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The Law, the Law, the Law, and the Law: Submission, Absence, or Organization?

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INTRODUCTION: DIVERSITY

We talk a great deal about diversity today. We live in a society that cannot ignore the diverse ways of living that are found within it. We have a variety of national origins. We are of many races. We are adherents to many religions. Our unity as a country and as a church requires that we reflect on that diversity and its implications. It has often been noted that each of those differences between us presents both a possibility for prejudice and misunderstanding as well as an opportunity for learning and understanding. With that well-worn truism in mind, I wish to look at one slice of our diversity, religion. And I will slice diversity even thinner by looking only at four religions, Judaism, Islam, traditional Christianity, and Mormonism. I am interested in thinking about how we think about religion when we think about diversity and in using overviews of those four religions to do so.

Religion as Symbolic Ordering

From the historical and anthropological points of view we think about religion strangely.

Historically our understanding is strange because prior to about the fifteenth or sixteenth century, in Europe religion was understood very differently than it was after that point. Prior to that time, religion was the ordering principle of the world. It was, to borrow a term from Jacques Lacan (1901–1981), a symbolic ordering. A symbolically ordered social unit is one in which the structures of the unit are ordered by symbolic words, actions, and material artifacts. In a symbolically ordered community relationships among humans and between humans and the world are what they are in virtue of the symbols they use and that give them meaning. An example of part of the premodern symbolic order is the feast calendar of the medieval Christian church, which governed much of the life of the community: 11 November, St. Martin’s day, was set aside for butchering meat animals. Plough Monday, the day when the activities of the agricultural year began with the first plowing, was designated as the first Monday after the Feast of Epiphany (6 January). Epiphany is a celebration of the incarnation of God the Son in the West. In the East it is a celebration of Jesus’s baptism. Whichever way one understands the holiday of Epiphany, it is surely no coincidence that medieval Christians lived lives in which the appearance of God as a human being and the first day of ploughing were intimately connected. For a medieval Christian, the end of the winter
season and the end of the human winter that Christ brought about were related typologically: the revelation of God as a human or the revelation that a human is God was the figure; the end of winter and the ability to produce food for oneself and one’s family was the resulting type. Of course the calendar was not the only way that religion ordered medieval lives. Children were brought into the community through the sacrament of baptism, families were created by the sacrament of marriage, and death was recognized through the rites of burial. Religion was “an apparatus established by God within human history to serve as the framework for his encounter with humankind.”

That understanding of the place of religion in our lives did not change drastically until approximately the sixteenth century. And by the seventeenth it is so much no longer the dominant way of understanding the world that someone like the philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650) could say that religion deals only with morality. It is no longer the ordering force of the world as a whole. From an historical point of view, our understanding of religion is recent and confined to European culture and those cultures that have been influenced by it.

The contemporary understanding of religion is also anthropologically strange. We often think of religion as a set of beliefs that one holds. Thinking that way, we assume that our religious beliefs—conceptual representations of the ideal world—are what make it possible for us to act in religious ways. In our eyes that assumed connection between belief and action is what makes belief fundamental. But that is a mistake. Holding particular beliefs is not what makes one a religious person. One’s beliefs are important to religion, but they are not central to it. Thinking that they are is like mistaking spots on one’s body for the measles rather than understanding that those spots are a symptom of the measles. Beliefs are, as it were, a ‘symptom’ of religion, something that one has if one is religious, but they are not religion itself.

Perhaps no one has done more to show that being religious is more than holding some set of particular beliefs than the historian of religion Mircea Eliade (1907–1986). He argues that we cannot understand religion except as a way of being in the world in which the sacred gives meaning to our world. A religious person finds himself in a world revealed by a sacred order, by the manifestation of something divine, whether that is the Christian God, other gods, the ancestors, or sacred plants or animals.

