

# “Those Who See”: A Century’s Charge to Religious Educators

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A couple of years ago I taught “that class”—thirty-five freshmen, twenty-seven of them boys.<sup>1</sup>

I’m sure every teacher has had or eventually will have a class like that. Maybe everyone needs one. Naturally, it was fifth period, right after lunch (it seems like it always is). By winter, the idealism of a new year the Church Educational System (CES) symposium had worn off, and I was frustrated. I was most bothered by a statement made by President J. Reuben Clark Jr. in “The Charted Course of the Church in Education.” He promised teachers: “The youth of the Church are hungry for things of the spirit; they are eager to learn the gospel, and they want it straight, undiluted. They want to know. . . . These students crave the faith. . . . They are prepared to understand the truth.”<sup>2</sup>

My students were hungry all right—but not for anything I was offering. Obviously, he had not seen my class.

That year I had on my wall a quote taken from President Boyd K. Packer’s talk to religious educators in which he quoted President Joseph F. Smith, who said: “The hand of the Lord may not be visible to all. There may be many who cannot discern the workings of God’s will in the progress and development of this great latter-day work, *but there are those who see in every hour and in every moment of the existence of the Church, from its beginning until now, the overruling, almighty hand of Him who sent His Only Begotten Son.*”<sup>3</sup>

In the winter of that year, I was far from seeing the hand of the Lord “in every hour and in every moment” of my class. I began to wonder if He spent “any hour” or “any moment” in my class and whether I could handle others like it for the next forty years.

But President Smith testified, “There are those who see.” Who are they, and what do they see? What is the prophetic vision of religious education? President Packer, speaking of CES employees, observed: “I would like to make just a comment or two about the assignments that are mine as one of the General Authorities. . . . I have learned firsthand how the General Authorities of the Church regard this group. I now know the importance of this body of men, and I do not know whether it is quite what I expected it to be. It is a good deal finer that I hoped it would be. And I know now, firsthand, how tremendously important this body is in reference to the destiny of the Church.”<sup>4</sup>

On another occasion, President Packer again noted: “In the history of the Church there is no better illustration of the prophetic preparation of this people than the beginnings of the seminary and institute program. These programs were started when they were nice but were not critically needed. They were granted a season to flourish and to grow into a bulwark for the Church. They now become a godsend for the salvation of modern Israel in a most challenging hour. We are now encircled. Our youth are in desperate jeopardy. These are the last days, foreseen by prophets in ancient times.”<sup>5</sup>

Prophets do not use phrases like “tremendously important,” “prophetic preparation,” and “godsend” lightly. As they are blessed with spiritual insight into youth and education, what do they see? How do prophets feel about religious education? Why do they feel so strongly?

These questions sparked our search of talks by General Authorities relative to education. Since 1938, nearly 150 talks by General Authorities have been directed to the CES audience. Addresses include messages delivered at BYU summer school conventions, CES symposia (conferences), annual “Evening with a General Authority” gatherings, and CES satellite training broadcasts. These talks, covering seventy years, represent what President Packer called “the prophetic preparation”<sup>6</sup> of the CES as well as the combined educational vision of over forty of the Lord’s anointed.

## **The Law of Teaching**

The talks of the century reveal a pattern that conforms to the directives the Lord has given for teaching. In 1987, President Ezra Taft Benson questioned, “Are we using the messages and method of teaching found in the Book of Mormon and other scriptures of the Restoration to teach this great plan of the Eternal God?”<sup>7</sup>

What did he mean by “the method of teaching found in the [scriptures]”? Is there a method of teaching the Lord has given us and expects us to use in teaching His gospel? If so, where is it found? If there is a method, do General Authorities teach and model it when they train?

The Lord outlined elements of a teaching model in the section Joseph Smith referred to as “the law of the Church.” The Doctrine and Covenants describes a “law of teaching” in the following words: “And again, the elders, priests, and teachers of this church shall teach the principles of my gospel, which are in the Bible and the Book of Mormon, in the which is the fulness of the gospel. And they shall observe the covenants and church articles to do them, and these shall be their teachings, as they are directed by the Spirit” (D&C 42:12–13).

The Lord’s law of teaching includes four elements: teaching principles and doctrines, observing covenants, obeying Church articles, and being directed by the Spirit. The talks to religious educators discuss and model each of these four elements.

### **“The Charted Course”:**

#### **A Beginning Place for Finding the Lord’s Method**

The first published address, “The Charted Course of the Church in Education,” holds a special place in establishing religious education. Since the talk’s delivery, prophets have continually referred to it, holding it up as a model. Of President Clark’s landmark talk, President Henry B. Eyring said: “The place I would always begin, to be sure I knew what those principles are, would be to read President J. Reuben Clark Jr.’s talk ‘The Charted Course of the Church in Education.’ . . . He saw our time and beyond, with prophetic insight. The principles he taught, of how to see our students and thus how to teach them, will always apply in our classrooms. . . . The great change in our classrooms, as the kingdom goes forth to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people, will only verify the prophetic vision of President Clark. . . . The principles described so many years ago will be a sure guide in the years ahead.”<sup>8</sup>

President Packer wrote of the same address: “President Clark was a prophet, seer, and revelator. There is not the slightest question but that exceptional inspiration attended the preparation of his message. There is a clarity and power in his words, unusual even for him. . . . Read it carefully and ponder it. For by applying the definition the Lord Himself gave, this instruction may comfortably be referred to as scripture.”<sup>9</sup>

Prophets feel so strongly about the principles outlined in “The Charted Course” that they quote liberally from it. In his 1980 address to religious educators, President Marion G. Romney scrapped a previously prepared speech (as indicated by President Eyring<sup>10</sup>), declaring instead, “Because this assignment to speak to you professional teachers about how to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ in these Church institutions requires an endowment which I do not possess, I shall say what I think should be said in the words of President J. Reuben Clark, Jr.”<sup>11</sup> He then proceeded to quote word for word from “The Charted Course of the Church in Education.”

