



PRESIDENT G. H. BRIMHALL  
President of the University

The self-made man who did a job of which we are all proud—and is still doing it. Over thousands who have had equal opportunities, he has survived, and is still young in his enthusiasm for education. Has a fine home and a bank account.



RALPH V. CHAMBERLIN

Professor of Biology. Got his B. S. at the U. of U. and later his Ph. D. at Cornell. A patient bug-hunter who often remembers his classes. Member of National Scientific Associations. A thorough student. Strong advocate of modern ideas and an authority on spiders and basket-ball. He sees with one eye what many do not see with two.

"A man who worked while others slept."



HENRY PETERSON

Professor of Education. Dean of Teachers' College. Graduated from Chicago University and took his M. A. from Harvard, and later was an Austin scholar *ibid.* A wrinkled thinker and an advocate of high altitudes and liberality.

"Behold at his touch the old changeth into new"



JOSEPH PETERSON

Professor of Psychology. Graduated from Chicago taking out his S. B. and later his Ph. D. with *Magnum Cum Lauda*. Member of National Scientific Associations. Is older and more experienced than he looks. Strong advocate of writing. Big Author—edited the *College Circular* and is a favorable candidate for White and Blue representative.

"Seeks each successive day a wiser man to be."

# CAMPUS IN CRISIS

## BYU, 1911

By Richard Sherlock

Work hard, learn all you can but don't change," was the unconsciously contradictory departing advice of one well-intentioned neighbor to his college-bound friend in the early twentieth century. The student was among an increasing number of aspiring young Mormons leaving Utah to study at major universities such as Harvard, Chicago, Michigan, and Berkeley, among the first to venture out from their mountain home after the period of political and economic isolation had ended. Those left behind sensed and those going away soon recognized that true education inevitably breeds change. "Modernist" ideas of social gospel, evolution, higher criticism, and pragmatism had to be confronted and reconciled with their religious convictions. However, after prolonged and intense personal struggles, most returned home to Zion, convinced that a religious interpretation of life and the facts of scientific knowledge were not incompatible. Having successfully negotiated the tensions and frustrations of such adaptation for themselves, they were anxious to share their insights, confident that their academic training would be welcomed and valued.

Their return to face a subsequent crisis at BYU in 1911 is the earliest and probably one of the most important examples of a usually private interface erupting into a significant and revealing public debate, one which engulfed faculty, students, administrators, and eventually the First Presidency. Ostensibly the source of the controversy was the teaching of evolution, but the crucial issue was (as mentioned above) the broader question of scholarly endeavor and religious interpretation. The response of the Church in this instance set something of a pattern of responses to other intellectual crises.

1908 found President George H. Brimhall attempting to establish academic credentials for his Brigham Young University by engaging a nucleus faculty of quality professors with advanced degrees. Two brothers, Joseph and Henry Peterson, who had recently completed doctoral work at the University of Chicago, were hired to teach psychology and education, respectively. At the same time Cornell-trained biologist Ralph Chamberlin came from the deanship of the new University of Utah Medical School. Two years later Ralph's brother, William Chamberlin, who taught ancient languages and philosophy, was recruited from Brigham Young College in Logan.<sup>1</sup> Each arrived with a sense of personal mission, convinced that the creation of a first-rate university capable of producing good thinkers

and "attracting students of exceptional earnestness and calibre"<sup>2</sup> was imminent. Said Ralph Chamberlin, "Enthusiasm was rife, and it was confidently hoped that early and adequate expression was to be given here to an ideal of education which had been cherished in the Church from its beginning, an ideal involving a harmonious presentation of knowledge in all fields within an institution devoted primarily to religious education."<sup>3</sup>

So each embarked on a rigorous campaign to enliven the students academically by introducing the latest developments in education, psychology, science, and philosophy. At a 1909 memorial service commemorating the births of Darwin and Lincoln, biologist Ralph Chamberlin read an address which recounted Darwin's long struggle to gain acceptance for his ideas. He concluded that Darwin was one of the greatest scientific minds of the age. The following year visiting speakers were invited to discuss eugenics, communism, and the impact of Darwinism on history and education.<sup>5</sup> Courses such as "Ecclesiastical Sociology" and "The Psychology of Religion," which stressed the relationship between scientific principles and Mormon doctrine, were added to the curriculum.<sup>6</sup> The campus was stirring with the enthusiasm infused by the earnest young professors.

