



Faculty Publications

1981-06-30

Reason and Revelation

Noel B. Reynolds

Brigham Young University - Provo, nbr@byu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/facpub>



Part of the [Mormon Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Original Publication Citation

"Reason and Revelation," in Philip L. Barlow (ed.), *A Thoughtful Faith: Essays on Belief by Mormon Scholars*, Canon Press, Centerville, Utah, 1986, pp. 207–224. (Revised from the June 30, 1981 BYU Devotional)

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Reynolds, Noel B., "Reason and Revelation" (1981). *Faculty Publications*. 1457.
<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/facpub/1457>

This Presentation is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

REASON AND REVELATION

Noel B. Reynolds is the author and copyright holder of this unpublished paper August 30, 1985 revision of a Brigham Young University devotional address given on 30 June 1981.

ABSTRACT:

This paper outlines and recommends a distinctively LDS approach to the ancient questions about reason and revelation in religious communities. It treats the variety of spiritual experience and distinguishes them from sentimentality and other pseudo spiritual experiences. It also explains how reason and revelation are important helps for one another and how better education can help individuals use reason and science to strengthen the role of revelation in their lives.

KEY WORDS:

reason, revelation, education, sentimentality, sin, Holy Ghost, science and religion

I believe the gospel of Jesus Christ because I know it is true. One way of characterizing our mortal probation is to describe it as a test of whether we will choose to believe the truths we encounter in this life and conform our lives to them, or whether we will pick and choose, modify and revise, and shape a set of beliefs which are more convenient to a lifestyle which suits our desires. The challenge the gospel presents to us is whether we will be willing to believe this fundamental truth, which will require a radical revision of our lives, or whether we will choose to rationalize it away as a means of protecting our commitment to our sinful ways.

But this way of explaining faith leads to a discussion that is complicated and not immediately helpful for the purposes of this volume. I will therefore approach the discussion by a side route and consider the role of reason in the process of learning from revelation. And I propose to begin that discussion negatively through a look at purported forms of religious understanding which deny any important role to reason or critical inquiry.

We live in an age plagued with false gospels and pseudo-spiritual modes of life. As our young people are confronted with one or more of these their own spiritual maturity will be repeatedly put to the test. However, this is not new. From the most ancient times, there have been religious traditions which insisted that true revelatory experiences involving the gods were always characterized by ecstasy or frenzy of the mind. In some of these traditions, wines or drugs were used to induce the frenzied state in which one could become the mouthpiece of the gods. Certain Christian and Jewish variants of these traditions have taught that the ancient prophets wrote in excited or frenzied states in which they were not in full control of their own minds.

Stated in these stark terms, this tradition is easily recognized as something alien to the teachings and practices of the restored gospel. We know the spirit of revelation as a spirit of peace. Notice the contrast between these mystical traditions and the scriptural references describing the voice of God as it comes to men. In the book of Helaman we are told that it is "a still voice of perfect mildness," like "a whisper," and it pierces "even to the very soul" (Helaman 5:30). As reported in 3 Nephi 11:3, it

was not a harsh voice, neither was it a loud voice; nevertheless, and notwithstanding its being a small voice it did pierce them that did hear to the center, insomuch that there was no part of their frame that it did not cause to quake; yea, it did pierce them to the very soul, and did cause their hearts to burn.

None of the scriptures suggest that revelation comes as a result of individuals working themselves into an emotional or frenzied state of mind. Yet, there are distinctive feelings that are

produced when the voice of God speaks to men, as in this passage where "it did cause their hearts to burn."

Because of the variety of emotional extravagances that prevailed among the Christian sects of his time, Joseph Smith often warned the Saints against these things and showed them the way that they might avoid coming under these same influences. He commented once that "nothing is a greater injury to the children of men than to be under the influence of a false spirit when they think they have the Spirit of God." [Teachings, p. 205] It is extremely important that, as Latter-day Saints grow, they learn to develop their ability to discern the difference between the voice of the Spirit and the many alternatives available in this world.

