Alexandria in the Shadow of the Hill Cumorah: A Comparative Historical Theology of the Early Christian and Mormon Doctrines of God

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The Early Christian and Mormon Doctrines of God

By Gordon Allen Carle

Claremont Graduate University
2015

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This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Gordon Allen Carle as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

Alexandria in the Shadow of the Hill Cumorah:
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Early Christian and Mormon Doctrines of God,

By
Gordon Allen Carle

Claremont Graduate University: 2015

This work is a comparative study of the theological and historical development of the early
Christian (Pre-Nicene) and Mormon doctrines of God. For the Christian tradition, I follow a
detailed study of the apostolic period, followed by the apologetical period, and then conclude
with the pre-Nicene up to around 250 C.E. For the Mormon tradition, I cover the period
beginning with the establishment of the Mormon Church in 1830 and conclude with its official
doctrinal formulation in 1916. I begin this work with a chronological examination of the
development of the Mormon doctrine of God, commencing with Joseph Smith’s translation of
the Book of Mormon and concluding with his revelations and additional translations of those
books that make up the Pearl of Great Price. I then examine Brigham Young’s single theological
contribution, followed with the speculative contributions of Parley P. Pratt, Orson Pratt, John A.
Widtsoe, B. H. Roberts, and concluding with James E. Talmage. This section covers chapters two
through four. In chapters five through seven, I examine the theological contributions of
Ignatius of Antioch, then Theophilus of Antioch, and conclude my study with the theological
contributions of Origen of Alexandria. For the Christian tradition, I trace the development of the pre-Nicene theologians’ struggle to explicate the theological and philosophical implications regarding the divinization of Christ within the context of monotheism. At the end of chapters five through seven I include a succinct, comparative study of each father’s doctrine with Mormon doctrine. This work will also address the major theological and historical factors that influenced both the Mormon and traditional Christian doctrines of God. Further, I contrast both theological systems and discuss their basic differences and similarities. My conclusion is that the fundamental difference between these two theological systems rests upon their foundational conceptions of reality as absolutist or finitist. The Mormon theological system rests upon a materialistic and monistic conception of reality, whereas traditional Christianity’s system rests upon a dualistic conception of reality. In Mormon materialism, the Trinity is divided as individuated Gods; in Christian transcendence, the unity of God may only be maintained, while acknowledging the separate existences of the Persons, if the nature of God is understood as an incorporeal substance.
In dedication to my former professor, mentor, and friend, Dr. H. Wayne House.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Mormon philosopher and historian David L. Paulsen has produced a considerable body of writings on the early Christian church, particularly his explication of the theology of the church fathers Origen and Augustine. In his interpretation of the work of Origen, Paulsen demonstrates that the impetus behind Origen’s strident anti-materialism for the substance of God was the prevalent belief in the early church in the corporeality of God. Origen, he maintains, completely absorbed Middle Platonic philosophical concepts regarding the transcendence (the immateriality) of God. It was his Platonic mindset that determined how he interpreted scriptural passages that spoke of God’s anthropomorphic characteristics by allegorizing such passages in a spiritual, immaterial sense. Paulsen rightly understands that many biblical passages suggest that God is composed of a corporeal substance and form that, when revealed to humanity, resemble their mortal bodies. Thus, Origen’s introduction of a totally transcendent God (as inspired by his former teacher, Clement of Alexandria) was an anomaly in the face of the church’s earlier belief in an embodied God. For Paulsen and many other Mormons, this was the beginning of the end of the original faith of the church that believed in the corporeality of God. It all began, Paulsen believes, with the introduction of

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Greek metaphysics in the second century that taught the concept of God's complete
transcendence, and which was eventually incorporated into the Church's teaching on the
nature of God.²

My purpose in this work is to study and compare the Mormon and traditional Christian³
doctrines of God early in their formations. This will involve an in depth study of the historical
and theological development of both traditions' doctrines beginning at their nascent stages.
First, I will probe the historical and theological foundation of each tradition separately, and
then compare the doctrines of God at the end of the work. I have devoted three chapters to
each tradition: three for the Mormon doctrine of God, and then three for the traditional
Christian doctrine of God. I will include my comparative study of the Mormon doctrine of God
at the end of each chapter that will discuss the theological contributions of the fathers I have
chosen for study. A final chapter will conclude with a final review of what constitutes the major
differences and similarities between the two traditions and possible reasons for such radical
differences.

To do a comparative study like this, many doctrines that are peculiar to the Church of
Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints could have been chosen. For example, one may have chosen to
study the early Mormon experiment in polygamy, or focused on their unique doctrine of
eternal marriage, or launched into their distinctive practice of proxy baptism for the dead. A
study of these doctrines in contradistinction with traditional Christian beliefs and practices

³ By traditional Christian, I mean an adherent of one of the major Christian traditions, Orthodox, Roman Catholic
and Protestant, who holds to the prevailing doctrine regarding the Trinity in general. My focus here, however, is
primarily upon American contemporary Christian doctrine.
would have posed a challenging task in and of themselves. However, I have chosen to focus on each tradition’s doctrine of God for this reason: this one doctrine alone defines the faith tradition for each at its core. This one doctrine defines what is most important to a religious tradition’s existence, particularly in America. The doctrine of God in many religious traditions represents the pinnacle of importance because all meaning and justification for the past, the present and the future flow from one’s concept of who and what God is. The concept of God to the Mormon is just as important as it is to the traditional Christian. For many religions, the doctrine of God is important, so long as that doctrine is understood as representing the ground of all reality and a religion’s reason for being. My meaning is that the doctrine of God is important to those who hold to it unswervingly. It is during the nascent phase of a new religious belief system’s historical and doctrinal development (it would seem) that a dynamic spiritual life appears to draw its most ardent followers and proponents. It exhibits more spiritual and creative vitality at that early stage than at any other time in its history. Of course, this is not a universal phenomenon among religious traditions, but it seems to hold for the early Christian and Mormon experiences. For this reason, I will focus upon the early historical development of the Mormon and traditional Christian doctrines of God. It appears in the Mormon movement, for example, that the most complex and formative development of doctrine occurred within the first two generations of Latter-day Saint history.

The Mormon system of beliefs, including its doctrine of God, finds its basis of authority primarily in the belief of direct revelation from God to humans through the instrument of a living Prophet. This means that in theory new revelations may come to the Mormon community directly through their current Prophet and Church President. This is a doctrinal
system founded upon the concept of progressive revelation. This is why the Mormon Church has never developed a doctrinal “creed,” such as the Nicene or Athanasian Creeds of Christendom. There is another reason why the Mormons have never developed a systematic theology. A systematic theology is based upon the order and logic of a “closed” canon of accepted divinely inspired books, such as the Bible (Old and New Testaments). But in Mormonism, on the other hand, because the canon is not closed, a systematic theology is not as likely to occur. The living God who manifested himself to Joseph Smith with new and startling revelations hidden for centuries is just as capable of manifesting himself again in like manner to another human being endowed with the Priesthood in order to reveal even more precious and wondrous truths that may supersede previous revelations or existing scripture in the context of ongoing clarification of doctrine, or in some cases, removal of doctrine. The fact is, however, that except for Joseph Smith and to some limited degree Brigham Young, there have been no further revelations to the living Prophet, or new translations introduced to the Mormon canon.4 Such supernatural phenomena were common to the era of Joseph Smith and to a very limited extent to Brigham Young, but not to successive Prophets.

Now, it is true that the Latter-day Saints, since their early historical development, have possessed a canon of accepted authorized books considered to be of divine origin. However, the Saints follow the precept of their founding Prophet and First President, Joseph Smith, Jr., by subjecting all written (or verbal) revelations to a fluid, flexible matrix of religious beliefs that originate from continuing revelation, whereby God may reveal new doctrines to the Saints as it

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4 This is mostly true in regards to canonized Mormon Scripture. However, most Mormons would maintain that when it comes to the administration of the Church, revelations are paramount. In fact, not all administrative revelations are public or canonized as Scripture. My thanks to Dr. Mason for providing me this information.
pleases him. It is the revelatory authority of the current Prophet that carries the final word on any doctrinal matter or religious practice. For this reason, Latter-day Saints proclaim that they are the only church on earth that has a living Prophet to guide them in God’s will. As this work will show, however, not everything that proceeds from the mouth or the pen of a standing Prophet may be accepted as possessing divine sanction by the governing authorities of the Latter-day Saints. An equally important component of Mormon theology, however, is the idea that any new doctrine that is proposed must also pass muster by the ruling authorities. Such authority from Mormon authorities is a safeguard against the imposition of doctrine that may be regarded as too controversial or against the teachings of current canonical or prior revelatory pronouncements.

In theory at least, all divine authority for the determination of Mormon belief and practice is invested in the office of the current Mormon Prophet and President of the Mormon Church. His word on all matters pertaining to the explication of doctrine and practice holds sway over the members of the Mormon Church. Even in this, however, as Mormon history demonstrates, there is adequate room for the freedom of individual consciences’ expression of scriptural interpretation. The basis for this principle, I conjecture, goes back to the early history of Mormon leadership under Joseph Smith. In its beginnings in Palmyra, New York, up to the

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5 For Example, the Manifesto of President Wilford Woodruff that delegitimized plural marriage in 1890, after it had been established by Joseph Smith as an everlasting covenant. The Manifesto was solemnized by President Lorenzo Snow on October 6, 1890, who wrote, “I move that, recognizing Wildord Woodruff as the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the only man on the earth at the present time who holds the keys of the sealing ordinances, we consider him fully authorized by virtue of his position to issue the Manifesto which has been read in our hearing . . . we accept his declaration concerning plural marriages as authoritative and binding.” Doctrine & Covenants, Official Declaration, 256-57. It should be noted, however, that although most Mormons would agree with this premise regarding the absolute authority of the living Prophet, there is a modern debate from some who believe that prophets are ultimately subject to Scripture. My thanks to Patrick Mason for bringing this to my attention.

6 This will be demonstrated in Chapter Three when I discuss the Adam-God theory proposed by Brigham Young.
period of Mormon sojourn in Kirtland, Ohio, Mormon corporate worship was notable for its highly charged emotional expressions of charismatic worship practices. Such charismatic activities as prophecies, healings, glossalalia, miracles of various kinds, and other sorts of charismatic experiences, which served as a magnet for the curious and those searching for an existential reality of God, were typical of early Mormon gatherings. The meetings that characterized early Mormon worship drew Christians from various denominational affiliations, such as the Methodists, the Congregationalists, Baptists and even Presbyterians. They were drawn by an array of charismatic manifestations that appeared to many outsiders as significant evidence of the divine presence, such as were missing from the normally staid church services that many of these seekers were accustomed. Such practices that resembled more the kind of experiences that characterized the Primitive Church lent credibility to the pronouncements of their Prophet who resembled more an early church apostle or evangelist. It appears that these early charismatic experiences experienced by many members of the early Mormon congregation, added to Joseph Smith’s revelations, served largely as the basis of Smith’s authority as a prophet of God. Mormon writer Grant Underwood proposes that it is precisely this Mormon supernatural heritage that typified its past and insulates the modern Mormon individual from the pitfalls of modernity. He writes:

Still, on the eve of the twenty-first century, though Mormonism has acquired the institutional accouterments of modernization, it remains intellectually insulated from the acids of modernity by an essential core of supernaturalism. It has gone far towards modernizing without becoming secularized. Key is the LDS conviction of continuing revelation. . . . Shrouded in the “sacred canopy” of modern revelation, Mormons are free to pick and choose their way into modernity. Inspired guidance from living
prophets gives them the confidence to feel that they can truly live “in” the modern world and yet be “of” it only to a degree not harmful to their sacred enterprise.7

The Second Great Awakening was in full bloom between 1820 and 1830, which would not reach its peak until the early 1840’s. This period of history was marked by an intense desire to abandon the vast history of past Christian tradition and to return to the ideal of early church doctrine and practice as it was portrayed in the primitive church. During this period of American history, many believed that Christian history since the apostles was marked by corruption in which “kingcraft and priestcraft wielded orthodoxy to enslave the minds of the people.”8 The old ties to the Protestant and Catholic traditions were severed with an expectation that a “restoration of the primitive church was at hand.”9 As Nathan Hatch has observed, according to Francis Asbury, the apostolic order of things was lost in the first century, and while the Reformers did much to try and retrieve it, it was able only to beat off “the rubbish of the intervening centuries.”10 And in John W. Nevin’s opinion, the American experience as a free republic had allowed for a new freedom to transcend the rubble of eighteen hundred years of religious corruption and return to the “simplicity, authority, and power of the age of the apostles.”11

In this, the burgeoning Mormon movement, under the charismatic leadership of Joseph Smith and his early followers and associates, possessed many of the characteristics of this

8 Nathan Hatch, The Democratization of Christianity (Yale University Press, 1989), 167.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid. Hatch also observes, “Elias Smith, Lorenzo Dow, Alexander Campbell, Francis Asbury, Barton Stone, Joseph Smith, and William Miller all believed that, since the age of the apostles, a great falling away had severed the relationship between God and man leaving the visible church virtually extinct during the Dark Ages.” 167.
uniquely American restorationist mindset. The Mormons were even more insistent on their
pronouncement of the condition of Christendom in their time:

Joseph Smith and the Mormons were even more strident in their conviction that the
corrupt, diseased ecclesiastical order tottered on the brink of destruction. Saints of the
latter day had the opportunity to witness the unfolding of the apostolic order in all its
fullness. For the first time in eighteen hundred years, the heavens had reopened, the
reconvening of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles by the prophet Joseph Smith
symbolized this restoration . . . .

