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*For he that diligently seeketh shall find; and the mysteries of God shall be unfolded unto them, by the power of the Holy Ghost, as well in these times as in times of old, and as well in times of old as in times to come; wherefore, the course of the Lord is one eternal round (1 Nephi 10:19).*

## **A Matter of Choice**

*Bruce L. Christensen*

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Faith looks forward, but its consequences are most clearly understood by looking backward. The space in-between, the present—described by C. S. Lewis as the point at which time touches eternity—is where faith influences action. Faith, at least for me, has never been the blinding flash of the obvious. The evidence of faith—which Paul says is of things hoped for but unseen—is hard for me to comprehend, except by looking backward. So, the opportunity to describe the role Brigham Young University has played in building my faith and giving me the opportunity to practice it permits that backward vision. It deepens my appreciation for all that this institution has meant to the development of my belief in a living and loving Father in Heaven.

I didn’t plan to come to BYU as an undergraduate. I applied and was accepted at Weber State College and intended to live at home my freshman year. I then planned to serve a mission. A high school friend, Grant Taylor, convinced me that I would be better off living away from home and persuaded me to at least apply for admission. I did, feeling that I might indeed be better off attending a larger, more academically challenging school. I was accepted and began my freshman year at BYU in the fall of 1961.

No one in our family had ever gone to college, so I was unprepared for what I faced. It was a tough year for me. I was homesick. I had few friends on campus. Most of my high school buddies were still in Clearfield (then about a two-hour drive from Provo), so I went home almost every weekend to see them and to spend time with my girlfriend, who was a senior in high school. My classes were large, difficult, and not particularly engaging. I found myself struggling to do the reading and to keep up with my homework. I regretted my decision to attend BYU.

My roommates, on the other hand, seemed to be having a pretty good time. They were getting by with their studies, and their social life seemed a lot more exciting than mine did. At the beginning of the second semester, three of us enrolled in an astronomy class. It met every Wednesday night. On our way home from the first class, we stopped by Heritage Halls, where I was introduced to an apartment of girls. From that point on, my BYU experience changed dramatically.

That night I met a tall, attractive freshman from Mesa, Arizona. Her father was a college professor. Her mother and father met at and graduated from BYU. Her three older sisters and their husbands similarly had met at and graduated from BYU. Her aunt, Dr. Glenna Wood, had been my English professor my first semester. “BYU blue” ran through their veins. She was a person of deep faith, instilled by her family’s religious tradition that went back to the earliest days of the Church. Barbara Lucelle Decker changed my life and for thirty-seven years has added immeasurably to my faith.

We began dating that spring (1962), and I spent less time going home on weekends. She coached me through my second semester of English, proofreading my papers. Most of what we did, however, was talk. We talked about anything and everything—long conversations. I never knew that I had so much to say. For the first time in my life, I felt entirely free to talk about anything that came into my mind. She felt the same, and we shared the deepest feelings of our hearts with each other.

Her family and background were intimidating. I teased her that she was a princess and I a lowly frog, waiting for

a transformational kiss. Her gifts were more than a kiss; they were a transformational presence in my life. Before BYU, my faith had consisted of what I believed was a witness that the Book of Mormon was true. I had read it during my senior year in high school and followed Moroni's injunction—asking if it was true. I felt that it was, and if so, then Joseph Smith was a prophet, and the Church was true as well. But my faith wasn't grounded. It often seemed hard to remember that one night's witness, kneeling at the side of my bed, when so many questions about the veracity of my testimony kept coming into my mind.

I realized that a part of my problem was personal worthiness. Those matters were resolved as I received my mission call to the Brazilian Mission. I went into the Mission Home in Salt Lake City (a brief, weeklong occurrence that doesn't compare with today's extensive MTC experience) wondering whether I should go to Brazil for two and a half years. My faith faltered. I talked with my mother (my father having died of cancer when I was fourteen). I talked to my bishop and stake president. I called Barbara and talked to her. She said that her father had some advice. Smith Decker took the phone and told me that there were two reasons why I might be feeling the way I was. One possibility was that I had been called to the wrong mission. I didn't think that was too likely, since President David O. McKay signed my mission papers. The other was that Satan didn't want me in the mission field because I would be a threat to his kingdom.

