

A Zion University

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For many years I have been observing the great miracle the Lord is performing on this earth as he builds a Zion people in country after country. In July 1956 I traveled by train and ship from Salt Lake City to London, England, to begin a mission for the Church. Upon arrival I learned that approximately 15,000 members lived in Great Britain in fifteen districts. There were no stakes. In fact, the number of stakes in the entire Church totaled only 239, and all but twelve were in the western United States and Canada. Upon completion of the mission two years later, there were sixteen districts in Great Britain but still no concentration of Saints large enough to organize a stake. In 1971 I returned as an employee of an American company. A few stakes existed in the British Isles by then, but the bulk of the Saints were still scattered and met in small congregations. My family lived in a tiny branch thirty-five miles west of London. The attendance at our first sacrament meeting was fourteen, including my family of seven. We met in a small schoolhouse with many members driving fifteen or more miles to attend. Twenty-three years have passed since our family returned from England, and the small seeds planted by missionaries and others after World War II have turned into

a miracle. Two years ago I returned to Britain on Church business and learned that more than forty stakes now exist in the British Isles. Membership exceeds 166,000.

Since my call as a General Authority in 1992, I have learned that the British experience is not unique. As late as 1966 there was only one stake in Brazil. On a recent trip to São Paulo, the Area Presidency informed us that the 150th stake would be created by the end of 1995, with Brazilian membership exceeding one-half million. The growth in Chile, Argentina, Peru, Mexico, and the Philippines is similar to that of Brazil. In early 1970 there were no stakes in Japan. Today there are twenty-five. Korea's first stake was created in 1973. Today there are sixteen. In 1978, following the priesthood revelation, I was called by President James E. Faust, then president of the Church's International Mission, to accompany Elder Ted Cannon on a fact-finding mission through West Africa. Although numerous groups of people in Ghana and Nigeria expressed interest in the Church at the time, total membership was less

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than one hundred. West African membership today totals more than 70,000, and stakes exist throughout the region.

The prophets Daniel and Isaiah saw this phenomenon happening in the last days. Daniel stated:

And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. [Daniel 2:44]

Isaiah likened the Church to a tent and said that in the last days it would stretch forth across the earth by lengthening its cords and strengthening its stakes (see Isaiah 54:2).

How is this done? How are people's hearts and minds changed so that conviction and commitment exist in their souls? What role does Brigham Young University play in this marvelous venture? With regard to the transformation occurring in the hearts of men and women, I have learned that the great miracle of the Church is based on thousands and thousands of small, quiet miracles. May I illustrate with two examples.

Four weeks prior to Elder Cannon's and my trip to West Africa in July 1978, fifty letters were sent to members and nonmembers in the various countries apprising them of our visit and asking them to meet us at the airport upon arrival. During a four-week period we visited eight cities in four countries. With the exception of one city, no one received a letter in time to meet us. Toward the end of the trip, we arrived in Calabar, Nigeria, on a Friday afternoon, needing the services of a previously identified member to help us find approximately fifteen congregations in the southeastern part of the country. Each congregation had adopted the name of our Church, and the leaders had written asking for information and missionaries.

The member, Ime Eduok, was not at the airport or at the hotel. Brother Cannon and I checked in and went to our room not knowing where or how to find Brother Eduok in a city of one million. The next two days were a critical part of the trip, and Brother Eduok was the only one who could help us. We knelt in prayer and asked the Lord to guide us to him. We returned to the lobby and asked the desk clerk if she knew Mr. Eduok. She did not. Within a few minutes a large number of Nigerians had gathered around us discussing our plight but lacking the information needed. Suddenly, I felt a hand on my shoulder. I turned to see a large man standing next to me who said: "Did I hear you say Ime Eduok? He is my employee. I just entered the hotel to buy a newspaper on my way home from work. Ime will be leaving the firm in fifteen minutes. I do not know where he lives. If he leaves the office before you arrive, it is unlikely that you will find him before Monday." The man hurriedly put us in a taxi and gave the driver directions. We arrived at the business just as Ime Eduok was locking the door. Brother Eduok guided us to each congregation during the Saturday and Sunday that followed. Many people in those congregations are now members of the Church, and information gleaned from them formed an important part of the report given to the First Presidency upon our return.

