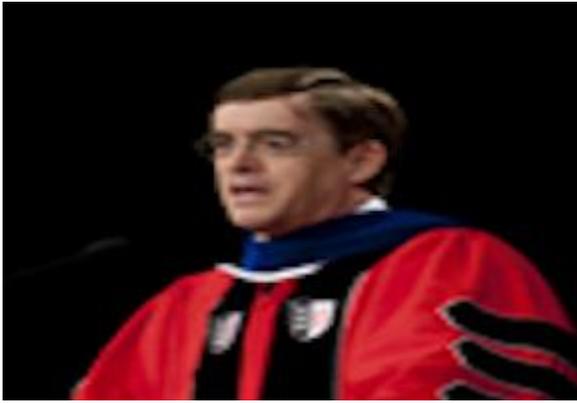


The Consecration of Our Studies



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Brothers and Sisters, Aloha.

It is good to be with you at Convocation literally a coming together at the beginning of a school year to talk about our academic work at the university. You usually see the faculty dressed like this (along with graduating students) at the completion of their university studies at graduation. At graduation the speakers will rightly tell you how you must use the knowledge gained to bless others. Our purpose today is to encourage us all to see to it that when you do graduate, you leave the university with greater knowledge, compassion, understanding, and faithfulness to our Lord, and not simply with a degree that you leave with as much knowledge and capacity learn and to bless others as is possible in the time you are here. To help you be, in Elder Eyring's words not just disciples, but disciple-scholars.

You see different colors among the robes of the faculty. At the university where I graduated with my PhD, some wore black robes and some bright red. I thought this must be because the faculty had chosen a few select students for recognition. I soon learned what that recognition was when, after the degrees were conferred, they moved those in red robes to a kind of fenced in arena and let the bulls out.

That's not really true, of course. The differences in robes here are differences of the university where one graduated with their advanced degrees. Most are black, some are other colors. And the hoods will also often differ according to the particular school, music, history, science, social science, etc.

In December of 2009, CNN Money magazine, reported on what were considered the fifty best jobs in America. College professor came in third. I posted and link to this and wrote the following on my facebook page:

I'm one of those fortunate ones to have the third best job in America. Though the description given in the article isn't exactly what my university follows, it lays out fairly well what the job is like. Some days are better than others (including the disappointment on days when I haven't connected well or when I've bored my students), and there are some aspects [of the work] that may annoy, but I must admit to absolutely loving my job. Discovering new things and rediscovering old things, getting to know, teach, and learn from students from all over the world. Having great colleagues and being married to one of the best of them. I honestly can't think of anything I'd rather do.

I know most of the faculty here. Some I know better than others. I don't think any of those I know would disagree with the spirit of what I wrote. Students, you should know that we love our jobs, yes because we love the world of academia and the disciplines we work in. But we also love our jobs because we love you. We rejoice in your success to see you work and learn. We enjoy waiting for you on the graduation line and to see you move on to bless lives and build the kingdom in your various countries. Of course, we are not only glad to see you graduate, but also sometimes relieved or surprised when you do. We are disappointed when, for whatever reason, you don't learn, when you don't get what you could be enjoying. This isn't necessarily a matter of our being personally offended or annoyed at you (though sometimes, in our weakness that may be true), but rather because we know the advantage, the enjoyment, the blessing, it is to learn and to know things. Being well educated opens up a world to you.

To illustrate a point I want to make in this regard, let's take one of my world-famous 7 question quizzes. The story is told of the seminary teacher who was to be visited by a supervisor the next day. The day before he told his students to do the following: When he asked a question, everyone was to raise their hands. You raise the left hand if you don't know the answer, and the right hand if you do. That way, all seemed to know, but he would only call on those who knew. Here we'll change it a little. Raise your left hand when and if you think you might know the answer. Raise your right when you are very certain you know. (In this quiz, it is also not cheating to discuss this with your neighbor.)