Equally important were the fascinating stories that circulated around Joseph Smith regarding
his angelic visitations and of his having been led to long-buried plates of ancient texts that only
he could decipher through the means of divine revelation. These stories solidified the
messianic expectations of many disparate groups of American Christians who were dissatisfied
with the prevailing order of Christian orthodoxy and who yearned for actual demonstrations of
the reality of God’s presence and activity in the world. Hatch notes that this popular ideology
empowered Christian groups on the fringes of society to believe that the essence of the
Christian faith was not in the creeds, or ancient liturgies or even notable sermons from the
past; rather, the quest for the primitive order lay in their own determined effort to bring the
New Testament order back to life. Hatch adds:

Restoring the apostolic order—and thus heralding the Millennial Kingdom—could only
be done by the re-creative power of handfuls of faithful believers, intent on following
the New Testament pattern. Saints on that mission had no reason to bow to the wishes
of well-placed graduates of colleges or seminaries of large and prosperous urban
congregations, or of councils and synods—particularly those trying to uphold to Calvinist
orthodoxy.13

12 Ibid., 168.
13 Ibid., 169-70.
In this light, the early days of Mormonism was fascinating and alluring to many Christians, some of whom were caught up in the Mormon experiment in charismatic gifts, visions, immediate revelations, and divine visitations. They were introduced to a revealed continental history of ancient Jewish inhabitants and to a radically different communal social structure. Its appeal was its alleged similarity to the New Testament Church, which many early converts to the Mormon fold were convinced its founding had to have been at God’s leading. Unless this early charismatic period of Mormon history is understood, then Joseph Smith’s appeal and influence over the hearts and minds of early converts cannot be fully appreciated. It was the fact that he exercised the spiritual gifts and proclaimed to have divine visitations and visions, and to possess the divine gift of interpretation and translation that he founded such a dedicated following of spiritually hungry “fringe” Christians. Such “charismatic” manifestations were a common feature of this period in American religious history.

As I indicated above, the Mormons have always placed far less importance on creedal statements of faith. As part of the nineteenth-century restorationist movement, this attitude was common. This did not mean, however, that the ancient creeds were rejected outright by all fringe Christian groups, only that they were regarded with varying degrees of skepticism and suspicion, and regarded as remnants of an ancient past that had little (or worse, nothing) to do with their present mission. This attitude was shared in large part with other Christians involved in the restorationist movement, who, like their Mormon counterparts, sought after the pristine

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14 I do not use this term in a pejorative manner. With few exceptions, the occasional historical occurrences of the charismatic gifts, attendant with healings, miracles, prophecies and the like throughout church history, were usually shunned by the intelligentsia and the academics of the more established churches. In this period, the “fringe” Christians did not belong to the established Congregationalist or Presbyterian bodies, but dominated the Baptist, Methodist, Mormon and other fringe groups newly established.

15 See Steven H. Webb, 86.
doctrine of the primitive church (at least as it was perceived by many in this movement),
untainted by the importation of later Catholic and Protestant traditions. But this is not the only
reason why Mormons have never formulated creedal statements or a systematic theology, and
Steven H. Webb has picked up on what I hold is the primary reason: unlike the early
nineteenth-century restorationist movement, “the . . . Mormons stood out with their trust in
visions, and visions are always hard to translate into systematic terms.”16 Since their nascent
beginnings, Latter-day Saints have committed themselves to a trust in the office of the living
Prophet, attendant with the catalogue of divine visions that may continue to reveal on-going
revelation of lost truths, under such a mindset no systematic theology would have ever
developed. Without an acknowledgment that revelation from God has ceased, or a divine
mandate that a collection of divinely inspired documents have closed revelation, then no
systematic theology is possible, or at the least it would have to look like something much
different. So long as a religious system like Mormonism possesses an office of Prophet, one
who actually has the authority to speak for God as an Old Testament prophet, then there can
be no closed canon, and subsequently little impetus for a systematic theology. We shall find
that this concept contrasts markedly with the attitude of Christian writers of the early church.
For Joseph Smith and other leaders of the early nineteenth century, the emphasis was upon
religious experience, not tradition.

We find, however, that the early Mormon Church collected a set of divinely inspired
translations that came from Joseph Smith, first with the Book of Mormon, followed by his
collections of visions and revelations, thereafter collected and standardized in what is known

16 Ibid.
today as the Doctrine and Covenants. More revelations followed that became the Book of Moses, and an additional translation work known as the Book of Abraham, which form the Pearl of Great Price. These works, along with the King James Version of the Bible, are the standardized collection of authorized texts of divine truth revealed to Joseph Smith. A kind of creedal statement was developed by Joseph Smith and others in the early years called the Lectures on Faith. However, after Joseph's career, we do see a sifting out of some doctrines, notably, the Adam-God doctrine that President Brigham Young introduced in 1852-53, and eventually the Lectures on Faith, which were removed prior to the publication of the 1921 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants.

Mormons early in their history understood their movement to be the restoration of lost Christian doctrine and practice. Current Mormon scholarship is particularly insistent that it was the importation of Platonist metaphysics into the Christian doctrine of God, which brought upon an apostasy of true Christian doctrine.¹⁷ In many respects, this attitude was shared as well by most in the American restorationist movement towards the older, established churches. They all shared a deep distrust of ancient Christian dogma and creeds, and particularly of Calvinism. “While Methodists, Disciples, and Mormons disagreed radically on what constituted belief in the gospel, they all shared an intense hostility to the passive quality of Calvinist

religious experience, and they all made salvation imminently accessible and immediately available," so observes Hatch.18

Where Joseph Smith and those who followed him parted company with the rest, however, was their insistence—confirmed by Jesus Christ in Joseph’s First Vision—that they should join none of the existing “sects”. Indeed, every last one of them had departed from the true faith. Joseph’s focus, however, was his indictment upon the “creeds” of Christianity. During this period of American history, no one within the restorationist movement (to my knowledge), except for Joseph Smith, had gone so far as to proclaim such a scathing indictment against all of Christendom, including the fringe groups mentioned above. Certainly, there were those in this period of American religious history who saw ample evidence of an accretion of human tradition and philosophical speculation that they believed had crept into the Church over the centuries and distorted the original Christian message to some degree, but no one except Joseph Smith suggested that Christianity at large had become hopelessly corrupted and beyond reformation. This is uniquely Mormon historiography.

According to the Mormon narrative, the Church’s absorption of Greek metaphysics in the second-century particularly became the primary cause of the eventual corruption of the true Church after the passing of the apostles.19 This absorption of Platonist philosophy (in particular) in the second century led the Church away from its original materialism and belief in the plurality of Gods within the Godhead and pushed Christian theology into its antithesis, the

18 Hatch, 172.
19 Some Mormon apostasy narratives focus on the corruption of early Christian doctrine, others on the passing of the original apostles, which in turn led to the corruption of doctrine. My thanks to Dr. Mason for providing me this information.
metaphysics of immaterialism and monotheism. Mormon historians and thinkers have outlined the tragedy of the loss of the pristine doctrine of God as taught by Jesus and his apostles, which they maintain was substituted with doctrine forged with the tools of Greek philosophy. The great Mormon expositor of doctrine and philosophy in the early twentieth century, James E. Talmage, encapsulated this early Mormon attitude towards Christendom after the last apostle died:

The consistent, simple, and authentic doctrine respecting the character and attributes of God, such as was taught by Christ and the apostles, gave way as revelation ceased and as darkness incident to the absence of divine authority fell upon the world, after the apostles and the Priesthood had been driven from the earth; and in its place appeared numerous theories and dogmas of men, many of which are utterly incomprehensible in their inconsistency and mysticism.20

In a discussion of the religious creedal belief of the Church of England regarding the nature of God, Talmage comments further, “The immateriality of God as asserted in these declarations of sectarian faith is entirely at variance with the scriptures, and absolutely contradicted by the revelations of God’s person and attributes, as shown by the citations already made.”21

The single most significant difference between the basic theological premise of the Mormon Church and that of traditional Christianity, then, is the difference between materialism and immaterialism, or between monistic and traditional dualistic concepts of reality.

At the core of Mormon theology is a steadfast belief that all that exists is matter, including what appears to be spirit, regarded as a fine and subtle form of matter. This was also the basis of Stoic metaphysics. All is matter and energy in their various forms in the universe.

20 James E. Talmage, A Study of the Articles of Faith: Being a Consideration of the Principal Doctrines of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City, Utah, 1959, Orig. pub. 1890, 47.
21 Ibid., 48.
Dualism, therefore, with its strict demarcation between matter and spirit, is rejected. The Stoics rejected the idea of mind as an intellectual existence, in opposition to what was explicated by Origen in his teaching on the essence of God. The essence of Mormon belief is that the "real" must be material. What truly exists must have a body of some form that exists concretely in reality. All that exists are energy and matter synergistically in all their variety and levels of evolutionary development in an endless, infinite universe. There is no concept of a truly immaterial, metaphysical reality beyond the material universe in Mormon thought. Matter and spirit are one.

On the Christian side, however, as argued by the Christian church since Clement of Alexandria, the apologists, and later by Origen, the divine substance cannot be "stretched out" to encompass the universe. Nothing "physical" has sufficient mass to fill the cosmos, regardless of how thin or ethereal it may become. Thus, Tertullian's concept of the spirit of God as corpus in Stoic-like fashion, was rejected by the Church eventually because it limited God within the cosmos. This was not concordant with the dominant metaphysical doctrine of Platonism, which Clement and Origen believed was more in accord with the scriptures' descriptions of God, properly interpreted. In the Stoic and Mormon concepts of "spirit," (a fine, ethereal—even invisible—substance), God's presence is understood as immanent and concrete. They both repudiate the idea of the incorporeality of God, as advanced by Platonists and later by the church, to be nothing more than an argument in support of a vacuum—a non-entity. God must not be regarded as transcendent because that puts him too far away from us, too "other."

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22 I will use the comparative terms "Christian" and "Mormon" as simply convenient markers to denote the distinctive doctrines of traditional Christianity and Mormonism throughout this work.
This work, then, will be a comparative study of the principal doctrines of God as promulgated by the Mormon and orthodox traditions. I will compare the principal beliefs of the nascent Mormon community on the nature of God in the early nineteenth century with that of three fathers of the Christian church: Ignatius of Antioch, Theophilus of Antioch, and Origen of Alexandria. These particular fathers were selected for their eminence, and also because of their affiliation with particular Christian eras, the apostolic, the apologetical, and that period in the mid to latter third century just preceding the Nicene formulation. Following is a brief summary of the contents of each chapter.

Chapter two will deal with the period of Mormon history from 1830 to 1844. It was within this period that Joseph Smith inaugurated the Mormon Church and received all of his revelations and books of divine origin. It is thus a pivotal period of Mormon history. All of the distinctive Mormon doctrines that are a part of the Mormon theological system today were formulated within this period. All of the books, like the Book of Mormon, the Book of Moses and the Book of Abraham were published during this time. His visions and revelations were collected and canonized in what would later be called the Doctrine & Covenants. It is during this period that some Mormon historians find a certain historical trajectory of doctrinal development that appears to indicate that the doctrine of God, which reached in its final form in Smith’s most notable sermon, the King Follett Discourse, underwent considerable refinement prior to Smith’s landmark sermon. This thesis is challenged by other able and competent Mormon scholars who do not interpret the historical trajectory in the same way, but find in Joseph Smith’s history a consistent narrative of increasing revelation of divine truth, line upon line, that culminated in the King Follett Discourse.
In chapter three I will begin with a summary of Joseph's life just prior to the delivery of his King Follett Discourse and then analyze his most notable 1844 sermon for its theological content. After that, I will show how the Mormons under the pioneer leadership of the second President and Prophet of the Mormon Church, Brigham Young in the Utah period, are introduced to a new theological concept, ostensibly derived from Joseph Smith's King Follett Discourse, with the introduction of his well-documented doctrine of the Adam-God theory. I will show how this doctrine was readily accepted by many but also opposed by some of the leading lights in the Mormon community at that time, particularly by Orson Pratt. Both Parley P. and Orson Pratt will develop further the theological implications of Joseph Smith's 1844 sermon and flesh out a refined Mormon philosophical system of considerable speculative importance. Parley P. Pratt, for instance, further explicated the theological implications of the idea of eternal progression and suggested an organic link between God and humanity. The system that would emerge would advance the idea that Inherent in all eternal "intelligences" is the germ of Deity. This will take us to 1877.

In chapter four I will discuss the Mormon doctrine of God as it developed from the death of Brigham Young in 1877 to 1916, when it appears that the final form of the distinctive Mormon doctrine of God solidified. Here I will introduce the theological and philosophical writings of perhaps Mormonism's most distinguished thinkers at the turn of the twentieth-century, John A. Widtsoe, James E. Talmage and B. H. Roberts. Some Mormon historians characterize this period of Mormon history as a period of significant reformulation of the theological teachings of Joseph Smith's King Follett Discourse. Other Mormon scholars, on the other hand, understand this later period as a refinement of already existing Mormon doctrine,
not a reformulation. Some Mormon scholars typify the period as a time of competing doctrines of God. These competing issues will be examined. In this chapter I will also analyze the theological writings of the above-referenced thinkers as they contribute to the understanding of Mormon doctrine in three major categories: the shape of Mormon thought on cosmology, anthropology and theology. It will be shown that the theological contributions of Widtsoe, Talmage and Roberts are a further explication of Joseph Smith's King Follett Discourse.