In 1909 Ralph Chamberlin published two articles in BYU's student paper, *White and Blue*. In the first, "The Early Hebrew Conception of the Universe," he emphatically defended the necessity of studying the Hebrew records without reading modern ideas into them. The early Hebrew tribal God and a primitive notion of the universe were consistent with an evolutionary-progressive philosophy of history, he wrote. "For, assuredly, it is only when we perceive the constant growth, the constant evolution, in the Bible and recognize in it the progressive unfolding of the Divine Will in the Hebrew race that it has its highest meaning for and can teach and stimulate us...its errancy in many matters that represent merely the accepted views of the day and the people do not weaken, but properly understood, should strengthen the value which it should have for us."<sup>7</sup>

In the second, "Early Hebrew Legends," Chamberlin described the tower of Babel story as a legend created by the Hebrews to explain the plurality of languages and peoples in the world. He drew a sharp distinction between history and legend for "history countenances only such reports as are verifiable." Unverifiable, the early Hebrew legends could not be understood as literal historical reports, but they were useful as myths which explain the Hebrew view of the world: "Only the childish and immature mind can lose by learning that much in the Old Testament is poetical and that some of the stories are not true historically.

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Poetry is a superior medium for religious truth. Everyone who perceives the peculiar poetic charm of these old legends must feel irritated by the barbarian—for there are pious barbarians—who thinks he is putting the true value upon these narratives only when he treats them as prose and history. Only ignorance can regard such a conclusion as irreverent for it is the judgment of reverence and love. These poetic narratives are the most beautiful possessions which a people brings down through the course of its history and the legends of Israel, particularly those of Genesis are perhaps the most beautiful and most profound ever known on earth."<sup>8</sup>

William Chamberlin, too, was struggling to reconcile evolution and theism in a religious-philosophical system. His theory was a personalistic-idealistic system modeled after the work of his teachers, George Howison at Berkeley and Josiah Royce at Harvard.<sup>9</sup> At a sacrament meeting in 1910 he addressed the need to look at the Bible as wisdom and parable rather than historical fact. Using the Book of Jonah as an example, he said that "regarding the book as a parable does away with the need of believing the fish story—as fact. It also places beyond the reach of petty critics other stories in the book used merely for purposes of

illustration."<sup>10</sup>

William and Ralph Chamberlin, as well as the Peterson brothers and other teachers, took every opportunity to lecture on evolution and the Bible: church groups, college audiences, and townspeople heard their message. Students made evolutionary ideas a "hot" topic on campus. Debating societies argued it; evolution was the topic at speech contests; the Chamberlins gave courses on evolution and the Bible to local elders' quorums.<sup>11</sup> A 1911 *White and Blue* article detailed contemporary critical evaluations of the subject: "Darwin and His Mission," in the January *Portal* is a good article. It is not so long ago that religious men branded the theories of Darwin as heresies of the worst sort. It is certainly a work of progress to note a statement like this in a sectarian journal. Undoubtedly among the great men of the nineteenth century the foremost place should be given to the eminent scientist, Charles Darwin."<sup>12</sup>

Challenging questions which the young professors had first encountered privately at far-away universities thus found a public forum in the Church's own Brigham Young University. University president George Brimhall, though not himself an advocate of evolution, at first seemed to sense the value of open discussion and diversity of opinion

## Cumming's Report

January 21st, 1911.

President Joseph F. Smith and  
Members of the General Church Board of Education.

Dear Brethren:

According to your request I herewith present for your consideration a written report of my recent visit to the B.Y. University, Provo, and the impressions made upon my mind concerning the nature and effect of certain theological instructions given, mostly by the College professors in that school.

I spent about nine days there between November 28th and December 10th, and conversed with the Presidency of the school, many of the teachers, and as many of the College students as I had opportunity of meeting. I also conversed with a number of leading citizens of Provo about this feature of the school's work and endeavored, conscientiously, to find out the real condition of the school in this respect, and the following are some of the points of information gained there.

1. About two years ago when some of the most radical changes in theological views were first introduced, it caused great disturbance in the minds of both the pupils and the old style teachers there, but many have gradually adjusted their views to the "new thought" and feel that they have gained much by the change. Many of the teachers and students are unable to accept them, however, though practically all the College students whom I met, except one or two returned missionaries, were most zealous in defending and propagating the new views.

2. It was the unanimous opinion that interest in theological work had never been more universal or more intense in the school than it is now. These classes are gladly attended and none seem to shirk the work.

3. All express firm faith in the living oracles.

4. All believe in tithing, missionary work, and the ordinances of the gospel, and appear to be determined to do their duty in these things.

5. I discovered no spirit of contention or bitterness—their differences seemed to be good natured. Still, there is a pronounced difference of opinion among both students and teachers upon many important points of doctrine and belief.

Some of the matters which impressed me most unfavorably may be enumerated as follows:

1. Several of the teachers follow the so-called "higher criticism" in their theological work and use Dr. Lyman Abbot's writings as authority.

