

FAITHFUL HISTORY

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This essay is an exceptionally challenging example of an endeavor that DIALOGUE was founded to encourage and which we are determined to make increasingly central in our published work: the application of deep personal faith to the work of this world. In this case, the author, who is fully committed to a specific religious faith and to a specific vocation — as a prize-winning (for his book, FROM PURITAN TO YANKEE) professor of history at Boston University and bishop of the University Second Ward, examines the ways he could and should be not only true to his faith but anxiously engaged in it at the same time that he works as a historian. This essay will appear in a forthcoming book of essays in honor of the memory of B. West Belnap, former Dean of the College of Religion at Brigham Young University, which is being edited by Robert K. Thomas.

I

Written history rarely survives the three score and ten years allotted to the men who write it. Countless histories of the French Revolution have moved on to the library shelves since 1789, and no end is in sight. The same is true of any subject you care to choose — the life of George Washington, the medieval papacy, or Egyptian burial rites. Historians constantly duplicate the work of their predecessors, and for reasons that are not always clear. The discovery of new materials does not satisfactorily account for the endless parade of books on the same subject. It seems more that volumes written even thirty or forty years before fail to persuade the next generation. The same materials must constantly be recast to sound plausible, the past forever reinterpreted for the present.

The books on the framing of the Constitution written over the past hundred years illustrate the point. Through most of the nineteenth century, Americans conceived of the framers as distinguished statesmen, if not demigods, who formulated a plan of government which embodied the highest political wisdom and assured freedom to Americans so long as they remained true to constitutional principles. Near the end of the century, however, when certain provisions of the Constitution were invoked to prevent government regulation of economic excesses, reformers began to think of the Constitution less as a safeguard of liberty than as a shield for greed and economic domination. Proposals for drastic revision began to circulate. Among the advocates of reform was a young historian, Charles Beard, who set out in a new mood to rewrite the story of the Constitution. As reported in *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution*, Beard discovered that most of the framers were wealthy men who feared popular attempts to encroach on property rights.¹ Quite naturally they introduced provisions which would forestall regulation of business by the democratic masses. The deployment of the Constitution in defense of business interests in the late nineteenth century was only to be expected. The framers themselves were businessmen who had foreseen the popular tendency to attack property and had written a document that could be brought to the defense of business. Far from creating a government for all the people, they constituted the power of the republic so as to protect property. Their interests were narrow and by implication selfish.²

That interpretation caught on in the early twentieth century when the main thrust of reform was to regulate business. For nearly twenty years historians found Beard's interpretation of the Constitution true to life as they knew it and faithfully taught his views to their students. Shortly after World War II, however, the temper of the times changed. Business interests no longer appeared so malevolent as before; the Supreme Court took a brighter view of government regulation; and constitutional principles were invoked on behalf of civil rights and other libertarian causes. All told, the provisions protecting property did not stand out so prominently as before, and men began to see once again the broader import of the document. A number of historians then began to attack Beard. They argued that all the political leaders of the eighteenth century were men of property, and that wealth did not distinguish those who favored the Constitution from those who opposed it. Rather than being protectors of class interest, the framers were seen to be seeking a balance in government that would keep order while preserving liberty, and they were generally acknowledged to have succeeded. Now the consensus of historical opinion has swung around once more to

¹Charles A. Beard, *An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1913).

²For an analysis of Beard's work and its intellectual milieu, see Richard Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, Parrington* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), chaps. 1, 5-8.

honor the framers as distinguished statesmen of unusual political wisdom who framed a constitution for which we can be thankful.

Presumably we are closer to the truth now than thirty years ago when Beard's views held sway. And yet it is disconcerting to observe the oscillations in historical fashion and to recognize how one's own times affect the view of the past. Anyone unfamiliar with the writing of history may wonder why historians are such vacillating creatures. Are not the facts the facts and is not the historian's task no more than to lay them out in clear order? Why the continual variations in opinion? It seems reasonable that, once told, the story need only be amended as new facts come to light.

The reason for the variations is that history is made by historians. The facts are not fixed in predetermined form merely awaiting discovery and description. They do not force themselves on the historian; he selects and molds them. Indeed he cannot avoid sculpturing the past simply because the records contain so very many facts, all heaped together without recognizable shape. The historian must select certain ones and form them into a convincing story. Inevitably scholars come up with differing accounts of the same event. Take the following vignette, the individual components of which we will assume are completely factual.

