

Newel K. Young
By M. Lynn Bennion¹

Newel K. Young was one of the most colorful and interesting persons whom it has been my privilege to know.

My respect for Newel K. Young was enhanced through an association I had with June and Oswald Pearson at Berkeley, California in the summer of 1932. I went to the University of California that summer to launch a graduate program in Educational Administration. Being alone on a strange campus, I was delighted to find Oswald, who had his family with him, in one of my classes. I found in him a source of strength and support in the academic work and his family, including his wife June and their baby daughter, a real comfort and a real touch of the home influence I needed. Recently I have met Nancy, one of the daughters of Oswald and June, whom my nephew, Bob Folsom, is planning to join in marriage. These fine people reflect the greatness of their parents. Soon after the Berkeley experience, the casual acquaintance I had had with Newel K. Young developed into an intimate and lasting friendship based on mutual respect and affection.

After completing my work at Berkeley, I came back to Salt Lake City as Supervisor of L. D. S. Seminaries. Newel was at that time (1935) a seasoned teacher with a wide background of experience in State and Church schools. If I figure rightly he was 57 years old — I was 33. He had been teaching since he was 21 years old. He taught at Loa, Wayne County, in the Mormon colonies in Mexico, at the L. D. S. High School, and in seminaries in several Utah communities, including Mount Pleasant, Murray, Ephraim, Moroni, Richfield, Brigham City, and Logan.

In 1928 Joseph F. Merrill became L. D. S. Church Counselor of Education. Being an engineer, he figured that he was not qualified to teach his staff religion. Feeling that they were entitled to the best, he arranged for three special summer school sessions at Brigham Young University and brought renowned Bible scholars from the University of Chicago Divinity School to teach us. No man in the classes of these famous scholars was more stirred by the experience than Newel K. Young. I was one of the youngest members of the group. I can well remember the questions posed to the teacher by Brother Young and his great enthusiasm for the program.

In 1937 I taught the same group at Brigham Young University in a summer session. We were all camped together in Aspen Grove. I was amazed at Newel K. Young. He had grown so much in spiritual and intellectual stature. I have never seen a mature man, in middle age, so increase his scholarship through the upward reach. Newel was especially fascinated by the new insights he had received concerning the New Testament. He read and studied widely. He knew the great books on the subject. He was afire with the zeal of a dedicated disciple of Jesus.

I visited with him often. I was not conscious of an age difference. We called each other by our first names. Although officially his superior, I was usually the learner. We became

¹ Funeral address given by M. Lynn Bennion, Superintendent of Schools, Salt Lake City, Utah, 20 August, 1956. Original typescript converted to PDF via OCR by Robert N. Reynolds.

intimate friends as well as professional colleagues. Newel thought in universal terms concerning one Universal Father and a common brotherhood of men. He worked hard to free his students from prejudice, hatred, and ignorance. He wanted to eliminate the barriers of race, color, and creed. Because he was thinking ahead of many, he was sometimes misunderstood.

Jesus of Nazareth was the center of Brother Young's mortal life and the object of his greatest loyalty. He envisioned Christ's teachings as a great power designed to build a universal brotherhood, where every human soul could be equally precious. He believed that this could be done only if every classroom was a citadel of truth, manned by teachers with untrammelled minds and spirits. And so he preached and taught of a universal morality and a common humanity. He was critical of churches and creeds, including his own, where he felt they were less generous, less inclusive of mankind's needs, than their professions warranted.

He often told me of the many former convictions that he was forced to unlearn and to give up. This is always painful to oneself and often unappreciated by others. The inner satisfactions that come with growth are more than compensating. So it was with Newel. He was cheerful, optimistic, and courageous. He maintained an even, pleasant disposition, flavored with a delightful sense of humor.

His recreation was the conversation of stimulating minds on the subject of religion. Nothing pleased him more than an evening of intimate and candid discussion with a few chosen friends. He enjoyed the confidence and respect of some of the brightest scholars in the Church school system. He was fully abreast of their thinking. Besides this, he had a unique and rich background of personal experience. Of this experience he was very reflective. He knew how to evaluate the worth of his experience and to benefit by it.

Central in his background was the worth of persons. He had 19 children, 14 of whom survive him. He struggled unendingly to support them on his meager teacher's salary. Of necessity, his large family was divided as he moved from one small town to another. They were not, however, absent from his mind and heart. He talked to me a great deal about George. He worried about him and suffered greatly because of his misfortunes. I often wondered how he ever sustained his heavy responsibilities. Although usually in pain himself, I do not remember ever having heard him utter a single, pessimistic, downhearted, gloomy word. I remember vividly the vitality, energy, enthusiasm, and the warmth of his affections. The memory of his smile will always help to right situations that are wearying and discouraging.

There is a great longing in the human soul to be wanted, to be understood, to be loved, to be a part of something, to feel associated with others in a worthwhile endeavor. This longing, this powerful motivating force our beloved friend recognized and utilized with great skill and effectiveness. This world would be better if we had a little more love, less hate, less bitterness, less cynicism, and less defeatism. Newel's philosophy of life is a good prescription for all of us.

Many of us share with his beloved family the feeling that with his passing we have lost part of our mental and spiritual strength. Something very vital and most precious is lost to us by his death. Fortunately we have undying memories of his quietness, his modesty, his refinement of thought and feeling, his intellectual acuteness and integrity, his responsiveness to beauty, his

deep concern for human welfare, his abiding faith in the reality of spiritual things and in the ultimate triumph of goodness in the world. These memories will remain to chasten what is bad in us and to inspire what is good, to enlarge our sympathies, and to make our judgments more compassionate.

We in the teaching profession knew and loved Newel K. Young. We knew him as a gentleman in the finest sense of that word — as one who was the very essence of sweetness and light, and as one who knew and practiced instinctively the little amenities that give life its charm, and friendship its quiet pleasures.

We pay our respects to a genuinely religious man — one who saw in all human beings something precious, some potential goodness and beauty which he must respect and, if possible, help to develop.

We are thankful that he passed from earth's life without pain or suffering. We extend our deepest sympathy to his splendid family of whom he was so proud and whom he loved so dearly. We share with them the firm belief that he has moved into a larger awareness and a fuller existence.

Newel K. Young by his kindness, by his faithfulness to trust, his sincerity, generosity, and high idealism, touched and changed the characters and lives of many. Good thus generated and dispersed spreads indefinitely in ever-widening circles, and who shall say upon what shore, distant in time and place, the last faint echoing ripple of it shall die?

*O strong soul, by what shore
Tarriest thou now? For that force,
Surely, has not been left vain!
Somewhere, surely afar,
In the sounding labor-house vast
Of being, is practiced that strength.*

We will try, as his family will try, to meet his parting with courage and serenity. May I add my prayer that as we mourn we may be comforted by the spirit of our Heavenly Father and by our knowledge of the spiritual realities of life.

M. Lynn Bennion
Superintendent of Schools
Salt Lake City, Utah