

On the Lord's Errand

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My remarks this morning will be a little different from those I have given in years past. Each fall in this setting I have given a report on several aspects of our university work or discussed the ongoing cycle of our administrative review or explained the allocation of resources or on and on and on. And usually I have gone on and on and on.

My mood and my feelings lie in another direction this morning, so I ask your indulgence if I just “chat” with you for a while about matters that in some cases you yourselves have suggested. For the first time, a reasonable portion of my remarks will come from your pen rather than from mine. I have chosen to make no reports today nor to discuss any of the substantial accomplishments or programs or areas of improvement that we are pursuing. I do, however, commend you for your devoted service and for the significant strides being made. It is an absolutely thrilling time to be at BYU, and I hope some of that joy marks every single day of the year that lies before us—certainly it is a joy for me to anticipate that year in your company. I love you all very much and am so thankful for your presence here, this morning and always. I am stunned at the size and significance of the turnout every year. That, perhaps more than anything else, is the most humbling and most emotional ingredient in this weighty responsibility that I feel every fall. I pray for

the ability to adequately represent you, not only in these remarks, but for as long as I am asked to serve in my present capacity.

Our theme for this year's conference is taken from section 64 of the Doctrine and Covenants, verse 29:

Wherefore, as ye are agents, ye are on the Lord's errand; and whatever ye do according to the will of the Lord is the Lord's business.

I believe it is most significant and very instructive that the first recorded words attributed to the Son of God in his mortality are “Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?” (Luke 2:49). We probably would do well to pause here, perhaps conclude, and let that single line serve as a message for the morning. That question (another of “the Lord's questions,” as Professor Dennis Rasmussen's recent book might suggest) surely must speak volumes about who he is, what lies ahead of him, and the ultimate measurement of his mission. And it just as surely must speak something of us, who have been invited to be about the same business.

Jeffrey R. Holland was president of Brigham Young University when this Annual University Conference was given on 27 August 1985.

The idea of the errand, the journey, the odyssey, the assignment, is of course a most significant one in the literary legacy that is ours at a university.

*. . . all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
[Alfred, Lord Tennyson; *Ulysses*]*

Whether it is slightly more pagan account of Ulysses on his travels or the more traditionally Christian pursuit of the Holy Grail, we have a rich heritage of making the quest, of shouldering the task and seeking the prize, of pursuing the blessings that await the faithful and persistent.

One of the seminal twentieth-century figures in my field of American studies was Professor Perry Miller, who seemed to capture the quintessential ingredient in the Puritan mission to the New World in his magnificent lecture cum essay given thirty years ago entitled "Errand into the Wilderness." In our own experience we have been anxious to see the pioneer migration westward as an extension of that "errand" (and that "wilderness"), believing very much that in coming to these valleys we were doing so with purpose, that our dreams would be realized, that God's promises to this dispensation would be fulfilled. And we still believe so.

I suppose, then, in the selection of our theme this year I have wanted to suggest that BYU could and rightfully should continue to ask questions and set goals and assess progress regarding that errand *today*, and do so believing that the start of another school year, at least at this school, lets us be about one significant part of the Lord's business in this last quarter of the twentieth century.

After five years (this is the start of our sixth together) of wrestling and struggling and praying over ways—and the ability—to convey

to the university family the highest and best purposes of our service together, at least as I could be allowed to glimpse them, I thought to expand both the blessings and the responsibility of such an opportunity regarding the errand we are on at BYU. In an effort to do that I invited *you* to write about the unique purposes and the possibilities of Brigham Young University.

Part of my intention in doing that was to broaden my own vision by reading of yours and, if at all possible, to see where those shared hopes and expectations come together for many of us—ideally all of us—giving even more community, and indeed more urgency, to the magnificent opportunity I believe is ours. Russ Osguthorpe began his essay, a fictitious exchange of letters between two LDS faculty members, one at BYU and one elsewhere, with this preface: "Personal dreams are windows into the soul. Dreams held in common are windows into the future." I like that, Russ, and it is dreams held in common that give unusual strength to our future at BYU.

I am greatly heartened that there is a wonderful sense of community here—in the best and most literal sense of that word—which shares not only Russ Osguthorpe's idea of collective hopes but also draws on something higher in that Latin root, something akin to communion. I have, of course, *always* felt that, and perhaps you have too. For many, that is why you have chosen to be here when money and professional advantage might well have drawn you to so many other places. Certainly these essays have reminded me of how very much we value here and, in spite of our many challenges, how sweet our association here really is.

