

Providential History

The Need for Continuing Revelation

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For millennia, humans have woven assertions of God's influence into their histories. Accounts of God's guiding hand and abiding presence in the Old and New Testaments established a precedent and model for subsequent historical work in the Western world. Indeed, providential history, in which writers worked from the assumption that a sovereign God governs human affairs, became the dominant form of historical interpretation from the time of Augustine, a Christian father and Bishop of Hippo in the fifth century, through the seventeenth century, when the French historian and theologian Jacques-Benigne Bossuet wrote his *Discourse on Universal History*, a history from the Creation to the time of the Holy Roman Empire. On a smaller scale but with a similar emphasis upon the sacred, Bossuet's contemporary, the American minister Cotton Mather, recounted the history of Puritan colonization and evangelism in New England in *Magnalia Christi Americana* ("The Great Achieve-

ments of Christ in America"). Many providential histories placed the world on a timeline consisting of seven dispensations beginning with the Creation and ending with the Last Judgment, with Christ's birth marking the central point. These ecclesiastical narratives, reflecting the influence of Augustine, who had distinguished between spiritual history and secular developments and had given primacy to the spiritual, figured prominently in many histories as illustrations of spiritual progress. But changes were in the offing: from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, developments including textual criticism by humanists, new geographical discoveries, the Protestant Reformation, and new scientific knowledge prepared the way for more secular approaches to world history.¹

This chapter briefly surveys the general albeit uneven decline of providential history, beginning with the criticisms of Enlightenment thinkers and culminating in the virtual disappearance of

providential history in the Western world by 1900. It then traces in greater detail a revival of interest on the part of historians in writing both providential history and history informed by Christian faith. This revival began in earnest in the 1940s and persisted in various forms over the balance of the century. While the number of scholars involved in writing providential history and Christian history has been relatively small, the professional debates surrounding their efforts are portentous for Latter-day Saints; they show that Christian historians who have sincerely sought to relate their faith in God to their scholarship without compromising either have encountered immense challenges. Some historians have boldly incorporated discussions of God and divine design within their work, but others have cautioned that the most a Christian historian can responsibly do is to judge human actions according to biblically based morality. Without modern revelation, the obstacles to writing providential history, even for those who are convinced that God is integrally involved in human affairs, are generally overwhelming.

DECLINE OF PROVIDENTIAL INTERPRETATIONS

Many factors hastened the decline of providential history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Enlightenment thinkers in the eighteenth century delivered some of the most direct and devastating blows to providential historical writing. They pointed out that providential interpretations such as the notion that kings ruled by divine right had been used by church and state to bolster authority, deflect criticism, and justify tyranny. Voltaire mocked Biblical writers and Christian historians for their emphasis upon the supernatural and miracles to the exclusion of rigorous naturalistic analysis, their preoccupation with “‘that miserable little people,’ the Jews,” their neglect of civilizations outside the Judeo-Christian tradition, and their use of history to attack rival churches.² Attributing human error to

a lack of education or to societal defects, many Enlightenment philosophers venerated human reason and progress in lieu of the God of the Bible. Many of these thinkers were curious optimists, observed Carl Becker; “they denied that miracles ever happened, but believed in the perfectability of the human race.”³ The transformation wrought by the Enlightenment was swift. As Ernest Breisach has observed, in European historical work written in the 1700s, “direct divine intervention was relegated to rare occasions, Divine Providence was reduced to a vague concept,” and the traditional timeline of Christian historiography running from Creation to Judgment was replaced with a new subdivision of history into ancient, medieval, and modern eras.⁴

While Deists in the 1700s retained a belief in God, they reasoned that He governed from a distance through natural laws rather than through special providences or direct intervention. Along with nonbelievers, they identified a secularized, humanized vision of Providence—progress, guided by human reason, freedom, and innovation—as the driving engine of history. As Ernest Breisach has observed, this interpretation was “proposed, debated, and praised in many works” until it became “a broadly shared expectation.”⁵ The celebration of progress reached its apex in Antoine-Nicolas de Condorcet’s *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1795). It continued, though, into the Romantic Era, influencing such luminaries as Thomas Macaulay, whose *History of England from the Accession of James II* (1848–61) took England by storm. In an 1835 essay, for instance, Macaulay wrote, “The history of England is emphatically the history of progress. It is the history of a constant movement of the public mind, of a constant change in the institutions of a great society.”⁶

Despite the impact of the Enlightenment, providential history revived in the 1800s as Enlightenment ideas temporarily fell from favor. In England, the Enlightenment philosophers, including Voltaire and Rousseau, were “read little”

and “studied little” between the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo in 1815 and the 1860s.⁷ In France, providential interpretations undergirded the work of Catholic historians, including François René de Chateaubriand and François Guizot.⁸ The latter wrote in his *History of Civilization in Europe* that man “bears within him something extrinsic—something superior to his existence on earth”—and that social progress and “the regeneration of the moral man” resulted from Providence working through Christianity.⁹ Leopold von Ranke, a professor at the University of Berlin, trained scores of budding professional historians to conduct archival research and concern themselves primarily with war, diplomacy, and politics. Remembered by his students as the “father of historical science,” Ranke believed that nation-states had evolved to achieve God’s will, and he urged historians to write about “the life of the individual, of generations, or nations, and at times the hand of God above them.”¹⁰ Providential history was even more prominent and pronounced in the United States, persisting through the end of the nineteenth century in popular work. American historians such as George Bancroft, the nation’s most widely read and influential historian in the late nineteenth century, blended a belief in progress and in Divine Providence, attributing American history to both forces. Bancroft interpreted the progress of the American colonies toward independence as “the change which Divine Wisdom ordained.”¹¹ The vision of the American nation as a divinely destined force for virtue and progress was so central to Americans’ vision of themselves and of their past that historian Conrad Cherry has called it “the essence of America’s motivating mythology.”¹²

Despite a resurgence of providential assertions in the nineteenth century, they were timid compared to those of medieval writers and they coexisted, particularly in Europe, with secular approaches. For instance, Ranke and his disciples generally offered material rather than spiritual explanations for historical change, focusing

upon natural forces, including geography, economics, and psychology, that seemed to have shaped history. In this context, watered down providential theories were readily replaced in Europe by secular interpretations in the final decades of the nineteenth century. Industrialization, materialism, class conflict, higher criticism of the Bible, and the Darwinian theory of evolution, as popularly understood, combined to reduce faith, fuel skepticism about miracles and the supernatural, and discredit assertions about God’s role in history. Even the most fundamental, biblically grounded instances of divine intervention in traditional Christian histories were questioned: higher critics and archaeologists recklessly flayed the Old Testament, dismissing its record of the tribes of Israel as historically unreliable, while the French philologist and Hebraist Ernest Renan questioned Jesus’s divinity in his widely read *Life of Jesus*. Evolutionary theory suggested alternatives to the Biblical account of creation and invited religious people to rethink their perceptions of God as “an old and kindly gentleman”¹³ who rested on the seventh day. As Owen Chadwick has observed, evolutionary theory suggested an alternative to the providential history of the Creation in Genesis and thereby jeopardized one of “the last places of a special intervention by a creating, acting, living God.”¹⁴

