

CHAPTER SIX

RETHINKING THEOLOGY:  
THE SHADOW OF THE APOCALYPSE



According to the Gospels, one of the most frequently repeated of Jesus’s messages during his earthly ministry was “The kingdom of God [or heaven] is at hand.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, early in his ministry Jesus describes preaching the kingdom of God, the reign of God, as his very message.<sup>2</sup> He does not announce that the kingdom *will* come near, but that it has already done so. As odd as it may sound to our ears, in the New Testament to preach the gospel is to preach the present nearness of the kingdom of God.

But the Lord does not only announce the nearness of his kingdom in the New Testament. He also announces it, indeed insists on it, in the Doctrine and Covenants, which opens with a call to all the world to hear his voice and a warning of destruction for those who do not (D&C 1:1, 4, 11–13). The second coming, the Apocalypse, begins with the restoration and it is figured in the lives of all who hearken to its call: “the Lord is nigh” (D&C 1:12; see also verses 35–36). To hear the gospel preached is to experience the nearness, both temporally and spatially, of the kingdom. It is to have an experience figured by the Apocalypse, the revelation of God’s kingdom; the revelation of the kingdom of God to a person is figured by, is a type of, the revelation of

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1. See, for example, Mark 1:15 and Matthew 10:7. The verb translated “is nigh” means, literally, “has come near”: ἐγγίζω: to draw near in space or time. Walter Bauer, Frederick William Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. *A Greek-English Dictionary of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

2. Luke 4:43: “I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent.”

his kingdom that will happen at the last day.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the revelation of the reign of God is not only something far away in time, something to be awaited, but something here and now. It happens in our lives when we become part of the kingdom of God. When that happens, the reign of God—his rule over us—has begun, a fact we signify when we agree to take his name on us (Moroni 4:3). In such an experience the Apocalypse does not so much refer to the end of the world, though it also refers to that, as it refers to the moment when the nearness of the kingdom of God is revealed to the believer and the believer's life is oriented by that kingdom rather than by the world. To hear the gospel preached is to experience a type or shadow of the Apocalypse, to “stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (Romans 14:10), not as a criminal, but as one freed. So the Apocalypse as the revelation of God's kingdom is not something to be feared, but to be hoped for, longed for.

The Book of Mormon uses the terms *type* and *shadow* as equivalents (Mosiah 13:10). We sometimes speak of figures and mean the same thing. Types, shadows, and figures are the things in the world by means of which we see the things of God. The various meanings of *type* (including a small block with a raised, reversed letter on it for printing; a kind; an exemplar, and a symbol) result from the fact that they share the same etymological origin: in Greek a *typos* is the mark of a blow or a stamp, an imprint.<sup>4</sup> If we see the world through religious eyes, we see the imprint of God's work in everything, as Paul sees Christ in Adam (Romans 5:14). And some things particularly bear that imprint. When I see my relation to my children as something to be shaped by the relation I have to my Father in Heaven, I see my fatherly work as a type of the work of the Father, as if what I do is a shadow cast by his work, as something figured or formed by him and what he does. So, when I understand what it means to be a father, I have a better understanding of who the Father is and what he does.

3. I rely here on the fact that the Greek word ἀποκαλύπτω, the root of *apocalypse*, means “to uncover, to disclose, or to reveal.” Bauer and others, *A Greek-English Dictionary*, s.v. ἀποκαλύπτω.

4. Bauer and others, *A Greek-English Dictionary*, s.v. τύπος.

I see him through the things in the world because those things are “stamped,” or figured by him. I know of no Book of Mormon term for what shows itself in the type or shadow, but the technical term is *antitype*, though I prefer the less common noun, *prefigure*.<sup>5</sup> When Christ’s second coming, the prefigure, is fully revealed, the old world will end, the new reign of God will begin, and no one will be able to resist (Mosiah 27:31). The individual’s encounter with the risen Lord is a figure of that second coming, for in each event the old world ends and a new world begins. Like Christ himself, whose beauty is not apparent, so that people do not see his desirability (Isaiah 53:2), the prefigure of his second coming remains invisible to most because they cannot see its figuration in the world. It remains invisible to all who have not encountered the Lord, whose experience of the world is not a figure, type, or shadow of his coming. Without the orientation to time and the world that is provided by entry into the kingdom one cannot see the things of the kingdom. Thus, seeing and hearing the announcement of Christ’s coming and the nearness of his kingdom does not require that we acknowledge this, that, or another fact, but that we experience the world as God’s kingdom. The experience of the nearness of the Apocalypse does not produce an answer to a question, but a response to a call. Of course, to have that experience will result in facts that one acknowledges, but the orientation and the experience which it engenders is fundamental rather than the facts.

Having read to his people from Isaiah’s prophecy of Israel’s eventual redemption, Jacob says:

O then, my beloved brethren, come unto the Lord, the Holy One. . . . And whoso knocketh, to him will he open; and the wise, and the learned, and they that are rich, who are

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5. In Greek, *antitypos* means “that which corresponds to something else” (Bauer and others, *A Greek-English Dictionary*, s.v. ἀντίτυπος). The type is the shape impressed in the soft wax. The antitype is that which has struck the wax, forming the impression. Cf. 1 Peter 3:21: “which [referring to the salvation of Noah’s family in the ark] was a prefigure [*antitypos*] of baptism.”

puffed up because of their learning, and their wisdom, and their riches—yea, they are they whom he despiseth; and save they shall cast these things away, and consider themselves fools before God, and come down in the depths of humility, he will not open unto them. But the things of the wise and the prudent shall be hid from them forever—yea, that happiness which is prepared for the saints. (2 Nephi 9:41–43)

Those who trust what their riches, learning, or worldly wisdom allow them to see will not be able to see the happiness prepared for the Saints. The results of the gospel are hidden from, invisible to, the merely learned; without the figured, typological experience of conversion we cannot see the truth of the gospel. Jacob's insight has been, I believe, shared by other thinkers. It is, for example, a variation of Augustine's admonition, "Believe that you may understand,"<sup>6</sup> which became Anselm's motto, "faith seeking understanding."<sup>7</sup> These thinkers agree that the understanding that the Christian seeks can only be achieved if he or she first has faith; without faith understanding will be blind.

