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Abstract Review of "Monotheism, Mormonism, and the New Testament Witness" (2002), by Paul Owen.

Of Simplicity, Oversimplification, and Monotheism

Barry R. Bickmore

It is often necessary when making a case against a substantially different theological tradition to simplify the subject for the sake of brevity and clarity. Care must be taken, however, not to oversimplify to the extent that the arguments advanced are meaningless in the context of the more complex reality. Unfortunately, in his essay "Monotheism, Mormonism, and the New Testament Witness," Paul Owen falls into the trap of oversimplification. This is not to say that he advances no cogent arguments; in truth, most of the issues Owen oversimplifies have often been similarly treated by Latter-day Saints. Therefore, we can assume that his arguments were made in good faith and treat them with respect. Whatever his motivation, the net effect of Owen's approach is to make Latter-day Saint beliefs seem less plausible than they really are to readers uninformed about the subtleties of Latter-day Saint doctrine.

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,* ed. Francis J. Beckwith, Carl Mosser, and Paul Owen, 271–314. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002. 535 pp., with glossary and indexes. $21.99.

In this review, I point out areas in which Owen has oversimplified Latter-day Saint beliefs, and I also examine issues that divide Latter-day Saints and evangelicals regarding "monotheism." Then I show briefly that "Mormon monotheism" is very similar to that preached by the earliest Christians.

The Unity and Plurality of God

Owen's first self-confessed oversimplification is set out in his introduction, and it in fact governs his entire presentation: "To put it simply, Christians believe that God is one, whereas the Latter-day Saints believe that God is more than one" (p. 272). Aware of the problematic nature of this statement, he adds the following in a footnote:

> I am well aware that the above statement is oversimplified. Christians also believe that the three *persons* of the Trinity share God's eternal divine Being, whereas Mormons acknowledge that God is "one" in the sense of there being one *Godhead* that rules over this earth. Some Mormons believe that God is one in an even stronger ontological sense and deny that there are other Gods beyond the God of this earth. Nevertheless, I think it a safe generalization to say that Christians largely emphasize God's oneness in conversations with Latter-day Saints, whereas Latter-day Saints *tend* to emphasize the doctrine of a plurality of Gods for apologetic purposes. (p. 467 n. 1)[1]

However, in practice, Owen ignores this caveat and crafts his argument on the basis of the assumption that Latter-day Saint the-

1. This illustrates to me the problem of defining one's own position in negative terms. In my experience, evangelicals tend to speak to Latter-day Saints about the divine unity as if we were pagan polytheists, and Latter-day Saints tend to speak to evangelicals as if they were modalists. Sadly, neither party typically does anything to disabuse the other of its false notions. Latter-day Saints *emphasize* the plurality of God and evangelicals *emphasize* unity. However, the fact that people often talk past each other is no excuse for someone who knows better (such as Owen) to perpetuate the situation.

ism is essentially no different than pagan polytheism. "It is my hope that—rather than understanding Christ's divine status within the polytheistic context of a pantheon—members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints may come to embrace Christ as the incarnate revelation of the One God" (p. 314).

The plain fact is that both Latter-day Saint Christians and Christians in the creedal tradition believe God is one *and* more than one. Both parties believe that there is one God composed of more than one person. For example, Owen writes:

> One of the most theologically enlightening allusions to Deuteronomy 6:4 is found in 1 Corinthians 8:4–6: "We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that *there is no God but one*. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords'), yet for us there is but *one God,* the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but *one Lord,* Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live" (emphasis added). What is interesting here is the way the Jewish Shema was reinterpreted by the early Christians in order to include both the Father (one God) and the Son (one Lord). . . .
>
> What this adaptation of Deuteronomy 6:4 shows is that in the early decades of the first century, Jewish Christians were including Jesus within the unique identity of Israel's "One God" without acknowledging any breach of biblical monotheism. (pp. 285–86)

So what? Since Latter-day Saints believe everything in the above statement, why waste the space to make this an issue? If the point concerns which aspect of God should be *emphasized,* then we are wrangling over semantics. The real difference between Latter-day Saints and creedal Christians on this score is *how* more than one "person" can be "one God." They believe that the divine unity is a "oneness of being," while we do not. Since, even in his caveat, Owen

oversimplifies the subject, I will describe three ways in which Latter-day Saints believe that there is only one God.

First, there is only one God because the Father is the supreme monarch of our universe. There is no other God to whom we could switch our allegiance, and there never will be such a being. He is "the Eternal God of all other gods" (D&C 121:32). Elder Boyd K. Packer writes:

> The Father *is* the one true God. This thing is certain: no one will ever ascend above Him; no one will ever replace Him. Nor will anything ever change the relationship that we, His literal offspring, have with Him. He is Elohim, the Father. He is God; of Him there *is* only one. We revere our Father and our God; we *worship* Him.[2]

Second, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are so unified in mind, will, love, and covenant that they can collectively be called "one God" (see 2 Nephi 31:21; D&C 20:28). A powerful unity of spirit, the universal "light of Christ" that is the power of God pervading the universe (D&C 88:7–13), bonds them. Jesus Christ can even be identified by the title "Father" because "I am in the Father, and the Father in me, and the Father and I are one—The Father because he gave me of his fulness, and the Son because I was in the world and made flesh my tabernacle, and dwelt among the sons of men" (D&C 93:3–4). Elder Bruce R. McConkie explained: "Monotheism 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."[3]

Third, even though an innumerable host of beings may be gods and though many more will become such, there is still only one God because all of them are unified in essentially the same way as the

2. Boyd K. Packer, *Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991), 293, emphasis in original.

3. Bruce R. McConkie, "Monotheism," in *Mormon Doctrine,* 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 511.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Therefore, the fact that the Father has a father and that his sons and daughters may be deified has no particular bearing on the question of whether there is one God. Brigham Young said:

> If men are faithful, the time will come when they will possess the power and the knowledge to obtain, organize, bring into existence, and own. "What, of themselves, independent of their Creator?" No. But they and their Creator will always be one, they will always be of one heart and of one mind, working and operating together; for whatsoever the Father doeth so doeth the son, and so they continue throughout all their operations to all eternity.[4]

President Young also said the following: "When will we become entirely independent? Never, though we are as independent in our spheres as the Gods of eternity are in theirs."[5] "Then will be given to us that which we now only seem to own, and we will be forever one with the Father and the Son, and not until then."[6] "Is he one? Yes. Is his trinity one? Yes. Is his organization one? Are the heavens one? Yes."[7] "Gods exist, and we had better strive to be prepared to be one with them."[8]

Orson Pratt echoed this sentiment:

> If, then, the one hundred and forty-four thousand are to have the name of God inscribed on their foreheads, will it be simply a plaything, a something that has no meaning? or will it mean that which the inscriptions specify?—that they are indeed Gods—one with the Father and one with the Son; as the Father and Son are one, and both of them called Gods, so will all His children be one with the Father and the Son, and they

4. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses,* 2:304.
5. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses,* 8:190.
6. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses,* 9:106.
7. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses,* 14:92.
8. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses,* 7:238.

> will be one so far as carrying out the great purposes of Jehovah is concerned. No divisions will be there but a complete oneness; not a oneness in person but a perfect oneness in action in the creation, redemption, and glorification of worlds.[9]

John Taylor said, "We may be influenced and directed from above, being united with the Gods in heaven we may become one in all things upon the earth, and afterwards one in the heavens."[10]

In short, Mormonism includes any number of separate persons within the one God "without acknowledging any breach of biblical monotheism." As Levi Edgar Young wrote, "'Mormonism' holds to the doctrine of God as given in the Old and New Testaments of the Jewish scriptures, namely: the monotheistic conception of the Deity, and the divinity of man."[11] While we believe in the existence of many separate beings who are correctly termed "Gods," in a very real sense they are all one.

The Names of God

Since the 1916 First Presidency statement on "The Father and the Son,"[12] Latter-day Saints have typically separated the name-titles Elohim and Jehovah, using them to refer to the Father and Son respectively. Because this differs markedly from creedal Christian usage, Latter-day Saint scholars and apologists have naturally been interested in the works of scholars outside their own tradition, such as those of Margaret Barker, who argue that the two were distinguished as the High God (El, or Elyon) and his primary agent (Yahweh, or Jehovah) in the original Israelite religion. Barker also argues that Christianity

9. Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses,* 14:243.
10. John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses,* 19:305.
11. Levi Edgar Young, "Mormonism," *Improvement Era,* July 1911, 830.
12. "The Father and the Son: A Doctrinal Exposition by the First Presidency and the Twelve," in *Messages of the First Presidency,* ed. James R. Clark (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1971), 5:23–34 (30 June 1916); also reprinted as "The Father and the Son," *Ensign,* April 2002, 13–18.

sprang from a strain of Judaism that retained this distinction.[13] Owen takes issue with Latter-day Saint use of Barker's work because her reconstruction of Israelite history is based on the premise that later editors reworked much of the Old Testament text to be more "monotheistic"—and this to an extent that might make many Latter-day Saints uncomfortable (pp. 303, 312–13). Elohim and Jehovah seem to be identified with one another in many passages of the present biblical text as exemplified in the extant manuscripts.

Here again, Owen oversimplifies the issue, as have many Latter-day Saints. The fact is that informed Latter-day Saints see Elohim and Jehovah as divine name-titles that are *usually* applied to specific members of the Godhead but can sometimes be applied to any or all of them. In contrast, Doctrine and Covenants 109:4, 34 addresses the Father as Jehovah, but Doctrine and Covenants 110:3–4 has this:

> His eyes were as a flame of fire; the hair of his head was white like the pure snow; his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun; and his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters, even the voice of Jehovah, saying: I am the first and the last; I am he who liveth, I am he who was slain; I am your advocate with the Father.

