



# Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel

---

Volume 7 | Number 1

Article 11

---

4-1-2006

## Charting the Course: President Clark's Charge to Religious Educators

Scott C. Esplin

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/re>

---

### BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Esplin, Scott C. "Charting the Course: President Clark's Charge to Religious Educators." *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* 7, no. 1 (2006). <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/re/vol7/iss1/11>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [scholarsarchive@byu.edu](mailto:scholarsarchive@byu.edu), [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).

# Charting the Course: President Clark’s Charge to Religious Educators

*Scott C. Esplin*

*Scott C. Esplin is a doctoral candidate in educational leadership and a part-time instructor of Church history and doctrine at BYU.*

---

Introducing President J. Reuben Clark Jr.’s classic address “The Charted Course of the Church in Education” in *Messages of the First Presidency*, editor James R. Clark observed, “No document, perhaps, in recent L.D.S. Church history, and in particular in the history of ‘Mormon’ education and educational philosophy, has had wider distribution or wider discussion than this message.”<sup>1</sup> The original 1938 *Improvement Era* publication of the talk likewise declared, “Its significance pertains to the whole Church, and may well serve as an authoritative guide in all our teaching and all our meetings—auxiliary and otherwise, where there is any possibility of Church facilities and Church time being used to expose Church people to contrary influences.”<sup>2</sup>

Commonly accepted today as the landmark charge in religious education, the talk has developed this central role over time. What brought about such a significant address in religious education? How was it received in its day? How has it been used in the intervening six decades of wide distribution and discussion?<sup>3</sup>

## **Preparation of a Lifetime**

What has been written of inspired statements and even scripture like President Joseph F. Smith’s vision of the redemption of the dead could likewise be said of “The Charted Course”: “The stage was set: preparation of a lifetime and preparation of the moment were recompensed with a heavenly endowment.”<sup>4</sup> A lifetime of educational, intellectual, and spiritual preparation met with a moment of need.

J. Reuben Clark Jr. was born in Grantsville, Utah, on September 1, 1871, and was the eldest son of Joshua Reuben and Mary Louisa Woolley Clark. His father, a recent convert to the Church, and his mother, the daughter of Utah pioneer Bishop Edwin D. Woolley, contributed greatly to the education of young Reuben. He grew up studying under his father, a farmer and part-time educator in the local schools. Although he did not start formal schooling until the age of ten, he was tutored at home by his mother. Dedicated to learning, he completed the eighth grade, which was then the highest available education in Grantsville, and repeated it twice more to learn all he could.<sup>5</sup>

Having exhausted his educational opportunities in Tooele County, Clark left home for Salt Lake City at the age of nineteen. Enrolling at the Latter-day Saints' College (now LDS Business College), he studied under the principal, James E. Talmage, ultimately working as clerk for Talmage's Deseret Museum. Eventually, Clark followed his mentor to the University of Utah, where he graduated valedictorian in 1898.<sup>6</sup> After marrying Luacine Savage later that fall, Clark took his first job, like his father before him, in education.

Clark's first teaching appointment was as inaugural principal of Heber High School. In his short teaching career, he was on the faculty at the Latter-day Saint' College and Salt Lake Business College, and was acting president of the southern branch of the State Normal School (now Southern Utah University) in Cedar City for one year.<sup>7</sup> Anxious to continue his studies, Clark left Utah in 1903 at the age of thirty-two to study law at Columbia University. Upon his departure, former teacher and then University of Utah president James E. Talmage remarked, "[J. Reuben Clark] possessed the brightest mind ever to leave Utah."<sup>8</sup>

His intellect, coupled with a passion for learning, served him well at law school and in his subsequent professional career. Upon graduation in 1906, Clark received an appointment as assistant solicitor of the State Department. He also resumed teaching, working for nearly two years as an assistant professor of law at George Washington University.<sup>9</sup> By 1910 he was solicitor for the State Department. Subject to the political fallout from national elections, Clark was in and out of public service from 1910 to 1933, maintaining an international legal practice in the Washington DC area. His public career culminated in four years of service as the U.S. ambassador to Mexico.

Clark's personal and political aspirations changed in the winter of 1931 when President Heber J. Grant called him to become Second Counselor in the First Presidency. Not sustained until the April conference of 1933 due to his ambassadorial duties in Mexico, he brought a

lifetime of educational and intellectual experience to the office as the first member of the First Presidency to have earned a graduate degree.<sup>10</sup> This preparation was vital in his charge to religious educators.