The second incident comes from a story told by Elder Russell M. Nelson of the Quorum of the Twelve.

[A] beautiful young mother named Svetlana [living in Leningrad, Russia] had importuned the Lord in prayer to make it possible for her to obtain a Bible written in the Russian language. Such a Bible [was] rare, precious, and very expensive. In the fall of 1989, she and her [family] went to Helsinki in quest [of] a Bible. While walking through a park in Helsinki, she stepped upon an object hidden beneath the ground cover of autumn leaves. She picked it up and found it to be the answer to her prayers. It was

a Bible written in the Russian language. So excited was she that she joyfully recounted the story of this great discovery to another mother who was also in the park with her youngster. The second mother then [asked] Svetlana, "Would you like to have another book about Jesus Christ, also written in the Russian language?" Svetlana . . . answered in the affirmative. [Russell M. Nelson, "Drama on the European Stage," Ensign, December 1991, p. 15; emphasis in original]

The Finnish woman, wife of a district president, gave Svetlana a copy of the Book of Mormon and invited her to church. Svetlana took the missionary lessons, joined the Church, and returned to Leningrad with her family. She then invited friends into her home, and many of them responded to the message of the missionaries and were baptized. Svetlana, her friends, and others like them are the pioneer foundation upon which the Church has been built in that part of the world.

Why was a Nigerian with vital information prompted to deviate from his normal course and stop at a hotel to buy a newspaper? How did a rare, expensive Russian Bible find its way into a Finnish park, coincident with the passage of a Russian woman who had been praying for such a book? How did the wife of a Finnish district president just happen to be in the park to share in the joy of the rare prize? Brothers and sisters, who is guiding the Church? We live in a day when hundreds of thousands of small miracles are quietly occurring as the Lord prepares the honest in heart for entrance into his kingdom and the earth for his return. What role does Brigham Young University play in this process? The answer depends on our testimonies and how we view the university in its relationship to the Church.

Is the university apart from or a part of the Church? Following the announcement of my appointment as president of Brigham Young University, the *Salt Lake Tribune* carried an article on what it means to have a General

Authority as the school's leader. The major point of the article concerned the university's relationship to the Church. The news reporter suggested that although some might have assumed prior to the announcement that the university was a secular institution distinct from but reporting to the Church, the call clearly indicates that the university is an integral part of the kingdom. The article surprised me in that I had never thought of Brigham Young University separate from the Church. Prophet after prophet has stated clearly that Brigham Young University is a religious institution with a divine mission, even though secular education is a key part of its purpose. Given the organizational structure by which the university is governed, it seems paradoxical that some might think that Brigham Young University is not an integral part of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The Church itself is an educational institution, and Brigham Young University is one of its key components. Thus, one might say that this institution is not only a university in Zion but is in the process of becoming a "Zion university."

From the very beginning education has been one of the central missions of the Church. The School of the Prophets established in Kirtland, Ohio, in 1833 foreshadowed the creation of the University of the City of Nauvoo in 1841. The purpose of the Nauvoo school, as stated by the Prophet Joseph Smith and his counselors, was

to teach our children wisdom, to instruct them in all the knowledge and learning, in the arts, sciences, and learned professions. We hope to make this institution one of the great lights of the world, and by and through it to diffuse that kind of knowledge which will be . . . for the public good, and also for private and individual happiness. [HC 4:269]

The Prophet Joseph's dream to build a university that would become a light to the world was cut short by a mob's bullet on June 27,

1844. But the dream burned deeply inside another prophet. Brigham Young taught, “Ours is a religion of improvement” (*JD* 10:290) and “Every art and science known and studied by the children of men is comprised within the Gospel” (*JD* 12:257).