As I understand the implications of Jacob's teaching for theology, they include that as long as theology remains merely a matter of learning we can see neither the gospel nor its teaching. The doctrine that the Messiah has come into the world and died so that all might come to him—meaning that we repent, are baptized, receive the Holy Ghost, and endure to the end (3 Nephi 27:13–16)—remains invisible

6. *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 29.6. Augustine was an adult convert to Christianity and lived in the fourth and fifth centuries AD. He became bishop of Hippo (in North Africa), and was highly influential in using philosophical ideas, particularly those of Plato, to understand Christianity. His most famous work is *Confessions*, perhaps the first autobiography, though he did not think of it as one.

7. As Anselm explains in the preface to *Proslogion*, that motto was the original title of his *Monologion*. Anselm was an eleventh-century Catholic theologian and thinker who was made archbishop of Canterbury in 1093, though he spent a good deal of his time as archbishop in exile because of church-king conflicts that foreshadowed those to come during the reign of Henry VIII.

if the gospel is merely a matter of learning.<sup>8</sup> However, as long as the Good News and God's kingdom are invisible in a Christian theology, it cannot really be talk about God. What we say may concern itself with his effects in this world or with our ideas and understanding of him. It may be about our doctrines, our understanding of his revelation: such a theology may say a good deal about those who espouse it. Theology may be about many things, but it is not about him if it does not reveal him, and it does not reveal him if it does not announce the nearness of his kingdom. In light of what Jacob tells us, theology must go beyond mere learning to allow the things of God to be opened or revealed to us. Our theology must be a figure of the Apocalypse, a theology that reveals God himself, even if only as a figure, rather than revealing only our understanding of him.

Chapter 4 addressed the question of how Latter-day Saint theology is possible. There I argued that the absence of official rational explanations or descriptions of beliefs and practices, and the presence of differing and inconsistent explanations for and descriptions of belief within the membership of the church, suggests that we have little if any official systematic, rational, or dogmatic theology. (I use those three terms, *systematic theology*, *rational theology*, and *dogmatic theology*, as synonyms.<sup>9</sup>) We are "a-theological"—which means that we are without a church-sanctioned, church-approved, or even

8. In scripture *the doctrine* is the preaching of the gospel described by Christ in 3 Nephi. The word *doctrines*, in the plural, is used exclusively to refer to false teachings. Louis Midgley, review of *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon: Volume I, First and Second Nephi; Volume II, Jacob through Mosiah*, by Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 1/1 (1989): 92–113, especially p. 100. It seems that scripture generally understands doctrine to be the preaching of the gospel rather than a collection of beliefs.

9. As used in theology, *dogmatic* means "pertaining to doctrines/teachings," not "asserting . . . opinions in an authoritative, imperious, or arrogant manner." (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "dogmatic.") Though dogmatic and systematic theologies are not the same, the difference between them, namely the sanction of a church for the first but not the second, is irrelevant here, so I ignore it.

church-encouraged systematic theology—and that is as it should be because systematic theology is dangerous.<sup>10</sup>

I made my argument using three sub-arguments:

(1) *Continuing revelation is primary to Mormonism.* Since Latter-day Saints insist on continuing revelation, they cannot have a dogmatic theology that is any more than provisional and heuristic, for a theology claiming to be more than that could always be trumped by new revelation. Dogmatic theology, however, tempts us to think we have found something more since, as a rational system, it gives the appearance of being complete.

(2) *Practice or response is more important than belief, particularly explicated belief.* By focusing on belief rather than on practice, dogmatic theology poses a danger to true religion (see James 1:27), threatening to invert the relative importance of thought or belief, on the one hand, and practice, the acts of life in covenant relation, on the other, as it eventually did in the early church.<sup>11</sup>

(3) *Scripture is more important than rational explanation.* In addition to continuing revelation, the locus of explanation for Latter-day Saint belief is scripture. However, unlike rational/dogmatic theology as it is usually construed, but like prophetic revelation, scripture is testimony that questions us, thereby calling us to new life in Christ rather than to a set of rationally-ordered belief propositions to which we are asked to assent. In other words, dogmatic theology does not deal directly with the substance of religious faith: life *in* Christ rather than beliefs *about* Christ.

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10. See chapter 5 in this volume.

11. In “Ritual as Theology and as Communication” (*Dialogue* 33/2 [2000]: 117–28), John L. Sorenson makes a case that for Latter-day Saints the ritual—a practice—is our most common theology. Needless to say, I find Sorenson’s paper persuasive.

If my arguments are right, then systematic theology is dangerous, and it is not surprising that we find little official sanction for it in the church.

Of course, for Latter-day Saints, talk about God that reveals God—the best sense of the word *theology*—is, first of all, the revelations given through the prophets. We dare to say that God continues to reveal himself authoritatively to human beings through another human being. Unless one insists that all theology be systematically rational, and I know of no one who does, it makes sense to call prophetic revelation theology. Indeed, revelation is *the* Latter-day Saint theology. However, I believe that those Saints who have done theology in the nonrevelatory sense have, for the most part, done it systematically and rationally.<sup>12</sup> In the nineteenth and early twentieth century Orson Pratt and John A. Widtsoe come to mind, both in works that few today would find philosophically or scientifically acceptable.<sup>13</sup> Some, such as BYU's David Paulsen and the independent scholar Blake Ostler, do it today with interesting and well-respected results.

These kinds of thinkers see no difficulty in holding to two propositions, “Theology is the continuously revealed word of God” and “Theology is rational, dogmatic, or systematic theology.” I do not know what either Paulsen or Ostler believes regarding the second of these claims,<sup>14</sup> though I assume that they accept the first as one meaning for the word *theology*. Regardless of their positions, however, based on more than thirty-five years of talking with other Latter-day Saints about theological questions, I believe that most of us who do theology or some informal version of it assume that God's knowledge is a systematic whole, and that he reveals parts of that whole

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12. I ignore the fact that I think church history has been, for many Latter-day Saints, the place where our theology has been expressed. (See chapter 3 in this volume.) I do so because few, if any, church historians or other Saints have seen history as at the same time theological.

13. Some of Pratt's work is particularly flawed, but to my mind both Widtsoe and Pratt accept Newtonian science as if it were unquestionable, making each untenable.

