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the journal of
the society for
mormon philosophy
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EDITORIAL STATEMENT

The editorial philosophy of *Element* is to provide a forum for philosophical and theological reflection as it relates to the beliefs and practices of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The journal takes seriously both the commitments of faith and standards of scholarship by encouraging academically productive dialogue between various theoretical perspectives both within and beyond the Latter-day Saint community.

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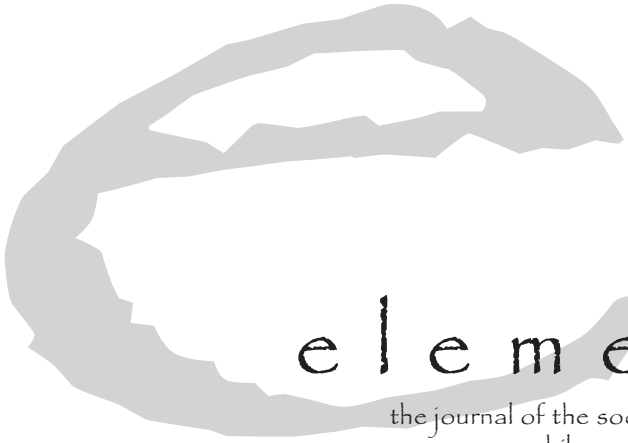

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SOCIETY FOR MORMON PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

Element (ISSN 1947-9719) is the official publication of the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology. More information on the Society can be found by at <www.smpt.org> or by contacting Benjamin Huff, Secretary/Treasurer of the Society, at <benjaminhuff@rmc.edu>

The Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology brings together scholars and others who share an interest in studying the teachings and texts of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It facilitates the sharing and discussion of work by sponsoring an annual conference, and publishing a journal entitled *Element: A Journal of Mormon Philosophy and Theology*. Its statement of purpose reads as follows:

"The purpose of the Society is to promote disciplined reflection on Latter-day Saint beliefs. Its aims include constructive engagement with the broader tradition of philosophy and theology. All its publications, conferences, and other forums for discussion will take seriously both the commitments of faith and the standards of scholarship."

Contents

Mormonism and the Trinity

by Daniel C. Peterson

I approach this topic humbly, both because I am by no means an expert in the dauntingly complex area of Trinitarian theology—St. Augustine, it is said, once quipped that anybody who denied the Trinity risked losing salvation, but that anybody who tried to understand the Trinity risked losing his mind—and because, of all subjects, the nature and character of God *should* be approached with awe, humility, and circumspection. Augustine also advised those who enter into this subject to "remember who we are, and of Whom we speak."[1] Alister McGrath's caution is worth taking to heart: "There is," he says,

> a tendency on the part of many—especially those of a more philosophical inclination—to talk about God as if he was some sort of *concept*. But it is much more accurate to think of God as someone we *experience* or *encounter*. God isn't an idea we can kick about in seminar rooms—he is a living reality who enters into our experience and transforms it.[2]

Nonetheless, we now proceed.

LDS REJECTION OF THE TRINITY?

It is often said, by both advocates and detractors of Mormonism, that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints rejects the doctrine of the Trinity.[3] After all, didn't Joseph Smith claim to see two distinct personages in his 1820 First Vision?[4] Didn't he produce, in his Book of Abraham, a creation narrative that frankly speaks not of a singular God but of "the Gods" as the agents of creation?[5] "In the beginning," he taught in his most famous sermon, "the head of the Gods called a council of the Gods; and they came together and concocted a plan to create the world and people it."[6] Didn't he, in a sermon delivered less than two weeks before his martyrdom, deny the divine unity in unmistakably clear language? "I will preach on the plurality of Gods," he announced in Nauvoo, Illinois, on 16 June 1844.

> I wish to declare I have always and in all congregations when I have preached on the subject of the Deity, it has been the plurality of Gods. It has been preached by the Elders for fifteen years.
>
> I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and that the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit: and these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods. If this is in accordance with the New Testament, lo and behold! we have three Gods anyhow, and they are plural: and who can contradict it?[7]

On the basis of such passages, critics routinely proceed to argue that alleged Latter-day Saint rejection of the Trinity reveals Mormons to be tritheists (a charge that may or may not disturb the objects of the criticism) and even that Mormonism is therefore not Christian (a claim absolutely certain to disturb).

But this is all too simple. Although Latter-day Saints tend not to use the term *Trinity*, some Mormon authorities have employed the word to describe their belief in a Godhead of three persons. Thus, for example, here is Brigham Young, speaking of "the Father of us all, and the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" at the Salt Lake Tabernacle in 1871: "Is he one? Yes. Is his trinity one? Yes."[8] Similarly, the second chapter of Apostle James E. Talmage's quasi-canonical 1890 treatise on *The Articles of Faith* is entitled "God and the Holy Trinity."[9] Furthermore, canonical texts peculiar to Mormonism assert the unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit at least as strongly as does the Bible itself. An April 1830 revelation to Joseph Smith, for instance, affirms that

"Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are one God, infinite and eternal, without end."[10] The Book of Mormon concurs, declaring (with an interesting use of the singular verb) that "the Father, and . . . the Son, and . . . the Holy Ghost . . . *is* one God, without end."[11] The impressive testimony of the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon, published in every printing of the book since the 1830 first edition, concludes by ascribing "honor . . . to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, which is one God."[12] "I am in the Father," says the Lord to Joseph Smith in an 1833 revelation, "and the Father in me, and the Father and I are one."[13] "Monotheism," explained the late apostle Bruce R. McConkie in his influential and oft-reprinted 1958 work *Mormon Doctrine*,

> is the doctrine or belief that there is but one God. If this is properly interpreted to mean that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—each of whom is a separate and distinct godly personage—are one God, meaning one Godhead, then true saints are monotheists.[14]

The question is, therefore, not whether Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one in Mormon thought, but what the nature of their unity is.[15]

THE ONE AND THE MANY

However, Latter-day Saints scarcely face this question alone. The precise nature of the divine unity is almost unanimously admitted to be unspecified, or underdetermined, in the New Testament.[16] Alister McGrath contends that trinitarianism emerged inevitably out of reflection on the biblical data—"All that theologians have really done is to draw out something which is already there," he writes. "The doctrine of the Trinity wasn't *invented*—it was *uncovered*"—and there is little question that, in a certain sense at least, he is right.[17] But what kind of trinitarianism should it be? Certainly the developed Nicene doctrine of the Trinity is not to be found in the Bible. As the Jesuit theologian John Courtney Murray pointed out,

> The Christology of the New Testament was, in our contemporary word for it, functional. For instance, all the titles given to Christ the Son—Lord, Saviour, Word, Son of God, Son of man, Prophet, Priest—all these titles, in the sense that they bear in the New Testament, are relational. . . . They do not explicitly define what he is, nor do they explicitly define what his relation to the Father is.[18]

The doctrine of the Trinity—the nature of the relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—has accordingly been among the most contentious issues in Christian history. "This most enigmatic of all Christian doctrines," Alister McGrath calls it.[19] Various accounts of that unity can be, and have been, constructed that accord more or less with the biblically-imposed obligation to think monotheistically while simultaneously asserting the deity of three divine persons. For this reason, the story of trinitarianism is a tale of struggle, and often of mutual recrimination. Critics have dismissed mainstream trinitarian theology as "cosmic numerology" and classed it with astrology and other occult pseudo-sciences. Serious arguments have been mounted to demonstrate that classical trinitarianism is, in the strictest sense, logically incoherent.[20]

The mainstream Christian doctrine of the Trinity arises out of the strongly felt need to reconcile a strong commitment to the oneness of God—perhaps felt by sophisticated Hellenistic thinkers little less than by committed Jews (who had been struggling against circumambient pagan polytheism since at least their days in the Sinai)—with an equally strong sense of Jesus as a uniquely full earthly manifestation of the divine. "For," writes St. Augustine,

> the Truth would not say, Go, baptize all nations in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, unless Thou wast a Trinity. . . . Nor would the divine voice have said, Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one God, unless Thou wert so a Trinity as to be one Lord God.[21]

"Let us make man in our image and likeness," says the Genesis creation narrative, using plural language that trinitarian Christians have often seen as intratrinitarian.[22] "My Father and I are one," says the Johannine Jesus.[23]

How are these and many other relevant statements to be harmonized? Two relatively simple solutions, generally resisted since then by the vast majority of Christians, occurred quite early. Monarchianism focused on the deity of the Father, usually granting that the Son was divine in a secondary sense (e.g., through adoption at the time of his baptism). Modalism held that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were simply manifestations, appearances, of the one God. The great fourth century heretical threat of Arianism might be viewed as a form of monarchianism, but its separation of Father from Son and Holy Spirit was so sharp that it can also be regarded as an incipient tritheism.

Mainstream teaching tried to navigate a middle way. In a sermon

delivered between 379 and 381 A.D., St. Gregory Nazianzus warned his fellow Christians that

> When I speak of God you must be illumined at once by one flash of light and by three. . . . We would keep equally far from the confession of Sabellius and from the divisions of Arius, which evils are diametrically opposed yet equal in their wickedness. For what need is there heretically to fuse God together, or to cut Him up into inequality?[24]

Although passages that can surely be interpreted in a trinitarian fashion are easily located in first century writers like St. Clement of Rome, the full-blown doctrine of the Trinity cannot be found in Clement or in any of his contemporaries. In the early second century, the *Shepherd of Hermas* (which Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen all seem to have regarded as canonical) insisted that there is one and only one God, but manifestly did not quite know what to do with the Son and the Spirit. The church fathers of the second through the fourth centuries invented esoteric terms like *trinitas* and *homoousios*, and exploited difficult technical vocabulary such as *ousia* and *hypostasis*, as they confronted denials of the deity of Christ and the personality of the Holy Spirit. Most no doubt believed that they were simply teasing out the doctrine implicit in the biblical data, but it is unmistakably clear from our perch in the twenty-first century that their exegesis was conditioned (as exegesis always is) by the cultural milieu in which they worked. In the words of contemporary Protestant theologian Lynne Faber Lorenzen, "the original doctrine of the Trinity was indebted to the philosophical vocabulary and thought of its time and so was authentic to its context."[25] By "the original doctrine of the Trinity," she intends the concept spelled out in the fourth century at the great ecumenical council of Nicea (325 A.D.) and, after more than a half-century of controversy involving Arianism and Semi-Arianism—at the follow-up council of Constantinople (381 A.D.).

As William La Due observes,

> Nicaea did not settle the christological controversy by any means. As a matter of fact, for thirty years after the council, the term *homoóusios* was hardly used. Actually, Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. 315-86) was always uneasy about employing the Nicene terminology. Athanasius does not mention *homoóusios* in his work, *On the Incarnation*, written prior to 325, and it was not until his writings after 350 or so that he became

> an outspoken proponent of the Nicene formula. One of the causes of the problem over *homoóusios* was that the representatives at the council added no explanation as to the manner in which the term was to be understood.

Some of the fathers rejected Nicea out of conservatism, because they felt that the new terminology went beyond the mandate of scripture. (The late Raymond Brown once noted that, by the time of Nicea, functional understanding of Christ and his role, in the manner of the Bible, had lost ground before an ontological one.[26] Some were presumably less pleased with that trend than others.) And indeed, along with the Bible, Platonism and Greek philosophy generally were to prove a major resource for early formulators of trinitarianism. A principal source for St. Augustine's *On the Trinity*, for instance, besides scripture, was Aristotle's *Categories*. Thus, Augustine speaks of

> God as good without quality, as great without quantity, as the Creator who lacks nothing, who rules but from no position, and who contains all things without an external form, as being whole everywhere without limitation of space, as eternal without time, as making mutable things without any change in Himself, and as a Being without passion.[27]

Augustine hereby rules out eight of Aristotle's ten categories, arguing that the divine being transcends them—leaving only substance and relation as applicable in discussions of the Trinity.

Resistance to philosophical and quasi-philosophical language persisted, however. Despite the fact that the documents produced by the Council of Constantinople avoided the term *homoousios*, preferring to use a vocabulary derived from scripture, Constantinople too left some uneasy.[28]

Nonetheless, the doctrine that emerged from these councils very quickly won wide acceptance across Christendom—an acceptance that it has maintained over the centuries—and it seems directly to contradict Joseph Smith's teaching of a plurality of Gods. "Whoever will be saved," says the Athanasian Creed, *quicunque vult salvus esse*, must

> worship one God in Trinity. . . . The Father is God: the Son is God: and the Holy Spirit is God. And yet they are not three Gods: but one God.

Whoever fails to keep this doctrine "whole and inviolate," the Creed warns, "shall without doubt perish for eternity."[29]

Three centuries later, the Creed of the Eleventh Council of Toledo (A.D. 675) repeats that

> They are not three gods, he is one God. . . . All three persons together are one God.[30]

In a sermon given at the Council of Constantinople, Gregory Nazianzus advised his hearers as follows:

> Let us . . . bid farewell to all contentious shiftings and balancings of the truth on either side, neither, like the Sabellians, assailing the Trinity in the interest of the unity and so destroying the distinction by a wicked confusion; nor like the Arians, assailing the Unity in the interest of the Trinity, and by an impious distinction overthrowing the Oneness. . . . But we walking along the royal road which is the seat of virtues . . . believe in the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, of one Substance [*ousia*] and glory; in Whom baptism has its perfection . . . acknowledging the Unity in the Essence [*ousia*] and in the undivided worship, and the Trinity in the *Hypostases* or Persons (which term some prefer).[31]

Nicea and Constantinople did not, however, end trinitarian reflection, nor—since the creeds they produced were comparable in some ways to negotiated treaties or joint communiqués, papering over substantial differences[32]—did they silence trinitarian controversy. Although the creedal language itself has rarely been disputed, what one pair of Protestant historians characterize as "the struggle of the fathers to say enough about the Trinity, but not too much," has continued through periods of greater or lesser intensity to the present day.[33]

Eastern theology has tended to concentrate on the "threeness" or trinity of God, or, perhaps more accurately, on the Father as unoriginated God and then, subsequently, on the Son and the Holy Spirit as God derivatively. Thus, for example, Father Thomas John Hopko insists that

> the Word and Spirit of God are revealed and known to be *persons* in Their own right, *acting* subjects who are other than who the Father is, essential to God's being, to be sure, yet not defined in any way

> in which they lose the integrity of Their personal existence by being explained as parts, aspects, components, actions, instruments, or relations in and of God's innermost nature.[34]

CLASSICAL TRINITARIANISM, EAST AND WEST

In the classical teaching of the Eastern Church, trinitarianism is a central doctrine that integrates—even implicitly summarizes—soteriology and Christology, and implies an understanding of salvation as transfiguration or transformation.[35] Further, the transfiguration of Jesus' humanity by Christ's divinity prefigures the destiny of the redeemed: "God became man," as the widespread formula of the ancient Church had it, "so that man could become God." We are created in the image of the Father, which gives us the hope of *theosis*, the Son bridges the gap between the human and the divine so that we can move in the direction of *theosis*, and the Holy Spirit is present within believers in order, by transforming them, to effect *theosis*. Each of the three divine persons, and thus their very "threeness," is necessary for our ultimate salvation. Yet, although each plays a particular role, they do not act separately but in perfect union.[36] "This Trinity is united," writes Lynne Lorenzen, "in its loving purpose of creating and saving the world."[37]

St. Gregory of Nyssa expressed it this way, in the latter fourth century:

> As it is impossible to mount to the Father unless our thoughts are exalted thither through the Son, so it is impossible also to say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. Therefore Father, Son and Holy Spirit are to be known only in a perfect Trinity, in closest consequence and union with each other, before all creation, before all ages, before any thing whatever of which we can form an idea.[38]

In fact, the very establishment of classical trinitarianism was driven by concerns about redemption. Athanasius's insistence, against Arius, on the full deity of the Son was motivated wholly or in large part by his conviction that only a fully divine Son could fully deify believers.[39] Had Christ not been *homoousios* with the Father, of the same essence or nature, there could be no hope that we could ever be "partakers of the divine nature."[40] "Sin," on this understanding, "is not participating in the process of salvation and thus refusing to enter into relationship with God."[41]

Many of the most prominent Western theologians, by contrast, have focused intensely on God's "oneness" or unicity, which has "resulted in an

abiding Western tendency toward modalism."[42] St. Augustine, his thought rooted in something like the One of Plotinian Neoplatonism, is an excellent representative of this tendency. Augustine's psychological model of the Trinity, in which he offers memory, understanding, and will—the *vestigia Trinitatis*—as an analogue to the relationship between the three divine persons, has exerted enormous influence on subsequent thinkers. Yet, as Colin Gunton has observed—and although his thought certainly includes genuine Christology and pneumatology—Augustine can say relatively little about the individual divine persons, "who, because they lack distinguishable identity, tend to disappear into the all-embracing oneness of God."[43] Jürgen Moltmann argues that Augustine's psychological model inescapably implies modalism and reduces the Holy Spirit effectively to a "glue" between the Father and the Son, depersonalized, a mere "it."[44] Memory, understanding, and will are not in any sense "persons," and it is difficult to see how any psychological relation between them is really much like interpersonal relationships.

In the medieval period, St. Anselm of Canterbury taught that "everything in God is identical except where opposed relations (as in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) stand in the way of identity."[45] (Anselm's proposition was eventually given authoritative status at the Council of Florence in the fifteenth century.) St. Thomas Aquinas emphasized the divine unity (*de Deo uno*), and only secondarily attempted to make a place for the multiplicity of divine persons (*de Deo trino*). There seems little vigor to the three persons of the Trinity in Thomas's notion of them as subsistent relations within one divine essence. In modern times, Karl Barth—"who stands out as perhaps the most important contributor to the theology of the Trinity in the mid-twentieth century"[46]—rejected use of the term *person* for the members of the Trinity, fearing lest Christians construe it to suggest that three distinct personalities exist within the one God.[47] "We are," he said, "speaking not of three divine 'I's, but thrice of the one divine 'I'."[48] He preferred to speak of a "mode of being" rather than of a "person."[49] In Barth's thinking, God is actually one; the divine threeness seems to derive from our limited ability to perceive or conceive him otherwise. Consequently, he has sometimes been accused of implicit modalism.[50]

On the Roman Catholic side, the eminent Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner (who admitted that most believers find the Trinity virtually unintelligible) similarly favored the formula "mode of being" over the more traditional "person"—or alternatively, preferred to speak of "three distinct manners of subsisting"—in order to ward off any sense that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit each possess "a distinct center of consciousness and will," and thus, in turn, to

avoid even the slightest hint of tritheism.[51] "There are not," Rahner insisted,

> three consciousnesses in God; rather, one consciousness subsists in a threefold way. There is only one real consciousness in God, which is shared by Father, Son, and Spirit, by each in his own proper way."[52]

TRINITY AND SALVATION

How have Western theories of the Trinity affected Western soteriology? A crucial distinction to keep in mind when discussing this topic is that between the "immanent Trinity"—God in relation to himself, in his inner life—and the triune God as he relates to the world external to himself, the so-called "economic Trinity."[53] While Eastern theology has always been oriented essentially to the economy of salvation, Western trinitarian theology has concentrated on God's immanent inner relatedness, his transcendent independence, with little relevance to Christian life and praxis.

Even orthodox Trinitarians acknowledge that "at times trinitarian theology has taken flights of speculative fancy and lost any solid connection with salvation and Christian worship, devotion, and discipleship."[54] It is largely for this reason that Renaissance humanist thinkers like Erasmus of Rotterdam, and reformers like Martin Bucer, Menno Simons, and, later, Count von Zinzendorf, grew impatient with what they saw as the hairsplitting irrelevance of medieval scholasticism, and focused, instead, on "following Christ," or, in the case of Philip Melanchthon, on the more practical "economic Trinity" at the expense of the "immanent Trinity." In his masterpiece *Der christliche Glaube*, the founder of modern Protestant theology, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), struggled with how to present the doctrine of the Trinity because he did not feel that it could be deduced from the statements of Jesus and the apostles. Ultimately, he presented it at the end of his book, so that readers would be less likely to assume that faith in it was necessary to Christian belief and redemption. Earlier, Immanuel Kant had remarked that the number of persons in the Deity was irrelevant, since the question had no practical implications for everyday life.[55]

Kant was correct in an important sense, but wrong in another. Views of the Trinity and of the nature of God have perfectly enormous theological consequences for every major aspect of salvation, for concepts of divine omnipotence and transcendence, and for notions of predestination. And, as many contemporary thinkers now argue, trinitarian theology influences views of ecclesiastical structure, social relationships, and ideal human behavior.[56]

Lynne Lorenzen regards St. Augustine's concentration on the oneness of God—founded upon a concern that Eastern theologies were perhaps coming too close to tritheism—as his primary contribution to trinitarian reflection. Still, she remarks,

> His emphasis on the oneness as the divine simplicity shows us what happens when the doctrine of the Trinity is separated from the concepts of christology and salvation, and thus fails in its original function. It becomes abstract and appears to be a riddle that requires explanation rather than a shorthand description of an entire theology.
>
> This happens because Augustine develops a very different understanding of salvation in which "becoming like God" is a description of sin at its worst, and salvation is described as being elected by God. This happens because God in the East is persuasively related to the world while for Augustine God in relation to the world is all-powerful in such a way that God's grace is irresistible.[57]

The thinking of the mature Augustine conceives humanity as an incorrigible wreck from which some, and some only, will be saved by the sovereign election of God. It is God who

> elects those predestined for salvation. The second person of the Trinity contributes his death as a sacrifice for sin, which makes election possible. However, since the election occurred before the foundation of the world, before the incarnation in Jesus, and before the fall of Adam and Eve, the relationship or dependence of salvation upon the event of the incarnation is questionable. It seems in fact that the salvation of humanity is dependent solely upon the election of God apart from God's life as Trinity.[58]

The irresistible grace furnished by the Son is external to us. The Holy Spirit's function is not sanctification, but to bind Father and Son together. Augustine's theology, in other words, is largely if not entirely focused upon the inner-trinitarian life of the "immanent Trinity." Thus, Lorenzen argues, "Augustine is operating with a received doctrine of the Trinity that does not fit with his understanding of salvation, Christ, or God."[59]

Nearly a millennium later, in his *De Deo Trino*, St. Thomas Aquinas paid little attention to the divine saving mission.

> Aquinas denied that God has any real relation to the created universe. Creation has a real relation to God, but God has no real relation to creatures.[60]

Against this background, Lorenzen concludes, many "Western Christians have focused theology and faith on the person of Jesus to the exclusion of any other theological categories"—including the Father and the Holy Spirit.[61] As William La Due writes,

> For Christians, fixing our eyes and hearts on Jesus is relatively easy. It happens almost daily for many. His generous life and engaging personality spontaneously attract our attention and generate an abiding loyalty in believers. The mystery of the Trinity, however, does not arouse the same kind of unrehearsed attraction and allegiance. From early on we were told that the Trinity is a mystery, and indeed, the loftiest and most impenetrable of mysteries. We were not expected to understand it, but simply to believe it.[62]

For believers who concentrate entirely on the accessible person of Jesus, says Lorenzen, "the doctrine of the Trinity does not work at all." Instead, it becomes "an abstract dogma that is no longer required to tell the story of salvation."[63]

Lorenzen also faults Martin Luther on the grounds that his teaching on the Trinity seems to offer no role for the Holy Spirit in human salvation and requires at most only a dyad of Father and Son. "Clearly," she writes, "the Trinity functions not as the integrating element for [Luther's] theology, but on the periphery."[64]

John Calvin agrees with Luther in locating the actual reality of salvation in the world to come. Calvin expects no human participation in sanctification prior to death, and no non-human sanctification at all, and salvation is wholly determined outside this world:

> By an eternal and immutable counsel, God has once for all determined, both whom he would admit to salvation and whom he would condemn to destruction.[65]

What Lorenzen says of three twentieth century Protestant theologians seems, therefore, applicable to their great reforming forerunner as well:

> Jenson, Jüngel, and Barth in an effort to remove theology from the context of the world have limited the salvific action of God in the world to Jesus and then only to the elect. God in Christ no longer permeates the world and the Spirit no longer transfigures the world into the kingdom of God by means of the work of the faithful. Instead, God makes a sovereign decision to forgive rather than punish, and this is revealed in Jesus who is the only instance of the presence of God in the world. And since salvation occurs in God and not in the world the role of the Holy Spirit is not to transfigure anything in this world, but to witness to the fact that Jesus is Lord.[66]

Karl Rahner was concerned that too strong a focus on the inner life of God and on the divine unity of being or divine simplicity misleads Christian believers into missing the strong link between trinitarian doctrine and soteriology. He sought to make trinitarianism practical. Such concern undergirds his famous formula "The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity," often dubbed "Rahner's Rule."[67] However, as we have seen, Rahner's thought, despite his concern for practicality, tended in a modalistic direction. Jürgen Moltmann laments that both Barth's and Rahner's focus on the unity and simplicity of the divine consciousness hindered them from achieving their own goals, which were to keep the doctrine of the Trinity grounded, respectively, in the Word of God and in the process and experience of salvation.[68]

Catherine Mowry LaCugna reviewed what she called "The Emergence and Defeat of the Doctrine of the Trinity," surveying the history of trinitarianism from its origins through the eras of Constantine and St. Augustine down to St. Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century West and St. Gregory Palamas in the fourteenth century East. As she saw it, this is a tale of the decreasing practical relevance of the doctrine, and of its becoming mired ever deeper in abstraction and speculation, fed by an unhealthy obsession with Greek ideas of impassibility and divine perfection. The doctrine becomes essentially irrelevant to Christian prayer, worship, and discipleship.[69]

"Even more conservative Christians," remark Roger Olson and Christopher Hall,

> often wonder whether Augustine and other church fathers and theologians have gone too far in asserting the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity. Can it really be so intrinsically connected with

> the gospel of salvation that denying it . . . results in loss of salvation or at least loss of status as a Christian? . . . How can it be so important if it is not explicitly stated in scripture?"[70]

And what of the notion of *theosis*? That very ancient Christian idea survives—if not fully, still more than merely nominally—in the Christian East. Yet Western theologians have repeatedly criticized Eastern Christian thought as either Pelagian or Semi-Pelagian.[71] Increasingly, in the Western understanding, it was felt that the image of God had been so overcome by sin as to have been completely lost. This different understanding had immense consequences. As Lynne Lorenzen remarks,

> Once the image is lost and the grace of God becomes external to us theosis becomes impossible. What then develops is a doctrine of salvation that is objective. It happens to humanity without humanity's free assent or cooperation. The internal connection between God and humanity in human nature is no longer possible, nor is the direct experience of God by humans in a mystical experience possible.
>
> The effects of salvation in the West are mediated by the assurance of faith rather than directly experienced as in the East.[72]

Latter-day Saints indisputably reject the solution to the trinitarian problem associated with standard readings of Nicea. But their rejection of mainstream Nicene orthodoxy does not necessarily place them in opposition to the project it represents. Nor, as has become more and more evident, does it leave them isolated and alone.

SOCIAL TRINITARIANISM

One relatively recent account, often known as "social trinitarianism," seems, indeed, to resemble the common Latter-day Saint understanding of the divine unity in several salient aspects. Social trinitarianism has not been wholly unknown in the West, historically speaking. Some, for instance, have even thought they recognized intimations of it in the Cappadocian fathers of the later fourth century, and particularly in Gregory Nazianzus.[73] Earlier, the third-century Roman presbyter Novatian had complained that modalism obscured the fact that Father and Son are two persons just as plainly as were the mortal humans Paul and Apollos.[74] A better example is surely Richard of St. Victor in the twelfth century, who took the threeness of the Father, Son,

and Holy Spirit as his point of departure, and then attempted to account for their oneness. For Richard, it was necessary that there be a plurality in God, with a second person in some real sense the equal of the first, in order for there to be love. And God *is* love.[75] Unfortunately (probably in response to the teaching of Richard's younger contemporary, Joachim of Fiore, which went far beyond Richard's social analogy to something truly very near tritheism), the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 affirmed the absolute simplicity and immutability of the one divine substance, declaring that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are nothing more than distinct relations within that substance. They are to be distinguished only by their differing origins. All three are identical with the divine nature, but not with each other, for the Father is ungenerated, while the Son is eternally generated or begotten by the Father and—the notorious *filioque*—the Spirit eternally proceeds from both the Father and the Son. Oneness was now primary. Threeness was secondary—and difficult to maintain.

