One Lord, One Faith, Two Universities: Tension between "Faith" and "Thought" at BYU

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Life and religion are one and the same. We don't need two universities at BYU.

ONE LORD, ONE FAITH TWO UNIVERSITIES: TENSIONS BETWEEN "RELIGION" AND "THOUGHT" AT BYU

By Scott Abbott

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AT THE AGE OF EIGHTEEN I LEFT THE OLD-BOOM town of Farmington, New Mexico, and headed north for my first year at BYU. The lush campus at the foot of the mountains seemed like paradise and at the center of that paradise was the honors program, its challenges and stimulations assuring that paradise was more than a country club. Informing the entire experience was a complex web of religious theory and practice. A philosophy professor taught my Book of Mormon class and was my ward bishop; a psychology professor was my stake president. The education I got from these and other religiously committed professors, trained in good programs around the country, qualified me for graduate work at Princeton and insured that I did well there; it also prepared me to teach an LDS institute class for Princeton undergraduates. After graduating from Princeton I taught for seven years at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. Those were good years: I wrote articles and published my first book; I taught good students an associated with good colleagues- I again taught an institute class; and I scrambled for tenure at an exclusive university I was granted tenure in March of 1988, and by April I had decided to move to BYU. Answering questions of an incredulous dean and various colleagues I described my desires to work at the university that had shaped me and that would shape my fellow Mormons in years to come. Some of them understood. Others did not. To further explain myself in my subsequent correspondence with Vanderbilt friends, I have recounted the following positive experiences at BYU.

At BYU I moved into a warm, supportive, and competent department. My teaching load is the same as it was at Vanderbilt. I have received generous research grants every summer and have had a semester of paid research leave. I have traveled to numerous conferences at my department's expense. BYU's library is good and, at a time when state universities are cutting library budgets, we have an aggressive acquisitions policy. The academic climate at BYU is even more stimulating than when I was a student. Faculty colleagues across the university are dedicated, morally committed scholars with diverse opinions; I have participated in faculty seminars on feminist thought and on the French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas. Richard Rorty Terry Eagleton, Alan Bloom, and Martha Nussbaum have led lively and controversial seminars. Further, BYU has more women faculty members and more black students than when I was a student, and it looks as if we will get more. Our Women's Research Institute and an active group of women students have gained national attention with their innovative and forceful work on women's issues. Women students now receive half of the university's most exclusive scholarships-offered, in my day, only to males. Sexist language is officially discouraged at BYU, and university policy on hiring women is one of affirmative action. This year when my department wanted to hire a bright non-Mormon woman who also had an offer from UCLA, the university administration and the board of trustees decisively waived normal deadlines and hired her. After four years I am grateful to be at BYU and am sure I made a good choice.

Though the university is a better place than the paradise I experienced in my student years, it is not yet what it could be. Let me give a few examples. I bring them up here because I am immensely proud of the university fellow Mormons have built up over the last century and I want to be part of the continuing productive process.
Ironically the most pressing issue on the BYU campus is Mormon scholarship. With few exceptions, Mormon and non-Mormon faculty are free to pursue their research wherever it takes them. I can write freely about Freemasonry and the German novel, and a friend writes uninhibitedly about Dante and the Latin sexual vocabulary. As long as the work is unrelated to Mormonism, and as long as it is real scholarship, BYU will pen-nit it—and it may be well funded. But when professors write about sexuality among Mormon adolescents, or query working Mormon women about their opinion of President Ezra Taft Benson's advice that they stay at home, or speak about Mormon women from a feminist perspective, or ask why Mormon chapels are bombed in South America (these are four recent, actual cases), immediate pressure is applied. The pattern is that a single general authority will contact a university administrator, who then contacts the faculty member's dean and department chair. BYU administrators are forced to defend faculty at meetings with the board of trustees, especially after sensationalized reports in the press. More often than we know, university officials shield faculty members from pressure from above. And there are surely many instances when board members bite their tongues when thoroughly provoked. But when board members don't, and when our administration doesn't act as a buffer, a pattern of arbitrary micromanagement arises that inhibits research on Mormon topics. We scorn efforts at the University of Utah to declare Mormonism an uninteresting and unfruitful research topic, but we produce our own climate in which faculty know they are safer pursuing topics unrelated to what may be most dear to them. And Mormon research at a Mormon university becomes controversial.