On another occasion Joseph Smith taught the Saints how they might **learn** the true spirit of revelation:

A person may profit by noticing the first intimation of the spirit of revelation; for instance, when you feel pure intelligence flowing into you, it may give you sudden strokes of ideas, so that by noticing it, you may find it fulfilled the same day or soon; (i.e.) those things that were presented unto your minds by the Spirit of God, will come to pass; and thus by learning the Spirit of God and understanding it, you may grow into the principle of revelation, until you become perfect in Christ Jesus. [Teachings, p. 151]

Perhaps it is because the Spirit does cause feelings such as a burning of the heart that it seems to be easily mistaken for other emotions. I would like to begin by pointing out some of the kinds of false spirits or emotions that seem to produce some spiritual confusion among our young people when they mistake their feelings for manifestations of the true Spirit.

Sentimentalism vs. Spirit

My first example may be a simple hazard of youth, though I suspect it is a general problem of our times. We are witnessing a widespread inability to distinguish between sentimentalism and true spiritual experience. Unfortunately, some of the literature used in the Church today is too much like the popular sentimental trash which is designed to pull our heartstrings or moisten our eyes, but which does not communicate true spiritual experience.

The tendency of our youth to use sentimental stories in Church talks creates a culture of spiritual misunderstanding in which thinking and learning are discouraged. When I was a bishop years ago in an Orem ward, I felt strongly the need to counsel the youth not to use the compilations of sentimental stories which were available. I feel that our failure to immerse these young people in the scriptures and other high quality literature makes them vulnerable to the cheap tactics of every moralistic movement which they encounter. Every teacher of youth knows what a challenge it is to make every lesson into a spiritual experience. Because youth respond positively to sentimentalism, there is a danger that we might come to rely on it as a more dependable way of getting their attention and creating an intensified classroom atmosphere. Genuine spiritual experience is not mechanically available to us. Both teacher and students must work together in a thoughtful and humble way for it to occur. This must be a particularly difficult challenge for seminary teachers who meet daily and for long hours with many young people who would prefer to be somewhere else.

But is it possible to imagine that Nephi was brought up on such sentimentalism? On the contrary, as he informs us in the first verse of his record, he was carefully instructed in all the learning of his father. And that learning was of no small effect, for, as he encountered the real

problems of real life, he responded in a supremely intelligent and powerful way, quickly learning the Spirit of God and obtaining its guidance in the most difficult tasks.

It may be that some sentimentality is a good and necessary thing, and certainly there is a place for it in our relationships with our loved ones. But it should never be leaned upon as a substitute for spirituality. Reliance on sentimentality will stunt our spiritual growth by robbing us of the spiritual gift of discernment and filling our understanding with false experiences.

Our spiritual immaturity can also be revealed through our choice of books. I was dismayed several years ago as editors of major LDS publishing houses apologetically explained to me that they are primarily interested in books which can either feature a well-known Latter-day Saint author or are written on a very simplistic level and in such a way as to give people a warm, comfortable feeling without any challenging ideas. Anything more demanding of the reader, I was informed, will not sell enough to justify publication. As a Latter-day Saint I was chagrined. But as I took more occasion to observe what is selling well in our bookstores, I could see they had only been candid with me.

Spiritual confusion may also manifest itself when we are invited to invest in expensive items which we do not really need but which can somehow be related by the salesman to goals we develop in church. College women frequently find themselves buying extremely expensive cookware sets so they will have first-class equipment when they get married. Somehow the purchase is supposed to improve the young woman's prospects of successful marriage.

At the same time, her parents may be investing precious savings in some sure-fire get-rich scheme without seeking sound financial advice--relying instead on trusted friends or relatives who have no better judgment. The vast majority of these investors lose everything, and usually

only the scheme perpetrators get rich. In fact, many of them turn out after the fact to be simple frauds. But instead of heeding spiritual warnings, we are lulled by other feelings into actually believing that we have spiritual reassurance and that we are going to get rich so we can help the Church or spend all our time with our children or some other worthy endeavor.

I firmly believe the Lord will give us the guidance we need in our financial affairs if we will think it all through carefully and responsibly and seek him in prayer. But when he speaks, it will be by the same still, small voice he uses on other occasions and not through a burning feeling of excitement at the prospects of having more wealth than our neighbors, nicer clothes or cars, or not having to work for a living. I believe we are much more likely to receive spiritual guidance in our business affairs when we ask the Lord what we can do or produce in this life that will be of real value to our fellow men. Can any man risk offending the Lord by seeking his blessing for any less noble scheme?

