

A Consecrated Place

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Nothing so focuses the attention of those who work in a school as the knowledge that their students are about to arrive. On my first day of teaching in a university, I lost my appetite for breakfast. Heaven only knows what anxiety those who prepared the student housing and the bookstore and the classrooms felt. But this I know, from that first experience and the decades in education that have followed: You are all about to give laserlike attention to your tasks. Tunnel vision for you is not a weakness. At the start of school, it becomes a necessity.

Just before we put our heads down to get a closer view of the grindstone, it is useful to put a picture in our minds and hearts of where we are headed and why we are going there. That is easier to do here because living prophets of God have described our possibilities. To get ready for this year, I have studied two of those pictures of the future. One is from President George Albert Smith. The other is from President Spencer W. Kimball. The two views combine for me to make more clear what we should do and who we must become.

President George Albert Smith ended his remarks at the first dedication of the Eyring Science Center on October 17, 1950, with this prayer and blessing for us:

Oh, Father, bless the men and the women who are on the faculty of this great school that they may teach . . . under the influence of Thy Spirit, that they may be able to inspire the . . . men and women with the desire to be worthy to be called Thy children. Bless them that they may see the fruits of their labors, have joy when they have finished their work as instructors and leaders . . . that they may look back over a field, not of grain, not of vegetable, not of other things that people labor so hard for to keep us going here in mortality, but that they may look over a field of Thy sons and daughters who have been developed to be worthy to live with Thee. [BYU Archives, UA 579]

That picture of our students worthy to live with God might have seemed to be in some distant future, in the world to come, if I had not next read this from President Kimball's second-century address (Spencer W. Kimball, "The Second Century of Brigham Young University," *Speeches of the Year, 1975* [Provo: BYU Press, 1976], 250–51):

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We must not lose either our moorings or our sense of direction in the second century. We still have before us the remarkable prophecy of John Taylor when he observed:

You will see the day that Zion will be as far ahead of the outside world in everything pertaining to learning of every kind as we are today in regard to religious matters. You mark my words, and write them down, and see if they do not come to pass.
[JD 21:100]

Surely we cannot refuse that rendezvous with history because so much of what is desperately needed by mankind is bound up in our being willing to contribute to the fulfillment of that prophecy. Others, at times, also seem to have a sensing of what might happen. Charles H. Malik, former president of the United Nations General Assembly, voiced a fervent hope when he said that

*one day a great university will arise somewhere—I hope in America—to which Christ will return in His full glory and power, a university which will, in the promotion of scientific, intellectual, and artistic excellence, surpass by far even the best secular universities of the present, but which will at the same time enable Christ to bless it and act and feel perfectly at home in it. [“Education in Upheaval: The Christian’s Responsibility,” *Creative Help for Daily Living* 21 (September 1970): 10; see *Brigham Young University: A School of Destiny*, Ernest L. Wilkinson and W. Cleon Skousen, eds. (Provo: BYU Press, 1976), xiii]*

Malik spoke with certainty of a time when the Savior will return in glory to this earth. He described a place—a university—where the resurrected Lord would join with the students and the faculty and all who labor there. The Master will feel perfectly at home there.

That would seem beyond our reach if after reading this quote President Kimball had not then said: “Surely BYU can help to respond to that call!” (“Second Century,” 251).

We know something of what a place must be like for the glorified Savior to feel perfectly at home. Of one thing we can be sure: those who labor there and all associated with it will have long before consecrated it to Him and to His kingdom.

His plan of redemption has always required men and women to consecrate all they have and all they are to the service of God. They covenant to do that. And then He tests them to see how sincere they are and how much they are willing to sacrifice. That test may be different for each of us, tailored for us alone, but it will be enough for the Master to prove our hearts.

Those who welcome Him at that university will have met and passed the tests. He will be at home, perfectly at home, because they will not only have said the words “This is the Lord’s university,” but they will have served and lived to make it so. They will have made it a consecrated place, offered it to Him, and in the process they will have been sanctified. What they will do to prove their consecration will have allowed the Atonement to change who they are.

A young student asked me a few days ago, “How do I know that the change made possible by the Atonement is happening in me?” The tears in her eyes and voice made me realize again how hard it is to recognize that change in ourselves. One way to know is that we are moving toward, not away from, consecration. I have seen evidence of that here.

I see it in the eyes of the students. I have seen it especially in the eyes of students who have been trusted with great responsibilities by you. Your remarkable courage to involve students in serious research, in leading service projects, and in caring for the campus has drawn from them sacrifice in time and effort

beyond what was true just a few years ago. That is changing them, and it is changing this place.