Having come from a broken home himself, Jack yearned for a warm and stable family life. For many years he went out with different girls without finding one whom he could love. At age thirty-four he finally met a girl who won his heart completely, and in his delirious happiness he dreamed of creating the home he had missed in his own childhood. In the fall of 1964, one month before their wedding, the girl withdrew from the engagement. Jack was heart-broken and deeply distressed. Two months later he entered the hospital and in three months was dead.

No causes for the death are explicitly given but we surmise a tangled psychic existence connected with Jack's ambivalence about marriage. He yearned for a wife and a happy home life, and yet his experience as a boy prevented him from risking it until long after most men are married. When he finally found the girl, the long pent-up desires were promised fruition. Her withdrawal from the engagement shocked his nervous system and induced a psychosomatic ailment serious enough to kill him. Admittedly we have to read a lot into the story to reach that conclusion, but it is not implausible. If the historian only gave us those facts and we were of a psychological bent, we would probably believe the account.

But listen to a briefer narration from the same life:

Beginning in his last year in high school, Jack smoked two packs of cigarettes a day. In the winter of 1965, his doctor diagnosed lung cancer, and three months later he was dead.

Aha, we say, now we have the truth. We do not have to resort to far-fetched psychological theories to explain what happened. We all know what cigarettes do to you.

But as careful historians we cannot yet close the case. The most obvious diagnosis is not necessarily the true one. Only a small fraction of those who

smoke two packs of cigarettes a day contract lung cancer at age thirty-four. Smoking alone does not explain why Jack was one of them. Can we rule out the possibility that psychic conflicts broke his resistance and made him susceptible? I do not think we can, though most people may prefer the more straightforward explanation. The point is that given the multitude of facts, historians by picking and choosing can make quite different and plausible stories, and it is difficult to demonstrate that just one of them is true. There is room for debate about the cause of Jack's death even when all the facts are in, including a medical autopsy. When so simple a case refuses to yield an indubitable result, think how interpretations of broad, complex events can vary: the motives of a presidential candidate, the causes of a war, or the origins of the Book of Mormon?

Notice also that neither of these explanations would have convinced reasonable people thirty or forty years ago. After the demise of romantic notions of broken-hearted lovers, and before the currency of psychoanalytic ideas about psychosomatic disease, a death by a broken engagement would have sounded outlandish indeed. In the same period, the connection of smoking and cancer was not yet established. The juxtaposition of two packs a day and the doctor's diagnosis would have been thought irrelevant, like linking the ownership of cats or a taste for bright neckties to tuberculosis. Nowadays, however, both theories make sense. New outlooks in our own time demand that past events be surveyed anew in search of relationships overlooked by earlier scholars. Reasonableness and plausibility, the *sine qua non* of good history, take on new meanings in each generation.

I doubt if any practicing historian today thinks of history as a series of bead-like facts fixed in unchangeable order along the strings of time. The facts are more like blocks which each historian piles up as he chooses, which is why written history is always assuming new shapes. I do not mean to say that historical materials are completely plastic. The facts cannot be forced into just any form at all. Some statements about the past can be proven wrong. But the historian himself has much more leeway than a casual reading of history books discloses. His sense of relevance, his assumptions about human motivation and social causation, and the moral he wishes readers to draw from the story — what he thinks is good and bad for society — all influence the outcome.

Perhaps the most important influence is the sense of relevance — what the historian thinks is worth writing about. For that sense determines what part of the vast array of facts he will work with. When you consider all that has happened in the world's history — children reared, speeches given, gardens planted, armies annihilated, goods traded, men and women married, and so on and on and on, more important than how you answer a question is what question you ask in the first place. Not until you decide that you want to know the history of child-rearing, or oratory, or gardening do you even bother to look at all the facts on those subjects stored away in the archives. A large part of creativity in the writing of history is the capacity to ask new questions that draw out arrays of facts previously neglected.