In the next section, I focus my study on the theological contributions on the nature of God from writers in the early church. My decision to study the selected Christian fathers last is due to my desire to introduce and familiarize the reader with the Mormon doctrine of God without Christian bias, and thereafter to introduce the reader to the Christian writings themselves. This is how most Mormons would read the Christian fathers, after they have been well-versed in Mormon doctrine. This will hopefully provide the non-Mormon reader with a more sympathetic understanding and perspective of how Mormons would read and interpret the following Christian material.

Chapter five will focus on the theological writings of Ignatius of Antioch, one who is representative of the so-called apostolic era of Christian history. Before I commence my study of his doctrine of God, however, I will study the historical trajectory of the development of the idea of God in the second and third centuries. It will demonstrate the difficulties that Christian writers during the second and third centuries faced as they attempted to explain in varying degrees of theological and philosophical precision the particular problem inherent in the acknowledgment of the divinization of Christ within the context of monotheism. Ignatius of
Antioch is a fascinating individual in his own right, but it will be shown that he also possessed a rather sophisticated understanding of the issues involved in accepting Jesus Christ as “God” within the broad context of monotheism. Although he was no philosopher, and even though he cannot be categorized as a Trinitarian theologian, his theological explications of the doctrine of God and his Christology are illuminating for understanding Christian theology of that early period. Prominent in his writings is a profound sense of love and devotion to Christ that inspired similar devotion in future Christians for generations to come.

In chapter six I take on the theological contributions of Theophilus of Antioch. He is a representative of that period in Christian history known as the so-called apologetical age.\textsuperscript{23} I will study the surviving three books attributed to him, \textit{Ad Autolycum}. Unlike Ignatius, Theophilus never mentions the words “Jesus” or “Christ.” It will be shown that this was a common feature for many apologists in this period, because it was not their wish to reveal everything to the non-Christian reader in writing. Here I will demonstrate that Theophilus was particularly concerned to maintain the unity of the Godhead. I will also demonstrate that his writing best characterized a modified or soft Monarchianism, not Monarchianism of the modalistic or adoptionist varieties. Theophilus is characteristic of a time when Christians began to write to the world at large, not to the Church. This means that they began to incorporate a broader range of philosophical terminology that was representative of the philosophical zeitgeist that then dominated the Greco-Roman world, which was Middle Platonism. Thus, we will see a greater use of philosophical terminology that is representative of Hellenistic

\textsuperscript{23} This period would cover roughly the early second to the mid third centuries. The apostolic era covered that period from the death of the apostles to the early second century.
philosophy. The reason for this tactic appears reasonably apparent, in my opinion, since their focus had shifted from the Church to the largely non-Christian world. The terminology used by Theophilus and other apologists to communicate the Christian message was set in philosophical theological language borrowed from the language of their culture, which they hoped would capture the ultimate sense of the scriptures and the significance of Christ. It was motivated by an apologetical concern for reaching the pagan mind of their time with terminology that was both scripturally supported and recognizable by their non-Christian contemporaries. They hoped to build a bridge between the God of the Bible and the “One” of the philosophers to demonstrate the providential care and direction of an infinite God.

In chapter seven I complete my survey of the early church doctrine of God with the one representative of the Church who for centuries has been renowned for his theological and philosophical erudition, Origen of Alexandria. In this chapter I begin with a study of the role of philosophy with orthodox Christianity and the history of philosophical concepts. Then, after a brief description of Origen’s life and literary contributions, I launch into his distinctive doctrine of God. Origen was most concerned with showing the absolute transcendence of God. His major concern was to refute a Stoic understanding of the nature of God held by many in the church at this time. He was also concerned over the Monarchian understanding of the Godhead that was also quite prevalent. Unlike Theophilus, Origen radically emphasized the concept of God’s aseity, or God’s complete ontological independence and existence from all physical reality. For Origen, God is utterly incorporeal. There is no matter that touches his being. He devises a method of biblical interpretation that originated with the Stoics and was fine-tuned by later Platonic thinkers, called allegory, which he used to explicate passages in Scripture that
he and others before him believed depicted God in anthropomorphic terms, and thus converted them into worthy expositions of the "intellectual existence" of God. He developed this technique into a science. Origen also held that the nature of God as described in the New Testament as "invisible" was the equivalent to the Greek concept, "incorporeal." Every attribute of God is explicated in light of this allegorical technique, firmly rooted in his Platonic understanding of the immateriality of God. At the end of this chapter I show the differences and similarities between Origen's thought and the thought of current Mormon teaching on the nature of God. I will also examine the contributions of Mormon scholar, David E. Paulsen, who has written a considerable body of work regarding Origen as a "reluctant witness" to the early church's belief in the corporeality of God.24

At the end of chapters five through seven, I present a brief but comprehensive comparative study of the more salient differences and similarities between the Mormon and the orthodox doctrines of God respective of each orthodox theologian.

In chapter eight, I conclude my study on the Mormon and traditional Christian doctrines of God with closing remarks and summary conclusions drawn from this study.

I present this comparative study from the perspective of an outsider to Mormonism. As a Christian from a Confessional tradition, I do not personally accept the truth claims of Joseph Smith or the Latter-day Saints. What I will do, however, is present an objective, enlightened and instructive presentation of the salient differences between the Mormon and traditional Christian doctrines of God. I will then present my observations and analyses for these

differences. For example, I have found in my study of Mormon sources that there has existed among them since the beginning of their movement a clear preponderance for special, divine revelation, either in the out-right acquisition of divine truth or for the explication of theological difficulties or paradoxes. In short, visions and religious experiences with the supernatural are the hallmark and bedrock of Mormon theology. The foundation stones of the Mormon Church were set amidst a series of rapid-fire visions and early spiritual experiences that were nothing short of remarkable in their intensity. As for their religious significance, these spiritual experiences, related by Joseph Smith and his early followers, of visions and special revelations on such a grand scale, can be regarded historically as second only to the ministry of Christ and the apostles. The bulk of Mormon doctrine was formulated in this early period of intense religious experience and divine activity. In many respects, it should be noted, such an emphasis upon religious experience with immediate contact with the supernatural is typical of the religious fervor of the Second Great Awakening in America. Everyone's private religious experience was validation of God's activity with the common man in New Testament fashion in the early nineteenth century.25

There are several themes that I will explore, which will add cohesiveness to this comparative study. The first is a realization that there exists a shared, common core conviction between the Mormon and Christian traditions a recognition that each of their differing understandings of the essence of Christianity is exclusively true. That is, neither of the two

traditions holds that their own faith tradition is merely one among many legitimate (or contrasting) expressions of faith in Jesus. Neither group believes, as has been suggested by Elaine Pagels\textsuperscript{26} with Walter Baurer,\textsuperscript{27} that the early church followed competing trajectories, that there are no heresies per se, only varying forms of personal expressions of faith that competed in a mixed culture, and which appealed to various spiritually, intellectually and temperamentally inclined groups of Christians. As Joseph Smith clearly intimated in the recitation of his first Vision, the totality of the old Christian tradition had fallen away from the truth. Likewise, the majority of traditional Christians believe that the Mormon tradition is an exclusively American aberration of Christianity based upon the pronouncements of a religious innovator. I am speaking of attitudes on the popular level, not the attitudes of those individuals from both traditions who are seeking common ground for dialogue. The point is, in general we regard one another’s theological underpinnings, such as the nature of reality and the doctrine of God, for example, with reservation at best. Logically, it is possible that both groups’ theological worldviews are wrong. It is also possible logically that only one of the two is right. It is not possible, however—and this is acknowledged by representatives from both groups—that both groups’ worldviews are right in the same sense and at the same time. Thus, both Mormons and traditional Christians are united with a common assumption that there is no compromise with truth statements about the nature of reality and of God within their respective traditions. Both traditions believe that Jesus Christ holds unique status and ultimate significance among all the religions of the world and between their own traditions. For


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example, on the Mormon side, Rodney Turner, I believe, speaks for many Mormons regarding their attitude towards the belief system of traditional Christianity when he writes:

False gods beget false religions. The primary reason contemporary Christianity is riddled with misconceptions about the gospel of Jesus Christ is that it is blind to the essential truth about the God it purports to worship. The gospel is an extension of God's nature. It is precisely what it is because God is what he is. How can we understand the gospel if we do not understand the God who authored it? . . . Unfortunately, many have wrested the Bible into a game of Trivial Pursuit. In spite of the preponderance of passages describing God in anthropomorphic terms, one brief verse in John, "God is a Spirit" (4:24), is seized upon to prove (in original) the contrary.28

On the traditional Christian side, for example, philosopher Francis J. Beckwith argues that:

It is our hope that Mormons move away from any sort of multiplicity of gods to the notion of the oneness of God; and more from their notion of a wholly immanent God to the transcendent creator of the universe. However, even if Mormonism's concept of God were to become orthodox, there are numerous other problems that must be dealt with. . . . These include the prophet status of Joseph Smith, the inspiration of his "revelations," and the exclusivity of the Mormon church as the only means to achieve exaltation. After all, if Joseph Smith were a false prophet, then Mormonism falls. In the end, Mormonism can be made Christian only by ceasing to be Mormon.29

Thus we find that there are uncompromising opinions between the two traditions that are clearly acknowledged by both sides. What unites them both, however, is their mutual claim to possess ultimate religious truth.

A second theme that I will explore in this volume, which forms the basis for such a study of comparative historical theology, is one that hearkens back to the basic presuppositions of the early apologists (particularly) in their use of Hellenistic philosophy, and which was eventually adopted by the early church in general. Why were the apologists and the early

church theologians, prior and up to Nicaea, so insistent on describing the nature of God as incorporeal? What was it about Middle Platonic theology regarding the transcendence of God that gripped the early church writers of the second century? A major impetus, I will suggest, was in the intense desire to maintain the doctrine of the unity of God, or monotheism. The unity of God, I will argue, was an overarching impulse in adopting the Middle Platonic doctrine of transcendence as the best representative philosophical model of describing the God of the scriptures to the pagan mind. As explained above, the apologists’ borrowing of Hellenistic philosophy was in large part an apologetical endeavor for finding common ground with their pagan interlocutors, but something more about Middle Platonic teaching on the transcendence of God loomed large in the background of their theology. For the early church writers, the unity of God was of primary importance in their minds, which is understandable given the church’s cultural and religious milieu. In the long march to Nicea and eventually to Constantinople, from the second to the fourth century, a tension was established between strict monotheism and polytheism in the forging of a rudimentary Trinitarian doctrine of the plurality of Persons in the one God. Or, as R. M. Grant has noted, a delicate balance was advanced between the two theistic concepts.

While at Antioch theologians generally insisted on maintaining monotheism even at the expense of the divinity of the Son and the Spirit, and at Alexandria theologians were often willing to speak of two (or three) gods with Origen, the difference must not be exaggerated. All alike were trying to maintain a delicate balance between monotheism and polytheism or at least tritheism. In the second and third centuries, all ran the risk of dynamistic or modalistic monarchianism. Instead of interurban rivalry, we seem to find intra-urban rivalry, at least in the period we are considering.30

It is my observation, then, that the early church's description of the divine essence, particularly as first formulated by the apologists, relied upon the Platonic doctrine of the transcendence of God in order to maintain this delicate balance, this "tension," between monotheism and polytheism. In other words, only within the one, immaterial essence of a transcendent, incorporeal and ultra-dimensional Being, could one speak of multiple Voices sharing the same divine "essence" without dividing that essence. This overarching concern for the unity of God, then, is what appears to have driven the early church writers to insist on an incorporeal and transcendent God, and who then (particularly after Origen) deliberately forced their interpretations of scripture, particularly the Old Testament anthropomorphic descriptions of God, with allegorical interpretations of the one God that demonstrated an incorporeal, intelligible essence. I do not find that the rationale for the basis of a transcendent God in light of the one and the many has been adequately discussed, therefore I advance the need for this particular discussion. Therefore, I do not detect nefarious motives for adopting Middle Platonism among the early Christian writers, only a sense of gratitude for the preponderance of prevailing philosophical and theological concepts that they believed might prove useful in their intellectual missionary endeavor to win the pagan heart and mind to Christianity.

Another theme I shall examine is the suggestion that that the majority of early Christians for at least the first three centuries of the Christian era believed God to be corporeal, i.e. possessing a physical body. We certainly have evidence that such was the case in the early church for more than four centuries. Paulsen has written extensively on this theme for years and intimates that such a belief in the corporeality of God by many in this era is evidence of the

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31 See footnote 17.
existence of a once pristine faith as taught by Jesus and the apostles in the corporeality of God. I will suggest that another plausible reason for the prevalence of belief in the corporeality of God is that the vast majority of new converts to the Christian faith during that time were ex-pagans who came to the church with all their prior philosophical and theological baggage. This became particularly acute with the influx of so many pagans into the church after its legalization by Constantine in 311. Even prior to this date, however, the issue of new pagan believers in the church was a major impetus for the development of the catechetical schools in major urban centers for instruction of new believers prior to baptism. Old concepts of the divine had to be replaced with the new Christian teaching.