Although the new "Statement On Academic Freedom at BYU" argues that academic freedom must include the individual's freedom "to ask hard questions," it also says that faculty behavior or expression must not "seriously and adversely affect the University mission or the Church." What behavior or expression might "seriously and adversely affect BYU's mission or the Church"? Who knows? We have enough shocking examples of arbitrary judgments during the Wilkinson years to cause unease. Historically, the efforts to prevent deviations from supposed political and doctrinal purity have adversely affected BYU and the Church more than might have the original "problems." Spy scandals and secret committees that keep files on members "contradict fundamental Church doctrines" more radically than does, for example, a private belief that the Book of Mormon is the word of God but perhaps not an archeological record, or than do suggestions that we talk more openly about our Mother in Heaven. Enforced "goodness" is infinitely more destructive than unorthodoxy--it is personally destructive and also inhibits scholars who give form to our history and illuminate our present circumstances.

Like the problem of doing research on Mormon topics, the gulf opening between teachers of religion and the rest of the faculty is crucial to our idea of a Mormon university. I'll focus on one example. The pattern of hiring in Religious Education indicates an increasing preference for candidates with BYU Ph.D.s and Ed.D.s and Church Education System (CES) faculty. In the department of ancient scriptures, only three full professors have their final degree from BYU, while nine have degrees from other universities. Of the associate professors, three are BYU graduates and five are from other programs. Of the most recently hired faculty, the assistant professors, five are from BYU and only two from elsewhere. The percentage of faculty with BYU credentials thus progresses from 25 percent to 37.5 percent to 71 percent in the department of Ancient Scriptures. In the department of Church History and Doctrine the numbers are even more skewed toward BYU and the trend is similar. Of full professors, seven are from BYU and four have degrees from other schools. Among associate professors nine have degrees from BYU and only one from elsewhere. And of the assistant professors, all six have their degrees from BYU. The percentage of home-grown faculty here progresses from 64 percent to 90 percent to 100 percent. Another way to put this is that only six of twenty-three faculty hired from 1984 through 1991 have degrees from schools other than BYU. Faculty hired for 1992 change this picture only slightly.

This kind of analysis doesn't tell you which of the BYU graduates in education or history have been excellent scholars and teachers and which of the graduates of Duke and USC have not been assets to the program. What it does tell you is that Religious Education
has experienced the kind of inbreeding that weakens any academic department—they have hired teachers rather than teacher-scholars, and they have chosen, to use their phrase, the "tried and true" former seminary and institute teachers rather than the products of good graduate schools. While other departments increasingly hire qualified faculty, and while students become increasingly brighter, this kind of religious inbreeding will lead inevitably to second-rate status.

Members of the Religious Education faculty argue that it is nearly impossible to find candidates with degrees from other schools who teach well and who fit their standards of orthodoxy. Perhaps their standards are too timid. I know of one faithful LDS candidate with extraordinary credentials in both teaching and scholarship whom they chose not to hire because he did not fit the unctuous seminary teacher mold. The normal procedure for any academic department, designed to make creative risk-taking possible, is to bring a young scholar/teacher to campus for two three-year trial periods. On the basis of that trial they are then given tenure or asked to leave. Religious Education faculty tell me that they could not bear to let someone with a family go and so they must be absolutely certain when the person is first hired. Those are difficult decisions for any department, of course, and the better the initial hire, the less pain later; but good departments are built only with hard decisions. CES employees area comfortable fit in one way, for already they have their proven loyalty to the Church. They have not, however, shown that they are scholars or that they are suited to a university academic department.

One solution to the pressure exerted on a relatively small religion faculty by the thousands of students required to take religion classes is to borrow faculty from other departments to teach religion classes. This arrangement has been used fruitfully for as long as I can remember; but it has been recently curtailed somewhat by Religious Education policy. Hal Miller, dean of Honors and General Education, recommends reversal of this policy in a recent memo, reasoning as follows:

By involving those outside Religious Education, students can be alerted to the fact that the Gospel is what is most important here, that we are (nearly) all about the business of pursuing it, of plumbing its depths, of savoring its inexhaustible richness, of encountering its matchless spirituality. Most important is the message that we are in this together, so we teach and learn the Gospel with one another. There is no corner of purchase on that effort. Moreover, it may alert students to the diversity of methods by which the gospel may be effectually apprehended and the Spirit invited.

For BYU to be a healthy Mormon university, Religious Education faculty and other faculty must be united in hiring and retaining only teachers and scholars of the academic, spiritual, and moral first rank (for those three are intimately related). As a friend of mine is fond of quoting: "First-rate faculty hire first-rate faculty. Second-rate faculty hire third-rate faculty."

