

SOME CONCEPTS OF

by Lorin K. Hansen

Since the beginning of the Restoration many Mormons have been led to believe that their position on the principle of modern divine revelation was nearly unique in the Christian world. Reactions from other Christians have been sufficient to leave that impression. Very early, for example, Joseph Smith related his First Vision to a Christian minister and received this first taste of prevailing opinion:

...He treated my communication not only lightly, but with great contempt, saying it was all of the devil, that there were no such things as visions or revelations in these days, that all such things had ceased with the apostles, and that there would never be any more of them. (JS 2:24)

Such reactions have been common in Mormon experience. This is not surprising since the belief in the cessation of modern revelation has been a dominant view throughout most of Christian history, the origin of the doctrine dating back to the second century. At that time the early church struggled desperately to protect the faith from the divisive influence of professed gnostic revelations. In self defense, in the face of waning authoritative guidance, the church of that day enunciated the principle of "...revelation given once for all in days long gone and never to be added to or altered."¹

But much has happened in Christian thought since Joseph Smith's day. There has been the rise of Protestant liberalism, the brief flourishing of the Catholic modernist movement, the reaction of Protestant fundamentalism, the influence in this century of neo-orthodox (crisis) theology, and a host of other theological expressions. As part of these theological movements there have been major changes in the general Christian view of divine revelation.

The awakening concern with revelation began first within Protestantism. In retrospect Carl Braaten observes:

Every modern Protestant theology, regardless of which category shapes its thinking, has felt obliged to establish itself as a theology of revelation, as if thereby it has achieved all that matters or what matters most.²

James Barr speaks of the uniqueness of the present situation:

... it is equally clear that the dominance of the concept of revelation is modern, and has caused this term to acquire a function which it never had in the whole previous history of the church.³

A veritable flood of literature has appeared on the subject. The doctrine of revelation has been called "...the most frequented hunting ground of theologians."⁴ In-

tense interest has been felt by Catholics as well as Protestants. One of the two most important documents to come out of the latest Vatican Council was the document on divine revelation. Karl Rahner explains the present situation in the Roman Catholic Church:

Quietly and almost unnoticed, an answer is being given at the present time to the question of a correct and full understanding of the concept of revelation, the question to which the Church at that time (during the Modernist Movement) had no clean answer...⁵

What are these new concepts of divine revelation? And why have they taken on such importance in our day? A concise statement on such a flurry of new thought is difficult. It is helpful, however, to realize that there are only a few basic recurring themes which dominate this new revelation-literature. In the following discussion four basic categories will be described briefly, put in historical perspective, and related to the Mormon experience.

Revelation as Communication

The most common concept of revelation through the Christian centuries has been revelation as communication. Revelation, in this view, is the divine process of unveiling, making known objective truths that before were hidden. By the incarnation, by vision, by voice, or by the inner promptings of the Spirit, God conveys to man objective truths important to his salvation.

It is this concept of revelation that has so long been coupled with the idea that revelation was complete and closed. The incarnation was God's complete self-revelation to man. The Bible, as a depository of propositional revelation, was complete with Christ and the apostles. The immediate source of man's knowledge from God was no longer the present prophetic gift but rather the inspired, inscriptured truths of a closed canon. The scriptures themselves became God's revelation.

Again, this view of revelation-complete and a canon-closed dates back to the struggles of early Christians. In fact, this concept has been at the center of Christian controversy ever since. It was a central issue in the Reformation when Protestants claimed not only the completeness of scriptures but also the sufficiency of scripture. It was hotly debated during the Enlightenment when Deists claimed that there had been no special communication from God. Belief in the closure of revelation has also been challenged. Scattered Spiritualists or "enthusiastic" sects such as the Montanists, the Quakers, the Quietists, and the Moravians have claimed the immediacy of the Spirit, the indwelling light, the openness of revelation.

The greatest challenge to this conservative, narrow

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view of revelation, however, came in the nineteenth century when many Christians became deeply influenced by the new historical and scientific criticism of the scriptures. In spite of an onslaught of skepticism the conservative view survived. A stream of orthodoxy, weakened but determined, continued down even to the present. In fact, orthodox views of revelation are now being reasserted with new force by a rising group of modern evangelicals. Carl F. H. Henry, a strong advocate in this movement, expresses this view concisely:

The Bible is no mere record of revelation, but is itself revelation. Revelation is inscriptured. Scripture is a mode of divine disclosure, a special written form of revelation . . .