What is at stake here, and which is the reason for my participation in this conversation, is whether God must be conceived of as a material being composed of flesh and bone, as Mormons maintain, or whether He is to be conceived of as a wholly transcendent being devoid of all matter, pure spirit, as maintained consistently by traditional Christianity. This is the primary focus of my conversation with Mormon writers. Mormons sometimes like to characterize the transcendent God of Christianity as a “vacuum,” a “non-entity” because such an immaterial God has no interface with humanity. I would maintain, however, that it does not necessarily follow that because early church theologians argued for a transcendent God, one that was devoid of all material categories, that such a God had no reality. To argue thus is a non sequitur. Who is to say what God can and cannot be in His nature unless it is given us in some form of revelation? In fact, I will argue that only an immaterial being, a wholly

32 Paulsen hopes to link this evidence with the Mormon narrative that true Mormon teaching regarding the doctrine of God disappeared from the earth soon after the death of the apostles and the soon-to-follow pernicious philosophical activity of the apologists.
transcendent deity, is capable of being one and three at the same time (logically). This was what pre-Nicene theologians strove to maintain as the only biblical understanding of the Triad of God. God is a completely different category of existence from creatures. As we shall see, such a God is not contrary to ordinary logic, but far removed from it and beyond our intellectual reach.

Finally, while no one does historical or theological research free of bias, once one is aware of one’s biases, there is the greater potential of recognizing that tendency and curtailing the deleterious effects that often accompany such a project of comparative religious studies. The desired result is a study that may become valuable for future researchers involved in similar projects. While it is not possible to get into the skin of Joseph Smith, by getting into his historical and cultural milieu, and perhaps finding some common ground with his religious experiences, there may be greater potential for understanding him and those who follow after his legacy.
CHAPTER TWO

THE MORMON CONCEPT OF GOD (1830—1844)

This chapter will focus upon the early Mormon development of the doctrine of God during the first phase of its history, from 1830 to 1844. It was in 1830 that the Book of Mormon was first published, the first of Joseph Smith's translations, with five thousand copies printed in its first edition in Palmyra, New York.\(^1\) It was also in this year, on April 11, that the first public sermon was preached by one of the Church's early members, a witness to the Golden Plates and one of the first Apostles, Oliver Cowdery, in Fayette, NY.\(^2\) Several meetings were later held in Colesville, NY. These meetings were well attended, and many were converted to the new Church. The new religious movement centered on the revealed translation of the Book of Mormon,\(^3\) to which all converts were required to believe upon their inaugural baptisms. The Church claimed through Joseph Smith that the primitive church of the New Testament had

\(^1\) Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 7 vols., introduction and notes by B.H. Roberts, 1902 ed. (Salt Lake City: The Deseret Book Company, 1946), 1:71. (Hereafter cited as HCH). There are four "standard works" of Mormonism considered as canonical by the Church: the Book of Mormon (hereafter cited as the BOM), the Kings James version of the Bible, the *Doctrine and Covenants* (hereafter cited as D&C), and the *Pearl of Great Price* (hereafter cited as PGP). Other doctrinal writings were introduced (and some since deleted) throughout the early period of Mormon history and, although not canonized, do serve as authoritative witnesses to Mormon doctrine authorized by Church authorities.

\(^2\) Ibid., 1:81.

\(^3\) The *Book of Mormon* purports to be the record of ancient civilizations that once flourished in the Americas. The civilization that is the focus of the BOM is the descended race of the Jewish people who left Jerusalem around 600 B.C. These were righteous Jews led by Lehi and later his son Nehi. They were eventually destroyed by a competitive and warring faction, the Lamanites (ancestors to American Indians). The BOM is supposedly the abridged record of the highlights of the Nephite civilization, including Christ's visit and evangelization of these people soon after his resurrection, written down by a prophet named Mormon. The BOM is a translation of the record of this and the earlier Jaredite civilization.
been restored, that it was the restoration of the New Testament Church in all its aspects and by virtue of this claim it was the only legitimate successor of primitive Christianity.

All of the foundational theological precepts that are distinctive of Mormon doctrine today regarding the doctrine of God occurred under Smith’s leadership between 1830 and 1844. It was also during this period that (in the opinion of some) the new Mormon faith appears to have shifted from a monotheistic belief in their doctrine of God, which was typical of American Protestant “Primitivism” in the early eighteenth century, into a radically new direction that today is termed a “plurality of Gods” concept of the Godhead. This is suggested today by a growing number of Mormon historians.4

My concern for this chapter is to focus upon the initial phase of Mormon theological development that occurred between 1830 and 1844, and to examine the early revelatory texts that Joseph Smith translated during this period, *The Book of Mormon, The Book of Moses,* and *The Book of Abraham.* This is the period when the nascent Mormon doctrine of God developed in the historical and cultural milieu of the distinctive American continental religious culture. The majority of these early texts to be examined were written during the “Kirtland” Period, which was that time of Mormon sojourning when the Saints occupied Kirtland, Ohio, from February, 1831 to April, 1836.5 This early period of Mormon history was contemporaneous with the American religious phenomenon, the “Second Great Awakening”. This period in

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5 The exception is, of course, The BOM, which was published in New York, March 1830. For a fuller discussion of this period and the circumstances surrounding its publication, see Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 2006), 84-94.
American religious history (circa. 1792 to 1840) was characterized by intense religious zeal for an intimate connection with the Divine and a longing for and pursuit of the restoration of the New Testament primitive church. One of Mormonism's most distinctive early characteristics (not fully appreciated by Christian historians) is its unique claim that direct divine revelation from God had been restored to the earth after centuries of eclipse. It was characterized also by a resurgence of the "lost" charismatic gifts that characterized the primitive church, such as speaking in tongues, words of prophecy, words of knowledge, the gift of healings and the gift of miracles. This phenomenon was also characteristic of the religious milieu that typified the Second Great Awakening in New England, out of which Mormonism was born. Largely because of the preponderance of these charismatic gifts amongst them, Joseph Smith and his early followers took these "signs" as confirmation of their peculiar witness to humanity.

The Church today relates the story of the early formative period of Mormon history as a single story of divine intervention in the life of Joseph Smith Jr. in 1820, with his life thereafter accompanied by numerous and striking divine revelations that heralded nothing less than the restoration of true Christianity on the earth. Mormon professor emeritus of history, Thomas G. Alexander, has observed, however, that Mormon doctrinal history (regarding the doctrine of God) is neither continuous nor consistent. Alexander expounds his thesis:

One of the barriers to understanding Mormon theology is the underlying assumption by most Latter-day Saints that doctrine develops consistently, that ideas build cumulatively on each other. As a result, older revelations are usually interpreted by
referring to current doctrinal positions. This type of interpretation may produce systematic theology and may satisfy those trying to understand and internalize current doctrine, but it leaves an unwarranted impression of continuity and consistency.\textsuperscript{5}

Alexander argues that the initial phase of doctrinal development over the Mormon doctrine of God occurred in the years 1830 to 1835.\textsuperscript{7} Thereafter, however, a shift from monotheism to tritheism appears to have occurred.\textsuperscript{8} However, in its early history, converts to the new movement were not required to make any radical changes in their basic theology, which they carried over from their largely Protestant heritage. They were required, however, to profess their belief in the divine origin of the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s calling as Prophet, Seer and Revelator.

This is an interesting fact because the Mormon Church was birthed out of the Second Great Awakening religious movement that marked American Christian revivalism of the early 1800’s. Geographically, it was centered in and surrounding New England, that also included a region of New York state known as the “burned-over district,” named thus for the perennial revivals that occurred there during this time. The Second Great Awakening was predominantly Arminian in its theology, and relied heavily upon emotionally driven conversions through mass revivals. Many leaders within this movement believed that this new phenomenon heralded the return of Christ and his physical rule in the millennial age in America. The movement stressed less the acquisition of sound theological doctrine and more the return to a heart-felt desire to follow Christ faithfully in practice as did the primitive church. The desire to restore a more

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid.
primitive form of Christianity was popular ever since the American Revolution.\(^9\) This intense
desire to restore a purer form of Christianity played a role in the formation and growth of not
only the Mormons, but the Adventists, Baptists and the Shakers, among others. The early
Mormon converts, flowing along the same religious revivalist currents, were less concerned,
then, about Joseph Smith’s theology than they were over his charismatic leadership and novel
teaching about new and direct revelations from God that included the recent discovery of a
long-buried record of a lost civilization evangelized by Christ Himself within the confines of their
own territory. Furthermore, it was a fascination in the resurgence of miracles and the
operation of the spiritual gifts in Mormon meetings that largely drew them to this new, vibrant
movement that resembled the early church under the leadership of the apostles more than the
staid and established Protestant church scene with which many new Mormon converts were all
too familiar.\(^10\) It would take a few more years until sufficient attention would be devoted to the
actual theology of the Book of Mormon and other early texts, and then a formulation of their
own theological beliefs based upon them and Joseph Smith’s personal revelations from God.
For now, the new Mormon community of converts basked in the light of God’s immediate
presence and worried less about what they were to believe as “Mormons.”

\(^9\) For a fuller discussion, see Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of Christianity* (Yale University, 1989);; and
Sons, 1985), 652-662.

\(^10\) See HCH 1:81-86 for a sample of Smith’s first-hand accounts of the miraculous events that transpired during
their early gatherings. Such occurrences were common throughout the Second Great Awakening. See also Joseph
Fielding Smith, *Essentials In Church History*, 15th ed. (Deseret Book Company, 1950), “It was not long after the
departure of the Apostles that spiritual gifts ceased to be manifest in the Church. The decline of these blessings,
which are inseparably connected with the Church of Christ (emphasis mine), led to the belief, so prevalent even to
this day, that they were not to be continued, having been instituted in the incipiency of the Church, merely as a
means of aiding in its establishment, after which they were no longer needed,” 9.
The Solidification of Mormon Divine Books

The Book of Mormon

Mormon historian Richard Lyman Bushman, commenting on the significance of the Book of Mormon, has said that the book presents itself as an offspring of the Bible. “If you believe one, the Book of Mormon says, you will believe the other.”1 And yet, despite their similarities, the Book of Mormon challenges the authority of the Bible by breaking the monopoly of the Bible on scriptural truth. Certain passages in the Book of Mormon even cast doubt on the veracity of the Bible.12 Bushman continues, “Over time, the Book of Mormon says biblical revelation has been depleted . . . . The Book of Mormon, in other words, declares the Bible to be deficient.”13 However, Bushman later notes that during Joseph Smith’s King Follett discourse on April 7, 1844, when Smith draws out his most startling theological teaching on the nature of God, it comes from the Bible, not from the Book of Mormon. “He spoke confidently, as if he was giving the obvious meaning of the Bible, even in making the most startling assertions.”14

The concept of “restoration” presented in the Book of Mormon was to encourage humanity that God was truly alive and once again speaking to men and women. Miracles, tongues, and reported healings were evidences to the early Mormon Church that God was once

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11 Richard Lyman Bushman, 99. In 2 Nephi 25:5, we read, “These last records . . . shall establish the truth of the first.”
12 Ibid., 99-100.
13 Ibid. Bushman adds, “There are many plain and precious things taken away from the Book, which is the Book of the Lamb of God. . . . We believe the Bible to be the Word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book of Mormon to be the Word of God.”
14 Ibid., 534.
again among God's people as he was with the primitive church. Early Mormon converts were not drawn, then, by new doctrinal truths taught in the Book of Mormon, but by vivid stories of ancient events in the America's and of a God who was still active in world history, a God who was more concerned about actual practice of piety than with theorizing on what was to be believed. This emphasis of religious practice over creedal belief is a hallmark of modern Mormonism today, which is a contributory reason why the Mormon Church has never produced a systematic theology of its own. From its inception, the Mormon religion was not characterized by a tightly woven theological system of beliefs, but by direct “revelations” from God himself to the Prophet Joseph Smith. These revelatory messages were admonishments and instructions for the reinstitution of a restored Christianity, which, as stressed by Smith and those who followed after him, had been lost for centuries. This was accompanied and confirmed by the wide range of spiritual gifts and the reinstitution of a living Prophet and the Melchizedek Priesthood.

However, it is being argued by a number of modern Mormon writers investigating the early history of Mormon theology that the nature of God as portrayed in the Book of Mormon is not only monotheistic, but monotheism of the modalistic variety, a subset of Monarchianism. Because of this, these Mormon scholars believe that Joseph Smith may have held to a modalistic brand of monotheism in the early days of the movement. This kind of

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15 On speaking in tongues, see Smith, HCH 1:296, 297, 323, 409, 422. On miraculous healings, see 1:431; 2:95, 354; 4:5, 414.

monotheism was not uncommon at this time during the Second Great Awakening, and was commonly shared among the laity and many preachers.¹⁷

Mormon writer Boyd Kirkland observes that the Book of Mormon speaks of only one God, who manifested himself either as the Father or the Son.¹⁸ Following is a representative passage that is claimed by some Mormon historians to have strong monotheistic and modalistic overtones.

For behold, the time cometh, and is not far distant, that with power, the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay [flesh], and shall go forth amongst men, working mighty miracles, such as healing the sick, raising the dead, causing the lame to walk, the blind to receive their sight, and the deaf to hear, and curing all manner of diseases. And he shall cast out devils, or the evil spirits which dwell in the hearts of the children of men. And lo, he shall suffer temptations, and pain of body. . . . And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary (Mosiah 3:5-8).