President Eyring later spoke of that night and the car ride with President Romney following the talk. He questioned: “President Romney, don’t you think young people and the world have changed almost completely since President Clark gave that talk in 1938? . . . Do you think what President Clark taught still describes the way we should approach our students today?” President Romney chuckled, sat silent for a moment, and then said, “Oh, I think President Clark could see our time and beyond.”<sup>12</sup>

President Clark’s vision of “our time and beyond” includes, like Doctrine and Covenants 42:12–13, a discussion of doctrine, covenants, articles (teaching counsel), and Spirit-directed teaching. Interestingly, it does not include any mention of the conditions of the day, although the talk was given at the beginning of World War II in Europe and the end of the Great Depression. His words are not time-sensitive, with statements such as “in our troubled times,” “in light of what is taking place,” or “with this on the horizon.” Like scripture, the talk transcends time and circumstance, stating facts as if they were applicable to any time or place in history. As stated by President Romney, a fellow member of the First Presidency, President Clark possessed “an endowment” unique to the situation.<sup>13</sup>

In the rest of this article, we will analyze the four elements of the Lord’s teaching method outlined in Doctrine and Covenants 42:12–13. The sections will include President Clark’s words on the subject, supported by prophetic commentary from fellow General Authorities in their counsel to CES

employees. Finally, it will include a summary of how the Brethren feel about students, teachers, and the role of religious education in the destiny of the Church.

## Doctrine

*Doctrine*, as used in Doctrine and Covenants 42:12, refers to the “principles of [the] gospel, which are in the Bible and the Book of Mormon.” From President Clark’s time until today, doctrine has received a strong emphasis in the talks to CES by General Authorities, with over sixty talks dealing with the subject. Elder Mark E. Petersen declared: “Our *authorities are the scriptures, the four standard works. Joseph Smith and the other Presidents and leaders are likewise our authorities.* They are our file leaders. We must teach as they do. We must *avoid the doctrines which they avoid*, we must avoid the practices which they avoid.”<sup>14</sup>

President Clark likewise stated:

There is neither reason nor is there excuse for our Church religious teaching and training facilities and institutions, unless the youth are to be taught and trained in the principles of the Gospel, embracing therein the two great elements that Jesus is the Christ and that Joseph was God’s prophet. The teaching of a system of ethics to the students is not a sufficient reason for running our seminaries and institutes. . . . There are the great principles involved in eternal life, the Priesthood, the resurrection, and many like other things that go way beyond these canons of good living. These great fundamental principles also must be taught to the youth; they are *the things the youth wish first to know about.*<sup>15</sup>

He continued:

You do have an interest in matters purely cultural and in matters of purely secular knowledge; but, I repeat again for emphasis, *your chief interest, your essential and all but sole duty, is to teach the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ as that has been revealed in these latter days. You are to teach this Gospel using as your sources and authorities the Standard Works of the Church, and the words of those whom God has called to lead His people in these last days. You are not, whether high or low, to intrude into your work your own peculiar philosophy*, no matter what its

source or how pleasing or rational it seems to you to be. . . .  
 You are *not*, whether high or low, to change the doctrines of the  
 Church or to modify them.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Power of Doctrine**

Prophets give promises for the power of doctrine in teaching. Elder Bruce R. McConkie testified: “You do not change anybody’s life by teaching them mathematics. . . . But you do change the lives of people when you teach them the doctrines of salvation.”<sup>17</sup>

Elder Jeffrey R. Holland declared: “The Church has a great work to do, and we want to do it right down the middle of the straight and narrow path. Teach the gospel. Teach the doctrine. It has all the power and appeal you will ever need to hold your students.”<sup>18</sup>

### **The Doctrines to Teach**

With faith that the teaching of doctrine has power, what constitutes “doctrine” in the CES classroom? Speaking of the Brethren, Elder Petersen noted, “We must avoid the doctrines which they avoid.”<sup>19</sup>

What doctrines do the Brethren teach? What do they avoid? Have they modeled them for the CES? President Harold B. Lee counseled teachers: “You as teachers are not being sent out to teach new doctrines. You’re to teach the old doctrines, not so plainly that they can just understand, but *you must teach the doctrines of the Church so plainly that no one can misunderstand.*”<sup>20</sup>

Part of the “plain teaching” includes teaching to the proper audience. Just because something may be true does not mean it needs to be taught in the classroom. President Packer warned: “There is a temptation for the writer or the teacher . . . to want to tell everything, whether it is worthy or faith promoting or not. Some things that are true are not very useful. . . . The writer or the teacher who has an exaggerated loyalty to the theory that everything must be told is laying a foundation for his own judgment. . . . It matters very much not only *what* we are told but *when* we are told it. Be careful that you build faith rather than destroy it.”<sup>21</sup>

Because of this warning, the Brethren have provided powerful aids to help a teacher determine the appropriateness of doctrine. One aid is the document “Basic Doctrine,” published in the *Charge to Religious Educators*, third edition. The two-page document lists and develops “basic doctrines and general objectives . . . approved by the Church Board of Education.”<sup>22</sup>

General Authorities’ talks are another aid. Again, as Elder Petersen stated, “We must avoid the doctrines which they avoid.”<sup>23</sup>

Teachers can look to the prophets as a model for doctrinal teaching, as almost half of the talks deal with doctrine. Most come from an era of doctrinal discussion, the 1950s and 1960s, when authorities like Joseph Fielding Smith and Harold B. Lee established the doctrine and modeled its teaching.