Today, however, theologians such as Leonardo Boff, Jürgen Moltmann, John O'Donnell, Catherine Mowry LaCugna, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Joseph Bracken, and John Zizioulas again seek to demonstrate that the doctrine of the Trinity is essential for Christian living, and intimately related to human salvation, and do so—to one degree or another—by means of at least a loosely social model of the Trinity.[76]

A principal concept employed by social Trinitarians is that of *perichoresis*. *Perichoresis* is the Greek term popularized by St. John of Damascus (d. A.D. 750) to refer to the mutual indwelling of the divine persons, their "coinherence" or "interpenetration." Gerald O'Collins describes it well as it occurs in the writing of St. Thomas Aquinas:

> Thomas along with other medieval theologians endorsed the radical, loving interconnectedness (*circumincessio*) of the three divine persons, something better expressed in Greek as their *perichoresis*, or reciprocal presence and interpenetration. Their innermost life is infinitely close relationship with one another in the utter reciprocity of love.[77]

Clearly, the concept can be and has been employed in varied forms of trinitarian thought. But it will prove crucial for the social model.

Modern social trinitarianism might reasonably be said to have begun with the British theologian Leonard Hodgson.[78] In the Eastern manner, Hodgson begins with the three persons, and then attempts to show how these three are one. "The doctrine of the Trinity," he writes,

> is . . an inference to the nature of God drawn from what we believe to be the empirical evidence given by God in His revelation of Himself in the history of this world.

"He refuses," Lynne Lorenzen observes of Hodgson, "to subordinate this revelation to the philosophical idea of oneness, i.e., undifferentiated simplicity."[79] Moreover, in Hodgson's theology, the Trinity returns to service as a practical formula for Christian life, as a guide to prayer and devotion:

> We shall speak to the Spirit as to the Lord who moves and inspires us and unites us to the Son; we shall speak to the Son as to our Redeemer who has taken us to share in His Sonship, in union with whom we are united to His Father and may address Him as our Father.[80]

This passage has obvious soteriological implications. Yet Hodgson seems not to have exploited them. Lorenzen laments that, although it aims to be a pattern for Christian community on earth, Hodgson's social trinitarianism fails to function, as the doctrine of the Trinity does in the East, to integrate Christology, soteriology, and the concept of God. It is still not a core doctrine, but remains a problem to be solved.[81]

The German theologian Jürgen Moltmann has been much more explicit about the implications of a social model of the Trinity for earthly human relationships. Again, in the Eastern style, he commences with the threeness of God, since this is the way the Trinity is portrayed in the story of Jesus and in the biblical texts. Then the divine unity must be explained, and this is to be done by means of the concept of *perichoresis*. In his view, inner-trinitarian *perichoresis* corresponds to the ideal experience within the Christian community, when it is united by and in the Holy Spirit:

> The more open-mindedly people live with one another, for one another and in one another in the fellowship of the Spirit, the more they will become one with the Son and the Father, and one in the Son and the Father.[82]

In his book *The Crucified God*, Moltmann has sought to go beyond the impassible God of classical theism, and to render the thought of God more appropriate to the genocidal world that arose in the twentieth century. God, he felt, must die with and on behalf of the innocent. And, Moltmann says,

God did so on the cross. But not only on the cross. Because, in Moltmann's view, God is a genuine community of three distinct persons who feel love for one another, they are also capable of experiencing pain and sorrow when one of them suffers. Viewed in this way, the redemptive suffering of the Son becomes an inner-trinitarian ordeal, undertaken out of unfathomable love for humankind.[83]

The contemporary Brazilian liberation theologian Leonardo Boff, too, seeks to make practical use of social trinitarianism, but in a much more overtly political way than Hodgson and Moltmann have done. Like them, Boff describes the perichoretic unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit not as sameness of substance but as a complete unity of love and perfect communion. Each divine person, he says,

> is itself, not the other, but so open to the other and in the other that they form one entity, i.e., they are God. . . . Such an exchange of love obtains between the three Persons: life flows so completely between them, the communion between them is so infinite, with each bestowing on the others all that can be bestowed, that they form a union. The three possess one will, one understanding, one love.[84]

The union within the Trinity, in turn, serves as a paradigm of what human community can and ought to be, and, in Boff's case, inspires his own theology of liberation in the context of Latin America.

> The community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit becomes the prototype of the human community dreamed of by those who wish to improve society and build it in such a way as to make it into the image and likeness of the Trinity.[85]

Theology, for Boff, is no merely theoretical exercise. It should motivate us to build a society that reflects and embodies the perichoretic unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Specifically, he believes that hierarchical models of the Trinity have legitimized and fostered repressive, hierarchical human societies, and he calls for social egalitarianism patterned after the co-equal Trinity, as he conceives it. His reading of inner-trinitarian relations as a pattern for earthly human life is also shared by the feminist theologian Elizabeth A. Johnson, who sees the persons of the Trinity united in mutuality, friendship, and maternal caring. "Their unsurpassed communion of love," she contends, "stands as the ideal model of mutuality for all people in the world."[86]

> She emphasizes that the Trinity can best be viewed as a communion in relationship that invites all of us into its circle. The incomprehensible threefold koinonia opens out to create a community of sisters and brothers. This vision had largely been lost for a thousand years or more in favor of the image of a solitary God.[87]

Yet another thinker who seems to have developed a social model for understanding the Trinity is the Jesuit process theologian Joseph Bracken.[88] Once again, he begins with the threeness of God and thereafter proceeds to explain the divine unicity. For Bracken, the concept of a *person* is to be distinguished from that of an *individual*. Whereas an individual is separate from other individuals, valuing autonomy and self-sufficiency above relatedness, a person is always related to a community. He thus agrees with the Orthodox Bishop Kallistos Timothy Ware that "to be a person is by definition to be internally related to other persons as persons of the Trinity are eternally, internally related to each other."[89] In Bracken's view, "Father, Son and Holy Spirit constitute a divine community."[90] Because of the strength of the interpersonal ties between its members, however, that community is not tritheistic. Bracken disputes the usual modern, Western definition of community as "a network of relationships between separate individuals who are first and foremost themselves and only in the second place associated with one another," a definition presuming that "only the individual entities ultimately exist." He faults St. Thomas Aquinas for accepting an Aristotelian attitude that views the individual as primary, and, hence, focuses excessively on the oneness of God.[91]

Persons and community cannot, Bracken says, be abstraced from one another, or understood in isolation. Since they are correlative concepts, the community too—and not merely the individual preferred by "classical" Western thinkers—has ontological status. In the specific instance of the trinitarian community, he writes,

> even though each divine person has his own mind and will, they are of one mind and will in everything they say and do, both with respect to one another and in their relationship with human beings and the whole of creation.[92]

So unified are Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, on Bracken's view, that "they hold everything in common except the fact of their individual personhood,

their relatedness to one another precisely as Father, Son and Holy Spirit."[93]

One of the most forthright and cogent recent advocates of what he terms "a strong or social theory of the Trinity" is Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., of Calvin Theological Seminary. "By strong or social trinitarianism," he writes,

> I mean a theory that meets at least the following three conditions: (1) The theory must have Father, Son, and Spirit as distinct centers of knowledge, will, love, and action. Since each of these capacities requires consciousness, it follows that, on this sort of theory, Father, Son, and Spirit would be viewed as distinct centers of consciousness or, in short, as *persons* in some full sense of that term. (2) Any accompanying sub-theory of divine simplicity must be modest enough to be consistent with condition (1), that is, with the real distinctness of Trinitarian persons. . . . (3) Father, Son, and Spirit must be regarded as tightly enough related to each other so as to render plausible the judgment that they constitute a particular social unit. In such social monotheism, it will be appropriate to use the designator *God* to refer to the whole Trinity, where the Trinity is understood to be one thing, even if it is a complex thing consisting of persons, essences, and relations.[94]

Plantinga contends that

> The Holy Trinity is a divine, transcendent society or community of three fully personal and fully divine entities: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit or Paraclete. These three are wonderfully unified by their common divinity, that is, by the possession by each of the whole generic divine essence—including, for instance, the properties of everlastingness and of sublimely great knowledge, love, and glory. The persons are also unified by their joint redemptive purpose, revelation, and work. . . .
>
> Each member is a person, a distinct person, but scarcely an *individual* or *separate* or *independent* person. For in the divine life there is no isolation, no insulation, no secretiveness, no fear of being transparent to another. Hence there may be penetrating, inside knowledge of the other as other, but as co-other, loved other, fellow. Father, Son, and Spirit are "members of one another" to a superlative and exemplary degree.[95]

CRITICISMS OF SOCIAL TRINITARIANISM

Notwithstanding the protests of its advocates, critics of social trinitarianism have, of course, been quick to denounce the model as tritheistic.[96] Many have also feared that it opens the gate to a Christian pantheon not sufficiently unlike the squabbling gods of Olympus.[97] Olson and Hall, for example, declare that

> The will and activity of God . . . is one. . . . All analogies drawn from human life ultimately break down when applied to trinitarian relationships. For example, Jane and John might share a common human nature but choose as individual persons to exercise their wills in opposition to one another. Their individuality as persons surely leaves the autonomous exercise of their wills as a genuine possibility. Not so with God. Although God's being is characterized by the hypostatic distinctions of Father, Son, and Spirit, all three persons are one in their will and activity. They are not autonomous persons in the modern nuance of "individual," each with its own separate "ego" and "center" of consciousness. Rather, they have always and will always purpose and operate with one will and action. They are one God, not three.[98]

Alister McGrath expresses a similar view, albeit laced with disdain. Mocking "the way in which a lot of Christians think about the Trinity," McGrath says that,

> In their thinking, Jesus is basically one member of the divine committee, the one who is sent down to earth to report on things and put things right with the creation. . . . [N]owhere in Scripture is God modeled on a committee. The idea of an old man in the sky is bad enough, but the idea of a committee somewhere in the sky is even worse. What, we wonder, might be on their agendas? How often would the chairman have to cast his vote to break a tie between the other two? The whole idea is ludicrous.[99]

However, a devout believer in social trinitarianism might respond that, although the individuality of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost "surely leaves the autonomous exercise of their wills as a genuine possibility," in fact the holiness, righteousness, intelligence, wisdom, love, and harmony of the three

divine persons are so utterly complete that no such discord will ever occur. Not because it is logically impossible, but because they are perfect. It is a matter of faith. "It goes without saying," remarks William La Due of Walter Cardinal Kasper's concept of the Trinity, "that there is an immeasurably greater interrelationality among the three divine subjects than there is in human interpersonal relations."[100] That should, in fact, go without saying in any serious discussion of social trinitarianism.

Cornelius Plantinga considers questions, raised by critics of the social model, on the theme of whether, if there really are three independent divine beings, one might withdraw and establish a rival kingdom, or, even, destroy the others. "The answer to these questions," he writes,

> is plainly negative. To see why this must be so, one has only to compare them with questions about any divine person's ability to harm, alienate, or destroy himself. No fully divine person could do that. . . . No more could any of the social trinity persons leave the others derelict, or compete for intergalactic dominion, or commit intratrinitarian atrocities. For just as it is a part of the generic divine nature to be everlasting, omnipotent, faithful, loving, and the like, so it is also part of the personal nature of each Trinitarian person to be bound to the other two in permanent love and loyalty. Loving respect for the others is a personal essential characteristic of each member of the Trinity.[101]

Olson and Hall continue, saying that

> what we mean by "social" on a human level breaks down when speaking of the divine persons. Human social relationships, for instance, are characterized by separate individuals or social groups interacting with other individuals or groups. These interactions can demonstrate marked agreement and harmony. At other times, tensions and disagreements rise to the surface. Such is not the case within the Trinity itself. Here there is no possibility of disagreement or conflict, because all three are one in will and activity.[102]

But this is precisely what a social trinitarian might affirm.

Cyril Richardson, objecting to the social doctrine of the Trinity advanced by Leonard Hodgson, declared that,

> if there are three centers of consciousness in God, there are three Gods. . . . It is simply impossible to say that God is really one in some ultimate sense, and still retain the idea of distinct centers of consciousness, which stand over against each other.[103]

Likewise, Phillip Cary asserts that

> God is *not* three persons in the modern sense of the word—for three distinct divine persons, with three distinct minds, wills and centers of consciousness, would surely be three Gods.[104]

However, although, so far as I am aware, they shy away from the expressly tritheistic language that both Cary and Richardson employ for shock value, at least some social trinitarians are willing to accept precisely that consequence. As we have seen, Cornelius Plantinga certainly is. The contemporary German theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg likewise unabashedly discusses the three persons of the Trinity as three separate, dynamic centers of action and consciousness.[105]

SUBORDINATIONISM

And it seems proper that he should. The most obvious reading of a New Testament passage like Mark 14:36, in which Jesus asks that the cup of his pending crucifixion be taken from him, surely seems to point to a numerical distinction in wills between the Father and the Son, made one by the Son's full submission: "Yet not what I will, but what thou wilt." When Jesus cries out from the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" the most natural understanding seems to be that one center of consciousness is begging an answer from another.[106]

Obviously, if one accepts the postbiblical notion that a divine nature and a human nature, mutually distinct, somehow coexisted in Jesus of Nazareth, a quite different understanding of such passages, one that does not, for example, support a distinction of wills and a subordination of the Son to the Father, is possible. Yet belief in true subordination of Son to Father seems to have been widespread in the first three centuries of Christianity. In the New Testament, as is often recognized, the Father is God *par excellence*, while Jesus seems to be secondarily divine.[107] "The Father is greater than I," says Jesus.[108] "There is little doubt," as Cornelius Plantinga observes, "that John presents at least a functional hierarchy, with the Father ultimately in control."[109] Paul

refers to "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"[110] "There is," Paul says, "no god but one. . . . For us there is one God, the Father, . . . and there is one Lord, Jesus Christ."[111] The Father knows the time of the Second Advent, but the Son does not.[112] Even after the universal resurrection and the culmination of all things, according to St. Paul, "the Son himself will also be made subordinate to God."[113]

A distinction between "the Most High" and Yahweh seems to occur in the Hebrew Bible.[114] Strikingly, the New Testament identifies Jesus as "the Son of the Most High."[115] That distinction persists into Christian times, with certain documents such as the fourth-century *Clementine Recognitions* and Eusebius's fourth-century *Proof of the Gospel* evidently identifying Jesus Christ with Jehovah, "whom," as Eusebius says, "we call Lord in the second degree after the God of the Universe."[116] The mid-second-century St. Justin Martyr wrote in his *Dialogue with Trypho* that Jesus was "another God and Lord subject to the Maker of all things; who is also called an Angel . . . distinct from Him who made all things,—numerically, I mean, not (distinct) in will."[117] In his *First Apology*, St. Justin described the Son as being "in the second place, and the prophetic Spirit in the third."[118] The great early-third-century theologian St. Hippolytus of Rome taught that God the Father is "the Lord and God and Ruler of all, and even of Christ Himself."[119] St. Irenaeus of Lyon taught that "the Father is the only God and Lord, who alone is God and ruler of all."[120] Origen of Alexandria described Jesus as a "second God," while Eusebius called him a "secondary Being."[121] Novatian, for his part, described the Holy Spirit as "less than Christ."[122] "We say," wrote Origen, "that the Son and the Holy Spirit excel all created beings to a degree which admits of no comparison, and are themselves excelled by the Father to the same or even greater degree."[123] St. Irenaeus of Lyon wrote that the Father exceeds the Son in terms of knowledge.[124]

"Until Athanasius began writing," remarks R. P. C. Hansen, "every single theologian, East and West, had postulated some form of Subordinationism. It could, about the year 300, have been described as a fixed part of catholic theology."[125] "During the first three centuries of the Christian era," agrees William La Due, "practically all the approaches to the clarification of the mystery of the Trinity were tinged with some degree of either subordinationism or modalism."[126] On the eve of the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325, the most numerous faction at the council, "the great conservative 'middle party,'" as J. N. D. Kelly terms them, were subordinationists who believed in three divine persons, "separate in rank and glory but united in harmony of will."[127]

ENTER MORMONISM

Where does Mormonism fit with all of this? "Three personages composing the great presiding council of the universe have revealed themselves unto man," wrote Elder James E. Talmage in 1890. And yet he proceeded to teach that "the mind of any one member of the Trinity is the mind of the others; seeing as each of them does with the eye of perfection, they see and understand alike."[128]

The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are "in perfect unity and harmony with each other," according to the semi-official 1992 *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*.

> Although the three members of the Godhead are distinct personages, their Godhead is "one" in that all three are united in their thoughts, actions, and purpose, with each having a fulness of knowledge, truth, and power.[129]

Perhaps because they are unmenaced by surrounding polytheisms and also because they have emerged from and historically reacted against a religious culture in which mainstream trinitarianism has been the norm, Latter-day Saints are less fearful than other social trinitarians of affirming a belief in "Gods" in the plural. But they are squarely within a form of what might be termed liberal social trinitarianism. What Kenneth Paul Wesche says of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in Eastern trinitarianism could easily have been said by a Latter-day Saint:

> These are not three separate actors, each one scheming against the other to effect his own agenda as one finds in the Olympian pantheon, nor is there one common operation performed independently by each of the Three as in the case, for example, of several human orators, or farmers, or shoemakers who each perform the same activity, but independently of others; there is but one natural operation which all three persons perform, each in his own way, but in natural union with the others. There is accordingly identity of purpose, will and knowledge; the Son knows what the Father is doing because his action is the Father's action and it is the very action perfected by the Holy Spirit.[130]

With the exception of his rejection of the plural term *Gods*, Latter-day Saints would feel perfectly comfortable affirming, with Bishop Kallistos Timothy Ware, that

> Father, Son and Spirit . . . have only one will and not three . . . None of the three ever acts separately, apart from the other two. They are not three Gods, but one God.[131]

Latter-day Saints confidently hold that their view of the Trinity is fully concordant with the biblical data. They would agree with Cornelius Plantinga's declaration that "A person who extrapolated theologically from Hebrews, Paul, and John would naturally develop a social theory of the Trinity."[132] And they believe that it is logically preferable to mainstream trinitarianism. In this, they have support from the outside: After rigorous analysis, Oxford's Timothy Bartel declares that the only logically tenable account of the Godhead is one in which "each member of the Trinity is absolutely distinct from the other two: the Trinity consists of three distinct individuals, each of whom is fully divine."[133]

Surprisingly, the Latter-day Saint approach may not even be incompatible with the text of the Nicene Creed.[134] In the third-fourth century *Clementine Homilies*, the apostle Peter is represented as teaching that

> The bodies of men have immortal souls, which have been clothed with the breath of God; and having come forth from God, they are of the same substance."[135]

While the pseudo-Clementine literature is dubiously orthodox, the language of this passage raises intriguing questions. It is extraordinarily difficult to pin down the precise meaning of the very controversial term *homoousios*, so central to trinitarian doctrine after the Nicene consensus.[136] (The term's ambiguity may, indeed, have been central to its utility in a creedal agreement between various theological factions.) Prior to the fourth century, phrases such as "of one substance" and "of the same substance" seem, at least in the minds even of some of those who approved the creed, to have indicated a generic similarity, meaning something like "the kind of substance or stuff common to several individuals of a class." The point may have been simply that Jesus, like the Father, is divine—a concept that Latter-day Saints fully endorse.[137] It can, in fact, be argued that the chief objection to the term *homoiousios*, with its fatal *iota*, was its potential usefulness to advocates of subordinationism. Creedal formulas were devised not so much to specify what God is, but to rule out what he isn't. Those eager to protect the full deity of Christ were not necessarily intending to proscribe what we now know as social trinitarianism.

TRINITY AND SALVATION

Somewhat analogously to the Eastern tradition, the transformative power of the Holy Spirit, which results in a fundamental reordering of the human heart, is a recurrent theme in the Book of Mormon.[138] In response to a powerful sermon delivered by their prophetic king Benjamin, the Nephites of the late second century B.C. enter into formal covenant to live righteously, and declare that, "because of the Spirit of the Lord Omnipotent, which has wrought a mighty change in us, or in our hearts, . . . we have no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually."[139] Alma 17-27 recounts the remarkable transformation of the people of Ammon from a violent and bloodthirsty paganism to a Christian covenant, according to which they forever abandon warfare, and because of which many of them suffer martyrdom.

Alma the Younger, actively apostate son of the high priest under Mosiah, last of the Nephite monarchs, is converted through a spectacular angelophany. When he emerges from a lengthy coma and is finally able to speak, he tells those around him that he has been "born of the Spirit." And so, he says, must all be who will be saved:

> And the Lord said unto me: Marvel not that all mankind, yea, men and women, all nations, kindreds, tongues and people, must be born again; yea, born of God, changed from their carnal and fallen state, to a state of righteousness, being redeemed of God, becoming his sons and daughters; And thus they become new creatures; and unless they do this, they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God. I say unto you, unless this be the case, they must be cast off; and this I know, because I was like to be cast off.[140]

A decade or two later, his father is dead and Alma himself is the high priest over the Nephites. In one of his greatest sermons, he poses a question to his audience that unmistakably emerges from his own miraculous transformation:

> I ask of you, my brethren of the church, have ye spiritually been born of God? Have ye received his image in your countenances? Have ye experienced this mighty change in your hearts?[141]

Righteousness, in the Book of Mormon and in Mormonism generally, is

not merely forgiveness of sins, though it surely includes divine forgiveness. Nor is it merely imputed, extrinsic to the believer. It is genuine alignment with God in heart and in action. Yet this alignment is not effected by human effort alone. It is made possible by the redemptive atonement of Christ, and comes through a synergy of faithful human discipleship and the transformative sanctification of the Holy Spirit. Through inspiration, faithful believers will, to the extent of their transformation, say and do what the Lord himself would say and do.[142]

Thus, the Book of Mormon prophet Nephi promised his readers that

> If ye shall follow the Son, with full purpose of heart, acting no hypocrisy and no deception before God, but with real intent, repenting of your sins, witnessing unto the Father that ye are willing to take upon you the name of Christ, by baptism . . . behold, then shall ye receive the Holy Ghost; yea, then cometh the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost; and then can ye speak with the tongue of angels. . . . And now, how could ye speak with the tongue of angels, save it were by the Holy Ghost? Angels speak by the power of the Holy Ghost, wherefore, they speak the words of Christ.[143]

Similarly, in a revelation given through Joseph Smith at Hiram, Ohio, in November 1831, the faithful priesthood of the Church is assured that

> whatsoever they shall speak when moved upon by the Holy Ghost shall be scripture, shall be the will of the Lord, shall be the mind of the Lord, shall be the word of the Lord, shall be the voice of the Lord, and the power of God unto salvation.[144]

This transformation will ultimately occur not merely in individuals, but in human society as a whole and in the earth itself: "May the kingdom of God go forth," Joseph Smith prayed, "that the kingdom of heaven may come."[145] In that day, according to the Articles of Faith of the Church, "the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory."[146] Latter-day Saints are millennialists, engaged in building the earthly Kingdom of God that will prepare the way for the return of Christ

Like Leonardo Boff and other social trinitarians, Latter-day Saints see in the fellowship of the Trinity a model for what human society ought to be. "And the Lord called his people Zion," one uniquely Mormon canonical text explains, in connection with a community led by the ancient patriarch Enoch,

"because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness."[147] In the first discourse of the risen Lord to his American saints in the Book of Mormon, an exhortation to avoid "disputations," "contention," and mutual "anger," is enclosed within two explicit declarations of the oneness of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and accompanied by a brief discussion of the varied but wholly united action of the three members of the Trinity.[148] "I say unto you, be one," commands a January 1831 revelation given to Joseph Smith in Fayette, New York, "and if ye are not one ye are not mine."[149] Unlike Boff's vision, however, but like the subordinationist Trinity seemingly favored in the first Christian centuries, the society for which Latter-day Saints have historically striven—the Kingdom of God, Zion—is an unmistakably hierarchical one, as is the currently existing Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. (Latter-day Saints can accept Joseph Bracken's description of the one God as "a structured society.")[150] It is perhaps worth noting in this context that the original name chosen for what is now Utah and much of the "Great Basin Kingdom" by the Mormon pioneers was *Deseret*, a word from the Book of Mormon signifying the honey bee,[151] and that the Utah state seal and state flag still feature a beehive as their central image. This arises not out of any supposed ambition to establish a theocratic fascism, as certain critics charge, but from a commitment to build a society of complete harmony and unity of purpose, obedient to the will of God.

In the Latter-day Saint view, furthermore, the perfect unity and harmony of the Trinity is not merely an ideal toward which earthly believers may strive. Joseph Bracken's explanation that "one major reason for the incarnation of the Son of God . . . was the need for a concrete model of human personhood, someone specifically to embody what the Father has in mind for all of us," resonates with Mormon understandings, particularly in view of his insistence that Christ's personhood is constituted at least in part by his intimate, perichoretic, relationship with the Father.[152] Through the atonement of Jesus Christ and the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit, such a relationship is also a fully realizable goal for the righteous of humankind in the life to come. Very much analogous to *theosis* in the Eastern tradition, this is deification—or, as Latter-day Saints tend to call it, exaltation.[153] The resurrected Jesus, speaking to his American disciples in the Book of Mormon, promises them that "ye shall be even as I am, and I am even as the Father; and the Father and I are one."[154]

An analogous theme appears in various social trinitarian writers, as well. In the thought of Leonardo Boff, for example, "All beings are invited to share in the sonship of the Son. . . . The perichoretic life of God expands ever

outward."[155]

> Boff writes that one can take two directions in describing the purpose of the Incarnation. One emphasizes the goal of healing human sinfulness and infirmity, while the other fixes on the creation of companions in love for the glory of God. Creation, according to this second approach, grew out of the wish of the divine figures to include others in their life of communion. This latter view, which was taught by the Franciscan John Duns Scotus (ca. 1266-1308), is preferred by Boff and many others because it is not based on the hypothesis of the sinful deficiencies of humankind, which contends that without human sin the Incarnation would seem to lack a purpose.[156]

Latter-day Saints see both functions in the atoning sacrifice of Christ. It is not an either/or. Humans are fallen, but they have the potential for exaltation, according to the Mormon understanding, because they are children of a divine Father. In his remarks to the pagan Athenians on Mars Hill, the apostle Paul approvingly quoted one of their poets to the effect that humans are of the *genos*—the "genus" or "kin" (another cognate) or "family"—of God.[157] As I have already noted, the *Clementine Homilies* declare human souls to be "of the same substance" with God. "But," the text goes on to say (in an argument strikingly similar to that advanced by Jesus himself at John 10:34-36),

> they are not gods. But if they are gods, then in this way the souls of all men, both those who have died, and those who are alive, and those who shall come into being, are gods. But if in a spirit of controversy you maintain that these also are gods, what great matter is it, then, for Christ to be called God? for He has only what all have.[158]

A revelation received by Joseph Smith in February 1832 describes those who are received into the highest degree of heaven:

> They are they into whose hands the Father has given all things—
> They are they who are priests and kings, who have received of his fulness, and of his glory. . . .
>
> Wherefore, as it is written, they are gods, even the sons of God—
>
> Wherefore, all things are theirs, whether life or death, or things present, or things to come, all are theirs and they are Christ's, and Christ is God's.[159]

A subsequent revelation teaches:

> And they shall pass by the angels, and the gods, which are set there, to their exaltation and glory in all things . . .
>
> Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue; then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them. Then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them.[160]

In instruction offered at Ramus, Illinois, in April 1843, and now part of the Latter-day Saint canon, Joseph Smith taught that

> When the Savior shall appear we shall see him as he is. We shall see that he is a man like ourselves.
>
> And that same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy.[161]

The juxtaposition here of highly anthropomorphic views of both God the Son and the heaven to which the Saints aspire is key to understanding the Latter-day Saint concept of salvation which, not unlike that of the Eastern Church, has often been dismissed as Pelagian.[162] Faithful Saints are offered entrance into the community of divine beings which is, in a very important sense, the one true God.

