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Therefore, verily I say unto you, lift up your voices unto this people; speak the thoughts that I shall put into your hearts, and you shall not be confounded before men; for it shall be given you in the very hour, yea, in the very moment, what ye shall say. . . . And I give unto you this promise, that inasmuch as ye do this the Holy Ghost shall be shed forth in bearing record unto all things whatsoever ye shall say (D&C 100:5–6, 8).

And Back Again

Allen E. Bergin

Allen E. Bergin had set himself on an academically challenging course of engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and liberal arts at Reed College when he happened to visit a friend in Provo who had transferred to BYU. That visit changed everything. Dr. Bergin received a B.A. from BYU in psychology in 1956 and an M.A. in 1957. He completed his Ph.D. at Stanford in 1960, followed by a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Wisconsin Psychiatric Institute and a distinguished career at Columbia University and BYU. Dr. Bergin has been a sounding voice in integrating moral and spiritual themes into professional psychology research, theory, practice, and education, where his international reputation has affected the profession for good. He has been heavily involved in community service and interfaith activities. Dr. Bergin and his wife, Marian—a psychotherapist and clinical social worker—are the parents of nine children and thirteen grandchildren.

I came to Brigham Young University in 1954 mainly because I was in love with Marian. She was a faithful Latter-day Saint who had just transferred to BYU. In addition, I was curious about Mormonism. What I could not foresee then was that BYU would provide a uniquely nurturing environment for me. As a student, I would receive my testimony, become engaged, marry, start a family, learn the value of church service, and set my feet firmly on my career path in psychology. Years later, after I joined the faculty, BYU would offer a platform for my colleagues and me to launch a series of studies on clinical psychology and religion that would be part of a movement to transform the guiding assumptions of the field. Naturally, along the way many people supported me, not the least of whom was Marian.

She and I had both been students at Reed College in Portland, Oregon, a strongly academic liberal-arts school. At that time in my life, I was in a moratorium period, searching for direction. I had left my physics and engineering pursuits at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) for Reed in order to explore the liberal arts. It was my sophomore year, my first at Reed. There was a program wherein a student could get a B.S. from MIT and a B.A. from Reed in five years, and that is what I was going to do. The first weekend I was in Portland, I met Marian at a get-acquainted dance.

We became very attached to each other that first year. I went to church with her a few times, and we enjoyed long walks and deep conversations frequently. The following summer she went home to Ogden, and I went to Alaska to work with my father, who was a construction superintendent. I took a large box of books—LDS books as well as books on evolution, philosophy, and Eastern religions. I was studying everything. I read the Book of Mormon; I even prayed about it, though I was not religious in the ordinary sense of the term. Actually, I read all four standard works that summer, and several other Church books as well. By the end of the summer I had definitely been affected by my reading and praying. However, I went to church only once, at the Fairbanks, Alaska Branch. My brother and I drove ninety miles to check it out. I was working six days a week, nine hours a day, on construction. Whatever free time I had I read and studied. Our house was literally out in the wilderness—no one was there but my father and mother and my brother and sister. My father was the supervisor of one part of a large project. I worked for him and made enough money to support myself for a full academic year. At the end of August, as I was planning to return to Reed, Marian made the surprise announcement that she was transferring to BYU. She seemed to have decided that her religion was more important than our romance! I thought, “Well, I don’t have any big commitment to Reed.” I wasn’t doing very well in school, and my focus in life was vague and ambiguous. So I took a trip to BYU and saw Marian. I was really taken with the campus and the people. Her aunt, Marge Wight, was President Wilkinson’s secretary. President Wilkinson had already told Marian that if she would transfer to BYU, he would give her a scholarship, and she had agreed to transfer. I had never heard of Brigham Young University. I didn’t know anything about Utah. I was from the state of Washington and knew nothing about Mormonism until I met Marian.

Before I left MIT I had gone up on the roof of my dorm searching for answers and prayed the agnostic prayer: “God, if you’re there, what is this all about?” That’s how I received the impression to go to Reed. The same thing

happened in coming to BYU. I went alone up east Center Street near the State Hospital. I didn't know it was the State Hospital, but I drove up there because it was a quiet spot. There I viewed the impressive mountains and the lights of the city; and because of a special, dramatic experience, I felt I should go to BYU.

