

College of Fine Arts and Communications
College Meeting, August 25, 2004
Dean Stephen Jones

I am very grateful to be with you today. In the last year I have had the wonderful opportunity to meet many of you and have come to an increasing sense of your goodness and gifts. Thank you for the dedication and consecration of those gifts to your students, the university, and your disciplines.

I would like to make a few comments about the topics addressed by my colleagues.

[Remarks about

External review letter: I can admire this person's work, but cannot judge whether he has met your standards because they are not sufficiently clear.

Asked chairs to work to redefine these standards by March 5

Etc.]

Regarding deeper student learning, please know that we realize that there is no silver bullet that will improve the learning of our students. As Professor Dill Parkinson said in his recent campus devotional,

I have come to believe that in most, if not all, instances of that miracle and mystery of having some piece of knowledge move from the head to the heart, grace is... involved.¹

Yet, as Nephi teaches, grace occurs after all we, and our students, can do. I have mentioned before President Hinckley's comments to the faculty given last September at the inauguration of President Samuelson:

[The students] long for success. And it is your opportunity and your responsibility to see that they do not fail. We should not have failures on this campus. We are more than teachers. We are shepherds. And we know that the spirit of shepherding resides in the hearts of those who serve here as members of the great Brigham Young University faculty.²

This is not to say that students here should be spoon-fed by faculty, or that standards should be lowered. Larry Peer, in his recent devotional, talked about the need for educational self-reliance and lamented students who might take the easy way out or avoid intellectual difficulty. He called for a renewed emphasis on literacy,

not the mere functional literacy of the ability to read and write but the high

¹ Dilworth B. Parkinson, "We Have Received, and We Need No More," BYU Devotional, 2 March 2004.

² Gordon B. Hinckley. "Remarks at the Inauguration of President Cecil O. Samuelson." Brigham Young University, 9 September 2003.

literacy of precision and range in thinking and expression. Great teachers do not tolerate the least technical flaw in students' expression, and neither do superior students.³

I think Professor Peer's standard also applies to the artistic expressions of the students in some of our disciplines.

So, the call for deeper student learning is all around us. Our colleagues across the nation are involved in discussions of student engagement, learning outcomes, assessment, effective use of technology in assisting learning, and the scholarship and research that surround teaching and learning. And, as has been mentioned here today and yesterday by President Samuelson, we will be asked to account, through our university accreditation, for both learning goals and data about student performance.

In focusing on learning, I have come to the conclusion of Jane Tompkins, who wrote that "what really matters...is not so much what we talk about in class as what we do."⁴ The classroom then becomes part of "a deepening process of participation in a community of practice."⁵

That participation in a community of practice is what I hope we as faculty can engage as well. I want here to insert a portion of an email Campbell Gray sent me a few days ago. In it he confirms that there are portions of our disciplines that

can be compared to the skills and information in many other disciplines. These perhaps are the mechanical, procedural, performative aspects of the discipline....In these domains, analyzing pedagogy can be a relatively straightforward process – we know what needs to be acquired by the student in order for him or her to have the foundation that is essential for their progression in the discipline, even in a professional environment.

In a world in which the artist's contribution is to interpret and bring personality and spirit to bear on another's composition or writing, the above teaching environment seems to me to be suitable and appropriate. But success in the ... arts does not occur because one has the skills and capacity to interpret another's work with subtlety and sensitivity. Success is based on the initiation and execution of a fundamentally new work. That perspective causes me to value that act and procedure very highly, and there are places in all of the disciplines of the college in which it exists. I would go so far to say (and it is my opinion) that much of what will alter perception, influence souls and represent the Kingdom most will

³ Larry Peer. "Beethoven's Kiss: On the Odd Reasons for Brigham Young's Excellent University." BYU Devotional, 2 December 2003.

⁴ Weimer, Maryellen. *Learner-Centered Teaching*, p. 9. Jossey-Bass, 2002.

⁵ From The Encyclopaedia of Informal Education at http://www.infed.org/biblio/communities_of_practice.htm.

emerge from that domain.⁶

So, deeper student learning is more than identifying learning outcomes and making sure our test questions fairly assess student achievement of those goals. That is expected of all of us, and we invite you to be engaged in that effort. If you have not already done that work, begin now. You will find it challenging and it will bless your students. It is foundational. But beyond this rational, analytical division of learning into discreet units, seeking to describe and sequence the pieces of knowledge that form our disciplinary base, there is a holistic, indivisible kind of knowledge, the acquiring of which, as mentioned earlier, is one of mystery and grace. Its cultivation will allow our students and us students to execute work clearly born of divine gifts, whose power is penetrating but never manipulative, whose authenticity speaks more than words can say. This kind of execution, which William Blake called “the chariot of genius,”⁷ is not merely formulaic and cannot be copied.