God speaks to us today by the scriptures; they are the trustworthy and adequate bearer of His revelation . . .⁶

When the scriptures thus become objectified, propositional revelation, the next step is to regard God as the literal author. "Biblical inspiration," in the view of strict orthodoxy both Catholic and Protestant, is said to be "verbal" (extending to the very choice of words) and "plenary" (extending to all parts equally).

The overriding concept of revelation in Mormon thought is also that of divine communication. The communication may come through vision or through voice. Sometimes the communication comes by the direct influence of the Spirit on the consciousness of man (D & C 8:2-3). Whatever the means, the revelation can be verbalized and recorded and added to the canon of scripture.

The Mormon concept of revelation, therefore, is similar to the orthodox view in that revelation, at least in part, is communicated proposition. But even in this respect there are obvious differences. The most obvious is that, in the Mormon view, revelation is continuous, the canon of the scripture is never closed. An article of Mormon faith is that God "... does now reveal, and ... will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God" (9th Article of Faith).

Revelation can become scripture, and here also there are parallels and contrasts in the Mormon and orthodox views. In orthodox verbal inspiration of the Bible is not considered to be equivalent to a mechanical dictation but in some way there is a confluence of the wills of God and man. The words of scripture reflect the styles and cultures of the writers yet are authoritatively the *very word of God*. The inspiration is plenary; one cannot call some parts of the scriptures inferior or allow for errors in so-called unessential matters.

In addition to the Bible there are modern accounts and testimonies that contribute to the Mormon concepts of

revelation and of the interplay of the divine and the human in revelation. An attempt should not be made to reduce these accounts to some universal formula, but to the extent that these testimonies are representative, revelation that is the basis of scripture is a cooperative experience between man and God. Joseph Smith once stated:

All things whatsoever God in his infinite wisdom has seen fit and proper to reveal to us, . . . are revealed to us in the abstract . . . revealed to our spirits as though we had no bodies at all.⁷

The prophet apparently gave expression to these abstractions in his own language and received confirmation concerning these expressions (D & C 9:7-9). Whatever the precise nature of this process, it was God's way for giving authoritative revelation to man "... after the manner of their language, that they might come to understanding" (D & C 1:24).

This confluence of God and man produces a correct message; in this respect the Mormon position is also one of scriptural inerrancy. In the words of Joseph Smith, "... there is no error in the revelations which I have taught."⁸ In contrast to Christian orthodoxy, however, a clear distinction has to be made between a correct teaching and a perfect and full expression of that teaching. The process of revelation is not mechanical, involving the very choice of words. The human element is there too. For this reason Joseph Smith and the Church after him have felt justified in editing and improving the wording of modern scripture, that it might better convey the intended message. The message is divine, the words are of man, and the text is sufficient for the purposes of God.

In orthodoxy, the human element in the scriptures must be circumscribed with great care. Verbal, plenary inspiration is the critical link to communication from God. In Mormonism the human element in scripture is also a sensitive issue, but there is not the urgency found in Christian orthodoxy. There is more allowance for the human element within the bounds of scriptural inspiration. As vital and cherished as the scriptures are in Mormonism, it is the personal witness and the present prophetic guidance which are deemed most vital as a foundation for the faith.

History as Revelation

In the mid-nineteenth century, about the time of Joseph Smith, intellectual forces were surfacing in western thought which were to bring sweeping changes in Christian theology and a major reaction against the rationalistic, proposition-centered religion of orthodoxy.

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A revolution was occurring in men's view of history. Historians were attempting a strict scientific approach to their work. Men were deeply influenced by such men as Hegel and Darwin. Ideas of progress, development, and evolution were coming into vogue. History was now being viewed not merely as a sequence of events but as an organic development.