So I applied immediately. It was only a week or two before classes started. I was accepted, which would be unusual now. I returned home to Spokane and then went to Portland to collect all my stuff. I checked out of Reed and checked out of the joint program at MIT.

When I first enrolled at BYU, everyone told me I should meet Professor Bob Thomas in English because he was a Reed graduate. So I went to talk to him. I was very impressed by his combination of faith and erudition. On the spot I decided to enroll in his Book of Mormon class.

During this period, Marian and I started to experience problems in our relationship. Conflicts and doubts about each other arose. So we broke up. Our breakup freed me from the complications of romance so I could focus on religion. But we were in the same Book of Mormon class. Not surprisingly, this created a tense situation. Through it all, I had a lot of talks with Bob Thomas. Those conversations were very important in keeping my feet on a proper path.

During that time, psychology professor Robert Howell had a significant influence on me. He was a clinical-type person, but he taught a course called History of Experimental Psychology. As I shifted from physical science into psychology, I moved toward experimental psychology because it had grown out of a marriage among philosophy, physics, and biology. Howell's course was wonderful for me because we analyzed the orienting assumptions behind modern science as they applied to human behavior. We covered the relevant great philosophers and scientists who had set the stage for twentieth-century empiricism. I had studied many of them before, but this time psychology and religion were both added to the mixture. It was as if everything in my life—science, philosophy, psychology, and religion—was altogether in that one class. I probably spent more time on that class than any class I have ever taken. I loved it. I buried myself in it. I was not a Latter-day Saint at that point, so dozens of intellectual issues I had been struggling with, in their confrontations with revealed religion, began to be sorted out in a rigorous way that I could respect. What is more, conversations with other students in the class, who were comfortable with their faith, had a profound impact on me.

Equally important were general authorities' Devotional talks every Tuesday. What an ideal learning environment for an investigator to hear apostles and prophets speak every week! Their messages left a deep impression on me and challenged me to rethink my values, commitments, and lifestyle. Under the circumstances, how could a sincere seeker not be persuaded? I also attended church off and on and then decided to go to general conference in October. A friend (who had dated an LDS girl at Reed) and I went to general priesthood meeting. We didn't know much, but we heard President McKay speak. Hearing him left another deep impression on me. It was a powerful weekend. Even so, I was so imbued with philosophy and science that it was very difficult to make the leap of faith. I studied all the issues long and hard. I talked with my roommates, two of whom were returned missionaries, and I continued to meet with Bob Thomas.

By the end of the quarter Marian and I got back together. In December, I asked her to marry me, decided to become a Latter-day Saint, and chose to become a psychology major. It had been the most complex, dramatic, and life-transforming period in my life. The BYU atmosphere, collectively and individually, had met my needs perfectly. If ever a person had become a new man, it was I. The founding mission of the University truly found full expression in my life and being. Looking back on it, I only regret that we do not currently have more room for inquiring, wandering non-LDS students!

I was baptized in March 1955, and Marian and I began attending the Manavu Ward after we married in June. We didn't marry in the temple because I had not been a member for a year. Bob Thomas felt we were ready for marriage and assured us that the temple sealing would be forthcoming soon enough. Indeed, our bishop was impressed to approve the sealing two months before the one-year period, an exception that is no longer available.

During the last year that we were at BYU, I became the deacons' advisor while attending the Manavu Ward. I had an illustrious group of boys in that quorum, including one of Ernest Wilkinson's sons and one of Roy Doxey's sons. But there was also a group of inactive boys in that part of Provo. So I read the manual. Some might say I was naive. I thought, "Well, as a Mormon you do what it said in the manual, and the manual says you reactivate the inactives." So I took my deacons quorum presidency to all those homes and reactivated all but one of those boys. They were twelve or thirteen years old. Marian and I came back a few years later and visited the Manavu Ward. There were three priests administering the sacrament with whom I had worked. They were all going on missions. It was exciting for me to feel that I had given something back in a place where I had received so much.