Beyond knowing the learning objectives for tomorrow’s class, mentoring at this level will require us to be, as President Kimball stated, a “refining host” for our students. Then we can fulfill his hope and expectation “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.”⁸

With you, I am excited about the prospect of continuing discussion and action in the area of deeper student learning. I hate to call it an initiative. It seems more to me an imperative. I invite you to join Rory after lunch to talk about more effective ways to structure our dialogue, and about moving dialogue ever more into practice.

I hope you noticed that I deliberately referenced devotional talks given in the last year. I want to encourage you to attend devotionals. In the last year, I was especially touched by the contributions made by members of our faculty. Larry Vincent’s journey from Nevada to the stage of the Vienna Volksoper caused all of us to reflect on the ways the Lord has guided us to the place we are now and would be of great benefit to many of students who upon their graduation wonder where they might end up. Dale Monson’s stories, told in his eloquent, descriptive manner, spoke of the pain we feel when we overlook others’ needs. It made me think of the words of the hymn: “to the wounded and the weary, I would show a gentle heart.”

If you are not attending, you are missing a wonderful opportunity to reflect. Our lives are too busy. Often we are trying to do too much. We have external pressures asking more of

⁶ Personal email from Campbell Gray, Director, BYU Museum of Art. 19 August 2004.

⁷ “Annotations to Reynolds” in *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, 1965), p. 632.

⁸ Spencer W. Kimball. “Second Century Address.” *BYU Devotional*, 10 October. 1975.
http://www.byu.edu/fc/ee/w_swk75.htm

us that we can give. Ironically, it then becomes important for us to make time for reflection and learning, to create space for the spirit of the Lord and our campus colleagues to touch us. I have gained a broader perspective about the purposes of BYU and my role here by attending devotionals, forums, and graduation than perhaps any other thing. Please come, and bring your students. The topics are relevant, the music refreshing, and the Spirit is present.

I would like to talk today about the relationship between the purposes of BYU as an institution and our scholarship. As I use the terms art, creative work, or scholarship, I hope you will interpret them broadly so as to include the creative and expressive functions found in the writing and production done by those in various disciplines across the college.

It seems to me that the journey of the artist or creator is to first ask some question. It is the question, and the hope that always accompanies a question, which fuels the artist's desire for expression, the researcher's thirst to know. Depending on the medium, the question may be hard to frame with words. It may be an interrogation of emotion or experience, sound or color, light, movement, spirit, or of the medium itself. Whatever the nature of the question, my experience has been that the making of things always begins with a question.

This place of beginning with a question is very much like the journey of faith described by Alma. Acquiring faith asks us, "Do you believe?" And *finding* faith requires that we allow the answers to our questions to work in us until we can accept and make room for them, until from the cocoons of our hearts we allow them to fly out of us and find expression through our words, gifts, and talents.

All of this points out the very basic idea that the scholar's journey, the creator's process, is intimately and inextricably linked with the life of the spirit.

I come to you today with questions about making things. I want to invite you into a conversation about creating art and finding and sharing truth. Today's breakout session on this topic will allow you to be part of that conversation.

My first question is, what kind of questions are we asking as artists, as researchers? What kind of answers do we hope for?

The concept of a question itself, especially in academia, so often takes a position contrary to, even adversarial toward, accepted belief. It is the "no, that is wrong, that can be done, I will prove it" attitude that has pulled back the curtains of knowledge and given us such great advances in science, medicine, and technology.

Likewise, the arts have questioned almost every aspect of meaning and materials one could think of, and led, in many cases, to wonderful expressions and ideas. But more so

than ever, we have reached a point, both in the arts and the sciences, that the questions posed challenge fundamental positions related to the nature of life and of moral and ethical correctness. It seems there is no restraint in the conceptions and explorations that generate and underlie much creative work.