Lael Woodbury wrote of his return to BYU after having once thought he couldn't get far enough away. In one of his paragraphs he said:

It is fashionable [with] some . . . to lament the level of student and faculty curiosity, to character-

ize our conversation as trivial, implying, of course, that the ambience is more intellectual [elsewhere]. That may be so. But I find here a peerless student habit of discussing—and feeling free to discuss—the question in class that [other] students discuss only among themselves, if at all. It is startling, to be sure, to have a student ask whether I think God agrees with Aristotle, and whether Oedipus is a good man. And my opinion changes from year to year, I confess, perhaps because I change. But I'm delighted with the question, and I laud students who use that standard for discussion in my class.

Jay Fox wrote a delightful, at times even rollicking, essay about his experience at a Princeton seminar where thirty academic colleagues from around the country were to discuss what values the humanities should espouse. Very early in the two-week period Jay sensed the difficulty and disagreement that was to pervade and ultimately doom their discussions in spite of the urging of leaders like Harvey Cox who pled that college teachers be “moral examples to their students,” leading to a state wherein all educated people were *citizens* in the best Greek sense of the word, where ideals were espoused, and every member of the community assumed responsibility for their protection and perpetuation.

But the haggling over what was worth protecting and perpetuating was constant and finally fatal. In the end *nothing* seemed to qualify. Jay then writes:

As difficult a task as it might be to translate the skillful teaching of moral reasoning into a humanities curriculum, I was reminded of the significant position of strength that we at BYU bring to the task: at least we have a fundamental belief in what is and what is not moral. We start from a point of reference, from a standard that transcends merely human reasoning. As much as we take that simple position for granted at BYU, it became apparent [for those] two weeks at Princeton that that position is a luxury . . . not enjoyed by most of the other

members of the workshop. My observation is that it is more difficult to foster faith than reason. The universities of the world today abound with skillful people of reason, but where are the people of faith? . . . The group felt, as it were, “between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born,” a situation Matthew Arnold accurately described in the nineteenth century as he saw the decline of a world of traditional values with no empowered replacement evident.

The experience ended after two weeks with a cocktail party that went on and on. Jay, the only teetotaler present, played out the humanities role to the end as the sole sober chauffeur carting the other philosophers home—somehow reaffirming for that group A.E. Houseman's early opinion that “Malt does more than Molton can/To justify God's ways to man” (*A Shropshire Lad*, no. 62).

Reed Blake made an impassioned case for the school of social work. Lee Farnsworth wrote movingly of “Education as a Sacred Activity.” Jim Allen shared the struggle of reinforcing a student's testimony with dependable pillars of faith. Wilfried Decoo, for whom English is not a first language, made a marvelous case for the unique international perspective that we probably take for granted at BYU, but which may not be reproducible to any comparable degree on any other campus in the world.

Ron Malan wrote a fine essay on some “correct principles” by which we might “govern ourselves” at a place like BYU. William Andersen prodded the administration a little in his essay “Faith and Education.” Glade Hunsaker wrote in that lilting prose of his a truly fine essay entitled “At BYU: A Secular Profession or a Sacred Professing”—an essay, by the way, which significantly influenced my decision regarding the coming year's topic. His departmental colleague Doug Thayer wrote an equally important piece, and so did Gerald Haslam and Gary Bryner.

Ron Simpson wrote a rather stunning appeal for better music and entertainment to offset the pervasively negative impact of so much that our high school and college-age students face at the present time. Just because it is such a skillful first page, let me share with you Ron's first few paragraphs.

When I go over the story of Joseph West, my grandfather, courting his reluctant Arizona beauty, Lois Hunt, my grandmother, I always smile as I visualize him bowing, helping her to her feet, and dancing with her to the strains of "Put Your Little Foot Right Out."

And when I remember the story of Venice West, my mother, telling Jerry Simpson, my father, that he'd been something of a dummy assuming she was in love with that other guy—and as I visualize the summer night and the Los Angeles front porch where it is supposed to have happened—much as I try, I really can't play the scene without the ukulele, and without my mother's voice singing, "Gimme a Little Kiss, Will Ya, Huh?"

Of if I should remember Kristen, my eighteen-year-old daughter, rebounding last year from the heartbreaking end of her first infatuation, the image wouldn't be complete without the top-forty hit that helped her sing her way through it: "Ain't Nothin' Gonna Break My Stride," and I feel so glad we've had these little popular songs that mirror our emotions, chronicle the events of our lives, and express our feelings when words alone are inadequate.

Then the smile disappears and he tackles the problem: "How sad it is that the entertainment industry has allowed its product to go so wrong so often."

Rick Brimhall gave a moving review of the work of the Benson Institute and Reed Bradford wrote so lovingly of his life and his faith in a remarkable career at BYU. Because I have loved him for so long and because of some of the present circumstances, I guess Brother Bradford's essay was most poignant of all for me.

