

The Idea of a Mormon University

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The word *university* originally meant a community; and one may expect of a community that its members are bound to one another in bonds of affection and mutual aid. The word is reminiscent of the medieval guilds. It is not pretentious: it gives the impression that the members of the *university* pursue a craft rather than something more highfalutin'; and indeed culture grows from learning skills; it does not follow from the super-imposition of ideas. For example, in order to enter the world of musical culture—beyond self-indulgent day-dreaming or orgiastic dancing—we need to learn to read music, to follow musical structure, and to play at least one instrument: these are skills that make us exact, and open up something beyond.

There is another sense of *university*: the cosmos. Let us keep in the back of our minds for the *university* two ideas to which I shall recur at the end: *fellow-feeling* and *totality*.

All other universities than Brigham Young University are products of an alien religion or an apostate church, or are imitations of such products. It is true that one root, perhaps the most important one, is in the Athenian Academy (the word “academy” was the name of a garden, a *hortus conclusus*, a ‘paradise,’ a place shut off from the rest of the world where one might delight in leisured study and above all in discussion with other people). The Muslims took over the tradition of learning from the Greeks and developed in Spain, in the Middle East, and in the Indian sub-continent ‘paradise’ gardens of knowledge like the western university; no wonder, for the first European universities grew in part from the impulse of the Arab example.

The universities in Europe rose (though sometimes rebelliously) under the tutelage of the Roman Catholic Church. They were characterized by the heresy of celibacy. “Celibacy” was the norm of the universities of the Middle Ages. It was, of course, pseudo-celibacy—it did not connote purity. But the fact that the university was founded and carried on as a celibate group has brought about certain phenomena in the modern university which are due directly to that heresy: the inbreeding of the university, the conceit and egocentricity of university faculty throughout the world (to which the female relatives of university professors can testify), and the preference for male over female company. Academics do not normally mature: it is more difficult to grow up when you are clever. The clever man

is all-important to himself. He can get away from his family into research or conviviality. So much of politics, of writing, or scholarship is and has been carried on in this way where additional hiding away comes under the influence of drugs—nicotine, alcohol, and caffeine.

Let us pass quickly by Newman's idea of a university, to which we need not pay much attention. It is easier to write superficially good prose about the obvious; more difficult to write good prose about things which are genuinely new. Newman's idea of a university is ultimately the idea of producing gentlemen; and the idea of the gentleman in the nineteenth century, at least in England, as opposed to the chivalrous idea, was to give young men the opportunity to learn how to control others without seeming to do so, and certainly without the spiritual right to do so.

I would also refer to Abraham Flexner's famous book published in 1930, *Universities American, British, and German*, a seminal book because it analyzes the idea of the heretical university at its best. What lies at the back of Flexner is not what he sees in British and American, but what he saw in German universities; and what the U.S.A. saw in Germany, because, of course, the German university has had a considerable influence on American universities. The important points about the German university have been the supremacy of the professor coupled with the supremacy of the idea of research. It was the institution of a leisured *bourgeois* society, and it produced the prime of the idols which will be dealt with below: *the idol of the study*.

The university ideally conceived in the nineteenth century, and as still pursued in some British universities, is freedom from the social environment: the ability to contract out of the community at large which is represented by the college and the campus, the ivory tower, the *hortus conclusus*, the garden. The BYU campus goes back to Plato's garden and the Muslim oasis of learning. But this freedom is *from* the community, not freedom to serve the community, not freedom in the community. On the other hand, there is the Mormon tradition: it is supremely one of work, work for the Lord. The power to work is the second-greatest of virtues (caring is the greatest, and work should spring from caring); and work will be dominant, even more so than here, in the Celestial Kingdom. One of the infirmities of the Terrestrial and Telesial Kingdoms will be the lack of work (the inhabitants will not want it and will not even be bored—though spiritually limited—for lack of it).

I need hardly remind you of two major points made by Brigham Young with which we are all familiar. One is that all truth is part of the gospel, the other that we must teach everything with testimony. These are our heritage from Brigham Young, a generous-minded man. Now subjects at a university may support, widen, give evidence of testimony; they may

be taught as testimony: testimony comes into them all. Testimony therefore is not to be shrouded in particular institutions on the campus; it goes everywhere and permeates everything. It has as much to do with physics as with English: I think of Nils Bohr, that Danish physicist Nobel-Prize winner who is reported to have said that he owed his discoveries more than anything else to the reading of Shakespeare. That may seem odd unless we have read that apparently frivolous book called *The Double Helix* about the discovery of the form of a genetic molecule by a young American in Cambridge: he tells exactly what happened during the days when he progressed towards that discovery. It is worth reading to realize that great discoveries in science like great writing come ultimately from—call it what you like—intuition; I would call it inspiration. The wind apparently ‘bloweth where it listeth’; but can anything worth-while happen on any university campus with which the Holy Ghost is not involved?

