

# *“Mirror, Mirror, on the Wall”: A Look at the “Me Decade”*

JEFFREY R. HOLLAND

Thank you, President Oaks, and all of you. My thanks to Dean Clark for that beautiful prayer; I pray that it will be efficacious in my behalf. According to Brother Robert Webb and a recently published Richter scale of Provo popularity, my talks on this campus rate somewhere just between the Haun’s Mill massacre and a terminal case of acne. My goal this morning is to keep trying—keep moving forward, perhaps to take my rightful place with the rich flora and fauna of colorful Ethiopia.

May I say, at the outset, that much of my message is intended to be seen against the backdrop of President’s Day, February’s reprieve of the winter doldrums and the annual commemoration of the births of, among others—including my wife—the two greatest presidents this republic has ever known. I am asking this morning that we look at your college decade (the seventies) and mine (the sixties) in the reflected light of a Washington and a Lincoln. As I speak, consider, if you will, their times and their trials and their gifts to us, and it will put your own world into clearer perspective.

Everyone I know is mad at the 1970s. One commentator recently said if he had the chance he would promptly bid goodbye to the seventies—“a year too early,” he thought, “but not a

moment too soon.” I presume that, with one year remaining in this decade’s contract, 1979 would be traded to the 1980s for a fixed sum plus six months of another year to be named in a later round of the draft.

Of course, culture and history do not actually happen in decades; but we find it convenient to talk about them that way. Your parents like to speak of the twenties—you know, the Charleston—and some of you like to talk of the fifties—you know, the Fonz. And thus the seventies; full, some say, of forgettable faces, books no one could read, movies no one wanted to sit through. It has been suggested that the nicest thing which might be said of these last ten years is that they were sort of “factory seconds—the temporal equivalent of the Edsel.” A country that once thought it could rule the world now despairs of governing New York City.

Has there indeed been some “souring of the national soul”? Professor Kenneth Kolson laments—and I quote—

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*Jeffrey R. Holland was commissioner of the Church Educational System of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this forum address was given at Brigham Young University on 20 February 1979.*

*In this decade an epidemic of cynicism [has] spread through the country, . . . contaminating [our national institutions] and the reservoir of good will . . . built up among Americans over the centuries; [now] Main Street [U.S.A. has been rendered] the moral equivalent of Pompeii.*

*Americans no longer revere the presidency; they believe that every interest is represented in Congress but the public interest; they even have little faith in the Justices of the Supreme Court. In 1964, 78% of a national sample . . . said that the government in Washington can be trusted to do what is right 'always' or 'most of the time.' By 1974 [the year of Watergate] this figure had shriveled to 36% . . . Similarly, the percentage of those answering that the government 'is run for the benefit of all the people' (as opposed to being controlled by a few big selfish interests) declined from 64% to 25% in the same ten-year period. . . furthermore the erosion of public trust and confidence is not confined to the realm of government. The family, schools, business, the professions . . . all seem to be experiencing serious credibility crises. [Tom Sawyer has grown up and there in the mirror stands Charles Manson.] [Kenneth Kolson, "The Great Sobriety: An Epitaph for the '70s" The Rockford Papers, vol. 3, no. 5 (1978), pp. 1–10.]*

Well, come now—tell me what can be wrong with a decade that has brought you *Jaws*, *Roots*, clones, Shake'n Bake, "Mork 'n Mindy," King Kong (you remember him? The big fella with the raccoon coat?), swine flu, R2D2, and frozen yogurt. That kind of decade can't be *all* bad! (See *New West*, Jan. 1979.)

Part of the dilemma over the seventies stems from the sixties (my college decade), as every dilemma in life always stems from some other. It was reported recently that a group of governmental advisers meeting in the White House to discuss inflation, Iran, Taiwan, the Middle East, public transportation, and national health—in that order—expressed some longing for "the benign 1960s." *Benign 1960s!* I was there, folks, and it was not benign. If the 1970s fear "a souring of the national soul," the 1960s saw a brutal

ransacking of it, in which presidents were assassinated, cities were gutted by flame, college campuses became battlegrounds, and American boys fought in a war more confusing than any since father faced son across the Mason-Dixon line. Protestations of love and freedom by the flower children of my college generation relapsed all too quickly into bloody rage and the enslavement of drugs and degeneracy.