I had never thought of myself as a threat to anyone's kingdom, but I knew the reality of Satan and his influence. A worthy mission in life would be to weaken his kingdom. So, I went to Brazil, faint of heart but resolved in spirit.

My BYU connections deepened further during those two and a half years. Barbara continued to write to me, keeping me posted on her progress through school. She even took a Portuguese class from the famed Gerrit de Jong. I shared my mission experiences, and together we got through a mission for me and all but one semester of a BYU baccalaureate degree for her. I returned from my mission just before Christmas of 1964. Barbara's graduation took place the following May, and we were married on 17 June 1965 in the Mesa Arizona Temple. We were launched on the next great adventure of our lives—one that we hope will be eternal.

Our problem was similar to that faced by most young couples—money. With the help of Arch Madsen, whom I had met while on my mission, I secured a job as a news reporter for KSL radio and television in Salt Lake City. Barbara found work at the Mountain Bell telephone company. Our workplaces were half a block away from each other, but she worked days and I worked nights—arranged this way so I could go to school at the University of Utah during the day.

The world that I entered as a reporter was new, challenging, and fascinating to me. As a reporter, I found myself on the inside of stories that were among the biggest of the decade. Catastrophic airplane crashes, Vietnam War protests, political infighting, debates over capital punishment, floods, mine explosions, serial murders, venality, greed, sloth, stupidity, mendacity, and plain old-fashioned foolishness made up the stuff of which I was to report over the next six years of my life.

I was introduced to a worldview foreign and different from any I had ever known. I began to wonder about the reality of the one that I had come from. Because I was a returned missionary (the only one in the newsroom at the time I was hired), I was given the LDS Church Office Building as one of my beat assignments. Seeing the Brethren with the eyes of a journalist, rather than those of a faithful missionary and Church member, was a jarring experience. Their humanity was evident. The deification that had taken place in my mind (as it does regularly in the Church) had not actually occurred. They were not perfect. The bureaucracy that they presided over made some of the same mistakes that were so evident in the city, county, state, and national institutions that I had been reporting on. How was it possible for the true and living Church to have failings? Above all else, journalism trains the reporter to question everything and everyone. In the journalist's world there are no eternal verities. Everything is challenged and everyone's motives are suspect. Journalists are trained skeptics. They seek truth by asking who, what, where, why, when, and how. This became my mantra. I made journalism my professional world. I accepted its intellectual grounding. It became my education, my work, and my life.

After earning my bachelor's degree from the University of Utah, I took a nine-month leave of absence from KSL, where I had worked full time while going to school full time. Barbara, our new baby daughter Jennifer, and I went off to Chicago. Nine months later, I had earned my M.S.J. from the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University.

This was a time of immense turmoil in American public life. The Democratic Convention had turned Chicago politics on its head. Many of my classmates had received no prior journalism training. They came three months early to start their program at Medill and were assigned to cover the Chicago Convention and reported on the despotic use of political and police power. They were hardened by and bitter toward what they witnessed. Their reporting experience hardened professional skepticism into cynicism. The Vietnam War was at its height. We learned daily of the lies and stupidity of politicians who made authority their truth, rather than truth their authority.

During this time I came to understand that the world of a journalist is unlike any other. If compared to the

planets in our solar system, I believe that Pluto would be the planet whose physical properties would most closely represent the worldview of a journalist. It's a cold, dark, tiny, miserable place, where everything is suspect; where everybody lies; where graft, corruption, malfeasance, self-interest, and greed reign supreme; and where the journalist's job is to find out about and tell people about all of these horrible happenings. Some wag said that if journalists had a Thirteenth Article of Faith, it would read: "If there is anything hateful, despicable, shameful, or rotten, we seek after these things."

The democratic assumption is that if people know about such things, they can at least protect themselves from it or vote the rascals out of office. I began to see the conflict and difficulty society has with the press. It comes from a failure of both sides to understand differences between their frames. The cultural assumptions held by society at large and those held by journalists differ. Journalists believe it is their duty to deliver bad news. Society finds an easy and ready scapegoat in the messenger.

