



Brigham Young University

Jeffrey R. Holland
President

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President Norman Lamm
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Dear President Lamb:

I was heartened and inspired by your recent article in The New York Times entitled "A Moral Mission for Colleges." You make a very telling point in a wonderfully articulate way and I commend you for your leadership in this important area.

The whole matter of declining moral and ethical strength in public and private life, particularly as such a decline indicts educational practices, is a chief concern of mine. I am taking the liberty of enclosing a copy of a talk I gave at the National Press Club not long after the highly publicized A Nation at Risk was issued. Perhaps you will find it of at least passing interest.

With best wishes,



Jeffrey R. Holland

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enclosure

A “Notion” at Risk

Jeffrey R. Holland, President
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(An address given by Jeffrey R. Holland, the president of Brigham Young University, at the National Press Club, Washington, D.C., on March 22, 1984.)

A "Notion" at Risk

*T*hank you for your hospitality this morning. I am aware of the responsibility such an invitation carries, and I earnestly hope you will feel your time has been well spent. Allen Drury once said that Washington, D.C., is "a city of just-arriveds and only-visittings."¹ I am guilty on both counts but am delighted to be in the nation's capital.

The Nation at Risk

Education is in the news. For the past twelve months the nation has been awash in a flood of reports and studies on the state of American schools. We have seen it examined by national commissions which say the "nation [is] at risk"² and by task forces that insist on "action for excellence."³ We are coached along the way by the very formal Carnegie Foundation and the very informal Group of Fifty. And of course these are only the evidence of national anguish. A gaggle of state and local reports pursue the agenda closer to our respective homes. Business barons and social scientists, public policy-makers and skeptical taxpayers are wading into the swamp to grapple with educational reform in his or her own way. And more reports of their combat are yet to come, some of them already public through recently published interim findings. Through it all education promises to be one of the three or four top domestic issues in the 1984 election campaign.

Though the former U.S. commissioner of education, Harold Howe II, terms this "heady wine for educators," he is also quick to note the "fickle ebb and flow of the tides of enthusiasm for education"⁴ which have been particularly evident for one-third of a century in this country. President Bartlett Giamatti of Yale University is even more biting:

The gaudy halftime show put on in the last six months by the strutting incumbents and aspirants for of-

fice, followed as always by massed trombones and xylophones of the press, will probably do no real harm, although the racket will be tremendous for awhile. . . .

[In fact] national opinion leaders and federal officials are paralyzed, baffled by the proper demands for partnership, lost in the joys of preemptive ideological strikes and in distrust of what their polls tell them is deeply important. As the country, fragmented, without serious moral authority from any quarter of public leadership, struggles to pay attention again to the means for elementary and secondary education, mistakes will be made; [even as] some ideas will be trumpeted . . . as the panacea for all time, world without end.⁵

Obviously the subject has touched a raw nerve or two, a little more painfully for some than for others, but eliciting a marked response in every quarter just the same. Not all the reports cover the same ground or make the same recommendations, but for our purposes today may I quote from the most publicized of them, submitted to Secretary T. H. Bell just one year ago by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. Its title is in its opening line.

Our Nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged pre-eminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world. . . . The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur—others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments.

If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war. . . . We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament.

Our society and its educational institutions seem to have lost sight of the basic purposes of schooling, and of the high expectations and disciplined effort needed to attain them.⁶

Then, to demonstrate that the "basic purposes of schooling" have indeed been lost, the commission reports that the Japanese make more automobiles than we do, the South Koreans make better steel mills than we do, the Germans make finer machine

tools than we do, and so forth. Thus, we are told, our nation is at risk.

The Real Problem

My concern this morning, after nearly a year of reading such reports and listening to them being endlessly discussed, is that while a nation may be at risk, it is manifestly clear that a very important American notion is at even greater risk.