Because of all that happened during my junior year, my first year at BYU, I found myself scrambling to meet the requirements for a psychology major while deciding what I was going to do with my life. But my senior year went well. I received all A's every quarter; the department gave me a teaching assistantship and invited me to come back on scholarship for a master's degree. I felt I needed to get through this stage, so I did the master's degree in nine months,

including the thesis. I finished by the next summer (1957) and then was accepted to graduate school at Stanford. By then I had three years at BYU, two years in the Church, and I had become excited about the gospel because I had spent so much time studying it. We also had our first two children, David and Sue, and began our family life as Marian chose to devote herself to family and dropped out of school.

In 1960 I finished at Stanford, where our third child, Cyndy, was born. Then I took a postdoctoral fellowship sponsored by the National Institute of Mental Health at the Psychiatric Institute at the University of Wisconsin Medical School. Carl Rogers, a famous psychologist with whom I wanted to work, was there. Our fourth child, Kathy, was born there. After a year, this man, who had obtained his doctorate at Columbia in the 1930s, recommended me and three other people for a professorship at the Teachers College Columbia University doctoral program in Clinical Psychology. I went to Columbia for an interview and, by some inspired combination of events, was offered the job on the spot.

Marian made it clear that she didn't want to go to New York but was willing if it was the right thing to do. I didn't really want to go either, but I had felt a strong impression and did want to become established as a leader in my profession. I said, "Let's do it for five years." We stayed eleven, during which time we both devoted major time to church service. Marian also gave birth to our fifth and sixth children, Eric and Ben, in New Jersey, where we lived, and she continued to anchor the family. Over those years, I became a full professor and enjoyed many opportunities, including several research grants. I published as widely as I could. In addition to journal publications, I published one major book. Several books were in process.

During those years, BYU faculty and administrators had tried to entice me to come back many times, including while I was still a graduate student at Stanford. I kept in touch, but in the 1960s BYU had a small psychology department and no accredited doctoral program where I would fit in. However, the numbers were starting to expand as BYU grew. Every year or two someone wrote to me, but I just never felt drawn back.

After about ten years at Columbia, a lot of problems arose in my department and at the university. Many of the difficulties followed the 1968 riots protesting the Vietnam War and the Columbia students' occupation of the administration building. The faculty split on how to respond to the crisis. In addition, there were wide differences of opinion about the war. By the time the university started to settle down, a lot of relationships had been broken. Some people decided to leave. In my program, in particular, there were serious problems. The director of my area, a very famous person with whom I was writing a book, decided to leave. That was demoralizing. Then somebody else earnestly suggested that our program be closed down entirely, even though it was a very prominent program. To escape the confusion and turmoil, I started looking at jobs at other universities.

I was interviewing at other places in the East and Midwest when the BYU psychology department sent a letter. In fact it said, "The former chairman of our department is retiring and we would like you to consider coming." I decided to take a look even though I was skeptical because I was unsure about the new doctoral program at BYU, and I previously had not taught undergraduates, which was an important responsibility. Applied psychology was strictly a graduate program at Columbia Teachers College. There were two hundred doctoral students and about three hundred master's students in half a dozen specialties. It was like a professional school. I didn't really want to go somewhere where I couldn't do what I had been doing.

When I visited BYU, Bob Thomas had become the academic vice president and Dallin Oaks had been the president for a year. The two of them greatly impressed me. I thought, "I will test this." The dean of social sciences was Martin Hickman. He asked, "What would it take for you to come here?" I said, "Number one, I only teach two classes a semester." He said, "Okay." "Number two, I want such and such a salary." He said, "Okay." Whatever I asked, he said yes. I thought, "My gosh, I should have asked for more."