The journalist's worldview is democratic. In America, the press enjoys an explicit, constitutionally defined and protected role written by the Founding Fathers. When asked what form of government the Constitutional Convention had agreed upon, Benjamin Franklin replied, "A republic, the worst of all political systems save all others." The Founding Fathers believed Lord Acton's statement, "Absolute power corrupts absolutely." Their antidote to such social malaise was freedom of the press. The press plays a potent role in American democracy because it was intended to do so. The press is one of the forces that the Founding Fathers balanced against the powers of government. The duty of the press is to tell about graft, corruption, greed, and malfeasance in our society. Journalists are trained to be society's equivalent of junkyard watchdogs. They bark at every opportunity, justified or not. It's the best way that the Founding Fathers could find to keep us alert to what is described in D&C 121:39: "We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion."

The Church's worldview, on the other hand, comes from the planet Kolob. The Church's worldview doesn't flow from democratic principles (as much as we admire the Constitution for the freedoms it provides). Our religious worldview comes from our belief that the best possible government is a theocracy—a righteous King making righteous judgments, ruling a righteous people who live righteous lives. Such a society needs no watchdogs. In a theocracy the media (whatever it is in that state) will be used to disseminate pure knowledge, light, and truth! The entire society will seek that which is virtuous, lovely, or of good report.

Can you imagine how strange that world is to a journalist? Can you understand how difficult it is for these two worldviews to understand each other? For me, at the age of twenty-five, my worldviews were at war. What I was learning in my professional training instantly conflicted with my faith. I struggled, trying to reconcile the two worldviews.

I remember coming home from the newsroom one Saturday morning after covering the opening session of a general conference. Disgustedly, I threw my coat and tape recorder on the couch of our newly purchased home and said in frustration to Barbara, "Why do the Brethren always talk about the same thing—the first principles? I've heard this stuff since I was in Primary. I want more. They should give us more. I'm sick and tired of the same old thing." I went on raging against the credulity of those who accepted this "pabulum" as real spiritual food. I wondered out loud and at great volume about the truthfulness of a religion that purports to be led by revelation but never reveals anything new. "All we get," I told my patient, loving wife, "is the same old, same old, and I am sick of it!"

As I heard myself talking out loud in this manner, doing what I had covenanted not to do, I realized that my faith was in crisis. The faith of my childhood, teenage, and missionary experiences had eroded to the point that I was asking questions to which the answers should have been self-evident. But for me they were not. I was doing what my profession said I should do: ask the hard questions, and unflinchingly report the results. How could I possibly remain faithful, seeing the obvious distance between the semiannual pronouncements of Church leaders from the Tabernacle pulpit and their imperfection? Rationally, faith made no sense, but I wanted it to make sense. I yearned for it to do so. Even in my seasons of waning belief, I felt that there was something to the Church. There had to be. What else could explain the sacrifices people made at the request of the Church leaders (paying tithing, accepting missions to the far ends of the earth, and surrendering brilliant professional careers to render full-time service in Church leadership)? There had to be a reason why people kept struggling, seeking to make their lives more closely fit the instruction that came from Church headquarters. Reason said that such faithfulness was folly, an abandonment of intellectual rigor, and a denial of irrefutable facts. Reason was at war with my faith, and reason had the upper hand.

During this struggle, an unexpected invitation came from Heber Wolsey to work with him at BYU in his public communications effort there. I initially turned down the opportunity, but a few months later, circumstances inside the KSL newsroom changed. We decided to accept Heber's offer and moved our little family (having added Heather) to

Provo. I started a new job at BYU in the fall of 1970. We followed another road back to BYU!

I hadn't resolved fully my struggles between reason and faith, and BYU seemed like a pretty safe place to undertake that resolution. For me, it turned out to be exactly the right place. I quickly found colleagues who were working on the same issues as I was. Their professions were different, but their struggles were no less real than my own.

We had an astonishing environment in which to wrestle with those questions—an environment in which it was acceptable (some would say required) to believe. In this atmosphere, not only did I have the benefit of being able to share my feelings with my peers—Bruce Olsen, Pete Peterson, Terry Olson, Mac Boyter, John Kinnear, Claudia Wright, and others—but I began to benefit from other BYU sources as well.

