Faithful History

by Richard L. Bushman

Written history rarely survives the three score and ten years allotted to the men who write it. Countless histories of the French Revolution have moved from bookstore shelves to library stacks since 1789. The same is true of any subject one could choose--the life of George Washington, the medieval papacy, or Egyptian burial rites. Historians constantly duplicate the work of their predecessors, and for reasons that are not always clear. The discovery of new materials does not sufficiently account for the endless parade of books on the same subject. It seems that volumes written even thirty or forty years before fail to persuade the next generation. The same materials must constantly be recast to be relevant, the past forever reinterpreted for the present.

Books on the framing of the Constitution written over the past hundred years illustrate the point. Through most of the nineteenth century, Americans conceived of the framers as distinguished statesmen, if not demi-gods, who formulated a plan of government which embodied the highest political wisdom and assured freedom to Americans so long as they remained true to constitutional principles. Near the end of the century, however, when certain provisions of the Constitution were invoked to prevent government regulation of economic excesses, reformers began to think of the Constitution less as a safeguard of absolute liberty than as a shield for greed and economic domination. Proposals for drastic revision began to circulate. Among advocates of reform was a young historian, Charles Beard, who set out to rewrite the story of the Constitution. As reported in An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution, Beard discovered that most of the framers were wealthy men who feared popular attempts to encroach on property rights.1 Naturally they introduced provisions which would forestall regulation of business by the democratic masses. The deployment of the Constitution in defense of business interests in the late nineteenth century was to be expected. The framers themselves were businessmen who had foreseen the tendency to attack property and had written a document that could be brought to the defense of business. Far from creating a government for all the people, they constituted the power of the republic so as to protect property. Their interests were narrow and by implication selfish.2

That interpretation caught on in the early twentieth century when the thrust of reform was to regulate business. For nearly twenty years historians found Beard's interpretation true to life as they knew it and faithfully taught his views to their students. Shortly after World War II, however, the temper of the times changed again. Business interests no longer appeared so malevolent; the Supreme Court had taken a brighter view of government regulation; and constitutional principles were invoked on behalf of civil rights and other libertarian causes. All told, the provisions protecting property no longer stood out so prominently, and people began to see once again the broader import of the document. A number of historians then began to attack Beard. They argued that all political leaders of the

eighteenth century were men of property and that wealth did not distinguish those who favored the Constitution from those who opposed it. Rather than being protectors of class interests, the framers were seeking a balance in government that would keep order while preserving liberty, and they generally succeeded. Now the consensus of opinion has swung around once more to honor the framers as distinguished statesmen of unusual political wisdom who framed a constitution for which we can be thankful.

Presumably we are closer to the truth now than sixty years ago when Beard's views held sway. And yet for some it is disconcerting to observe the oscillations in historical fashion and to recognize how one's times affect the view of the past. Anyone unfamiliar with the writing of history may wonder why historians are such vacillating creatures. Are not the facts the facts and is not the historian's task no more than to lay them out in clear order? Why the continual variations in opinion? It seems reasonable that once told the story need only be amended as new facts come to light.

The reason for variation is that history is made by historians. Facts are not fixed in predetermined form merely awaiting discovery and description. They do not force themselves on the historian; we select and mold them. We cannot avoid sculpting the past because the record contains so many facts, all heaped together without recognizable shape. We must select certain ones and form them into a convincing story. Inevitably we come up with differing accounts of the same event. Take the following vignette, the individual components of which we will assume are factual: "Having come from a broken home, Jack yearned for a warm and stable family life. For many years he went out with different women without finding one he could love. At age thirty-four he finally met a woman who won his heart, and in his happiness he dreamed of creating the home he had missed in his childhood. In the fall of 1964, one month before their wedding, the woman withdrew from the engagement. Jack was heartbroken and deeply distressed. Two months later he entered the hospital and in three months was dead."

No explicit causes for the death are given, but we surmise a tangled psychic existence connected with Jack's ambivalence about marriage. He yearned for a wife and happy home life, and yet his experience as a boy prevented him from risking it until long after most men are married. When he finally found the right woman, the long pent-up desires were promised fruition. Her withdrawal shocked his nervous system and induced an ailment serious enough to kill him. Admittedly we have to read a lot into the story to reach that conclusion, but it is not implausible. If the historian only gave us those facts and we were of a psychological bent, we would probably believe the account.