It is therefore extremely important that as Latter-day Saints grow, mature, and seek an education, they learn to develop their ability to discern the difference between the voice of the Spirit and the many alternative voices available in this world. We must be clean in every way that we might be receptive to the true Spirit. We must come to know the Spirit that we might not be misled by the imposter varieties. And we must learn to think clearly and to recognize the ways of good and evil in their many forms, that we may avoid evil early and help others to do the same.

Most Latter-day Saints probably assume that an education should help them develop the kind of judgment and thinking ability needed to be able to recognize these kinds of dangers. Yet they may also have some ambivalence about the tools of analysis taught in philosophy and

science and may wonder how they can help them rather than becoming an obstacle to their testimonies and to personal revelation. I would like to suggest an approach to education that will help one derive strength from it without letting it develop into a spiritual stumbling block, as it undoubtedly has done for many, many people.

An Approach to Education

As infants every one of us came into this world faced with the same general problem. We knew nothing of this world, and we did not know how to find out the truth about it. So we started from ignorance, but we were given some basic tools. We had senses with which we could establish contact with the world around us. We had minds with which we could reflect on the things we observed in the development of our understanding. There are people and a culture which will help each of us deal with the problems of life and will also pass on to us a variety of beliefs about the world in which we have found ourselves--some true, some false. And we have a basic spiritual gift. By learning to use these God-given faculties well, we can come to grips with this world more or less successfully.

As we mature and grow in our knowledge of the world, we can also begin to develop our knowledge of God and his ways. And just as with our knowledge of the world, our knowledge of him comes through the things told to us by others and through our personal experiences. But how do we know what is true and what to believe? Is it not reasonable to expect that our knowledge of God and his ways, though it reaches into the spiritual sphere, is built up by use of the same thinking skills and honest self-criticism that we have learned from infancy in mastering the world around us? Would it make sense for the Lord to design this world in such a way that a devotion to learning the truth about the world in which we live would make it more difficult for

us to learn the truth about its creator? Are the hard won skills of honest and diligent inquiry to be rendered irrelevant in the quest to know our God?

Countless scriptures promise us that we will be rewarded for the faith that we develop in God. We would not expect to be rewarded for faith in false things, so what basis or merit is there in our having faith in the true God? Why should we be rewarded for that? The only answer would seem to be that there is some meritorious action on our part which prepares us for the gift of faith. There must be available to every one of us some reliable means of finding a measure of truth and knowing when we have found it.

We are all of necessity developing a broad system of beliefs which we will use to determine our daily conduct. Through trial and error we discover which ones are good, and we reject the bad. We can use this same method for testing our religious beliefs and the teachings given to us by others. But the problem which always confronts us is the difficulty of being rigorously honest in this process. Beliefs have implications. We cannot help wanting some things to be true and others to be false. If we love our sins, we will likely not want the gospel to be true because it commands us to forsake them utterly.

So our integrity is constantly on the line, and only God knows when, in fact, we sacrifice for the truth or when we harbor error willingly. To gain increasing knowledge of him, we must learn not to promote ourselves by manipulating others, by intimidating, lying, or cheating--by exploiting others or deceiving ourselves--because none of these will work with him. And our knowledge of him comes through the revelations of the Spirit, which we receive only at his pleasure.

Light of Christ

The Spirit, or Light of Christ, is given to all men to provide guidance and encouragement in those important domains of moral action where reason and experience are demonstrably inadequate guides. It is a simple fact of modern philosophy that unaided human reason has not even come close to providing us with a single true and persuasive set of moral principles. And even if we had such a complete set of ethical guidelines, our reasoning abilities would not be adequate to use them in particular situations to determine what we should do. We are therefore all in need of an omniscient friend who knows what courses of action will have the best implications for the future. The great good news of the gospel is that there is such a friend who has prepared the way whereby we can receive and use such assistance. As this friend gives us spiritual guidance and tells us what is right, we will come to rely on him, if we are honest in heart and as we recognize the reliability of that guidance. Thus by being rigorously honest in pursuing what is right and true, even when it requires sacrifice on our part, we can come to have faith--to act as Christ directs without knowing how or why but knowing that his is the only reliable direction we have ever discovered.