As Professor Kolson has noted, the sixties asserted that every child is entitled to a free hot lunch; the seventies concede the worthiness of the goal but rediscover that there is no such thing as a free lunch, hot or cold. The sixties urged women to put down their brooms and take up their banners; the seventies are once again asking if before counting the profit we have counted the cost. The sixties adjusted educational standards to ensure that no student would ever fail to meet them; the seventies stand stunned at the spectacle of high school graduates who cannot read with any facility nor write a coherent sentence.

The sixties saw California legislators award a ten-thousand-dollar grant for a choral group to serenade whales, and it funded community college courses in voodoo; the seventies saw California pass Proposition 13. The sixties nourished the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, those warm friends of BYU with the kamikaze instinct who want to fly down the tube of the Y smokestack in what one writer called "the Swedenization of America"; the seventies, pondering the condition of HEW in this year of its silver jubilee, wonder how it has come to pass that this department, which employed 35,000 people in 1954, now pays the salaries of 1,444,000 people and spends 500 million dollars every 24 hours. As Everett Dirksen used to say: "A billion here, a billion there—before you know it, it adds up to real money." We do have some challenges in the seventies.

But for all of this, I do not think that we are seeing "a moral Pompeii" or even a Sahara of the spirit in our day. Public opinion surveys seem to

show consistently that Americans, rather than being alienated from their national institutions, are simply disgusted with their standards of performance and are going to demand more of them. I think the national soul has not soured, but that people are generally unwilling to buy any more lemons. The ultimate result should be an improvement in public trust and confidence, not an erosion of it.

I wish to make a distinction here between cynicism and concern. I have concerns about our day—a major one of which I wish to discuss with you in some detail. But I am not cynical and I ask you not to be. I do not believe that all human conduct is self-serving or that all noble-sounding explanations are contrived and only mask the depravity of human motives. Cynicism is an intellectual cop-out, a crutch for a withered soul, a thin excuse for inaction and retreating commitment. Do not become cynical about government or education or civic affairs or religion or the human race or the time in which you live. Do on the other hand, be appropriately concerned and actively involved. We will always need responsible, reputable, reasonable social critics who will help in mapping the terrain and marking the pitfalls. But we do not need what Elder Gordon B. Hinckley once described on this campus as “pickle suckers,” those studied in the “sour vinegar of invective and anger.” May I quote from Elder Hinckley’s remarks at a BYU devotional.

*The tragedy [of the pickle sucker] is that this spirit is epidemic. . . . To hear tell these days, there is nowhere a man of integrity among those holding public office. In many instances this spirit has become the very atmosphere of university campuses. The snide remark, the sarcastic gibe, the cutting down of associates—these, too often, are of the essence of our conversation. In our homes wives weep and children finally give up under the barrage of criticism leveled by husbands and fathers. Criticism is the forerunner of divorce, the cultivator of rebellion, sometimes a*

*catalyst that leads to failure. Even in the Church it sows the seeds of inactivity and finally apostasy.*

*I come . . . with a plea that we stop seeking out the storms and enjoy more fully the sunlight. I am suggesting that we “accentuate the positive.” I am asking that we look a little deeper for the good, that we still our voices of insult and sarcasm, that we more generously compliment virtue and effort. I am not asking that all criticism be silenced. . . . I am not suggesting that our conversation be all honey and blossoms. . . .*

*What I am . . . asking is that we turn from the negativism that so permeates our society and look for the remarkable good in the land and times in which we live, that we speak of one another’s virtues more than we speak of one another’s faults, that optimism replace pessimism, that our faith exceed our fears.* [Gordon B. Hinckley, “Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled,” *Speeches of the Year, 1974* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), p. 266]

I offer that again this morning as good counsel in a month when we honor the memory of a George Washington or an Abraham Lincoln.