A third, and probably the greatest, aid in teaching true doctrine has been provided by the Lord Himself. Elder McConkie taught: “The scriptures themselves present the gospel in the way that the Lord wants it presented to us in our day. . . . We are to teach in the way things are recorded in the standard works that we have. And if you want to know what emphasis should be given to gospel principles, you simply teach the whole standard works and, automatically, in the process, you will have given the Lord’s emphasis to every doctrine and every principle.”<sup>24</sup>

### **Warnings about Teaching the Sensational**

When explaining doctrine, instructors are warned against teaching the sensational. President Spencer W. Kimball cautioned:

There may be a tendency, perhaps there may be a temptation, for some institute and seminary teachers to want to delve deeply into things which we are not primarily concerned with in the eternal life of our youth. Perhaps they do this to get something that would be somewhat spectacular; something that is not known; something a little strange; a little different; or something that hadn’t been dug out. . . . A teacher is doing a disservice to his students when he incites curiosity or encourages discussion about those things which are not a part of their lives or of their experiences. . . . The teachers should confine themselves to the practical standard living phases and not expound spectacular, strange, and exciting newnesses.<sup>25</sup>

President James E. Faust observed: “I have wondered if a few gospel scholars, including Church educators, get bored with everyday life, with the basics, and with the first principles and fundamentals of the gospel. Some seem to find the esoteric intriguing. These miracles and mysteries hold some fascination. All of us would do well to teach principles and covenants that build faith more than to teach history and geography.”<sup>26</sup>

Elder Holland summarized the challenge with this warning:

For the sake of the Church and your students and the gospel we love and teach, brethren and sisters, please work hard at staying balanced and steady, not given to extremism or rumors, sensationalism or fads of various kinds that often sweep through the land (and sometimes come among the members of the Church). In this regard you can be for us, and we hope with us, part of a solution, and never part of a problem.

I know the challenge of trying to hold a class's attention. Every teacher wants to be a pied piper, in the very best sense, appealing to a student for the right reasons and mesmerizing them with our grasp of gospel truths. In this audience you and I know how demanding that is hour after hour, day after day, week after week. Teaching effectively, teaching powerfully, teaching with enthusiasm, solid preparation, and appealing supporting materials, that's hard work—it's among the hardest work I know and surely among the hardest work I have ever done. But please resist the temptation to push into the sensational or the extreme any doctrine you teach or any counsel you may give.<sup>27</sup>

We are, therefore, to teach the basic doctrines of the Church as found in the standard works and the words of the prophets. These are, after all, "the things the youth wish first to know about," according to President Clark. In concluding his address, he summarized: "The tithing represents too much toil, too much self-denial, too much sacrifice, too much faith, to be used for the colorless instruction of the youth of the Church in elementary ethics. . . . In saying this, I am speaking for the First Presidency."<sup>28</sup>

### **Covenants**

Prophets have stressed that there is more to teaching than merely declaring true doctrine. President Eyring added a second aspect when he stated, "If we make the doctrine simple and clear, and if we teach out of our own changed hearts, the change for them [the students] will come."<sup>29</sup>

Elder Neal A. Maxwell likewise reminisced on his own seminary experience: "My own memories of my teachers at Granite High Seminary . . . are basically now distilled into what they *were* in terms of their character. Forgotten are the specific lesson menus, but I remember the chefs! It's likely to be



that way with you. You will be remembered not only for what you taught, but even more for what you are.”<sup>30</sup>

President Romney emphasized the power of a teacher’s example: “I would prefer that he [the teacher] were a little off on whether the pearly gates swing in or out than not to be living so he can go through them.”<sup>31</sup>

In another address, he observed, “I never pay any attention to a person’s interpretations of the gospel if I know he isn’t keeping the commandments.”<sup>32</sup>

The Lord’s law of teaching in section 42 continues: “And they shall observe the covenants.” Observing the covenants, from a teacher’s perspective, includes commitments both in righteous living as individuals and in obligations as employees of the Church. It deals with being worthy of the Spirit, faithful to the teaching appointment, and obedient to the directions given by the scriptures, file leaders, and the Lord’s servants.

What did President Clark establish in “The Charted Course” as the standard for all teachers? “The first requisite of a teacher for teaching these principles is a personal testimony of their truth. . . . No teacher who does not have a real testimony of the truth of the Gospel . . . has any place in the Church school system. If there be any such . . . he should at once resign.”<sup>33</sup>

President Clark stressed not only the importance of possessing a testimony but also the moral and intellectual courage to declare it.

What have the Brethren taught dealing with the aspect of covenant keeping in the Lord’s method of teaching? The greatest emphasis on covenant keeping seemed to be in the decade of the 1970s when covenant keeping and personal worthiness came under attack. Focusing on this time period, what did the Lord’s anointed say to teachers about covenantal worthiness?

President Packer counseled teachers to “make sure that you are committed, that you are nonneutral, that you are biased, that you are one-sided, that you are on the Lord’s side.”<sup>34</sup>

He continued: “Somewhere on earth in our day our youth must, positively must, be able to tie to someone who is not confused and who is secure in his faith. . . . Somebody has to stand, face the storm, declare the truth, and let the winds blow, and be serene and composed and steady in the doing of it. That is your responsibility and your obligation as teachers.”<sup>35</sup>

During this same time period, President Kimball declared:

I hope that you will be such a solid rock that they can receive from you strength that can be a real deterrent to troubles.  
. . . Your students do not deserve to suffer by reason of your

problems. . . . Your students are entitled to expect years of firm spirituality in your effective teaching. . . . In a large measure, quite a large measure, young people are going to the temple for their marriages because of you. . . . They go to the temple because you went to the temple, because you have been talking about the temple. You've been telling them the joys of temple life, and so largely because of your influence, they will go to the temple after they have filled their missions.<sup>36</sup>

President Benson reminded teachers: "Your first responsibility as a teacher of the gospel is to prepare yourself spiritually. All of you were interviewed by a General Authority when you applied for employment in the Church Educational System. I assume most of you were asked if you possessed a testimony. . . . Your responsibility is to live as you teach. Be consistent in your life with the message you declare to your students."<sup>37</sup>

When we read the talks delivered over the years, it seems the Brethren have been concerned that we keep our covenants particularly in relationship to the following:

1. That we have firm testimonies of the Savior and the Prophet Joseph Smith and the courage to bear witness of them.
2. That we are true to the questions asked by the General Authorities during our interview for employment and those established in our letters of appointment.
3. That our lives are in harmony with the covenants we have personally taken.
4. That what we teach and how we live are in harmony.
5. That we are defenders of the Brethren and "teach what prophets preach."
6. That our loyalty to the doctrine and the Brethren is unequivocal.