These changes had far-reaching effects on Christian theology and particularly on the concept of divine revelation. The critical, skeptical eye of the historian now shifted to the Bible. Eventually, little of the Bible was not called into question. As a result Christians began to lose faith in the inerrancy of the scriptures and began to see the Bible as a very fallible, human book. This struck at the very heart of orthodox religion, leaving many, especially Protestants, to wonder where they were to turn for the foundation of their faith, where they were to find the locus of divine revelation.

Men of that day were very much in the spell of historical and evolutionary thought, and many came to regard history instead of scripture as the locus of divine revelation. The scriptures were no longer the inspired recordings of once delivered propositions but a human record of man's upward, spiritual evolution. The revelation was not in the words of the book but in the divine process of historical, progressive redemption that the book described. Thus it could be said that the Bible itself was not revelation but that it "contained" revelation in the sense that it described or represented the historical revelation.

The relating of history to revelation has been touched on in various ways down through the centuries. But it was in the nineteenth century that the categories of history, evolution, and progressive redemption had their full impact on the Christian theology of revelation. At that time the view of revelation-in-history came to be associated with liberal theology, but even then uses made of the idea were quite varied. The naturalistic thinker, the liberal, and the conservative all used the category of history to convey views of divine revelation, each in contrast to the view of traditional orthodoxy. The debate among these various views has continued to our own day.

The enthusiasm with which this concept of revelation-in-history has been embraced, in whatever form, was noted by James Barr:

...No single principle is more powerful in the handling of the Bible today than the belief that history is the channel of divine revelation. Thus the formula 'revelation through history' is taken to represent the center of biblical thinking, and the interpretation of any biblical passage must be related to this historical revelation... These ideas today are not only common, but they

enjoy almost unqualified acceptance...

Historians of theology in a future age will look back on the mid-twentieth century and call it the revelation-in-history period.⁹

It should be noted that the theme of history-as-revelation has been used explicitly by one Mormon author, Heber C. Snell, to relate the story of ancient Israel. To quote Snell:

God was making a special revelation of himself and his will through ancient Israel. It was not a revelation embodied in words but in life. What happened to individuals, to communities, and to Israel as a whole, which led in the direction of the highest values we know, is the proof of the revelation. In this sense the greatest persons and events were the revelation. That is what is meant by the revelation of God in History.¹⁰

Snell's work was received with mixed feelings by his Mormon audience. Some saw his book essentially as a document of Protestant liberalism. Others thought it addressed a definite heritage in the Mormon concept of history. Perhaps it was some of both.

In any case, the concept of revelation-in-history has made its contributions. It was a challenge to an abuse that treated the Bible merely as a textbook of doctrinal propositions. It brought into relief the key biblical theme of what God was accomplishing in history. The historical context in scripture gained new importance. But the revelation-in-history concept has also had its difficulties. It too has been involved in distortions of the scriptures. Preconceived notions of evolutionary history have been used to reconstruct and reorder biblical events. The revelation-in-history concept has also been used to displace or downplay the concept of direct, divine revelation. When God recedes behind the scenes of history, in the writings of many, he recedes too far. God no longer speaks. Prophets become mere gifted philosophers giving expression to the religious consciousness of the age rather than chosen emissaries announcing, "Thus saith the Lord!"

The revelation-in-history concept, in many of its expressions, is foreign to Mormon thought. It is a Mormon belief, however, that history does have meaning and direction. God, according to Milton R. Hunter, has been "...the center, the principle, motive force of human history."¹¹ Salvation is not just a matter of lifting men out of a meaningless sea of events. There is also a divine "plan of salvation" for the human family as a whole.

This view of God working through history is often found in Mormon literature which deals with the principles of revelation-accommodation and progressive preparation. A prophet or a Savior can be sent to men, but

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unless men are sufficiently prepared in their cultural and spiritual situation, little is accomplished. Christ came in the meridian of time, but for centuries there had been a schoolmaster. As man progresses he receives divine revelation conditioned to his present situation. In the words of Brigham Young:

I do not believe that there is a single revelation, among the many God has given to the Church, that is perfect in its fullness. The revelations of God contain correct doctrine and principle, so far as they go. . . . He (God) has to speak to us in a manner to meet the extent of our capacities . . ." (JD, 2:314).