14. Either of them, for example, could believe that systematic theology is merely one of several kinds of theology rather than either the fundamental or the only kind.

over time, gradually revealing more and more of it. If so, then those who think that way assume that, using the part of the whole that has been revealed so far, they can tentatively speculate as to the systematic whole that stands behind the part. However, as reasonable as that may seem, I think it is mistaken.

For one thing, to claim that our speculations are concerned with an eternal, rational system of truths that God reveals to us over time assumes that knowledge is fundamentally and essentially systematic and rational. In other words, it assumes that all knowledge is either self-evident,<sup>15</sup> incorrigible,<sup>16</sup> or a result of direct sense perception—or it can be rationally and systematically derived from those three kinds of knowledge. But much of twentieth-century philosophy, with work ranging from that of Martin Heidegger, to American pragmatism, to Alvin Plantinga, Nicholas Wolterstorff, and others in the analytic tradition of philosophy, has made that assumption about the character of knowledge dubious, each in different ways. It is questionable whether it makes sense to believe that there is an eternally existing set of systematically related fundamental truths expressed at least in part in our accurate understanding of things. Indeed, I believe that most who have dealt with the question carefully have concluded that the notion is rationally incoherent. But it does not follow from that rejection of an eternal, static realm of truth that is metaphysically prior to or beyond this world that there is neither truth, nor that there is no eternal truth. Indeed, the revealed truth that God is embodied and, so, within the cosmos in some way rather than metaphysically apart from it, suggests that the realm of truth is not metaphysically prior to the cosmos within which human beings find themselves. Instead the truth is part of the cosmos, perhaps as its happening. We can reject the Enlightenment formulation of truth (a formulation that continues to use the traditional God as its model even if it sometimes rejects

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15. For example, axioms.

16. For example, my genuinely held beliefs about what I am currently, explicitly thinking.

his existence) without rejecting truth itself. However, the assumptions of modern rationalism and the Enlightenment have become so much part of our common sense that we may sometimes have to struggle to rethink them.

Thus, some forms of systematic theology that we find among Latter-day Saints are philosophically problematic and, whether a particular kind of systematic theology is entangled in those problems or not, it is dangerous. But the possible problems of systematic theology mean neither that systematic theology per se is impossible nor that those who do it sin. We need apocalyptic theology, to be sure—at least as continuing revelation—but apocalyptic theology is not a *kind* like “dogmatic theology” or “liturgical theology.” A *kind* is a group of related objects, and apocalyptic theology is not in the same group as dogmatic, liturgical, or other ways of doing theology, for it is not a method for doing theology. Dogmatic and other kinds of theology are defined by their objects and methods. They differ by having differing objects and methods, but they are alike in that they are defined by their objects and methods. In contrast, apocalyptic theology is defined by what it does rather than by objects and methods; it is defined by its revelation of the nearness of the kingdom of God.

So I would supplement my previous argument: though rational, dogmatic theology may be dangerous, it too can be apocalyptic. Indeed, systematic theology has an important place in apologetics as well as in critical theology, for it explains our beliefs to others and helps us understand the limits of our claims about God. I doubt that we could argue against a systematic theology, such as Orson Pratt’s, without doing systematic theology in response, and I think that Pratt’s theology is ultimately philosophically incoherent. Making that claim requires doing at least a minimal level of systematic theology. Perhaps, as I believe, other kinds of theology are less likely to fail to be apocalyptic, but no theology is, in itself, incompatible with apocalyptic theology, and no theology can, in itself, avoid the dangers of theology.

How, then, does a theology avoid the heresy<sup>17</sup> of being nonapocalyptic, of making the gospel something I choose rather than something God gives? Theologizing by those who are not prophets may put the kingdom at a distance by making talk about the gospel merely talk about our own learning, but how does theologizing by nonprophets avoid doing that and, at the same time, take seriously the proximity of the kingdom, inviting us to enter it?<sup>18</sup>

With Jacob as our guide, as a first step toward understanding what apocalyptic theology is, we could say that it opens a moment of understanding and conversion, a moment on the way toward membership in the kingdom of God. Thus, we could recast the discussion in these terms: Philosophy thinks being-in-the-world.<sup>19</sup> Theology thinks being-in-the-world directed toward God. If we recast the discussion further, using the terms of apocalyptic theology we can say that philosophy thinks being-in-the-world while apocalyptic theology thinks being-in-the-world as a figure of the Apocalypse. The danger is that the addendum, *directed toward God*, will cease to be the compass of our thinking. When it does, our being-in-the-world is no longer a type and shadow of the Apocalypse. The nearness of God's reign no longer defines as a whole the movement of our life with others and among things.

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17. I depend here on the meaning of the Greek root, *hairetikos*, “to grasp,” “to take for oneself,” “to choose.” Bauer and others, *A Greek-English Dictionary*, s.v. αἱρετικός. That which is truly heretical is that which we make for ourselves, taking the things of God as if they were our property, to do with as we please.

18. I am, of course, using the word *prophet* here in its narrow sense, namely to refer to those called and set apart as prophets. In its wider sense, “someone who genuinely speaks the word of God,” the term *prophetic theology* would mean the same as *apocalyptic theology*.

19. This phrase comes from the work of the twentieth-century German philosopher Martin Heidegger. He argued that our fundamental encounter with the world is not one of a consciousness faced with something outside of or opposed to it. Rather, we are beings who find ourselves already in a world of things and others, with projects to accomplish. Reason, abstraction, explicit consciousness—these arise as part of and in response to our initial situation in the world. “Being-in-the-world” describes that initial situation. (For more on Heidegger, see chapter 2, note 62 in this volume.)

Of course, theology occurs in the world. However we theologize, whether with dogmatic theology or some other kind (hermeneutic, feminist, liberation, liturgical . . .), the challenge is to do it without succumbing to the unavoidable risk that theology turns in on itself, becoming a merely academic, only mental exercise that claims to refer to God but in which he does not make himself known and within which he does not call us to his kingdom because it is an exercise referring to our own ideas. But the alternative to that mistake is not a thinking that is outside of or beyond the world in some way, the thought of that which is absolutely other than this world—and given the Latter-day Saint belief in God’s immanence in existence, his indwelling in existence, we ought not even to desire such supposed purity of thought. The challenge is not to think another world or to think other than the world. It is not to create a Platonic metaphysics. The challenge is to think our being-in-the-world differently, to think it as directed toward God by his self-revelation in the world. In other words, apocalyptic theology aims to remake the world of its hearers and readers by allowing the kingdom to be revealed.<sup>20</sup> An apocalyptic theology is one in which the theologian can see the “happiness which is prepared for the saints” in this world (2 Nephi 9:43).

