



Pres. Spencer W. Kimball
(1895-1985)

Excerpts from “The Second Century Address” by President Spencer W. Kimball

Address given at the dedication of the Carillon Tower and Bells - October 10, 1975

... It was almost precisely eight years ago that I had the privilege of addressing an audience at the Brigham Young University about “Education for Eternity.” Some things were said then which I believe, then and now, about the destiny of this unique University. I shall refer to several of those ideas again, combining them with some fresh thoughts and impressions I have concerning Brigham Young University as it enters its second century. ...

My task is to talk about BYU’s second century. Though my comments will focus on the Brigham Young University, it is obvious to all of us here that the University is, in many ways, the center of the Church’s Educational System. President McKay described the University as “the hub of the Church educational wheel.” Karl G. Maeser described the Brigham Young Academy as “the parent trunk of the great education banyan tree” and later it has been designated as “the flagship.” However it is stated, the centrality of this University to the entire system is a very real fact of life. What I say to you, therefore, must take note of things beyond the borders of this campus, but not beyond its influence. We must ever keep firmly in mind the needs of those ever-increasing numbers of LDS youth in other places in North America and in other lands, who cannot attend this University, whose needs are real and who represent, in fact, the majority of LDS college and university students. ...

We hope that our friends, and even our critics, will understand why we must resist anything that would rob BYU of its basic uniqueness in its second century. As the Church’s Commissioner of Education said on the occasion of the inaugural of President Oaks,

Brigham Young University seeks to improve and to “sanctify” itself for the sake of others—not for the praise of the world, but to serve the world better. (Neal A. Maxwell, “Greetings to the President,” Address at the inaugural of President Dallin H. Oaks, 1971)

That task will be persisted in. Members of the Church are willing to doubly tax themselves to support the Church’s Educational System, including this University, and we must not merely “ape the world.” We must do special things that would justify the special financial outpouring that supports this University.

As the late President Stephen L. Richards once said, “Brigham Young University will never surrender its spiritual character to a sole concern for scholarship.” BYU will be true to its charter and to such addenda to that charter as are made by living prophets. ...

I am both hopeful and expectant that out of this University and the Church’s Educational System there will rise brilliant stars in drama, literature, music, sculpture, painting, science, and in all the scholarly graces. This University can be the refining host for many such individuals who will touch men and women the world over long after they have left this campus.

We must be patient, however, in this effort, because just as the City of Enoch took decades to reach its pinnacle of performance in what the Lord described as occurring “in process of time” (Moses 7:21), so the quest for excellence at BYU must also occur “in process of time.”

Ideals are like stars; you will not succeed in touching them with your hands. But like the seafaring man on the desert of waters, you choose them as your guides, and following them you will reach your destiny. (Carl Schurz, April 18, 1975, Address in Faneuil Hall, Boston) ...

Students in the second century must continue to come here to learn. We do not apologize for the importance of students' searching for eternal companions at the same time that they search the scriptures and search the shelves of libraries for knowledge. President McKay observed on one occasion that "the university is not a dictionary, a dispensary, nor is it a department store. It is more than a storehouse of knowledge and more than a community of scholars. The University life is essentially an exercise in thinking, preparing, and living." We do not want BYU ever to become an educational factory. It must concern itself with not only the dispensing of facts, but with the preparation of its students to take their place in society as thinking, thoughtful, and sensitive individuals who, in paraphrasing the motto of your Centennial, come here dedicated to love of God, pursuit of truth, and service to mankind.

There are yet other reasons why we must not lose either our moorings or our sense of direction in the second century. We still have before us the remarkable prophecy of John Taylor when he observed,

You will see the day that Zion will be as far ahead of the outside world in everything pertaining to learning of every kind as we are today in regard to religious matters. You mark my words, and write them down, and see if they do not come to pass. (Journal of Discourses 21:100)

Surely we cannot refuse that rendezvous with history because so much of what is desperately needed by mankind is bound up in our being willing to contribute to the fulfillment of that prophecy. Others, at times, also seem to have a sensing of what might happen. Charles H. Malik, former president of the United Nations General Assembly, voiced a fervent hope when he said

One day a great university will arise somewhere... I hope in America... to which Christ will return in His full glory and power, a university which will, in the promotion of scientific, intellectual, and artistic excellence, surpass by far even the best secular universities of the present, but which will at the same time enable Christ to bless it and act and feel perfectly at home in it. ("Education and Upheaval: The Christian's Responsibility," Creative Help for Daily Living, 21 September 1970)

Surely BYU can help to respond to that call!

By dealing with basic issues and basic problems, we can be effective educationally. Otherwise, we will simply join the multitude who have so often lost their way in dark sunless forests even while working hard. It was Thoreau who said, "There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root" (Walden, p. 51). We should deal statistically and spiritually with root problems, root issues, and root causes in BYU's second century. We seek to do so, not in arrogance or pride, but in the spirit of service. We must do so with a sense of trembling and urgency because what Edmund Burke said is true: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing" (Letter to William Smith, January 9, 1795).