As evidenced by their conspicuous and wholesale absence from virtually every one of these reports and proposals, we have obviously relegated all the moral and civic (read "civilizing") values of education to the very back seat of the big yellow bus—if indeed they are still being allowed to ride at all—while prominently seated up front are the real necessities, those which give primacy to our economic needs, our escalating technological needs—in short, those that are "unabashedly utilitarian." As Professor Douglas Sloan has said, "First, a living, then art and morality; first, survival for our financially beleaguered colleges and universities, then a philosophy of higher education. . . ." If one doesn't believe it, just ask the Education Commission of the States. Last month a university president serving there said, "I really believe there has got to be a resurgence of public commitment to education in the country, and I think it's fundamental if we really do want to see economic growth, advancement in national defense, and an increase in productivity. . . . This has got to become the nation's number-one priority."⁸

Well, if our number one priority in this country is education devoted to economic growth, national defense, and increased productivity, important as they are, then God in his heaven cannot help us out of the severe straits we are in. No wonder Amitai Etzioni speaks of the 1980s as "the hollowing of America."⁹ Meg Greenfield saw the wrongheadedness of it all when she wrote several months ago that

the values we bring to the effort to right the situation are precisely the ones that got us in trouble in the first place and are only likely to perpetuate our grief.

Education as an "investment," education as a way to beat the Russians and best the Japanese, education as a way to get ahead of the fellow down the street . . . you

really do not generate the educational values that count when you stress only these external, comparative advantages.¹⁰

In the words of Robert Nash and Edward Du-charme about *A Nation at Risk*, "[The report's] deficiencies are a direct outgrowth of what is essentially a manpower-needs view of educational excellence, a view which encourages a marketplace solution to complex spiritual and intellectual problems."¹¹

What is missing, they say, is evidence that the commission asked "the most irksome (yet the most important) value question of all: what should education's short- and long-term purposes be beyond [a] response to . . . manpower needs."¹²

It is as if Leo Strauss's classic *Natural Right and History* speaks directly to this hour. "We can be . . . wise in all matters of secondary importance, but we have to be resigned to utter ignorance in the most important respect. . . . We are then in the position of beings who are sane and sober when engaged in trivial business and who gamble like madmen when confronted with serious issues—[it is] retail sanity and wholesale madness."¹³

James Reston made just this point last fall in a *New York Times* article about political leadership. "It's interesting to look back," he says, "at the speeches and the Federalist Papers at the beginning of the American Republic. Their authors were tough politicians, but they were always referring to their responsibilities to 'future generations.' The talk here in modern times is mainly about the next election."¹⁴

Then, quoting Walter Lippmann, Reston goes on. "Those in high places . . . are more than the administrators of government bureaus. They are more than the writers of laws. They are the custodians of a nation's ideals, of the beliefs its cherishes, of the faith which makes a nation out of a mere aggregation of individuals."¹⁵

"Leaders do matter," he concludes. "Much depends on how they view themselves, what they say, whether they appeal to the best or the worst in the people." Well, if that kind of leadership matters in politics, I insist that it matters in education. Teachers and principals and superintendents and presi-

dents of universities are in "high places." They are—or should most assuredly be—"custodians of a nation's ideals, of the beliefs it cherishes, of the faith which makes a nation out of a mere aggregation of individuals."¹⁶ That is after all why all those young Athenians went to Socrates in the first place. Educational leaders "do matter," and as a profession we need to appeal to "the best in the people." The nation is educationally at risk, all right, but not solely for the reasons expressed by the National Commission, indeed not even principally for the reasons they express. As a nation we have lost sight of "the basic purpose of schooling," but so, it seems to me, have far too many of our educators, including many who must have responded to the honest and important inquiries made by the National Commission. Where are the Thoreauvian men and women who will strike at the root of our educational—and national—problem rather than hacking forever at the branches? Too many in our profession have forgotten what Socrates said in those original and purer groves of academe—"For the argument," he said to his students, "is not about just any question, but about the way one should live."¹⁷ Losing the significant sense of that notion has put our nation at risk. It is the greater crisis in American education, for the "rising tide of mediocrity" is in morality and manners far more than in mathematics and manufacturing.

Education in Virtue: Historical Perspective

We know that at least Socrates' very best student tried to address the teacher's question. Against the Sophists, those itinerant charlatans who said they could teach fifth-century B.C. Athenians how to be clever and win debates so long as they didn't worry about "the truth" (of which, relatively speaking, they felt certain there wasn't any), Plato held that not only was there truth but that the highest truth always had moral value. To know it and live according to it was a man's obligation and his virtue. Finally, for him only education in virtue was worthy of the name. Plato's philosophy provided a justification not only for what students ought to be taught but also for how they ought to live.