Perhaps no essays should have been mentioned in this way because all were so deserving of citation and of reward. I note these very few—thinking even now of others I should mention—just to share something of the rich experience this was for me, and for what it does say about our "dreams held in common" here. From Sister Helen Andreason's one-page impression of an early morning moment in the empty Harris Fine Arts Center to Bruce Brown and Warren Icke's twenty-one-page piece, all were provocative and appreciated, whatever the length and whatever the lesson. Let me share just a few more excerpts for a collective view of the Lord's errand here.

The first is from Robert Goodall, who speaks today, at least in part, for an entire roomful of you who serve so quietly and so well as supportive staff to the classroom and laboratory experience. As I noted earlier, Robert is assistant supervisor of custodial services at BYU.

He writes:

Our faculty should be commended [for its excellence. Surely there can't be a finer academic group anywhere.] But the challenge [to excel] was not given to the faculty alone. Even those of us who are not educators per se have accepted the challenge to strive for that admirable goal. They are the custodians, grounds keepers, electricians, carpenters, painters, plumbers, and auto mechanics. They work in the heating plant. They are the architects, accountants, upholsterers, and so many others who often contribute above and beyond the call of duty. These are physical contributions, seen immediately and evident to all. As visitors arrive on our campus, they often comment on the beauty of the grounds. As they view the building, they marvel at the architecture, and time later time they refer to the cleanliness of the building. The care given these surroundings makes these buildings temples of learning, [often] named for apostles and prophets of the Lord. Here, of all places on earth, we should be able to observe how the world might be if excellence were its goal. . . .

[I was taught the gospel by two missionaries and was baptized into] *a small branch of the Church in northwestern Ontario. . . .*

I dreamed of a faraway Zion, a place In the West called Utah, and I hoped that one day I would see that place so important to me as a new convert. In the Church magazines I would read of a university owned and operated by our church, a university dedicated to the same gospel ideals that those missionaries taught. How would it be to live in such a place? Pictures of templed hills, chapels, universities, and well-kept homes flashed unceasingly before my eyes. But mine was to be a much different experience, for we met in the modest surroundings of a house [which served as our] chapel. . . . There was no beautiful architecture making the building conducive to the attitude of worship and [there was] no steeple drawing the gaze heavenward. . . .

What I would have given at that time to have met in a lovely edifice built with worship in mind, where my non-LDS friends could have come and been awed by the Church I belonged to. As years go by I find myself embarrassed by [those] presumptuous desires [then] for something far better than that which we had.

[Now, looking back on that experience, I realize that] *though our church house may have been small and plain, I cherish the fond memories of that sacred spot. . . . I reflect on the care we gave to the grounds, the edging, the mowing, the planting of flowers. Inside we dusted and cleaned. The smell of furniture polish floated freely on the cool spring breeze making it all so clean and fresh. The windows sparkled like crystal in the sunlight. No temple custodians could care for their grounds with any more affection than did we. . . .*

. . . In retrospect . . . I am now grateful for having had that experience which allows me to appreciate even more profoundly the buildings on this campus and give them that special treatment I could only dream of giving as a youth.

In this important hour opening a new school year, let me seize on Robert's introduction to thank all of you, including those in plain and

unheralded positions, who provide the support for the massive educational mechanism that the modern BYU has become. We love every one of you and could not succeed without you.

And because Robert spoke of his own dreams, may I add two more excerpts noting other visions of our task.

First this from Bruce Brown and Warren Icke:

In December of 1910, some BYU students told George Brimhall, the third president of the university, that they "had quit praying because they had learned in school that there was no real God to hear them." Soon after that President Brimhall dreamed a dream of "snow-white birds circling among the clouds." He watched as the birds were attracted to baited hooks, which were attached to a large machine being operated by some BYU professors. As the birds were pulled to the ground, they were transformed into grieving students garbed in ancient Greek costumes. He went to the students and asked them why they were so unhappy. They told him they were sad because they would never fly again.

Then after discussing the unique challenge of that moment in BYU's history, the writers say:

There is a world of difference between apprenticeship and discipleship. We don't need academic discipleship. We are already disciples of Jesus and believers in his words through the prophets. Personality cults and academic discipleship are always a constriction of the scholarly community. The problem with the crusade of the Petersons and the Chamberlins was not that it taught the students too much but . . . too little. It focused on only one of many possible approaches to the "science and religion" question, and with an air of authority and finality that won many over. But there was little independence of thought. . . .