Our inquiries, on the other hand, can explore things we know will ultimately and eternally generate light and life, open and expand our minds, and provide safety. The Aims of a BYU Education states that

Students [and I would add, faculty] need not ignore difficult and important questions. Rather, they should frame their questions in prayerful, faithful ways, leading them to answers that equip them to give a reason of the hope that is in them and to articulate honestly and thoughtfully their commitments to Christ and to his Church.⁹

So, the students and scholars in this community must ask questions from within a perspective that will lead to reasoned, articulate answers of hope, based on faith. The artist or journalist in this community cannot be overly intoxicated by the defense of objectivity, so prized by the world. Here we are subject to God and his truths, and it is from within that frame that we must generate our questions and explore their answers.

My second question is, what answers are we finding, and how are we framing them for our audiences?

Perhaps you would agree with me that the artists and researchers of the twentieth century asked more questions than all the others combined. Overall, the century produced many answers that are unacceptable when weighed against the knowledge of the restored gospel. As one writer expressed, our epoch is like a sick man that calls for morphine, not for recovery.¹⁰ Because the world is in such trouble, the subject matter of much art has become dark and despairing. Said Arthur Henry King,

Most of the art of the twentieth century is, alas, not positive, but at its best powerfully negative. It is quite ruthless in its way of depicting what mankind is like without God. The best literature of our times (outside of the gospel) is miserable, uncertain, vicious, uncertain, cynical, uncertain, sardonic, uncertain. And it is no accident that this is the case. The reason is that faith has gone out to a lower ebb than it has ever been at before in Western civilization. Knowledge of the gospel, understanding of the gospel, and above all, following of the gospel, are less common now outside of the Church than they have ever been. Only the bad literature of our time is 'happy,' and it is bad because the happiness is

⁹ Aims of a BYU Education, “Spiritually Strengthening.”

¹⁰ Jacques Maritain. “The Frontiers of Poetry.”

<http://www.nd.edu/Departments/Maritain/etext/frontier.htm>

synthetic.¹¹

The trace of these things can stain us, causing us, if we are not careful, to emulate and advocate models of art and communication whose themes uphold weak or even false ideas, whose techniques result in pieces that are “without form and void,”¹² or whose tone or underlying philosophies have “a form of godliness but . . . deny the power thereof.”¹³ We can find our work, or that of our students, slipping into the world’s selfish lack of restraint, indulging as it does in an attitude of “How can I shock you now?” Elder Maxwell noted that

Moderns elsewhere may, with anguish and clarity, use art to describe the dark and the anguished human condition at forty fathoms in a sea of sin, but BYU, in the dispersing of its talents, seeks to add to the light rather than further describe the darkness, and the latter is a style that, unfortunately, is becoming normative.¹⁴

The lack of restraint mentioned earlier needs to be replaced with submissiveness, taught Elder Maxwell. We ought to hold back the world and give in to the Lord. Many might see this as a loss of artistic or academic freedom or independence. “I am inclined to think,” he said,

that holding back can . . . reflect a mistaken understanding regarding our individuality. Some presume we will lose our identity if we are totally "swallowed up." Of course, our individuality is actually enhanced by submissiveness and by righteousness. It is sin that grinds us down to sameness--to a monotonous, single plane.¹⁵

As a student composer, my teachers told me that I should try lots of approaches, gain as much experience as I could, and that eventually I would find my own voice. What a powerful, challenging thought it is then, to realize that that voice will be enhanced and become authentic as we lose our will and submit it to God. Expressing ourselves with greater restraint always brings refinement and a distilled, sharpened focus, allowing our work to speak with greater freedom and effect.

My third question is, how can we express the values and truths of the gospel in our work as artists, scholars, and researchers?

I have often quoted Jacques Maritain, a French Catholic philosopher, who said,

¹¹ Arthur Henry King, *The Abundance of the Heart*. Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1986, p. 134.

¹² Moses 2:2

¹³ Joseph Smith – History 1:19

¹⁴ Neal A. Maxwell, “Why a University in the Kingdom?” *Ensign*, Oct. 1975, 6.

¹⁵ Neal A. Maxwell *Discipleship and Scholarship*

<http://unicomm.byu.edu/about/foundation/documents/maxwell.htm>

If you want to make a Christian work, then be Christian, and simply try to make a beautiful work, into which your heart will pass: do not try to "make Christian."

Do not make the absurd attempt to dissociate in yourself the artist and the Christian. They are one, if you are truly Christian, and if your art is not isolated from your soul by some system of aesthetics. But apply only the artist to the work; precisely because the artist and the Christian are one, the work will derive wholly from each of them.