### **Preparation of the Moment—August 8, 1938**

The need for a definitive statement on religious education in the Church was evident to President Clark early in his service in the First Presidency. As part of his duties, he “made a thorough review of curriculum materials being used in the Church schools, institutes, and seminaries. Fearing the influence of secularization, he underlined [questionable terms]. . . . In his opinion, the terms were a compromise with secular ideas which asserted that the teachings of Jesus were purely ethical and not divine.”<sup>11</sup> This exposure to secular interpretations of spiritual truths was not new to President Clark. He had become familiar with the intellectual trends in religious studies while in the East. There, he had studied extensively the works of New Testament scholars, making copious notes that were later used in his 1954 book titled *Our Lord of the Gospels* and his 1956 book titled *Why the King James Version?*<sup>12</sup> The Clark papers also contain charts tracking expenditures on religious education. The themes of intellectualism in religious education and the justification of Church expense for education are evident in “The Charted Course.”

With the issues and their solution fully formulated in his mind, President Clark accepted an invitation from church commissioner of education Franklin L. West, to address the assembled seminary, institute, and Church school religion faculty in Provo Canyon at Aspen Grove on Monday, August 8, 1938.<sup>13</sup> The faculty and their spouses, numbering over ninety teachers, had been assembled for six weeks of special courses during Brigham Young University's Alpine term.<sup>14</sup> The group represented a majority of the 128 seminary, 18 institute, and 4 Brigham Young University religion faculty members employed by the educational system in 1938.<sup>15</sup> During what one report called a “vigorous” morning rainstorm, President Clark addressed the assembled faculty.<sup>16</sup> Seminary teacher Sterling M. McMurrin described the experience: “During the summer of 1938, when Natalie and I were newly married and I had a contract to teach a second year at Richfield, we attended the BYU Aspen Grove program held for seminary and religion teachers. . . . We camped out, really. The Wests and the Bennions had cabins, but here were the seminary, institute, and BYU religion teachers from all over the West living in tents. . . . Guest speakers came in every week for the Sunday morning service. Among the speakers were John A. Widtsoe, J. Reuben Clark, and myself.”<sup>17</sup>

It is apparent from the Clark correspondence that the issues he discussed weighed heavily on his mind before the summer of 1938. Glimpses of this prior preparation emerge from letters written shortly after the talk's delivery. In one response letter, President Clark wrote, "I have appreciated more than I can express your observations regarding that speech, and particularly your fine and sane estimate of the situation in our Church School System, and its needs. The talk at Aspen Grove is probably the first notice you had that I was feeling concerned about the situation, but I would like to assure you that the concern is not newly born, but has been with me ever since I came into the Presidency. I hope we are on the way towards curing the situation which has developed."<sup>18</sup> Responding to Samuel O. Bennion, vice president of the Deseret News Publishing Company, President Clark also wrote, "I said a good many things then that I had been thinking for a long time, and wishing to say. I think that most of the parents of the Church will agree with all that I said."<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, fellow Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith wrote to President Clark immediately after the talk, saying, "I have been hoping and praying for a long time for something of this kind to happen. I have talked to many of these teachers, including the Commissioner of Education himself, and realize thoroughly the need of such counsel and wisdom which I hope will bear fruit."<sup>20</sup> President Clark responded, "I am very grateful to you for your kind expressions about the talk. We have felt for some time—as you say you have felt—that something of this sort should be said, and we are trustful that now it has been said, things will move in accordance with the ideas suggested."<sup>21</sup>

### Reception of President Clark's Message

As noted in the Clark correspondence, news of the talk spread quickly. McMurrin continued his description of the occasion: "Recently appointed to the First Presidency of the church, Clark gave his notorious address which was printed immediately in the *Improvement Era* (Summer 1938). It continues to be cited even today."<sup>22</sup> Excerpts from it were published the next day in area newspapers, including the *Deseret News*. The introduction to the article states: "Voicing an official pronouncement of the First Presidency of the Church, President Clark gave direct counsel to teachers of the Church Seminary System who are attending special courses during the university's Alpine term. The policy, he said, was to apply also to other institutions of the system, including Brigham Young University, and Church academies and institutions."<sup>23</sup> On Saturday, August 13, the Church section of the *Deseret News* carried the full text on its front page under the title, "First Presidency

Sets Standards for Church Educators.”<sup>24</sup> By August 15, *Deseret News* vice president Samuel O. Bennion asked President Clark to authorize its printing in pamphlet form, noting, “I am hanging on to my Church Section of *The News*, but I should like to see this outstanding address widely read.”<sup>25</sup> Later the next month, the *Improvement Era* also ran the full text for the first time, under the title “The Charted Course of the Church in Education.”<sup>26</sup> The origin of this title is unclear. President Clark’s personal correspondence and diary of the era refer to it as “my talk at Aspen Grove,” “my talk before the seminary and institute teachers,” or simply “Aspen Grove—Seminary People.”<sup>27</sup>

