

A GOLDEN
ERA OF
CONTINUING
EDUCATION

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**Educating for a Golden Era
of Continuing Righteousness**
President Joseph Fielding Smith

**Common Concerns and Commitments
in Church Education**
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Continuing Education in the Church
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COMMON CONCERNS AND COMMITMENTS IN CHURCH EDUCATION

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My brothers, and sisters, I would like to indicate to you two things out of my most recent experiences in England before proceeding to my message. In speaking to a group of our LDS youth in Edinburgh, I was touched by the fact that a small choral group from riot-torn Belfast, Ireland, had come to the Edinburgh meeting with their guitars. These were young members of the Church, some of them having only been in the Church a short time. They had composed several songs—one of them dedicated to President Joseph Fielding Smith and another to the Prophet Joseph. They had travelled by train two hours to the boat and then four hours across the sea, and then, by train to our meeting in an act of complete devotion and complete dedication. What seemed striking to me was that their spirits *resonated* the gospel of Jesus Christ in such a way that they transcended the national barriers. It is no secret that one of the problems in Belfast is that there is a Scottish regiment policing the Irish people. The historical wounds that separate those two people are deep. I saw in this group from Belfast, who thoroughly fascinated the Scottish saints, a symbolic expression of what the gospel can do to leap over the problems of nationalism and the deep divisions that seem, so often, to push us apart.

A second experience was the series of meetings with the eight top British educators (thanks to the helpful arrangement of Dr. Arthur King, who will grace the faculty at Brigham Young University this fall). We discussed what they are doing in the British educational system that might be germane to the Church educational system—since we struggle, in many respects, with common problems. They are doing some interesting things, and there is much to be learned from them. However, I have an impression, and will allude to it shortly, that there is a vacuum in educational leadership that lies waiting to be filled. One force that can move both morally and educationally into that vacuum will be the educational system of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I do not say that out of any arrogance or hubris but rather with the feeling that the problems impinging upon the educational system of the Church are small by comparison to the problems that press in upon the educational systems of the world. We can, within our relatively small system, point the way, if we are of a mind to do so, and if we care enough to exercise some leadership in this dimension of human affairs.

Our Commitment

In this context I would like to talk about our

commitment to education and some of the special features that are relevant to the international concerns I mentioned. We sometimes use the scripture on learning in the Book of Mormon almost catechism-like, which I regret. The words fall so easily from our lips. I refer to the scripture that says it is good to be learned if we "...hearken unto the counsels of God." (2 Nephi 9:29.) The Scriptures are like doors behind which lie immense truths. This is a divine insight of major proportions that means far more to me now than it did years ago. It is a clear indication, among other things, that there is a *cosmic curriculum*. There are things that God would have us learn—all men and women upon the face of the earth. These are not capricious rules. Rather, what the "counsels of God" represent to us are the insights of a superior intelligence who found out how to survive and be happy in a seemingly cold universe. These counsels, therefore, represent to Church members what must be the religious education counterpart of the common commitment we find in secular education—which is to learn the "lessons which the tides of history have washed to our feet." In religious education, we must learn the lessons of eternity. These lessons are divinely divulged for us and are necessary for our survival and happiness forever.

The Eternal Concept

Where the world's concerns must of necessity be tactical (here and now) in terms of what history shouts to us, the concerns of the gospel must be eternal. Therefore, we are not really "learned" if we exclude the body of divine data that the eternities place at our disposal through revelation and the prophets of God. A man cannot be "learned" if he deliberately seeks to ignore the wisdom, not only of the ages, but of the eternities. No man can be "learned" if he excludes that great, abundant storehouse of divine data that restructures our understanding of the universe of which we are citizens. A man cannot be "learned" if during his mortal journey he drinks at conceptual wells that, instead of slaking our thirst, simply inflame us with appetites that are inextinguishable.

The well from which we must drink the waters of "living life" is a well that contains the concepts to guide us through eternity. If we seek to satisfy our thirst at other wells, we will finally perish. We will not find the kind of satisfaction we want, because the water from worldly wells is self-destructive. It does

not equip us to make the voyage in space and time to which I have already alluded. In fact, the water of the world develops in us a dependency that becomes a cruel hoax. I do not say this to put down secular knowledge or the sincere, even feverish, efforts of the people of the world to find solutions for the immense problems that seem to be enclosing us. I say it because it seems to me necessary for us to understand—and for me certainly to understand—that there is a qualitative difference between the significance of the concepts the gospel of Jesus Christ presents to us and secular concepts which may be true but which belong to a lower order of significance.