What I learned by coming back to BYU was that my professional education—knowledge, skill, and expertise—had outstripped my education in faith. This built slowly. It was never as clear to me then as it is today. It came “line upon line,” experience upon experience, as my faith was built in the nurturing, accepting environment of BYU. An unexpected aspect of strengthening my faith came from my responsibility to cover each of the Devotionals and Forums for the broadcast media. I found myself again, as I had while I was a freshman, educated in a manner that was quite unexpected. The testimonies—the confessions of faith—of those who spoke touched my heart. Spiritual food midweek came from those experiences, and I realized how much I needed that nourishment. I recalled the richness of the Devotionals my freshman year. The messages of Truman Madsen, President Hugh B. Brown, Elder Spencer W. Kimball, Elder Harold B. Lee, and a host of others came flooding back to me. In some cases I recalled specific parts of their addresses. I remembered the powerful testimony of the Savior and the story of the currant bush given by President Brown. He began his speech by joking that he didn't mind the loss of hair, or diminished eyesight, or reduced hearing. “But,” he said, “oh, how I miss my mind.”

The advice given by Brother Madsen came vividly to mind. He explained that Church leaders were called to strengthen our testimonies. Some did it by faithful example and others by trial of our patience. “Either way,” he said, “your testimonies will be strengthened if you will let them be.” His explanation elicited a laugh of recognition from the audience. Who hadn't had a leader or teacher about whom they asked, “What inspiration led to his or her call?” This recollection, prompted by the spiritual experiences of again attending BYU Devotionals, led me to think carefully about why I had such a hang-up about the human failures I had witnessed as a reporter.

Other BYU experiences opened doors of faithful understanding beyond what I had thought possible. I was asked to serve as bishop of the BYU 46th Ward. I was twenty-eight years old, and the ward members joked that they could trust their bishop because he was under thirty. This was near the end of the Vietnam War, and the counter culture told young people to never trust anyone over thirty.

I succeeded Gordon M. Low, who had been called to be president of the BYU Fifth Stake. Darrell Monson and John Covey were his counselors. These wise, seasoned, and able Church leaders poured their knowledge and experience into us as they led a stake of students who themselves were remarkable because of their faithfulness. My counselors and I willingly followed their instruction and for four years we enjoyed the richest blessings imaginable.

The BYU 46th Ward was made up mostly of freshman. Our numbers included women on three floors and men on two floors of Deseret Towers. Our most visible sin was that of pride. We had our own ward fight song (“Fighting 46th”), our own motto (“One for Another”), and our own ward hymn (“To Some 'Tis Given,” written by a former ward member and President Low while he was bishop of the ward). We had a ward flag. We won first place in the all-stake road show competitions because we had original music performed by our ward orchestra, and every member of the ward was involved in the show. We considered ourselves “the only true ward on campus.” We even had our own section of the Doctrine and Covenants—the forty-sixth section—it explained that all of our gifts were to be used for the benefit of each other!

In spite of our pride, we did learn important lessons. We learned about living for something greater than self. Service was the heart of all that we did. Our stake leadership helped us to see that knowing the gospel meant little if it did not translate into the application of its principles in our daily living. The way that we interact with each other mattered. The gospel needed to inform the way we treated our classmates and our roommates, our faithfulness in home teaching and visiting teaching, our consideration of those who were in our Sunday School, Relief Society, and priesthood classes. Ours was a practical laboratory of gospel action. Such was the faithfulness of those wonderful freshmen that it can be said of them, “There truly was not a happier people!”

Time seemed to evaporate from one year to the next. Gospel lessons learned and applied proved the importance of faith in action. During six years of service in the BYU Fifth Stake, I gained gospel insight that could have been obtained in no other way. Perhaps the most important single lesson for me is summarized in the forty-sixth section of the Doctrine and Covenants: “To some it is given by the Holy Ghost to know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and that he was crucified for the sins of the world. To others it is given to believe on their words, that they also might have

eternal life” (D&C 46:13–14).

I learned that I didn’t have to have knowledge. Faith is sufficient to achieve the desired end of eternal life. What a stunning realization! How foolish I had been to believe that I had to reason it all out in my mind and come to know for myself. Faith achieved the same end. I discovered that through faith, Alma’s simple metaphor (Alma 32:28–43) and Isaiah’s counsel (Isa. 28:10; see also 2 Ne. 28:30; D&C 98:12; 128:21) worked. “Line upon line, and precept upon precept,” seeds of faith were planted. They grew, and the fruit was “most precious” and “sweet above all that is sweet” (Alma 32:42). I could choose and did choose faith, because I was in an environment that invited that choice as the only option.