As is also evident by McMurrin calling the talk “notorious,” early opinions of President Clark’s message varied. McMurrin continued, “We divided ourselves up pretty quickly into liberal and conservative camps, and I landed among the liberals. . . . There was considerable discussion about it around our campfires. Natalie and I were included in the campfire discussion presided over by Newell K. Young. . . . That evening by the campfire, Newell got up . . . and said, ‘I don’t know about the rest of you; but before I go to bed, I’m going over to see Lynn Bennion and resign.’ He did too.”<sup>28</sup> Brother Bennion refused to accept the resignation.<sup>29</sup> Young later expressed his concerns about academic freedom in a letter to Russel B. Swensen, a religion faculty member at BYU: “I think the Brigham Young University is the greatest institution in all the Church. I would to God that whole and welcome freedom was granted all of you. What an intellectual, social, and spiritual power the Y could be if properly financed, well administered, and given complete democratic and Christian freedom of research and expression. Nothing can be spiritually and religiously great without the fullest freedom. No where else is force or coercion so harmful as in the realm of religion.”<sup>30</sup> Another teacher reported a conversation among Church educators who bristled at the criticism, calling the talk “an expression of medieval theology.”<sup>31</sup>

President Clark himself was aware of the controversy generated by his declaration. Responding to mission president William E. Tew’s praise of the printed talk, he wrote, “It is enheartening to receive commendation such as yours, because there has been not a little rather severe fault-finding on the part of certain groups because of the things which I said at Aspen Grove. We expect to follow through on this matter and to try to bring our Church education institutions in line herewith.”<sup>32</sup> To another friend President Clark confided, “I am going to . . . treasure this expression of admiration because it helps to wipe out the memory of the unkind things which always come to me after I say something that seems to me to be worthwhile.”<sup>33</sup>

In spite of the “unkind things” that came to President Clark following his talk, there was also much to treasure. The Clark papers in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections at BYU contain numerous letters of praise, gratitude, and agreement he received in connection with the message. Among them are letters from a fellow Apostle, mission presidents, a stake president, business leaders, teachers, and students. Some reported evidence of the intellectualism President Clark sensed was a problem in Church education, to which he responded, “The information which [your letter] contains will be valuable to us in our attempt to handle a difficult situation. Unfortunately, yours is not the only statement of this sort that comes to us.”<sup>34</sup> Others were simple expressions of encouragement and thanks. Unique among them is a letter from a nonmember friend, who penned, “If there is another man in Utah who could make such a talk, I do not know him. If there is another man in the United States who could make for his church such a clear, forceful, and valuable statement, I have never heard of him. Permit me, as an outsider, to voice my great appreciation of your teaching. Only good can result from your work.”<sup>35</sup>

### **Historical Impact of “The Charted Course”**

While his nonmember friend was correct in his prophecy of “good” coming from the work, much of it occurred after President Clark’s lifetime. Some immediate changes did result from the talk, however. Franklin L. West, Church commissioner of education, was committed to act on the message. In a letter written to President Clark the month after delivery of “The Charted Course,” West highlighted several of the talk’s themes, stating, “I desire to say again . . . that I fully agree with the position the Presidency has taken. We exist wholly for the purpose of building testimonies to the Divine Mission of the Prophet Joseph Smith and to the Messiah as the Son of God. Our job is to teach the Gospel. . . . I promise you that you will see marked and rapid improvement along the lines you have in mind. . . . I am anxious to carry forward the work as nearly as I can exactly as you would have it.”<sup>36</sup>

President Clark’s office diary further reports the following meeting with Commissioner West on January 23, 1939:

Brother West told me that he was himself outlining the courses for the Brigham Young University religious training; that he was also looking over the question of selection of the teachers, and insisting that no teacher should be employed in the school who is not spiritually sound; that this qualification seems at some time to have been overlooked or

not sufficiently emphasized; and that the problem presented there was, for various reasons, rather a difficult one. He said, however, he was determined that the schools should take on a proper instruction in religion.

In the course of his observations he spoke of the fact that as a body the institute and seminary teachers had real testimonies of the truthfulness of the Gospel. I told Brother West that I had never had a serious doubt but that the bulk of those teachers did have a testimony. I said that my own view was that their real difficulty was that they could not bring themselves to teach the doctrines of the Church because of what their non-Church member colleagues would say about them. I said in my judgment the real difficulty was lack of courage. I emphasized this several times during the conversation.

