



The lesson my grandpa had first shared with me at eight was that through the power of the Holy Ghost, I could discern truth from error.

Uniting Faith and History

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Introduction

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In my eighth-grade English class, we had to write an “I am” poem: this particular style provides a rather simple formula for composing self-reflective verse. In the first line, for example, the author lists two personal characteristics; they are followed by the identification of desires, dreams, beliefs, hopes, and so forth.

At the risk of revealing my lack of literary genius, as well as my inherent nerdiness, I will confess that my composition began as follows: “I am a Mormon girl who hates to be late.”

While my peers talked about being dancers, singers, athletes, and friends, I saw my religiosity and my precision as central to my identity. The subsequent lines revealed my love of reading and writing and hinted at my explicit and implicit academic goals. As a thirteen-year-old girl, I had woven believing and thinking, the sacred and the secular, into a single worldview.

Five years later, as I entered the academy, I was introduced to the dichotomies of intellectual and spiritual life: many proposed either/or scenarios. Was I going to stand on the fringes of scholarship or on the fringes of belief? Although determined to cultivate academic and spiritual integrity, I had to wrestle with whether or not a woman of faith could also be a rigorous scholar.¹

Mormon Historiography

As Mormons, we believe, first and foremost, in the atoning sacrifice of the Savior, and we recognize our need to submit to his grace. But we also believe that Joseph Smith—a prophetic figure—had visions, restored gospel truths, and translated a sacred text by the power of God. Consequently, doctrine seeps into our understanding of history, and history is intertwined with our doctrinal perspectives.

Such convictions are a fundamental part of Mormon testimony. “Coming into possession of the truths that pertain to external realities . . . about institutions and historical persons,” while also laying “claim to certain, divinely revealed knowledge of things,” Terryl Givens explains, has been considered an essential component of conversion since the LDS Church’s inception.² As believers, we proclaim that the events of the Restoration go hand in hand with the doctrines God revealed to a new prophet, and we know the Holy Ghost can and will confirm the truth of all of these things to earnest seekers. Consequently, reverence and trust, rather than skepticism and doubt, dominate LDS views of the past.

Broadly speaking, Church members are aware of and interested in our history because we consider it sacred and inspired, indeed, providential. Our personal conversion experiences, and the testimonies that result, are laced with historical convictions: events as well as doctrines are declared true. As a result, how our history is narrated and interpreted matters to us. We believe sacred stories should promote faith—that the continuation of the conversion process is nurtured as the Holy Ghost witnesses that particular events and situations were inspired by God. How history is written and interpreted, then, is important to us as a people of faith.

Over the years, Mormon historiography, like all historiography, has undergone a series of transitions: the partisan views of the 1800s, defined by faith claims or polemics, evolved at the turn of the century as trained historians relied upon scholarly methods to interpret their work. By 1968, Moses Rischin, then a Fulbright professor of history at the University of Uppsala

in Sweden, suggested that the writing of Mormon history had become less rigid and more nuanced, and thus the story was becoming more accessible to the non-Mormon world. He titled this development the New Mormon History. Almost immediately, debates sparked: In what ways might the lenses of secular training detract from the divine origins of the LDS past? And what was true Mormon history—the devotional writings of the devout, or the academic and contextualized interpretations of the trained (some devout and some not) historians? Could the latter also be the former? Was the work that was produced during the nineteenth century more faithful, more exact, and more prone to acknowledge God’s influence? Indeed, what characterized Mormon history, and should and could that change? Could truth really be viewed from different angles without being discredited by secular leanings?

Early Mormon historiography, specifically that written and compiled in the nineteenth century, is riveted to stark interpretations about historical and religious truth. Two groups, LDS writers of providential history and non-Mormon antagonists, made opposing claims in the attempt to prove or disprove the legitimacy of Mormonism. Believers defended while those in opposition sought to destroy. Each group selected sources that allowed them to use “history” to their own advantage. Agenda, rather than scholarly inquiry, shaped many works—and the misconception that historians could prove or disprove truth dominated the field (we know that is the job of the Holy Ghost, not scholars).

Believing Mormons wrote with conviction; they wanted it to be clear that this is “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth” (D&C 1:30) and that we have the responsibility to share this message with others in preparation for Jesus Christ’s Second Coming. Such providential or faithful leanings are akin to Old Testament and Puritan descriptions of a chosen people. Interpretation and analysis, albeit scarce and simplified in a context dominated by antiquarians, were focused on truth claims. The miraculous nature of Mormon historical events, followers believed, proved the truthfulness of God’s message as revealed to Joseph Smith. Those authors saw themselves as tools in God’s hands: they believed that the writing of history, and the records themselves, could serve as testaments of faith.

In some of Joseph Smith’s early revelations (one actually received on the very day the Church was organized, on April 6, 1830) the Lord commanded him to keep a record (D&C 21:1; 47:1). In response to these commands, the office of Church Historian and Recorder was organized. Unpublished

manuscripts were produced, and newspapers and pamphlets emphasized historical experiences as well as current events and theology. Orson Pratt, for example, wrote a pamphlet titled *An Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions*; this text was the first narrative history that detailed the events associated with Joseph Smith's First Vision and thus influenced the shape of later LDS-authored works. Pratt not only related the events; he bore personal witness of them.

Non-Mormon writers disagreed with the providential interpretations of believers. Consequently, they broached a different vantage point: they wanted to use historical evidence to prove that Mormonism was not true. Often, these compilers of history consisted of rival Christian ministers, apostate Mormons, or others who opposed the faith. Eber D. Howe's *Mormonism Unveiled*, published in 1834, for example, became a seminal work in the genre of anti-Mormonism. He discredited Smith's character and was one of the first to propose an alternative hypothesis about the origins of the Book of Mormon. Several years following the dissemination of Howe's work, other books similar in tone and content were published. By the mid-nineteenth century, tell-all books about the horrors of polygamy, the power of the Mormon theocracy, and the threat Mormonism posed to national institutions had become quite popular. Calling Mormon character into question remained a predominant theme in all the varieties that anti-Mormon works assumed.

By the turn of the century, some suggest, the writing of LDS history had begun to "mature."³ Rather than simply quoting and compiling materials, several historians began to synthesize and even offered new interpretations. Nonetheless, old divides—"the two opposing camps that argued the merits of Mormonism rather than seeking an understanding of the individuals involved"—continued to plague new developments.⁴

And yet, as Mormonism itself continued to mature, and as the Church became increasingly Americanized, "the emerging history also was characterized by a less provincial and more national mood."⁵ As professional training became more common, methodologies were defined and interdisciplinary approaches utilized. One important contribution during this period was the completion of B. H. Roberts's *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. Although critics complained that it was extremely Mormon in tone and limited to hierarchical, male, and political topics, its value was impossible to ignore. For the first time, the Mormon past was chronicled in great detail, and, to his credit, Roberts did not gloss over

imperfections. He was, as Ron Walker, David Whittaker, and James Allen noted, “a partisan, not an unquestioning apologist.”⁶

Later in the twentieth century, a number of Mormons who pursued careers in academia focused their research on Mormon history. Rather than being driven by the desire to legitimate their faith or by the quest to discover and share religious truth, they sought neutrality, or objectivity. Drawing on the tools of the social sciences, they reexamined nineteenth-century Mormon pioneering. The result was a series of works that reflected something unfamiliar to the Mormon believer: religious detachment. An emphasis on natural causes, rather than divine origins, was uncomfortable to many people. The products did not seem like their story—at least as they knew it. The approach such scholars brought to Mormon history reflected their own personal sense of faith: some were not committed believers. As a result, Mormon scholars of this era were dubbed the “lost generation of intellectuals”—for believers, their works cultivated doubts about academia. It seemed that succeeding in one area meant surrendering in another.

