

## INTRODUCTION



**M**y father was an Army officer, so I spent at least half of my childhood outside the United States, graduating from high school at the Department of Defense school in Seoul, Korea. At the end of my father's tour of duty in Korea, we were flying across the Pacific Ocean: he and the rest of the family headed to Fort Devens, in Ayer, Massachusetts; I headed to Brigham Young University as a first-year student. At some point in the flight, my father handed me an envelope containing a letter. In it he gave me advice about the life I was beginning by leaving home. Among other things, he said he hoped that I would think about becoming a teacher.

I had never considered teaching. I liked many of my high school teachers—such as Mr. O'Brien, my art teacher, and Mr. Smith, my English teacher—but I couldn't imagine myself doing what they did. I thought I wanted to practice medicine. However, years later, after studying at BYU, serving a mission, and marrying—and for much of that time no longer knowing what I wanted to do—I realized that my father knew me better than I knew myself. I wanted to teach. So, I went to graduate school in philosophy and, in 1975, came back to BYU as a professor.

Professors have three primary duties: teaching, scholarship, and participation in the organizing and overseeing work of the university and their profession. For me, each of the second two flows from the first. Scholarship is a way of preparing to teach more and a way of extending my teaching; doing the work of the university and profession are ways of supporting teaching. Teaching is what I do. The other things are

what I do so that I can teach. Being a good university and professional citizen is necessary, though occasionally drudgery. Being a scholar is hard work, and often very intellectually stimulating. Neither, however, gives the kind of personal fulfillment that teaching gives.

Thus, the ten essays in this book are the result of my profession as a teacher, the work I do, of course, but more importantly that which I *profess* as a teacher. I am a profess-er, so I profess, and these essays are about the most important things I profess: faith, philosophy, and the scriptures. My faith has been central to my life since my conversion. The scriptures were important before that and have become more and more important as I have studied. In fact, graduate school was a turning point in my study of scripture, for it was there that I came to understand fully the scriptures' power to teach and the blessings to be had by studying them carefully.<sup>1</sup> Philosophy has been important in my life because, of course, it is how I have earned my living and supported my family. But it has also been important because it has been a way of life.

For many of the ancients, philosophy was a competitor with religion because it offered an alternative way of understanding what it meant to be a human, how we are related to each other and to the cosmos, and what is expected of us. For me, however, philosophy has the same relation to religion that it had for those such as the fourth- and fifth-century Catholic thinker Augustine of Hippo: it is a supplement to rather than a competitor with religion. The confidence of my faith, a confidence that came by revelation, has allowed me to hear the questions of philosophy without fear, and philosophy has never asked me to give up my faith, though it has asked questions about it. Those questions have often been of great help in refreshing my understanding of the gospel, in helping me see it with new eyes. I offer these essays so that others might see how these three—faith, philosophy,

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1. For an account of one of the experiences that has been pivotal in my in learning about scripture study, see "Studying the Scriptures" in my *Scripture Study: Tools and Suggestions* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 1–15.

and scripture—can be part of a whole life, each helping make sense of the others, with faith as the ground and center of them all.

To make a more or less coherent whole of this collection, each of the essays has been revised, some of them lightly, some more heavily.

The first essay, “Remembrance,” reflects on the importance of remembrance to my life as a Latter-day Saint.<sup>2</sup> I argue that memory and conscious recollection are not the same, and that we remember by means of signs, symbols, tokens, institutions, acts, rituals, memorial objects, and many other things. Often we are not engaged in the conscious recollection of that which we remember—as when we wear a wedding ring—yet even when we are not, we remember. Or, as I suggest, it might even be appropriate to say that those signs, tokens, objects, and rituals remember for us. In our relation to us, they always remember for us that which we sometimes bring to explicit memory. By doing so, they make those explicit memories possible. Explicit memories of profound faith-events put us back in touch with those events, safeguarding our faith, but memory keeps them ready for recollection even when we are not recollecting them.

“Room to Talk: Reason’s Need for Faith” was originally written as part of a Festschrift for Truman Madsen.<sup>3</sup> I have great respect for Professor Madsen. I had my first experience with university teaching when I worked as his assistant in 1971, grading papers and leading discussion groups. Responding to Truman Madsen’s work as something that created room for Latter-day Saints to talk about their faith, I argue that the tension between faith and reason is, ultimately, not real, for faith is the foundation of reason.

During the 1994–95 academic year, David Paulsen, a professor of philosophy and a specialist in the philosophy of religion, as well as a previous holder of a Richard L. Evans Professorship of Religious

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2. “Remembrance” was first delivered as a devotional address at Brigham Young University, 23 June 1998.

3. It was published in *Revelation, Reason, and Faith: Essays in Honor of Truman Madsen*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 85–120.