Truly, a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. There is much less chance of this kind of error in a

community of scholars that ranges broadly in the world of ideas with access to a diversity of sources. Making a broader sweep in our research and reading allows us to extend the dialogue of our academic community to the world's greatest minds, beyond the barriers of continents and centuries. . . .

[At the same time] one must be cautious in advocating excellence. Zion will not be built by the drive to surpass one's neighbor. This kind of excellence has a secular ring to it. It implies interpersonal comparison, achievement primarily in relative terms by outperforming some implied group of others. If one is seeking knowledge or scholarly excellence for the purpose of gaining power, wealth, or recognition, that work will fail. The laborer in Zion shall labor for Zion. If he labors for money he shall perish. And laboring for scholarly recognition is no more noble. "Keep your riches," said Brigham Young, "and with them I promise you leanness of soul, darkness of mind, narrow and contracted hearts." Likewise a dullness of spirit comes upon one who has begun to learn the mysteries of the kingdom and then turns away to devote his whole soul to academic achievement. The search for truth is much bigger than that.

And this from Gene England. After comparing Brigham Young's thought with the lamentable circumstances facing much of higher education today, he writes:

To succumb, at BYU, to our critics' insistence that we "grow up," come into the "wonderful" twentieth century, and become a "real university" is to sell our birthright for a mess of national rankings—and for a depreciated one-sided view of the possibilities of education. One commentator recently asserted, "BYU can claim to be a university only if it acts as one and follows a basic rule of inquiry: no truth claim is so absolutely final and certain that it cannot be exposed to the process of rational inquiry." [Despite the] trouble [some leaders at BYU and the Church have had and still might have] with that assertion . . . , I am convinced Brigham Young would accept it with alacrity. [But] he would also insist on the other side

of the paradox [as] something like this: "No process of rational inquiry is so certain or complete that it cannot be exposed to the challenge of absolute truth claims and processes of verification given from God." Despite the opposition of modern secularist educators, in and out of the Church, Brigham Young would insist that a complete higher education worthy of that name—and of the consecrated tithing resources of the Church—must try, however difficult it will always be, to maintain both values. . . .

Brigham Young, I believe, cares about this institution and continues to watch over it—patient, perhaps amused by our struggles, hoping we can slowly come up to his vision. Most of you know that despite his close supervision of the building of the St. George Temple, he was not its designer and in fact disliked acutely and vocally the small original tower, which offended his carpenter's eye as badly out of proportion. He did not embarrass the local craftsmen by directly insisting on a change, but on August 16, 1878, about one year after Brigham's death, his voice seems to have been heard. The tower was struck by lightning and, though the temple was miraculously preserved from burning, the tower was badly damaged—and was replaced by a much larger one. [A few] of you may know that also in 1878, not long after Brigham's death, he visited Karl Maeser in a dream and took him on a tour of a large building, with many rooms and a spacious assembly hall. Maeser, on waking, drew the floor plans for the building in some notes about the dream and put them away until six years later when the old Academy building was destroyed by fire. He remembered the notes and used the plans to design the new Academy Building that became the center of BYU for fifty years. Brother Brigham could still be our best architect.

Perhaps the single most pervasive scriptural theme identified and quoted and finally exalted by the Puritan fathers coming to the New World was Matthew 5:14–15:

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid.

Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.

Using the latter of these two verses, William Bradford said in that still remarkable piece of Puritan writing *Of Plymouth Plantation*:

Thus out of small beginnings greater things have been produced by His hand that made all things of nothing, and gives being to all things that are; and, as one small candle may light a thousand, so the light here kindled hath shone unto many, yea in some sort to our whole nation. [Chapter 21]

Governor John Winthrop, who followed Bradford's 1620 group to Massachusetts Bay just ten years later, said from on board the *Arbella* as they searched for a glimpse of the New England coastline and anticipated the errand they were now to begin:

For we must consider that we shall be a city [set] upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us, so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a byword through the world. [A Model of Christian Charity (1630), a sermon delivered on board the *Arbella*]

Now Brother H. Smith Broadbent did not know that I was going to refer to people like Bradford and Winthrop and their preoccupation with Matthew 5:14, but just the same he conveniently entitled his essay "A City Set Upon a Hill."

There is something special in those near the culmination of their careers passing the torch on to the next generation. That, too, had meaning for the Puritans with their "Errand into the wilderness." Would the next generation be serious enough about the Lord's business? That one plaintive question shaped the nature and

course of that first century on New England soil more than any other.