My BYU faithful education expanded into my professional life. Not long after I was called to be a bishop, I was asked to become the director of Broadcast Services and general manager of BYU’s noncommercial, educational radio and television stations—KBYU FM and TV. At the time, I felt that I just happened to be in the right place at the right time (which was true). As events have unfolded in my life, this was to be a time of education in a professional field that I could have obtained nowhere else but at BYU.

I knew broadcasting in general from my reporting experience, but I came from the news side of broadcasting and not from experience in the business or advertising side, which was the most common avenue to top management in commercial media. The world of public (noncommercial, educational) broadcasting was new.

Colleagues who were passed over, who were more knowledgeable about public broadcasting and who were better trained than I to assume the duties of director and general manager, stepped forward to help me succeed. They did not hold back, they were not bitter at someone else being given preference over their years of service, and they willingly shared knowledge, skill, and expertise with me. Those were the best of times—heady times—for those of us who wanted to prove that broadcasting could be used for higher purposes than making money. Our collective goal was to fulfill E. B. White’s vision of excellence—television used as our society’s “Lyceum, our Chautauqua, our Minsky’s, and our Camelot.”<sup>[1]</sup>

Armed with the optimism of youth and inexperience (we often said we were simply too dumb to know that something couldn’t be done, so we did it), we transformed the stations into our image of White’s ideal. The work was enormously satisfying. Refining our management skills, we had the help of Bill Dyer and his talented group of faculty and students in organizational behavior. The Marriott School of Management offered accounting classes and project management training that were desperately needed. Ben Lewis, Darrell Monson, and Bill Farnsworth provided administrative oversight that was at once encouraging of our collective vision for the stations while requiring fiscal and management accountability of the highest order. Over the next ten years I received the most important and unique professional training one could imagine. Central to it all was the participation and leadership of the University’s new president, Dallin H. Oaks.

While the tactical management issues were handled with thorough attention to detail, the strategic vision for the stations ultimately came from President Oaks, who joined the Board of Directors of the Public Broadcasting Service—the television network that supplied much of our daily programming. President Oaks had worked his way through school as a radio announcer and engineer, so he knew the field, but the insight he brought to the PBS Board was much more. It came from his BYU undergraduate financial training, his legal scholarship and experience, and his practical administrative style. His immense skill and integrity earned him the board’s deepest admiration and respect. He chaired several important board committees, including a crucial committee on organizational restructuring, and ultimately he became vice-chair and then chairman of the PBS Board.

During this time, President Oaks nurtured KBYU’s development with insight that came from his work at the national level. He saw what could be done with the stations and encouraged us to make the possibilities reality. We couldn’t have asked for better direction or support.

After nearly ten years of exhilarating experience managing BYU’s Division of Broadcast Services, the University of Utah asked that I join their staff to direct the work of their public television and radio stations as well as their university press and instructional media operations. It was a promotion of extraordinary opportunity. We accepted.

So, I went back to my alma mater with an opportunity to practice what I had learned at BYU on a much larger scale, with a larger staff and budget. I found that I was to carry both my professional and my faithful education into a setting that was largely interested in only one set of those qualifications, while unappreciative of the value of the other. I was back on a campus where the choice of faith was defined as the irrational act. My BYU experience, however, had solidified my confidence in the value of faith and its application to a daily routine. The profession and exercise of one’s faith was not readily accepted by many faculty colleagues, who were as bright, inquisitive, and competent in their fields as any faculty to be found anywhere in the nation.

My two and a half years at the U of U passed quickly. My public television work expanded from a regional to the national level when I was invited to be a member of the PBS Board. I again found myself working with President Oaks, who continued on the board after his appointment to the Utah State Supreme Court. It was an exhilarating time. I felt blessed beyond measure. I had the perfect job. Our family had grown to three daughters and a new son. I could not have asked for a better or more perfect circumstance in which to live and work.