IT has been almost a year since the First Presidency's statement suggesting that Church members not take part in symposia like Sunstone's. Many of us on campus saw this as an order to mind our own academic business in chemistry and law and humanities and to quit thinking and talking about Mormon topics. Faculty in the sociology department drafted a letter to Rex Lee protesting the statement and asking for clarification.3 At about the same time an assistant professor who had read a paper at the last symposium was called in by his ecclesiastic leaders in what seemed an attempt to intimidate him. Several departments sent letters or delegations to Rex Lee in support of the sociology department's positions and argued against arbitrary limitations of academic freedom. A persistent rumor was heard and often denied that the administration had been given a hit list of six faculty members whose employment was to be terminated. A faculty member named as co-editor of Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought received abusive anonymous phone calls and was attacked in the press. When BYU's academic vice president resigned rumors flew. Members of the board of
trustees told faculty members privately that tension between the board and BYU faculty had never been as high.

One specific example in its absurdity shows just how bad things are. Recently, a member of the board of trustees mistakenly and in private expressed contempt for a faculty whose elected advisory committee had recommended that we no longer call one another brother and sister at BYU. There was no such recommendation; the faculty committee wrote a draft, subsequently tabled, that recommended that we should not refer to male faculty as professor and women faculty as sister, that we should instead refer to them as brother and sister or professor and professor, and that we be careful with distinctions between LDS and non-LDS faculty. But some excitable faculty member with access to this general authority board member reported that we were all going to hell in a handbasket and the board member, already disposed to believe the worst, all-too-easily fit this into his picture of a university spinning out of control.

BYU administrators' biggest headache, one administrator says, are ill-informed, biased end runs to members of the board of trustees. I suspect that the board of trustees sees itself as enormously patient. But when complaints by members of the John Birch Society to a trustee about a faculty member's lecture on the need for a new ecological world order can produce a request by a board member for a faculty member to be reprimanded, as recently happened, something is amiss.

Apparent distrust among some trustees has led to attempts to further control Church employees. The statement on symposia is one such action. And this spring, when BYU faculty received their 1992-93 contracts, they contained a new paragraph:

Brigham Young University is a private university. It has unique goals and aspirations that arise from the mission of its sponsoring institution, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. By accepting a contract of employment here, faculty members choose to accept, support and participate in the University's religiously oriented educational mission, to observe and support the behavior standards of the University, including the Honor Code and Dress and Grooming Standards, and to further the University's objectives by being role models for a life that combines the quest for intellectual rigor with the quest for spiritual values and personal character. Faculty who are members of BYU's sponsoring Church also accept the spiritual and temporal expectations of wholehearted Church membership.

There is nothing particularly obnoxious in the paragraph (except, perhaps, for the morally misleading dress and grooming standards), for most of us came to BYU precisely to "further the University's objectives." But the sudden, unannounced, and unexplained change in our contracts indicates that someone doesn't trust us and finds it necessary to remind us of the letter of the law. In the context of such newly exerted control, the document on academic freedom and competency reads like a legal document making it easier to fire unruly faculty. In all fairness, it may simply be that the current tensions and paranoias on campus cause it to be read this way, for there is much language in the document defending faculty rights to free expression.

SO much for my litany of complaint. Every university has its problems. I'm grateful ours don't include racially segregated and alcoholic fraternities or a provost whose vision of a university doesn't include a library-two of Vanderbilt's most pressing problems when I left there. But BYU's problems concern me deeply. I am also aware that I can't see all sides of any of these issues. Caveat lector.

Many unsavory things at BYU (sexist hiring practices, attempts to disallow certain non-traditional viewpoints, harassment and backstabbing in the name of orthodoxy) involve individuals and departments within the university who inflict wounds on themselves and others despite concerted actions and policies of the administration and board of trustees. I say despite, and I have mentioned just how good Church support of BYU is, but I also want to say
because of. Our collective stupidities aren’t happening in a vacuum. While supporting education with economic gusto, some of our leaders say and do things that make education nearly impossible. There is a virulent strain of anti-intellectualism in the Church. This is nothing new. Joseph Fielding Smith, for example, wrote in his journal in late December 1938: “The more I see of educated men, I mean those who are trained in the doctrines and philosophies of men now taught in the world, the less regard I have for them. Modern theories which are so popular today just do not harmonize with the gospel as revealed to the prophets.”

In my view, the basic and most destructive mode of this anti-intellectualism is to distinguish between faith and reason, setting the one against the other and the one above the other. And its purveyors are, among others, members of BYU’s board of trustees. I don’t think they mean to be anti-intellectual, often in their writings and talks they indicate they not only support thought and education, but they link them integrally to faith. These are, in fact, our spiritual leaders; and as an academic vulnerable to the pride they warn against I am thankful for their reminders that, in the end, I am not as smart as I think I am. The anti-intellectualism I am talking about, however, is the message heard and used by people at BYU and elsewhere who disdain the intellect and suppose they can live by what they think is faith.