That philosophy provided what Alston Chase

calls "the paradigmatic rationale for scholarly activity"¹⁸ from the fifth century B.C. to the nineteenth century A.D.

Even during the very darkest moments in our history it endured. St. Benedict, living at a time when Rome was threatened and finally overrun by vandals, simply retreated behind the stone walls of Monte Cassino, taking with him the spirit and valued traditions of Christianity. "While the barbarian invaders ran wild," notes Calvin Woodard, "pillaging and destroying everything in sight, St. Benedict and his monks gently nurtured the flickering flame of civilization."¹⁹

St. Benedict's example reminds us that one of the purposes of education is not only to resist the wicked, the tawdry, and the profane, but to stand unalterably for the higher values of civilization—Plato's truths, if you will—and, when the turbulent world will not accept them, to preserve and keep them alive for the future—when and after the vandals have exhausted themselves.

And so it continued, out of the darkness and into the light. "Learning and training in virtue are peculiar to man," they would still write in the fifteenth century. "We call those studies liberal that are worthy of a free man; those studies by which we obtained and practice virtue and wisdom; that education which calls forth, trains, and develops those highest gifts of body and mind, which ennoble men and are rightly judged to rank next in dignity to virtue only."²⁰

From continental and English Renaissance to the shores of the New World, the universities were charged with molding the moral character of their students.

In the new United States such personal beliefs as John Adams's virtuous citizen²¹ and Thomas Jefferson's moral sense and "aristocracy of talent and virtue"²² were the natural values upon which the Republic was predicated. Jefferson always placed the individual man first in his philosophy and framed his entire social theory in the light of the moral nature of that human being.

The key to John Adams's optimism was his abiding belief in American virtue. He was irrepressible. Even during the darkest hours of the Revolution,

he felt "the great difficulties which America faced, would 'lay the Foundations of a full and flourishing People, deep and strong in great Virtues and abilities.'"²³ He believed firmly that history (under the direction of divine providence) was the story of man's search for liberty, and that America was destined to become the next and greatest in the continuing succession of empires—a land where the two great bulwarks of liberty and knowledge would flourish.

But none of this meant that virtue was either automatic or inevitable. It required education and discipline. The Founding Fathers had read John Locke with a passion and believed with him that "of all the Men we meet with, Nine Parts of Ten are what they are, Good or Evil, useful or not, by their Education."²⁴ The great danger to society then was not from any innate evil within the individual, but rather from ignorance born of sloth. Laziness, both moral and intellectual, was at the heart of the problem.

That is why Benjamin Franklin would believe that an individual, in devoting himself to his own intellectual and moral development in a disciplined way, not only insures his success in life but also determines his society's moral progress. "Virtue is an art, Franklin maintained, as much as painting, architecture, or navigation. If a person wants to become a painter, a navigator, or an architect. . . . One must learn 'the Principles of the Art.'"²⁵ Even the pessimistic James Madison said, "I go on this great republican principle, that the people will have virtue and intelligence to select men of virtue and wisdom. Is there no virtue among us? If there be not, we are in a wretched situation. No theoretical checks, no form of government, can render us secure. To suppose any form of government will secure liberty or happiness without any virtue in the people, is a chimerical idea."²⁶

As Professor Douglas Sloan has so carefully documented (and to whom I am indebted for his writings on ethics and moral philosophy), the moral foundation for the Republic both informed and encouraged the same foundation for the American educational experience. Until the very last decade of the nineteenth century, the most important course

in the college curriculum was moral philosophy, taught usually by the college president and required of all senior students. It aimed to integrate, to give meaning and purpose to the student's entire college experience and course of study. In so doing it more importantly sought to equip the graduating seniors with the ethical sensitivity and insight needed if they were to put their newly acquired knowledge to use in ways that would benefit not only themselves and their own personal advancement, but the larger society as well.

So the foremost task of the moral philosopher was to demonstrate to his students that humans are fundamentally moral creatures. It was his task to exhort, admonish, and inspire students to recognize that the demands of morality were real and all-encompassing. Furthermore the entire college curriculum and campus environment had the same purpose. The entire college experience was meant above all to be an experience in character development and the moral life.

But the advent of the twentieth century brought decisive change, including the rise of the modern university. Yet "Daniel Coit Gilman, President of Johns Hopkins, the model of the research university, spoke for most of his fellow university reformers when he said, 'The object of the university is to develop character—to make men.'"²⁷ But there was change in the wind.