At a later point in the conversation Brother West said that the Brigham Young University people were almost apologetic about the Gospel, to which I responded that was evidence to my thesis, namely, that what they lacked was not testimonies, but courage. We agreed that no person should be employed to teach in the college who is not in a position spiritually to teach any subject in religion.<sup>37</sup>

As noted in the Clark diary, the talk produced organizational changes in Church education, especially at BYU. "The late 1930's was a time of sensitive relations between Salt Lake City and Provo. Many Brigham Young University faculty members were beginning to feel themselves qualified scholastically and spiritually to reconcile the worlds of science and religion."<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, control of the school did not reside in Salt Lake City. At the time, Executive Committee members of the BYU Board of Trustees were all Utah County men.<sup>39</sup> Even before the talk, the Church Board of Education discussed a structural reorganization. The idea was to replace local individuals and Brigham Young family members with General Authorities on the board of trustees. President Grant felt that "Brigham Young University is not a Provo institution, but a Church institution."<sup>40</sup> Following delivery of "The Charted Course," the Church Board of Education took action, and on February 2, 1939, the BYU Board of Trustees was restructured to match identically the General Church Board of Education, with all three members of the First Presidency and seven members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles comprising both boards.<sup>41</sup>

A second immediate change from the talk occurred in Church school curriculum. As Commissioner West reported in January 1939, he undertook to personally outline the courses. True to his word, West reviewed the curriculum, delivering a "Preliminary Outline of Courses in Religion for Church Colleges and Institutes" to President Clark on March 3, 1939.<sup>42</sup> Later, detailing what he called



a First Presidency Conference, President Clark recorded in his office diary on July 21, 1939: "In connection with the general discussion of Church Education, I repeated my statement that the present courses in the Church Educational program contemplated the study of religion and ethics, with our own religion really as a part of this general study, rather than a study of the Gospel. It was agreed that this should be changed, and the Gospel should be made the essential thing."<sup>43</sup> This seems to be a repetition of what he said more forcefully to the religious educators at Aspen Grove: "These students fully sense the hollowness of teachings that would make the gospel plan a mere system of ethics. . . . You are not to teach the philosophies of the world, ancient or modern, pagan or Christian, for this is the field of the public schools. Your sole field is the gospel, and that is boundless in its own sphere."<sup>44</sup>

BYU religion professor Russel B. Swensen reported the impact of these changes on the curriculum: "About 1941 they had a new curriculum and Brother West, under severe pressure from the General Authorities had to make the whole revision. . . . They had social dancing, they had psychology of religion, the sociology of religion, which were taught to get religious credit. They found that a man could go the full four years at BYU and not take a genuine religious course, so probably we had gone too far in deviating from religious courses."<sup>45</sup>

In spite of these immediate changes due to President Clark's talk, larger national and international issues may have quickly overshadowed it. The year he delivered the address, Germany's military occupied Austria. The front page of the same edition of the *Deseret News* that reported the talk covered fighting between Japan and Russia. In March of 1939, Germany occupied Czechoslovakia. One year after the talk's delivery, missionaries were withdrawn from Europe shortly before Hitler's forces invaded Poland, beginning World War II.<sup>46</sup> The impact of these events on the Church generally, and on educational institutions specifically, could have pushed "The Charted Course" and educational reform to the periphery for the remainder of President Clark's life.

Ironically, the talk itself, given in the midst of these tumultuous times, seems to transcend them. President Clark, himself a man of vast political experience, made no reference to national or international developments. His words are not time sensitive. Like other inspired teachings, its application is not dependent on the contextual events that initiated it. Sixty years later, Elder Henry B. Eyring observed, "He saw our time and beyond, with prophetic insight."<sup>47</sup>

## Gaining a Life of Its Own: "The Charted Course" After President Clark

With the end of global conflict and a flood of students returning to the classrooms, educational growth and change again took center stage in the 1950s. Enrollment at BYU, for example, nearly doubled from 1950 to 1956.<sup>48</sup> However, President Clark's charge seems to have been lost. Never quoted in general conference during the 1940s and 1950s, few, if any, references exist to it. The next reference about the talk came in an October 1959 letter from BYU president and administrator of the Unified Church School System Ernest L. Wilkinson to President Clark. Apparently ignorant of "The Charted Course," Wilkinson wrote, "After giving my address to the faculty, one of the members of our faculty, who long preceded me, Brother Wes Belnap, sent me a copy of an address which you had given to the faculty dated August 8, 1938. I note . . . that you had said 20 years prior, in much more eloquent language, the same thing I tried to say in my enclosed address."<sup>49</sup>

Franklin D. Day, assistant commissioner of Church Education from 1968 to 1986, credits the increased use of the talk during this era to President Boyd K. Packer, former assistant administrator of seminaries and institutes of religion. Noting that he only remembered it being mentioned casually before this time, Day reports that Elder Packer began emphasizing it frequently when he served as an administrator and early in his call as a General Authority. Day commented, "I don't know of anyone else that emphasized it as much as Boyd K. Packer."<sup>50</sup> Elder Packer himself later stated, "I think I have never talked to religious educators of the Church except I have quoted some verses of scripture from the document entitled *The Charted Course of the Church in Education*."<sup>51</sup> In addition, Elder Packer, in his second year as an Assistant to the Council of the Twelve Apostles, quoted from the talk in his April 1963 general conference address, the first General Authority to do so since it had originally been given.<sup>52</sup> A decade later, noting that "never a year goes by but that I reread it carefully," he published it as the appendix to his book *Teach Ye Diligently*.<sup>53</sup>