The sacred reveals itself in symbols. Eliade says “Every religious act, by the simple fact that it is religious, is endowed with a meaning which, in the last instance, is symbolic, since it [ultimately] refers to supernatural values or beings.” Because it is symbolic, religion involves rites, practices, social structures, and so on. It also involves beliefs. But those things are not the essence of religion, they are its expression. The essence of religion is the recognition of the appearance of the sacred in the world—to return to an earlier example, epiphany is the essence of religion. Religious life is life for which the ordering revealed in that manifestation of the sacred gives form to life in general. Ritual and the rest, including belief, are expressions of a religious way of life, a way of life which sees the world in terms of the sacred, in terms of something of a different order, a different reality, revealing itself in the world.

Secularism is supposedly the dominant structure of society today. Some have responded to the rise of secularism by abandoning religion altogether. Others have responded by keeping some religious practices—getting married in the church, for example—but unloosing those practices from their moorings in religious understanding and belief. It might seem, then, that secularism has won the day and that religion has been reduced merely to belief, that we are headed toward a time when there will no longer be people who live in a religious world. That is certainly the claim one hears from the “new atheists” such as Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens: religion is not only outmoded, it is on its last legs, they tell us; the sooner we are done with it, the better.

As you might guess, my claim is the contrary: living in the world as a believer is different today than it was six hundred years ago, but there are still people who live in a world that is largely symbolically ordered. Religion is not likely to go away. Any attempt to understand the cultures of the world and the people in those cultures will be inadequate if it ignores religion. That is not as obviously true of Western culture, but it is also true. But if religion is as I’ve described it, then understanding the social and psychical lives of religious people will require more than understanding their beliefs. It will require understanding their being-in-the-world.

As I said earlier, to think about religious diversity and its implications, I will look at four different, though re-
lated religions: Judaism, traditional Christianity, Islam, and Mormon Christianity. Relying on the seminal work of the contemporary philosopher Rémi Brague (1947–), I will outline the different though overlapping symbolic orders of each of these religions by focusing on the ways in which they understand law. (It is not irrelevant that during the medieval period, the word “law” was used to designate different religions: “the law of the Moors,” for example. Law is a particularly good focus for understanding these religions.) Presumably thinking at least sketchily about the four different ways of understanding law will give us a glimpse into the differences in the ways their adherents are in the world.

Of course, I cannot discuss even one of these four religions in depth in a paper, perhaps not even in a book. That means that to talk about four of them, I will have to resort to the broad strokes of caricature. But in the same way that the caricatures of a political cartoonist can reveal what a detailed description might hide, I hope that my caricatures will help us catch a glimpse of the main lineaments of each of these four religions. So, the first stroke of my caricature: I take the Jewish and Islamic traditions to understand the law in terms of submission, the traditional Christian to understand it in terms of its absence, and the Mormons to understand it in terms of organization and family. That is not to say that there are no elements of submission in Mormonism and traditional Christianity, nor that there are no elements of organization in the Judaic take on law. It is to say that submission, absence, and organization / family provide a handy way of describing what I take to be the most important lines in my sketches.

Judaism

Begin with Judaism, the oldest of these Abrahamic religions. Israel as a whole had only a short time, about one hundred years, as a nation under a king, and a slightly longer history as two states. In spite of their only brief experience as an independent state, during that time they developed a unique kind of nation, and those unique developments have been important to later philosophers of politics and law, such as John Locke, as well as to later founders of nations and states, such as Thomas Jefferson.

To a large extent, what made the Israelite nation unique was that it had written rules for how to select a king. Deuteronomy 17:14–20 tells us:

1. The king must be chosen by God.
2. He must not be a foreigner.
3. He must not make himself rich.
4. He must make a copy of the divinely given Mosaic Law, keep it by him, and study it.

The first and the last of these are particularly interesting, and the last, the insistence on written law, is unique to Judaism among the other early religions of the Near East. That insistence takes law to be something objective rather than the personal whim of the ruler. The law is something interpreted by the priests and learned by the king, but it is given by God. The king rules, but he does not legislate—only God can do that—and there are restrictions on his rule. We see here two ideas that were new to the world: the law is written and it has a divine origin. In these we see the one of the earliest ideas that there are limitations on the power of the ruler, divine limitations.