As Elder Hinckley suggests, we must have our concerns. Life demands something more than a ubiquitous smile button saying, “Have a nice day.” If we need a button at all I suppose it should say something more like “Make it a nice day.” Part of my message this morning is that as we exert virtuous effort in this world we can rejoice in many good things that are central to our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, our family and friends and neighbors, our Church activity, and our life together in a choice land and in an age unequaled in the history of this world in its privileges and possibilities. We are not without our solutions. Especially is it true that a faithful Latter-day Saint is not without his or her solutions.

I believe that for the most part our Founding Fathers (whose monumental revolution we again commemorated in the seventies, by the way) were endowed with such faith. Surely they had problems. Taxation *with* representation was not a heck of a lot more fun than

taxation *without* it. They had great concerns, but avoided cynicism and rolled up their sleeves. Surely the presidential greatness of Washington and Lincoln must have been in no small measure due to the fact that they were good, thoughtful, dignified, responsible, spiritually sensitive men *before* they were presidents. For all their courage and commitment, neither could be called a lunatic or a zealot; and for all their burdens, they could not be called “pickle suckers” either.

Perhaps we could do not better in this month when we honor their birth than to use their example, as we examine the challenge of the 1970s or the eighties or the nineties, and to remember something of their service and their sacrifice. As I look at your decade—and at those that lie ahead—I am very hopeful and very encouraged because of what I believe. I believe in help from both sides of the veil and in the worth and the possibility of a human soul. I take great strength from that oft-repeated reminder in the Doctrine and Covenants:

*Fear not, little flock . . .*

*. . . Ye are little children, and ye have not as yet understood [what] great blessings the Father hath in his own hands and prepared for you;*

*. . . Be of good cheer, for I will lead you along.*  
[D&C 6:34, 78:17–18]

With that much introduction and assurance, I do wish to share one concern I have. It is not restricted to—or unique in—the 1970s. Indeed, it is quite literally as old as Cain and Abel, having something to do with why we came to this planet from an earlier, heavenly existence. It is not really a challenge for governments or schools or cities or businesses—at least not initially. It is, rather, a challenge for individual people—even people right here at BYU, or any other place we might find ourselves. Some problems seem far away and beyond our reach—problems in places like Washington or

Teheran or Peking. But this is, if you will, a Provo problem and you can do something about it—in your apartments and wards and classes, at work or in your leisure. If you do not, then it certainly becomes a problem for governments and schools and businesses and families. But the real solution is in the privacy of the human soul—yours and mine.

This concern I have is dramatized by a new magazine that appeared on newsstands for the first time last month. It is called *Self*. I know nothing about the merits or liabilities of this magazine; I am merely intrigued by the title: *Self*. After *Life* and *Look*, to *People* and *Us*, we have now come to *Self*. My concern about the seventies, and indeed about every decade ahead of you, is somehow suggested by that title—by the threat of moral vision which seems to steadily decrease until it may finally come down to “self” only—one life wide, one life deep, and the devil take the hindmost. The threat I fear, in a month when we remember two who did not suffer from it, is the threat of self-centeredness gone amuck, or psychic insistence upon everyone doing his own thing, of everyone getting in touch with himself at the expense of getting in touch with anyone else. It is the threat of a culture which has in some ways carried accentuated individualism to the extreme and now has the pursuit of happiness standing *paralyzed* in front of a mirror, pleading, “Mirror, mirror on the wall, who’s the fairest of them all?” We live in a time in which there has been almost transcendent self-attention, in which the conquest of nature and search for new frontiers, social and otherwise, has given way to neonarcissism. The greatest of all tasks in the 1970s appears to be “self-realization.”

In a world where it is all hanging out, where we have immersed ourselves in ourselves, where intimacy has gone public and four-letter words batter our ears, we run the risk, in our quest for instant gratification and purely personal views of our world, of

profoundly violating the two great commandments on which all others depend. We may come to find neither love of God nor love of neighbor but only love of ourselves. Should that ever be so, then, as Pogo Possum would say: “We have met the enemy and he is us.”

I say “we”: that is an editorial “we.” I am not speaking of you and me personally so much as I am speaking of our times, our climate, our current condition. Unfortunately, such preoccupation with self does face us in many locations on this globe.