Writes Professor Miller:

[The election sermons of the seventeenth century in New England] *show by their title-pages alone—and, . . . infinitely more by their contents—a deep disquietude. They are troubled utterances, worried, fearful. Something has gone wrong. As in 1662 Wigglesworth already was saying in verse, God has a controversy with New England; He has cause to be angry and to punish it because of its innumerable defections. They say, unanimously, that New England was sent on an errand, and that it has failed.*

To our ears these lamentations of the second generation sound strange indeed. We think of the founders as heroic men—of the towering stature of Bradford, Winthrop, and Thomas Hooker—who braved the ocean and the wilderness, who conquered both, and left to their children a goodly heritage. Why then this whimpering?

[Perhaps it was because] *the second and third generations suffered a failure of nerve; they weren't the men their fathers had been, and they knew it. Where the founders could range over the vast body of theology and ecclesiastical polity and produce profound works like the treatises of John Cotton or . . . [Thomas] Hooker, or . . . Nathaniel Ward . . . [or] Roger Williams [while] all [their] children could do was tell each other that they were on probation and that their chances of making good did not seem very promising.* [Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*, an address (Williamsburg: The William and Mary Quarterly for The Associates of the John Carter Brown Library, 1952), pp. 3–4]

I choose to see Smith Broadbent's and Reed Bradford's and Bill Dyer's and a half-dozen other essays by our most senior colleagues as a call to the next generation—"our" generation so to speak—asking us not to lose our nerve. We need to be the men and women these associates (and our LDS ancestors) were.

In that spirit Brother Broadbent begins with a personal experience:

My wife and I first met Trudi Hoffman [(not her real name) when I was] spending six months as a guest professor in a German university where she was then working as a secretary. Trudi is a very bright, well-educated, widely traveled, . . . German woman of approximately our own age. She was proud to have been personally, albeit adventitiously, recognized by Hitler in her youth as a model German fraulein, and she was more than a little chauvinistic. Nevertheless, she had married a Jewish-American diplomat and had lived for ten years in the U.S. during her early married years. Life for Trudi had provided its full share of problems: family tragedies during and immediately following World War II; her marriage and divorce; her only child, a son, ungrateful and abusing drugs; and exploitative male friends. Thus she acquired a heavy, protective patina of cynicism and worldliness. A less likely candidate to be touched by the Spirit could scarcely be imagined.

She came to visit us following several weeks spent with her son in San Francisco and with friends there and in Berkeley and Oregon. She didn't come to visit because of any interest in the Church, although she knew, of course, that we were LDS. She came because she had the typical German love for nature. She knew we lived in the relatively sparsely populated and unspoiled Central Rockies, and we loved nature too. She was amiable, naturally, but she kept her guard up letting us know diplomatically, but firmly, that she really wasn't interested in our culture or religion. She maintained the barrier essentially intact through nearly a week in spite of attending Sunday services, which puzzled her, and enjoying a Labor Day family reunion with us, complete with a multitude of small grandchildren under foot, which offended her convictions about strict population control, although she was solicitous of the tiny ones, and I think she was secretly envious of our large family.

But all the barriers came tumbling down, precipitously—the worldliness and the cynicism—after

her tour of our campus in the company of my wife and under the guidance of the Hosting Center. . . . During lunch [with my wife and me] she decided she wanted to repeat the tour, this time alone. Perhaps she doubted her initial impressions or feared the experience was just a fluke. . . . After all, she wasn't born yesterday. She had been on many college campuses for extended periods in many places. But the second tour confirmed the first. She was truly impressed, almost against her will. There were several factors: the personable young man at the Hosting Center who happened to speak excellent German, the beautiful campus, the buildings ([she] is something of an authority on architecture and once worked as secretary for Ludwig Mies van der Rohe), the retrospective slideshow, but the overwhelmingly dominant fact was the transparent wholesomeness, love, and goodwill, truly the light of Christ shining through the countenances of the people she encountered. It permeates our environment and conditions every human relationship in work, play, and worship. However imperfect, to a considerable degree it does model those "Zion" societies celebrated in the scriptures, old and new. . . .

It made me half ashamed to realize that I had become so accustomed to it that I had allowed myself to become a little cynical, insensitive, and unappreciative, and that it took a person from "another world" to refocus my attention. It made me proud once more to be a part of BYU. . . .

I first became overtly aware of the profound influence of BYU in my life as a young high school student in our small, isolated, predominantly Latter-day Saint community in northern Arizona. Most of our graduates attended Arizona colleges, and indeed, as a result of winning a statewide public speaking contest, I was offered a scholarship to the University of Arizona, no mean inducement to an impoverished farm boy with few other prospects. Scholarships were very scarce in those days. Some of my teachers, and even my bishop, who was one of them and a University of Utah graduate, incidentally, counseled me to go to the University of Arizona. But the teachers who had the greatest influence upon me were BYU graduates,

[they were] my science and my agricultural teachers, who had been students, respectively, of two of BYU's greatest teachers, Joseph K. Nicholes and Thomas L. Martin. My consuming passion since the seventh grade had been the study of chemistry, and they arranged for me to acquire a full-year's credit in college chemistry at BYU by examination and demonstration before I ever left home. Thus it transpired in due time that I arrived in the back of a pickup truck at the steps of the old Education Building, green and scared, nearly penniless, but eager to begin my college education. I endured the trauma of poverty and homesickness, but I have never regretted my decision to attend BYU.