One of the characteristics of a place where the Savior can come is that there will be no class of people that holds itself above another. Think of how foreign that is to the nature of most university life you have seen.

Yet you have enriched the learning of students by letting them share in your professional lives, in your research and writing, and in other responsibilities. But you have done far more. Students come poor in what they know about things you have worked years to understand. Yet you have welcomed undergraduates into your worlds as partners. That will give them powerful advantages when they go on to graduate school and to employment. But in the process of giving equal value to their contributions when they give all they have, you have changed this place. In the great day when the Master comes, the people will have “all things common” (Acts 2:44; 4:32) and there will be “no poor among them” (Moses 7:18). If I had not seen what I have seen here, I would not have thought that possible in universities, where rank and status have always been so carefully guarded.

There is another way in which I see an increase in consecration. I see more people who care about how much they can give the Master, almost forgetting to ask what they will get in return. A man was in my office the other day. He has just assumed a new title and a greater responsibility. Before he accepted, he forgot to ask about any change in salary. He had given his all as a teacher. He expected to give his all in his new position. His pay as a teacher was enough to meet his family’s modest needs. And so he expressed great surprise that his pay was to increase.

His surprise told me something about him that he could not see. He had met and passed one of the tests of consecration. His giving his all was not for him a sacrifice, and so he ceased

to calculate any expected return. He wasn’t looking sidewise to see what others in comparable positions received or what he might get for himself in another place. Instead of looking to the side, he was looking up. And so he was changing the place he was in. I realize that such an attitude is rare. But it is becoming less rare here.

It is not only those who work and study here who are consecrating this place. I was with members of the Church in Latin America the last two weekends. There I met tithe payers, full-tithe payers, who struggle for economic survival. One great leader, a medical doctor, lost his employment for months. To feed his family, he turned to the manual work he had done to put himself through medical school. He had borrowed to get food. The loan was coming due, and he saw no way to pay it. And yet through it all, week by week, he paid tithing on his tiny earnings. He did not ask me for money but asked that I would pray for him. His only concern was that God would help him to keep his covenants.

I thought of you and this place as I listened to him. He will never come here. His children will never come here, nor will the blessings of this university likely reach them. But his tithes, combined with the offerings of millions of covenant Saints across the earth, come to this place because the Lord trusts and blesses us. I can see only dimly His purposes in making us so dependent on tithing, but surely those purposes include the humbling of those who receive as well as His exalting the poor for their keeping their promise of consecration.

All of the sources of funding for this university help to make it a consecrated place. The tithing comes mostly from members of modest means. Other funding comes from donations. You have heard much of the success of our capital campaign. If you knew the donors as I do, you would know that what appear to be gifts coming out of affluence frequently require great sacrifice

and consecration. I remember a luncheon with a man and his large family. He had in his early years promised the Lord that any surplus would go to the kingdom of God. Now the married children gathered as the father and the mother gave away what in any other family might have been seen as the very large and rightful inheritance of the children. I remember that luncheon every time I am tempted to say, "Well, we can always pay it out of the endowment," as if somehow those funds were less precious and less the Lord's.

The same mistake can be made with that part of our funding that comes from students and their families. I had a man push his finger in my chest once to convince me that it was a stupid thing not to raise the tuition dramatically. He talked about how far behind we were in tuition compared to schools he judged inferior to ours. He said it was wrong to give such a bargain to rich families and that we could always use the excess revenues to give scholarships to those who were poor.

One evidence that this is becoming a consecrated place is that most of you sense something wrong in those words. In a place where the Savior can come, the poor will be exalted. They will have the chance for education. It will be funded by consecrated offerings,

not out of "excess revenues." And costs will be less—far less—because those who provide the education will treat all funds as sacred.

And where the tuition is beyond the means of the poor, whatever they need in aid they will be trusted to pay back to benefit those who follow. We can be confident that the poor with training can lift themselves to bless others and thereby decrease their feelings that they are helpless victims and increase their sense of dignity as children of God. They can be led away from selfishness and toward consecration.

The journey toward being a consecrated place is a long one. We have not arrived, but we are moving on the path. Those everyday tasks to which you now will give your all—because you give your all—are changing this school, and they are allowing the Lord to make a change in you. There will be tests ahead—not because God doubts us but because He loves us. I have every confidence that we will pass the tests and that surely BYU will respond to the call to be a consecrated place, as President Smith and President Kimball knew we would.

I leave you my blessing. I bless you that you will in the days ahead see evidence of increased consecration in your students, in your families, in your colleagues, and in yourselves, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.