Thus, the Lord tells the Church today, ". . . ye are little children . . . ye cannot bear all things now; nevertheless be of good cheer, for I will lead you along. . ." (D & C 78:17-18). Here a little, there a little, hopefully man progresses in spiritual vision.

While Mormons generally believe in a divine influence and some sort of progression in history, they do not ordinarily use the term revelation in reference to it, particularly since this seems to raise the specter of the nineteenth century Protestant liberalism. Nevertheless, at least one Mormon author has so named it by using a convenient metaphor.¹² The usual sense of revelation as direct communication from God has been called "vertical revelation." The disclosure of God's purposes through development in history has been called "horizontal revelation."

Revelation as Personal Encounter

Protestant liberalism has had a major impact on Christianity. Early in the twentieth century, however, it began to slip from its central position on the theological stage. One reason for this was the position of liberalism on the nature of man. After a world war and a depression it no longer seemed so evident that progress was inevitable or that man's unfolding nature was altogether good. The mood was changing from one of optimism and hope to one of crisis and despair.

In this new context, after the First World War, neo-orthodoxy or crisis theology developed. The movement began in Europe under the leadership of the Swiss theologians Karl Barth and Emil Brunner but quickly gained an extensive following, influencing even British and American theologians. This movement has been most influential in bringing into relief within Protestantism still another view of divine revelation.

Instead of a theology of the immanence of God, as found in nineteenth century liberalism, in neo-orthodoxy emphasis shifted to a theology of the complete transcendence of God. Instead of man being able to

gradually create a kingdom of God on earth, man was held to be sinful, depraved, and hopelessly lost. Salvation was not in history but by a timeless eternal God breaking into history and lifting men out of it. Within liberalism there had been a shift to the message of the social gospel; within neo-orthodoxy there was a return to an emphasis of personal-redemption. Man's predicament was not to be solved by evolution through time or even by striving for adherence to presumably divinely disclosed propositional truths. Not rational knowledge and progress but faith and the grace of reconciliation were man's dire needs. And this came through personal encounter between man and God. In the words of Karl Barth:

. . . revelation—that which came to apostles and prophets as revelation—is nothing less than God himself . . .¹³

In other words, God himself in personal encounter. The supreme revelation occurred when God was incarnate in the Christ. But this revelation is not complete for an individual until he too encounters the very presence of God within his own soul. This occurs as one recognizes the Christ in the man Jesus.

The divine-human encounter, the unveiling and the response, involves also the awakening of man to the reality of his justification and election with God. Quoting Barth:

This is what revelation means, this is its content and dynamic: reconciliation has been made and accomplished. Reconciliation is not a truth which revelation makes known to us; reconciliation is the truth of God Himself who grants himself freely to us in his revelation.¹⁴

For Barth, revelation is a matter of redemption and exclusively a matter of redemption. The encounter, the faith and the reconciliation are all one revelation event. Finally, it is important to note that the testimony, the justification, and the reconciliation are *not* communicated propositions. Rather, through this encounter with God and the outpouring of the Spirit, man is changed, finds himself in a new position.

Neo-orthodoxy, in a sense, is a return to reformation themes. But (on the question of the historical and scientific criticism of the scriptures) it is not entirely in the tradition of the reformers. It accepts with liberalism the critical approach to the Bible. In Protestant liberalism this led to the shift of the locus of revelation from scripture to history. The key to the neo-orthodox accommodation, however, is a shift of the revelation concept from objective, communicated propositional truth to personal encounter. Revelation, it is claimed, is completely devoid of

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propositional truth. There can be truths about revelation, man's response in retrospect, but the revelation itself is pure encounter. For orthodoxy the Bible was revelation; for neo-orthodoxy revelation was the encounter that came while man was reading the Bible. The Bible was merely the stepping stone to revelation. Thus, in neo-orthodoxy, criticism of the Bible can be accepted and yet divine revelation itself remains beyond the reach of destructive criticism.

This accommodation to scriptural criticism is shown in the interpretation given to many biblical accounts. Reference is often made by Barth and Brunner, for example, to the Fall of Man. But for them there is not actually a man named Adam. Brunner considers the theophanies of the Old Testament to be a "relic of popular mythology." Such "naive and childlike stories" indicate not the physical presence of God as a person but only the "personal" presence of God through the "Spirit."

