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Title Editor's Introduction: "What Has Athens to Do with Jerusalem?": Apostasy and Restoration in the Big Picture

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Abstract Introduction to the current issue, including editor's picks. Latter-day Saints appear to approach theology and history in ways that fit remarkably well into the Hebrew thought-world from which Christianity emerged rather than from the Hellenization that eventually emerged.

Editor's Introduction

“WHAT HAS ATHENS TO DO WITH JERUSALEM?”: APOSTASY AND RESTORATION IN THE BIG PICTURE

There is, it seems to me, a profound difference between the way Latter-day Saints think about their faith and the way many other Christians think about their own faith. This difference has implications for the kind of writing we produce, for the way in which we evaluate writing about our religious tradition and beliefs, and for the way we both argue for and defend the restored Church of Jesus Christ. Accordingly, it seems to me that discussion of this difference is appropriate for the pages of the *FARMS Review of Books*.¹

“Christianity,” observes Thorleif Boman,

arose on Jewish soil; Jesus and the Apostles spoke Aramaic, a language related to Hebrew. . . . As the New Testament writings show, they were firmly rooted in the Old Testament and lived in its world of images. Shortly after the death of the Founder, however, the new religious community's centre of gravity shifted into the Greek-speaking Hellenistic world, and after the year 70, the community was severed finally from its motherland: Christianity has been the religion of Europeans ever since. It is significant, however, that despite

1. It so happens, too, that I had a paper on the topic substantially written and wanted to publish it somewhere. This introduction is a slightly revised version of a presentation originally given in June 1999 to a symposium sponsored in Ben Lomond, California, by the Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research (FAIR). I'm grateful to FAIR and its leaders for their permission to publish the paper here.

their absolute authority the words of Jesus were preserved by the Church only in the Greek language. Not only are these two languages essentially different, but so too are the kinds of images and thinking involved in them. This distinction goes very deeply into the psychic life; the Jews themselves defined their spiritual predisposition as anti-Hellenic. Once this point is properly understood, it must be granted completely.²

Mormons, of course, recognize in this Hellenization at least one aspect of what they term “the Great Apostasy”—the event that made necessary the restoration of the gospel in the early nineteenth century.

Latter-day Saint studies of the restoration and the early Christian church tend to focus on the detailed resemblances that exist between the two. This is both fascinating and perfectly appropriate. But it is not merely the content of Mormon ideas that parallels many elements of early Christianity. I contend that the very way in which Latter-day Saints primarily think about their faith and express it resembles the mode of thinking typical among the Hebrews and the first Christians (who were, of course, largely also Hebrews). On the other hand, Mormons have tended not to develop the intellectual approaches to their faith—and the institutions that would support such approaches—that are characteristic of Hellenized Christianity. To illustrate my claim—if not to prove it, which would require much more time and space than I have available to me here—I will look at the way Latter-day Saints do “theology” and history, and at some characteristics of the way life is lived in the church.

Prologue

“What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” Tertullian’s famous question, propounded within two centuries of the death of Jesus, reflects perhaps the unease with which some Christians greeted the (by then) quite obvious Hellenization of their community.³ In fact, of course, neither Athens nor Jerusalem had much directly to do with

2. Thorleif Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (New York: Norton, 1970), 17.

3. Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* 7.9.

what we can now, by virtue of hindsight, realize was a quite inexorable process. Athens, as a center of philosophical study and speculation, was past its prime, although there would be flickers of life from time to time, and Jerusalem, by the period of Tertullian and following two ruthlessly suppressed Jewish revolts, was almost wholly irrelevant to the development of Christian doctrine. It was probably Alexandria, more than any other city, that served as the engine of theological change within what would come to be the mainstream church, as well as within the various “heretical” movements that occasionally seem to have outnumbered the “orthodox.”⁴ It was at Alexandria that the first distinctly anti-anthropomorphic movement can be recognized, when, for example, the translators of the Septuagint omitted the “repentance of God” from their version of Genesis 6:6.⁵ (And if anthropopathy—attributing human emotions to deity—proved offensive to those Alexandrian scholars, it is hardly surprising that expressions of what might be construed as a more literal or even physical anthropomorphism were also dispensed with. Thus, the Psalmist’s declaration, at Psalm 8:6, that man had been made “little lower than God” (or than “the Gods”—*elohim*) became, in the Septuagint, βραχυ τι παρ’ αγγελους, “a little lower than the angels.”)

It was in Alexandria that Philo arose (born ca. 10 to 20 B.C.); “[he] propounded, if he did not originate the doctrine of a transcendental deity.”⁶ Here, also, Basilides and Valentinus, eminent second-century Gnostic leaders, flourished. (The great Gnostic systems of the second century “originated almost exclusively in Alexandria,” remarks Kurt Rudolph, “for here the problems discussed are closely related to Greek Platonic philosophy.”⁷) And it was here that the great

4. See Walter Bauer’s famous *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum*, translated into English as *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

5. On this, see Morris S. Seale, *Muslim Theology: A Study of Origins with Reference to the Church Fathers* (London: Luzac, 1964), 8.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, trans. Robert M. Wilson (New York: Harper and Row, 1983), 284. Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 308, thinks that Gnosticism reached Alexandria from the Syria-Palestine area in the first two decades of the second century. On Basilides, see *ibid.*, 309–12.

church fathers Clement (born ca. 150) and Origen (ca. 185–254) fought against “persistent anthropomorphic tendencies in early Christianity.”⁸ Alexandria was in the vanguard of the religious thought of the day.

Alexandria’s contribution—valuable both intrinsically and for its effects upon the monotheistic religions—has not, until recently and perhaps not even now, received the full attention that it deserves. But this is also true of the greatest philosopher of late antiquity, Origen’s contemporary, Plotinus, who seems to have been born and educated in Egypt, even if he spent most of his actual career and wrote his great work, the *Enneads*, in Rome. In 1917–18, when William Ralph Inge, then dean of St. Paul’s in London, delivered his Gifford Lectures at the University of St. Andrews, he could complain that

the neglect with which the *Enneads* have been treated is not a little surprising. In most of our Universities where Greek philosophy is studied (I can speak at any rate for Oxford and Cambridge), it has been almost assumed that nothing later than the Stoics and Epicureans is worthy of attention. Some histories of ancient philosophy end earlier still. The result is that a very serious gap seems to yawn between Hellenic and Christian philosophy, a gap which does not really exist.⁹

Studying Christian theology as if it had sprung fully armed from the Hebrew and Greek scriptures and the Councils, while neglecting the Hellenic element in its makeup, was, he said, “like tracing a pedigree from one parent only.”¹⁰

If the situation has improved somewhat in the eight decades since Dean Inge spoke those words, it is probably still not fundamentally different. Even today, very few students of philosophy occupy themselves seriously with the *Enneads* of Plotinus. This is unfortunate, for, with the Middle Platonism from which it evolved, it is Neoplatonism, the philosophical school “founded” by Plotinus, that may

8. Seale, *Muslim Theology*, 8–9.

9. William R. Inge, *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, 3rd ed. (New York: Longmans, Green, 1948), 1:12–13.

10. *Ibid.*, 1:14; cf. 1:60.

be chiefly responsible for the movement, in varying degrees, of all three Abrahamic traditions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—away from their roots as historico-revelatory religions to their new status as Hellenized theological systems.

For a similar process did indeed occur in all three. The great Islamicist Marshall Hodgson was one who clearly understood this fact. “For those,” he says,

who cast the history of Islamicate civilization into the form “what went wrong with Islam?,” there have been two answers on the level of intellectual history: that Muslims failed to give full effect to the Greek heritage, or that they allowed the Greek heritage to inhibit unduly their own more concrete and historically-minded (kerygmatic) heritage. I am not, here, siding with those few who take the second view, of course; I am not clear that anything more did go wrong with Islam than with any other tradition.¹¹

As a matter of fact, I do tend to think that an imported Hellenism diverted Islamic religious conceptions from their original inclination toward literalism and concreteness. However, I also think that this merely repeated, in broad brush strokes, an evolution which both Judaism and Christianity had already undergone. Of course, any verdict to the effect that Hellenism “unduly” affected Islam—or Judaism, or Christianity—is a prescriptive judgment that must necessarily flow rather from transhistorical values than from any objective data in the literary monuments. Still, that this process occurred is, it seems to me, indisputable. Its history is inextricably bound up with the story of Platonism. And, in this forum at least, I do not hesitate to say that, yes, Hellenism “unduly” affected Christianity. It warped and deformed it.

I shall now attempt to show, in three different areas, how the restored gospel, known popularly as Mormonism, seems to fit remarkably well into the Hebrew thought-world from which Christianity emerged.