Quick to dispense with Providence, many historians at the turn of the century possessed an abiding faith in the order and predictability of the physical and social world. Influenced in part by Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution, which many equated with progress, many of this first generation of professional social scientists looked for general laws that could explain human progression and cultural development.¹⁵ For instance, the founder of anthropogeography, Friedrich Ratzel, asserted a deterministic, inevitable relationship between environment and culture, arguing that “lands, no matter how distant from one another they may be, whenever

their climates are similar, are destined to be scenes of analogous historical developments.”¹⁶

Historians were also influenced by the disillusionment and despair engendered by the First World War, scientific advances including Albert Einstein’s theory of relativity, and the relativistic approaches of anthropologists in cultural studies. Beginning in the 1920s, historians applied relativity to their own field, emphasizing flux and chaos rather than any order rooted in divine oversight or natural law. Writing in the 1930s, historian Carl Becker, an ardent proponent of historical relativity, caricatured the nineteenth century’s search for historical order premised upon natural law, cleverly describing how “the Bible says, and the Middle Ages agreed, that man cannot add a cubit to his stature by taking thought; the eighteenth century insisted that he could; the nineteenth maintained that cubits would be added to his stature whether he took thought or not.”¹⁷

Still, the belief in historical regularity and order persisted among laymen, particularly in the United States. Indeed, Americans liked to think in terms of turning points in history, speculated Oscar Handlin, because turning points reduced “the inexplicable and cataclysmic . . . to one incident,” leaving “the rest of history subject to the regularity of law.”¹⁸ In *Chance or Destiny: Turning Points in American History*, Handlin sought to beat down these persistent beliefs by discussing eight pivotal occurrences in American history, including the Louisiana Purchase and the sinking of the *Lusitania*, raising serious questions about “the nature of such turning points and their places in history.”¹⁹ His conclusions left little room for God or natural law. He sought to demonstrate that “chance played a role in history” and that “we are ourselves the products of a series of accidents.” Handlin acknowledged that institutions and forces influenced history, too, as did individuals who seized unexpected opportunities, but the opportunities themselves arose from “the momentary convergence of a

myriad of factors, personal and social” that were “the products of altogether separate chains of causes and effects.”²⁰

RESURGENCE OF PROVIDENTIAL THEMES AND CHRISTIAN SCHOLARSHIP

Whereas many historians joined Handlin and Becker in scorning absolutes and embracing relativism and chance, others, particularly in Europe, rejected the relativists’ claim that order and patterns did not exist. For instance, Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee looked for common developmental patterns in the histories of cultures. The influential *Annales* school in France addressed fundamental structural continuities in environment and in climate over the long duration of human history, while Marxist historians identified recurring patterns of class struggle.²¹ Other historians in the 1930s, ’40s, and ’50s responded to the cataclysmic developments of their era by anchoring their interpretations of history in Christian conceptions of good and evil, Providence and agency. Although relatively few historians participated in this development, C. T. McIntire characterized this surge of interest in providential history in the middle decades of the twentieth century as “a major [intellectual] movement.”²² Beginning in the 1930s, some European philosophers and theologians, including Nikolai Berdyaev, Paul Tillich, H. G. Wood, and John MacMurray, eloquently pled for a reappraisal of God’s role in history. Following the Second World War, the Holocaust, and the onset of the Cold War with its attendant fears of Communism, the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr and two historians in Britain, Christopher Dawson and Herbert Butterfield, published seminal work on the subject of God and religion in history. They advanced providential history while at the same time attempting to give human nature, agency, and the physical world their due.²³ Butterfield, the subject of a subsequent chapter in this volume, rejected the Deist view of “an absentee God leaving man at the mercy of

chance in a universe, blind, stark, and bleak." He insisted instead that history was meaningful and "eschatological" in its revelations of God and in its unfolding of the "real conflict between good and evil."²⁴ Dawson championed the Christian view of history, with its "belief in the intervention by God in the life of mankind by direct action at certain definite points in time and place." He wrote that divine intervention was most apparent in the life and mission of Jesus but that it also occurred in "the providential preparation of mankind for the Incarnation," "the life of the Christian Church," and the future events connected with "the final establishment of the Kingdom of God when the harvest of this world is reaped."²⁵ Rather than identifying specific events with Providence, Dawson's chief objective was to demonstrate the centrality of religion, broadly defined, to culture, and to chart Western society's departure from its Christian foundations between the Middle Ages, when "the relatively poverty stricken peoples of medieval Europe erected vast cathedrals and abbeys" as reflections of their faith, and the modern era, when "we build temples greater than the Egyptian pyramids or the Gothic cathedrals . . . dedicated to toothpaste or chewing gum."²⁶

Dawson's and Butterfield's work gained an audience in the United States among professional historians, and Dawson eventually held a chair in Catholic studies at Harvard, but among historians in the United States in the postwar era, it was Kenneth Latourette in his 1948 presidential address before the American Historical Association who most prominently promoted the providential approach to history. Latourette, a professor of missions and Oriental history at Yale University and a devout Baptist, summarized the Christian view of history for his colleagues: "Christians believe that God is the creator of the universe and rules throughout all its vast reaches. . . . This means . . . that all of reality is one and under the control of God, and that the human drama is part and parcel of the far larger

unity of God's creation. Ultimately and in His own way, so the Christian view maintains, God is sovereign in the affairs of men."²⁷ Latourette attributed "most of man's misery and frustration" to poor choices or abuse of freedom and believed that "ultimately God will triumph. History moves toward a culmination. Whether within or beyond time God's will is to be accomplished and His full sovereignty will be seen to have prevailed."²⁸ Short of that day, how might the historian glimpse God's hand in history? For Latourette as for Augustine, the historian who would "understand history as God sees it . . . must focus his attention upon events which he would normally ignore."²⁹ Christ, for instance, did not seek an earthly kingdom and avoided politics. Instead, God's influence would be felt beyond the birth, mission, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus through the ministrations of the Holy Spirit and the consequent spread of Christianity and growth in "the influence of Jesus" worldwide.³⁰ Latourette saw evidence of the ministration of the Holy Spirit in the role of Christianity and the Church in promoting art, education, literature, morals, democracy, literacy, pacifism, abolitionism, and internationalism. As William Speck has observed, Latourette "ignore[d] the spiritual and cultural arrogance underlying the missionary enterprise" and minimized "the damage missions have done to foreign societies." Moreover, Latourette was prone to identify God with the religious endeavors in which Latourette personally participated.³¹ Despite these weaknesses in Latourette's approach, his presidential address provoked no debate within the pages of the *American Historical Review* following its publication. But it also failed to inspire a significant shift in American historical scholarship toward providential interpretations.³²

