

CHAPTER THREE

A MORMON VIEW OF THEOLOGY:
REVELATION AND REASON



The contemporary Catholic theologian David Tracy points out that the difference between philosophy of religion and theology is that the latter requires “some notion of revelation as well as divinely en-gifted reception of that revelation called ‘faith’—a knowledge born of revelation,”¹ while the former does not. One can examine religious beliefs philosophically, including a belief in revelation or a claim to faith, without assuming the reality of either revelation or faith. However, the consequence of assuming divine revelation and knowledge based on that revelation is that “theology can neither ignore nor be sublated by philosophy.”² It cannot be sublated by philosophy because by beginning with revelation and knowledge produced by that revelation, it contains an element that philosophy cannot take into itself. Revelation takes us further than can reason by itself. Presumably, theology cannot ignore philosophy because philosophy is that discipline by which we examine knowledge. However, that it cannot ignore philosophy does not mean that theology can be reduced to philosophizing about a particular subject matter. In his article Tracy addresses Latter-day Saints, asking how we understand the relation between philosophy and theology.

The easy answer is that, as he suggests, the situation in Mormonism is similar to that in Catholicism: theology cannot ignore philosophy but is not subsumed by it, and the theology of Latter-day Saints

1. David Tracy, “A Catholic View of Philosophy: Revelation and Reason,” in *Mormonism in Dialogue with Contemporary Christian Theologies*, ed. David L. Paulsen (Macon, GA: Mercer University, 2007), 449.

2. Tracy, “A Catholic View,” 449.

most often tends toward one of two forms, rationalism or fideism, neither of which can be neatly separated from the other. Like Tracy, Mormons would agree that theology must be grounded in revelation. However, that agreement is complicated by the fact that Tracy separates revelation and religion, a separation that most Mormons cannot make and that may be contradicted by Tracy's turn to hermeneutics, to a philosophy that takes interpretation to be the basic relation of human beings to the world. Though Tracy does not explicitly tell us what he means by "religion," he seems to mean something like "the practices and institutions of a particular religious tradition, often carried out in response to revelation." On that basis, I doubt that many Latter-day Saints would allow the distinction of revelation from religion since revelation is assumed to be part of our religion's practices and institutions and since many of our practices and institutions were specifically given by revelation. To understand how best to understand the relation between philosophy and revelation, I will argue that philosophy and theology must understand religion and belief as part of a way of life. Since that way of life includes revelation, revelation cannot be neatly tweezed apart from it.

Latter-day Saints are primitivists: we believe that the original Christian church was restored in 1830 through the Prophet Joseph Smith. The restoration began in a literal revelation to Smith: Just as Jesus-God made himself manifest in first-century Palestine, God and Jesus Christ appeared to Joseph Smith and spoke to him, and they appeared as physical beings. Later, angels—physically embodied angels with whom one could shake hands—appeared to him and others, speaking with them, relaying divine counsel, and ordaining them to the priesthood by putting their angelic hands on the mortal heads of Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. The primary revelation of early Christianity, the appearance of God as man, repeats itself at the founding of Mormonism. As a result, the events that led to and included the founding of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are called, by Mormons, "The Restoration."

Mormon primitivism means that Smith's encounter with transcendence was not an encounter with a metaphysically transcendent world, but with a world that most Mormons assume is ontologically like our own.³ Though few Mormons claim to have had a similar experience (I have met none), the possibility of that kind of revelation—direct, unmediated, physical encounter—remains permanently open.⁴ Jesus Christ is present not only in the “word (proclamation) and sacrament (those disclosive signs which render present what they signify).”⁵ It is also always possible that Jesus will be present *in physical person*. Indeed, we generally assume that kind of revelation did not cease with Smith, but continued with some succeeding prophets as well as other people.

Mormons also recognize forms of revelation that are much more like what other Christians speak of. We assume that revelation most often comes as inspiration and impression, “the whisperings of the Spirit,”⁶ rather than as voice, vision, or visitation. Nevertheless, for Latter-day Saints, revelation is assumed to be as common as well as a fundamental religious experience, and it is an experience that has at its base the possibility of an unmediated encounter with God, an encounter that is ontologically comparable to that of the first Christians.