President Packer's special emphasis of "The Charted Course" dominates its history since the 1970s.<sup>54</sup> As mentioned, he cites it frequently, often noting, "It is revelation; it is as much revelation as that which you find if you open the standard works."<sup>55</sup> On numerous occasions he has challenged religious educators, "Surely you read that every year, every one of you, every year."<sup>56</sup> Speaking to the BYU religion faculty at the presentation of Jeffrey R. Holland as dean of Religious

Instruction, Elder Packer summarized many of these themes, “We have, I am sure, all read [‘The Charted Course’]. But some of us have not read it enough. 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. I know you have read it before, some of you many times, but I assign you to read it again. 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>57</sup>

During the same time period, Elder Joe J. Christensen, then associate commissioner of education, emphasized a return to “The Charted Course.” He attributed this emphasis to three challenges facing religious education at the time. First, in 1970, the Church Board of Education decided that the seminaries and institutes of religion would follow membership growth in the Church worldwide. Elder Christensen commented, “We felt it would be very important for everyone to be aware of this basic, classic document to get them going in the right direction doctrinally from the start.”<sup>58</sup> He continued, “Secondly, we were in the process of creating a lot of curriculum that would have an influence around the world. We wanted those who had that responsibility to have what they prepared to be consistent with the principles contained in ‘The Charted Course.’ Third, we were aware of a few of our personnel we felt needed to adjust their approach in teaching to conform better with the doctrinal principles President Clark taught.”<sup>59</sup> For these reasons, he issued a reprint of the talk for religious educators, adding the following introduction:

Only a few things are worth a second reading—rarely are things of such enduring quality that they are read many times and live to inspire a second or third generation. President J. Reuben Clark’s address “The Charted Course of the Church in Education” belongs to the latter group and has been republished so that its fundamental principles may continue to inspire and motivate the personnel of the Church Educational System.

President Clark’s summation of the responsibilities teachers have to the Church and its mission and to students’ spiritual needs are relevant, comprehensive, and inspirational.

May this reprint serve to remind us that although it may take extraordinary moral and spiritual courage to apply them, the stakes President Clark drove remain solid and firm. Perhaps it is time for all who teach to recheck their bearings and see where they are and whether the axiomatic principles and objectives outlined in the “Charted Course” are being fully implemented (or utilized).<sup>60</sup>

Of this reprinting, Elder Christensen observed, "We felt that the reprint had a very important influence on many teachers to assure that the students were being taught the doctrines of the Gospel more solidly."<sup>61</sup> He later commented: "[The Charted Course] is a classic which I believe is just as relevant in principle now as then and applies to all who teach the gospel. You would do well to read and reread it in its entirety."<sup>62</sup>

Other General Authorities without direct Church Educational System backgrounds also began citing President Clark's talk in the mid 1970s. It was the underpinning of the First Presidency's inaugural instructions to Church Commissioner of Education Elder Neal A. Maxwell in 1970 and later in the 1971 charge to Elder Dallin H. Oaks as the new president of Brigham Young University.<sup>63</sup> In his 1976 address to religious educators, Elder Ezra Taft Benson relied heavily on excerpts from "The Charted Course," declaring, "This counsel has not changed over the years. Its applicability is even greater today."<sup>64</sup> Elder Bruce R. McConkie mixed numerous quotations from "The Charted Course" with scripture in his 1981 talk "The Foolishness of Teaching" and later challenged teachers to "read again your instructions as given by President J. Reuben Clark, Jr."<sup>65</sup> Other General Authorities to cite President Clark in addressing religious educators include Bishop Victor L. Brown, President James E. Faust, and Elder Henry B. Eyring.<sup>66</sup>

Unique among all citations of President Clark's charge was President Marion G. Romney's 1980 talk "The Charted Course Reaffirmed." Beginning his talk, President Romney stated, "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 President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., used in an address he gave forty-two years ago entitled 'The Charted Course of the Church in Education.'"<sup>67</sup> President Romney then reread nearly the entire talk, making only one change: substituting the word *you* for the original phrase "the Church seminaries and institutes."<sup>68</sup>

Elder Henry B. Eyring, then commissioner of Church Education, later added the following details to the experience:

That was the end of his talk. He had chosen to read The Charted Course of the Church in Education, even though, I knew, he had prepared a talk of his own.

President Romney had no family member with him at the Salt Palace that night. So I volunteered to drive him to his house. . . .

After we had driven along for a few minutes, I asked, “President Romney, don’t you think young people and the world have changed almost completely since President Clark gave that talk in 1938?” And then I paraphrased what seemed a remarkable part of President Clark’s talk, at least to me:

“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 about the fundamentals I have just set out—about our beliefs; they want to gain testimonies of their truth. They are not now doubters but inquirers, seekers after truth. Doubt must not be planted in their hearts. Great is the burden and the condemnation of any teacher who sows doubt in a trusting soul.