Then came a telephone call from the chairman of the Board of Trustees of the National Association for Public Television Stations (NAPTS). This was an organization created by the restructuring of public television undertaken by a PBS committee chaired by President Oaks. Its duties included the representation work before Congress, the administration, and the regulators that had been part of PBS (FCC, NTIA, etc.). NAPTS was public television's lobbying organization.

NAPTS Chairman Homer Babbage, president of the Hartford Graduate Institute and former president of the University of Connecticut, asked me on behalf of the board if I would come to Washington, D.C., to direct the activities of the association. Ronald Reagan had just been elected, and there had been deep cuts into the appropriations for public radio and television. Homer insisted that the association needed leadership that was station-based, that had experience managing and operating a local television station. I told Homer that I didn't think that I was the one to do this job. "It's the job of the board to decide whether you can do the job," he said. "We've concluded that you can, and now it's up to you to decide whether you want to do it."

In discussing the opportunity with Justice Oaks, his view was a bit different. "The question is not whether you can do the job," he explained, "but whether you are willing to take the risk."

We took the risk and accepted the offer. In January of 1982, the morning after a huge snowstorm in Salt Lake City, we moved into a brand new world for us. It was a world full of turmoil, contention, wonder, power, and extraordinary beauty. Most of all, it was a world full of opportunity. The choice turned out not to be terribly risky for us, although the move to D.C. was as traumatic as any that our family has ever had. We did it on faith—on the feeling that after prayerfully considering the options, D.C. was the next stop for us.

The work, however, was daunting. Twelve-hour days were routine, fourteen- and fifteen-hour days common, and weekend work inevitable. There was so much to do and so little resource with which to do it that we had to burn the candle at both ends. I quickly learned just how bucolic had been my time at BYU and the University of Utah. Everyone I met in Washington had an agenda. People were smart, ambitious, well connected, and hardworking—the very antithesis of the bloated, lazy bureaucracy condemned by political rhetoric.

The city was in revolution—the Reagan Revolution. Public programs in education, social services, and the arts and humanities were being deeply cut or, when possible, eliminated. Public television was among those suffering deep cuts to its current appropriation. There was no time to lose. My work as a reporter on Utah's Capitol Hill served me well. We organized visits by local station managers to key authorizing and appropriations committee members. These visits were quickly expanded by coordinated visits of local station supporters who were also key campaign contributors to members of Congress. There were 535 members and every one of them received dozens of visits from local constituents and national celebrities talking about the value and importance of noncommercial, educational television in the lives of their families—their children and their grandchildren.

Our success was spectacular. We restored the cuts to public broadcasting and even increased our authorization and appropriations in the face of the full opposition of the Reagan Administration. No Republican or Democrat in Congress wanted to be painted in his or her reelection campaign as the representative or senator who killed Big Bird.

My professional activities were so demanding that little time was left to attend to things spiritual. Barbara cared for the family's needs. I was off crusading. The inattention took its toll. Alma's warning clearly came true for me. "If ye neglect the tree, and take no thought for its nourishment, behold it will not get any root" (Alma 32:38). I chose not to care for the weightier matters, and it was taking its toll on my faith.

About this time I began reading a book published by the Brigham Young University Press (another example of BYU strengthening my faith). It was the first volume of a biography of President J. Reuben Clark by Frank W. Fox. I was mesmerized by the life of a man of intellect who came to Washington and drank from its alluring waters. He ultimately chose a life of faith over reason. To my mind it was an act of heroic proportions—an act that I had never considered was possible in the way that he did it. At the end of his book *J. Reuben Clark: The Public Years*, Fox wrote about the extraordinary intellectual powers of this man and the duality of his nature—one part realistic and the other idealistic. "One pointed toward hardheadedness, practical-mindedness, and ultimately a doctrinaire conservatism, while the other pointed toward open-endedness and possibility."<sup>[2]</sup> This duality of Clark's nature and his disagreements with Senator and Apostle Reed Smoot mirrored some of what had gone on in my own mind during my early days as a

reporter. I understood his need to reconcile these conflicting parts of his nature. The full extent of that struggle and the ultimate outcome were made much clearer in the next volume of his biography (also published by the BYU Press). This book, written by D. Michael Quinn, was entitled *J. Reuben Clark: The Church Years*. President Clark described his dilemma to Cloyd H. Marvin, the non-LDS president of George Washington University: “For my own part I early came to recognize that for me personally I must either quit rationalizing . . . or I must follow the line of my own thinking which would lead me I know not where.”

