Herbert Butterfield on Tragedies and Providence in the Twentieth-Century Historical Experience
A Reappraisal

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Herbert Butterfield (1900–79), Cambridge University historian of modern European history, is primarily remembered today for his role as one of the three scholars (along with Christopher Dawson and Reinhold Niebuhr) involved in the revival of a Christian historical perspective. Beginning with a series of BBC broadcasts in 1948 that were printed into a book entitled *Christianity and History*,[1] Butterfield developed a wide reading audience in Britain and a greater following in America. In this and in subsequent books and essays, Butterfield developed a distinctive approach to the role of Providence within the historical perspective. Much discussed during his lifetime, Butterfield's ideas still spawn discussion today, although few scholars have wholeheartedly endorsed his perspective.[2] Still, Butterfield offers important insights upon which critical discussions of the role of Providence can be focused. Butterfield's views, it is argued here, provide some important insights for contemporary Latter-day Saints. Given the fact that there is no systematic Latter-day Saint approach to the role of God in history (at least not as Karl Barth attempted to do for Christianity), and various providential views abound, perhaps something can be learned through a critical appraisal of some of his prominent positions on Providence.

As Butterfield was a lifetime Methodist, having served many years as a local preacher, we should not think that his views on Providence will be entirely compatible with the Latter-day Saint perspectives on this issue. For example, his rejection of the concept of history moving towards a millennial climax is one important point of difference.[3] It was also Butterfield's contention that there is a providential order but not a providential plan, or at least not one that we can readily ascertain, a position not entirely compatible with Latter-day Saint theology.[4] Still, he believed

there is something to which the creation moves. Nor is his view of the evils of human nature in accordance with Latter-day Saint precepts, as Butterfield avowed that human nature was corrupted by sin as a result of the Fall and therefore subjected to a series of never-ending predicaments because of our willful natures.[5] If, however, we overlook some of these obvious doctrinal differences and concentrate on his view of how Providence works in human affairs, his views are at least worth considering within the context of the debate over the concept of the workings of God in history.

Providential Perspectives in the Old and New Testaments

One important theme in Butterfield's thought that is bound to strike a familiar chord with Latter-day Saint audiences was his linking of freedom, history, and Providence. To him, the world is a place for soul making, where individuals have the freedom of choice to shape their eternal destinies.[6] Butterfield believed that history takes place in a field in which every action has a moral significance.[7] It is necessary for individuals to choose the right and live in accordance with the divine will. He acknowledges, "In Him we live and move and have our being."[8] Still it is individuals who make these choices, and history as we know it is shaped by their actions, either for good or for evil. Butterfield's perspective was always based on the notion of human free will and our responsibility for having created the past. In his view, people cannot blame Providence for the misfortunes that we have constantly created from the beginning of human history.

Another distinctive insight developed throughout his writings was the idea that the history of the ancient Hebrews was fundamentally of the same texture as our own.[9] In his view, the purpose of the Old Testament was to establish the role of Providence in human affairs and to demonstrate to later generations the unchanging nature of God's involvement with man, even beyond the Crucifixion. Thus, he saw comparisons between the Hebrews and modern times: "That is the [Old Testament] history of a nation whose stories of violence and conflict, treachery and war, or worldliness and cupidity, could be told just like the story of any other nation."[10] Unlike some Christian thinkers, Butterfield saw a continuing pattern of providential involvement in history based upon the idea of a promise offering greater things to the human family. He describes the role of God among the ancient Hebrews as an extremely close and intimate relationship: "Conceiving of God as a person who was very close to them, very closely involved in human affairs, they walked with him, they conversed with him, they wrestled with him on ethical issues, sometimes with frankness that is quite startling. Above all, they established an intimacy with him, realised him as a spirit, knew that he was inside them, and that if you plunged to the depths of the ocean you would find him there as well. It is this God who exists in the very inwardness of things that we have to have in mind when we think of God in history."[11]

Yet the tragedy of history has always been our deviation from the promise. At various times in the Old Testament, God's chosen people veered from revealed truths. Forgetting the promise, for example, they strayed into the worship of false gods, which resulted in divine punishment. But the promise was always renewed, even with the sins of Israel leading to captivity in Babylon. Out of such tragedies came not only renewal but also a new meaning to promise. In Jeremiah 31:33, a significant concept is developed, "which seems to mark a change in the consciousness of men, a change that one is surprised to find so clearly registered in an historical document." God is described as saying (in what became the new covenant), "I will put my law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts." In an another adjoining passage (verses 29–30), Jeremiah modifies the earlier tradition of children

suffering for the sins of their fathers by saying that "every one shall die for his own iniquity."[12]

This statement is important, Butterfield stressed, because it elevates the human personality to a new height. At this "magnificent conjuncture," the ancient Hebrews came to see religion as a matter of internal development within the soul. Thus, God found "his real temple [was] inside a human being, that the law was written in man's heart and that every individual had his separate wire to eternity."[13] Also encompassed in this new personal understanding was the idea that God's direct relationship to man was based on love—a love that could rescue human affairs or renew man's personal relationship with the divine in spite of sin.

