

## OF -ITES AND BHAGS



WE HAVE OFTEN HEARD that BYU should become a Zion university. I endorse this ideal with all my heart. But over the years, I have often wondered how the horizontal, egalitarian ideal of Zion—a society with no poor and no class distinctions—can be reconciled with the essentially hierarchal, rank-riven realities of the modern university. To adopt a Book of Mormon phrase, the academy is full of all manner of “-ites” (4 Nephi 1:17).

Thus faculty are considered to belong to a class distinct from administration and staff, and these are separate from students. Further, within the faculty, sharp distinctions obtain among different orders: instructor, assistant, associate, full, professional, professorial, part-time, tenure-track, tenured, and so forth. The military is not more rank conscious than are we. Though as individuals, faculty tend to be inclusive and democratic, as a tribe we tend to be exclusive and aristocratic. Our world is vertically ordered and fraught with carefully demarcated boundaries. To be a tenured faculty in the modern university is to be trained in border patrol of these boundaries.

I do not entirely disparage this. After all, enforcing distinctions between mediocre and excellent, shoddy and superb, nonsense and sense is fundamental to faculty work. That’s what universities are supposed to do and, when functioning properly, what they do best. Not surprisingly,

therefore, the academy has cultivated a culture that also evaluates its members based on perceived merit. Perhaps distinctions of rank are inevitable in meritocracies.

But how can such distinctions be squared with the idea of a Zion university? If the ideal of a Zion university is not an oxymoron, there must be a way to develop a culture of excellence at BYU in which the contributions of each member are both evaluated *and* valued. I have spoken before of how we must develop such a culture at BYU—one that nourishes both excellence and charity—and probably shall do so again.

In this essay, I want to call attention here to one way some of our fellow workers in the BYU vineyard are striving to realize the ideal of a Zion university by consecrating their resources for the good of the whole. They have reached across the great divide common to all universities, that between faculty and staff. Their sacrifice has moved me beyond measure.

A few months ago, a number of units on the “support side” of the university set for themselves a “Big, Hairy, Audacious Goal,” or BHAG, using Jim Collins’s term in *Good to Great*.<sup>10</sup> They embraced the BHAG of transferring some staff/administrative slots to the faculty in order to improve teaching and learning for the students. The only way to do this, of course, is for the staff to do more with less. Yet, when the idea was floated in some units, our colleagues cheered—so eager were they to sacrifice for the greater good!

This is the spirit of a Zion university. It partakes of the pioneer spirit of sacrifice and consecration that built BYU and that must never be forgotten. When we heard of it in Academic Vice President Council, we wanted to respond in some appropriate way. So we are funding rotating fellowships to complement each new slot transferred to the faculty. These will be awarded to the colleges receiving the new slots. Fellowships will bear the name of a noteworthy retired employee from the support unit providing the position. These fellowships are intended specifically to recognize and encourage excellence in teaching and learning.

What a blessing it is to work at a university inspired by the noble dream of Zion! We have a ways to go yet to realize this dream at BYU, but isn't it a privilege to labor in a setting where so many share the hope and vision of a Zion university in their hearts? May we ever preserve and nurture a spirit of sacrifice and consecration worthy of this ideal.