In comparison, revelation in Mormon literature is often defined as divine communication, and emphasis is placed on the "knowledge" that comes from revelation. ". . . By the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things" (Moroni 10:4-5). But there is another dimension to the Mormon concept of revelation. The Holy Ghost is also the Comforter. Revelation is also communion. It involves not only proposition but also a deep feeling of the nearness of God. In the words of David O. McKay:

Never forget that great events have happened in this Church because of such communion, and because of the responsiveness of the soul to the inspiration of the Almighty. I know it is real! . . . the greatest comfort that can come to us in this life is to sense the realization of communion with God.¹⁵

This aspect of revelation is important in the Church today, evident not so much in theological descriptions and definitions or even in the recorded propositions of the Restoration. It is to be experienced oneself or sensed in the personal testimonies of the members.

While there are some similarities between neo-orthodox and Mormon concepts of revelation in that revelation is thought of as personal communion and a present reality, there are also fundamental differences. In neo-orthodoxy, for example, the encounter is one of reconciliation between the wholly transcendent, absolute God and depraved man. The encounter is a moment in which man becomes aware of his election and justification to which he contributes nothing. In Mormon thought God is not so distant nor man so depraved; neither is revelation subsumed in the concept of redemption. After receiving the testimony of Jesus, the witness

of the Spirit, one's ultimate salvation most likely is still in the balance. There is the Holy Spirit of Promise, but this is God's affirmation to those who receive the testimony of Jesus, who are baptized in his name, and who at long last overcome by faith (D & C 76:50-53).

Mormonism, of course, differs as well in its estimate of the Bible and to an extent stands in a position between orthodoxy and neo-orthodoxy. Mormons do not accept the concept of strict verbal, plenary inspiration (as in orthodoxy) nor do they accept at the other extreme that God speaks only in subjective truths, never in objective, propositional truths (as in neo-orthodoxy). From this middle ground it would seem that orthodox theologians are trying to preserve their faith and protect the scriptures from the critics by exaggerating them and that the encounter theologians have unnecessarily conceded the scriptures to the critics and have sought haven in an un-touchable world of subjectivity.

Existential Experience as Revelation

We have seen in neo-orthodoxy how modern theologians have turned away from the nineteenth-century concepts of salvation and revelation-in-history and turned instead to a subjective interpretation of revelation along the lines of reformation themes. In this century we also find another closely related development, another thread in this fabric of subjective interpretation. Many modern theologians have adopted the approaches of existentialism in their statements of faith, rejecting not so much nineteenth-century liberalism as the positivistic approach to knowledge that lies at the basis of it. Passionate involvement rather than dispassionate observation, reflection, and speculation is claimed as the key to insight. From a world of "things" interest has shifted to man's personal "existence." This existential approach has had its effect on recent views of divine revelation, expressed in the writings of such theologians as Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich, and H. Richard Niebuhr.

In the existentialist view, as in neo-orthodoxy, revelation could be described as encounter. But now the encounter is not with a divine, transcendent being. Revelation is rather, as Tillich would say, an encounter with "Being Itself." The revelation is the manifestation of God only in the sense that "God" is another name for the "ultimate ground of being," and the encounter is with the personal only in the sense that God, though not a person in any sense, is the "ground of all that is personal." According to Tillich:

A revelation is a special and extraordinary manifestation which removes the veil from something which is hidden in a special and extraordinary way. This hid-

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denness is often called "mystery" . . .

Here (in revelation) the mystery appears as the power of being, conquering nonbeing. It appears as ultimate concern . . .¹⁶

Man, in despair, uncertainty, estrangement, guilt, or dread of nonbeing, is grasped by the "mystery" of revelation. His mind transcends to a state of ecstasy and illumination. There is a disclosure of what ultimately concerns him, the Ultimate Ground of his Being. In the miracle of this mystery-ecstasy encounter he achieves his inner integrity, his meaning and authenticity.