Joseph Smith also wrote, "Thou eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent Jehovah—God—Thou Eloheim, that sittest, as saith the Psalmist, 'enthroned in heaven,' look down upon Thy servant Joseph at this time; and let faith on the name of Thy Son Jesus Christ . . . be conferred upon him."[14] Obviously, the names Jehovah and Elohim were used by Joseph Smith to denote specific persons in some instances and as generic titles for any member of the Godhead in others. Brigham Young continued this usage, as demonstrated by the following quotations: "It is true that the earth was organized by three

13. See Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster, 1992). See also Kevin Christensen, "A Response to Paul Owen's Comments on Margaret Barker," *FARMS Review of Books* 14/1–2 (2002): 193–221.

14. *History of the Church,* 5:127.

distinct characters, namely, Eloheim, Yahovah, and Michael."[15] "We obey the Lord, Him who is called Jehovah, the Great I AM, I am a man of war, Eloheim, etc."[16] Elder Franklin D. Richards made the following two statements within months of each other. "The Savior said He could call to His help more than twelve legions of angels; more than the Roman hosts; but He knowing the great purposes of Jehovah could go like a lamb to the slaughter."[17] "We learn that our Savior was born of a woman, and He was named Jesus the Christ. His name when He was a spiritual being, during the first half of the existence of the earth, before He was made flesh and blood, was Jehovah."[18]

The use of the name Jehovah as a generic title became much less common after 1916 but can be noted in the following passages. President David O. McKay spoke of "Jehovah and His Son, Jesus Christ."[19] According to Joseph Fielding Smith, "The Father and the Son appeared to [Joseph Smith] and settled the question of the nature of

15. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses,* 1:51. Some might object that this statement refers to President Young's "Adam-God" teachings, so the identity of Jehovah is ambiguous. See Boyd Kirkland, "Elohim and Jehovah in Mormonism and the Bible," *Dialogue* 19/1 (1986): 77–93. I argue that Brigham Young identified Jehovah with Jesus Christ on this basis. First, in the following passage President Young identified Jesus ("the prince of peace") as "I am that I am" (Jehovah) and "the God of Jacob." "I know that we are but a handful of people—Jacob is small, but who can contend with the God of Jacob? He is 'a man of war,' and 'the prince of peace,' 'I am that I am.'" *Journal of Discourses,* 10:357. Second, in Brigham Young's statement it is clear that there were three main players in the creation—Elohim, Jehovah, and Michael. Which one of these was Jesus Christ? I could quote any number of passages from every Latter-day Saint standard work to show that Jesus Christ was the Creator of the world; but so that the reader will be convinced that Brigham Young was aware of this fact, I submit the following: "God chose, elected, or ordained, Jesus Christ, his son, to be the Creator, governor, Saviour, and judge of the world." Brigham Young and Willard Richards, "Election and Reprobation," *Millennial Star* 1/9 (January 1841): 218. Similar statements were made in Young's presence by George Q. Cannon, in *Journal of Discourses,* 11:98, and Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses,* 18:290 and 19:316–17, among others. If Brigham Young did not mean to equate "Yahovah" with Jesus Christ, then he was effectively expelling Jesus from the "executive council on creation," so to speak.

16. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses,* 12:99.

17. Franklin D. Richards, in *Journal of Discourses,* 26:172.

18. Franklin D. Richards, in *Journal of Discourses,* 26:300.

19. David O. McKay, *Church News,* 1 July 1961, 14.

God for all time. . . . It was the true and living God, Jehovah—the God of Israel."[20] President George Albert Smith declared: "We confidently believe that our Father in heaven has spoken in this day and age. . . . We believe that Jehovah has the same feeling towards us, the same influence over us that he had for and over his children who lived in this world in times that are past."[21]

"However," Rodney Turner explains, "it may be that virtually all names, titles, and epithets are shared by the Father and the Son. To the extent that this proves the case, they are indeed, one, for shared honors implies shared activities and attainments."[22] Glenn Pearson and Reid Bankhead write:

> There are many names for Deity. Probably most of them could be used for either the Father or the Son. In the LDS Church we frequently refer to our Heavenly Father by the name of *Elohim* when we want to be sure there is no mistake about the identity of the person about whom we are talking. In the same manner and for the same reasons, we commonly call Jesus *Jehovah*. The use of the word *Elohim* in this manner is arbitrary, and the name *Jehovah* could just as well be applied to the Father as to the Son. However, it is true that the personage who identified himself as Jehovah was usually, if not always, Jesus. But since he was always acting on behalf of the Father, he could have been using a name that applied as well to the Father as to the Son. *Jehovah* is probably the first person, singular, present form of the verb *to be* in the Hebrew language. Most likely it simply means "I AM."[23]

20. Joseph Fielding Smith, "The Faith of Our Fathers as Expressed in Their Worship of the Living God," *Improvement Era,* August 1923, 929.

21. George Albert Smith, "Some Points of 'Peculiarity,'" *Improvement Era,* March 1949, 137.

22. Rodney Turner, "The Doctrine of the Firstborn and Only Begotten," in *The Pearl of Great Price: Revelations from God,* ed. H. Donl Peterson and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1989), 103.

23. Glenn L. Pearson and Reid E. Bankhead, *Building Faith with the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1986), 126–27.

This nuanced description of Latter-day Saint usage of the divine name-titles places the issue in an entirely different light. That is, Latter-day Saints have no problem whatever in reconciling our position to biblical statements that conflate Elohim with Jehovah. On the other hand, we would expect to find instances where these name-titles are separated to designate the Father (Elohim) and the Son (Jehovah). However, to my mind, such instances would be somewhat problematic for creedal Christians, who do not expect the distinction. If nothing else, such usage would be a bit awkward in the context of creedal Christian theology.

One instance of such a separation that has already been mentioned is Paul's reinterpretation of the Shema in 1 Corinthians 8: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord [Jehovah] our God [Elohim] is one Lord [Jehovah]" (Deuteronomy 6:4). "But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him" (1 Corinthians 8:6). ("Lord" is the translation of the Greek *kyrios,* which was the gloss for Jehovah in the Greek Old Testament and Greek New Testament quotations of the Old Testament.)

A second instance is found in the Septuagint (LXX) and Hebrew Dead Sea Scrolls versions of Deuteronomy 32:8–9:

> When the Most High parcelled out the nations, when he dispersed all mankind, he laid down the boundaries of every people according to the number of the sons of God; but the Lord's [Jehovah's] share was his own people, Jacob was his allotted portion. (Deuteronomy 32:8–9 New English Bible)

The Hebrew text (Masoretic text, or MT) substitutes "sons of Israel" for "sons of God," and the Greek LXX substitutes "angels of God." Barker explains:

> This text shows two things: that there was some reason for altering sons of God to sons of Israel, or vice versa (the Qumran reading suggests that the earlier Hebrew had read "sons of God"); and that the sons of God were the patron deities of

> the various nations. Elyon the High God had allocated the nations to the various sons of God; one of these sons was Yahweh to whom Israel had been allocated (Deut. 32:9).[24]

Owen disputes this interpretation of the passage in his critique of the work of Peter Hayman, who agrees with Barker on this issue. It is certainly possible that Jehovah was not separated from the Most High (Elyon) in this passage,[25] but Owen never deals with evidence cited by Barker that her interpretation was a standard early Christian reading of the passage. For instance, consider the following quotation from the early Jewish Christian work, the *(Pseudo)Clementine Recognitions,* a fourth-century text based on a second-century source document.

> For the Most High God, who alone holds the power of all things, has divided all the nations of the earth into seventy-two parts, and over these He hath appointed angels as princes. But to the one among the archangels who is greatest, was committed the government of those who, before all others, received the worship and knowledge of the Most High God. . . . Thus the princes of the several nations are called gods. But Christ is God of princes, who is Judge of all.[26]

24. Barker, *The Great Angel,* 5–6.

25. On the other hand, Owen makes the following admission in a footnote: "Admittedly, Deuteronomy 32:8–9 comes close to a monarchistic/henotheistic outlook, since YHWH is depicted as the national God of Israel alone. However, the affirmation that it is YHWH/the Most High who *delivered the nations over* to these other 'sons of God' pushes in the direction of monotheism, since Israel's God is still ultimately in authority over all the nations" (p. 479 n. 135). This illustrates how Owen juggles terminology to fit his agenda: If the Bible has the Most High ruling over other gods or "sons of God," then this is a manifestation of "monotheism," and he contrasts "monotheism" with "monarchism." However, if the Latter-day Saints believe in a Most High God ruling over other gods or "sons of God," it must be "polytheism." In contrast to Owen, Larry Hurtado calls the religion of first-century Judaism "monarchial monotheism." Larry W. Hurtado, "What Do We Mean by 'First-Century Jewish Monotheism'?" *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* (1993): 348–68.

26. *(Pseudo)Clementine Recognitions* 2.42, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (hereafter *ANF*), ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (1885; reprint, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 8:109.

