUMAN BEINGS—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.

IN THE PREMORTAL REALM, spirit sons and daughters knew and worshiped God as their Eternal Father and accepted His plan by which His children

could obtain a physical body and gain earthly experience to progress toward perfection and ultimately realize his or her divine destiny as an heir of eternal life. The divine plan of happiness enables family relationships to be perpetuated beyond the grave. Sacred ordinances and covenants available in holy temples make it possible for individuals to return to the presence of God and for families to be united eternally.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT that God gave to Adam and Eve pertained to their potential for parenthood as husband and wife. We declare that God’s commandment for His children to multiply and replenish the earth remains in force. We further declare that God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife.

WE DECLARE the means by which mortal life is created to be divinely appointed. We affirm the sanctity of life and of its importance in God’s eternal plan.

HUSBAND AND WIFE have a solemn responsibility to love and care for each other and for their children. “Children are an heritage of the Lord” (Psalms 127:3). Parents have a sacred duty to rear their children in love and righteousness, to provide for their physical and spiritual needs, to teach them to love and serve one another, to observe the commandments of God and to be law-abiding citizens wherever they live. Husbands and wives—mothers and fathers—will be held accountable before God for the discharge of these obligations.

THE FAMILY is ordained of God. Marriage between man and woman is essential to His eternal plan. Children are entitled to birth within the bonds of matrimony, and to be reared by a father and a mother who honor marital vows with complete fidelity. Happiness in family life is most likely to be achieved when founded upon the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. Successful marriages and families are established and maintained on principles of faith, prayer, repentance, forgiveness, respect, love, compassion, work, and wholesome recreational activities. By divine design,

fathers are to preside over their families in love and righteousness and are responsible to provide the necessities of life and protection for their families. Mothers are primarily responsible for the nurture of their children. In these sacred responsibilities, fathers and mothers are obligated to help one another as equal partners. Disability, death, or other circumstances may necessitate individual adaptation. Extended families should lend support when needed.

WE WARN that individuals who violate covenants of chastity, who abuse spouse or offspring, or who fail to fulfill family responsibilities will one day stand accountable before God. Further, we warn that the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.

WE CALL UPON responsible citizens and officers of government everywhere to promote those measures designed to maintain and strengthen the family as the fundamental unit of society.

[“The Family: A Proclamation to the World—The First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” *Ensign*, November 1995, p. 102]

It is no small thing for 15 prophets, seers, and revelators to warn the people of the world that “the disintegration of the family will bring upon individuals, communities, and nations the calamities foretold by ancient and modern prophets.” We must strengthen the basic unit of our society and of the Church, the family. I read the full text of the proclamation to you because the answers to the problems facing the families of the world are found in the doctrine of the Church. I believe that spiritually prepared BYU graduates, along with all of our extensive missionary efforts, can improve the families of the world.

If, in combination with academic truth, gospel principles are clearly taught by you and received by your students with spiritual confirmation, this university will send into

the world men and women of understanding, faith, and integrity—men and women who have a clear vision of the eternal purposes of life for individuals and families. Perhaps over time our combined voices will be heard and the families of the world will find in the teachings of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ the real answers to lasting peace and happiness.

I return now to William F. Bennett’s report.

Suicide

Since 1960, the teenage suicide rate has tripled, and “for every successful suicide there are at least fifty to one hundred adolescent suicide attempts” (pp. 78–79).

Sat Scores

In the last 30 years, SAT scores have dropped almost 75 points (see p. 84).

“In a 1989 *National Geographic* survey of geographical knowledge, Americans between the ages of 18 and 24 finished last among nine countries, including Mexico” (p. 85).

Impact of Television

“In 1960, the average daily television viewing per household was 5:06 hours. By 1992, it had increased to 7:04 hours. . . . The average teenager spends 1.8 hours per week reading, 5.6 hours per week on homework, and an average of 21 hours per week watching television. . . . In contrast to the 3 hours per day they spend watching TV, teenagers spend an average of 5 minutes per day alone with their fathers, and 20 minutes with their mothers. A Carnegie Corporation study found that even the time teenagers spend with their families consists primarily of eating or watching television together” (pp. 102–3).

“In 1990, more than 98 percent of all households had at least one television set. More American households have televisions than have indoor plumbing” (p. 103).

“The average child watches up to 8,000 made-for-TV murders and 100,000 acts of violence by the end of grade school” (p. 104).

Although “more than 85 percent of the country identifies itself as either Protestant or Catholic,” “according to one study, only 20 percent of Protestants and 28 percent of Catholics attend church in any given week” (p. 116). And, in the words of Margaret Thatcher, “There is little hope for democracy if the hearts of men and women in democratic societies cannot be touched by a call to something greater than themselves” (p. 117).