For instance, the divine distillation that God has given us in the Scriptures is the thing we most need to survive to be happy. It includes a clear statement that the principle of work is an eternal principle. We ignore the principle of work at the peril of our souls. Carrying that principle further, when we separate the world of education from the world of work, we do it at our own peril. We have done it too much in this land, and I suspect elsewhere. A man cannot be learned, brothers and sisters, if he is not still searching for what God can yet reveal to him. This, to me, is what that scripture suggests when it says that we must "hearken unto the counsels of God," all of which have not been given to us yet.

In a sense, what President Spencer W. Kimball has called "education for eternity" rests on a kind of continuing quest that your presence here today symbolizes. But this quest is not indiscriminate. "There is no democracy of facts;" they are not all of equal significance. What the gospel seeks to help us focus on are those facts that have overwhelming importance, not only for this life but for the worlds to come. Therefore, I rejoice that we spend our time dealing, at least in part, with those overarching concepts that make such a tremendous difference.

The Home as a Learning Center

Now if I can, brothers and sisters, I would like to suggest again, as is always the case, that the Lord has already been wherever you and I go, intellectually and conceptually, and that He has been there first, a long time ago, and infinitely more perceptively in his assessment. We have been told that our spirits in the beginning were *innocent*. (D & C 93:38.) In a sense, they are waiting to be written upon; this places great pressures upon *the home*. It reminds us that in the

world of education, if we are really dealing with priorities, there is no escaping the fact that the impact of education in early years is more significant than in later years, though it is desirable at both times. A professor at Oxford noted that we have about 100 trillion brain cells at birth and that at about age twenty we start losing around 50,000 cells a day. The decline is steady. This does not mean we are not wise; it does not mean that we are not competent. It simply means that our capacity to absorb new information, assimilate and relate it to other information, declines with the passage of time.

This same Oxford professor says, significantly, something that reinforces what the Church has said for years: "It seems important that the normal child should at least in his earlier years be able to develop his own personality and ability without having at the same time to form for himself a code of behavior and a purpose in living. It seems to me that it is desirable that the young child should be presented with a definite code of behavior within which he can develop without too many uncertainties and problems." (*London Times*, June 2, 1971.)

The structure of the Latter-day Saint home, when it is nutritive, provides a tremendous support for learning that can maximize the child's chances in the earlier years. What we must do—and this is special—is to provide homes and environments within our family relationships that undergird the child during this period of searching when he is so plastic and so able to expand and absorb that which you and I increasingly lack the capacity to do.

We cannot separate the world of education from the world of work, even though we try to do it in this country. This disjunction is part of the underlying malaise that encompasses so much in higher education. The Oxford professor also observed that young people cannot continually absorb new information. I quote: "Most young people cannot absorb information usefully from books and lectures for more than three or four hours in the twenty-four, and the consolidation of this new knowledge might well occur more effectively if the remaining hours of the working day were spent in practical physical tasks." (*London Times*, June 2, 1971.)

Current Pressures

If I were to identify three or four of the pressures on education to reform (there are many, and they are

not all wise), to which we should perhaps yield, one of them would be a closer union between the world of work and the world of education. This seems sound in terms of the Scriptures. Both worlds (work and education) need each other desperately, but they get a little paranoid about each other at times. We need to take some fresh approaches to the possibility that there may be wisdom in a student's pause from the educational routine. This brief respite permits him to assimilate and integrate the knowledge that he has acquired and make it applicable to the world of work. Now in terms of educational engineering that is easy to say and hard to do. I would like to see the Church Educational System look at what we might do to show the way.

A second pressure that seems to be a legitimate one on education to reform is that we must have *multiple tracks* in our approaches. Young people are highly individualistic, which is clearly sanctioned not only by the parents and the Church but by society and our system. This multiple track system ought to be one in which the individual can sort out his needs and his qualifications in such a way that his approach to education permits him to equip himself not only for the eternities but for the life in which we now operate.