By the second half of the twentieth century, Mormon history experienced another shift. Those engaged in the New Mormon History did not want to attack or defend LDS truth claims: rather, they wanted to use the tools of the trained historian—secular or naturalistic analysis—to explore a variety of topics, some relevant to questions about truth and some not. Perhaps most important, the divisions of the past, Mormon versus non-Mormon interpretations of history, became less stark. Both sought to attain middle ground.

In 1972, Leonard Arrington, a key figure in the New Mormon History movement, received the position of LDS Church historian. Under his direction, a number of important projects got under way, such as those focused on creating professional narrative histories of the LDS Church. Eventually, Arrington’s group was transferred to BYU to form the Joseph Fielding Smith Institute for Church History,⁷ where they continued to produce articles and books. Their works reshaped the historical landscape, and the people involved influenced many budding scholars. They sought to align faith and history in their various scholastic endeavors.

Unfortunately, the evolution of Mormon historiography resulted in division rather than unity. Debates about devotional and professional history seeped into discussions about Mormon history and even led to some retrenchment from the study of our past. Young scholars were warned away from rather than being encouraged to pursue such studies—and thus

Latter-day Saints trained as professional historians sometimes became less apt to study Mormon history than those outside of the Church.

New Mormon History Becomes Old

As an undergraduate student at Brigham Young University, I became aware of the nuances of Mormon historiography and the different conceptions of faith and history that spanned over one hundred and seventy years of interpreting the LDS past. While I had helpful and essential conversations with various mentors, ones for which I will be ever grateful, I will confess that I often found myself perplexed by the divisions I personally sensed: did I have to choose between intellect and faith? Some implied that objectivity—to the point of ignoring faith claims—was ideal. They believed scholars could not approach questions of faith. But that didn't work for me. Others seemed to suggest that interpretation and analysis were secular tools and that historical narrative should be used only to convince others that the Church is true, and that every experience recounted should be positive. I wondered if claims of human perfection could really promote faith. That didn't work for me either. How could I claim a history that did not require a Savior? That was not LDS doctrine—and thus it seemed essential not to write a history that seemed to cross that line. As I continued to reflect on my choice to be a historian, I concluded that I wanted to be both intellectual and faithful. But I didn't want to define intellect or faith in the ways they were being presented to me—it seemed important to learn from and then improve upon past approaches.

As I attended graduate school and became increasingly capable of utilizing the historian's craft, it became more clear to me that history alone cannot prove or disprove truth (my essay, which follows, will describe how I came to understand this) and that interpretations of the past will vary depending on the evidence one uses, the theoretical tools one embraces, and the particular biases one employs. To be afraid of sharpening my own academic abilities, to somehow assume faith and history cannot coexist, to be unprepared or unwilling to enter scholarly conversations, or to limit my own reading habits is to surrender the Church's past to others and to suggest, rather implicitly, that we have something to be afraid of. I have learned that I must be willing and able and prepared to engage in historiographical discussions—I have to know how to speak the dual language of scholarship and faith. To assume that the division is the norm—that I must choose to be either scholarly or

faithful— is to question the words of modern prophets and apostles, as well as the very premise of the Church Educational System.

Fortunately, I have discovered that being a historian of religion more generally—and of Mormonism specifically—has never been more exciting! Overly secularized interpretations are being revised; examining religiosity is more likely to be considered legitimate scholarship by the academy than it was years ago. New lenses and interpretations are being employed, and deeper and richer publications are resulting. In an LDS context, the Church Historical Department seems to be expanding at an unprecedented rate. Important topics are being explored both thoroughly and openly, and many significant works are resulting. In addition, many believing scholars throughout the Christian community have become increasingly committed to discussions about faith and history over time; such individuals are grappling with ways in which their faith can enrich their professional work. LDS historians are just beginning to enter such conversations in the broader academic context—we could and should be more involved. For this reason, I have invited several faithful historians to share their views, experiences, observations, or theoretical approaches to the subject of faith and history. Some of the pieces included are autobiographical, while others are more historiographical or philosophical in their analysis. And yet despite differences, a common unity emerges. The goal of this article is not to be exhaustive, but rather to begin and hopefully encourage future conversations on this topic with colleagues and students, as well as with those of other faiths.

“By the Power of the Holy Ghost, Ye May Know the Truth of All Things”

RACHEL COPE

Our life stories—meaning our personal histories—are drawn from collections of memories; the autobiographies we share reflect the circumstances we have remembered as well as those we have forgotten. As participants in the mortal experience, it is important that we recognize that humans are fallible and that each history, whether shared textually or orally, provides one interpretation of a life that has been lived or an event that has been experienced. While the past does not change, our understandings of it certainly do.

As I reflect upon my own history, I find that some memories are clear while others seem to be a bit muddled. On occasion, a side detail actually overshadows the main event. In fact, many of my most precious memories stem from the ordinary rather than the spectacular. Such is the case with my

baptism—a short conversation with my grandfather following the performance of this ordinance has become the most memorable, indeed, the most life-changing part of that important experience.

When I think back to that brisk March day, I remember that before my hair had even dried, my grandpa, his eyes twinkling as they were wont to do, asked me to bring my Book of Mormon to him. As I did so, he led me into the living room and summoned me to sit beside him on the couch. Grandpa talked to me about the importance of the Book of Mormon and bore a powerful testimony of this sacred text. He then removed a red pencil from his suit pocket, opened the book to Moroni 10:4–5, and marked this well-known passage with straight, even lines.

While handing the book back to me, he asked, “Rachel, can you read the verses I just underlined?”

I did so eagerly. As I finished, he looked into my eyes with the most loving of expressions and explained Moroni’s exhortation, and then he challenged me to memorize this passage and to act on its promise. I can’t remember all of the particulars that followed; I just know that I earnestly began to work toward both goals that very night and that the feelings I felt as we shared that special moment together will never be forgotten.

For years, I have described this experience as a moment in which an essential part of my spiritual foundation was first laid—I became committed to reading the Book of Mormon, and I gained a testimony of its message, just as Grandpa had encouraged me to do. Time, however, has enabled me to see additional meanings in this particular story (in other words, I interpret parts of my own history rather differently now). Quite simply, I see a message within the message my grandfather had so wisely shared with me. Yes, he was encouraging me to read the Book of Mormon, but he was also teaching me what it means to receive the Holy Ghost. Perhaps no other lesson could have been more important than that one—developing the ability to discern and recognize truth—for a young girl who as an adult would pursue a PhD in religious history in a secular environment.

As a very young college student, I felt most comfortable reading religious history books (including LDS history) that promoted and supported what I will call faithful views; I was slightly afraid of interpretations of Church history that had a more secular tone. I had heard stories about people losing their faith, and I feared falling into that trap. I wanted to remain on the believing side of the academic line. As I continued to pursue my study of history—as I

started to bud into a historian—I came to recognize that historiography (the work of historians) is composed of various sets of evidence and interpretations (just as our own personal histories are). Each scholar draws upon the evidence available to him or her and then interprets it through the particular lens that he or she (probably wittingly and unwittingly) decides to use; this combination shapes the story that the scholar tells. It is then up to the readers to determine (we could also use the word discern) the legitimacy of the sources and the approach. This realization helped me recognize that the study of history did not have to challenge my faith *per se* but rather could teach me how to challenge (in a scholarly way) those things that dismissed faith. Faith and reason could indeed be combined.