It had felt right years before when I had left my Reed College and MIT connections for BYU. On this new occasion, before I returned to New York, I met with Bob Thomas and enjoyed another of our long talks. He had baptized me, ordained me an elder, and was my spiritual godfather, so to speak. I already felt pretty convinced about coming back to BYU. After our conversation, he hugged me and said, "So you think this is it?" I said, "Yes, I think this is it." When I returned home, we fasted and prayed as a family and decided to accept BYU's offer. Everybody in the family seemed to feel good about it until they got to Provo. The adjustment was especially difficult for our teenage daughters, but the boys loved the outdoor opportunities.

We had been gone from Provo for fifteen years. Our return in 1972 was nice in many ways because I had the administration's support. But when I was assigned an office in the Faculty Office Building, separate from the psychology faculty, someone quizzically remarked to me, "Do you remember the Old Testament story of Joseph and the coat of many colors?" It became clear that colleagues thought I was receiving special treatment. For my part, I was not entirely happy because I felt that the department was a little backward, not up to date, and not doing enough research.

To solve my dilemma, I started to collaborate with some of the younger faculty. One of them, Mike Lambert, has

now become a senior person in our specialty and is a major international scholar. The Oaks administration was in favor of the sort of cooperative and productive research work that Mike and I undertook. It was just that there was tension between people who had been hired under other agreements specifying that they would mainly teach. I could see their point and came to respect those faculty. But I also wanted to see the department become a major player on the national scene; during the 1980s and 1990s this finally came to pass. The BYU psychology department is now first-rate.

The gospel has made all the difference to me professionally, especially in the sense that the BYU environment has been so reinforcing of my development as a person and a scholar. It seemed that at BYU I could bring together research and religion at a new level. Our new locale in Provo also became the setting for the birth of our triplet sons, Patrick, Daniel, and Michael, and for Marian's eventual return to school. She is now a clinical social worker and psychotherapist in private practice, where she harmonizes spiritual and professional approaches in treating LDS clients.

At Columbia, and even at Stanford, I had tried to bring religion and psychology together and to coordinate them. In another subject, chemistry, for example, I don't know whether one would see the connections, except maybe in theory. But in psychology there is a major overlap between the goals of psychology and the goals of the gospel in terms of social development, mental health, and personal growth. In the era of the 1950s and the 1960s, when academic departments were anti-God, especially in psychology, I got nowhere. The best I received was approval at Columbia in the late 1960s to teach a course on values in psychology. I decided not to teach that course. Instead, I decided to incorporate its essence into a course that I was already teaching. But we would get into serious arguments in the class when I introduced conservative moral values as possibly being beneficial for mental health.

Liberal moral values and antireligious attitudes manifested themselves in other settings. For example, we had a case conference every week. A therapist from New York City would be invited to come in and present a case. Often moral issues would come up, such as, should this client be encouraged to have a sexual relationship with her friend? I remember specifically one episode in which the presenting therapist said he would consider therapy to have been a success with this very isolated, shy young woman when she had a sexual relationship with a young man. In his view, that action would be a sign that she had come out of her shell, so to speak, and could be intimate and could express herself. I challenged him very vigorously on his ethics, his morality, and the potential negative consequences of achieving such a goal. He was shocked by what I said. He thought that my response was ridiculous. There were more than thirty people in the room, graduate students and faculty, and not one person supported my position. (Afterwards, one student who was a Catholic said privately that she supported my position.) One faculty member did say, "I disagree with you very much, but I admire your courage." She sensed what it took to respond as I had.

Now the field has changed. Between 1980 and 1990, there was a tremendous shift toward basic moral values and the role of spirituality in mental health. My colleagues and I at BYU have been part of the publishing, speaking, and challenging that have brought about the change. There has also been a coalescing of groups, with new journals and organizations devoted to psychology and religion. Even though this is not yet a dominating trend, it has earned a respected position and is here to stay. However, in the beginning (say, 1980), the movement was very controversial. I was invited to speak in many places because people wanted to debate the religious issues. Not surprisingly, some of those experiences were very negative.