Understanding, brought a variety of theologians to BYU's campus to speak of their views on theological topics. A Latter-day Saint scholar was asked to respond to each. Paulsen gathered the presentations together and, with Donald W. Musser, eventually published a book, *Mormonism in Dialogue with Contemporary Christian Theologies*. That volume contained not only the initial presentations and responses, but also additional responses. I wrote one of the additional responses to the Catholic theologian, David Tracy: "A Mormon View of Theology: Revelation and Reason," chapter 3 in this collection.<sup>4</sup>

Professor Tracy's essay asks how Latter-day Saints understand the relation of revelation and reason and the relation of the two to theology, and I respond by arguing that there are a variety of views among us, but that few do what would count as academic theology. I give three reasons for that absence, reasons that figure importantly in later essays: continuing revelation, the nature of scripture, and the fact that religion is a matter of practice more than it is a matter of belief.

In the same volume, I contributed a response to the work of the Protestant theologian, Langdon Gilkey: chapter 4, "Myth and Religion: Theology as a Hermeneutic of Religious Experience."<sup>5</sup> Gilkey's argument is that science and religion can coexist. However, we live in an age that is fundamentally secular, so scriptural language is no longer truly meaningful. Gilkey sees the job of the theologian to be to help make religion once again meaningful. Doing so means using the language of secularism against itself to "translate," as it were, the religious understanding of the world into secular terms. My response is that Gilkey has misunderstood the conflict between religion and the secular by privileging the secular. We cannot, as he proposes, rewrite the truth of religion in secular terms. Neither of the two languages is reducible to the other. But we can use the truth of religion to create a "space" within the secular world for religious understanding. To show

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4. "Response to David Tracy: A Mormon View of Theology: Revelation and Reason," in *Mormonism in Dialogue with Contemporary Theologies*, ed. Donald W. Musser and David L. Paulsen (Atlanta, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007), 468–78.

5. Faulconer, "A Mormon View of Theology," 423–34 and 445–48.

that possibility, I argue that we can understand, philosophically, how the sacred manifests itself in the world. However, that sacred is manifest mostly in the lives and practices—the way of being—of believers.

The fifth essay, “Why a Mormon Won’t Drink Coffee but Might Have a Coke,” deals with the problem of why Latter-day Saint doctrine is often difficult to explain.<sup>6</sup> I say:

It is a matter of curiosity to many and an annoyance to a few that it is sometimes difficult to get definitive answers from members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to what seem like straightforward questions—questions of the form “Why do you believe or do *x*?” Latter-day Saints subscribe to a few basic doctrines, most of which they share with other Christians (such as that Jesus is divine) and some of which differentiate them (such as the teaching that Joseph Smith was a prophet of God). They also accept general moral teachings, the kinds of things believed by both the religious and the nonreligious. Apart from those, seldom can one say without preface or explanation what Latter-day Saints believe.

I answer the question of why it is difficult to know what Mormons believe using the same three themes that I suggest in chapter 3: continuing revelation, the nature of scripture, and the priority of practice over belief. I give an extended argument under each topic for why theology is dangerous and conclude that there are nevertheless kinds of theology that are more likely to avoid those dangers.

“Rethinking Theology: The Shadow of the Apocalypse,”<sup>7</sup> chapter 6, argues that, in spite of the arguments in chapter 5, arguments

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6. First delivered to a conference, “God, Humanity, and Revelation: Perspectives from Mormon Philosophy and History,” Yale University, 29 March 2003. A slightly edited form was later published in *Element: A Journal of Mormon Philosophy and Theology* 2/2 (2007): 21–37.

7. First delivered for Brigham Young University’s Harold B. Lee Library House of Learning Lecture Series, 25 January 2007. This piece was published in the *FARMS Review* 19/1 (2007): 175–99.

that conclude that systematic theology is more dangerous than other types, the kind of theology one does is not as important as whether that theology testifies of the nearness of the kingdom of God. Though Latter-day Saints have no official theology except the scriptures and the declarations of modern prophets, and though I think that theology can be dangerous, it does not follow that we should avoid all theology. Food can be dangerous, but it does not follow that we ought not to eat. Instead of avoiding theology altogether—which is probably impossible—we must be aware that our theology can be dangerous and be sure to avoid that danger. Theology can do that if it understands itself as a kind of testimony.

In chapter 7, “The Writings of Zion,”<sup>8</sup> I argue that the point of scripture reading is to be called to a different way of being-in-the-world, the way of Christ. I argue that the way to hear that call is through an appropriative reading—through making the scriptures our own, in Nephi’s language, likening the scriptures to ourselves—and I show that historical meaning is not only not irrelevant to an appropriative reading, it is often important to it, though never primary. I argue for a particular understanding of what it means to liken the scriptures to ourselves, seeing our lives as types that are prefigured in various ways in scripture and the scriptures as teaching us, through those types, how to live in covenant with the Father and the Son, and therefore with one another. In the end, the most important meaning we find in scripture is that revealed through the Holy Spirit, a revelation that occurs, most often, if we liken the scriptures to ourselves.

