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Speeches

Out of the Best Faculty

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Out of the Best Faculty

NEAL A. MAXWELL

Thank you for this privilege, especially after enduring me last night. May I begin by expressing not only my personal gratitude for your present service, but also my additional appreciation for all the efforts expended by you earlier in your lives to prepare for you faculty service here. I share the confidence President Hinckley expressed some months ago, saying: “I am confident that never in the history of this institution has there been a faculty better qualified professionally nor one more loyal and dedicated to the standards of its sponsoring institution” (“Trust and Accountability” [13 October 1992], *BYU 1992–93 Devotional and Fireside Speeches* [Provo: Brigham Young University, 1993], p. 22).

One of your number made a presentation to the board of trustees at its recent August meeting. His presentation on his BYU duties and research was brief but powerful. Those present were visibly touched by the combination of world-class scholarship and world-class testimony. This episode illustrates the often not-fully-appreciated strength in this faculty.

There will always be a need for civility and trust throughout the large BYU family, harnessed as we are together. John Taylor observed,

*Many of us are tried and tempted, and we get harsh and hard feelings against one another. And it reminds me of your teams when going down hill with a heavy load. When the load begins to crowd on to the horses, you will frequently see one snap at his mate, and the other will prick up his ears and snap back again. And why? A little while before, perhaps, and they were playing with each other. Because the load crowds on them. Well, when the load begins to crowd, do not snap at your brethren, but let them feel that you are their friends, and pull together. [John Taylor, *Journal of Discourses* 21:214-15]*

Lead horses are especially snapped and nipped at, even though they are pulling more than their share of the load. Very few of the faculty need the several reminders to follow.

For instance, to remind of the linkage between the Church and this university is unnecessary for almost all. It is why most of

Neal A. Maxwell was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when this address was delivered at the Thursday second faculty general session of the BYU Annual University Conference on 26 August 1993.

you came here in the first place! To remind, as well, of the need for the enlivening of personal scholarship is unneeded by most. Likewise, to remind of how many other worthy projects could use the millions and millions of dollars of tithing that support BYU would be redundant for the truly appreciative, who make up nearly all of this audience. To remind of how precious the students are who come here and how deserving of both the time and example of the faculty is certainly not needed for the vast majority. To remind that there is no contradiction—only benefaction—between genuine testimony and genuine scholarship is to speak of a given—for most. As Richard Bushman said recently, if religion and scholarship “cannot be brought together, how can we justify a Latter-day Saint university at all?” (“The Millennial University,” BYU Honors Faculty Seminar, June 1993, p. 1). There is not reason for the tithe payers of the Church to fund another secular university since, as taxpayers, they are already helping to fund useful systems of public higher education.

Likewise important, however: Only an excellent university can really help the Church much. Mediocrity won’t do either academically or spiritually. A unique Church deserves a unique university!

Twenty years ago, when President Oaks presided, a group of deans, administrators, and their partners heard my expression of faith in the future of this special university. Similar and specific things were also said 13 years ago at the inaugural of President Holland, including how “The greatest gift a [university or college] president can give his students is the example of his life” (Elder Neal A. Maxwell quoting Reverend Theodore M. Hesburgh [president of the University of Notre Dame], speaking at the 59th Annual Meeting of the American Council on Education, New Orleans, Louisiana, 7 October 1976, p. 15).

President Rex Lee is certainly giving that precious gift to BYU, and likewise so are many

others here. This is as it should be, since producing student credit hours without giving the accompanying gift of faculty exemplification is not enough at BYU! To seek and to maintain a consecrated, bilingual faculty—who speak both the language of scholarship and also of faith—requires retaining and recruiting those with inarguably good scholarship and also with testimonies born of the Spirit. Such individuals need never look anxiously over either shoulder. Therefore, teaching wisdom “out of the best books” assumes an educational process that emerges “out of the best faculty”! (See D&C 88:118.)

Thirteen years ago I also noted how many once church-related institutions have long since become indistinguishable from other universities and colleges, keeping the ceremonial robes without the theology, the pomp without the purpose. My conviction was, and is, that such a change will not happen here, since both BYU’s trustees and faculty are at home with John Henry Cardinal Newman’s observation that the sponsoring church “steadies” the university in the performance of its tasks pertaining to true education (*The Idea of a University* [Garden City, New York: Image Book, 1959], Preface).

James Burtchaell’s recent writings about “The Decline and Fall of the Christian College” lament how

*Ambitious but improvident leaders had suppressed their schools’ Christian immune systems and since the virus of secularization would not seek out these now-defenseless institutions until the professional personnel could be replaced by scholars predominantly of no faith or a hostile faith or an intimidated faith, the reformers had no way of understanding how much farther their actions would carry beyond what they intended. [James Tunstead Burtchaell, “The Decline and Fall of the Christian College,” *First Things*, April 1991, no. 12, p. 29]*

Avoiding the outcome described by Burtchaeff is not something that can be achieved only by a few trustees, administrators, and faculty. Only a deep and widely shared commitment by the faculty will insure that such a decline will not happen here.