You will know from the *Daily Universe* and a poster or two around campus and President Oak’s introductory remarks that I have titled this forum address “ ‘Mirror, Mirror on the Wall’: A Look at the ‘Me Decade.’ ” That phrase “the Me Decade” was coined for the 1970s by Tom Wolfe, whose strongest recommendation is that he holds a PhD in American Studies from Yale. While I do not agree with Wolfe’s entire thesis, I would nevertheless like to appropriate his title and much of his stimulating suggestions for our purposes this morning—for LDS purposes if you will—and apply them to our life here at BYU. I repeat that this tendency about which I am concerned is no more linked to the seventies than it was to the thirties or will be to the nineties, though it may be a little more visible at some times than at others. It is first and foremost a matter of spirit and only incidentally a matter of society. The principles involved are as old as the gospel is old, and the future is as bright as every new and everlasting covenant is always bright. Let me briefly suggest how we got where we are, quoting generously from Mr. Wolfe. (See Tom Wolfe, “The Me Decade and the Great Awakening,” *Mauve Gloves and Madmen*, [New York: 1976], pp. 126–67.)

It has been in our time, yours and mine—inflation notwithstanding—that we have seen some significant realization of at least four centuries of utopian dreams. In this country and largely in the last quarter of this century—your

lifetime—we have realized for many (surely not all) in this country (though not everywhere in this country) the potential dreamed of by those who foresaw the three great necessities of industrialized man: (1) surplus or discretionary income, (2) surplus or discretionary time, and (3) political freedom. From the end of World War II to the 1960s this “common man” had just about arrived. It was obviously time to get on with the business of “realizing his potential.”

Observing, studying, doting on, remaking, remodeling, elevating, and polishing oneself had always been, heretofore, an aristocratic luxury, confined throughout most of history to royalty since they had the time and the money and usually the vanity to do it. By the mid-1960s, however, this luxury had become available to literally millions. The equivalent of Louis XIV’s finishing school at Versailles was now the Esalen Institute, perched on a cliff overlooking the Pacific in Big Sur, California. Esalen’s specialty, as one participant put it, was “an oil change and a lube job for your personality.” Businessmen, housewives, students, drifters—anyone who could afford it, and by now many could—paid \$220 a week to come to Esalen to learn about themselves, loosen up a little, and maybe wear a jumpsuit. The primal screams of hysterical encounter sessions roared through the pines, startling enough to stunt a sequoia.

What on earth was the appeal? The appeal, on earth, was simple enough. It was, as Mr. Wolfe suggests, the chance for each to say, “Now let’s talk about *me*.” Whether or not your personality was renovated was beside the point; you had finally focused your entire energy and attention (and with any luck everybody’s else’s) on the most fascinating subject on the earth: ME—and with a live audience. Just imagine “my life” becoming a real drama with universal significance, analyzed just like King Lear’s or Rasputin’s.

By this time the much-publicized hippie communes of the 1960s, no longer big items in the press, were becoming more and more slanted toward pop theology, and many of the Me movements swung in behind them. Their neo-Gnostic religious style saw its ultimate and most tragic expression just weeks ago in Jonestown. Synanon, Arica, EST, scientology had now all become religions, or so they said.

In almost any city now a strange menagerie (as George Steiner calls them) can be seen tangling along some sidewalk, offering “dime-store mantras and fairground meditation” leading to instant Nirvana, or for the recalcitrant perhaps a rattlesnake in the mailbox. Such groups as the Hare Krishna, the Sufi, and the Mahraji Ji communes—not to mention the Unification Church of Sun Myung Moon—soon discovered that they could enroll thousands of new members and still make a small fortune in real estate.