However, Brigham Young University is a Mormon University in an American cultural setting, and Mormons have not had the same attitude towards the American cultural setting after 1890 as they had before 1890. When I speak of the American cultural setting, moreover, I am thinking of the United States as the leader of all Western society, and therefore, that which is characteristic in Western society nowadays has for the most part come from or been spread wide by the United States. This country is now predominantly responsible for Western culture generally, for Western civilization. It is best exemplified here in its vices and in its virtues.

Let me remind you of a phrase that a BYU man is said to have used of the pomp of Commencement: “Clothed in the robes of the false priesthood.” These caps and gowns are the rags and relics of the apostate church. What are they doing on Mormon backs and heads? They are symbols of compromise: at their best they are indications that we have arrived and want the world to see that we are like everybody else. Now we should not want the world to see that we are like everybody else in any other respect than that we are brothers in Christ; because it is back to Christ that we wish to bring them, and it is very much more difficult to bring a man back to Christ if you and he both wear caps and gowns: they convey the wrong sense of self-importance.

The obvious object of BYU is to serve the Church; for, whether we have grown up in it or are converts to it, if we believe in the Church, we believe that it is the most important organization on this earth, the instrument of God’s will; that Christ is its head; and, therefore, that anything that the Church sets up must be finally and ultimately to serve the Church. This means that BYU serves the Church as a servant in that full sense in which “servant” is used in the New Testament: in the sense of “ministers” we are the servants of the Church.

In considering how to serve the Church on campus, many of us think that BYU ought to be like other universities for this, that, and the other reason; and yet at the same time the same people want BYU to be different and better, which indeed it should be. Ends and means come in here. It is no good pursuing means that will change or even obliterate the end. To use divine means to any other than divine ends and to use means that will change your divine end to something else is to be Satanic. When we wear those robes of the false priesthood we are more tempted to do Satan's work. Ends and means need sorting out.

I ask this fundamental question—it is the main question that I have to ask, because it is the one that subsumes all the other questions in this context: Why do we have to be like other American universities? Why do we have to be like any other Western university at all, since these are ultimately heretical phenomena? All other universities in the world except this one are in decline. They are in moral decline and therefore they are also in intellectual decline; for the one will follow from the other, and follow fast, as it is already doing. I notice in the universities I know that as members of the staff become more cynical, agnostic, atheistic, so are they inclined to earn more money, to wish to become TV personalities or to act as international consultants instead of paying more attention to their own students. They explain that they are not well enough paid and therefore have to earn money on the side. The idea of the *universitas* of fellow-feeling, the idea of the bond between teacher and taught shrinks, because where the staff is cynical and self-centered, the students rapidly become so too. Some colleagues at BYU believe at the bottom of their souls that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence; I have spent most of my life in the grass on the other side of the fence; it is plastic, that is why it holds its color so well and needs no watering.

I now come to four images which have been imported from the surrounding culture into BYU and which I think are idols. The first I have already mentioned *the idol of the study*, the most rooted idol of them all; second, *the idol of the grade*; third, *the idol of the Hammond organ*; and fourth, *the idol of the cougar*. They represent different things which are all heretical and all opposed to what we are trying to do in this university.

First of all, the study, the isolation, the sense of relief in sitting by yourself in a comfortable chair at a large desk, or in reinvolving yourself with experimental apparatus. What is the research for? What does learning for its own sake mean? All learning at BYU should be for God's sake, not for its own sake. Directly speaking of learning for its own sake, we set up learning as an idol independent of God. Here are some examples. (I have to give examples from what I know best. If I gave examples from what I know less, I should be inaccurate, so those from whose areas the examples come will

remember there are equally good examples elsewhere.) Why do we study a language at BYU? The Church has missions in many of the countries whose languages we teach on campus. Why is there not a closer relationship between our language departments and the Language Training Mission (which seems to be developing better ways of teaching languages than the group Mim/Mem it was using a year or two ago)? Is the research that we carry out on campus in the language departments concerned with what our missionaries are doing in the relevant countries and with the conditions in those countries? The more we know about a country culturally, and about its language, the better able we are to teach that language, the better our mission effort should be; because, the better we prepare ourselves, the more the Holy Ghost will bless us. He will not make up for deserved failures, nor for our own failing, but he will help us when we do our best, and crown our successes. To what extent should “pure” research (so-called, because I regard from the Church’s point of view “pure” research as morally impure) be pursued at BYU when it is pursued elsewhere and we can make use of it? Is not the gospel one of application? Why study the humor of Rabelais when we could be doing something about the way in which French language and culture should be taught to our missionaries intended for France? And I give France as an example because in that country, of all countries, they will pay attention to how well our missionaries speak their language.