1.
CajÃ³n
Steel
BodhrÃ¡n
Taiko

2.
Leader to Subject
Father to Son
Husband to Wife
Elder Brother to Younger Brother
Friend to Friend

3. Pray, do not mock me:
I am a very foolish fond old man,
Fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less;
And, to deal plainly,
I fear I am not in my perfect mind.
Methinks I should know you, and know this man;
Yet I am doubtful for I am mainly ignorant
What place this is; and all the skill I have

Remembers not these garments; nor I know not
Where I did lodge last night. Do not laugh at me;
For, as I am a man, I think this lady
To be my child Cordelia.

4. "Charlie bit me. And that really hurt Charlie, and it's still hurting."•

5. " 'Joseph, you are late.' " I took confidence and said:
Yes, but I am clean. I am clean!"

6. Southern Cross.

All Blacks.

Lord of the Rings was filmed here.

7. "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world."

Now, imagine I had told a joke alluding to one of those, or if I had simply referred to it in passing. Would you have got the joke? Would you have understood what I was referring to? Perhaps you would have had a good guess at what I was saying, but you would have missed something. I don't say this to make you feel bad about not knowing these particular things. I picked things that I knew about and that I thought would be obvious to some, but not to others.

But I also hope you sense that it's enjoyable even fun to know things , or to have a puzzle before you and to want to solve it, and when you know something or have figured a mystery out, to want to let others in on it. Let's return to the statement by Wittgenstein: "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world."• One of the ways to think about this is to see that our language, including our culture, our degree of learning, etc. will be the lens by which we see and know the world. Such a limitation needn't be seen as a bad thing, but rather a necessary limiting that opens things up. We will know things if we have the language to know with.

Let me give you an example of this. In May of 1986 I started bird watching. I don't remember why I became interested in that then (though part of it came from a comment a professor made in an English class about how there was a birding group on campus that met once a week). I had a pair of binoculars already. I showed up on Saturday Morning at 7:00 AM and walked for an hour and a half or so with a guide (Professor Simmons) and a group of fellow birders through the southern end of BYU campus. In a little less than two hours that morning, we saw 25 different kinds of birds. I continued with the group for the next two months. I bought my own copy of Peterson's guide book and have continued learning and watching since then. The interesting thing was how much more I saw and heard after that. Where before I might have known 5 or 6 of the birds on campus, now there was so much more of sight and sound. That whole world was there, but I never knew it until I was made attuned to it by knowledge and practice, until I was given the language for it.

I think what I learned there is similar to your education at the university. One of the underlying purposes of a general education is to make you attuned to and give you capacity to see and know and operate in the world around you more fully. This doesn't mean simply knowing facts and dates and formulas (though it includes those things) but knowing how to be knowledgeable and wise, to be able to think and live in a world educatedly, to know how scientists think, how historians understand the world, how artists and musicians create and how their creations are to be 'read' or seen or listened to, how the world of economics (global and personal) goes, how anthropologists or psychologists or sociologists work, how the world of athletic games and competitions and personal fitness are experienced. To know the beauties and intricacies of languages and the literatures of these. To know our own history as a people, our beliefs and practices and the Books of Scripture, as well as some acquaintance with the beliefs and practices of those of other faiths. To understand the world of

mathematics. These are the worlds and the languages that open those worlds that the faculty know and love and want you to experience yourselves. It is the idea behind having a general education, to know the basic languages of the disciplines so you are able to know the world around you better.

The idea of a major, then, is to make you more fully qualified and knowledgeable in a specific discipline. We can't do all there is to do, so we must focus and use the specific gifts, abilities, and interests God has given us to do specific things well. The knowledge from the general education program should help you be well rounded, and generally speaking the more you know outside your discipline, the more you'll see within it as well.