11. Marshall G. S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 2:179 n. 14.

Life in the Church

“It is impossible for any one,” Edwin Hatch declared in his classic Hibbert lectures for 1888,

whether he be a student of history or no, to fail to notice a difference of both form and content between the Sermon on the Mount and the Nicene Creed. The Sermon on the Mount is the promulgation of a new law of conduct; it assumes beliefs rather than formulates them; the theological conceptions which underlie it belong to the ethical rather than the speculative side of theology; metaphysics are wholly absent. The Nicene Creed is a statement partly of historical facts and partly of dogmatic inferences; the metaphysical terms which it contains would probably have been unintelligible to the first disciples; ethics have no place in it. The one belongs to a world of Syrian peasants, the other to a world of Greek philosophers. The contrast is patent. . . . [T]he question why an ethical sermon stood in the forefront of the teaching of Jesus Christ, and a metaphysical creed in the forefront of the Christianity of the fourth century, is a problem which claims investigation.¹²

My friend and colleague Stephen D. Ricks likes to imagine an updated version of Matthew 16:13–17 in which Jesus, questioning his disciples, encounters a theologically more savvy Peter than the one depicted in scripture:

He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?
And Simon Peter answered and said, “Thou art the

12. Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity* (Gloucester, Mass.: Smith, 1970), 1. It should be remarked that Hatch’s modern annotator, F. C. Grant, cannot let the passage I have quoted go by without comment. “The famous contrast between Jesus on the mount, preaching his imperious ethical sermon, and the later church reciting the Nicene Creed amid the pompous ritual of the fourth century is grossly unfair and does violence to the whole conception of the historical development of religion” (see *ibid.*, xii). I do not entirely agree. In any event, Hatch’s stated question is an important and valid one.

ground of all being, of whom no positive attribute may be predicated. Thou art the focus of our ultimate concern, transcending both existence and non-existence, ontologically one with the Father and the Holy Spirit in a manner that neither confuses the persons nor divides the substance.”

And Jesus answered and said unto him, “*What?*”

It has often been noted that Hebrew thought is characteristically dynamic and active, while Greek thought tends to the static and the contemplative. “If Israelite thinking is to be characterized, it is obvious first to call it dynamic, vigorous, passionate, and sometimes quite explosive in kind; correspondingly Greek thinking is static, peaceful, moderate, and harmonious in kind.”¹³ More precise than a contrast between the dynamic and the static, however, might be a distinction between the dynamic and the harmonic or resting.¹⁴ One might remark, for example, that, as in the Semitic languages generally, almost all Hebrew nouns are derived from verbal roots.¹⁵ Thus it is action, rather than inaction, that seems to be fundamental in Semitic languages. Boman suggests an examination of the chief Hebrew and Greek terms for *word* as a way of entering into their distinctive worlds of thought. “*Logos*,” Boman writes,

expresses the mental function that is highest according to Greek understanding. . . . *dabhar* performs the same service for the Israelites; therefore, these two words teach us what the two peoples considered primary and essential in mental life: on the one side the dynamic, masterful, energetic—on the other side the ordered, moderate, thought out, calculated, meaningful, rational. . . .

13. Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, 27; compare 19. One must always beware of oversimplifications, of course. Nietzsche famously distinguished between Apollonian and Dionysiac elements within Greek culture itself. But Dionysus may have been a foreign god, brought into Greece proper by Thracian invaders.

14. See Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, 27.

15. The arrangement of Hans Wehr’s very important *Arabic-English Dictionary* makes the priority of verbal meanings over nominal meanings visibly clear.

We have to render *dabhar* as well as *logos* by “word”, but our concept “word” renders only one part of the content of *dabhar* and of *logos*; the most important part is not touched by this rendering, and at the same time the great distinction between *dabhar* and *logos* is hidden within the very term “word”. “Word” is, so to speak, the point of intersection between two entirely different ways of conceiving of the highest mental life.¹⁶

Boman illustrates his contention with a chart that shows how the Hebrew *dabhar* derives from a verbal root originally meaning “to drive forward” and, later, “to speak.” Greek *logos* stems from a verbal root that first meant “to gather, to arrange” and came thereafter to mean “to speak, to reckon, to think.” The two developmental tendencies intersect in the sense that both *logos* and *dabhar* signify “word,” but they diverge again when *logos* acquires the sense of “reason,” while *dabhar* takes on the notion of “deed” or “act.”¹⁷ The ancient Hebrews did not—to an extent because they *could* not—distinguish as rigidly as we tend to do between word and deed. Thus, Goethe’s famous translation of John 1:1 as “In the beginning was the deed” (*Am Anfang war der Tat*) is, from the Hebrew biblical perspective, really not far wrong.¹⁸

Boman observes that “it is characteristic of the Hebrews that their words *effect* and of the Greeks that the word *is*.”¹⁹ “The characteristic mark of *hayah*, in distinction from our verb ‘to be’ [to which it is the primary Hebrew equivalent], is that it is a true verb with full verbal force.”²⁰ And, of course, the same is true for the Arabic verb “to be,” *kāna*; it takes an accusative object just as any other transitive verb would. This is not true in English, even though, despite what our grammar teachers would have of us, many of us (at least in the

16. Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, 68.

17. See *ibid.*, 65.

18. Goethe, *Faust*, 1.1.889. On this, see Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, 65–66.

19. Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, 69.

20. *Ibid.*, 38.

United States) find it difficult to answer the phone with “It is I” rather than the more colloquial but incorrect “It’s me.”

Study of the definitions of Hebrew verbs yields a very similar, and reinforcing, conclusion:

Hebrew and Greek thinking differ on the relative importance and ontological status of changing and remaining the same. We usually think of stasis as originary and movement as a change from that originary state. In Hebrew thinking, however, remaining the same—stasis—is a particular kind of movement. For example, *to rise up* and *to stand* are the same verb, standing being a particular instance (the completed event) of rising up.²¹

Perhaps not surprisingly, the Semitic linguistic focus on action seems to have had an impact on Semitic culture. It is scarcely an original insight to say of both Judaism and Islam that they are religions of the *law*. Good Jews are Torah-observant. Good Muslims live according to the *shari‘a*, the legal code of Islam. *Orthopraxy*, in other words, or “right action,” seems to be a more central concern for both religions than is *orthodoxy*, or “right belief.” “The genius of [the Jewish] people was directed not toward the fashioning of form, nor toward a harmonious experience of the surrounding world, but toward the legitimacy of moral activity.”²²

But the Jews’ relative emphasis on behavior led inevitably to a relative deemphasis of theology and doctrine. Ask a rabbi a theological question or a question about the specifics of the life to come, and you are likely to be told that such matters are of no real concern. But the Talmud is full of detailed and passionate discussions of the minutiae of sacrificial procedure and other matters of practical action. While neither Judaism nor Islam is entirely without theology (as witnessed by such figures as Maimonides and al-Ash‘ari), and while

21. James E. Faulconer, *Scripture Study: Tools and Suggestions* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999), 140. Once again, the same thing is true in Arabic: The verb *qāma/yaqūmu*, to choose the same example, means both “to get up” and “to stand” or “to continue standing.”

22. Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, 17 n. 2, citing the *Jüdisches Lexikon*.

both certainly have characteristic doctrines, the role of theology in both has been distinctly more limited than it has been within mainstream Christianity. Yet Hatch's observation suggests that such emphasis has not always been characteristic of Christendom, either.

Greek thinking was rather different from Hebrew on this point.

The life of the philosopher is a βίος θεωρητικός [*bios theoretikos*], a *vita contemplativa*. For Aristotle, the word θεωρία [*theoria*] means, in part, observation and the inquiry connected with it, and in part, the doctrine which is thereby set forth, our notion of "theory". In the *Protrepticus* it is said that pure idea is *theoria* and deserves to be esteemed most highly as sight among the senses is esteemed; in the *Metaphysics* (xi, 7), *theoria* is called "the most pleasant and most excellent", and in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (x, 8), perfect happiness, too, becomes a contemplative activity (*theôrêtikê*).²³

Indeed, so highly did the Greeks value contemplation that "The participant in a cultic act or mystery drama is called θεωρός [*theoros*] 'spectator', which was soon connected by folk etymology to θεός [*theos*], 'god'."²⁴

Such contemplation is notable in scripture, by contrast, for its absence. Significantly, for example, Boman notes the remarkable lack of visual description in the Hebrew Bible. While we are told in sometimes excruciating detail how and of what the temple and the ark and the Tabernacle in the wilderness were built, we really don't know what they looked like. "The edifice is thus not a restful harmonious unity in the beauty of whose lines the eyes find joy, but it is something dynamic and living, a human accomplishment."²⁵

Yet the scriptures were by no means the sole influence on the development of Christian thought. It is perhaps to be expected that, in a Christianity saturated by Greek ideas (including an emphasis on

23. *Ibid.*, 115–16.

24. *Ibid.*, 117. Latter-day Saints, of course, will be tempted to see something significant in a connection between participation in a ritual drama and human deification.

25. *Ibid.*, 76.

meditation and contemplation), the ultimate and most yearned-for goal came to be the “beatific vision”—a purely intellectual “seeing” of God (who, it was said, was invisible in any other sense). Although the Jewish idea of the physical resurrection of the dead was not abandoned in favor of this doctrine (perhaps because, given the New Testament’s affirmation of the corporeal resurrection of Jesus, it was now simply too central to Christianity to permit its surrender), having a restored physical body seems oddly irrelevant to a vision of postmortal bliss as purely mental.

I would argue that, with regard to the primacy of action over contemplation, of orthopraxy over orthodoxy, both Judaism and Islam have remained more faithful to their Semitic roots than has mainstream Christianity, though it shares those roots.