The Book of Mormon is explicit about the importance of revelation:

And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy

3. However, see my “Divine Embodiment and Transcendence: Propaedeutic Thoughts and Questions,” *Element: A Journal of LDS Thought* 1/1 (2005): 1–14, for a discussion of some of the ways in which the divine world and our world differ and some theological questions those differences raise.

4. One of many examples: “Revelation may come through dreams or visions, the visitation of angels, or, on occasion such as with Moses, by face-to-face communication with the Lord.” Hugh B. Brown, in Conference Report, October 1961, 96.

5. Tracy, “Catholic View,” 457.

6. *Teachings of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 364.

Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things. (Moroni 10:4–5)

This passage has become more and more doctrinally important among Mormons—it is, for example, an important element in the proselytizing program of the church—and I think we find it implicitly behind Terryl Givens’s argument that the Mormon understanding of revelation is unique in that it is “dialogic.” According to Givens, revelation allows Mormons to appeal to God for answers to questions and problems, without the restraints of a closed canon. The result of that revelation is often knowledge with a propositional content given directly to particular individuals by God rather than, *but not excluding*, revelation as the experience of divine grace, the content of scripture, or the self-disclosure of God.⁷ As mentioned, revelation need not come in the form of propositions literally heard or understood, but one form of revelation, perhaps the form most often referred to when Latter-day Saints speak of revelation, has a propositional content, though not necessarily a propositional form. Little scholarly work has been done on what the term *revelation* means to Mormons, but there is sufficient discussion of it in non-scholarly contexts to give us a reasonable idea: it includes an unmediated response from God in a form that can often be given a propositional exposition. This understanding of revelation as fundamentally propositional goes a long way toward explaining the dominant Mormon understanding of theology as rational or systematic. It is natural to assume that if revelation is propositional, then, at least in principle, those propositions can be organized into a systematic whole.

Nevertheless, Mormons today, intellectuals or otherwise, do not use the word *theology* in a consistent way. From the beginning of the church to the present, Latter-day Saints have often assumed that

7. Terryl L. Givens, “The Book of Mormon and Dialogic Revelation,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10/2 (2001): 16–27. See also the relevant portions of Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). I think it remains a question whether Givens is right that the LDS understanding of revelation as dialogic differs significantly from the experiences of personal revelation by other Christians, such as evangelicals.

theology means “rational or systematic theology.” (By “systematic” I mean a theology in which the doctrines are assumed to be interrelated and capable of structured exposition rather than a theology that is divided into the traditional branches of Christology, pneumatology, etc.) The nineteenth-century work, *The Lectures on Faith*,⁸ arranged in a catechetical format and, for a while, included in the Latter-day Saint canon, is an excellent example of a work that makes this assumption. We find another example in the controversial writings of Orson Pratt, also in the nineteenth century. John A. Widtsoe’s *A Rational Theology*,⁹ first used as a manual in weekly classes for the church’s lay priesthood and later in adult classes of the church’s Mutual Improvement Association, is yet another.¹⁰ We see contemporary examples in Bruce R. McConkie’s *Mormon Doctrine*¹¹ (more of an encyclopedia than a theology, and self-described as a compendium, but nevertheless an attempt at systematic exposition) and Blake Ostler’s series *Exploring Mormon Thought*.¹² Thus, when in 1995 Chieko Okazaki equated the word *theology* with “theorizing about the gospel,”¹³ I doubt that anyone found that usage unusual.

Our widespread understanding of theology as rational theology seems to spring from our interpretation of claims we find in scripture, such as “The glory of God is intelligence” (Doctrine and Covenants

8. Traditionally *The Lectures on Faith* have been attributed to Joseph Smith. However, there is disagreement over its authorship. See Noel B. Reynolds, “The Authorship Debate Concerning *Lectures on Faith*: Exhumation and Reburial” in *The Disciple as Witness: Essays on Latter-day Saint History and Doctrine in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew W. Hedges (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 355–82. I suspect *Lectures* was removed from the canon because its teaching about the Holy Ghost do not cohere with early twentieth-century proclamations by the church’s First Presidency.

9. John A. Widtsoe, *A Rational Theology; as Taught by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Printed by Deseret News, 1915).

10. The Mutual Improvement Association was an organization for young men and women.

11. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 1st ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1958); 2nd ed. (1966).

12. Blake Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought* (Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2001, 2005, 2008).