Remember, to be learned is good. I know you are all filling in the rest of the scripture with "if they hearken to the counsels of God."• But let's take that as a given, and generally speaking if we are here and are living up to the standards required of us and that we are committed to following our Savior, let's take it as a given that we are seeking to hearken to God's counsels. Then to be learned is good. Why? I've given you one reason. In the language of section 59 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the fulness of the earth is opened up to us. We follow Christ and seek to know him and he gives us the revelatory knowledge and the knowledge of experience that lets us know him. And the knowledge we gain in our studies can help us know him at the very least in knowing the world he has created, and peoples who have and do live in this world. Christ is the light and life and truth of the world and the life and light of men. When coupled with our efforts to follow and be like him, the fulness of the world, the fulness of his light begins to shine and grow. "That which is of God is light, and he that receiveth light and continueth in God, receiveth more light, that light growth brighter and brighter until the perfect day."•

There are other reasons that it is good to be learned. Perhaps you are thinking of some now. Let me give you a second reason beyond the idea that learning opens up the fulness of the earth. At the end of the years you spend at BYU-Hawaii, you will have made decisions that will determine who you are, what you have become, what you are able to do. The ideal for anybody, at the end of your time here, will be to be a good person, that is, a disciple of Christ-fully and whole heartedly. But you should also be a disciple who has been well educated at a university. This means you should be able to think more carefully and knowledgeably about the world around you, to express yourself more clearly and articulately, to be more wise and learned and good.

Let's say that you have two people, the same "you"• if you will. Both are equally prayerful, devout, obedient, all of that is the same. At the end of your time at the university, the two "yous"• will also have made decisions with regard to your studies.

I want to suggest that the you who is well educated can be more effective in God's service, in doing good for others, in helping and understanding. He or she may see more, be able to see problems and solutions more clearly and creatively. You will be more learned and this is good.

Am I saying one who isn't university educated cannot be a good servant? Not at all. I am saying that those of us who have university educations can and must bring those gifts to the Lord's service. If God has given you the gift of learning (and if you are here he is offering that gift to you), he wants that gift magnified. And if the Lord has provided a university like this, I am convinced he wants us to be the best educated that we can be. That is the stewardship that befalls both students and teachers and staff that work here.

With a mind towards helping us as teachers and students help us keep this stewardship (and I emphasize that this applies to Faculty and Students and Staff I haven't forgotten the staff here and the vital role they play. For times sake I must speak of student and faculty), what can we do to help us keep and magnify this stewardship? Again, I hope you are thinking of things.

In answering this question, I want to talk about some different ways to see the relation of student and teacher that might illuminate how we can provide for the best possibilities of success. I don't pretend that my description here covers everything, only that it can shed light on the experience.

This summer, I was a student again. For two weeks in June I attended a seminar on Buddhism in Jemez Springs, New Mexico. I met some very kind and interesting people there. The seminar was an interesting mix of practice (early morning zazen or meditation starting at 5:15), instruction throughout the day into the evening from leading professors in their fields, and about every other day, a dharma lecture from a one hundred and three year old Zen Master, Roshi as he was called. (His mind, by the way, was as clear as any, and he was still articulate and full of energy). I enrolled in this seminar because of personal and scholarly interests, including an interest to be more effective in the classroom. One of the courses I teach is the World Religions and the Gospel. I have studied in Academic Settings a few of the religions in detail, Christianity, Islam, Judaism, but had comparatively less formal schooling in the others (including Buddhism). Granted I had read a number of books, but never had any formal courses and certainly no face to face instruction. This is not the place to discuss what I learned about Buddhism. I did, however, relearn some things about being a student and being a teacher.

Generally speaking, I read what I was supposed to, most of it a few weeks before the seminar actually took place. Because of a mix up, there were some readings I never received until after the seminar began and there was little time to catch up. Though I read them (most of them), I was not able to read these as carefully as the others. You can guess which sessions I learned the most from. When I came to class having not read, I still learned, but to this day retain much less of that. (And this is true despite my promise that I would get back to this someday, something that hasn't happened yet.) When I read before the lecture I learned much more. And when I studied as opposed to just reading, the difference was tremendous. Granted that some of the professors were better presenters than others. Some knew how to communicate more clearly and interestingly. But whether they were average, good, or excellent presenters, generally speaking I learned most when I was prepared.

One of the key things will be for us as teachers to set things up so that you are studying and doing work before you ever come to class that we shift the burden of learning back to you. In saying this, I don't mean to say that new learning never happens in the classroom or that teachers really have little to do in the whole process. I don't mean that at all. But the key moments are when you come to know and learn and do for yourself. In this sense we might see the relation of teachers and students similar say to a master woodcarver and apprentice woodcarvers. The master speaks and shows how things are done and gives the apprentices opportunities to try, giving guidance and correction as you go along. The apprentice, ideally, is eventually able to do something on his or her own, maybe not always at the level and skill of the master, but something similar.