And how do the Latter-day Saints fare when viewed in this light? We use the word *orthodox* relatively rarely, and the word *heretic* even less commonly. When we inquire whether a person is a “good Mormon,” we generally have in mind such things as attendance at church and adherence to the Word of Wisdom. When that person comes to her bishop for a temple recommend interview, she is not invited to lay out her views on the relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost for theological evaluation. Rather, by and large, she is asked whether she obeys the commandments and keeps her covenants. Being a good Latter-day Saint, while it certainly involves some basic doctrinal commitments (as does the temple recommend interview itself), is largely a matter of behavior.

We seldom describe a person as a “devout Mormon,” and even more rarely as a “pious Mormon.” We are much more inclined to describe that person as an “*active* Mormon.” I think this kind of language is significant. Boman, attempting to distinguish representative Greek modes of thought from representative Hebrew ways of thinking, contrasts them in a striking comparative image: “The matter is outlined in bold relief,” he writes,

by two characteristic figures; the thinking Socrates and the praying Orthodox Jew. When Socrates was seized by a problem, he remained immobile for an interminable period of

time in deep thought; when Holy Scripture is read aloud in the synagogue, the Orthodox Jew moves his whole body ceaselessly in deep devotion and adoration. The Greek most acutely experiences the world and existence while he stands and reflects, but the Israelite reaches his zenith in ceaseless movement. Rest, harmony, composure, and self-control—this is the Greek way; movement, life, deep emotion, and power—this is the Hebrew way.²⁶

Thus, I would argue that Mormonism is closer, in this regard, to the Semitic roots of Christianity than are most other branches of the Christian movement today. When one recalls the hired gangs of thugs deployed by the rival Alexandrian church officials of Athanasius's day against their theological opponents, one can scarcely avoid the obvious conclusion that, for them at least, doctrinal correctness (orthodoxy) trumped ethical behavior (orthopraxy) in importance. Of course, all Christians fall short of the moral ideal. But that is not the point. The Alexandrian leaders would have justified their behavior, and did justify it, as essential to carrying out their Christian mission and ecclesiastical responsibility—much as St. Augustine later justified the use of state force against heretics.²⁷

Before leaving this subject of *activity* as the marker and manifestation of religious devotion, one other aspect of it is perhaps worth noting: "The Israelites," says Boman, "like all other ancient peoples were 'outer-directed' and did not dissect their psychic life as modern man does."²⁸ This, too, seems akin to the Latter-day Saint mode of religiosity. If one wanders through contemporary bookstores today, looking for what comes under the category of "spirituality," one is sometimes hard pressed to see exactly how it differs from a type of

26. *Ibid.*, 205.

27. See R. W. Dyson, trans., *Augustine: The City of God against the Pagans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), xxviii. In his introduction, Professor Dyson notes of St. Augustine that, "despite his initial misgivings, he came eventually to feel that the Church may and should call upon the secular magistrate to aid her in her struggle against heretics and schismatics."

28. Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, 45.

(perhaps almost “pop”) “psychology.” Much time and effort is expended nowadays on the analysis of one’s inner states. Latter-day Saints, on the whole, have tended to produce little of this literature. Our emphasis, by contrast, tends to be on getting out to the welfare farm, attending the temple, cleaning the chapel, taking care of our home teaching. Doing things, in other words. And this seems to go right back to our founder. “There are few men,” Fawn Brodie complained of Joseph Smith, “who have written so much and told so little about themselves. To search in his six-volume autobiography for the inner springs of his character is to come away baffled. . . . His story is the antithesis of a confession.”²⁹ Mrs. Brodie, of course, was seeking fodder for a reductionist psychoanalysis.³⁰

Finally, on a rather different note: Conservative Protestant critics of the Latter-day Saints have taken to deriding Mormons as “irrationalists” who rely on emotion rather than reason for the justification of their religious loyalties. Now, I will leave to the side the fact that such charges of emotionalism and irrationalism ring rather oddly coming from Protestant fundamentalists, and I will not try to demonstrate my considered impression that Latter-day Saints need feel no inferiority when comparing their own educational attainments and ability to reason to those of their critics. I will not even attempt to show that it is not emotionalism to which Latter-day Saints appeal, but the Holy Spirit (a rather different matter), and that they are entirely biblical in doing so. What I do want to suggest, even though I cannot develop it here to the extent that I hope to do elsewhere, is that the Latter-day Saint way of coming to know spiritual truth is rather like that of the ancient Hebrews.

29. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, 2nd ed. (New York: Knopf, 1975), vii.

30. She herself spent a great deal of time on the psychoanalyst’s couch (see Newell G. Bringhurst, *Fawn McKay Brodie: A Biographer’s Life* [Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999], 268), and the second edition of her biography of the Prophet, particularly, is an explicit attempt to portray Joseph Smith in psychobiographical terms. Compare Davis Bitton and Leonard J. Arrington, *Mormons and Their Historians* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988), 115.

Listen, again, to Boman:

The . . . Hebrew concept of truth is expressed by means of derivatives of the verb *ʾaman*—“to be steady, faithful”; *ʾamen*—“verily, surely”; *ʾomen*—“faithfulness”; *ʾumnam*—“really”; *ʾemeth*—“constancy, trustworthiness, certainty, fidelity to reported facts, truth”; cf. *ʾomenah*—“pillar, door-post”. In short, the Hebrews really do not ask what is true in the objective sense but what is subjectively certain, what is faithful in the existential sense; therefore, it is not what is in agreement with impersonal objective being that interests them, but what is in agreement with the facts that are meaningful for them. This shows that Hebrew thought is directed toward events, living, and history in which the question of truth is of another sort than in natural science. In such matters the true is the completely certain, sure, steady, faithful.³¹

Boman proceeds to show that, when Israelite thinkers (notably those of the Bible) seek to convince an audience, they do not resort to logical syllogisms but to parables and to repetition. Two examples should suffice to make clear what he means:

Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. (Ecclesiastes 1:2)

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. (Psalm 1:1)

The object of such narrative and rhetorical devices is not logical convincing but psychological conviction. “The Hebrew thinkers’ and poets’ art of composition is not like that in architecture where everything is built step by step, but it is more similar to music wherein the theme is set forth at the beginning and returns later in constantly new variations.”³² “The other expressions for the function of think-

31. Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, 202.

32. *Ibid.*, 203.

ing (*yadha*—‘know’, *ra’ah*—‘see’, *shama*—‘hear’) likewise have the purpose of finding a point rather than of furnishing a proof. . . . Greek thinking is clear logical knowing; Israelite thinking is deep psychological understanding. Both kinds of thinking are equally necessary if one means to be in touch with the whole of reality.”³³

For both Latter-day Saints and the ancient Hebrews, coming to know divine truths seems to have been less a matter of persuasion than of immediate, intuitive—and ultimately incommunicable—*perception*.³⁴

History

The Semitic insistence on the importance of acts and behavior carries over into the Semites’ very positive valuation of history. “According to the Israelite conception, everything is in eternal movement: God and man, nature and the world. The totality of existence, *‘ôlam*, is time, history, life.”³⁵ In this regard, although it is true that the Greeks did give us the tradition of “scientific” historiography—commencing, perhaps, with Herodotus but reaching its real fruition in Thucydides—their valuation of the lasting significance of history was far different than that of the Hebrews.

Heinrich Rickert argued—rightly, I think—that “the unique, that which occurs only once, is the proper category for history, while the natural sciences disregard differences and inquire only into what is repeated again and again without change.”³⁶ It is in that sense that we are to understand Boman’s dictum that “The Greeks have given to the world the science of history; the Israelites gave to the world historical religion.”³⁷

33. *Ibid.*, 204.

34. It was to this same immediate if incommunicable perception—he termed it *dhawq*, or “taste”—that the great Islamic theologian al-Ghazali ultimately resorted. See his spiritual autobiography, *Al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl* (“The Deliverer from Error”), available in various translations.

35. Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, 205.

36. Heinrich Rickert, *Die Grenzen der Naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung: Eine logische Einleitung in die historischen Wissenschaften* (Freiberg i. B: Mohr, 1896–1902), 441–42, as summarized in *ibid.*, 169.

37. *Ibid.*, 170.

Let us first look at the Greek attitude toward the world of change and decay, of coming to be and ceasing to be, that is the sphere of historical events:

While, as we have seen, the Hebraic kind of thinking was in the main dynamic, the kind of thinking employed by the Eleatic school of philosophers was not only diametrically opposite but contradictorily so. They considered *being* not only as the essential point, but even more, as the only one since they flatly denied the reality of motion and change. Only what is immovable and immutable exists; all becoming and passing away is mere appearance and is equivalent to what is not, about which nothing positive can be said. Our sense-impressions are deceptive. In a sense, the Greek kind of thinking appears here most distinctly and clearly.³⁸

The Eleatic philosophers, of course, represent an extreme view—and, as an extreme view, the Eleatic approach was not likely to be accepted by the Greeks generally, given their characteristic accent on moderation. Moreover, one might point out that the Eleatic vision had its opposite extreme in Heraclitus of Ephesus, who insisted that all was constant change and flux, that “all things flow” and that one cannot step into the same river twice. Still, the Eleatic position had considerable influence. Plato named one of his dialogues after Parmenides of Elea, the founder of the Eleatic school, and Zeno of Elea gave us his famous paradox, purporting to demonstrate the impossibility of motion and change. (In order to cover the distance from A to B, he said, an arrow must first cover *half* that distance. But before it can cover *that* distance, it must cover half of that half. And so on, to infinity, which means that the arrow can never cover any distance at all.) Moreover, Heraclitus may not be fully Greek in his insistence on universal change. He came not from Greece proper but from Ephesus in Asia Minor, and most of his followers were likewise Asians, which may reveal an “oriental” influence—that is, an influence akin to that of the Hebrews—on his thinking.³⁹

38. *Ibid.*, 51.