Brigham Young, speaking in the Tabernacle at Salt Lake City in 1859, declared that Mormonism is "designed to restore us to the presence of the Gods. Gods exist, and we had better strive to be prepared to be one with them."[163] "When will we become entirely independent?" he asked on another occasion. "Never, though we are as independent in our spheres as the Gods of eternity are in theirs."[164] Latter-day Saint monotheism will not be compromised by the eventual deification of any number of the saved, as that deification will occur only as they enter into essentially the same fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that the Trinity already enjoy among themselves—a fellowship that constitutes the Trinity "one God."[165]

DIVINE ONENESS, BIBLICALLY DEFINED

As it turns out, there is indeed one passage in the New Testament where the nature of the divine unity is specified.[166] And, significantly, that same kind of unity is pronounced available, by no lesser figure than Jesus himself, to faithful believers. Knowing that his time on earth is short, Jesus prays to the Father for his disciples "that they may be one, as we are one."[167] And he has in mind not only the inner circle of the apostles:

> But it is not for these alone that I pray, but for those also who through their words put their faith in me; may they all be one: as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, so also may they be in us, that the world may believe that thou didst send me. The glory which thou gavest me I have given to them, that they may be one, as we are one; I in them and thou in me, may they be perfectly one.[168]

There can be no question of modalism here, of a single person appearing under a multitude, now, of different masks. Nor does it seem plausible, for even the most perfectly united Christian community that might be conceived, to describe the relationship between believers as analogous to that between memory, understanding, and will, or to characterize members of such a community as "modes of being" or as subsistent relations within one essence rather than as individual centers of consciousness. This prayer of the Lord seems inescapably to imply a social model of the Trinity, bound together in absolute harmony by mutual indwelling or *perichoresis*. Moreover, Christ expressly asks that the faithful enjoy the same mutual indwelling ("they in us . . . I in them and thou in me") that is enjoyed by the Father and the Son. And if perfect perichoretic union with the Father and the Son is not *theosis* or deification, it is difficult to imagine what it might be instead.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

While some Latter-day Saints, myself included, may be tempted to see in social trinitarianism a "coming around" of other Christians to our point of view, it may be more fruitful to see in it a potential bridge for more sympathetic mutual understanding.

Critics of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have exaggerated and exploited the gap between mainstream Christendom and Mormonism

on the issue of trinitarianism, but Latter-day Saints have commonly been their naïvely willing partners, overstating the separateness of the three divine persons of the Godhead. In doing so, Latter-day Saints have also unwittingly but artificially divided their understanding of the Trinity from their understanding of salvation, thus impoverishing both—a mistake that, in various forms, has occurred previously in the history of Christian doctrine. For Mormonism, its doctrine of the unity of the three divine persons can and should serve to ground its teaching on the ultimate destiny of the redeemed as well as to justify its social and ecclesiastical vision and to inspire believers to ever richer cooperation, kindness, and mutual care. "This is eternal life: to know thee who alone art truly God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent."[169]

Particularly hostile critics tend to view Latter-day Saints as polytheists. This is simply wrong. It is no more accurate than is the common Latter-day Saint misreading of orthodox trinitarianism as modalism.

Phillip Cary lists seven propositions essential to trinitarian theology. Of these, the first three "confess the name of the triune God":

1) The Father is God.
2) The Son is God.
3) The Holy Spirit is God

The next three propositions "indicate that these are not just three names for the same thing":

4) The Father is not the Son.
5) The Son is not the Spirit.
6) The Holy Spirit is not the Father.

With his seventh and final proposition, Cary supplies the "clincher, which," he says, "gives the doctrine its distinctive logic":

7) There is only one God.

Two of Cary's own observations about these seven propositions are relevant here. First, he contends that they demonstrate that trinitarianism can be summarized without employing "abstract or unbiblical language." Second, he remarks,

> These seven propositions are sufficient to formulate the doctrine of the Trinity—to give the bare bones of what the doctrine says and lay out its basic logical structure. The logical peculiarities of the doctrine arise from the interaction of these seven propositions.[170]

Every one of these propositions, and all of them simultaneously, can be and are affirmed by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.[171]

Cornelius Plantinga defends social trinitarianism as an acceptable form of monotheism "in," as he says, "appropriately enough, three ways." First, if the term *God* is used to refer uniquely or particularly to the Father, with the Son and Holy Spirit as derivatively divine—as, in fact, the New Testament typically uses it—social trinitarianism is certainly monotheistic. Second, if *God* is used to name the "divine essence"—"Godhead," "Godhood," or "Godness" (*divinitas*, *deitas*, or, in Greek, *theotes*)—as a set of attributes possessed by each divine person, social trinitarianism is, again, monotheistic. (And acceptably so: The notion of one "divine essence" is standard in many ancient and medieval discussions of the Trinity, particular in the Latin West.) Third, if *God* is employed to designate the Trinity as a whole—which it often is, even by standard Trinitarians—social trinitarianism remains securely monotheistic.[172]

The doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints satisfies all three of Cornelius Plantinga's conditions for monotheism.

I do not doubt that both critics and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will be surprised to hear it, but Mormons are trinitarian Christians. The history of trinitarian doctrine is a long and complex one. But if there is room in trinitarian Christianity for the social model, there seems likewise to be room for the Latter-day Saints. The fundamental Mormon divergence from mainstream Christianity, doctrinally speaking, lies not in their beliefs regarding the nature of the divine unity, but in their rejection of an ontological chasm between divinity and humanity.[173]

Gregory Nazianzus remarks of Athanasius that, confronted with a disturbing terminological differences between Eastern thinkers and "the Italians,"

> He conferred in his gentle and sympathetic way with both parties, and after he had carefully weighed the meaning of their expressions, and found that they had the same sense, and were nowise different in doctrine, by permitting each party to use its own terms, he bound them together in unity of action.[174]

Latter-day Saints and other Christians will continue to disagree on many

things. But, if I'm correct, the doctrine of the Trinity need not loom quite so large among them.

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NOTES

This paper was written for (partial) presentation at a conference on Mormon theology held at the Divinity School of Yale University, in New Haven, Connecticut, in March 2003. It benefited from suggestions from Carl Griffin, Benjamin Huff, and Marc-Charles Ingerson, as well as from a pre-publication reading of Barry R. Bickmore's essay "Of Simplicity, Oversimplification, and Monotheism," a review of Paul Owen, "Monotheism, Mormonism, and the New Testament Witness," in *The New Mormon Challenge: Responding to the Latest Defenses of a Fast Growing Movement*, edited by Francis J. Beckwith, Carl Mosser, and Paul Own (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002,) 271-314, that eventually appeared in the *FARMS Review* 15:1 (2003): 215-258. Bickmore's discussion is highly relevant to the topic treated here. In what follows, I have used *Latter-day Saint* and *Mormon* interchangeably. I have also used *Holy Spirit* in preference to *Holy Ghost*, although *Holy Ghost* is the standard locution of English-speaking Latter-day Saints, in deference to what I take to be predominant usage in the wider Anglophone Christian world. Unless otherwise specified, all biblical quotations are from the New English Bible.

[1] Augustine, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament*, Sermon 2, "Of the Words of St. Matthew's gospel, chap. 3:13, 'Then Jesus cometh from Galilee to the Jordan unto John, to be baptized of Him,' Concerning the Trinity," trans. R. G. MacMullen, *A Select Library of the Nice and Post Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church* First Series (NPNF) (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 6:261. See Roger E. Olson and Christopher A. Hall, *The Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), on Augustine's insistence that intellectual ability must be accompanied by holiness of character when seeking spiritual and theological insight.

[2] Alister E. McGrath, *Understanding the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 13; emphasis in the original.

[3] That Latter-day Saints reject the Trinity is so uncontroversial that the claim even shows up, rather casually mentioned, in such places as Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester and Grand Rapids: InterVarsity and Zondervan, 1994), 407.

[4] Joseph Smith – History 1:17.

[5] Abraham 4-5.

[6] Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, ed. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 349.

[7] Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 6:474.

[8] Journal of Discourses 14:92.

[9] James E. Talmage, *A Study of the Articles of Faith, Being a Consideration of the Principal Doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1972), 29-51.

[10] Doctrine and Covenants 20:28

[11] 2 Nephi 31:21; emphasis mine. Compare 3 Nephi 28:10.

[12] In all Latter-day Saint editions of the Book of Mormon for many decades, the testimonial statement, endorsed by Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris, has been included in the front matter.

[13] Doctrine and Covenants 93:3. Compare 3 Nephi 11:27, 36; John 17:21; 10:30.

[14] Bruce R. McConkie, "Monotheism," in *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 511; emphasis removed.

[15] Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 248, is probably fairly typical in explaining that "Tritheism denies that there is only one God." If Grudem is correct, Latter-day Saints cannot be dismissed—in any simple way, at least—as tritheists, since they manifestly affirm the oneness of God.

[16] As will appear below, I disagree.

[17] McGrath, *Understanding the Trinity*, 148. Compare pages 115-118, 130.

[18] John Courtney Murray, *The Problem of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 40.

[19] McGrath, *Understanding the Trinity*, 109 (compare page 93).

[20] See, for example, E. Feser, "Has Trinitarianism Been Shown to Be Coherent?" *Faith and Philosophy* 14:1 (January 1997): 87-97. Compare Timothy W. Bartel, "The Plight of the Relative Trinitarian," *Religious Studies* 24:2 (June 1988): 129-155. Attacking the coherency of trinitarian doctrine has, of course, been a staple of Muslim polemics for many centuries. A notable example has been published, with translation and commentary, as David Thomas, translator, *Anti-Christian Polemic in Early Islam: Abu 'Isa al-Warraq's "Against the Trinity"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). My colleague David Paulsen has shared with me an interesting unpublished paper by Stephen T. Davis, entitled "Modes without Modalism," that seeks to sketch a view of the Trinity that is both faithful to mainstream Christian tradition and logically defensible.

[21] Augustine, *On the Trinity*, NPNF 3:227. Augustine, of course, is citing Christ's instruction at Matthew 28:19, and the *shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4.

[22] Genesis 1:26.

[23] John 10:30.

[24] Gregory Nazianzus, Oration 39, NPNF ser. 2, 7:355, 356.

[25] Lynne Faber Lorenzen, *The College Student's Introduction to the Trinity* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999), 3. The term *homoousios*, incidentally, appears to have been coined by Origen, one of the "Christian Platonists of Alexandria." See William J. La Due, *The Trinity Guide to the Trinity* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), 38.

[26] Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1994), 171.

[27] Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 285.

[28] Significantly, the term is also seldom used by St. Hilary of Poitiers (ca. 315-367) in his work *On the Trinity*.

[29] Symbolum Quicunque ("The Athanasian Creed"), 1-3, 15-16. The original Latin text of the document is conveniently accessible, along with an English translation (which I have followed rather loosely), in Philip Schaff and David Schaff, eds., *The Creeds of Christendom*, 6th ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983), 2:66-67.

[30] Cited by Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., "Social Trinity and Tritheism," in Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., eds., *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1989), 21. Plantinga's entire essay occupies pages 21-47, and is a superb statement of the social model of the Trinity that will be discussed at some length later in this paper.

[31] Gregory Nazianzus, Oration 42 ("The Last Farewell"), NPNF ser. 2, 7:90.

[32] Constantine, for instance, had wanted a creed that as many Christians as possible could accept.

[33] The quoted phrase is from Olson and Hall, *The Trinity*, 25.

[34] Thomas John Hopko, "God and the World: An Eastern Orthodox Response to Process Theology" (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Fordham University, 1982), 206, cited in Lorenzen, *The College Student's Introduction to the Trinity*, 91; emphasis as found.

[35] Such thinking becomes visible early—for example, in the second-century teachings of St. Irenaeus of Lyons. The broad resemblance between Latter-day Saint ideas of human destiny and the Irenaean view, as the latter is sketched, for example, in John H. Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1976), would be a worthy topic for further examination.

[36] See Lorenzen, *The College Student's Introduction to the Trinity*, 3-4, 60, 93-94, 106, 108. Strikingly, the formula "God became human so that human beings should be deified" appears in Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, translated by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 291-292.

[37] Lorenzen, *The College Student's Introduction to the Trinity*, 108. In the Book of Moses, God tells Moses that "This is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39).

[38] Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Holy Spirit*, NPNF ser. 2 , 5:319. Significantly, Cyril Richardson, *The Doctrine of the Trinity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1967), objects to Gregory's description of the distinct roles of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in salvation (on pages 135, 140) and, not coincidentally, rejects trinitarianism outright.

[39] Lorenzen, *The College Student's Introduction to the Trinity*, 11-13, 21. For an examination of the centrality of *theosis* in the thought of St. Athanasius, see Keith E.

Norman, *Deification: The Content of Athanasian Soteriology* (Provo: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2000).

[40] 2 Peter 1:4.

[41] Lorenzen, *The College Student's Introduction to the Trinity*, 97.

[42] La Due, *The Trinity Guide to the Trinity*, 143. Beside those mentioned in the text, Eberhard Jüngel and Robert Jenson will serve as examples of contemporary theologians who likewise stress the oneness of God, possibly to the detriment of the divine multiplicity. McGrath, *Understanding the Trinity*, 130-131, seems to me to teeter on the brink of modalism.

[43] Colin Gunton, *The Promise of Trinitarian Theology* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1991), 42. In fairness, I note that La Due, *Trinity Guide to the Trinity*, 53, insists that the divine persons are individuals even in Augustine. Plantinga, "Social Trinity and Tritheism," 33, doubts that Augustine's position is ultimately coherent.

[44] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, translated by Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981); Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, translated by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

[45] As summarized by Fortman, *The Triune God*, 227.

[46] La Due, *The Trinity Guide to the Trinity*, 125.

[47] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics I.1*, Chapter II, Part I.

[48] Barth, *Church Dogmatics I.1*, 403.

[49] Barth, *Church Dogmatics I.1*, 415.

[50] As noted by Olson and Hall, *The Trinity*, 97. Plantinga, "Social Trinity and Tritheism," 33, levels the accusation.

[51] Rahner, *The Trinity*, 103-115,

[52] Rahner, *The Trinity*, 107.

[53] It undoubtedly seems odd to most theologically uninitiated modern readers to use the word *economic* in this fashion. The term refers to the "economy" of salvation, and reflects the original Greek sense of *oikonomia* as the management of a household.

[54] Thus Olson and Hall, *The Trinity*, 3.

[55] Cited by Jürgen Moltmann, in *The Trinity and the Kingdom*.

[56] This will be further discussed below.

[57] Lorenzen, *The College Student's Introduction to the Trinity*, 94.

[58] Lorenzen, *The College Student's Introduction to the Trinity*, 30.

[59] Ibid., 95.

[60] La Due, *The Trinity Guide to the Trinity*, 117.

[61] Lorenzen, *The College Student's Introduction to the Trinity*, 1.

[62] La Due, *The Trinity Guide to the Trinity*, xi.

[63] Lorenzen, *The College Student's Introduction to the Trinity*, 1, 41; compare 95-96.

[64] Ibid., 32.

[65] John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III.xxi.7. See, on Luther

and Calvin, Lorenzen, *The College Student's Introduction to the Trinity*, 30-35, 95.

[66] Lorenzen, *The College Student's Introduction to the Trinity*, 47.

[67] The Rule is to be found at Rahner, *The Trinity*, 22.

[68] See Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, translated by R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (New York: Harper and Row, 1974); Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*.

[69] Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993); 21-205

[70] Olson and Hall, *The Trinity*, 1.

[71] See the brief comment of Lorenzen, *The College Student's Introduction to the Trinity*, 2.

[72] Lorenzen, *The College Student's Introduction to the Trinity*, 35.

[73] However, Olson and Hall, *The Trinity*, 37, are probably right to follow Phillip Cary in claiming that the Cappadocians compared the Trinity to a society of three human beings for the very purpose of showing that the comparison should not be taken too far.

[74] Novatian. *Concerning the Trinity*, 27. Novatian, it is true, is typically classed as a "heretic." But this label stems from his rigorist stance during the Decian persecution, not from his doctrinal opinions, which were wholly orthodox for his time.

[75] 1 John 4:8.

[76] See Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, translated by Paul Burns (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988); John O'Donnell, *The Mystery of the Triune God* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989); LaCugna, *God for Us*; John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Press, 1984). Walter Cardinal Kasper, too, seeks to relate his trinitarianism primarily to salvation, though it is less clear that he does so within a social trinitarian framework. See Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, translated by Matthew J. O'Donnell (New York: Crossroad, 1988).

[77] Gerald O'Collins, *The Tripersonal God* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 147.

[78] Leonard Hodgson, *The Doctrine of the Trinity* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944).

[79] Lorenzen, *The College Student's Introduction to the Trinity*, 50.

[80] Hodgson, *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, 179-180.

[81] Lorenzen, *The College Student's Introduction to the Trinity*, 55-56.

[82] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, translated by Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 158. Moltmann believes that many of the structural problems and abuses of Christian ecclesiastical history are connected with a faulty view of the Trinity, and that a more adequate trinitarian theology can assist in ecclesiastical reform. Compare Leonardo Boff, discussed below. A relevant study that I have not yet seen at time of writing is Thomas Robert Thompson, *Imitatio Trinitatis: The Trinity as Social Model in the Theologies of Jürgen Moltmann and Leonardo Boff* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, where?,1996). Catherine LaCugna

also leans in this direction.

[83] For Latter-day Saint reflections on a related topic, see Daniel C. Peterson, "On the Motif of the Weeping God in Moses 7," in *Revelation, Reason, and Faith: Essays in Honor of Truman G. Madsen*, edited by Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002), 285-317.

[84] Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 32, 84.

[85] Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, 7

[86] As summarized by La Due, *The Trinity Guide to the Trinity*, 172. I have not yet looked at her book *She Who Is* (New York: Crossroad, 1993).

[87] Again, as summarized by La Due, *The Trinity Guide to the Trinity*, 173, this time from Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Trinity: To Let the Symbol Sing Again," *Theology Today* 54 (October 1997): 299-311.

[88] The discussion of his thought that follows is based upon Joseph A. Bracken, *The Triune Symbol: Persons, Process, and Community* (New York: University Press of America, 1985). Father Bracken and I spent two months together in a 1990 seminar sponsored by the National Endowment for the Humanities, led by Huston Smith at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California. After a party on the last night of our seminar, he washed the dishes while I dried them. Father Bracken was amused at the thought of a Jesuit process theologian and a Mormon Islamicist working side by side at such a task. I expect that he would be even more amused by my use of him, now, to set out my thoughts on "Mormonism and the Trinity." I would not have expected it myself.

[89] Olson and Hall, *The Trinity*, 90, summarizing an argument advanced by Bishop Kallistos. Such reasoning, which I find persuasive, has led theologians such as Leonard Hodgson, Leonardo Boff, and John Zizioulas to argue that God must necessarily be multiply personal, lest he be dependent for his "personality" upon the existence of the world. See the discussion at Olson and Hall, *The Trinity*, 105, 107, 113. La Due, *The Trinity Guide to the Trinity*, 107, 179, rightly notes that the concept of "person" has shifted substantially over the past several centuries. The Oxford social trinitarian David Brown usefully applies Stephen Lukes's distinction between French *individualisme* and German *Individualität* (as the words came to be used in the early nineteenth century) to the trinitarian persons, affirming the latter (which is akin to Bracken's "person") while denying the former. See David Brown, "Trinitarian Personhood and Individuality," in Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., eds., *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1989), 48-78.

[90] Bracken, *The Triune Symbol*, 87.

[91] Ibid., 16.

[92] Ibid., 26.

[93] Ibid., 30.

[94] Plantinga, "Social Trinity and Tritheism," 22.

[95] Ibid., 27, 28.

[96] The charge of "tritheism" is even gently hinted at by the rather mild Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 194.

[97] Sensationalizing critics of Latter-day Saint beliefs often draw comparisons with the pantheons of ancient Greece and Rome, evidently hoping that their naïve audiences will assume that the mutual backstabbing, adulteries, and general foibles of the Olympians are present, likewise, in the Mormon conception of heaven. This is, of course, simply false.

[98] Olson and Hall, *The Trinity*, 36.

[99] McGrath, *Understanding the Trinity*, 120.

[100] La Due, *The Trinity Guide to the Trinity*, 107.

[101] Plantinga, "Social Trinity and Tritheism," 36.

[102] Olson and Hall, *The Trinity*, 37.

[103] Cyril Richardson, *The Doctrine of the Trinity* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1967), 15.

[104] Phillip Cary, "Historical Perspectives on Trinitarian Doctrine," *Religious and Theological Studies Fellowship Bulletin* (November-December 1995): 5, cited in Olson and Hall, *The Trinity*, 36 note 59.

[105] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 1:317-327.

[106] Mark 15:34.

[107] See Plantinga, "Social Trinity and Tritheism," 25-26, also the various references given at La Due, *The Trinity Guide to the Trinity*, 19-24, 38-40, 96, 160. These are only representative, and could be multiplied.

[108] John 14:28.

[109] Plantinga, "Social Trinity and Tritheism," 26.

[110] Romans 15:6.

[111] 1 Corinthians 8:4, 6. Paul is, of course, echoing the famous *shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4.

[112] Matthew 24:36.

[113] 1 Corinthians 15:28.

[114] For example, in the Septuagint and Qumran versions of Deuteronomy 32:8-9. Compare the similar understanding reflected in *Clementine Recognitions* 2:42 and Eusebius, *The Proof of the Gospel*, 4:7. See, on this, Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel*, 5-6; Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism*, . Such a distinction is also arguably present in Psalm 91:9, properly read. (See the argument of Barker, *The Great Angel*, 198-199.)

[115] See, for example, Luke 1:32.

[116] *Clementine Recognitions* 2:42; Eusebius, *The Proof of the Gospel*, 4:7.

[117] Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 56; in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (ANF) 1:223. Admittedly, Justin's tendency to speak of the Son as an "angel" was not well received among later fathers. On this, see O'Collins, *The Tripersonal God*, 90.

[118] Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 13 (ANF 1:167).

[119] Hippolytus, *Scholia on Daniel*, 7:13 (ANF 5:189).

[120] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3:9:1 (ANF 1:422).

[121] Origen, *Against Celsus* 5.39, 6.61, 7.57 (ANF 4:561, 601, 634); Eusebius, *The Proof of the Gospel* 1.5 (or 1.26?).

[122] Novatian, *Concerning the Trinity* 16 (ANF 5:625).

[123] Origen, *Commentary in Joannem* 13.25. It must be noted, incidentally, that, from a Latter-day Saint viewpoint, Origen's estimate of the gulf between the Father, on the one hand, and the Son and the Spirit on the other, appears vastly overdone.

[124] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 2.28.8 (ANF 1:402).

[125] Richard Hansen, "The Achievement of Orthodoxy in the Fourth Century A.D.," in *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick*, edited by Rowan Williams (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 153. So, too, Norbert Brox, *Kirchengeschichte des Altertums* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1983), 171, 175.

[126] La Due, *The Trinity Guide to the Trinity*, 41. Illustrations might be multiplied indefinitely. See, for instance, La Due's discussion of Tertullian on pages 35-36, and of Origen on pages 38-39.

[127] J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1978), 247-248.

[128] Talmage, *The Articles of Faith*, 39, 41.

[129] Paul E. Dahl, "Godhead," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, edited by Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:552.

[130] Kenneth Paul Wesche, "The Triadological Shaping of Latin and Greek Christology, Part II: The Greek Tradition," *Pro Ecclesia* 2/1, 88, as cited in Olson and Hall, *The Trinity*, 39. Brief conspectuses of the some of the specific, distinct, but harmonious roles played by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in Latter-day Saint belief occur, among many other passages that might be named, in 2 Nephi 31:10-12 and Moroni 9:25-26, 10:4, in the Book of Mormon.

[131] Timothy Ware (Bishop Kallistos), *The Orthodox Church* (New York: Penguin, 1963), 37.

[132] Plantinga, "Social Trinity and Tritheism," 27.

[133] Bartel, "The Plight of the Relative Trinitarian," 151.

[134] This would be of, at best, mild interest to Latter-day Saints, who do not grant the authority of the classical creeds. As La Due, *The Trinity Guide to the Trinity*, 58, 59, indicates, the first four ecumenical councils have become canons of trinitarian orthodoxy alongside the New Testament itself for much of Christendom.

[135] *Clementine Homilies* 16 (ANF 8:316).

[136] See, for example, Christopher Stead's discussions in his *Divine Substance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 242-266, and his *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 160-172, as also Lorenzen, *The College Student's Introduction to the Trinity*, 14-20, and Olson and Hall, *The Trinity*, 22, 34.

[137] J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper

and Row, 1978), 234-235. The quoted definition occurs on page 234.

[138] In addition to the passages alluded to in the text, see Mosiah 5:7, Alma 5:12-13, Helaman 15:7, and Ether 12:14.

[139] Mosiah 5:2; compare Alma 19:33.

[140] Mosiah 27:24-27.

[141] Alma 5:14; compare 5:26.

[142] In extraordinary cases, and within limits, Latter-day Saint scripture affirms that Godlike power has been granted to mortal men. In the Book of Mormon, for instance, one of the prophets receives such power by direct divine bestowal, "for thou shalt not ask that which is contrary to my will" (Helaman 10:4-11; quotation from 10:5). This story echoes the earlier biblical story of Elijah, who looms large in Mormon scripture and thought.

[143] 2 Nephi 31:13, 32:2-3. An amusing illustration of this principle, that angels speak the words of Christ, occurs toward the end of the Revelation of John. Twice—the second passage is clearer in this regard than the first—John, encountering a being who speaks in the first person as if he were himself God or the Son, quite understandably falls down to worship. Both times, the speaker, who is in fact an angel, sharply tells him not to do so, for the speaker is simply relaying the divine words in the capacity of a messenger. See Revelation 19:10, 22:7-9.

[144] Doctrine and Covenants 68:4. Strikingly, both the prayer alluded to below (Doctrine and Covenants 65) and the dedicatory prayer given in 1836 for the temple at Kirtland, Ohio (Doctrine and Covenants 109) form part of the Latter-day Saint canon. Both are believed by Latter-day Saints to have been given by revelation. In these inspired prayers, it seems, the very words of the person praying were given by God and, then, offered back to God.

[145] Doctrine and Covenants 65:6.

[146] Articles of Faith 10, in the Pearl of Great Price.

[147] Moses 7:18. "And," the text continues, "there was no poor among them."

[148] 3 Nephi 11:27-38.

[149] Doctrine and Covenants 38:27.

[150] Bracken, *The Triune Symbol*, 44.

[151] See Ether 2:3.

[152] Bracken, *The Triune Symbol*, 89.

[153] A Dominican Catholic priest discusses parallels between Eastern *theosis* and the Latter-day Saint concept of exaltation in Jordan Vajda, *"Partakers of the Divine Nature": A Comparative Analysis of Patristic and Mormon Doctrines of Divinization* (Provo: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002).

[154] 3 Nephi 28:10.

[155] As summarized by La Due, *The Trinity Guide to the Trinity*, 166.

[156] La Due, *The Trinity Guide to the Trinity*, 166-167; cf. 165, 185.