Thus, to Butterfield, people always make their own history through the choices they make, leading to both exceptional creative achievements and also unfortunately to carnage and destruction. Nevertheless, God is directly involved in human events, breaking into the story as the divine judge, convicting us of our sins and shortcomings, but at the same time offering us a new and ever greater promise of a better and renewed life out of the tragedies of our past. As Butterfield stated, the greatest insight into human history was God's presence in the story of mankind, fulfilling the promise, "but fulfilling it at a higher attitude than men had in mind."[14] Thus the role of Providence is to convict men of their sins, to win them over, and to free men from the slavery to their past and move them to a higher plane. God is always with the process of events, even though Butterfield was insistent about human responsibility for the tragedies of the past.

Although Butterfield identified with the Old Testament view of the promise, he also incorporated a New Testament perspective into his views. Obviously he was convinced through his experiences in life that the human family is under divine guidance, not chance happenings. Thus, "the ultimate faith is the belief that all things will have a final reconciliation—a final share in the redemptive purpose of Christ."[15] In one of his most moving passages, he outlines the meaning of New Testament love to the historical process: "The spectacle of Christian humility, the knowledge of forgiveness of sins—furthermore, the astonishing power of these things and the way they came to be vindicated over long periods of history—are like something supernatural imposed on the whole drama."[16]

The purpose of the historical process since the Resurrection continues to be the same: "He [Christ] has a project to convict men of sin, to win them from their sins, to take away the burden of them, and free men from slavery to their own past."[17] God is love and, like a leaven, comes to influence the course of worldly events in ways that we mortals cannot totally fathom.[18]

Providential Metaphors

Although we are the authors of our own past and future, God is always there, moving with "infinite pliability and subtlety."[19] As Butterfield averred: "In his Providence he continues the original work of creation and keeps the stars alight, maintains his world continually; we ought to feel that if he stopped breathing it would vanish into nothingness. It is because God is in everything, in every detail of life, that people so easily think they can cancel him out." While God is in everything, in every detail of life, he does not act in a capricious fashion but moves through regularities and laws.[20] As we understand these regularities and laws, we can shape our individual lives and our civilization to conform to these laws and regularities. Or, as he stated, we should not only cooperate with Providence but we should put ourselves in an alliance with Providence. To him, the choice is clear: either one traces everything back in the long run to sheer blind chance, or you trace everything to God.[21]

While he believed God was working within history, he also recognized an element of the unpredictable in human events. We do not know what course it will take, what unexpected

happenings will change the "flow" of events. To Butterfield, history consists of the play of human free will on one hand, the working of law in history, and the operation of chance, with all three elements embraced together under His Providence, "the world and all its history lying in the hollow of His hand."[22] But Butterfield also asserted that, in spite of the seemingly randomness of events, there is also a fixity in the process of history: "Even when the unpredictable has happened we can go back and account for it retrospectively, we can show that there was organization all the same."[23]

Butterfield argued that God has made the best end to tragedy that is possible. In addition His judgment is constantly occurring in the present. As he warns:

> If a society even becomes too materialistic in its objectives, as that of the competition between its members for more than their due share of the materialistic benefits gets too intense, then I think there is a judgement of God which is embodied in the very constitution of things which will bring that society to total collapse. That is how the world is constituted. In this sense there is a Providence, there is a judgment that is embodied in the very constitution of the universe.[24]

To explain his position on Providence, Butterfield often resorted to metaphors, all of which involved the notion of God working to correct the errors created by human beings. In one of his examples he compared the workings of Deity to that of a symphonic conductor. Unlike orchestral leaders whom we hear at a concert performed by a well-known symphony and conductor, this maestro does not perform music from a preexisting score; instead, he creates the composition during the course of the performance. Thus, he "composes the music as we go along, and when we slip into aberrations, switches his course in order to make the best of everything." We might say that the composer knows the basic theme of the composition (hence there is a pattern), but he skillfully alters orchestral errors in such a way that the outcome is harmonious and uplifting, even if the players are rank amateurs, perhaps even reluctant musicians. In Butterfield's analogy there is no suggestion that the wrong notes themselves are beyond the composer's control. The maestro is always able to blend even the worst of musical aberrations into the harmony of the whole. This seemingly impossible feat of creating harmony out of chaos is achieved with subtlety and restraint; lacking is any heavy-handed effort to dominate the musicians. And, if heard in the right spirit, the outcome is always pleasing to the audience.[25]