In part, providential history failed to catch on because it proved untenable for many devout Christians as well as for atheists. In 1950, the Christian philosopher and writer C. S. Lewis charged that historians who attempted to write

God into history were “at the very best, wasting their time.” He believed that “history is a story written by the finger of God” but felt that for several reasons humans lacked the faculties to perceive that story. First, historians are prisoners of the present who can glimpse the end of the world only through prophecy and who do not even know precisely “what stage in the journey we have reached.” Lewis likened the providential historian to a person arriving at the theater midway through a play, with only a fragmentary knowledge of what has gone before and no knowledge of what lies ahead. Such a person might easily “mistake a mere super [or extra] in a fine dress for one of the protagonists.” Second, humans notice only a portion of the events that transpire and record an even smaller portion. “Most of the experiences in ‘the past as it really was’ were instantly forgotten by the subject himself.” Third, although humans record the things they consider to be most important, there is no guarantee that their assessments of importance square with God’s criteria. Fourth, even the fragmentary records humans create are imperfectly preserved. “Do you ever turn out an old drawer,” queried Lewis, “without wondering at the survival of trivial documents and the disappearance of those which everyone would have thought worth preservation?”³³

Butterfield, Dawson, and Latourette failed to overcome the objections of critics like Lewis and did not stimulate an outpouring of providential history. But their work, in tandem with other forces, including the Cold War reaction against all things Communist, did create a climate in the 1950s and 1960s in which historians could openly relate their religious beliefs to their historical questions and interpretations—a decided advantage for scholars who desired to relate God to history. In the words of Princeton historian E. Harris Harbison, it became “respectable” to be a “scholar who is also a Christian.”³⁴ In 1954, French historian Henri-Irénée Marrou considered the implications of Christian theology for

historical inquiry, particularly regarding Western civilization, in *De la connaissance historique*.³⁵ In North America, Princeton University, where Harris Harbison had once been dubbed the “departmental Christian,” attracted a cadre of eminent historians who reflected publicly on the implications of their religious beliefs for their scholarship.³⁶ In addition to Harbison, who delivered a series of lectures on Christian views of history in the 1950s drawing American audiences’ attention to the work of Butterfield and Neibuhr, his colleague Georges Florovsky explored the obligations of the Christian historian to cautiously “attempt to reveal the actual course of events in the light of his Christian knowledge of man.”³⁷ In 1962, another Princeton historian, Arthur Link, published his ruminations on “what it means to be a Christian as historian” and “what it means to understand history as a Christian.”³⁸ Meanwhile, Jeffrey Russell, a young historian at the University of New Mexico, and Paul Ward, a senior historian at the Carnegie Institute of Technology, made the case for a limited integration of Christian commitment with historical writing and teaching, arguing that insights, questions, and limited interpretations could legitimately be shaped by the religious historians’ world view.³⁹ But, Ward cautioned, “strong belief on grounds of faith must be deliberately shelved until after working hours.”⁴⁰

Harris Harbison’s moderate views regarding the relationship of Christian belief to historical scholarship typify the cautious tenor of these discussions. Harbison identified “the very essence of a Christian understanding of history” as “the strange paradox that God both reveals and conceals Himself in history.” Thus, the spiritual significance of history could not be “unambiguously clear” to any historian “as a human being.” Noting the tendency of earlier generations to trace the history of God within institutions such as the Roman Catholic Church or to look for God’s hand in events from the miracles of the saints to the outcomes of battles, Harbison

instead believed that the Christian historian should be marked by a more circumspect Christian "attitude toward history." In his teaching and writing he would manifest "the Christian's respect for human personality in general." His work would be morally relevant but not simplistic in its moralizing. How would God enter into his interpretations? "Where materialists may see mere blind process, where rationalists may see evident progress, he will see providence—a divine *providing* in both the conscious decisions and the unintended results of history, a purpose partly revealed and partly concealed, a destiny . . . in which human freedom and divine guidance complete each other in some mysterious way." He would look for God in history with "a sense of pondering and wondering more than of either dogmatizing or doubting."⁴¹

In his 1964 presidential address before the American Society of Church History, Albert Outler extended the case for including God in historical writing. Outler pointed to the tentative nature of historical research, dependent as it is on fragmentary records. Cautiously, he reminded historians of the presence of pivotal yet almost unbelievable "chance occurrences" in history and the paradox that humans are rooted in nature yet transcend it in their "self-consciousness and freedom." Could divine influence be the reason behind these historical mysteries? While Outler rejected "glib and always unverifiable" claims of episodic *divine intervention* or special providences, he argued that the mysteries and surprises of history justified the inclusion of references to *pronoia*, or "God's total resourcefulness in dealing with his human children" in historians' accounts. Without offering examples of how it was to be done, he claimed that history could be justly interpreted in light of God's compassion, his redemptive love, and his decree that sin and death would ultimately be subdued.⁴²

In 1964, one seminarian disputed the general consensus among Christian scholars that religion might help historians to understand hu-

man beings but that historians lacked the evidence to trace God's direct influence or special providences. John Warwick Montgomery argued, as had Latourette, for more explicitly providential interpretations. A professor of church history at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and a conservative Christian apologist, Montgomery proposed the "Christian conception of history" as a means of discovering "genuine meaning and purpose in history." Montgomery reflected, "Let us suppose that the historical process were known in its entirety by a God who created both the process and the people who take a part in it. Now if this were the case, and if that God entered the human sphere and revealed to men the origin and goal of the historical drama, the criteria for significance and value in the process, the true nature of the human participants in the drama, and the ethical values appropriate to the process, then, obviously, the question, 'Where is history going?' could be successfully and meaningfully answered. A gigantic If, you say. True, but this is precisely the central contention of the Christian religion." Montgomery believed that the life of Christ and the Biblical teachings, which were "to be regarded as revealed truth," held the keys to historical interpretation. Although God's judgmental hand was not always "transparent" it could be discerned in light of Biblical principles and foreshadowings, in developments from "the fall of decadent Rome" to the "annihilation of the demonic fascism of the Third Reich."⁴³

