

“The Means of Doing Much Good”

CECIL O. SAMUELSON

Graduates, families, members of the faculty, brothers, sisters, and friends, it is a pleasure to be together with you on this special day of celebration. Of course we not only celebrate the signal achievements and accomplishments of this distinguished class, but we also gratefully acknowledge the contributions of so many of you who have assisted, encouraged, and supported these impressive graduates during their stretching years of study.

Today we will grant a total of 2,513 degrees. Most are at the baccalaureate level, but 375 are master’s degrees and 36 are doctorates. As you will note in the commencement program, several have also earned special commendation. We are pleased and impressed with each one being recognized today.

As is frequently the case, the age range of our graduates is almost 50 years. While the graduates are almost evenly split between women and men, 55 percent are now married—and that figure, I’m told, will be increasing significantly in the days ahead. The graduates in this commencement come from 48 states, five U.S. territories, and 55 other countries. We particularly appreciate the families and friends who have traveled great distances to be with and honor the graduates today. Almost a third of the undergraduates and over half of those

receiving graduate degrees have attended other institutions of higher education before enrolling at BYU.

A year ago, in August 2006, I mentioned to the commencement audience our pleasure in having the groundbreaking for the new Gordon B. Hinckley Alumni and Visitors Center on the prophet’s 96th birthday. As most of you know, last June 23—exactly one year after the groundbreaking—the beautiful new Hinckley Center was dedicated. Again, President Gordon B. Hinckley attended and participated with his counselors, family, many of the Brethren, and special guests. It was a wonderful event. You will likely hear more today about what this magnificent new structure will mean to BYU and to you as alumni. It is a very welcome addition to an already impressive and functional campus, and I express my thanks to the many of you who contributed to this building. As announced, yours will be the very first group of graduates invited to the Hinckley Center tomorrow for our president’s reception. We look forward to continuing this tradition in this new, remarkable setting.

Cecil O. Samuelson was president of Brigham Young University when this commencement address was given on 16 August 2007.

In mentioning these happy events, I must also pause in remembrance of a dear friend, supporter, and leader, President James E. Faust, who passed away early last Friday morning. The entire Church and many others join us in mourning his death. His contributions to Brigham Young University have been significant and numerous. For more than 12 years he has served as the vice chairman of the BYU Board of Trustees. Along with President Howard W. Hunter and Elder Jeffrey R. Holland, he has had a key leadership role in the long process of establishing our BYU Jerusalem Center. To the end he has been our mentor, our supporter, our guide, and our friend. We will miss him terribly. Our condolences, prayers, and appreciation go to Sister Faust and his wonderful family.

We are grateful for our marvelous campus with its spectacular grounds and superior facilities. None, however, would be necessary or even possible without the students, who are the fundamental and primary justification for the existence of BYU. We are always grateful for occasions such as today that remind us of this signal reality.

As we reflect on the importance of our students individually and collectively and acknowledge their efforts, we also must ask ourselves why they make this effort. Few would quibble with the assertion that education is beneficial both to the individual being educated and also to the society in which the individual resides. While we share this general appreciation found almost universally across the higher education spectrum, we also acknowledge that the light of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ provides additional insights and doctrinal imperatives for all to place great value on learning and to be lifelong learners.

The Lord has said, "The glory of God is intelligence, or, in other words, light and truth" (D&C 93:36). Likewise, He has promised:

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]

Thus while we are delighted that repeated surveys and statistical analyses consistently report that compensation for your life's work will be increased by your BYU education, we believe that, more important, you have made major steps in the process of preparing for the eternities. In addition to participating in sacred ordinances and keeping our covenants and God's commandments that spiritual progress requires, we need to learn, understand, and apply all that we can generally. This is why it makes sense for the Church leadership to commit significant resources to the educational enterprise of the Church, of which BYU is such a central part. This is also why so many faithful Saints throughout the world contribute their tithes and offerings to make this remarkable university possible for those blessed to be able to attend here.

As we express thanks to our families, professors, and friends for helping along the way, let us also remember the great debt we owe to those who have made this unique experience possible. At BYU we are able to hone our academic skills while strengthening our faith and our capacities for service to God and to our fellow man. Having taken advantage of the BYU experience, you are now especially well equipped to go out into the world and contribute in wonderful and special ways.

As the Lord promised Hyrum Smith, so He promises you that "if you desire, you shall be the means of doing much good in this generation" (D&C 11:8). Some of you already have a strong sense about what that "much good" will be. Some of you are still searching. But all of you will be able to see the fruition of this promise if you stay true to your ideals and

constantly reflect on the Spirit of the Y, which will continue to be with you and lead you to do justly, walk humbly, and judge righteously (see D&C 11–12).

You have been given so much. Now you have the great opportunity and privilege to give back. Of course we will gladly welcome your financial contributions as you join the group of loyal alumni—now more than one-third of a million—who express appreciation for their highly subsidized education by giving back to the university regularly. But above and beyond the financial treasure we hope you will contribute are the character, integrity, and concern for others that are expected of one with the great distinction of being a graduate of Brigham Young University.

While the reputation and standing of this remarkable institution are measured and evaluated in a number of different ways, ultimately

the real value of its contribution is reflected in the graduates that it produces. Thus, with great confidence, we look forward to what you will do in your lives with immense appreciation for the benefit that will accrue to the students who follow you and to the blessings that will come to our sponsoring church and its faithful members by virtue of all the good that you will do.

As you leave and go on to other pursuits, whether in the workplace, in the home, or in further education, please remember to apply the secrets of successful learning throughout your lives “by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118).

God does live, and this great university is part of His plan and work. Congratulations and best wishes as you go on with our faith and prayers in your behalf. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