2. The Bible is treated as a collection of myths, folk-lore, dramas, literary productions, history and some inspiration. Its miracles are mostly fables or accounts of natural events recorded by a simple people who injected the miraculous elements into them, as most ignorant people do when things, strange to them, occur. A few concrete examples will illus-

trate this view:

(a) The flood was only a local inundation of unusual extent.

(b) The confusion of tongues came about by the scattering of the families descended from Noah when they became too numerous for the valley they originally occupied. After a generation or two, having no written language, their speech changed, each tribe's in a different way. There is nothing sudden or miraculous in the change.

(c) The winds blew the waters of the Red Sea back until the Israelites waded across, but subsided in time to let the waters drown Pharaoh, while a land slide stopped the River Jordan long enough for them to cross it.

(d) Christ's temptation is only an allegory of what takes place in each of our souls. There is no personal devil to tempt us.

(e) John the Revelator was not translated. He died in the year 96.

3. The theory of evolution is treated as a demonstrated law and their application of it to gospel truths gives rise to many curious and conflicting explanations and interpretations of scripture. Its relation to the fall, the atonement and the resurrection are, perhaps, the most important and damaging to the faith of the students.

4. Philosophical ideas are often carried too far and result in wrong impressions, as to doctrine. This may be partly the fault of the teacher in not making himself clear, and partly of the pupil in jumping at wrong conclusions or applications. For example:

(a) Sin is the violation of a law resulting in pain or discomfort. Righteousness is pursuing a course that brings happiness. No intelligent being would sin if he knew its full consequences, hence, sin is ignorance—education or knowledge is salvation. Sinners should be pitied and enlightened rather than blamed and punished. Ordinances may be helpful props to weak mortals, but knowledge is the only essential.

(b) We should never agree. God never made two things alike. Only by taking different views of a thing can its real truth be seen.

5. Memory gems are immoral, since fixing the words fixes the thought and prevents growth. I was told that one teacher, before his class, thanked God he could not repeat one of the Articles of Faith and another took his children out of the Primary Association because they were taught to memorize.

6. All truths change as we change. Nothing is fixed or reliable. As we grow, or change our attitude toward any truth, that truth changes.

7. Visions and revelations are mental suggestions. The objective reality of the presence of the Father and the Son, in Joseph Smith's first vision, is questioned.

8. To get the real truth in any vision or revelation, modern as well as ancient, the mental and physical condition of the prophet receiving it must be known. After eliminating the personal equation, the remainder may be regarded as inspiration or divine.

9. In thus robbing the scriptures both ancient and modern, of the greater part of their divinity, and limiting the wonders of the Great Creator to the necessity of confining his operations to the natural laws

though he cautioned students not to ascribe the personal views of those in favor of evolution to the University. Edwin Hinckley, a counselor in the presidency of the school and professor of natural science, had as early as 1903-04 taught a class entitled "Geological Biology." The course description noted that "Special attention will be given to the study of fossil forms, their life history and the evolution of our earth and its organism."<sup>13</sup> Though Hinckley was at least sympathetic to evolutionary ideas, Joseph Keller, Brimhall's other counselor and a professor of commerce, published a strong attack on Darwinism. Most faculty and students, however, seemed sympathetic to the new ideas; the professors who taught evolution and higher criticism were dynamic, articulate and very popular.

A young student later recorded her response to a series of lectures given by Joseph Peterson on the Bible: "How I enjoyed them!... I fully believed that the men who had done research on the old Hebrew records were just as honest as any scientist. Why should we turn down their findings? I must say that I was a little shocked, yet my mind consoled itself with the idea that God is our friend. ... To illustrate, one of my greatest disturbances occurred when I learned that the study of Adam and Eve and the Garden of

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known to man, I asked if it did not lower the scriptures and weaken their influence upon their minds. The reply was that Scriptures and the gospel were more dear and more beautiful to them, on that account, being broader in their applications. Nevertheless it seemed to me that the line of prophets and righteous men of both the Bible and Book of Mormon, whose reference to the miraculous deliverance of Israel from Egypt, is recorded as a special mark of their divine approval, cannot but be regarded with pity for not knowing the science of our day which robs those events of their wonder, if not their divinity.

10. And in the same line, while these teachers extol the living oracles, it came to me from several sources that if their teachings are to be investigated they will demand that the ones who do the investigating shall be men of the same learning of themselves; none others could understand them and do them justice.