Occasionally, BYU's trustees will do more than show up at commencements periodically and appropriate money regularly. Nevertheless, we understand and support the necessity that BYU's day-to-day life will be largely what the administration, faculty, and students make of it.

Likewise noted 13 years ago was the special role that universities should play as "providers of perspective." A real university does not oscillate in response to all the political, social, and educational trends and fashions of a particular time. Six decades ago, thought there were a few notable exceptions, German universities failed as providers of perspective. They were too concerned with becoming "politically correct." Just after World War II, one commentator wrote of Hitler's rise and of the decline of Germany's universities, bemoaning that

*Nothing occurred in 1933 in the way of spiritual upheaval, and examples of weakness and corruption were abundant. . . . The invention of "German" mathematics and other forms of intellectual prostitution, as well as the numerous "somersaults" of scholars and writers, one can only recall with shame. It is also undoubtedly true that many trends in German academic life had paved the way for an excessive nationalism and an "anarchy of values" upon which the brutality of Nazi dictatorship . . . could thrive. [Hans Rothfels, *The German Opposition to Hitler* (Hinsdale, Illinois: Henry Regnery Company, 1948), pp. 34-35]*

In our period of human history, traditional values are being challenged, and some are even being inverted. In so many ways, just as prophesied, "all things [are] in commotion" (D&C 88:91). While functioning in such a setting, so

far as this university is concerned, "the only way to go is *through*; there isn't any *around*!"

My expectations for this institution continue to include not only teaching "out of the best books," but also having its faculty and graduate *write* some of the best books! Likewise, not only are BYU's students to be helped to appreciate and to enjoy great music, but they and some of the faculty and graduates are to *compose* some of it! For these and like things to be achieved, the gospel provides an ordering context with perspective and proportion to shape what will come out of the best faculty!

Important things are in process. Presently the trustees, administration, and faculty are joined, as seldom before, in giving serious consideration to a series of important matters, some of which President Lee and Provost Hafen spoke of yesterday. These major matters have come forward representing work carefully done by faculty groups in concert with the administration. Whatever the occasional frustrations may be in that process, the task is surely worth it, as BYU so positions itself that its academic quality will be further enhanced and its uniqueness further underscored.

One pressing reason for this planning is that there is no way the Lord can hasten his work in the global building of his kingdom without that hastening's also having an exciting but challenging impact upon this university. Hence the university will continue to do all the things a good university would do anyway, but there are extra chores to be done. The variety and significance of these additional chores will increase with that hastening.

Certain dimensions of BYU's academic programs can probably create beyond-the-campus benefits for the whole Church. In seeking to spread BYU's wingspan, however, we seek a particular plumage. How can this task be approached? My view, shared recently with your Faculty Planning Committee, is that the faculty and administration should first work through, winnow, and then recommend what

these special contributions might be that would contribute directly to the mission of the Church, thus giving added value to the entire Church. The process of peer and administration review enhances the likelihood that understandings can be established that facilitate funding based on shared expectations. Such recommendations would come forward in the now well-established process of making regular and substantive presentations to and through the commissioner, the executive committee, and then to the trustees. Having so assured you as to my trust in this process, it is too direct to say that the board of trustees—while genuinely solicitous of your advice and insights—prefers to hear from you through proper channels rather than on television channels?

As we plan for this institution's future, what of those young Church members who can never be privileged to be enrolled here? The Church's institute program will be enhanced, just as Elder Eyring has indicated. Meanwhile, the tens of thousands of qualified students who will not be able to come here, and their parents, should at least be entitled to feel the place at BYU—for which they might have qualified—is filled by a student who is academically capable and spiritually worthy.

Doing all the extra chores associated with BYU's institutional uniqueness will require not only reciprocated trust in the whole family, but more "mentoring" of the faculty—especially by other faculty—and more mentoring of students to help them maximize their time on this campus, such as in time-to-graduation.

In all human situations, on occasion, mentoring involves corrective counsel, as in this mode of communication—which, alas, is a path "least traveled by." "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother" (Matthew 18:15)

The same process might help those very few who have unrealistic expectations for this university. By way of a non-BYU illustration, I feel sorry for the few who seek to redefine the Book of Mormon in order to believe in it. But we do not invite these few to rewrite the Church's curriculum. Likewise, with those few who would redefine BYU's role.

The better BYU's initial recruiting, whether of faculty or students, the less need for corrective mentoring later concerning better teaching, better scholarship, or better citizenship in the university and the Church.

What could be more exciting than to serve at a special university that offers so much needed by so many? What could be more exciting than being part of charting the future course of this university, soon to go into the 21st century?

Whatever and however important our particular BYU chores are, these are temporary. We should all be seeking, daily, to become ever more the men and women of Christ. One day, if we are spiritually successful, whatever our mortal titles have been, in the light of eternity these will be seen as having been far too provincial. Jesus, the creating Lord of the Universe, was mistakenly known by some merely as "the carpenter's son," or, provincially, as Jesus of Nazareth.

One day all our temporary designations, locations, and vocations will shrink in their significance when bathed in the candlepower of Kolob's brighter and perfect day. Meanwhile, however, spiritual perspective is precious. So is meekness.