Fashions in historical questions come and go like other fashions, and these changes in the sense of relevance require that old stories be told anew. Beard's generation took a great interest in economic forces. They wished to know (and we still do today) the wealth and sources of income of historical figures, the distribution of wealth through society, price levels, and the volume of trade and production. Earlier generations, particularly those before 1800, did not even think such facts important enough to record them properly. Economic historians today are hard-pressed to answer the questions which interest them most. The same is true of demographers who bewail the failure of colonial Americans to take even a rude census before 1754. The present generation would also dearly love to know the opinions and feelings of the poor and the slaves. One hundred and fifty years ago hardly anyone thought it worth the effort to record their thoughts. Now we must laboriously collect materials from scattered sources, speculate on the implications of the skimpy materials we do have, and try to answer questions our generation is asking in order to make the past relevant for us.

To sum it all up, written history changes simply because history itself brings change. Were we exactly like our ancestors, their history would satisfy us just as their houses and clothes would. But time has altered our concerns, our beliefs, our values, just as it has changed our taste and technological skill. We need new histories that appeal to our views of causation, our sense of significance, and our moral concerns. Since the materials out of which histories are made are so vast and flexible, historians are forever rearranging old facts and assimilating new ones into accounts that will help men of the present understand the past.³

II

Historians nowadays are philosophical about the frailty of their work. Most of my contemporaries realize the next generation's books will supersede their own and are content to write for their own times. They know their work will pass into obsolescence just as architects build knowing their structures will come down. Looking at the matter realistically, we can probably hope for nothing more. So long as men change, their understanding of the past must also change. Even from a religious perspective, at least from a Mormon point of view, there can be no lasting history for mortals. So long as we progress, we will enjoy ever broader horizons, and these must inevitably reflect on our understanding of what went before. As our wisdom enlarges, we will see more deeply into all of our experiences. Only when we come to the limits of knowledge and intelligence will we reach the final truth about history.

Recognizing the contingency of written history does not mean we can dismiss it as trivial. No human activity, including the physical sciences, escapes these limitations. We must try to speak the truth about the past as

³The questions I raise are explored more fully in E. H. Carr, *What Is History?* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1961).

earnestly as we try to tell the truth about anything. Accepting the inevitable role of beliefs and values in history simply compels us to examine more closely the concerns which influence us and to make sure that we write history with our truest and best values uppermost.

It seems to me that given these premises, the Mormon historian, if he is given to philosophizing about his work, must ask himself what values govern his scholarship. What determines his views of causation, his sense of significance, and his moral concerns? One might think that his religious convictions, his deepest personal commitments, would pervade his writing. But in my own experience, religious faith has little influence on Mormon historians for an obvious reason: we are not simply Mormons but also middle class American intellectuals trained for the most part in secular institutions.

It is perfectly clear that all Mormons live by varying values and outlooks, not all of them religious. When we sell cars, we act like most used car salesmen, for they are our teachers in selling automobiles. When we preside over a ward or teach a gospel lesson, we act in another frame of mind, more in accord with what we have learned at church. The two are not entirely separable, but we all sense the different spirit of the two situations—a used car lot and a church classroom. Obviously different ideas and assumptions about life prevail in each place. Similarly, historians who are Mormons write history as they were taught in graduate school rather than as Mormons. The secular, liberal, establishmentarian, status-seeking, decent, tolerant values of the university govern us at the typewriter, however devoted we may be as home teachers. Indeed this viewpoint probably controls our thinking far more than our faith. The secular, liberal outlook is the one we instinctively think of as objective, obvious, and natural, even though when we stop to think about it we know it is as much a set of biases as any other outlook.

The values learned in modern universities are not without merit, and I do not intend to disparage the work produced under their auspices, but given a choice would not most Latter-day Saints agree that their religious faith represents their best selves and their highest values? Is it not the perpetual quest of the religious man to have religious principles regulate all of his conduct, the selling of automobiles and the writing of history as well as Sunday preachments—in short, to do all things in faith? Now that we have abandoned the naïve hope that we can write objective history, I think Mormon historians should at least ask how we might replace our conventional, secular American presuppositions with the more penetrating insights of our faith.

I am not contending for orthodox history in the sense of adherence to one opinion. Gospel principles do not point toward one way of describing the past any more than they specify one kind of human personality. The Lord does not intend that we all be exactly alike. The possible styles of history in a Mormon spirit are as varied as the persons who write it. The authentic forms of Mormon-style history will emerge in the works of Mormon historians. They cannot be deduced from theological doctrines. All we can do in a theoretical vein is to speculate on some of the leads the gospel opens

up, the directions which Mormon historians might take. And that is what I intend to do in the remainder of this essay.