This became ever clearer to me as I was reading section 91 of the Doctrine and Covenants, a revelation that resulted from the Prophet Joseph asking if he should translate the Apocrypha. In previous readings of this section, I had focused on the statement that said “it is not needful that the Apocrypha should be translated” (D&C 91:3). By so doing, I had missed the heart of the message—a message that teaches historians (and other scholars) how to combine study and faith: “Therefore, whoso readeth it, let him understand, for the Spirit manifesteth truth; and whoso is enlightened by the Spirit shall obtain benefit therefrom; and whoso receiveth not by the Spirit, cannot be benefited” (D&C 91:4–6).

It is important to note that the Lord did not say we should not read texts that employ various viewpoints; rather, he said we should read a plethora of materials with the influence of the Spirit as our guide. For the first time, I truly understood what it means to be a historian of faith. I did not need to fear “unfaithful history”—I needed to apply the lesson my grandpa had first shared with me when I was eight. Through the power of the Holy Ghost, I could discern truth from error; I could glean the useful from the unuseful. I could think critically and faithfully.

I suppose no one leaves graduate school unscathed in some way or another (we could all swap stories!), but the valuable lessons I have described did enable me to withstand various challenges and maintain my faith in a rigorous PhD program. These are lessons I continue to draw upon as I pursue my own scholarly endeavors; they are also skills I hope to teach my students to develop. As a teacher of scripture and religious history, I want those who enter my classroom to understand that testimonies should not be made or broken because of interpretations of the past—historians (including faithful

historians) are not prophets; they are scholars who are both empowered and limited by the tools they employ. In order to benefit from (but also survive) the scholarship that we immerse ourselves in, it is essential that we learn for ourselves and then teach our students how to discern truth from error. As we rely upon the power of the Holy Ghost, we will be able to glean much from spiritual and secular works that surround us, and we will recognize the importance of entering multiple conversations (taking place both within and outside of the Church) about our history and our culture with confidence.

Building the Kingdom:

Pioneering Historians within the Church Educational System

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Professionally trained historians have contributed significantly to the Church Educational System for the better part of a century. This article highlights the pioneering contributions of early historians in CES. Two specialists in LDS history holding history PhDs taught at the Logan Institute of Religion before World War II. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, a second cadre of history PhDs joined BYU's religious education faculty. By treating historical research and teaching as religious endeavors, these scholars nurtured students spiritually and intellectually, demonstrating the usefulness of historical approaches in religious education.

Thomas C. Romney (PhD, Berkeley, 1929) and Milton R. Hunter (PhD, Berkeley, 1935) began teaching at the Logan Institute of Religion during the Great Depression. Both helped to develop productive relations between the campus community and the institute and demonstrated the compatibility of faith and careful historical scholarship in their research and writing. Hunter's revised dissertation, published as *Brigham Young the Colonizer*, and Romney's *The Mormon Colonies in Mexico* nurtured LDS readers' faith while fostering outsiders' appreciation for Mormonism.⁸

Soon after Romney became director of the Logan Institute, several Church educators pursued PhDs at the University of Chicago Divinity School, following the lead of Sidney B. Sperry. Some, including Daryl Chase and Russel B. Swensen, wrote their dissertations on historical topics, but they were supervised and trained primarily by theologians rather than professional historians.⁹ The first PhD in history to join the religious education program at BYU was Hugh Nibley (PhD, Berkeley, 1938), who came to Provo in 1946

at the encouragement of Elder John A. Widtsoe. Those with PhDs in history who would focus their teaching and research primarily upon Mormon history came to BYU's religious education program close to the time that the College of Religious Instruction was created in 1959: they included G. Byron Done (PhD, USC, 1939), who had been an institute director in southern California for twenty years before coming to BYU; Milton Backman (PhD, University of Pennsylvania, 1959); Richard Cowan (PhD, Stanford, 1961); Richard Anderson (PhD, Harvard, 1962); James Allen (PhD, USC, 1963; transferred to the history department in 1964); and Spencer Palmer (PhD, Berkeley, 1964). At roughly the same time, T. Edgar Lyon, a faculty member at the Salt Lake Institute of Religion, completed his PhD in history. By teaching substantial, intellectually rigorous, and spiritually engaging classes, these and other teacher-scholars nurtured students' faith.

Many in this cohort who spent their careers in religious education at BYU viewed their historical teaching and writing as a religious mission. As Richard L. Anderson reflected in 2006, "I think I prayed every day that I would work on something pleasing to the Lord." By engaging in careful historical research they were able to respond credibly and responsibly to the Church's critics. For instance, Backman studied and wrote about the historical setting of the First Vision to counter scholarly critics such as Wesley Walters.¹⁰

Much of these scholars' work entailed collecting, editing, and publishing primary documents related to the Restoration. For instance, Backman authored *Eyewitness Accounts of the Restoration*, and Palmer and his wife, Shirley, wrote and edited *The Korean Saints: Personal Stories of Trial and Triumph*. At least some of these historians focused upon editing and publishing historical documents because they believed that the most honest and revealing portraits of figures in Church history came from their own pens. As Anderson explained in 2005, "When I started studying history, I learned that you need to let the sources speak for themselves." Backman recognized he could not prove the divinity of Joseph Smith's calling through historical research and editing. "We have to be careful with the use of the word 'evidence' because religious or spiritual things are not based on evidence," he explained. But he wisely saw in the contextual evidence and first-person accounts "something to support" faith claims.¹¹

In 1967, the Institute of Mormon Studies within the College of Religious Instruction began to send historians to archives in search of new documents regarding the Restoration. As the institute's director, Truman Madsen,

explained, they hoped to use historical research to answer two key questions: first, “what is the [documentary] evidence for these [sacred] events?” Having gathered the evidence, they would be better able to broach a second, deeper question about religious truth: “what are the events evidence for?”¹²

What were the results of these professional historians’ labor? They are legion, but among them is a better understanding of the richness of the First Vision and the multilayered meaning it held for Joseph Smith as a result of Backman’s and Allen’s work. We understand the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and the enduring testimony of the Book of Mormon witnesses more fully thanks to Anderson’s meticulous research. We understand the ways that sacrifice and continuing revelation have shaped missionary efforts, international growth, and the proliferation of temples over the past century as a result of Cowan’s work. And we understand the faith of recent converts in Africa and Asia and the possibilities for common ground and cooperation between Mormons and Muslims thanks to Palmer’s pioneering scholarship.¹³

Many Latter-day Saint students, including me, benefited from the teaching or writing of these scholars: I appreciated their humility, their careful scholarship, and their honesty in the face of a morally complex past. I appreciated the fact that they eschewed facile interpretations, responded respectfully and responsibly to tough questions, and deftly harmonized faith and reason. By their historical scholarship and teaching, they demonstrated a high standard of faith. Their example convinced me that the Baptist historian Robert H. Handy was right when he observed, “The knowledge that comes through the application of historical method may be inconvenient and even painful, but to resist it or turn from it may give evidence of our lack of faith; for an unblinking facing of the reality that is disclosed by this method . . . may help us learn more about the ways of the Creator, the creation, and the creatures.”¹⁴

The Supernatural and the Boundaries of the Discipline

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The first lesson all historians should learn is how radically true it is that all histories are a reflection of presuppositions driven so deeply that it is impossible to recognize them all. The sort of history today written by historians from Richard Bushman to Eric Foner to David McCullough, for instance, is based upon the principle that the reader might track down all the evidence quoted

and footnoted and judge for herself how accurate the author's interpretation is. But, like all history, these assumptions are actually projections of our beliefs about human nature and how one lives in the world. Footnote-driven history is based upon the Enlightenment's presupposition that humanity has the capacity to understand ourselves and that our decisions and the evidence we leave of them are, at the base, those things which drive history forward. Therefore, the more we understand ourselves, the greater our capacity to make correct decisions, to progress, and to make our world a better place. As David Hume put it, the purpose of history is to "instruct us in the principles of human nature and regulate our future conduct."¹⁵ This history is based, finally, on the faith that human choices matter.

