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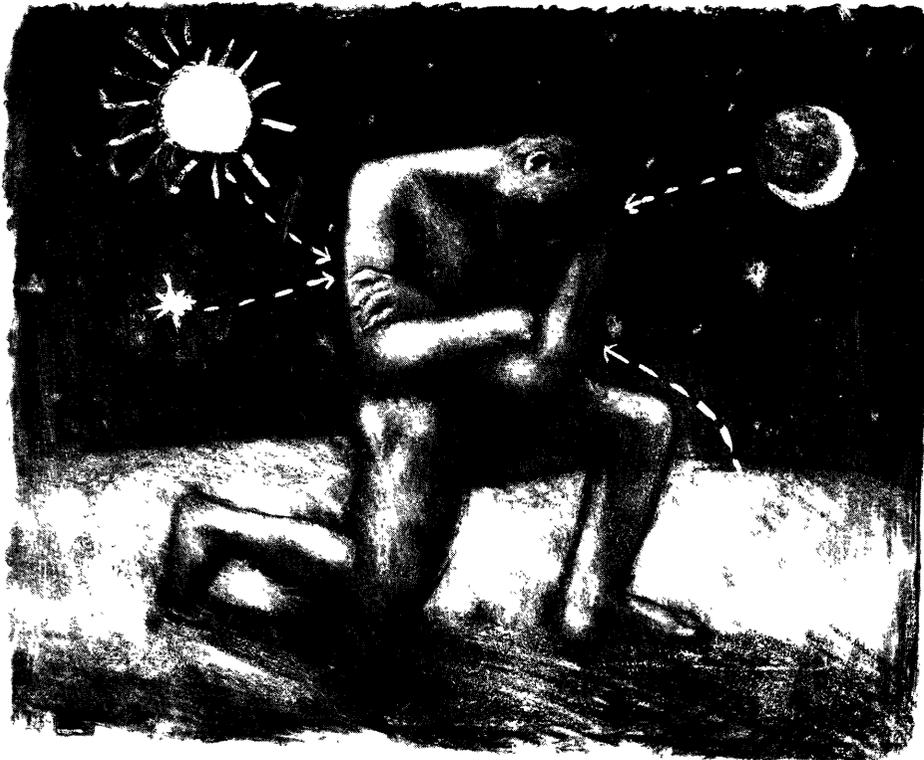
## TURNING THE TIME OVER TO . . .

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Lowell L. Bennion

# FAITH AND KNOWLEDGE



I have my reasons for believing in God.  
The beauty, goodness, and rationality that I find in life  
bespeak an intelligent personal source.

THE SCRIPTURES ARE replete with examples of faith and admonitions to live by faith, but I know of only two efforts to define the concept. One is in Hebrews. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). The other statement is in Alma's well-known

chapter on faith: "Therefore if ye have faith ye hope for things which are not seen, which are true" (Alma 32:21).

Both statements acknowledge that faith rests on hope in the existence of things not seen. Faith is not knowledge. Knowledge is based on experience, on repeatable, verifiable experience either in science or everyday living. In this modern, scientific age we have learned to trust experience and to be skeptical of wishful and speculative thinking whether in philosophy or theology. There are many people who, believing that the whole of religion rests on faith in the unseen world, prefer to live by knowledge, even though admitting that life divided by reason leaves a very large

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remainder. Faith does not fill the void for them.

All religion does not rest on faith. There are principles taught and exemplified by the Hebrew prophets and Jesus which from experience we can know that they are good and life-fulfilling for the individual, for the community, and for society. I refer to justice and mercy taught by the writing prophets of the Old Testament—Amos, Isaiah, Micah, Hosea, and Jeremiah—and to the love and humility which were all-important to Jesus.

I have observed what the presence and absence of these principles do for individuals and human relationships. I have in my own life tasted of their influence and also know what it means to fail to live by them. I know they are basic principles of good living. I no longer exercise faith in them, for I know their value.

A humanist without a religious faith can keep his or her integrity and cultivate love, but this fact does not discount the role these principles play in religion (where they were born) and without which the Judeo-Christian LDS faith is quite meaningless.

There are, however, some very significant aspects of Christian religion which rest on faith. They are:

1. The existence of a personal God,
2. The divinity and atonement of Jesus Christ, and
3. The immortality and eternal life of human beings.

I have reason to accept these concepts as aspects of reality, but I have not experienced them with the same certainty that I accept humility, integrity, and love. I have not seen Deity nor have they spoken to me.

Some people believe that they know the reality of God's existence, Christ's mission, and personal immortality by the witness of the Holy Ghost, but I have to exercise faith that the Holy Ghost is bearing witness to me.

I have my reasons for believing in God. The beauty, goodness, and rationality that I find in life bespeak an intelligent personal source. It is difficult for me to believe that they are the products of impersonal, blind forces. I believe I have felt on occasion inspiration from my Father in Heaven, but I have to exercise some faith in interpreting what I call religious experience.