“These students crave the faith their fathers and mothers have; they want it in its simplicity and purity. There are few indeed who have not seen the manifestations of its divine power. They wish to be not only the beneficiaries of this faith, but they want to be themselves able to call it forth to work” (The Charted Course of the Church in Education, 1992 rev. ed. [address to religious educators, August 8, 1938], p. 3.).

I talked with President Romney, as we drove along, about all the changes in youth, in morals, in science, in education, in the sophistication of young people, and the changes in their families—and on and on. And that is when I repeated my question to President Romney, something like this: “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>69</sup>

This episode highlights another aspect of “The Charted Course.” As President Romney indicated, speaking to religious educators required a special endowment that not even he as a fellow member of the First Presidency felt to possess. President Clark himself seems to indicate this. In a letter written after the talk’s delivery, he commented, “We of the Presidency have felt that something should be said about matters that were discussed in my talk at Aspen Grove, and it was decided that I should be the mouthpiece to say them.”<sup>70</sup> Two weeks later he added, “In that talk I said what the First Presidency believe, and expressed the decisions which they have reached.”<sup>71</sup> The *Deseret News* stressed the importance of the message, introducing it as “voicing an official pronouncement of the First Presidency of the Church.”<sup>72</sup> The *Improvement Era* emphasized that the message had been given “with the approval of the First Presidency.”<sup>73</sup> More recently, Elder Packer emphasized that President Clark was “speaking for” and was “approved by the First Presidency.”<sup>74</sup>

The talk's very inclusion in *Messages of the First Presidency* says something about its importance. Editor James R. Clark indicated in the introduction to the first volume of *Messages of the First Presidency*: "The general rule of the compilation was to include only *Messages* of a public nature signed by The First Presidency as a quorum (D&C 107:21–22). Some are signed only by the President of the Church."<sup>75</sup> In his introduction to the fourth volume, James R. Clark further explained, "I have chosen to include in this volume a number of documents issued on the letterhead of the First Presidency and dealing with Church matters but signed by less than a full quorum of the First Presidency."<sup>76</sup> Expanding those general rules to include a talk delivered by the First Counselor in the First Presidency seems unique indeed.

### **"The Chartist Course" Today**

After more than six long and interesting decades, President Clark's "The Chartist Course of the Church in Education" seems to characterize the man. President Marion G. Romney, President Clark's friend and associate, wrote of him, "I have always hoped that those who would write about J. Reuben Clark, Jr., would remember this: to him it mattered little whether he was being praised or criticized; it mattered much, however, whether his course was right and true."<sup>77</sup> While initially offensive to some, the talk stands today as the centerpiece of religious instruction in the Church, outlining a course "right and true." Cited, sometimes extensively, in over fifteen General Authority addresses to assembled religious educators, it continues to be emphasized in training for prospective teachers, is quoted in *Teaching the Gospel: A Handbook for CES Teachers and Leaders*, and was reprinted as the first in a collection of core addresses to CES entitled *Charge to Religious Educators*.

From a personal perspective, the emphasis on President Clark's words and the subsequent prophetic commentary his successors made about it changed me as a teacher. Six years ago, in an address that highlights my early concerns as a teacher, Elder Henry B. Eyring stated, "On an evening in February, you may well be feeling a little discouragement about how hard it seems to be to lead young people to choose eternal life. In your class today or yesterday, you searched the faces and watched the body language of your students, looking for some sign that the gospel was going down into their hearts and into their lives."<sup>78</sup>

Addressing religious educators like President Clark before him, Elder Eyring continued, "The place I would always begin . . . would be to read President J. Reuben Clark Jr.'s talk 'The Chartist 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. . . . 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, both in our classrooms and in the homes of our students and their posterity."<sup>79</sup> That year, President Clark and his message encouraged me to stay in the classroom. Six years later, it still does. **RE**