Offering a slightly different rendition of this musical metaphor, Butterfield discussed how history is like a Beethoven symphony, which displays remarkable beauty in each of its movements. The whole of it is not mere preparation for the grand finale or even the last bar. Instead, each part of the composition has its own intrinsic interest and beauty, even if we do not hear the entire composition performed. So it is with history: each generation or historical epoch can be examined or understood on its own merit and has meaning for the entire course of history, even if we are far removed from the end of human events. Butterfield further stated, "When we think of the action of God in history—and present it to ourselves in pictures, as we are almost bound to do—we need to imagine a heavy hand interposed to interfere with the working of a heavy piece of machinery. Perhaps a better picture of our situation would be that of a child who played her piece very badly when she was alone, but when the music teacher sat at her side played it passably well, though the music teacher never touched her, never said anything but operated by pure sympathetic attraction and by just being there."[26]

It might be argued that there are two problems with his metaphors dealing with God in history. While he is undoubtedly correct in assuming that God constantly intervenes to correct

the aberration created by humans, his metaphors do not allow for a grander vision of history in which God directs human affairs, shaping them to His noble ends in spite of all that humans do to impede His noble design and purposes. It might be assumed, however, that Butterfield would counter such a criticism in the following way, as he did with his criticism of eighteenth century Deism, which projected God as an indifferent but divine watchmaker:

> God cooperated in every single motion of the piece of clock-work [the movement of the universe]—that He lies behind the song of the lark, the coming of spring[.] He cooperates in the movements of history[.] And we [would] vanish like a whiff of smoke if for a moment He stops thinking about us. He is not merely the fabric of the watch and the agent who winds up the spring of the watch[.] He is in all the motions of nature and the very system of nature is an invention of His—it is His way of operating.[27]

It was Butterfield's contention that we make our own history and are ultimately responsible for the outcome, yet God is part and parcel of the process, constantly intervening to fulfill His purposes among the human family. Yet is it really correct to argue that humans are totally responsible for what happens, especially in the light of his belief that there is a providential order in which we are created with the purpose to cooperate with Providence?[28] Is there not, at least to some extent, a shared responsibility between God and mankind for the tragedies of history as well as the triumphs? After all, this is His universe and He establishes the rules, as well as to grant human beings the freedom to act either with the forces of Providence or in opposition to the divine will. Indeed, Butterfield was convinced that human willfulness invariably will destroy the equipoise created at the time that the promise is given, and invariably history moves from one crisis to another, just as it appears in the Old Testament. Thus, we can expect that history will move from one crisis to another, that the best we can hope for is for temporary peace and stability, not any kind of a utopian future. But, at the same time, he saw God as the divine creator, constantly making new things happen which leads to the best possible future that can happen, in spite of human willfulness.

Tragedies and the Twentieth-Century Experience

It is significant that Butterfield lived through many of the dark periods of the twentieth century. As a young man, he witnessed the disasters of trench warfare on the Western Front during the First World War. As a student at Cambridge in the 1920s, he studied under the diplomatic historian Harold Temperley, who was an outspoken critic of the Treaty of Versailles in 1919. Butterfield came to share his views and decried the failure of the Great Powers to reestablish a viable international order following the defeat of Germany.[29] Instead, the leading nations attempted to prevent future calamities through unilateral disarmament, and in some cases, isolationism, thus leaving a power vacuum which was instrumental in the rise of ruthless dictators, such as Mussolini and Hitler, who were not committed to maintaining the peace settlement. Moreover, out of the war emerged the Communist victory in Russia, which subsequently created the Red Scare in Europe, with fears of Soviet intrigue and the possible spread of revolution in countries weakened by the war. Both the Soviet system that emerged under Stalin and the tyranny of the Nazis were seen by Butterfield as evidence of the breakdown of civilization and the reemergence of barbarism in Europe, not unlike what the world experienced with the breakdown of the Roman Empire.[30] To him, the new barbarians were essentially shallow men who renounced Christian values in favor of a Nietzschean belief in the will to power and the virtue of violence. As Nazi tyranny spread through Europe, Butterfield countered the totalitarian threat

by producing a patriotic essay, *The Englishman and His History*, in which he extolled the virtues of the English political system, with its commitment to reasonableness and compromise.[31] Nor did the defeat of Nazi Germany and Japan lead to an end to barbaric atrocities, as the world plunged into cold war conflict, which in turn led to new conflicts, such as the Korean war and the Vietnam conflict. This latter development Butterfield opposed as the instance of the arrogance of U.S. power.[32]

Thus, Butterfield commented on the general tendencies in world events throughout his life, which he saw in *religious* terms, but he omitted specific incidents in his analysis, such as the Holocaust, perhaps the worst episode in the modern world with the systematic, scientific extermination of at least six million people. His only comment was that out of the horrors of World War II (like the pattern of the Old Testament) came the rebirth of the nation of Israel.[33] In his analysis, God had made the best end to tragedy that is possible, given the reality of the human predicament.

