

## PREFACE

June 15, 2005

The second volume represents a movement toward a different kind of discourse—but it is not yet a different discourse. It engages still in the analytic tradition. However, the subject matter deals more centrally with divine grace and love in relationship.

I take up several important issues that I find significant, even revolutionary, in LDS philosophical theology. The first chapter focuses on the most basic LDS story of the cosmos and history as the story of God's seeking a peer relationship with us, particularly the nature of his love that must leave us free to choose whether we will enter into relationship with him. It is this freedom in relationship that makes libertarian free will essential to LDS thought, in my view. The second chapter explores how such freedom interacts in our direct discourse in prayer with God.

In this volume, I offer a theory of atonement in LDS thought that, so far as I am aware, has never been clearly elucidated or described. However, there are other features of this approach to atonement that I think are especially significant. I offer a reading of Alma 34 and 40-42 that moves away from interpreting the reconciliation of mercy and justice in atonement from an Anselmian perspective and that therefore suggests a much more adequate reading of the text. God could justly punish us now for our sins, but he is merciful in placing us on probation instead and giving us time to repent before judging us. Because we will be judged at the end of this probationary period, God is both just and merciful. The entire discourse of atonement focuses on the central truth that the purpose of life is to give us a space in which we can choose to freely enter into rela-

tionship with him or reject him. The atonement is construed as God's very mode of being in relationship with us in every moment, with Gethsemane and Calvary as the preeminent instances of a supremely loving being sharing our mortality with us. Such a view avoids the problems of the penal substitutionary view of atonement, which I believe is a morally reprehensible way of explaining God's love and reconciliation through atonement.

I also believe that the view of sin as alienation or anything that injures a relationship is significant. It allows a robust agape theory of ethics (chap. 3) and a description of original sin in terms of self-deception and self-betrayal (chaps. 4-5). Considering the doctrine of grace in terms of the theory of self-deception enlightens the scriptural view of how we manipulate the truth so that we come to believe the lies we tell ourselves, avoid taking accountability for our breach of the law of love, and, in essence, reject the call to each of us presented by the face of the other. It also throws considerable light on the role of grace in inspiring us to forget ourselves and live in integrity and honesty.

Perhaps the most significant historical contribution of this volume is its analysis of Paul's culture as an honor/shame society and how those values influence the doctrine of justification by grace. Paul's view of grace fits perfectly within the context of Jesus as the honored go-between who brokers a relationship with the patron that we do not have access to except through him. God has promised to honor all whom Christ honors and brings to him, and we are saved in the sense that God will never allow us to be ultimately shamed.

I also believe that the arguments showing that free will is not compatible with *creatio ex nihilo* are a significant contribution to theological discourse. If I am correct, then the conventional "Christian" tradition cannot affirm free will of the kind that leaves room for genuinely loving relationships. For this reason, the LDS view of creation by organizing a chaos represents a significant breakthrough in the possibilities of divine relationships.

This volume originally contained ten additional chapters. Four of these chapters were devoted to an exegesis of the biblical view of the relationship among divine persons and gods. Two additional chapters argue that the biblical documents do not support *creatio ex nihilo* but rather support the concept of creation from preexisting chaos. This additional mate-

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rial focused primarily on textual exegesis not only made the book an unwieldy length but are also not usually topics of philosophical theology. An additional four chapters treated the logical and theological issues related to the LDS view(s) of the Godhead and human theosis. An additional chapter presented a taxonomy of views of theosis that, as far as I know, has never been offered before, assessing the strengths and contributions of the various views of theosis among Christians. In this chapter, I review various theological arguments and present my own, suggesting that the LDS view is fully scriptural and has considerable philosophical strength among its theological competitors. The ultimate goal of divine love is theosis or the fulness of indwelling life together as peers who can fully share all that they have and are. Everything Joseph Smith said, did and sought in his mortal life was aimed toward this goal. He sought to teach us how to share the divine life in our relationships with one another in the here-and-now. He sought to teach us how to be gods by learning to love each other as the divine persons in the Godhead relate to each other always and in all ways. That also seems to me to be the preeminently valuable goal that humans can seek. Hence, the present volume. But all of this will have to wait for another volume which will probably increase the number of volumes in this series to four!

I thank Professors Richard Swinburne of Oxford University, Stephen T. Davis of Claremont College, Edward Wierenga (University of Rochester) and Dale Tuggy (SUNY Fredonia) for extended responses to my critiques of their views and comments that assisted me to more clearly state my views. As always, I thank David Paulsen, Dennis Potter, Brian Birch, Jim Mclauchlan and the members of LDS-Phil who discussed many of the issues presented in this book and allowed me to sharpen my views considerably.

I also omitted to thank three people who made very significant contributions to the first volume by reviewing it. William Hasker (Huntington College) read all of the chapters related to free will and foreknowledge and made some very significant suggestions. David Basinger (Roberts Wesleyan College) commented on portions of the manuscript. Donald Wayne Viney (Pittsburgh State University) also made some valuable comments, especially about process thought. I thank them for their invaluable comments and suggestions—even though a bit late.