The same sentiment was also expressed by Eusebius of Caesarea in the fourth century:

> In these words [Deut. 32:8] surely he names first the Most High God the Supreme God of the Universe, and then as Lord His Word. Whom we call Lord in the second degree after the God of the Universe. And their import is that all the nations and the sons of men, here called sons of Adam, were distributed among the invisible guardians of the nations, that is the angels, by the decision of the Most High God, and His secret counsel unknown to us. Whereas to One beyond comparison with them, the Head and King of the Universe, I mean to Christ Himself, as being the Only-begotten Son, was handed over that part of humanity denominated Jacob and Israel, that is to say, the whole division which has vision and piety.[27]

Similarly, Owen never deals with Barker's interpretation of Psalm 91. According to Barker, "the text of Ps. 91.9 does actually say: 'You, O Yahweh, are my refuge, You have made Elyon your dwelling place.'"[28]

What of Owen's assertion that Latter-day Saint apologists should rethink their use of Barker's work because it implies an extremely negative view of the Bible? For instance, Barker hypothesizes that vestiges of early polytheism were removed from the Bible beginning in the reign of Josiah. Owen objects:

> If one wishes to follow Barker, it must be assumed that Josiah's reforms had a *negative* influence on the religion of Judah—which is precisely the opposite of what the Bible states: "Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did—with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his strength, in accordance with all the Law of Moses" (2 Kgs 23:25). Furthermore, if one wishes to maintain with Barker that the Deuteronomistic movement had

27. Eusebius, *The Proof of the Gospel* 4.7, ed. and trans. W. J. Ferrar (New York: Macmillan, 1920), 1:176.

28. Barker, *The Great Angel,* 198–99.

> a negative impact on the religious faith of Israel, then one is compelled to reject the teaching of a large body of biblical literature. Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings, large chunks of Isaiah and Jeremiah, as well as other prophetic books were all written or heavily edited (according to this theory) by the Deuteronomists. These writings all promoted the ideals of Second Temple religion, which Barker contrasts with the religion of the First Temple that emerged in a fresh way with the rise of Christianity. It goes without saying that orthodox Christians will be unwilling to reject such a large portion of the Bible—I suspect many members of the LDS Church would likewise be uncomfortable in doing so. Yet it is inconsistent to cite the conclusions of Barker's study while paying no attention to the arguments and methods used in arriving at those views. (p. 303)

This objection is clearly overstated. Latter-day Saints have always believed that the Bible has been subjected to a certain amount of unauthorized editing, but such a stance has never "compelled" us to throw out entire books that have sustained some changes.[29] It is clear that changes *have* been made. Furthermore, Owen never gives an explanation for why Deuteronomy 32:8–9 was emended by scribes to read "sons of Israel" if it was not being interpreted by some Israelites, as Barker suggests. However, in this case I see no need to suppose that all the passages emphasizing monotheism were not in the original documents, since the distinctively Latter-day Saint scriptures contain strong monotheistic statements as well. A shift in emphasis may have taken place that was entirely appropriate, considering the constant battle of Israelite religion with that of polytheistic neighboring cultures. I say more about this issue later in this review, but for now it is enough to note that the Latter-day Saint usage of the divine

29. Kevin Christensen has recently shown that Barker's view of Old Testament history fits surprisingly well with that of the Book of Mormon. See Kevin Christensen, "Paradigms Regained: A Survey of Margaret Barker's Scholarship and Its Significance for Mormon Studies," *FARMS Occasional Papers* 2 (2001): 1–94; cf. Owen, "Monotheism, Mormonism," 469 nn. 11–12.

name-titles to designate specific members of the Godhead *and* as generic titles for any or all of them is well supported in the Bible and early Christian texts.

Reevaluating the Problem

Acknowledgment of the oversimplifications discussed above narrows the focus of the argument considerably. For instance, it is not cogent to ask *whether* there is one God, but, rather, *how* more than one person can be one God. Also, it has been shown that Latter-day Saints view the Father (as well as the entire Trinity) as unique, at least with respect to our experience. Therefore, it is not relevant to ask *whether* the Bible depicts God as "unique," but, rather, *how* God is unique.

As I noted above, Owen appears to realize that these are indeed the relevant questions, and some of his arguments touch on these points. However, his relevant arguments are significantly weaker than the irrelevant ones. In the sections that follow, I briefly argue that the answers the earliest Christians would have given to these questions are remarkably similar to the answers given by Latter-day Saints.

Jesus as the Angel of the Lord

A number of scholars have shown that the "Angel of the Lord (Yahweh)" figure in the Old Testament was the basis for New Testament Christology. Of this angel, God said, "Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him" (Exodus 23:20–21). This Angel was distinguished from all others by virtue of the fact that he was the bearer of the divine name Yahweh. This is quite significant; as Charles Gieschen notes, "Because the Name of God is synonymous with his divine nature, the angel or being who has his Name should be regarded as a person possessing his full divine authority and power."[30] Similarly, the Epistle to the

30. Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 57.

Hebrews distinguishes Jesus from the angels because he had been given a more excellent *name:* "Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they" (Hebrews 1:4). Jesus prayed to the Father, "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world" (John 17:6). Paul wrote that God had exalted Jesus "far above . . . every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come" (Ephesians 1:21). Similarly, he wrote, "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name" (Philippians 2:9). In John's vision, Jesus "had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself . . . and his name is called The Word of God. . . . And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (Revelation 19:12–13, 16). Similarly, in the writings of Philo of Alexandria (30 B.C.–A.D. 50), "the Logos [Word] is linked with the principal angel of Exod. 23: 20–21 who is said to bear the name of God (e.g. *Quaest. Exod.* 2.13; *De Agr.* 51; *Migr. Abr.* 174)."[31] The following passage is especially telling:

> But if there be any as yet unfit to be called a son of God, let him press to take his place under God's First-born, the Word, who holds the eldership among the angels, an archangel as it were. And many names are his for he is called: the Beginning, the Name of God, His Word, the Man after His Image, and "He that sees", namely, Israel.[32]

(The designation "He that sees" probably refers to Genesis 16:13, which in turn refers specifically to the Angel of the Lord.) A second-century Jewish writer, Ezekiel the Tragedian, also identified "God's Word" with the Angel of the Lord in Exodus 3:2.[33] Finally, it was the Angel of the Lord who led the children of Israel in the wilderness,

31. Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1998), 49.

32. Philo of Alexandria, *De Confusione Linguarum* 146, as cited by Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology,* 109.

33. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology,* 107.

and Paul says that it was Jesus who did this (1 Corinthians 10:4). Much more evidence could be cited,[34] but this should be sufficient to show that the identification of Jesus as the Angel of the Lord in the New Testament stands on very solid ground.

This sort of "angel Christology"[35] was standard fare in early Christianity and appears to stem from the original Jewish Christianity.[36] For instance, the early second-century Jewish Christian pseudepigraphical text *Ascension of Isaiah* has the following description of the Son and Holy Spirit:

> Then the angel who conducted me said to me, "Worship this one"; so I worshiped and praised. And the angel said to me, "This is the Lord of all glory whom you have seen." And while the angel was still speaking, I saw another glorious one, like to him, and the righteous drew near to him, worshiped, and sang praise. . . . And I saw the Lord and the second angel, and they were standing; but the second one whom I saw was on the left of my Lord. And I asked, "Who is this?" and he said to me, "Worship him, for this is the angel of the Holy

34. See especially Barker, *The Great Angel;* Jarl E. Fossum, *The Image of the Invisible God: Essays on the Influence of Jewish Mysticism on Early Christology* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag Freiburg Schweiz, 1995); Hurtado, *One God, One Lord;* Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology*.

35. Owen writes: "It is important to distinguish 'angel Christology,' which literally identifies Christ as an angel . . . , from 'angelomorphic Christology,' which refers to the fact that Christ is sometimes portrayed *visually* in the 'form' of an angel" (p. 481 n. 172). This is an important distinction, but I will make the argument below that all nonmodalist Christologies in the pre-Nicene periods were more subordinationist than modern creedal analogues, and there are a number of indications that even though Jesus was distinguished from the angels in the New Testament, there is no sign of a great, unbridgeable "ontological gap" between angels and God in the earliest stratum of Christian thought.

36. For instance, Origen, *De Principiis* 1.3.4, notes that "the Hebrew" interpreted the two seraphim in Isaiah 6:2–3 as Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Ray Pritz connects this Jewish Christian idea to the sect of the Nazarenes, which, he argues, was descended from the original Jerusalem congregation. Ray A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity: From the End of the New Testament Period until Its Disappearance in the Fourth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 10, 22, 108–10.

> Spirit." . . . So my Lord drew near to me, and the angel of the Spirit, and said, "Behold, now it is granted to you to behold God, and on your account is power given to the angel with you." And I saw how my Lord worshiped, and the *angel of the Holy Spirit,* and how both together praised God.[37]

An early second-century Jewish Christian document, the Shepherd of Hermas, speaks of "the angel of the prophetic Spirit"[38] and Jesus as the "glorious . . . angel" or "most venerable . . . angel."[39] Justin Martyr, a converted philosopher who lived in Rome in the mid-second century, was no Jewish Christian, but Robert M. Grant suggests that in passages like the following, he was influenced by the Jewish Christian writings of Hermas, who lived in the same city.[40] Justin Martyr wrote 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."[41] He also wrote that the Son is "in the second place, and the prophetic Spirit in the third."[42]

A good argument can be made from all this for some unique and essential features of Latter-day Saint Christology. The Angel of the Lord is given the name of God—Jehovah or Yahweh—setting him apart from all angels. This seems to mesh well with Latter-day Saint usage of the divine name-titles, Jesus often being represented as the unique bearer of the name-title Jehovah, which is also ultimately applicable to the Father. Also, the idea that Jesus is an exalted angel is consistent with the Latter-day Saint belief that Gods and angels are gradations of the same species. Further, the designation of Christ as

37. *The Ascension of Isaiah*, in *The Other Bible,* ed. Willis Barnstone (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), 528.

38. Shepherd of Hermas, Commandment 11 (*ANF* 2:28).

39. Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, trans. and ed. John A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 119.

40. See Robert M. Grant, *The Early Christian Doctrine of God* (Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Virginia, 1966), 81.

41. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 56 (*ANF* 1:223).

42. Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 13 (*ANF* 1:167).

an angel seems to imply subordinationism—that is, the doctrine that the Son is subordinate in rank and glory to the Father.