The longest and probably most difficult essay in the book is “Scripture as Incarnation,” chapter 8.<sup>9</sup> In it I ask what it means to say that the scriptures are literally true, and I argue against the usual understanding of that claim: they do not necessarily give us a description of what one would see were one to see a movie of the life of Abraham

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8. The first version of this piece was given as an address at the annual meetings of the Association for Mormon Letters, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 8 March 2008.

9. Originally published in *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2001), 17–61.

or Moses or the ministry of Jesus. Instead, the scriptures are literal in the root sense of that word: they mean what they say “by the letter.” The problem with the usual view of scripture is that it uses the canons of modern, scientific history to judge the meaning and veracity of scripture, but doing so is anachronistic, for the books of scripture were written by people with a different understanding of history. I explore the difference between the premodern and modern understandings of history, and I argue that the premodern understanding has a great deal to teach us (though we cannot merely return to it). As I explain it, the premoderns understood history as an incarnation—the entry into historical “flesh”—of a divine order of meaning. On this view, the divine order of meaning shapes and gives meaning to the events of human history. This means that whereas for moderns religion is one sphere of life among others in which we can participate and which we can investigate, for premoderns it was not a sphere among others, but that which makes sense of all the various spheres of our lives. Scripture is the multivocal expression of that order; its incarnation in words.

Chapter 9, “On Scripture, or Idolatry versus True Religion,”<sup>10</sup> asks what idolatry means in a contemporary context, argues that we often think about that question naively, and contends that some contemporary thinkers give us tools for thinking about what it means to live non-idolatrously. Nevertheless, more than those thinkers, the scriptures can bring us to repentance and true religion if our reading of them is an event in which we hear the preaching of the gospel, an event in which we are called. Chapters 2 through 9 make an extended argument for the importance of reading scripture in an appropriative way, making it one’s own by likening it to oneself, but not interpreting in a merely subjective manner. So chapter 9 ends with examples of the kinds of readings of scripture that can be done, readings of the story of Adam and Eve and of Abraham and Isaac.

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10. An earlier draft of this piece was published in *Discourses in Mormon Theology*, ed. James M. McLachlan and Lloyd Erickson (Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2007), 247–64.

The final essay, “Breathing,” concludes the book with a meditation on the last half of Romans 7 and the first half of Romans 8.<sup>11</sup> That meditation centers on the role of the Holy Spirit in the change that occurs when, having found ourselves unable to live the commandments, we are inspired—literally “breathed into”—by that Spirit. As an appropriative reading of scripture, I think it is a fitting end to the book because it brings together the themes of the preceding chapters: faith, reason, and scripture.

I have arranged these essays in an order that I think will help make my arguments more clear. Indeed, in general, chapters 2 through 8 move from the simpler to the more difficult, with chapter 9 providing a transition from the more academic back to the more general, and chapters 1 and 10 providing “bookends” for the discussion between them.

Of course, a person need not read the essays in the order in which they occur here. Each began its life on its own and can continue to stand independent of the others. Nor should anyone feel obliged to slog through all of the arguments in a particular essay if he or she does not have an interest in the intricacies of the argument. Some of these pieces were originally addressed to audiences of lay members, others were addressed to Latter-day Saint philosophical audiences. Even with editing, those differences remain.

What I say may be confusing or difficult in places, sometimes because I have not expressed myself as well as I ought, sometimes because the material itself is difficult. I am tempted simply to quote the twentieth-century German philosopher Martin Heidegger.<sup>12</sup> He began a lecture, “Time and Being,”<sup>13</sup> by remarking that if we were to see two pictures by Paul Klee painted in the year of his death, “Saints from a Window” and “Death and Fire,” we would want to stand before them for a long time, and we would not be bothered by the fact

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11. An early version of this essay was first delivered to the Sunstone New Testament Lecture Series, in Salt Lake City, Utah, April 1991.

12. For more on Heidegger, see chapter 2, note 62.

13. Martin Heidegger, “Time and Being,” in *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 1–2.

that they were not immediately intelligible. Similarly, if we were to read a great poem (he suggests Trakl's "Siebengesang des Todes") or to have it recited to us, we would want to hear it more than once, and we would not think it should be immediately intelligible. Or if Werner Heisenberg were to present some of his work in theoretical physics, at most two or three people in the audience would be able to follow him. No one would offer it as a criticism that his work is not immediately intelligible. In each of these cases, we would be satisfied to listen, to listen carefully and more than once before we made our criticisms.