But is this really reflective of the enormity of evil that came out of World War II, not only for the Jews but for the approximately fifty-five million people (mostly civilians) who were killed as a result of the war? Such evils demanded the cooperation of large numbers of people besides Hitler and other well-known leaders.[34] We should be mindful of the conclusion reached by one of the best historians of World War II, who commented that Nazi atrocities "irrevocably eroded human self-esteem and self-confidence." One reason for this was the large-scale participation in Nazi brutality: "The Nazis exposed human evasiveness, cowardice, and selfishness. Many Germans retain a sense of guilt because it was their society that gave power to the Nazis. Other western Europeans, including the British, know that their relative freedom from guilt rests on historical accident, not moral superiority."[35] The cruelty and stark reality of this world war demonstrates how far human agency can go to unleash terrible disasters.[36]

But this is only part of the pattern of atrocities throughout the past century. It has been estimated that the world's "megadeaths" through wars and other atrocities accounted for 187 million victims by 1993.[37] The trail of death includes more than the two world wars, the Holocaust, the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the Great Leap Forward in China under Mao Tse-tung in the late 1950s. It also includes the millions killed in Stalinist gulags (labor camps), the Soviet war against the Kulaks, Vietnam, Cambodia, Rwanda, the collapse of Yugoslavia—to name but a few of the major events.[38] Between 1960 and 1976 over five million people lost their lives in the numerous wars of this period.[39] The above figures do not take into account the enormous numbers of domestic tragedies within the various countries of the world. For instance, any appraisal of tragedies in the world would have to include the thousands of missing children who disappear each year in the United States, as well as the hundreds of children who annually are victims of kidnappings and the most horrendous sex crimes and violence. Indeed, one is reminded of the biblical massacre of the innocent children and Jeremiah's haunting lament of Rachel weeping for her children, "and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more" (Matthew 2:18). Butterfield did not choose to delve into such specific instances of human cruelty, although he was certainly aware of the dimensions of human evil during his lifetime.

Butterfield's views on tragedies begins, however, on the microcosmic level, where he created a hypothetical example of a young girl walking down the street. While she is walking a loose tile from the roof falls and strikes the youngster on the head, killing her. To Butterfield, the blame lies pure and simple with the faulty roof, which constitutes human error, either through improper design or attachment of the

roof tiles. Also at fault could be the failure of the owner of the building to inspect the facility periodically for potential dangers. The proper Christian response, according to him, would be to make certain in the future that safer roofs are built and maintained. We should never blame God directly for such accidents, although we should always be cognizant that accidents such as this involving innocent children fall under His Providence and are part of the divine order. "Even tragedies (whether natural or caused by the wickedness of men) [are] somehow within the will of God."[40] Thus, although God does not necessarily prevent such accidents from happening, His love and care are always with the victims of such events.

Even in the case of murder, Butterfield argues that the fault lies with human cupidity, although he did acknowledge that God is involved at least to the extent that He did allow for agency, creating the conditions under which such crimes could occur. When the extent of murder is expanded to constitute an atrocity involving large segments of society or even entire nations, Butterfield contends that such crimes were "morally indefensible"and the responsibility for such crimes lies squarely on the shoulders of the perpetrators.[41] But he also averred that such circumstances constituted a breakdown of civilization and that in all instances steps needed to be taken to prevent future occurrences. What he seemingly suggests is that there needs to be a reassertion of civilizing values in which morality can be reestablished within a perspective of individual and collective responsibility. He is also adamant that force—police and other coercive institutions—needs to be reestablished in order to keep human nature under checks and restraints.[42]

In all human situations, however, Butterfield adamantly believed that the Christian should never feel that God was responsible for crimes and wrongdoings, even those on a massive scale. Rather, it should always be remembered that such happenings are themselves within the providential order. Butterfield argued, "The Christian should never feel that God was responsible for the crimes of men or the accidents of nature, but that even these were in the order of Providence, neither crime nor accident taking him out of the care of Providence."[43] While this is reassuring to know that God does ultimately care about the tragedies of human life, there is an element of estrangement which also comes when victims confront the truth that God did not prevent such events from happening. We are left with only the comfort that there is an overall purpose of life that transcends our terrestrial situation and that divine justice will ultimately prevail over the tragedies of the moment.

Although atrocities involving large segments of society are an outcome of our freedom, they do not escape from divine judgment. Butterfield offered solace in his assertion that divine judgments for wickedness are executed in the course of actual events: "In this sense, a judgment of God on mammoth systems [of evil] is almost embedded in the Providential order, in the very constitution of things." In the case of such cruelty and arrogance as displayed in the evil systems of tyrants such as Napoleon and Hitler, divine retribution is so self-evident that many an ordinary technical historian can see the overthrow of such wickedness as a judgment.[44] Likewise obvious about such conditions is that God, at least temporarily, allowed the wicked to prosper. God has forewarned us that He would because of His commitment to freedom. But Butterfield maintained that Providence will always win out—to convict sinners and to make the best possible ending to calamity—even in the case of Nazi brutality.[45] Moreover, he argued that the healing process following the Second World War brought at least some good things for mankind; out of the ashes and rubble has come a prosperous and free Europe. Out of the Holocaust has come the rebirth of the nation of Israel.[46]

How satisfactory is Butterfield's approach to the problem of evil in the twentieth century?