On the other hand, although Owen does not fully develop this line of thought in his essay,[43] the link between Jesus and the Angel of the Lord traditions can also be used to make a fair argument for a creedal Trinitarian interpretation of the New Testament. Owen writes:

> However, a careful analysis of the Angel of the Lord passages reveals that it is quite possible to understand this enigmatic figure as an *earthly appearance* of the one God on specific occasions, rather than as a separate and ontologically subordinate God. In Genesis 16:7–13, the Angel of the Lord who appears to Hagar is specifically identified with Yahweh, not as a second God. . . . The appearance of the Lord to Jacob at Bethel in Genesis 28:13–17 is connected with the figure named the "angel of God" and "the God of Bethel" in 31:11–13. The "man" (i.e. angel) who wrestled with Jacob in Genesis 32:24–28 is identified with the *visible appearance* of God himself in 32:30 (cf. Hos. 12:3–5). Jacob's blessing of Joseph in Genesis 48:15–16 identifies God with "the Angel."
>
> Other preexilic traditions likewise seem to identify the Angel of the Lord with the earthly appearance of the Lord, rather than with a separate and ontologically subordinate God. [Owen then cites Exodus 3:2–7; 23:20–23; Judges 6:11–24; 13:3–22; and commentary by Darrell Hannah.][44] (pp. 279–80)

While it is true that the Angel of the Lord is sometimes conflated with Yahweh himself, this can just as easily be explained within the context of Mormonism, where the Father and the Son are sometimes conflated (see, for example, D&C 93:3–5). That is, if the Son received the name Jehovah from the Father, in recognition of the investiture

43. Owen's essential argument is also used by James Patrick Holding, *The Mormon Defenders: How Latter-day Saint Apologists Misinterpret the Bible* (self-published, 2001), 35–52.

44. Darrell D. Hannah, *Michael and Christ: Michael Traditions and Angel Christology in Early Christianity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 20.

of a fulness of divine power and authority, and if Jesus is the one who nearly always appeared as God to men, it would be only natural to refer to the premortal Jesus as Jehovah and to conflate his words and deeds with those of the Father.

Although Owen does not discuss the possibility, it seems natural to ask whether we could agree that the Angel of the Lord at least represents *a distinct person* within the Trinity. After all, even though the Angel and Jehovah are sometimes indistinguishable in the biblical text, sometimes they are distinguished. For instance, in Exodus 23:20–21, God refers to the Angel in the third person. Similarly, Jesus was equated with the Angel by the early Christians, and creedal Trinitarians affirm that the Father and the Son are *separate persons* within the One Being of God. In this context, Owen's interpretation of the Angel as the "earthly appearance" of God seems to square well with the New Testament identification of Jesus with "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15; cf. Owen, p. 292).

Furthermore, Owen points out that Jesus was linked in a number of New Testament passages with the figures of the Word and Wisdom of God (pp. 290–93). He quotes James Dunn:

> The Wisdom and Word imagery is all of a piece with this—no more distinct beings than the Lord's "arm," no more intermediary beings than God's righteousness and God's glory, but simply vivid personifications, ways of speaking about God in his active involvement with his world and his people.[45]

As has been discussed, such personifications of divine attributes were commonly associated with the more concrete figure of the Angel of the Lord. This sort of background would seem to lend itself to the interpretation that Jesus is somehow part of God's being.

Jarl Fossum and Charles Gieschen appear to promote a similar argument. That is, they connect traditions about Jesus and the Angel of the Lord to traditions about the glory of God, which "could be seen

45. James D. G. Dunn, "Was Christianity a Monotheistic Faith from the Beginning?" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 35 (1982): 320.

as God's hypostasized human form."[46] This sort of usage of the term *glory* may be implied in some Old Testament texts (see, for example, the vision of God in Ezekiel 1:26–28; cf. Exodus 33:18–23). "And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, . . . and upon the likeness of the throne was the likeness as the appearance of a man above upon it" (Ezekiel 1:26). Again, this seems to fit well with New Testament statements that Jesus is "the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15) and that "No man hath seen God [i.e., the Father] at any time" (John 1:18). Furthermore, Philo the Jew and the Christian philosopher Justin Martyr "assert that all the anthropomorphisms in Scripture are to be referred to the Angel of the Lord."[47] Irenaeus of Lyons (ca. A.D. 180) repeated this teaching,[48] and it is interesting to note that both Irenaeus and Justin (or Pseudo-Justin) taught that God created man in his *bodily* image.[49]

Problems remain with this interpretation, however. For instance, in Acts 7:55–56 Stephen sees a vision of *both* "the glory of God" and "the Son of man standing on the right hand of God." This implies that God the Father has a visible human form, and this interpretation fits well with the description of Jesus as "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person" (Hebrews 1:3). In the *Ascension of Isaiah,* Isaiah's spirit leaves his body, and he is taken through the heavens. In the seventh heaven he is shown the Son and Spirit, both described as angels who receive worship, and thereafter he is shown the Father, who is called "the Great Glory."[50]

46. Fossum, *Image of the Invisible God,* 106; cf. 17, 26, 31–34, 95–108; also Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology,* 78–88, 273–76.

47. Fossum, *Image of the Invisible God,* 31 n. 73.

48. See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.7.2–4 (*ANF* 1:470).

49. See Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* 11, in *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation,* ed. Johannes Quasten and J. C. Plumpe (New York: Newman Press, 1946–present), 16:54; Justin Martyr, *On the Resurrection* 7 (*ANF* 1:297). Many scholars deny that Justin is responsible for this work, but the authorship of the work attributed to Irenaeus is undisputed. For Justin, see Walter Delius, "Ps. Justin: 'Über die Auferstehung,'" *Theologia Viatorum* 4 (1952): 181–204; for Irenaeus, see Everett Ferguson, ed., *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (New York: Garland, 1990), 471–73.

50. For a full discussion, see Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology,* 229–44.

How does this square with the New Testament statements that the Father is "invisible" and has never been seen by man? Jewish Christians appeared to believe that God the Father could not be seen by mortal flesh. For instance, in the *Ascension of Isaiah,* the prophet's spirit leaves his body, and even then he could not see "the Great Glory" until "the eyes of [his] spirit were open"; after that brief vision, God was not seen again. In contrast, the Son and Spirit were visible continuously.[51] The text known as *1 Enoch* describes God as "the Great Glory" who sits on his heavenly throne and states that "None of the angels was able to come in and see the face of [God]; . . . and no one of the flesh can see him."[52] Similarly, the Jewish Christian *(Pseudo)Clementine Homilies* gives this explanation:

> For I maintain that the eyes of mortals cannot see the incorporeal form of the Father or Son because it is illumined by exceeding great light. . . . For he who sees *God* cannot live. For the excess of light dissolves the flesh of him who sees; unless by the secret power of God the flesh be changed into the nature of light, so that it can see light.[53]

Incidentally, this seems to be essentially the same explanation given in Latter-day Saint scripture: "And he saw God face to face, and he talked with him, and the glory of God was upon Moses; therefore Moses could endure his presence. . . . [Moses said,] For behold, I could not look upon God, except his glory should come upon me, and I were transfigured before him" (Moses 1:2, 14).

Therefore, while this line of evidence offers some help to creedal Trinitarians, it ultimately breaks down. Jesus' connection with the Word and Wisdom in the New Testament may reflect a simple literary allusion to his role as the means of God's "active involvement with his world and his people." After all, does anyone think Jesus is *really* just a personification of some of God's attributes? On the other

51. *Ascension of Isaiah* 9:36–40, as cited in Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology,* 236.
52. *1 Enoch* 14:20–21, as cited in Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology,* 87.
53. *(Pseudo)Clementine Homilies* 17.16 (*ANF* 8:322–23).

hand, Latter-day Saint interpretation of New Testament Christology appears to be consistent with the evidence. God the Father, an anthropomorphic being, has given the divine name Jehovah to his Son, who is the earthly manifestation of God. Sometimes the Father and Son are conflated in scripture because of their shared Godhead, but this does not imply "oneness of being."

Subordination, Oneness, and Divine Simplicity

The Subordination of Divine Attributes and Agents

In the previous section I suggested that the Angel of the Lord might be interpreted as a separate person within the Trinity since, in some passages, he is presented as distinctly separate from God. However, Owen might feel compelled to insist that the Angel and Word/Wisdom are some sort of "personified attributes" of God. As was mentioned, the description of Jesus as an "angel" seems to imply the sort of subordinationism that Latter-day Saints teach, especially if angels are thought to be beings separate from God. Even if a degree of "personification" is granted, these "personifications" are only ever represented as *partial* manifestations of God. Larry Hurtado, professor of New Testament language, literature, and theology at the University of Edinburgh, writes that "the personification of divine attributes was intended to focus attention on particular aspects of God's nature and (e.g., in Philo) occasionally to magnify God by emphasizing that he is greater than any of his works indicate."[54] Equating Jesus with these "personified attributes" would seem to imply that he is less than "fully God."

The status of the personified attributes is a hotly debated point among scholars, some insisting that they were mere literary metaphors and others that the personifications were thought to have independent reality.[55] Hurtado has been an energetic defender of the

54. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 49.

55. A good discussion of the debate can be found in Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology,* 36–45.

view that personified attributes were mere poetic metaphors in the Jewish literature.[56] However, he also points out that the personified divine attributes were described in terms identical to those used to describe principal angels or exalted human patriarchs.[57] These figures were always described as subordinate to God but were distinguished from other heavenly and earthly beings as "bearing more fully . . . the properties associated with divinity. Moreover, the figures emphasized are each described as representing God in a unique capacity and stand in a role second only to God himself, thus being distinct from all the other servants and agents of God."[58] However, none of these figures ever gained universal recognition in Jewish circles as second only to God[59]—a fact which led Christians and some Jews, such as Philo, to combine a number of them (the Angel of the Lord, Michael, the Angel Israel, the Name, the Word, Wisdom, etc.) into one intermediary. It appears, therefore, that the New Testament authors used this sort of imagery not to describe the Father and Son as sharing the same being, but to assert Jesus Christ's position as the principal divine being next to the Father.