But listen to a briefer narration from the same life: "Beginning in his last year in high school, Jack smoked two packs of cigarettes a day. In the winter of 1965, his doctor diagnosed lung cancer, and three months later he was dead." Aha, we say, now we have the truth. We do not have to resort to psychological theories to

explain what happened. We all know what cigarettes can do.

But as careful historians we cannot yet close the case. The most obvious diagnosis is not necessarily the true one. Only a small fraction of those who smoke two packs of cigarettes a day contract lung cancer at age thirty-four. Smoking alone does not explain why Jack was one of them. Can we rule out the possibility that psychic conflict broke his resistance and made him susceptible? I do not think we can, though most people prefer a more straightforward explanation. The point is that given the multitude of facts, historians, by picking and choosing, can make different but equally plausible stories, and it is difficult to demonstrate that only one of them is true. There is room for debate about the cause of Jack's death even when all the facts are in, including a medical autopsy. When so simple a case refuses to yield an indubitable result, think how interpretations of broad, complex events can vary: the motives of a presidential candidate, the causes of a war, or the origins of the Book of Mormon?

Notice also that neither of these explanations would have convinced reasonable people thirty or forty years ago. After the demise of romantic notions of broken-hearted lovers and before the currency of psychological ideas about psychosomatic disease, a death by a broken engagement would have sounded outlandish indeed. In the same period the connection between smoking and cancer was not yet established. The juxtaposition of two packs a day and a doctor's diagnosis would have been irrelevant, like linking the ownership of cats or a taste for bright neckties to tuberculosis. Nowadays, however, both theories make sense. New outlooks demand that past events be surveyed anew in search of relationships overlooked by earlier scholars. Reasonableness and plausibility, the sine qua non of good history, take on new meanings in each generation.

I doubt if any historian today thinks of history as a series of bead-like facts fixed in unchangeable order along the strings of time. The facts are more like blocks which each historian piles up as he or she chooses, which is why written history always assumes new shapes. I do not mean to say that historical materials are completely plastic. The facts cannot be forced into any form at all. Some statements can be proven wrong. But historians have much more leeway than a casual reading of history discloses. Our sense of relevance, our assumptions about human motivation and social causation, and the moral we wish readers to draw from the story--what we think is good and bad for society--all influence the outcome.

Perhaps the most important influence is the sense of relevance--what historians think is worth writing about. For that sense determines what part of the array of facts we will work with. When you consider all that has happened in the world's history--children reared, speeches given, gardens planted, armies annihilated, goods traded, men and women married, and so on, more important than how you answer a question is what question you ask in the first place. Not until you decide that you want to know the history of child-rearing, or oratory, or gardening do

you even bother to look at all the facts on those subjects stored away in archives. A large part of creativity in writing history is the capacity to ask new questions that draw out previously neglected facts.

Fashions in historical questions come and go like other fashions, and these changes in the sense of relevance require that old stories be told anew. Beard's generation took great interest in economic forces. They wished to know (and we still do today) the wealth and sources of income of historical figures, the distribution of wealth through society, price levels, and the volume of trade and production. Earlier generations, particularly those before 1800, did not even think such facts important enough to record them properly. Economic historians today are hard pressed to answer the questions which interest them most. The same is true of demographers who bewail the failure of colonial Americans to take even a crude census before 1754. The present generation would also love to know the opinions and feelings of the poor and enslaved. One hundred and eighty years ago hardly anyone thought it worth the effort to record their thoughts. Now we must laboriously collect materials from scattered sources, speculate on the implications of the skimpy materials we have, and try to answer questions our generation is asking in order to make the past relevant for us.