[157] Acts 17:28. On this passage and attendant issues, see Daniel C. Peterson, "'Ye are Gods': Psalm 82 and John 10 as Witnesses to the Divine Nature of

Humankind," in Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges, eds., *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson* (Provo: FARMS, 2000), 471-594.

158 *Clementine Homilies* 16 (ANF 8:316).

159 Doctrine and Covenants 76:55-56, 58-59.

160 Doctrine and Covenants 132:19-20.

161 Doctrine and Covenants 130:1-2.

162 Most anti-Mormon writing is too unsophisticated to avail itself of such terms as *Pelagianism*, but the charge is nonetheless fairly frequent. (Anti-Mormonism has produced an enormous "literature.") Anthony Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults: Christian Science, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormonism, Seventh-Day Adventism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 52, for instance, pronounces Latter-day Saints "completely Pelagian with respect to the doctrine of original sin." The agnostic Sterling M. McMurrin, in his *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1965), 74, makes the same identification, though without hostile intent. Bernhard Lange and Colleen McDannell, *Heaven: A History*, describe the Mormon view of heaven as one of the most concrete in Christian history.

163 Journal of Discourses 7:238.

164 Journal of Discourses 8:190.

165 It should be clearly understood, however, that the Trinity will not expand to become a Quaternity, or some such thing. In the hierarchical manner that characterizes Mormon thought in so many areas, members of the Trinity will continue to preside and the exalted righteous will continue to be subject to them. Presiding quorums in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—e.g., bishoprics, stake presidencies, and the First Presidency that leads the Church as whole—typically contain three members. This is yet another illustration of the way in which the Mormon understanding of heavenly society informs Latter-day Saint community life on earth.

166 Cardinal Kasper, too, sees the vital importance of this passage. See Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 303.

167 John 17:11.

168 John 17:20-23.

169 John 17:3.

170 Phillip Cary, "The Logic of Trinitarian Doctrine [Part I]," 2, as cited at Olson and Hall, *The Trinity*, 46.

171 Another way of making much the same point is to note that Latter-day Saints can agree with every one of the propositions deduced by the late-nineteenth-century Bishop of Exeter from his exhaustive and detailed survey of the relevant biblical data. See Edward Henry Bickersteth, *The Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1957).

172 Plantinga, "Social Trinity and Tritheism," 31-32.

173 Which is, of course, a subject for another paper—or book.

174 Gregory Nazianzus, *On the Great Athanasius*, NPNF ser. 2, 7:279.

Exaltation and Gods Who Can Fall: Some Problems for Mormon Theodicies

by Carl Mosser

Many LDS thinkers claim that Mormonism's chief philosophical strength vis-à-vis traditional theism lies in its ability to solve the problem of evil in both its logical and soteriological versions. A fair amount of energy has been invested in attempts to show that classical theism cannot solve the problem of evil whereas Mormonism can. LDS philosophers have spent far less energy reflecting on other implications that stem from the metaphysical framework that grounds Mormonism's perceived advantage with regard to evil. In this essay I will illustrate how reflection on traditional LDS teachings about preexistence, the divine nature, God's status as God, and exaltation raise interesting questions for Mormon theodicies.[1] Each of the areas I will address will also show how Mormonism's metaphysical commitments ironically provide grounds for skepticism about the actualization of the Mormon soteriological hope. If true, they may require us to reevaluate the manner in which we trust God.

There is diversity within LDS thought and some will disagree with the particular positions I include within Mormonism's metaphysical commitments. For the purposes of this essay I will equate traditional Mormon theology with the theological synthesis associated with James Talmage, B.H. Roberts and John Widtsoe. I will draw upon the metaphysical commitments expressed in the main discussions of Mormonism and the problem of evil in the writings of B.H. Roberts and his intellectual heirs.[2] I take this to be representative of an influential understanding of Mormon thought that enjoys support from

the LDS Standard Works and teachings of LDS General Authorities, even if other views may as well.

The problems I will identify point to tensions between various LDS commitments. However, my discussion here is not intended to be an argument against Mormonism or any of its fundamental teachings. My comments should instead be construed as an exercise in theological exploration intended to spark conversation that may yield additional insight into the unique LDS vision of God and salvation. The problems I will discuss are problems in the sense that they call out for some kind of explanation. Whether traditional LDS theology has the resources to provide adequate explanations remains to be seen.

THE METAPHYSICAL FRAMEWORK FOR MORMON THEODICY AND EXALTATION

Four metaphysical commitments provide the framework within which Latter-day Saints address the problem of evil. They also serve as important elements of the traditional LDS notion of eternal progression and exaltation.

(1) *Eternalism*—the universe and its basic constituents have always existed in some form. The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* and the view of the universe's contingency entailed by that doctrine are rejected.

(2) *Pluralism*—there are several ultimate entities or principles. These include the uncreated, chaotic matter from which this world was fashioned (D&C 93:33; Book of Abraham 3:24; 4:1), eternally existing intelligences at various stages of progression,[3] and eternal laws or principles that regulate the universe. Each of these things self-exists and their most basic properties and potentialities are brute facts.

(3) *Theological Finitism* is entailed by eternalism and pluralism. God is a highly developed intelligence who exists within an environment that he neither made nor transcends in the manner affirmed by classical theism. Though very powerful within the cosmos, what he is capable of fashioning and doing is limited by the uncreated natures of matter, intelligences and principles.

(4) Eternalism and Finitism entail a peculiar form of *Naturalism*. That is, there is no "supernatural" realm or being transcending the uncreated natural realm of matter, energy, intelligence and eternal law. Mormonism's is an unusual form of naturalism because it does not entail denial of the existence of gods, angels and demons, nor does it preclude the occurrence of unusual events that defy what seems to be possible given our current scientific understanding of world and its laws (i.e. miracles). Rather, traditional Mormonism affirms the existence of each of these but defines them in ways that differ significantly from the classical tradition.

It is easy to see how these four commitments provide a solution to the classical dilemma posed by arguments from evil against God's existence. Simply put, God cannot be held responsible for any evil that can be traced back to the brute existents of the universe or their inherent flaws because he is, strictly speaking, impotent to change the fundamental nature of other ultimate realities. So, for example, if evil is the product of human imperfection, or if this imperfection is considered an evil, then evil is eternal because human beings are eternal and God cannot be blamed. B.H. Roberts made these points eloquently in the following summary of his influential theodicy:

> [Evil] is as eternal as good; as eternal as space or duration or matter or force. God did not create any of these things, nor is He responsible for them. He found Himself, so to speak, co-eternal with these and other eternal things, and so works out His creative designs in harmony with those existences; not creating intelligences, but begetting intelligences, spirits. God is not responsible for the inner fact of them—the entity which ultimately determines the intellectual and moral character of spirits and of men, which are but spirits incarnate in human bodies. God is not responsible for their nature, as if He had created them absolutely out of nothing—intelligences, spirits, men; and created them as He would have them, measuring to each severally as He pleased to have them in intellectual degree and intensity of moral value. Had He so absolutely created them, He could have made the man of lowly degree the same as the man of highest degree; the man of brute mind and nature the same as the man of refined sentiment and aesthetic instincts. Why this inequality, if God absolutely created men—intelligence, spirit, body; and created them as he willed to have them, and could have had them different had He so willed? Why then did He not have them of higher grade all round? Why were not all the men

> made brave and all the women fair? The answer to all this is that God did all that could be done as the immanent, eternally active, and creating, and causing power in the universe under the limitations of other eternal existences… including consideration of the intractableness of the material with which the Creator had to work.[4]

In addition to these four metaphysical commitments, the soteriological version of the problem of evil is addressed by appeal to Mormonism's post-mortem opportunity to respond to the gospel, its expansive view of three kingdoms of glory in which nearly all men and women will find a place, and the possibility of attaining exaltation and eternal increase.

It is frequently observed that "salvation" within Mormon thought has two distinct senses. The first is salvation from death and corruption. This will be experienced by nearly everyone when God resurrects them to one of the three kingdoms of glory. But within LDS theology "salvation" also refers to something greater, exaltation within the celestial kingdom. Fewer people will attain salvation in this sense, but the opportunity is available to all and the priesthood and temple ordinances of the LDS Church exist to enable as many as possible to reach it.

What exactly is exaltation? It is to become "like God." A survey of the Standard Works, Joseph Smith's sermons, the theology of the temple ordinances, the teachings of General Authorities and correlated Church curriculum finds that five particular notions are frequently associated with exaltation. The first is being made like God by obtaining a glorious, resurrected body like his. Second is the possession of divine attributes and powers, including omnipotence (within the parameters entailed by pluralism). Thirdly, exaltation is associated with the ability to create and rule worlds as Kings and Queens. Fourth is the right and ability to have an "eternal increase," that is, procreate spirit children after the resurrection to populate the worlds one creates. Lastly, the exalted man will be to one's spirit children what God the Father has been to one's self. In short, ultimate salvation—to become like God in the fullest possible sense—is to become a Heavenly Father as God is a Heavenly Father.[5] For women, exaltation is to become a Heavenly Mother like our occasionally mentioned Heavenly Mother.

This concept of exaltation is predicated upon the belief that humans and G/gods are of the same species of being.[6] Moreover, G/gods and humans are the same species of being for two distinct reasons. First, in their most primal selves both are eternally self-existing "intelligences"[7] whose hallmark characteristic is free agency.[8] Secondly, human beings are intelligences who

have been begotten to become "spirit children" of God the Father. Precisely how this is accomplished remains a matter of speculation, but it is generally agreed that spirit children have a relationship to the Father that is analogous to the genetic relationship between earthly parents and their children. Thus, spirit children have the inherent potential to become what their Father is. This point is made in a doctrinal exposition by the First Presidency titled "The Origin of Man." We are told: "All men and women are in the similitude of the universal Father and Mother, and are literally the sons and daughters of Deity.… man, as a spirit, was begotten and born of heavenly parents…. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, basing its belief on divine revelation, ancient and modern, proclaims man to be the direct and lineal offspring of Deity."[9] Having been begotten by God, the potential for Godhood is inherent in every human being on earth, making every man a potential God and every woman a potential Goddess. Thus, the exposition continues, "Man is the child of God, formed in the divine image and endowed with divine attributes, and even as the infant son of an earthly father and mother is capable in due time of becoming a man, so the undeveloped offspring of celestial parentage is capable, by experience through ages and aeons, of evolving into a God."[10] The point is made more succinctly in the words of the Lorenzo Snow Couplet, "as God now is, man may be."

We may restate the point by saying that human beings are divine *per naturum*—albeit embryonically—because they have an uncreated nature capable of development into godhood by virtue of being an intelligence. They are also divine *per naturum* because of their "genetic" relationship with Heavenly Father and Mother, having the potential to become all that they already are. Though not usually stated in this way, the point is widely recognized. Ezra Taft Benson, for example, made the same point when he stated, "As eternal beings, we each have in us a spark of divinity. As God's offspring, we have His attributes in us. We are gods in embryo, and thus have an unlimited potential for progress and attainment."[11]

These commitments entail that human and divine beings (as well as angelic beings) differ from one another in the degree to which they have progressed in actualizing their innate potential. They do not differ in natural kind. Thus, there is no ontological gap between human beings and God. The traditional theological loci of theology proper (doctrine of God), angelology (doctrine of angels and demons) and anthropology (doctrine of humanity) reduce into one. Moreover, these commitments entail an understanding of ultimate salvation as the more full realization of one's inherent divine nature, though not necessarily achieved by autonomous means.

WHY AREN'T WE ALREADY EXALTED?

When we consider LDS solutions to the problem of evil and the ontological basis for exaltation in close proximity, some interesting things can be observed. For example, eternalism says that at least the basic stuff out of which we are made has always existed. Doctrine & Covenants 93:29 (as well as the King Follet Discourse) commits Mormonism to the idea that we have eternally self-existed as human beings in one form or other: "*man* was also in the beginning with God."[12] But there is a problem. We exist in an unexalted state and lack a "fulness of joy." Without exaltation we cannot experience the blessings of "eternal increase" and never-ending familial bliss.

If we were creatures who began to exist and develop at a particular point in time, this would not be a problem. Every creature begins life in a state of immaturity and realizes potential over time. The fact that we exist in an unexalted state is a problem because we have already had, quite literally, an infinite amount of time to realize our potential.[13] Why, then, are we not already exalted? The fact that we are not constitutes a practical problem of evil—something is not the way it ought to be. Certain passages in the Standard Works suggest that the reason we have not already attained exaltation may lie in our uncreated natures. Moreover, they also suggest that exaltation simply may not be possible for many of us even with God's assistance.

Intelligences are not all equal: some are more intelligent and more noble than others (Abraham 3:18-19). James Talmage recognized this when he affirmed that "we were decidedly unequal in capacity and power" in our preexistent state just as we are in mortality.[14] B.H. Roberts attributes this to metaphysical brute fact when he refers to "independent, uncreated, self-existent intelligences, *who by the inherent nature of them are of various degrees of intelligence and moral quality*."[15] We may be the slow kids in the cosmos who have had a very hard time figuring out how to progress. Even so, we should have gotten our act together after an infinite number of millennia. Joseph Smith taught that God found himself in the midst of intelligences and glory. Because he was more intelligent than those around him he instituted laws "whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself." These laws function "to instruct the weaker intelligences, that they may be exalted with himself."[16] This suggests that we are not already exalted because, unlike some intelligences, we happen to have inherent flaws that prevent us from figuring it out on our own. We are "weaker intelligences" who were stuck in our progression until someone more intelligent kindly devised a way to help

us forward. The assistance is welcome. But in light of the fact that God ultimately has no power to change flaws within our most primal selves or ensure that intelligences have equal capacities and powers, we may not have much warrant for the belief that every one of us has the capacity to become all that God the Father is. Ultimate salvation—exaltation—may not even be a possibility for many of us, regardless of what we attempt to do.

That God would institute laws to assist us in our exaltation is consonant with his statement, "this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man" (Moses 1:39). This well-known passage occurs immediately after God refers to the creation of worlds as his endless "works" (1:38). God apparently creates worlds to bring about the immortality and eternal life of man. Within this context he institutes laws for exaltation. God created innumerable other worlds prior to ours (Moses 1:33; 7:30). We can presume that he has significant prior experience assisting intelligences fulfill their divine potential. This initially looks like cause for comfort but the Book of Moses gives us reason to pause.

In addition to creating innumerable worlds, many worlds are said to have passed away at the word of God's power (1:35). As one world and its heaven passes away God creates another (1:38). Is God figuring out how to help intelligences reach exaltation through trial and error? Are these destroyed worlds failed attempts? Might the redemption of our world also be unsuccessful? Whatever reasons God had for destroying so many worlds, the comparison he makes between the inhabitants of this world and all others is disheartening: "Wherefore, I can stretch forth mine hands and hold all the creations which I have made; and mine eye can pierce them also, and *among all the workmanship of mine hands* there has not been so great wickedness as among they brethren" (Moses 7:36, emphasis added). After having created millions upon millions of earths like ours (cf. 7:30), the wickedness of this world evokes an extraordinary reaction from the Lord. He "wept and stretched forth his arms, and his heart swelled wide as eternity; and his bowels yearned; and all eternity shook" (Moses 7:41).

God created innumerable earths before this one. At the time of Enoch God described inhabitants of this world as the most wicked he has seen anywhere. The billions of spirit children who have entered mortality since Enoch have not significantly improved humanity's track record. Perhaps we are not only the slow kids, but also the bad kids of the cosmos. It is tempting to speculate that God created millions of worlds elsewhere before attempting one here because he knew how difficult it would be to work with this particular group of intelligences. God's plan was a risky one with a real chance for fail-

ure.[17] The metaphysical commitments that help to solve the problem of evil may reveal that most of us have intractable moral or metaphysical flaws that will prevent us from ever attaining exaltation even with God's assistance.[18] They also present us with the possibility that God will simply fail to achieve his redemptive purposes for this world and destroy it. The information supplied by the Book of Moses suggests this as a real possibility. We cannot therefore merely assert God's ability to providentially achieve his redemptive aims regardless of what choices our race makes as free agents.[19] These stark possibilities must temper the optimism expressed in LDS solutions to the soteriological problem of evil.

WHY DID GOD EMPOWER THE MORALLY IMMATURE AND BASE?

Recall the quotation from B.H. Roberts presented earlier. In it Roberts seems to assume what David Paulsen has argued explicitly: absolute creation and divine foreknowledge would render God an accessory before the fact and thereby morally responsible for the wicked deeds of his creatures.[20] Why? Because God chose to bring into existence creatures that he *knew* would become wicked. This line of reasoning is not a very persuasive critique of orthodox Christian theism since it rests on dubious assumptions about the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* and the transitivity of moral responsibility. Ironically, though, a version of it may have some force with respect to Mormonism's God.

In LDS theology embodied beings have more power than unembodied spirits and unembodied spirits (like the devil) have greater power than mere intelligences (cf. *TPJS*, 181). Prior to begetting them, God is able to discern the intelligence of other intelligences (Abraham 3:18-19). Presumably he is also be able to discern the general tendency of their moral character. If the Christian must ask why God would create an angel that would become a devil, the Mormon must ask why God chose to beget him as a son and thereby forge into his spirit "the embryonic traits, attributes, and powers of God Himself!"[21] God could have refrained from begetting any intelligences who were internally corrupt or evil, thereby limiting their power to act.[22] The Mormon must also ask why mass murderers, child rapists, and infamous leaders like Nero and Hitler were allowed to progress from preexistence to mortality, thereby expanding their power by the reception of a body. We do not have to make presumptions about God's knowledge at this stage; several texts indicate that God knew the moral character of his spirit children well-

enough to ordain the more noble ones to special offices and tasks (Abraham 3:22-23; D&C 138:55-56; Alma 13:3; *TPJS*, 365). It follows that (1) some spirits were less than noble and (2) God knowingly allowed them to progress to mortality. If behavior in mortality reflects something about one's character in preexistence, as is suggested, then one may ask why were those known to be morally weak, underdeveloped in virtue, or base permitted to progress? To state the point differently, wouldn't God be culpable for allowing wicked men to progress since he knew in advance what sorts of character they possessed?[23] Indeed, it seems in this case that he ensured they would have greater power to accomplish their ends. They may have chosen to come to earth; God chose to permit them. Even if none of them were wicked at that time, was it not irresponsible to increase the power of spirits who were not morally developed enough to use it responsibly? If we follow the reasoning employed by Roberts and Paulsen, then even for this God should be held liable.

Of course, the future Neros and Hitlers of the world may have been virtuous and mature, just not especially noble in the preexistence. In this case God would not be culpable for anything. But if we accept that assumption we are forced to conclude that progression from one state of existence to a higher one does not ensure constancy of character. Virtuous individuals at one stage of progression may become the heinous villains of the next.

IS GOD NECESSARILY GOOD? LOSSKY'S DILEMMA

Eternal progression and exaltation constitute a soteriology predicated on the supposition that humans are divine *per naturam*. Salvation ultimately consists in the more full realization of this divine nature. But such a soteriology can throw the problem of evil into confusion. This can be seen in a dilemma the Russian Orthodox theologian Vladimir Lossky presented in order to reduce to absurdity any view of deification predicated on the idea that humans are in some way naturally partakers of the divine nature. According to Lossky, "either Adam could not sin, since, being God in his soul, he was a particle of divinity, or else original sin would also be reflected upon the divine nature, so that God Himself would have sinned in Adam."[24] In other words, either (1) Adam could not have sinned because he was naturally divine in his soul, or (2) Adam did sin and God sinned with him.[25] The unstated premise is the traditional theological axiom that the divine nature is necessarily good and incapable of sin. As long as one affirms this axiom it is absurd to speak of humans as naturally divine while maintaining the reality of evil in human society. Mormon theology, however, denies the premise and

predicates humanity's highest eschatological end on the natural and full kinship between humans and God. We can become G/gods because we are the natural offspring of God who can become all that our Divine Parent is if we allow our innate capacities to mature and develop. But there is a flip side to this. Whereas Mormonism denies original sin to human beings, its corollary is the denial of the intrinsic goodness of God. If we are already possessors of the divine nature, then it would seem that we are not only capable of becoming all that God is, but God is capable of becoming all that we are.

Lossky's dilemma forces some key theological choices. To begin, we must accept or deny the full and necessary goodness of God. If we accept it, then we must determine whether evil in human society is real or illusory. If it is real, then it cannot be said that humans who sin are divine by nature, but this would undermine the metaphysical basis for eternal progression and exaltation. If it is not real, then whence the problem of evil? On the other hand, we can deny the intrinsic and necessary goodness of God. If this is the case, then we can maintain the generic *homoousias* and kinship shared by God, humans, angels and demons but we must face up to the fact that any being possessing this nature is metaphysically capable of wicked deeds.

The traditional argument from evil depends on the fact that classical theists cannot give up either God's goodness or omnipotence. Both are necessary attributes. Process theists and Mormons evade the force of the argument by denying divine omnipotence in the classical sense while maintaining God's goodness. Lossky's dilemma won't let the issue rest with that. The kinship between God, humans, and angels will not allow us to assume that beings possessing divine nature are necessarily good. After all, human beings display a mixture of good and evil and some humans exemplify wickedness to such a degree that Mormonism reserves for them its own version of hell, outer darkness. If God is wholly good, this is a contingent fact about him. Rather than assume God's goodness in the face of evil, the Mormon theodicist must argue for it.

I suspect that most Latter-day Saints would be inclined to address this by asserting that being wholly good is requisite to attaining Godhood. Perhaps so—it may be that eternal principles allow only good and loving beings to attain exaltation. Be that as it may, God is still said to possess free agency and his goodness is thus a contingent fact. But how can we know that God is wholly good *now*? Without the metaphysical constraints of the classic tradition, it would seem that the question can only be answered empirically. We have to look and see. Of course, the Standard Works and the teachings of the Prophets characterize God as wholly good and loving, but nothing in

his *metaphysical* nature prevents God from misleading us about his character. Perhaps the best empirical explanation for the existence, extent and, especially, horrendousness of evil is that it is caused and/or orchestrated by a being who is far more powerful and intelligent than we are. With a contingently good God, it may turn out that he is really Descartes' omnipotent evil demon.

Maybe the world is not evil and perverse enough to reach that conclusion. Mixed in with the evil we observe, experience, and perpetuate we find a lot of substantial beauty and goodness. A more adequate explanation for this mixture can be found in the principle frequently cited by LDS writers to ground exaltation: "like begets like." Not only can children look to their parents to see what they may become, they can also look to themselves and detect traits inherited from their parents, including flaws. Our propensity for evil may simply be an inherited trait. Like us, God could have his good days and his bad days. He does immense good, but sometimes his virtue fails. Old Testament stories in which he orders the complete annihilation of Canaanite cities or his wrath "breaks out" for seemingly trivial offenses could be read as illustrations of this. I doubt any LDS philosophers will opt for this conclusion, but they owe us a theological account of why a God who is not wholly good is a less plausible explanation for the evil we observe than one that insists he is.

WILL GOD ALWAYS BE GOD?

The force of the previous problem might be mitigated if one could postulate an eternal principle that could ensure only wholly good beings are exalted *and they must remain such* (an attained moral immutability). However, the LDS tradition appears to rule out that possibility. Of course, there are passage in the LDS Standard Works that affirm the unchangeableness of God (e.g. D&C 20:17; Moroni 8:18). But other passages countenance the possibility that God could cease being God. For example, if the work of justice were to be destroyed, "God would cease to be God" (Alma 42:13, 22, 25). Likewise, the Book of Mormon argues that if God were to stop being a God of miracles he would cease to be God at all; because we know that God has not ceased to be God we can be confident that he is still a God of miracles (Mormon 9:19).[26]

In the short-lived *Nauvoo Expositor*, Joseph Smith's critics claimed that he was teaching "a plurality of Gods above the God of this universe, and his liability to fall with all his creations."[27] According to Van Hale, "this idea that

God could fall is not found in any of Joseph's recorded teachings, but Isaac Scott corroborated that Joseph taught this." Hale quotes the following statement written by Scott and dated June 16, 1844: "Joseph says there are Gods above the God of this universe as far as he is above us, and if He should transgress the laws given to Him by those above Him, He would be hurled from his Throne to hell." Hale notes that "we don't know how accurately Scott reports the Prophet, but his notation bears the same date that Joseph taught on the plurality of gods. The report of that sermon was taken by Thomas Bullock, but he did not report the entire sermon due to a rainstorm."[28] While there may be some question about the precision of the reports of Smith's sermon, Scott's report shows that the *Expositor's* charge was not made up whole cloth. Furthermore, the idea that God could fall is consonant with Smith's emphasis on free agency. If free agency is a fundamental characteristic of all intelligences, then God possesses it and is capable of choosing the wrong.

Brigham Young assumed that even God could violate eternal principles and suffer the consequences thereof. For example, he cites this in an 1853 sermon to illustrate the scope and inviolability of the laws and ordinances which govern the universe.

> Suppose that our Father in heaven, our elder brother, the risen Redeemer, the Saviour of the world, or any of the Gods of eternity should act upon this principle, to love truth, knowledge, and wisdom, because they are all powerful, and by the aid of this power they could send devils to hell, torment the people of the earth, exercise sovereignty over them, and make them miserable at their pleasure; they would cease to be Gods; and as fast as they adopted and acted upon such principles, they would become devils, and be thrust down in the twinkling of an eye; the extension of their kingdom would cease, and their God-head come to an end.[29]

Eugene England once asserted that "Modern scripture makes clear that God *cannot* break eternal law (D&C 130:20)."[30] But in what sense? At what level? Doctrine & Covenants 130:20 states: "There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundation of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated." Truman Madsen understands the inability of God to lie, deny his word, violate his promises or break eternal law as follows: "The 'cannot' does not mean that he lacks the power, for that would mean that God has less power than man. It means that in harmony with the attributes of his nature he *will* not violate law."[31] I take it to mean that nature in this context

does not refer to ontological nature but moral character and Godly status. The more consistent way to understand a statement like Eugene England's, which may be what he intends, is that God cannot break eternal law *and remain God*. That is, the person who is God cannot break eternal law and retain the title and status of "God" because there are higher-level eternal laws which would come into effect and cause him to be cast down from his exalted status. This seems to be what Brigham Young assumes in the quotation above. It is higher-order eternal law which not even God can break because this is what ultimately governs the universe.

Acknowledging the possibility that God could fall is not confined to nineteenth century Mormonism. Blake Ostler has argued against divine immutability and God's necessary goodness because if God has such attributes he could not be a moral agent. In the stead of such doctrines, Ostler says, "I prefer the Mormon view that sees God as a person who is worthy of praise and worship precisely because *he could go wrong*, but in the excellence of his personal character has freely decided to do what is good."[32] What there is to prefer in a God who could go wrong is not explained. Ostler does not think it likely that God will go wrong; for all practical purposes he is convinced that he will not. But on what basis? One might suggest that a well-formed character guarantees God will not go wrong. But that would ascribe to God compatibilist freedom and undermine Ostler's own claim about God's status as moral agent. If God's "morally significant freedom" entails that he really can choose evil then there is no guarantee that God will not or has not.