The same thing is not true of philosophy. Those who do philosophy are supposed to offer "worldly wisdom," and it is supposed to be immediately intelligible. Everything is supposed to be clear and distinct; nothing should be difficult. If philosophers do not make themselves immediately intelligible, then they, not the subject matter or the audience, are assumed to be at fault.

But Heidegger's remark will not do for me—partly because I am not yet presumptuous enough to compare myself to Klee, Trakl, Heisenberg, or Heidegger, more because ultimately my subject matter is not philosophy, but the gospel of Jesus Christ, and in some sense that must be immediately intelligible (though I would emphasize the words "in some sense"). Nonetheless, I doubt that everything I say will be immediately intelligible to most readers.

There are at least several possible reactions to that difficulty: one is that of the naive, and I mean that word to have positive connotations. The naive are of two types, those with childish faith and those with more mature childlike faith. Those with childish faith will find what I say difficult because it makes the obvious difficult. They are likely to be bored or, at best, indulgent of me, and their reaction is the right reaction. I have nothing to say to those who are naive in a childish way because anything I say would be superfluous. Those with more mature, childlike faith have moved from their initial naivete to one that knows the obstacles to faith and has faith anyway—not necessarily *in spite of* those obstacles, but aware of them and able to cope

with them.<sup>14</sup> Often those who have a second naivete are aware of the problems but do not find them problematic, though perhaps once they did. It is as if they do not care because their faith has made them secure. I especially like to read the work of those in their second naivete, or listen to them speak, but what they say is not philosophical. If it were, it would not be naivete. The second kind of naivete is better than philosophy since philosophy is more like adolescence than childhood.

Another group of readers may find what I say difficult because it invokes difficult concepts and calls the ordinary way of thinking and speaking of things like faith and scripture into question, offering a different vocabulary, and they are afraid to have their ordinary concepts and vocabulary questioned. Those in this group have a dangerous naivete. In the face of the difficulties any child soon encounters, in the face of evil and indeterminacy, they have given up their childish faith and turned to “what everyone knows.” Sometimes what everyone knows is what everyone in church knows. Sometimes it is what everyone in a particular culture knows. Sometimes it is what everyone in a particular profession knows. There are many ways to succumb to “what everyone knows.”

Those with this kind of naivete assume the values and ideas of their history and culture without question, though they sometimes pride themselves on questioning, especially if the “everyone” who “knows” is a professional or academic community. Unaware, they mingle scripture and the philosophy of men—the ideas that most people in our time and culture take to be true. They are fish that do not know the water they swim in. For them, perhaps Heidegger’s quotation would be appropriate if it were not for the fact that I am sometimes one of them.

A third group may find what I say difficult mostly because of my shortcomings. I may have made the simple unnecessarily difficult. I may

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14. See Paul Ricoeur, “Religion, Atheism, and Faith,” in Alasdair MacIntyre and Paul Ricoeur, *The Religious Significance of Atheism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 58–98, for a discussion of this second naivete, though he does not use the term in that essay.

not express myself as well as I should. If you are among this third group, please bear with me and forgive. I have not done so intentionally.

Given the various audiences to which these essays are addressed and the difficulties some may encounter in them, readers should feel free to skim those parts which they find either irrelevant to their interests or more philosophical and academic than suits their tastes. Pick out the conclusions and move to the things that interest you more. Just as not everyone needs to be a scientist to enjoy learning about science or an art critic to enjoy looking at a painting, a person need not be an academic philosopher to read these essays. Philosophy is not to everyone's liking, and those who do not like it should feel free to ignore the more technical parts in order to focus on that which they—and I—find more important.

Finally, I owe thanks to so many people that I fear that in naming any I may inadvertently exclude someone important. My wife, Janice, and my family (children, in-laws, and grandchildren) have been and continue to be of enormous support to me. Only a few of them have much intellectual interest in the things that I do (though they have powerful intellectual interests of their own), but for many years they have unfailingly put up with my shortcomings and idiosyncrasies as well as my philosophical interests and the absences those interests have sometimes caused. I cannot tell how important their love and support has been and continues to be.

Outside my family, the number of people to whom I am in debt is staggering, but I should name a few and apologize profusely to those I overlook. My oversight is not a reflection of the value of their contributions. Some to whom I am indebted and whose names come to mind are Brant Bishop, Grant Boswell, Sabrina Clifford, Robert Couch, Alison Coutts, Elder Henry B. Eyring, Stephen Goldman, Daniel Graham, Ralph Hancock, Paula Hicken, Paul Hoskisson, Jeff Johnson, Bruce Jorgenson, Brenna King, Keith Lane, Adam Miller, Paul Moyaert, Nathan Oman, Noel Reynolds, Shirley Ricks, James Siebach, Joseph Spencer, Brandie Siegfried, Carl Vaught, Rudi Visker, Mark Wrathall, . . . . Thank you all.