Here is the beginning of the challenge of opening that past to the supernatural. The great Protestant theologian Jonathan Edwards was distressed that people like Edward Gibbon seemed to understand history as a series of causes springing from discoverable human effects, the temporal manifestation of human decision making, something of our own creation. For Edwards, theology and history were inseparable, and he called his great *History of the Work of Redemption* a "body of divinity . . . thrown into the form of a history."¹⁶ There was no moment in time that was not in some sense a projection of God's will, and therefore, should we want to understand how history works, we should try to understand not necessarily the ways human decisions function but rather the will of God. For Edwards, the most important story about the past—indeed, the entire reason the past existed—was to work out God's saving mercy and to illustrate it in ways humans could understand. Therefore, historians that dwelt on the role of human choices were necessarily blind to the real forces that drove the universe forward. This providential history should not be unfamiliar to Latter-day Saints; it is the way that the Biblical authors understood the past, and moreover, it is quite clearly the form of history told in the Book of Mormon.

For scholars trained in the form of history written in America today, Edwards's view of the past is terribly problematic. To concede supernatural influence in the past is not only to allot agency to something which by its nature cannot be footnoted but also to compromise whatever coherence assumptions of human agency give the stories we tell about ourselves.¹⁷ Edwards, with iron nerve, might well assent to that. But for modern Americans, it is harder. Historians want to communicate with each other, and the footnote is the thread which allows us to do so.

But increasingly, scholars like the Catholic Robert Orsi are struggling to find ways to acknowledge that, for the vast majority of the human subjects we write about, the supernatural does in fact have historical agency. Many adopt a phenomenological approach, which seeks only to judge the effects of religious belief on human behavior rather than passing primary judgment upon the reality of the supernatural.¹⁸ This has going for it modesty: it seeks to understand the sure providentialism of Edwards but also acknowledges that the historian is not equipped to make such judgments on her own. But in other ways, it is limited: it treats the supernatural as a second-order phenomenon, observed in its effects rather than in its presence.

What, then, can historians do? The answer may be, so long as we remain bound by the rules of our discipline, not much. There are, however, scholars who seek to grasp more fully the experience of the religious life. Robert Orsi has argued strenuously that to grasp the role the supernatural plays in the lives of our subjects, historians must take steps toward granting the supernatural historical agency, acknowledging that visions and mystical encounters do in fact sometimes drive forward human behavior.¹⁹ Such an approach also encompasses the growing historical school of “lived religion,” which seeks to understand how religious people live their lives, the roles and motivations it gives them, and to treat these as equivalent to secular motivations like poverty or political beliefs.²⁰ Thanks to these scholars, religion has been rid of its status as an epiphenomenon, a manifestation of something else, like social marginalization or political repression. The simple boundaries of the discipline mean that the sort of history Edwards might be happy with may never be written in the academy, but if scholars are willing to continue to push them, the presences within the past may become increasingly tangible.

Faith and History, Old Testament–Style

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Some wonder why we as Latter-day Saints bother devoting one out of every four years in the Sunday School curriculum to the Old Testament. Other than a superficial acknowledgment that it is scripture—and thus *prima facie* deserves our attention—it seems to me there are plenty of legitimate reasons why we should spend our time elsewhere. Many of our ward-level Gospel Doctrine teachers have not even read the whole book; even fewer really know

anything about ancient Hebrew culture, history, or religion. Class sessions are filled with complaints about how hard it is to understand the Old Testament (Isaiah, alas, being the most frequent whipping boy), so the discussion typically centers on a handful of accessible stories known from childhood or carefully chosen proof texts that seem to confirm what we already know about the gospel. Even on a strictly doctrinal basis, most of the topics we cover during our Old Testament study are addressed in equal and often superior depth, richness, and clarity in one of the other standard works. In short, some might ask, how much would we lose by replacing the Old Testament with more in-depth study of, say, the Gospels or the Book of Mormon?

I don't pretend to be an Old Testament scholar; indeed, I know hardly anything about ancient Hebrew culture, history, or religion. But it seems to me that rather than tossing the book in the can, a more robust engagement with the Old Testament would do much to help us see our notion of humans as historical agents and the complicated relationship between faith and history in a different light.

The Old Testament is easily the most human of sacred texts accepted by Latter-day Saints as scripture. There are few angels here (among the mortals), and even the men and women who are the heroes of the various stories are deeply, and often tragically, human. Adam and Eve fall, Noah gets drunk, Abraham lies, Sarah gets jealous, Jacob deceives, Moses kills, Joshua and Saul commit genocide, David commits adultery, Jeremiah and Ezekiel are social outcasts—and these are the good guys! One can hardly walk away from the Old Testament without a sense that, as Reinhold Niebuhr was fond of saying, “the doctrine of original [or universal] sin is the only empirically verifiable doctrine of the Christian faith.”²¹

The stunning thing to me is that *this* was the narrative that was preserved and held sacred by the Jews and then adopted by Christians as a meaningful and faithful record of humanity's relationship to God. Indeed, if there was ever a history written with “warts and all,” the Old Testament is it.

In his companion essay, Matthew Bowman (channeling Jonathan Edwards) shows that one powerful way of reading the Bible is as a narrative of God's inscrutable agency and sovereignty—what he calls “providential history.” Another, less Calvinist, reading emphasizes both the integrity and real consequences of human action as a response, on both individual and communal levels, to a reality perceived as sacred. God is no doubt a principal actor on the stage, but that does not mean that humans are reduced to the level of

bit players or even marionettes. At times, God is shuttled off the stage altogether, as sacred reality is either misperceived or generally neglected. Some books, such as *Chronicles*, have a kind of proto-secular historical orientation, whereas others, such as *Ecclesiastes*, are only vaguely theistic in their articulation of wisdom. It would be a misreading of the text to think the Old Testament presents a post-Enlightenment view of human individualism, but we do similar violence to the text when we deny its often surprising affirmation of the variety of human experience, from the depraved to the saintly.

In his classic essay “Faithful History,” Richard Bushman noted that the narrative structure of Church history often takes one of two forms: “The fundamental dramatic tension can be between the Church and the world, or it can be between God and the Church.” The first model has attracted most Latter-day Saint historians who wish to defend the faith and demonstrate it to be a pearl of great price in the midst of a wicked and characteristically hostile world. In the second model, Bushman observed, “the Lord tries to establish his kingdom, but the stubborn people whom He favors with revelation ignore him much of the time and must be brought up short. . . . The prophets mourn the declension of faith within the Church itself more than they laud the righteousness of the Saints.” In the first model, “the Saints are heroes and the world villains. In the second, the world is wicked, but so are the Saints much of the time.”²²

While the Book of Mormon, and to a lesser extent the Doctrine and Covenants, contains elements of the second model (alongside the first), the Old Testament is the paradigmatic example of the “Saints versus God” genre. The warts of fallen humankind’s history are not presented to embarrass the prophets and other figures who are simultaneously portrayed as spiritual exemplars. Rather, an acknowledgment of frailty and sin provides far more insight into the human condition than an airbrushed bit of propaganda ever could. In this, the authors point to God as the only reliable anchor of hope and salvation. Any portrait of the covenant people as inherently righteous—even at their best—is not only dishonest but borderline idolatrous.

Faithful history operates under the assumption that “there is none good but one, that is, God” (Mark 10:18). Even Mormonism’s theology of our divine nature and potential does not alter the sin-stained reality of human existence. If we can learn from the Old Testament that the compassionate recounting of human frailty does not undercut faithful history but in fact can enhance it, then all those Sunday School lessons will have been well worth it.