To many, it might seem that he is too legalistic in his expostulation into the problem of evil. Thus, it might be said, he is technically correct from a biblical perspective, but his analysis lacks depth into the tragedy of such events. We might even agree with him, but it seems there is something missing if we consider the problem of the enormity of evil and human suffering in the historical experience of the twentieth century. Certainly this is more than a "breakdown of civilization." Kenneth Surin, for example, has sought to create a more meaningful understanding of the deep, unfathomable dimensions of evil and to steer thinking away from the trivialization of pain and suffering. As he says, since the gruesome details of the experiences at Auschwitz, we must take suffering more seriously than ever before.[47] In Eli Wiesel's story, *Night*, the encounters between faith and doubt in the death camps are still ringing in our ears some fifty years later:

> Why, but why should I bless Him? In every fiber I rebelled. Because He had thousands of children burned in His pits? Because He kept six crematories working night and day, on Sundays and feast days? Because in His great might He had created Auschwitz, Birkenau, Buna, and so many factories of death? How could I say to Him: "Blessed art Thou, Eternal, Master of the Universe, Who chose us from among the races to be tortured day and night, to see our fathers, our mothers, our brothers, end in the crematory? Praise be Thy Holy Name, Thou Who hast chosen us to be butchered on thine altar?"[48]

No efforts at theodicy can ultimately comprehend or explain the terrible deaths and agony involved in such events, at least not completely.[49] Perhaps all we can do is tell stories of human suffering and depravity. Maybe assembling a collective memory dealing with the many Auschwitz experiences is one way of glimpsing into the "banality of evil." But even this approach, which is altogether common in contemporary historiography, is only scratching at the surface. Perhaps the Christian historian needs to turn to poetics for a greater sense of comprehension that is otherwise unfathomable.

Indeed, all tragedies eventually come down to the impact they have on the lives of individuals, families, extended families, and friends. As we view horrendous statistics, for example, the Japanese massacre at Nanking in 1937 stands out as one of the worst atrocities in Asia during World War II. Beginning in December 1937, the Japanese army engaged in the indiscriminate killing of civilians throughout the city. The terror lasted for the next six weeks. At one point the streets were so littered with dead bodies that it was difficult for automobiles to pass through the streets. According to one account, "Girls as young as twelve, and women of all ages were raped by gangs of 15 or 20 soldiers who roamed the town in search of women. Over a thousand men were rounded up and marched to the banks of the Yangtze river where they were machine-gunned to death. Thousands of captured Chinese soldiers were similarly murdered. . . . Department stores, shops, church and houses were set on fire while drunken soldiers indulged in wholesale looting and bayoneting Chinese civilians for sport."[50] When the massacre ended, approximately three hundred thousand Chinese civilians and soldiers were killed in what was described the worst wholesale butchery committed by the Japanese military in the Second World War.[51]

One of the witnesses to brutality of war in China was a dentist and photographer named T. C. Lau. He and his family were forced to flee for their lives, eventually escaping to Hong Kong. Lau wrote about how the pathos of such events escape the passing notice for the historian, but how real they are for the survivor: "Historians may appropriate only a line or two to record this present catastrophe but it is tremendous to us who are in it."[52] The point to be made here is the limitations of statistics in describing events such as this. Tragedies come down to a personal

dimension with individuals, families, and friends burdened for life because of what happened in such events. Thus, we should remember that in the Nanking affair, virtually millions of people experienced personal grief and loss.

In one sense, however, Butterfield is right. All tragedies in history demand appropriate human responses. It is necessary to prevent recurrences through concerted actions on the part of statesmen and civilians who must somehow create a new world in which such atrocities are less likely to occur. Long periods of peace, the cultivation of humane values, and the creation of a stable international order can go a long way toward providing the necessary conditions for healing the world's wounds. But, Butterfield was prone to argue, we should always realize the constant workings of human cupidity, which seeks to overthrow stability.[53] For peace to exist, we must always bear in mind the workings of evil forces in the world, which in all instances should be put in check by counterforces, a lesson that was lost to Western statesmen in the 1930s.

But this is not all there is to the story of the twentieth century. Higher standards of living have produced prosperity never before dreamed of, although the distribution of wealth has also been shown to be remarkably uneven. Revolutions in transport and in communications have radically altered the world we live in. But, as Butterfield testified, while technolgical progress has improved the lot of most of mankind, it has created its antithesis in the form of problems with the environment, as well as put us in jeopardy of extinction through the nuclear peril (in his words, the "second fall of mankind").[54]

In Butterfield's approach, there is the optimism of knowing that out of tragedies come higher purposes and the belief that God is always working within human affairs, accomplishing His purposes and pushing human society to higher ends, in spite of the aberrations that occur through human cupidity. Belief in Providence always entails a sense of optimism about the future, a belief there is a providential order and that out of calamities, whether natural or man-made, that there is always a higher purpose and that God is, as Butterfield taught, making the best possible future, given our mistakes and His ultimate purposes, which are to be fulfilled within the process of history.