The opening verse describes God as “the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity”. This initial description of God (presumably the Father) as “the Lord Omnipotent” is set in conventional Christian terminology and would be understood as a familiar reference to God the Father by any Christian at that time. Smith is referring apparently to the Father here as “the Lord Omnipotent” [who] “shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay [flesh].” Thus, the passage appears to depict the Father

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¹⁸ Boyd Kirkland, “The Development of the Mormon Doctrine of God.” Line Upon Line, 35. For BOM references, see 1830 ed., 1 Ne. 11:21, 28; in current editions, see Mos. 3:5-8; 7:27; 15: 1-5; Al. 11:28, 29, 38, 44; 3 Ne. 1:14; Morm. 5:17; 9:9-12; Eth. 3:14f.; 4:12, listed in Kirkland, n. 5.
himself who comes down from heaven and dwells in a tabernacle of clay (human flesh) in the person of Jesus Christ, who is then presented as one who “shall go forth amongst men, working mighty miracles, such as healing the sick, raising the dead,” and every other activity that typified Christ’s earthly ministry. Notice here that the passage does not suggest that the Lord “sent” the Son down to earth, but that the Lord himself came down and dwelt in a tabernacle of clay in the Person of Jesus Christ. On the face of it, this is a clear instance of modalism. It is not that the Son assumes the role of the Father, as we shall see later in Theophilus of Antioch, but that the Father in this BOM passage assumes the role of the son, taking on human flesh. One might argue that this is an instance of Economic Trinitarianism, wherein the Triad as manifested in creation and redemption was an attempt to show how the Son (and the Spirit), revealed in the “economy” as other than the Father, was at the same time inseparably linked with him in his eternal being. However, the strong suggestion that the Father comes down to earth to assume the role of the Son in salvation is an indicator of modalism and patripassianism.

This very detailed description of Christ continues on into verses 6 and 7. In verse 7 the Lord Omnipotent (the Father) “shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death.” This passage thus far indicates that “the Lord Omnipotent” has come down to earth to dwell in a tabernacle of clay and assume the role of Jesus Christ, the Son. In verse 8 it says, “And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the

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beginning; and his mother shall be called Mary.” Thus far, my reading of this passage indicates that the one God, the Lord Omnipotent, has come down to assume the role of the Son. One God is assuming the roles of two different modes of divine activity, i.e. the Lord Omnipotent (or, the Father) who, prior to this, resided in heaven, and the activity of the Son, who now resides in human flesh on the earth. Again, this passage is reminiscent of a form of modalism that has been termed Patripassianism, a form of Monarchianism, which arose in the early third-century and that taught essentially that God the Father suffered as the Son. However, it should be pointed out that, because the “Lord Omnipotent” is not specifically named in the passage as either the Father or the Son, one cannot make too strong a case for a modalistic interpretation for this passage.

In yet another passage from the Book of Mosiah, we read of Abinadi’s sermon that explores the relationship between God and Christ:

God himself shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people. And because he dwelleth in the flesh he shall be called the Son of God, and having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father, being the Father and the Son—the Father, because he was conceived by the power of God; and the Son, because of the flesh; thus becoming the Father and the Son—and they are one God, yea, the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth (Mosiah 15:1-4).

This passage also appears to be an inference that the Father and the Son are one and the same person, but manifested in two different roles. It appears to suggest a modalistic version of monotheism. This passage teaches that because the Father has come down to dwell in the flesh, he shall be called the Son of God. As the Son, the “Father” then subjects the human flesh of the Son to the will of the Father, “being the Father and the Son.” It goes on apparently to

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20 When I refer modalism, I am referring to modalistic Monarchianism, and not Dynamic Monarchianism, unless so designated.
show why the Son can be the Father, “because he was conceived by the power of God,” but called the Son, “because of the flesh,” thus being both the Father and the Son. This is rather confusing, but the passage appears to attempt to show how two “personages” can be both one God in a modalistic framework. Indeed, Jesus Christ in the flesh has now become “The very Eternal Father of heaven and earth.”

Mormon historian Van Hale also suggests that this passage shows that Jesus and the Father are identical, that is, that Jesus was the Father come in the flesh.21 If that is true, then it is clearly demonstrative of patripassianism. On the other hand, Mormon writers Ari D. Bruening and David L. Paulsen advocate that passages like these that appear to suggest a modalistic understanding of God actually show either one or all of three possible explanations: 1) that Jesus is the Father in the sense of being the Father of heaven and earth, or 2) that the Book of Mormon is teaching that Jesus becomes the Father of those who have been redeemed and covenant to obey him like an adoptive father, or, 3) that Jesus is the Father in the sense that he has received the fullness of the Father while in the flesh on earth, in the sense that he inherits all that the Father has and in this sense is the Father.22 These explanations appear plausible on the surface, but then one could ask, if the BOM passages definitely wished to portray God in a modalistic sense, would they not take the form that we find them here?

In an even stronger example of modalistic theology, in the Book of Mormon passage from the book of Ether, we read:

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Behold, I am he who was prepared from the foundation of the world to redeem my people. Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son (emphasis added). In me shall all mankind have life, and that eternally, even they who shall believe on my name; and they shall become my sons and my daughters. . . . And whatsoever thing persuadeth men to do good is of me; for good cometh of none save it be of me. I am the same that leadeth men to all good; he that will not believe my words will not believe me—that I am; and he that will not believe me will not believe the Father who sent me. For behold, I am the Father (emphasis added), I am the light and the life, and the truth of the world (Ether 3: 14 f.; 4:12).

On the face of it, this passage suggests an even stronger example of a modalistic passage in its description of God. “Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son.” And, “For behold, I am the Father.” Although these passages do not reflect an orthodox Christian concept of the Godhead, they do represent what was typical of the early nineteenth-century American primitivist perception of the Trinity that in some manner the Father and the Son were both representatives of the one God.23 Or, as Bruening and Paulson have suggested above, the passage may be interpreted in a more Trinitarian fashion as antimodalistic. Unless one can find a BOM passage that deliberately reads that the Father is not the Son, or vica-versa, then it is difficult to come to any other conclusion than the passages we have examined thus far are representative of a Modalistic Monarchianism and not Trinitarianism.

Boyd Kirkland has suggested that Joseph Smith’s earliest descriptions of God as an absolute, infinite, self-existent, spiritual being, perfect in all of his attributes and alone in his supremacy24 is typical of American Protestant belief that was prevalent in early nineteenth-century America. The Godhead was described within the current understanding of the

24 Kirkland, 35. See the following Mormon literature verifying this: 1 Nephi 10:18-19; 2 Nephi 9:20; Alma 18: 18, 24-30; 22:9-11; 26:35; Mormon 9:9, 17, 19; Moroni 7:22; 8:18; in the Doctrine and Covenants 20:17, 28; 38:1-3; 76:1-4, 70; POG: Moses 1:3, 6.
Trinitarian formula of “the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, which is one God.” Smith’s early theology, as maintained by Kirtland and other Mormon scholars like him, is manifested in his translation of the BOM. In the early Mormon publication, *Evening and Morning Star*, the Book of Mormon along with the “Articles of Faith” were both used for proselytizing efforts and declared that “there is a God in heaven who is infinite and eternal, from everlasting to everlasting, the same unchangeable God, the framer of heaven and earth and all things which are in them.” Such a description of God fits nicely into the cultural and religious milieu of early nineteenth-century American restorationist theology. It would appear that the descriptions of God found in the Book of Mormon and restorationist Christian concepts of deity share a common cultural and religious background, due most likely to their close proximity and mutual Protestant heritage.

Despite this apparent similarity between early Mormon and American restorationist doctrines of God as presented by one group of Mormon scholars, Bruening and Paulsen present a caveat that there are far more Book of Mormon passages that present an antimodalistic portrayal of God than the so-called “modalistic” passages. They refer to one passage in the book of 3 Nephi, which they maintain is the strongest antimodalist text in the Book of Mormon:

Kirkland adds, “The only passage in the Bible containing the formula, ‘The Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one’ (1 John 5:7) is not found in any of the most ancient manuscripts or in the writings of the early church fathers. All modern critical translations of the New Testament omit the passage. Thus its presence in the *Book or Mormon* appears to be an anomaly.” 35.
27 Bruening and Paulsen, “The Development of the Mormon Concept of God: Modalism and Other Myths,” 124-32. The authors’ research claims that the antimodalist passages far outweigh the so-called modalist passages by a ratio of more than 20 to 1. However, even if one clear example of modalism is found in the BOM, the dilemma would remain, despite the ratio of antimodalist passages against it.
And it came to pass that again they heard the voice, and they understood it not. And
behold, the third time they did understand the voice which they heard; and it said unto
them: Behold my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my
name—hear ye him. And it came to pass, as they understood they cast their eyes up
again towards heaven; and behold, they saw a Man descending out of heaven; and he
was clothed in a white robe; and he came down and stood in the midst of them; and the
eyes of the whole multitude were turned upon him, and they durst not open their
mouths, even one to another, and wist not what it meant, for they thought it was an
angel that had appeared unto them. And it came to pass that he stretched forth his
hand and spake unto the people, saying: Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets
testified shall come into the world. And behold, I am the light and the life of the world;
and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have
glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world, in the which I have suffered
the will of the Father in all things from the beginning (3 Nephi 1:4, 6-11).

In this passage we have a clear example of a manifestation of at least two members of the
Godhead represented at the same time. Bruening and Paulsen ask that if Joseph Smith meant
to portray a modalistic concept of the Godhead, why not modify this and other antimodalist
passages in the Book of Mormon as well?28 They point out that Mormon scholars of the
modalist persuasion generally do not present this or other antimodalist passages as
contravening evidence against their position of Joseph Smith as an early modalist proponent of
the doctrine of God. Van Hale, however, does in fact caution other Mormon writers who would
use modalism to define early Mormon doctrine by demonstrating that the Book of Mormon
also contains several other passages that appear to contradict the oneness of modalism.29

Thus we apparently find ourselves confronted with evidence from the Book of Mormon
for both modalistic and antimodalistic descriptions of God. If this is true, we have at best a
rather confused portrayal of the doctrine of God depicted in Joseph Smith's first divinely
inspired translation. If for the sake of argument we presume that the Book of Mormon is not a

28 Ibid., 131.
29 Van Hale, "Defining the Contemporary Mormon Concept of God," 13, e.g., 3 Ne. 11:6-8, 32; 15:1, 18, 19; 18:27;
26:2, 5, 15.
divinely aided translation of an ancient text, but is rather the product of a nineteenth century author (or authors), conversant with American theology of the restorationist era, then the apparent confusion regarding the nature of God is an argument in support of the theory that the Book of Mormon is an American product of the nineteenth century. On the other hand, if we presume that the Book of Mormon is the translation of an ancient text preserved and abridged by a long-dead Jewish descendant of ancient America, then we must naturally attempt to reconcile these modalistic and antimodalistic passages along the lines suggested by Bruening and Paulsen.

My reading of the aforementioned Book of Mormon passages leaves me with the impression that the author (whoever he—or they—might have been) was trying to prove too much by saying too much about the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity occupies a large portion of the theological content of the Book of Mormon. Add to that the historical observation of a similar preoccupation with speculation (mostly negative) on the doctrine of the Trinity in the same American period shared by Smith, which also reflects similar confusion regarding the relationship of the members of the Trinity, and we have further evidence that the Book of Mormon is of here human origin and a product of its time.

As I have noted earlier, I am suggesting in this work that the doctrine of the Trinity as it eventually found expression in the Nicene-Constantinople Creed was an attempt to maintain a delicate balance between monotheism and polytheism. The Book of Mormon passages on the nature of God that we have examined, understood as modalistic passages by some, are not representative of the Nicene-Constantinople Creed’s theological expression. For that matter,
even passages that represent an “antimodalist” understanding of the Trinity are not representative of creedal Christianity. There is an indefinite complexity evident in the roles and the relationships of the members of the Trinity in the Book of Mormon. A “tension” must exist between monotheism and polytheism, otherwise the Persons in the Godhead will be expressed either in a modalistic sense (for concern to maintain the unity of God), or in a polytheistic sense (for concern to acknowledge the true existences of the individual Persons). This tension, this delicate balance, can only be maintained if the essence of God is understood to be incorporeal. There is no discussion (that I can find) in the Book of Mormon regarding the essence of God’s nature. There is certainly no discussion that the essence of God’s nature is transcendent and immaterial.

*The Rewriting of Genesis: The Revelations of Moses and Abraham*

Between the months of June and December, 1830, Joseph Smith claimed to have received a number of revelations from God. These revelations, originally received by Moses, would later be collected and compiled in the little tract known as the *Book of Moses.* This series of revelations authentically portray early Mormon theological belief given their provenance in the history of the Church. Only two major theological texts pre-date the revelations of Moses: these are the *Book of Mormon* and the “Articles and Covenants of the

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30 HCH 1:97-139. These revelations were later collected and published in the first edition of the *Pearl of Great Price* in 1851. On October 10, 1880, Second Counselor Joseph Fielding Smith directed that the writings contained in *PGP* be added to the Church’s official canon.
Church of Christ,” written in April of 1830. The “Articles and Covenants” were first published in the first edition of the *Evening and Morning Star* in June of 1832.\(^{31}\)

The *Book of Moses* purports to provide further revelation on several theological and cosmological ideas. It is interesting that a review of the earliest Mormon creation accounts found in Moses 2:1-5, 29 follow very closely the Authorized Version of the Bible. For example, following is a quotation of that passage found in Moses 2:1-4:

> And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto Moses, saying: Behold, I reveal unto you concerning this heaven, and this earth; write the works which I speak. I am the Beginning and the End, the Almighty God; by mine Only Begotten I created these things; yea, in the beginning I created the heaven, and the earth upon which thou standest (v. 1).