THE CONFERENCE ON FAITH AND HISTORY AND THE CALVIN SCHOOL OF HISTORIOGRAPHY

The interests of Montgomery and other Christian scholars, particularly from an evangelical tradition, led to the founding of the Conference on Faith and History in 1967 and the establishment of a new professional journal, *Fides et Historia*. Initially the organization included many history-minded ministers and seminarians. In fact, Montgomery's Christian apologetics, including

his insistence upon Biblical inerrancy, were frequently reviewed and defended in the journal between 1970 and 1974.⁴⁴ Some authors went beyond Montgomery in their providential claims. For instance, Janette Bohi, a history professor at the University of Wisconsin–Whitewater, argued in an article in 1973 that “all events of history [were] tied” to a three-pronged divine program: “the preservation of moral law, the preaching of the gospel, and a partiality to the Jew.” With these purposes in mind and with the Bible and prayer as “a source of instruction,” the Christian historian could “dimly read God’s time chart.”⁴⁵

However, some professional historians who had joined the Conference on Faith and History, hoping to nurture their religious convictions without turning their backs on their historical training, found “Montgomery’s apologetics an embarrassment.”⁴⁶ Their perspective on the writing of providential history closely resembled the cautious views advanced by Harbison and others a decade earlier, but it bore the imprint of Dutch Reformed theology’s view of man. By the mid-1970s these scholars had succeeded in affiliating the Conference on Faith and History with the American Historical Association and in reorienting the nature of the scholarly dialogue in the Conference’s journal. The journal’s editorial offices moved to Calvin College, an institution supported by the Christian Reformed Church in America. In time, these scholars’ brand of Christian history would come to be called “the Calvin school of historiography.”⁴⁷

Historians on the Calvin faculty who would play a prominent role in shifting the focus of the debate over Christian history included Frank C. Roberts, George M. Marsden, Dirk W. Jellema, Edwin J. Van Kley, Dale K. Van Kley, M. Howard Rienstra, and Ronald A. Wells. C. T. McIntire, a faculty member at the Institute for Christian Studies (ICS) in Toronto (a graduate institution rooted in the same Dutch Reformed tradition as Calvin College), lent stature and energy to the movement. McIntire gathered and edited essays

by eminent philosophers, theologians, and historians on providential history for publication by Oxford University Press under the title *God, History, and Historians: Modern Christian Views of History*. The first book to emerge from the Calvin school, containing chapters by many of the participants, was *A Christian View of History?* (1975). While the contributors believed that “biblical revelation must be the starting point for the Christian historian,” they were skeptical of the “overassurance” of scholars such as Montgomery or even Latourette who, they charged, “play down the complexity and ambiguity of history and . . . emphasize the clarity of the divine plan and purpose in events of the past . . . pointing out the good and evil forces within history.” While they disparaged such “clear-cut or easy answers” about God’s role in history they insisted that “valuable things can be learned through the study of history concerning God and man and the way man ought to relate to his neighbor.”⁴⁸

Elaborating upon these generalities, one of the editors, George Marsden, observed that the Bible recorded God’s actions, but he argued against the “traditional approach to Christian history” in which writers such as Montgomery extrapolated from biblical patterns and revelations to explain the rest of history. Such writers drew, for instance, upon the Old Testament theme that “God visibly blesses men and nations who serve him and punishes those who do not” in order to conclude that the outcome of the American Civil War, the fall of the Third Reich, or the defeat of the Spanish Armada were manifestations of God’s judgment. Pointing out that the New Testament provided an alternate pattern of divine influence in which the righteous were told to expect to suffer for their beliefs, Marsden argued against broadly applying principles from one era to another. He contended instead that “all we do know is that God has worked in our history and is continuing to work, but outside of biblical revelation we do not know clearly his

precise purposes in permitting particular historical developments." Marsden posited that the Christian historian might admit divine influence as a "possible causal explanation" because of his belief in "the continuing active work of the Holy Spirit," but not to the exclusion of other causal factors. Christian historians' work would be distinguished largely by their biblically based views concerning the nature of man. Thus, from a perspective of religious belief, the Christian scholar might discuss the great gains in science and technology during the Enlightenment but also the detrimental effects of substituting human reason and science for revelation and religion. In short, the Christian historian would "uncover man's self-deceptions" as well as his achievements.⁴⁹

In 1984, four of the contributors to *A Christian View of History?* joined with four other scholars in taking "another step in the development"⁵⁰ of the Calvin school's approach, producing *History and Historical Understanding*. While the articles in the volume varied in approach, they all proceeded from the assumption that "the days are gone when a Christian interpretation of history meant mainly telling about God in history, looking for God's action and judgment or the advance of his purposes."⁵¹ As one of the contributors, Martin Marty, reminded readers, "Christians cannot meet the ordinary canons of critical or analytical history when they make claims for verification of a transcendent intrusion in the human past."⁵² Embracing those canons, the authors instead sought to show that religious people who "view as important some details of the picture that others overlooked as simply incidental"⁵³ might make significant revisionist contributions. While most of the authors approached these issues in abstract terms, Dale Van Kley offered a concrete example in a revisionist essay arguing that religious ideology played an integral role in the French Revolution, a political movement that most scholars have viewed from a secular vantage point.

After joining the history department at Notre Dame, Marsden went on to more fully articulate and refine the approach growing out of his experiences at Calvin College in his 1997 classic, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*. Whereas Harris Harbison had encouraged the believing historian to at least wonder about divine influences⁵⁴ and whereas Marsden himself had once felt it permissible for the Christian scholar to identify divine action as a possible causal factor, he now advised historians to entirely avoid speculation about divine intervention. "The very nature of spiritual reality is mysterious, so that we have only the most general notions of its meanings," he maintained. "One of the most common mistakes of Christian thinkers has been to fail to recognize the limits of their own knowledge of the mysterious spiritual realm. For instance, Christians have often confused the belief *that* the Holy Spirit is working in history and in our lives with the ability to tell precisely *how* the Spirit works. That is the problem with many older providential views of history. Those who held such views had a commendable sense of God's active role in history, but they also thought they could identify God's special providences." Marsden believed that it was "impossible to sort out" the divine from the human in history; what could be known theologically was that "we are involved in a great spiritual struggle between the forces of darkness and light." Taking this "most important" insight into account, the Christian historian would arrive at moral judgments based upon "critical Christian thinking."⁵⁵

A fascinating early application of the approach advocated in *A Christian View of History?* was a series of essays published in 1981 that examined America's wars from the American Revolution to the Vietnam War from a Christian perspective. Avoiding questions of divine will and sovereignty, the authors focused instead upon the morality of America's wars. Having avoided what they considered to be the temptation to

play God by claiming to discern His hand, they nevertheless attempted to judge men based upon their understanding of God's standards, giving the book a distinctively religious tone. The contributors were eight members of the Conference on Faith and History—Ronald Wells, George Marsden, Ralph Beebe, Ronald Rietveld, August Cerillo Jr., Robert Bolt, Richard Pierard, and Robert Clouse. Building upon Reinhold Neibuhr's characterization of God as a being "who laughs at human pretensions without being hostile to human aspirations," they examined America's military involvements from the perspective of biblically based standards of just war (or, in the case of Beebe, of passivism). They judged that "no American war was begun with a conscious choice of evil" but they generally concluded that America's wars had been unjust, that Christians had perverted religion to support militarism, and that America's martial spirit was rooted in its "prior acceptance of [a] pretentious view of itself and of its role in world history."⁵⁶