In the meantime traditional Christian churches often strained to keep up with the action. Modernization for them (you know—“let’s look at ourselves”) meant a new liturgy or new apparel or perhaps a new coffeehouse where one might—as ever—“get in touch with himself.” This was obviously not a time to worry about getting in touch with God. Some even thought it might help if the preacher put on a turtleneck sweater and sang “Michael Row the Boat Ashore” at Sunday evening vespers. In that transition from the sixties to the seventies one church saw its magnificent cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City become the scene of a pot-smoking, anti-war ceremony in which Norman Mailer’s dirty words were read before the High Altar. At nearly the same time its Grace Cathedral in San Francisco saw Allen Ginsberg, wearing animal robes and a deer’s head, cast images of buffalo herds and other endangered species on the walls and ceiling of the building—accompanied, of course, by rock music. But as one contemporary Christian said, indicating so much

that offended him, “There are no heresies in a dead religion.” (Paul Seabury, “Trendier Than Thou,” *Harper’s*, October 1978, pp.39–52).

So cathedrals and churches were active again, but in a new way: do-it-yourself religion had taken over, religion in which a whale or porpoise or snail darter or lousewort, along with any bird or blade of grass in a national park, was entitled to greater legal protection than a five-month-old fetus. After all—“mirror, mirror on the wall”—it is my body, is it not? In the 1970s some of the actors on our worldwide stage had come to that prayer offered thirty years ago in one of W. H. Auden’s plays:

*O God, put away justice and truth for we cannot understand them and do not want them. . . . Leave Thy heavens and come down to our earth. Become our uncle. Look after Baby, amuse Grandfather, escort Madam to the Opera, help Willy with his homework, introduce Muriel to a handsome naval officer. Be interesting and weak like us, and [then] we will love you as we love ourselves.* [W. H. Auden, *For the Time Being*, 1944]

Of course, what so affects the self inevitably affects society. As a result we have also had great political and social challenges. A recent column in the *New York Times* lamented these narrow commercial and social concerns that are dividing people and diverting them from the larger question of our common good. Such conflict between general and personal interests has always been at the roof of political action; but it seems more of a threat now, in a free world when the need for cooperation in complex societies is greater than ever before. Some examples:

In his New Year’s message to the Canadian people, Prime Minister Trudeau was almost pleading with his fellow countrymen to disarm their violent tempers and to think and act, not as French Canadians or as English Canadians, but just as Canadians. Scarcely days later Rene Levesque was in Washington proclaiming the

virtues of violent separation and getting a good hand from the National Press Club.

At the same time President Carter, concluding that inflation was the main threat to the commonwealth, brought in what he called a “lean and austere” budget (of more than half a trillion dollars!) and ever since has been under attack from minorities and labor for abandoning the poor and from big business and special interests for paying too much attention to the poor. The success of purely voluntary wage and price controls surely remains to be seen.

The mayor of New York City, in his state of the city message, asked for an end to factionalism and the harmful rhetoric of confrontation. The response was a recall petition to throw him out of office.

Even in Britain—the land of my mission, the scene of my spiritual birth, the home of team play and democratic responsibility—there is such a maze of strikes and disputes now on that no computer can, as the British would say, keep “a proper tally.” That only reflects the terror and chaos of other locations, particularly Italy, the Middle East, and now especially Iran.

May I quote from the *Times* article?

*What is it that has brought on this [self-centered] contempt for authority? It is partly the misuse of authority in the past—imperial presidencies leading to imperial congresses and parliaments, greatly influenced by powerful business, labor, and racial factions.*

*Beyond this, however, it is also a general feeling among the general public of being overwhelmed by the complexity of modern problems.*

*In short, [there is now] a tendency to work within factions for limited and often selfish ends. One hears the same refrain over the wide range of free countries—that everybody is out for himself, so why not do the same? [James Reston]*

Part of this chaos is due to what our colleague Bruce Hafen calls “the almost endless

talk about personal liberty and self-fulfillment; it is in the air. There are right movements [everywhere].” (Bruce C. Hafen, “Individual Liberty, Commitment, and Marriage,” *Ensign*, December 1978, p. 14.)