But the law in early Judaism differs from the law of other nations in additional ways, for the Mosaic Law (Torah) is first of all wisdom rather than law as we understand it. Indeed, the word “Torah” literally means something more like “teaching” rather than “law.” It is a teaching rather than a set of rules, though it contains both prescriptions and proscriptions. In other religions of the region, the rules of cultic practice were either rules to be observed within a particular space, especially the space of the temple, or they were rules observed by priests in order to set themselves off as priests. In Exodus 19:6 the Lord says to Moses: “And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel” (italics added). Though the Levites are set apart as priests, they are distributed throughout Israel, and in principle every male is a priesthood holder. The temple offering at the birth of a son is a recognition of that principle, for it was an offering to redeem the son from priesthood service. God tells Moses that Israel is to be a nation of priests. As a result, as Brague says, “Israel is obliged to observe, at all times, the code of conduct that pertains to pertains to priests and to behave as if within the sanctuary.” For an Israelite, the laws are the wisdom needed for one who would live in the house of God. They teach one how to be one of the people of God.

As the medieval Jewish thinker, Moses Maimonides (1135–1204), explains, human laws only regulate the actions of the body, but the Torah encourages human beings to strive for both bodily and spiritual perfection.
Indeed, the kabbalists (Jewish mystics) believed that the Torah corresponds “to the very structure and dimensions of the divine; it constitutes its name (or names).”¹³ Israel understands itself as elect because it has been given Torah, the teaching for divine life. And this connection of ethical / moral values and life with religious practices, the refusal to separate the two, is also novel. Other Near Eastern groups keep them separate, with the latter, religion, being a matter only of cultic practice.¹⁴ This failure to separate religion from ethical life made it nearly impossible for Roman conquerors to understand the Jewish, and later the Christian, refusal to offer sacrifices to the Roman emperor. Why, they wanted to know, wouldn’t the Jews and then the Christians, just perform the cultic sacrifices since those have nothing to do with one’s morality? Jewish and Christian insistence on the connection of religion and ethics was novel—and it made life for them much different, and often much more difficult because it separated them from the political state.

The separation of religion from the state which resulted from the refusal to separate religion and ethics had a great deal to do with why the Jews were able to survive after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. For non-Israelites the cultic practices of religion were matters of state. The destruction of one was the destruction of the other. For the Jews, however, they were matters of ethics, how to live life in a divine way. So, after the destruction, the religion of Judaism was able to continue without being part of any state. Political authority was that held by whatever state the Jews lived in. It had nothing to do with their religion. Unlike other nations, Israel had never been defined by a territory (in spite of God’s gift of the land). Instead, they were defined by their temple, temple worship, and by the Mosaic Law—and by the first century AD, for a variety of reasons, the temple was less and less important and the Mosaic Law was more and more important. So, when the destruction happened, the fact that Israel was defined by its religion, a religion that put ethics and worship together and separated religion from the state, made the survival of Judaism possible.

For Israel, the experience of the law was the experience of a gift, the gift of the wisdom for living life in the family of God. That wisdom requires that one submit to its teachings, but because that teaching is the only way in which we can truly know God, we have the surprising result that one contemporary, orthodox Jewish thinker can title an essay “Loving the Torah more than God.”¹⁵ The law and God can be separated conceptually. God is not his teaching. But in the law he has revealed himself by teaching us what we are to do, so his law takes precedence. We submit to the law of God rather than to God himself.

Though this strikes Christians as strange, perhaps even blasphemous, it is an attitude that follows from the Jewish understanding of law. For a Jew, it is not enough to believe in God. Nor is it enough to have had an experience of God. One could have those beliefs or those experiences and yet not really have known God. Indeed, it is not difficult to think of those who seem to have had exactly such experiences: they profess belief in God, but clearly do not know him. The Bible describes such people and Mormon scripture repeats the description: “This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me.”¹⁶ Others claim to have had experiences of God, being overcome by the Spirit whether mystically or otherwise, but there is little evidence in their lives afterward that they know him. Israel counters such possibilities with the Law: To know God, to love him, to be in his covenant, part of his kingdom, is to live the life he teaches. Obedience to the law is, thus, not the mere submission of a slave to his or her master. Submission is the way one worships, it is the way one knows God and joins in community with others and with him. To love the Torah more than “God” is to genuinely love the only true God.