The foregoing are only a few of the more important features of the questionable teachings there that came to my notice, but enough to give a general idea of what I found. Much of the work, of course, was sound and unobjectionable, and even many of the questionable new theories and explanations were not fixed. There seems to be a struggle still going on between their new views and their old ones, and at times, their words are full of light and at other times and on the same subjects they would be full of darkness. The struggle that both teachers and pupils described to me as having taken place in their own hearts when the new thought was being presented to them, was very fierce, and often robbed them of appetite and sleep. "An unusual effect of getting added light on the gospel," I urged; but they replied it was like the sorrow of a little child when first told there is no Santa Claus. "Our early teachings have been very satisfying and useful but untrue, and as the child's real parents are better than a Santa Claus, so will the real new Bible and gospel be better than the old one."

Religion, like science, must be expressed in terms of knowledge. Faith now seems to be regarded with pity as superstition and is not a characteristic of the intellectually trained.

Since my visit to Provo, as many as three Stake Presidents in one week have called upon me expressing alarm at the teachings that emanate from the B.Y. University. One of them said that when he expostulated with the Principal of their Stake Academy for teaching false doctrine, his defense was that the B.Y. University taught the same. Another President told me he did not want their present principal another year, as he is an apostate in his teachings and belief. The third said he would not allow one of his children to be under certain of the B.Y. University professors for anything. Many parents of students there have also visited me and expressed great fear for the faith of their children.

A student who will take his degree at the University of Utah next spring, appealed to me the other day for a position in the Church schools. In our conversation he told me that one of his professors, well known as hostile to our Church, has read the articles from the White and Blue, the

Eden may not be literally true. Its literal acceptance has been one of the important premises of Mormonism. Too, if the story of the flood came from the legends of a people the Israelites had met in captivity, or if the Book of Jonah was a satire of Jewish self-righteousness and written as a fable to portray that characteristic rather than as history, why accept literally the story of creation as related in the Bible?"<sup>14</sup>

Such searching questions were inevitably threatening to the guardians of Mormon orthodoxy. In particular, Horace Cummings, Church superintendent of education, was a bitter opponent of evolutionary thought and of modernist religious ideas in general. To teach evolution and critical study of the Bible was to attack the faith of the youth of Zion.

In 1908 the Church board of education, led by Cummings and no doubt sharing his concern, had specifically forbade BYU teachers to use as texts any books about the Bible written by non-Mormons. Such materials could be consulted in preparing lectures but could not be followed as a guide: "the school was established to teach the gospel of Christ and not destroy faith."<sup>15</sup>

In the fall of 1910 Cummings reported to the board that

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B.Y. University school journal to his classes and expressed great satisfaction, that young Mormons, anyway, are getting their eyes open on religious matters.

I presume that, being the Superintendent of the Church schools, more complaints of this kind reach me than come to any of the other brethren; and I may, therefore, be unduly impressed with the danger which exists and needs to be remedied in our Provo school. I do not wish to magnify these conditions, but cannot help feeling deep anxiety that the soundness of doctrine, the sweetness of spirit, and the general faithfulness that has, from the beginning, characterized the products of that school, should not diminish, much less give way to error and disbelief.

I believe the Presidency of the school feel exactly as I do about this matter, for I have talked about it with them many times, especially with President Brimhall and President Keeler.

The responsibility for this state of affairs seems to rest upon no more than four or five of the teachers, all of whom I regard as clean, earnest men, conscientious in what they teach; but, being so long in college with so little to help them to resist the skillfully formed theories of learned men, they have accepted many which are erroneous; and being zealous teachers, are vigorously laboring to convince others of their views. Such attitudes of mind, from the beginning, have been a common experience with our students in eastern colleges; but fortunately they often get rid of these errors when they again plunge into Church work at home. Conditions in Provo are unfavorable for such a solution of their difficulty. The number there is sufficient to form a coterie having similar views, and the opposition they receive from others keeps them drawn together and determined to defend their views. If they were distributed and given other lines of work to do where their theories would not be continually called into activity, I think their attitude might change much for the better, in time, but I feel sure the conditions in the Teachers' College, in this respect, needs changing as soon as practicable.

These teachers have been warned by the Presidency of the school and by myself, and even pleaded with, for the sake of the school, not to press their views with so much vigor. Even if they were right, conditions are not suitable; but their zeal overcomes all counsel and they seem even more determined, if not defiant, in pushing their beliefs upon the students. They seem to feel they have a mission to protect the young from the errors of their parents, and one student said to me, "I could make my dear mother weep in a minute by telling her how I have changed my religious views." Yet he had only accepted that which he thought was far ahead of what his mother had taught him. The poor mother did not have the capacity of understanding his new light and rejoicing with him in it, so he would keep it secret from her.