Latter-day Saint Parallels

We have earlier suggested that there is not a single systematic Latter-day Saint approach to the role of Providence in history, although Latter-day Saints maintain that God does work through the historical process and that the Restoration reopened lost channels of communication between God and man. It is a doctrinal belief that Jesus Christ guides His Church in these the last days. Another important view is that the agency of man is not interfered with by Providence. As President Joseph F. Smith explained, "God, doubtless, could avert war, prevent crime, destroy poverty, chase away darkness, overcome error, and make all things bright, beautiful and joyful. But this would involve the destruction of a vital and fundamental attribute of man—the right of agency."[55] While God does interfere into the affairs of mankind, many of the specifics concerning the role of God within history are left to individual interpretation.

What has been suggested in this paper is that the twentieth-century historical experience gives witness to the extent to which human agency can operate in support of massive evil enterprises. But does this not mean that horrendous events, such as the Holocaust, with the deaths of nearly six million people, not only have happened, but have happened within the providential order? The answer is yes. Moreover, there is no guarantee that such tragedies that plagued the previous century will not happen in the future. The only hope that we have as a human family is diligence in preventing such recurrences, including removing conditions under which atrocities occur. This will involve concerted international

actions and individual initiatives, as well as a change in moral climate in the world. As Jonathan Glover has recently stated:

> There are features of our time which make it particularly important to build up moral defences against barbarism. Most obviously, there is the way technology hugely increases the scale of atrocities. But there is the increasing awareness of the fading of the moral law. As authority-based morality retreats, it can be replaced by a morality which is deliberately created. The best hope of this is to work with the grain of human nature, making use of the resources of moral identity and human responses. But changes and additions to common-sense attitudes will be needed.[56]

For the Latter-day Saint community, the moral resources are still in place, and there is no need to create a new identity; what is needed is a sense of awareness and concern to the extent that individual members will work with others in order to make the world a safer place for all.

Contrary to Butterfield's expectations, the international community has not adequately responded to the problem of genocide. In a recent study, Samantha Power writes critically of the U.S. government's failures to react to such atrocities. From 1915 when the young Henry Morgenthau Sr., then U.S. ambassador to Turkey, warned State Department officials of Turkish massacres of Armenians, to John Western, the junior intelligence analyst on Bosnia in 1993, who reported on atrocities in the former Yugoslavia, senior officials in Washington have been slow to react, if they reacted at all. The same was true in Rwanda in the 1990s, where the death of over eight hundred thousand innocents still did not bring sufficient international pressure to end the killings. According to Power:

> U.S. officials spin themselves (as well as the American public) about the nature of the violence in question and the likely impact of an American intervention. They render the bloodshed two-sided and inevitable, not genocidal. They insist that any proposed U.S. response will be futile. Indeed, it may even do more harm that good, bringing perverse consequences to the victims and jeopardizing other precious American moral or strategic interests. They brand as "emotional" those U.S. officials who urge intervention and who make moral arguments in a system that speaks principally in the cold language of interests. They avoid use of the word "genocide." Thus they can in good conscience favor stopping genocide in the abstract, while simultaneously oppoing American involvement in the moment.[57]

Perhaps we have not learned from the Holocaust. What was termed the "banality of evil" continues to plague mankind, although perhaps not quite on the scientific scale that it did under the evil leadership of Hitler.

What is argued here is that individuals, and especially the Latter-day Saint community, need to be more involved in speaking out against genocidal events. Moreover, we must invoke divine assistance, through individual prayers and actions, in order to promote peace and stability in the world. Butterfield would certainly be in agreement with this approach, as he taught that we live in a universe in which God is directly involved with human affairs, but also a place in which He expects His children to cooperate in the struggle against evil. This is, as Butterfield suggested, a dangerous universe, but one in which we can do something positive to shape the future course of history.

It is argued here that there are significant ideas on Providence in Butterfield's thought that are attractive to ongoing discussions on the role of God in history. There is the belief in his writings of the constant workings of God in human affairs. While his metaphor of God creating harmony out of the discordance of amateur musicians might seem too restrictive, his other musi-

cal metaphor of the Beethoven symphony offers some significant insight. God is seen as compassionate and concerned about His human family. Or, in his words, God is making the best happen in human affairs that is possible, given our agency and the divine nature of the human personality. The idea of the promise is also not altogether foreign to the Latter-day Saint views of covenants operative between God and man, although belief in covenants are taken to an even higher plane than Butterfield envisioned. These are some features of Butterfield's thought that might be seen as useful to discussions within the Latter-day Saint community.