> And the earth was without form, and void; and I caused darkness to come up upon the face of the deep; and my Spirit moved upon the face of the water; for I am God (v. 2).

> And I, God, said: Let there be light; and there was light (v. 3).

> And I, God, saw the light; and that light was good. And I, God, divided the light from the darkness (v. 4).

> And I, God, called the light Day; and the darkness, I called Night; and this I did by the word of my power, and it was done as I spake; and the evening and the morning was the first day (v. 5).

One notices immediately that Joseph Smith added, “I” each time God is mentioned. This formula is followed throughout each day of creation. It appears to serve as a reminder that the God with whom Moses conversed “face to face” (Moses 1:2) is a distinct and personal being.

So far, up until verse 2:26, only “I, God” is referred to as the agent of creation. When we come to verse 26, however, a shift occurs:

\(^{31}\) The *Evening and Morning Star* was the first printing press established by the fledgling Church in Independence, Missouri, in early 1832. It served as the official Church organ of disseminating knowledge and revelations of God through Joseph Smith, and was the only official publication of Mormon literature until its destruction on July 20, 1833.
And I, God, said unto mine Only Begotten, which was with me from the beginning: Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and it was so. And I, God, said: Let them have dominion over the fishes of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. And I, God, created man in mine own image, in the image of mine Only Begotten created I him; male and female created I them (Moses 2:26, 27).

In the Book of Moses we are once again introduced to God’s “Only Begotten,” in whose image he shares with God. In relation to God, the Only Begotten is described to be, “In mine own image, in the image of mine Only Begotten created I him,” and who assists God in the creation of man. This is undoubtedly Jesus Christ, who is introduced to Moses prior to any Old Testament prophecy concerning the coming Messiah.32 Bruening and Paulsen note that in this passage both God and his Only Begotten are clearly portrayed as two distinct persons.33 Prior to this, in Moses 1:6, Jesus Christ is introduced to Moses as “mine Only Begotten,” but not in person alongside God. Moses is told that he himself, as God’s son, is “in the similitude of mine Only Begotten.” Not until the creation of man are both God and his Only Begotten introduced as the necessary agents of this divine activity. As I shall show in a later chapter, this is the same technique used by Theophilus of Antioch when he describes the creation of Adam. Even though the above Moses passages that announce the Only Begotten do not betray an overt modalistic tendency, neither do they portray a clear distinction between them as separate “Personages,” one of spirit and the other of tabernacle.

There is no physical description of “God” in the Book of Moses. This is because, as Moses relates it, he could not behold the form of God with his natural eyes, but only with his “spiritual” eyes: “for my natural eyes could not have beheld; for I should have withered and

32 In Mormon theology, the fullness of the Gospel is revealed to Adam and to every Old Testament patriarch, and now to Moses.

33 Bruening and Paulsen, “The Development of the Mormon Concept of God,” 118.
died in his presence; but his glory was upon me; and I beheld his face, for I was transfigured before him” (Moses 1:11). Thus, The Book of Moses describes God as a spiritual being who cannot be seen by the natural man. However, in Mormon theology today, God is a glorified man of flesh and bone. One wonders if, from this book, Smith at that time believed that the God that Moses beheld with his spiritual eyes was in the form of a man. It certainly holds true for God’s Only Begotten that he is in the “similitude” of a man.

In Moses 1:6, God tells Moses that his Only Begotten “is and shall be the Savior, for he is full of grace and truth.” Then God says, “but there is no God beside me, and all things are present with me, for I know them all.” It is unclear what Joseph is trying to relate here through Moses. Is he saying that there is no God but the “Almighty God” (Moses 2:1)? What of his Only Begotten? What of the Holy Ghost? Such language appears to be Monarchian or Unitarian in that it seems to say that God Almighty is the only God who exists.

This passage also appears to allude to the orthodox Christian absolutist concept of God’s Omniscience, for “all things are present with me, for I know them all.” Further, If one assumes that the Book of Moses is Joseph’s own literary creation, and not the product of a vision as he claims, then one may speculate from our above observation that his reference to “no God beside me” is a default position that may hearken back to the traditional Christian theology. If one assumes, rather, that the Book of Moses is a vision of Moses revealed to Joseph in June of 1830, then it is difficult to know where to place the Only Begotten in relation to God Almighty with whom “there is no God beside me.” Is the Only Begotten also a God beside whom there is
no other? The passage is not clear in explicating the distinction between God and his Only
Begotten.

When the book says, “and all things are present with me, for I know them all” (1:6)
(emphasis mine), there is no qualifier that clarifies in what sense God knows all things, whether
in the classic absolutist sense, or in the Mormon finitist sense. The plain rendering of the
passage seems to indicate that God’s knowledge is absolutely unlimited.34 Mormon writer Kent
E. Robson discusses this very issue of Mormon theology in opposition to the classic orthodox
understanding of omniscience when he writes, “We do not limit, in my opinion, the concept of
omniscience . . . in Mormon theology . . . if we say that God cannot know or do what absolutely
cannot be known or done. In fact, this is true by definition. Only those who would make of
God an ineffable mystery, a totally other being, incomprehensible and uncomprehended, would
suggest otherwise.”35 In orthodox Christian theology, God is omniscient in the sense that all
things are present with him, for he knows them all without succession of thought in time.
Robson says, however, in accordance with Mormon theology, God knows only those things
which can be known.36 But in Moses 1:6, however, we appear to have a passage that tells us in
almost classic orthodox fashion that God is indeed Omniscient.

34 Other Mormon passages seem to indicate the same sense of unlimited knowledge, or omniscience, in the
absolute sense: 1 Ne. 9:6; 2 Ne. 2:24; 9:20; W. of Mormon 1:7; D&C 38:2 (which is almost word for word with
Moses 1:6).
35 Kent E. Robson, “Omnipotence, Omnipresence, and Omniscience in Mormon Theology,” in Line Upon Line:
Essays On Mormon Doctrine, 68.
36 Ibid.
Another interesting passage in the book is worth investigating:

And in that day the Holy Ghost fell upon Adam, which beareth record of the Father and the Son, saying: I am the Only Begotten of the Father from the beginning, henceforth and forever, that as thou hast fallen thou mayest be redeemed, and all mankind, even as many as will (Moses 5:9)

Here we are introduced to the Holy Ghost, who is shown to “fall” upon Adam. The Holy Ghost is he, or that, which falls upon Adam. The text does not specify if the Holy Ghost is a person or an influence, a divine unction, or perhaps “the mind” that is shared by the Father and the Son, as is taught in the “Lectures on Faith,” published in the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. Lecture Five reads:

There are two personages who constitute the great, matchless, governing, and supreme power over all things, by whom all things were created and made. . . . They are the Father and the Son: the Father being a personage of spirit, glory, and power. . . . The Son, who was in the bosom of the Father, is a personage of tabernacle . . . being in the form and likeness of man. . . . He is called the Son because of the flesh . . . possessing the same mind with the Father, which mind is the Holy Spirit that bears record of the Father and the Son. These three are one; or, in other words, these three constitute the great, matchless, governing and supreme power over all things.

A series of catechetical questions follow. One in particular specifically asks: “How many personages are there in the Godhead? Answer: Two: The Father and the Son.” Robert L. Millet has observed regarding the Fifth Lecture that “[t]his is a perplexing passage, perhaps one of the two most enigmatic passages of Lecture 5, a segment of the lecture which seems to have

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38 Larry E. Dahl and Charles D. Tate, Jr., eds., The Lectures On Faith In Historical Perspective, v. 15 in The Religious Studies Center Monograph Series (Provo, Ut: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1990), 83-84.
resulted in confusion on the part of members and may have contributed eventually to the deletion of the Lectures on Faith from the Doctrine and Covenants in 1921.”

In the first line of the above passage in the Book of Moses the wording with regards to the Holy Ghost says, “the Holy Ghost . . . which beareth record of the Father and the Son,” matches closely the concept given in the Lecture Five: “which mind is the Holy Spirit that bears record of the Father and the Son.” It appears that the Book of Moses passage may have had an influence upon the “Lectures on Faith.” Thus, it appears from the reading in Moses 5:9, that there are only two Personages; that the Holy Ghost is that which bears record of the Father and the Son as their “mind”, but is not a Personage.

Another interesting fact in this particular passage is the statement: “the Holy Ghost . . . which beareth record of the Father and the Son, saying: I am the Only Begotten of the Father from the beginning” (emphasis mine). One may ask, who is doing the speaking here? Is it the Only Begotten through the Holy Ghost? Is it the Holy Ghost speaking as the person of the Only Begotten? Is it Adam speaking, under the influence of the Holy Ghost, as proxy for the Only Begotten? Or is it, rather, the Only Begotten himself speaking to the mind of Adam through the agency of the Holy Ghost? There is enough ambiguity in the passage that no uniform answer seems apparent. Both the Moses passage and the Fifth Lecture declare that the Holy Ghost bears record of the mind of the Father and the Son. The Fifth Lecture, however, is more specific in its doctrine that the Holy Spirit is the mind of the Father and the Son.

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39 Robert L. Millett, “The Supreme Power Over All Things,” in The Lectures On Faith In Historical Perspective, 224. Millett offers a number of explanations on how the troubling notion that the Father is a personage of spirit may be understood (224-28) in light of other writings by Joseph Smith and other non-Mormons and shows that “spirit” may be understood as a reference to God’s eternal nature, just as man is a being that has an eternal nature.
The Book of Abraham

On July 3, 1835, one Michael Chandler arrived in Kirtland, Ohio, with his curios of Egyptian artifacts, texts and mummies, and with him, a new era of Mormon theological development arrived also. Chandler came to Kirtland specifically to meet Joseph Smith because of his reputation as a translator of ancient texts. It was Chandler’s hope that as translator of the Book of Mormon, Smith would shed light on the collection of ancient Egyptian texts he possessed and shed light on the identity of the mummies. Upon inspecting the papyri, Joseph announced that one roll contained the writings of Abraham of Ur and in another the writings of Joseph of Egypt. Without being able to translate the ancient texts himself, Chandler had no way of verifying that Smith’s pronouncement regarding the ancient texts was genuine. For whatever private reason unknown to us, Chandler provided Smith with a certificate of authentication, which read:

This is to make known to all who may be desirous, concerning the knowledge of Mr. Joseph Smith, Jun., in deciphering the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic characters in my possession, which I have, in many eminent cities, showed to the most learned; and, from the information that I ever learn, or meet with, I find of Mr. Joseph Smith, Jun., to correspond in the most minute matters. How did Chandler know that Smith had correctly surmised the origin of the Egyptian papyri? Actually, he did not. He was just as much in the dark in such matters as was everyone else in America at the time. No one understood ancient Egyptian except Champollion and those on the European Continent following his work. An English translation of Champollion’s work had

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40 See Bushman, 285-93, 452-58.
41 Ibid.
42 Bushman, 285-86. See also HCH v. 2, 235-36. It is unknown as to why Joseph Smith never got around to translating the “writings of Joseph.”
43 HCH v. 2: 235.
not yet been published at this time. After acquiring the texts from Chandler, Smith began translating the papyrus.

How did Joseph translate the Book of Abraham? He was not interpreting the hieroglyphics like an Egyptologist.\(^4^4\) He used the papyri as an occasion for inspiration as he did the gold plates with the Book of Mormon. As Richard Bushman describes the event, “Joseph translated Abraham as he had the characters on the gold plates, by knowing the meaning without actually knowing the plates’ language.”\(^4^5\)

Nowhere in the Book of Mormon or The Book of Moses do we find anything like what we find in the Book of Abraham. Joseph began translating the papyrus soon after he acquired it from Chandler in the summer of 1835. He translated the first two chapters at that time, and then shelved the project for seven years. He did not come back to it until 1842. He finished the project by completing chapters three through five sometime in the winter of that year. The Book of Abraham is the story of Abraham’s sojourn from Ur of the Chaldeans to Canaan, and then to Egypt because, “I, Abraham, saw that it was needful for me to obtain another place of residence” (1:1). After being rescued by God Himself from certain death as a human sacrifice by priests of Pharaoh, the Lord’s angel releases him from his bonds and says to him, “Abraham, behold, my name is Jehovah, and I have heard thee, and have come down to deliver thee, and to take thee away from thy father’s house, and from all thy kins-folk, into a strange land which thou knowest not of” (1:16). The only other mention of God as Jehovah is in chapter 2, verse 8: “My name is Jehovah, and I know the end from the beginning; therefore my

\(^{44}\) Ibid., 291.

\(^{45}\) Ibid., 292.
hand shall be over thee.” It is not certain to whom Joseph is referring when he uses the word “Jehovah,” but it is most likely that he has the Father in mind. This is because later he refers to Jesus as “like unto the Son of Man:”

And the Lord said: Whom shall I send? And one answered like unto the Son of Man: Here am I, send me. And another answered and said: Here am I, send me. And the Lord said: I will send the first. And the second [undoubtedly Satan] was angry, and kept not his first estate; and, at that day, many followed after him (3:27-28)

Thus, in the Book of Abraham, God the Father is named “Jehovah,” whereas Jesus Christ receives the title “Son of Man.” In 1842, Joseph completes his translation for chapters three, four and five.