To sum up, written history changes simply because history itself brings change. Were we exactly like our ancestors, their history would satisfy us just as their houses and clothes would. But time has altered our concerns, our beliefs, our values, just as it has changed our taste and technological skill. We need new histories that appeal to our views of causation, our sense of significance, and our moral concerns. Since the materials out of which histories are made are so vast and flexible, historians are forever rearranging old facts and assimilating new ones into accounts that will help men and women of the present understand the past.3

Historians nowadays are philosophical about the frailty of their work. Most of my contemporaries realize the next generation's books will supersede their own and are content to write for their own times. They know their work will pass into obsolescence just as architects build knowing their structures will come down. Looking at the matter realistically, we can probably hope for nothing more. So long as people change, their understanding of the past must also change. Even from a religious perspective, at least from a Mormon point of view, there can be no lasting history for mortals. So long as we progress, we will enjoy ever broader horizons, and these must inevitably reflect on our understanding of what went before. As our wisdom enlarges, we will see more deeply into all of our experiences. Only when we come to the limits of knowledge and intelligence will we reach the final truth about history.

Recognizing the contingency of written history does not mean we can dismiss it as trivial. No human activity, including the physical sciences, escapes these limitations. We must try to speak the truth about the past as earnestly as we try

to tell the truth about anything. Accepting the inevitable role of beliefs and values in history simply compels us to examine more closely the concerns which influence us and to make sure that we write history with our truest and best values uppermost.

It seems to me that given these premises, Mormon historians, if they are given to philosophizing about their work, must ask themselves what values govern their scholarship. What determines their views of causation, their sense of significance, and their moral concerns? One might think that their religious convictions, their deepest personal commitments, would pervade their writing. But in my experience, religious faith has little influence on Mormon historians for an obvious reason: we are not simply Mormons but also middle-class Americans trained for the most part in secular institutions.

It is perfectly clear that all Mormons live by varying values and outlooks, not all of them religious. When we sell cars, we act like most car salespeople. When we preside over a ward or teach a gospel lesson, we act in another frame of mind. The two are not entirely separable, but we all sense the different spirit of business and church settings. Obviously different ideas and assumptions about life prevail in each place. Similarly, historians who are Mormons write history as they were taught in graduate school. The secular, decent, tolerant values of the university govern us. Indeed the liberal, scholarly outlook is the one we instinctively think of as objective, obvious, and natural, even though when we stop to think about it we know it is as much a set of biases as any other outlook.

That said, if given a choice would not most Latter-day Saints agree that their religious faith represents their best selves and their highest values? Is it not the perpetual quest of the religious person to have religious principles regulate all conduct, the selling of automobiles and the writing of history as well as Sunday preachments--in short, to do all things in faith? Abandoning the hope that we can write objective history, I think Mormon historians should at least ask how we might replace our conventional, secular American presuppositions with more of the penetrating insights of our faith.

I am not contending for orthodox history in the sense of adherence to one opinion. Gospel principles do not point toward one superior way of describing the past any more than they specify one kind of human personality. I doubt that God intends that we all be exactly alike. The possible styles of Mormon history are as varied as the people who write it. The authentic forms of Mormon-style history can emerge in the various works of only Mormon historians. They cannot be deduced from theological doctrines. All we can do in a theoretical vein is to speculate on some of the directions which Mormon historians might take, apart from those their secular colleagues choose to pursue. And that is what I intend to do in the remainder of this essay.

The Book of Mormon is a source of insight about the nature of history. Since Latter-day Saints believe it was written by prophets, we can assume that the extraneous cultural influences were largely subordinated to faith in its composition. What clues does the Book of Mormon offer about appropriate concerns for a Mormon historian?

As I read the book one pervasive theme is the tension between humanity and God. Class struggles, dynastic adventures, technological change, economic forces are all subordinated to this one overriding concern. Human obedience and divine intervention preoccupied the prophets who told the story. Where is God leading the Nephites? Will he help Nephi get the plates of Laban? Will Laman and Lemuel repent? Will God protect the Nephites on the voyage? Will they serve him in the new land? The prophets are most interested in what God does for people and their willingness in turn to serve him. All events take on meaning as they show God's power or as they depict people coming to him or falling away. The excitement of the story often lies in finding out what God will do next or how the people will respond. As would be expected of prophet-historians who had experienced God's glory, the fundamental axis of every story stretches between earth and heaven.

Presumably Mormon historians today might concentrate on the same relationship. Just as the concerns of the Progressive Era led historians to focus on economic forces, our concerns center on the hand of God in history. Nothing could be of more lasting importance. As we examine our best selves in moments of faith, God's presence seems to fill our consciousness as the ultimate source of meaning in life. Inevitably, we must ask how God has shaped human experience generally, just as historians overawed by industrialization and business power asked how economic forces affected the past.