The Lord and the Brethren stress covenant keeping on the part of the teacher because of its teaching power. Elder Maxwell summarized:

Each of you realizes, long since, that you teach what you are. It is that lesson in the memories of your students which will outlast all other lessons that you will teach. You, as a person, can bulk large in the memory of your students. Your teaching techniques will be secondary to what you are as an individual. Your traits will be more remembered, compositely, than a particular truth in a particular lesson. This is as it should be, for if our discipleship is serious, it will show, and it will be remembered. . . . You can't be a successful

teacher in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, nor can I, if things are not right in our eternal callings.<sup>38</sup>

### Church Articles

As a teacher, it is not enough to teach pure doctrine and keep one’s own covenants, as powerful as these two may be in the law of teaching. The Lord in Doctrine and Covenants 42 requires something more, stating, “And they shall observe the covenants and church articles to do them.” What are the “church articles”? At the time of the writing of the Doctrine and Covenants, what are now sections 20 and 22 were called the “Articles and Covenants of the Church.” Speaking of these revelations, Joseph Smith stated, “In this manner did the Lord continue to give us *instructions* from time to time, concerning the duties which now devolved upon us.”<sup>39</sup>

Noah Webster’s dictionary of 1828 gives the following as one of the definitions of *article*: “A single clause in a contract, account, *system of regulations*, treaty, or other writing; a particular separate *charge* or item, in an account, a term, condition, or *stipulation* in a contract.”<sup>40</sup>

“Church articles,” for our purposes, are the “instructions, duties, regulations, charges, and stipulations” that constitute being a teacher beyond merely keeping covenants. They are the instructions relative to teaching. It is not enough to live as Church articles instruct and teach pure doctrine. We must, as Elder Petersen noted, “teach as [prophets] do.”<sup>41</sup>

So what have the prophets said specifically about teaching? How can teachers improve teaching? Elder Holland noted there is something beyond covenant keeping that constitutes valuable teaching:

To a group of professional teachers surely it need not be belabored that, after we have prepared and purified ourselves to have the companionship of the spirit of the Lord, it is then required of us to develop genuine mastery in our profession, using the best educational techniques we can employ and honing our skills for as long as we are privileged to enter that classroom. We need to devote the same kind of effort toward improving our teaching abilities that a man or woman in any other profession would exert, be they physicians, or attorneys, or computer experts, or microbiologists. *In the Church Educational System it is essential but not sufficient that we be good men or women—we must also be good at what we do. We must be very*

*good. Our subject matter and the lives of our students demand that we give our very best effort in our teaching.*<sup>42</sup>

Elder Maxwell likewise observed the importance of effective teaching:

Of course there are individuals who are keeping their covenants who lack teaching charisma. Of course there are those whose lives are in order who are not exciting as teachers. However, the Spirit blesses the efforts of all who live worthily. It endorses what they say or do. There is a witnessing authenticity which proceeds from the commandment keeper, which speaks for itself. Therefore, I prefer doctrinal accuracy and spiritual certitude (even with a little dullness) to charisma with unanchored cleverness.

However, part of what may be lacking, at times, in the decent teacher is a freshening personal excitement over the gospel which could prove highly contagious. Since we can only speak the smallest part of what we feel, we should not let that “smallest part” shrink in its size.<sup>43</sup>

President Clark set the standard in improving teaching skills and magnifying the “smallest part”: “Before trying on the newest fangled ideas in any line of thought, education, activity, or what not, experts should just stop and consider that however backward they think we are, and however backward we may actually be in some things, in other things we are far out in the lead, and therefore these new methods may be old, if not worn out, with us.”<sup>44</sup>

He continued commenting on teaching methods: “You do not have to sneak up behind this spiritually experienced youth and whisper religion in his ears, you can come right out, face to face, and talk with him. . . . There is no need for gradual approaches, for ‘bed-time’ stories, for coddling, for patronizing, or for any of the other childish devices used in efforts to reach those spiritually inexperienced and all but spiritually dead.”<sup>45</sup>

Teaching in the CES, therefore, is different from any other public or private teaching setting. What works elsewhere may “be old, if not worn out with us.” Teaching is different because the students and the subject are different.

### **Teaching Gimmicks, Fads, and Games**

Elder McConkie noted the difference in teaching in the Church Educational System versus other teaching. After quoting President Clark’s statement

on bedtime stories, coddling, patronizing, and childish devices, Elder McConkie stated, “I suppose that [statement] has some bearing on games and parties and entertainments and gimmicks which, really, brethren, are poor substitutes for teaching the doctrines of salvation to the students that you have.”<sup>46</sup>

Elder Richard G. Scott likewise commented: “There is no place in your teaching for gimmicks, fads, or bribery by favors or treats. Such activities produce no lasting motivation for personal growth nor any enduring beneficial results. Simply stated, truths presented in an environment of true love and trust qualify for the confirming witness of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>47</sup>

President Benson warned, “You were not hired to entertain students or unduly dramatize your message.”<sup>48</sup>

So how do we find the balance between Elder Maxwell’s “freshening personal excitement” and President Benson’s “not hired to entertain . . . or unduly dramatize,” especially on cold mornings in the middle of winter when the teacher may be more tired than the students?