Twentieth-Century Shift in Values

Diversity and specialization, trained experts, the rise of scholarly societies, the elective principle introduced under Charles W. Eliot at Harvard, the growth of university departments, undergraduate specialization, vocationalism, professional education, and research—all of these shattered the vision of a unified curriculum and culture of learning. The ethical, social, and character concerns once central to higher education were giving way to an emphasis on research and specialized training as the primary purpose of the university.

"With the new status and scholarly achievements of the faculties came an academic style that was becoming, in the words of Frederick Rudolph, 'indifferent to undergraduates,' 'removed from moral

judgment,' and to an increasing degree 'unrelated to the traditional social purposes of higher education.'"²⁸

There was an increasing emphasis on "value-free inquiry"—and for good reason. By dispensing with such ethical questions, the scholars also eliminated a major source of potential controversy. The teaching of ethics was relegated to the department of philosophy—where there was little danger that anyone would enroll in it. The classic texts by America's nineteenth-century moral philosophers had all been almost totally abandoned. " 'With the world calling for moral power and efficiency, and with the adolescent of college years in the nascent period of moral adjustment,' wrote one early student of the teaching of ethics, 'how insufficient, foreign, barbarian, do the arid ethical logomachies of most textbooks appear?' "²⁹

Efforts to Resist Change

Some, sensing the loss, tried anxiously to reclaim their cultural and indeed religious heritage. The general education movement in the first half of the twentieth century involved experiments that declared their "central concern was moral education, the turning out of persons with the breadth of knowledge, intellectual discipline, and ethical sensitivity needed to grapple with the personal and social problems of the modern world."³⁰

One of the earliest efforts was made at Columbia in 1917. Harry Carman said,

*The college, we agreed, should be concerned with education for effective citizenship in a democratic society: citizens with broad perspective and a critical and constructive approach to life, who are concerned about values in terms of integrity of character, motives, attitudes, and excellence of behavior; citizens who have the ability to think, to communicate, to make intelligent and wise judgments, to evaluate moral situations, and to work effectively to good ends with others.*³¹

Twenty-five years later, following the lead of Robert Hutchins, President James Conant of Harvard appointed a committee to study "the objectives for general education in a free society." In 1945 they issued their report. "The impulse to rear students to a received idea of the good," it read, "is

in fact necessary to education. It is impossible to escape the realization that our society, like any society, rests on common beliefs and that a major task of education is to perpetuate them."³²

But it was very hard work and we seemed to be failing. As Walter Lippmann wrote at the time, *we reject the religious and classical heritage, first, because to master it requires more effort than we are willing to compel ourselves to make, and, second, because it creates issues that are too deep and too contentious to be faced with equanimity. We have abolished the old curriculum because we are afraid of it, afraid to face any longer in a modern democratic society the severe discipline and the deep, disconcerting issues of the nature of the universe, and of man's place in it and of his destiny.*³³

Effortless Barbarism

Then came the effortless barbarism of the third quarter of this century when grand educational institutions—and more than a few grand educators—were savaged by the very students who had come to those centers to be civilized. The late sixties and early seventies were the darkest hours in the history of American higher education, a dark night of the institutional soul from which we have not yet and may not ever fully recover. In their disdain for standards and their demand for relevance, our cultural continuity was eroded, and any institutional sense of morality regarding a student's course work, conversation, conduct, or sexual conquest was obliterated. Our Benedictine walls around campus were not thick enough, and neither were our convictions.

Now in the eighties we are trying to pick up the pieces. In our time it is obligatory for us to see that schools in this nation forcefully renew their commitment to the inseparability of living and learning—and the sooner the better. If we are not diligent, it will be as Montaigne wrote, "They teach us to live, when life is past. A hundred students have caught the syphilis before they came to Aristotle's lesson on temperance."³⁴

The moral decline of higher education in the twentieth century was both representative of and cause for decline elsewhere in society, especially in the primary and secondary schools. President Reagan has chosen to focus on at least one rather ob-

vious—and universally deplored—manifestation of the present problem there. Every year for fifteen years respondents to the annual Gallup Poll have listed "lack of discipline"³⁵ as their number one concern in elementary and secondary schools.