Subordinationism in Early Christianity

Owen attempts to sidestep the issue of subordinationism by granting the subordination of the Son and Spirit in a very limited sense:

> It should be kept in mind that orthodox Trinitarianism has always been careful to maintain a *functional* subordination of the Son and the Spirit *to the Father*. The Son and the Spirit are included within God's own identity precisely *as* the Son and Spirit *of God*. The Son is God because he is all that the Father is (not the other way around). The Spirit is God because in him the presence of the Father and the Son

56. See Hurtado, *One God, One Lord*, 41–69.
57. Ibid., 17–39.
58. Ibid., 18.
59. Ibid., 19.

> is known within the Christian community. The Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Son, and he proceeds *from them* (not the other way around). The divine nature that the Son and the Spirit possess is precisely the divine nature of the Father—he remains the reference point. (p. 295)

It is difficult to square Owen's explanation with Christian doctrinal history. The Anglican historian Richard P. C. Hansen observes: "Indeed, until Athanasius began writing, 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."[60] And he was not talking just about "functional" subordination. I have already noted subordinationist language in several early Jewish Christian texts and the writings of Justin Martyr, but everywhere we look (aside from modalism) in pre-Nicene Christianity, we find subordinationist Christologies of various sorts.

After all, Jesus said, "My Father is greater than I" (John 14:28), and he asserted that only the Father knows the hour of Christ's second coming (Matthew 24:36). Paul wrote that the Father is "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 15:6 New English Bible) and that *after* the resurrection Jesus will "be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28; see 15:24–27). Hippolytus of Rome wrote that the Father is "the Lord and God and Ruler of all, and even of Christ Himself."[61] Irenaeus referred to John 14:28 and insisted that the Father really does surpass the Son in knowledge.[62] He also wrote that "the Father, is the only God and Lord, who alone is God and ruler of all."[63] Clement of Alexandria taught that while the Father cannot be known, the Son

60. Richard Hansen, "The Achievement of Orthodoxy in the Fourth Century A.D.," in *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry Chadwick,* ed. Rowan Williams (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 153.

61. Hippolytus, *Scholia on Daniel* 7.13 (*ANF* 5:189).

62. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.28.8 (*ANF* 1:402). The same point is made by Peter in *(Pseudo)Clementine Recognitions* 10.14 (*ANF* 8:196).

63. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.9.1 (*ANF* 1:422). Christopher Stead points out that Irenaeus may have considered the Son and Spirit to be coequal, in harmony with his de-

is the object of knowledge.[64] Athenagoras spoke of the "diversity in rank" within the Godhead.[65] Tertullian claimed that there was a time when the Son did not exist with God[66] and that "the Father is the entire [divine] substance, but the Son is a derivation and portion of the whole."[67] Origen labeled Jesus as a "second God."[68] Novatian taught that the Holy Spirit is "less than Christ."[69] Eusebius of Caesarea called Jesus a "secondary Being."[70] By the time of the Council of Nicea (A.D. 325), subordinationism was still the conservative stance. J. N. D. Kelly describes the most numerous group at the council as "the great conservative 'middle party,'" whose doctrine was that there were three divine persons, "separate in rank and glory but united in harmony of will."[71]

If the original Christian doctrine really was that there are three truly divine persons "separate in rank and glory but united in harmony of will," this is a stunning vindication of the Latter-day Saint definition of the divine unity. Certainly, many of the writings referred to above express philosophical definitions of God that are foreign to Mormonism, but we can point to "anthropomorphite" Jewish Christians in the early centuries as evidence that the original doctrine of deity was both anthropomorphic and subordinationist.[72] Can mainstream Trinitarians do the same? Where is the evidence that

scription of the Son and Spirit as "the two hands of God," "but his image hardly suggests the later view that *all three* Persons are coequal." Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 157, emphasis in original.

64. See Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 4.25 (*ANF* 2:438).

65. Athenagoras, *Legatio* 10.5, in *The Emergence of Christian Theology,* ed. Eric F. Osborn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 175.

66. See Tertullian, *Against Hermogenes* 3 (*ANF* 3:478).

67. Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 9 (*ANF* 3:603–4).

68. Origen, *Against Celsus* 5.39 (*ANF* 4:561).

69. Novatian, *Concerning the Trinity* 16 (*ANF* 5:625).

70. Eusebius, *The Proof of the Gospel* 1.5 (Ferrar trans., 1:26); cf. Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 7.15, trans. Edwin H. Gifford (Oxford: Clarendon, 1903), 351.

71. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines,* rev. ed. (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1978), 247–48.

72. David L. Paulsen, "Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity: Origen and Augustine as Reluctant Witnesses," *Harvard Theological Review* 83 (1990): 111–12; Carl W. Griffin

anyone in the first three centuries believed in three coequal persons in one being? Perhaps this concept was unknowingly embedded in scripture by the first Christians, only to be extracted by later generations. However, assuming that the Holy Spirit had anything to do with revealing the new interpretation, it seems difficult to fathom how this would not constitute a new revelation, such as the New Testament reinterpretation of the Old.[73]

Divine Simplicity and the Influence of Greek Philosophy

Owen does not deny that at least some of the early Christians and Philo were subordinationists (with respect to Christology and Philo's *Logos* doctrine), but he attributes this to the corrupting influence of Middle Platonist philosophy.

> I would not deny that Philo's Middle Platonic views—which presumed God could have no direct contact with the material world—posed certain problems for his monotheistic outlook. Philo described the Logos as if it existed on a level *in between* Creator and creation. . . . Nevertheless, because the Logos never attained an independent identity in Philo's thought (remaining an emanation from God's own being), his commitment to Jewish principles kept him within the bounds of monotheism. Middle Platonic assumptions caused similar problems for early Christian apologists such as Justin

and David L. Paulsen, "Augustine and the Corporeality of God," *Harvard Theological Review* 95 (2002): 97–118.

73. See Owen Chadwick, *From Bossuet to Newman: The Idea of Doctrinal Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 195. This point touches on the fascinating subject of "doctrinal development." For good summary discussions of the issue from Catholic and Protestant perspectives, see Aidan Nichols, *From Newman to Congar: The Idea of Doctrinal Development from the Victorians to the Second Vatican Council* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1990); Peter Toon, *The Development of Doctrine in the Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1979). For a preliminary foray into the subject from a Latter-day Saint point of view, see Barry R. Bickmore, "Doctrinal Trends in Early Christianity and the Strength of the Mormon Position," found at FAIR Papers, www.fairlds.org/apol/ai180.html, as recently as 17 March 2003.

> Martyr and Origen, whose understanding of the Son's identity was similar to Philo's Logos. The tensions remained unresolved until the Nicene fathers clearly identified the Son as a distinguishable relation within God's own substance rather than an emanation from God (so Justin, Origen), or worse, a creature (so Arius). Hence, Nicene theology marked a decisive break with all Platonic and subordinationist views that presumed that the true God could have no direct contact with the physical world. (p. 481 n. 169)

I agree with Owen that the Middle Platonist views dominating Christian theology in the second and third centuries caused many Christians to take their subordinationism too far. For instance, Origen wrote, "We say 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."[74] In contrast, Jesus was presented as *fully God* in the New Testament (Philippians 2:6). However, it does not follow that all forms of subordinationist Christology were corrupted: I have already pointed out Jewish Christian documents—such as the writings of the Shepherd of Hermas, the *Ascension of Isaiah*, and the *(Pseudo)Clementine Recognitions*—which all present Jesus as the principal angelic helper to God but show no trace of significant Middle Platonist influence. Can Owen point out Jewish Christian traditions that were explicitly not subordinationist? Knowing of none, I conclude that Middle Platonism only influenced Christians to take their subordinationist views to extremes.

Owen does not, however, deny that Greek philosophy had some role in shaping "orthodox" Christian theology. Carl Mosser and Owen quote Cambridge scholar Christopher Stead as saying that he resists the charge that "the main structure of Christian orthodoxy was argued

74. Origen, *Commentary on John* 8.25, in *The Early Christian Fathers,* ed. and trans. Henry Bettenson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 233.

out in a continuous tradition with the aid of philosophical techniques."[75] However, Stead contends that the doctrines of God, the Trinity, the incarnation, and "perhaps . . . that of the Creation" are "the product of Christian reflection upon the Scriptures." He goes on: "It is faith that gives the Christian imagination the power of advancing new perspectives within a continuous tradition of common devotion."[76]

What Mosser and Owen do not let on is that a large portion of Stead's book is devoted to showing that when Christianity moved out into the larger hellenized world, there was a shift from a Hebrew concept of God, which was specifically anthropomorphic, to a Greek philosophical concept.[77] "The Hebrews . . . pictured the God whom

75. Carl Mosser and Paul Owen, review of *How Wide the Divide?* by Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *FARMS Review of Books* 11/2 (1999): 1–102; see 95.

76. Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity,* 89–90.