Islam

We begin to understand Islam when we understand that the word “Islam” means “submission” and “Muslim” means “one who submits.” The world of the Muslim is a world organized and made meaningful by submission to God. The basic religious attitude of Islam is, as the name suggests, submission, obedience to the law. But, in contrast to Judaism, the law is not the practices of the priest taken up by the nation as a whole, and in Islam when one obeys one obeys God rather than the law. Islam is an objective morality, and its goal is to produce a political / social community of those who submit to the revealed law.

Islam as we know it comes into being with the reception of the Qur’an by the Prophet Muhammad, who was born on the Arab peninsula in 570 AD (died 632 AD). But according to Islamic belief, Islam was revealed from
the beginning. Just as Mormons believe that Adam had the fulness of the gospel, Muslims believe that he received the law taught by the Qur’an. Indeed, not only were the words of the Qur’an revealed from the beginning of the world, their content is also revealed from our beginnings as individuals. According to Islam, every person is born a Muslim. God created us Muslims. That is our natural state. But the traditions of our fathers have made us led us away from our original state. Conversion means returning to that state, our condition at birth, having pledged fidelity to God and his law in the preexistence.17

Thus the foundation of Islam through the revelation of the Qur’an to Muhammad was a restoration of what had been given to Adam first and then also to each of the prophets. Islam understands itself as a restoration of what had been lost, and first and foremost, what had been lost was the law. Muhammad was born into a tribal society where law was a matter of blood line and worship was a matter of idolatry. The tradition says that at the age of forty (610) he received a visitation from the angel Gabriel, the first of many revelations. These revelations were memorized and later written down to form the Qur’an, which means “the recitation.” (Muhammad himself was illiterate.) After receiving his first revelation Muhammad began to preach Islam to those around him, and over time he made many converts, replacing idolatry with the monotheistic worship of Allah (the Arabic word for “God”) and creating a society based on law rather than blood line. The Qur’an brought civilization to the Arab peninsula by giving it law.

The law of the Qur’an, however, differs from that of the Torah. For Islam the law is the objective manifestation of God himself. The words are literally his words, not in any sense the prophet’s understanding or interpretation or restatement of what God said. The Qur’an cannot be edited, translated, or interpreted because it is the direct language of God. What the law commands in the Qur’an (or the Hadith, sayings of the Prophet)—in other words, what God himself commands—is good and what it prohibits is bad: God’s command defines good and evil. Personal judgment is in principle unneeded and irrelevant. He created the world so that those created might submit to him, not so that they could be taught to live the divine life (as in Judaism) or adopted into the divine family (as in Christianity).18 God’s law is the means for bringing about that submission.

As in Judaism, over time the laws multiplied, governing what seem to outsiders like rules concerning trivial acts, such as whether one can twiddle one’s thumbs, which children’s games are permissible, and which hand to use in the toilet. But whatever the criticisms one can make of this multiplication and this concern for what seems trivial, it reflects “a noble idea that everything is holy: since God is present everywhere, he must be worshiped in all things.”19 For the Muslim there is no sphere of life into which God does not enter through his law.

God’s presence in all aspects of life and the divine character of law explain what is, for most of those outside Islam, at least puzzling and at most grounds for believing that it will be impossible ever for Islam to co-exist with what we call “the West” (though it is important to remember that most Muslims live outside of the areas we usually associate with that extreme difficulty and most have no difficulty co-existing with non-Muslims—and most Muslims already co-exist with the West). Recall that Islam begins, not just as a religion, but also as a state, with the destruction of relationships based on blood ties and the creation of a politico-religious community. From the beginning Islam has been part of the political domain. Whereas we saw Israel distinguishing between religion and the state, but not distinguishing between religion and ethics, Islam doesn’t distinguish between any of the three: the political is the ethical, and both are encompassed in the religious. This means that the power of Allah himself is political.20

In the United States religion has most often supported the separation of church and state, and it has often encouraged that separation. But “for Islam, [in principle] the separation of the political and the religious has no right to exist. It is even shocking, for it seems like an abandonment of human affairs to the power of evil or a relegation of God to a place outside his proper sphere.”21 If we say that God reveals himself only in his law, a law that cannot be differentiated from either politics or ethics, then to say that religion should remove itself from the state is tantamount to saying that law is irrelevant to the state. If God is present everywhere and must be worshiped in everything, then the state can be no exception. States which deny this are not just mistaken, they blaspheme.