In August of 1983, President Reagan and Secretary Bell, concerned about persistent reports of a school discipline/violence problem in the schools, directed the Human Resources Cabinet Council to establish a working group on the issue. The report of that working group and its recommendations were presented to the president on January 3, 1984. Four days later Mr. Reagan took to the airwaves in his first radio address of this new year to decry the troubles pointed out in the report. Citing a 1978 report by the National Institute of Education, he revealed that each month three million secondary school children were victims of in-school crime. Two and one-half million were, each month, victims of robberies and thefts, and more than 250,000 students suffered physical attacks. At the same time 6,000 teachers were being robbed each month, 125,000 teachers were being threatened with physical harm each month, and at least 1,000 teachers each month were assaulted with violence so severe they required medical care. That was 1978. A study released in 1983 suggests that the earlier report probably understated the problem.³⁶

Elsewhere we read of a teacher in California forced by an intruder in her classroom to undress and then be sexually assaulted as her second-grade class looked on in horror. We read of a New Orleans teacher who watched while two boys threw a smaller child off a second-floor balcony, afraid to interfere because she thought the boys might then attack her. We read of high school girls in Los Angeles who set fire to their teacher's hair because of low grades she had given them.³⁷

We read of school property in Alexandria which was slashed, ripped, smashed, soaked, snipped, rammed, and detonated before the school was burned to the ground—presumably by school vandals.³⁸ We read that in New York City high schools on a normal day only 71 percent of enrolled students are in school.³⁹ Crimes against property, malicious mischief, and vandalism cost taxpayers

\$600 million yearly, the equivalent of a vandalism tax of \$13 levied on every public school student in the nation.⁴⁰

It is alarming to open a professional journal as we did some months ago and read "The Testimony of a Battered Teacher."⁴¹ (The neurologist was 90 percent certain she would recover, which must have been reassuring.) It cannot be entirely incidental in any discussion of excellence in education in America—or the lack of it—to note that as the violent trend moves into schools that have traditionally been calm, more teachers are opting to leave the field altogether. Early retirements and resignations had by 1979 reduced the number of teachers with twenty years or more experience by half over a period of less than two decades. Teachers surveyed in Chicago listed nervous tension, ulcers, high blood pressure, migraine headaches, and coronary stress as health hazards faced in their profession. Alfred Bloch, a Los Angeles psychiatrist who has treated nearly 500 public school teachers,⁴² 243 of whom were physically beaten, concluded that the syndrome of these teachers' symptoms was classical "battle fatigue."⁴³ Why not, when a recent survey of California schools found that teachers "spend between 30% and 80% of their time on discipline."⁴⁴ Of course the only other answer is crushing compromise. In the words of Ernest Boyer,

*Beaten down by some of the students and unsupported by the parents, many teachers have entered into an unwritten, unspoken corrupting contract that promises a light work load in exchange for cooperation in the classroom. Both the teacher and the students get what they want. Order in the classroom is preserved, and students neither have to work too hard nor are too distracted from their preoccupations. All of this at the expense of a challenging and demanding education.*⁴⁵

Additional Manifestations

Consider these other manifestations of the problem:

- More than *half* of all serious crimes in the United States are now committed by youths ten to seventeen years of age. Juvenile delinquency is increasing so fast that one of every nine children will appear in court by age eighteen. And studies by the

National Council on Crime and Delinquency show that criminal acts are as common among youth of middle-class families as they are among those from low-income homes.

- Teachers everywhere agree that students of all ages have far less respect for authority than they once had. Children and teenagers defy and swear at their teachers. Says one substitute teacher who has worked for ten years in an affluent suburb: "Every obscene word you can possibly think of has come out of the mouths of elementary school students. And these aren't 'bad' schools."⁴⁶

- Says a veteran elementary school principal: "We're seeing more just plain meanness. On the playground kids don't seem to play like they used to; they rove around in gangs. They're quick to identify the weak ones, kids on the fringe, kids who don't wear the right sneakers or jeans. They go after them, taunt them; there's a vicious edge to it. . . . We've tried to stop it, but we haven't been very successful."⁴⁷

- There's hardly a community in America that doesn't face the problems of teenage drug abuse and drinking. The number of teenage alcoholics is estimated to be 2.5 million. During the 1970s, the number of twelve-seventeen-year-olds experimenting with marijuana and cocaine doubled. Often it starts even younger. Says a mother of two boys in a white-collar town: "The elementary schools in this community are full of drugs. Our kids were into it before we knew what was happening."⁴⁸