In February 1850, only two and one-half years after the first wagon train entered the Salt Lake Valley, the Latter-day Saints created the University of Deseret, the first institution of higher learning west of the Mississippi and a testimony to the value placed on education by the Saints. Brigham Young University was founded in 1875 by the prophet whose name it bears. It has become the flagship of the Church’s educational system. It is becoming the light to the world that Joseph foresaw and through which knowledge is and will be diffused for public good and personal happiness. Let us now explore what it means for Brigham Young University to be a Church entity, a Zion university.

As almost everyone here knows, the word *Zion* in Latter-day Saint literature refers to the “pure in heart” or the “place where the pure in heart dwell.” A Zion people are of one heart and one mind—they dwell in righteousness and have no poor among them. “The word *university* originally meant a community,” but it also is used to mean “cosmos” or “totality” (Arthur Henry King, “The Idea of a Mormon University,” *BYU Studies* 13, no. 2 [winter 1973], p. 115). In our context, a Zion university is a community of righteous scholars and students searching for truth for the purpose of educating the whole person. They understand that God’s children are more than intellect and body. The intellect is housed in a spirit that must also be educated. Sacred or higher truths relating to the spirit are the foundational truths in a Zion community and center on Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh, the sacrificial Lamb who gave his life for the sins of the world, the First Fruits of the Resurrection. Community

members also have full faith in the appearance of the Father and the Son to the Prophet Joseph in a vision in a grove of trees, believe that other angelic visitors also appeared to him, and believe that the gospel and the holy priesthood were restored to earth following a long period of apostasy. They know that the Book of Mormon is what it professes to be and that revelation from God to his prophets is the guiding instrument for the Church.

But we must also remember that as a university there is a prime obligation to teach secular truth. Our goal is to achieve excellence in this sphere. There must be no alibi for failure to achieve a first-class rank within the parameters set by the board of trustees. Continual improvement of faculty qualifications and performance is the key to this objective. Faculty turnover in the next few years will be high, but I am convinced that prospective faculty with the proper credentials have been and are being prepared.

Because the gospel is the common denominator at this university and since all truth is part of the gospel, every subject must be taught with testimony. Testimony is not to be encased in particular institutions on campus (see King, “The Idea,” p. 117). Brigham Young University is not a Harvard of the West or a Stanford of the Rocky Mountains with an institute of religion on the periphery. We have the opportunity to be better at discovering and teaching truth, all truth, because testimony can be everywhere and permeate everything (see King, “The Idea,” p. 117). Testimony and the Holy Spirit have as much to do with English and mathematics as with religion if we are diligent in scholarship and obedient to gospel principles. Teachers and students in this community should understand that all truth is spiritual, and thus the so-called secular truths may be discovered by revelation as well as by reason.

Arthur Henry King was a great Shakespearean scholar at this university.

He understood the process of revelation in the discovery of secular truth. In a BYU forum speech in 1972, he related the following:

Niels Bohr, [the] Danish physicist Nobel-Prize winner . . . is reported to have said that he owed his discoveries more than anything else to the reading of Shakespeare. That may seem odd unless we have read that apparently frivolous book called The Double Helix about the discovery of the form of a genetic molecule by a young American in Cambridge: he tells exactly what happened during the days when he progressed towards that discovery. It is worth reading to realize that great discoveries in science like great writing come ultimately from—call it what you like—intuition; I would call it inspiration. The wind apparently “bloweth where it listeth”; but can anything worth-while happen on any university campus with which the Holy Ghost is not involved? [King, “The Idea,” pp. 117–18]

My favorite story illustrating the role of the Holy Ghost and the Light of Christ in the discovery of truth comes from James W. Cannon, a member of our mathematics department, regarding his discovery of how to unknot an infinitely knotted object in high-dimensional space. (He was a professor at the University of Wisconsin at the time.) After pushing the problem around for many months with no success, the solution came in an unexpected manner. He records:

*One night at 2:00 A.M., my eyes suddenly popped open. I sat up in bed. . . . I knew how to extend Stan’ko’s techniques. I do not know how the answer came to me. I couldn’t sleep. I dressed quietly and went walking on the dark streets of Madison. . . . I checked the ideas for all of their consequences. I checked for absurdities. I couldn’t find any. The picture was wonderful. [James W. Cannon, “Mathematical Parables,” *BYU Studies* 34, no. 4 (1994–95): 94]*

Brother Cannon’s experience is not unusual. After studying, puzzling, and dreaming about a problem, scientists often find progress stopped. Then, suddenly, as if out of nowhere, a flash of light comes. Secular truth is revealed by the Spirit as well as sacred truth.

