Recent events have intensified public scrutiny of the role of the LDS Church in the secular arena. Dr. David Pierpont Gardner is an active, believing Mormon who has spent his entire career in that public sphere. We felt that his perspective would provide valuable insights.

Dr. Gardner became tenth president of the University of Utah on August 1, 1973. Previously Dr. Gardner had worked as an administrator in the University of California system and also held a faculty appointment in education. His book, *The California Oath Controversy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1964), was well-received, and he has also published numerous articles regarding the role of universities in American society. In a special August 1974 edition of *Time* magazine, President Gardner was named one of the 200 men and women "destined to provide the United States with a generation of leadership." He was one of nine university presidents on the list. In 1979 he served as a Visiting Fellow at Clare Hall, Cambridge University, England. Dr. Gardner is married to the former Elizabeth Jane Fuhriman, and they have four daughters.

This interview was conducted by Peggy Fletcher and Allen Roberts in President Gardner's office at the University of Utah, 23 April 1980.
SUNSTONE: Tell us about your background and how you came to be president of the University of Utah.

GARDNER: I was born and raised in Berkeley, California. My parents were both from Utah, but they moved to California in the 1920s. Growing up in Berkeley had a significant influence on my value system, on my attitudes, on my respect for learning, and on my sense of the place of universities in our society. My freshman year was spent at Berkeley, but then I wanted to get away from home; so I went to BYU. I graduated with three majors (political science, history, and geography) and took a secondary teaching credential. I went into the United States Army and served in the Far East for two years in Army Intelligence. Then I returned to Berkeley and took a Master’s degree in political science and a Ph.D. in Higher Education. My studies focused on the university in much the same way as the study of business focuses on the private corporation. The course of study was highly interdisciplinary and included a mosaic of courses in economics, public administration, political science, sociology, intellectual history, and philosophy.

During graduate school I worked for the Alumni Association at Berkeley. Later I served as vice-chancellor at the University of California, Santa Barbara, where I also held my first faculty appointment. I served there from about 1964 to 1970. From 1970-1973, I served as a vice-president of the nine-campus University of California system. I came to Utah in 1973.

SUNSTONE: How do you perceive the role of the University in America, now and in the future?

GARDNER: In order to discuss the future, we would be well advised first to consider the past. Prior to the Civil War, there were no universities in America; there were colleges. The emphasis was on preparing young men for the ministry, law, or medicine. This was accomplished through a classical undergraduate liberal arts program, preparatory to one’s professional training. The idea of the liberal arts college had its conceptual roots in England and over the years gradually adapted to the American scene. During the Civil War the Land Grant Act (the Morrill Act of 1862) was passed, which gave life to the land grant university idea. That act was the most important single stimulus for public higher education in the United States. The act not only encouraged the colleges of higher education in the country to reach out to more of the people, but it also broadened the curriculum to include the sciences and the agricultural as well as the liberal arts. During the period between the close of the Civil War and the turning of the century, the German idea of research and graduate instruction, which emphasized empiricism and the scientific method, further modified the essential character of the emerging American university. Thus, by the end of the century a new kind of university had been forged in this country, which included an expanded undergraduate curriculum accommodating the liberal arts, the sciences, the agricultural arts and sciences, professional work, a panoply of professional schools, newly founded graduate programs, and a growing emphasis on research.

This concept of a university, with its threefold mission of teaching, research, and public service, held together pretty well until the close of World War II. It began to fray at the edges a little then because of the enormous stress placed on the system by the GI’s coming back from the war; in some cases enrollment almost doubled within a two- or three-year period but then slacked off. But in the 1960s enrollment in American higher education doubled and this time the increases stuck, placing a different...
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kind of stress on our colleges and universities: dissatisfaction on the part of students with the quality of teaching and the curricula, unhappiness with the size and perceived impersonality of the institution, and a widespread disquietude about the social and political role and responsibility universities should have in modern society. In addition, an increasing number of persons in their thirties and forties began to study part time, many of them women. These forces have tended to affect the fundamental character and style of higher education, approximating in some ways the magnitude of the changes that worked their influences on our universities and colleges a hundred years ago. We’re still in transition, and what universities will look like in twenty years is anyone’s guess.

But whatever the university will look like in the year 2000, it will still be society’s chief instrument for the discovery, organization, analysis, and transmission of knowledge. That role will not change; but how we go about performing it, on the other hand, will very likely change, and considerably so. The basic mission, however, will most likely remain unchanged. In the coming years knowledge will be more central to our nation’s ability to compete in the world, to secure its sovereignty, and to satisfy the educational aspirations of her people. There is very little likelihood that universities will move to the margin or periphery in terms of their significance. Instead, they will continue to move towards the epicenter.