A sub-idol which derives from the study as a kind of extension of the study, is the department. (I am not talking specifically of BYU here, but about what happens in universities generally.) The department tends through its head and through its staff to elevate itself above the university because it chooses to idolize the subject. What is the subject? I would draw your attention to Professor Basil Bernstein¹ on this matter. There are subject-based curricula and learner-based curricula. Relevant questions are: What is the point of a major? Do too many people take majors? What is the point of general education or honors education at BYU? These last seem to be different kinds of things from departmental education. Some of us in Britain have seen that subject-based curricula are and cannot fail to be, conservative; whereas learner-based curricula are forward-looking because the initiation, the new thing, the discovery, usually comes not from the center of a conservative department, but from the peripheries and interstices of departments, from the interrelation of subjects. Subjects are formal divisions of learning. They have no more real existence than words, which are formal divisions of a sentence. We should be on the side of learner-based curricula, against subject-based curricula, because subject-based curricula lead, on the whole, to conservatism, to a situation in which we do not develop. They lead also, and they tend to lead at BYU, to the use

of the course as a means of providing information. The course should be there, the lecture given, not so much to provide information, as to exemplify method, develop skills, apply principles; to show how learning is organized, how it can stimulate through organization and lead through discussion to new organization. If courses are used just to pass on information—and I have heard estimates that no less than eighty percent of the courses on this campus are informational—then they are replacing something else which is better suited to do this: the library. Are we therefore at BYU spending too much money on teaching and not enough on library and study space? The more courses we run, the fewer books students read; partly because they do not have so much time, partly because they attend the courses to acquire in pre-digested form the pabulum that they should be finding for themselves in books—not simply one textbook but several, and not textbook only, but monographs. This applies even at the undergraduate, but much more so at the graduate stage. What is the function of the course if it is feeding pap as opposed to creating genuine discussion on matters about which the students have themselves read? What is the function of the book? The book has to be firmly defended nowadays. I heard that some people at Church College of Hawaii were saying, “Students don’t after all have to read books, they can look at things and they can take objective tests which will find out whether they have grasped the point. They don’t have to read books; anyway, they can’t read books.”

Why are lectures compulsory at BYU? They are not at Oxford and Cambridge. In my first year at Cambridge I went to every lecture I could to find out what they were like, in my second year I made a choice, and in my third year I went to hardly any; I had more important things to do: to study and to consult with my fellow-undergraduates, for one learns more from one’s peers than one does from faculty. One’s peers are younger and usually more lively-minded; and at least a proportion of them are more intelligent and enterprising, because they are going out into the world and are not merely going to remain at the university.

I discovered also at Cambridge that it is good not to study always by yourself, but to study with other students, to form student-groups, and share tasks.

Second, *the idol of the grade* can be regarded as a kind of Mosaic concept as opposed to a gospel concept. The grade is linked with the test attitude, the attitude which finds it easy to write behavioral objectives. The discipline of writing proper behavioral objectives is good; but the more important a process is, the more difficult it is to write a behavioral objective for it. I could readily write behavioral objectives for small, less important parts—e.g. scansion—of my current Shakespeare class; but I do not expect that any total result from that class could be *assessed* for twenty

years. I hope the class will have its real effect in terms of what its students do for the rest of their lives. For this kind of effect, testing, grading, behavioral objectives, the facile, use of the computer—all fall short. The trouble with the behavioral approach is that it leads to pharisaism. It is all very well to say that faith without works is dead—and of course it is—but the reverse is equally true: if the inside man is not right, then the outside action is not right; and behavioral objectives and grade-giving lead to pharisaism, humbug, hypocrisy, and waited sepulchres. The behavior may be correct, but the heart may be wrong or dead. Whatever some modern psychologists may say, we all have centers, because we all have eternal spirits.

What about the computer in this connection? The computer must be used by all in order to become a gospel as opposed to a Mosaic tool. It is dangerous in the hands of the Mosaists. If we humanists from laziness allow only the technologists and the scientists to handle the computer, then the computer will not become as subtle, as interesting, and as valuable as it should become. It follows: first, that humanists should take courses in the use of the computer; and second, that ‘freshman’ English is not enough—we must have ‘freshman’ mathematics. We must become numerate as well as literate, and we usually arrive at the university as neither.