13. Chieko Okazaki, *Aloha!* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), 54.

93:6). Widtsoe characterized the Mormon understanding of theology as rational theology this way:

Whether knowledge be obtained by any or all of the methods indicated [namely, the senses, inward feeling, transmitted knowledge], it should be carefully examined in the light of reason. . . . A man should therefore use his reasoning faculty in all matters involving truth, and especially as concerning his religion.¹⁴

Brigham Young called theology his favorite study, comparing it to law, “physic,” and astronomy.¹⁵ An impetus for identifying theology with rational theology can be found in a Mormon belief that truth is ultimately “one great whole,”¹⁶ a whole that has, for historical and broad cultural reasons, been assumed to be systematically rational. Surely the fact that, for Mormons, revelation is often, if not exclusively, propositional is largely responsible for the general understanding of theology as systematic: reflection on revelation is a matter of making the propositions of revelation rationally coherent.

However, from early in church history—and still today—the word *theology* has also been used more loosely, as a synonym for belief or teaching. George Q. Cannon, of the Council of Twelve, spoke of his children’s favorite study as theology.¹⁷ Marion D. Hanks, speaking to Brigham Young University students in 1960, described theology as “religious doctrine and knowledge.”¹⁸ And in 2002 Neal A. Maxwell, another member of the Twelve, speaking in the church’s General

14. Widtsoe, *A Rational Theology*, 4th ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1937), 8.

15. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 6:315.

16. See, for example, *The Teachings of Howard W. Hunter*, ed. Clyde J. Williams (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 182.

17. Cannon, “Suffering of the Latter-day Saints—Importance of Educating Children—Importance of Teaching Correct Principles—Need to Donate to Building Schools—Law of Tithing Still Required,” in *Collected Discourses*, ed. Brian H. Stuy, 5 vols. (Burbank, CA: B. H. S. Publishing, 1987–1992), 2:39.

18. Marion D. Hanks, “Steps to Learning,” 4 May 1960, *BYU Speeches of the Year, 1959–60* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1960), 2.

Conference, equated “the restored gospel” with theology.¹⁹ My anecdotal experience is that Mormons seldom distinguish between these two different meanings: sometimes *theology* means “what we believe” or something like that, and sometimes *theology* includes explaining what we believe by giving it a rational structure. Often it is not obvious which of those is intended.

This broadness in the meaning of the word *theology* is at least partly the result of the fact that there has not yet been anything like an official Mormon theology. If *theology* means “beliefs,” then there is a widely accepted theology, though there is considerable variability in even that. However, if *theology* means formal reflection about religious beliefs and practices, then Mormonism does not even have a widely accepted theology, much less an official one, though it has and has had several practitioners.

In spite of the prevalence of equating the terms *theology* and *beliefs* in Mormonism, when I use the term *theology* in this book, I will not use it that way. Though I intend to continue to use the word broadly, whatever else *theology* is, I assume that it includes a reflective, explanatory component. It is more than “what most Mormons believe.” When *theology* is used in the way I propose, we can accurately say that few Mormons have done it in an academic way.²⁰ We could describe those who come closest today, such as David Paulsen and Ostler, as doing either the philosophy of religion or theology, though

19. Neal A. Maxwell, “Encircled in the Arms of His Love,” *Ensign*, November 2002, 16.

20. There is interest in the philosophy of religion among LDS intellectuals. Paulsen’s classes at BYU are always full and Ostler’s books sell well. There is an e-mail discussion group, LDS-Phil, dedicated to discussions of Mormonism and philosophy, which, for obvious reasons, often discusses topics in the philosophy of religion. Clark Goble has a Web site devoted to his philosophical reflections on that topic: www.libertypages.com/clark (“Mormon Metaphysics,” 11 July 2006 posting, accessed 1 August 2006 and 3 March 2009). One can find nonacademic discussions of the philosophy of religion fairly regularly on LDS blogs such as the group blog, Times and Seasons (timesandseasons.org for 1 August 2006). But I think few, if any, of these would call what they do theology, and this constitutes a small group within Mormonism as a whole, even within educated or intellectual Mormons.

I believe that one hears their work referred to most often as “philosophy of religion.” There are notable exceptions, but Mormons have not done much theology, and since about the beginning of the twentieth century, we generally avoid calling what we do theology.