Learning that includes familiarization with facts must not occur in isolation from concern over our fellowmen. It must occur in the context of a commitment to serve them and to reach out to them.

In many ways the dreams that were once generalized as American dreams have diminished and faded. Some of these dreams have now passed so far as institutional thrust is concerned to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and its people for their fulfillment. It was Lord Acton who said on one occasion,

It was from America that the plain ideas that men ought to mind their business, and that the nation is responsible to Heaven for the acts of the State—ideas long locked in the breast of solitary thinkers, and hidden among Latin folios—burst forth like a conqueror upon the world they were destined to transform, under the title of the Rights of Man . . . and the principle gained ground, that a nation can never abandon its fate to an authority it cannot control. (The History of Freedom and Other Essays, 1907, p. 55)

Too many universities have given themselves over to such massive federal funding that they should not wonder why they have submitted to an authority they can no longer control. Far too many no longer assume that nations are responsible to heaven for the acts of the state. Far too many now see the Rights of Man as merely access rights to the property and money of others, and not as the rights traditionally thought of as being crucial to our freedom. ...

In other instances, we must be willing to break with the educational establishment (not foolishly or cavalierly, but thoughtfully and for good reason) in order to find gospel ways to help mankind. Gospel methodology, concepts, and insights can help us to do what the world cannot do in its own frame of reference.

In some ways the Church Educational System, in order to be unique in the years that lie ahead, may have to break with certain patterns of the educational establishment. When the world has lost its way on matters of principle, we have an obligation to point the way. We can, as Brigham Young hoped we would, "be a people of profound learning pertaining to the things of this world" but without being tainted by what he regarded as the "pernicious, atheistic influences" that flood in unless we are watchful. Our scholars, therefore, must be sentries as well as teachers!

We surely cannot give up our concerns with character and conduct without also giving up on mankind. Much misery results from flaws in character, not from failures in technology. We cannot give in to the ways of the world with regard to the realm of art. President Romney brought to our attention not long ago a quotation in which Brigham Young said there is "no music in hell." Our art must be the kind which edifies man, which takes into account his immortal nature, and which prepares us for heaven, not hell. ...

One peak of educational excellence that is highly relevant to the needs of the Church is the realm of language. BYU should become the acknowledged language capital of the world in terms of our academic competency and through the marvelous "laboratory" that sends young men and women forth to service in the mission field. I refer, of course, to the Language Training Mission. There is no reason why this University could not become the place where, perhaps more than anywhere else, the concern for literacy and the teaching of English as a second language is firmly headquartered in terms of unarguable competency as well as deep concern.

I have mentioned only a few areas. There are many others of special concern, with special challenges and opportunities for accomplishment and service in the second century.

We can do much in excellence and, at the same time, emphasize the large-scale participation of our students, whether it be in athletics or in academic events. We can bless many and give many experience, while, at the same time, we are developing the few select souls who can take us to new heights of attainment.

It ought to be obvious to you, as it is to me, that some of the things the Lord would have occur in the second century of the BYU are hidden from our immediate view. Until we have climbed the hill just before us, we are not apt to be given a glimpse of what lies beyond. The hills ahead are higher than we think. This means that accomplishments and further direction must occur in proper order, after we have done our part. We will not be transported from point A to point Z without having to pass through the developmental and demanding experiences of all the points of achievement and all the milestone markers that lie between!

This University will go forward. Its students are idealists who have integrity, who love to work in good causes. These students will not only have a secular training, but will have come to understand what Jesus meant when he said that the key of knowledge, which had been lost by society centuries before,

was “the fulness of the scriptures.” We understand, as few people do, that education is a part of being about our Father’s business and that the scriptures contain the master concepts for mankind.

We know there are those of unrighteous purposes who boast that time is on their side. So it may seem to those of very limited vision. But of those engaged in the Lord’s work, it can be truly said, “Eternity is on your side! Those who fight that bright future fight in vain!”

I hasten to add that as the Church grows global and becomes more and more multicultural, a smaller and smaller percentage of all our LDS college-age students will attend BYU, or the Hawaii Campus, or Ricks College, or the LDS Business College. It is a privileged group who are able to come here. We do not intend to neglect the needs of the other Church members wherever they are, but those who do come here have an even greater follow-through responsibility to make certain that the Church’s investment in them provides dividends through service and dedication to others as they labor in the Church and in the word elsewhere.

To go to BYU is something special. There were Brethren who had dreams regarding the growth and maturity of Brigham Young University, even to the construction of a temple on the hill they had long called Temple Hill, yet “dreams and prophetic utterances are not self-executing. They are fulfilled usually by righteous and devoted people making the prophecies come true.” (Ernest L. Wilkinson, Brigham Young University: The First One Hundred Years)

All rights reserved
Reproduced for classroom use only