To summarize the grade idol, American civilization has been regarded by other civilizations as being based on competition. My principal answer to such a base—and you can see this from presidential elections downwards—is that the ability to get a job does not constitute the ability to do that job. Tests are produced by our civilization; they are all subject to the atmosphere and desires of the civilization which produces them. Tests are not simply a *reflexion* of a particular civilization either; they are caricatures of it, because they are simplified. If one has to give grades at all—and I think probably that grades are anti-gospel—I would say that they ought to be given to the groups who work rather than to the individuals who work in the groups. I wouldn’t mind giving a grade to the whole of my class; I dislike giving grades to members of it. The correlative of that view is that we should encourage group work in our classes, as I have tried to do. This should save time, be more interesting, produce more intelligent results, and be better remembered. It is to be recommended as something which has the gospel in it; for, whatever we are doing, if we do it seriously and to the Lord, “wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” Why should that not be applied to students’ work as well as to divine service? Should not academic work be divine service?

The *third main symbol is the Hammond organ*, and its characteristic use in the USA to play all sorts of music, including jazz. The problem is of standards of cultural education. I went to a campus banquet sometime ago, and when I came in there was the Hammond organ blaring. I went to

another one where there was a string quartet. Then I went to a third and there was a consort of recorders there. At the one where the Hammond organ was blaring we had immediately afterwards a fine rendering of a song by Hugo Wolff. Now cannot we see something profoundly absurd in that concatenation, just as we must see something profoundly wrong in the incidental music of low quality which the radio and the TV are able to provide us with, that even KSL broadcasts on a considerable scale, and that is piped in at the Wilkinson Center? Music and art which are intended to lull, to soothe, to put to sleep, to make oblivion of what we ought to remember, are enemies of the truth: they are drugs. The object of art is to make you more awake, to be more vigilant, to notice more things, not to recline mentally on foam rubber.

I spent an interesting evening recently with a local barbershop organization; I remember Western Week each semester. Both these organizations, superficially reprehensible though they might culturally seem, contain seeds of strength. Shakespeare did not despise the popular: he used it and made something superior of it. We have to find the strength of our civilization where it potentially is, even when it does not seem actually to be there, and when at the same time it certainly is not actually anywhere else. I do not regard a consort of recorders or even a string quartet as necessarily an ideal symbol; but if barber shop and Western Week on campus had something of the quality of the music played by the consort of recorders and the string quartet, we should have arrived. There has to be strength from the folk in order that there may be a really superior culture.

The encyclopedia says that the *cougar* never attacks man unless provoked, which would presumably mean that the football team would not play well unless it lost its temper. The cougar is a solitary beast of prey. Is it not curious that a Church which has as its head the Lamb should have the cougar for its university symbol? Is it not rather like the fact that manufacturers give cars predatory or snobbish names to encourage men to buy them and drive them with aggression? The most famous of these is known as a Jaguar. The cougar will not lie down with the lamb until the Millennium. What about the interim?

Games and athletics should be for everybody. When they are highly professionalized and undertaken by a few, they do not necessarily have a good influence on the performance of all, because the special team collects together and symbolizes the wishes and instincts of the whole; and so the finer the team, the better they play, the more specialized they are, the less likely everybody else is to do likewise, because the gap between these and the para-professional players is too great. Britain invented, or first developed, most internationally popular games and is not 'good' at most of them nowadays because it has gone on playing them in the old way; that is

to say, as things for everybody to do and not to take too seriously. Eliot said of poetry that it was just a superior amusement. The gospel contains a sense of proportion and a sense of humor: both are aspects of humility.

Let us come back to the idea of a Mormon university: *Universitas*, the guild, with its bond of affection; *Universitas* the whole, the totality, the teaching from testimony so that what you teach is a whole and springs from the whole mind. BYU is the only university in the world which is *Universitas Dei*, the University of God, and if I might suggest a motto for it, the motto would be "For God and our neighbor." It is doubtful whether the right translation of *caritas* is 'love'. 'Love' is a debased word after all the idolization of adultery in nineteenth-century arts and after. Nor can the Latin word *caritas* be translated in our day by "charity." It can be translated by the word "caring." BYU should be a university of caring. The last line of Ibsen's "Brand" is: "Han er *Deus Caritatis*." This utterance comes paradoxically out of the avalanche which is to overwhelm Brand's egoistical pride: "He is the God of Caring."

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1. Basil Bernstein, "On the Classification and Framing of Educational Knowledge" in *Knowledge and Control*, ed. Young, (Collier-Macmillan Co., 1971).