When I left with my baccalaureate degree to begin graduate study elsewhere, it was with no thought that I might ever return. Consequently, it was a considerable surprise when on the eve of receiving my Ph.D. degree I received a telephone call offering me a position on the BYU faculty. I had already accepted an appointment as a Milton Fund post-doctoral research fellow at Harvard University, and I had several very tempting offers designed to take effect at the end of that appointment, one to the faculty of my graduate alma mater. All of them by any standard of the world offered far more than BYU—more than twice as much. I was ambitious and prospects for professional achievement at BYU seemed dim; yet we knew fellow Mormons on faculties of eastern universities who had lost their entire families from the Church, partly at least, we felt, due to lack of sufficient LDS influence in their lives. Other factors were involved, of course, but one could not lightly dismiss any major positive influence on a growing family. My wife was supportive, as she has always been, of whatever major decision of this kind I should make. I was torn. My graduate professors regarded returning to BYU as professional suicide. On the other hand, it seemed to me, none of my undergraduate college, high school, and public school mentors, to whom I owed so much, had chosen their place of employment primarily for personal advantage. In retrospect, I think, I never wavered in my emotional commitment to BYU, but I could not escape the nagging feeling that rational

analysis dictated otherwise. In any event we did finally choose to return to share the fortunes of a BYU just emerging from the rigors of the World War II years, and here we have remained to make a career and to rear our family in spite of renewed offers to go elsewhere. We will be eternally grateful for having made those decisions. . . .

. . . Let it be stressed that inasmuch as our world is becoming increasingly hostile to religious values, there needs to be a place where these values can be legally taught and supported in a "respectable" academic environment as well as in church and religion classes. BYU is, and should become even more than it now is, such a place. We need never be ashamed of truth, however unpopular. Truth is academically respectable because it will endure the most searching and academic analysis. Thereby the increasingly fatuous, but nevertheless widely accepted, sophistries of the world may be combatted. Now, I fear, "the world is too much with us; late and soon." Focusing too heavily on worldly values "we lay waste our powers." . . .

[And we have so very much in common here.] Obviously, one would not expect [an athletic] coach to explain the intricacies of the Hundred Years' War to a player, but he might appropriately suggest that the study of history has much to teach about winning strategies and life in general besides being just plain interesting. Moreover, I suggest that the player, after overcoming his initial astonishment, would be more likely to believe his coach's assessment of the value of history than that of his history professor. The example and the testimony of either the coach or the history professor about the value of sacrament meeting attendance is at least as likely to influence the player as is that of his bishop. Such suggestions could be easily multiplied far beyond the possible scope of this essay. Suffice it to say that ample possibilities exist for those in every realm of the university to augment and sustain the mission of those in every other realm and yet remain within the province of one's own knowledge and experience. Such effort will naturally require a considerable measure of humility. One's own realm is obviously not necessarily more important than any

other, even if he. . . did choose it. It may not even be as important—not all realms are inherently equally important—but the esteem of all is vital so long as they are part of the officially ordained university program. None can say to the other, “I have no need of thee.” God loves a humble heart. It will be a prerequisite to receiving the needed inspiration.

God grant that we receive it.

With just this brief sample of wonderful expressions from so many of you, may I close with just a personal thought or two of my own. The last forty-five days have been as difficult and demanding—hour in, hour out; day in, day out—as any comparable period I’ve ever known in my life. Some problems, inevitably involving time and counsel with our trustees in Salt Lake City, have consumed all day, every day, and yet the mail still had to be answered, the telephone calls returned, that portion of the university’s work done that only I could do. Occasionally the tasks through the night seemed almost indistinguishable from those through the day. Through a couple of the worst of those periods I slept where I could, when I could, and looked like it. The thought of school starting was about as appealing as joining the law faculty and the chemistry department in their “fun run” and cholesterol chase. I wondered where the summer had gone, as many of you have, and worried that I would not be ready.

But then Dennis Rowley, our wonderfully able colleague in the Harold B. Lee Library, sent me a letter that Franklin S. Harris had written to the faculty as they started school in much this same kind of setting fifty-six years ago. It suggested that other presidents had chaotic schedules too, and surely they had. President Harris was writing from his boat, “On the Amur River between Siberia and Manchuria,” under the date of August 25, 1929.