“Obtain a Knowledge of History”

STEVEN C. HARPER

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In 1985, Mark Hofmann killed two innocent people and nearly himself trying to cover his string of forged documents, many of which were calculated to cast Church history in a suspicious, less than faithful light. Earlier that year (May 1985), the Church published one of the forged documents in the *Church News*, a purported letter from Joseph to Josiah Stowell about using a fresh hazel rod to find buried treasure guarded by a clever spirit. At age fourteen, I read the letter in the *Church News* at the breakfast table and thought seriously about it. My father helped me to do so. Now, years later, I look back on that experience and recognize that I had a historian inside me early on, though I hardly knew it then. What teenage boy dreams of becoming a historian?

Another awakening to my calling came near the end of my mission. I had begun to think about what I should do after my mission to prepare me for my life's work. In one of those magical moments where a passage of scripture speaks to me here, now, as powerfully as it did to them there, then, words originally given to the First Presidency in 1833 were revealed anew to me: “It is my will,” the Lord said, “that you should . . . obtain a knowledge of history” (D&C 93:53). The ways for me to obtain that knowledge subsequently opened, and one of them is best described by narrating another slice of history.

At the time of the bombings in 1985, Hofmann had rumored that he could acquire documents created by controversial early Apostle William McLellin if he could get funding. In June 1985, as part of his plot to defraud, Hofmann offered to donate the collection to the Church. Ironically, the Church had acquired many of McLellin's papers in 1908. Leaders and archivists who knew of the acquisition had passed away, and the Church had lost consciousness of the documents. In March 1986, in the legal fallout following the bombings, archivists discovered letters that mentioned acquisition of McLellin's papers, which led to the discovery of these original papers. Rumors spread, meanwhile, that the Church would suppress the McLellin documents. Instead, Church leaders invited Jan Shipps, a renowned non-Mormon scholar of the Saints, to edit McLellin's papers for publication by an academic press. She in turn collaborated with John W. Welch, editor in chief of *BYU Studies*, where I was working as an editorial assistant. I was assigned to help the editors compare McLellin's original holograph journals to typescripts to ensure

the accuracy of *The Journals of William E. McLellin, 1831–1836*. I read those journals closely. They are evidence for Richard Bushman's informed observation: "The closer you get to Joseph Smith in the sources, the stronger he will appear, rather than the reverse, as is so often assumed by critics." That is my experience. And that is why my life's work is to bring my students closer to Joseph Smith in the best sources—the rawest forms of his revelations, histories, and letters.

In the last dispensation, the Lord called a first and a second elder, then a bishop, and then a historian. On the day he organized the Church, the Lord said, "There shall be a record kept among you." To record is to remember. To remember is sacramental; to remember is to commune with God. What is history but remembering? What is history but one way of communing with God?

Some separate history and doctrine, but I can't find the seam where one ends and the other begins. Our doctrine is historical. We don't have theological classes on philosophical creeds; we have history and doctrine classes where we talk about the nature of God being revealed in time and space. We tell the stories of historical events. We can because the stories were recorded in historical documents that must be understood in order to understand our doctrine. The revelations that contain our doctrine are historical and cannot be well understood without historical knowledge (see Explanatory Introduction to the D&C).

The plan of salvation is historical. We explain our present life in terms of our premortal past. Without such history, our existence is meaningless.

Testimonies are often historical. They are based on experiences in our past, or in the pasts of others: Jesus Christ, Moroni, Joseph Smith—individuals whose pasts have come to bear on ours because they were recorded in historical documents and thereby made available and memorable, and therefore sacramental, to us. One cannot, for instance, have a testimony that Joseph Smith was a prophet without knowing about Joseph Smith and his experiences, and one cannot know about him or his experiences without history. We remember President J. Reuben Clark's charge to teach the Savior's Atonement and Joseph's First Vision. We would not know a thing about either if not for historians like Luke, Benjamin, Mormon, and Joseph himself, who was much more diligent in documenting his vision than his followers have been in studying his documents of it.

Our history is doctrinal. The commandment to keep a history came the day the Church was organized. It motivates the enormous expenditures of human and material resources spent acquiring, preserving, and making accessible our historical sources. The Lord revealed instructions for the Church historian and a rationale for them that linked the past, present, and future. He was commanded to “continue in writing and making a history of all the important things which he shall observe and know concerning my church,” and this “for the good of the church, and for the rising generations” (D&C 69:8). The First Presidency (and I) were commanded to “obtain a knowledge of history, and of countries, and of kingdoms, of laws of God and man, and all this for the salvation of Zion” (D&C 93:53). Sister Julie B. Beck, former Relief Society general president, spoke about the importance of Church history, especially Relief Society history, in her address to the sisters on September 25, 2010. “We study our history to learn who we are,” she said. “Studying and applying the history of Relief Society gives definition and expression to who we are as disciples and followers of our Savior Jesus Christ.” She then illustrated this truth by teaching the history of D&C 25.

There is no restored doctrine without history, and history without restored doctrine would be bleak indeed. History is truth, the particular kind of truth that is knowledge of things “as they were.” Such truth is of God and ought to be obtained until it is all known (D&C 93:24–28). For that reason, I am thankful that a loving God invited me to obtain a knowledge of history and positioned me to share it with others, “and all this for the salvation of Zion” (D&C 93:53).

Mormon History and the Rules of the Academic Game

MATTHEW J. GROW

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As a graduate student at the University of Notre Dame, I became part of a vibrant community of religious historians in both senses of the words—historians who studied the influence of religion in the past and many of whom adhered to some sort of faith commitment themselves. Catholics were, of course, well represented, but the history department also contained a large number of evangelical Christians who had come to study with George Marsden and Mark Noll, leading historians of evangelicalism and American religious history. A small sprinkling of Mormons and Mennonites added to

the mix. We engaged in vigorous discussions about the relationship between personal belief and the academic study of history.

In his book *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, George Marsden, who was my PhD adviser, argued that historians could bring their religiously informed perspectives into the academy, just like a Marxist historian or a feminist historian would bring his or her own distinct viewpoint, as long as they abided by the “rules of the academic game.”²³ In other words, they need to study history through professional research methodologies which other academics can accept. I am convinced that believing Latter-day Saint historians greatly benefit for both theological and practical reasons when they keep in mind Marsden’s counsel.

In 1 Corinthians 13:12, the Apostle Paul taught, “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” I believe that God intervenes in history. But, in most instances in mortality, “we see through a glass, darkly.” In other words, in our professional research and writing, we need to be humble in our approach about explicitly identifying God’s working in history. In Isaiah 55:8, the Lord declared, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.” Certainly, we can through the Spirit sense many of the ways that God has dealt with his people in history. But we are always wise to remember the limits our understanding in mortality.

In addition, by adhering to academic standards, by pursuing graduate degrees and by engaging with the cutting-edge scholarship of our field, we increase our credibility with scholars and others not of our faith. This credibility is crucial if we want to participate in shaping how Latter-day Saint history is understood by the broader public and how it is taught by academics in university settings. We enhance our credibility by participating in scholarly conferences, by publishing with academic presses, by networking with other historians, and by generally participating in the academic conversations. Elder Marlin K. Jensen, Church historian and recorder, has said, “The scholarship of incisive, faithful Mormon historians needs to be injected into the marketplace of ideas. Truth always does very well in that setting.”²⁴ Playing by the rules of the academic game allows us to enter into that marketplace.

The recent direction of the Church History Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which I joined in late 2010 after I graduated from Notre Dame and taught for about five years at universities in Indiana, demonstrates the belief that academic training and approaches are

not only compatible with but can be fully supportive of a faithful approach. For instance, the large-scale investigation during the past decade into the Mountain Meadows Massacre, performed by scholars employed by or associated with the Church History Department, resulted in the publication of *Massacre at Mountain Meadows* by Oxford University Press, with two other books on that crime still in preparation.²⁵ *The Joseph Smith Papers*, published by the Church Historian's Press and a part of the Church History Department, adheres to the most exacting standards of the documentary editing community, ensuring that present and future scholars and students of Joseph Smith must grapple with the documents he produced. Hiring patterns also indicate the belief that academically rigorous training enhances a truthful pursuit of history. Within the past two years, the Church History Department has hired ten scholars with PhDs in history or related fields.