Ronald Wells, the editor of the foregoing volume, ambitiously carried the Calvin College agenda further, approaching Western civilization generally from the Christian perspective in *History through the Eyes of Faith* (1989). Therein he narrated and appraised historical developments such as the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the Scientific Revolution in light of Christian doctrine. The book is, on balance, a lively and engaging interpretive study. Although writing primarily for a Christian audience, Wells studiously avoided speculation about God's role in history, aside from the life and Resurrection of Jesus, as if his audience did not share his belief in a sovereign God. The history of Christianity occupied a prominent place in Wells's narrative, particularly from the time of Christ through the Counter-Reformation. In many cases Wells sought to disabuse Christians of simplistic, theologically based preconceptions of eras, institutions, or movements, including the medieval church, the Dark Ages, and the Protestant Reformation. In his dis-

cussions of political, economic, and intellectual currents, his religious biases and judgmental attitudes particularly animated his discussion of secularization: "Begun in the Renaissance and completed in the Enlightenment was a steady progression of human assertion that increasingly marginalized the spiritual realm of human existence even as it emphasized the capacities and capabilities of humankind." Wells contended that this "secular-scientific humanism" had "led humankind down a blind alley."⁵⁷ In much of the book, though, his desire "to avoid simple judgmentalism" produced what appeared to Westminster Theological Seminary's Darryl G. Hart to be "fairly generic" surveys and "tepid" discussions of the spiritual dimension in history.⁵⁸

While the concessions made for the sake of broad academic acceptance appeared to some to be selling out, Wells, Marsden, and others in the Calvin school did help to create a climate in which historians could seriously study religious convictions and supernatural experiences as phenomena that "could not be wholly reduced to naturalistic categories." Their work provided a rationale for rejecting reductionist assumptions that "empirically demonstrable explanations are the only, or even the most important, explanations." In their explanations, divine influence remained a possibility in explaining religious experience.⁵⁹

In this climate, some Christian historians of religion working in mainstream academic settings and publishing in mainline venues made the case for moving even further in their claims of spiritual and supernatural realities. Jeffrey Burton Russell of the University of California at Santa Barbara, for instance, argued that by discerning patterns in human experiences with the supernatural (visions of heaven, encounters with Satan) over the centuries, one could attain the "surest truth available to us in this world."⁶⁰ The truths arrived at would not be absolute, but their general tendencies would probably be reliable.

The arguments of Marsden and others for relating Christian belief to historians' central questions, assumptions, and models also yielded important exploratory work. In *History and the Christian Historian* (1998), thirteen scholars related Christian perspectives, or "angle[s] of vision," to historiographic currents such as women's history and to influential historical paradigms rooted in movements such as multiculturalism and postmodernism.⁶¹ For instance, in "Men, Women, and God: Some Historiographical Issues," Margaret L. Bendroth traced the emergence of feminist scholarship and the "subjective, personal engagement" of many feminist scholars with their approach. She then asked what Christian historians, who also bring a personal engagement to their subject, can learn from feminist historians about preachiness, ghettoization, and attempts to forge dialogue with historians of labor, race, art, and other fields.⁶² C. Stephen Evans drew upon postmodern theory in arguing that the "'modern' intellectual assumptions about the supernatural that we have inherited from the Enlightenment," including a rejection of the possibility of miracles, are assumptions that are not universally shared. Indeed, he pointed out, "traditional religious beliefs, including belief in the supernatural" are common in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and among the poor.⁶³

EVANGELICAL BACKLASH AND ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

Despite the useful perspectives and work arising from the Calvin school's approach, some evangelical historians found its products bland and difficult to distinguish from the work of secular historians. Darryl Hart, a church historian, contended that the label "Christian history" had been misappropriated by Marsden and others. At its core, Christian history is the story of God's dealings from the "first to the last Adam," and conflating it with "narratives of the United States, ethnic groups, or Western civilization," in order to sell Christian history to a secular audi-

ence, simply "distract[s] from the grander history of salvation."⁶⁴ Peter Russell of Fircroft College in England identified other liabilities of such an approach. First, the argument that God is present but that His actions cannot be discerned runs the risk of making not only discussions of God but the very concept of God peripheral to human existence. Second, the Calvin model compels believers to privatize their faith, restricting their ability to fulfill faith-based obligations to "witness" for God.⁶⁵ As Donald Yerxa and Karl Giberson explain, this creates "an incoherence between the commitments of one's discipline and one's faith."⁶⁶ Richard Lovelace, a historical theologian rather than an "academic historian," found the questions that Marsden asks to be insufficient: the study of the past is not spiritually fulfilling, he charged, if it stops short of asking, "Was it Christian or not? Was it renewal, or was it a blind alley that led nowhere?"⁶⁷

In light of these objections to the Calvin school's approach, it is not surprising that other approaches to writing about God in history have been explored in recent decades. Writing outside the American-Canadian tradition, in 1979 David W. Bebbington of the University of Stirling in Scotland argued that a Christian can "put his vision of the historical process into his writing," a vision that might encompass not only God's general superintendence of the world's history but also His direct intervention in minute details. Bebbington warned against overgeneralization, insisted that the historian must also recognize natural causes and human agency, and acknowledged that historians lack "the inspiration that gave the biblical historians their special insight." While acknowledging the need for humility because the historian is "a fallible human being who can speak only with diffidence beyond his own experience," Bebbington nevertheless thought it to be inconsistent for the believer with "personal experience of the intervention of God" in his life to suppress the urge "to discern it in the world as well." Bebbington thought that it

was reasonable to suggest supernatural influence when “the expected course of events [is] diverted in a way which accords with the character of God as the author of peace.”⁶⁸ He used the example of a Puritan writer, Richard Baxter, who attributed to divine mercy the peaceful disbanding of the English Army following the restoration of Charles II, notwithstanding the army’s history of conquest, murder, and disregard for civil liberties. While historians would be remiss if they did not recognize “the role of individuals” and “circumstances” as causal factors, “he will also wish to acknowledge, like Baxter, God’s merciful part in the process.” The believing historian might also look for “the characteristic divine tactic of bringing good out of evil,” as in the case of the fourteenth-century plagues, which contributed to a better standard of living for surviving laborers.⁶⁹ While such conclusions could not be proved definitively, they could be presented as plausible scenarios to audiences who shared the author’s belief in God.