39. As suggested in *ibid.*, 51–52.

In any event, to illustrate what clearly emerged as the leading and most characteristic Greek view, permit me to quote at some length from Plato's *Republic*:

"See human beings [says Plato's Socrates] as though they were in an underground cavelike dwelling with its entrance, a long one, open to the light across the whole width of the cave. They are in it from childhood with their legs and necks in bonds so that they are fixed, seeing only in front of them, unable because of the bond to turn their heads all the way around. Their light is from a fire burning far above and behind them. Between the fire and the prisoners there is a road above, along which see a wall, built like the partitions puppet-handlers set in front of the human beings and over which they show the puppets."

"I see," he said.

"Then also see along this wall human beings carrying all sorts of artifacts, which project above the wall, and statues of men and other animals wrought from stone, wood, and every kind of material; as is to be expected, some of the carriers utter sounds while others are silent."

"It's a strange image," he said, "and strange prisoners you're telling of."

"They're like us," I said. "For in the first place, do you suppose such men would have seen anything of themselves and one another other than the shadows cast by the fire on the side of the cave facing them?"

"How could they," he said, "if they had been compelled to keep their heads motionless throughout life?"

"And what about the things that are carried by? Isn't it the same with them?"

"Of course."

"If they were able to discuss things with one another, don't you believe they would hold that they are naming these things going by before them that they see?"

"Necessarily."

“And what if the prison also had an echo from the side facing them? Whenever one of the men passing by happens to utter a sound, do you suppose they would believe that anything other than the passing shadow was uttering the sound?”

“No, by Zeus,” he said. “I don’t.”

“Then most certainly,” I said, “such men would hold that the truth is nothing other than the shadows of artificial things.”

“Most necessarily,” he said.

“Now consider,” I said, “what their release and healing from bonds and folly would be like if something of this sort were by nature to happen to them. Take a man who is released and suddenly compelled to stand up, to turn his neck around, to walk and look up toward the light; and who, moreover, in doing all this is in pain and, because he is dazzled, is unable to make out those things whose shadows he saw before. What do you suppose he’d say if someone were to tell him that before he saw silly nothings, while now, because he is somewhat nearer to what *is* and more turned toward beings, he sees more correctly; and, in particular, showing him each of the things that pass by, were to compel the man to answer his questions about what they are? Don’t you suppose he’d be at a loss and believe that what was seen before is truer than what is now shown?”

“Yes,” he said, “by far.”

“And, if he compelled him to look at the light itself, would his eyes hurt and would he flee, turning away to those things that he is able to make out and hold them to be really clearer than what is being shown?”

“So he would,” he said.

“And if,” I said, “someone dragged him away from there by force along the rough, steep, upward way and didn’t let him go before he had dragged him out into the light of the sun, wouldn’t he be distressed and annoyed at being so dragged? And when he came to the light, wouldn’t he have

his eyes full of its beam and be unable to see even one of the things now said to be true?"

"No, he wouldn't," he said, "at least not right away."

"Then I suppose he'd have to get accustomed, if he were going to see what's up above. At first he'd most easily make out the shadows; and after that the phantoms of the human beings and the other things in water; and, later, the things themselves. And from there he could turn to beholding the things in heaven and heaven itself, more easily at night—looking at the light of the stars and the moon—than by day—looking at the sun and sunlight."

"Of course."

"Then finally I suppose he would be able to make out the sun—not its appearance in water or some alien place, but the sun itself by itself in its own region—and see what it's like."

"Necessarily," he said.

"And after that he would already be in a position to conclude about it that this is the source of the seasons and the years, and is the steward of all things in the visible place, and is in a certain way the cause of all those things he and his companions had been seeing."

"It's plain," he said, "that this would be his next step."

"What then? When he recalled his first home and the wisdom there, and his fellow prisoners in that time, don't you suppose he would consider himself happy for the change and pity the others?"

"Quite so."

"And if in that time there were among them any honors, praises, and prizes for the man who is sharpest at making out the things that go by, and most remembers which of them are accustomed to pass before, which after, and which at the same time as others, and who is thereby most able to divine what is going to come, in your opinion would he be desirous of them and envy those who are honored and hold power among these men? Or, rather, would he be affected as

Homer says and want very much 'to be on the soil, a serf to another man, to a portionless man,' and to undergo anything whatsoever rather than to opine those things and live that way?"

"Yes," he said, "I suppose he would prefer to undergo everything rather than live that way."

"Now reflect on this too," I said. "If such a man were to come down again and sit in the same seat, on coming suddenly from the sun wouldn't his eyes get infected with darkness?"

"Very much so," he said.

"And if he once more had to compete with those perpetual prisoners in forming judgments about those shadows while his vision was still dim, before his eyes had recovered, and if the time needed for getting accustomed were not at all short, wouldn't he be the source of laughter, and wouldn't it be said of him that he went up and came back with his eyes corrupted, and that it's not even worth trying to go up? And if they were somehow able to get their hands on and kill the man who attempts to release and lead up, wouldn't they kill him?"

"No doubt about it," he said.⁴⁰

The latter is no doubt a foreshadowing of the death of Socrates himself, Plato's teacher, who was one of those who had freed himself from the cave and sought to liberate others. And it must not be forgotten that Socrates, with his guiding *daimon* and his mandate from the oracle of Apollo at Delphi, is, in some respects, no less a religious figure than one of the Israelite prophets.

With his famous doctrine of the Ideas, or the Forms, Plato reconciles Heraclitus's recognition of change with Parmenides' insistence that what is truly real is changeless. There is triangularity, and there are innumerable triangular objects in what we would today call

40. Plato, *Republic* 514a–517a (Book VII). I use the version given by Allan Bloom, trans., *The Republic of Plato* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 193–96.

the “real world.” For Plato, though, the real world is the world of the Forms, or the Ideas. “There abides the very being with which true knowledge is concerned; the colourless, formless, intangible essence, visible only to mind, the pilot of the soul.”⁴¹ It is triangularity, and not the approximate triangles in the world of matter, that is truly real. Plato saw two main levels of being:

Visible things and their reflected images together form the first large main level of being—the kingdom of γένεσις. Characteristic of this level are *being born* and *passing away*; everything here is mutable and transitory, and nothing is eternal. . . .

The spiritual and intelligible world, νοητὸν γένος, has an essentially higher reality; here nothing alters, nothing comes into being, and nothing passes away. This is the kingdom of true being, οὐσία. This upper level of being is . . . divided into two subordinate levels; the lower of these levels consists of mathematical realities, especially geometric figures and numbers together with the laws that inhere in them, while the Ideas, which *truly are*, form the upper and highest level. . . .

All being is therefore at rest and in harmony, and all higher being is unalterable and indestructible; there is also a certain order of rank among all existing things. The more original and spiritual a thing is, the more *being* it has and the higher is its dignity. . . . In the eternal and intelligible world the *rest* of the Eleatics rules; but the world of appearance, which consists partly of images of the Ideas and partly of images of the images, is perishable and transitory, and it possesses less reality, power, and value the farther removed it is from that which eternally is.⁴²

41. Plato, *Phaedrus* 247, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952), 125.

42. Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, 53–54, emphasis in the original.

(This ontological hierarchy becomes particularly important and evident in Neoplatonic thought. It is fundamental to the system outlined by Plotinus in his *Enneads*.)⁴³

The basis of Plato's thinking is the eternal or transcendent world of which our world of experience is only an image; this image is in itself beautiful and glorious, but the glory of the world is nothing compared to the glory of eternity. That in our world which most nearly approaches the beauty of the transcendent world is the beauty of geometry. (One has to be fascinated by geometry in order to be able to enter into Plato's experience and to understand him.)⁴⁴

It is said that there was an inscription above the entrance to Plato's Academy, saying, "Let no one ignorant of mathematics enter here."

The deep conviction that "the sensible world was transitory, and the supra-sensible was everlastingly wonderful, beautiful, and divine"⁴⁵ cannot fail to have an impact on how one views the significance of historical events, which necessarily take place in, precisely, that sensible world. "Alles Vergängliche ist nur ein Gleichnis," wrote Goethe, in a rather Platonic spirit. "Everything transitory is but a likeness."⁴⁶ If this is believed, ultimate truth is not to be discerned in history. It is not to be found in the world of appearances rather than reality, of belief rather than knowledge. "The classical culture, elaborated by Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics," wrote Reinhold Niebuhr, "is a western and intellectual version of a universal type of ahistorical spirituality."⁴⁷ "The true votary of philosophy," says Plato, "is always pursuing death and dying; . . . he has had the desire of death all his

43. I have treated this subject, among other places, in a paper entitled "Ascension Soteriology and the Great Chain of Being: Some Islamic Evidence," presented at the Mulla Sadra Conference in Tehran, Iran, 23–27 May 1999. The paper is scheduled to be published in the proceedings of that conference.

44. Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, 155.

45. *Ibid.*, 175.

46. Goethe, *Faust*, 2.5.

47. Reinhold Niebuhr, *Faith and History: A Comparison of Christian and Modern Views of History* (New York: Scribners, 1949), 16, as cited in Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, 169.

life long. . . . Would you not say he is entirely concerned with the soul and not with the body? He would like, as far as he can, to get away from the body and to turn to the soul.”⁴⁸ Porphyry, in his *Life of Plotinus*, says that the great Neoplatonist “seemed embarrassed at being in the body. As a result of this attitude he couldn’t stand to talk about his ancestry or his parents or his homeland.”⁴⁹ History and the physical world cannot be the primary arena of divine disclosure for anybody holding such a view.

Let me show the impact such presuppositions had on one particular group within the Islamic tradition. Edwin Hatch argued with reference to the history of the early church that “the change in the centre of gravity from conduct to belief is coincident with the transference of Christianity from a Semitic to a Greek soil.”⁵⁰ While rejecting any potentially racist inferences from such a view, I believe that an analogous shift is observable within some segments of the Muslim community or *umma* as it, too, encountered the Greek intellectual tradition with all its attractiveness and prestige.⁵¹ An intellectual trend arose that had little interest in what Hodgson, in his insightful discussion of the situation, has called “the dated and the placed.”⁵² Alongside students of *ḥadīth* (the sayings and precedents of the Prophet Muhammad) and *uṣūl al-fiqh* (the principles of jurisprudence, which derived from past precedents) and history, there came to be another category of thinkers, almost always quite distinct, who found their inspiration in the timeless regularities of the natural world.

It is too simple, of course, to blame everything on the Greeks. “Irano-Semitic culture,” as Hodgson terms it, “had . . . shown another face from Cuneiform times on: one in which not the moral judgments of history but the rational harmonies of nature were the source of inspiration. This tradition had its own high seriousness in

48. Plato, *Phaedo* 64, in *The Dialogues of Plato*, 223–24.

49. Porphyry, *Peri tou Plotinou Biou* 1 (my translation).

50. Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity*, 2.

51. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 1:429 n. 6, warns against just such a racist interpretation.

52. Hodgson develops the concept at some length, in *ibid.*, 1:359–409.

life, as alien to courtly elegance or frivolity as was that of the monotheistic tradition.”⁵³ But this ancient tendency was reinforced by the introduction into the future lands of Islam of Hellenizing modes of thought, and of the Greek language itself, by Alexander the Great and the forces he set in motion. And it should not be forgotten that both of these positions were *religious*. “Both the Abrahamic prophetic tradition and the Hellenizing philosophic and scientific tradition,” Hodgson continues,

had, in their origins, dealt with comprehensive life-orientational problems. Even the mathematical and scientific traditions of Cuneiform times were instrumental to larger religious visions. The transition into the Greek language had at the same time been a transition into a new religious framework: that of the Socratic tradition of *Philosophia*, to which the particular scientific traditions were more or less ancillary. Socrates and Plato, by the definitions of religion we have been using, were as much religious figures as Amos and the Isaiahs; geometry or astronomy were almost as subordinate to the total cosmic vision which adherents of the several Socratic traditions were working out as was Hebrew historiography to the spiritual vision of the adherents of the Abrahamic tradition.⁵⁴

By the time of what Hodgson calls the “High Caliphate” or the “High Caliphal Period” (A.D. 692–945), the Hellenizing philosophical orientation had become largely identified with Christianity, which “had been profoundly touched by it: Christian thinkers had had to confront the Hellenic metaphysical and logical traditions, and the formulation of the problems of Christian theology—problems concerning the nature and power of God and the freedom of human beings—reflected this.”⁵⁵ A few centers of pagan Hellenism still survived (most notably, the star-worshippers of Mesopotamian Harran),

53. *Ibid.*, 1:410.

54. *Ibid.*, 1:410–11; cf. 1:432.

55. *Ibid.*, 1:412.

but they were of far less significance than the presence of a Hellenized Christianity.⁵⁶ It was this surviving Hellenism that faced the new Semitic revelation of Islam, emerging from its Arabian matrix.

When we survey the civilization of what has often, if somewhat misleadingly, been called classical Islam, at least three main intellectual trends are immediately discernible. With one of these, the one (perhaps somewhat problematically) termed “*adab* culture” by Hodgson, I am not here concerned. However, two others were probably more religiously serious and are of direct relevance to this essay. The first trend was that of “the objective studies proper to the Shari‘ah-minded [i.e., to those who concerned themselves with the divine law], [which] were especially historical studies, from the collection of hadith reports to the elaborate compositions of Tabari.” The second, with which the first often conflicted, was the trend embodied in the lives and works of the *falāsifa*—the philosophers—whose designation in Arabic transparently manifests their Greek roots. (They were said to practice “the foreign sciences.”) “The Philosophic tradition expressed itself most objectively in nature studies, particularly those based on mathematics,” says Hodgson.

Perhaps the most generally appealing of these studies was astronomy. The earliest of the nature studies to be highly developed almost anywhere, it yielded dramatic and imaginatively satisfying results to the application of elementary but precise observation. But the results could be rather too satisfying. For the Greek tradition, the temptation was great to find in astronomy just the perfection which their vision of pure reason called for, in the shape of the universe as a whole.⁵⁷

It was reason, after all, that was the fundamental value of this worldview, and the *faylasūf*, or philosopher, sought to govern himself according to the rational order of the universe. His seeking to uncover such order was, in most cases, largely an aid to what might be

56. See *ibid.*

57. *Ibid.*, 1:413. On these sciences, see *ibid.*, 1:413–25.

termed "the philosophic way of life," to becoming a sage. (A mastery of science and the gathering of technical knowledge, considered as valuable in its own right, would be of interest only to a mere craftsman and unworthy of the sage.)

Any concern with the time-bound, the accidental, the whole realm of the historical, as such, was despised as unworthy, irrelevant to genuine self-cultivation. What was wanted was an adequate understanding of the unchanging whole; any particular instance was at best only one more repetitive exemplification, and acquaintance with it could be of only transient relevance, meeting needs of the moment. . . .

The model sciences of the Greeks had fitted this principle. In geometry a whole range of propositions could be deduced from a few axioms. It was the true triangle, which never occurs in nature, and not actual more-or-less three-cornered objects, that could be known and was worth knowing; neglect of the rest was what made possible geometrical calculations that were effective even on the practical level. In astronomy, if one observed essential regularities in a few heavenly bodies, the course of conjunctions and eclipses could be predicted to the end of time. Ideally, all truth should be reducible to this level of exact statement, incontestably demonstrative and timelessly applicable (at least by approximation) to anyone anywhere.⁵⁸

The Faylasûfs were interested, since the days of Plato, in the unchanging, in the permanently valid. Thrust into the water, a stick appears bent; in the air, it appears straight. When one is angry, one's neighbour seems an object for violent assault; a few minutes later, he may seem an object for pity. If one is born in India, it seems of the utmost importance to burn one's father's corpse; if one is born in Arabia, one will bury it, and do one's best to prevent anyone's burning it. A year

58. *Ibid.*, 1:422–23.

ago one's fields were rich with wheat and this year the same fields are almost barren. In such a world what can one be sure of? The rationalistic answer of the Philosophers was that though individual plants and even fields appear and disappear, we can know what wheat is, as such, and what a field is, and what is universally true of any wheat growing in any field; we can know what anger is, and what pity is, and what a human being is as such, apart from any particular feeling we may have for particular persons. Knowledge is therefore a matter of timeless concepts, essences, and natural laws, rather than of transient and changing details. We can be sure that there are 180 degrees in a triangle, that justice is more admirable in men than injustice, that oaks grow from acorns; we cannot be sure, but can only have a provisional opinion, that this three-cornered piece of wood is a triangle, that this man is just, that this acorn will actually grow into an oak.⁵⁹

Thus, for the philosopher, "Rationality involved bringing all experience and all values under a logically consistent total conception of reality. Falsafah proved to have its own special world view, its cosmology, to which its adherents were implicitly committed."⁶⁰ This worldview, this conception of rationality, had direct impact on the theological position of those who adopted it. It also created conflict with those people of intelligence who did not. "The Socratic tradition could not rest content with being bound to limit its questioning within a framework which was imposed by a historical intervention such as Islam," Hodgson observes. "Nor could the Qur'anic tradition accept subordination of its conclusions to the authority of private human speculation."⁶¹ Ash'arī *mutakallimūn*, or "theologians," for instance,

doubted that there were any inherently unchanging essences and natural laws. For them the most important facts were

59. Ibid., 1:440; cf. 1:441.

60. Ibid., 1:422; cf. 1:418.

61. Ibid., 1:431; cf. 1:441.

not abstractly universal but very concrete and historical. These were, first, that the individual man Muḥammad had brought to human beings supreme truth in a particular place at a particular time, and that this truth was carried by his community from generation to generation; and second, that every individual was faced with the supreme choice of deciding in his own case whether to accept this truth or not. One could know the individual man Muḥammad, or more exactly one could know by documented ḥadīth reports, various individual facts about him; it was much harder to say anything dependable about the universal essence of prophecy . . . all we can actually know is the concrete momentary fact.⁶²

(This stance is surely not unrelated to the doctrine of atomistic occasionalism, so characteristic of Ash‘arism.)⁶³ “The monotheists’ notions of God,” Hodgson says,

had been built up precisely from observing and responding to those contingent and historical data which the Faylasūfs tended to disregard as not amenable to reason. The prophets’ idea of God was more moral than ontological, more historical than timeless. . . .