77. This is *the* key concept that Latter-day Saint scholars and apologists have pointed to as the most significant corruption due to hellenization. Mosser and Owen, review of *How Wide the Divide?* 82–102, seem to want to saddle Latter-day Saints with the claim that *everything* to do with Greek philosophy must have been bad, which is simply not the case. However, Mosser and Owen's critique might have some validity if it were true that "the very places in which Latter-day Saint scholars find parallels with Mormonism among certain segments of ancient Christianity are *exactly* where some variety of *Platonism* or some other philosophical school has had the most influence" (p. 89). It has already been pointed out that anthropomorphism was found among Jewish Christians; in fact, the Christian Platonists Origen and Justin both ascribed this belief to the Jews in general (Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 3.1; Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 114, in *ANF* 1:256). Origen believed in the premortal existence of souls but appealed to a Jewish text to make his case (*Commentary on John* 2.25, in *ANF* 9:341), and the Jewish Christian *(Pseudo)Clementine Recognitions* (1.28, in *ANF* 8:85) does assert this doctrine. Mosser and Owen point out that Adolph von Harnack thought deification was a Hellenistic corruption (p. 90), but, as will be shown below, this doctrine was taught most explicitly in some forms of Judaism and in the New Testament. Jesuit scholar George Joyce wrote that the early doctrine of deification was regarded "as a point beyond dispute, as one of those fundamentals which no one who calls himself a Christian dreams of denying." George H. Joyce, *The Catholic Doctrine of Grace* (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1920), 36. Another Jesuit scholar, Henri Rondet, wrote that deification was a doctrine common to both the orthodox and heterodox. Henri Rondet, *The Grace of Christ: A Brief History of the Theology of Grace,* trans. Tad W. Guzie (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1967), 80. Mosser and Owen, noting that parallels to Latter-day Saint doctrine and practice have been found in gnostic texts, characterize Gnosticism as "Platonism on steroids" (p. 89). However, this ignores recent work showing the deep dependence of gnostic systems on Jewish apocalyptic. As Guy Stroumsa states,

they worshipped as having a body and mind like our own, though transcending humanity in the splendour of his appearance, in his power, his wisdom, and the constancy of his care for his creatures."[78] "By saying that God is spiritual [cf. John 4:24], we do not mean that he has no body . . . but rather that he is the source of a mysterious life-giving power and energy that animates the human body, and himself possesses this energy in the fullest measure."[79] "In a Palestinian milieu it was still possible to picture the heavenly Father in human form and to see the contrast between heaven and earth as one of light and glory against relative darkness and indignity."[80]

> The Old Testament writers sometimes speak of God as unchanging. . . . In Christian writers influenced by Greek philosophy this doctrine is developed in an absolute metaphysical sense. Hebrew writers are more concrete, and their thinking includes two main points: (1) God has the dignity appropriate to old age, but without its disabilities . . . ; and (2) God is faithful to his covenant promises, even though men break theirs.[81]

"One could even say that Gnosticism is Jewish-Christianity run wild." Guy G. Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom: Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 106. It seems that nearly all the parallels between Latter-day Saint doctrine and practice and those found in early Christian circles can be traced back to Jewish and Jewish Christian influence. This fact is solid historical evidence for Joseph Smith's claim of a restoration of primitive Christianity. See Barry R. Bickmore, "Mormonism in the Early Jewish Christian Milieu," in *Proceedings of the First Annual Mormon Apologetics Symposium* (Ben Lomond, Calif.: Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research [FAIR], 1999), 5–32.

78. Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity,* 120.

79. Ibid., 98.

80. Ibid., 188.

81. Ibid., 102. Stead uses the example of Revelation 1:4: "'From Him who Is and who Was and who Is to Come' expresses God's perpetuity *within* and throughout all ages." However, he points out that when Christianity became hellenized, "this doctrine came to be developed in an absolute sense which goes well beyond anything that we find in the Bible" (p. 128).

Therefore, when Stead writes that "orthodox" doctrine is part of a "continuous tradition," he is making a value judgment—that is, he is implying that Hebrew anthropomorphism was not an "essential" doctrine.

The truth is that the mixing of Greek philosophical and Jewish Christian concepts of God catered both to extreme forms of subordinationism and to the Nicene doctrine of three coequal persons in one being. The reason for this is that the God of the philosophers was an absolutely unique and simple being—simple meaning "without parts," as in the Westminster Confession of Faith. While the Bible does present God as unique in some ways (though not in such an extreme fashion as creedal Trinitarians would like), it nowhere attests any doctrine of divine simplicity. For example, Stead gives evidence that Clement of Alexandria's and Novatian's doctrine that God is "simple and not compounded, uniform and wholly alike in himself, being wholly mind and wholly spirit" derives from the Greek philosopher Xenophanes.[82] The Middle Platonist philosopher Numenius wrote that God "is simple and unchangeable, and in the same idea, and neither willingly departs from its sameness, nor is compelled by any other to depart."[83] If God is absolutely unique and "simple," then no other beings can be divine in the same sense. Thus the early Christian apologists could speak of Jesus as some sort of emanation from God but not on a par with the one God. Nicene theologians, concerned to preserve the full divinity of Christ, asserted three coequal persons united in one being in such a way that the divine substance is not divided.

This solution is considered a great mystery, beyond human reason. In fact, it is logically incoherent. Latter-day Saints and others have often erroneously charged creedal Trinitarians with logical inconsistency for believing in a tripersonal being. However, the fact that this goes beyond our experience does not mean that there might not be whole planets crawling with tripersonal beings somewhere in

82. Christopher Stead, *Divine Substance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 187–88, quoting Irenaeus.

83. Numenius, quoted by Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 11.10 (Gifford trans., 566).

the universe. How should we know? The logical inconsistency of the Trinity stems from the dogma of divine simplicity. If, by definition, there can be no divisions within God, how can we consistently say that there are three *distinct* persons within God? No matter how you slice it, some *division* must result. "Orthodox" statements that there can be *separate* or *distinct* persons without *dividing* God in any way are simply theological special pleading.

Subordinationism and Monotheism

Finally we have hit upon the real reason creedal Trinitarians balk at subordinationism. For them, there cannot be more than one being who is truly God, and subordinationism would so clearly provide an instance of *division* within the divine substance that even they could not deny the logical incoherence of their doctrine. On the other hand, Latter-day Saints, along with the biblical writers, do not assert the uniqueness of God in such extreme terms, and they deny any doctrine of divine simplicity. In this framework, there can be any number of truly divine beings who are one with, and subordinate to, God the Father. God can be spoken of as an absolute monarch or a corporate entity.

Yet the Latter-day Saint (and original Christian) doctrine of the divine unity is a legitimate expression of monotheism. Hurtado writes:

> Jews were quite willing to imagine beings who bear the divine name within them and can be referred to by one or more of God's titles (e.g., Yahoel or Melchizedek as *elohim* or, later, Metatron as *yahweh ha-katon*), beings so endowed with divine attributes as to be difficult to distinguish them descriptively from God, beings who are very direct personal extensions of God's powers and sovereignty. About this, there is clear evidence. This clothing of servants of God with God's attributes and even his name will seem "theologically very confusing" if we go looking for a "strict monotheism" of relatively modern distinctions of "ontological status" between God and these figures, and expect such distinctions to be

> expressed in terms of "attributes and functions." By such definitions of the term, Greco-Roman Jews seem to have been quite ready to accommodate various divine beings.[84]
>
> Definitions of monotheism must be formed on the basis of the beliefs and practices of those who describe themselves in monotheistic terms. This means that there will likely be varieties within and among monotheistic traditions and that it is inappropriate for historical purposes to impose one definition or to use one definition as a standard of "strict" or "pure" monotheism in a facile manner.[85]

Creatio ex Nihilo

The acceptance by Latter-day Saints of the anthropomorphic God of the Bible requires us to reject the Greek notion of the *absolute* uniqueness of the one God. That God is in some sense unique and that there is a "Creator/creature distinction" are facts taken for granted by Latter-day Saints, but to us this does not imply some unbridgeable "ontological gap." In support of this interpretation, Latter-day Saints have often pointed to the work of a number of scholars who assert that the doctrine of creation from nothing *(creatio ex nihilo)* was a postbiblical invention. Owen critiques the work of one such scholar, Peter Hayman, but admits, "Hayman correctly notes that God's unique status is compromised if matter is eternal with him" (p. 296). This subject has been more than adequately covered in Blake Ostler's review of Paul Copan and William Lane Craig's chapter in *The New Mormon Challenge,*[86] but I will briefly comment on

84. Hurtado, "First-Century Jewish Monotheism," 364.

85. Ibid., 367.

86. See Blake Ostler, review of "Craftsman or Creator? An Examination of the Mormon Doctrine of Creation and a Defense of *Creatio ex nihilo*," by Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, available online at www.fairlds.org/apol/TNMC/ as recently as 17 March 2003.

Owen's attack on Hayman's scholarship in this area and the general state of the evidence.

Owen's main objections relevant to this discussion relate to Hayman's use of the rabbinic text *Genesis Rabbah*.[87] Owen complains:

> Unfortunately, Genesis Rabbah is cited out of context in the attempt to establish his point. Hayman cites the following statement from Genesis Rabbah 1.5 on Genesis 1:1: "R. Huna said, in the name of Bar Qappara: 'If it were not written explicitly in Scripture, it would not be possible to say it: *God created the heaven and the earth.* From what? From *the earth was chaos [tohu],* etc.'" What Hayman leaves unquoted is the immediately previous sentence, which, in the Soncino edition, reads: "Thus, whoever comes to say that this world was created out of tohu and bohu and darkness, does he not indeed impair [God's glory]!" The translator notes: "Here, however, they *[tohu and bohu]* are regarded, together with darkness, as forms of matter which according to some who deny *creatio ex nihilo* was God's raw material in the creation of the world. *The object of the Midrash here is to refute that view*." Hayman also ignores Genesis Rabbah 1.9 on Genesis 1:1, wherein "a certain philosopher" is told in no uncertain terms by R. Gamaliel that God himself created all the materials from which the world was made, rather than merely being a great artist who was assisted by good materials. (p. 296, Owen's emphasis)

To evaluate Owen's first criticism, let us paste together the two parts of *Genesis Rabbah* 1:5 cited above:

> "Thus, whoever comes to say that this world was created out of tohu and bohu and darkness, does he not indeed impair

87. Owen also argues against examples given by Hayman from the Kabbalah, but these texts are quite late, so I will restrict my discussion to earlier texts more relevant to the issue dividing Latter-day Saints and creedal Christians.