For example, I was invited to give a keynote address in Amsterdam to the Dutch Psychotherapy Society at its fiftieth-anniversary celebration. I said, "The subject of psychology, values, and religion is what I want to talk about." The members knew what I intended to discuss. At the conference, I gave a straightforward, value-oriented talk, and supported religion as a mentally healthy thing, arguing in favor of traditional values as anchoring lifestyles that could prevent many mental and social problems. During my speech, people yelled at me from the audience. A fellow twenty feet away from me jumped up and shook his fist. The first part of my presentation lasted an hour and a half, and then we took a break. During the break no one spoke to me.

In 1980, Amsterdam was one of the drug capitals of Europe, and the city had deteriorated since I had been there in 1968. At the beginning of the second session, I said, "I've overheard a lot of nasty remarks about what I've had to say so far. I would like to ask you a question: If you don't think values are important, where do you think all of these deviant people walking the streets of Amsterdam come from?"

At that point people really let loose on me. The two discussants ripped into me. One was a psychiatrist and one a psychologist. One of them said, laughing, "I think the Bible is a pretty interesting book, but it doesn't have anything to do with mental health." Then he said, only half in jest, that I had ruined their birthday party. At another point I thought I was going to be physically attacked. As a result, I did not go to the banquet that evening; I went back to the hotel and ate alone. It was a terrible experience.

A Dutch journal of psychotherapy was supposed to publish my address. When I finished the final draft, I sent it in. Not surprisingly, the editors refused to publish it. It seems that my name was used in vain for several years thereafter.

There were other, contrasting experiences, such as one at the University of Washington, where some of the faculty felt affirmed and legitimized in their personal faith. They came up and hugged me and said, “You know, I will never teach psychology the same way because obviously there’s a different, richer philosophy.” These were “closet Christians” who decided it was acceptable to come out. In the 1980s such experiences happened over and over again in the United States and other countries, and not just from my influence. Many people started speaking out, saying psychology had been ideologically oppressive, dogmatic, and insensitive to the beliefs of the populace at large.

The standard position at that time was exemplified by a notable psychologist in New York, Albert Ellis, who published a critique of one of my articles and said, “Religiosity is in many respects equivalent to irrational thinking and emotional disturbance. . . . The less religious they are, the more emotionally healthy they will be.”^[1] In this period, my BYU colleagues and I, and others elsewhere, published evidence about how most clients are religious and come from religious cultures. Essentially we said, “You’re interested in diversity. You’re not accounting for religious diversity.” I took Albert Ellis’s statement as a challenge and decided I would study BYU students. I thought this effort would be an acid test. Here we have devout people, and the question is whether they can be both devout and rational. That question seems ridiculous to people like ourselves, and to those from other religious traditions. Psychologists simply did not realize how far they were from what most people thought. If most people had understood psychology’s antireligious bias, they would have stopped funding psychological research. In this light, I pursued several studies of BYU students, with graduate students helping me. Basically, we gave undergraduate students many mental health tests and clinical interviews. Then we took the theory of Albert Ellis and administered a measurement based on his work that is called the Rational Beliefs Test, a measure for neurosis, giving it to a group of BYU students. They came out quite well on that test, as well as on other tests. They were consistently equal to or better than national norms for mental normality.

I thought that another acid test of whether religiosity can be normal would be to examine a group of returned missionaries. The group of returned missionaries whom we selected were taking an advanced Book of Mormon class. We did psychological tests on thirty-three returned missionaries, testing for depression scores and the like. They came out with the lowest average depression score of any sample I had ever seen. We then published all of our research results.

We decided that we would never publish in religious journals or pastoral counseling journals. We published in mainstream psychology journals. Sometimes it was difficult. There would be arguments with the editors; they would reject an article out of hand. I would send it to another journal. The strategy paid off: each study was published in a good journal, some were published in the best journals. Other people, doing similar research, started doing the same. Gradually, the debate regarding religion and individual values dramatically changed in our favor. Finally, in 1989 the American Psychological Association gave me the Distinguished Contribution to Knowledge award for this work and the earlier work which I had done at Columbia on therapy research. Other awards followed from several national and international professional societies. These “official” stamps of approval, given to me and other colleagues, have opened the way for a new philosophy and a new kind of research to blossom.