III

The Book of Mormon is a source of insight about the nature of history which Mormons have only begun to mine. Since it was written by prophets, we can assume that extraneous cultural influences were largely subordinated to faith (although Mormon's interest in military tactics must have affected his decision to include the war episodes in the latter part of Alma). What clues does the Book of Mormon offer about appropriate concerns for a Mormon historian?

As I read the book, one pervasive theme is the tension between man and God. Class struggles, dynastic adventures, technological change, economic forces are all subordinated to this one overriding concern. Human obedience and divine intervention preoccupied the prophets who told the story. Where is God leading the Nephites? Will He help Nephi get the plates of Laban? Will Laman and Lemuel repent? Will God protect the Nephites on the voyage? Will they serve him in the new land? The prophets are most interested in what God does for men and their willingness in turn to serve him. All events take on meaning as they show God's power or as they depict people coming to Him or falling away. The excitement of the story often lies in finding out what God will do next or how the people will respond. As would be expected of prophet-historians who had experienced God's glory, the fundamental axis of every story stretches between earth and heaven.

Presumably Mormon historians today might concentrate on the same relationship. Just as the concerns of the Progressive era led its historians to focus on economic forces, our concerns interest us in God. Nothing could be of more lasting importance. As we examine our best selves in moments of faith, God's presence seems to fill our consciousness and to be the ultimate source of meaning in life. Inevitably, we must ask how He has shaped human experience generally, just as the historians overawed by industrialization and business power asked how economic forces affected the past.

Admittedly, we are not as gifted as the prophets in discerning the hand of God or even the consequences of sin. Who can say where He intervened in the lives of Charlemagne or Napoleon or even in the formation of the Constitution? Belief in God is not a simple guide to relevant history. But our faith certainly compels us to search for Him as best we can, and the scriptures suggest some avenues to follow. We know from our doctrine that God enters history in various ways: revelation to the prophets, providential direction of peoples and nations, and inspiration through the Spirit of Christ to all men. Each of these offers an interpretive structure that puts God to the fore and suggests a strategy for the Mormon historian. Someone, someday may work out more systematically the implications of each of these perspectives and perhaps even approach a Mormon philosophy of history. But even on first inspection some of the possibilities—and problems—can be seen.

1. *Revelation to the prophets.* We are most certain of divine intervention when the prophets, whose judgment we trust, tell us God has spoken or acted. The most obvious subject for Mormon historians is the history of the Church, the story of God's revelation to his people and the implementation of His will in the earth. Mormons are drawn to their own past not merely out of ethnocentrism, but because they see it as part of the Lord's work.

Faith in the revelations does not, however, determine how the story is told, not even its basic structure. The fundamental dramatic tension can be between the Church and the world, or it can be between God and the Church. In the first, the Lord establishes His kingdom among men, and the Saints struggle to perform his work against the opposition of a wicked world. Joseph Fielding Smith's *Essentials in Church History* rests on this structure.⁴ In the second, the Lord tries to establish his kingdom, but the stubborn people whom He favors with revelation ignore him much of the time and must be brought up short. I know of no modern Mormon who has written in this vein, but it is common in the Bible and the Book of Mormon. The prophets mourn the declension of faith within the Church itself more than they laud the righteousness of the Saints. In the first, the Saints are heroes and the world villains. In the second, the world is wicked, but so are the Saints much of the time.

Unfortunately, the polarization between Mormon and anti-Mormon has foreclosed this latter kind of history for the time being. Virtually everyone who has shown the "human side" of the Church and its leaders has believed the enterprise was strictly human. To defend the faith, Mormon historians have thought they must prove the Church to be inhumanly righteous. We need historians who will mourn the failings of the Saints out of honor for God instead of relishing the warts because they show the Church was earth-bound after all.

However we write our own story, we cannot, of course, content ourselves with the history of the Church, for statistically speaking it is such a small part of world history. We must find some way of bringing a larger portion of mankind within our field of vision. The most common device among Mormons for comprehending the whole of world history within the scope of revelation has been the concept of dispensation. The revelation of knowledge and the bestowal of priesthood power is seen as a pattern repeated through history to various people in many places. Usually an apostasy follows each dispensation of divine blessings so that history follows the path of an undulating curve. Each dispensation raises men toward God, and then they fall away, only to be lifted by the succeeding dispensation.