I will give examples of this anti-intellectualism from several recent statements by current members of our board of trustees. These are men I admire immensely, each of whom has moved me spiritually sometime in my life; I would not now be at BYU or in the Church if I had not felt the spirit in their words. What follows will be seen by some as “contradicting or opposing, rather than analyzing or discussing, fundamental Church doctrine or policy” or “deliberately attacking or deriding the Church or its general leaders”--to quote the document on academic freedom. I wish that the readers who see it that way would recognize the damage to our leaders, damage to the Church, and damage to our own souls caused by assumptions of infallibility and by quashing attempts at discussion.

Elder Dallin Oaks quotes President Harold B. Lee at the beginning of his discussion of religion and academia in his book, The Lord’s Way: “The educational system of the Church has been established to the end that all pure knowledge must be gained by our people, handed down to our posterity, and given to all men. We charge our teachers to give constant stimulation to budding young scientists and scholars in all fields and to urge them to push further and further into the realms of the unknown.”

This was the experience I had as a student at BYU. I felt I was “urged to push further and further” into science and philosophy of every kind, fearlessly, certain that I would never face an unbridgeable dilemma. That happened because my mentors were simultaneously scholars and faithful Mormons. Today’s students have similar experiences, I think, with a new generation of faithful scholars.

But after quoting Harold B. Lee the chapter continues with what I see as its main topic: “Unfortunately, some of the practitioners of study and reason are contemptuous of or hostile toward religion and revelation.” Although the chapter returns several times to the argument that “the view of religion ... includes the methods of reason and the truths determined by them” and although there is a section on how revelation needs reason, the chapter emphasizes the negative. It warns that while there may be “nothing wrong” with reasoning about the principles of the gospel in journals and symposia, there is nothing especially right about that either. It argues that while religion does not reject reason, “spiritual verities can be proven only by spiritual means . . . we comprehend secular truths predominantly by study and reason and spiritual truths finally only by revelation.” This text is an attempt to produce a balanced discussion of reason and revelation; but splitting the two so drastically, and asserting the primacy of one over the other while spending almost half the chapter warning against reason and professors and universities, has the net effect of fostering anti-intellectualism.
Along with the people in my ward who pick up on this kind of negative portrayal and justify their own lack of intellectual curiosity, some professors at BYU find it comforting to assert "us (spiritual giants) v. them (academic pygmies)." Neil Flinders, for example, uses Elder Neal Maxwell's division between the "tongue" of secular language and the "mother tongue of faith" to lament that "academic practice at BYU is clearly dominated by contemporary academic norms"9 and to ask why we don't "see the secular domain as foreign to the spiritual domain."10 BYU Provost Bruce Hafen's distinction between the passports Mormon academics have earned to Athens and their citizenship that must remain in Jerusalem11 unwittingly feeds the same unproductive fires.12 And when Elder Maxwell asserted at the 1992 BYU Education Week that a few modern individuals seem to favor a life of the mind over a life of devotion, that "exciting exploration is preferred by them to plodding implementation," anti-intellectual dogmatists nodded nowingly."13

Two influential talks in the last decade by Elder Boyd Packer, another board member, have likewise served to divide the spirit and the mind and to denigrate reason while praising it. One talk mentions blending, wedding, and mixing the spirit and mind: "The fusion of reason and revelation will produce men and woman of imperishable worth.... The combining of reason and revelation is the test of mortal life!"14 Elder Packer describes here some of my most meaningful experiences. But the speech leaves these thoughts behind and identifies the following as its crux: "Now listen carefully! It is crucial that you understand what I tell you now. There is danger! Church-sponsored universities are an endangered species-nearly extinct now." The talk quotes a passage from the recent debate on the secularization of church-sponsored colleges that asserts that "the schools that lost, or are losing, their sense of religious purpose, sincerely sought nothing more than a greater measure of 'excellence.' . . . The language of academic excellence is powerfully seductive."15 The talk further asserts that BYU can only be kept "in faith with the founders" if the prerogatives of this unique board of trustees are neither diluted nor ignored.... Theirs, and theirs alone, is the right to establish policies and set standards under which administrators, faculties, and students are to function-standards of both conduct and of excellence. . . . History confirms that the university environment always favors reason, and the workings of the spirit are made to feel uncomfortable. I know of no examples to the contrary.