Witnessing these trends, historian Richard Bushman recently declared, "I believe we are in a golden age of Mormon history." He continued, "We do not need to conceal our history. It will be more convincing, more engaging and more true if we tell it as it is."²⁶ Those of us living in this "golden age" should, of course, maintain a deep sense of humility in this as well. But we should also recognize the opportunities that can come to the study of the Latter-day Saint past as we engage with the broader professional historical community.

What Is So Sacred about History?

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Mormons are inherently concerned with history; its fabric enfolds the Mormon experience. Mormons invoke history each time the "Joseph Smith story" is retold (as if it were a singular thing), and we reenact it in youth pioneer treks. We trace its geographic span with pilgrimage tourism to Church history sites in the US and Canada, "Book of Mormon" tours to Central America, and journeys to the Holy Land in the Middle East. Mormons inscribe themselves in history with books of remembrance, multigeneration pedigree charts, scrapbooks, ward histories, and, increasingly, blogs and websites of all kinds. Mormons create history by testifying to personal, true stories about the past in testimonies, talks, and lessons. We sing of angels who serve as miraculous, mysterious archivists in heaven, "silent notes taking of

every action.”²⁷ We reverently pass down artifacts and shore up the walls of crumbling buildings to preserve a tangible record of our collective past.

Yet most Mormons are not professionally trained historians, and those that are might, like myself, experience some cognitive dissonance. Trained historians resist bending historical narratives along preordained patterns or attributing historical events to divine causes—actions that are acceptable and encouraged, indeed, utterly unproblematic in Mormon settings. Where sacred history diverges from academic and scholarly history is in the former’s discomfort with the latter’s insistence of contingency as a central principle. For academic historians, history has no definite endpoint, no future dénouement toward which the lines of human experience will inescapably converge. History has causality but not inevitability. It follows no predetermined trajectory, although one can (in retrospect only) trace an arc backward from antecedent to precedent. Academic history glories in complexity, rejecting the notion of simple universal laws or moral lessons. These days, it tries to steer between the Scylla of declension narratives or jeremiads and the Charybdis of triumphant progress, down the enlightened center that celebrates not a story’s didactic value but its verisimilitude.

In other words, academic history deliberately places itself at odds with—in fact, as a protest movement in reaction to—religious perspectives on the past. Christianity had imposed upon the past an overlay, a transparency, of sacred metahistory upon the march of time. Writing in *History: A Very Short Introduction*, John H. Arnold puts it this way: “Christian belief did not depend upon the wheel of fate; instead it saw the world moving inexorably between two fixed points, the Creation and the Apocalypse.”²⁸ Mormons further refine this by seeing the self as a soul moving along a predefined one-way trajectory: from premortal existence to mortality to eternity. And Mormons take a dispensational view of human time, assigning people and civilizations and history to prophetic epochs according to degrees of fullness of the kingdom of God. We orient ourselves within this sacred codex as it unfolds, with a clear sense of both heritage and destiny.

In explaining what history is for, Arnold proposes three reasons for doing history: for simple enjoyment, as a tool (“something with which to think about ourselves”), and to be made aware of the possibility of doing things differently. One would think that Mormons would be especially enthused about the third reason because it celebrates human agency, choice, and accountability as a core reality of human existence. We apply divine approbation to

those capabilities; we have a theology in which agency is central to the success of the plan of salvation. But this idea is dangerous, too, because it radically assaults the supposition of intentionality that underlies nonscholarly ways of constructing the Mormon sense of the past. Finding God's hand in human affairs, seeing his tender mercies evident in one's life, and drawing universal human lessons from stories about our pasts strengthen our sense of connection with a loving and powerful God, but somewhere along the path they part ways with historical scholarship. The two can never be fully reconciled.

However, creative tension is productive. Inquiry lives in the gap between irreconcilables. Silences and discontinuities are necessary; they produce questions.

When I look back on my graduate studies, perhaps the most important lesson I learned was something Morton (Mickey) Keller, an eminent legal historian, used to say while evoking Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's famous fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes. In the short story "Silver Blaze," Holmes quizzes a Scotland Yard detective on the disappearance of a racehorse, directing him to "the curious incident of the dog in the night-time." The Scotland Yard man observes that "the dog did nothing in the night-time," to which Holmes replies, "That was the curious incident."²⁹ Keller would often ask, pointedly, what dogs were not barking in a particular line of research inquiry. What are you not asking? What sources do you not have? He trained me to look for what is absent, what has been silenced, that which others have overlooked, dismissed, or suppressed. And as history has converged with literary and textual studies in recent years, scholars have proven wonderfully inventive in reading into the gaps, lacunas, and fragments in the historical record, ciphering sources with new attentiveness to those absent from them. The recent edited volume *Contesting Archives: Finding Women in the Sources* marshals brilliant examples of these techniques, driven by scholars' concern with people whose presence in the historical record had been masked, obscured, or excised.³⁰

In the celebration of the ordinary, the left-behind, and the fragmentary—in other words, in the methods and the aims of what we might call the new new social history—I find a deep religious connection which hallows even my "secular" work as a professional historian. Every child of God is significant; God is no respecter of persons. No one is undeserving of having her or his story told; no one is beneath a careful historian's interest. In being trained to listen for the silences, I found that God was not in the loud wind or the earthquake but in a still, small voice. I do not see the unfolding of a

grand design in the course of human history (although I respect those who do). Instead, I see his love enfolding human history on the smallest and most mundane levels, a constant thrumming behind the tapestry of history, a faithful dog not barking—if we choose to listen for it.

History, Philosophy, and Natural Law

PAUL E. KERRY

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A historian who has religious commitments can play by the rules of the game, as George Marsden puts it, and be a resident alien, a believer who is the best historian possible, by the standards of the profession.³¹ This view, of course, implies that believing historians should not be rejected by the academy for holding private, non-naturalistic views of history. Such a position is seen by some professional historians as a cheat, an artificial split in the reasoning of a scholar that may well disqualify the believing historian on grounds of being disingenuous or simply mad for holding supernatural views privately while professing only naturalistic explanations as a scholar.³² Accepting that others see one's beliefs as foolishness is par for the course in Herbert Butterfield's view—just as it was to profess Christianity in the ancient pagan world.³³ David Bebbington put forward that one's research insights can be molded by the acknowledgment of God's hand—not so easily discerned—in historical events. Yet he also points out that a believing historian must be aware of his or her audience, which might mean not stating overtly one's belief in God's hand for a professional stance.³⁴ Several historians in *Seeing Things Their Way* (2009) have argued that religion must be understood on its own terms. It is not merely an epiphenomenon that sheds light on economic or sociological or other social science theories, but is a category in itself and is central to the lives of those who have lived in the past. Strangely, some have downplayed analyzing religion as if it would be least likely to play a role in historical periods when it is most evident. Historical empathy, an approach that has long fallen out of favor, is experiencing a recrudescence in historical writing and may be particularly productive in analyzing religious history.

Believing historians sometimes put themselves at a disadvantage by cleaving too closely to the notion that all of secular history must be fitted into a providential narrative, like Cinderella's stepsister attempting to force her foot into the glass slipper. Professional history has entailments, of course. It must work through its own biases (including false objectivity) and is often blind

to its own philosophical assumptions. Do the historical actors posited by professional historians possess a moral personality? What motivates human action—is it merely passion, or can human beings discern intelligible goods through reason? Are we able to pass ethical judgments on historical events and actors—if so, by what standard?³⁵ How can and should we learn from the past and teach our students to do so?