And then the Lord said: Let us go down. And they went down at the beginning, and they, that is the Gods (emphasis mine), organized and formed the heavens and the earth (4:1)

Two significant developments occur here: first, Joseph’s designation of the council of the Gods; and second, his rejection of creation ex nihilo in describing the creation of the cosmos. Joseph reworks the creation account in Abraham, in opposition to the Book of Moses where, first, God is portrayed in the first person as “I, God.” Then, In the Book of Abraham, the voice shifts to the third person and refers to “the Gods.” He alters his original cosmology significantly. In the Book of Moses, God creates the heavens and the earth, and the earth “upon which thou standest.” In this he follows the biblical account of Genesis found in the Authorized Version quite closely. But in the Book of Abraham, he changes the cosmology radically by portraying the Gods as organizing and forming the heavens and the earth from pre-existing material. In chapter three, Abraham is informed by God that in the cosmos there are eternal intelligences ranked according to glory. Among all these eternal intelligences, God stands alone as the
“more intelligent than they all” (3:19). Rather than showing a cosmos created out of nothing, *ex nihilo*, as in Christian cosmology, Joseph offers a radically different portrait in 1842.

Bushman, then, is quite right in pointing out the significance that this radical cosmology entails:

“Now he [Joseph Smith] showed a universe filled with individual intelligences ruled by a God who was ‘more intelligent than they all.’ God’s power grew out of his glory and intelligence rather than his having created everything out of nothing.”

The first three chapters in the *Book of Abraham* consistently refer to God in a singular form. Beginning with the fourth chapter, however, a major shift occurs and “Gods” is used consistently throughout the rest of the book. A major theological paradigm shift must have occurred between 1835, when the translation was begun, and 1842, when the compiled translation first appeared in the *Times and Seasons*.

Thus, the publication of the Book of Abraham would have far-reaching ramifications. The accepted doctrine of God of the 1840’s was a concept specifically taught by a canonical document, the “Lectures on Faith.” The Lectures were accepted as official Church doctrine at the General Conference in the summer of 1835. In 1842, however, we see the inclusion of a document that teaches a redefined nature of God in the Nauvoo period. Unlike the Book of Mormon and the Book of Moses, which may allude to a plurality of Gods, the Book of Abraham is explicit. Thus we find that a major theological development occurred during the first period of Mormon history under the leadership of Joseph Smith. It was to be sure one of the most significant shifts in its entire history, second only to the King Follett discourse. From 1842 to 1844, before Joseph delivers his most important sermon, the King Follett Discourse, he begins

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46 Bushman, 456.
to emphasize that God the Father, as well as the Son, both had bodies of flesh and bone. We
find in the Doctrine and Covenants, "Important items of instruction given by Joseph Smith the
Prophet, at Ramus, Illinois, April 2, 1843," and among them the following doctrine of the
Godhead:

The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also; but the
Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not
so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us (130:22).

In writing of this period, Richard Bushman observes:

Piece by piece, Joseph redefined the nature of God, giving Him a form and a body and
locating Him in time and space. Taken as a whole, the bits and pieces of the Nauvoo
metaphysical doctrines were gradually coalescing into a new story of Creation and the
purpose of life. Joseph would pull the parts together in one grand narrative in the King
Follett sermon of April 1844, but portions crept into the early sermons in Nauvoo. By
emphasizing the eternity of matter and intelligence, Joseph modified the Creation story
until it appeared that God had not created anything ex nihilo.47

For Mormon theology hereafter, a radical break from traditional Christian cosmology and
theology occurred, a breach that has remained to this day.

All of these nascent ideas would be summed up by Joseph Smith in his most famous
sermon on April 7, 1844, known as the King Follett Discourse. Not long after the sermon was
delivered, Joseph Smith soon would leave the stage of history under tragic circumstances, and
the fledgling Mormon Church would be catapulted into a new era. This will be the subject of
the next chapter.

47 Ibid., 421.
CHAPTER THREE

THE MORMON CONCEPT OF GOD (1844 – 1877)

In this chapter I will examine perhaps the most significant theological development of the Mormon doctrine of God. As has been observed thus far, most of the theological development over the Mormon doctrine of God occurred within the life of the movement’s founder, Joseph Smith Jr. It was during the first fourteen year period, from 1830 to 1844 that some Mormon historians have alleged that Mormon doctrine shifted from its initial monotheistic belief in God to a radically new understanding of the nature of God. In this chapter I will first review Joseph Smith’s most significant sermon he ever preached, the famous “King Follett Discourse,” wherein Smith, according to some Mormon scholars, makes an unequivocal break with monotheism and the Christian concept of the doctrine of God.¹ I will then examine the theological significance of Smith’s sermon and the seminal ideas that would influence the theological speculations of other Mormon thinkers after him. This will include an examination of the theological speculations of the second church Prophet and President, Brigham Young (1801 to 1877), including apostles Parley P. Pratt (1807 to 1857), and his younger brother, Orson Pratt (1811 to 1881). This will take us to the late 1800’s under the leadership of Brigham Young as Second President of the Mormon Church.

¹ Assuming, of course, he had held such a position early in his prophetic career.
Prelude to Destiny

Prior to the King Follett Discourse of April 7, 1844, the concepts spelled out in the Book of Abraham, in particular the final two chapters (4 & 5), were already firmly entrenched in Joseph Smith's mind as the basic material to his understanding of God's nature by 1842. These concepts were the materiality of God the Father and the Son, the eternity of matter, the plurality of gods, and the eternal progression of intelligences. It seems a plausible surmise that much of this new doctrinal material was inspired as a result of his study of Hebrew. Thus, his study of Hebrew I maintain to be a significant factor that led up to Smith's revolutionary sermon regarding the doctrine of God. During and after his monumental sermon, Smith appealed to the biblical text primarily, and to the Book of Abraham not at all. Relying upon his new-found knowledge of Hebrew, he employed Genesis as his primary text and retranslated the traditionally understood singular noun for God, "Elohim," to "Gods".

Smith, already a veteran at retranslating the Bible, may have concluded that the normal English translation in the Authorized Version of the Bible must also be in error, and thus translated the Hebrew noun Elohim as Gods, instead of its normal usage God. In the creation account found in the Book of Abraham, Smith replaces God ("I, God," Book of Moses) with Gods. Thus, after his exposure to Hebrew, Joseph's biblical cosmology undergoes a significant change from "I, God," found in the 1830 Book of Moses, to "the Gods" in the Book of Abraham, published soon after Joseph completed its translation in 1842.

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Thus, a pivotal theological shift occurred in the Nauvoo period of Mormon history, wherein Joseph Smith begins to denounce the orthodox notion of the Trinity altogether.\(^4\) We will see that he emphasized that God the Father, as well as the Son, both had tangible bodies of flesh and bone (D&C 130:22), introduced the plurality of Gods concept, and taught that human beings could also strive to become Gods themselves. God himself had a father upon whom he depended for his existence and authority. The Father had acted upon the leadership and direction of a "head god" and a "council of gods" in the creation of the worlds.\(^5\) Thus, the King Follett Discourse would provide the core of Latter-day Saint theology and speculative thought on the doctrine of God for the rest of the 19th century.

In addition, the King Follett Discourse would become the catalyst for a new understanding of matter as an eternal element. From this time forward, Mormonism rejects the traditional concept of "dualism," or the concept of reality divided between matter and spirit (as incorporeal reality). Now, under Smith's influence, matter and spirit are taught to be the same "stuff," understood as existing in every degree in all existing forms of tangible matter down to a very refined, invisible and ethereal substance, but "material" and eternal, none the less. Benjamin E. Park has suggested that Mormonism's redefinition of matter as an eternal substance, coupled with its rejection of traditional dualism, completely redefined Mormon theology, and would become the center of its developed doctrine of divine embodiment.\(^6\)

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\(^4\) Boyd Kirkland, "The Development of the Mormon Doctrine of God." *Line Upon Line: Essays on Mormon Doctrine*, Editor Gary James Bergera (Signature Books: Salt Lake City), 1989, 37-38. Again, whether Smith had always renounced the traditional doctrine of the Trinity as vehemently as he did in 1842 to 1844 is the subject of debate.

\(^5\) Ibid.

\(^6\) Benjamin E. Park, "Salvation through a Tabernacle: Joseph Smith, Parley P. Pratt, and Early Mormon Theologies of Embodiment," 10-11. He proceeds to show that there were three major influences for this development: Joseph
Even as Joseph mounted the podium on that rainy day to deliver his sermon on April 7, 1844, the economic and social events preceding the April Church Conference had cast doubt on his claim of being God's Prophet. He was attempting to vindicate his calling in the eyes of the Saints, and to quiet the discontent in the hearts of even some within the inner circle that increasingly entertained doubts about his authority.

In the opening of the Conference, Sidney Rigdon gave the commencement address on April 6. Undergirding his entire address is a strong awareness that Joseph Smith's status as a Prophet was in doubt by some, and that the content of the "secret meetings" were causing serious misgivings by a growing number of the Saints. A portion of Rigdon's sermon is as follows:

The time has now come to tell why we had secret meetings. We were maturing plans fourteen years ago which we can now tell....The Church would never have been here if we had not done as we did in secret. The cry of "False prophet and imposter!" rolled upon us....I know God. I have gazed upon the glories of God...if even now we should tell the glories and privileges of the Saints of God to you and to the world? We should be ridiculed. No wonder we shut it up in secret....If a man tells you one glory or one message, he learning another at the same time. Do not be astonished, then if we even yet have secret meetings, as King God for For things for your benefit.  

In his sermon, Rigdon was preparing the Saints gathered at Nauvoo for what would soon be delivered by Joseph Smith. According to Rigdon, these new revelations from God had to be

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Smith’s exposure to the Egyptian text, i.e. the Book of Abraham and its significant shift in the Creation story; Smith’s exposure to the Hebrew language; and, the Saints’ exposure to the Scottish lay philosopher, Thomas Dick

kept secret because the Saints up to now were not yet ready to hear them. The time had now come that they were ready to receive these deep truths of God. These were revelations that Smith and Rigdon and a few selected others had known for years, according to Rigdon. On the following day, April 7, 1844, Joseph Smith would finally reveal to the thousands of gathered Saints the true nature of God.

Smith begins by asserting that all past teachings regarding God have been based upon false teachings. He argues that if he can reveal to the Saints the true nature of God, then his claim to be a prophet of God would be a legitimate one. The majority of the sermon touched upon a doctrine that was to be known later as the “Doctrine of Eternal Progression.” This doctrine can be summarized in four major points: 1) God is an exalted man, having progressed through the ages; 2) Man’s spirit is co-equal with God and he can become a God; 3) Innumerable Gods exist in the universe that progress in knowledge; 4) There exists a council of Gods. In Smith’s own words, following are excerpts of the sermon:

I will prove that the world is wrong, by showing what God is. I am going to enquire after God; for I want you all to know him, and be familiar with him; and if I am bringing you to a knowledge of him, all persecutions against me ought to cease. You will then know that I am his servant; for I speak as one having authority....I will go back to the beginning before the world was, to show what kind of being God is. What kind of being was God in the beginning? Open your ears and hear, all ye ends of the earth, for I am going to prove it to you by the Bible, and tell you the designs of God in relation to the human race and why He interferes with the affairs of man....God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret.

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8 This is an interesting assertion. No matter what Joseph said about the true nature of God, this would not vindicate his status as God’s prophet, because no one in the audience would know whether his assertions were true or not. There would be no way for them to verify or falsify his assertions about God’s nature.

9 See Bushman, 533, who informs us that, “Though never canonized as scripture, the King Follett sermon, known only through the overlapping notes of four diarists, has been called the culminating statement of Joseph Smith’s theology.”

10 Smith Jr., HCH, 6: 305.
Here Joseph wants to stress that he is about to prove that the religious system of Christianity has been wrong regarding the nature of God. What he now knows about God after exercising his special prophetic gift, he wants them all to know—indeed, this is a proclamation of the truth for the whole world. And because he is bringing them a new insight into the very nature of God, because he is God’s Prophet, then all doubts about his calling should be dispelled. He intimates that with the proclamation of the knowledge he is about to reveal to them, his standing as God’s servant should be reinforced and all persecutions against him should cease.