Admittedly, we are not as gifted as prophets in discerning the hand of God or even the consequences of sin. Who can say where God intervened in the lives of Charlemagne or Napoleon or even in the formation of the Constitution? Belief in God is not a simple guide to relevant history. But our faith certainly compels us to search for him as best we can, and the scriptures suggest some avenues to follow. We know from our doctrine that God enters history in various ways: revelation, providential direction, and inspiration. Each of these offers an interpretive structure that puts God to the fore and suggests a strategy for Mormon historians. Someone someday may work out more systematically the implications of each of these perspectives and perhaps even approach a Mormon philosophy of history. But even on first inspection some of the possibilities--and problems--can be seen.

1. Revelation. We are most certain of divine intervention when prophets, whose judgment we trust, tell us God has spoken or acted. The most obvious subject for Mormon historians is the history of the church, the story of God's revelation to his people and the implementation of his will in the earth. Mormons are drawn to

their past not merely out of ethnocentrism but because they see it as part of a divine work.

Faith in the revelations does not, however, determine how the story is told, not even its basic structure. The fundamental dramatic tension can be between the church and the world or between God and the church. In the first God establishes his kingdom and the Saints struggle to perform his work against the opposition of a wicked world. Joseph Fielding Smith's Essentials in Church History rests on this structure.4 In the second, God tries to establish his kingdom, but the stubborn people whom he favors with revelation ignore him and must be brought up short. I know of no modern Mormon who has written in this vein, but it is common in the Bible and the Book of Mormon. Prophets mourn the declension of faith within the church more than they laud the righteousness of the Saints. In the first, the Saints are heroes and the world villains. In the second, the world is wicked, but so are the Saints. What we need are historians who will mourn the failings of the Saints out of honor for God instead of worshipping achievement because it proves God's favor, or relishing warts because they show the church was earthbound after all.

However we write our story, we cannot, of course, content ourselves with the history of the church, for statistically speaking it is a small part of world history. We must find some way of bringing a larger portion of humanity within our field of vision. The most common device among Mormons for comprehending the whole of world history within the scope of revelation has been the concept of a pattern--or dispensation--repeated through history to various people in many places. Usually an apostasy follows each dispensation so that history follows the path of an undulating curve. Each dispensation raises people toward God, who fall away, only to be lifted by a succeeding dispensation.

The archetype of this pattern was the "Great Apostasy," the period of time intervening from the dispensation of Jesus Christ to the restoration of the church through Joseph Smith. B. H. Roberts and James Talmage have most vividly explicated this period of history for Mormons with the liberal assistance of Protestant scholars who were equally committed to belief in the apostasy of the Roman church. (Indeed Roberts, Talmage, and James Barker may not have added anything to the findings of Protestant scholars.5) On this framework Mormons have hung the course of western civilization since Jesus. Milton Backman in American Religions and the Rise of Mormonism has filled in the picture with a more detailed account of the Protestant Reformation and the growth of tolerance prior to the emergence of Mormonism.6 Together these works tell of the church's glory under the original twelve apostles, declension under Roman influence, upward movement with Protestantism and religious liberty, and climax in Joseph Smith and the restoration.

Beyond this one period the dispensation pattern is more difficult to apply because scriptural and historical materials are much thinner. Milton Hunter's Gospel

Through the Ages briefly told the whole story from Adam to the present, relying almost entirely on the scriptures.7 But clearly the most significant advances in this area are those of Hugh Nibley. Nibley's innovation is to argue that the influence of revelation in the dispensation cycle does not end with apostasy; revelation leaves its mark long after people cut themselves off from God. Gnostics yearn for revelation and even counterfeit it; medieval Christians envy the temple when temple ceremonies are forgotten. In short the structure and aspirations of declining religion are derived from the revealed religions from which they sprang.8 The dispensation pattern thus does not restrict itself to the people who figure in the scriptures. Revelation to prophets more or less directly influenced vast portions of world civilization, perhaps all of it.