To the Faculty of BYU,

Dear Colleagues:

I am reminded that yesterday the Alpine Summer school closed and that the autumn quarter will be opening by the time a letter can arrive there. Since I cannot be present at the opening of school I am sending you this word of greeting. I should like very much to write each of you an individual letter in regard to your work and to tell you of some of the interesting things regarding this far-away land, but the pressure to finish our work here before the time we must leave starts the day at 5 and continues it well into the night. This leaves me very little time for correspondence, but it is Sunday evening and I am going to take time off to what I want to do—visit with you.

As I look around the faculty room in my imagination I see you all in your places. Some who have been way have returned to make us happy by their presence. A few will be away this year, but even these I see in their places. What a wonderful group it is! How fortunate I feel myself in the opportunity to associate with you! How happy I shall be to return to your midst.

I wish that we might have a little gathering of the faculty members and our families here on the boat this evening. The night is perfect, the moon is just rising from behind the Hingan mountains out across the Amur basin. . . .

. . . Day before yesterday we finished a 7 days trip on horseback through [those] mountains most of the way through little known areas without trails. . . . Kiefer developed a good deal of skill in helping his horse out of sphagnum swamps and over fallen timber. I on the other hand, learned to talk Dutch to Cossack guides who would put their instinct for direction against the compass. In the end I still believe in instruments of precision as against guessing. . . .

Before the mountain trip we spent three weeks exploring along the railroad using the private car of the president of the railroad as our base. . . . We have spent but one day in an automobile—a Dodge truck—and it had to be pulled all the way by a track-laying tractor. This is the rainy season here

and there are no hard roads, hence automobiles do not function. . . .

Both Kiefer and I shall be glad to turn our faces westward in less than a month. We already have about 20,000 miles of travel to our credit on this trip and we must travel more than halfway around the world to get home. . . .

We keep in the best of health in spite of mosquitoes, gnats, and other pests. . . . Affectionately your colleague,
F.S. Harris. [Letter, BYU Archives]

I took a wonderfully strange consolation in that letter, realizing that I have had to endure neither Cossack guides nor Dodge trucks in my recent assignments. I have felt the stress of unexpected travel, faced some serious questions at home and abroad, and dealt with BYU problems—some of which you would know much about and other problems about which you probably know nothing. But I am free of “mosquitoes, gnats, and other pests.” And thanks to you, school keeps on with or without much encouragement or even the personal presence of the university president. But, like President Harris, I say, “What a wonderful group it is! How fortunate I feel myself in the opportunity of associating with you! How happy I shall be to return to your midst.”

With that democratizing reminder from President Harris may I try to share a personal feeling stemming from these recent and highly publicized events in Jerusalem. There is no way I can adequately share with you the details or drama of such a confrontational and challenging experience. I’ve even tried to write something of it in a journal (a practice about which I am sinfully haphazard) but I find myself unable to write what was, for the most part, an ineffable range of emotions and an undeniable sequence of revelations. May you today and posterity hereafter forgive those kinds of omissions in the BYU history of the 1980s.

Near the end of one of those periods to which I have just referred in which most of

the working day was spent in Salt Lake City receiving very sensitive incoming information and trying to communicate equally sensitive forms of response, I returned home at about eight o’clock, as I recall, to have a bite of food with my wife who had (as always) fed the children and then waited to eat with me. We talked briefly of my now inevitable trip to Jerusalem within just a few days at best, and then I opened my briefcase to yet another day’s paperwork demanding attention. I was somewhere in the midst of that at about 10:00 p.m. when a call came from Church headquarters asking if I could verify that David Galbraith, resident director of our Jerusalem Study Abroad Program, had in fact been shot and killed. That kind of inquiry would, of course, be stunning under any circumstances, but given the sequence of experiences and kinds of concerns we had been facing, I felt as if I had been hit fully in the face with a pickax. I muttered something about having absolutely no knowledge of any such thing and asked where or how it had been reported. I was told that two international journalists had made direct inquiry to the Church Office Building, one call originating from Paris and the other one in New York. My first thought was that those journalists were far enough away from Jerusalem and from each other to indicate that something was on the wire services, news not likely to be sent without some basis in fact. My heart simply sank to the depths of my soul. I said I would find out everything I could and would try to get information back to President Hinckley and the two other trustees who had been informed.

And so I began a terribly urgent series of phone calls, praying throughout that this early information was in error. What I did not realize, or at least had not been conscious enough to be concerned about, was that my youngest son, on a summer’s night, was still awake and playing nearby as I took that call and pursued its question.