Do not separate your art from your faith. But leave distinct what is distinct. Do not try to blend by force what life unites so well. If you were to make of your aesthetic an article of faith, you would spoil your faith. If you were to make of your devotion a rule of artistic activity, or if you were to turn desire to edify into a method of your art, you would spoil your art.¹⁶

Maritain's quote suggests that if we wish to communicate honestly, to make art that speaks from our hearts with the power of our faith, we should not use a recipe that calls for a pinch of religiosity or a dash of spirituality. Our faith is not a coat of shellac we brush on after the work is done. It recommends we attend a great deal to the inputs to our spirit, and let the outputs speak for themselves. Jesus taught us "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh."¹⁷

Again quoting Elder Maxwell, "Whatever our particular fields of scholarship, the real test is individual discipleship, not scholarship. But how good it is when these two can company together, blending meekness with brightness and articulateness with righteousness."¹⁸

As suggested by my previous questions, I do not believe we should take no thought about our motives or desires in making art or writing articles. There are some topics about which we can write, ideas that we can explore, or external collaborators we can work with that will move the kingdom along faster than others. There are ways of framing answers to the questions we are asking that are more faithful than others, that point us and our audiences forward, answers that stand for something, and these should be sought. But in so doing, we must guard against trying to make over the top, self-conscious Mormon art. It must arise from within us. It is less a self-conscious act and more the natural result of the sacrifices we make to keep our covenants and to develop our gifts.

¹⁶ Jacques Maritain, "Art and Scholasticism," Chapter VIII, "Christian Art." <http://www.nd.edu/Departments/Maritain/etext/art8.htm>

¹⁷ Luke 6:45

¹⁸ Maxwell, Neal A. "Discipleship and Scholarship." *BYU Studies* 32(3), Summer 1992, pp. 5-9.

My fourth question: Is it possible to please both our peers and the Lord?

The short answer is yes, if we focus on pleasing the Lord first and seeking to serve the world and our disciplines, rather than to gain its praise. It will take the very best we have to offer in personal and spiritual development. It will require grace. It will happen in process of time. It will be part of us becoming “the fully anointed university of the Lord”¹⁹ spoke of by President Kimball.

I believe there are ways to think about and present the problem of exercising faith in a faithless world that will open the hearts of millions, not just hundreds. I believe there are sounds and images so vitally fresh they will, upon experiencing them, change the very nature of the recipients, calling them into a new kind of being. There are articles so cogently written that the reader, or the viewer, is compelled to learn more, to trust the source as an honest voice in a sea of attention-seeking headlines.

Who will make this art? Who will write and tell these stories of faith? With many others, I believe you and your students will.

“When it is done,” wrote Elder Packer, “it will be done by one who has yearned and tried and longed fervently to do it, not by one who has condescended to do it. It will take quite as much preparation and work as any masterpiece, and a different kind of inspiration.”

I return to Campbell’s email to me. “[Our] stewardship,” he writes,

gives us the responsibility to seek after things (and people and places) that are virtuous, lovely and of good report and praiseworthy, wherever they may be found and to strengthen them. It gives us the responsibility to contribute our own expression of good things wherever we can. It gives us the responsibility to influence and convert His children, which requires empathy and understanding, reason and knowledge of people and places and things and ideas.

This . . . paradigm is one in which the world is our campus, within which we function, to which we contribute, and from which we receive knowledge and experience.

But to feel confident in this position and to advance its potential requires continual debate and discourse so that we are aligned with Him and so that our leaders are aware of and are informing our work. This represents a different kind of academic person and academic environment to the conventional one. It requires

¹⁹ Spencer W. Kimball. “Second Century Address.” BYU Devotional, 10 October. 1975. http://www.byu.edu/fc/ee/w_swk75.htm

one who (and which) is collaborative, open, reaching out and including others. One who is not protecting title, but who is committed to the unlimited potential of knowledge and behavior when more and more people become participants in the environment of goodness and truth.²⁰

We are about a great work that will not fail. May God bless you this school year as you seek to bless and love your students. You have our confidence and trust. May you have the help of the Lord in the development of your gifts and the expression of your faith. May you have sufficient for your needs and be blessed with peace in your families. May the pressures and limits of time be a blessing to you, helping you to choose wisely those activities that will yield the greatest rewards, and blessing you to rely more upon the Lord to help you accomplish what you could not do on your own, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

²⁰ Personal email from Campbell Gray, Director, BYU Museum of Art. 19 August 2004.