The contemporary French philosopher-theologian Jean-Luc Marion makes a distinction that we can use to think further about the difference between apocalyptic and nonapocalyptic theology because it mirrors the distinctions of scripture. Marion writes of the “idol” and the “icon.”<sup>21</sup> Begin with an icon: an icon reveals something other than itself, something divine. Apocalyptic theology as I am describing it is iconic. It reveals the nearness of the kingdom, its coming, something I can anticipate but which is not present. In contrast, with an idol I claim to produce something that re-presents, that makes manifest, the Divine. The idol creates the appearing of the god rather than merely

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20. “Allowing” is essential. We cannot force or guarantee that the revelation will occur. We can only strive to make it possible.

21. See, in particular, Jean-Luc Marion, *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001).

creating a locus in which that appearing may happen. In creating an idol I have the audacity to claim to make the Divine appear, even if only in an image, a representation.<sup>22</sup> If *theology* means only “our talk about God,” then it is idolatrous, for in it I use my powers of language to create an image or representation of God, violating the second of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:4–5; Deuteronomy 5:8–9). I walk in my own way and after the image of my own god, “whose image is in the likeness of the world, and whose substance is that of an idol” (D&C 1:16). I reveal myself—*my* ideas, *my* world, *my* perspective on God—in what I say; I do “autology” rather than theology. By contrast, in an icon the Divine reveals itself through something made by human beings (cf. D&C 1:17). As Christian theologians know (and not only Latter-day Saint Christian theologians), absent revelation theology is idolatry. In my terms, unless a theology is apocalyptic, it is idolatrous.

Marion’s terminology helps us see more clearly something about theology that we have already glimpsed—namely, that the difference between the two ways of doing theology is not methodological. The difference between them is how they exist in our world, not what properties they have. Just as is true for any religious object, any theology can be idolatrous, and any theology can be iconic. There is probably no theology that is, in itself, apocalyptic; there is probably no theology that is completely blind to “the things of the wise and the prudent” (2 Nephi 9:43). However, if the essential difference between idolatrous and apocalyptic theology is neither their objects nor their methods, then how can we describe the latter? If the difference between the two is primarily their existential how, what can we say of that how? What happens in a theology in which God reveals himself, an apocalyptic theology, that does not happen in one in which we merely examine our ideas of God, in an idolatrous theology? In

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22. See Clifford Ando, “Idols and Their Critics,” in *How Should We Talk About Religion: Perspectives, Contexts, Particularities*, ed. James Boyd White (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), 33–54. Ando does an excellent job of explaining how pagans could understand the physical idol not only to represent their gods, but actually to be their gods.

apocalyptic theology, whatever we do, what is most important is not what we do or what we say, but what happens to us and our audiences. The passivity of experience is more important than the activity of reason and will (which does not make reason, will, or content unimportant). What happens, what we experience, is the coming of the kingdom. We find ourselves in the kingdom of God—at least at its periphery—rather than in the dark and dreary world. The practice of psychoanalytic psychiatry, whatever one thinks of the merits of that practice, provides a good analogy to apocalyptic theology.<sup>23</sup> The traditional psychoanalytic therapist encourages the patient to talk, asking questions to encourage more talk and to give direction to the patient's talk. Whatever cure finally comes is the result of the patient talking in response to the psychiatrist's questions. Trying to deal with the therapist's questions and aporias (puzzling difficulties), and trying to say something coherent in response, the patient comes to see the world newly. It is not that the questions led directly to the patient's insight. It is not that the content of the patient's responses was the cure. Rather, trying to formulate coherent responses to the questions and aporias brought the patient to the point of seeing things differently. A new world was revealed to the patient—in the patient if the therapy is successful—as he went through the therapy of being questioned. Using terminology I used earlier, we could say that the patient has been reoriented in the world.

We can think of doing apocalyptic theology as something like that. An apocalyptic theologian puts himself or herself in the position of the psychoanalytic patient.<sup>24</sup> An apocalyptic theology, therefore, confronts us with questions and aporias, whether it does so explicitly or not. The questions may arise in us without being explicitly proposed

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23. I am indebted to an online discussion with Joe Spencer, and others, particularly Adam Miller, for this analogy.

24. It is probably no coincidence that the word *therapist* comes from a Greek word that means, not “healer,” but “servant” or “companion in arms.” In Homer the *therapon* is the person who fights with one against a common enemy. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, comps., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (1843; repr., Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), s.v. *θεράπων*.

by the theologian. They may come from the philosophical tradition as things for us to ponder. They may happen as we read scripture and find ourselves accused, as did David, “Thou art the man” (2 Samuel 12:7). Of course the questions have content, as do our answers. Without a particular content, the questions are meaningless. But the questions and answers are not the point. The point is what happens to us in dealing with those aporias: trying to respond to them coherently, we find ourselves reinterpreted, resituated in the world. We find ourselves in a world revealed by the Spirit and directed toward a God who makes himself known. In the aporias I experience the second coming, the nearness of the kingdom. I hear a call that obliges me to respond, and I respond with acceptance.

I recognize that many will find this way of thinking about theology difficult. I suspect that the difficulty is rooted in our tendency to think of religion as a set of beliefs, a tendency inherited from the Christian tradition. On this view, religion is a set of beliefs and theology examines that set of beliefs in some way. Those who understand theology in that way do not understand talk of apocalyptic theology because they cannot see more than one basic kind of theology, and in the kind they see religion is defined by belief. Of course religion as we understand it entails beliefs. It is problematic to say, “I am a Mormon, but I do not believe what Mormons believe.” Beliefs certainly matter. Nevertheless, believing what Mormons believe is not enough to make one a Mormon, so examining beliefs is not enough to understand Mormonism. We can imagine someone who believes everything that most Mormons believe but is, in spite of that, not a member of the church. Why? Because that person has not yet been baptized. Even in religions that do not—as do we Latter-day Saints—insist on the necessity of ordinances, religion cannot be reduced merely to belief.<sup>25</sup> Especially in a religion for which priesthood is essential and ordinances are required, beliefs are not sufficient to define religion.

