

Biola University

Digital Commons @ Biola

Biola Library's 20th Anniversary

Library History

2-25-2000

CHAPEL ADDRESS THE GROUND BREAKING FOR A NEW LIBRARY BIOLA UNIVERSITY

J. Richard Chase
Biola University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.biola.edu/library-anniversary>

Recommended Citation

Chase, J. Richard, "CHAPEL ADDRESS THE GROUND BREAKING FOR A NEW LIBRARY BIOLA UNIVERSITY" (2000). *Biola Library's 20th Anniversary*. 20.
<https://digitalcommons.biola.edu/library-anniversary/20>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Library History at Digital Commons @ Biola. It has been accepted for inclusion in Biola Library's 20th Anniversary by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Biola. For more information, please contact university.archives@biola.edu.

CHAPEL ADDRESS
THE GROUND BREAKING FOR A NEW LIBRARY
BIOLA UNIVERSITY

February 25, 2000

By Former President of Biola, J. Richard Chase

Opening Comments (Purpose, People, Library and Academics)

- I. The Historical Significance of a Library
- II. The Current Need for Libraries

Three hundred and thirty-two years before the "calendar" birth of Christ, Alexander the Great conquered Egypt. As was his custom in conquered countries, he established a city and named it Alexandria. He was 24 years old and on a mission to take over all the land that the great Persian Empire controlled. Before he died at age thirty-three, he had succeeded—and then some.

Alexander was well prepared for the task. He was a great military tactician. He was also well educated in Greek literature and philosophy, knowledgeable in the sciences and versed in political science. The full-time tutor his father, Philip of Macedonia, provided for his son was the forty-one-year-old genius Aristotle.

Later, as the young Alexander marched and conquered, he wanted the world he controlled to experience the benefits of Greek thought. Thus, when he conquered a land he often established a city, named it Alexandria, and tried to make it a center for learning—emphasizing, of course, Greek learning. The Alexandria he established in Egypt was blessed with as many as thirty-two fine museums and a great library, and became known and respected throughout his vast empire and beyond.

The spread of Greek culture, enhanced with the expansion of trade, was such a powerful influence in the Mediterranean world that to this day scholars refer to the three centuries following Alexander's death as the Hellenistic Era. At its peak, before the Roman invasion in 47 BC and the burning of the library, it is estimated that the Alexandrian library held some 700,000 scrolls. The devastating fire, however, could not destroy the Alexandrian scholar's thirst for knowledge and discussion. The city flourished, the libraries rebounded and schools flourished.

What has all of this got to do with Biola University and our groundbreaking service for a new library building?

Probably the most dominating and unifying concept in Christian Higher education today is the "integration of faith and learning." During the latter part of the 20th century, no concept dominated the conferences, workshops and publications of evangelical educational associations as did the idea that Christian scholars should bring their faith in God and their knowledge of the Bible into the full world of learning—as well as living. Was that a great new idea? No. It was an ancient idea revisited and wisely adapted to the 20th century world.

How did this come about? Alexander the Great gave a wide measure of freedom to people; and this included the Jews. Not long after Alexander's death, there is good reason to believe that Ptolemy II, the Greek ruler in charge of Egypt, asked the librarian in Alexandria to bring a group of Jewish scholars to the city to translate into Greek what we know as the Hebrew Old

Biola University
Library Groundbreaking Chapel
February 25, 2000

Testament. Why? Most people knew Greek, few knew Hebrew, and there were many scholars who knew of this special literature. Also, many Jews were scattered throughout the Mediterranean world by then and many of them could only read and speak Greek. About seventy scholars started the translation task, so when it was finally completed it was called the Septuagint.

God works in amazing ways: the first major translation of scripture was requested by a Greek ruler in Egypt, arranged by a librarian, and accomplished in the "University" city of Alexandria. That was just a start for this fascinating city.

Alexandria's academic atmosphere attracted the Mediterranean world's scholars. And it was there, a couple centuries after the birth of Christ, that the most significant and extensive encounter of Greco-Roman knowledge and Judeo-Christian faith took place. Rhetoric, grammar, logic, mathematics, science, and such, concepts that were the result of sheer academic pursuit and sweat, met head on with the Jewish and then Christian foundational belief that the "Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

By 200 AD Christian scholars in Alexandria had their own catechetical school and were well versed in the standing knowledge of the day. Under the leadership of such men as Clement and then Origen, they were active in exploring a broad field of information. Through the eyes of faith in Christ and knowledge of scripture, they sought to explore and use wisely the current knowledge and skills that could enrich life and enhance their service to God and humankind. In a sense, it was at that catechetical school in Alexandria that the concept that 'All truth is God the creator's truth' stimulated broad scholarly inquiry.