BYU and other religious schools gave people like me a base of operations and support, in a word, reinforcement. I could not have done this kind of research at a secular university at that time. I could not have found funding. At BYU the College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences kept giving me money every year. Things have changed sufficiently that today many organizations will give money for research on values and religion, including government agencies and private foundations.

BYU now has a significant name in this work. Let me illustrate. Scott Richards was one of my students in 1983, and now he’s a professor at BYU. In 1997 we published a book entitled *A Spiritual Strategy for Counseling and Psychotherapy*. The publisher was the American Psychological Association, and it has become one of their best sellers. The Association also invited us to edit a second book that is titled *Handbook of Psychotherapy and Religious Diversity*. We have invited expert therapists from many major religious traditions to write about how one would counsel people within their particular religious tradition, such as Muslim, Jewish, and Hindu. Contributions will also represent several Christian groups. Naturally, we have a chapter on Latter-day Saints.

Sally Barlow and I have also published a chapter in the new *Handbook of Religion and Mental Health*, edited by Dr. Harold Koenig of the Duke University Psychiatry department. The chapter summarizes research that has been done over the last fifteen years on LDS religious and mental health issues. The book’s last section is titled “How Do You See Mental Health from the Religious Perspective?” The editor chose seven religions: Judaism, Catholicism, Protestantism, Unity religions, Islam, Buddhism, and Mormonism. That’s it. No others are represented. Notably, we were classed among seven major world religions. I was amazed.

For a person like me it has been wonderful to be at BYU. I have been hampered only in the sense that there were

some faculty who held to traditional psychology and didn't like the idea of bringing in a spiritual perspective. Rather contrary to BYU's mission, they felt it was important to make a reputation in the way that the rest of the profession does. There is nothing wrong with that in itself, but there was a period of tension between me and a few faculty members who felt that psychology should remain purely as a traditional social science. But that issue has been resolved. I like the changes that have occurred. I like the feeling that God is more in the classroom, laboratory, and clinic at BYU.

As much as BYU's religious tradition has nurtured my work and soul, there are a few obstacles to finding God there. One of these is the pressure to conform to certain behavioral standards. All of these are part of what I would call extrinsic aspects of religion, and they worry me. In our studies, we have tried to distinguish between intrinsic religiosity and extrinsic religiosity, as originally defined by Gordon Allport at Harvard University. We have found that intrinsically religious persons choose to be faithful to God for their own internal reasons. Such persons are healthier mentally and spiritually. I fear putting pressure on our youth in general and our BYU students in particular to meet external contingencies of reinforcement. In other words, "If you do these things, then you get approval or certain rewards." To be extrinsically rewarded or conditioned can get in the way of a genuine religious life. It would be unfortunate if we were successful in creating an image of righteousness without the heart and soul of it. In our research and in my experience as a bishop and stake president on campus, I fear that I have seen too much religious role-playing—that is, doing the right thing for the wrong reasons.

I don't have all the answers to the dilemma of how to maintain standards and encourage independent exercise of agency at the same time. Perhaps a statement we made in one of our published articles about BYU student mental health is pertinent here. After observing cases of perfectionistic depression, shallow religious conformity, and emotional blandness in some subjects of our studies, we noted the following: "The healthy features of intrinsic religiousness will be better actualized when the institutional and familial environments allow for honest recognition and acceptance of moral imperfections, thereby emphasizing growth relative to moral principles rather than an outward perfectionism that reinforces rigidity and ensures lowered adaptability."^[2]

However such matters are ultimately resolved, and I do believe they require resolution, the fact remains that BYU has attracted an unusual community of believers. It is governed by spiritual inspiration to such an extent that the social system is collectively an unusual, even distinctive, source of positive human development in the quest for eternal life.

^[1] Albert Ellis, "Psychotherapy and Atheistic Values: A Response to A. E. Bergin's Psychotherapy and Religious Values," *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 48, no. 5: 635–39.

^[2] Allen E. Bergin, "Religious Life-styles and Mental Health," in *Religion, Personality, and Mental Health*, ed. Laurence B. Brown (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1994), 85.