SUNSTONE: Do you see an increasing emphasis on learning which will provide employment as opposed to the study of ideas for their own sake?

GARDNER: There is always a pull and tug (which tends to become acute in this state from time to time) between those on the one hand who view higher education as a means of training high school graduates for their first jobs and those on the other who view the purposes of higher education in a more inclusive way. A university both trains students for gainful employment and educates them for purposes not principally related to their employment but pertinent to their responsibility as citizens functioning in a free society. We both train and educate and should do both. For example, law school helps prepare students to practice law. Medical school helps prepare students to practice medicine. But both medical and law school faculties expect that the students coming for professional training will have been previously educated, i.e. their communications skills will have been developed and refined; their capacity to think abstractly and understand concepts will have been nurtured; their ability to understand the relationship between things and ideas and to appreciate the complexities of the social, political, economic, religious, and cultural dimensions of life will have been enhanced and refined. I do not regard higher education as merely a conduit for linking up a high school graduate with his or her first job. I think that view shortchanges the student, corrupts the underlying purposes of education, and is not in the public interest.

SUNSTONE: Do you consider yourself an active, believing Mormon?

GARDNER: Yes.

SUNSTONE: Did you have any personal doubts or experience a crisis of faith during your educational career?

GARDNER: Of course. I think anyone who exercises faith does so in part because of doubt. That should be self-evident by definition. Faith has no function if there is no doubt. Faith, in my view, serves the function of sustaining testimony in the face of uncertainty. There is a precarious and precious balance between the two; and it tends to shift back and forth over the years. I was born in the Church, but I think everyone whether born in the Church or not must be converted to it sometime, if, that is, the membership is authentic. Often, one is converted by asking questions to which the answers are not clear; but as knowledge increases, one relies more on a knowing conviction of the truth than on the pure exercise of faith. Of course, there is always a measure of murkiness, and that’s where faith comes into play. To say that one has never had a doubt or an uncertainty about the Gospel is to misconstrue entirely the nature of our obligations as Mormons. We should be expected to examine our beliefs gently to the questions of friends for whom the exercise of faith is irrelevant.

SUNSTONE: What was the Church involvement in the establishment of the University of Deseret, from which the U of U was derived?

GARDNER: The University of Utah was founded in 1850 as a secular, public university by the Utah territorial legislature. It was not founded as a Church university. There were 15,000 people in the Salt Lake valley at the time. Many of them were without adequate housing and with barely enough to eat, and yet they gave life not to a Church university but to a public one. In a state generally
regarded as a theocracy, that demonstrated a remarkable measure of vision and insight into the nature of the educational process itself and into the need for that process to be reasonably free from the kind of constraints that necessarily affect universities that are overtly church affiliated or church owned. When the territorial legislature gave life to the University of Deseret, it was enlarging on the model of the University of Nauvoo, where the same kind of sensitivity was reflected on the part of the founders. Therefore, this university was always viewed as serving all of the people of the state and not just some. It fits established notions of a free university in a free society. The pioneers exhibited high courage and just understanding and perception in what at that time and under those circumstances can only be construed as an audacious act of faith and self-confidence.

SUNSTONE: Could you comment on BYU, which is overtly sponsored by the Church?

GARDNER: Brigham Young University and the University of Utah are both universities, but they perform different missions. If that were not so then either the taxpayers' money would be misspent in the one instance or the Church's tithing would be misspent in the other. The University of Utah is a public, secular university, established in the tradition of free universities in this country. It is governed by two boards appointed by the governor of the state with the approval of the state senate. The University of Utah is a public, secular university, established in the tradition of free universities in this country. It is governed by two boards appointed by the governor of the state with the approval of the state senate. The taxes paid by all the people of the state, whatever their religious affiliation, support the University. This university must and is free—as free as any public university I know of in the United States—from both political and ecclesiastical influence. The criteria we employ in recruiting faculty, promoting faculty, and granting tenure to faculty are the same used by all public universities of our kind and character in this country. We make these decisions based on the professional competency and promise of the faculty members. We admit students if they are capable and prepared to engage in university-level work. There's no religious test. Finally, all ideas are welcome here and none is excluded. I have an affirmative obligation to protect our freedom against pressures however severe and extreme the source; and I do so.