- The age at which teenagers begin to have sexual relations gets younger all the time. One in five has had intercourse by fifteen. Teenagers account for 25 percent of the one million reported cases of gonorrhea each year. Half of all illegitimate babies in this country are now born to teenage mothers.⁴⁹

- Says a fifteen-year-old girl: "All my friends are cheating on tests and getting good grades as a result." In one high school survey 95 percent of juniors and seniors admitted cheating. At the college level, according to a survey of research by psychologist Roger Burton, 50 percent to 80 percent of students, given the chance, will cheat on a test.⁵⁰ Many colleges and universities have had to abandon honor codes because of the frequency of violations. In

some cases, students have been found bribing custodians to get copies of an exam and then selling them to their fellow students.

North Carolina State University Professor Hattye Liston says that "cheating is an American pastime," involving 30 to 50 percent of the nation's higher education students. (We use higher education advisedly.) Speaking at a recent conference of the American Psychological Association he noted that one West Los Angeles company working "the term paper flimflam . . . has been operating since 1969, and boasts a catalog of over 14,000 titles, taking pride in adding several hundred new titles every year."⁵¹

"The company employs fifty professional writers, each with an advanced degree and specializing in a particular field. All academic topics are covered." Business is brisk. The product is a finished term paper, complete with footnotes, bibliography, and covers. The price? A very reasonable \$5.00 a page.⁵²

• Or what of the 131 U.S. business students recently surveyed? Nearly all expected to face pressure toward unethical behavior, and fully one-half of them anticipated, not resistance to that invitation, but accommodation and compromise. I suppose then that it is no surprise to learn that two years ago white-collar crime in the retail industry alone in this nation was an \$8-billion-a-year business. That's \$26 million a day, every day,⁵³ taken, I suppose, by those like the young business students who were quite prepared to compromise, even before they got out to that first job.

• Two years before that \$23 million was taken out the front door of banks in armed robbery while three times this amount, about \$80 million, was taken out the back door in fraud and embezzlement. Where did those clerks and accountants and loan officers and vice-presidents go to school? And what were they taught? As one writer said, "If English literature courses can teach the distinction between Shakespeare and comic books, the school should also be able to take a stand on what is ethically sound."⁵⁴ But that is clearly a notion at risk in the 1980s.

• April 15 is just around the corner. "Taxes," said Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., "are what

we pay for civilized society.”⁵⁵ Ever since 1913, when the income tax system became law, there has been the expected grumbling as well as the classic debates about just who should pay and how much, but civilized people paid. At least we assumed so. During a three-month “tax amnesty” program in Massachusetts that ended last January, more than \$54.6 million was received.⁵⁶ This amount shattered even the most optimistic forecasts for payment.

In a poll conducted for *Time* by Yankelovich, Skelly and White, Inc., 43 percent of those questioned found cheating on taxes “acceptable.” In an Oregon state survey, one out of four citizens revealed that they had cheated on their taxes and in another study more than half felt that most everyone would cheat if they had the chance and thought they could get away with it.⁵⁷

Well, enough of this jeremiad. Surely some criticism for our present plight has to be directed toward me and my fellow presidents who should have been in the forefront all these years, “custodians of a nation’s ideals,”⁵⁸ declaring the difference between right and wrong.

Consider this story told to me personally by Alston Chase. A friend of his was teaching at a small liberal arts college. One of his students, living off campus, vandalized her apartment to the tune of several thousand dollars and then refused to reimburse the landlord. As the college did nothing to encourage her to pay the damages, the professor took matters into his own hands. He gave her an F in the course she was taking from him and told her that he would not change it until she paid the landlord. He justified this, he told the college, on the solid Socratic grounds that if a student did not know right from wrong she should not pass a college course.

Well, the college authorities, naturally, were incensed. The grievance committee overruled him, expunged the F from the student’s record, and did not renew his contract.

There Is Hope

On that note of what is right and what is wrong, I draw to a close. For all that I’ve said, there is hope—and a courageous teacher like this proves it.

