

## WHAT KIND OF MIND HAS THE LORD?

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In this article I want to deal with what looks like an assumption related to a second-order of change as described by Mike Farnworth in last semester's *Perspective*. He wrote "To be awake to the assumptions that lie beneath our perception is the paradoxical nature of understanding second-order change." I hope to say something about a fundamental assumption for becoming BYU-Idaho, an assumption which, it seems to me, is not yet clearly articulated.

In a recent thought-provoking conversation I had with David Ward, he talked to me about determining what President Hinckley had in mind when he initiated this change to become a university. As soon as David said that, the thought came to me, "What if in his prophetic calling the Prophet didn't have anything more in mind than what he said?" What if what he knew was that the Lord desired to have a university in Rexburg, that it ought to take the name of BYU-Idaho, and that it ought to fill the needs of the people in the Church and in the world at this crucial period of time, and a few other things? What if what he did was to pass the keys to the people in Rexburg for them to determine what was to happen here? So the question really became "what does the Lord have in mind?" So in implementing the Prophets instructions, our revelatory source is directly from God. The President Hinckley would approve what was done here not because it conformed in detail to the plan he had in mind, but because it would be confirmed by the Holy Ghost as conforming to the plan the Lord has in mind.

With that perspective, would it not be well to ask what is fundamental about an institution that in the worldly sphere would appropriately be called a university and still fulfill whatever purpose the Lord/God has in mind?

The general purpose of God has been succinctly stated, It is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man. We understand that the "eternal life" part of this purpose means that mankind is to become as much like our Heavenly Parents and Jesus Christ as possible. Returning to our particular purpose here, aren't we then led to ask, what divine attribute should a university primarily help us to emulate?

The answer seems obvious to me. While various other purposes may find their way onto a campus, some properly and others improperly, the primary purpose of a university is to train minds. This purpose is not contrary to the divine goal for humanity since one attribute of godliness is omniscience, a quality of the mind. So the question of "what does God have in mind" becomes "what kind of mind does God have?" The answer would seem to be something like this: the mind of God is

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capable, well trained, and properly directed. So the purpose of a church university is to educate capable, well trained, and properly directed minds, after the divine model.

Of course this fundamental purpose must be correlated with the other aspects of divinity which we seek to emulate. But this type of correlation is required for all parts of the church organization, each of which has its particular focus, so a university is no different in that regard.

So at this point I believe we have arrived at two basic propositions which make up our assumption. The first is that God has a capable, well trained, and properly directed mind. The second is that the fundamental purpose of a church sponsored university is to prepare similar minds, godlike minds, among the members of the university community. If we accept these two propositions, where does that take us?

Might it not first cause us to consider our mission statement? Wouldn't it be more accurate to say for part two of the statement, for example, "Provide a quality education, *emphasizing training the mind as it integrates secular and religious subjects*, for students of diverse interests and abilities." Or with part three, "Prepare students for further education and employment and for their roles as citizens, *parents, and heirs of salvation in the kingdom of God.*" That would put teeth and more honesty into our mission statement, (and likely raise a few eyebrows).

What would it do about the notion of integrating the "secular" and the "spiritual"? First we would see that this distinction is not clear-cut. The Lord has said that all things unto me are spiritual, and not at any time have I given unto you a law [read instruction to create BYU-Idaho] which is temporal;... The "spiritual" is in a fundamental way "secular," and the "secular" is "spiritual." The two categories are different in degree, not in kind. The question, "How can we integrate them?" reveals a false dichotomy, a category error, in our own minds. For example, the principles and methods of physics, perhaps as we learn them in our earthly environment and surely as they are enunciated on a divine creation level, are an integral part of the process of bringing "to pass the immortality and eternal life of man." Another example: English composition has obvious application in the presentation and comprehension of divine thought, as readers read and writers write. And more to the point, Deity can certainly craft a good essay and can understand a complex piece of writing. Since He can, we should. This approach applies to, or should apply to, all that is done at this university. If it does not or cannot, our obligation is to "can it."<sup>1</sup>

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I have used two examples of "secular" classes, physics and composition. What about religion classes? Does Deity have a capable, well trained, and properly directed mind relative to religious subjects? To pose the question is to answer it. Still, consider the statement by

President Joseph Fielding Smith, which, I think, represents the priority which must exist between the “secular” and the “spiritual.”