May I now say a few words to the faculty, staff, and administration, although I expect the students to listen as well because it has application in their lives. A Brigham Young University appointment is a sacred trust. More than 27,000 youth of the Church selected on the basis of gospel commitment and scholarship potential are under our stewardship. Consequently, we have a responsibility to nurture their faith and improve their academic skills. The great majority of us are members of the LDS Church, and the prime requisite for employment is a personal testimony of and behavior consistent with the restored gospel. Nonmember faculty and staff are expected to live according to the light within them and standards agreed upon at the time of employment.

Placing commitment to gospel truths first in the life of a faculty member does not demean the second requirement of academic excellence. If testimony and high personal standards are the foundation, outstanding scholarship that includes teaching ability is the capstone. Both testimony and scholarship are essential for this university to achieve its destiny. They are not competitive but complementary. The new administration is committed to academic excellence. The desire for excellence covers graduate studies and research in selected areas as well as continued improvement of undergraduate teaching. In particular, we believe that teaching quality must be improved in some key areas, and we will be working with the faculty to accomplish this.

A personal commitment to gospel standards by faculty members will increase, not decrease, academic freedom. If applied, the gospel framework will keep us from gathering

like flies hovering over the dead carcasses of secular error. As a close faculty friend pointed out to me recently, the greatest limitation on academic freedom comes when faculty take for granted the assumptions of colleagues at other institutions while developing secular theories. We will be more productive and enjoy more freedom if we examine and test secular assumptions under the lamp of gospel truth. We must not blindly accept the choices made by others. These statements obviously apply more to the social sciences and humanities than to the physical sciences, engineering, and the professions. However, even scholars in these areas would do well to measure the worth of their scholarship in the gospel light.

A brief illustration is in order. In speaking of the last days, Isaiah and Nephi indicate that people will “call evil good, and good evil; [will] put darkness for light, and light for darkness; [will] put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (see Isaiah 5:20, 2 Nephi 15:20). Recently, I learned about a movie that was described by a newspaper critic as “wonderful, joyous.” It was rated PG-13. The film features seven illicit relationships, including open marriage, fornication, and adultery. The main messages of the film are *first*, open marriages are acceptable; *second*, it is appropriate for men to abandon their wives and families if they become stressed; *third*, illicit relationships relieve grief and do no harm if secrecy is maintained; and *fourth*, premarital sex is normal. To a committed Latter-day Saint, the film is not wonderful or joyous but depressing and sad as evil is called good again and again. There is a stark contrast between the messages of the film and the recently issued “Proclamation on the Family” by the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve.

There are scholars in this university who study the family. There are classes taught in several disciplines that relate to the family. If scholarship and teaching at this university are based on the proclamation’s standards rather

than on the world’s standards, academic freedom will increase and students will be spiritually strengthened to withstand the onslaught of evil—theories and practices that the world calls good. A society that is in moral decline is also in intellectual decline; for the one surely follows the other and follows fast (see King, “The Idea,” p. 119; also 2 Nephi 9:28–40 and Moroni 9:18–20).

The grass is not greener on the other side of the fence. What may appear to be limits on academic freedom derived from the religious nature of the institution actually provide additional freedoms. It is imperative that we not mimic the research and teaching choices of our colleagues at other universities without first using the measuring rod of the gospel.

I believe, using the Lord’s measuring stick, that we have the finest faculty and staff in the world. It is clearly the strongest faculty and staff ever assembled at Brigham Young University. I firmly believe that the Lord will strengthen the faculty in the process of time.