Dr. Bennett goes on:

The social regression of the last 30 years is due in large part to the enfeebled state of our social institutions and their failure to carry out a critical and time-honored task: the moral education of the young. We desperately need to recover a sense of the fundamental purpose of education, which is to engage in the architecture of souls. [p. 12; emphasis added]

Treatises have been written on why this has occurred, on why we have allowed this to occur. The hard truth is that in a free society the ultimate responsibility rests with the people themselves. [p. 10]

The Bennett report contains much more information, but what I have shared is sufficient to demonstrate the critical need for the mission of BYU and the aims of a BYU education to in fact be accomplished so your graduates will be fortified spiritually to righteously lead others in this ever-crumbling society of ours. With a BYU education that is “(1) spiritually strengthening, (2) intellectually enlarging, and (3) character building, leading to (4) lifelong learning and service,” your students can be a great “influence in a world we wish to improve” (*Mission and Aims*, pp. 3, 2).

Fulfilling the Mission of BYU

Although there are many good and wonderful things happening across this campus, as evidenced by the high marks earned last March in the visit by the accreditation team from the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges—a direct result of the good work being done by you—I believe you can still do more. I believe you can be more focused on the central mission of Brigham Young University. As teachers you must be absolutely expert in your academic disciplines—you must then use that expertise to teach your students in a way that feeds them spiritually and anchors them to faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ. This must apply not only in the classroom but also in the dorms, in student activities, and in the hundreds of places across this campus where devoted staff people supervise BYU student employees. Whatever our assignment, we must be dedicated to building testimonies and providing appropriate examples by our conduct, our unity, and our support for each other and our love for our students.

Brigham Young’s charge to Brother Maeser—“I want you to remember that you ought not to teach even the alphabet or the multiplication tables without the Spirit of God”—surely applies to each one of you today (in Alma P. Burton, *Karl G. Maeser: Mormon Educator* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1953], p. 26). You have heard this taught here time and time again. However, in these times more than in any others, I believe the youth of the Church need to hear *the certain sound of faith* in the Lord Jesus Christ and see a *united trust* in the leaders of his Church. As you know, there are many unusual things happening in and out of the Church that have a tendency to confuse and misguide our youth. Perhaps at no time in the history of this university or of the Church has it been more important for professors and teachers, for staff, and for the administration to be united in the support of the mission and the aims of

the university. All the leaders of the Church—including the faculty and staff on this campus and the teachers within the stakes and wards—need to stay anchored to the underlying principles and values espoused by the Church in order to ensure that we prepare strong leadership for the Church in the years that lie ahead. Testimony must be centered in the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it must be deeply rooted in all of us. Perhaps this story of the *Queen Mary* that I recently read is applicable.

When the *Queen Mary* was launched in 1935, she was the largest and most powerful sailing vessel ever to cross the oceans. She enjoyed a distinguished career—her decades of service included significant involvement in World War II. After her retirement, the *Queen Mary* was anchored in Long Beach, California, and converted into a hotel and museum. Sister Ballard and I spent a night in the captain’s cabin as guests of the owner.

Restoration crews removed three massive smokestacks in order to scrape and paint them. Once detached from their supported location, however, the stacks crumbled. The three-quarter-inch steel plate from which they had been constructed had completely disintegrated. All that remained of the *Queen Mary*’s stacks were the layers of paint that had been applied during the years. The *Queen Mary* suffered a condition that is also common to humankind. Polished and attractive exteriors crumble if not supported internally by enduring substance. Personally and professionally, our lives can break down, deteriorate, or even collapse if we lack a solid set of values and standards.

We believe that “the glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth” (D&C 93:36) and that

whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection.

And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and

obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come. [D&C 130:18–19]

And so we follow the scriptural admonition to seek diligently and to “teach one another words of wisdom,” to “seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118). But even as the Lord encouraged his people to “study and learn, and become acquainted with all good books, and with languages, tongues, and people” (D&C 90:15), we are also warned to “beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Colossians 2:8). And Nephi said it this way: “Cursed is he that putteth his trust in man, or maketh flesh his arm, or shall hearken unto the precepts of men, save their precepts shall be given by the power of the Holy Ghost” (2 Nephi 28:31). Therefore, everything you do, every concept you teach, should have nestled securely in its very core the notion of bringing souls unto Christ and building up the kingdom of God upon the earth.