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25. See chapter 8, especially p. 192, n. 76 in this volume.

The Lord commands ancient Israel, “Ye shall be holy [“set apart,” “consecrated”]: for I the Lord your God am holy” (Leviticus 19:2). Similarly, during his ministry in Israel, he commands, “Be ye therefore perfect [or “whole”], even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:48), and he repeats that command when he comes to the Nephites (3 Nephi 12:48). To be in Israel, ancient or modern, is not only to hold a set of beliefs, but to make and keep covenants with God. It is to enter into a formal relation with him in which we imitate him. For Latter-day Saints, covenant rather than belief is the heart of religion. It is probably true that no covenants fail to entail beliefs, but the important point is that religious beliefs do not matter if they are not intimately bound up with covenants. Apocalyptic theology evinces that intimate connection to covenant. It is not enough to say what we think about God. It is not enough even to say what we know. If a theology is apocalyptic, it must go beyond learning to the gospel, to the *revelation* of Christ. It must be not only about beliefs; it must also be testimony. For Latter-day Saints, apocalyptic theology must go beyond learning and even testimony to being part of covenant life, for we cannot reveal God by re-presenting him in an idol of some sort, but he reveals himself in our covenant life.

That we cannot reveal God, make an image of him, represent him conceptually, takes us back to a point in Jacob’s sermon: theology is not only a matter of going beyond learning through testimony and covenant, though it is that. It is also a matter of remaining a fool before God in knowledge. The fool is not empty-headed merely because there is some fact he does not yet know.<sup>26</sup> To be a fool is to be silly in the old sense of that word;<sup>27</sup> it is to be weak, to be deficient in judgment and sense. It is to be nothing (and King Benjamin reminds us that salvation requires that we recognize our nothingness; Mosiah 4:5, 8–9, 11).

26. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “fool,” from the Latin *follem*, “bellows”—so “one full of air,” “an empty-headed person.”

27. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “silly.” The older meaning was “deserving compassion, defenseless,” “weak,” or “rustic.”

Of course the silliness, deficiency, and nothingness of the foolishness recommended by Jacob are before God rather than human beings. Foolishness and humility before God do not require that we say and know nothing in our relations with others. Being dumbstruck before God is one kind of deficiency, but so are many kinds of speech. Neither does foolishness before God require that we have no confidence in what we say. Indeed, divine foolishness may be the ground of our confidence before other human beings.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, the necessity of foolishness and humility before God means that if our theology is to be apocalyptic, it must demonstrate its foolishness before God in some way. One person may do so by an explicit, sincere statement acknowledging the not only tentative but foolish character of her speculation. Another person may do it in a style that reveals his humility.<sup>29</sup> Surely there are also other ways. In addition, I think that some theological methods are more conducive to demonstrating godly foolishness, including hermeneutic and narrative theologies, because they make questioning and being questioned rather than claiming the center of their methods.

Sometimes nothing is so helpful as an example, and in philosophy sometimes nothing is so rare. Let me try, therefore, to give an example of theological thinking that I hope will show one way that theology can be apocalyptic, showing our foolishness as thinkers before God as well as the nearness of his kingdom. My example will be the problem of theodicy, and my thinking about that problem will rely heavily on the work of the twentieth-century French thinker Paul Ricoeur.<sup>30</sup>

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28. D&C 121:45 suggests as much.

29. I take this to be characteristic of David Paulsen's work: students love his classes, not as much because of what he teaches as because of what he is when he teaches. In my day, David Yarn was a popular philosophy teacher for the same reason.

30. See, for example, Paul Ricoeur, *Le mal* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1996). To a lesser degree, I also depend on the work of Philippe Nemo, *Job and The Excess of Evil* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998). Ricoeur (1913–2005) taught not only in France, but also at the University of Chicago for fifteen years (1970–1985). He was one of the most important French thinkers of the twentieth century.

As classically formulated, the problem of theodicy is the seeming impossibility of believing four propositions at the same time, four propositions that most religious people believe:

1. God is all-loving.
2. God is all-powerful.
3. God is all-knowing.
4. Evil exists.

The argument is that if God is all-loving, all-powerful, and all-knowing, then the existence of evil is inexplicable, for such a God *could* create a world without evil—he has the power and the knowledge to do so—and he *would* create it, for his love would require that he do so. According to the argument, therefore, the existence of God is incompatible with the existence of evil. For many, the suppressed conclusion is that it is irrational to believe in God if one recognizes the existence of evil, as most people do.

Notice, first of all, that neither the prophets nor scripture has given us these propositions as they are understood philosophically. These are philosophical interpretations of scriptural and prophetic statements, and we must not assume without question that the translation of prophetic discourse into philosophical discourse is innocent, retaining the meaning of the former in the latter without changing it or introducing something not in scripture. Every translation of one language into another risks changing the meaning of the original, so we must be wary of changes that this translation might have made, changes which we do not notice.

Theologians have responded to the problem of theodicy in a variety of ways. For example, some have denied the reality of evil.<sup>31</sup> Others have argued that the problem is set up so that it demands that God

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31. David Ray Griffin argues that all theologians prior to the twentieth century disputed the existence of evil: *God, Power, and Evil* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 2004). I suspect that if he is right, they did so as a consequence of assuming creation *ex nihilo*. If God created the world from absolutely nothing, then one can argue that either evil is not real or he created it. Latter-day Saints avoid that dilemma by not believing that the world was created *ex nihilo*.

do what is logically contradictory. That means that the problem itself is faulty. For example, one might argue that, by definition, embodied beings are necessarily passive as well as active, for they can be acted on: to be embodied is to be able to be affected. In technical terms, it is to be *pathetic* in the root sense of that word: to have things happen to one.<sup>32</sup> But to be pathetic is to suffer in the broad sense of the word: “to be affected.”<sup>33</sup> If an argument from the nature of embodiment were successful, it would show that it is logically contradictory to create a world without creating suffering. Perhaps one could argue that if there is suffering in the broad sense, then it is impossible to avoid evil, suffering in the narrow sense, as well. If so, then it seems that the three characteristics describing God could continue to be held without contradicting the claim that evil exists. That is because the contradiction between God’s character and the existence of evil is derived only if one supposes that God logically could create embodied beings that are not affected, and that supposition may involve contradiction.