All of this assumes that his voice is distinctive, that it is recognizable by us and not readily confused with other sources of ideas. It also assumes that we have a commitment to what is right, that we will be able to respond to that spiritual guidance as we learn about it. The suggestion, of course, is that it is this very commitment to the right and our sensitivity to direction from the Lord, as well as our honesty of heart, that are being tested in this probationary state.

Usefulness of Reason

This analysis suggests that the Lord does expect us to use all the tools he has given us in a diligent and rigorously honest way in the pursuit of truth. Although I have already indicated that reason is inadequate to insure the discovery of truth, it is extremely useful in identifying error. There are many ways in which reason can be used to reveal erroneous or problematic claims to truth. We can identify contradictions or gaps in our own system of beliefs as we examine them rationally. Reason will also help us to identify inconsistencies which need repair that might occur between our own beliefs or ideas and the beliefs of the prophets as recorded in scripture. And it will help us compare alternative courses of action. That is, it will help us if we have developed our ability to think and to use our rational capacity.

But reason is not adequate to show us definitively which answers are true. We will always be in need of an omniscient friend to point out the way, to let light through the clouds and darkness, to open our understanding of truths and explanations we could never have thought of from our positions of ignorance. And no doubt, much of our problems of understanding will result from partial or inadequate interpretations of the scriptures or the prophets, something that the Spirit will also help us to overcome.

Two scriptures illustrate some ways in which the Lord expects our reason to be involved in the process of receiving revelation. To explain Oliver Cowdery's failure to translate the Book of Mormon, the Lord said:

Behold, you have not understood; you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me.

But, behold, I say unto you, that you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right, and if it is right I will cause that your bosom shall burn within you; therefore, you shall feel that it is right. [D&C 9:7-8]

On a later occasion it appears that Edward Partridge and others may have inquired of the Prophet as to how they should travel to the land appointed for their new residence. Seeking direction on this point, the Prophet was instructed:

Wherefore, let them bring their families to this land, as they shall counsel between themselves and me.

For behold, it is not meet that I should command in all things; for he that is compelled in all things, the same is a slothful and not a wise servant; wherefore he receiveth no reward. Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness;

For the power is in them, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward.

But he that doeth not anything until he is commanded, and receiveth a commandment with doubtful heart, and keepeth it with slothfulness, the same is damned. [D&C 58: 25-29]

The point of this scripture seems to be that these people could have counseled directly with the Lord and between themselves in seeking an answer to this question without troubling the Prophet for direction. The power was in them wherein they were agents unto themselves. It was only by exercising that agency that they could gain a reward. And yet the exercise of that agency clearly included counseling with the Lord.

The Lord delights to bless his children, and when we need answers quickly to questions where we cannot help ourselves, he does not hesitate to give us the guidance we need. But where we can help ourselves, he does not take from us that opportunity of coming to our own decisions. We are promised the guidance of the Holy Ghost in all things. It is my belief that as we exercise our agency in humility and righteousness, the Lord will warn us spiritually should we begin to go astray. I also believe that at every stage of the process of analyzing a problem and formulating a decision, those gentle promptings are available to help us find our way and come to the proper course of action.

This process is illustrated rather well in the development of the Welfare Program of the Church. This program was not revealed full blown to the prophet or even to the Brethren in the presiding councils of the Church. Rather the need for such a program became evident to these leaders. Through inspiration they selected the individuals who would be instrumental in developing the program. After a rather long, prayerful period of counseling together and experimenting with various forms of a possible program, a final proposal was prepared and brought before the presiding councils of the Church. William E. Berrett has given us one account of that event. He says he was in the first meeting in which the Welfare Program was announced to the members of the Church in 1936.

President Grant related that individuals had asked him whether he had been talking to Heavenly Beings, whether the Lord had given him a vision. His answer was, "No, I have not talked to angels; I have not had a vision." And he recounted that the word of the Lord on such matters was already given. A plan was worked out in accordance to earlier revelations . . .