Of course, within Mormon discourse the term "God" can refer to the entirety of the Godhead as well as to the Father. Recently David Paulsen and Brett McDonald acknowledged the possibility that "one member of the Trinity could oppose the other's [sic] plans" and that there could be "a split amongst the Persons of the Trinity."[33] This scenario of "divine rebellion" (their term), they emphasize, is "logically possible but practically impossible." Why is this a practical impossibility? The "binding power of love," they tell us, "guarantees the eternal unity of the Trinity." But on their view the love between the members of the Godhead is not necessary. That would make it "incompatible with divine free will" and would make "the divine love a hollow form of self-love." Thus, the relationship of love which binds the Godhead is one that is freely entered into and which can be freely dissolved.[34] It is not clear, then, in what sense this love can possibly "*guarantee* the eternal unity of the Trinity." As long as love is defined as something subject to an agent's free will, then at any time an agent may freely choose to cease loving another. Love may seal the Godhead together, but metaphysical free agency

renders those bonds easily breakable. There can be no guarantees of unity based on this kind of love alone.[35]

Despite this problem, Latter-day Saints will likely be inclined to follow Paulsen and McDonald's example of admitting God fallibility but relegating its realization to a logical possibility that is a practical impossibility, or as Rodney Turner labels it, a "purely theoretical possibility."[36] However, we can treat purely theoretical possibilities as practical impossibilities only if we know that they have never been realized in the actual world. The Standard Works give us reason to believe that Gods have indeed fallen. For example, some Latter-day Saints cite Psalm 82 as a proof text for both exaltation to godhood and the natural kinship between God and human beings.[37] Yet, the "gods" in this psalm are judged for their failings and condemned to die like men (vv. 2 and 7). If Psalm 82 refers to men who have received exaltation, then it is also evidence that Gods have fallen.[38]

More significant is Lucifer's fall to become Satan. The LDS canon does not state that Lucifer was a God but it seems the reasonable inference to draw. According to the creation accounts in the books of Moses and Abraham (Moses 4:1-4; Abraham 3:22-28), prior to the creation of the earth both Jesus and Lucifer volunteer to be the savior of humanity and present plans of salvation to the council of Gods. Lucifer's plan would have saved everyone but is rejected because it would destroy human free agency in respect to salvation. In response, Lucifer rebels and falls from his status in heaven to become Satan. Jesus' plan is accepted and he becomes the Savior of the world.[39]

These accounts appear to substantiate the idea that a God can fall because in LDS theology godhood is generally taken to be a prerequisite for Jesus being a Savior. Jesus could be our Savior and offer an infinite atonement because he fully exemplifies divine nature as a member of the Godhead. If Lucifer was able to present his plan as a viable candidate to be the Savior, or even if he was merely a viable candidate to serve as Savior in another's plan, then it is reasonable to assume that he, like Jesus, was a God. Furthermore, Lucifer seems to have been the second of God's spirit sons and held a high rank commensurate with his birth order.[40] Since the Holy Ghost is a God, but presumably begotten after Lucifer, it would be reasonable to assume that Lucifer, like Jesus and the Holy Ghost, was to that point in time a God united in purpose, power and love with the Father and Son.[41] If he was, then necessarily he would have had the kind of virtuous, well-developed moral character necessary for godhood. Yet, he fell. The force of this reasoning can be mitigated *slightly* if the Latter-day Saint denies that godhood is prerequisite to being a Savior (which would not come without cost in the areas of soteriology

and Christology). But even if Lucifer were not a God, to have held such high rank in the heavenly hierarchy he would have possessed a very well-developed moral character. Still he fell. What then is to prevent other beings with well-developed moral characters from falling? Well-developed moral character offers no more assurance than love that a good being won't turn evil.

If God or any of the Gods, says Turner, "were to modify or discard even a single attribute, the perfect unity that makes all gods one god would be violated (see D&C 38:27). To restore that unity, such a fallen being would, like Lucifer, have to be cast down (see Isa 14:12-15)." Such beings would forfeit perfection but would not cease to exist as organized intelligences.[42] What would be the implications of this? Here much turns on how one understands God's relation to eternal law and whether God is taken to be the head over *all* other Gods or just over a divine council pertaining to this world.[43] If one accepts at face value the words attributed to Joseph Smith, then God would be "hurled from his Throne to hell." Given the example of Lucifer, presumably he would remain for some time quite powerful and able to cause havoc.[44] According to the line of thought expressed in Young's sermon, God would be overthrown by the operation of higher-order eternal laws and/or Gods above him. He would lose his status as a God and would begin to regress.

Turner favors that strand of the LDS tradition that eschews the notion of uncreated eternal laws and seems to assume that there are no Gods above God the Father.[45] In this scenario things are worse. If God were to fall he would not be dethroned because there would be nothing powerful enough to dethrone him. He would simply "be transformed into a new and different deity ruling over new and different realities." Confidence in God would be lost and "shock-waves of uncertainty would rumble from world to world destroying the very foundation of faith as we know it."[46] Should God cease to be just, the kinds of chaotic scenes of blood and horror Satan has promoted on this earth would extend to all reality. Turner is confident that this will never happen, "but if it did, the cruel gods of the ancient world would come alive at last."[47]

Why is the possibility of a divine lapse a problem? One could simply accept it as one of those things that very well could happen but over which you have no control. It seems unlikely, so you move on without worrying about it—much like acknowledging the possibility that a giant meteor could destroy earth. But in the context of addressing the problem of evil all viable explanations for the phenomena of evil must be considered. The LDS theodicist needs to explain why we should conclude that the Mormon God exists and is wholly good rather than conclude that he exists and is fallen. It is clear

which option we *prefer* to be true. The LDS philosopher, however, needs to *demonstrate* that it is also the philosophically superior conclusion. Until then the task of LDS theodicy remains uncompleted.

The possibility of divine lapse is also a problem because it affects the way we understand Mormonism's ultimate soteriological hope. The doctrine of eternal progression intimately links our progression with God's. He progresses as we progress. Mormon theology organically connects the celestial kingdoms of the exalted within the kingdom of our God.[48] The implication of this is exactly what Joseph is reported to have taught: if God were to fall his creations would fall with him. If Mormonism offers a more expansive view of salvation than orthodox Christianity, it also offers a much riskier one. However unlikely we may think the occurrence of divine lapse may be, on this view it is conceivable that even the celestially redeemed could one day find themselves in hell. According to Richard Bushman, "Many Mormons find Joseph Smith's cosmology the most attractive part of his restoration."[49] Perhaps it should frighten them instead. In the least, Mormon optimism in responding to the soteriological problem of evil should be tempered.

HOW SHOULD WE TRUST A GOD WHO CAN FALL?

Within the orthodox Christian tradition divine fallibility cannot even rise to the level of theoretical possibility. There it is easy to see why an attitude of absolute trust in God is appropriate. Being necessarily good and having bound himself by covenant, it is simply not possible for him to break trust. Nor is it possible for him to fail to redeem his creation. However, doing so is inappropriate for anyone who accepts the Talmage-Roberts-Widtsoe synthesis of Mormon theology as utilized to solve the problem of evil.

What sort of attitude of trust is appropriate with respect to a God who is contingently good, who might not succeed, and who could even fall and bring us to ruin? It would seem that it must be like the trust that wives have for their husbands. Every wife is cognizant of the fact that her husband is capable of infidelity (as she herself is) but seeks to cultivate as deep a trust as possible. She does not go about constantly looking for evidence of unfaithfulness. Instead she trusts that her husband remains the virtuous and honest man she chose to marry, expecting that he will prove faithful in the future as he has in the past. The longer they are married, the more implicit her trust becomes. But the wise wife never forgets that on occasion one hears about husbands who lapse into infidelity after a lifetime of keeping their marriage vows. She may be confident that she is loved by a man of integrity, honor,

and well-formed character, but she does not trust him so completely that she becomes incapable of detecting the signs of infidelity. If she begins to find lipstick on his collar that is not her shade, then her suspicions will be aroused and she will investigate.

In a universe where Gods can go wrong, the extent and horrendousness of evil can look a lot like another woman's lipstick. If this is not a sign of divine fallenness or incomplete goodness, as Latter-day Saints will surely insist, then we need an explanation for why it is not.

TO WHAT SORT OF GOD, REALLY, DO THE SAINTS ENTRUST THEIR LIVES?

Latter-day Saints rarely entertain the possibilities discussed in this essay. The message of the Restored Gospel and the temple ceremonies are presented on the assumption that every single person has the potential to attain exaltation, that progression is irreversible growth in light and goodness, and that God's plan of salvation cannot possibly fail. God has the power to overcome any possible hindrance or opposition. If my reading of LDS doxastic and doxological practice is correct, then most Latter-day Saints also trust God in the absolute manner that orthodox Christians do. Deeply embedded in these practices is the bedrock conviction that unlike human beings, God's goodness is absolute and immutable. The prospect that God could fail or fall or turn out to be anything other than perfectly good does not even rise to the level of hypothetical possibility. Such things are not "logically possible but practically impossible"; they are impossible full stop. Prayers are offered to none other than a God who is certain to be the same yesterday, today, and forever. Latter-day Saints do not typically respond to evil with resignation as if it is a natural, eternal given of the universe over which nobody has any ultimate control. They instead treat it as an alien intruder and cry out to a God who is sure to one day flood the cosmos with righteousness, justice and glory. This is the kind of God we can trust with our whole being without reservation. The practices of Mormon piety know nothing about a God who could transgress laws and be hurled from his throne into hell along with all his creations.

The greatest challenge for LDS theodicy may not lie in telling a logically consistent story to ensure that God is not held responsible for evil in any way. Rather, it may lie in presenting a theological narrative consistent with Mormon piety. From my vantage point it looks as if the current practices of LDS piety point to a fundamentally different theology than the one invoked in Mormon theodicies. Are Latter-day Saints willing to reform the practice of

their piety to conform to the metaphysical commitments demanded by purported modern revelation? That's the price for a consistent Mormon theodicy built on a foundation that includes Nauvoo theology as its cornerstone. The alternative is to allow the beliefs embedded in the practices of piety to reform the stated theology.[50]

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NOTES

[1] I have discussed a few other problems that stem from LDS solutions to the problem of evil in "Can the Real Problem of Evil Be Solved?" in *The New Mormon Challenge*, ed. Francis J. Beckwith, Carl Mosser and Paul Owen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 212-18 and "Evil, Mormonism, and the Impossibility of Perfection *Ab Initio*: An Irenaean Defense," *SBJT* 9:2 (2005): 56-68.

[2] Peter Appleby, "Finitist Theology and the Problem of Evil," in *Line Upon Line: Essays on Mormon Doctrine*, ed. Gary James Bergera (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1989), 83-88; John Cobb and Truman G. Madsen, "Theodicy," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 5 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1473; Truman Madsen, *Eternal Man* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1966), 53-61; Sterling M. McMurrin, *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1965), 91-109; Blake T. Ostler, "The Mormon Concept of God," *Dialogue* 17:2 (1984): 80-89; David Lamont Paulsen, "Comparative Coherency of Mormon (Finitistic) and Classical Theism" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1975), 91-154; idem, "Joseph Smith and the Problem of Evil," *BYU Studies* 39:1 (2000): 53-65; David L. Paulsen and Blake Thomas Ostler, "Sin, Suffering, and Soul-Making: Joseph Smith on the Problem of Evil," in *Revelation, Reason, and Faith: Essays in Honor of Truman G. Madsen*, ed. Donald W. Parry, et al. (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2002), 237-84; Dennis Potter, "Finitism and the Problem of Evil," *Dialogue* 33:4 (2000): 83-96; B.H. Roberts, *The Truth, The Way, The Life: An Elementary Treatise on Theology*, ed. Stan Larson (San Francisco: Smith Research Associates, 1994), 373-83.

[3] The nature of intelligences has been debated within Mormonism, but this is the view that became dominant within the tradition. See Blake T. Ostler, "The Idea of Pre-Existence in the Development of Mormon Thought," *Dialogue* 15:1 (1982): 59-78 and "The Idea of Preexistence in Mormon Thought," in *Line Upon Line*, 127-44.

[4] Roberts, *The Truth, the Way, the Life*, 381.

[5] Describing his response to a non-Mormon's objection, LDS writer Joseph Fielding McConkie illustrates this last point with a strict analogy: "'I have only one father,' I responded. 'He will always be my father. Gratefully nothing in all the eternities can change that. That does not mean, however, that I cannot be like him, that I am not his heir, or that I cannot be a father myself…. That message is all over the pages of the Bible,' I added. I then quoted Psalm 82:6: 'I have said, Ye are gods;

and all of you are children of the most High.'" Joseph Fielding McConkie, *Sons and Daughters of God: The Loss and Restoration of Our Divine Inheritance* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994), 53.

[6] In this essay I use the stylistically cumbersome term "G/gods" because LDS writers differ on whether it is appropriate to refer to exalted saints as "Gods" or "gods." The King Follett Discourse (as printed in *TPJS*) and the First Presidency's Doctrinal exposition on "The Origin of Man" (see n. 9 below) use the capitalized term in reference to those who achieve exaltation. This practice is generally followed by earlier LDS writers. However, D&C 132 uses the lowercase term and is followed by recent LDS writers who see in this a theologically significant distinction between exalted saints and God (e.g., Stephen E. Robinson in Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?* [Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1997], 87-88).

[7] On the minority reading, they are composed of the same primal stuff, "intelligence."

[8] There is also a sense in which free agency during mortality is a gift of God. I take it that within Mormonism the basic ability to act and be responsible for one's self is metaphysical. It cannot be obliterated but it can be inhibited by the circumstances of birth, the decisions of other agents, and the consequences of sin. The gift of free agency refers to the removal of particular impediments by the atonement to ensure that all are able to freely choose salvation.

[9] Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder and Anthon H. Lund, "The Origin of Man," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1667, 1668, 1669. The essay was first published in 1909.

[10] Smith, "Origin of Man," 1669.

[11] *Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 20–21.

[12] Book of Abraham 3:22 can be read to imply that God organized intelligences at some point prior to creation, perhaps from some basic "stuff" called "intelligence" (cf. D&C 93:30). But the phrase "the intelligences that were organized before the world was" only demands that they be viewed as not needing to be organized as part of the creation. They were already organized and it may be that self-organization accompanies their self-existence. Indeed, the idea of self-existence may imply self-organization, otherwise it is difficult to distinguish the self-existent entity as some *thing*.

[13] Spirit birth took place in a finite past. We can chart development since then but the innate potential to be a God ultimately lies in our eternal existence as intelligences.

[14] James Talmage, *The Vitality of Mormonism* (Boston: The Gorham Press, 1919), 322; cf. 240-241.

[15] Roberts, *The Truth, the Way, the Life*, 288.

[16] *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, ed. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 354.

[17] Dennis Potter countenances this possibility on other grounds in "Finitism and

the Problem of Evil," 93.
[18] If some intelligences are incapable of ultimate salvation because of innate, intractable moral flaws, then this entails something like metaphysical depravity.
[19] *Contra* David L. Paulson, "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and (William) James," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 13/2 (1999): 126-27. Paulsen's notion of redemptive sovereignty strikes me as an arbitrary limitation on the finitude ascribed to God in solving the problem of evil. If God is not morally responsible for evil in this world because he lacks the power to prevent or overcome it, then why should we think he is powerful enough to overcome it with respect to his redemptive purposes? The notion also raises questions about whether redemption involves the overcoming of evil, or whether evil will always be something with which we contend. In any case, the problem here is whether redemptive sovereignty is compatible with the inferences drawn from the Book of Moses, not whether it is logically compatible with divine finitude as such.
[20] "Joseph Smith and the Problem of Evil," 55; Paulsen and Ostler, "Sin, Suffering, and Soul-Making," 240-41.
[21] This phrase comes from Madsen, *Eternal Man*, 35. Madsen refers to human beings in particular, but the same applies to all of God's spirit children.
[22] One might reply by speculating that God was trying to change them by instilling into them something of his own character. But eternalism entails that the fundamental characteristics of an intelligence are immutable. If God is able to change the fundamental characteristics of intelligences, or at least their moral character, then appeal to their self-existence can play no role in a theodicy.
[23] We should not presume that all who were morally base sided with Lucifer. Some may have wanted to advance further before establishing their own independent kingdom or they simply did not like Lucifer.
[24] Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978), 122.
[25] In this context, "original sin" refers to the first sin, not to the notion of inherited original sin that Mormonism rejects.
[26] I mention these verses only because many Latter-day Saints take them to imply that God could fall. I'm not convinced that Alma or Mormon actually consider this possible. Alma's statements, for example, are given as part of an explanation for why God punishes sinners by consigning them to a state of misery (42:1). To pardon unrepentant sinners would be unjust. Alma reasons that just as it is impossible for God to cease to be God, so it is impossible for him to do what is unjust. In both cases the author takes for granted the impossibility of God ceasing to be God as the ground for assurance that he will always act justly and do miracles. As Mormon 9:19 states: God is an "unchangeable Being" (cf. Moroni 8:18). This rhetorical move is fairly common in evangelical sermons of the eighteenth and nineteenth century.
[27] Cited in Van Hale, "The Doctrinal Impact of the King Follett Discourse," *BYU Studies* 18:2 (1978): 218.

[28] Hale, "Doctrinal Impact," 218. The recorded portion of Smith's sermon on the plurality of Gods can be found in *TPJS*, 369-76.
[29] *Journal of Discourses* 1:117.
[30] "The Good News—and the Bad," *BYU Studies* 38:3 (1999): 197.
[31] Truman G. Madsen, "B.H. Roberts: The Book of Mormon and the Atonement," in *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, the Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1988), 302.
[32] Review of Francis J. Beckwith and Stephen E. Parrish, *The Mormon Concept of God: A Philosophical Analysis* in *FARMS Review of Books* 8:2 (1996): 126. Emphasis added.
[33] "Joseph Smith and the Trinity: An Analysis and Defense of the Social Model of the Godhead," *Faith and Philosophy* 25/1 (2008): 64.
[34] I doubt that this agapeistic voluntarism is either coherent or true to the experience of love, but I won't pursue the point here.
[35] One way Latter-day Saints might attempt to address this problem is by appeal to sacred ordinances between divine persons. After all, sacred rites are at the heart of Mormon ritual and key to exaltation. If families are sealed together on earth, then it seems reasonable to assume that the members of the Godhead have also been sealed to one another. This would preserve the emphasis on the free nature of the loving relationship at its inception while providing a basis for ensuring unity thereafter. The difficulty lies in the fact that sealings seem to *permit* the eternal continuation of the family unit and are *requisite*; they do not ensure it. Children who have been sealed to their parents can apostatize and be excommunicated. Some higher-order, metaphysically unbreakable sealing would have to be invoked for this strategy to work.
[36] Rodney Turner, "The Imperative and Unchanging Nature of God," in *The Lectures on Faith in Historical Perspective*, ed. Larry E. Dahl and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1990), 210.
[37] This reading is defended at length in Daniel C. Peterson, "'Ye are Gods': Psalm 82 and John 10 as Witnesses to the Divine Nature of Humankind," in *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo Utah: FARMS, 2000), 471-594.
[38] Early Christians cited this same passage in support of deification, but on their interpretation (1) humans do not become Gods in the sense that the Father is God and (2) the reference to falling and dying refers to rejection of the gospel on the part of individuals who have been given the opportunity to become sons of the Most High. Thus, for the patristic writers and the orthodox tradition after them, this passage does not similarly suggest the possibility that God could fall. For more detailed discussion, see Carl Mosser, "The Earliest Patristic Interpretations of Psalm 82, Jewish Antecedents, and the Origin of Christian Deification," *JTS* 56:1(2005): 30-74.
[39] Brian Birch reminds me that a popular view among contemporary Latter-day

Saints is that Lucifer's plan was never even a possibility given the necessity of free agency for eternal progression. The plan presented by Christ on this view was God the Father's plan. Christ was thus merely attempting to carry out the will of the Father for his children. Bruce R. McConkie states, for example, that the "Father did *not* ask for volunteers to propose a plan whereby man might be saved. What he did was ask whom he should send to be the Redeemer in the plan he devised. Christ and Lucifer both volunteered, and the Lord chose his Firstborn and rejected the amendatory offer of the son of the morning." ("Our Relationship With the Lord," a speech presented at BYU on March 2, 1982. Online: http://speeches.byu.edu/reader/reader.php?id=6843. A similar view is expressed by Brent L. Top, "War in Heaven" in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1546). Harmonizations like McConkie's prioritize the narrative in Moses 4:1-4 whereas mine prioritizes the narrative in Abraham 3:22-28.

[40] This is not explicitly stated in the Standard Works. However, the Book of Abraham's creation account refers to Jesus as "one like the Son of Man" and "the first" and to Lucifer as "another" and "the second" (3:27-28). But according to the account in Moses 4:1-2 Lucifer presents his plan of salvation chronologically before Jesus presents his. The simplest harmonization is to infer that Abraham's references to "the first" and "the second" are not based on the chronological order in which Jesus and Lucifer presented their plans of salvation, but to their rank in the heavenly hierarchy based on their birth order and level of exaltation.

[41] If the harmonization of the previous note is accepted, then the Holy Ghost was most likely the third of God's spirit sons. This leads to the intriguing possibility that Lucifer might have been a member of the Godhead—the Godhead either originally having four members or the Holy Ghost replacing Lucifer after his fall.

[42] Turner, "Unchanging Nature of God," 210.

[43] Cf. *TPJS* 348-49. Neither here nor elsewhere in the King Follett Discourse does Joseph clarify whether God is the head God of a divine council with jurisdiction over this creation only, or whether this extends to all reality. In his sermon on the plurality of Gods, however, he stipulates that "but to us there is but one God—that is *pertaining to us*" (*TPJS*, 370; cf. the revelatory principle in Moses 1:35a). Furthermore, "the heads of the Gods appointed one God for us" (*TPJS*, 372). This suggests that our God is not the head of all the Gods but that there are Gods above God the Father.

[44] Given the fact that he has a glorified body, he would be more powerful than Lucifer currently is.

[45] Turner, "Unchanging Nature of God," 214.

[46] Ibid., 210.

[47] Ibid., 215.

[48] This is depicted graphically in Orson Hyde's diagram of the kingdom of God and described in the accompanying comments in Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980), 297.

[49] Richard L. Bushman, *Mormonism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 64.
[50] Richard Sherlock provides an example of the shape this kind of reform might take in "Prayer and Divine Attributes," in *Discourses in Mormon Theology*, ed. James M. McLaughlan and Loyd Ericson (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 87-102.

The Challenges of Defining Mormon Doctrine

by Loyd Ericson

The dramatic growth of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in recent decades has prompted unprecedented inquiry into the beliefs and practices of the 178 year old Church. Scrutiny has risen sharply from critics and the news media over the past decade as the Church has been highlighted in the national media by events such as the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Olympics, the FLDS polygamy cases, and Mitt Romney's campaign for the United States presidency. A review of the data predictably shows a range of views from gross misrepresentation to sincere inquiry regarding the official teachings of the Church – an understandable response given the sharp divergence between many Latter-day Saint teachings and those of traditional Christians. Furthermore, as the Church has grown in population so have the number of members within the Church who actively study, theorize, and speculate about their beliefs. The availability of information and communication over the internet has greatly accelerated these inquiries. As a result, a frequent question from outside the LDS faith is "What do Mormons really believe?"[1] and the reply from within can equally be asked, "Well, what *is* our doctrine?"

This paper will analyze recent attempts to grapple with the questions of Church doctrine in the effort to show the challenges involved in establishing precise criteria to distinguish doctrine from beliefs, teachings, or policies. Furthermore, these models point to deeper theological issues that emerge

in the attempt to reconcile infallible doctrinal truths with the growth of understanding implied in Mormonism's concept of modern revelation. This paper does not seek to resolve these issues, but to help clarify the questions for future work and discussion.

THE AUTHORITATIVE MODEL

The most common approach to providing criteria for determining Church doctrine is what I will call the *authoritative model,* which attempts to define doctrine by appeal to what is commonly assumed to be authoritative sources and leaders. This model has been expressed by Robert Millet in his essay, "What Do We Really Believe? Identifying Doctrinal Parameters within Mormonism,"[2] and has recently been promoted in an official LDS Newsroom commentary on the Church's website.[3] Departing from this authoritative model, Nathan Oman has more recently proposed an hermeneutic approach modeled after judicial practices of interpreting law. In this approach, particular doctrines are appealed to in an attempt to provide boundaries or parameters of doctrinal possibility.[4] However, I will argue that both of these models face problems in their respective attempts to 1) live up to their own criteriological goals, 2) adequately accommodate the breadth of Mormon theology, and 3) avoid question-begging arguments.

The authoritative model appeals to the commonly held belief that there are authoritative sources to which someone could turn as a definitive source of doctrine. According to Millet, a doctrine is something that is 1) "found within the four standard works and/or within official declarations or proclamations;" 2) "taught or discussed in general conference or other official gatherings by general Church leaders;" 3) "found in the general handbooks or approved curriculum of the Church;" or 4) in "the content of the temple endowment." Furthermore, some overriding criteria are that Church doctrines are found in 5) "the teachings of the Church *today*;" are 6) "central and saving doctrine[s] . . . , not tangential and peripheral concepts," and have 7) "what might be called 'sticking power,' i.e., [they are] taught and discussed and perpetuated over time." Finally, Millet places a heavy emphasis on contemporary sources, repeatedly pointing out that statements of the past should not necessarily be considered doctrine as 8) "not everything that was ever spoken or written by a Church leader in the *past* is part of what we teach *today*."[5] Thus if a belief or teaching is confirmed by these criteria then it could be confidently claimed to be doctrine.[6]

However, the appeal to a criterion of authoritative sources faces challenges.

First, no justification is provided as to why that particular set of criteria should be used over any other. If there are, in fact, saving doctrines or saving practices tied to certain doctrines, then the method by which one determines this (as opposed to one that is merely tangential or non-doctrinal) would seem to be of equal importance. For example, Millet briefly mentions the old teaching that plural marriage is essential for salvation.[7] On the authoritative model, such a teaching would not be considered doctrine as it is no longer taught by the Church today; whereas, the present teaching that monogamous marriage is essential for salvation (and polygamous marriage is grounds for excommunication) would qualify as a true doctrine. As adherence to the former teaching could prove damning while adherence to the latter could prove saving, the method by which someone could distinguish between the two would be just as equally as important for salvation. Yet Millet does not offer scriptural, official, or authoritative justification in support of such criteria.

Furthermore, even if such criteria are justifiable through scriptural and other authoritative sources, they face the problem of overcoming the fact that the relevance of those sources as justification for the criteria would be based on the criteria they are attempting to justify. This circularity is a challenge because similar reasoning could be used to establish a variety of methodologies for determining what qualifies as authentic Church doctrine. For example, I could claim that doctrine is that which is contained in the scriptures or taught in a sermon by Brigham Young. I could then appeal to Young's sermon where he states that he has "never yet preached a sermon and sent it out to the children of men, that they may not call scripture,"[8] and then use that to justify my criteria. Just as with the authoritative model, the validity of my *Young model* would depend on the criteria of this model to grant doctrinal authority to the sources I am using to justify my criteria.

Another example is found in the widespread belief that contemporary Church leaders are correct in pronouncing doctrine because God would not allow a modern day prophet to lead the Saints astray. Wilford Woodruff's well-known quote is often invoked in support of this claim: "[T]he Lord will never permit me or any other man who stands as president of this Church to lead you astray."[9] This assurance, like the others, faces the bootstrapping question as to whether it is an infallible criterion for knowing what to accept as authentic doctrinal teaching.

The authoritative model also suffers from the problem of interpretation. As Oman points out, scripture is not an unproblematic source for determining doctrine because multiple interpretations have come from a single verse.[10]

For example, Mormons and traditional Christians both appeal to the Bible as a source of their beliefs, yet as any Mormon-Christian dialogue shows, what they believe the Bible to actually mean can vary tremendously. This is the same frustration Joseph Smith felt when he observes that "the teachers of religion of the different sects understood the same passages of scripture so differently as to destroy all confidence in settling the question by an appeal to the Bible."[11] The presence of modern prophets in Mormonism addresses this problem, but as the history of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints shows, their words, like the scriptures, are themselves subject to varying interpretations.[12]

Finally, the appeal to 'sticking power' as a measure of doctrine is also problematic because it places a time limit on doctrine and requires a democratic process that could oppose new doctrines that might arise through modern revelation. The scriptural record gives numerous accounts of prophets and leaders speaking out against the immoralities of the people and the church, as well as promulgating new doctrines. The requirement of consistency or 'sticking power' would negate many of these as they were rejected by the people and church. If not outright rejected, with this criterion it would take some amount of time and general acceptance before it could be considered doctrine. For example, after the June 1978 revelation was announced that gave blacks the priesthood, at what point would it have garnered enough 'sticking power' to be considered doctrine? One hour? One day? One year? Furthermore, how much acceptance must it gain before it is doctrine? Must it have unanimous approval, or need it only minimal acceptance? Such a requirement would seem to go against the view that Church leaders are able to reveal new doctrine.