Why the defensiveness? Why the distrust? Why the need to assert exclusive control? Why the absolute division between the faithful board of trustees and the unfaithful university-the very university that is and can be an "example to the contrary"?16

I find a clue in attitudes expressed in an earlier talk by Elder Packer. "It is an easy thing," he states, "for a man with extensive academic training to measure the Church using the principles he has been taught in his professional training as his standard. In my mind it ought to be the other way around. A member of the Church ought always, particularly if he is pursuing extensive academic studies, to judge the professions of man against the revealed word of the Lord."17 And why shouldn't academics "measure the Church using academic principles"? Because, the talk asserts, academics will vitiate religion and true religious scholarship whenever possible. The talk gives as an example a friend, a CES employee who went East to do a doctorate in counseling and guidance. He chose as his dissertation topic, "The Ward Bishop as Counselor." He was forced by his professors to delete references to power of discernment and revelation. If he would do so, he was promised, he would become "an authority in the field, hi dissertation would be published and his reputation established." In the end he both compromised and didn't compromise, and the dissertation became neither the inspired document it might have nor the academic success promised by his professors. The writer, the talk reports, returned to the modest income and to the relative obscurity of the CE System. "He summed up his experience this way: 'The mantle is far, far greater than the intellect.' "

The audience was to conclude from this that professors don't understand things of the spirit, that academics are forced to produce spiritually sterile work, and that truly wise men
and women will retreat from academia. The example was so foreign to my experience that I went looking for the dissertation mentioned in the talk. It turned out to be typical of so many dissertations written for weak departments. "The purpose of this study," the author wrote, "is to measure the counseling attitudes of bishops and seminary instructors of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and to compare their counseling attitudes with various measures of activity in their wards and class rooms." The startling conclusions were that "There is a relationship between counseling attitudes of bishops and their effectiveness as bishops.... Also the amount of training received in counseling is positively related to counseling attitudes."18

This example is bogus. The dissertation is clearly a weak piece of work done for a weak department. To use it as the key example in a talk pitting academia against spirituality is unfair. Contrast the anti-intellectual spirit of that example with this passage from Joseph Smith's letter to Isaac Galland, 22 March 1839: "the first and fundamental principle of our holy religion is, that we believe that we have a right to embrace all, and every item of truth, without limitation or without being circumscribed or prohibited by the creeds or superstitious notions of men, or by the dominations of one another, when that truth is clearly demonstrated to our minds, and we have the highest degree of evidence of the same."19

Academia, at its worst, is indeed sterile, mind-numbing, and spiritually destructive. So is religion at its worst. We don't choose to be academics or practitioners of a faith because of how bad they can be, but rather because of the power they give us to live good and productive lives.

My recurring question is why, with our extraordinary theological background in which all truth is meant to be circumscribed into one great whole, we insist on fearfully dividing instead of fearlessly circumscribing? Why the weak anecdotes about academic misfits instead of the academic and spiritual triumphs like Steven Epperson's Mormon History Association prize-winning book on Mormons and Jews in the nineteenth century?20 Epperson wrote his dissertation at Temple University in Philadelphia. His non-Mormon dissertation committee was thrilled by the project and supported him while learning from his religious commitment. Or why not the example of Susan Taber's oral history of her Delaware ward, a study academic readers of the University of Illinois Press found stimulating and academically challenging?21 Why not choose, as an example of scholarship growing out of faith, Richard Bushman's fine history of Joseph Smith's early years that helped him move into a distinguished chair at Columbia University?22 Or Hugh Nibley's massive set of writings on Church-related subjects?23 Or Paul Cox's brilliant work in Pacific rain forests?24 Or Lamond Tullis's Latin-America studies?25 Or Royal Skousen's work on Book of Mormon manuscripts?26 Or Fred Geddicks's book on religion and law?27 Or Alan Bergin's psychology?28 Or Wilford Griggs's Egyptian archeology?29 Or Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's Pulitzer Prize work in women's history?30 In these "Mormon scholars" work and lives there is no whining supposition that it's us vs. them, that if the so-called secular academic world were just spiritually minded they would award us all Guggenheim fellowships and Nobel prizes. (Note that although Ulrich's women, Cox's rain forests, and some of the other subjects are not Mormon, the work and conclusions fit squarely into Joseph Smith's anti-sectarian vision of the truths we seek.)

But the trustees whose texts I have described give primarily negative examples and warn mainly of the seductive power of reason over faith. Again I ask, why do they and so many others defend faith over reason in what our theology teaches is a false dichotomy? Let me give several examples to argue that there should be no split between the two.