This connection between the political and the religious explains the origin of radical Islam. Of course there are many more in Islam who are not radical than who are,22 but
radical Islam is an extremist interpretation of something real within Islam: Unlike Christ who died on a cross, executed by the political and religious authorities, Muhammad died in his bed, and Muhammad was aware of that difference. As a result, “Islam understands the martyr as a combatant who falls while killing, not as a victim who accepts being put to death. Defeat is not conceived as concealing a deeper victory, reserved for resurrection.”

There is no concept of quietly accepting one’s fate and having everything made right in the next world. It does not follow that one must be a martyr for Islam, but it does follow that political quietism is not the way of Islam.

The faithful Muslim submits to the will of God and in doing so is building a community of others who have also submitted. The ultimate goal is to bring all back to the submission to which they originally swore.

**Traditional Christianity**

Judaism was unique among its ancient sister religions for taking the law to be divine and for insisting that it can and ought to be put into writing. It was also unique for first bringing together the ethical and the political. Christianity is a revolution, a turning, within that unique movement.

As members of the kingdom of God, Christians are foreigners in the states within which they live. As a sect of Jews, initially Christianity takes the separation of religion from the state that had its genesis in Israel further even than Judaism had. Judaism had founded the unity of the community on respect for shared law, and it had created a divine community on that law. But for Christians, the kingdom of God is not of this world. Christianity dispenses with shared law as the basis for community—though it does not dispense with law—and founds the community, instead, on respect for shared faith. Even when Christianity later obtained political power, it always recognized the difference between the power of the rulers and the power of the state. The result was that for centuries Christian countries had two sets of laws, religious law and civil law.

Contrary to what Christians sometimes say about the early Church, it did not reject the Law of Moses. In Acts the question is never whether converts from Judaism should stop practicing the commandments, but whether converts from outside of Israel must obey it. For Christians, however, “law” means something very different than it did for either Jews or Muslims, for Christianity insists that the observance of the law must make complete the inner attitudes from which those laws ultimately spring.

Contrary to the interpretation that many Christians were later to give this insistence, and the way some continue to understand the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, the insistence on inner attitude was not a development against the Judaic understanding, but of it. In Judaism living the law means learning to do what God does; in Christianity it means learning to do what God does and with the correct attitude. Indeed, for a Christian, having the correct attitude, having faith, is what makes genuinely living the law possible.

But Christians not only expanded what it meant to keep the law, they also introduced a new element, conscience. In Romans 4:15 Paul argues that there can be no crime without a law, which means that the law describes the limits of good and evil: we know evil only because we have learned a law. But even those who have not been taught the law know something of what is right and wrong. They have conscience. But if we can know the law through conscience, then though God is the origin of the law, he is not—at least not directly—the law giver. Conscience is the proximate law giver, and God is the origin of conscience.

Paul also suggests an understanding of the purpose of the law that is radically different from the way Islam would later understand law and perhaps different than the way previously Israel did. In 1 Corinthians 10:23 Paul says “There is a saying, ‘Everything is permissible’—but not everything is profitable. ‘Everything is permissible’—but not everything is upbuilding” (my translation). The law is not defined by the will of God, but by what it will do to make us better. Thus, we do not obey the law to please God, though he is pleased when we do. We obey because the commandment he has given us will make us better people, more like him.