The foregoing is respectfully submitted in the hope that a wise and effectual way may be decided upon to bring into harmony the theological teachings in our Church schools and prevent the dissemination of doubt or false doctrine.

more than a dozen stake presidents had complained to him about the teaching of evolution at BYU. The board appointed him to investigate. To this point, Brimhall had not taken a stand on the modernist controversy and in fact defended the professors in a letter to President Joseph F. Smith in December 1910: "It seems clear to me that the attitude of these brethren ought to be made clear to the President of the Board of Directors. I believe I understand them. While I believe they are from their point of view perfectly right, still I think they are a little over zealous in their desire to bring people to their point of view. As they look at it, their teachings are in perfect harmony with the principles of the Gospel, but there are certainly many who cannot perceive that harmony, and, therefore, it seems to me that a little waiting with their working will be in keeping with greater wisdom on their part."<sup>16</sup> On 7 December 1910 at a faculty meeting, "Superintendent Cummings spoke of the criticisms he heard of the result of some of the teachings here, but was glad to learn through conversation with the Presidency that the matters have been misrepresented."<sup>17</sup>

The complaints, however, continued. So Cummings spent four days at the school talking to faculty, students, administrators, and townspeople to prepare a report for the board of education. In the report, dated 21 January 1911, he stated (for the complete report, see sidebar):<sup>18</sup> "The theory of evolution is treated as a demonstrated law and their applications of it to the gospel truths give rise to many curious and conflicting explanations of scripture.... The Bible is treated as a collection of myths, folklore, dramas, literary production and some inspiration. Its miracles are but mostly fables or accounts of natural events recorded by simple people who injected the miraculous element into them as most ignorant people do when things strange to them occur."

Worse still, he found wide-spread acceptance of the modernist heresies: "Practically all of the college students whom I met, except one or two returned missionaries, were most zealous in defending the new views."

According to Cummings, "responsibility for this state of affairs seems to rest upon no more than four or five of the teachers." They were all good men, but serving on the same campus they reinforced each other's errors. He recommended that they be reassigned immediately.

Three days later, on 3 February 1911, the board of education met and appointed a committee of five apostles, Francis M. Lyman, Heber J. Grant, Hyrum M. Smith, Charles W. Penrose, George F. Richards, as well as Brimhall and Cummings to follow up on Cummings' report. By that time Brimhall had come to agree with Cummings. According to the minutes, "Brother Brimhall, the President of the institution, expressed himself to the effect that the only thing that he could see was to get rid of these teachers. He had patiently labored with them in the hope that they would change their attitude and abstain from thrusting their objectionable views before the classes but it seemed that they were more determined than ever to teach theology according to their own ideas and theories, instead of according to the revealed truth, and he therefore saw no alternative but to dispense with their services."<sup>19</sup>

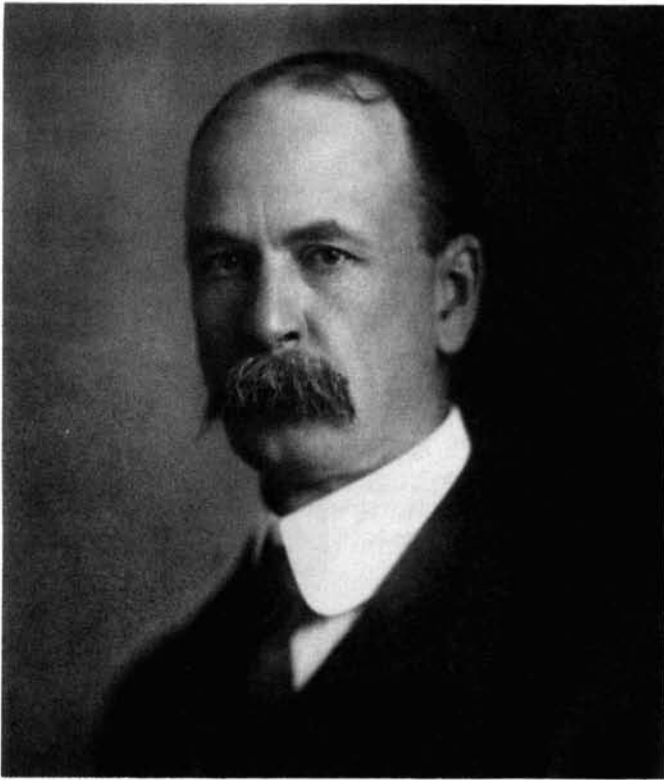
The committee met 10 February from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. and the next day from 10 to 3. On the second day the three teachers were present but Ralph Chamberlin claimed that they were not given a chance to defend themselves and

that no evidence was presented to prove "that we were disloyal in any way or that we knowingly injured anyone's faith."<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Henry Peterson denied all charges of having corrupted the faith of his students, claiming that "on one or two occasions he had been mistakenly blamed for the teachings of another professor."<sup>21</sup>

Nevertheless, the committee found that the charges contained in Cummings' report were true and recommended that "the services of these three professors be dispensed with unless they change their teaching to conform to the decisions and instructions of the Board of Trustees of BYU and the General Church Board of Education."<sup>22</sup> BYU's board of trustees responded with a resolution that teachers in Church schools must be in accord with Church doctrine.<sup>23</sup> The three professors were given the choice of conforming or resigning.