Another tack is to take up the problem of theodicy in terms of the quantity of suffering: “Why didn’t God create the world with less suffering in it than he did?” Most answers to this question accord with Leibniz’s answer in some way: this is the best of all possible worlds; if there were more or less evil in the world, the world would be defective. The problem is that, by asserting that the way we find the world is, inexplicably, the way things must be, Leibniz’s answer runs the risk of denying the evil of evil. If I say that the evil of the world is a necessity, then I no longer call it evil. At best, perhaps I express my lack of understanding; at worst, I acquiesce to or become complicit in its presence, implicitly assuming it to be a good in that it is necessary. The only answer of this sort that does not go in the direction of denying evil is one that goes in the direction of faith: though we cannot explain the degree of suffering we see in the world, we have to trust God as

32. The Greek word *pathos* from which our word “pathetic” is derived means “that which happens to a person.” Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. πάθος.

33. For our purposes, suffering is not best defined as “feeling pain” because feeling pain is a species of suffering, of being affected.

we confront that suffering. Of course, to say that I do and must trust God is not to answer the question, “Why isn’t there less suffering in the world?” It is to deny that there is an answer for us. This may be the best of all possible worlds, but the claim that it is requires an incredible amount of optimism, an optimism explicable only on the basis of faith and, so, an optimism that begs the question.

There is yet another way of understanding the problem itself to be the problem: As usually set forth, the problem of theodicy assumes that God’s power is essential to his being; the claim that God is omnipotent is crucial to the problem. That may sound reasonable at first, but it is questionable. Latter-day Saints are hardly alone in seeing in God, not power, but a kind of powerlessness, namely the holding back, allowing, suffering, persuasion, charity, gentleness, and absence of compulsion that is described so eloquently in Doctrine and Covenants 121:41–46 and that informs much of the scripture that we share with other Christians.<sup>34</sup> That seeming—but my mind only seeming—limitation of power appears to be correlate with God’s power to save, perhaps the only power essential to his divinity. I take it that this way of understanding his power is among the reasons why the scriptures show us a very human God rather than an omnipotent one: After dinner, Abraham walks with God’s messengers and perhaps with God himself, showing them the way to Sodom, and God bargains with Abraham over the fate of those who live there (Genesis 18). It is one thing to speak of God as all-powerful when we praise him and to mean what we say when we do. It is another to assume that our praise can be parsed directly into logical propositions that we can use to solve theological conundra such as the problem of theodicy. Whatever the case for dogmatic or rational theology, scriptural assertions of God’s power are enriched and, therefore, complicated by instances in which his power is limited and, even more, by the importance he puts on his patience, persuasion, and love.

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34. Modernism’s definition of knowledge as power rather than relation (charity) puts modernism at odds with religion from the beginning. The solution is to rethink the intellectual and other advantages bequeathed us in modernism in terms of charity rather than in terms of power. See the discussion of knowledge as power in chapter 1 in this volume.

Still another way a Christian might respond to the problem of theodicy is to object to the question it asks. It would not be unreasonable for a Christian to argue that since even Christ suffered on the cross, with suffering incomparable to any of our own, we have no right to ask why we suffer. To do so is impertinent, perhaps impertinent to the point of blasphemy. To complain about my suffering when faced with the suffering of Jesus Christ is, implicitly, to deny the gravity and effect of his suffering. I have no right to ask why I suffer. Here is another way to put the same point: If Jesus Christ asked the question of God's justice while on the cross—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34)—we have no right to think that we can avoid the same question. And if he did not receive an answer in mortality, we have no reason to think that we can.

But thinking about the problem of evil need not be a complaint about my suffering. It could be a question about the suffering of others. As the name we have given to the problem suggests, our question is about God's justice as a whole, including his dealings with others. The question is not only a personal complaint, and the scriptures themselves show prophets from Abraham to Joseph Smith sometimes questioning God's justice. In fact, it is not unreasonable to construe their ability to question God's justice as a sign of their righteousness before God. Abraham's bargain with God over Sodom occurs immediately after the Lord has described him as someone who "will command his children . . . to do justice and judgment" (Genesis 18:19). Thus the Christian argument puts me in my place, but it does not dissipate the question of theodicy, for as a general question rather than a complaint, the question may be rooted in Christ-like compassion for our fellows rather than in a demand for a justification of my suffering.

My intuition as a philosophy teacher of Latter-day Saint students is that most Mormons who have tackled the problem have done so by reformulating the second proposition of its traditional formulation, namely that God is all-powerful. They do so by redefining what it means to be all-powerful in such a way that the paradox will disappear. That

solution neatly dissolves the problem, but many Saints are uncomfortable with the limitation that the solution puts on God's power.

I have described a few of the ways of dealing with the problem of evil. There are any number of others, but I believe we see a pattern here. When we deal with the problem of theodicy, we often, perhaps always, find ourselves at an impasse that requires us either to give up, to reformulate the question, or to show how the problem is itself problematic; and even when we do seem to have dissolved the problem, it reappears soon afterward in some new form. But behind that impasse is a perhaps surprising assumption. If I look at the problem, its solutions, and its problems with a merely theological eye, I find in it the attempt to represent rationally a god who is God and also allows the evil we encounter. I create a god in my own image, a rational representation of God (an idol), and then I try to resolve—to dissolve—the problem of evil; I try to make it go away. I commit idolatry. Then I pretend that the enemy of God is either illusory or not really an enemy.

There is, however, another way to think about the problem, namely as a problem that makes things more difficult, a problem that will not go away. We may not be able to answer the philosophical problem. But the problem of evil will continue to call for our response—and dealing with the philosophical problem, whether with a solution or not, may be an obstacle to responding to the call. Though the problem of theodicy can be a legitimate topic of philosophical and theological thought, and philosophical and theological thought can be legitimate pursuits, even apocalyptic ones, seeing the problem of theodicy as one that makes thinking more difficult rather than as a problem to be dissolved tends toward apocalyptic theology.