THE INTERPRETIVE MODEL

Nathan Oman's interpretive account does not make explicit appeals to authoritative sources. Instead he employs a model analogous to the judicial practice of appealing to previously decided legal cases to provide an interpretive basis for judging a new case. Oman points out that judges are often presented with difficult legal cases where the obvious ruling is unclear and no precedent had yet been established for determining the proper and best ruling for the new case. In this situation the judge must then "look at the previously decided cases and construct the best possible argument that he can to justify them."[13] On this approach, a new case must be decided by reference to its consistency with previous cases, but there is some hermeneutic

flexibility in deciding *how* this consistency is understood.

Centuries ago, when a judge was unable to make a clear ruling he "could rule *dubitante*, simply declaring that the law was unclear and leave the case undecided."[14] Similarly then, Oman proposes that when a question arises as to whether or not a certain teaching or belief is a Church doctrine, we would need to first appeal to "some easily identifiable core cases of Church Doctrine from which we can reason."[15] By appealing to these "brute facts" of doctrine we "can simply reason on the basis of clear cases, fitting the new question into a story that will place things in their best possible light."[16] If a clear answer is still not available, like the ruling of *dubitante*, we can ascertain that while the answer may not be clear, possible answers would fall within certain boundaries or limits of doctrine.

To illustrate this interpretive model, Oman examines one of the most debated questions within Mormonism – are caffeinated beverages doctrinally prohibited by the Word of Wisdom? Acknowledging no clear answer, Oman goes back to "the brute fact that we all agree that the Word of Wisdom is Church Doctrine and that it forbids drinking coffee, tea, and alcohol."[17] Just as a judge will look into the reasons behind rulings for previous cases, we would attempt to look at the reasons behind the prohibition of coffee and other foods or substances in the Word of Wisdom. From this we might conjecture that the Word of Wisdom is not merely a prohibition of certain chemical substances because chocolate (which contains caffeine) and cold medicines (which may contain some alcohol) do not appear to be proscribed. Neither does the revealed Word of Wisdom bar narcotics and other drugs that were prevalent at the time of the revelation. Instead we might decide that "a better account is that the prohibition is meant as a reminder or symbol of the covenant that [we] make with God and an open-ended admonition to be healthy."[18] On this approach, the specific prohibitions of the Word of Wisdom would be akin to the Jewish practices of circumcision and Sabbath adherence as signs of a covenant with God. We also might interpret that the broader teachings of the Word of Wisdom should be applied to our entire lifestyle by eating healthy and avoiding over-consumption. Thus, caffeinated beverages would not be specifically prohibited, but like all foods and substances, should be consumed, limited, or proscribed based on what would be a healthy diet and lifestyle.

While Oman's interpretive model largely avoids the criteriological problems of the authoritative model, it suffers from the assumption that there are "clear instances" of Church doctrine that are easily identifiable. In the legal basis for his analogy, the judge assessing a new case appeals to

"previously decided cases" of law. In such instances, there are clear, public, and officially documented rulings that were formally made within an established and accepted framework of law. However, analogous instances of "previously decided cases" of Church doctrine are more difficult to identify. This is because a formalized framework of understanding and ruling upon Church doctrine has never been established. While there exists a codified framework of policy and procedures under Church government, a framework for defining "easily identifiable core cases" of Church doctrine does not seem to exist; especially one that is universally accepted and understood by members of the Church.[19] According to Oman, such a framework would be akin to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, where a Catholic could easily turn as a reference point to mitigate a dispute between points of doctrine in Catholicism. However Oman readily admits that the LDS Church "has no analogous volume."[20]

One could argue that while the Church does not presently possess a framework, it *could* create one that is able to provide this analogous source.[21] However this is problematic for at least two reasons. First, like Millet's authoritative model, the creation of a committee for authoritatively establishing Church doctrine would not have the doctrinal basis to justify itself. And second, as Oman points out, such a committee would still need an authoritative criterion by which it would determine doctrine. It would still require that "Church Doctrine exists as some body of identifiable, authoritative teachings *independent of correlation or whoever else is expounding it*."[22]

Oman provides two examples of what he considers to be easily identifiable cases of Church doctrine: that "Jesus is the savior of mankind"[23] and that the Word of Wisdom prohibits the consumption of coffee, tea, and alcohol.[24] In the former, what it means for Jesus to be the savior of mankind is widely disputed. Both Stephen Robinson and I may affirm that 'Jesus is the savior of mankind;' however it may be that we believe the phrase to mean two very different things – even to the extent that he might not consider my understanding and affirmation of that phrase to be sufficient for my salvation. If we take into account the many different beliefs of Jesus, salvation, and the atonement there are dozens and dozens of different understandings of what it means for Jesus to be the savior of mankind, even though the same scriptures and sources may be appealed to for the various understandings. This is often the assertion of critics of Mormonism – that Mormons use the same language of traditional Christianity, but do not mean the same thing; and that these mistaken beliefs are detrimental to salvation.

Similarly, the assumption that the prohibition of coffee, tea, and alcohol

is an easily understood doctrine does not take into account the varying interpretations of what that actually means. Does the prohibition include de-caffeinated coffee, frozen lattes, coffee ice cream, chocolate-covered espresso beans, green tea, chai teas, herbal teas, iced teas, and kava? What about the prohibition of alcohol? The revealed text of the Word of Wisdom distinguishes between "strong drinks" which "are not for the belly" and "mild drinks" of barley and other grains which are promoted.[25] Yet, there is no easily identifiable interpretation of this to which one can point.[26] Also, the alcohol prohibition does not seem to forbid cough syrups and other medicines that may contain alcohol.

Oman's interpretive model depends on the *assumed* ability to appeal to easily identifiable brute facts of Church doctrine; however, upon examination, these supposed clear cases of doctrine are not so clear at all. This is because no accessible and widely accepted framework for determining doctrine has been established for which these cases could be determined. Instead of clear cases of doctrine, we have only vague and abstract terms with no definitive understandings of what they should actually mean. While Oman shies away from authoritative models, his proposal of an interpretive model *presupposes* an authoritative criteria to establish a framework from which to interpret.[27]

PROBLEMS OF DEFINING DOCTRINE

The authoritative and interpretive models both suffer from a definitional problem in their proposals for determining doctrine in that they fail to define what it is they are determining. In asking the question, "Is 'x' a doctrine?" whatever 'x' may be is carefully examined and defined, but the term *doctrine* is left unexplored or deficiently defined. This lack of a proper definition is especially problematic as it often leads to a confusing conflation of *beliefs*, *teachings*, *policies*, and *doctrine*. This is especially true when the ordinary usage of these terms in Mormon discourse is not considered, or when these terms are applied both descriptively and prescriptively without an acknowledgement of a difference in usage. [28]

In his "What Do We Really Believe?" Millet recounts an experience of an LDS woman who approached him and claimed that Mormons did not technically believe in the virgin birth of Jesus, but that it was a Mormon belief that Jesus was conceived through sexual relations that God had with Mary.[29] Appealing to his authoritative criteria, Millet convinced her that Mormons do not believe the very thing that she, a Mormon, was claiming to be a Mormon belief. This should seem familiar to the experiences and frustrations of many

Mormons who have to defend their personal beliefs from critics who claim to better understand what they *actually* believe.[30]

Thus when Millet asks what it is that Mormons really believe, he is not asking a descriptive question of what Mormons believe; rather, he is posing a prescriptive question of what Mormons *ought* to believe. In other words, he is equating beliefs with doctrine or teachings. However, this prescriptive use can cause confusion because for most Mormons the question, "what do you believe?" is asking them to describe their beliefs, not to theorize about what they should believe. In fact it is very common for Mormons in Sunday School or in other forums to begin a statement with, "Well this may not be doctrine, but I believe that. . . ."[31] From this it seems that a belief is not necessarily an official teaching or doctrine, but is rather believed even though it may not be taught by the Church. For example, there are many Mormons who hold various beliefs that they would not claim to be doctrine or officially taught by the Church: such as the belief that Jesus was married, that we should not drink caffeinated sodas,[32] that the Earth is no older than 13,000 years, that God has multiple wives, or that the three Nephites possess the cure to cancer.

Now, it could be the case that Millet is trying to be descriptive with his question and that his use of the plural subject ("what do *we* really believe?") is meant to ask what it is that *all* Mormons believe. However, such a question would seem to go against his need for an authoritative model; as establishing what all Mormons believe would be more easily learned through a questionnaire than through his criteria. Furthermore, if all Mormons did believe in the actual virgin birth of Jesus, then he would have had no need to correct this Mormon woman of her incorrect belief. As discussed with Oman's appeal to easily identifiable cases of doctrine, we would be hard-pressed to find a single particular doctrine that all Mormons agreed on.

Furthermore, just as a Mormon may hold a belief that is not doctrine or taught by the Church, it would seem that for most Mormons there is not a necessary relationship between their beliefs and truth. A statement of belief by a Mormon does not require that it be believed to be true. It would not be uncommon to hear a Mormon say, "I believe 'x', though it may not be true" just as it would not have been uncommon to hear someone say prior the 2008 elections, "I believe that Barack Obama will win the presidency, though he could lose to John McCain."

Similarly, what is officially taught in the Church does not seem to be considered co-extensive with doctrine either. Oman points out that while the scriptures are taught in Church, there are many things within them that

are not considered doctrine. For example, the scriptural and revealed form of the Word of Wisdom is given as guidance and not as commandment,[33] it prohibits the consumption of meat except in times of winter and famine,[34] and seems to support the consumption of mild alcoholic beverages.[35] Yet most Mormons would not consider these to be doctrine. Likewise, what has been taught in the past by Church leaders is not necessarily doctrine either (as Millet has strongly emphasized). But what about that which is taught in General Conference or "found in the general handbooks or approved curriculum of the Church today" as Millet argues?[36] It seems that, similar to beliefs, official teachings are not necessarily coextensive with truth or doctrine. Mormons frequently comment (though perhaps less publicly) that they did not agree with something said in General Conference, published in the Ensign, or taught as part of a gospel doctrine course – claiming that an interpretation of a scripture was not correct, that a particular statement did not ring true to them, or that something was just their opinion and not doctrine. Even general authorities have been known to disagree with things taught by their colleagues in General Conferences and official gatherings.[37]

This is an important distinction that Millet's and the LDS Newsroom commentary's authoritative model seems to lack – that for many faithful and believing Mormons, that which is officially taught in the Church's curriculum and spoken of by Church leaders is not *necessarily* true doctrine. In fact, Millet explicitly equates teachings with doctrine in his latest appeal to his authoritative model when he says that "Doctrine means teaching. If the general authorities do not teach something today, it is not part of our doctrine today. This does not, however, mean that a particular teaching is untrue."[38] While this may be a technical definition, it does not seem to fit the ordinary usage of 'doctrine' in LDS discourse. As just mentioned, a particular teaching may be such that any given faithful member might say, "Yes, that is taught, but I believe it is a poor interpretation or just his opinion. I don't believe it to be true doctrine."

Unlike beliefs and teachings, policy seems to have a stronger and more authoritative nature because it is usually incorporated into church governance through official instructional leadership handbooks and, in many cases, strict application. Policy may best be defined as procedural regulations that are contingent and not directly based in scripture or published revelations. Examples of policy may include the size of priesthood quorums, the wearing of white clothing and complete submersion during baptism, perfect word-for-word recital of sacramental prayers, the Word of Wisdom, the specifics of temple rituals, and the nature of homosexuality. Yet like beliefs and official

teachings, it seems that policy is not co-extensive with doctrine in Mormon discourse. For example David O. McKay argued that the ban prohibiting those of African descent from ordination into the priesthood was a policy and not a doctrine.[39]

So what is it then that distinguishes a policy from a doctrine? Consider the following statements:

(1) Photographs should not be taken of baptismal ordinances.
(2) A new convert should be dressed in white for her baptism.
(3) Those of African descent should not be ordained into the priesthood.
(4) A deacons quorum should be composed of twelve or less deacons.

The first of these is clearly a policy according to the official *Church Handbook of Instructions*, but it does not seem to be something that most Mormons would consider a teaching or a doctrine of the Church. The second statement is also a policy and it would seem fair to say that it is taught by the Church. However, it seems that many Mormons might consider it problematic to call it doctrine as it may be more of just a symbolic convention that is not necessary; if a situation arose where attaining white clothing for a baptism would not be possible, most Mormons would see no problem with baptizing the new convert in whatever they could – even if that meant blue jeans and a Metallica t-shirt. The third statement becomes interesting for a few reasons. While it is not a statement that would have application today in Mormon beliefs, teachings, or doctrine, in 1960 it was widely discussed and written about. It was certainly a policy at the time, but did it rise to the level of doctrine? While McKay insisted it was not, other Church leaders at the same time (such as Bruce R. McConkie and Joseph Fielding Smith) taught that it was.[40] Perhaps it was their belief in the nature of the policy that led them to either distinguish it from, or attribute it to, Church doctrine – as the former believed that the ban could and would be lifted, while the latter believed it to be divinely mandated until at least the millennium.[41]

Finally, many Mormons would more likely claim the last statement to be doctrine because it is a policy that is taught by the Church and is contained in the LDS scriptures.[42] However, some may still have reservations about calling the size of priesthood quorums doctrine because it may seem to them to be an arbitrary number that could be changed by revelation (or counsel) in order to accommodate a growing and culturally changing Church. From an

examination of these statements, it seems clear then that something which is a policy for the Church is not necessarily a doctrine; and for many Mormons, one of the distinguishing marks between the two is that the former is a contingent regulation that may or may not be divinely instituted, while the latter is something that is necessary and cannot be changed. Furthermore, while an active Mormon may adhere to the policies of the Church, not only may she feel that they are contingent, but she may also disagree with the policy and believe it ought to change. This was in fact the view of many Mormons of the priesthood ban before it was lifted in 1978.[43]

If beliefs, teachings, and policies are not necessarily doctrine, then what is a doctrine? Like teachings and policies, a doctrine must have some sort of official support. While determining what official support consists of is problematic in itself, we can reasonably maintain that speculations, theories, and even revelations of lay members would not be considered doctrine. And as discussed earlier, even that which is officially taught by the Church is not necessarily considered doctrine either. However, unlike beliefs, teachings, and policies, which are not purported to necessarily be true or correct, doctrine does seem to have this quality. This is especially evident in General Conference addresses and teachings from Church leaders where 'doctrine' is used almost always in conjunction with 'truth.'[44] For example, in the April 2008 General Conference, Richard B. Wirthlin gave a loving sermon urging Mormons who have strayed from the Church for various reasons to return. He adds to this however, "To those who have strayed because of doctrinal concerns, we cannot apologize for the truth."[45] Making this same relationship of truth and doctrine, Millet frequently appeals to "true doctrine" when discussing his authoritative model.[46]

Though there is a relationship between truth and doctrine, the mere truth of a statement is not sufficient for it to be considered Church doctrine in ordinary Mormon discourse. As Oman points out,

> [T]here are issues about which Church Doctrine is silent. For example, I take it to be fairly uncontroversial that there is no Church Doctrine on the precise location of Williamsburg, Virginia. . . . No one could plausibly argue, however, that because of this, no statement about the location of Williamsburg, Virginia . . . could be true or false. The statement that "Williamsburg, Virginia is located on the banks of the Potomac River" is clearly false, the silence of Church Doctrine notwithstanding. Nor does it make sense of our ordinary usage of the term Church Doctrine to say, "It is Church Doctrine that

Williamsburg, Virginia is on the York-James Peninsula."[47]

Furthermore, just because a statement about a religious matter happens to be true, its truthfulness is likewise not a sufficient condition for being doctrine. For example, it may be the case that the mortal Jesus was actually married or that Earth was created less than 13,000 years ago. Even if those were true unbeknownst to us, that would not be sufficient for it to be doctrine. Like the location of the Potomac River, Church doctrine is silent on these matters.

The role that truth plays in determining doctrine is then not to say that the actual truth of something makes it doctrine; rather it is to say that it is the claim of truth within an *official context* that makes it doctrine. Despite the factuality of the matter, it would be extremely odd for a church leader to speak during General Conference and say, "X is a doctrine, but it is not true" or "X is a doctrine, but it may not be true." When something is declared to be a doctrine, it is assumed that an implicit endorsement of its truth accompanies it.[48] So then what distinguishes a doctrine from a belief, teaching, or policy is that while the latter may be given or made with a presumption that it may not actually be true or correct, a doctrine is something that is officially considered and assumed to be true.

DOCTRINE AND TRUTH

While discussing his method of determining doctrine, Robert Millet acknowledges that difficulties arise when approaching controversial Church teachings of the past that are no longer taught today when it is clear that "someone in the past *has* spoken on these matters, *has* put forward ideas that are out of harmony with what we know and teach today."[49] Millet recognizes that the "hard issues" arise when Latter-day Saints are confronted with these teachings that were presented as doctrine by previous leaders of the Church (such as Brigham Young's Adam-God teaching). He asks, "Well then, what *else* did this Church leader teach that is not considered doctrine today? How can we confidently accept anything else he taught? What other directions taken or procedures pursued by the Church in an earlier time do we not follow in our day?"[50] Millet believes that his authoritative model, with an emphasis on contemporary teachings, is able to address these hard issues because modern Church leaders have corrected the errors of the past by either directly replacing or indirectly abandoning those former teachings. Other teachings of Brigham Young can be known to be true because they are still taught today. What he appears to overlook is that there are even

harder issues that arise when these past teachings are put into a context of modern revelation, changing teachings, and the truth claims that doctrines make. While the hard issues for Latter-day Saints may concern the rest of Brigham Young's teachings, the harder issues in light of these past teachings may ask *what it means* for something to be true in Mormonism. If leaders of the past could be mistaken in their teachings, what in principle would prevent the teachings of current leaders from being mistaken? These questions have largely been ignored by LDS philosophers, teachers, and leaders.

While Oman argues that truth is not co-extensive with doctrine, he does not go as far as to say that Church doctrines are nonetheless true. He does, however, defend himself from the accusation that he is claiming that the truths of the doctrines should be contested. He writes, "[i]t is important to understand that when I say that certain aspects of Church Doctrine are inherently contestable, I am not talking about disagreements over whether Church Doctrine is true or whether it should be followed."[51] One reason why truth and doctrine become problematic together is that in ordinary Mormon discourse 'truth' is predominantly used along with a correspondence theory of truth. According to this theory, a statement is considered true if it accurately represents the facts of the world. For example, the statement "Salt Lake City is the capital of Utah" is true according to this theory if it happens to be the case that Salt Lake City *actually* is the capital of Utah. This correspondence theory seems to be what Dallin H. Oaks appeals to in his April 2008 General Conference talk when he says, "[a] testimony of the gospel is a personal witness . . . that certain facts of eternal significance are true and that we know them to be true."[52] Not only do most Mormons hold to a correspondence theory of truth, but many Mormons and Church leaders frequently appeal to doctrine as being "absolute truth" and said to be even more accurate in its truth claims than science. Richard G. Scott, a former nuclear engineer, recently said of the scientific method, "[i]t has two limitations. First, we never can be sure we have identified absolute truth, though we often draw nearer and nearer to it. Second, sometimes, no matter how earnestly we apply the method, we can get the wrong answer."[53] Theories of truth that depart from correspondence are usually condemned as relative and signs of a deteriorating society. Exemplifying this notion of absolute truth being superior to a relative truth, Dieter F. Uchtdorf recently said in a General Conference of the Church,

> When we bear testimony, we declare the absolute truth of the gospel message. In a time when many perceive truth as relative, a declaration

> of absolute truth is not very popular, nor does it seem politically correct or opportune. Testimonies [tell] of things how "they really are" . . . . Satan wouldn't mind if we declared the message of our faith and gospel doctrine as negotiable according to circumstances. Our firm conviction of gospel truth is an anchor in our lives; it is steady and reliable as the North Star. [54]

The conundrum lies in trying to fit this correspondence theory of truth into the broader context of modern revelation and changing teachings within the Church. This becomes clear if we apply either the interpretive or authoritative models of determining doctrine. If we were to begin with Oman's interpretive model, we would first have to find a "brute fact" of doctrine with which to begin, which itself would require an authoritative model to define. However, because the authoritative model depends on contemporary sources to determine doctrine, the question of temporal relativity emerges. For example, if we applied his authoritative model in 1852 we would see that Adam-God was taught by the president of the Church, taught by his counselors, published in official Church publications, had consistent 'sticking power' at the time, and was allegedly taught as part of the endowment ceremony.[55] By Millet's criteria, it was a true doctrine in 1852. However in 2008, if we applied this same criteria we would see that it is not only no longer taught by Church leaders, but is also condemned as a false doctrine;[56] it is not published in any official Church curriculum and its 'sticking power' has long since been unstuck. So by these same criteria, in 2008 Adam-God is a false doctrine. Other examples of where a change in 'true doctrine' appears to occur include the age of the Earth, the state of life before the Fall of Adam,[57] the immorality of birth control,[58] the perpetuation of the priesthood ban, and theories for the ban.[59] At various times in the past, if Millet's criteria are applied, we would get a different 'true doctrine' than that which would be received today. Furthermore, many of these doctrines of the past were not considered tangential beliefs, but were taught along with the injunction that adhering to them was essential for our salvation. Thus they were not just 'true doctrines' in times past, but they were 'true saving doctrine' that are now considered false or non-doctrinal.

One may respond that the reason for the changes in what counted as true doctrine is that they were true for the people at the time they were given and taught, but are no longer true for us today. For example, a Latter-day Saint may argue that the use of birth control was, in fact, a sinful practice up until the mid-twentieth century, but that it is no longer the case. This,

however, is problematic because 1) the temporal relativity of doctrine has been frequently condemned by Church leaders; and 2) many of these doctrines refer to historical facts that do not change. For example the statement 'George Washington was the first President of the United States' refers to a historical fact of the late eighteenth century. This fact cannot change. Similarly, either God the Father took on mortality as Adam or He did not. Either the Earth is less than 13,000 years old or not.

These challenges exist not only for Millet's and Oman's models of determining doctrine, but lies at the heart of Mormon concepts of doctrine, truth, and modern revelatory authority. If a Church leader at T^1 is understood to be teaching true doctrine, and if a later Church leader at T^2 could preach a revelation that supersedes or contradicts those of the previous leader, then theoretically any true doctrine at T^1 can become a false doctrine at T^2. Similarly, any false doctrine condemned at T^1 could, in principle, be overturned and considered a true doctrine at T^2.

A great example of this problem can be found in John Lewis Lund's apologetic book, *The Church and the Negro*, published in 1967.

> Brigham Young revealed that the Negroes will not receive the Priesthood until a great while after the advent of Jesus Christ, whose coming will usher in a millennium of peace. . . .
>
> *In view of what President Young and others have said, it would be foolish indeed to give anyone the false idea that a new revelation is immediately forthcoming on the issue of the Negroes receiving the Priesthood.* If the prophet of God were to receive a revelation tomorrow giving the Negroes the Priesthood it would be certainly be accepted regardless of what Brigham Young or any other previous prophet has said. This is because the words of the living oracles relate more specifically to the era in which we live. . . .
>
> Mormons view a prophet as God's literal mouthpiece on earth. . . . The faithful Latter-day Saint accepts the prophet's words as God's will. Prophets do not inspire God; God inspires prophets.[60]

For Lund, the doctrines taught by Brigham Young and other church leaders would have precluded the idea of a later revelation giving blacks the priesthood before the Second Coming. Such an idea would be 'foolish' and 'false' because that revelation would contradict the teachings of Young and others that were supposed to be true and representative of God's will. Both could not be true because either the priesthood would not be given to black Saints before the

Second Coming or it would be. Despite this, Lund is apparently open to the idea that a new revelation might come that would be equally true and representative of God's will. This should, of course, raise the question as to how the statements by Young should be understood were the priesthood ban to be lifted prior to the Millennium (as it was eleven years later). Can a Latter-day Saint accept both as being absolutely true doctrine? It seems that the later revelation would show that the prior teachings by Brigham Young and other Church leaders were false. Bruce R. McConkie addressed this very issue when he said,

> Forget everything that I have said, or what President Brigham Young or President George Q. Cannon or whomsoever has said in days past that is contrary to the present revelation. We spoke with a limited understanding and without the light and knowledge that now has come into the world.
>
> We get our truth and our light line upon line and precept upon precept. We have now had added a new flood of intelligence and light on this particular subject, and it erases all the darkness and all the views and all the thoughts of the past. They don't matter any more.[61]

According to Millet, the hard issue for Latter-day Saints deals with the rest of Young's past teachings in light of others like this. However, this also reveals harder issues of why a Latter-day Saint should accept the teachings of a modern leader as a true doctrine when it apparently contradicts the doctrines of other leaders of the past. If a Church leader of the past could be wrong about X, why should a Church leader of the present be trusted in being right about Y? Such problems cannot simply be dismissed as being unrelated to salvation, many of these doctrines that are no longer taught today (such as the sin of birth control, the requirement of polygamy, and the condemnation of evolution) were once taught as being essential for salvation.[62]

These problems not only concern simple beliefs, but could have practical and moral implications. If, for example, person A taught that (a) polygamy would no longer be practiced by the Church in 20 years, they would have been considered to be espousing a false doctrine and possibly subject to Church discipline. At the same time, if person B believed and taught that (b) the Church would be continuing to practice polygamy into the 20th century they would have been considered to be affirming a true doctrine. Yet in 1900 we would see that person A who may have been disciplined for her belief was now holding a true doctrine and person B a false one. Likewise, a person

today who believes and teaches something that is considered a false doctrine by the Church and is disciplined for teaching it could theoretically have her beliefs validated at some point in the future by the teachings of a Church leader, or vice-versa. For example, while the Church was recently urging its members in California to support a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriages,[63] a Latter-day Saint could believe and argue (based on the historical fact that Church leaders have been wrong) that the current push and teachings about same-sex marriages by Church leaders may also be wrong. And a while a public criticism of the current teachings on the matter may incur informal or formal discipline, it is conceivable that a revelation by a future Church leader, no matter how foolish and false it may seem in light of current teachings, may occur that vindicates that person.

Finally, one may argue that the truthfulness of a doctrinal teaching is only secondary to a Latter-day Saint's *believing and following* the current teachings of Church leaders, regardless of their truth of falsity. But this seems to ignore the way in which truth has been understood from the Church's founding. It would also appear to challenge the faith claims that lie at the foundation of the Church—as the truthfulness of the LDS faith claims play a very important role in the religious discourse.

CONCLUSION

The centrality of continuing revelation in LDS discourse presents unique strengths and challenges. The strengths have long been extolled and rightly so. Unfortunately, the challenges have not been given the theoretical attention they deserve. For Millet, the 'hard issues' that arise from these challenges primarily deal with the teachings of past leaders. However, these same challenges also present harder issues for Latter-day Saints who look not only to the teachings of the past, but also (and often more so) to the teachings of current leaders. While no resolutions to these problems are presented here, it should be clear that there is certainly much work that can be done to engage these and other pressing issues that may arise when Mormonism confronts its own conceptions of doctrine, truth, and modern revelations.

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NOTES

[1] For example, see John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *What Do Mormons Really Believe? What the Ads Don't Tell You* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 2002).