Hugh Nibley, in his now classic "Zeal Without Knowledge," quotes Joseph Smith: "The things of God are of deep import and time and experience, and careful and ponderous and solemn thoughts can only find them out. Thy mind, O man! if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation, must stretch as high as the utmost heavens." Nibley's interpretation: "No shortcuts or easy lessons here! Note well that the Prophet makes no distinction between things of the spirit and things of the intellect."31
Many "Mormon scholars" will tell you that the process of study and inspiration is the same whether the subject is physics, art history, a talk for ward conference, psychology, or choosing counselors for a Relief Society presidency BYU professor. A. LeGrand Richards, for instance, writes that "In my own life, I can't draw a specific line between those experiences which have been 'religious' and those which have been 'secular'.'

When we distinguish between religious experience and intellectual experience (or religious experience and mechanical experience, for that matter), we disregard the verses in the Doctrine and Covenants that describe the light of Christ: "And the light which shineth, which giveth you light, is through him who enlighteneth your eyes, which is the same light that quickeneth your understandings; Which light proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space. The light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed, even the power of God who sitteth upon his throne, who is in the bosom of eternity, who is in the midst of all things" (D&C 88:11-13). All experience of life and light, as I interpret this, is experience of God.

The following episodes from The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith, made accessible by Dean Jessee's meticulous scholarly work, have had a profound effect on how I view faith and reason. Just one month before receiving the above revelation Joseph bought a book in which to record his thoughts. On the flyleaf he wrote his name and then the phrase: "Record Book Baught for to note all the minute circumstances that comes under my observation." These are the misspelled and intensely meant words of a man of great capacity hungry for knowledge. The following years, between 1832 and 1836, were a time of intense "getting wisdom" of the broadest kind. Attending class daily in the "Elders School" with its lectures on medicine, grammar, Egyptian artifacts, and finally Hebrew, Joseph filled his diary with entries like the one on 3 November 1835 in which he links study and the temple endowment: "I then went to assist in organizing the Elders School called to order and I made some remarks upon the object of this School, and the great necessity there is of our rightly improving our time and reigning up our minds to a sense of the great object that lies before us, viz, that glorious endowment that God has in store for the faithful." A few months later Joseph made the following entry:

Wednesday the 17th [February 1836] attend[ed] the school and read and translated with my class as usual, and my soul delights in reading the word of the Lord in the original, and I am determined to pursue the study of languages until I shall become master of them, if I am permitted to live long enough, at any rate so long as I do live I am determined to make this my object, and with the blessing of God I shall succeed to my satisfaction,-this evening Elder Coe called to make some arrangements about the Egyptian records and the mummies.

One month later (27 March) Joseph dedicated the Kirtland Temple. His dedicatory prayer is full of his enthusiasm for learning, and he quotes from the aforementioned revelation that will become section 88. The temple will be a place where "the Son of Man might have a place to manifest himself to his people." And what will allow that to happen?"Seek learning; even by study, and also by faith. Organize yourselves; prepare every needful thing, and establish a house, even a house of prayer, a house [of] fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God." The extraordinary outpourings of knowledge through the endowment are only possible in minds prepared through intense study and prayer.

The temple, as we use it today, is no longer a place where we can receive instruction in Hebrew grammar or the latest medical discoveries-although it has often been the locus where a scholar's mind is set free to make discoveries, like John Widtsoe's in organic chemistry or my bishop's in civil engineering. But the temple's shift in function need not lessen the marriage of religion and thought. With this shift, Church universities become, in the best and broadest sense, houses of learning. The fact that meetings of student wards are
held in science lecture halls and English classrooms connects religion and thought physically and symbolically in ways our students cannot misunderstand.

Finally, President Joseph F Smith says it as well as anyone has: "With God all things are spiritual. There is nothing temporal with him at all, and there ought to be no distinction with us in regard to these matters. Our earthly or temporal existence is merely a continuance of that which is spiritual."37

MY reuniting of reason and faith is not simply a theological game. Separating the two has grave consequences.

In the pages of the journal First Things there has been a recent flurry of articles about the secularization of American universities. Our university administration, the authors of the new document on academic freedom, and members of our board of trustees have quoted from these at some length. One supposition of several of the articles is that "the real danger comes from a much larger group of persons who believe that [church universities] can strive for ever-higher standards of academic excellence-and use the same criteria of excellence by which the best secular universities in the land are judged to be excellent."38 This makes no sense to me. What is wrong with "secular" standards of academic excellence? Where are the conflicts between academic excellence and the Mormon theology I have just outlined? The author of the article supposes that there is a fundamental difference and thus admits the reason/faith distinction that is at the root of all this evil. Imagine Joseph Smith saying that "If there is anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy (as long as academics don't think it is excellent) we seek after these things."