We are all impressed when we encounter sheer genius in a man or woman. We especially rejoice, however, when that genius is harnessed to righteous purposes. I remind us all of Jesus' supernal meekness. The Savior—the brightest individual ever to walk this planet—never sought to "prosper" or to "conquer" "according to his genius" and "strength"! (See Alma 30:17.)

President Abraham Lincoln, a serious student of human nature, experienced firsthand the interplay of intellect, ambition, power, and purpose. He wrote of the strivings for power and for glory among the talented:

This field of glory is harvested, and the crop is already appropriated. But new reapers will arise, and they, too, will seek a field. It is to deny, what the history of the world tells us is true, to suppose that men of ambition and talents will not continue to spring up amongst us. . . . Towering genius disdains a beaten path. It seeks regions hitherto unexplored. It sees no distinction in adding story to story, upon the monuments of fame, erected to the memory of others. It denies that it is glory enough to serve under any chief. It scorns to tread in the footsteps of any predecessor, however illustrious. It thirsts and burns for distinction; and, if possible, it will have it, whether at the expense of emancipating slaves, or enslaving freemen. [Don E. Fehrenbacher, ed., *Abraham Lincoln: A Documentary Portrait Through His Speeches and Writings* (New York: The New American Library, 1964), p. 41]

In contrast, isn't it marvelous how Jesus deflected credit from himself? Even after his excruciating atonement, he meekly said, "Glory be to the Father"! (See D&C 19:19.) In the miraculous healings during his mortal messiahship, his encouraging phrase often was, "Thy faith hath made thee whole," almost as if he had not been involved. The genius that matters most, therefore, is safely enclosed in meekness and is anchored in righteous purposes. Unanchored brilliance merely adds to the turbulence, when "all things shall be in commotion."

Jacob's marvelous phrases about reality—"things as they really are" and "things as they really will be" (Jacob 4:13)—serve to remind us of who we really are and what we are really supposed to be doing. These perspectives are needed by us all, given the intensity evoked

by our immediate assignments, our periodic frustrations, and our contemporary concerns! Looking through the lens of gospel perspective, we see more clearly what life is really all about. In considering, for instance, the great reconciliation of Jacob and Esau with their caravans in the desert, none of us would be much interested in reviewing the invoices of the gifts offered or exchanged. It was their reconciliation that mattered!

This Church's greatest scientist, at least to date, is very probably Henry Eyring, the father of Commissioner Eyring. In the closing moments of his life, Dean Eyring's thoughts turned to his many and gifted students. Through them, the spiritual as well as intellectual contribution of Professor Henry Eyring will live much longer than his remarkable and world-prize-winning scientific work.

In the two or three weeks preceding this gathering, my gentle and good 91-year-old father humbly sought release and was buried Monday. The encompassing perspective helped me amid my few Martha-like concerns! It has actually been a happy time. Tender, humorous, appreciative, and spiritual things were said by him in one-liners and in little wisps of conversation.

Dad's only recent Church assignment has been to send birthday cards to the high priests and their wives. Nevertheless, he wondered how that chore would now get done and worried over who might be missed in any transition. Dad had already written his obituary. When we reported that we couldn't find it, in the midst of his exhaustion, he said he'd have to write another one—which would be the inspired version!

As breathing became more difficult for him, his coughing increased. One of his granddaughters, recently back from a mission to Korea, said, "Grandpa, can I help you cough?"

Dad said, "What language will you cough in?"

Michelle said, "In Korean."

Dad replied, "I'm sorry, I can only cough in English!"

He lived well and he died well, as another of the meek and lowly overcame the world.

What finally matters, brothers and sisters, is what we have become. There will be no puffed vitas circulating in the next world. They stay here—in the files. What we will take with us—to the degree we have developed them—will be the cardinal qualities that Jesus has perfected; these are eternal and portable.

In the same quest for perspective, suppose each of us were to take a last stroll across this beautiful campus at the foot of the everlasting hills—just before our crossing of the great divide? Perhaps this would be best done in early morning or at eventide—"far from the madding crowd." We might hear faint echoes of earlier footsteps, and then strain with thirsty ear to hear the voices of those who had walked this campus, some when it was so much smaller. All who truly care about this university would understandably yearn to hear the respected voices of the past—in my case, Martin Hickman has come repeatedly to mind—to hear such voices as voices of approval concerning what happened during our own watches at BYU!

Meanwhile, however, we are all pulling in that shared harness. In closing, ponder the perspective of him whose name this university bears. Brigham said,

*We talk about our trials and troubles here in this life: but suppose that you could see yourselves thousands and millions of years after you have proved faithful to your religion during the few short years in this time, and have obtained eternal salvation and a crown of glory in the presence of God; then look back upon your lives here, and see the losses, crosses, and disappointments, the sorrows . . . , you would be constrained to exclaim, "But what of all that? Those things were but for a moment, and we are now here." [Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* 7:275]*

Our watches are, indeed, "but for a small moment." Nevertheless, may we prove faithful and effective during that "small moment."

I love you. I trust you. I hope you sense that. God bless you. God bless the Brigham Young University for all that it now does and for all that will yet emerge "out of the best faculty," I pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.