If we were to have a system in which there could be some way of pausing, in which there could be some diversification, students would experience less sense of futility. Students experience this feeling of frustration because we—with the media, with education, and even with the Scriptures—push out our "circles of concern." We help the young to care about so many things. But, within each of our circles of concern is the much smaller "circle of competence," which encompasses the things *we can really do something about*. This disparity often develops a feeling of cynicism or futility on the part of the young. If there could be a closer correlation between the world of work and education, there would be a lessening of that sense of fruitlessness. There would be a fresh appreciation for what is offered as the youngster returns to the classroom, whether this is daily or episodically. There would be more relevancy in terms of what can be sought and absorbed.

In this same kind of context, if we accept the Scriptures as valid in terms of the great premium they place upon the individual, they also ought to suggest to us the "customizing" and the "individualizing" of

education, within necessary limits, because we are so different in so many respects. There are a number of critics of education who argue that all we have done is equalize expectations upon which we cannot deliver. This also leads to a great sense of cynicism and frustration. We should begin to "customize," and to do so unashamedly where people's needs and skills and interests are different. Of course, this is where continuing education—adult education—is so peculiarly adapted to respond. If we could begin to do this, then we would be more consistent. We would then have young and old people who would be less vulnerable than they now are when they come out of an education system in a lockstep relationship with their age. Uniformity, with all of the efficiency it has produced, tends also to produce a kind of bureaucratic, deadening effect. Too much uniformity can "turn young people off." It makes it difficult for them to respond. I refer to the American educational scene and where I think we can play a unique role.

Finally, the costs of our present educational system have all the signs of becoming unbearable for America in the immediate years ahead. We cannot deliver financially on the expectations we have created. Therefore, we will have to find some systems of part-time study and integration with the world of work that will make education financially manageable. In an internationalized Church, and in terms of our budget, we, too, have some special needs to do this.

Importance of the Individual

I have mentioned the importance of the individual. I would like to return to that thought for this additional comment. Dr. Arthur King intrigued me with the comment to the effect that "sin robs us of our individuality." As I reflected on that fascinating idea, it seemed to me that this is one of the devastating features of sin: it really does homogenize us. It does rob us of our individuality. It grinds us down to a single plane of appetite and action, which then makes us dependent, which then makes us throb in unison and become like everybody else. There is a connection between that idea and the scripture which says of Satan, "for he seeketh that all men might be miserable like unto himself." (2 Nephi 2:26.)

There is a kind of uniformity, a sameness, and a destruction of the individuality that goes with sin. Because the gospel places such a premium upon indi-

viduality, and since we brought that kind of luggage with us and should continue to carry it, our educational systems need to be compatible with that divine principle of individuality, which God has never compromised and which you and I must not compromise. It is possible for us to share commitment, principles, and common concerns and still have this wonderful variety among people. This is what the gospel does. It brings strong men together (like the brethren who are divergent and different in some respects), because they have this common, deep, core-commitment which they combine without robbing them of their individuality.

Our Common Commitments

One of the roles that we can play is to bring to bear our common commitment which holds us together as a people on some of the problems of our time. This means that we are willing, with our tithes, to help people in another culture who are not so privileged—and to do it gladly, not resentfully. In the absence of goodwill and real brotherhood, the tides of nationalism have ruined, in many cases, man's secular efforts aimed at giving effective aid to peoples of other cultures. The gospel can cross cultures because of this common commitment, though it will not necessarily be easy.

We also have going for us the acceptance of adequate authority under a prophet to make a system operate. Because the world is so frightened by authority, it is apt to back into anarchy or into systems of great authoritarian dictatorship. We have sufficient authority—and our common commitment to the Presidency and the Twelve to get things done. We can hold ourselves together while in the process of making a dramatic contribution. We can in a way that cannot be done by people who do not have this kind of shared commitment, who do not sustain this kind of authority. We forget this advantage too often in the Church!

A third thing we have going for us, which permits us to act if we are willing, is the fact that the gospel permits us to bring truth, knowledge, and love together. Gandhi worried about what he called the coldness of some intellectuals, their lack of heart, their lack of warmth, their lack of love for the people whom they wanted to help. Commitment to the principle of love would mean, in effect, that our knowledge—as we seek to transmit it and to share our

insights—is encapsulated in love. This love underlies a kind of brotherhood that can transcend not only nationalism but also the problems of differential status.

We so often say that knowledge is power; but it is a dangerous kind of power without love. The gospel gives to us an amalgam of love and knowledge a special advantage. We should not seek knowledge to control. We do not want knowledge in order to manipulate. We do not seek knowledge to parade it. Rather, knowledge puts us in a position, again, to move into the field of education in such a way that learning occurs in the context of love, across culture and across class. It crosses the kind of status barriers that can exist even within a single valley. Perhaps in this way, as we educate ourselves and grow, we are consistent with Jesus' idea that for the sake of others we sanctify ourselves. This is one of the great paradoxes of the gospel: in selflessness there is an ennoblement of self, as one serves.