Many American colleges founded by religious groups have become secular, and our board and administration are worried that we might follow a similar path. Alan Keele, former associate dean of General Education and Honors, argues that the analogy is wrong-headed:

Joseph Smith and Brigham Young would, I fear, roll over in their respective graves at the very suggestion that the founding of a school in Zion might be comparable in any way to the founding of what they would have called 'sectarian' colleges. The LDS theological imperative for learning ... with its grand vision of the compatibility of all truth, is so unlike the typical 'sectarian' view that it has in fact become a focal point of anti-Mormon rhetoric down to our own time.39

Fears that BYU will become secular should be balanced by fears that it will become sectarian like Liberty Baptist or Bob Jones University-and the document on academic freedom should include this in its language.

One First Things article on the subject is especially helpful to us in our situation. In "The Decline and Fall of the Christian College,"40 James Burtchael first reviews the history of Vanderbilt University. Vanderbilt was founded in 1875 by the Methodist church, financed initially by Cornelius Vanderbilt. A Methodist bishop, Holland McTyeire, led the university until 1889. During the next twenty-five years Vanderbilt moved away from the Methodist church, becoming fully independent in 1914. Burtchael identifies several related causes for the break. Here are the ones that strike me as most relevant to our situation:

1. "There was a period of great intellectual turbulence, when fresh findings and methods and disciplines raised fearful philosophical challenges to theology. Spokesmen for the church's concerns, by a compound of incapacity and animosity, exacerbated the apparent hostility between the church and rigorous scholarship." I have described moments in our own recent BYU history when these conditions were met precisely.

2. "There was a transfer of primary loyalty from the church to the 'academic guild,' especially on the part of the faculty" Why? Burtchael asks. Because the "angry General
Conference ... had narrowed its view of what it meant to be Methodist to things like a religious test for all faculty and disciplinary control over students. Absent any larger vision of Christian education, this program was unrelievedly negative, and assured the educational reformers that the church had no stomach for ambitious scholarship. I have been trying to show that while not unrelievedly so, much of our current vision of what it means to be Mormon at a Mormon university is negative and that we fear ambitious scholarship.

3. "There was a progressive devolution of church-identifiers: first from Methodist to generically Christian, then to generically religious, then to flatly secular." Why? Burtchael's answer is because "an effective bond to the Methodist Church instinctively evoked references to bigotry, exclusion, narrowness, sectarianism, and selfishness." There is no acknowledgment of "any intrinsic benefit for the mind in Methodism . . . and no exploration of the [more general Christian] faith which would suggest that it was illuminative of the mind."

We are similarly at risk here—the word "Mormon" can and does evoke bigotry, exclusion, narrowness, and sectarianism. In John Gardner's 1982 novel Mickelsson's Ghosts, for example, Mormons are described as a "sea of drab faces, dutiful, bent-backed, hurrying obediently, meekly across an endless murky plain . . . timidly smiling beasts, imaginationless . . . family people, unusually successful in business and agriculture, non-drinkers, non-smokers . . . no real fault but dullness." Or in Tony Kushner's 1992 play, Angels in America, a Mormon woman describes Salt Lake City as a hard place, "baked dry. Abundant energy; not much intelligence. That's a combination that can wear a body out." Edward Abbey sees us similarly in Desert Solitaire, as does John Le Carr in The Russia House. Burtchael's point is that when a church begins to harp on the faith/reason distinction, denigrating its supposed academic enemy, those who know the value of reason will abandon ship. Although our theology radically affirms intelligence as the glory of God, our actual practice makes us imaginationless and intellectually dull. Non-Mormon writers see this, and so do increasing numbers of faithful Church members.

4. Most of Vanderbilt's second-generation faculty were loyal to the church as well as being academics, Burtchael writes, yet this was the group that laid the groundwork for the later, complete secularization of the university. This is, I think, the present situation at BYU. Most of the faculty are loyal to the Church as well as being academics. There are some, of course, who aren't loyal to the Church and there are some who aren't academics. But if we and our board of trustees continue to proceed from a foundation of fear, we too will create either a sectarian or a secular university.

IF we aggressively asserted the connections between reason and faith on Joseph Smith's (and Brigham Young's and John Taylor's and Joseph F. Smith's) model, sectarianism and secularization would be rendered impotent. In 1972 as president of BYU, Dallin Oaks argued similarly in a discussion of BYU's connection with Jim Jensen's work with dinosaurs: "Jensen points out . . . that the bones are there and cannot really be ignored by a major university that is almost literally sitting on top of them." Oaks suggested that the board "give controlled but expanding support to research in Rocky Mountain paleontology and pursue the private funding of a museum to exhibit findings. [In so doing] . . . we demonstrate that the church has nothing to fear from any legitimate research; in fact, the church university fosters it."