President Eyring gave a key to effective CES teaching when he stated:

Our aim is both that they will choose to return to our classroom daily and that they will endure in faith to the end of life. To draw them back would seem to require entertainment, and the longer haul would seem to demand some stiffer medicine. Those two aims seem incompatible, or at least very difficult to achieve in the same classroom. But it has become clear to me that what the student—even the very young student—wants in the short run is also the needed preparation for the long road ahead, however narrow in places and shrouded in mist it may turn out to be. What every student wants now is happiness. And what the student will want for the rest of life and for eternity is happiness.<sup>49</sup>

How do we teach happiness to a fourteen-year-old freshman boy? Almost twenty years earlier, President Eyring gave another key. In a talk to the CES administrators, he stated:

There is a tremendous faith in the way they are revising the curriculum. The faith is that young people can be led into and love the scriptures. . . . My feeling is that there must be some way . . . to make them more using the scriptures and less using the other things and something in my heart tells me

that's right. . . . I have a hunch, if you just want my prediction, that four or five years from now you will see more Latter-day Saint youth in our classes pondering the scriptures, talking about them with each other, teaching each other from them, loving them, believing that they really do have the answers to the questions of their hearts. . . . It's going to take a miracle for young people to do that.<sup>50</sup>

More recently, Elder Holland has verified this focus on the scriptures, declaring: "It is little wonder that as times get tougher and the going gets rockier, the Brethren have focused our curriculum at every level, every level in the Church and every level in CES, on the scriptures. Please immerse yourself in them and immerse your students in them. Don't stray off into forbidden paths and get lost in mists of darkness. You know what happened to those folks! Stay with the rod of iron, which is the word of God. Use what teaching techniques you need to assist with your lesson, but keep war stories and strange doctrines and near-death experiences to a minimum. Stay in the heart of the mine where the real gold is."<sup>51</sup>

President Eyring himself recently summarized the change, "Where once there was a wealth of material calculated to hold the wandering interest of young people and even entertain them, the words of the scriptures are now doing the holding."<sup>52</sup>

The Brethren have counseled how to teach the scriptures to bring about this miracle. The CES is charged to teach the scriptures sequentially, using the Church-approved curriculum. President Benson illustrated his faith in these resources: "Always remember, there is no satisfactory substitute for the scriptures and the words of the living prophets. These should be your original sources. Read and ponder more what the Lord has said, and less about what others have written concerning what the Lord said. . . . As you stay with the fundamental doctrines and gospel principles, adhering to the standard works, the words of the Brethren, and your Church Educational System outlined courses of study, seeking the guidance of the Spirit, you should have no trouble following this counsel."<sup>53</sup>

President Eyring likewise promised: "We can unlock the power of the curriculum simply by acting on our faith that it is inspired of God. . . . Sticking with the content of the curriculum as well as its sequence will unlock our unique teaching gifts, not stifle them."<sup>54</sup>

What if the scriptures, the prophets, and the curriculum are silent on a question the youth may pose? President Eyring counseled:

As we ask questions of our students we will surely stir questions in their minds. Sometimes they will ask us things which are new to us or for which we do not know the answers prophets have given. We do best at such moments to remember our purpose; it is to allow our students to be fed by hearing truth which is confirmed by the Holy Ghost. Where we have any doubt that we can answer with a fundamental and well-established truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we serve our students best by saying simply, “I do not know.” . . . We can show students our faith that God answers every question for which we need an answer and our patience to go forward without answers to all the others.<sup>55</sup>

President Lee gave similar counsel: “Brethren, it is the wisest thing that you say, ‘I don’t know,’ to the many questions of youth, when the Lord has not spoken. Never presume to elucidate upon a matter on which the Lord has revealed very little.”<sup>56</sup>

How can a teacher have the courage to say “I don’t know” to a student he or she loves and knows is struggling with a particular concern? President Howard W. Hunter warned:

Let me give a word of caution to you. I am sure you recognize the potential danger of being so influential and so persuasive that your students build an allegiance to you rather than to the gospel. Now that is a wonderful problem to have to wrestle with, and we would only hope that all of you are such charismatic teachers. But there is a genuine danger here. That is why you have to invite your students into the scriptures themselves, not just give them your interpretation and presentation of them. That is why you must invite your students to feel the Spirit of the Lord, not just give them your personal reflection of that. That is why, ultimately, you must invite your students directly to Christ, not just to one who teaches his doctrines, however ably. You will not always be available to these students. You cannot hold their hands after they have left high school or college. And you do not need personal disciples.

Our great task is to ground these students in what can go with them through life, to point them toward him who loves them and can guide them where none of us will go. Please make sure the loyalty of these students is to the scriptures and the Lord and the doctrines of the restored Church. Point them toward God the Father and his Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ, and toward the leadership of the true Church. Make certain that when the glamour and charisma of your personality and lectures and classroom environment are gone that they are not left empty-handed to face the world. Give them the gifts that will carry them through when they have to stand alone. When you do this, the entire Church is blessed for generations to come.<sup>57</sup>

President Hunter's counsel is supported by similar statements from President Kimball and President Monson about not taking the role of parent or bishop in the lives of the students.<sup>58</sup>

So what have prophets said about proper teacher-student relationships? Should they do anything? While prophets remind CES teachers of their proper place, prophets also consistently talk about reaching out to students. This theme is a constant one throughout the century.