The Brigham Young University has a somewhat different mission. Its purpose is to permit the LDS Church to educate some of its young people as it wishes. The Church has every right to require certain standards of decorum and belief fitted to the purposes for which the BYU exists, but wholly inappropriate if similarly required by a public university. The Church can also have a degree of
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School of 2,200 students, BYU added a certain dimension to my life that would not have been there had I remained at Berkeley. So, I think it is hard to generalize.

SUNSTONE: How do you see the future of the two universities?

GARDNER: In many ways, the Church, contrary to the opinion of many, may have less difficulty in the future relating to the University of Utah as a public university than to its own university. One can always expect differing opinions to exist between a university of our kind and the civil and ecclesiastical authorities. It is in the very nature of the relationship. We are bound to be a disquieting influence in the community. All universities are. We are dealing with ideas. Ideas affect people differently. We are transmitting the culture from one generation to the next, and the teacher and the student ask and try to answer hard questions.

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As BYU asserts its intellectual prerogatives (and this will most assuredly occur as it continues to better itself academically), the more likely it is that differences will arise. Such differences, however much they are an expected part of a public university's life, tend to be less expected between a church-owned and operated university and the church that owns and operates it. The question, of course, is what will the Church do about it? If it permits, without interference, the natural course of events to unfold, then the tensions will arise; but if the Church tries to intervene, then the image of BYU as a university qua university tends to tarnish.

SUNSTONE: And its best and brightest members won't go there.

GARDNER: Some will and some won't.

SUNSTONE: What do you think education means in the context of Mormon theology?

GARDNER: The Church has clearly demonstrated a commitment to education from the beginning. This commitment is reflected in the underlying values of the people of Utah. And I think it cannot be contested that the Mormon Church and its members have consistently supported education. The photograph you see there on my wall is of the Pine Valley Chapel. My dad grew up there. Grades one through eight of the Pine Valley School were on the first floor; the chapel was on the second. I think that graphically illustrates the value the Church has always placed on education.

The idea of education, however, has generally meant preparation for work, preparation for a job. Students in Utah tend to be somewhat more vocationally oriented in their outlook than at many other universities in the country. I also believe that when education is more inclusively or liberally defined, it is discomforting to those people who have difficulty living with uncertainty or who find doubt to be disquieting. These characteristics, if discerned by others, often manifest themselves in anti-intellectual ways.

SUNSTONE: I wonder how a Mormon can deal with that dilemma?

GARDNER: I think it is a dilemma for the person who sees it as a dilemma. Why should we be insecure in these matters? If we understand what it is we believe, why should we be threatened by people whose ideas are not the same as ours? I regard the difference as an opportunity, not a threat. Even if we're not really comfortable about the depth of our knowledge or our capacity to re-
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spond effectively to other ideas, we should not try to push off these ideas or suppress them or pretend they are not there. Instead, we should increase our capacity to deal with these ideas. Rather than be afraid of opposing viewpoints, we should become better informed and more knowledgeable about our own beliefs. Such ideas are not going to go away in any event, and, therefore, I think we’re better off dealing with them head on. This process is a fundamental part of mortality.

We talk much about the kind of adversities that our grandparents, great-grandparents, and great-great-grandparents encountered as they crossed the plains. They faced physical and environmental problems which, in many respects, were more easily understood and more easily coped with than the more sophisticated, more subtle, less visible kinds of intellectual and conceptual pressures that members of the Church face today. The principle, however, is constant. How did the pioneers overcome their adversity? Certainly not by pretending it wasn’t there. When they got to the Missouri River, they crossed it. When they got to the Platt, they crossed it. They didn’t say, “There is no river there.” There was a river. In one sense, ideas constitute the rivers that we want to cross today. We can’t just wish them away or curse their presence.

SUNSTONE: Are there not situations in which individuals are asked to obey, making them feel uncomfortable?

GARDNER: I believe in exercising one’s agency such that it becomes habit-forming.

SUNSTONE: But isn’t it true that the world through the media perceives ours as a church which demands obedience of its members? Won’t this handicap Mormon graduates, especially in areas of public service?

GARDNER: If the Church did demand such absolute obedience, then it would be a hardship without any question whatsoever. I hold a position of public trust. I exercise my best professional judgment in making decisions that are intended to serve the long term best interests of the University of Utah. Let’s assume there is some issue on campus (it happens all the time) that engages the interest of Church members, and let’s assume that the Church, as an institution, expresses a view on that issue indicating that the solution to the issue should be A. Based upon information and the counsel I receive from advisers within the University, I decide A is the best solution. Who is going to believe that I decided on A independently and not because of Church pressure? No one, of course. Under such a circumstance, I would find myself under unbelievable pressure from those who quite naturally would think that I had accommodated pressure from the Church, even though I arrived at the decision independently.

