

A lot of people have asked me: if you disagree with what BYU or the government does, why don't you just go someplace else? (A favorite suggested location is Berkeley.) I only know one way to answer them, which is to tell them that I love this place, and want it to be what it can be. After I answer this way, there is always another question: If you love it, why do you criticize it? My answer is the same: because I love it, and because I believe that integrity requires a mix of staying and going, charity and chastisement, and because I want to go to a school and live in a country that let me do all of the above.

I am an English major, and so I have taken the liberty of choosing the most dangerous and endangered word in the English language—integrity. I think it is the most dangerous word because it is one of the few words that requires us to critique everyone and everything equally, including ourselves. So I am here today at commencement to defend an endangered word, and to save a place for it in our political and academic dictionary.

I am certain that integrity requires great vision and great compassion, but I fear that these virtues are often poor friends. It is tempting for people with great vision to leave the places that need them most, and it is tempting for compassionate people to accept places as they are.

I believe that integrity is an ambivalent condition, and that people earning it believe painfully that people and places are good but that both can also be much better. This kind of person has two kinds of vision: one that sees the beauty in what is, and another that sees a beautiful urgency in what could be, the scrutiny of a seer and the prescience of a prophet. This compassion and urgency moves a person to critique herself, and then to critique because she wants them to be as much as they promised that they would be. Integrity requires the creation of community, and that is what we see here today.

Our schools, churches, and political parties are supposed to act like communities, but most usually teach us only how to survive. They might keep us from the worst things, might get us some jobs, pave a street. If they teach us much beyond that, it is a cruel kind of questioning, and interrogation that includes and condemns everybody but ourselves. But if we love what is and what is possible, and if we feel equally responsible to both, than I believe we will start with questions for ourselves and our institutions and our answers will not let us wait to be good. We won't be content to survive; we will change our surroundings by becoming whatever is missing. But we will not stop there, and can't. We will go further, because we will not agree to the survival of anything. We will stay and build a community, a place where things we live for—art, expression, beauty, fairness, striving, and giving—will not be eclipsed by the things that get us there. We will stay on as creators and participators amidst

other creators and participators, responsible for each other as we are and for what we could be. Any other kind of staying is less of a straight look around and more of a lingering look back or sideways, more salt pillars and less salt of the earth.

Integrity isn't staying or going, it is staying or going with all our might, without confusing the ugliness inside us for the ugliness outside of us, and trying to fix both. Integrity is not about leaving, surviving, or even questioning, but about giving our abundance to the poverty that we see. Integrity is how you stay or how you go, and a generosity in both.

But having vision means waking to an imperfect world, and what do we do with our dreams after that? Nothing good, until we learn that loving and criticizing amidst imperfection—our own and others—is not a hassle on the way to the point but the point itself. Knowing that, integrity isn't just a question for people, but a question for politics and religion and heart, a question we must say yes to alone and then yes to together. If there is heart left, I think it would be difficult to stop integrity at the limits of our own body. The body singular would always be the body politic, and all our acts would have the creative motion of bringing, improving, and togetherness.

But all is not well at BYU or in America if our fossilized feelings give us the righteousness of the already-finished, the now-to-be-endured, the soon-to-escape.

It is not noble to survive; it is noble to create and revise. Integrity is not smug separation, and it is not the worship of a rhetorical fossil. Integrity requires the ripple of revision, reform, restoration, and recreation. It requires the sacrifice of superiority and the awakening of awe. It reminds us that we should be stunned to be here at all, to be here with others, and to have something to give or restore.

I believe that survival is an insult to human beings. I am told that people need food, and water, and shelter, and that is easy enough to believe. That is what people need. But humans need to create and to be responsible for something, to love it and give back to it. Humans want to participate and, if they are sincere, to leave themselves everywhere.

The above has been my philosophy and my burden. It is my answer to why I have stayed at BYU and why I have organized this alternative commencement. I believe that if we do not shut ourselves against the horror of the modern world—its poverty and its corruption and its cruel economy—we would feel compelled at all moments to be generous so that everyone could be equal. This generosity includes criticism—fundamentally includes it. Criticism is admitting that we are living without eyes, and considering it a surrender to live happily with what gouged them out.

I am part of this commencement because I want people to have the chance to speak, and to speak better because they have had to listen. My school and my country do not

allow enough of this, and they hurt themselves for that. I believe that ordinary people know what is best, and I believe that organizations that don't allow ordinary people to improve them from the inside will be less vibrant, less fair, and less humane.

This requires something. It requires ethics in the present tense. As a nation and as a community we are too comfortable with ethics in the past or future tense. We are comfortable with revolutionaries who no longer threaten us, and with someday-people who will solve the problems that we are unwilling to address. As college students and community members, the best thing we could learn is that change always occurs within a context of cyclical arguments, manufactured virtues, and reasons not to act—not to be shocked or horrified. The barest fact is that everyone has a vested interest, and the barest virtue is to divest ourselves. If we learn this, we will be able to do the right thing at the right time, even when truisms and fallacies are ranged against us.

And so we should get to work, and spare no one our love, our help, or our ideas. We should consider it an honor to work, to sweat for something, and to give a brave offering to the imperfection around us.

Until we do this, we will live, for the most part, under Berger's sacred canopy of the status quo. If we do not learn to live deliberately, to give a hard look to our institutions and assumptions, and to commend people who look, we will repeat history again and again. We will reinforce survival—unimaginative, task-oriented survival. We need to live looking around, deciding whether our institutions are doing what we designed them to do. Are our schools and our churches and our families places where we learn how to transform ourselves, where we are free to apply the lessons of history in the present, and where we are rewarded for thinking and not merely obeying, where we can be creative and thoughtful and human? If they are not, then we are not finished. We could start finishing by following Auden, who told it to me plain in a poem: "There is no such thing as the State/We must love one another or die." We could start by using our integrity the way it ought to be used: to evaluate ourselves and others equally, and with love.