It is hard, in the apple-pie tradition, to be against rights; but consider this comment from Alexander Solzhenitsyn:

*Destructive and irresponsible freedom has been granted boundless space [in the free world]. [Remember—this is from one who knows a great deal about loss and lack of freedom.] [Western] society appears to have little defense against . . . human decadence, such as . . . the misuse of liberty for moral violence against young people [where] motion pictures [and television and magazines are] full of pornography, crime, and horror. This is considered to be part of freedom, and theoretically counterbalanced by the young people’s right not to look or accept. [But they do look and are accepting, and] life organized [so] legalistically has thus shown its inability to defend itself against the corrosion of evil . . . It is time, in the West, to defend not so much human rights as human obligations. . . .*

*In early democracies, as in American democracy at the time of its birth, [those] human rights were granted because man [was] God’s creature. That is, freedom was given to the individual conditionally, on the assumption of his constant religious responsibility. Such was the heritage of the preceding [two] thousand years. Two hundred years ago—even fifty years ago—it would have seemed quite impossible, in America, that an individual could be granted boundless freedom simply for the satisfaction of his [basest] instincts or whims. Subsequently, however, all such limitations were discarded . . .; a total liberation occurred from the moral heritage of Christian centuries, with their great reserves of mercy and sacrifice. Meanwhile, state systems were becoming increasingly materialistic. The West ended up by . . . enforcing human rights, sometimes even excessively, [while] man’s sense of responsibility to God and society grew dimmer and dimmer. In the past few decades, the legalistic, selfish aspect of Western*

*thinking has reached its apogee, and the world is now in a harsh spiritual crisis and a political impasse. All the glorified technological achievements of Progress, include the conquest of outer space, do not redeem the twentieth century's moral poverty, which no one could imagine even as late as in the nineteenth century.*

*[Man's task now is of] a spiritual nature . . . . No one on earth has any way left but —upward.*  
[Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "A World Split Apart," *National Review*, 7 July 1978, pp. 836–55]

One of the first gifts we receive in this world to help us "upward" is a family. It is obvious that marriage and family are designed to be two of the most basic opportunities in this world where these barriers of selfishness and self-centeredness and moral poverty may be overcome. In that discussion about "rights" to which I referred, President Hafen wrote:

*Not understanding the depth of the commitment made [in a] marriage and perhaps influenced by a seductive talk about the 'rights to self-fulfillment,' many in today's world who experience marital differences [simply] leave the scene of the conflict by either literally or figuratively divorcing themselves from the persons they view as the source of their frustrations.*

*Many of these in time will marry another person, only to find another set of conflicts and frustrations. Once again, they may leave the scene of conflict, somehow believing that they are entitled to live without the inconvenience of dealing with points of view different from their own. . . . Thus, they may never experience what it is to understand a situation from the perspective of another person or to subordinate their own needs to those of others. As a result, they deprive themselves of the experiences necessary to permit the discovery of the meaning of love.* [Hafen, "Individual Liberty," pp. 16, 17]

In the same vein, Lois and Paul Glasser—after reciting a litany of statistics on divorce,

one-parent families, illegitimacy, adultery, and parental violence—say wistfully:

*Is it possible that more and more young people, and some older ones also, enter a new marital relationship expecting instant gratification . . . for which no effort on their part is required? Can we hypothesize that society's emphasis on individualism is so great that marriage is not seen as a partnership but another place to compete for gratification of personal needs? Can it be suggested that family life is no longer seen as a cooperative venture among parents and children who have social responsibilities toward the group as a whole, but as a place where each grabs what he or she can get now without endangering future rewards?* [Lois and Paul Glasser, "Hedonism and the Family," *Journal of Marriage and Family Counseling*, October 1977, pp. 13–14]

I think that what is destroying the family, where it is being destroyed, is what destroys any society: it is "mirror, mirror on the wall." We wish to follow our own star and not be hampered by the glare of any other. Move the old folks to Florida and put the kids in a day-care center. That works, says Dr. Urie Bronfenbrenner, if you're young and rich. But if you happen to be a child, or sick, or lonely, or old—and all of us are at some time—then you need someone else. In fact, you will find that you need someone else even if you are young and rich. If that someone is off doing his own thing, then you are probably in trouble.