Bebbington admitted that appeals to supernatural explanations would be unpersuasive to most nonbelievers. In writing for a more general audience, believing historians could “discern God at work in the past without necessarily writing of him there.” Their work would still be consonant with their faith, Bebbington asserted, if it reflected the moral sensibility of a Christian.⁷⁰

In 1981 W. Stanford Reid, a history professor at the University of Guelph, likewise argued that historians could know more of divine providence than Marsden or Wells allowed. Reid maintained that the concept of the “kingdom of God”—composed of “the whole of the divine redemptive work in the world” and including religious conversion, the Christian church, and the righteous endeavors of the converted—was “the key” to understanding sacred history. In a manner reminiscent of Latourette, Reid cited Christianity’s influence upon the Roman Empire in the fourth and fifth centuries, the church as a force for civilization in the Middle Ages, the Protestant

Reformation, abolitionism, the involvement of Christians in the British labor movement in the nineteenth century, and the missionary endeavors of Christians worldwide as evidence of God’s redemptive work. Movements rooted in the church or in Christian teachings that promoted dignity and freedom reflected God’s influence. He posited, too, that God’s hand could be seen in the fall of corrupt civilizations.⁷¹

In 2002, Donald A. Yerxa, a history professor at Eastern Nazarene College, agreed with Marsden that “believing historians” would “violate the methods of critical history”⁷² by introducing God into their work. As historians they are limited by the canons of their profession to evidence that is accessible to all other investigators. But why must historians claim that “critical history exhausts what can meaningfully be said about the past”? Yerxa advised historians to “engage theologians and philosophers in a more speculative level of transdisciplinary discussion” regarding God’s role in the past. The result would be interdisciplinary rather than strictly historical. For instance, historians might move beyond the canons of their discipline to consider the implications for their own work of the “risk view of providence” coming out of relational theology. In developing this view, philosopher and theologian John Sanders had proposed a theological model that historians might benefit from exploring: he posited a “genuine give and take between God and humans” in which God rejects micro-management of history in favor of “willing people [who might fail] to become collaborators in achieving the divine project.”⁷³

Yerxa’s consideration of relational theology and interdisciplinary dialogue, Reid’s experimentation with the concept of “the Kingdom” as a key to sacred history, and Bebbington’s arguments for providential explanations of historical surprises demonstrate the enduring allure of providential history. As long as Christians profess God’s sovereignty and glimpse His hand in their personal lives, many will wonder about

God's role in the broader sweep of history. Yet in the absence of prophets to point the way, they will be forced to extrapolate from general biblical patterns and principles, to be content with documenting the role of religion and religious sentiment in history, or to limit themselves to critiquing assumptions and behavior on the basis of morals or theology.

CONCLUSION

As the foregoing survey has shown, the obstacles to writing providential history, even for those who are convinced that God is integrally involved in human affairs, are generally overwhelming in the absence of modern revelation. As much as we desire to know God's purposes, "Knowledge of providence comes through inspiration to prophets. . . . We don't get there through study, as scholars," cautions C. John Sommerville, a historian at the University of Florida.⁷⁴ On the basis of historical methodology alone, Arthur Link reflected, "It is not given to me to say, 'Thus saith the Lord.' This is the prophet's word."⁷⁵ As George Marsden observed in 1975, through "biblical revelation" one may ascertain God's "precise purposes in permitting particular historical developments," but Christian historians generally recognize nothing dating since the biblical era that resembles the revelations of the Old and New Testaments.⁷⁶ David Bebbington dryly observed that modern historians "cannot write history in the manner, say, of the writer of the Second Book of Kings" because they lack "the inspiration that gave the biblical historians their special insight."⁷⁷

Revelation would change the equation dramatically, these Christian writers acknowledge, opening avenues for inquiry in many directions. Providential history might be written with "the special revelation God gave to the apostles and through the risen Christ," noted Darryl Hart.⁷⁸ C. S. Lewis decried the idea that humans, "by the use of their natural powers," could discern God's hand in history but admitted that if a writer "had

asked me to accept it on the grounds that it had been shown him in a vision, that would be another matter. . . . His claim (with supporting evidence in the way of sanctity and miracles) would not be for me to judge."⁷⁹

In Latter-day scripture and prophetic discourse Latter-day Saints possess an array of inspired sources that other Christian historians have only dreamed of. The prophetic statements in the Book of Mormon on American and world history, the revelations to Joseph Smith and other prophets in the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price, and the statements of modern prophets and apostles provide a wide range of sources for Latter-day Saint interpretation of providential history. These sources both enrich and complicate the work of the thoughtful Latter-day Saint historian. Such sources are not recognized as valid beyond the Latter-day Saint community and would therefore be unconvincing as evidence of God's purposes and influence in articles and books written for a mainstream audience. But when a Latter-day Saint historian writes to fellow Saints, these additional sources are most relevant, facilitating exploration of questions about God's intent and views that cannot be explored as fully using the Bible alone.

The experiences and perspectives of those whose work is surveyed in this chapter serve as reminders that even the most faith-filled historians operate without the prophetic mantle. Thus our natural tendencies as humans toward oversimplification, intellectual laziness, and ethnocentrism, coupled with our finite, temporal perspectives and our incomplete historical record, necessitate moderation and caution in writing about God in history. As David Bebbington recommends, natural forces, "circumstances," and human agency must also be given their due in historical explanations.⁸⁰ Even with the insights of modern revelation, Latter-day Saints should not play God by claiming to know more of His ways that we can truly ascertain. N. T. Wright, a New Testament scholar, offers valuable counsel

that applies to all Christians who hope to glimpse God through history: "One of the key words [in interpreting history] is Paul's little word *perhaps*, which he uses in Philemon. . . . 'Perhaps this is why Onesimus was parted from me for a while, so that you could have him back not just as a slave but as a brother' (Philemon 15). When Christians try to read off what God is doing even in their own situations, such claims always have to carry the word *perhaps* about with them as a mark of humility and of the necessary reticence of faith. That doesn't mean that such claims can't be made, but that they need to be made with a 'perhaps' which is always inviting God to come in and say, 'Well, actually, no.'"⁸¹

Because of the variety and complexity of Latter-day scripture and prophetic discourse, Wright's advice regarding cautious interpretation applies to Latter-day Saints in their use of modern revelation just as it does to Christians generally in their extrapolation from sacred records. Even inspired accounts of fundamental instances of divine intervention such as the First Vision and the restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood emphasize divergent elements and defy simplistic synthesis.⁸² This being the case, it is only natural that in some matters that are less central and doctrinally fundamental, the record is even more diverse and complex. As was the case in biblical times, modern apostles and prophets are inspired seers and revelators but also human beings who bear the imprint of their own cultures, backgrounds, and personalities; they sometimes speak, as Elder Bruce R. McConkie candidly observed, "with a limited understanding" and obtain truth "line upon line and precept upon precept."⁸³ The careful historian will be sensitive to nuances and differences of opinion within prophetic discourse as well as change over time in an inspired individual's rhetoric and views, bearing in mind Elder McConkie's description of the sometimes incremental nature of the revelatory process. Not all documents will be equally useful. Viewpoints

that defy conventional wisdom or cultural norms, official statements, or articulations of a broad consensus on the part of apostles and prophets may deserve particular attention. Building as Kenneth Latourette and Stanford Reid have done upon the insight that God's redemptive purposes are central, the history of what Reid calls the "Kingdom" may be the most fruitful field for those aspiring to write providential history. Even with the benefit of the rich sources available to them, Latter-day Saint historians will still see through a glass darkly and partially. But they will see far more than would otherwise be possible.