Still, the position that is perhaps most important to consider out of Butterfield's thought is his Old Testament perspective on the promise. Butterfield conceived of good things happening within the human family in spite of the enormous mistakes that we make as individuals, nations, and as an international community. Out of human tragedies always comes a renewal of God's commitment to His human family. To make sense of Butterfield, we must look at the tragedies of history and attempt to reconcile these horrors to our views of Providence. It would seem that too often we are insular in our approach, often seeing the past and the present from a restricted, perhaps regional perspective, rather than a view that would encompass events from the history of the world. And, any way we try to reconcile the historical experience of the twentieth century, the extremes of human evil must be taken into account. Butterfield did not deny that this was so.

If we move forward, slightly into our century, we find the threefold horrors of the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and the crash of United Flight 93 in southwestern Pennsylvania, which killed over three thousand innocent people. We might surmise that Butterfield would rightly blame these tragedies on wicked men, although he would also raise questions about why such individuals engaged in such terrible acts. Consistent with his beliefs would be the idea that such horrible events have happened and will happen in the future, although it is our responsibility to try and counter such evil actions. Still, out of these tragedies (according to Butterfield) will come hope and the renewal of God's promise to mankind.

For at least some of the families of the victims of September 11, 2001, this was not enough. In various news interviews, some individuals expressed despair in the form of doubting God; if there were a god, he would not have allowed such events to happen. The experience of the twentieth century demonstrates, as we have seen, massive episodes of evil even greater than those of September 11. But the message of the true believer is that God is operative in such events, in the process of healing, and in efforts at building a better world. We can even say that God's purposes will triumph over the momentary manifestation of evil.

We are not immune to the powers of Satan. In the New Testament, Jesus prophesied of the terrible destruction of Jerusalem: "But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! For there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:23–24).

The foreseen calamity was part of the providential plan for the future, even though this involved loss of life, destruction of property, and even captivity. Yet out of such a tragedy would come hope and eventual fulfillment. What the Lord admonished to individuals in the face of such impending doom was personal diligence and commitment: "Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke 21:36). To this, we might add, belief in a future that lies within the providential order.

Such an interpretation, it would seem, would not be outside of the realm of Butterfield's teachings, although he probably would not have used such a prophetic example. Nevertheless we might learn from his view on the role of Providence, even if he gives us a slightly different perspective and even if he tended toward a general interpretation rather than expostulating on specific examples. Still, the different dimensions of his thought can perhaps assist us in raising our perspectives on the historical past to a higher level of insight. And even if we cannot see the hand of God in all events, we can at least be assured that our lives operate within the perspective of His purposes and that ultimately good will prevail out of the evils that mankind creates, if not in this life, in the eternities to come. We should never lose sight of the fact that God is the final author of the historical drama.

Notes

1. Herbert Butterfield, *Christianity and History* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1950).

2. For an assessment of Butterfield as a Christian historian, see Malcolm R. Thorp, *Herbert Butterfield and the Reinterpretation of the Christian Historical Perspective* (Lewiston, Queenston and Lampeter: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1997).

3. Butterfield, *Christianity and History*, 79.

4. Butterfield, "Christians in the Coming Period," in C. T. McIntire, ed., *Herbert Butterfield Writings on Christianity and History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 266.

5. Malcolm R. Thorp, "The Inescapable Predicament: Sir Herbert Butterfield's Reflections on the Human Dilemma," *Fides et Historia* 16 (Fall 1983), 7–17.

6. Butterfield, *Christianity and History*, 76.

7. Butterfield, *Christianity and History*, 68.

8. Cambridge University Library, Butterfield Papers, Box 92, "Christianity," untitled, 27.

9. Butterfield, "The Christian and the Biblical Interpretation of History," in McIntire, *Butterfield*, 185.

10. Butterfield, "God in History," in McIntire, *Butterfield*, 16.

11. Butterfield, "Originality of the Old Testament," in McIntire, *Butterfield*, 95.

12. Butterfield, "Reflections on Religion and Modern Individualism," in McIntire, *Butterfield*, 36.

13. Butterfield Papers, Box 69, "Buck Hill . . . Paper," 1.

14. Butterfield Papers, Box 3, Old Testament Paper Presented to the School of Oriental Studies, August 28, 1958.

15. Butterfield Papers, Box 92, "Christianity, typescript for Christmas number of *Methodist Recorder*," 3.

16. Butterfield Papers, Box 92, "Christianity," unpublished paper, "How the New Testament Has Influenced the Process of History," 8–9.

17. Herbert Butterfield, "The Crucifixion in Human History," *British Weekly* 126 (April 6, 1950): 2.

18. Butterfield presents a picture of "God presiding over this world of tumult and violence, of cupidity and fear, of struggle and cross-purposes—presiding over it and drawing upon it like a magnet, drawing men by the Lord of Love" (Butterfield, *History and Human Relations* [London: Collins, 1952], 52).