Notice that the Christian talks about the problem of evil differently than does the philosopher. This difference is not just a matter of taste or style. It has everything to do with the difference between what each kind of discourse does. Sometimes we treat scripture and revelation as if they were simplified scientific explanations of things or poetic philosophizing, but I think that is a mistake, and sometimes

a serious one. For it assumes that the rationality characteristic of science is the measure of all discourse. Though religious discourse may offer us explanations, its purpose is not explanatory, but soteriological: It is concerned, not with telling us how the world and the things in the world are (at least not in the way that science and philosophy do),<sup>35</sup> but with telling us about God's power to save and how we can be saved. Religious discourse calls for our repentance and good works rather than our rational reflection. It is not that the two are incompatible, but that religious discourse does something different than does the discourse of science and philosophy. Given its purposes, revelation ignores the problem of theodicy—which, since theodicy is a philosophical/theological problem rather than a religious one, is not the same as ignoring the problem we face in reconciling the evil we encounter with our faith in God.

That religion ignores the problem is deeply suggestive. Of course revelation is not blind to suffering.<sup>36</sup> Christian revelation often reminds us that we must be deeply concerned with suffering, especially with the suffering of others and with our own spiritual suffering. God wills neither and he offers answers to both. But Christian concern is with the proper, Christ-like response to that suffering, not with explaining its logical compatibility with God's existence. One can even imagine a Christian arguing that, as a speculative rather than a practical problem, the problem of theodicy distracts us from the existential problem.

Obviously I am sympathetic to the charge that the philosophical problem of evil and suffering is a distraction. However, since concern for the philosophical problem can be a concern for justice, it is not enough

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35. And its explanations are not scientific, not even in a primitive way. For a discussion of the difference between religious thinking and scientific, see chapter 3 in this volume. For a discussion of how I understand scripture and, therefore, religious discourse, see chapter 8 in this volume.

36. Christ's healing miracles were not incidental to his mission. Indeed, in Jesus's first sermon he identifies himself as the one appointed "to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind" (Luke 4:18; cf. Isaiah 61:1).

to ignore that problem as a distraction. My sympathy does not extend to agreement. Nevertheless, even if the problem of evil is not merely a distraction, it is also not a purely philosophical, theoretical problem. In the end, it *is* a problem for action, and philosophical speculation has little place among the actions required when we respond concretely to suffering and evil. At the second coming not only will every knee bow and every tongue confess, but also the lame and the halt will be cured.<sup>37</sup> Confession and cure show themselves in the type and shadow of our concrete responses to suffering rather than in rational speculation. They show themselves in the confession we make and the succor we offer in a world remade by our encounter with God.

Of course, it does not follow that careful thought is irrelevant or unnecessary, and by “careful thought” I am not just referring to the planning we must do to make our actions fruitful. Careful thought may include the rigorous analyses of rational philosophy. Philosophy does many things. It has many purposes, including the pleasure of philosophy, a good that does not require that I justify it by showing how it leads to some other good. But among its other purposes is that of showing us the limits of reason. When we think of philosophers who are concerned with the limits of reason, perhaps we most often first think of Immanuel Kant and the first critique. Kant says that knowing the limits of pure reason will remove obstacles that stand in the way of practical reason<sup>38</sup> and will make it possible to take morality and religion seriously.<sup>39</sup> But Kant was neither the first nor the last philosopher to think that we needed to consider the limits of reason. In fact, thinkers whose goal it is to make things difficult—Kierkegaard and Nietzsche come to mind—generally do so as a means of showing the limits of reason.

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37. See Mosiah 3:5, where we see the first coming as a figure of the second. See also such passages as Jeremiah 30:17 and Alma 41:4.

38. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman K. Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1929), Bxxv.

39. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxxx–xxxix.

In the fifth century, Pseudo-Dionysius gave us negative theology, not to demonstrate that we cannot have faith nor to attack religion, but to show us the limits of reason when reason tries to talk about God. He believed that by opposing negative theology to affirmative theology, a third way will show itself to us, the way of revelation.<sup>40</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius explicitly wanted to do apocalyptic theology and saw negative theology as a means for doing so. Others, such as Maimonides, have taken a similar approach. As I read Kierkegaard, though he does not do negative theology, he does show us the limits of reason by making it less philosophically clear how to understand what it means to be a Christian. For example, his claim in *Fear and Trembling* that Abraham can only be understood by means of the absurd is a claim that we *can* understand Abraham, but not philosophically.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, we can understand the problem of theodicy as demonstrating the limit of reason confronted by evil. We, therefore, can see the problem as an aid to foolishness, reminding us of God's greatness and our own nothingness.

However, to see the problem as demonstrating the limits of reason is not to reject reason. We can neither reject nor avoid it. We ought not to wish to do so. For reason not only helps us find solutions to problems, it sometimes sharpens the problem. I think the long history of the problem of theodicy is sufficient evidence that we are unlikely to find a solution that puts an end to that problem once and for all. The merely theological response is to take up the question of theodicy as a free-floating philosophical problem, but if we take it up, the most we can gain from it is the pleasure of philosophical thought. Few who are religious can deal with this issue only for its philosophical pleasure. The apocalyptic alternative is that the problem is a philosophical goad, a spur, an itch that will not go away, for it challenges our faith even when it points to the need for faith. Every call invites a response, and

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40. For one of the best brief explanations of the thought of the fifth- and sixth-century thinker, Pseudo-Dionysius (also called simply "Denys"), see Jean-Luc Marion, *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 134–39, 145–48.

41. See chapter 1 in this volume.

in doing so it disturbs the status quo.<sup>42</sup> The problem of theodicy calls to us, challenging our faith and, by doing so, inviting us to respond. It invites us to see the world as still awaiting the second coming even if we live in a world that has been figured by the presence of Christ.

For some, faith fails in the face of that challenge by the problem of theodicy, but not for most. Most of us continue to believe even as we struggle with the problem. In fact, we struggle with the problem *because* we believe. We struggle only because we have faith. If we find the problem of theodicy to be a real problem rather than only an intellectual game, that is evidence that we have faith. Thus, by continuing to be a problem—by the fact that we seem unable to find any solution to the problem of theodicy that does not merely shift it some place else where it reappears in a new and slightly different guise—the problem of theodicy shows us the necessity of trust as well as the limits of reason. The problem of evil and suffering is intractable to our powers of reason. As believers we find ourselves foolish before it. Ultimately the only thing to which it is tractable is moral and faithful response: action.