The archetype of this pattern was the "Great Apostasy," from the dispensation of Christ to the restoration of the primitive Church through Joseph Smith. B. H. Roberts and James Talmage have most vividly explicated this period of history for Mormons with the liberal assistance of Protestant

⁴Joseph Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History: A History of the Church from the Birth of Joseph Smith to the Present Time . . .* (Salt Lake City: Published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1922).

scholars who were equally committed to belief in the apostasy of the Roman Church. (Indeed it would be interesting to know if Roberts, Talmage, or James Barker added anything to the findings of Protestant scholars.⁵) On this framework Mormons have hung the course of western civilization since Christ. Milton Backman in *American Religions and the Rise of Mormonism* has filled in the picture with a more detailed account of the Protestant Reformation and the growth of tolerance in preparation for the Restoration.⁶ Together these works tell of the Church's glory under the original Twelve, declension under Roman influence, upward movement with Protestantism and religious liberty, and climax in Joseph Smith and the Restoration.

Beyond this one period the dispensation pattern is more difficult to apply because the scriptural and historical materials are much thinner. Milton Hunter's *Gospel Through the Ages* briefly told the whole story from Adam to the present, relying almost entirely on the scriptures.⁷ But clearly the most significant advances in this area have been achieved by Hugh Nibley. Nibley's great innovation is to argue that the influence of revelation in the dispensation cycle does not end with apostasy. Revelation leaves its mark long after people cut themselves off from God. The Gnostics go on yearning for revelation and even counterfeiting it; medieval Christians envy the temple when temple ceremonies are long forgotten. In short, the structure and aspirations of uninspired religion are derived from the revealed religions from which they once sprang. Even in non-Christian ritual, remnants of the temple ceremony can be glimpsed.⁸

The dispensation pattern thus does not restrict itself to the people who figure in the scriptures. Revelation to the prophets more or less directly influenced vast portions of world civilization, perhaps all of it. A number of anthropologists today argue that rather than arising independently, civilization diffused from some cultural center in the Near East. Nibley, himself a diffusionist of a sort, seems to be hinting that a revelation started it all, and the divine original still shows up in the distorted worship of apostate religions.

I can only suggest the scope and richness of Nibley's thought. One certainly cannot accuse him of unduly narrowing the span of time or space which he encompasses. It will require teams of scholars to match his erudition in a large number of complex fields, and to follow up on his insights. I hope the immensity of the task will not discourage the young men he has

⁵B. H. Roberts, *The "Falling Away," or, The World's Loss of the Christian Religion and Church . . .* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1931); James E. Talmage, *The Great Apostasy Considered in the Light of Scriptural and Secular History* (Salt Lake City: The Deseret News, 1909); James L. Barker, *Apostasy from the Divine Church* (Salt Lake City: K. M. Barker, 1960).

⁶Milton V. Backman, Jr., *American Religions and the Rise of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1965).

⁷Milton R. Hunter, *The Gospel Through the Ages* (Salt Lake City: Stevens and Wallis, Inc., 1945).

⁸Nibley's articles in Church and secular journals as well as his books are listed in Louis Midgley, "Hugh Nibley: A Short Bibliographical Note," *Dialogue* 2 (Spring 1967): 119-21.

inspired. He very well may have opened up the most promising approach to a religiously oriented understanding of world history.

My only misgiving about this method is its limited sympathy. Nibley's gospel framework may brilliantly illuminate some aspects of a people's culture. The Gnostics' frenetic search for mysteries and ineffable experience makes sense when seen as a quest of recovery, an effort to regain the Holy Ghost. But at distant removes the gospel frame may also distort a culture's values and purposes. The temple ceremonies may indeed have shaped the form of the Roman liturgy or of Icelandic sagas, but does not time alter a culture until it means something quite different to the people absorbed in it than was originally intended? Should we not be sensitive to what the mass means today as well as to the remnants of the ordinances from which it was derived? If nothing else, our love for all people as part of God's progeny should caution us against stuffing them into our own categories, however cosmically significant. At its best, Nibley's analysis would show the interplay of what a religion was originally and what history made of it.

