

AN OLIVE LEAF

THE QUESTING SPIRIT

By President Hugh B. Brown

President Hugh B. Brown served as a counselor in the First Presidency from 1961 through 1970. He is well remembered by many SUNSTONE readers for his 1969 speech at Brigham Young University in which he championed openness and freedom of the mind. The following, excerpted from a 29 March 1958 BYU address, given less than two weeks before he was ordained an apostle, demonstrates that expansiveness of thought and trust in our human abilities to think and wrestle with important ideas were hallmarks of President Brown's entire tenure as an apostle and counselor.



We are very grateful in the Church and in this great university that the freedom, dignity, and integrity of the individual is basic in Church doctrine as well as in democracy. Here we are free to think and express our opinions. Fear will not stifle thought, as is the case in some areas which have not yet emerged from the dark ages. God himself refuses to trammel man's free agency even though its exercise sometimes teaches painful lessons. Both creative science and revealed religion find their fullest and truest expression in the climate of freedom.

THE PSALMIST SAID, AS he gazed into the starry heavens: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet" (Psalms 8:3-6).

As I look out upon this sea of faces, I feel, I think, somewhat of the awe that inspired those words; but I believe that what I behold here is potentially grander and greater and more precious than what the psalmist saw in the starry heavens. He saw the handiwork of God: I see his offspring. I say "potentially" greater, and it is to man's potential that I would like to direct your attention.

I can best express my feelings, I think, by borrowing an expression from Will Durrant: "I feel like a droplet of spray proudly poised for a moment on the crest of a wave, undertaking to analyze the sea." Humbly and prayerfully I approach the subject of what is man and what might he become. What are the limits, if any, to his potential, especially as we think of our present-day world? As I think of man—potential man—and his relationship to God, his origin, and his possible destiny, and as I ask what is to be the limit of his accomplishment, I think the answer is found in another question: What will man do with his freedom, and will he bring his life into harmony with the laws of his universe, the laws of God?

As you proceed to make your individual "declarations of independence," I hope you will not become young radicals. I hope you will distinguish between liberty and license. I hope you will realize that freedom is only a blessing if it is accompanied by wisdom and intelligence. And so I would say, beware of radicalism. At the same time I would urge you to resist the down drag of mental laziness which someone has said leads to the premature hardening of the intellectual arteries. I would urge you, also—and especially, to avoid sluggishness of spirit, which is the worst kind of lethargy. You know there are some men who are phlegmatic to a degree that would make a turtle seem intolerably vivacious.

I hope that you will develop the questing spirit. Be unafraid of new ideas for they are as steppingstones to progress. You will, of course, respect the opinions of others but be unafraid to dissent—if you are informed.

Now I have mentioned freedom to express your thoughts, but I caution you that your thoughts and expressions must meet competition in the market place of thought, and in that competition truth will emerge triumphant. Only error needs to fear freedom of expression. Seek truth in all fields, and in that search you will need at least three virtues: courage, zest and modesty. The ancients put that thought in form of a prayer. They said, "From the cowardice that shrinks from new truth, from the laziness that is content with half truth, from the arrogance that thinks it has all the truth—Oh, God of truth, deliver us." ☐