> [God's glory]!" "R. Huna said, in the name of Bar Qappara: 'If it were not written explicitly in Scripture, it would not be possible to say it: *God created the heaven and the earth.* From what? From *the earth was chaos* [*tohu*], etc.'"

It seems clear (to me, at least) that it is Owen, not Hayman, who has misread this passage. The idea expressed is that the assertion that God created the world from preexisting material would seem to impair God's glory, so if the scripture did not *explicitly teach this,* it would not be possible to say it. Since the Soncino edition of the Midrash was published in 1939, before most of the scholarly work on the origin of the *ex nihilo* doctrine had been produced, it seems natural that the translator would try to spin the meaning of this passage to fit the then-current party line.

In addition, Owen's charge that Hayman "ignores" *Genesis Rabbah* 1:9 is patently false. Hayman writes:

> Nearly all recent studies on the origin of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* have come to the conclusion that this doctrine is not native to Judaism, is nowhere attested in the Hebrew Bible, and probably arose in Christianity in the second century C.E. in the course of its fierce battle with Gnosticism. The one scholar who continues to maintain that the doctrine is native to Judaism, namely Jonathan Goldstein, thinks that it first appears at the end of the first century C.E., but has recently conceded the weakness of his position in the course of debate with David Winston.[88]

It turns out that the discussion between Goldstein and Winston centers on the very passage from *Genesis Rabbah* that Owen is so concerned about.[89] Briefly, Winston shows that the particular verb used by the

88. Peter Hayman, "Monotheism—A Misused Word in Jewish Studies?" *Journal of Jewish Studies* 42 (1991): 1–15.

89. Jonathan Goldstein, "The Origins of the Doctrine of Creation ex Nihilo," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 35 (1984): 127–35; Jonathan Goldstein, "Creation ex Nihilo: Recantations

philosopher implied that God had been "actively assisted" by preexistent material in the creation, and Rabbi Gamaliel was responding to that idea, not asserting any strict notion of *creatio ex nihilo*.

Owen's problem on this score appears to derive from his heavy reliance on the work of Paul Copan.[90] Copan's essay in *The New Mormon Challenge* is essentially a repackaging of a previous paper published in *Trinity Journal*.[91] I will offer only one point of criticism regarding Copan's journal article.

The *Trinity Journal* article is billed as "an examination of Gerhard May's proposal," referring to May's classic book *Creatio ex Nihilo.*[92] However, Copan persistently refuses to deal with the main line of evidence that May and others have presented. May has convincingly shown that where early texts say that God created out of "nothing" or "non-being," or some similar translation, they were using a common ancient idiom to say that "something new, something that was not there before, comes into being; whether this something new comes through a change in something that was already there, or whether it is something absolutely new, is beside the question."[93] For instance, the Greek writer Xenophon wrote that parents "bring forth their children out of non-being."[94] Philo of Alexandria wrote that Moses and Plato were in agreement in accepting a preexistent material, but also that God brings things "out of nothing into being" or "out of non-being."[95] Similarly, even today somebody might ask, "What's that

and Restatements," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 38 (1987): 187–94; David Winston, "Creation ex Nihilo Revisited: A Reply to Jonathan Goldstein," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 37 (1986): 88–91.

90. Owen recommends "the contribution of Paul Copan and William Lane Craig in this volume for a rigorous defense of the biblical and orthodox doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*" (p. 471 n. 26).

91. Paul Copan, "Is *Creatio ex Nihilo* a Post-Biblical Invention? An Examination of Gerhard May's Proposal," *Trinity Journal,* n.s., 17 (1996): 77–93.

92. Gerhard May, *Creatio ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of 'Creation out of Nothing' in Early Christian Thought*, trans. A. S. Worrall (Edinburgh: Clark, 1994); originally published as *Schöpfung aus dem Nichts* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1978).

93. May, *Creatio ex Nihilo,* 8.

94. Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.2.3, quoted in May, *Creatio ex Nihilo,* 8.

95. See discussion of Philo in May, *Creatio ex Nihilo,* 9–22.

over there?" The answer given might very well be, "Oh, nothing," but obviously this would not imply *actual nothingness.* It would simply mean that the object in question is nothing of *consequence.* Therefore, in view of this common usage and the many explicit statements by ancient authors regarding the preexistent matter, we must rule out a belief in *creatio ex nihilo* unless it is explicitly stated otherwise. Such an explicit statement would distinguish itself from the usage common in both the ancient and the modern world.

We do not find viable candidates for such explicit statements anywhere until the mid-second century with the gnostic teacher Basilides and, later, the Christian apologists Tatian and Theophilus of Antioch.[96] Even as late as the turn of the third century, Tertullian had to take the more ancient usage into account when arguing for the new doctrine. "And even if they were made out of some (previous) matter, as some will have it, they are even thus out of nothing, because they *were* not what they *are*."[97]

Copan complains that in *The New Mormon Challenge* "May—along with Mormon scholars in general—does little to defend" the claim that "the text of the Bible does not demand belief in creation *ex nihilo*." He goes on: "While he makes passing reference to certain biblical passages that seem to hint at the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo,* he does not seriously interact with them, seeming to pass them off lightly" (p. 109). But as has been discussed, May simply points out that the biblical texts that seem to support this doctrine cannot be distinguished from contemporary statements that demonstrably affirm no such thing. Copan never discusses the merits of May's argument;[98] rather he indulges in a spate of proof texting, appeals to out-

96. See Frances Young, "'Creatio ex Nihilo': A Context for the Emergence of the Christian Doctrine of Creation," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 44 (1991): 141–42.

97. Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 2.5 (*ANF* 3:301).

98. I could also mention that Copan nowhere deals with May's argument as it is extended by others—for example, by David Winston. While Copan *specifically* claims to respond to Gerhard May, he completely ignores May's primary argument and wrongly accuses May of the same thing he does himself.

dated opinions of scholars, and dogmatic appeals to one particular form of the Big Bang theory.

The bottom line, for the moment, is that the weight of scholarly opinion is on the Latter-day Saint side. There is simply no reason to believe that the Bible requires belief in *creatio ex nihilo* and thus to believe that the Bible requires an unbridgeable ontological gap between Creator and creature.

Deification

The Shrinking "Ontological Gap"

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ and creedal Christians affirm together that Jesus Christ is true God and true man. However, since Latter-day Saints reject the notion of *creatio ex nihilo,* we can also consistently assert that Jesus is subordinate in rank and glory to the Father and was created by the Father.

In support of this idea, I cite early Christian texts that seem to make no distinction between the ontology of Jesus and the angels. For example, Justin made the following controversial statement: "We reverence and worship Him and the Son who came forth from Him and taught us these things, and the host of other good angels who are about Him and are made quite like Him, and the Prophetic Spirit."[99] While Father William Jurgens admits that Justin here "apparently [made] insufficient distinction between Christ and the created angels," he asserts that there "are theological difficulties in the above passage, no doubt. But we wonder if those who make a great deal of these difficulties do not demand of Justin a theological sophistication which a man of his time and background could not rightly be expected to have."[100] Robert M. Grant writes: "This passage presents us with considerable difficulties. The word 'other,' used in relation to

99. Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 6, in William A. Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1970), 1:51.

100. Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers,* 56 n. 1.

the angels, suggests that Jesus himself is an angel."[101] A third-century text called the *Threefold Fruit of the Christian Life* describes Jesus as the angel Yahweh of Hosts: "When the Lord created the angels from the fire he decided to make one of them his son, he whom Isaiah called the Lord [Yahweh] of Hosts."[102] Methodius of Olympus made a similar statement: "And this was Christ, a man filled with the pure and perfect Godhead, and God received into man. For it was most suitable that the oldest of the Aeons and the first of the Archangels, when about to hold communion with men, should dwell in the oldest and the first of men, even Adam."[103]

This was no mere Middle Platonic aberration. Hurtado notes that, while there was a definite Creator/creature distinction between God and all others in the Judaism of the period, the difference between God and other heavenly beings was thought to be in degree. "This commitment to the one God of Israel accommodated a large retinue of heavenly beings distinguished from God more in degree than kind as to their attributes, some of these beings portrayed as in fact sharing quite directly in God's powers and even his name."[104]

This leads into questions about the difference between Jesus' ontology and that of human beings. After all, Jesus is supposed to be "true man" as well as "true God." Creedal Christians since Origen have usually explained that Jesus possessed a human body and spirit in addition to "the Word" (meaning his divine nature).[105] However, Kelly writes that the original type of Christology seems to have been a "Spirit Christology," where the Logos, a divine spirit, took on a body of flesh.[106] In short, "the Word was made flesh" (John 1:14), or as Hippolytus puts

101. Grant, *The Early Christian Doctrine of God,* 81.

102. *Threefold Fruit of the Christian Life* 216–19, quoted in Barker, *The Great Angel,* 203.

103. Methodius, *The Banquet of the Ten Virgins* 3.4 (*ANF* 6:318).

104. Hurtado, "First-Century Jewish Monotheism," 367.

105. Origen, *Against Celsus* 2.9 (*ANF* 4:434). Though perhaps Tertullian preceded him; cf. Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 11 (*ANF* 3:532). On the other hand, other passages make Tertullian's position somewhat ambiguous. See Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 27 (*ANF* 3:624).

106. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines,* 142–45.

it, the "Logos we know to have received a body from a virgin."[107] The *Epistle of Barnabas* states, "He also Himself was to offer in sacrifice for our sins the vessel of the Spirit."[108] Ignatius of Antioch (ca. A.D. 110) wrote: "God the Word did dwell in a human body, being within it as the Word, even as the soul also is in the body."[109] Given that the Word dwelt in a human body in place of a normal human spirit, how could Jesus be truly human if his divine nature is separated from humanity by some unbridgeable ontological gap? Thus, the sort of Christology taught in the earliest Christian circles is fundamentally incompatible with the modern creedal concept of God but is quite consistent with the Latter-day Saint concept of God.