[2] Robert L. Millet, "What Do We Really Believe? Identifying Doctrinal Parameters within Mormonism," in *Discourses in Mormon Theology: Philosophical and Theological Possibilities*, ed. James M. McLachlan and Loyd Ericson (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 265-81. A previous version of this essay was also published in "What Is Our Doctrine?" *The Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center). Vol. 4, no. 3 (2003), 15-33. Also selections from this essay, including his authoritative model, are included in his latest books *Getting at the Truth: Responding to Difficult Questions about LDS Beliefs* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2004), 43-63; and *What Happened to the Cross? Distinctive LDS Teachings* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2007), 52-65.

[3] See LDS Newsroom, "Approaching Mormon Doctrine" (4 May, 2007) in the LDS Newsroom: The Official New Source for Media, Opinion Leaders, and the Public. Retrieved March 6, 2008 at http://newsroom.lds.org/ldsnewsroom/eng/commentary/approaching-mormon-doctrine. For a similar, but slightly more restricted authoritative model, see Stephen E. Robinson, *Are Mormons Christians?* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991), 13-8.

[4] Nathan B. Oman, "Jurisprudence and the Problem of Church Doctrine," *Element* 2:1 (Fall 2006), 1-19. See also, Nathan B. Oman, "A Defense of the Authority of Church Doctrine," *Dialogue* 40:4 (Winter 2007), 1-28. In the latter essay, Oman examines the authoritative role that Church doctrine plays in the lives of members. While I agree with Oman that doctrine can and does play an authoritative role among believers, the role that it plays depends on how each member personally interprets Church doctrine. This latter essay still begs the question of whether or not doctrine can be established for the whole Church and whether it does so as a matter of policy, current teaching, or absolute truth.

[5] Millet, "What Do We Really Believe?," 266-7, 273. Emphasis added. In fact, Millet uses the word 'today' at least 18 times throughout his essay to emphasize that statements of current leaders should be given doctrinal authority over those of past leaders.

[6] Compare to LDS Newsroom, "Approaching Mormon Doctrine" where it states that (1) "doctrine resides in the four 'standard works' of scripture;" (2) is established by the First Presidency . . . and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles;" (3) "in official Church publications;" (5) "relevant to the circumstances of [the] day;" (6) "might be considered core doctrines;" (7) "is consistently proclaimed;" and (8) a "single statement by a single leader on a single occasion . . . is not meant to be officially binding for the whole church." The omission of temple rituals as a source of doctrine may be to avoid providing justification for the media to cite the sacred rites.

[7] Ibid., 267.
[8] Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* Vol. 13:95.
[9] Wilford Woodruff, Sixty–First Semiannual General Conference of the Church, Monday, October 6, 1890, Salt Lake City, Utah. Reported in *Deseret Evening News*, October 11, 1890, 2.
[10] Oman, "Jurisprudence and the Problem of Church Doctrine,"6.
[11] Joseph Smith-History 1:12.
[12] For a recent example, see Elder Russell M. Nelson's February 2003 *Ensign* article, "Divine Love," where he writes, "While divine love can be called perfect, infinite, enduring, and universal, it cannot correctly be characterized as unconditional" (20). What Nelson meant by this was largely discussed and debated by LDS thinkers. For an example of a discussion of this article, see the June 29, 2007 blog entry, "Your Friday Firestorm #3" on the Mormon blog *By Common Consent*, http://bycommonconsent.com/2007/06/29/your-friday-firestorm-3/ (last accessed May 11, 2009).
[13] Oman, "Jurisprudence and the Problem of Church Doctrine," 9.
[14] Ibid., 10. Emphasis in original.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., 11.
[18] Ibid.
[19] While the *Church Handbook of Instructions* lays out the ecclesiastical policies of the Church, to which a leader could (and is instructed to) turn to clarify matters of policy, it is not designed to clarify points of doctrine.
[20] Ibid., 2.
[21] This might be something like the Correlation Committee which informally serves this purpose by virtue of what is included and excluded from the teaching curriculum.
[22] Ibid., 3. Emphasis added.
[23] Ibid., 9.
[24] Ibid., 11.
[25] D&C 89:7, 17.
[26] Though a historical reading of the text would probably make the same distinction of the drinks that exists today – that strong drinks are hard drinks with a high alcohol-content such as whiskey, rums, spirits, and some wines, while mild drinks are mild drinks with low alcohol-content such as malted beers and stouts. For example, in an 1875 sermon, Brigham Young equated "mild drinks" with beer as he urged the saints to avoid purchasing beer for primarily economical reasons: "The same may be said of money spent in the purchase of beer. It is a mild drink, and is very pleasant and agreeable to a great many; but when a man pays his fifty cents, his dollar or his ten dollars for beer it goes into the hands of the grocery keepers and they send it off, and it does no good to the community. The beer itself does no good, it injures the system of those who habitually indulge in the use of it, and,

whether they think of and realize it, or not, they will be brought to account for the means they have thus wasted. (*Journal of Discourses* Vol. 18:72). See also, Oman, "Authority of Church Doctrine," 11.

[27] See especially Oman, "Jurisprudence and the Problem of Church Doctrine," 2-7.

[28] While I acknowledge that there is a wide variation of how these terms may be used within Mormonism, by 'ordinary usage' I am referring especially to the usage employed by Church General Authorities when speaking to the membership. These, I believe, best represent how terms are applied for the majority of Latter-day Saints. Oman similarly appeals to 'ordinary usage' when trying to pinpoint doctrine. See Ibid., 5.

[29] Millet, "What Do We Really Believe?," 270.

[30] For example see the introduction in Ankerberg and Weldon, *What Do Mormons Really Believe*, 7. "We have written this book to help clarify what Mormons *actually* believe, not what they give us the impression of believing." Emphasis added. See also, Robinson, *Are Mormons Christian?*, 9-10.

[31] For a recent example, see Jeffrey R. Holland's April 2009 General Conference talk where he makes it clear that he is referring to his own thoughts and feelings, and not speaking for the Church when he says, "Indeed, *it is my personal belief* that in all of Christ's mortal ministry the Father may never have been closer to His Son than in these agonizing final moments of suffering." Jeffrey R. Holland, "None Were with Him," *Ensign* (May 2009), 86.

[32] For a recent discussion on the consumption of caffeine for Latter-day Saints, see Thomas J. Boud, "The Energy Drink Epidemic," *Ensign* (December 2008), 48-52. Also, Russell Wilcox, "Energy Drinks: The Lift That Lets You Down," *New Era* (December 2008), 30-33.

[33] D&C 89:2.

[34] D&C 89:12-3.

[35] D&C 89:17.

[36] Millet, "What Do We Really Believe?," 267.

[37] See for example Gary James Bergera, *Conflict in the Quorum: Orson Pratt, Brigham Young, Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), especially 169-187; D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997), 66-115; and Richard Sherlock and Jeffrey E. Keller, "The B. H. Roberts/Joseph Fielding Smith/James E. Talmage Affair," in *The Search for Harmony: Essays on Science and Mormonism,* ed. Gene A. Sessions and Craig J. Oberg (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993).

[38] Millet, *What Happened to the Cross?*, 67.

[39] See Gregory A. Prince and Wm. Robert Wright, *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: The University of Utah Press, 2005), 75.

[40] Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* Vol. 1, ed. Bruce. R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964), 61, 66.

[41] Prince and Wright, *David O. McKay*, 79-80; Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions* Vol. 2 (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1958), 188.

[42] D&C 107:85.
[43] For example, see Hugh B. Brown's disagreement with the priesthood ban in Edwin B. Firmage, *An Abundant Life: The Memoirs of Hugh B. Brown* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988), 129, 142-3.
[44] Compare to Armand L. Mauss, "Fading of the Pharough's Curse, " in *Neither White nor Black: Mormon Scholars Confront the Race Issue in a Universal Truth*, ed. Lester E. Bush and Armand L. Mauss (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1984), 173-5. Mauss provides four categories of doctrine: official teachings and policy fall under the categories of canonical and official doctrines. (Beliefs would fall under the categories of authoritative and popular doctrines). His definition of doctrine, I believe, fails to recognize ordinary usage within Mormonism that equates doctrine with truth. For Mauss, his definition of doctrine is "an operational construct, not a theological one, not synonymous with 'truth' in an ultimate, objective sense" (173).
[45] Richard B. Wirthlin, "Concern for the One," *Ensign* (May 2008), 18.
[46] Millet, "What Do We Really Believe?," 265, 273, 278.
[47] Oman, "Jurisprudence and the Problem of Church Doctrine," 5.
[48] A search of the last 37 years of General Conference sermons on the Church's website results in over 800 returns that mention doctrine in conjunction with it being true.
[49] Millet, "What Do We Really Believe?," 271.
[50] Ibid., 272.
[51] Oman, "Jurisprudence and the Problem of Doctrine," 14.
[52] Dallin H. Oaks, "Testimony," *Ensign* (May 2008), 26.
[53] Richard G. Scott, "Truth: The Foundation for Righteous Decisions," *Ensign* (November 2007), 91.
[54] Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "The Power of a Personal Testimony," *Ensign* (November 2006), 38.
[55] See David Jon Buerger, "The Adam-God Doctrine," *Dialogue* 15:1 (1982), 14-58.
[56] For example see Bruce R. McConkie, "The Seven-Deadly Heresies," *BYU Devotional Speeches of the Year, 1980* (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 1981), 78.
[57] For example, see Joseph Fielding Smith's appeals to authority, scripture, etc. as he argues for a young earth and a rejection of death prior to the fall as Church doctrine in *Man, His Origin and Destiny* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954). Compare to *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1992, s.v. "Earth."
[58] For example, see LDS Church President Joseph F Smith in the June 1917 *Relief Society Magazine*, ". . . I regret, I think it is a crying evil, that there should exist a sentiment or a feeling among any members of the Church to curtail the birth of their children. I think that is a crime whenever it occurs, where husband and wife are in possession of health and vigor and are free from impurities that would be entailed upon their posterity. I believe that where people undertake to curtail or prevent the birth of their children that they are going to reap disappointment by and by. I have no hesitancy in saying that I believe this is one of the greatest crimes in the world today, this evil practice. . . ." cited in Lester Bush, "Birth Control

Among the Mormons: Introduction to an Insistent Question," *Dialogue* 10:2 (Autumn 1976): 22. Compare to "Birth Control" in the 2004 Church-produced *True to the Faith* which states that the decisions for birth control "are between the [married couple] and the Lord." (Salt Lake City, Intellectual Reserve, 2004), 26.

[59] See the later discussion concerning the ban.

[60] John Lewis Lund, *The Church and the Negro: A Discussion of Mormons, Negroes and the Priesthood* (Glendale, Calif. : Paramount Publishers, 1967), 45. Emphasis added.

[61] Bruce R. McConkie, "All Are Alike unto God," address given at the CES Religious Educators Symposium on 18 August 1978.

[62] For birth control as a sin, see note 57 above. For a belief in the doctrine of polygamy being essential for salvation see *Journal of Discourses* Vol. 11 pp. 268-9, where he states that "[t]he only men who become Gods, even the Sons of God, are those who enter into polygamy." For a condemnation of evolution as essential for salvation, see Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation,* Vol. 1:93 where he argues that a belief in evolution entails a denial of the atonement. See also, McConkie, "The Seven-Deadly Heresies."

[63] "LDS Church backs marriage measure on California ballot," *Deseret News*, June 24, 2008.

Philosophical Theology for Mormons: Some Suggestions from an Outsider

by Stephen T. Davis

I

In this paper I want to ask what philosophical theology might be able to do for Latter-day Saints. I will begin with a discussion of what philosophy is and how it contrasts with theology. Then I will describe what philosophical theology is and what it typically can do for faith communities, especially Christian ones. Then I will suggest four issues in contemporary Mormon thought where, as it seems to me (an interested outsider), philosophical theology might be of some help. It is hardly my place to suggest how Mormons ought to deal with the issues that I will raise. But I do want to recommend that some of those who engage in the emerging discipline of Mormon philosophical theology ought to try to do so. Finally, I will argue that Mormons can benefit from systematic theology, despite Mormonism's traditional aversion to it.

II

I myself am both a philosopher who teaches at a secular institution and a Christian. As such, I am occasionally asked about the relationship between philosophy and Christianity. There are lots of opinions out there on this topic. Some religious people view the two as enemies and accordingly avoid

philosophy. Others hope that philosophy can be used to buttress Christianity. Many of today's philosophers think that commitment to Christianity requires losing one's philosophical integrity. Some try to use philosophy to discredit religion.

So what exactly is philosophy? There is no better way to begin than with Plato and Aristotle. They both tell us that philosophy begins in wonder.

> This sense of wonder is the mark of the philosopher. Philosophy indeed has no other origin.[1]

> For it was curiosity that first led men to philosophize and that still leads them. Men philosophized in order to escape ignorance.[2]

What are philosophers curious about? I will say they are curious about what I will call "ultimate questions."

To me, philosophy is no more or less than the attempt to satisfy our curiosity about ultimate questions. An ultimate question is a question (1) which people are deeply interested in and desperately long to answer and (2) which cannot be answered by the methods of science. The question, "Was Julius Caesar right-handed or left-handed?" is not a philosophical question because nobody is deeply interested in answering it. I've never heard of anyone spending three hard hours thinking about it. The question, "Is there life on Mars?" is a question that people *are* deeply interested in answering, but this question can be answered by science, and no doubt one day will be. So then this question is not a philosophical question either.

Well, then, what are some philosophical questions? Let me list a few:

> What will happen to me when I die?
> What is knowledge?
> What is the meaning of life?
> How can I know what is right and what is wrong?
> What is beauty?
> Does God exist?
> Are my acts free or determined?

These are inescapable questions that keep reappearing in the history of human thought, and they do not appear to be answerable by the methods of science. They are, then, ultimate or philosophical questions.

Philosophy (at times not unfairly) has earned the reputation of being

vague, speculative, and irrelevant to real life. But it should not be so. On the contrary, philosophy attempts to help people in a concrete way: it tries to answer questions like these that bother them. So at heart it is a practical enterprise: it concerns real questions asked by real people. If it does not do this, if its concerns become unrelated to real life, then it flounders and is not worth the hard effort it requires. Philosophy is not just for professional philosophers. Anyone who asks a philosophical question is a philosopher.

Philosophical questions cannot be once-and-for-all answered by means of crunching numbers, taking a poll, or doing an experiment in a laboratory. This fact makes philosophy both fascinating and frustrating. Philosophy makes no empirical discoveries and consequently there seems to be almost no progress in philosophy. In other disciplines knowledge can grow like building-blocks: one expert's discovery, once accepted by others, can lead to new discoveries and new knowledge, and these discoveries to others. But not so in philosophy; since there is no method of verifying or falsifying philosophical results, philosophers can and do continually reexamine the same old questions and the same old answers to those questions. Some people are suspicious of philosophy because of the paucity of accepted conclusions, but in a sense this is not philosophy's fault: philosophy just is the discipline that gets stuck with the most difficult questions of all.

What is the relationship between philosophy and theology? This is a complex question. On the one hand, there are striking similarities. Many of the questions asked by philosophers are also asked by theologians, e.g., Does God exist? What happens to me when I die? What is the meaning of life? How can I know what is right and what is wrong? Also, philosophers and theologians share certain methodological preferences: both strive for connected, systematic thinking, for example. Also, in a sense, both philosophy and theology are backward-looking disciplines; both philosophers and theologians consider it vital to study and interpret the thoughts of past practitioners.

But there are important differences. The most important is the fact that theology is based upon the assumption that certain claims are revealed truths. So in theology, certain things are accepted, as we might say, on authority—e.g., because Jesus said so or because the Bible says so. Philosophy, however, accepts nothing on authority. (That is not so say that philosophers never do.) A point can be accepted only if reason deems it acceptable, i.e., only if the arguments or evidence in its favor outweigh those against it.

Accordingly, many people have concluded that philosophy and theology are enemies. Many philosophers have apparently believed this, and so have some of the greatest figures in the history of Christian theology, from

Tertullian to Karl Barth. Even St. Paul seemed to argue passionately that secular philosophy is the enemy of the Christian Gospel:

> See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. (Colossians 2:8)

> For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. . . . For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. . . . The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Corinthians 1 and 2, selected verses)

These words of Paul are easy to misinterpret. The passage from Colossians should not be taken as a condemnation on Paul's part of all philosophy. His speech at Athens, quoted by Luke in Acts 17, shows how he could appreciate and even utilize current philosophy. What Paul was criticizing was the fantastic and mythological speculations that were being perpetrated among to Colossian Christians. He was saying: Do not allow yourselves to be deluded by empty, superstitious thought masquerading as philosophy.

As to the Corinthian passage, I agree that: (1) Christian faith does not rest on philosophical wisdom but on revealed truth; (2) the truth that is revealed to Christians can seem absurd to non-believers, especially to philosophically inclined non-believers; (3) no rational system of human devising, no matter how eloquently it is expressed, has the power to save; and (4) the true wisdom of God is not attained by reasoning but by faith. But I do not believe that reasoning is divorced from faith; although reasoning does not exhaust faith, it is a vital element in faith.

It would even be safe to say that some people *should* and indeed *must* be Christian philosophers. For philosophically inclined persons who are also

Christians, doing philosophical theology is a spiritual necessity. Such people cannot believe unless their philosophical scruples allow them to believe. It is a spiritually dangerous enterprise for such people, so to speak, to put their philosophy in one pocket and their faith in another and never allow the two to affect each other. Moreover, their faith need not be merely intellectual—cold, theoretical, or dispassionate. Philosophers can be as deeply and passionately committed as anyone else.

In one sense, the work of philosophy is unimportant to faith. Few religious believers recognize themselves as philosophers and probably even fewer regard their faith as in any sense dependent upon philosophy. It is obvious that religious lives can be and often are lived apart from any interest in philosophy, at least academic philosophy. But in another sense, philosophy is vitally important to faith, and this is no doubt the reason that many Christian believers throughout history, like Clement of Alexander, Augustine, Aquinas, and Pascal, have either approved of philosophy or have seen themselves as philosophers. For surely it would be a catastrophe for Christianity if it were to turn out that Christian faith could not be defended intellectually, if it were to turn out to be irrational to have such faith.

III

So then let us turn to philosophical theology. What exactly is it and what can it do for faith communities? Let me define three terms, the first of which is theology. There are many types of theology—biblical theology, historical theology, pastoral theology, etc. In this paper, when I use the word "theology" I am speaking of what is usually called systematic theology. So I will say that *theology* is simply the attempt to understand revelation. Theologians take what they believe has been revealed and place it in various topics (doctrine of God, doctrine of redemption, etc.), order it systematically, reflect about it, and explain it. Theology uses human reason to understand God, human beings, redemption, the church, the sacraments, and the future. It tries to be both comprehensive (covering all the doctrines) and systematic (showing how they fit together into a system). Theology explains and presents the content of faith as best it can, both to the church and to the world. Theology is an aid to understanding what one believes and why.

Philosophical theology, in my sense, is just the attempt to think clearly and rigorously in a philosophical way about specific theological topics that are internal to a given faith tradition. Using the tools of philosophy, it has four main concerns, the first of which is logical coherence. Critics occasionally

charge that a certain doctrine in a given religion is internally inconsistent, and philosophical theology asks whether that charge is true. The second is evidential considerations. In the case of some doctrines—especially those involving historical claims—matters of evidence and probability come to the fore. The third is fit with what is taken to be orthodoxy. Philosophical theologians can argue that a certain theological claim either does or does not cohere with the religious world-view in question. The fourth issue is closely related to the first two: it is apologetics. Philosophical theologians are often called to defend theological claims against criticisms.

IV

What are some issues in Mormon thought that I think Mormon philosophical theologians might be able helpfully to work on? Let me mention three of them.

1. Mormonism on the mind/body problem.

This first point concerns four terms commonly used in Mormon theological discourse. I think LDS thinkers need to do some work on what we might call the Mormon view of the mind-body problem. Maybe it is just a matter of defining terms clearly, but perhaps more serious issues lurk behind problems of vocabulary. One such term is "spirit." It is clear that Mormons do not think that being a spirit entails being incorporeal. They hold that spirits are embodied human-like persons, although possibly less tangible than human persons because they are composed of "refined matter." But this is the second puzzling term, refined matter. What exactly is it? Is it meant to be the same thing as the new body or resurrection body (*soma pneumaticon*) that Paul speaks of in I Corinthians 15, or not? And is having a body consisting of refined matter the same thing as having a "spirit body" (the third term), which Mormons say the Holy Spirit has? Also, how do the two terms, spirit and refined matter, relate to the Mormon view of "intelligence" (the fourth term)? In one sense, I gather that Mormons believe that human intelligences are uncreated and everlasting. Is that true of spirits and refined matter too? Finally, do Mormons hold to what philosophers call substance dualism? This is the theory which says that (1) human beings consist of both material bodies and immaterial souls and (2) the soul is the essence of the person. I suspect that Mormons would affirm the first conjunct of this definition (although they would prefer the word "spirit" to the world "soul"), but I am not sure. I at least need some clarification here, and maybe even Mormons do.

I would humbly recommend that some Mormon scholars tackle the task of defining what these four terms mean—spirit, refined matter, spirit body, and intelligence—and explain how they are related.

2. The need for logical consistency?

As mentioned above, one of the central things that philosophical theology can do for faith communities is to show that their various commitments or doctrines are both individually consistent and consistent with each other. It is important, of course, that our beliefs form a coherent system, because we all live under the epistemological principle that incoherent statements cannot be true and that two statements that are inconsistent with each other cannot both be true. If a given religion holds propositions A and B, but it can be shown that A is internally incoherent, or if it can be shown that A and B are both individually coherent but are inconsistent with each other (that is, if one of them is true the other must be false), that, obviously, would constitute a serious problem for adherents of that religion.

Now this matter of consistency is especially important for mainstream Christianity, where revelation is closed. That is, mainstream Christians hold that normative revelation ceased when the sixty-six books of the Bible were written. We certainly believe that God continues to act in the world and continues to speak to people. I believe that God has spoken to me (not aloud, of course) on several occasions. But those acts of revelation are not—so we hold—normative for the whole of the people of God, as the Bible is. So no Christian has the authority to add to or subtract from the revelation of God given to us in the scriptures.

Of course Christian theology goes on; every generation we discover new things about what God has revealed and new ways to speak that revelation to ourselves and to the world. But since there is no new revelation, the issue of internal consistency among our doctrines is especially acute. We cannot amend revelation, not even to provide consistency. It is true that mainstream Christianity has undergone major mid-course alterations in the twenty centuries in which it has existed. The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century is the most notable example. But those adjustments never purported to involve new revelations; they always centered on different interpretations of what had already been revealed.

Naturally, Mormons also face the requirement that their doctrines be both individually coherent and consistent with each other. And it is up to Mormon philosophical theologians, in situations where consistency is challenged, to try to answer that sort of charge. But that is not the main point I want to

raise as a challenge to Mormon thinkers. There seems to me to be two ways in which doctrinal change can occur in Mormonism. The first is what we might call the official way. As we all know, the LDS church does not have a tradition of closed revelation. Revelation is on-going. And there have been at least two occasions in Mormon history when the then current president and prophet has received revelations that in effect said a decisive no to doctrines and practices that were previously held, and even held as important, by Mormons. The second way I will call unofficial: it involves things that were once pronounced by LDS church authorities and believed by most Mormons that are simply no longer taught. There was no announcement, so to speak, but a doctrinal change was in effect brought about.

For example, take the traditional Mormon idea that mainstream Christian notion of the virgin birth of Jesus is false because in fact Jesus was conceived when God the Father had sexual relations with Mary. I may be mistaken, but I have the impression that most Latter-day Saints once held this view and that many now affirm the virgin birth.[3] A second example: despite Joseph Smith's and Lorenzo Snow's clearly stated belief that God was once a man (an issue to which we will return below), many Mormon scholars are now saying that we know nothing at all about God's life before the creation and that since there is nothing in the canonical Mormon scriptures about this point, discussion of it is pure speculation.[4]

So my question is this: just how important is the issue of logical consistency in a religion of continuing revelation? I ask this question because it seems to me that there are several theological areas where Mormonism is presently developing against previous Mormon traditions. Just on the doctrine of God, I have heard contemporary LDS thinkers say that Mormons need to reclaim the picture of God found in the Book of Mormon, which picture seems to people like me to be much closer to mainstream Christian views of God than those found in later LDS canonical writings. And I know that some current Mormon thinkers are uncomfortable with Mormonism's traditional infinite regress of Gods, with God the Father at one time being finite and inferior to other deities. Now whether these trends will prevail is ultimately up to LDS church authorities, not up to Mormon scholars, and certainly not up to outsiders like me. But I do just wonder whether consistency among one's doctrines is as serious a *desideratum* for Mormons as it is for mainstream Christians. In theory, Mormonism can always solve an apparent inconsistency by abandoning or modifying an old doctrine, either officially or unofficially.[5] I think this issue might be a fruitful topic for Mormon scholars to explore.

V

3. How to decide what is normative and what is not.

I have in mind here a related but different issue in theological methodology. Like any religious tradition, Mormonism must be able to distinguish among doctrines that are *normative* for all Latter-day Saints, doctrines that are not normative but have been *traditionally believed* by Latter-day Saints, and doctrines that are not normative and maybe not traditional but are *permitted* for Latter-day Saints. In specific cases, people can and will disagree about such matters. But there must in principle be some way to draw such lines.

As an example, how much weight should be given to non-canonical sayings of Joseph Smith, like the King Follett sermon and other discourses delivered near the end of his life? As we all know, that sermon is not considered sacred scripture by the LDS church. But why not? I certainly do not know. Is it because of the esoteric doctrines espoused or apparently espoused in it? Or is it because Joseph Smith's death a few weeks after delivering it prevented him from ever correcting or authorizing any text of the sermon? Or is it because the discourse was not given as a revelation in the way that other LDS revelations were? Still, despite its non-canonical status, there is no denying that the King Follett Discourse is and always has been an important and highly authoritative source of Mormon doctrine.

But whether today's Mormons do or do not give much theological weight to the King Follett Discourse, they certainly do give substantial weight to other things that Joseph Smith said outside the context of "revealed truth."[6] Now I realize that nobody holds that everything Joseph Smith ever said in his life was religiously authoritative. So it seems that some sort of criterion is needed to decide which extracanonical teachings of Joseph Smith are authoritative for Latter-day Saints and which are not.

I also realize that certain LDS scholars have addressed the issue of determining what is church doctrine, and for both external and internal reasons. Externally, I'm sure that most Mormons have been involved in conversations with non-Mormons where they get accused of believing something that they don't in fact believe. As a scholar whose vocation seems to be speaking mainly to outsiders, Robert Millett sensibly argues, in several of his writings, that Mormon doctrine is whatever can be found in the standard works and/or in official church declarations, proclamations or publications, and that has, as he says, "sticking power" through time.[7]

But Nathan Oman, who seems to be speaking mainly to his fellow Latter-

day Saints, argues that there is no foolproof method or rule for determining what church doctrine is. At the core, of course, he says that Mormons are clear what they believe. But at the margins there is and can be disagreement and even confusion as to what Mormon doctrine is.[8] His criticism, as I understand it, of Millett-type suggestions, is that the words of official spokespersons or publications cannot infallibly declare what is church doctrine since the authors of those statements use a pre-understanding of what counts as church doctrine in making their statements. I will not explore here Oman's own interesting and nuanced proposal involving telling stories that amount to interpretations of church history, teachings, practices, and texts.

So this issue too seems a point that Mormon philosophical theologians might fruitfully address. How do Mormons decide—or how should church authorities decide—what is normative and what is not?