Like Barth, these theologians give no place to objective knowledge or doctrine in what they mean by revelation. There can be statements made about revelation, but the "true" knowledge of revelation is subjective and cannot be verbalized and separated from the revelation event itself. Truth is found only in the depth of inward experience. To quote Bultmann:

What, then, has been revealed? Nothing at all, so far as the question concerning revelation asks for doctrines—doctrines, say, that no man could have discovered for himself—or for mysteries that no man could have known once and for all as soon as they are communicated. On the other hand, however, everything has been revealed, insofar as man's eyes are opened concerning his own existence and he is once again able to understand himself.¹⁷

What is received is existential knowledge or what Bultmann calls "not-knowing knowledge."

Again, it follows that the objective statements of the scriptures have no divine sanction. They represent merely the crude attempts by the ancients to express themselves. The extraordinary events of the scriptures (the fall, the resurrection, etc.) become the myths (Bultmann) or symbols (Tillich) employed to allude to the truths of revelation, that is, the existential truths behind the myths.

Let it be said in passing that the God in this existential concept of revelation is in great contrast to the God of Mormon testimony. Revelation for Tillich and Bultmann is said to be an encounter with the Divine, but still the focus is on man. In their writings the personal God who is a loving Father seems to fade away into esoteric abstractions.

These theologians also speak of the dread and uncertainty of life. Yet they give no place to the possibility of objective, revealed truths which could relate to these feelings. According to Mormon scripture there are truths which cannot be known except by the Spirit. There are also truths that defy verbalization " . . . neither is man capable of making them known . . ." (D & C 76:114-118).

But still there are simple, vital, objective truths which can be known, can be expressed, and have been revealed by God. It is these truths of the Gospel, the Good News, the "peaceable things" (D & C 39:6; 42:61) of joy and eternal life that are so addressed to man's situation.

The importance of the inner man was not an original discovery of modern existentialism. This has been God's message throughout the centuries. Superficial assent and outward show are not sufficient. " . . . Saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and I will be their God and they shall be my people" (Jeremiah 31:33). Man must be deeply affected by the gospel message; he must be born of the Spirit into a newness of life.

The testimony of a life touched by the Spirit of God has been told so often. That touch is often a delicate touch, but at times it has been very dramatic. The classic example from Mormon scripture, of course, is the experience of Alma the younger. Alma made a transition from a soul racked with torment to one filled with marvelous light, exceeding joy, and consuming purpose. Without retelling that story, it can be said that whatever modern theologians could mean by such words as "encounter," "reconciliation," or "authenticity," the meanings could hardly indicate more than the overwhelming reality of the transformation in the life of Alma.

Another dramatic example, more modern, illustrates another important point. Lorenzo Snow tells that he had expected some manifestation at his conversion and baptism into the Restored Church—as a confirmation of the truth of his actions. None came. His feelings became gloomy and depressed, and he decided to pray about it. As he began to pray he immediately became enveloped and filled with the Spirit of the Lord:

. . . O the joy and happiness I felt! No language can describe the almost instantaneous transition from a dense cloud of mental and spiritual darkness into a resplendent of light and knowledge, that God lives, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and of the restoration of the Holy Priesthood, and the fulness of the gospel . . .¹⁸

Lorenzo Snow describes several aspects of this experience: despair, encounter with the Spirit, and ecstasy. Finally, in contrast to the "not-knowing knowledge" of Bultmann, he speaks of propositional testimony. Thus, it would be the Mormon view that when we speak of revelation, we are speaking of the ways of God and, therefore, that we should approach the subject with humility and openness. We should take care not to think that the ways of divine revelation can be reduced to overly simple formulas. In particular, we should not imagine that the

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importance of existential knowledge in revelation precludes the concurrent reality of objective knowledge in revelation.

Conclusion

In summary, looking at ourselves in comparison with others, we could say that the Mormon concept of revelation is that of communication, without revelation being completed or without the heavens being closed. God's subtle influence is in history, but revelation also comes to man at a point of history and in a manner accommodated to his conditions. Revelation is existential or subjective without thereby being devoid of propositional content. And it is encounter without the person of God being lost in superlatives and vague philosophical abstractions.