The idea that men are essentially the same kind of being as God is found in another Jewish Christian document, the *(Pseudo)Clementine Homilies*. "Learn this also: 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, but they are not gods."[110] It should be noted that before the fourth century, phrases such as "of one substance" or "of the same substance" implied a generic unity of species, meaning something like "made of the same kind of stuff."[111]

God's Name, God's Throne

The shrinking ontological gap between God and man discussed above leads into the question of human deification. The Jewish literature from around the time of the earliest Christians has a number of references to deified patriarchs. They were often represented as having received the name of God (Yahweh) and sometimes were able to sit on

107. Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 10.29 (*ANF* 5:152); cf. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.9.3 (*ANF* 1:423).

108. *Epistle of Barnabas* 7 (*ANF* 1:141).

109. Ignatius, *Philadelphians* 6 (*ANF* 1:83).

110. Peter, in *(Pseudo)Clementine Homilies* 16 (*ANF* 8:316).

111. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines,* 234–35; Stead, *Divine Substance,* 158–59; Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity,* 160–72.

God's throne or another throne nearby. For example, Gieschen cites the example of Moses sitting on God's throne in the writings of Ezekiel the Tragedian.[112] The ancient writing known as *3 Enoch* contains an account of the exaltation of Enoch into Metatron, who is called "The Lesser YHWH," for, "as it is written, 'My name is in him.'"[113]

Owen criticizes Hayman's use of the *3 Enoch* text to show that God was not considered to be metaphysically unique.

> I would have to agree that Enoch's transformation in this document is unusual (3 En. 4:1–5; cf. 2 En. 22), and possibly *borders* on a break with monotheism. Deification is probably not too strong a term for describing the transformation of a man into "the Lesser YHWH" (3 En. 12:5) and "Prince of the Divine Presence" (12:1). . . .
>
> However, even within the document itself, there are attempts to qualify Metatron's divine status in such a way as to protect the unique identity of the One God: (1) Enoch is seated, not on God's own throne, but on "a throne *like* the throne of glory" (10:1). (2) Enoch is said to be appointed, "as a prince and a ruler over all the denizens of the heights, *apart from the eight great, honored, and terrible princes* who are called YHWH by the name of their King" (10:3). This suggests that Enoch is *not* in fact exalted to the highest possible heavenly status, for there are eight other angelic "princes" above him. God himself is exalted even above these heavenly princes; hence the eight angels create a buffer between Enoch and the One God. (3) In 3 Enoch 16, Anapiel YHWH (presumably one of the eight heavenly princes) gives Metatron a lashing when Aher sees Metatron "seated upon a throne like a king" (16:2) and declares: "There are indeed two powers in heaven!" (16:3). Metatron is forced to stand up and vacate his

112. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology,* 163–65.

113. *3 Enoch* 12:1–5, cited in Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology,* 146–48.

> throne when it is sensed that God's unique status has been threatened (16:5). (pp. 297–98, Owen's emphasis)

I admit that this Jewish account of human deification contrasts sharply with Jesus' depiction in the New Testament. For instance, in Revelation 7:15–17, Jesus is depicted as sitting on God's own throne. Owen describes another such instance:

> Another place where the title Son of Man is linked with unique divine status is in Mark 14:62, where Jesus replies to the High Priest's question whether he is the messianic Son of God: "'I am,' said Jesus, 'And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.'" The Jewish response to this statement is predictable—blasphemy! In Jesus' reply to the High Priest, Daniel 7:13 is conflated with Psalm 110:1 (cf. Mk. 12:35–37), which means that the Son of Man will, in fact, be seated on God's own *heavenly* throne (cf. 1 Chr 29:23). (p. 289)

These images really are striking and do indeed suggest a belief that Jesus was truly divine. However, compare the above to Jesus' promise to the faithful in Revelation 3:21: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne." If *3 Enoch* shows that the Jews hedged on their deification doctrine, Revelation shows that John certainly did not! Consider also that Owen claims that the fact that "God made the name of Jesus equivalent to the divine name YHWH" (p. 287) means that Jesus was included in God's "unique identity" (p. 286). Compare again Jesus' promise to the faithful in Revelation 3:12: "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, . . . and I will write upon him my new name." Through Jesus, the faithful will receive the divine name and become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). If the bestowal of the divine name to Jesus means that he is included in God's unique identity, can identical language not mean the same for deified Christians?

I fear that Owen will answer that the two cannot mean the same. For instance, consider Jesus' Intercessory Prayer, in which he asks that his disciples "all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us. . . . And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one" (John 17:21–22). Latter-day Saints have often pointed to this as evidence that (1) the *kind* of unity available to separate human beings is the same sort of thing that binds the Father and the Son in one, although to a degree beyond human experience, and that (2) humans can become one in God just as the Father and Son are one. These seem to be rather explicitly stated points in the text. Although Owen does not address this common Latter-day Saint argument in his essay, Mosser and Owen have previously commented on these verses.[114] Noting Stephen Robinson's argument that John 10:30 ("I and my Father are one") should be interpreted in light of John 17:21–22, they respond that John 10:30 and other passages emphasizing the unity of the Father and Son and the divinity of Jesus (John 10:24–25, 28–33, 38; 14:9–11, 16–21) appear prior to this, so we should interpret John 17:21–22 in light of them. This is poor logic. The verses Mosser and Owen cite merely state that the Father and Son are one and that the Father is "in" the Son, but nowhere do they say exactly *how* they are one. I am unaware of any other biblical statements that directly address this issue. The fact is that Jesus asked that the disciples become one "even as we are one" and that they be one "in" the Father and Son. Both instances of "oneness" are specifically equated here, yet Mosser and Owen do not allow that these verses present a very good case for a sort of divine unity that is not a "oneness of being."

With this in mind, let us return to the ancient texts to find out what it would have meant to bestow the divine name on exalted human beings. Psalm 124:8 says, "Our help is in the name of the Lord,

114. Mosser and Owen, review of *How Wide the Divide?* 52–55. I find disturbing the fact that Owen neglects a discussion of this passage when addressing a primarily evangelical audience but discusses it in detail when addressing a primarily Latter-day Saint audience.

who made heaven and earth." *Hekaloth Rabbati* says, "Great is the Name through which heaven and earth have been created."[115] A Samaritan text asserts that the name of God "is the Name by which all creatures arose."[116] Clement of Rome spoke of God's "Name, which is the primal source of all creation."[117] Gieschen summarizes, "The cosmogenic significance of the Name probably resulted from its association with the creative command, . . . ('let there be'), spoken in the act of creation."[118] What is the significance of all this for deified humans who are given the name? Rabbi Akiba (d. A.D. 135) is credited with the following statement:

> The Holy One, blessed be He, will in the future call all of the pious by their names, and give them a cup of elixir of life in their hands so that they should live and endure forever. . . . And the Holy One, blessed be He, will in the future reveal to all the pious in the World to Come the Ineffable Name with which new heavens and a new earth can be created, so that all of them should be able to create new worlds. . . . The Holy One, blessed be He, will give every pious three hundred and forty worlds in inheritance in the World to Come.[119]

Conclusions

While the issues that Owen mainly oversimplifies are the same ones that Latter-day Saints themselves often treat with similar shallowness, I was hoping for much more from him. Certainly, he knows that Latter-day Saints are not troubled by scriptural passages that say there is "one God," yet he chooses to argue against our position as if it

115. *Hekaloth Rabbati* 9, in Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology,* 74.
116. *Memar Marqa* 4.2, in Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology,* 74.
117. *1 Clement* 59:3, in Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology,* 74.
118. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology,* 74.
119. Midrash Alpha Beta diR. Akiba, BhM 3:32, quoted in Raphael Patai, *The Messiah Texts* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1979), 251. I gratefully acknowledge John Tvedtnes for providing me with this reference.

were simple polytheism. This is just as unacceptable as it would be for Latter-day Saints to argue against creedal Trinitarianism as if it were modalism (as they sometimes do). If the intent of *The New Mormon Challenge* is to raise the level of dialogue between Latter-day Saints and evangelicals (see, for example, pp. 25–26), why not take the opportunity to rise above the simplistic level and focus strictly on real issues that divide us, rather than wasting space on nonissues? I submit that the dialogue regarding the divine unity ought to focus on *how,* rather than *whether,* God is one. We should discuss *how,* rather than *whether,* God is unique.

I have not addressed every point Owen makes against Barker and Hayman on the subjects of the plurality of gods, the ontological gap between God and man, and man's potential for deification, but I believe I have shown that he does not treat the scholars fairly. He has certainly not made a case that Latter-day Saint apologists should stop citing them. The really odd thing about Owen's essay is that he takes only six pages (pp. 309–14) out of forty-four to address specifically the arguments of Daniel Peterson, whose essay on these issues is perhaps the most comprehensive scholarly treatment so far from a Latter-day Saint point of view.[120] Although Owen admits that Peterson's work "poses a more serious challenge to orthodox Christian theology" than does the work of Hayman and Barker; he takes only a few minor swipes at it before confessing that "I do not have space here to offer a point-by-point response to Peterson's arguments" (p. 309). Perhaps not, but he could have made a larger dent if he had forgone his discussions of whether the earliest Christians and the Jews of the Second Temple period were "monotheists" in some sense and whether the first Christians thought of Jesus as being "included within God's unique identity." So regardless of his intent, Owen has only succeeded in addressing an oversimplified caricature of Latter-day Saint belief rather than our best arguments.

120. 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.