President Spencer W. Kimball said:

*BYU exists to build character and faith. This institution [BYU] has no justification for its existence unless it builds character, creates and develops faith, and makes men and women of strength and courage, fortitude, and service—men and women who will become stalwarts in the kingdom and bear witness of the restoration and the divinity of the gospel of Jesus Christ. . . . This institution has been established by a prophet of God for a very specific purpose: to combine spiritual and moral values and secular education. [Edward L. Kimball, ed., *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), p. 395]*

And just last October, in his general conference address, President Gordon B. Hinckley gave this clarion and upbeat call:

This is an age of pessimism. Ours is a mission of faith. To my brethren and sisters everywhere, I call upon you to reaffirm your faith, to move this work forward across the world. You can make it stronger by the manner in which you live. Let the gospel be your sword and your shield. Each of us is a part of the greatest cause on earth. Its doctrine came of revelation. Its priesthood came of divine bestowal. Another witness has been added to its testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is literally the little stone of Daniel's dream which was "cut out of the mountain without hands [to] roll forth, until it has filled the whole earth" (D&C 65:2). . . .

*How glorious is the past of this great cause. It is filled with heroism, courage, boldness, and faith. How wondrous is the present as we move forward to bless the lives of people wherever they will hearken to the message of the servants of the Lord. How magnificent will be the future as the Almighty rolls on His glorious work touching for good all who will accept and live His gospel. [Gordon B. Hinckley, "Stay the Course—Keep the Faith," *Ensign*, November 1995, p. 72]*

In a recent essay entitled "Can Notre Dame Be Saved?" David W. Lutz muses on the unusual challenges faced by his school and by Christian universities the world over (in *First Things*, no. 19 [January 1992]). Lutz indicates:

The real danger comes from a . . . group of persons who believe that Notre Dame can strive for ever-higher standards of academic excellence—and use the same criteria of excellence by which the best secular universities in the land are judged to be excellent—without forfeiting the Catholic character of the University. [p. 35]

Lutz states that

our objective should be not merely to teach values, but to teach values radically different from and superior to those taught at secular universities. . . .

. . . Christians should not let civil libertarians and secular humanists decide for us what it means to be free. . . .

True academic freedom is not freedom from ecclesiastical authority, but freedom to speak the truth. . . .

. . . One of the things a [Christian] university should do is introduce students to intellectual positions opposed to Christianity. But to place a higher priority on challenging students' faith than on teaching them how to defend their faith against attack is simply imprudent. . . . To attack faith without first nurturing it is like teaching people to swim by dropping them in the middle of the ocean. [pp. 37–38]

Lutz concludes:

What every Christian academic institution needs is not merely faculty members who are Christians in some minimal sense, but scholars who take their Christian faith so seriously that they believe it should be integrated with their scholarship. [p. 39]

I believe, my brothers and sisters, that much of what David Lutz said not only applies to Notre Dame but also applies to BYU. President Bateman shared with the board of trustees in June five strategic priorities for the future. He explained that his administration will focus on:

1. Building on religious foundations
2. Blessing students
3. Strengthening teaching
4. Improving communication between administration, faculty, and staff
5. Sharpening institutional focus

With these strategic priorities, coupled with the mission and the aims of a BYU education unitedly supported by your skills and talents, BYU will produce sound-thinking men and women of faith who will bring into our sick world the healing influence of the teachings of the restored Church of Jesus Christ.

In closing, brothers and sisters, I believe what the world and the Church need most are

men and women of sound judgment with the ability to use their education for the eternal benefit of themselves, their families, and all of our Father's children. On my office wall hangs a small framed statement of the last words of my Grandfather Elder Melvin J. Ballard, "Above all else, . . . let us think straight." May the Lord bless each of you with the gift of "straight thinking."

My thanks go to each of you in your various assignments for your significant contribution in making BYU a university worthy in every way to be blessed by the Lord. My testimony is unwavering: Jesus is the Christ; he is the Only Begotten Son of our Heavenly Father; he lives and directs this, his Church, the only true and living church upon the face of the earth. May the peace of the Lord bless and guide each one of you—in your personal lives, in your families, and in your special stewardship here at Brigham Young University—now and always.

I invoke a special blessing upon you, my beloved brothers and sisters, that, with the feeling and the sense of responsibility we all have as members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we will stand before the world as a light unto the world, and we will stand united. If there be any of us who have a difference or choose to make correction with one another, may we have the courtesy to do that privately.

I humbly pray that each one of you will have the Spirit of the Lord in your homes; that your families may be blessed; that you may be watched over and cared for; that your minds may be keen; that you may teach your subjects with power; and that you may have the satisfaction when a student leaves you of knowing you did your part to fortify him or her spiritually to go into a world that we need to improve, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.