Think back to my previously described experience learning to be a bird watcher. I showed up and I showed up with the binoculars. There was someone to guide and explain things and answer questions when those of us in the group had them. Professor Simmons not only told us what birds we were looking at, but he also taught us how to look, how to identify birds by noting markings, habitat, behavior, so we could see and know for ourselves when he wasn't there. Learning happened from the first moment I joined the group, but the most important learning came when I picked up the book and started looking for myself, something he had prepared us for.

With this in mind, perhaps the most important thing professors can do may not be so much to teach a certain

body of knowledge (though I emphasize this is vital in many areas), but to teach the how and the why of a discipline that is, to help students gain capacity to think and act and do in particular ways to know and speak the language of the disciplines. While courses differ across the curriculum, perhaps we should orient them such that we emphasize not only learning content, but also gaining capacity.

As this continues, there is a real sense in which the relation of teacher to student, becomes one of fellow learners. I think this idea of fellow learners happens at one level when we, as professors, keep learning through study and research. I have found that I am most effective in the classroom, both more interested and more interesting, when I am still learning new things about what I am teaching. Some of what I learn may make it into the classroom directly in giving students the latest discoveries or controversies, or perhaps in being able to answer a question more fully. Some may make it in indirectly in that I still see the subject I am teaching as fresh and interesting.

There's another way in which I think we are fellow learners. It's easy to think that because a professor has so much knowledge he or she can't learn much from students. My experience, and I would guess the experience of my fellow professors, has taught me otherwise particularly if I set my classes up in a way where students can bring their experience and insight to bear. At one level, students may know more about a subject or certain aspect of a subject than me.

For instance, for the last couple years, I have been teaching an Interdisciplinary Course (one of the possible course Juniors or Seniors are to take before they graduate). This particular course deals with Christianity in Film, Art, Music, Literature and Theology. I have students from a variety of majors. Some of those students, say for instance art or music majors, may by both experience and formal schooling know and see and hear things I don't. When I do things right, asking the right questions, setting things up in a way where students feel free and encouraged (perhaps even obligated) to comment and contribute, they help me and other students understand more than we otherwise would.

Interestingly, I've also found when it comes to the "theology"• or "philosophy"• part of understanding Christianity (the area where, because of the opportunities I've had to study through the years, I will know more than my students about most things), if I set things up and have students wrestle with particular issues in Christian thought, they often end up (sometimes as individuals, sometimes as a class) being smarter than they actually know. By this I mean that their honest, careful, thoughtful questions and comments often end up laying out some of the basic arguments and positions that philosophers and theologians have argued through the centuries. The student's arguments aren't always bolstered with the sophistication and elaborate thinking of a major theologian or philosopher, but they often see right to the heart of the issues and questions at hand. And now and then a student's careful comments often make me wish I had said it that way. I may actually end up quoting them in class for years. In many ways I see enacted there the kind of principle spoken of in Section 88 122: "Appoint among yourselves a teacher, and let not all be spokesmen at once; but let one speak at a time and let all listen unto his sayings, that when all have spoken that all may be edified of all and that every man may have an equal privilege."• Now I don't mean to say all classes can or should be run the way I do this particular class. That would be both impossible and foolish. We wouldn't have time, for instance, to go around a course with forty or more students and ask each student what he or she thought about the storming of the Bastille, or what bad experiences they may have had with the law of gravity. But perhaps we can think of ways that something similar to the principle here could be worked out in appropriate and helpful ways, ways in which, in the language of section 46 of the Doctrine and Covenants, people bring their various gifts to the table "that all may be profited thereby."• And think of the variety of possible perspectives and gifts that can be brought at this university.