Far the larger part of all the history written with an identifiable Mormon twist falls into these two categories: history of the Church or history of the dispensation cycle. The reason for this concentration is obvious. In both cases the prophets tell us where God intervened. We do not have to rely on our own insight to make this most difficult of judgments. The revelations themselves guide us. The historian has only to work out the implications of divine action. God's part in the other forms of history I wish to discuss is far more conjectural, and historians have understandably shied away from them. Until we develop more precise techniques, these categories will probably remain empty, mere theoretical possibilities.

2. *Providential direction of peoples and nations.* The large plan of three scriptural histories falls into this division: the Old Testament, the Book of Mormon, and the Book of Ether. Day by day, the dramatic tension in all of the scriptures resembles that of the Book of Mormon: God acting and man responding. But the collection of small events in these three national histories is not a shapeless heap of successes and failures; they form a Providential pattern. Each of the peoples in these books was chosen by God, guided, chastised when they wandered, and eventually rejected — though not forever; ultimately the Lord will restore them (except for the people of Ether, who were obliterated).

This divinely supervised rise and fall is related to the dispensation cycle but stands above it as a pattern of its own. The history of a nation or people forms the next larger historical unit after the dispensation. It tells the whole story of a people, following the long curve of their history along the ups and downs of various dispensations and apostasies that occur within the larger cycle of national ascent and decline. Presumably this scriptural structure could guide scholarly study today as it did the work of Old Testament historians.

Practically speaking, the history of the Jews is the only area that will prove fruitful for the time being. The absence of non-scriptural sources

compels us to rely mainly on the Book of Mormon for the history of Lehi's and Ether's people. So long as we are unable clearly to identify which of the pre-Columbian remains connect up with the Book of Mormon, we have no materials to enlarge the scriptural accounts. Not that we should neglect early American history; Mormons certainly should be involved. But as far as I know we are as yet a long way from writing Providential history of pre-Columbian America that would in any way add to the Book of Mormon. We simply have no way of telling where God intervened. We are less in the dark about the Jews. Scriptural events and non-scriptural sources have been connected at a number of points. We could write their history and that of their predecessors in the light of the concept of Providence. Doubtless that is partly the fascination of Cleon Skousen's ambitious works.⁹ Certainly it is sufficient reason to attract serious Mormon scholarship.

But beyond the application to these two peoples, the scriptural model of Providential history raises questions for other nations. Does God have a plan for them as well? Does their history follow a Providential pattern? It seems to be a fact that all civilizations rise and fall much as Israel did. Could it be for similar reasons? Nibley discovered that the dispensation cycle could be enlarged to include many peoples; perhaps Providence also has a wider compass than we have imagined.

The possibility of broadening the scope of Providential governance leads us back to examine more carefully the causes of Israel's ascent and decline. The Old Testament leads one to believe that God rejected the Jews because they rejected Him. The tribes of Israel entered into a covenant at Sinai, and when they consistently refused to honor it, God's patience wore thin. Finally He cast them aside. If that is all there is to it, Israel's case would apply only to covenanted nations. Egyptian and Hellenic civilization would be another matter entirely. Not having been chosen, they could not be rejected. Providence must govern them according to another plan, and the Old Testament does not tell us what it is.

Just possibly the Book of Mormon does. Much less is said there of the original covenant, and more of the righteousness of the people. The general impression one receives is that righteousness brought peace and prosperity, while war and misery came close on the heels of sin. The people of Lehi declined when they persistently broke the commandments. Their fate was less dependent on a personal quarrel with God than on refusal to comply with His laws. By extrapolation, righteous behavior and the well-being of a civilization may be linked in some lawful relationship among gentiles as well as among covenanted people. The historian who understood the laws well enough could explain the course of a nation's development just as Toynbee tried to do, except that divine principles would be seen to underlie events.

⁹W. Cleon Skousen, *The First 2000 Years* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1953); *The Third Thousand Years* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964); *The Fourth Thousand Years* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966); *Fantastic Victory: Israel's Rendezvous with Destiny* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1967).