---

## Notes

1. James R. Clark, ed., in *Messages of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1975), 6:44.
2. J. Reuben Clark, "The Charted Course of the Church in Education," *Improvement Era*, September 1938, 520.
3. Clark, in *Messages of the First Presidency*, 6:44.
4. Robert L. Millet, *Selected Writings of Robert L. Millet* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 251.
5. David H. Yarn Jr., "Biographical Sketch of J. Reuben Clark, Jr.," *BYU Studies* 13, no. 3 (Spring 1973): 235–36.
6. Yarn, "Biographical Sketch," 236.
7. Yarn, "Biographical Sketch," 237.
8. Harold B. Lee, "President J. Reuben Clark, Jr.: An Appreciation on his Ninetieth Birthday," *Improvement Era*, September 1961, 632.
9. Yarn, "Biographical Sketch," 237–38.
10. Lawrence R. Flake, *Prophets and Apostles of the Last Dispensation* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2001), 204–5.
11. Ernest L. Wilkinson, *Brigham Young University: The First One Hundred Years* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1975), 2:243.
12. D. Michael Quinn, *Elder Statesman: A Biography of J. Reuben Clark* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 64, 167. See also Wilkinson, *Brigham Young University*, 2:243.
13. Franklin L. West to J. Reuben Clark Jr., July 26, 1938, correspondence, in Clarkana, Papers of Joshua Reuben Clark Jr.; mss 303, box 215, folder 8; L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.
14. "Pres. Clark Sets Forth Church Seminary Policies," *Deseret News*, August 9, 1938, 16; see also "The Church Moves On," *Improvement Era*, November 1938, 671.
15. *Directory of L.D.S. Church Schools*, September 1938; see also Richard O. Cowan, *Teaching the Word: Religious Education at Brigham Young University* (Provo, UT: Religious Education, Brigham Young University, 1998), 80.
16. Ray Nelson, "Candid Quotes from Aspen Grove," *Evening Herald*, August 9, 1938, 3.
17. Sterling M. McMurrin and L. Jackson Newell, *Matters of Conscience: Con-*



*versations with Sterling M. McMurrin on Philosophy, Education, and Religion* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 115.

18. J. Reuben Clark Jr. to N. L. Nelson, October 27, 1938, correspondence, in Clarkana, Papers of Joshua Reuben Clark Jr.; mss 303, box 215, folder 8; 20th & 21st Century Western & Mormon Americana; Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

19. J. Reuben Clark Jr. to Samuel O. Bennion, August 20, 1938, correspondence, in Clarkana, Papers of Joshua Reuben Clark Jr.; mss 303, box 215, folder 8; Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

20. Joseph Fielding Smith to J. Reuben Clark Jr., August 15, 1938, correspondence, in Clarkana, Papers of Joshua Reuben Clark Jr.; mss 303, box 215, folder 8; Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

21. J. Reuben Clark Jr. to Joseph Fielding Smith, August 15, 1938, correspondence, in Clarkana, Papers of Joshua Reuben Clark Jr.; mss 303, box 215, folder 8; Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

22. McMurrin and Newell, *Matters of Conscience*, 115.

23. "Pres. Clark Sets Forth Church Seminary Policies," 16; see also Nelson, "Candid Quotes from Aspen Grove," 3.

24. "First Presidency Sets Standards for Church Educators," *Deseret News*, August 13, 1938, 1, 6, 8.

25. Samuel O. Bennion to J. Reuben Clark Jr., August 15, 1938, correspondence, in Clarkana, Papers of Joshua Reuben Clark Jr.; mss 303, box 215, folder 8; Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

26. "The Charted Course of the Church in Education," *Improvement Era*, September 1938, 520.

27. J. Reuben Clark Jr. to R. K. Bischoff, September 8, 1938; J. Reuben Clark Jr. to Joseph Fielding Smith, August 15, 1938, correspondence, in Clarkana, Papers of Joshua Reuben Clark Jr.; mss 303, box 215, folder 8; Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU; see also J. Reuben Clark Jr. Year Book 1938, Monday, August 8, 1938, in J. Reuben Clark Jr. Papers, 1871–1961; mss 303 addendum, box 10, folder 3; Brigham Young University Archives; Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

28. McMurrin and Newell, *Matters of Conscience*, 115.

29. McMurrin and Newell, *Matters of Conscience*, 115–16.

30. Newel K. Young to Russel B. Swensen, November 21, 1938, correspondence, in Russel B. Swensen Papers; mss 1842, box 2, folder 5; Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

31. N. L. Nelson to J. Reuben Clark Jr., September 2, 1938, correspondence, in Clarkana, Papers of Joshua Reuben Clark Jr.; mss 303, box 215, folder 8; Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

32. J. Reuben Clark Jr. to William E. Tew, September 22, 1938, correspondence, in Clarkana, Papers of Joshua Reuben Clark Jr.; mss 303, box 215, folder 8; Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

33. J. Reuben Clark Jr. to Stephen Abbot, August 31, 1938, correspondence, in Clarkana, Papers of Joshua Reuben Clark Jr.; mss 303, box 215, folder 8; Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

34. J. Reuben Clark Jr. to Merrill Y. Van Wagoner, September 3, 1938, correspondence, in Clarkana, Papers of Joshua Reuben Clark Jr.; mss 303, box 215, folder 8; Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.



35. Captain Stephen Abbot to J. Reuben Clark Jr., August 21, 1938, correspondence, in Clarkana, Papers of Joshua Reuben Clark Jr.; mss 303, box 215, folder 8; Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

36. Franklin L. West to J. Reuben Clark Jr., September 4, 1938, correspondence, in Joshua Reuben Clark Papers, 1933–61; ms 4265, reel 14; Archives of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah; hereafter cited as Church Archives.