In 1958, Elder A. Theodore Tuttle stated: "You brethren must set the example in compassion and love. These students may be forgotten by everyone else, but *they should not be forgotten by you*. . . . How can you sleep without seeking after every student? I know it is difficult to reach every one. But we can do much better! That is what I am pleading for today."<sup>59</sup>

President Kimball requested: "I hope that if any of God's children are out in spiritual darkness, you will come to them with a lamp and light their way; if they are out in the cold of spiritual bleakness with its frigidity penetrating their bones, you will come to them with your coat and your cloak also; and when they need you to walk with them holding their hands a little way, you will walk miles and miles with them lifting them, strengthening them, encouraging them and inspiring them."<sup>60</sup>

"The Rescue" was not just a nice pioneer theme for the sesquicentennial.

The examples of counsel and directives on teaching are numerous. It is the most-often-mentioned topic of the talks delivered to the CES; it is cov-



ered in 60 percent of the talks. Elder Tuttle was right when he declared, “I think that the prophets, after all, are the greatest teachers in the Church.”<sup>61</sup>

## Spirit

As important as the Church-directed curriculum may be in the law of teaching, the Lord Himself includes a fourth and final phase—the Spirit. Elder Holland, citing Doctrine and Covenants 42:14, stated, “‘The Spirit shall be given unto you by the prayer of faith; and if ye receive not the Spirit ye shall not teach.’ . . . Not just that you won’t teach or that you can’t teach or that it will be pretty shoddy teaching. No, it is stronger than that. It is the imperative form of the verb. “‘Ye *shall not* teach.’ Put a *thou* in there for *ye* and you have Mt. Sinai language. This is a commandment. These are God’s students, not yours.”<sup>62</sup>

Elder Maxwell observed:

I hope you find fresh ways to involve our youth in the personal reading of the scriptures. I guess the best analogy that comes to mind is that it’s like a songbook. There are many melodies that need to be sung and heard, and my favorites and your favorites are not necessarily those that would attract or be relevant for the young. Only by some personal involvement with the scriptures can they find the song the scriptures would sing to them today to meet their needs. You cannot count on the curriculum—any curriculum—to respond to individual needs that adroitly and that precisely. They have to open the songbook and hear the music. It is there. It will speak to them; it will sing to them, but sometimes it’s going to have to be in the privacy of their own scholarship. There is no way you and I can anticipate all those needs that precisely.<sup>63</sup>

Counsel given by the General Authorities over the years that deals with teaching by the Spirit includes both learning and preparing by the Spirit. In at least twelve talks dealing directly with this subject, the Brethren emphasize that all teaching is done by the Spirit: “Wherefore, I the Lord ask you this question—unto what were ye ordained? To *preach* my gospel by the Spirit, even the Comforter which was sent forth to *teach* the truth” (D&C 50:13–14; emphasis added). The Savior stated the same truth at the Last Supper: “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, . . . he shall teach you all things” (John 14:26).

This aspect of teaching has received increased emphasis since 1980. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, there seems to have been a shift in the Church and in the CES, with greater emphasis on being Spirit directed. Teaching shifted to sequential scripture study, manuals and material helps were reduced, lessons in priesthood meeting and Relief Society were rewritten, and greater emphasis was placed on parental teaching in the home. In other words, members, leaders, and teachers were encouraged to learn to follow the prompting of the Spirit in their lives rather than to rely on detailed written directives, manuals, and guidelines from Church headquarters.

President Eyring illustrated the shift: “You’re going to see a streamlining and stripping away of non-essentials and an impatience with inefficiency. . . . There is a tremendous faith in the way they are revising the curriculum. The faith is that young people can be led into and love the scriptures.”<sup>64</sup>

This change has already occurred, bringing with it a greater emphasis on the scriptures and teaching by the Spirit and less emphasis on materials. President Eyring’s prediction of more youths pondering, talking about, teaching, loving, and believing the scriptures has been verified.<sup>65</sup>

What have the Brethren shared with us about teaching with fewer aids and more Spirit? Elder McConkie stated, “I do not care what I talk about. All I am concerned with is getting in tune with the Spirit and expressing the thoughts, in the best language and way that I can, that are implanted there by the power of the Spirit. The Lord knows what a congregation needs to hear, and he has provided a means to give that revelation to every preacher and every teacher.”<sup>66</sup>

Elder L. Tom Perry counseled: “First and foremost, of course, is to teach with the Spirit. Teaching with inspiration means seeing and taking advantage of every special teaching moment that comes along or that can be purposely created. Teaching with the Spirit will let the students know of your love and especially God’s love and concern for them. . . . It would be impossible to stand before a class ‘on fire’ with the Spirit of the Lord without having your soul’s vibrations resound in the hearts of your students.”<sup>67</sup>

Elder Richard G. Scott declared:

The greatest impact of all is what they *feel* in your presence in the classroom and elsewhere. . . . It is the commitment to a life every hour of which is purposefully lived in compliance with the teachings and example of the Savior and of his servants. It is a commitment to constant striving to be

evermore spiritual, evermore devoted, evermore deserving to be the conduit through which the Spirit of the Lord may touch the hearts of those you are trusted to bring to a greater understanding of his teachings. . . . The most lasting impressions, the greatest teaching, and the most enduring effects for good will result from your ability to invite the Spirit of the Lord to touch the hearts and minds of those you teach.<sup>68</sup>

Elder Maxwell gave detailed instructions, including a list of do’s and don’ts, for teaching with the Spirit. He stated:

Teaching does not remove responsibility from the teacher for prayerful and pondering preparation. Teaching by the Spirit is not the equivalent of going on “automatic pilot.” . . . Seeking the Spirit is best done when we ask the Lord to take the lead of an already informed mind, in which things have been “studied out.” Additionally, if we already care deeply about those to be taught, it is so much easier for the Lord to inspire us to give customized counsel and emphasis to those we teach. Thus we cannot be clinically detached when teaching by the Spirit.<sup>69</sup>

President Eyring shared the effects of teaching by the Spirit at the 1999 CES symposium:

I would more carefully invite the Holy Ghost as my companion. The students wouldn’t see much of what I would do, since so much would be in private. But they would sense the change in me, as the Spirit softened my nature. They would notice it in my being a little more patient, a little more interested in them, a little less likely to argue or belittle, a little more likely to smile. They would notice not only that I seemed more happy but that they were more happy in our classroom. . . . If they decided to copy what they saw brought happiness in me, they might choose the right because it brings happiness and peace of companionship of the Holy Ghost. And then the Holy Ghost will teach them all things they should do to please God and so take happiness along with them, years after they are gone from our classrooms.<sup>70</sup>

## Prophetic Visions of the CES

Prophets indeed have a vision of what the educational system can do with the youth of the Church. A final common theme of the seventy-year history of addresses to the CES is prophetic insight into the youth of the latter days and their teachers. Nearly every talk, from President Clark's time until today, includes some blessing and counsel for these two groups. Of the youth, Elder Maxwell said: "The rising generation, those seedling Saints who sit before you—ordinary as they may seem on a dull day—are being especially prepared for unique service in the last days of this dispensation. To a significant degree, you are entrusted with the shaping of their religious education—a very genuine compliment to you and a blessing to them."<sup>71</sup>

President Eyring prophesied of those "ordinary" kids and their future. "I can't promise you that fifty years from now one of those skinny kids in your class will, because of you, go somewhere for the Lord where it may be hard to go. But I can promise you this: more than one of them will in that future day love whatever you love and be loyal to what you are loyal. And that could come from just one class on one day, even a day in February. You are doing more good than you know."<sup>72</sup>

General Authorities have constantly stressed the blessings that gospel teachers enjoy. President Hunter remarked: "I have often thought how privileged you are, how fortunate you must feel, to be in a profession that not only *allows* you but quite literally *compels* you to be immersed in the holy scriptures every day. There are so many members of the Church who envy you that rare privilege, and on some days my brethren and I envy you as well."<sup>73</sup>

President Eyring expressed his appreciation for teachers:

In my travel across the Church, whenever one of you is introduced to me as "our early-morning seminary teacher" or "our seminary teacher for our students at the something-or-other junior high school," I hear a note of gratitude and admiration that I hope you hear and remember. I hope you feel it on some dark mornings as you roll out of bed or at the end of a long day when some of those junior high school students want to linger to ask a question that is new and vital to them but which you have heard more times than you can remember. I suppose what keeps you going, even more than gratitude and

admiration, is the glimpse you get of what a difference it can make when you do what you do well.<sup>74</sup>

Elder Scott expressed his love: “You have set aside the allurements of what so many people in the world seek—material success—and have concentrated on the better, albeit, more difficult part. Eternal success through the application of eternal truth—oh how we love you for that. I wonder if you have the remotest idea of how important you are to building faith and testimony and sustaining it as the Church grows throughout the world.”<sup>75</sup>

Great gospel teaching truly does matter. The CES program has been and is guided by a prophetic vision. President Packer, a witness and participant in the prophetic history of the CES, summarized:

I mentioned the many things that have improved over the years. . . . *There are some things that haven't changed.* We still have the young man and his wife struggling to get through school and then moving out to seek their fortune. That man makes a choice that he will be a teacher—a teacher of the gospel—that he will devote his life to that. With that decision at once comes the fact that all the other things that he might have chosen are therefore set aside, and the realities of his chosen life are then to be accepted. He lives on a modest income, about the middle of the middle class economically. He struggles, he has children—ordinarily too many children by the world's standards. He has the realities of a worldwide program where he is moved here and there and everywhere. . . . Well, in spite of all of those realities and challenges and the modest budgets and the problems—the difficulties in it all—*you are involved in and attached to the greatest thing on this earth, the greatest thing that has ever been upon the face of this earth.*

*You have the complete trust of the Brethren.* I say again that there is no greater evidence of the prophetic preparation of this people than the beginning of this religious education program, because when it was installed it was nice, but really not critically needed. It has had time to flourish and now helps to protect our youth from all that we face. . . . Be patient with all the realities that you face, all the difficulties and challenges. You brethren be understanding, be helpful to your lovely wives and companions, the mothers of your children. Sisters,

be patient with these brethren. They have chosen a better part. Encourage and sustain them. They are a *part of the greatest thing that transpires on this earth this day.*<sup>76</sup>

## Notes

1. This account is shared by Scott C. Esplin.
2. J. Reuben Clark Jr., “The Charted Course of the Church in Education,” *Charge to Religious Educators*, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1994), 4.
3. Boyd K. Packer, “The Mantle Is Far, Far Greater Than the Intellect,” in *Charge to Religious Educators*, 3rd ed., 64; emphasis added.
4. Boyd K. Packer, “The Ideal Teacher,” in *Charge to Religious Educators*, 3rd ed., 18.
5. Boyd K. Packer, “Teach the Scriptures,” in *Charge to Religious Educators*, 3rd ed., 88.
6. Packer, “Teach the Scriptures,” 88.
7. Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, April 1987, 106.
8. Henry B. Eyring, “The Lord Will Multiply the Harvest,” talk to the CES (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1998), 1–2; all references cited as “talk to the CES” had limited distribution to CES teachers and leaders.
9. Boyd K. Packer, “Seek Learning Even by Study and Also by Faith,” in *That All May Be Edified* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 44.
10. Henry B. Eyring, “‘And Thus We See’: Helping a Student in a Moment of Doubt,” in *Charge to Religious Educators*, 3rd ed., 107.
11. Marion G. Romney, “The Charted Course Reaffirmed,” talk to the CES (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1980), 1.
12. Eyring, “‘And Thus We See’: Helping a Student in a Moment of Doubt,” 107.
13. Romney, “The Charted Course Reaffirmed,” 1.
14. Mark E. Petersen, “Avoiding Sectarianism,” in *Charge to Religious Educators*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982), 118; emphasis added.
15. Clark, “The Charted Course,” 6; emphasis added.
16. Clark, “The Charted Course,” 7; emphasis added.
17. Bruce R. McConkie, “The Foolishness of Teaching,” talk to the CES (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 13.

18. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Our Consuming Mission,” talk to the CES (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1999), 6.
19. Petersen, “Avoiding Sectarianism,” 118.
20. Harold B. Lee, “Loyalty,” in *Charge to Religious Educators*, 2nd ed., 64.
21. Packer, “The Mantle Is Far, Far Greater Than the Intellect,” 65.
22. “Basic Doctrine,” in *Charge to Religious Educators*, 3rd ed., 85.
23. Petersen, “Avoiding Sectarianism,” 118.
24. McConkie, “The Foolishness of Teaching,” 6.
25. Spencer W. Kimball, “The Ordinances of the Gospel,” talk to the CES (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1962), 24.
26. James E. Faust, “A Legacy of the New Testament,” talk to the CES (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1988), 2.
27. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Our Consuming Mission,” talk to the CES (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1999), 3.
28. Clark, “The Charted Course,” 8.
29. Henry B. Eyring, “We Must Raise Our Sights,” 2001 CES Conference, August 14, 2001, 3.
30. Neal A. Maxwell, “Glorify Christ,” Evening with a General Authority address to CES, February 2, 2001, 1.
31. Marion G. Romney, untitled address to CES coordinators convention, April 13, 1973, 8.
32. Marion G. Romney, “The Value of a Well-Informed Faith,” talk to the CES (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1975), 10.
33. Clark, “The Charted Course,” 6.
34. Boyd K. Packer, “To Those Who Teach in Troubled Times,” in *Charge to Religious Educators*, 3rd ed., 100–1.
35. Packer, “To Those Who Teach,” 101–2.
36. Spencer W. Kimball, “Men of Example,” in *Charge to Religious Educators*, 3rd ed., 25–27.
37. Ezra Taft Benson, “The Gospel Teacher and His Message,” in *Charge to Religious Educators*, 3rd ed., 11, 15.
38. Neal A. Maxwell, “But a Few Days,” talk to the CES (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1983), 2.
39. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1932–51), 1:64; emphasis added.

40. Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: S. Converse, 1828), s.v. “article”; emphasis added.
41. Petersen, “Avoiding Sectarianism,” 118.
42. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Teaching Skills,” talk to the CES (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1992), 1–2; emphasis added.
43. Neal A. Maxwell, “Teaching by the Spirit—The Language of Inspiration,” in *Charge to Religious Educators*, 3rd ed., 61.
44. Clark, “The Charted Course,” 7.
45. Clark, “The Charted Course,” 7.
46. McConkie, “The Foolishness of Teaching,” 10.
47. Richard G. Scott, “Helping Others to Be Spiritually Led,” talk to the CES (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1998), 3.
48. Benson, “The Gospel Teacher and His Message,” 14.
49. Henry B. Eyring, “Teaching the Old Testament,” talk to the CES (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1999), 1.
50. Henry B. Eyring, “A Miracle Required,” talk to the CES administrators (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 12–13.
51. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Therefore, What?” 2000 CES Conference, August 8, 2000, 2.
52. Eyring, “We Must Raise Our Sights,” 1.
53. Benson, “The Gospel Teacher and His Message,” 13.
54. Eyring, “The Lord Will Multiply the Harvest,” 4.
55. Eyring, “The Lord Will Multiply the Harvest,” 6.
56. Harold B. Lee, “The Mission of Church Schools,” talk to the CES (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1953), 5.
57. Howard W. Hunter, “Eternal Investments,” talk to the CES (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989), 2.
58. See Kimball, “The Ordinances of the Gospel,” 6; and Thomas S. Monson, “True Shepherds after the Way of the Lord,” in *Charge to Religious Educators*, 2nd ed., 78.
59. A. Theodore Tuttle, “Men with a Message,” talk to the CES (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1958), 83–84; emphasis added.
60. Spencer W. Kimball, “What I Hope You Will Teach My Grandchildren,” talk to the CES (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1966), 11.
61. A. Theodore Tuttle, “Teaching the Word to the Rising Generation,” in *Charge to Religious Educators*, 2nd ed., 130.



62. Holland, “Therefore, What?” 7.
63. Neal A. Maxwell, “The Gospel Gives Answers to Life’s Problems,” in *Charge to Religious Educators*, 2d ed., 93.
64. Eyring, “A Miracle Required,” 7, 12.
65. Eyring, “A Miracle Required,” 13.
66. McConkie, “The Foolishness of Teaching,” 8.
67. L. Tom Perry, “If Ye Receive Not the Spirit Ye Shall Not Teach,” in *Book of Mormon Symposium Speeches* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1986), 34.
68. Richard G. Scott, “Four Fundamentals for Those Who Teach and Inspire Youth,” in *Old Testament Symposium Speeches* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1987), 1–2.
69. Maxwell, “Teaching by the Spirit—The Language of Inspiration,” 58–59.
70. Eyring, “Teaching the Old Testament,” 6.
71. Neal A. Maxwell, “Those Seedling Saints Who Sit before You,” in *Charge to Religious Educators*, 3rd ed., 31.
72. Henry B. Eyring, “Love and Loyalty,” introduction to talk to the CES by Jeffrey R. Holland, “Our Consuming Mission” (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1999).
73. Hunter, “Eternal Investments,” 1; emphasis in original.
74. Eyring, “‘And Thus We See’: Helping a Student in a Moment of Doubt,” 104.
75. Richard G. Scott, typescript of untitled video address to CES, February 4, 1994.
76. Packer, “Teach the Scriptures,” 91–92; emphasis added.