

# Speeches

*Inaugural Address*

CECIL O. SAMUELSON

9 September 2003

*Cecil O. Samuelson is the president of Brigham Young University. This address was delivered at his inauguration on 9 September 2003 in the Marriott Center.*

President Hinckley, officers, other members of the board of trustees, other General Authorities, auxiliary officers, government and education leaders, honored guests, students, staff, faculty, special friends, brothers and sisters, and family: It is an honor and privilege not easily described to stand before you this morning in these special circumstances. I am mindful of the significant sacrifices made by many of you to participate with us. Sharon and I will be ever grateful for your support and thoughtfulness. Likewise, literally hundreds of the university family have worked tirelessly to plan, support, and implement today's events. I thank those who have spoken today in representing this impressive throng.

So much has been done by so many. I am frankly embarrassed, but I am constantly reminded that today is not about me. It is all about this wonderful place and idea we know as Brigham Young University.

We have had a remarkable history. We must never forget those whose vision and sacrifices have made our comfortable and positive present possible. We are grateful that Elder and Sister Bateman are with us today. President Bateman built impressively on the firm foundation he found when he arrived and in turn left the university strengthened in important ways. Presidents Lee, Holland, and Oaks have left in their time wonderful, indelible marks that have lifted BYU in its continuing ascendancy. I am grateful that I have personally witnessed their contributions over the years and now benefit from them. My appreciation for President Wilkinson and his six predecessors is more distant but no less profound. All could have done what they did only with the inspired leadership and support of the board of trustees that has been constant throughout our history.

It is also appropriate that we pause to express gratitude to those of today who contribute so significantly to this large, complicated, and wonderful enterprise we call BYU. This includes, of course, our trustees and other Church leaders, our spectacular students, our able staff and administration, and our devoted faculty. But we must also remember our debt for the substantive and continuing support of those many who assist and enable us through their faithful living of the law of tithing. This includes the poor and meek who may never have the privilege of a direct BYU experience for themselves or for their family members. In addition, we express deep gratitude for that important and impressive group of leaders, friends, and alumni who so generously share the bounty of their blessings with the university. They help fulfill our dreams and those of many generations who love and have loved Brigham Young University.

President Hinckley, I am grateful for your wise and continuing counsel and will do all within my power to live true to the great confidence you place in me and my associates. Although our opportunities and responsibilities are daunting, I am comforted to know of your encouragement and support, knowing also whose servant you are. I, together with all my colleagues in every capacity at Brigham Young University, sustain you and those who serve with you. We are grateful for the direction and counsel we receive and also appreciate the confidence expressed in us to make appropriate decisions and to move the work of this great university forward.

Today is not the time for long explications. It is a day to look to our future. I do so with eagerness and a sense of anxious anticipation for what we might and must accomplish in this next season of the illustrious history of Brigham Young University. We see that future more clearly when we understand more fully our past and also the unique foundation of this great miracle of BYU.

Long before this institution had any physical presence, the need for and potential scope of education in the Church was well understood. Think of early examples from the revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants:

*Teach ye diligently and my grace shall attend you, that you may be instructed more perfectly in theory, in principle, in doctrine, in the law of the gospel, in all things that pertain unto the kingdom of God, that are expedient for you to understand;*

*Of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass; things which are at home, things which are abroad; the wars and the perplexities of the nations, and the judgments which are on the land; and a knowledge also of countries and of kingdoms. . . .*

*. . . Seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith. [D&C 88:78–79, 118]*

Our mandate, with respect to education, is expansive and encompassing. Brigham Young University is a vital element in our commitment to knowledge and wisdom.

If we do our part, we have the unspeakable privilege to be part of an enterprise that may cause inspired prophecy to be fulfilled. But, just as in the early days of our institution, this progress and improvement does not just happen. It requires continued blessings from heaven and also our best, consistent, and most effective efforts. It means we must always keep in mind our sacred mission: to seek the best of academic and scholastic achievement within the enfolding environment and sustaining power of abiding faith in our Heavenly Father and His Son, our Savior, and in the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We cannot neglect or be passive about either our environment of faith or our commitment to academic excellence. In all that we do, we want to bless our students by never allowing the balance between these fundamental basics to become tilted in any direction.

In fact, all that we do must focus on our students. Our common commitment to and understanding of their growth and spiritual and intellectual development is the reason we exist as a university. There are many wonderful universities, and we applaud enthusiastically the great good they do. We will try with confidence to be as

good as the best in certain, carefully selected areas. But we will not be detracted nor detoured from the fundamental “charted course” that makes our mission distinctive.

We recognize our opportunities and also our potential dangers, which are greater than ever before. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell reminds us, “LDS scholars can and should speak in the tongue of scholarship, but without coming to prefer it and without losing the mother tongue of faith” (*Deposition of a Disciple* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976], 16).

Speaking from this pulpit several years ago, President Gordon B. Hinckley said:

*I challenge you never to forget that the schooling of the Spirit is as important, if not more so, than the schooling of the mind. . . .*

*. . . We live in a world where knowledge is developing at an ever-accelerating rate. Drink deeply from this ever-springing well of wisdom and human experience. . . . Keep everlastingly at it. Read. Read. Read. Read the word of God in sacred books of scripture. Read from the great literature of the ages. Read what is being said in our day and time and what will be said in the future. [“A Three-Point Challenge,” BYU commencement address, 27 April 1995; excerpt in *TGBH*, 171]*

All kinds of learning are possible without the university. However, the university—and particularly this university—provides a special milieu, environment, and means that maximize not only the accumulation of knowledge but more importantly enhance the capacity of the individual to learn more ably, profoundly, and effectively in the related realms of scholarship, science, and worldly knowledge and in the spheres of faith, spirituality, and Christian service.

Dr. John A. Fry, president of Franklin and Marshall College, said something in his inaugural address this past April that has resonated with me. With your forbearance, and, I hope, his forgiveness, let me quote him by substituting Brigham Young University for his institution: “With the privilege of a [BYU] education comes the responsibility to act on what was learned” (“The Saga of Franklin and Marshall College,” inaugural address, 12 April 2003, 11–12; at [http://www.fandm.edu/president/address/inaugural\\_address.pdf](http://www.fandm.edu/president/address/inaugural_address.pdf)). If that is true at an institution bearing the names of great Americans Benjamin Franklin and Chief Justice John Marshall, then what should be the responsibility of those having the privilege of an education at this university that bears the name of one of the Lord’s prophets—Brigham Young? We mention often Brigham Young’s instruction to Karl G. Maeser that BYU “ought not to teach even the alphabet or the multiplication tables without the Spirit of God” (in Reinhard Maeser, *Karl G. Maeser: A Biography* [Provo: Brigham Young University, 1928], 79). But we also must understand President Young’s counsel that we “be a people of profound learning pertaining to the things of the world” (*JD* 8:40).

Thus we say with appreciation and with confidence that we “enter to learn [and] go forth to serve.” While we are here learning, we also gain much by serving. As we go forth to serve, we strive to continue to learn so that our service in every sphere can be more productive, effective, and consistent with those things we hold most dear.

I express my gratitude to the officers and members of the Church Board of Education for their confidence and this opportunity; to my many new BYU associates that include students, staff, faculty, administrators, and friends of the university; especially to

Sharon, my wife, who has ever been by my side, particularly when the going is tough and the stakes are high; to our children, their spouses, and our grandchildren; and to each of you for your thoughtful support and friendship, and particularly for your prayers in our behalf. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.