37. J. Reuben Clark Jr. Diary: 1936–1939, January 23, 1939, 61–63, in J. Reuben Clark Jr. Papers, 1871–1961; mss 303 addendum, box 9, folder 3; Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

38. Wilkinson, *Brigham Young University*, 2:266.

39. Wilkinson, *Brigham Young University*, 2:358.

40. Cited in Wilkinson, *Brigham Young University*, 2:358.

41. Wilkinson, *Brigham Young University*, 2:362–63.

42. “Preliminary Outline of Courses in Religion for Church Colleges and Institutes,” in Joshua Reuben Clark Papers, 1933–61; ms 4265, reel 14; Church Archives.

43. J. Reuben Clark Jr. Diary: 1936–1939, July 21, 1939, 166, in J. Reuben Clark Jr. Papers, 1871–1961; mss 303 addendum, box 9, folder 3; Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

44. 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), 5, 7.

45. Russel B. Swensen, *Russel B. Swensen Oral History Interview*, September 13, 1978, 16, ua oh 32, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

46. D. Michael Quinn, *Elder Statesman: A Biography of J. Reuben Clark* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 88–89.

47. Henry B. Eyring, “The Lord Will Multiply the Harvest,” address to CES (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1998), 2.

48. Wilkinson, *Brigham Young University*, 2:610.

49. Ernest L. Wilkinson to J. Reuben Clark Jr., October 15, 1959, correspondence, in Clarkana, Papers of Joshua Reuben Clark Jr.; mss 303, box 215, folder 8; Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.

50. Franklin D. Day, interview with author, May 2004.

51. Boyd K. Packer, “Teach the Scriptures,” *Charge to Religious Educators*, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1994), 91.

52. Boyd K. Packer, in Conference Report (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, April 1963), 106.

53. Boyd K. Packer, *Teach Ye Diligently* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 153, 361.

54. “The Charted Course” has been cited by Boyd K. Packer in the following published addresses to religious educators: “Seek Learning Even by Study and Also by Faith” (1974), “Equally Yoked” (1975), “Teach the Scriptures” (1977), “The Great Plan of Happiness” (1993), and “The One Pure Defense” (2004).

55. Packer, “The Great Plan of Happiness,” 114.

56. Packer, “The Great Plan of Happiness,” 114.

57. Boyd K. Packer, *That All May Be Edified* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 44; see also D&C 68:4.

58. Joe J. Christensen, letter to author, September 22, 2004.

59. Christensen, letter to author, September 22, 2004.

60. Joe J. Christensen, cited in Clark "The Charted Course of the Church in Education," reprint edition.
61. Christensen, letter to author, September 22, 2004.
62. Joe J. Christensen, "Religious Education: A Latter-day Saint Point of View," *Commissioner's Lecture Series* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1974), 7.
63. Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 6:44.
64. Ezra Taft Benson, "The Gospel Teacher and His Message," *Charge to Religious Educators*, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1994), 13.
65. Bruce R. McConkie, "The Bible, a Sealed Book," CES Symposium on the New Testament (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1984), 6.
66. See Victor L. Brown, "Except He Be a Man of God," address to religious educators, September 9, 1983, 2; James E. Faust, "A Legacy of the New Testament," CES Symposium on the New Testament (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1988), 2; Henry B. Eyring, "And Thus We See: Helping a Student in a Moment of Doubt," *Charge to Religious Educators*, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1994), 107; Henry B. Eyring, "The Lord Will Multiply the Harvest," address to religious educators, February 6, 1998, 1–2.
67. Marion G. Romney, "The Charted Course Reaffirmed," address to religious educators, September 12, 1980, 1.
68. Romney, "The Charted Course Reaffirmed," 4.
69. Eyring, "And Thus We See," 107.
70. J. Reuben Clark Jr. to R. K. Bischoff, September 8, 1938, correspondence, in Clarkana, Papers of Joshua Reuben Clark Jr.; mss 303, box 215, folder 8; Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.
71. J. Reuben Clark Jr. to Jacob H. Trayner, September 22, 1938, correspondence, in Clarkana, Papers of Joshua Reuben Clark Jr.; mss 303, box 215, folder 8; Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU.
72. "Pres. Clark Sets Forth Church Seminary Policies," 16.
73. Clark, "The Charted Course of the Church in Education," 520.
74. Boyd K. Packer, "Equally Yoked Together," *Charge to Religious Educators*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982), 30; Packer, "Teach the Scriptures," 91.
75. Clark, in *Messages of the First Presidency*, 1:xxiv.
76. Clark, in *Messages of the First Presidency*, 4:xi.
77. Frank W. Fox, *J. Reuben Clark: The Public Years* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1980), xi.
78. Eyring, "The Lord Will Multiply the Harvest," 1.
79. Eyring, "The Lord Will Multiply the Harvest," 1–2.