

Remarks at Convocation
August 12, 2011
Stephen Jones

We thank all those who have contributed to this meeting, and are grateful for all of you who have made the effort to be here. Thank you for your attendance, and for the support you have provided these wonderful graduating students.

It's now my privilege to offer a few brief remarks before we close.

Thirty-three years ago I left high school, without a diploma, and entered BYU to begin my studies in this college. I lived in Deseret Towers, which were recently demolished in order to build the beautiful new dorms you see going up north of Heritage Halls. The quarters in DT, as we called it, were tight: two beds to a room, two desks, two closets and dressers, and two mirrors.

Today, in your dorms rooms or apartments you immediately worry about whether you have Internet service, and, if you do, how fast it is and if it is included in your rent or not. In my day, “enter” and “net” were still two distinct words, separated by “the,” and represented a short prayer uttered by all basketball players when shooting.

In those days, the all-important device we wanted installed in the room was a telephone. And the only other electronic gadget on which we depended for our studies was that clunky, fairly heavy and quite noisy relic we called an electric typewriter.

I received my typewriter as a gift from my parents. It had a wonderful, hard plastic carrying case with handles and was ideally suited for easy transport to my new room at BYU.

Prior to my coming to BYU I had used my typewriter for all kinds of things, including typing the lyrics to hymns, songs and choral pieces I had composed during my high school years. I was serious about my work, and wanted my music to look as professionally prepared as possible. Of course, I also typed papers for my high school classes and talks given at church.

One of the projects I used my typewriter for I still have. It is a quote book filled with dozens of thoughts I collected, typed on individual 3x5 cards and filed alphabetically by topic. I love quotes, and have since I was little. I love them because of the way they point out principles of importance, distilled and concentrated bits of wisdom, often using literary qualities that make them memorable and meaningful.

I still love to gather quotes. Now, rather than typing them on 3x5 cards, they go on my blog or on my computer, where they can be recalled whenever I need them.

Last week I came across my new favorite quote, one I would like to share with you today. It comes from the British author Dorothy L. Sayers, a well-known author, essayist, translator and Christian apologist and a contemporary of C. S. Lewis. It has, I believe, application for you at this important moment of your lives.

Concerned about the failure of the Church to impact our conduct in daily life, she wrote:

In nothing has the Church so lost Her hold on reality as in Her failure to understand and respect the secular vocation. **She has allowed work and religion to become separate departments**, and is astonished to find that, as a result, the secular work of the world is turned to purely selfish and destructive ends, and that the greater part of the world's intelligent workers have become irreligious, or at least, uninterested in religion.

But is it astonishing? How can anyone remain interested in a religion which seems to have no concern with nine-tenths of his life? The church's approach to an intelligent carpenter is usually confined to exhorting him not to be drunk and disorderly in his leisure hours, and to come to church on Sundays. **What the church should be telling him is this: that the very first demand that his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables.**

Church by all means, and decent forms of amusement, certainly—but what use is all that if in the very center of his life and occupation he is insulting God with bad carpentry? **No crooked table legs or ill-fitting drawers ever, I dare swear, came out of the carpenter's shop at**

Nazareth. Nor, if they did, could anyone believe that they were made by the same hand that made Heaven and earth. No piety in the worker will compensate for work that is not true to itself; for any work that is untrue to its own technique is a living lie.¹

Crooked crooked table legs of course are a metaphor for shoddy work - for work that does not meet standards that we set for ourselves, standards of integrity, of honest and decency, of goodness and virtue.

As you leave BYU today and enter professions of all kinds, places where you will now profess through your work and your words that you are aligned with and subject to the truth of these disciplines, truths that demand of you your full heart and mind - all that you can give - as you enter these fields of labor, wherever they may be, be sure that no crooked table legs come from your carpenter's shop. Further, see that your *life* is straight, and that your standard is the standard of the carpenter of Nazareth, the gentle teacher from Galilee, the Master Earth and Skies.

Here at BYU you have committed to live lives of honor and integrity. You have maintained a standard of conduct that now we ask to continue to hold up, one that must be visible in all the work of your lives. The world needs people who stand tall and straight, who do not bend to take a bow in the spotlight of pride,² whose work serves the world before it serves them. The world needs people who are consecrated to the development of humanity, the renovation of the earth, and the destruction of wickedness.³

Today we send you on your way with a rushing wind up of hope, with a certainty about your possibilities and with full confidence in our hearts that you will achieve those possibilities. We wish you success in everything you do. May you be blessed in your carpenter shop wherein you can, in time, develop the desires and the gifts that are certainly yours for the claiming to make your work sweet – “Sweet is the work, my God my King!” – may this be your proclamation.

¹ Dorothy L. Sayers, *Creed or Chaos?*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949), 56–57.

² This idea is similar to a quote from N. Eldon Tanner. See N. Eldon Tanner, *Ensign*, Nov. 1975, p. 76.

³ See *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, sel. Joseph Fielding Smith (1976), 231–32.

May all you do radiate the light with which you were born, and which the Carpenter has asked you to shine forth to the world, is our humble prayer and blessing upon you, in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.