NOTES

1. For an excellent history of historical interpretation with detailed coverage of providential approaches, see Ernest Breisach, *Historiography: Ancient, Medieval and Modern*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 77–97, 125–44, 166–70, 177–85, 195–98. See also E. Harris Harbison, *Christianity and History: Essays by E. Harris Harbison* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 53–59; Christopher Dawson, "The Christian View of History," in *God, History and Historians: Modern Christian Views of History*, ed. C. T. McIntire (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 35–38; D. W. Bebbington, *Patterns in History: A Christian View* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 43–63; Michael Kraus and David D. Joyce, *The Writing of American History*, rev. ed. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 12, 28–31.

2. Harbison, *Christianity and History*, 16.

3. Carl Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932), 31.

4. Breisach, *Historiography*, 199.

5. Breisach, *Historiography*, 205; see also 204–9, 250–51.

6. Thomas Babington Macaulay, "Essay on History of the Revolution in England in 1688 by Sir James Mackintosh," in Lady Trevelyan, ed., *The Complete*

Writings of Lord Macaulay, vol. 13, *Essays III* (New York: Lamb Publishing, 1908), 358.

7. Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 147–49.

8. Kraus and Joyce, *Writing of American History*, 97–108.

9. F. Guizot, *The History of Civilization from the Fall of the Roman Empire to the French Revolution*, trans. William Hazlitt (London: George Bell & Sons, 1894), 1:14, 16.

10. Breisach, *Historiography*, 232–33.

11. Breisach, *Historiography*, 257.

12. Conrad Cherry, *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971), vii. See also Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1968), vii.

13. Chadwick, *Secularization*, 188.

14. Chadwick, *Secularization*, 185. See also 161–88, 212–23.

15. Breisach, *Historiography*, 321; Kraus and Joyce, *Writing of American History*, 136–51.

16. Friedrich Ratzel quoted in Franklin Thomas, *The Environmental Basis of Society: A Study in the History of Sociological Theory* (New York: Century, 1925), 78.

17. Carl Becker in Harbison, *Christianity and History*, 60.

18. Oscar Handlin, *Chance or Destiny: Turning Points in American History* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1955), 209.

19. Handlin, *Chance or Destiny*, 4.

20. Handlin, *Chance or Destiny*, 210, 212, 192.

21. Breisach, *Historiography*, 349–56, 370–76, 395–403.

22. McIntire, *Christian View*, 4.

23. McIntire, *Christian View*, 9–15.

24. Herbert Butterfield in Harbison, *Christianity and History*, 67.

25. Christopher Dawson, "The Christian View of History," in McIntire, *Christian View*, 31–32.

26. Christopher Dawson, *America and the Secularization of Modern Culture* (Houston: University of Saint Thomas, 1960), 12. See also Donna Rose Echeverria,

"Christopher Dawson Revisited," *Fides et Historia* 29 (Fall 1997): 24–37.

27. Kenneth Scott Latourette, "The Christian Understanding of History," in McIntire, *Christian View*, 51–52.

28. Latourette, "Christian Understanding," 52.

29. Latourette, "Christian Understanding," 56.

30. Latourette, "Christian Understanding," 65.

31. William A. Speck, "Kenneth Scott Latourette's Vocation as Christian Historian," in *A Christian View of History?* ed. George Marsden and Frank Roberts (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1975), 135.

32. Albert C. Outler, "Theodosius's Horse: Reflections on the Predicament of the Church Historian," *Church History* 34 (September 1965): 257.

33. C. S. Lewis, "Historicism," in McIntire, *Christian View*, 226, 230–35.

34. Harbison, *Christianity and History*, vii.

35. Henri-Irénée Marrou, *De la connaissance historique* (Paris: Edition du Seuil, 1959).

36. Harbison, *Christianity and History*, vii.

37. Georges Florovsky, "The Predicament of the Christian Historian," in McIntire, *Christian View*, 438. See also 407–42.

38. Arthur S. Link, "The Historian's Vocation," in McIntire, *Christian View*, 385.

39. Jeffrey Russell, "Religious Commitment and Historical Writing," *Christian Scholar* 45 (Spring 1962): 18–21.

40. Paul L. Ward, "The Christian and History Teaching," *Religion in Life* 26 (Autumn 1957): 498.

41. Harbison, *Christianity and History*, 339, 353–55.

42. Outler, "Theodosius's Horse," 257, 253, 259, 260. A more recent attempt to discuss the uncanny developments in history uses the term providence ambiguously as a reference to dumb luck. See Walter Russell Mead, *Special Providence: American Foreign Policy and How it Changed the World* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2001).

43. John Warwick Montgomery, *Where Is History Going?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1969), 29, 31, 34, 35.

44. D. G. Hart, "History in Search of Meaning: The Conference on Faith and History," in *History and the Christian Historian*, ed. Ronald A. Wells (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998), 71–78.

45. Janette Bohi, "The Relevance of Faith and History: A Mandate from God," *Fides et Historia* 6 (Fall 1973): 49. Shortly before Bohi's article was published, Latter-day Saint historian Richard Bushman in 1969 briefly investigated the degree to which Latter-day Saint historians, "know[ing] from our doctrine that God enters history in various ways" might employ the concepts of "revelation, providential direction, and inspiration" in their work. Bushman observed, "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. . . . Inevitably, we must ask how God has shaped human experience generally." While he preferred the subtle concept of inspiration, Bushman still found the providential approach intriguing. "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," he wrote (Richard Bushman, "Faithful History," reprinted in George D. Smith, ed., *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992], 8, 12).

46. D. G. Hart, "History in Search of Meaning," 78. See also 79–82.

47. Ronald A. Wells, "Beyond 'Religious History': The Calling of the Christian Historian," *Fides et Historia* 34 (Winter/Spring 2002): 47.

48. Frank C. Roberts, introduction to *A Christian View of History?* ed. Marsden and Roberts, 10, 14.

49. George Marsden, "A Christian Perspective for the Teaching of History," in *A Christian View of History?* ed. Marsden and Roberts, 38, 39, 44, 46.

50. C. T. McIntire and Ronald A. Wells, eds., *History and Historical Understanding* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), vii.