Several prominent historians have called for a deeper philosophical grounding in historical writing, including James Tracy and Brad Gregory.³⁶ This is a highly serious consideration, as the dignity of human life is being increasingly called into question, and human beings are seen, from the materialist perspective, as mere points on an ecological continuum.³⁷ Jacques Maritain recognized a productive relationship in the interpenetration of the philosophy of history and moral philosophy (which may be informed by theology).³⁸ Similarly, Josef Pieper argued that the “end of history,” in the philosophical sense of its proper aim and the theological sense of eschatology, transcends merely factual history (which is still a necessity) as questions of meaning arise.³⁹ Happily, there is a recent volume, *Confessing History* (2010), in which historians suggest how philosophical approaches strengthen and make more relevant teaching and writing history: through “virtue ethics” (T. A. Howard), understanding history as a “vocation” (W. Katerberg), exercising “sympathetic understanding” (B. J. Gundlach), and recuperating misunderstood Enlightenment historiographic techniques, including a rehabilitation of moral philosophy (M. Kugler).⁴⁰

Another way forward is to learn how insights from natural law may strengthen the project of history. This would help to shore up the philosophical foundations of a profession that invests so much in the cult of the archive but might be accused of paying little heed to the philosophical cohesion of its animating assumptions. Although the roots of natural law go back to antiquity and in particular Aristotle, there is a strong Judeo-Christian contribution to natural law theory, contained not only in the Decalogue but in, for example, Romans 2:14–15: “For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another.” Latter-day Saints could plumb the rich depths of Alma’s profound statement to Korihor, who sought a sign to prove God’s existence, in the light of natural law: “The scriptures are laid

before thee, yea, and all things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all things that are upon the face of it, yea, and its motion, yea, and also all the planets which move in their regular form do witness that there is a Supreme Creator” (Alma 30:44). In this verse are contained what Jean Porter calls the “three traditional loci for Christian moral reflection [for scholastics]—namely, nature, reason, and Scripture.”⁴¹

Natural law was developed by St. Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologica*. Here is one of its most famous formulations: “It is manifest that all things participate to some degree in the eternal law, insofar, that is to say, as they have from its impression inclinations to their own acts and ends. Among the others, however, the rational creature is subject to divine providence in a more excellent way, insofar as it is itself made a participant in providence, being provident for itself and others. Hence there is in it a participation in the eternal reason, through which it has a natural inclination towards a due act and end. And such participation in the eternal law by the rational creature is called the natural law.”⁴² Aquinas also “described the function of the natural law as ‘the light of natural reason, whereby we discern what is good and evil.’”⁴³ Although there are various definitions of natural law, the philosopher Ralph McInerny provides one of the broadest: “Natural law—the theory—maintains that there is a common fund of knowledge, truths we can assume that everyone—anyone—already knows.”⁴⁴ Alasdair MacIntyre puts it this way: “Every account of natural law, no matter how minimal, makes at least two claims [the first only will interest us here]: first, that our human nature is such that, as rational beings, we cannot but recognize that obedience to some particular set of precepts is required, if we are to achieve our good or goods.”⁴⁵ Robert P. George maintains that natural law “consists of three sets of principles [again, the first will suffice for our purpose here]. First, and most fundamentally, a set of principles directing human choice and action toward intelligible purposes, i.e., basic human goods that, as intrinsic aspects of human well-being and fulfillment, constitute reasons for action whose intelligibility as reasons does not depend on any more fundamental reasons.”⁴⁶

Natural law was taken up as a legal theory by various philosophers including Grotius, Pufendorf, and Locke and is nested in several of the founding texts of the United States, not least the Declaration of Independence, which uses the language of the “laws of nature and nature’s God.”⁴⁷ The political philosopher Leo Strauss quoted from the Declaration in his University of Chicago lectures: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are

created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”⁴⁸ Strauss opens his lecture with the insight that developments in the discipline of history since the eighteenth century have made it impossible to “derive any norms from history,” and as universal principles were discredited, history became its own highest authority.⁴⁹ He opines that eighteenth-century philosophy failed to remain concerned about “the humanizing quest for the eternal order” and therefore gave way to the full flowering of universal history, often with its attendant celebration of progress, as, for example, in the universal histories of Bodin, Schlözer, and Schiller.⁵⁰ Strauss points out that these views collapsed and that even Hegelian history could work only by positing the end of history. Other nineteenth-century efforts (not excluding those by the so-called father of modern history, Ranke) to retain some modicum of universal or providential history, by the likes of Chateaubriand, Guizot, Motley, and Bancroft, failed to establish themselves.⁵¹ History would become rooted in relativity to the point that some contemporary historians, for example, profess that history is indistinguishable from fiction, or so contingent or idiosyncratic as to render learning from the past an impossibility. More recent critiques see historical narratives as a tool to direct political power, thus reducing history to an instrumentalized narrative in the service of an ideological agenda.

In 1789, Friedrich Schiller gave his inaugural lecture as a historian at the University of Jena, “What Is Universal History and to What End Is It Studied?” He argued there that history encompassed “the entire moral world.”⁵² What is that moral world? The nature of reality—is it secular and relativistic, or is there an objective moral reality?—is of particular, if not crucial, importance to all historians, including believing historians and students. Historians and students of faith understand divine law through their revealed religions and are taught the positive law that governs their societies. The current “rules of the profession” seem to be that believing historians must accept secular and relativistic assumptions and keep religious insights into human nature or the nature of reality private, if not secret, to avoid being marginalized. In this setting, natural law theory could provide historians and students of history with a way to understand human nature, the common good, and an objective moral reality that reason can discern without the necessity of drawing directly on theology.

Conclusion

RACHEL COPE

As the writing of Mormon history continues to move forward, I suspect that the stories of our past will be enriched and that a sense of what faith and history meant and means will become more evident. In order for this to happen, we must look through the lenses of faith and scholarship more frequently, and we must let those lenses shape the types of questions we ask. More importantly, we must teach our students how to do this so they can learn ways to reconcile faith and reason before entering more secular settings.

Although I certainly did not know it at the age of thirteen, my “I am” poem was also an “I will be” poem. Indeed, the things I proclaimed still hold true: I am a Mormon, I am a woman, I am a scholar, and, perhaps less importantly, yes, I still hate lateness. Throughout my academic journey, I have discovered that the two aspects of my own consciousness, that of the believer and that of the scholar, have finally fused (despite the suggestions that such was not possible). Nonetheless, I recognize that I can and should do a better job of addressing faith and history, theoretically as well as practically. My teaching and my scholarship will become better if I make this a priority, as so many of my Christian friends do. As believers, we cannot do otherwise. **RE**

Notes

1. I also shared this story at <http://mormonscholarstestify.org/2128/rachel-cope>.
2. Terryl Givens, *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 26–27.
3. Ronald Walker, David Whittaker, and James B. Allen, *Mormon History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 18.
4. Walker, Whittaker, and Allen, *Mormon History*, 21; R. Marie Griffith, “American Religious History and Women’s Divides and Recent Developments,” *Reviews in American History* 25, no. 2 (1997): 220–26.
5. Walker, Whittaker, and Allen, *Mormon History*, 31.
6. Walker, Whittaker, and Allen, *Mormon History*, 36.
7. This institute was disbanded in 2005; many of the scholars it employed transferred to the Church Historical Department and have continued working on *The Joseph Smith Papers* and other projects.
8. Milton R. Hunter, *Brigham Young the Colonizer* (Independence, MO: Zion’s Printing & Publishing, 1945), 2, 13, 32; Thomas Cottam Romney, *The Mormon Colonies in Mexico* (1938; Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005).
9. Russel B. Swensen, “Mormons at the University of Chicago Divinity School,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 7, no. 2 (Summer 1972): 37–47.
10. Joseph F. Darowski, “A Scholar as Witness: A Conversation with Richard Lloyd Anderson,” *Mormon Historical Studies* 7, nos. 1–2 (Spring/Fall 2006): 78, 81; Steven C.