A simplistic form of such a history could model itself after David McClelland's study of the achievement motive.¹⁰ McClelland worked out a measure of people's desire for concrete achievements and used it to assess the presence of this need in popular literature over the past two or three centuries. To his delight, the production of iron and steel, a rough indicator of economic growth, followed the ups and downs of the need achievement curve. Presumably when people got worked up about getting things done, that desire ultimately got the economy to perking. A need for righteousness or for religion might yield similar results. Could it be when the level of pride goes up so does civil strife, or when a nation humbles itself it enjoys peace?

The difficulties of the program are obvious. How does one measure righteousness, and what kind of righteousness is most critical. And what are the historical consequences of goodness? Wealth? Peace? An artistic flowering? Military power? Imperial conquest? I doubt very much that the relationship will be the simple one which seemingly held for McClelland. However, it would be a mistake to give up on the scriptures as a source of historical understanding. We still might be able to derive a religious sociology and psychology from the Book of Mormon which would illuminate all national histories. We sense in our bones that virtue affects the quality of social life. The prophets have expressed the same sentiment rather emphatically. Can that insight be worked out in concrete historical instances? I think it deserves a try. We may not be able to plot the course of a people through all of their history as the scriptures do for Israel and Toynbee does for his civilizations. But perhaps we can penetrate lesser events or epochs to show Providence at work governing the world by divine law.

3. *Inspiration through the Spirit of Christ.* Mormons have long entertained the vague belief that God was guiding all good men everywhere to various triumphs of the spirit in art and government and science. In general we have attributed the appearance of "the finer things" to the activity of the Spirit of Christ, thereby reconciling our gospel convictions with our commitment to middle class American culture. I have no serious objection to this comforting belief so long as we do not fall prey to secularization of the worst sort, that is, to clothe worldly values in religion. But what I have in mind as a program of historical research has a different purpose than the sanctification of culture heroes.

It rests on two doctrines: spiritual death at the Fall and spiritual life through the light of Christ. The assumption is that our separation from God wounded us, and we desire to be healed. We are not whole without God, and seek completion. The truest and only completely satisfying course is to yield to the Spirit of Christ which God sends into the world in lieu of His own presence. Following that Spirit brings us eventually to the gospel and to God where we enter once again into the rest of the Lord. But en route most humans are waylaid or deceived. They accept counterfeit Gods, mere idols, and fruitlessly seek fulfillment in them. Rarely are individuals entirely

¹⁰David C. McClelland, *The Achieving Society* (Princeton, N.J.: Van Nostrand, 1961).

defeated, for the Spirit continues to strive with man, and men as a whole, however badly misled for a time, will always back away from their false gods and start again on a more promising path. Thus the search is perpetual, driven by man's deepest need. All of human history in this sense can be thought of as *heilige geschichte*, a quest for salvation.

The model for this mode of history, I must confess, is not the scriptures (though they too tell of the quest for salvation) but Reinhold Niebuhr's Gifford Lectures, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*.¹¹ Niebuhr's categories were human finitude and divine infinitude. Man is limited and contingent but because of a divine component yearns to be infinite and free. His quest has taken two major forms, romantic and classical, which roughly correspond to emotion and reason, loss of self in the senses and exaltation through the mind. The romantics are Dionysians, giving themselves over to feeling and seeking union with the All through sense and emotion. Classical figures are Apollonians. They seek order and perfect control. The scientist is a classical man who tries to reduce all of life to laws of which he is perfectly certain and which afford complete control. Both of these styles are idols, Niebuhr argued, false and misleading efforts to be God, that eventually lead to tyranny and death. The only true way to reach the infinite is through worship, which permits men to reach God without claiming to be God themselves. I do not subscribe entirely to Niebuhr's categories, although they are immensely useful, but his model of incomplete man striving for completion does accord with the scriptural view of the human situation.

Furthermore, I find that the model works in historical research. I am presently studying religious and political thought in America in the early eighteenth century. Without forcing the issue, I see men in this period attempting two things in their ideological discourse. The first is to describe life as it should be. This generation was vexed by their own greed and contentiousness. The self was forever getting in the way, venting bitter and rancorous emotions, or pursuing its private interests at the expense of the whole. These people yearned for peace and union, ways of keeping the self in check or of giving themselves to noble causes that would make them forget self. Union, tranquillity, peace, harmony were among their most prominent values, and these, I think, represent in some way a response to the Spirit of Christ, a form of the desire for the rest of the Lord.