In my decade of the sixties a vast best seller was Harris's book, *I'm OK, You're OK*. (You know—"mirror, mirror on the wall.") But in yours—the seventies—Ringer has done him one better—in fact done him two better—by publishing *Looking Our for #1 and Winning through Intimidation*. Against such outrageous monuments to self-interest may I set one transcendent figure with its penetrating lesson for all mankind: He who, in Isaiah's language (listen carefully), "hath borne *our* griefs, and



carried *our* sorrows, . . . was wounded for *our* transgressions [and] bruised for *our* iniquities” (Isaiah 53:24–25). Of the innumerable accounts from his own life and teachings—and let your mind consider how often Christ taught the love of God and neighbor, those elements on which all the law and the prophets, and indeed the gospel of Jesus Christ, hang—let me recount in many of His own words what one writer has called the “Doctrine of the Cross” (see A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve*, [1894; reprint ed., Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1974], pp. 281–91). It is the scriptural answer to “looking out for number one.”

Jesus had for the third time explicitly announced his approaching crucifixion, indicating that his death would take place in connection with the very visit to Jerusalem which he and his disciples were now making. Luke notes, however, that the disciples “understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken” (Luke 18:34). They were obviously thinking of other matters. Their minds were possessed by some dreams and expectations of that time when “the kingdom of God should immediately appear” (Luke 19:11).

In the light of Jesus’ discourses on the coming of the Son of Man, undoubtedly all the disciples were looking forward to their thrones, but James and John were for a moment seeking the most distinguished ones. Their mother, kneeling before the Savior, said urgently, “Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.” We cannot fault this mother in wishing such a noble station for her sons, except that she is asking the Lord himself to aid in matters of ambition and vanity, however worthy. What was asked could not be granted without Jesus being untrue to his own character and his habitual teachings on selfishness and humility.

Furthermore, hers seems to be a narrow view of the kingdom of God. It is a particularly unwholesome court, even in a secular world, where places of highest distinction can be obtained by solicitation and favor—by assertion and Ringer’s intimidation, if you will—rather than by invitation and merit.

This request apparently caused some bitterness, for it is recorded that “when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation against the two brethren.” We are, at first, a bit mystified by this scene. If James and John innocently thought that such a request would cause difficulty, they seem to be less wise than we might have assumed. If, on the other hand, they made the request without caring for the disaffection that might ensue, they would appear to be selfish as well as vain.

In fact, they were neither. The gentleness of Jesus’ reply suggests that these faithful disciples were not calculating or cruel. They were, along with the other ten, simply children in terms of gospel growth and education. Christ uttered not a word of direct rebuke, but dealt with them as a father might deal with a child who had made a request without thinking of the consequences. He implies no malice—only ignorance. “Ye know not,” he said to them quietly, “what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I [am about to drink] . . . ?”

There is more than compassion or correction in this question: there is instruction, concerning the true way of progress in the kingdom of God. Jesus taught His disciples that advancement in His kingdom went not by favor or political solicitation, but rather *via dolorosa*, by the way of the cross. The “palm-bearers in the celestial realms of glory” will be they who have passed through tribulation, and the princes of the kingdom will be those who have drunk most deeply of His cup of service and sacrifice. For those who refused to drink thereof—the selfish, the self-indulgent, the purely ambitious or vain—there will be lesser

places in the kingdom, places without honor on His right hand or His left.

The startling question put to those two apostles by Jesus did not take them by surprise. Promptly and firmly they replied, "We are able."

His response then: "Ye shall drink indeed of my cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with." (See Matthew 20:20–24.)

This was a strange favor, it seems to me, for the Lord to grant. He was not mockingly offering them the cup of His suffering rather than a throne in His kingdom, but he was obviously very serious. However perhaps even then James and John knew that the cup and the throne were inextricably linked and could not be given separately.

The elect of God usually do not look like the prosperous publisher of a magazine called *Self* or a book titled *Winning through Intimidation*. More often they will be toilers, pioneers in a sometimes unwelcome world, turning a wilderness of complex problems into a fruitful field with faith. They are the world's salt, its leaven, and its light, but they may get little thanks for that service. This does not, however, really matter to them because it is scripturally certain that those who ask only the favor—the self-fulfillment, if you will—of being companions with Christ in tribulation and service will be rewarded with the highest stations in the eternal kingdom. Perhaps there is no better argument in support of the doctrine of exaltation than W. W. Phelps's line from the hymn you all know: "Sacrifice brings forth the blessings of heaven" (*Hymns*, no. 147). If crosses would let us alone, I suppose we would let them alone. We usually do not seek out the bitter cup and the bloody baptism, but sometimes they seek us. God does draft men into the warfare of this world; and if any come to genuine faith and conviction as a result of it, as many an impressed soldier has done, it will be a faith and conviction which at least in the first flames of battle, he did not particularly covet.