The Faylasūfs’ “God” remained a very different figure from the God of the prophets, as different as their sense of human destiny; and however much the difference was disguised by the use of common words, it showed up at crucial junctures.⁶⁴

It is easy, of course, for us to say such things about Islam. I deliberately chose an illustration that was unlikely to arouse opposition or murmuring in a predominantly if not entirely Christian audience.

62. Ibid., 1:440–41; cf. 1:443.

63. On which, see Majid Fakhry, *Islamic Occasionalism and Its Critique by Averroës and Aquinas* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1958).

64. Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, 1:428. The Gnostics have also been described as, in a certain sense, devaluing history in order to emphasize rather that which is timeless. See Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 159–60.

But Islam did not exist in a vacuum, nor was it hermetically sealed off from Christendom. Muslim philosophers had a perfectly enormous influence on philosophical theologians of the Latin West such as St. Thomas Aquinas. And it isn't even necessary to blame the Muslims. The ahistorical style of theology that arose out of Hellenism had long since entered Christian thought. Philo's allegorizing interpretations of scripture, in which he managed to see behind the historical narratives of scripture in order to discover that the Bible was really teaching Middle Platonism, may not have found much immediate echo within Judaism. But Philo's general approach unmistakably entered in among the leading thinkers of the church in the persons of Clement and Origen and the Cappadocians. The metaphysical systems of Pseudo-Dionysius and of St. Thomas, brilliant though they are, breathe a spirit sharply, dramatically different from that of the scriptures.

For Plato, "If God is to be found, he must be sought in the unalterable, in mental being, in the Ideas." On the other hand,

God revealed himself to the Israelites in history and not in Ideas; he revealed himself when he acted and created. His being was not learned through propositions but known in actions. The majority of Old Testament books are historical, and those that are not (Song of Solomon, Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, for example) have concrete human life as their subject; they are not systematic presentations.⁶⁵

"Whereas the scriptural accounts spoke of the actions of God in history, Greek philosophy centered attention on the question of metaphysical being."⁶⁶ There is a tangible quality to the witness of the Bible that is utterly different from the ontological speculations of the Hellenes and their imitators among the Christians. The authors of the New Testament did not offer syllogisms and metaphysics. Rather, they testified of "That which was from the beginning, which we have

65. Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, 171.

66. Donald K. McKim, *Theological Turning Points: Major Issues in Christian Thought* (Atlanta: Knox, 1988), 8.

heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life" (1 John 1:1).

One can hardly fail to think, here, of the Nephite multitude coming forward to feel the marks of the wounds in the hands and feet of the resurrected Savior. No abstract metaphysical argument could have been nearly so decisive. And one thinks naturally also of Hyrum Smith, one of the Eight Witnesses to the Book of Mormon, writing in December 1839 of his sufferings in Missouri, where he had come face to face with the prospect of martyrdom.

I had been abused and thrust into a dungeon, and confined for months on account of my faith, and the testimony of Jesus Christ. However I thank God that I felt a determination to die, rather than deny the things which my eyes had seen, which my hands had handled, and which I had borne testimony to, wherever my lot had been cast; and I can assure my beloved brethren that I was enabled to bear as strong a testimony, when nothing but death presented itself, as ever I did in my life.⁶⁷

Four and a half years later, of course, Hyrum Smith did go willingly to his death as a martyr. The Greek word *martyros* means "witness."

Boman writes of "the centre of the Old Testament revelation." "That centre," he says,

is God's mighty and merciful leading of the people out of Egypt through Moses, particularly the miraculous delivery of the people at the Red Sea. Although these events observed from the point of view of world history might be quite insignificant, through them Israel experienced Jahveh's unlimited power over the might of the Egyptians as well as over nature, and they experienced it so trenchantly and convincingly that this event became the starting point, source and foundation of all later religious faith in Israel.⁶⁸

67. General letter of Hyrum Smith (December 1839), *Times and Seasons* 1 (1839): 20, 23, cited at Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 148.

68. Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, 172. By contrast, Boman observes on page 179 that the author of the book of Job "cannot refer to Jahveh's revelation

As recent studies have shown, precisely the same attitude appears in the Book of Mormon.⁶⁹ And Professor Louis Midgley has shown the very Hebraic importance of “memory” in the Book of Mormon.⁷⁰

Indeed, the historical orientation of Mormonism is one of the most immediately obvious things about it. It begins with the story of a young man, called to be a prophet, through whom is revealed another story, an account of several pre-Columbian peoples in the New World. Its truthfulness does not stand or fall on metaphysical speculations but on whether Christ really visited America, on whether there really was a historical Lehi, on whether Joseph Smith was really visited by the Father and the Son and, later, by the resurrected Moroni. It is a resolutely historical faith, making claims about the history of the tangible world.

The distinction can be pressed too far, of course. Most Christians see their faith as resting upon the decisive historical events of the crucifixion and the resurrection of Christ. And if Latter-day Saints reenact the pivotal events that occurred *in illo tempore* (as Mircea Eliade would put it), so, too, do many Christians. Latter-day Saints have their pageants (to say nothing of the temple); other Christians have their passion plays.⁷¹ Latter-day Saints have the sacrament;

in history because Job, as a non-Israelite, does not know of it.” So the book of Job is full of awe at the wonders of God’s creation.

69. See George S. Tate, “The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon,” in *Literature of Belief: Sacred Scripture and Religious Experience*, ed. Neal E. Lambert (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1981), 245–62; Terrence L. Szink, “To a Land of Promise (1 Nephi 16–18),” in *1 Nephi to Alma 29*, ed. Kent P. Jackson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 60–72; S. Kent Brown, “The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon” *BYU Studies* 30/3 (1990): 112–26; Bruce J. Boehm, “Wanderers in the Promised Land: A Study of the Exodus Motif in the Book of Mormon and Holy Bible,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3/1 (1994): 185–203; Mark J. Johnson, “The Exodus of Lehi Revisited,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3/2 (1994): 123–26. See also David B. Honey and Daniel C. Peterson, “Advocacy and Inquiry in the Writing of Latter-day Saint History,” *BYU Studies* 31/2 (1991): 139–79, for a discussion of the ancient tradition of “exemplar historiography.”

70. In his “The Ways of Remembrance,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 168–76, and “O Man, Remember, and Perish Not,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 127–29.

71. For an interesting study of Mormon historical pageants and related matters, see Davis Bitton, *The Ritualization of Mormon History and Other Essays* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 171–87.

other Christians have communion or the mass. Mercifully, mainstream Christianity (notwithstanding a few eccentrics like Paul Tillich, who said that it actually didn't matter whether the historical Jesus of Nazareth really lived, since only the Christ *symbol* was truly important) has not lost its anchor in claimed historical reality.⁷²

Theology

The quite different ratio in Mormonism of “theological” and historical interest shows up, however, very clearly in the fact that, while we produce historiography in considerable quantities, we scarcely do “theology”—at least in the ordinary understanding of that term—at all. While historical scholarship is an intellectual activity that we share with other Christians, we do not share their theological approaches to any significant degree. And, therefore, our historical scholarship looms relatively larger. But it is also, I think, larger on an absolute scale.

72. See Mark K. Taylor, ed., *Paul Tillich: Theologian of the Boundaries* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 107, where Tillich, writing of his fellow theologian Karl Barth, says, “Historical criticism is of so little concern to Barth that he can quite avowedly express his indifference toward the question of the existence or non-existence of the ‘historical Jesus.’ He does not reject the historical research of the liberals, but he treats it as a trifling matter, of which his Christology is independent.” It isn’t altogether clear, however, that Tillich’s own view on this matter was substantially different: “Religious symbols, he [Tillich] insisted, should not symbolize any-thing or actual event. The ‘truth’ of a symbol is always truth *for someone* and not about something. The proper posture of man is not credulous acceptance of merely probable empirical statements like ‘Jesus was resurrected’—a proposition he felt was absurd if taken at all literally—but *concern*, concern about one’s own being and therefore about that which is the ground of all finite being(s). Faith is not the acceptance of factual propositions about ‘doubtful historical probabilities’ like the resurrection of Jesus, even if the probability were high. ‘If the Christian faith is based even on a 100,000 to 1 probability that Jesus has said or done or suffered this or that; if Christianity is based on possible birth-registers of Nazareth or crime-registers of Pontius Pilate, then it has lost its foundation completely.’” In fact, “As far back as 1911 he was busy trying to show ‘how the Christian doctrine might be understood if the non-existence of the historical Jesus should become historically probable.’” Louis Midgley, “Religion and Ultimate Concern: An Encounter with Paul Tillich’s Theology,” *Dialogue* 1/2 (1966): 68–69 (where the primary source references to Tillich are supplied). Alison Coutts reminds me of Tillich’s dismissal of the historical reality of Jesus’ resurrection. See Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 2:155–58.