Already responding to the not unexpected charges, Ralph Chamberlin had published an article entitled "Evolution and Theological Belief" in the *White and Blue* shortly after the Cummings investigation but before the special committee met, stressing that evolutionary theory only concerns itself with *how* the processes of nature worked. It does not attempt to answer the question of *why*: "Evolution does not and cannot give us the meaning of the processes it describes; that question is properly left to religious faith."<sup>24</sup> On 14 February after the ultimatum to conform or resign, William Chamberlin, who had not been threatened with dismissal, also published a lengthy defense of evolution in the *White and Blue* entitled "The Theory of Evolution as an Aid to Faith in God and Belief in the Resurrection." Evolution, he insisted, does not conflict with faith in God. On the contrary, evolution provides a firmer support for the idea of purposeful design in nature than traditional defenses. Evolution, he wrote, even provides a basis for belief in that most miraculous of Christian events, physical resurrection. The millions of years required to create the human body in the evolutionary scheme implied "a measureless interest in our welfare." To think that death would put an end to God's millions of years of activity in creating his most noble work is absurd: *prima facie* evidence for belief in a resurrection.<sup>25</sup>

Bolstered by the Chamberlin brothers' confidence that evolutionary thought could only reinforce rather than weaken their religious convictions, in early March the students mobilized, petitioning Brimhall on behalf of the threatened professors. They argued for academic freedom and defended the teaching of evolution in Church schools. It is not the purpose of the Church, they said, to pass judgment on scientific questions, but to give theological guidance. The strictly scientific question of evolution should be left open to free discussion and investigation. "We believe that it is not the proper attitude to fight a proposition by ruling it completely out of consideration. We feel that if our gospel is true it will triumph over error without any artificial protection. We understand that it invites us to investigate anything that is praiseworthy or of good report; hence to prohibit the investigation of a scientific theory so well established as the theory of evolution is scarcely living up to our understanding of the Gospel." They denied the teaching of the three professors was destroying faith. The student petition was signed by over 80 per cent of the students at B.Y.U., but it received nothing more than an acknowledgment of receipt from President Brimhall.<sup>26</sup>



Horace H. Cummings

Unable to receive a satisfactory response from the administration, the students went public. They sent their petition to all three Salt Lake newspapers. On 16 March the petition appeared on the front page of the non-Mormon *Tribune*. In a lengthy cover story the *Tribune* charged that a conspiracy to suppress the story existed at the Church-controlled *Deseret News*.

Publication of the student petition brought a swift response from the *Deseret News* and the school administration. A *News* editorial reprimanded the students for rushing into print, especially in a paper that could never be a friend to the students. The editorial declared that the Church favored the truth and would not suppress science or learning. In a speech to the student body, Brimhall charged them to have faith in the Lord and his servants who were leading the school.<sup>27</sup>

The next day Brimhall dismissed Henry Peterson, effective at the end of the term. Henry responded immediately through the Provo newspaper: "Readers, don't let people tell you from the pulpit or otherwise that to accept evolution means to forsake your faith or deny God. Evolution is the process by which God works." A member of the Sunday School general board, Henry had deep and genuine Mormon commitments. He was deeply hurt by the accusations that he was destroying faith.<sup>28</sup> Anthon H. Lund recorded in his journal: "At the Sunday School Board meeting I met Henry Peterson. He wanted to resign from the religion class board, saying, 'As I am not worthy to teach in Church schools, I am not worthy to teach religion classes.' I said, 'Brother Henry, it is not worthiness that is lacking, it is this, that you should teach the word of God without private interpretation, and not take the bridle bit in your own mouth!'"<sup>29</sup>

Convinced of the importance of unfettered discussion,

Milton Bennion, future commissioner of Church education and professor of philosophy and education at the University of Utah, argued in the April issue of *Utah Educational Review* that although religionists may have faith in an unchanging truth, human finite ability to perceive truth fully rendered closed-minded dogmatism self-defeating. He reminded his readers that earlier scientific theories such as the Copernican system had been declared heretical by church leaders. He emphasized the difference between "essentials and non-essentials of faith," and urged the Church "to grant the utmost liberty of belief in respect to the non-essentials without questioning the fellowship of members who exercise this liberty." After all, "is it not probably that any serious attempt on the part of Church officials to dictate the methods and results of science in Church schools would mean the death of higher education in these schools?"<sup>30</sup>