51. McIntire and Wells, *History and Historical Understanding*, viii.

52. Martin E. Marty, "On the Difference in Being a Christian and the Difference it Makes—for History," in *History and Historical Understanding*, 54.

53. George Marsden, "Common Sense and the Spiritual Vision of History," in *History and Historical Understanding*, 65.

54. E. Harris Harbison, "The Marks of a Christian Historian," in McIntire, *Christian View*, 355.

55. George M. Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 95–96, 82.

56. Ronald A. Wells, *The Wars of America: Christian Views* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1981), 6–7.

57. Ronald A. Wells, *History through the Eyes of Faith* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989), 234.

58. Wells, *Eyes of Faith*, 185; D. G. Hart, "History in Search of Meaning," in Wells, *History and the Christian Historian*, 84.

59. Marsden, *Outrageous Idea*, 71, 74. For instance, Brad Gregory's study of Christian martyrs in the Early Modern period rejects secular interpretations of martyrdom, contending that one must "take religion seriously, on the terms of people who were willing to die for their convictions," in order to understand martyrdom (Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999]), 350; see also Harry S. Stout, "Theological Commitment and American Religious History," *Theological Education* [Spring 1989]: 55–56, 58). Latter-day Saint historians of religion have fruitfully employed this approach as well in ways that are consonant with religious faith. Craig Harline in his *Miracles at the Jesus Oak: Histories of the Supernatural in Reformation Europe* sets aside the "laboring over whether an event was 'truly' miraculous (by the questioner's implicitly objective standards)" and instead seeks "to understand how people in and around the event saw things" (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 4. Similarly, Leonard Arrington and Davis Bitton in discussing the recollections of many Mormons of the passing of the "Mantle of Joseph" to Brigham Young in Nauvoo quote directly from some of the reminiscences and then conclude, "However social psy-

chologists might explain the change of Young's voice and appearance at the August 8 meeting, he was in fact a Joseph Smith to those who accepted him" (Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979], 85). One of the first Mormon scholars to employ this approach was Thomas G. Alexander in his presidential address before the Mormon History Association in 1975. Alexander presented Woodruff's religious experiences straightforwardly. "In my view, the only question the historian had a right to ask was whether the reported experience was consistent with the other aspects of the actor's personal life. The historian had no right to reject it or to bracket it by referring to an experience as alleged simply because he or she had never had a similar experience. Thus I could write that Woodruff's experiences in Kirtland included visitations by heavenly beings, speaking in tongues, receiving washings and anointings, formal blessings in which the power to heal the sick and other gifts were given to him, manifestations of clouds of blood and fire in the heavens, and the overcoming of the power of Satan" (Thomas G. Alexander, "The Faith of an Urban Mormon," in Philip L. Barlow, ed., *A Thoughtful Faith: Essays on Belief by Mormon Scholars* [Centerville, UT: Canon Press, 1986], 63).

60. Jeffrey B. Russell, "History and Truth," *The Historian* 50 (1987): 13. See also Russell, *A History of Heaven: The Singing Silence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) and Rick Kennedy, "Introduction: The Sacred Calling of History," *Fides et Historia* 35 (Summer/Fall 2003): 4.

61. Ronald A. Wells, "Introduction," in Wells, ed., *History and the Christian Historian*, 4.

62. Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, "Men, Women, and God: Some Historiographical Issues," in *History and the Christian Historian*, 92.

63. C. Stephan Evans, "Critical Historical Judgment and Biblical Faith," in *History and the Christian Historian*, 65.

64. Hart, "History in Search of Meaning," 86–87. See also D. G. Hart, "Christian Scholar, Secular Universities and the Problem with the Antithesis," *Christian Scholars Review* 30 (2001): 398.

65. Peter A. Russell, "The Challenge of Writing Christian History," *Fides et Historia* 21 (January 1989): 14.

66. Karl W. Giberson and Donald A. Yerxa, "Providence and the Christian Scholar," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 11 (1 / 2 1999): 123.

67. Tim Stafford, "Whatever Happened to Christian History?" *Christianity Today* 45, no. 5 (2001): 46.

68. Bebbington, *Patterns in History*, 173–74.

69. Bebbington, *Patterns in History*, 183–84.

69. Bebbington, *Patterns in History*, 187. While Ronald Wells disagrees with Bebbington's recommendations for a Janus-faced approach to writing he has judged Bebbington's exposition to be "the best statement yet on the calling of the Christian historian." (Wells, *History through the Eyes of Faith*, 5.)

70. Bebbington, *Patterns in History*, 187.

71. W. Stanford Reid, "The Kingdom of God: The Key to History," *Fides et Historia* 13 (Spring/Summer 1981), 12, 14. In a response to Reid's essay, Richard Lovelace, a professor of historical theology, advised historians to seek to "discern the Holy Spirit at work in different and even conflicting parties in Church history" such as Catholics and Protestants during the Reformation as a guard against the tendency to equate the good with what one knows best. (Richard Lovelace, "Response," *Fides et Historia*, 20–22.)

72. Donald A. Yerxa, "A Meaningful Past and the Limits of History: Some Reflections Informed by the Science-and-Religion Debate," *Fides et Historia* 34 (Winter/Spring 2002): 22.

73. Yerxa, "Meaningful Past," 21–23. Two Latter-day Saint philosophers, David L. Paulsen and Matthew G. Fisher, believe that Sanders's view of God "should be of special import to Latter-day Saint readers, for the Latter-day Saint tradition also rejects many absolute elements in the classical view of God and providence (immutable, impossible, timeless, ineffable, imple, invisible, all-controlling, completely transcendent)" (Paulsen and Fisher, review of *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* by John Sanders [1998], *BYU Studies* 42, nos. 3 and 4 (2003): 122).

74. C. John Sommerville, "Christian Historiography? A Pragmatic Approach," *Fides et Historia* 35 (Winter/Spring 2003): 3.

75. Link, "Historian's Vocation," 388. (See note 38.)
76. Marsden, "A Christian Perspective," 38. (See note 49.)
77. Bebbington, *Patterns in History*, 183. (See note 1.)
78. Hart, "History in Search of Meaning," 86.
79. Lewis, "Historicism," 225, 230. (See note 33.)
80. Bebbington, *Patterns in History*, 184.
81. Stafford, "Whatever Happened to Christian History?" 42. (See note 67.)
82. Dean C. Jessee, "The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision," *BYU Studies* 9 (Spring 1969): 275–94; Milton V. Backman, *Joseph Smith's First Vision: Confirming Evidences and Contemporary Accounts*, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980); Brian Q. Cannon and BYU Studies Staff, "Priesthood Restoration Documents," *BYU Studies* 35, no. 4 (1996): 162–207.
83. Bruce R. McConkie, "The New Revelation on Priesthood," Spencer W. Kimball and others, *Priesthood* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 132.