Harper, "History Is People, Places, Sources and Stories: An Interview with Milton V. Backman, Jr.," *Mormon Historical Studies* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 107, 112.

11. Darowski, "Scholar as Witness," 78, 81; Harper, "History Is People," 107, 112; Milton V. Backman Jr., *Eyewitness Accounts of the Restoration* (Orem, UT: Grandin Book, 1983).

12. Truman G. Madsen, "Guest Editor's Prologue," *BYU Studies* 9, no. 3 (Spring 1969): 235–40; James B. Allen and Leonard J. Arrington, "Mormon Origins in New York: An Introductory Analysis," *BYU Studies* 9, no. 3 (Spring 1969): 241.

13. Milton V. Backman Jr., *Joseph Smith's First Vision: The First Vision in Its Historical Context* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971); Backman, *Eyewitness Accounts of the Restoration*; Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981); James B. Allen and Richard O. Cowan, *Mormonism in the Twentieth Century* (Provo, UT: BYU Extension Publications, 1964); James B. Allen, "The Significance of Joseph Smith's 'First Vision' in Mormon Thought," *Dialogue* 1, no. 3 (Autumn 1966): 239–45; James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992); Richard O. Cowan, *Temples to Dot the Earth* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989); Richard O. Cowan, *The Church in the Twentieth Century* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1985); Donald Q. Cannon and Richard O. Cowan, *Unto Every Nation: Gospel Light Reaches Every Land* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003); Spencer J. Palmer, *The Expanding Church* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978); Spencer J. Palmer, *The Church Encounters Asia* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970); Spencer J. Palmer, ed., *Mormons and Muslims: Spiritual Foundations and Modern Manifestations* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 1983).

14. Robert T. Handy, "Christian Faith and Historical Method: Contradiction, Compromise, or Tension?" in C. T. McIntire and Ronald A. Wells, eds., *History and Historical Understanding* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1984), 87.

15. David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Berlin: GRN Verlag, 2009), 69; Claudia M. Schmidt, *David Hume: Reason in History* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 377–413.

16. Jonathan Edwards, *History of the Work of Redemption*, ed. John F. Wilson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 62.

17. Bruce Kuklick makes this point about the problems of religious history in "On Critical History," in Bruce Kuklick and Darryl G. Hart, eds., *Religious Advocacy and American History* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 62–63.

18. The classic work here is William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1902); see also "Phenomenology and History of Religions," in Seth Daniel Kunin and Jonathon Miles-Watson, eds., *Theories of Religion: A Reader* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 109–75.

19. Robert A. Orsi, "Abundant History: Marian Apparitions as Alternative Modernity," and the responses, in *Historically Speaking* 8, no. 6 (September/October 2008): 12–20.

20. See, for instance, David D. Hall, ed., *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

21. Quoted in Andrew S. Finstuen, *Original Sin and Everyday Protestants: The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr, Billy Graham, and Paul Tillich in an Age of Anxiety* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 69.

22. Richard L. Bushman, "Faithful History," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 4, no. 4 (Winter 1969): 18.

23. George M. Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).
24. Elder Marlin K. Jensen and David F. Boone, "A Historian by Yearning: A Conversation with Elder Marlin K. Jensen," *Religious Educator* 8, no. 3 (2007): 13.
25. Ronald W. Walker, Richard E. Turley Jr., and Glen M. Leonard, *Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).
26. Emily W. Jensen, "At Symposium Honoring Birthday, Bushman Says Now Is 'Golden Age' of Mormon Historian Scholarship," *Deseret News*, June 22, 2011.
27. "Do What Is Right," *Hymns* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 237.
28. John H. Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 20.
29. Arthur Conan Doyle, "Silver Blaze," in *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (1894; repr. New York: Dover Publications, 2010), 17.
30. See Nupur Chaudhuri and others, eds., *Contesting Archives: Finding Women in the Sources* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010).
31. See Marsden, *The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, 44–58. Neal A. Maxwell used a similar metaphor, that of an LDS scholar holding a "passport into the professional world" whilst maintaining "citizenship in the kingdom." Neal A. Maxwell, "Some Thoughts on the Gospel and the Behavioral Sciences," *Ensign*, July 1976, 70.
32. See Bruce Kuklick, "Believing History," *Books and Culture*, March and April 2005, 6–7.
33. Herbert Butterfield, "The Christian and Academic History," 174–76 in C. T. McIntire, *Herbert Butterfield: Writings on Christianity and History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 172–82.
34. David Bebbington, *Patterns in History: A Christian Perspective on Historical Thought* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2000), 168–88.
35. See Richard T. Vann, "Historians and Moral Evaluations," *History and Theory* 43, no. 4 (December 2004): 3–30.
36. James D. Tracy, "Believers, Non-Believers, and the Historian's Unspoken Assumptions," *Catholic Historical Review* 86, no. 3 (July 2000): 403–19. See Brad Gregory's recent articles in *History and Theory*.
37. I address this topic in "Reflections on Reconciling Religious Belief and the Historian's Craft," *Fides et Historia* 43, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 2011): 41–52.
38. Jacques Maritain, *On the Philosophy of History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957).
39. Josef Pieper, *The End of Time: A Meditation on the Philosophy of History* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1999).
40. See their contributions in *Confessing History: Explorations in Christian Faith and the Historian's Vocation*, ed. John Fea, Jay Green, and Eric Miller (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010).
41. Jean Porter, *Natural and Divine Law: Reclaiming the Tradition for Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 63.
42. *Summa* I–II 91.2, as quoted in Jean Porter, *Nature as Reason: A Thomistic Theory of Natural Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 48.
43. *Summa*, I–II 91.1 as quoted in Charles Rice, "Natural Law in the Twenty-First Century," in *Common Truths: New Perspectives on Natural Law*, ed. Edward B. McLean

(Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2004), 306. This has resonances with D&C 88:11 and 13: “And the light which shineth, which giveth you light, is through him who enlighteneth your eyes, which is the same light that quickeneth your understandings; . . . the light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed, even the power of God who sitteth upon his throne, who is in the bosom of eternity, who is in the midst of all things.”

44. Ralph McNerny, “Are There Moral Truths That Everyone Knows?,” in *Common Truths*, 1.

45. Alasdair MacIntyre, “Theories of Natural Law in the Culture of Advanced Modernity,” in *Common Truths*, 94.

46. Robert P. George, “Natural Law and Positive Law,” in *Common Truths*, 151.

47. It is important not to confuse a philosophical approach to historical assumptions with what David Bebbington calls the “positivist school,” as opposed to the “idealist” (*Patterns in History*, 142–67).

48. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 1.

49. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 17.

50. Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, 34.

51. Brian Q. Cannon, “Providential History: The Need for Continuing Revelation,” in *Window of Faith: Latter-day Saint Perspectives on World History*, ed. Roy A. Prete (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2005), 143–60.

52. The title of Schiller’s lecture was “Was heist und zu welchem Ende studiert man Universalgeschichte?” and the original German of “the entire moral world” is “die ganze moralische Welt.” Friedrich Schiller, *Werke und Briefe in zwölf Bänden*, Frankfurter Ausgabe, ed. Otto Dann and others (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1988–2004), VI: *Historische Schriften und Erzählungen* (2000), FA 6, 211–12.