My faith in God rests in good measure on my understanding of his purpose and attributes. His words to Moses on the purpose of life inspire me: "This is my work and my glory to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). His attributes are very appropriate to his divine role. "The glory of God is intelligence" (D&C 93:36); he is a

person of justice and mercy and has all the attributes appropriate to his title of Father.

My faith in Christ is based on several things: The testimony of those who claim to have known him—the authors of the gospels, Paul, and Joseph Smith—and the truth and beauty of his life and teachings. Because I have verified the truth and value of Christ's teachings, I feel that I can also trust his insight into the nature of his mission.

My faith in the immortality of individual human beings rests on personal experience with them. I marvel at their intelligence, integrity, and love. They bear witness of the intelligence and goodness operating in the universe. I cannot believe that they are the product of blind, impersonal forces. I believe that the intelligent power that created them has the power to preserve them. I like W. P. Montague's statement: "Religion is the faith that the things that matter most are not ulti-

mately at the mercy of the things that matter least," such as the impersonal forces of nature that lead to death.

My religious faith in God, Christ, and human immortality is based on both knowledge and faith. In my more skeptical moments I recall the words of Socrates when he was sentenced to die. His friends wanted to save him by aiding his escape. He acknowledged their good intentions, but refused their offer saying, "No harm can come to a good man in death. For death is either the best night's sleep a person ever had undisturbed by dreams and nightmares, or he goes to a place where justice reigns and where he can converse with great minds who have preceded him." Religion appeals to me because it contains principles fundamental to life. We can know of their truth through experience and direct acquaintance with them. They also give us reason to have faith in God, Christ,

and humankind's immortality. Faith remains a vital part of religion, but it should be supported by knowledge based on experience as well as on hope.

In conclusion, may I reiterate that not all of religion rests on faith. Justice and mercy, or integrity and love, can be known and tested through experience. Some basic beliefs in religion can only be established on faith. These include faith in a personal God, the divinity and Atonement of Jesus Christ, and the immortality of human beings.

Faith remains an essential, fundamental part of religion. Faith is greatly strengthened, it seems to me, if it is related to the knowledge aspects of religion: God's character, purpose, and attributes. Keeping one's integrity and loving all humans bring one into touch with a new dimension of reality. ☞

## PSALM

### THE POET'S PRAYER\*

God of my fathers! Friend of human-kind!  
Almighty molder of creative mind,  
That sitt'st enthroned aloft from mortal ken,  
Showering thy mercies on the sons of men!

Thou who, of old, unloosed the prophet's tongue,  
While Daniel prophesied, while David sung;  
That sayest to all—oh, simple, pleasing task—  
"if any lack for wisdom, let him ask:"—  
If prayer like mine find favor in thy sight,  
If I have loved and longed for wisdom's light,  
And thou, to whom no creature cries in vain,  
Hast deemed my soul deserving care or pain,  
To thee, my Father, hands and voice I lift,  
And crave of thee, Almighty God, a gift

Not worldly wealth, though wealth of worlds be thine;  
Nor gilded rank, 'mong human worms to shine'  
For wealth might fail, and rank might purchased be,  
But not the guerdon I would win from thee

Be thou my muse! None other would I know,  
Eternal Fount of all inspiring flow,  
Whose voice it was bade seer of Patmos "write"  
Such things as ne'er could mortal mind indite,  
Or, grander than old ocean's glorious swell,  
Rolled through Isaiah's themes on Israel  
On whose high altar flames the sacred fire,  
Whose vivid rays inventive dreams inspire,  
Unhonored oft, yet evermore the same,  
Omnific light that lumines earth with fame.

On bended knee before that altar now,  
In Jesus' mighty name I meekly bow;  
Great God! give ear; judge thou my heart's intent,  
For I am weak, but thou Omnipotent  
While o'er my task in feeble frame I bend,  
Be thou my guide, my counselor, my friend;  
Teach me true gold to separate from dross,  
And count for gain what many scorn as loss.

Thou who endowedst me with receptive soul,  
O'er all its powers possess me of control,  
From off my mind remove each hampering coil,  
Or image vain that lingers but to soil.  
Let heavenly thought descend as Hermon's dews,  
With loftier themes my thinking to infuse.  
My fainting soul with fresh aspiring fill,  
Its every wish submissive to thy will;  
Its main desire to magnify thy laws,  
Its crowning aim thy Kingdom and thy cause.

Roll on my days responsive to thy rule,  
This tongue thine oracle, this pen thy tool;  
Designed to soar, or doomed to lowly plod—  
Amanuensis of the mind of God

—ORSON F. WHITNEY

\*London, January 1882 From *Poetical Writings of O.F. Whitney* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1889).