My only misgiving about this method is its limited sympathy. Nibley's gospel framework may illuminate some aspects of a people's culture. But it may also distort a culture's values and purposes. According to Nibley, LDS temple ceremonies may have shaped Roman liturgy or Icelandic sagas, but does not time alter a culture until it means something different to the people absorbed in it than was originally intended? Should we not be sensitive to what the mass means to Catholics today as well as to the ordinances from which it is believed it was derived? If nothing else, our love for all people as part of God's progeny should caution us against stuffing them into our own categories. At its best, Nibley's analysis would show the interplay of what a religious tradition was originally and what history made of it.

For the most part, all the history written with an identifiable Mormon twist falls into two categories: history of the church or history of the dispensation cycle. The reason for this concentration is obvious. In both cases prophets tell us where God intervened. We do not have to rely on our own insight to make this difficult judgment. The historian has only to work out the implications of this divine action. God's part in other forms of history is far more conjectural, and historians have understandably shied away from them. Until we develop more precise techniques, these categories will probably remain mere theoretical possibilities.

2. Providential direction. A still broader historical scheme encompasses three of the national histories in scripture. The record of the Nephites in the Book of Mormon, the Book of Ether, and the Old Testament have the same dramatic structure: God and humans interacting. Events in these three histories are not a shapeless heap of successes and failures; they are given meaning by the effort of God to choose and guide a people with whom he has covenanted. The idea of providential direction enters into the day-by-day story, but in addition, that direction gives a shape to the whole course of the histories. There comes a time when God casts off these covenanted people, after repeated apostasies, and they are then subject to national humiliation and suffering. For a time God abandons them, though not forever. In two cases he ultimately restores them, giving the histories a happy ending.

This divinely supervised rise, fall, and restoration is related to the dispensation cycle but stands above it as a pattern of its own. The history of a nation forms the next larger historical unit after the dispensation. It tells the whole story of a people, following the curve of their history along its ups and downs of various dispensations and apostasies, charting the overall ascent and decline.

Could this scriptural structure guide the study of all nations? Does God have a plan for them as well? Does their history follow a providential pattern? It seems to be a fact that all civilizations rise and fall much as Israel did. Could it be for similar reasons? Nibley suggests that the dispensation cycle could be enlarged to include many cultures. Could providential history apply to their nations too?

The possibility of broadening the scope of providential governance leads us to examine more carefully the causes of Israel's ascent and decline. The Old Testament leads one to believe that God rejected the Jews because they rejected him. The tribes of Israel entered into a covenant at Sinai, and when they consistently refused to honor it, God's patience wore thin. Finally he cast them aside. If that is all there is to it, Israel's case would apply only to covenanted nations. Egyptian and Hellenic civilizations would be another matter entirely. Not having been chosen, they could not be rejected. Providence must govern them according to another plan, and the Old Testament does not tell us what it is.

Possibly the Book of Mormon does. Much less is said there of original covenant and more of righteousness. The impression one receives is that righteousness brings peace and prosperity, while war and misery come close on the heels of sin. The people of Lehi declined when they persistently broke the commandments. Their fate was less dependent on a personal quarrel with God than on refusal to comply with his laws. By extrapolation, righteous behavior and the well-being of a civilization may be linked to gentiles as well as among covenanted people. The historian who understood divine laws well enough could perhaps explain the course of a nation's development.

A simplistic form of such a history could model itself after David McClelland's study of the achievement motive.9 McClelland worked out a measure of people's desire for concrete achievements and used it to assess the presence of this need in popular literature over the past two or three centuries. To his delight the production of iron and steel, a rough indicator of economic growth, followed the ups and downs of his need achievement curve. Presumably when people decided to get things done, that desire ultimately improved the overall economy. A need for righteousness or for religion might yield similar results. Could it be that when pride increases so does civil strife, or when a nation humbles itself it enjoys peace?

The difficulties of this approach are obvious. How does one measure righteousness, and what kind of righteousness is most critical? What are the historical consequences of goodness? Wealth? Peace? An artistic flowering?