VI

4. Lorenzo Snow reconsidered.

As I think all Latter-day saints know, mainstream Christians listen to Lorenzo Snow's famous couplet (echoing, as it does, things that Joseph Smith said) with nothing but shock and horror. It comes in two parts, of course. In my opinion, one of the parts is more troubling than the other. I at least have heard contemporary LDS explanations of the second part, "as God is, man may become," that strike me as acceptable, although we would still wish that other language could be used. If Mormons are willing to deny that human beings can ontologically become God, and if this part of the couplet means no more than that human beings in the kingdom of God will be redeemed, will have the image of God fully restored in them, and in their glorified bodies will be immortal and perfect in holiness, then I think I can be convinced to let the idea pass. I would probably consider it a slightly rhetorically overblown version of what Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Athanasius, and other Eastern Church Fathers meant by "theosis" or "divinization." However, there remains one difference which might not be subject to compromise: in the LDS notion of eternal progression, God and human beings share the same ontology (are members of the same species), so in their exaltation, human beings attain a status (immortality and divinity) that was potentially theirs all along. In the mainstream notion of theosis, on the other hand, God graciously grants human beings a status that is not rightfully theirs.

But the real trouble lies with the first part of the couplet, "As man now is, God once was." There are both theological and philosophical problems here.

The theological problem, at least for mainstream Christians, is that a God who was once finite and limited like human beings does not seem to us to be worthy of worship. Worshipping him would seem to us like idolatry. Why do we worship *this* God, and not one or all of the Gods who are superior to this God or who arrived at exhaltation before him? I realize that Joseph Smith said that "the heads of the Gods appointed one God for us,"[9] but that is hardly sufficient to solve the problem: why not worship the Head God? Moreover, we must ask: what is the relationship between the God whom we worship and all the other Gods (presumably an infinite number of them) who were divine before him? Does he worship them?

Philosophically the idea is fraught with difficulties. How can a finite being progress to infinity? Does that idea even make sense? I am not referring to infinite longevity here, since Mormons hold that all beings, Gods and humans, are in a sense everlasting. I am thinking more of divine attributes like omnipotence. Humans, of course, can do many things, but not an infinite number of things. Suppose, just for fun, that extraordinarily powerful human beings have it within their power in their lifetimes to perform a google number of actions. (A google is the number represented by a one followed by one hundred zeros.) But even that very large number is a finite number, and it is impossible to arrive at an infinite number by successive addition. No matter how long you keep increasing numbers in the series, "a google, a google plus one, a google plus two…," you will never arrive at an infinite number. So if an omnipotent being has it within its power to perform an infinite number of actions, it looks very much like you can never take a finitely powerful being and by increasing its powers arrive at an omnipotent being. So for this reason and others, it looks as if there is an unbridgeable ontological gulf between finite things and infinite things. Moreover, where did the universe—the ordered and quite apparently contingent cosmos that we inhabit—come from in the first place?

As noted above, some contemporary Mormon scholars and ordinary believers solve this problem by denying or ignoring the traditional "infinite regress of Gods" notion. And that certainly seems to me—a Presbyterian—the right way to go. But until the traditional notion is officially or in effect ruled out in the LDS church, there are several issues here that I think Mormon philosophical theologians ought to work on.

VII

In conclusion, let me try to mount an argument to the effect that Mormons need theology, i.e., systematic theology. I make these points tentatively and by way of suggestion only, because as I say, I know that it is none of my business to try to tell Latter-day Saints what they ought to do.

Now as we all know, Mormonism has no official philosophy, theology, or creed. Three reasons are usually given for Mormonism's aversion to theology. (1) Mormonism has always been oriented more toward the down-to-earth problems of life and practice than to theoretical or academic concerns. Some LDS scholars argue that Mormonism is not to be defined by its beliefs.[10] (2) Mormon scriptures have always been taken as far more important than any theology. (3) Mormonism's essential insistence on an open canon and on continuing revelation makes systematic theology largely useless; virtually anything that any Mormon theologian says might soon be outdated because of new revelation. Even what has been revealed in the past is partial and subject to revision.[11]

I cannot argue against the first point. It seems to me that Mormonism's orientation toward life and practice is a defining characteristic. I will only say that I do not see why theology must interfere with that orientation. Indeed, I think it can help it. In mainstream Christianity we have a whole branch of theology—what is called practical theology—that exists just for this purpose.

I warmly embrace the second point in its entirety. Although I believe in a far less expansive scripture than Mormons do, I certainly hold—as do most mainstream Christians—that scripture is far more important than theology and must always outrank any theology.

The third point about continuing revelation does not seem to me to constitute a barrier to theology. I don't see why the words of Mormon theologians or even official church-sanctioned theological statements cannot be indexed to a certain time. The point could be made or implicitly understood that any such statement is subject to revision by later revelation or authoritative interpretation.

Theology is needed, then, (1) to help Latter-day Saints understand their own religion; (2) to help settle internal disputes as to what church doctrine is and what is not; (3) to enter into informed dialogue with non-Mormons; and (4) to assist Mormon scholars, whenever necessary, to defend Mormonism from criticism. In at least these ways, philosophical theology can be helpful to Latter-day Saints.[12]

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NOTES

[1] Plato, *Theatetus* 155d, in *The Collected Works of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton, NJ: The Bollingen Foundation, 1961), 860.

[2] Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Hope (Ann Arbor, Mi: The University of Michigan Press, 1960), 7.

[3] See Robert Millett's discussion of this issue in Robert L. Millet and Gregory C. V. Johnson, *Bridging the Divide: The Continuing Conversation Between a Mormon and an Evangelical* (Rhinebeck, NY: Monkfish Book Company, 2007), 138-139.

[4] See, for example, Ibid., 58. In another essay, Millett makes these same points and adds that this is not a "saving doctrine." Robert L. Millett, "What Do We Really Believe? Identifying Doctrinal Parameters Within Mormonism," in *Discourses in Mormon Theology: Philosophical and Theological Explorations*, ed. James M. McLaughlin and Loyd Ericson (Draper, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007).

[5] Robert Millett quotes a 1978 statement of Elder Bruce R. McConkie: "Forget everything that I have said, or what President Brigham Young or President George O. Canon or whosoever has said in days past that is contrary to the present revelation." in "What Do We Really Believe?" 275.

[6] Notice the intense interest in the question whether Joseph Smith ever stated or believed that human beings have a Heavenly Mother. See the discussion of this issue in David L. Paulsen, "Are Christians Mormon? Reassessing Joseph Smith's Theology in His Bicentennial," *BYU Studies* 45:1 (2006): 96-107.

[7] For example, see "What Do We Really Believe?" 266-7, 271.

[8] See Nathan B. Oman, "Jurisprudence and the Problem of Church Doctrine," *Element* 2:2 (Fall, 2006) and "A Defense of the Authority of Church Doctrine," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 40:4 (Winter, 2007).

[9] See Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, ed. Joseph Fielding Smith, (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book Company, 1961), 372.

[10] See James E. Faulconer, "Rethinking Theology: The Shadow of the Apocalypse," *FARMS Review* 19:1 (2007). Faulconer even argues that systematic theology is dangerous.

[11] See James E. Faulconer, "Why a Mormon Won't Drink Coffee but Might Have a Coke: The Atheological Character of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," *Element* 2:2 (Fall, 2006): 24-5.

[12] I would like to thank Brian Birch for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

Nature and Natural Affection

by Matthew Gowans

There are a number of reasons for being concerned with the state of the natural world. For instance, we may be alarmed by the growing rate of habitat destruction or rising levels of pollution and the consequent affects these potentially have on our health and well-being. We may be worried about future human generations and the kind of world they will inherit. Perhaps our concern is rooted in the sense of obedience to God's divine commands or in response to His all-inclusive love. Lastly, we may be interested in understanding the obligations that humans have for non-human life itself. All of these, as different as they appear, are legitimate reasons for examining the kind of footprint humans are making upon the earth. Furthermore, all of them are capable of being supported by the doctrines of the LDS church and the teachings of its prophets and apostles.[1] The issue that I wish to address in this work pertains to the question of our direct obligations for non-human creation. I argue that the idea of nature's intrinsic value is supported by the doctrines of the LDS Church, and that relationship is key to recognizing such value in nature. The Apostle Paul declared to Timothy that in the last days humans will be without natural affection.[2] I hope to demonstrate that this loss of natural affection can be applied, not only to our relationships with other humans, but to the natural world as well, and that restoring these affections requires a dedication to relationship and an attitude of service.

To begin, it is important to be clear on what is intended by idea of in-

trinsic value. Anyone familiar with the literature on environmental ethics is well acquainted with the terms *intrinsic value*, *inherent worth*, and *non-instrumental value*. Applied to nature, they are intended to capture the idea that, aside from whatever goods we might reap from it, the natural world possesses worth in and of itself. As straightforward as this idea seems, it can be applied in a variety of ways and is often the source of confusion. John O'Niel of Lancaster University demonstrates that those writing about intrinsic value generally mean it in one of three different ways. For some, intrinsic value is a synonym for non-instrumental value, that is, value distinct from any instrumental usefulness a thing may have for others.[3] For example, an ethicist might say that although a deer is good for a number of things such as food, nature watching, or the health of an ecosystem, it also has value independent of its instrumentality.

Secondly, intrinsic value may be used to refer to the value an object has by virtue of its non-relational properties, or the properties that are intrinsic to the nature of the object.[4] In this case, that which determines the thing's value is not based on its non-instrumentality, but on the possession of inherent properties. At first glance these may appear much the same, but an example will demonstrate their differences. According to some environmentalists, pristine nature (i.e. nature that has been untouched by human beings) has intrinsic value whereas nature that has been altered by human beings or even restored to its natural state somehow lacks the same value. In this case, pristine nature possesses intrinsic value in the first sense because this worth is not measured in terms of instrumentality or usefulness to others. It fails, however, to have intrinsic value in the second sense because the value is still determined by its relation to human beings and their activities; the worth of pristine nature is a function of its relationship to humans. This worth can change given human interference; and so nature's value cannot be said to rest in inherent properties. From this perspective, intrinsic value grounded in a thing's inherent properties makes a stronger ethical claim than simply non-instrumental value.

The third use of intrinsic value is often meant to convey objective value, that is, value which exists independent of the valuations of valuers.[5] The idea expressed here is that a thing has value regardless of our subjective belief regarding its non-instrumentality or its inherent properties. In the example above, pristine nature could be said to have value because of certain human judgments respecting its integrity. In other words, *we* place a value on pristine nature. Intrinsic value based on inherent properties is subject to the same criticism. Even though an object may be said to possess non-relational prop-

erties such as life and the potential for growth, it does not necessarily follow that the value associated with those properties is intrinsic to the object, i.e. humans can still be considered the source of such values. To put it differently, though an object possesses the properties of life and the potential for growth, the value of these properties may still be determined by what certain humans think about them. This subjective way of looking at value means that the inherent properties one person prizes, another person may disregard as trivial. What objective value suggests, on the other hand, is that objects are possessed of a value which all human beings can and ought to recognize given ideal conditions, just as we all might recognize the color green given ideal conditions. In this sense, an object has inherent worth regardless of whether it actually appears that way to an outside observer; the value is inherent to the object.

It goes without saying that questions regarding the intrinsic value of nature can be convoluted, so much so that some ethicists today are giving up on the notion altogether. Nevertheless, recognizing the way that these perspectives on value are different helps to set the scene for the distinctive position of LDS theology on the matter. James Nash, former Executive Director of the Churches' Center for Theology and Public Policy in Washington D.C. wrote a book in which he argued for the need to love nature based on its intrinsic value.[6] It is clear that Nash would like to promote the idea of intrinsic value in its strongest sense, that is, as objective value with respect to nature. He believes that such value demands that humans reverence the creation for what it is in and of itself.[7] At the same time, however, he makes the point that the source of all value is God; nature is divinely endowed with intrinsic value. For theologians like James Gustafson, these two points are irreconcilable. Though non-instrumental value might be applicable here, value based upon non-relational properties is not since nature is valuable conditional upon its relationship with God. Likewise, objective value is not applicable either since the object does not have value independent of God's valuations.

Theologians who are troubled with this problem might take one of two roads: 1) Wishing to sustain the idea of nature's inherent value, they may reconsider the kind of relationship that exists between creation and creator; or 2) they may abandon the idea of nature's intrinsic value altogether. Gustafson, a retired professor of theology takes the latter course. In his view, only the most extreme intrinsic value, i.e. intrinsic value meant in its strongest sense as objective value, can be absolutely consistent.[8] One cannot adopt the idea of intrinsic value without it meaning worth which is independent of humans and God. Instead, Gustafson argues for an environmental ethic that is decidedly theocentric. We should not reverence nature as if it possessed its own essence,

but because it transmits something of the divine to us. God created it, loves it, and it bears His mark. We respect nature because we reverence God. To value nature as an object in and of itself is to attribute to it a certain sacrality that exists independent of God's being, and this notion is theologically problematic in that it challenges God's supremacy and opens the door for idolatry. Among those who retain a strong notion of intrinsic value in nature are many eco-feminists and process thinkers. Theologians like Dorothy Soelle, John Cobb Jr., and Jay McDaniel contend that intrinsic value extends to all living things and further, including even inorganic realities like mountains, rivers, and stars. McDaniel explains that this view of an existence saturated with objective value is made possible in part by the streams of thought emerging from discoveries in quantum physics which suggest that, at the subatomic level, particles appear to act independent of causal forces, and even seem to exercise a certain sentience or intelligence. To quote McDaniels:

> Christians need not assume that there are any vacuous actualities in the material realm. . . . [They] can affirm that there is no sharp dichotomy between sentient and insentient matter and that so-called "dead" matter is simply less sentient – less alive – than "living" matter. This is to say that nothing is really dead and that God's love – indeed, God's empathy – extends even to mountains, rivers, stars, and wind. . . .[9]

This approach allows McDaniel to speculate on the existence of objective value; on entities whose value exists independent of even God, and who are consequently loved by God not simply as aesthetic objects as one might love a painting or a symphony, but as subjects capable of engaging in a mutually affecting relationship.[10]

Latter-day Saint doctrines likewise support the concept of intrinsic value in its strongest sense. It is grounded in the assertion that the essence of life is immortal and indestructible. Regarding the belief that God created the immortal spirit *ex nihilo* or out of nothing, Joseph Smith responded, "the very idea lessens man in my estimation."[11] What exactly is it that exalts the human in this principle? It is that there is strong intrinsic value implied in a being's self-existence, in its inherent possession of certain intelligence and the potential for progression and fulfillment. LDS doctrine maintains that while humans undergo various stages of creation or organization, that is, both as spiritual children of heavenly parents and as mortal beings upon this earth, the principle sign of life within them endures. Though Joseph Smith's comment addresses specifically this principle sign of life in humans, LDS doctrine

affirms that it extends to all living things composed of a mortal soul, or that which exists as a combination of the spiritual and the natural. Chapter 3 of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price means this to include all that God creates: "And out of the ground made I, the Lord God, to grow every tree, naturally, that is pleasant to the sight of man; and man could behold it. And it became also a living soul."[12] James E. Talmage, citing Genesis 2:5 explained:

> The preexistent condition is not characteristic of human souls alone; all things of the earth have a spiritual being of which the temporal structure forms but the counterpart. We read of the creation of 'every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew.'[13]

If living creations, like humans, possess an eternal essence marked by intelligence and the potential for progression and fulfillment, it should not surprise us to find in Latter-day Saint theology the idea that they are also the subjects of eternal exaltation. Joseph Smith's revelation on the four beasts spoken of in the 4th chapter of the book of Revelations instructs:

> They are figurative expressions, used by the Revelator, John, in describing heaven, the paradise of God, the happiness of man, and of beasts, and of creeping things, and of the fowls of the air . . . which were shown to John, to represent the glory of the classes of beings in their destined order or sphere of creation, in the enjoyment of their eternal felicity.[14]

Likewise the earth will be exalted, for it receives its paradisiacal glory because it "abideth the law of a celestial kingdom, for it filleth the measure of its creation, and transgresseth not the law – Wherefore, it shall be sanctified."[15]

These doctrines have profound relevance with respect to the human obligation for all life. Their message is in harmony with the notion of strong intrinsic value in nature and provides Latter-day Saints with the proper conceptual framework to rightly order their relationships. This re-ordering of relationship is urgently needed today, as we still live according to many harmful ideas. For example, not a semester goes by that a student does not say to me with respect to the obligation to care for living things "What is it good for?" or "What does it do?" Their comment reflects the general Judeo-Christian belief that nature exists solely for mankind's purposes, and so possesses value inasmuch as it is deemed valuable by humans. I have tried to show elsewhere

that this attitude is not supported by LDS scripture nor by the Church's leaders, past or present. The notion of strong intrinsic value has the potential to rectify past misconceptions which have emphasized a heavy handed dominion at the exclusion of universal well-being.

In spite of the implications that a strong intrinsic value has for environmental ethics, it is not without its problems. Though the doctrines of the LDS Church provide support for this idea of intrinsic value in nonhuman creation, a question still looms large: Does an objective value in nature actually provide humans with the motivation to care for it? That is to say, once we have divorced the idea of value from the human valuer and placed it squarely within the object, we are left with the dilemma of getting the subject to care for the object's value. An adequate belief system which supports the idea of strong intrinsic value plays an important part, but it does not by itself engender the affections necessary to create motivation, just as the command to love one's enemies does not by itself provide what is needed to alter one's affections. Recognizing this problem with objective value, John O'Niel argues that the motivation for environmental ethics should proceed along lines similar to that of friendship.[16] In his view, mutual relationships place a subject in the ideal conditions to recognize another's objective worth. To be informed of another's inherent worth is simply not enough. Only through relationship do we become affectively invested in the inherent worth of others.

The association of friendship with intrinsic value is not a new idea. Thomas Aquinas thought it necessary to grant intrinsic value to beings other than God because, in his view, it was essential for the kind of love possible in friendship. This is also the reason, however, that he excluded nonhuman creation from the category of intrinsically valuable beings. Nonrational creation could not be loved out of charity because it was not capable of friendship, and therefore, not affected by its goods. Aquinas concluded that creatures are capable of being loved only metaphorically or perhaps secondarily as the means of providing for "God's honor and man's use."[17] Aquinas was right to associate objective value with the sort of affections only possible among friends. His subsequent denial of nonhuman intrinsic value, however, was grounded on an analysis of friendship based on rationality and excluded any consideration of the affections. In other words, he failed to consult his affections when attempting to understand the nature of friendship. In all fairness to Aquinas, it was not exactly academic in his day to consult the affections when deliberating upon truth. For that matter, the same principle largely applies today. Nonetheless, I am at least partially attracted to the words of G.K. Chesterton declaring: "The Madman is not the man who has lost his reason. The Mad-

man is the one who has lost everything except his Reason."[18] Chersterton's suggestion highlights the fact that we are more than just rational beings. Latter-day Saint doctrine emphasizes that humans learn truth both in the mind *and* in the heart.[19] The proposition that I am offering is an epistemological one, namely, that our affections can attain something true about their objects; in this case, the objective value of living things. Consider the following story from the preface of Timothy Jackson's book *The Priority of Love* to illustrate the above point. In 1979 Jackson, then a graduate student, was walking along the streets of New Haven when he was awakened from a "rationalist's dream" by the howling of a black Labrador retriever that had just been struck by a passing car. It was apparent to those at the scene that this dog had been fatally injured and would die in just a matter of minutes. Jackson recalls:

> It obviously did not know how to die, because it came up to two of us in front of Timothy Dwight College and seemed to look imploringly into our eyes for some sort of explanation. I suddenly felt the need to beg pardon. Partly inspired by Kant's speculation that animal subjectivity is "less even than a dream," I had just two months before written a graduate seminar paper arguing that animals don't feel morally significant pain. . . . Now, confronted by the Lab's agony, I saw how absurdly callous and callow this opinion was. I did not go through any elaborate process of reasoning; I simply felt for the dying dog so obviously in pain and so needlessly undone. As it slumped down in a patch of grass, I was touched by its misery and viscerally ashamed of myself.[20]

Admittedly, this is an extreme example, and the last thing I would wish to assert is that it demonstrates the necessary conditions for recognizing the objective value of a being. It does represent, however, a life-changing moment for Jackson where his affections relayed to him a certain knowledge that superseded his previous rational conclusions on the matter, and by so doing, rightly ordered a formerly skewed relationship; he was a changed person from that day forward. Hopefully, our relationships can be more enduring and positive than this to adequately speak to and engage our affections. Hopefully, we do not need to lose objects of value to become cognizant of the affections we ought to have for them. I appreciate the moral perceptiveness of Aldo Leopold whose ideas have acted as the framework for so much of environmental ethics today, and whose book *A Sand County Almanac* provides an early guide to human relationship with nature. The naturalist David Wood Krutch identifies Leopold's greatest contribution as recognizing the fact that

public policy, education, and management would amount to nothing in an ethics that was ultimately devoid of love.[21] Though true, I think this is still an understatement of Leopold's contribution to environmental ethics and eco-theology. His understanding of ecology and emphasis on the interdependence of all living things helped to dismantle the barrier of alienation between humans and the created world, thereby making relationship possible; Leopold enabled the ethics of love and friendship to be something more than simply metaphorical with respect to nature.

More recently, eco-feminists have echoed the importance of loving relationships. Dorothy Soelle, author of the book *To Work and To Love*, states that "Self-sufficiency is a concept of the lonely and unrelated person."[22] Though Latter-day Saints are encouraged to achieve a certain measure of material self-sufficiency, it may be said that absolute self-sufficiency is ultimately damnation, or the end of progression, since others are needed for a self-existent being to realize its full potential. Soelle argues further that the need for relationship also extends to God, and that the traditional understanding of His otherness or extreme distinctness is problematic:

> If God is absolutely transcendent, then God is rendered invisible as the Creator for whom there can be no human analogies. There is no interaction between such a creator and us. . . . Absolute transcendence literally means unrelatedness.[23]

Consider this statement in light of Joseph Smith's *King Follett Discourse* where he instructs "It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the character of God, and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another. . . ."[24] Soelle envisions a creator who is capable of being affected, who acts precisely because He longs for such relationships. She refers to a poem by James Weldon Johnson which gives a new perspective to the traditional creation story in Genesis:

> And God stepped out on space,
> And he looked around and said:
> I'm lonely –
> I'll make me a world.[25]

The sort of creation described in these few lines is *ex nihilo* and so God is portrayed as acting for the purpose of creating relationships. In Latter-day Saint theology, God does not create in order to produce loving relationships,

but organizes a creation because He is affected by loving relationships. Referring again to the King Follett Discourse: "God himself, finding he was in the midst of spirits and glory, because he was more intelligent, saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to advance like himself."[26] God, who has power over all other beings, uses it to provide a way for those beings to become more than they are by themselves. Can a better analogy demonstrate the way Latter-day Saints ought to behave with respect to an intrinsically valuable, ensouled creation? John A Widstoe affirms this idea when he declares:

> Soul-lifting is the sequence of events when unselfishness rises in the human heart; when the real brotherhood of men is accepted, when there is a surrender to the divine program! Charity and mercy soon flow from the unselfish man. He looks with forgiving compassion upon the weaknesses of others. He seeks to succor all who are in need. Such service begets love, the impelling principle of divine action."[27]

A few points are worth noting in this statement. The first is simply that God is involved in the unselfish work of soul-lifting, and that includes all souls. Secondly, humans are meant to follow His example of soul-lifting, and when they do, they too become the possessors of love and the perceivers of objective worth.

Hugh Nibley has written in his book *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints* that Adam, according to ancient accounts, was the great friend of the animals when they all inhabited the paradisiacal state of Eden.[28] What was the purpose of the Edenic experience? Latter-day Saints believe that the Fall of Adam and Eve was foreseen by God, and that Eden was a period that anticipated that event. But if this was all, it fails to explain the command to tend and care for the Garden. Is it possible that God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden to serve, to discover the goods of loving relationships and to develop a proper orientation to life? Recently, I heard an interview on the radio with Aryn Kyle who released a novel titled *The God of Animals* about a family horse ranch in Colorado. The interviewer noted that there was an apparent lack of sentimentality in the novel between the ranchers and the horses. The author frankly responded that when you are faced with bills that need to be paid, with continual setbacks and the humble rewards of extremely hard work, you cannot always afford to be sentimental with your animals. Struck with terror at this comment, I realized how idealistic my focus on intrinsic value and the role of the affections seemed when confronted with the realities of existence.

We are not living in Eden where life is leisure and all of our physical needs are provided as a banquet. Adam learned this harsh reality upon leaving Eden, where LDS scripture declares that his first order of business was to offer up the firstlings of his flock.[29] Was the lesson here that Adam could no longer afford the luxury of getting hung-up on his affections for the Garden? No, the lesson was that taught by the Angel who may well have asked "Adam, why are you doing this to your friends?" Uncertain of the meaning of the sacrifice, Adam was told by the angel: "This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father, which is full of grace and truth."[30] This message concerning Christ was rendered poignant precisely because of Adam's great affections for the Garden; he understood to some extent what God must go through in offering up His Son.

The purpose of this work has been to clarify what strong intrinsic value is, how it is supported by the doctrines of the LDS Church, and why friendship and the affections are so crucial to the promotion of intrinsic value and to the practice of environmental stewardship. The obstacles that hinder this practice are colossal and have both ideological and emotional roots. As Aryn Kyle illustrates in her novel, it is a fact of the human condition that we become desensitized, self-interested, and without natural affection when confronted with the less-than-ideal circumstances of life. The Apostle Paul recognized this tendency in the latter days as well, but insisted that as followers of Christ it is our responsibility to do better. Latter-day Saint doctrines provide the framework to re-order distorted relationships with nature caused in part by today's emphasis on high returns. This doctrine, however, is not enough to change our dispositions toward creation. For this, we must follow God's example of service to all life with the hope of restoring our natural affections and rendering us cognizant of objective value.

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NOTES

[1] For further discussion on these issues, refer to Matthew Gowans and Philip Cafaro, "A Latter-day Saint Environmental Ethic," *Environmental Ethics* 25, (Winter 2003): 375-394.

[2] 2 Timothy 3:3.

[3] See John O'Niel, "The Varieties of Intrinsic Value," in H. Geirsson and M. Losonsky, eds., *Beginning Metaphysics* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1998), 106.

[4] Ibid., 106.
[5] Ibid., 114-115.
[6] James Nash, *Loving Nature* (Nashville: Abigdon Press, 1991).
[7] Ibid., 140-1.
[8] James M. Gustafson, *A Sense of the Divine* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1994), 160; Nash, *Loving Nature,* 140-1.
[9] Jay B. McDaniels, *Of Gods and Pelicans* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 21-22.
[10] Process thinkers like Cobb and McDaniel have argued against a common Christian idea of creation *ex nihilo*, or God's creation of the universe from nothing. In their view, life must be self-sufficient and enduring to have genuine value independent of others. If God creates from nothing, then He is by necessity the bestower of value.
[11] Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1969), 352.
[12] Moses 3:9.
[13] James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1984), 442.
[14] Doctrine and Covenants (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 77:2-3.
[15] Ibid., 88:25-26.
[16] John O'Niel, "The Varieties of Intrinsic Value," in H. Geirsson and M. Losonsky, eds., *Beginning Metaphysics* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1998), 117-118.
[17] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica,* II – II, Q. 25, Article 3.
[18] G. K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1974), 32.
[19] Doctrine and Covenants 8:2.
[20] Timothy Jackson, *The Priority of Love* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), xii-xiii.
[21] David W. Krutch, *The Voice of the Desert* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1954), 193-194.
[22] Dorothy Soelle, *To Work and To Love* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 16.
[23] Ibid., 14
[24] *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith,* ed. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1969), 345.
[25] Dorothy Soelle, *To Work and To Love* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 15.
[26] Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1969), 354.
[27] John A. Widstoe, "Foundations of Peace," *Conference Report* (8 October 1939), 100.
[28] Hugh Nibley, *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1994), 9.
[29] Moses 5:5-8.
[30] Moses 5:7.