Alexandria and its library is part of every academic institution's heritage. For Christian schools, it pointed the way to one of our most cherished distinctives: The integration of faith and learning.

Let me share one other illustration of the significance of the library of Alexandria for Christian scholars.

Some two hundred thirty years before the birth of Christ, Eratosthenes was the librarian at Alexandria. His interest and competency ranged from poetry to mathematics and geography. Using simple instruments and geometry, he calculated the circumference of the earth. Today we know that he was off less than two hundred miles.

Long before the birth of Christ, there were scholars who believed the world was round, turned on its axis and circled the sun!

Yet the common man then and for centuries to follow could look around and "know" that the earth was flat and that it was the sun that was moving around the earth. The Eratostheneses of those ancient days, as well as the Galileos of just a few centuries ago were thought to be dreamers or heretics.

The farther you move from bodies of serious scholarship, from the challenge and verification of data in scholarly encounters, and, the farther you move from faith in our God who is not only the lover of our souls and author of the Bible, but the creator of this knowable universe, the deeper you move into the dark path of limited and untested thought.

Biola University
Library Groundbreaking Chapel
February 25, 2000

With the gradual fading of communities that welcomed inquisitive scholars such as the librarians of Alexandria and the likes of Clement, Origen and Augustine, humankind entered what historians call the Dark Ages.

Too often when we stray from the opportunity for rigorous investigation, discussion and reflection that good libraries and academic communities provide, we see only our own little flat acre of land. Further, we withdraw our observations and convictions from the market place of learning and lessen our impact on society as a whole.

Looking forward at the world—the whole world—through the eyes of faith is at the heart of “faith and learning.” Our world needs our thoughts and our witness. God’s servants serve: they do not withdraw from the arduous task of being effective salt and light. Excellent libraries are at the heart of academic communities. What we do here today enhances greatly Biola University’s abilities to educate and serve.

II. The Current Critical Need for Libraries

Excellent libraries have been foundational to learning centers through the centuries. But is this new age of technology making the library obsolete? Is the door on the world that has been opened by personal computers now closing the door of the library? I think not. But if it does it will, ironically, be a death perpetrated by ignorance as well as arrogance.

Technology is not killing libraries; it is radically enhancing them and strengthening their critical role in education. Technology has brought speed and breadth to our quest for information as well as excellence and efficiency in research. And, I believe, everything from hardware to the World Wide Web will not only transform the basic services of the library, they will also necessitate its prominence.

A library, particularly in an academic community, is not just a storage facility for data—or even just a center for searching and retrieving information. Libraries were never meant to be warehouses. They were and are the gathering place for learners. By that I mean that a library is not only a building you can enter, but it is a magnet that helps draw learners into a world of inquiry, reflection and discussion.

It is, furthermore, a world you cannot control from your keyboard. Here others with different backgrounds and interests than yours may confront you with questions and dilemmas that never crossed your mind. Even if bound paper is replaced by disks and chips, a library’s critical function as a magnet for warm, breathing, confident or struggling learners will remain, a challenging and effective place for the development of the mind and soul.

One final thought from the libraries of antiquity. As we do today, they also sought excellence in their collections. Alexander’s motivation in establishing the Alexandria in Egypt was to shape society and enhance the learner’s appreciation for that which was excellent and noble. In a similar vein, the dominant characteristics of libraries down through history have been significant literature and also art. In a sense, libraries have a soul and a noble purpose. A good academic library is not the result of anything and everything. It is enriched and maintained with guidance, care, and purpose.

The internet is different. It sends forth excellence as well as trash, deception and baloney. If technology were to replace libraries, it would need a soul—some warm, breathing, noble guidance system. Today the internet has no soul, no concept of virtue, and no expectation for excellence and nobility: it is a marvel, but it is a tool, a soul-less tool.

Biola University
Library Groundbreaking Chapel
February 25, 2000

Biola University's library has a soul: it is guided by policy and people. It is enriched and encouraged by those who seek here a haven for serious thought, knowledge and growth. It teaches by the example of its collection, service and environment. Life in the light of the Biola library helps scholars young and old, note that the difference between spiritual intellectual growth and the mere accumulation of information as well as the difference between citizenship and undisciplined freedom. Above all, this library, at the core of its soul, echoes with that grand theme of old, "The fear of the Lord is indeed the beginning—the foundation—of wisdom."

The Library at Alexandria is not only of historical significance to us today, it is also a challenge to us as we face the opportunities of service and witness in our new Millennium. As we break the ground today for this new library facility, may it serve well this community and the world for the glory of God and the enrichment of humankind.