What keeps us from fulfilling this vision? Distrust, I think, and fear. Again I quote then President Oaks: "While church authorities know we have testimonies, they question our judgment and sensitivity... We must not have anything done at BYU or said publicly by BYU teachers and administrators that can be misinterpreted. . . . It doesn't matter that it couldn't reasonably be so used, or that it was distorted. We must not give occasion for retaliation or give ammunition to our enemies." Bruce Hafen reiterated this advice to walk carefully in his most recent address to BYU faculty and staff: "If a few among us create enough reason for doubt about the rest of us, that can erode our support among Church members and Church leaders enough to mortally wound our ability to pursue freely the dream of a great university.
in Zion." As I read these statements, both of these university leaders imply that some powerful members of our board of trustees do not understand how generally faithful the BYU faculty is, nor do they share our "dream of a great university in Zion."47

This is not a climate in which faithful scholarship will flourish. Realistically, pragmatically, President Oaks and Provost Hafen are surely right. But idealistically, divinely inspired leaders should not let a few differences between them and BYU faculty get in the way of a century-long effort to build a Mormon university. We have in our recent history many examples of the kind of vision that will make us whole. Hugh B. Brown's 1969 talk at BYU, for example, developed a kind of aggressive prointellectualism: "Preserve, then, the freedom of your mind in education and in religion, and be unafraid to express your thoughts and to insist upon your right to examine every proposition. We are not so much concerned with whether your thoughts are orthodox or heterodox as we are that you shall have thoughts."48

Elder Marlin Jensen has quoted the following inspiring passage from a letter by J. Golden Kimball, a statement that sums up my view of BYU: "Elder Maeser visited Bear Lake Stake in the interest of the Brigham Young Academy, and filled an appointment at Meadowville, Rich County, Utah, in 1881. The meeting was held in a log school house. Language cannot explain the impression made. The spirit and personality of the man burned into my soul and awakened me to a realizing sense of what life and religion mean-I drank in his words, as I was an hungered. I repented in sack cloth and ashes-no power could prevent me from attending Brigham Young Academy. My brother, Elias, and I together with our mother went to Provo at great cost and sacrifice, and all who know us can look back to 1881 and ascertain just 'what Dr. Maeser did for me.'"49

In addition to the testimony of the powerful effects of an educator and an education, two things stand out in this passage: the fact that Karl Maeser is referred to both as Elder and Dr., and Kimball's phrase combining life and religion-"he awakened me to a realizing sense of what life and religion mean." Life and religion are one and the same. We don't need two universities at BYU.

ADDENDUM

IN what may prove to be a landmark BYU devotional address, President Gordon B. Hinckley spoke to faculty and students on 13 October 1992 about his expansive vision of the university Statements like the following take the edge off some of the tensions described above:

I am confident that never in the history of this institution has there been a faculty better qualified professionally nor one more loyal and dedicated to the standards of its sponsoring institution.

This institution ... is a continuing experiment on a great premise, that a large and complex university can be first-class academically while nurturing an environment of faith in God.

"Trust is what makes an army work, and trust comes from the top down." (Gene Smith, published in condensed form by Reader's Digest Condensed Books, Vol. IV, page 299.)

May God bless you my beloved associates, both young and old, in this great undertaking of teaching and learning, of trust and accountability.

I am honored and grateful to be called President Hinckley's associate: he inspires me to help build this university for the greater glory of God.

NOTES

2. No other department on campus even approaches these percentages of hiring faculty with BYU degrees.


8. Oaks, 64.


10. Flinders, 8.


13. Neal A. Maxwell. (Not in print that I know of.) This statement was repeated in Elder Maxwell's 1992 October general conference talk.


18. "Counseling Attitudes of Bishops and Seminary Instructors of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," (Boston: Boston University School of Education, 1961)


31. Hugh Nibley, "Zeal Without Knowledge," Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1978), 261-78,

32. A. LeGrand Richards, "God or Mammon: Not Both/And, But Either/Or" in Laying the Foundations, 95.

33. Smith, Personal Writings, 15.

34. Smith, Personal Writings, 72.

35. Smith, Personal Writings, 161.

36. Smith, Personal Writings, 176.


39. Alan Keele, personal memo.

45. Bergera and Priddis, 163.
46. Bergera and Priddis, 223.
48. Bergera and Priddis, 71.