Those who gain the exaltation... must, in the eternities, reach the time when they will know all things. They must know mathematics, they must know all the principles of science, they must be prepared in all things—by learning, by study, by faith... It is, however, knowledge of the principles of the gospel that will save men in the kingdom of God. (*Doctrines of Salvation* 291-92)

If the religious has priority over the secular for the purpose of salvation, what should be the relative capability and training of the mind in each area? Wouldn't it follow that the quality of the religious mind be at least equal to that of the secular? Given its higher priority, why wouldn't it be that the quality of the religious mind should exceed that of the secular mind? Consider this statement of John A. Widtsoe, a scientist and former member of the Quorum of the Twelve.

It is a paradox that men will gladly devote time every day for many years to learn a science or an art, yet will expect to win a knowledge of the gospel, which comprehends all sciences and arts, through perfunctory glances at books or occasional listening to sermons. The gospel should be studied more intensively than any school or college subject.<sup>2</sup> (*Evidences and Reconciliations* 16-17)

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When classes carrying the religion prefix are equal in preparing capable and well trained minds as compared to classes carrying secular prefixes, religion does not need to fear coming off second best when contests arise between them.

Suppose we employ the model of Deity and consider some aspects of the kingdom of God on earth and the kingdom of heaven in eternity as a format for our university. Paul compares the church of Jesus Christ to a human body, noting the differences among the parts of each. No part envies or objects to the condition or functions of any other part. Each recognizes its individual worth and contribution to the whole (1 Corinthians 12:12-31). Moreover the conditions in premortality and the hereafter recognize differences as a beneficent aspect of everlasting life. Might not these examples suggest that the differing qualities among minds is not a condition of life to be embarrassed about or ignored? Differences are not curses but blessings, to be addressed directly and honestly, and then explained in the context of the restored gospel. Why not have different intellectual standards of admission for students studying in different disciplines, as is done elsewhere? And would we, in our current environment of putting everything on the table, ever have the courage to attack the evil of grade inflation which misleads students as to their capabilities, and thus retards their progression in developing a capable, well trained, and properly directed mind—a divine mind?

Who knows where the ramifications of this basic assumption would lead us? But if in fact the goal of our mortality, indeed of our existence, is to be as godlike as we can be, shouldn't we say so, mean it, and implement it? Of course such a path has its challenges, but wouldn't giving more attention to the question "what kind of mind has the Lord" help us to arrive at "what the Lord has in mind" for this university? ∞

## NOTES

1. It is noteworthy that the subtitle of this journal is "Expressing Mind and Spirit." In a recent general priesthood meeting President Hinckley said that BYU and Ricks exist "as flagships testifying to the great and earnest commitment of this Church to education, both ecclesiastical and secular, and while doing so prove to the world that excellent secular learning can be gained in an environment of religious faith" ("Why We do Some of the Things We Do," *Ensign*, Nov. 1999). In January of this year we all received the pamphlet by Robert L. Millett entitled *BYU as a Covenant Community*, which effectively demonstrates the necessity of integrating the secular and religious. My personal experience is that we do pretty well with this at Ricks, although surely we can do better. I suspect that our success in this regard is one reason for our change to a university.
2. In his talk to the faculty and staff on January 11, 2001, President Bednar said: "I reject the notion that academic rigor is antithetical or contrary to spiritual development. In fact, the development of the mind is an important element in spiritual progress." I endorse that statement, but would suggest substituting "essential" for "important" in the second sentence.

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