



The Doe Library at the University of California, Berkeley, is built in the Neoclassical Revival style. Courtesy University of California, Berkeley.

Beehive and Portico

John S. Tanner

In the introduction to these conference proceedings, Gerrit Gong recalls with fondness his experiences at his second alma mater, Oxford. I have similar fondness for my second alma mater, UC Berkeley. I spent most of my time there in two grand buildings at the center of campus, Wheeler Hall and the Doe Library. One does not find at Berkeley Oxford's lovely dreaming gothic spires or its enclosed colleges, each with its own chapel, or students riding bikes to exams in academic robes. All these bespeak the monastic origins of Oxford and remind us that the university grew out of the medieval church. The campus architecture at Berkeley points to another origin of the university. It is built in the Neoclassical Revival style with an architectural vocabulary intended to recall the origins of the academy in Athens. Indeed, the center of campus, which includes a Greek theater, was deliberately conceived to convey the message that Berkeley is the Athens of the West.

I spent my days haunting the halls of Berkeley's Greek-inspired temples of learning. I particularly loved to study in the magnificent Reading Room of the Doe Library, whose vast, vaulted, light-filled space functions as a sort of cathedral where acolytes in pursuit of wisdom sit in quiet concentration. I delighted in the ornately fretted ceiling of the Reference Room, engraved with the names of worthies of science, literature, and art—like a pantheon to the gods of secular learning.

Only one building of Brigham Young University, my undergraduate alma mater, resembles the great edifices of UC Berkeley. This is the Maeser Building, which was also built in the Neoclassical Revival style and during exactly the same decade as its counterparts at UC Berkeley. The Maeser Building was also originally planned as part of a neoclassical core

of campus. It was to anchor a classical quad at the entrance to the university as one approached BYU from town. Its vocabulary was intended to recall values associated with classical civilization, such as order, harmony, wisdom, culture, learning, authority, and tradition. It was a little Greek temple on what was known as “Temple Hill,” where BYU’s founders hoped the Church would someday erect an LDS temple to complement what they regularly referred to as “temples of learning” on campus.

As a freshman, I lived in the shadow of the Maeser Building in a house on the brow of “Temple Hill.” Often I studied on its porch and on its grounds. Later, as a faculty member, I taught Honors Western Civilization courses in the Maeser, discussing the very values and traditions that BYU’s little Greek temple was meant to invoke.

The Maeser Building, however, includes one feature utterly unlike anything one can find in the neoclassical architecture of UC Berkeley. Above the Doric columns of the portico, capping the original front porch of campus, sits a carved stone beehive. This was intended to be a prominent feature of the building as one approached upper campus from the west, the way BYU was originally laid out. A symbol of Deseret, it served as a visible reminder of BYU’s pioneer past and LDS identity.

This juxtaposition of a beehive atop a classical entablature serves as a visual reminder of BYU’s dual heritage from Athens and Jerusalem. It thus forms a fitting image for a symposium about inquiry, scholarship, and learning and teaching in religiously affiliated colleges and universities. The neoclassical design reminds us that BYU belongs within a venerable academic tradition stretching back to antiquity. We have inherited from ancient Athens and medieval Europe the very idea of a university just as we have inherited the elements comprising the Maeser Building’s neoclassical design. Likewise, the beehive reminds us that BYU also belongs within a specifically LDS tradition. We are the beneficiaries of founders who, out of their poverty and through their industry, established a house of learning in the desert at the behest of prophets and inspired by belief that God expects members of the Church to seek learning “by study and also by faith,” for “the glory of God is intelligence.”

As BYU entered its second century, Spencer W. Kimball, then President of the Church, reminded the faculty at BYU that they “have a double heritage which they must pass along: the secular knowledge that history has washed to the feet of mankind with the new knowledge brought by scholarly research—but also the vital and revealed truths that have been sent to us from heaven.” It is our duty, President Kimball continued, to become fully “bilingual,” speaking with “authority and excellence” the language of scholarship while becoming deeply “literate in the language of



The Karl G. Maeser Building, on the brow of “Temple Hill,” with its Doric columns and carved stone beehive, symbolizes BYU’s dual heritage.

spiritual things.”¹ For these reasons, BYU takes seriously both the beehive and the portico.

Some doubt that religious universities can truly integrate their dual heritage. These doubts are not new. Long ago, Tertullian famously quipped, “What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church?”² This posture can result in intellectual and spiritual fragmentation between the sacred and secular, reason and revelation—with zealots on either side of the divide, each inclined to dismiss the claims to knowledge by the other. For many, if not most, of those associated with religiously affiliated colleges and universities, including almost all of us who are participating in this symposium, such separation between Athens and Jerusalem would constitute a limitation and loss. For us, a religiously affiliated university like BYU does not limit inquiry but enables it, precisely because it opens intellectual and cultural commerce between Jerusalem and Athens. The overarching theme of these conference proceedings has been integration—its possibilities and promise, as well as its perplexities and pitfalls. This theme is present from Dr. Thomas Hibbs’s opening presentation to the concluding remarks by Presidents Samuelson and Eyring. Overwhelmingly, the participants recognize something precious and powerfully appealing about being able to connect professional preoccupations with ultimate concerns, which Paul Tillich called faith³—connecting discipline with discipleship.

There is a deep satisfaction—indeed wholeness—for disciple scholars and students in being able to integrate domains in which they feel so passionately and fully invested. For we are “academic anables,” to use Dr. Bonnie Brinton’s memorable metaphor; convinced of what Professor Hibbs calls “the unity of truth”; capable of living with apparent contradiction in the confidence that God “does not require us to believe anything that is not true,” as President Samuelson says, paraphrasing President Eyring’s father; comfortable pursuing truth by reason and revelation in a Greek temple crowned by a beehive.

BYU, alas, did not continue to build in the Neoclassical Revival style. Few now study and teach in the Maeser Building on the far end of campus. But in a deeper sense, we all live in its extended shadow. The tradition of the beehive and portico continues in our practices. This is evident every week in the way the campus transforms classrooms into chapels and back again. This transformation never fails to move me. I recall as a student blessing the sacrament in the same classroom in which I studied geology. There, where I learned about dinosaurs and the age of the earth, I also made covenants with the God of Creation. Likewise, I was bishop of a ward that met in a room with a periodic table on the wall and in which the sacrament bread was laid out on a counter next to Bunsen burners. On Sundays, students assembled in dresses and ties in rooms where they wore Levi’s on weekdays; they laid scriptures on desks where they placed their textbooks for class. Such is the legacy of a beehive atop a portico.

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1. Spencer W. Kimball, “Second-Century Address,” *BYU Studies* 16, no. 4 (1976): 446.

2. Tertullian, *The Prescription against Heretics*, trans. Peter Holmes, available online at http://www.tertullian.org/fathers2/ANF-03/anfo3-24.htm#LOC_P3709_1244728 (accessed June 15, 2010). Quotation in chapter 7.

3. Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 1.