But however we see that, I think it is helpful for students and teachers to see themselves as fellow learners, even if that is at different levels. This of course means that we as faculty must keep learning. As I mentioned earlier,

I'm most effective in the classroom when I'm still learning. I'm least effective when I simply repeat the same things in the same ways as I have for years. Of course, this doesn't mean I don't teach some things in the same way as I always have. If I find something that works, I use it. But the research and learning that I keep doing help keep me and my presentation alive.

Thus far we've covered the idea of the relation of teacher and student as one of master and apprentice, and one as fellow learners. I suggest one other, one of fellow disciples under consecration to use our time and talents and efforts -and specifically our academic efforts--under God's guidance and to be used for his purposes. Think of it this way: The Lord's Church pays the salaries of the faculty and staff and provides the greater part of Students tuition. It costs lots of money, money taken from the tithes. This puts a serious face on things. We must be diligent and see that we do an honorable work with our stewardship.

For a moment let me be more direct about this than some might like. I don't want to offend. If it helps you get through this, please remember my experience in fourth grade. Our teacher was Miss Goshorn. She taught us well. To this day I still remember her reading *Animal Farm* and *Charlotte's Web* to us. I liked her and generally tried to be a good boy in her class. One day, a student did or said something that made everybody laugh and clap and scream boisterously. In the middle of this I cupped my hands around my mouth and gave out my best Tarzan yell. Miss Goshorn was not happy with the class or with me. She told us in rather stern words that this was not appropriate. She asked who did the Tarzan yell. "Keith Lane did you do that?"• I said no. "You didn't cup your hand like this and yell?"• I knew then she'd seen me. In my fourth grade embarrassment and shame I said "If I did, I didn't mean to." With that she let it go, knowing she'd done enough. I was so sorry and really wouldn't do that again. If what I describe now fits, please accept it even if on a level of "If I did, I didn't mean to."

I know there are serious and diligent students at BYU-Hawaii. I know this. I wonder however, if we really have a culture of study that influences all that we do here like it should. Search your experience, including what you observe around you seriously and honestly. I don't think we do yet. It should be a given that we will be diligent and hard working and that we give our studies a high place. That after all is why the Lord has given us a university. We must do what we can individually and collectively to help us be better than we are in this regard. I'm fully aware of the pressures some experience with demanding course loads, work, learning in a second language, living in a different culture, etc. Those are real challenges and we must work with those challenges. But we must be much more intent on our studies. In many ways, the future success of God's kingdom in your various countries depends on this. How we more fully create this culture of study is a serious and critical discussion we must have. If our lives and our studies are to be consecrated to God, we must take this to heart to create a culture of study that fosters study and that makes study more effective. (Please note that I am not saying not to have any fun or outside enjoyment. Not at all. I am saying to let studies be the main effort and the others as the happy and needed breaks that help support this main effort.)

Having said that rather negatively, let me put it in another more positive light. One way to see your time at BYU-Hawaii is as a kind of MTC for life. You come and work and learn so that you can be a more effective instrument in the Lord's hand for your families, your communities, your peoples. This means making sacrifices and giving genuine, full-hearted attention to your studies. The good thing in this is that you can then see your studies as an integral part of your discipleship. When our heart is set to do God's will in all things, our studies then become a key part in doing that will. Our studies truly can be a kind of consecration. And the wonderful thing then is that you may have God's Spirit to enlighten and enliven your studies in all areas. God can sanctify or make holy your studying, no matter what it is.

This isn't a matter of the Lord letting you off with less work, or of his necessarily making things easy. He requires that we work diligently. In Provo one of my student wards one year met in their testing center for

Sacrament meeting. Between the Church meetings and the prayers that went up during the week and especially during finals, that was probably the prayingest place on Campus. I don't think the Lord is interested in whispering answers to us if we haven't studied. (That almost sounds like cheating.) But I do believe he will help and enlighten and strengthen our earnest and diligent efforts. Not everyone who puts out such effort will get A's. But the Lord can bless our studies and he wants us to learn and grow and gain capacity to continue such learning all of our lives. As we consecrate our time and studies to him, he can sanctify them and us. For Faculty and Staff and Students alike, it will be real work requiring our best efforts sometimes long and exhausting, but it can be a sweet, joyful, holy work.

Photo by Nathan Lehano.