From time to time it has not been an easy thing for our children to lead the presidential lifestyle I have thrust upon them. I suppose for all the blessings that go with that—and there have been a host of them, far outweighing any occasional disadvantages—some of these concerns have nevertheless taken a bit of a toll on this eleven-year-old. He has never, for example, forgotten the time early in my administration when my life was threatened on Homecoming Day, and the precautions that had to be taken to ride in a parade and move in a crowd and participate in a football game without concern. He is a bright child who watches the news and reads the papers and knows of the problems many children have faced, and often enough the children of conspicuous parents. It has, on some of those occasions, been hard for him to sleep alone, a burden for which I feel a terrible sense of responsibility. Now, without my being sensitive enough to have realized it would be so, the nightmare was starting for him again.

While I spent the next twenty or thirty minutes trying to locate David or anyone else in Jerusalem who could (we prayed) disavow this report, Duffy had been at my side and watched my face and sensed the concern in my voice. Slowly he had left the room, but it did not take his quick little mind long to think and finally to say that if David Galbraith had been shot and if I were to leave within hours to go there myself, they would surely be proud and planning to shoot the president of the place. In an explosion of tears and fright, he ran up the stairs to his room and fell sobbingly on his bed.

Pat went to attend to him while I stayed on the phone long enough to find out that all was indeed well and that somehow we had again been victims of a cruel and calculated hoax. I reported that to those who were concerned in Salt Lake City and then took counsel with my colleagues here about responding to the press. By this time it was nearly midnight, and somehow I could not bring my mind back to that stack of papers tumbling out of my briefcase.

I, too, headed upstairs, without the tears but thinking it wasn't a bad idea.

Duffy was long since asleep. Pat was, as always, waiting for me, and we prepared for bed in that rather sober silence couples know when sleep is the best solution and talk—even important talk—seems best postponed for a better time.

Before we knelt together in prayer as we've done for twenty-two years of marriage, I kept alive another tradition, exhausted as I felt, by opening the covers of the standards works to read a passage of scripture—any passage—which might suggest counsel and offer consolation through the dreams and deliverance of the night. I opened the scriptures at random and my eye was as instantly riveted to a single passage of scripture as I had ever experienced in my life. It was as if no other verse existed on the page and as if there were no other pages. I had only known section 25 of the Doctrine and Covenants as revelation to Joseph Smith's wife Emma, principally regarding the writing of a hymnal for the Church, but with a concentration as crisp as a heat-seeking missile I saw these words alone before me on an otherwise white page:

A revelation I give unto you concerning my will; . . . if thou art faithful and walk in the paths of virtue before me, I will preserve thy life, and thou shalt receive an inheritance in Zion. [D&C 25:2]

I knew in a flash of irrefutable revelation that this had been given not for my reassurance but for my son, and although quite literally the thought of harm to myself had never seriously crossed my mind, it had troubled me deeply that it had so severely affected this child. I shot out of the room, prayer still yet to be uttered, my wife bedazzled, and went straight to the side of my boy's bed. The faint purity of his youthful tears in my behalf were still on his cheeks and his pillow. Although I'm not sure he understood what I was doing (and for all

intents and purposes remained sound asleep through the whole conversation), I woke him up with the zeal of a new convert and read him the passage of scripture I've just read you. I told him the revelation had come for him and that little boys' prayers are often more readily heard than their dads', perhaps because they are more loyally and trustingly uttered. Then I rocked him in my arms and talked aloud to no one in particular about the faith of a child and the promises of God and "an inheritance in Zion." I might have read him of the inherent safety in these words: "Wherefore, as ye are agents, ye are on the Lord's errand; and whatever ye do according to the will of the Lord is the Lord's business" (D&C 64:29).

I'm conscious that being on the Lord's errand is not always an easy assignment, that being about his business involves sorrows as well as joys, discouragement, and pain, as well as eternal life. I'm aware that on the Lord's errand some in that train of prairie schooners

are, as President J. Reuben Clark said, of the "last wagon":

*Last [in part], because . . . father took a little longer to yolk his cattle and to gird himself for the day's labor; last, because his morning prayers took a few more minutes than the others spent,—he had so many blessings to thank the Lord for and some special blessings to ask the Lord to grant, blessings of health and strength, especially for his wife . . . and for the rest, and then the blessings for himself that his own courage would not fail, but most of all for the blessing of faith. [J. Reuben Clark, Jr., *To Them of the Last Wagon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1947), p. 11]*

To all of you who mean so much to me and to Brigham Young University, please know that I believe your prayers, your pleas, and your faithful efforts are recorded by the very angels of heaven and that there is peace at the end of our "errand into the wilderness."