19. Butterfield Papers, Box 28, "Current Writings on Christianity," untitled, 33.

20. Butterfield, "God in History," in McIntire, *Butterfield*, 7.

21. Butterfield, "God in History," in McIntire, *Butterfield*, 6–7.

22. Butterfield Papers, Box 66, "Papers on Christianity," "Divine Judgment in History," 21.

23. Butterfield, *Christianity and History*, 109.

24. Butterfield Papers, Box 66, "Papers on Christianity," unpublished paper, 10.

25. Butterfield, *Christianity and History*, 111; Thorp, *Butterfield*, 47–48.

26. Butterfield, *Christianity and History*, 111.

27. Butterfield Papers, Box 28, "Current Writings on Christianity." According to Butterfield, "There is the hand of God in it [history] and over it, but you can't sort it out or extract the pattern—the pattern is just woven into the cloth. . . . The pattern is lost to our

eyes in a way because it comes into the weaving of the very cloth. Even our prayers make a difference" (Butterfield Papers, Box 92, "Christianity," untitled, 38).

28. Butterfield Papers, Box 92, "Christianity," untitled, 99.

29. Butterfield Papers, Box 15, "Rede Lecture," 16.

30. According to Butterfield, "Many of the cruelties and the degradation of personality are at the same time a feature of what we have called modern barbarism, wherever the phenomenon may appear; and it is possible that there is no cure for this save peace and a continuity of development, during which men may grow in reasonableness. It is modern technique and organisation, rather than any change in the quality of human nature—save, possibly such change as the technical developments themselves almost inevitably produce—which have altered the scale of atrocities in the modern world" (Butterfield, *Christianity and History*, 143–44).

31. Herbert Butterfield, *The Englishman and His History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1944), 11 and passim.

32. Thorp, *Butterfield*, 188–89.

33. Thorp, *Butterfield*, 55.

34. For a recent study arguing for a much greater pattern of complicity among the German populace, see Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

35. R. A. C. Parker, *The Second World War: A Short History* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 280. For British tergiversations over the dilemma of the European Jews, see Bernard Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe, 1939–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

36. For interesting examples of German complicity, see Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933–1945* (London: Lime Tree, 1993).

37. Z. Brzezenski, as quoted in Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (London: Abacus Books, 1995), 12.

38. For a recent assessment of these events, largely from a secular perspective, see Jonathan Glover, *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001). For a critical assessment of the difficulties of atrocities and American policy, see Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell: America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

39. Martin Gilbert has documented many of these events. See *A History of the Twentieth Century*, 3 vols. (New York: Harper Collins, 2000). Gilbert concludes that "there are many catastrophes of the century that do not get the space they might have received, and perhaps ought to have received; and some perforce are absent altogether." This would suggest that the above figures are suggestive but not necessarily all inclusive (see Gilbert, 3:912).

40. Butterfield Papers, Box 66, "Papers on Christianity," untitled, n.p.

41. Butterfield Papers, Box 5, "Morality and the Historical Process," 16.

42. See Thorp, *Butterfield and the Reinterpretation*, 60–62.

43. Butterfield Papers, Box 28, "Current Writings on Christianity," untitled, n.p.

44. Butterfield asserted that moral judgment on such tyrants is executed within the course of the actual events created by such people: "In this sense, a judgment of God on mammoth systems [of evil] is almost embedded in the Providential order, in the very constitution of things. And, of course, where it is *superbia* and intellectual arrogance—where a Napoleon or a Hitler goes so far that he seems to defy Heaven itself—then the ancient Hebrews and the ancient Greeks come still closer to one another—many an ordinary historian will regard the final catastrophe as a judgment" (Butterfield Papers, Box 66, untitled, 10).

45. Butterfield, "God in History," 8.

46. Thorp, *Butterfield*, 55.

47. Kenneth Surin, *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 142–63 passim.

48. Eli Wiesel, "Selections from Night," in *Holocaust Religious and Philosophical Implications*, ed. John K. Roth and Michael Berenbaum (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 272.

49. In partial response to Wiesel, Irving Greenberg has written, "The religious enterprise after this

event must see itself as a desperate attempt to create, save, and heal the image of God wherever it still exists—lest further evidence of meaninglessness finally tilt the scale irreversibly. Before this calling, all other 'religious' activity is dwarfed" (see Irving Greenberg, "Cloud of Smoke, Pillar of Fire," in *Holocaust: Religious and Philosophical Implications*, 332).

50. F. Tillman, "All Captives Slain," *New York Times*, December 18, 1937, 1, 10; reprinted in *Modern History Sourcebook: the Nanking Massacre, 1937*, http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/nanking.html.

51. "Massacres of the Second World War," 31, at http://members.iinet.net.au/~gduncan/massacres.html.

52. Gilbert, *Twentieth Century*, 3:912.

53. See Malcolm R. Thorp, "The Inescapable Predicament: Sir Herbert Butterfield's Reflections on the Human Dilemma," *Fides et Historia* 16 (Fall 1983): 7–17.

54. See Thorp, *Herbert Butterfield*, chapter on the Nuclear Dilemma, 181–204.

55. Joseph F. Smith, *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Joseph F. Smith* (Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve, 1998), 286.

56. Glover, *Humanity*, 409.

57. Power, "*A Problem from Hell*," 505, 381, xviii.