Then Quinn describes the rest of the dialogue between President Clark and his “non-Mormon friend.”

But J. Reuben Clark soon recognized where an uncompromising commitment to rational theology would lead him, and he shrank from the abyss. “I came early to appreciate that I could not rationalize a religion for myself, and that to attempt to do so would destroy my faith in God,” later he wrote to his non-Mormon friend. “I have always rather worshipped *facts*,” he continued, “and while I thought and read for a while, many of the incidents of life, experiences and circumstances led, unaided by the spirit of faith, to the position of the atheist, yet the faith of my fathers led me to abandon all that and to refrain from following it . . . For me there seemed to be no alternative. I could only build up a doubt.—If I were to attempt to rationalize about my life here, and the life to come, I would be drowned in a sea of doubt.”<sup>[3]</sup>

What an astonishing statement! As I read this, I began to realize that someone else had wrestled with the same issues that I struggled with. President Clark’s long and tempestuous relationship with Apostle Reed Smoot, his questions of authority and orthodoxy—which included a letter written to the First Presidency questioning the wearing of temple garments in the insufferable heat of Washington, D.C., before air conditioning, and his pleading missive that his brother Frank not be sent on a mission—spoke to some of my own feelings and concerns.

I came to the realization during this time that faith is a matter of choice—not something that “happens to you.” I could choose faith or not, but the choice was mine. I’m not sure why this crystallization of options suddenly meant so much to me. I had carried with me the impression that faith was something that you either had or didn’t have, that it was a gift from God, not a conscious selection to be made and then exercised. What a revelation! How little I had really understood of Alma’s teaching on faith. I never considered faith a matter of choice because it is not rational. Of course it’s not. I was so connected professionally to facts that choosing faith never would occur to me. President Clark’s example, however, gave me the answer I needed. Having made the choice, a new world opened to me. Not only did I have a new and successful career as a Washingtonian, but also my faith was renewed in a fashion that I never had expected.

I felt fully and completely at peace with my choice of faith for perhaps the first time in my life. I was not compelled to exercise it. It was a true and free choice, strengthened and shaped through my BYU experience and associations, and by the publication of a set of books on a remarkable life that changed my view of how one accepts and acts on faith.

In May of 1984, I became the president and chief executive officer of the Public Broadcasting Service. The pace of my life, which was already hectic, seemed to double. My travel schedule took me to every state and to many foreign countries. I had an office in New York City in addition to my principal office in Washington, D.C. Being the head of America’s public-service television network was heady stuff. I had just turned forty years old, and I did not fully grasp just how unique my position was. Every week there were receptions to attend and speeches to give. There were almost daily interviews with the media.

Gradually I began to understand that these folks were not interested in meeting Bruce Christensen; they wanted to meet the president of PBS. They didn’t care what Bruce Christensen thought or said, but they would listen to the chief executive officer of PBS. I had a “bully pulpit,” and I used it to explain the value and importance of noncommercial, educational television to a society in which everything has its price. Our hope was to create a “national park” for a small part of the public’s airwaves—a reservation of television spectrum to “enrich the human experience and build a better world.” Our driving force was public service (PBS Vision Statement, 19 February 1992).

Everywhere I went, the Church was known and the fact that I was a member added a unique dimension to my very public life. My faith and the manner in which I lived it were almost always a matter of curiosity to those whom I met. I don’t think that I wore my religion on my sleeve, but we are a peculiar people. If nothing else, living the Word of Wisdom is always a distinguishing characteristic.

An unrelenting schedule of travel, speeches, program screenings, fund-raising calls, and board activities left little time for family. My Church involvement was focused on scouting, which gave me some time with our son, Jesse. On Sundays, I taught the Gospel Doctrine class in the Arlington Ward. This assignment required careful and consistent study. Over a period of eight years, I read and reread the standard works. My weekly study kept me spiritually fed and

allowed me to share what I had gained with others.