The second quest is for moral justification. Men yearn to prove themselves right, that is, to reconcile what they are with what they think they should be. I am willing to work on the assumption that the consciences of men are somehow related to the Spirit of Christ. Warped as moral standards sometimes appear to be, usually we find behind the specific standards of behavior an intention which we can recognize as admirable in our own terms. What I am arguing is that conscience is not entirely relative, though in detail it varies immensely. And that when we find men justifying themselves or setting standards for others, we see them wrestling with the influence

¹¹Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation* (C. Scribner's Sons, 1941).

of heaven. These eighteenth century figures, living as they did in a rapidly expanding society, were forever contending with one another and following naked self-interest in contradiction of what they believed ought to be. Their tortured efforts to justify their actions I think open a window on an authentic religious struggle.

All of this becomes interesting historically when we see various ideals, sometimes disparate ones, working against a reality which drives men to fight with themselves. The ideals and the actual situation create a dynamic interplay which goes far to explain specific events and to account for changes in ideology. In eighteenth century America, the ideal of harmony and the reality of conflict moved men toward a new view of the social order that envisioned life as compartmentalized, each person secluded and safe within the bounds of his own rights, in short, an order more like our present pluralistic society. That minimized contention and unleashed ambition, but it also separated men from each other and required another ideal to give moral significance to life: the free individual progressing toward his own destiny. Nineteenth-century Americans sought their salvation by pursuing that ideal.

Again without forcing the issue, I am convinced that men require a moral setting for their lives. They want to measure themselves against some ideal standard, however grotesque, inarticulate, or irrational it may be. Life has to have purpose and meaning, to operate within a structure which describes existence as it should be and permits people to justify their exertions by some standard outside themselves. In some respects these moral frameworks are godly, and rightly attributed to the Spirit of Christ. They seem to be among the chief means by which men undertake to save themselves.

The advantage of the history of salvation (or man's attempts at it) over the history of revelation or the history of Providence, the two other categories I have discussed, is that the first applies to all people and permits, even demands, full sympathy with them. There is no danger of narrowness, which is inherent in concentration on the locus of revelation or on the vicissitudes of covenanted nations. Its disadvantage is that it may blend imperceptibly with secular history. I confessed my indebtedness to Niebuhr, no Mormon though a Christian. At the moment I am impressed with the work of Carl Schorske, who has no religious convictions at all so far as I know. If these men write history as I aspire to write it, can I still claim to be working out of a Mormon heritage in response to the self I encounter in moments of faith?

IV

The query brings me to my final point, one which I touched on when I said we will only know what Mormon history is when Mormons write it. There is a paradox in the very discussion of the subject of Mormons writing history. On the one hand, I wish to encourage Mormon historians, like Mormon psychologists and Mormon physicians, to think about the relationship of their faith and their professional practice. We are still too much merely Sunday Christians. On the other hand, I do not wish my categories

to be thought of as prescriptive. I think it would be a mistake to set out to prove that nations rise and fall according to principles of righteousness outlined in the Book of Mormon. The outcome would probably be no more convincing than the books which try to show principles of psychoanalysis governing novels. Such works always seem stilted, forced, and artificial. You feel the author was trying to prove an ideological point rather than tell you what he thinks actually happened.

Scriptural principles will guide us toward more powerful works of history only when those principles are fully and naturally incorporated into our ways of thinking; so that when we look at the world we see it in these categories without lying to ourselves or neglecting any of the evidence. We must believe in our framework as sincerely as the Progressive historians believed in economic forces or as any of our secular contemporaries believe in their theories of motivation or social change. It must be part of us, so much so that we will not consciously write as Mormons, but simply as men who love God and are coming to see the world as He does.

Thus it is that my history of the eighteenth century as a quest for salvation may indeed partake of secular strains of thought. But I also know that for me it is religious as well. It is faithful history. As I look at the world in my best moments, this is how I see it. I am not lying to any part of myself, neither the part that prays nor that which interprets documents. If I am still the victim of secularism, the recourse is not to a more obviously Mormon approach but to repentance. Merely altering technique or a few ideas will not make the difference. My entire character, all the things which shape my vision of the world, must change.

The trouble with wishing to write history as a Mormon is that you cannot improve as a historian without improving as a man. The enlargement of moral insight, spiritual commitment, and critical intelligence are all bound together. A man gains knowledge no faster than he is saved.