

In loco parentis — Alive and Well in Provo

Brigham Young University: A House of Faith by Gary James Bergera and Ronald Priddis (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books, 1985), 513 pp. \$19.95.

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DAVID RIESMAN, in his landmark study of American higher education entitled *The Academic Revolution* (1969), was fascinated by BYU and insightfully observes: "Despite academic upgrading, Brigham Young has not lost its sectarian character nor even been troubled by the kinds of public soul-searching that go on in the milieu tied to the National Council of Churches and in intellectual Catholic circles. Potential conflicts between religious and secular beliefs seem to have been handled largely by compartmentalization and avoidance of public debate" (p. 331). Bergera and Priddis attempt to bring some of these conflicts to public debate or at least public light through their historical research.

The book is not a typical institutional history — the "family biography" replete with sentimentality and a parade of "great men" (presidents) and expansion (buildings) despite its first chapter on presidents and the sixth and seventh chapters on student activities and athletics. The book concentrates on issues where faith or authority have conflicted with norms of free inquiry and expression. The authors' expressed purpose is to explore these conflicts by investigating selected themes in

the institution's past rather than to construct a comprehensive institutional history.

The reader is introduced to the origins and development of BYU through biographical vignettes of its eight presidents. In the second chapter, the authors introduce a series of issues, ranging from the curriculum to compulsory tithing, to illustrate the underlying tensions of balancing religion and academics. The next six chapters then deal in greater depth with this balancing dilemma in the following areas: standards and the honor code; organic evolution; partisan politics; student government, social clubs and newspapers; intercollegiate athletics; and arts, entertainment and literature. While incidents are drawn from various periods of BYU's history to illustrate the difficulty of maintaining an equilibrium, the events of the more recent past predominate. The final chapter, entitled "Academics and Intellectual Pursuits," reviews evaluations of BYU's academic standing and attempts to assess the place given intellectualism in the Church's university.

The book is fascinating precisely because of what Riesman termed the absence of public debate over these issues in the case of BYU. The absence has created a vacuum attracting interest in writings which detail instances and issues heretofore substantiated largely by rumor.

One could ask whether the selection of issues was based on the "level of controversy" engendered or on some concept of the importance of the issue to a Mormon philosophy of education. Those who find in the book an unbalanced view of the

totality of the BYU experience will probably claim the former. The reader should certainly place the BYU experience, as reflected in this book, in the context of similar conflicts at other religious colleges. Here the authors are remiss in not giving readers a context for the resolution of ecclesiastical and authoritarian issues at BYU compared to Notre Dame or Baylor, for example.

The chapters are also somewhat uneven in their capturing of the dilemmas of faith and intellect as well as in their quality of writing. The "Organic Evolution Controversy" chapter is superb in framing, developing, and documenting the issues. Other chapters, such as those on student life, athletics, and academics do not fare as well.

Source material and documentation in the book are fascinating, mysterious, and frustrating. The authors have somehow managed to gain access to an amazing range of heretofore closed sources such as President Wilkinson's diary and memos from presidents to the Board of Trustees and individual general authorities of the Church. Documents noted as "copy in the authors' possession" will, I am sure, raise interest and questions among researchers and concern among administrators for security of documents. The frustrating part of their documentation stems primarily from the "endnote" system used in publication where footnotes are generally given by paragraph rather than individual citations in the text. Under this system, it is sometimes difficult to attribute a particular point made to a specific source.

Many of the policies, activities, and personalities described in the book are reminiscent of the era of ante-bellum colleges, concerned more with student behavior than academics, and seem anachronistic when viewed from the perspective of modern secular universities. President Wilkinson's policies and attitudes, as reflected in his diary and correspondence, were amazingly paternalistic and authoritarian for the times, and what is more incredible, apparently tolerated by the majority of

students, faculty and trustees. One wonders, after reading of the role conflicts experienced by various BYU presidents, how anyone could last very long in this presidency. In fact one wonders why anyone would want the job!

The authors' "student perspective" is evident throughout the book in the selection of topics and discussion of issues. Indeed, the book has much more to say about student-administration politics than it does about faculty politics or the university as a whole. The authors lament, for example, that students were not given the right of naming the student center—a prerogative jealously guarded by governing boards everywhere. The high proportion of student newspaper citations may also lend greater credence to the reliability of that source than is advisable. In their treatment of the Vietnam years, the authors portray student sentiments and activities but little is said of faculty perceptions.

"In loco parentis," the legal doctrine that the institution acts in the place of parents, is portrayed throughout the book as being an overriding concern of Church authorities and parents—a characteristic of most denominational colleges. In an era of increasing secularization of private colleges, BYU clearly remains, and is likely to remain, thoroughly denominational and for that reason very attractive to parents who find solace in a strong, pervasive, and safe "in loco parentis" environment.

Does the book succeed in what it sets out to do, i.e., outlining the struggles of blending academics and faith? Yes, I believe it does, due largely to its addressing forthrightly "sensitive" issues and its citation of significant new documentation. I would highly recommend the book to those interested in the history and development of BYU as an institution and those with a general interest in Mormon attitudes and practices toward education and intellectual activity. The book does not go as far as I would like in its explication of a Mormon philosophy of education. The final chapter starts down this path but then disintegrates