Finally, I now speak to the students. May I paraphrase an earlier president of Brigham Young University: “Our reason for *being* is to be a university. But our reason for *being a university* is the students.” (President Dallin H. Oaks in his inaugural response stated: “Our reason for *being* is to be a university. But our reason for *being a university* is to encourage and prepare young men and women to rise to their full spiritual potential as sons and daughters of God” [12 November 1971, p. 18; emphasis in original]). For more than 120 years this campus has had a distinctive character. Strangers who visit are struck by the cleanliness and orderliness of the buildings, the grounds, and especially the people. Although the Dress and Grooming Standards may not seem as important as other parts of the Honor Code, they help us be a distinctive people. I remember visiting other college campuses during the early 1970s while serving as a faculty member at this university. It was the height of

the “hippie” period, when long hair, drugs, sloppy clothes, and rebellion were the order of the day. It was so refreshing to return to this campus, to see the clean young people, and to feel the peace that prevails here. This administration is committed to preserving that atmosphere. We ask you to live by your word of honor regarding the Dress and Grooming Standards. A few may be uncomfortable and may not want to abide by them. For those few, please have the intellectual courage and integrity to live the standards or depart peacefully and try another institution.

Last Sunday evening, as I watched many of you at the CES fireside with President Faust, I could tell you have testimonies. You are not doubters but seekers after truth. You recognize the Spirit. Many of you have experienced an epiphany as described by President Faust in that flashes of insight and testimony have come to you at critical times. Many of you have seen the manifestations of divine power. You have made covenants. You have been able to call heavenly power forth in your own lives. You understand that age is not a prerequisite in communing with the Lord and his Spirit.

May I share with you a flash of insight given me by the Spirit twenty years ago in which I learned about this university’s major role in building the kingdom. It concerns you, the students. The Bateman family had just returned to Provo from the East Coast following my appointment as dean of the School of Management. We had been away for four years with a multinational corporation and had enjoyed ourselves immensely. Although we knew the decision to return to Brigham Young University was correct because prayers had been answered, I was still struggling emotionally with the new assignment.

In September 1975 we attended the first multistake fireside of the school year, similar to the one held last Sunday evening. We were sitting high up in the Marriott Center near portal C. As the speaker began his sermon for the

evening, I looked out across a congregation that must have totaled 18,000, including all of the missionaries from the MTC. They were easy to spot because they were allowed to take off their suit coats! Approximately 2,500 white-shirted missionaries filled the section under portal M, and it was a sea of white. I looked at them and realized that within weeks they would be scattered to the four corners of the globe. It was exciting to contemplate the people they would serve, the change that would occur in the missionaries as they matured spiritually, and the miracles that would bring new members into the Church.

Then a flash of inspiration opened my mind as to the purpose of Brigham Young University. I realized that 27,000 students were being prepared to enter the world. Every year approximately 6,000 would leave Provo, scattering across North America with some going on to Europe, others to Asia, some to Africa, and a number to South America. Some might even go Down Under. If the university performed its roles well, deepening spiritual roots and providing a first-class education, in the course of time strong Church families would grow up in hundreds and thousands of communities all over the world. These BYU families would be waiting when later missionaries arrived. My earlier experiences in London, Boston, Colorado Springs, High Wycombe, Lancaster, Bedminster, Accra, and Lagos had pointed to the importance of just one or two strong families to form a core around which the Lord could build a branch, then a district, and finally a stake. The BYU families would be good neighbors; have strong relationships with business associates; and, if well-trained, be leaders in their communities. These strong families by example and invitation would open doors for missionaries to enter.

I then knew why we had returned to Brigham Young University. It provided a satisfying feeling on the journey home that evening.

Students leaving the university with a first-rate education combined with spiritual strength based on faith in Christ and his restored gospel have a tremendous advantage in the world. They know who they are. They need not be afraid. Faculty members should know that their teaching and research are building something of great worth. Brigham Young University is a major contributor to the central mission of Christ's kingdom on earth.

I testify, brothers and sisters, that this institution will not fail. As Daniel prophesied, the kingdom will not be left to other people. Joseph's and Brigham's vision that the spiritual can be combined with the secular without the latter overcoming the former will prove true because of faith and priesthood power. Brigham Young University will be a light to the world, dispensing truth for the public good and for individual happiness. I say this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.