There is a national battalion of them out there, from Seattle to Savannah and from Bangor to Burbank. The most sensational of the problems we have mentioned are limited, but they are increasing and we must act boldly. Fortunately there is an increasing number of private voices giving an ever clearer call to arms. I believe several chapters of Alston Chase's *Group Memory* to be the best examination of the moral issues facing—and in some sense, stemming from—higher education in the 80s. For slightly different purposes one would add President Derek Bok's *Beyond the Ivory Tower*. A third would be Warren Bryan Martin's *College of Character*, and, earlier, Alexander W. Astin's *Four Critical Years*. A provocative look at the college student (rather than at the college per se) is Arthur Levine's *When Dreams and Heroes Died*.

For primary and secondary education I would commend Neil Postman and Jonathan Kozol for their persuasive effort to claim a moral base for our educational efforts, one which underscores the continuity of the human enterprise. Like most people, I don't know exactly what to do with Mortimer Adler's *Paideia Proposal*, but three other very recent books on the public schools are encouraging—Ernest Boyer's *High School*, John Goodlad's *A Place Called School*, and TheodoreSizer's very new *Horace's Compromise*. None deals as directly with the continuity of moral tradition in education as I would like, but they are good books written by good men who are pointing in the right direction. And the rest of us must do more. Our schools and those who teach there need the support, as Secretary Bell said to the National Commission, "of all who care about the future."⁵⁹ I suggest the following:

(1) For one thing we can all talk about and expect more and indeed demand more virtue in our lives and in our schools. The remarkable Barbara Tuchman once wrote, "Standards of . . . morality . . . need continued reaffirmation to stay alive, as liberty needs eternal vigilance. To recognize and to proclaim the difference between the good and the shoddy, the true and the fake, as well as between right and wrong . . . is the obligation . . . of persons who presume to lead, or are thrust into leadership, or hold positions of authority."⁶⁰ We can have

exactly what we want in this matter of morality. SAT scores in mathematics have finally improved after nineteen years of decline—largely, I think, because enough people talked about it and expected it and indeed demanded it. We can do the same regarding the civilizing of our children's minds if we want it badly enough.

(2) Schools, and especially universities, have to again be keepers of what Chase calls the group memory, remembering the unity, continuity, and values which have marked the teaching of the liberal arts for nearly 2,500 years.

At Brigham Young University we have nearly completed a review of our twelve academic schools and colleges in which we are trying to evaluate and encourage the unifying principles that should characterize any true university and, more specifically in our case, a true Christian university. We are determined not to be sadly secularized, nor to fracture our institutional unity through departmental isolation or increasingly specialized technologies. And because we teach future teachers, as well as future doctors and lawyers and mothers and fathers, we intend to send them out into the world with a sound sense of where they fit in the scheme of things.

We are also initiating a massive reorientation of our Student Life organization. We are moving to have these young student leaders create for themselves the kind of campus milieu which will communicate an expectation of virtue and moral growth to every student who comes on campus. An initial group of several hundred students are being monitored as they identify their individual values (within the context of traditional Judeo-Christian values) and then set personal goals, short- and long-term, that flow from those values.

We have committed five full-time and two part-time professionals to design and implement this student experiment. It has been under way for one year and will have a major evaluation after one more. If it works we will tell you about it; if it doesn't we probably won't.

(3) With just a little more groundwork to lay, we will be proposing a conference on the moral foundations of higher education to be hosted, if no one else wishes to do so, at Brigham Young Uni-

versity. Such a conference could convene one year from now, and we have every reason to believe there are many who would be interested.

(4) Lastly, the parents of this nation need to care about the moral quality of their schools—K through college—because there is precious little chance that a willing but increasingly weary band of underpaid school teachers or beleaguered administrators will have either the will or the way to do it without you. We need to put back into those civics texts the teachings that were once so central to our national experience. We've thrown accusations and insults and statistics—and have always wanted to throw money—at this problem. What we really need to throw at it is ourselves.

Faithful to Our Mission

The task before us is staggering. The social and cultural and economic and political problems that complicate it seem nearly insoluble. It all looks very difficult and demanding and dark.

When Mother Teresa was once asked whether she got "discouraged in the face of seemingly endless poverty, disease and misery in the cities of India," she said, "'My job is not to succeed, but to be faithful to my mission.'"⁶¹ With so very much in American life at risk, we ought to stiffen our educational spine and be faithful to the moral notions inherent in our mission. I pray God's blessing that we will. Thank you.

Endnotes

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