Military power? Imperial conquest? I doubt that the relationship will be the simple one which held for McClelland. However it would be a mistake to give up on the scriptures as a source of historical understanding. We still might be able to derive a religious sociology and psychology which would illuminate national histories. We sense that virtue affects the quality of social life. Prophets have expressed the same sentiment rather emphatically. Can that insight be worked out in concrete historical instances? We may not be able to plot the course of a people through all of their history as the scriptures do for Israel. But perhaps we can penetrate lesser events or epochs to show providence at work governing the world by divine law.

3. Inspiration. Mormons have long entertained the vague belief that God guides all good people everywhere to various triumphs in art, government, and science. In general we have attributed the appearance of "the finer things" to the activity of the spirit of Christ, thereby reconciling our Mormon convictions with our commitment to middle-class American culture. I have no objection to this comforting belief so long as we do not fall prey to secularization of the worst sort, that is, to clothe worldly values in religion. But what I have in mind as a program of historical research has a different purpose than the sanctification of culture heroes.

My proposal rests on two doctrines: spiritual death at the fall of Adam and spiritual life through the light of Christ. The assumption is that our separation from God wounded us and we desire to be healed. The truest and only completely satisfying course is to yield to the spirit of Christ which God sends to the world in lieu of his own presence. Following that spirit brings us eventually to God where we enter once again into his rest. But en route most humans are waylaid or deceived. They accept counterfeit gods and fruitlessly seek fulfillment in them. Rarely are individuals entirely defeated, for the spirit continues to strive with them, and they, however badly misled for a time, will always back away from their false gods and start again on a more promising path. Thus the search is perpetual, driven by humanity's deepest need. All of human history in this sense can be thought of as heilige geschichte, a quest for salvation.

The model for this mode of history, I must confess, is not the scriptures but Reinhold Niebuhr's The Nature and Destiny of Man.10 Niebuhr's categories were human finitude and divine infinitude. We are limited and contingent but because of a divine component yearn to be infinite and free. Our quest has taken two major forms, romantic and classical, which roughly correspond to emotion and reason, loss of self in the senses and exaltation through the mind. The romantics are Dionysians, giving themselves over to feeling and seeking union with the All through sense and emotion. Classical figures are Apollonians. They seek order and control. The scientist is a classical person who tries to reduce all of life to laws of which he or she is perfectly certain and which afford complete control. Both of these styles are idols, Niebuhr argued, false and misleading efforts to be God, that eventually lead to tyranny and death. The only true way to reach the

infinite is through worship, which permits us to reach God without claiming to be God ourselves. I do not subscribe entirely to Niebuhr's categories, although they are useful, but his model of incomplete humanity striving for completion does accord with the scriptural view of the human situation.

Furthermore, I find that the model works in historical research. My own academic interests center on studying religious and political thought in America in the early eighteenth century. Without forcing the issue, I see people in this period attempting two things in their ideological discourse. The first is describing life as it should be. This generation was vexed by its own greed and contentiousness. The self was forever getting in the way, venting bitter and rancorous emotions, or pursuing its private interests at the expense of the whole. People yearned for peace and union, ways of keeping the self in check or of giving themselves to noble causes that would make them forget the self. Union, tranquility, peace, harmony were among their most prominent values, and these, I think, represent in some way a response to the desire for the "rest of the Lord."

The second quest is for moral justification. People yearn to prove themselves right, that is, to reconcile what they are with what they think they should be. I am willing to work on the assumption that our consciences are somehow related to the spirit of Christ. Warped as moral standards sometimes appear to be, usually we find behind specific standards of behavior an intention which we can recognize as admirable in our own terms. What I am arguing is that conscience is not entirely relative, though in detail it varies immensely. When we find people justifying themselves or setting standards for others, we see them wrestling with the influence of heaven. These eighteenth-century figures, living as they did in a rapidly expanding society, were forever contending with one another and following naked self-interest in contradiction to what they believed ought to be. Their tortured efforts to justify their actions I think open a window on an authentic religious struggle.

All of this becomes interesting historically when we see various ideals, sometimes disparate ones, working against a reality which drives people to fight with themselves. The ideals and the actual situation create a dynamic interplay which goes far to explain specific events and to account for changes in ideology. In eighteenth-century America, the ideal of harmony and the reality of conflict moved people toward a new view of the social order that envisioned life as compartmentalized, each person secluded and safe within the bounds of his or her own rights, in short, an order more like our present pluralistic society. This minimized contention and unleashed ambition, but it also separated people from each other and required another ideal to give moral significance to life: the free individual progressing toward his or her own destiny. Nineteenth-century Americans sought their salvation by pursuing that ideal.