President Grant said that . . . he went before the Lord in prayer to ask him if the plan was acceptable, and he got the feeling from the crown of his head to the soles of his feet that he Lord was pleased. ["Teaching by the Spirit," BYU, 27 June 1966]

Our decisions to follow revealed guidance will always require faith. In this life we can never act in full knowledge until we come to "see as we are seen," and "know as we are known"--undoubtedly a miraculous gift which is not widely enjoyed.

The Role of Sin

The iron rod goes along a straight and narrow path. There are many ways in which we can stumble and lose our footing. The most frequent cause of our wandering from that path is sin which clouds our vision and dries up our access to spiritual guidance, leaving us alone to wander with our own dim light and weakened resolve.

Pride is an obstacle for almost all of us. Somehow the requirements of faith seem to threaten our identity. This is probably true only because we choose to identify with things of this world, things which the Lord will ask us to give up. Anticipating that demand, we often find reasons in advance to steer clear of him and his guidance, thereby losing precious opportunities and stunting our own spiritual growth.

Some of us make the mistake of imposing on the Lord our conceptions of him and what he is like, what is good and right, and what is true. He may just let us have our pet beliefs and suffer the consequences. I am reminded of that great sermon in which Moses discussed this matter with the ancient Israelites before leaving them. He said:

Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of fire:

Lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female.

And the Lord spake unto you out of the midst of fire: ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice. [Deuteronomy 4:15-16, 12]

Moses was at pains to stress to the Israelites that they did not know what God looked like because he feared that they would tend to make images of God for the purposes of idol worship. Rather he stressed with them that all they knew about God was that he has a voice. That, of course, is the most important thing to know because the God of Israel can speak to man and tell him what to do. Later in the same sermon Moses warned the Israelites that in the last days their descendants could only be saved from their dispersion if they would forsake their evil ways and hearken to the voice of God once more.

We could also err by blindly trusting in others who seem to be more spiritual than we are. But in so doing we must remember that if they lead us astray it will be no excuse for us at the judgment day. At that time we must each stand on our own feet, on our own performance. We will be judged on what we did with the opportunities and talents given to us. Brigham Young is reported to have warned the Saints many times not to simply rely on his word but to get confirmation of that word for themselves, that they might know his directions were from God.

We need to be sure that our testimonies and gospel understanding keep pace with our learning of the world. Having lived many years in university communities, I have had that sad experience of working with members who have grown too sophisticated in their own view of themselves to remain faithful to a gospel which they really only understand on a grade-school

level. There is always a great danger that faithful members of the Church will find their testimonies threatened by the doctrines of men as they extend their education.

But should our reaction be to simply shield ourselves from exposure to the teachings and theories of the world? Such a posture communicates a lack of confidence in the gospel itself, or possibly too much faith in reason or science, or both. For either, on one hand, we do not really believe that all truth can ultimately be circumscribed in one great whole with Jesus Christ at the center, or, on the other, we do not appreciate the fundamental limitations on the power of man's reason and science to discover truth about the world, and especially about God.

Confidence in the Lord

I believe that one day we will be able to understand all things, that we will rejoice to see how all things are in the Lord's hands, and that all things in the final analysis will work together for our good. But that vision is beyond human science, and I look forward to it as a matter of faith--faith based on invaluable personal experience with the Lord and his revelations. So I believe we must approach the learning of the world with open minds and with confidence that the Lord can and will protect us from error if our hearts are pure--and not lifted up in pride.

I am thinking of the kind of confidence expressed by President Tanner in a story he told in General Conference several years ago. I will relate it in his own words:

Some years ago in Canada I was driving along and had two young men with me in my car, and a young man thumbed a ride with us. I asked the boys who were with me if we should take him with us, and they said yes. I picked him up, and after we had driven along a little way he said, "Do you mind if I smoke in your car?"

I said, "No, not at all if you can give me any good reason why you should smoke." And I said, "I will go farther than that." (I was stake president at this time.) "If you can give me a good reason why you should smoke, I will smoke with you." Well, my two young friends looked at me and wondered.

We drove on for some distance, about twenty minutes, I think, and I turned around and said, "Aren't you going to smoke?"