From the Mormon viewpoint, however, the most striking of the concepts used to describe divine revelation in modern theology is the new emphasis among Christians of revelation as a modern, personal experience. It seems the logic of the position has become most compelling. The Swedish theologian, Nathan Soderblom, echoes the feelings of many others when he concludes "how impossible it is to maintain that there is a true revelation unless we assume it continues in the present time."¹⁹

It is also interesting that for all the modern emphasis on revelation as a present, personal experience, there seems to be little discussion on the role of the prophet for modern times. Revelation is often said to be subjective only; there is no objective, prophetic message. But even on this point, there are signs of change.²⁰

In Mormonism, by way of contrast, the president of the Church, as prophet, and other spiritual leaders provide everpresent guidance from God. The importance of the role of the prophet, however, in no way diminishes the importance in Mormon thought of each person receiving revelation. Mormons feel that to each person is given the opportunity for inspiration within the sphere of his own affairs and responsibilities. And to each is promised the confirming witness that the guidance from spiritual leaders is inspired.

Thus, even with the emphasis in Mormonism on prophetic revelation, there is a shift of responsibility to the individual.²¹ In a sense, all must be prophets of God,²² each must seek his own communion. The promise of Brigham Young is typical:

When you have labored faithfully for years, you will learn this simple fact—that if your hearts are right and you still continue to be obedient, continue to serve God, continue to pray, the Spirit of revelation will be in you like a well of water springing up to everlasting life. (JD 12:103)

Whoever the person and whatever the faith, there is the personal promise and the personal challenge of divine revelation. Revelation is now. So we must ask: Can we live the precepts of God? Can we draw near to him? Can we serve him in righteousness? Can we be sensitive to the Spirit and responsive to the Spirit?

Notes

- ¹A. C. McGiffert, *A History of Christian Thought*, (New York: Scribners, 1950), p. 164.
- ²Carl E. Braatan, *New Directions in Theology Today, vol. II: History and Hermeneutics*, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), p. 12.
- ³James Barr, *Old and New in Interpretation*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), pp. 83-84.
- ⁴John Baille, *Revelation*, (New York: Macmillan, 1937), p. x.
- ⁵Karl Rahner and Joseph Ratzinger, *Revelation and Tradition*, (New York: Herder, 1966), pp. 10-11.
- ⁶Carl F. H. Henry, "Divine Revelation and the Bible," in *Inspiration and Interpretation*, ed. J. F. Walvoord, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 256-257.
- ⁷DHC, vol. VI, p. 312.
- ⁸DHC, vol. VI, p. 366; also vol. I, pp. 104-105.
- ⁹James Barr, "Revelation Through History in Old Testament and in Modern Theology," in *New Theology*, no. 1 ed. by Martin E. Marty and Dean G. Peerman, (New York: Macmillan, 1964), p. 61.
- ¹⁰Heber C. Snell, *Ancient Israel—Its Story and Meaning*, (Salt Lake City: Univ. of Utah Press, 3rd ed. 1963), p. 280.
- ¹¹Milton R. Hunter, *Gospel Through the Ages*, (Salt Lake City: Stevens and Wallis, 1945), p. 52.
- ¹²George T. Boyd, *Dialogue*, vol. III (Spring 1968), p. 56.
- ¹³Karl Barth, *God in Action*, (Manhasset: Roundtable Press, 1963), p. 56.
- ¹⁴Karl Barth, *ibid.*, p. 17.
- ¹⁵David O. McKay, "Consciousness of God: Supreme Goal of Life," *Improvement Era*, (June 1967), p. 80.
- ¹⁶Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 108-110.
- ¹⁷Rudolf Bultmann, "The Concept of Revelation in the New Testament," in *Existence and Faith*, (New York: Living Age Books, 1960), p. 85.
- ¹⁸Eliza R. Snow Smith, *Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow*, p. 5, quoted in Preston Nibley, *The Presidents of the Church*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), p. 140.
- ¹⁹Nathan Soderblom, *The Nature of Revelation*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), p. 121.
- ²⁰Gabriel Moran, *Theology of Revelation*, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), note especially chapter 6; see also Louis C. Midgley, *Improvement Era*, vol. 73, (August 1970), p. 68.
- ²¹See J. Reuben Clark, *Speeches of the Year*, July 7, 1954, Brigham Young University.
- ²²See Brigham Young, JD 3:192; Heber C. Kimball, JD 5:88.

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