Brimhall, too, saw the crisis in terms of a deathknell but from a different perspective: "I have been hoping for a year or two past that harmony could be secured by waiting, but the delays have been fraught with increased danger. . . . The school cannot go off and leave the Church in any line of activity without perishing in the desert. My mind has been thoroughly made up for some time. . . . I feel now that nothing short of a public retraction should be accepted as a guarantee that these men will preserve an attitude of being in harmony with the spirit of the school and the doctrines of the Church as preached by the living oracles. I do not believe that with the present attitude they can be patriotically patriotic, to the Prophets in the hour in Israel.

"... The going of these professors will perhaps disturb the college and interfere with its immediate growth. They will have a following, but like the Church, in a short time the school will not only retrieve its losses, but out of the accident God will bring glory to the institution until it will be said, 'It is a good thing it happened.' There are some people who predict the death of the college if these men go. I am ready to say that if the life of the college depends upon any number of men out of harmony with the brethren who preside over the Church, then it is time for the college to die. I would rather the Maeser Memorial remain a sealed tomb containing our college hopes and ambitions until the day of a new educational resurrection than to have its doors thrown open to influences antagonistic to the heroism, inspiration and revelation of those who have made the school and who have the right to say, 'Thus far shalt thou go and no farther.' The school follows the Church, or it ought to stop."<sup>31</sup>

President Joseph F. Smith, too, attempted to shift the emphasis from the specific issue of evolution to the question of Church discipline. Through an editorial in the *Improvement Era* he acknowledged that the three discharged teachers were "eminent scholars, able instructors, men of excellent character." But, "nevertheless, as teachers in a Church school they could not be given the opportunity to inculcate theories that were out of harmony with the recognized doctrines of the Church." The question of evolution was neatly avoided. In the *Juvenile Instructor* President Smith explicitly stated that the Church was not taking a position on evolution itself: "In reaching the conclusions that evolution would best be left out of discussions in our church schools, we are deciding a question of propriety and not undertaking to say how much of evolution is true or how much false."<sup>32</sup>

For the Church leadership the controversy had thus become a question of loyalty and obedience. Avoiding debate, the Church ignored the pleas of the students for academic freedom and open discussion and instead opted for order and "propriety." The debate itself and not the specific question seemed most threatening. Although all Church leaders were not anti-intellectual, the official resolution of the 1911 conflict did reflect a fear of rigorous investigations of doctrinal and philosophical issues in Mormon thought. A gospel grown too complicated and problematic might require a "professional theology" and "theologians" to teach it. "Philosophizing" or "speculating" can only cause immature members and divert attention from the simple and practical saving truths of the gospel.

In a sense, hostility to speculative theology has kept the central theological tenets and symbols of the faith within easy grasp of the common man, anchors in a troubled and changing world. But at what cost? Many of the choice sons and daughters of Zion continue to confront complex intel-

lectual challenges for which simple answers are not enough. They still need the support of like-minded friends and the open forum BYU's earlier student body fought to maintain. The often duplicated official solution to demand obedience and avoid discussion—from the firing of controversial professors, to earlier debates over writings of an Orson Pratt or B.H. Roberts, or to the contemporary deemphasizing of academia in the institute system—never really addresses the problem. We still need the Chamberlins and Petersons. As expressed by Thomas Martin, dean of the College of Applied Sciences at BYU some thirty years after the original controversy at that school: "I feel that we lost much when the Chamberlins and the Petersons left us. If some of the narrowness which caused the upheaval in 1911 could have been prevented from exercising its power, I believe the vision of George Brimhall would have been accomplished; and if we could have had a free hand with these men and their associates people would be singing our praises all over the country at the present time."<sup>33</sup>