And he said, "No."

I said, "Why not?"

And he said, "I can't think of a good reason why I should." [CR, April 1965, p. 93]

This is not to suggest that I believe there is any procedure by which we can compel the Lord to reveal to us the fullness of the truths for which scientists seek. I have heard some LDS scholars announce such projects, but I have not seen them reach the promised end. The Lord has his own timetable--and his own ways. He has given us all the direction we need to get access to the most important opportunities of life. And he will quickly and constantly provide the daily personal guidance we all need to keep our feet on that straight and narrow path which leads to life eternal. Beyond that, I do not believe he objects to our further inquiry if we can keep all things in perspective. But we have no assurance of receiving early or full answers to our questions. These other matters wait on his good pleasure.

Guidelines to Keep Faith

We need not fear losing our testimonies or our faith through scholarly pursuits if we will observe a few basic guidelines:

1. Keep the commandments. I have heard many stories about intellectual apostasy, but I am not convinced I have ever seen a genuine case. More often, intellectual dissent serves as a handy rationale to justify one's sins. Intellectuals, who are morally clean, who pay their tithing, and who are not lifted up in pride find no intellectual motives to apostatize.

2. Study the scriptures. The prophets were men of great understanding and inspiration. As we grow and struggle with the problems and questions of life, we will continually find higher levels of wisdom and guidance in their writings. And the Lord will often use our thoughtful scripture study as the opportunity to illuminate and expand our understanding through the Spirit.

3. Pay careful attention to the assumptions and limitations of the various forms of human intellectual endeavor. Do not be intimidated by irresponsible claims that some scientists or scholars might make. Develop a responsible awareness of the foundations of any discipline you choose to pursue so that you can assess for yourself the strength of the theories and evidences that are under discussion.

One of the most disappointing things I sometimes find as I interview students who are graduating from the university is an inability to discuss the assumptions and the limitations of the particular science or discipline that they have been studying for four years. How can you appreciate the strengths and use those strengths appropriately if you do not understand the limitations? It may be true that these limitations are most easily understood by the most advanced practitioners of a discipline. But there is no reason that university level students in any discipline cannot develop a significant appreciation of these matters.

Intellect and Faith

There is a strong sense in which genuine intellectual apostasy is not even a possibility for someone who has had much personal spiritual experience and has obeyed the first principles and ordinances of the gospel by repenting of his sins and receiving the Lord's forgiveness through the baptism of fire. Those are clear and undeniable firsthand experiences with the Lord. An honest intellectual knows that none of the moral or scientific theories of man are nearly so certain to be true. They can never transcend tentative hypotheses. So how should he respond to a theory or doctrine, however attractive, that does not seem to square with his spiritual experience or understanding of the scriptures? He will very naturally decide to shelve the matter until such time as his understanding of the world or the prophets or both progresses to the point that the two will fit together. But he would be a fool to reject that which is most certain and valuable for theories which he knows are likely to be revised or refuted by future scholars.

Another way of putting the problem of reason and revelation is to ask if revelation must give the same results as philosophical or scientific inquiry to be valid. Because of the narrowness of these two, as conceived by contemporary practitioners, the answer must be negative. In the interest of time, allow me to point out only one of many reasons. Contemporary philosophers and scientists must accept certain ground rules--such as the principle of naturalism--which restrict in advance the range of possible explanations that **can be given** for our observations. Specifically, no explanations are acceptable which refer to gods, other supernatural beings or forces, or even purposes.

It may well be that such a principle has been necessary for secular science to make any headway when its practitioners represent so many different beliefs about the existence of gods. But it is also clearly true that to the extent that the supernatural world does exist and does interact

causally with the world of our ordinary experience, science has arbitrarily erected a barrier against its own free explorations of that essential feature of reality--and has condemned itself permanently to a partial and defective understanding of the truth.