The single greatest feature in the lesson which Jesus gave His disciples here is the contrast between His kingdom and the other kingdoms of this earth. Both the way of acquiring position and the means of exerting authority were dramatically different. His message to them was that earthly kingdoms were then being ruled by a class of people who possessed hereditary rank, or by those who sought favors from them. The governing class were those whose birthright was to rule, and whose boast it was never to have been in a servile position. In His kingdom, on the other hand, a man could only become great—a ruler, if you will—by first being the servant to those over whom he is to bear rule. In the divine commonwealth, only they rule who account it a privilege to serve.

Having explained by contrast the great principles of the spiritual kingdom over those of mortal men, Jesus next enforced the doctrine by a reference to His one example. "Whosoever will be chief among you," He said to the Twelve, "let him be your servant:" and then He added: "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:27–28.)

These words were spoken by Jesus as one who claimed to be a king, and who was indeed ordained in the very councils of heaven to be the first in a great and mighty kingdom. So the Lord is setting himself forth here not merely as an example of humility, but as one who must illustrate for us all that the way to power in the spiritual world is through service, not intimidation; it is loss of self, not obsession with self, that brings those otherwise mystical icons—meaning and fulfillment and happiness. The truth of the matter is that He would one day be ministered to by legions—yes, worlds—of willing, devoted people, acknowledging Him as their Lord and King. Every knee would someday bow and every tongue confess. The point on which He wishes to fix the attention of his disciples here, however, is the peculiar

way in which He must work to obtain that crown. In effect he says:

“I am a King, and I expect one day to claim my kingdom; James and John are not mistaken in that respect. But I will obtain my kingdom differently from the way secular princes get theirs. They get their thrones by succession or intimidation or selfishness; I will get mine by personal merit alone. They secure their kingdom by right of birth or bombast; I hope to secure mine by the right of service. They inherit their subjects, but I will need to buy mine, with the payment of my body and my blood.”

*. . . Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant:*

*Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.*

With that one thought I close. Please, please, do not misunderstand my message this morning. Surely you know that I am not speaking against self-improvement. I am certainly not speaking against self-worth. Those are precisely the things of which I am speaking. I simply believe that real improvement and worth and fulfillment are demonstrated to us in the life of the Master and not at the Esalen Institute.

Above all, I have not wanted to sound like a pickle-sucker. It was H. L. Mencken who defined a Puritan as one who had the uneasy, insatiable, gnawing fear that someone somewhere was

having a good time. I hope you know me better than that. I love you very much and I wish for you the profoundest kind of joy and fulfillment in this world.

It is just that I believe the source—the source—of meaning and fulfillment and joy in our lives is not egocentric—it does not originate in us, but lies elsewhere. We then tap that source and cause it to flow to us when we reach out and reach up. To quote President Kimball and to conclude:

*I have learned that . . . when we are engaged in the service of our fellowmen, not only do our deeds assist them, but we put our own problems in a fresher perspective . . . . In the midst of the miracle of serving, there is the promise of Jesus, that by losing ourselves we find ourselves.*

*Not only do we “find” ourselves in terms of acknowledging guidance in our lives, but the more we serve our fellowmen in appropriate ways, the more substance there is to our souls . . . . Indeed, it is easier to “find” ourselves because there is so much more of us to find. [Spencer W. Kimball, *Ensign*, December 1974, p. 2]*

George Washington and Abraham Lincoln and Pat and Jeff Holland—and all the prophets of God—ask for you a rich life, sacred liberty, and the successful pursuit of happiness—this year, this decade, and all your life. And as you seek those inalienable rights, may we ask you also to pay heed to your enduring sense of obligation. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.