### Footnotes

1. There are three other treatments of this episode, each written from different perspectives. Ralph Chamberlin's discussion in his *Life and Philosophy of W. H. Chamberlin* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1925) pp. 137-60 is obviously written to present Chamberlin's side of the incident, though it does attempt to be balanced in its treatment. The account contained in Ernest Wilkinson ed. *Brigham Young University: The First One Hundred Years*, (Provo: Brigham Young Univ. Press, 1975) I, pp. 412-33 is strong on detail but has an obvious institutional slant and is weak on placing the incident in the larger context of the problem of accommodation in modern Mormon history. The discussion in Glen Leonard and James Allen, *The Story of the Latter Day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976) is balanced and accurate but very brief. The best and most impressive attempt to treat the general problem of religious modernism in America is William Hutchinson, *The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1976).
2. Ralph Chamberlin, *Life and Philosophy of W. H. Chamberlin* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1925), p. 137.
3. *Ibid.*
4. The Darwin memorial address is contained in the Ralph Chamberlin papers at the Utah State Historical Society.
5. Wilkinson, ed., p. 411.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 412.
7. The fundamental issue here is not the conclusion that Chamberlin comes to in any of these essays but his insistence that the study of the Bible must be governed by the same canons of historical proof and evidence that are basic in historical research generally. It was this insistence that made his essays so fundamentally challenging to those who wanted to treat the Bible with a special reverence that would deny the applicability of these critical presuppositions. See Ralph Chamberlin, "The Early Hebrew Conception of the Universe," *White and Blue* 13 (24 Dec. 1909) 85 and "Early Hebrew Legends" *White and Blue* 13 (4 Feb. 1910) 129-32.
8. William Chamberlin, *White and Blue* 14 (15 Oct. 1910) and 13 (16 Feb. 1909).
9. Chamberlin, *Life & Phil.*, p. 113.
10. "Professor Chamberlin Talks on the Book of Jonah," *White and Blue* (25 Oct. 1910).
11. *Provo Daily Herald*, 5 Jan. 1909 and 18 Feb. 1909; *White and Blue* (12 Nov. 1909) and (29 April 1910) and (31 Jan. 1911).
12. *White and Blue* (16 Feb. 1909) p. 121.
13. E. H. Anderson to George Brimhall 14 Nov. 1910; George Brimhall to Benjamin Cluff 24 Dec. 1900; George Brimhall to Reed Smoot 4 Feb. 1910; George Brimhall to Isaac Oldroyd 25 Jan. 1910.
14. Annie Clark Tanner, *A Mormon Mother: An Autobiography* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1941) pp. 187-88.
15. Cumming's views are found at many places in his unpublished "Auto-

biography" and his journal both of which are on file at the Church Archives.

16. George H. Brimhall to Joseph F. Smith 3 Dec. 1910, Brimhall Presidential papers as quoted in Wilkinson, p. 421.
17. BYU Faculty Minutes, 7 Dec. 1910, as quoted in Wilkinson, p. 421.
18. The report is contained in the manuscript "History of Brigham Young University" compiled by J. Marinus Jensen, N.I. Butt, Elsie Carroll and Bertha Roberts on file at the B.Y.U. Library.
19. Wilkinson, p. 426.
20. Ralph Chamberlin, "Evolution and Theological Belief," *White and Blue*, 14 (31 Jan. 1911).
21. The information on the committee meetings comes from George F. Richards journal for the dates mentioned, on file in the Church Archives. The decision that the three professors must go was recorded in the minutes of the Church board of education for 3 Feb. 1911.
22. Ralph V. Chamberlin, BYU Archives Oral History Collection, p. 9.
23. Wilkinson, p. 425.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 426.
25. William Chamberlin, "The Theory of Evolution as an Aid to Faith in God and Belief in the Resurrection," *White and Blue*, 14 February 1911. See also his letter in the *Deseret News*, 11 March 1911.
26. *Salt Lake Tribune*, 15 March 1911.
27. *Salt Lake Tribune*, 16 March 1911; *Deseret News*, 17 March 1911; There had been some press reporting of the troubles earlier f *Salt Lake Tribune*, 19 February 1911, 23 February 1911, 12 March 1911; *Deseret News*, 21 February 1911 and 11 March 1911.
28. George Brimhall to Henry Peterson, 16 March 1911; *Provo Herald*, 17 March 1911.
29. Anthon H. Lund Journal, 21 February 1911, LDS Church Archives.
30. Milton Bennion, "The Evolution and Higher Criticism Controversy at the Brigham Young University," *The Utah Educational Review* (Apr. 1911), pp. 9-10. In 1920 Bennion was the first choice of the First Presidency to succeed Cummings as Church superintendent of education but they eventually decided that he was needed as a "Mormon spokesman" at the increasingly secular University of Utah, so his brother, Adam, was appointed instead. cf. Anthon Lund journal.
31. Brimhall to Bean, 27 Mar. 1912, Brimhall Presidential papers, as quoted in Wilkinson, p. 430.
32. Joseph F. Smith, "Theory and Divine Revelation," *Improvement Era*, 14 Apr. 1911, pp. 548-551; Joseph F. Smith, "Philosophy and the Church Schools," *Juvenile Instructor*, April 1911, pp. 208-209.
33. Wilkinson, p. 432-33.
34. Thomas Martin to Heber Snell, 16 Mar. 1942, Snell Papers, Utah State University Library.