I know some members of the Church have chosen to get very excited about the conflicts they see between the theories of science and the teachings of the prophets. But it seems to me that most of this is unnecessary and only provides the devil with another tool for introducing pointless division among the Lords' people. Take, for example, theories about the origins of the universe and of life on this earth, a subject on which the scriptures do seem to say something. The scriptural accounts seem to impose at least two limits on any theories we might choose to develop. The classical Christian doctrine that the earth and the life forms were created **ex nihilo** (from nothing) is rejected. On that score Latter-day Saints agree with modern scientists. But the other clear teaching of the scriptural account is that the creation was the work of the gods, that they did it in a carefully ordered way to accomplish their eternal objectives. But science by its own game rules cannot include any gods or purposes in its explanations and theories. So the scientific theories **cannot** use anything beyond chance and nature to explain our origins. Should we be surprised, or even concerned, that scientific theory does not recognize the role of gods? Science operates under that handicap. But once we see that difference, there is a world of interesting facts that scientists have turned up which invite our analysis from a much broader point of view, a view which allows much more than chance and nature in our theories and explanations.

Conclusions

What will happen if we can repent, overcome sin and pride, and humbly seek truth and right at his hand? He will always expect us to use our own resources to the fullest--our reason, our experience, the scriptures, inspired guidance of our leaders, and the gift of the Spirit which gives new guidance and confirmation as necessary. We will come to know of his never varying goodness. We will learn that he always promotes good and warns us from evil. We will become convinced of his great love and mercy for us. How else could he tolerate us and labor with us so long and patiently and forgive our sins? We will learn that he will exalt us above our own weaknesses to the extent that we allow it. We will gain an increasingly adequate understanding of the real world. We will learn to see the hand of God in all things. This will enable us to get both ourselves and others into perspective. On one hand, we will see the divine potential of each individual as a son or a daughter of God. On the other hand, we will recognize that as vile sinners we are forever doomed to misery if we repent not and cultivate not the heavenly gift.

Mormonism is a distinctively intellectual faith. From the very beginning great importance has been placed on giving a full picture of the world and its relation to God to the humblest member. Our members pride themselves on the ability to explain in detail the reasons for the interesting and different doctrines of this restored gospel. We can explain why we are commanded to be baptized for the dead and why the Word of Wisdom was given. Doubtless, we carry this too far, sometimes providing semiauthoritative explanations for things we really do not understand at all. But we have a much higher tolerance for that speculative error than for the attitude which tells us we should rejoice in inconsistencies when they are discovered, that we should rejoice in the apparent lack of logic or wisdom in the commandments of God. Such

claims are foreign to scriptural and prophetic views. When we object to someone's teachings on the grounds that they do not make sense, it is a false spirit that replies, "That is the beauty of it."

This is not to say that the Lord provides us with the explanations for all things. Some of the most basic teachings of the gospel are left unexplained, and we do accept them simply on the basis of faith. But overall, the Lord has provided us with a coherent picture of him and our relationship to him. He has blessed us with the ability to see continuity in our experience with him and all our daily experiences. It is because of this continuity and coherence that we are able to separate out day by day, truth from error, that we might grow to know and understand him and his commandments better.

Education and Opportunity

As I look back on my own educational experiences, the two most important things I learned at BYU were, first, a knowledge of the Lord and his gospel and of his expectations of me; and second, an ability to read good books, to understand the views of others, and to think independently in evaluating those views. We constantly remind ourselves that our bodies are the temples of God, that we should keep them fit and clean. Our morning streets are crowded with people jogging to maintain fit bodies. I am concerned that we are not jogging our minds sufficiently. Paul has remarked in the book of Timothy that the exercise of the mind and the spirit is far more important than the exercise of the body (see 1 Timothy 4:8). How can God reveal sublime truth to muddled minds? We must prepare an ordered mind so that he can say to us as he has on many occasions to his children anciently, "Come, let us reason together." As President Lee is reported to have said, "It is good to be faithful, but it is better to be faithful and competent."

The youth of today face the greatest challenge that has ever been presented by the Lord to his servants--that of preparing the world for his return. Their ability to handle the challenges they will face will in large measure be a function of the seriousness with which they have taken their educational opportunities. I would plead with young people everywhere not to be misled by those who would have them believe that spirituality is simply an emotional state. I would urge them to prepare themselves appropriately to approach the Lord with clear and open minds that they might be able to understand and follow his word when they receive it. Doing this, they will be able to speak and act in the name of Jesus Christ and do his works. And they will know that the gospel is true.