One obvious reason for the relative absence of theology among Mormons is that the church is still young. A tradition that is not yet two hundred years old has not had time to develop the kind of theological discussions that one finds in much older Christian traditions, such as Catholicism. Furthermore, though deciding cause and effect here is difficult (assuming it is relevant), the absence of theological work in the Church of Jesus Christ today is also probably related to the fact that fideism seems to have grown in popularity among contemporary church leaders. For example, speaking of church history and the origins of Mormonism, Maxwell said, “Reason, the Greek philosophical tradition, dominated, then supplanted, reliance on revelation,” but with the restoration, “Revelation . . . replaced the long and inordinate reliance on reason.”²¹ Though this more fideistic approach has become increasingly obvious during the last half of the twentieth century, it is not a completely original development.²² Among other precursors, we find Joseph Smith saying things like, “Without a revelation, I am not going to give them the knowledge of the God of heaven”²³ and, speaking of the rest of Christianity, “[they] are bound apart by cast-iron creeds, and fastened to set stakes by chain-cables, without revelation.”²⁴ Revelation trumps reason.

21. Maxwell, “From the Beginning,” *Ensign*, November 1993, 18. Taking a somewhat ameliorated position, Dallin H. Oaks has said, “The source of the ancient conflict between (1) reason or intellect and (2) faith or revelation is the professor’s rejection of revelation, not the prophet’s rejection of reason.” Oaks, *The Lord’s Way* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 50.

22. One would have to do a more thorough study of the documents to decide, in fact, whether this movement from more focus on rational theology to more focus on fideism is as pronounced as I take it to be. I have not made that study, so I rely on my intuition that it is.

23. *Discourses of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Alma P. Burton (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977), 37.

24. *History of the Church*, 5:215.

Let me briefly offer three additional reasons for the dearth of theology among Latter-day Saints: the belief in continuing revelation, the nature of scripture, and the fact that, like many Jews, Mormons understand their religion primarily in terms of practices and attitudes rather than in terms of beliefs.²⁵ Of these, of course, perhaps only the first is unique to Mormons. The other two reasons can also be found in other religions. Indeed, Tracy argues (and I agree) that the nature of scripture requires us to rethink theology,²⁶ and he also sees the importance of practice, arguing explicitly that theory and a way of life ought to join themselves, and recognizing that “such a remarkable union seems clearly present in Mormon philosophies.”²⁷

Continuing revelation makes theology more challenging—if *theology* means “rational theology”—because, as Spencer J. Condie says, “Change is an inevitable consequence of continuous revelation.”²⁸ Two iconic events in Mormon history, the 1890 prohibition of polygamy and the 1978 declaration that all worthy male members of the church were to be given the priesthood, remind Latter-day Saints of the fact that a belief in living prophets who give continuing revelation means that, not only is our canon not closed, but what has been an authoritative teaching can become radically nonauthoritative, even when the original authority was direct revelation from God. Our religion requires that we always recognize the possibility that we will have to give up doctrines and practices that we thought central and authoritative.

The first of the two iconic practices, the practice of polygamy, was supported by a well-developed theology, a theology based on official teachings, scriptural and prophetic, that made polygamy a religious requirement for some.²⁹ In the second case, though there was

25. See chapters 4 and 5 in this volume for expanded discussions of these three claims.

26. Tracy, “Catholic View,” 452, 457.

27. Tracy, “Catholic View,” 462.

28. Spencer J. Condie, *In Perfect Balance* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1993), 106.

29. Perhaps the experience of having a thorough theological justification for the necessity of polygamy only to have polygamy abandoned is also at the root of less and less theology in the twentieth century and afterward—not in absolute numbers, but in

neither authoritative revelation nor explanation for why Blacks were not ordained, there was a great deal of speculation, speculation that many Mormons took as quasi-authoritative. The belief that there was a doctrinal basis for the exclusion of Blacks from the priesthood was so strong in the church that, even among those Mormons who, prior to 1978, refused to give revealed status to the practice, few thought that the practice would be discontinued in the foreseeable future. Many Mormons assumed that the practice could be explained in terms of authoritative church teachings, even if no one seemed able to say what that explanation was. However, in spite of their authoritative place within church belief and theology, revelations from prophets overturned both practices and their associated beliefs and explanations. (In the first case, the overturning took a while to complete; in the second, the effect was essentially instantaneous.) In neither case did the church give a theological explanation of the change—in my eyes, evidence that the prophets in question did not see their revelations as responses to questions, but as responses to a divine call. One can ask “Why?” of an answer to a question, but it does not make sense to ask that of the response to a call. The answer to “Why are you responding that way?” is quite different than the answer to “Why do you believe that?”