I recall the moment, a number of years ago, when a Latter-day Saint friend of mine who was completing a doctorate in philosophy told me, very concerned, that one of his quite eminent professors had expressed interest in meeting and speaking with a “Mormon theologian.” He couldn’t think of any in the state. Neither could I. We could hardly think of any anywhere. Not, at least, in the sense that she intended. Although there may be an exception somewhere, it cannot be far wrong to say, simply, that Latter-day Saints have no theologians in the normal acceptance of the term.

One might account for that fact by observing that Latter-day Saints have no paid clergy and no divinity schools, and that, since most theologians are either clergy or are on the faculty at divinity schools, there is no economic basis for the rise of specialized Mormon theology. And certainly the financial realities play a role. But even among full-time Latter-day Saint leaders and employees of the Church Educational System—Mormon clergy, as it were—though there have been not a few with good minds and excellent educations, no systematic theologians have appeared, nor even anybody with an apparent hankering to become such. And one could say, too, that the reason there are no Latter-day Saint divinity schools is because there is no Mormon interest in theology. On the other hand, there are many fine Latter-day Saint historians, and a small but solid and growing group of biblical scholars (perhaps another species of the genus *historian*). And even the so-called “theologians” of Mormonism—men such as Bruce R. McConkie and James E. Talmage—have not done anything even remotely resembling theology as it is practiced in other Christian traditions. (For what it’s worth, “systematic theology” is effectively nonexistent within Judaism and Islam, too.) What is more, several of those “theologians”—including Hugh W. Nibley, probably including Joseph Fielding Smith, certainly including B. H. Roberts—have actually been historians.⁷³

73. For reflections on the place of theology in Mormon thinking—or the lack of such a place—see Louis C. Midgley, “Theology,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4:1475–76.

Mormonism's nonspeculative character is hardly a secret. In fact, it is frequently seen as a liability. Thus, in his recent bestseller *How the Irish Saved Civilization*, Thomas Cahill offers a glib and superficial summary of Manichaeism, concluding with the judgment that "it couldn't keep up with Augustine's fearlessly inquiring mind." Then, entirely gratuitously, he offers a modern analogy: "Like . . . Mormonism, it was full of assertions, but could yield no intellectual system to nourish a great intellect."⁷⁴ In its 1997 cover story on the church, *Time* magazine spoke of "a vacuum of theological talent in a church with a lot of unusual theology to explain."⁷⁵ And back when the Washington D.C. Temple was dedicated, the student newspaper at nearby Georgetown University published a lengthy article in which some of its editors responded to their tour of the building during its open house. Their report was not favorable. At one point, they met the president of the new temple, a retired executive (as I recall) from the Singer Sewing Machine Company. Shaking his hand, the writer observed with unconcealed contempt, one could not overlook the fact that it was a hand that must have sold many sewing machines in its day.

It is difficult for an intellectually inclined Latter-day Saint *not* to feel some pain at our lack of a sophisticated theological tradition. Years ago, I had the opportunity of studying, one on one, for several months, with the late Father Georges Anawati of the Institut Dominicain d'Études Orientales in Cairo. He was one of the great authorities in the world on Islamic philosophy, and we spent many hours together reading and discussing several important texts. He was fascinated by the fact that I was a Latter-day Saint and frequently joked about it in a good-natured way. (Father Anawati was, I would judge, incapable of anything malicious. I fully concur with F. E. Peters's expression of thanks, in a book published that same year, to "Père Anawati, O.P., of Cairo and the Kingdom of God."⁷⁶ When I left

74. Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland's Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 49.

75. *Time*, 4 August 1997, 55.

76. F. E. Peters, *Children of Abraham: Judaism/Christianity/Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), xi.

Egypt, I presented him with a leather-bound “triple combination” as a farewell gift. He assured me that he would place it in the section of the Dominican Institute’s library that he called “limbo.”) At a certain stage in our relationship, I was overcome by a feeling of inferiority before the vast and ancient intellectual traditions Father Anawati represented—both Islamic and Catholic. How improbable it suddenly seemed to me that God’s true church resided in the arid Great Basin of the American West, among a relatively unsophisticated people with a very short history.

And yet, that is precisely how an early Christian might have felt.

The first few pages of the *Recognitions of Clement*, a Christian text from perhaps the first half of the third century, offer us a glimpse of a clash between Hellenized philosophical culture and a Christian witness that had not yet succumbed to the attractions of that culture. The first-person narrator, who identifies himself as Clement of Rome, tells of his youthful anxiety about the immortality of the human soul and his desperate search for proof of it. A talented young man, Clement joined the philosophical schools of his native city but was very disappointed and depressed to find no truly convincing arguments and to see that his teachers and fellow students were more interested in demonstrating their cleverness than in attaining to the truth. So desperate did he become that he even, for a time, considered taking up spiritualism.

But then rumors began to reach Rome of a great and powerful worker of miracles in the distant land of Palestine. And one day, while he was walking in the city, Clement ran into what can only be described as a Christian missionary “street meeting.” A Jewish Christian named Barnabas was proclaiming the coming of Christ to the passersby. “When I heard these things,” recalls Clement,

I began, with the rest of the multitude, to follow him, and to hear what he had to say. Truly I perceived that there was nothing of dialectic artifice [i.e., arguments of the kind that were cultivated in the philosophical schools] in the man, but that he expounded with simplicity, and without any craft of speech, such things as he had heard from the Son of God, or had seen. For he did not confirm his assertions by the force

of arguments, but produced, from the people who stood round about him, many witnesses of the sayings and marvels which he related.

A number of those in the crowd were impressed and began to give credence to what Barnabas and his fellow witnesses related. But then a group of philosophically minded onlookers challenged Barnabas. They “began to laugh at the man, and to flout him, and to throw out for him the grappling-hooks of syllogisms, like strong arms.” Why do tiny gnats have six legs and a pair of wings, while the much larger elephant has only four legs and no wings at all? But Barnabas declined to enter into their silly objections. “We have it in charge,” he said, “to declare to you the words and the wondrous works of Him who hath sent us, and to confirm the truth of what we speak, not by artfully devised arguments, but by witnesses produced from amongst yourselves.”

The crowd now mocked him, saying that he was a barbarian—that is, a foreigner, presumably with a funny accent—and a madman. At this, though, Clement could remain silent no longer. “Most righteously does Almighty God hide His will from you,” Clement cried out,

whom He foresaw to be unworthy of the knowledge of Himself, as is manifest to those who are really wise, from what you are now doing. For when you see that preachers of the will of God have come amongst you, because their speech makes no show of knowledge of the grammatical art, but in simple and unpolished language they set before you the divine commands, so that all who hear may be able to follow and to understand the things that are spoken, you deride the ministers and messengers of your salvation, not knowing that it is the condemnation of you who think yourselves skilful and eloquent, that rustic and barbarous men have the knowledge of the truth; whereas, when it has come to you, it is not even received as a guest. . . . Thus you are convicted of not being friends of truth and philosophers [i.e., lovers of wisdom], but followers of boasting and vain speakers. Ye think that truth dwells not in simple, but in in-

genious and subtle words, and produce countless thousands of words which are not to be rated at the worth of one word. What, then, do ye think will become of you, all ye crowd of Greeks, if there is to be, as he says, a judgment of God?⁷⁷

Is selling sewing machines any less spiritual or dignified than sewing and mending nets on the Sea of Galilee? Is fishing a more intellectual pursuit than serving as a corporate executive? Were the Georgetown writers biblically justified in looking down their noses at the president of the Washington D.C. Temple? Would a modern Latter-day Saint intellectual be biblically justified in sharing their contempt to any degree at all? I remember an interview, from a decade or so ago, with a Harvard Divinity School student who was a disciple of the Rev. Sun Myung Moon. He was asked whether he didn't feel it rather incongruous to devote his increasingly sophisticated theological understanding to the interpretation of writings by a man who had received no theological education at all. "Oh," he replied, feigning denseness. "Are you referring to St. Peter?" It was a very good answer.

So, while it may be understandable that some of us wish for a sophisticated theology with which to impress outsiders, that wish may nonetheless be misguided and, perhaps, even morally questionable. It was the early Christian "Apologists"—Minucius Felix, Justin Martyr, and others—with their desire to make Christianity intellectually respectable, who may have done more than any other group to deform early Christian doctrine. With the best will in the world, they adopted and adapted the philosophical concepts of their day to express Christian beliefs and, in that very process, subtly but unmistakably altered those beliefs. Moreover, Boman is right to lament "the customary European judgment that only the systematists are real thinkers. Whoever is of this opinion will find no thinkers in the Old Testament, for the Israelites were truly no systematizers, even less

77. The account occurs at *Recognitions of Clement* 1.1–9. Hugh Nibley summarizes it in *The World and the Prophets* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 34–38. I use the translation of Thomas Smith, as featured in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 8:77–79.

logicians.”⁷⁸ At least, they didn’t do logic the way Aristotle did logic. “I have repeatedly pointed out,” wrote the great W. F. Albright,

that the Hebrew Bible is the greatest existing monument of empirical logic and that this logic is more exact than formal logic in some important respects. After all, it is based on the cumulative experience of men, and not on postulates or pre-suppositions which may or may not be correct, as is inevitably true of most postulational reasoning outside of mathematics and the exact sciences.⁷⁹

So Latter-day Saints do not do “theology.” The great historian of doctrine Adolf Harnack “maintained that the Gospel was hellenized and that dogma was a product of the Greek intellect in the soil of the Gospel.”⁸⁰ Once again, if Harnack is correct, the Latter-day Saints have dodged a Hellenizing bullet. What have they missed out on by neglecting this very Greek enterprise? Let us cite a few examples.