Thus, the ultimate goal of any commandment is freedom, freedom from sin, liberation from a state in which we are not living the lives we want to live even when we do what we think we want to do. And the goal of the law is not just to get us to cease to act in sinful ways, but to overcome our desire to sin. As the last half of Romans 7 shows us, Paul is well aware of the difficulty that overcoming sin poses. But what he has in mind when he thinks about law “is less a collection of commandments and prohibitions [that tell us how to behave] than a [completely] different
The ultimate goal of law is to discipline our souls to love the good so that we can follow the admonition of Augustine, “Love and do what you want,” but no set of laws can give us that discipline by itself. In the end, then, there is no law for the Christian, at least not in a sense recognizable within either Judaism or Islam. The law is at best, as Paul says, a schoolmaster, a teacher, but even as a teacher it is temporary. If we have faith, in other words if we have trust in God—if we live by his Spirit and the instruction of that Spirit—we have no need for the law. We can become what the law intends for us to become but cannot finally fully teach us.

**Mormonism**

A person reading only the Book of Mormon would not see anything about law that is very different from traditional Christianity: the Mosaic Law was a schoolmaster and Christ’s atoning sacrifice introduced a new regime of salvation. Jesus, a person, is the law; there is no longer a code of law except as a temporary expedient. But the Doctrine and Covenants adds something new. The New Testament seldom mentions law, except when referring to the Law of Moses. Likewise the Book of Mormon. But the Doctrine and Covenants speaks of law more than a hundred times, and rarely uses the term to refer to the Law of Moses. Mormonism is awash in law.

For example, the Doctrine and Covenants tells us that the transgression of law has made us “sensual and devilish,” that there are no merely temporal laws, and that just as Christ gives laws by which we are to organize ourselves and live now, he will give us a law by which to live when he comes. Law is central to the Mormon understanding of religion, but it is not a law to which one merely submits. But the Doctrine and Covenants adds something new. The New Testament seldom mentions law, except when referring to the Law of Moses. Likewise the Book of Mormon. But the Doctrine and Covenants speaks of law more than a hundred times, and rarely uses the term to refer to the Law of Moses. Mormonism is awash in law.

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According to Mormonism, law is that which organizes our relationships amongst ourselves as the relationships among God’s children ought to be organized. It is his word: his decree and his promise. But there are alternative laws, several of them.

For Mormons the question of salvation is not really whether one will go to heaven or hell. With a few exceptions (whom I will ignore because we know almost nothing about them) everyone goes to some heaven, to some kingdom of glory ruled by a member of the Godhead, each with its own law. Mormonism preaches a modified form of universal salvation. The question is, therefore, not “Will I be saved in the kingdom of glory?” but “What level in the kingdoms of glory will I reach?” with the highest level being a couple married by the priesthood and capable of being like God. The answer to the question about one’s level of glory is determined by obedience, but that is not primarily obedience to the ethical laws, but more importantly participation in the prescribed ordinances and faithfulness to the covenants of those ordinances. Law does not save a person. Christ does that. But the degree of obedience to law, particularly in the form of ordinance, places that person at a particular level in the hierarchy of the afterworld. As mentioned earlier, however, this view is complicated considerably by the idea that if one lives by the Spirit neither prescription nor proscription is needed, though organizing principles as well as ordinances and covenants are.

The highest degree of heavenly reward, the highest degree of postmortal existence, called “exaltation,” requires law in the form of ordinance and covenant, for those who reach that level of reward are men and women who have been sealed to each other for time and eternity as conjugal couples. Their promise is “a fulness and a continuation of the seeds forever and ever.”

Law, then, has two primary functions in Latter-day Saint thinking: it organizes us, ultimately organizing us according to our desires and acts, placing us in the glory most appropriate to us; and it brings us together in eternal family units. It teaches us, as the Law of Moses teaches Israel, but it does not demand our submission in the way that Islamic law demands the submission of Muslims. It recognizes the insight of traditional Christianity that we must be beyond the law if we are to serve God faithfully, yet it nevertheless maintains a notion of law. For traditional Christianity the believer may begin in something like Islamic submission, but the objective of Christian faith is to overcome the law, to live “by the Spirit” instead. By reinserting the notion of life by the Spirit back into the Israelite notion of covenant law, the Mormon position could be understood as either a synthesis of the other two or a continuing development of the them.
CONCLUSION

Each of these ways of understanding the relationship to the law results in different ways of understanding one’s place in and relationship to the world. It isn’t just that each of the believers in these religious traditions believes in different propositions. Rather, each lives in the world differently. One result of that difference is misunderstanding—again, not misunderstanding of the propositions to which each assents. It is perfectly possible that a Mormon could understand the beliefs of a traditional Christian or an observant Jew or a devout Muslim. But the Mormon would have difficulty understanding the possibility of believing those things. He or she could repeat the beliefs and perhaps even explain them, but feeling like they make sense would be more difficult. The world of possible things, ideas, and relationships is different for each of these traditions, though they often overlap. But if we relegate our attempts to understand one another to the beliefs we hold, we will not understand one another.