Again without forcing the issue, I am convinced that people require a moral setting for their lives. They want to measure themselves against some standard,

however grotesque, inarticulate, or irrational it may be. Life has to have purpose and meaning, to operate within a structure which describes existence as it should be and permits people to justify their exertions by some standard outside themselves. In some respects these moral frameworks are godly, and rightly attributed to the spirit of Christ. They seem to be among the chief means by which people undertake to save themselves.

The advantage of the history of salvation over the history of revelation or the history of providence is that the first applies to all people and permits, even demands, full sympathy with them. There is no danger of narrowness, which is inherent in concentrating on the locus of revelation or on the vicissitudes of covenanted nations. Its disadvantage is that it may blend imperceptibly with secular history. I confess my indebtedness to Niebuhr and to Carl Schorske, two non-Mormon historians. If these men write history as I aspire to write it, can I still claim to be working out of a Mormon heritage in response to the self I encounter in moments of faith?

This query brings me to my final point. There is a paradox in discussing the subject of Mormons writing history. On the one hand I wish to encourage Mormon historians, like Mormon psychologists and Mormon physicians, to think about the relationship of their faith to their professional practice. On the other hand I do not wish my categories to be thought of as prescriptive. I think it would be a mistake to set out to prove that nations rise and fall according to principles of righteousness outlined in the Book of Mormon. The outcome would probably be no more convincing than books which try to show principles of psychoanalysis governing novels. Such works always seem stilted, forced, and artificial.

Scriptural principles guide us toward more powerful works of history only when those principles are fully and naturally incorporated into our ways of thinking; so that when we look at the world we see it in these categories without lying to ourselves or neglecting any of the evidence. We must believe in our framework as sincerely as Progressive historians believed in economic forces or as any of our secular contemporaries believe in their theories of motivation or social change. It must be part of us, so much so that we will not consciously write as Mormons but simply as people who love God and are coming to see the world as he does.

Thus my history of the eighteenth century as a quest for salvation may partake of secular strains of thought. But I also know that for me it is religious as well. It is faithful history. As I look at the world in my best moments, this is how I see it. I am not lying to any part of myself, neither the part that prays nor that which interprets documents. If I am still a victim of secularism, the recourse is not to a more obviously Mormon approach but to repentance. Merely altering technique or a few ideas will not make the difference. My entire character, all the things which shape my vision of the world, must change.

The trouble with wishing to write history as a Mormon is that you cannot improve as a historian without improving as a person. The enlargement of moral insight, spiritual commitment, and critical intelligence are all bound together. We gain knowledge no faster than we are saved.

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Notes:
1. Charles A. Beard, An Economic Interpretation of the Constitution of the United States (New York: Macmillan Co., 1913).

2. For an analysis of Beard's work and its intellectual milieu, see Richard Hofstadter, The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, Parrington (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), chaps, 1, 5-8.

3. The questions I raise are explored more fully in E. H. Carr, What Is History? (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1961).

4. Joseph Fielding Smith, Essentials in Church History: A History of the Church from the Birth of Joseph Smith to the Present Time . . . (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1922).

5. B. H. Roberts, The "Falling Away," or, The World's Loss of the Christian Religion and Church . . . (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1931); James E. Talmage, The Great Apostasy Considered in the Light of Scriptural and Secular History (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1909); James L. Barker, Apostasy from the Divine Church (Salt Lake City: K. M. Barker, 1960).

6. Milton V. Backman, Jr., American Religions and the Rise of Mormonism (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1965).

7. Milton R. Hunter, The Gospel through the Ages (Salt Lake City: Stevens and Wallis, Inc., 1945).

8. Nibley's articles in church and secular journals as well as his books through 1967 are listed in Louis Midgley, "Hugh Nibley: A Short Bibliographical Note," Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought 2 (Spring 1967): 119-21.

9. David C. McClelland, The Achieving Society (Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand, 1961).

10. Reinhold Niebuhr, The Nature and Destiny of Man: A Christian Interpretation (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1941).