After almost ten years at PBS, I was restless, feeling that I had done what I could do in this assignment. I felt that my family needed more of my time and that Jesse, in particular, needed a different social environment. Job offers of various sorts had come during my tenure at PBS, but none had felt right for us. Barbara and I talked about what might be ahead. It seemed like a return to the academy could be a wise choice. We loved the East Coast and our home and friends in Arlington, so we had thought that there might be something that would keep us in the area.

In the spring of 1993, Robert Webb, a colleague at BYU, called and said that he was chairing the search committee for a new dean for the College of Fine Arts and Communications. My name had been recommended as a potential candidate. He wondered if I would be interested in applying. Barbara and I talked about it, and I sent my resume to Bob. That led to an interview with the search committee and a phone call from Rex Lee, whom I had known in Washington during his several tours of duty there.

Rex offered me the position of dean. I accepted, and BYU was again at the center of our lives. I couldn't have asked for a better opportunity. I welcomed the chance to give a measure of my professional experience and faith back to the institution that had given so much to me. I quickly felt that mine was the best job on campus. The college was a collection of my most ardent passions—art, design, music, theatre, film, journalism, broadcasting, and a host of related activities—all taught and practiced in an atmosphere of faith. I was soon engaged with all of my loves. My time away made it possible for me to see BYU with “green” eyes. The value of the institution is clear to me now. I know and understand the importance of a venue in which to learn and practice the arts and communications from the perspective of faithful adherence to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Philosophers describe five different ways of discovering truth. Truth can be obtained through our senses, through reason, from authority, through revelation, and from intuition. Science and our tradition of intellectual enlightenment during the past three hundred years recognize only two of these means. Sensory and rational processes are supreme in the academy. BYU, however, gives full access to the other three means of discovering truth, while still honoring sensory and rational experience.

Here's a simple example of BYU's uniqueness. Meetings, performances, and classes open with prayer, inviting divine influence on such activities. Returning to BYU, I found that this practice gave me great comfort. I hadn't realized how much I had missed it. Those for whom BYU has been their only professional experience, however, sometimes take these experiences for granted. One of my BYU colleagues called the practice of opening our performances with prayer a folk tradition. It has a much deeper meaning for me.

Soon I was asking, “What can I contribute to the faithful education of those who study and work in our college? How can we follow Commissioner Eyring's admonition to create a learning environment that nurtures faith? How do we encourage the development of great learners?”<sup>[4]</sup> We daily wrestled with questions central to the application of faith to fields of discipline in higher education. This gave new meaning to the term higher education. We struggled with some particularly thorny issues in our college. How should our beliefs affect the content of our artistic performances and inform our communications practices? How do we prepare students to compete in the world, while schooling the applications of their talents from the perspective of faith in the restored gospel? How can we honor agency, while requiring behavioral conformity? These issues include nudity in art, studying and viewing R-rated films, profanity and sexual innuendo on stage, investigative reporting in journalism, integrity in marketing and public relations, composition and performance of categories and classes of music, and the list goes on. The application of faith reached into every discipline studies and taught in that college.

The answers aren't easy or simple, but at BYU the questions can be asked and tested. BYU faculty and staff have the intellectual stature to do the research and the creative work that will inform their disciplines from a position of a belief in Jesus Christ. The faithful foundation upon which BYU stands provides access to truth that is rarely available to scholars. BYU offers a road less traveled, and that has made all the difference in the world for me.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Carnegie Commission on Educational Television, *Public Television: A Program for Action* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967), 13. E. B. White, in a letter to the Commission, “Noncommercial television should address itself to the ideal of excellence, not the idea of acceptability—which is what keeps commercial television from climbing the staircase. I think television should be the visual counterpart of the literary essay, should arouse our dreams, satisfy our hunger for beauty, take us on journeys, enable us to participate in events, present great drama and music, explore the sea and the sky and the woods and the hills. It should be our Lyceum, our Chautauqua, our Minsky's, and our



Camelot. It should restate and clarify the social dilemma and the political pickle. Once in a while it does, and you get a quick glimpse of its potential.”

[2] Frank W. Fox, *J. Reuben Clark: The Public Years* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press and Deseret Book, 1980), 604.

[3] D. Michael Quinn, *J. Reuben Clark: The Church Years* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1983), 25.

[4] Henry B. Eyring, “A Child of God,” *Brigham Young University 1997–98 Speeches*, (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Publications & Graphics, 1998), 47.