

LIGHT REFLECTIONS

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June 2024

Wholeness

A broad university education—so our mission statement declares—should help students “establish clear standards of intellectual integrity.”¹ For a long time I read this as a call for honesty in matters of the mind—an injunction to avoid cheating, to eschew plagiarism, to tell the truth without counting the cost.

Such a call is urgently needed in our time, which some have crushingly styled a “post-truth” era. Some moral temptations prowl like wolves in sheep’s clothing. But the temptation to lie to gain an advantage is as brazen as it is basic. It comes as a wolf in wolf’s clothing.² We and our students must stand forever watchful against that wolf’s predations.

But the integrity toward which our mission beckons is broader than basic truth-telling. It points further toward unity and wholeness—toward what Professor Ruth Okediji recently called a “fully integrated life.”³

Integrity derives from the Latin *integritas*, meaning “one” or “whole.” It shares its etymology with *integer*, beloved from elementary math, which refers to a whole number. A life of integrity is a harmonious whole; a life without integrity is a life divided—a life of fractions, divisions, and discordant parts.

At BYU we aim toward this broader conception of integrity. The aims of a BYU education are cumulative: they mount in crescendo, uniting spiritual strength with intellectual breadth to forge a Christlike character that that fuels a lifetime of learning for the Savior’s glory and serving others in His name.⁴

Taken together, [these aims] should lead students toward wholeness: “the balanced development of the

*total person.” [They] aspire to promote an education that helps students integrate all parts of their university experience into a fundamentally sacred way of life—their faith and reasoning, their knowledge and conduct, their public lives and private convictions.*⁵

This sacred way of life is the path of integrity. Our pursuit of such wholeness parallels and inspires our quest to unite all truth.

At April’s general conference, Elder Jack N. Gerard pointed to the Savior as the ultimate exemplar of integrity.⁶ At one level, this should have been obvious to me: the Savior is the fount of every blessing, the embodiment of each virtue, the source of all good things.⁷ But before hearing Elder Gerard’s talk, I likely wouldn’t have included integrity among the Savior’s most salient attributes.

I now see it as fundamental. Everything we know about the Savior’s eternal ministry reflects the singular sovereign principle that gives unity, harmony, and wholeness to His incomparable character: His everlasting love for the Father and His invincible resolve to perform His Father’s will. This principle provides the indestructible foundation of His peerless integrity.

Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever (Moses 4:2).

[T]he Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him (John 8:29).

I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me . . . I have suffered the will of the Father in all things from the beginning (3 Ne. 11:11).

Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men (D&C 19:19).

The Savior’s consummate integrity—the wholeness that flowed from His unshakable devotion to the Father—allowed Him to effect “an infinite atonement” (Alma 34:12). Unlike many of our theological terms, which stem from Latin or Greek, *atonement* derives from plain old English: it simply means at-one-ment, a translation of the medieval Latin *adunamentum*.⁸ Christ was and is perfectly “at one” with the Father. His infinite offering affords us the possibility of similar unity and wholeness.

We desperately need that offering precisely because we are not whole. In this fallen sphere, we are all fractured, wounded, broken. In His boundless mercy, the Savior offers healing from all our inward divisions. (And what is sin if not a soul

divided against itself?) He offers a wholeness we cannot achieve alone.

Just before He drained the bitter cup in Gethsemane and on Golgotha, Jesus prayed for all who would thereafter believe in Him: “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us” (John 17:21).

That, finally, is the wholeness toward which our “clear standards of intellectual integrity” aspire. “Ultimately,” our Aims document concludes, “complete wholeness comes only through the Atonement of Him who said, ‘I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.’”⁹

May we embrace for ourselves, and point our students toward, the Savior’s healing wholeness.¹⁰

¹ “The Mission of Brigham Young University” in John S. Tanner (ed), *Envisioning BYU: Volume 1 – Foundations and Dreams* (2022) 66.

² Cf. *Morrison v. Olson*, 487 U.S. 654, 699 (Scalia, J., dissenting) (asserting, in a wildly different context, that “this wolf comes as a wolf”).

³ Ruth L. Okediji, “The Costly Arc of Religious Freedom,” BYU Forum Address, 30 January 2024.

⁴ Earlier this year, John Tanner, the principal drafter of the Aims document, told me in an email that “I placed ‘character building’ where it is in the Aims not because it is less important than intellect and spirituality, which precede it in the Aims, but because it is *more* important. It should be built on them. It is not enough to know about truth, or to feel it spiritually; one must *live* the truth.” Personal Correspondence, 4 March 2024 (emphasis added).

⁵ “The Aims of a BYU Education” in John S. Tanner (ed), *Envisioning BYU: Volume 1 – Foundations and Dreams* (2022) (quoting “The Mission of Brigham Young University”) 80.

⁶ Jack N. Gerard, “Integrity: A Christlike Attribute,” *Liahona*, May 2024.

⁷ See, e.g., Omni 1:25; Alma 5:40; Ether 4:12; Moro. 7:12-17.

⁸ *Wholeness*, incidentally, is also good old English, first appearing before 1000 AD.

⁹ “Aims” at 80.

¹⁰ See Arthur Henry King, “God’s Healing Wholeness” in Arthur Henry King, *Arm the Children: Faith’s Response to a Violent World* (1998) 331-47.