What We Can Do

We are in a position to do some other special things that seem appropriate for me to share with you, since they are being discussed and will be discussed. Whereas the world has had great difficulty (not for want of sincerity or effort) in crossing cultures, then perhaps we can do it. Again, let me say that the world has had great difficulty in this area, but not for the want of trying. In helping without being condescending, we may be able to succeed. It is easy to be condescending when one helps someone else. Former Prime Minister Harold MacMillan, in his recently released memoirs, said that DeGaulle's resentment of England probably stemmed from the fact that Paris had fallen to Hitler but that London had not and that later London and the British people had helped to recapture Paris. MacMillan noted that it is hard to forgive a favor or a kindness. In many ways this is true. One of the great things the gospel can do for us, however, is to inject us into the lives of others, if we are careful, without the spirit of condescension, without a "Lady Bountiful" approach. Again, we have some special opportunities.

As you pursue the days here and as all of us seek to continue our education, many of us will have to retrain several times during our lives. Technology is simply too fast for us. The average young man who graduates today will hold two or three entirely distinctive jobs in his life.

We also seek to continue our education for increased and deserved self-esteem. Boredom produces sin, and low self-esteem tends to lead to boredom. We need to keep alive and growing in order to keep spiritually healthy.

We must pursue our education to increase our capacity to serve God, others and those in our own homes.

Finally, part of the pursuit of learning is for the sheer enjoyment, the sense of discovery, the sense of seeing relationships between bodies of knowledge that need to be connected in one's own mind. Education should be the new and sudden vista of seeing a restructured view of something.

The Principle of Love

In closing, may I suggest that we have to be very honest about life in the LDS home. It is easy for us to love people in a faraway country, because they make no demands of us. One really tests the principle of love when he is third in line to brush his teeth in a busy family bathroom. (In my own case, we really had the test in a twenty-seven-hour train ride from Lisbon to Paris where six of us were in a compartment. Under these circumstances you see a lot of each other.) What I admire about the Church is its insistence that you and I face up to the principle of love where it really can be tested—in our homes! It is no test for us to love nations or people in the abstract, to feel a momentary sense of passion for a tragedy far away. It is good that we so oscillate, but the abstract still makes no real demands on us.

It is the proximate demands about which we can really do something, for which we are truly responsible. The focus on the home and the principle of love call for a special brand of courage, and we had better be honest about it. It is precisely in the home that pressures are the greatest and where we will experience, at times, our most significant failures. But it is the only meaningful arena of action that most of us have. Failing there makes it hard, as President McKay implied, to take a full sense of satisfaction from successes that we may achieve elsewhere. The practical demands of life and a family put pressures on each of us to see if we really love, if we really care, if we can really level with each other, and to see if we can really begin to see each other with the same modest concern with which we can see ourselves. In this

respect we are doing something very honest, although very difficult.

I am grateful to be a part of a church that is willing to face this kind of challenge, which does not involve itself helter-skelter in rhetoric about issues that make no demands of us and about which it is easy to become highly emotional! I suppose, in truth, that what the gospel does is to refuse us the luxury of escaping from each other. It insists that we really see if we have the capacity to grow and to develop; to see if we can do it under the real pressures of life and home, in a family and among friends. Then, perhaps, we can do more elsewhere!

The Future

I believe we are on the exciting threshold of developing a Church educational system that is being internationalized. This is a system in which the Semi-

nary and Institute program will (in countries like those of the British Isles) do some very special things for the new, rising generation of young members of the Church. They, in turn, will provide a new and indigenous base of leadership. I believe we are going to be successful, at least partially, in helping, without condescending, overcome the barriers of nationalism. If we do, it will be because of homes such as yours, which produce young men and women who can carry this kind of torch. It will be because the Church members, like you, have been generous with their tithes. It will be because good institutions, such as this University, exist with their special flavor and contagion. I am grateful to be a part of that system. I salute you for your commitment to further education in the context of the gospel, which has carved out of the experience of eternities those lessons that are necessary for survival and happiness. I say this to you in the name of him whose Church this is, Jesus Christ. Amen.