Understanding requires what hermeneutic philosophers call a “fusion of horizons.” At least temporarily I must try to understand the other person’s position as if it makes sense. Seeing things from another person’s point of view means understanding such things as the law in the way that the person understands them. Allowing the law and everything else in question to have the same place in the world, psychically and existentially as well as conceptually, that it has for the adherent. I don’t have to believe that the other person may be right. I need only see that the view of the other person makes sense even if I believe it is wrong.

ENDNOTES

2. See René Descartes, Discourse on the Method for Rightly Conducting the Reason, part III § 1, 3.
3. The belief that a religion is essentially a set of beliefs is a result of a movement in late medieval philosophy called voluntarism, one of the precursors of the Renaissance and modernism. According to voluntarism, God’s will is his essential feature, making it superior to both his intellect and his emotion. Prior to the voluntarist movement the assumption had been that love was God’s defining feature, that which made sense of his other attributes. With voluntarism, his will takes that position. On a voluntarist view, religious beliefs are representations to ourselves of the religious aspect of the ideal world. As such, they make it possible for us to act in religious ways. Therefore, beliefs are fundamental to religion. To take religion to be a matter of symbolic ordering is to reject this understanding of the connection between religion and belief.


6. It is not directly relevant to this essay, but it is important to recognize that Eliade’s understanding of religion is insufficient when it comes to Judaism and Christianity. Ancient and medieval Judaism and Christian until the Renaissance understood religion in a way that is similar to that described by Eliade, but their understanding was different on at least the two ways: The Jewish-Christian understanding of the world takes the world to be the creation of God (rather than an eternal cosmos), and it insists that there is a historical aspect to its stories about divinity and humanity and their relationship (rather than that those stories reflect merely cycles in an eternal round). Instead of the ordered and beautiful, perhaps eternal, cosmos, we have the ordered and beautiful creation of God. Instead of the endless repetition of the cycles of nature, Christians have on-going history (with a beginning, a middle—the Incarnation—and an end) within which we can see the imprint of God’s patterns.


8. Besides the earlier mentioned The law of God, Brague has written several relevant books, including The wisdom of the world, translated by Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago: U Chicago, 2003).


10. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. White, eds., Theological wordbook of the Old Testament 910d.


12. In “Epistle to Yemen” (1172 CE).


14. Ibid., 54.

15. Emmanuel Levinas, “Loving the torah more than God,” Difficult freedom: Essays on judaism 142–145, translated by Séan Hand (Bal-
timore: Johns Hopkins, UP, 1990). The title is not original with Levinas. He is quoting Yossel ben Yossel.

17. Brague 162.
18. Brague 166.
19. Ibid., 107.
20. Ibid., 80.
21. Ibid., 38, translation revised.

22. A Muslim acquaintance, an imam, said to me “There are 1.3 billion Muslims in the world. If we wanted to kill all you Christians, you would already be dead.”

23. Ibid., 113.
24. Ordinary and radical Muslims share that belief. They differ on whether violence is justified in order to bring others back. Most Muslims believe it is not. Indeed, in the United States most Muslims don’t engage in proselytizing, trusting God to bring others to him.

26. Brague 68.
27. See also 2 Nephi 2:13 and Alma 42:17.
31. 3 Nephi 15:5.
33. D&C 29:34.
34. D&C 41:3; 51:2; 42:2.
35. D&C 38:22.
37. 132:18; D&C 130:21–22;
38. Our entire scriptural knowledge about the Sons of Perdition is limited to nine verses, D&C 76:30–38.
40. Nothing makes the primacy of ordinance over law more obvious than D&C 132:26 and similar verses.
42. D&C 132:19.