Though not impossible, it is difficult for any rational theology to contain the proposition, “Important authoritative propositions in this theology could be authoritatively denied at any moment, requiring the complete re-rationalization of the propositions that remain.” As a result, some modes of rational theology have been difficult for Mormons, but we have seldom recognized other kinds of theology, except theology as a set of beliefs. Those are the only two options most Mormons have considered.

As I pointed out earlier, the second reason that we find little academic rational theology among Latter-day Saints, the nature of

relation to the membership of the church: there are substantially fewer people doing academic theology as a percentage of church membership than there were in the nineteenth century prior to polygamy.

scripture, is not unique to us. My point about the effects of the nature of scripture on theology of any kind is similar to one that Tracy has made: We often speak of and use scripture as if it were a set of propositions that are poorly expressed or, at best, “merely” poetic. We then try to discover the propositional content (doctrine) that we assume is lurking behind or implicit in those poorly expressed or poetic expressions and to disentangle the relations of those propositions. But that approach misunderstands scripture. Instead of a poetic expression of implicit propositional truths, it is an inspired resource that allows us to question ourselves and our world through reading and reflection. Scripture requires our interpretive, mediated response to its questions: the appropriation of scripture—in Mormon terminology, likening it to ourselves—more than its rational exegesis (cf. 1 Nephi 19:23).³⁰ Of course, the appropriation proper to scriptural understanding remains inherently theological—reflection on belief—albeit not narrowly rational.³¹

Few Latter-day Saint thinkers, conscious of themselves as doing theology, have taken up the task of this appropriation, but why? Part of an answer is, I think, the belief in continuing revelation combined with the cultural assumption that scripture is to be understood as collected prophetic declarations that set forth a particular, unique set of propositions, though those propositions are often only implicit. (That is, of course, not an assumption found only among Mormons.) Whatever the reason, though we find relatively little systematic theology among Latter-day Saints, a theology of appropriation fits well with our insistence on continuing revelation. Indeed, though it is not usually done in a rigorous way, appropriation of scripture is ubiquitous among Latter-day Saints. I assume that a more rigorous theology of appropriation would be a hermeneutic theology—and that it would bring together our reliance on scripture and our belief in continuing revelation.³²

30. See chapter 7 in this volume for a fuller discussion of *likening*.

31. Cf. David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 104.

32. I assume that what many Latter-day Saints do when they read and talk about scripture is such an appropriative theology, though a naive one.

Of the three reasons, however, (continuing revelation, the nature of scripture, and the fact that religion is primarily a matter of practice rather than propositional belief) the latter seems to be the most important. To say that Mormons focus primarily on practices is, of course, not to say that beliefs are irrelevant to Latter-day Saint religion. Rather, it is to say that they are what they are and have their importance only in terms of the practices of which they are part. To use language taken from Martin Heidegger, it is to say that beliefs have their importance only as they are part of a way of being, and for Latter-day Saints that way of being is defined by the call of God.³³ Latter-day Saints are more concerned with whether they have paid their tithing, visited an ill fellow congregant, done their home or visiting teaching,³⁴ and performed vicarious ordinances in the temple than they are with how to explain the grace of God or the Word of Wisdom.³⁵ (Of course, that one thing is more important than another does not mean that the second is *unimportant*.) Perhaps the most important reason that Latter-day Saints have done little toward giving an intellectual clarification of revelation is that our experience of religion is fundamentally practical and, so, does not lend itself readily to systematic theological reflection. The faith-knowledge engifted by revelation, perhaps most obviously seen in the faith-knowledge of scripture, is practical rather than theoretical knowledge, so one theology that can deal appropriately with that knowledge would be a hermeneutical theology, a theology of listening for the word of God and saying what one hears and how one hears it.³⁶ Naturally, this hermeneutic would

33. For more discussion of this point, see chapter 5 in this volume. For more on Martin Heidegger, see chapter 2, note 62.

34. Home and visiting teaching are church programs in which members of the church are assigned to visit each other each month in pairs—men for home teaching; women for visiting teaching—to encourage and to watch over the members of the congregation.

35. The Word of Wisdom is a revelation forbidding the use of coffee, tea, and alcoholic drinks, and urging moderation in eating meat (see Doctrine and Covenants 89).