Let’s turn the matter on its other side. Let us assume that the Church, as an institution, expresses the view that A is the right solution and, after I have made proper inquiry into the matter, I conclude that A is the wrong solution and that B is the correct one. I would, of course, choose B, and then my faithfulness as a member of the Church would be called into question. No one should be put into that position. If one is, then no active member of the Church is going to be permitted to serve in positions of public trust. Fortunately, we are not in that position, and I honestly hope that we never will be.

SUNSTONE: It’s like President Kennedy being perceived as a Catholic and owing final allegiance to the Pope.

GARDNER: Yes, and he overcame that with the acquiescing cooperation of the Catholic Church.
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SUNSTONE: Are there any LDS educators that you have particularly admired?

GARDNER: I have a great respect for Sterling McMurrin and Dallin Oaks and others like them here in Utah and elsewhere.

SUNSTONE: In terms of original ideas, do you think that the time will come when Mormons will rise to the very heights of the sciences, arts, and other fields?

GARDNER: I think they have in the sciences and in some of the arts, less so generally in the social and behavioral sciences and humanities. You see, there are two ways of affecting Church influence in the world. One is through the kind of relationships which have naturally evolved out of the presence of Mormons in the various towns, villages, cities, communities, and countries of the world and through the very active Church missionary program. That's one kind of influence and we do a pretty good job of it, probably as well as almost any other Church. There is another way to influence and I don't think we do very much of it, and I think we should do more. We should develop and nourish active, believing Mormons who are intellectually equipped to enter into the mainstream discussion of theology with the world. We should be part of the conversation at the top and we're not; we're not even close to it. Now if we run the risk of losing some of our bright young people in the course of preparing them for this kind of dialogue, that's a risk we must take. Think of the alternative. Nothing is without its risks, and I think our absence from the ranks of theologians who communicate globally is, in the long run, not serving us well. We should be an ongoing, vital, contributing, participating part of that conversation. We have much to offer and something to learn.

SUNSTONE: Why are we absent?

GARDNER: Because I think we don't value it enough. If we did, we wouldn't be absent.

SUNSTONE: Does your Mormonism, your sense of the doctrine and your beliefs, affect your leadership of this university?

GARDNER: What I am, of course, is a function of a lot of things: DNA, my family, parents, friends, teachers, and the Church. My world view, my value system, my perspectives, my lifestyle, my attitudes are all significantly influenced by my being a member of the Mormon Church and having been so all my life. But the decisions I make as president of this university are strictly professional, based on a background of twenty years of university administration. I have an overreaching respect for the purposes of the university and the kind of intellectual freedom which accompanies it. I understand its inner life and its value system which I find in no respect to be incompatible with my own beliefs.

SUNSTONE: The University of Utah has been accused of having anti-Mormon hiring practices and there certainly are whole departments with few, if any, Mormons. Do you think that that is a problem?

GARDNER: If one reads the history of the University, one would correctly conclude that there were times when it would have been very difficult for a member of the Mormon Church to be appointed in certain departments and, one might add, very difficult for someone who was not a Mormon to be appointed in other departments. Such behavior, of course, is a mark of institutional immaturity. I find it to be professionally and personally offensive and, wherever it surfaces, I have no tolerance for it at all. The University, of course, has made great strides in recent decades. If it exists today, it's just a residue (a little pocket here and there), and my hope is that it will wash out in a decade.

SUNSTONE: Are you optimistic about the overall challenges which confront us as Mormons?

GARDNER: I think it may be difficult for active Mormons to be invited to take positions of major responsibility in the future. That's already happening. I don't mean it's an overpowering difficulty; I merely mean that today we have to overcome a certain measure of suspicion and concern before we can be objectively considered (e.g., perceived Church positions on ERA in the present and the issue of Blacks holding the priesthood in the past). I heard it expressed the other day that "the way things are going Church members are going to wind up sitting in the back of the bus." My response to that was if we think we're going to sit in the back of the bus, then that's where we're going to sit. But that is up to us. It is a function of how informed we are about the great issues of the day, how people perceive us, how we perceive them, and how effectively we communicate the essence of our beliefs, coupled with the degree of understanding, compassion, and tolerance for others that we expect them to accord us. If we communicate clumsily, or in untimely, insensitive, and ill-informed ways, we'll be lucky to get on the bus at all. On the other hand, if we proceed with the measure of care, sophistication, sensitivity, and good sense that I think we are capable of exhibiting, we will come out all right. I think it can go either way.