Thus, the intractability of the problem of theodicy can be positive in Christian life rather than merely negative. First, it can continue to serve as a goad. That it is intractable can continue to remind us that evil and suffering are real and that they require our response. Second, the rational difficulty of the problem can provide an impetus for recognizing that faith is prior to reason.<sup>43</sup> To paraphrase something that Heidegger said of theology and that Kierkegaard could have said, the problem of theodicy may only render faith more difficult—that is, render it more certain that faithfulness cannot be gained through reason, but only through faith.<sup>44</sup> So, the problem of theodicy continues to be important to believers for two reasons: because it points to the ground

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42. Jean-Louis Chrétien, *L'Appelle et le Reponse* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuet, 1992), 20.

43. Notice that I do not think faith is opposed to reason. I am not a fideist.

44. Heidegger, "Phenomenology and Theology," trans. James G. Hart and John C. Maraldo, in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 39–62, especially p. 46.

of our belief by showing a limit of reason, and because it reminds us that we must not neglect to respond to evil and suffering as Christian faith calls us to respond.<sup>45</sup> When the problem of theodicy does these things for us, we find ourselves not only awaiting but expecting the coming of Christ and seeing his nearness. When it does these things, it is apocalyptic.

In the end, therefore, the difficulty with merely philosophical or theological answers to the problem of theodicy is that every one of them looks for a way to integrate evil into our understanding of the world. To understand something is to understand how it fits with the other things that we understand, how they make sense together, as a whole. But it is evil to integrate evil into our understanding, to make sense of it and make it part of the wholeness of our existence. It is evil to do so precisely because evil *cannot* be made sense of, cannot be justified. It is evil to explain evil, to tame it, no longer to be horrified by it. If evil ceases to be horrible, but instead makes sense, then we cease to struggle with it. The shadow of the apocalypse is concrete struggle with evil, not abstract thought about it, which may well be relevant but is never enough. Our horror in response to transcendent evil is one with our eschatological hope for the good of the kingdom that is to come, and that hope makes no sense apart from the fight against evil. Only if the problem of theodicy is genuinely a problem—only if all solutions ultimately fail in this world without the Apocalypse, the Revelation of Jesus Christ—can we continue to know that evil is genuinely evil.

I hope it is not too much of a conceit to suggest that thinking philosophically about the problem of theodicy has a relation to the struggle for justice that is similar to the relation of prayer to that struggle: for the apocalyptic Christian theologian, the problem of theodicy is a kind of prayer.<sup>46</sup> To pray is to turn oneself toward God in response to his call.

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45. Though this is not the place to explore the question, it may be that these two things are really one.

46. For a discussion of the phenomenology of prayer, see Jean-Louis Chrétien, “The Wounded Word,” in *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”*: *The French Debate* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 147–75. Chrétien pays insufficient attention to

The believer who approaches the problem of theodicy also turns toward God, responding to the question of God's justice as to a question and a call: the question of his or her justice, the call to do good. At the same time, because that person's intellectual powers fail in responding to the call, the believer recognizes her own weakness, her own foolishness, a recognition requisite to prayer. And as every prayer ought, in responding to the problem of theodicy, the believer praises God's goodness, wisdom, power, and sovereignty, and prays for his kingdom to come—for the Apocalypse (Matthew 6:9–10, 13). Those are, after all, the divine attributes which give rise to the question that calls us to respond. Without those divine attributes, there is no problem of evil, only evil. Without the promise of the Apocalypse, there is no answer to the problem, only intellectual confusion and continued evil.

Finally, as is also true of prayer, to deal with the problem of theodicy is to be concerned for others beside oneself. Just as I always pray in community with others who pray, even when I pray only for myself—"our Father" rather than "my Father" in the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9)—the problem of theodicy is a concern for others as well as myself. When thought apocalyptically, prayer and thinking come together in the problem of theodicy, and because it continues to remain a problem, the problem of theodicy can allow us to continue the prayerful thought of belief and a believing awareness of the nearness of the kingdom of God.

Theology is possible that, in responding to God's call, demonstrates our foolishness before God, praises God, and opens the possibility of seeing the world anew by seeing the nearness of God's kingdom (covenant life with others) both in time and space. Some theologies are better at doing that than others. As I have said, I believe that hermeneutic and narrative theologies—to which I would add liturgical, ritual, scriptural, and pastoral or practical theologies, as well perhaps as a theology modeled on what some Protestants call canonical theology

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the fact that much prayer is petitionary and that the believer hopes that the requests of his petitions will be granted, but in spite of that his description of prayer is very helpful.

(without the forced assumption of scriptural inerrancy)<sup>47</sup>—are more likely to be apocalyptic.

However, ultimately the question of whether our theologies are, on the one hand, merely theology and, therefore, idolatrous or, on the other hand, apocalyptic is not a methodological question. It is a question of character and spirit—our own, our audience’s. That is why, though some theologies may be more amenable to idolatry than others, none are immune to it. As human beings, we are not immune to it. Whether a theology is apocalyptic depends on what the theologian does and the experience of his or her audience, not on the content of what the theologian says nor on the method the theologian uses. Understanding the difference between theology *simpliciter* and apocalyptic theology brings us to understand that the danger of theology is ultimately the danger of human character: we may believe that the theological work we do is directed toward God—and be wrong; we may be right that it is, but our audience may fail to take it up as the apocalyptic theology that it is for us. The attempt to do apocalyptic theology can go wrong in many ways, all of them ways in which *we* are wrong.

It does not follow that we ought to avoid all theology. Rather, it follows that we ought not to do theology unaware of the danger of failure, of the danger that our theology may be a species of idolatry. Apocalyptic theology should be our goal, but idolatrous theology is its ever-present danger. If we do theology, whatever other reasons we have—and there are other good reasons—we must do it to announce “the Lord is nigh” (D&C 1:12) and to proclaim the revelations of the restoration (D&C 1:18), remaining weak, simple (D&C 1:23), and prayerful,<sup>48</sup> yet confident in the presence of God that figures our lives (D&C 121:45).

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47. Canonical theology is a theology of the canon, of scripture. It seeks to understand the scriptures in their own terms rather than as documents to be deciphered as merely historical or so as to conform to some implied, preexisting theology. I would use, instead, the term *scriptural theology*.

48. Matthew 7:7: “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” This and its variations appear over and over again in scripture. In Alma 33, Alma particularly emphasizes the importance of prayer to faith, as does Amulek in Alma 34.