36. For an excellent philosophical article on what a hermeneutic theology might look like, see Paul Ricoeur, “Toward a Narrative Theology: Its Necessity, Its Resources, Its Difficulties,” in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, ed. Mark I. Wallace, trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 249–61.

be more than a hermeneutic of texts. It would especially be a hermeneutic of relations, practices, and events. Indeed, there is an important sense in which, without calling it “theology,” Latter-day Saints have practiced hermeneutic theology since shortly after the founding of the church. They have been intensely interested in and written much about church history, understanding Mormon history—the things we have done and experienced—as the key to understanding what it means to be a Mormon; understanding the interpretation of Latter-day Saint history as disciplined reflection on what it means to be a Latter-day Saint, in other words as quasitheological, even if only implicitly. Perhaps this explains why the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*,³⁷ though it contains articles on traditional theological questions such as God’s foreknowledge, devotes proportionally much more space to articles on church history. It also explains why Latter-day Saint academics and students, as well as church members outside the academy, often have an avid interest in Mormon history, even though they are not themselves historians. The fact that the Mormon History Association has thousands of members while the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology has, at most, hundreds, says something about where Mormons find theology. Finally, understanding Mormons as doing hermeneutical theology by doing history explains why the dispute over how history should be done—a dispute that was resolved only by the participants changing topics and, so, a dispute that remains implicit in much Mormon discussion of our history—was so strong.³⁸

Some Mormons, including Mark Wrathall and myself, have made the hermeneutical approach more explicit, using philosophical rather than historical hermeneutics to think about their faith. Though thinkers like Heidegger, the twentieth-century German, Hans-Georg Gadamer (a student of Heidegger), and the twentieth-century French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur (who taught in the United States for some time)

37. *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992).

38. See, for example, the essays in George D. Smith, ed., *Faithful History: Essays in Writing Mormon History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992).

are not among the philosophers to whom most Mormons are likely to refer, that seems to be changing. Of course, hermeneutical theology is not the only Mormon alternative to rational theology and its offspring. Though less well known than the work in the philosophy of religion done by Paulsen and Ostler, there are a number of contemporary Mormon thinkers who are exploring alternatives. Kathleen Flake has taken the Mormon interest in history and used it to think about Mormon faith through narrative theology, a cousin if not a sibling of hermeneutical theology.³⁹ Some Mormon thinkers, like Brian Birch and Keith Lane, use D. Z. Phillips's Wittgensteinian understanding of theology as a basis for their reflections. One Latter-day Saint thinker, Adam Miller, takes his theological cue from the work of Alain Badiou. All of these alternative approaches, even Miller's, assume as fundamental that practice, belief, and reflection on practice and belief are temporal and situated. In that sense they too are hermeneutic.

Thus, the answer to the question, "How do Mormons understand the relation between philosophy and theology," turns out to be complicated. Traditionally, we have taken theology to be strongly rationalistic, though there has also been an important and growing fideistic strain in Latter-day Saint thought, a strain that may be a reaction against rationalist theology more than a positive assertion about the nature of reason and faith. But, because the practical rather than theoretical understanding of religion is fundamental to Mormonism, perhaps the most important Mormon theological work to date has been the work of Mormon historians. Though people like Paulsen and Ostler continue to labor for theological understanding in a more systematic fashion, it appears that the theological work traditionally done by attention to history is beginning to be supplemented by theologies of scriptural appropriation, narrative, Wittgensteinian analysis,

39. Flake, "Translating Time: Joseph Smith's Translation of the King James Bible," unpublished manuscript delivered at "God, Humanity, and Revelation: Perspectives from Mormon Philosophy and History," New Haven, Yale University, 24 March 2003. Notice that *history* takes the place in the title of the conference where one would expect to find *theology*.

and hermeneutics, theologies that do not take the implicitly objective view taken by rational theology, and theologies for which continuing revelation plays a more central role than it does in rational theology. Mormon theology is beginning to take part in the larger theological discussion, moving more in the direction of multiple theologies and, particularly, theologies that, as Tracy so well put it, “accord priority to ‘possibility’ over ‘actuality,’” “take history and historicity with full seriousness,” and recognize truth as manifestation, disclosure, or disclosure-concealment.⁴⁰

40. Tracy, “Catholic View,” 460.