- As we have said, Greek philosophy focused its attention on what, in its view, does not change. For the philosophers, by and large, change was seen as a defect. Therefore, whatever is ultimate (and this would obviously include God) must, of necessity, be static and immobile. Moreover, they argued, if something was perfect, any change would inevitably be a change from the perfect, and therefore a change for the worse. In their understanding, whatever changes, including the world of experience and history, is of a lesser order and a lower rank than that which does not change. Indeed, things subject to change were thought to be less real than things purportedly beyond change.

78. Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, 196.

79. William F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1968), 177. But even the mathematical sciences and symbolic logic are subject to personal predilections; perhaps Professor Albright was too impressed by them. On this, see William E. Barrett, *The Illusion of Technique: A Search for Meaning in a Technological Civilization* (Garden City: Anchor, 1978), 3–117.

80. As summarized by Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, 18.

The orthodox, traditional Christian concept of God falls within this philosophical tradition that the fixed is superior. In other words, traditional Christian ideas about God are based on Greek models of what it means to be. . . . From this unchangeableness follow all the attributes of the traditional God (that he is static, unembodied, and atemporal).⁸¹

Latter-day Saints reject these attributes.

- “Motionless and fixed being is for the Hebrews a nonentity; it does not exist for them. Only ‘being’ which stands in inner relation with something active and moving is a reality to them. This could also be expressed: only movement (motion) has reality.”⁸² It is readily evident therefore, that Aristotle’s conception of God as the Unmoved Mover could not have arisen on Hebrew soil. And, thus, that such attempts to demonstrate the existence of God as the cosmological proof have little if anything to do with the God of the Bible.

Latter-day Saints have paid virtually no attention to the cosmological or other proofs of the existence of God. Instead, they come to conviction of his reality through the narratives of the scriptures and the early days of this final dispensation and through the seemingly subjective (because personal and individualized) witness of the Spirit.

- “Unlike Greek, Hebrew does not conceive of anything immaterial or unembodied, even in thought.”⁸³ Latter-day Saints are famously anthropomorphic in their conception of the divine. “There is no such thing as immaterial matter” (D&C 131:7), taught Joseph Smith.

- The Greeks tended to see a qualitative gulf between “time” and “eternity.”

Eternity for [Plato] is not endless astronomical time, but the life-form of the divine world to which God also belongs. Time designates for him the life-form of the world of nature,

81. Faulconer, *Scripture Study*, 135, 136.

82. Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, 31.

83. Faulconer, *Scripture Study*, 137.

the world produced by God. By way of analogy with the origin of the world, which he defines as a reflection of divinity, Plato calls time a moving image of eternity (*Timaeus* 38).⁸⁴

Aristotle is in agreement with the maxim that time destroys (κατατῆκει ὁ χρόνος): everything grows old under the pressure of time and is forgotten in the course of time, but nothing grows new or beautiful through time. Hence we regard time in itself more as destructive than constructive. That which exists eternally, e.g. a geometrical proposition, does not belong to time. This contempt for time by so clear and sober a mind as Aristotle's tells us more about the difference between Greek and Hebrew conceptions of time than all attempts to understand the Greek concept of time philosophically. For this reason, too, everything pertaining only to space, e.g. geometry, was so highly regarded, and the Greek gods and the divine world had to be conceived as exempt from all time, transitoriness, and change because time, change, and transitoriness are synonymous terms.⁸⁵

The Hebrews, on the other hand, tended to see the difference between "time" and "eternity" as a quantitative one. Eternity is pretty much like time, only much, much longer.

Our notion of eternity inherited from Plato . . . is at base the same thing as the divine beyond (*Jenseits*), and is therefore rather more something spatial than something temporal. The Hebrew language has no word for the same notion; Hebrew equivalents for eternity are temporal to the extent that they do not signify things beyond but things pertaining to this life. . . .

The commonest word for boundless time is *ʿōlam*; according to the most widespread and likeliest explanation the word is derived from *ʿalam* meaning "hide, conceal". In the

84. Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, 127.

85. *Ibid.*, 128.

term *‘ōlam* is contained a designation of time extending so far that it is lost to our sight and comprehension in darkness and invisibility. . . .

Even when *‘ōlam* is used of God, it suggests only unbounded time and does not refer to his being beyond time or to his transcendence.⁸⁶

Like the Hebrews, Latter-day Saints do not expect to encounter, in eternity, a mode of existence utterly unlike our present mortal existence. “When the Savior shall appear,” taught the Prophet Joseph Smith, “we shall see him as he is. We shall see that he is a man like ourselves. And that same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy” (D&C 130:1–2).⁸⁷

“When it comes to thinking about divine things,” writes my friend and colleague James Faulconer, “I think it not too much to say that, by itself, Greek thinking locks us out of an understanding of God as a living and acting being, handing us over to the theology of a static and immutable, in other words, dead, god.”⁸⁸ I agree. With him, “I believe that most of what passes for talk about God, whether positive or negative, is talk about a god who is not the God of Israel.”⁸⁹ I also believe that Mormonism represents in its broad outlines and its general approach, as well as in many of its details, something very similar to what we find in the Bible and in early Christianity.

I do not want to push things too far. Latter-day Saints are not *exactly* the same, in their attitudes, as early Christians. There is too much water under the bridge for that, including the scientific and industrial revolutions, the Renaissance, the age of discovery, the

86. Ibid., 151–52.

87. Many years ago, Brigham Young University’s Dennis Rasmussen published a fascinating essay on Platonic and anti-Platonic concepts of immortality that deserves more attention from Latter-day Saint thinkers than it seems to have received. (Perhaps Latter-day Saints missed it because it appeared in a non-Mormon academic philosophical journal.) See Dennis Rasmussen, “Immortality: Revolt against Being,” *The Personalist* 56/1 (1975): 66–74.

88. Faulconer, *Scripture Study*, 150–51.

89. Ibid., 136–37.

Crusades, different languages and cultures, and many other factors. No two people can ever see anything in precisely the same way, owing to their differing psychologies and personal histories. And if this is true for contemporary neighbors, it must necessarily be true for peoples separated by thousands of years and thousands of miles. And, of course, the New Testament itself is not entirely pure of Greek influences. There is, for example, the use of the term *logos* in both John 1 and Middle Platonism—particularly in John’s Platonic Jewish contemporary, Philo.

But the claim that Mormonism represents a restoration of authentically ancient biblical faith seems, to me, entirely plausible, in the big picture as in the small.

Editor’s Picks

As has become customary at this point, I now offer my personal picks and recommendations from among the books considered in this issue of the *Review*. Although I’ve had the benefit of reading the various essays by our reviewers and have talked these matters over with the *Review*’s production editor, Shirley Ricks, these ratings are mine, and they necessarily remain even more subjective than a Florida election recount. While I’m comfortable with the decision to recommend or not to recommend any given item, the number of asterisks assigned to each might easily have been different had the quality of my breakfast varied or the number of bad drivers on the road been greater or lesser. Still, I hope that at least some readers will find these recommendations helpful. They are made according to the following schema:

- **** Outstanding, a seminal work of the kind that appears only rarely.
- *** Enthusiastically recommended.
- ** Warmly recommended.
- * Recommended.

So, now, without further elaboration, here are the editor’s picks for this issue of the FARMS Review of Books:

- *** Barry R. Bickmore, *Restoring the Ancient Church: Joseph Smith and Early Christianity*.
- *** Davis Bitton, ed., *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson*.
- *** S. Kent Brown, *From Jerusalem to Zarahemla: Literary and Historical Studies of the Book of Mormon*.
- *** Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*.
- *** Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Questions and Responses for Latter-day Saints*.
- ** *The Book of Mormon: Restored Covenant Edition*.
- ** James E. Talmage, *The House of the Lord: A Study of Holy Sanctuaries, Ancient and Modern: A Special Reprint of the 1912 First Edition*.
- * Mark D. Thomas, *Digging in Cumorah: Reclaiming Book of Mormon Narratives*.
- * Brent L. Top, *As One Crying from the Dust: Book of Mormon Messages for Today*.

Finally, I would like to thank those who have made it possible to produce this issue of the Review. My primary gratitude, of course, goes to the reviewers themselves, without whom there would be nothing for the rest of us to work on. My appreciation, and a free copy of whatever they've reviewed, pretty much sums up the compensation they receive for their labors. And, as always, Shirley Ricks, the Review's production editor, has been the one indispensable person in the process of putting it all together and getting the Review to press. Julia A. Dozier, Naomi L. Gunnels, Tessa Hauglid, and Linda Sheffield did our source checking to ensure, so far as we can, that the citations and quotations appearing in the various reviews are accurate. Meg Thorne Zerkle prepared the 1999 Book of Mormon bibliography; Angela D. Clyde, Alison Coutts, and Tessa Hauglid offered helpful editorial suggestions; and Carmen Cole prepared the layout. I'm grateful to them all.