This prelude is calculated to win back their trust. There must have been enough opposition from among the Saints to warrant this lengthy appeal to his authority. He tells them that in order to show what kind of being God is, he must go to the beginning. He will do this by going to the Bible. By doing this, Smith hopes to show what kind of being God is and why he “interferes” with the affairs of humanity. Then it comes, the great secret: God (presumably speaking of the Father) was once a man as we are now, and is an “exalted man.” He does not go into great detail here, but the implication is that as men and women, we too have the very same capacity to become as God the Father is now, sitting on his own thrown, because we also share his nature. This concept is staggering if true. What the Christian religion has taught about the nature of God has been false for most—if not all—of its history. The traditional Christian doctrine of the Trinity has been challenged by Joseph’s statement that God is an exalted man, who once used to be flesh and blood as we are now.
[F]or I am going to tell you how God came to be God....The answer is obvious—in a manner to lay down His body and take it up again.... Here then, is eternal life—to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves,...What did Jesus do? Why; I do the things that I saw my Father do when worlds came rolling into existence.11

Smith again appeals to the Bible, by referring to Jesus’ statement that he says and does nothing but that he sees his Father doing.12 He begins to speak of the beginning of the cosmos. And again he stresses that he is teaching nothing more than what the biblical text has always taught. It appears evident that what the Saints were hearing on that day was new to them, because the reaction of many to what Joseph had said stunned them. For example, when Smith said that he wanted to “refute the idea that God was God from all eternity. . . . God that sits enthroned is a man like one of yourselves,” the statement so stunned Thomas Bullock, Richard L. Bushman notes, that in his journal he wrote just the opposite: “He was God from the begin [sic] of all eternity.”13

Joseph tries to assure his audience that what he is teaching them is not contrary to the Bible’s own teaching. Apparently, this revelation about the nature of God was not widely known among the Saints, otherwise he would not have had to go to such lengths to prove its veracity. Now apparently relying upon his Hebrew study, and utilizing the first chapter of Genesis as his proof text, Smith elaborates on the concept of the plurality of Gods:

11 Ibid, 305-306. Although Smith appeals to the Bible for justification of this doctrine, he appeals more strongly to his gift of divine revelation through the power of the Holy Ghost in numerous instances throughout this sermon, pp. 307, 308, 310, and 312. He does this to imply that his insights into God’s nature are infallible as God’s prophet.
12 John 5:19: “Most assuredly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner” (NKJV). See also Jn. 5:30; 6:38; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10.
13 Bushman, 534, found in the Words of Joseph Smith (hereafter WJS), 340 (Apr. 6, 1844); JS, Journal, Apr. 7, 1844 in APR, 465.
I suppose I am not allowed to go into an investigation of anything that is not contained in the Bible....So I will go to the old Bible and turn commentator today....I shall comment on the very first Hebrew word in the Bible; I will make a comment on the very first sentence of the history of creation in the Bible....When we begin to learn this way, we begin to learn the only true God.14

Joseph uses Genesis 1:1 and points to the noun “Elohim” as his proof-text for justification of his doctrine of the plurality of Gods. While one can understand how he can supply a meaning of the plurality of Gods from this text if used strictly in its plural form, he does not elaborate how this word in Genesis 1:1 explains how God was once a man and became God as he is now. That concept is extraneous to the text. What he does rely on, rather, is another text from the New Testament. Joseph continues his sermon by saying, “We suppose that God was God from eternity, I will refute that idea. . . . [Y]ea, that God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ Himself did.” For Joseph, this was so patently true that he exclaimed, “I defy all the learning and wisdom and all the combined powers of earth and hell together to refute it.”15

The scriptural basis for the doctrine, then, is Genesis 1:1 and Jesus’ statement in the New Testament about doing nothing but what he saw his Father doing. Joseph provided a new interpretation of this familiar New Testament text (Jn. 5:19) where Jesus says that he does nothing but what he sees his Father doing. Joseph interprets this to mean that just as his Father came in the flesh on another planet, died and was resurrected to godhood, so the Son follows in his Father’s footsteps and follows the same course to godhood. This possibility is open to all free “intelligences,” which implied that every one of the Saints in the hearing of this sermon had the same innate capacity to progress to godhood. This also implies that the only

14 Smith, Jr., HCH, vol. 6: 307-308.
15 Ibid., 305, 306.
basic difference between man and God is the degree of advancement along the upward path of godhood, achieved through the use of "intelligence" and free will. In the final analysis, then, it is a question of will over matter. Just how far does one wish to progress? Humanity and God are of the same material substance, beginning from eternity as free intelligences and progressing to embodiment, death and resurrection, and then to godhood. The God of whom Smith spoke so exercised his superior will and intelligence (a word that encompasses more than intellectual capacity, but wisdom, as well) that he achieved the maximum attainment of any intelligence.

As one of the free intelligences spoken of in the Book of Moses, God was one of the free intelligences who had learned to become God.\textsuperscript{16} In this light, Joseph said to the Saints gathered to hear him:

\begin{quote}

[A]nd you have got to learn how to be gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all gods have done before you, namely, by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one; from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you attain to the resurrection of the dead, and are able to dwell in everlastings burnings, and to sit in glory, as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{quote}

Christ, then, is the model for the idea of divine progression. Smith asks, "What did Christ do? Why, I do the things that I saw my father do when worlds came rolling into existence. My Father worked out His kingdom with fear and trembling, and I must do the same; and when I get my Kingdom, I shall present it to My Father, so that He may obtain kingdom upon kingdom, and it will exalt Him in glory. He will then take a higher exaltation, and I will take His place, and

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 310.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 306.
thereby become exalted myself. Joseph is engaged either in speculation or is giving divine revelation in his rendition of Christ’s words regarding what he saw his Father doing.

Mormon historian Richard Bushman offers a modern commentary on Joseph’s discourse when he writes,

The words evoked a hierarchy of gods, succeeding to higher stations of greater glory as kingdoms are presented to them and as rising souls below them ascend to godhood. As humankind’s advocate and leader, Christ is the one through whom humans are saved; the kingdom prepared on earth is presented to Him, and He presents it to the Father, Elohim. In the light of this doctrine, the early statement from the 1830 revelations of Moses took on new depth. “This is my work and my glory to bring to pass the immortality & [sic] eternal life of man,” God had said to Moses. Now it could be seen that God’s creation of humans contributed to His own glory as kingdoms of the rising gods were presented to him. As he glorified them, they glorified Him.

Bushman goes on to note that the Christian Trinity was Joseph’s model, but is reinterpreted by as meaning that the “gods are one as Christ and the Father are one, distinct personalities unified in purpose and will. . . . The unity and order Joseph strove to instill in the Church was a type of the higher unity among the gods in their heavens.” This is a complete break from the traditional Christian view of the Trinity. Bushman and the Mormon Saints concur.

Joseph further developed this idea when he wrote that the Creation came under the oversight of a “council of the Gods,” who “came together and concocked [sic] a plan to create the world and people it.” The world, then, was not made out of nothing, ex nihilo, but “organized” out of the existing, eternal chaos of matter. Joseph said later: “We say that God Himself is a self-existing being,” and “Man does exist upon the same principles. . . . God never

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18 Ibid.
19 Bushman, 535.
20 Ibid.
had the power to create the spirit of man at all. God himself could not create himself.

Intelligence is eternal and exists upon a self-existent principle.”

As Bushman sees it, this made individual persons radically free. Their nature was not predetermined by a sovereign Creator of all things out of nothing. “They were what they were, not what God made them” The universe is a school for the free, self-existing intelligences, and Elohim is their teacher, not Creator.

Not everyone understood the sermon in the same light. Although apparently the majority of Mormons present during Smith’s address approved of the sermon, others disapproved vigorously.

Shortly after delivering his King Follett discourse, Smith delivered another sermon on June 16, 1844, as a follow up to his Discourse of April 7th. This June 16th sermon was a defense of his King Follett discourse against the rising criticism he experienced from William Law and the pages of the Nauvoo Expositor. Following is an excerpt of his June 16, 1844 follow up sermon:

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

21 HCH 6:308, 310, 311.
22 Bushman, 535.
23 Ibid., 535-36.
24 For a detailed account of the dissent that arose after Smith’s Discourse, see Bushman 537-543.
25 HCH 6:474.

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From this sermon and Smith’s prior discourse, the basic principles laid out by Joseph Smith would be taken up and expanded by President Brigham Young and apostles Parley P. Pratt and Orson Pratt. If there had been any doctrinal development of Joseph’s concept of God’s nature prior to 1844, then these two sermons solidified Mormon doctrine hereafter. Soon after Smith’s murder, Brigham Young was elected to be the next Prophet and President of the Mormon community.

The Mormon Experience after Joseph Smith

A New Beginning

With his hardy band of Mormon faithful in tow, Brigham Young led the Saints to the Valley of the Great Salt Lake in the Utah Territory and arrived there in 1847. Here the Mormons would establish their new headquarters and practice their faith free from any surrounding societal and political opposition. Saints from around the world would gather here and hear the oracles of God pronounced by Brigham Young. Within the parameters of such unprecedented freedom, the Mormon doctrine of God under the influence of the Second Prophet would take a new direction. Previous topics taught by Joseph Smith would be expanded on by Brigham Young, Parley P. Pratt, Orson Pratt and others. The innovative teachings regarding the origin, nature and character of God that emerged from the early Salt Lake period would flow from the teachings of the King Follett discourse, Smith’s most notable sermon. Several individuals would build upon the primary focus of this sermon.
Brigham Young and God the Father

In the early 1850's, soon after the Endowment House had been built, Brigham Young would gather the apostles and other close associates on each Sunday for a prayer circle. It was during these sessions after prayer that general conversation would gravitate towards subjects of spiritual importance. It was during one of these sessions in March of 1852 that President Brigham Young introduced his ideas regarding the identity of God the Father with Adam.26 Young claimed that he got this doctrine from Joseph Smith. Although Smith identified Adam with the "Ancient of Days" (D&C 27:11), and as our Father (D&C 29:34), it does not appear for certain that Smith ever represented Adam as the head of all, including Christ. This appears to be Young’s innovation. In an October, 1854 conference sermon, referring to Adam, Young preached, “He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, both body and spirit, and He is the Father of our spirits, and the Father of our flesh in the beginning.”27 Although much more could be quoted from Young, it is quite apparent that he did teach this doctrine throughout his life, even against opposition to his views.28 Thus, for Brigham, Adam may have his own Father in heaven (perhaps Jehovah), but for humanity on earth, Adam was God the Father, the pivotal figure in the creation and governance of the earth.29

26 John G. Turner, Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 231-232. Turner notes that “The prayer circles were a chance for Young to unburden himself, to freely speak his mind on subjects he was not yet prepared to broach in public. ‘Brigham Young rolled out revelation upon revelation,’ Thomas Bullock recorded after a March 1852 prayer circle, ‘in regard to the creation of the world.’ ‘Adam,’ Young explained, ‘came to the Earth when he assisted to form it and he then partook of the fruits of the Earth and became Earthy [corporeal].’”


28 For a further detailed study on this subject, see Turner, 231-236.

Whether this new doctrine was of divine origin or not, Young’s claim that the doctrine of Adam-God (the Father) was given to him by divine revelation was his to make as legitimate successor to Joseph Smith as Prophet. Any opposition to this principle was tantamount to a betrayal of the faith.30 Be that as it may, Young believed he had additional justification for the doctrine in that he said that it was taught to him by Joseph Smith. We have no way of verifying this, but if Young is referring in part to Joseph Smith’s final “discourse,” and to what is found in the Doctrine & Covenants 27:11, “And also with Michael, or Adam, the father of all, the prince of all, the ancient of days,” then he may well have some justification. In this particular revelation in August, 1830, Joseph clearly identifies Michael, “or Adam,” as “the father of all . . .”. It is not clear in this revelation what Joseph means by “the father of all.” Does he mean the father of all “intelligences”? Does this include being over the Only Begotten, Jesus? We simply do not know for certain. However, if Brigham was relying upon this revelation given to Joseph Smith, then he does have some justification to conclude that Adam, the father of all, “the ancient of days,” is our Father in all ways, even the Father of our organized spirits. The title, “Ancient of Days,” from the Book of Daniel, has generally been understood throughout church history as being another title for Deity. There is no reason why the same meaning would not spill over into early Latter-day Saint thinking, as well. Since the ancient moniker, “Ancient of Days,” was a title for God, the Mormon consciousness, having originated from Protestant churches who understood the title in this way, would also have also associated the tile with the same meaning. It appears Joseph applied it in the same way. Joseph Smith’s final sermon also

30 Ibid., 235: “The conflict between Young and [Orson] Pratt simmered for years. . . . Young privately chastised Pratt. In 1856, he warned Pratt that he would never become ‘Adam,’ suggesting the apostle would not achieve the highest level of celestial glory and godhood.”
spoke of the progression of mankind into godhood. Since Adam, like all “intelligences,” was first an eternal, spirit being, who was then formed of the dust of his own planet, upon his resurrection, also would become a god with his own kingdom—our planet. Thus, Young is following Smith according to his “King Follett Discourse” on eternal progression of humanity towards godhood.

Young preached that exalted Latter-day Saints would one day return to their eternal parents. “When you see your Father in the Heavens, you will see Adam. When you see your Mother that bear[s] your spirit, you will see Mother Eve.” As John G. Turner has observed, although Young often used standard Christian language, encouraging the Saints to imitate Jesus, Adam also served as a human-divine archetype: an exalted man who had built a new world and established a kingdom whose increase would never end. Through the church’s ordinances, Mormon men could embrace those same privileges.

Although many accepted Brigham’s new doctrine of Adam as the God of the human race, there were those who had their doubts. One of his own apostles, Orson Pratt, opposed him in this teaching consistently. Young and Pratt often disagreed about this matter. Young’s attitude was that no one in the church had a right to oppose him on doctrinal matters because he was the oracle through whom divine revelation flowed. Turner points out that Pratt, on the other hand, considered the scriptures and Joseph’s revelations as authoritative sources that he could use to test the truthfulness of any doctrine, including those taught by Brigham Young. Finally, however, as Turner shows us, by 1857, Young conceded that “[w]ether Adam is the personage

31 Turner, 233.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid. One may observe here a crisis in authority. Young appealed to his position as the second President and duly appointed Prophet of God as his sole authority for establishing church doctrine. Orson Pratt, however, relied upon his reading of scripture and the authoritative teachings of Joseph Smith. One wonders if Orson ever really accepted Young’s position as leader of the Mormon Church in the first place.
that we should consider our heavenly Father, or not, is considerable of a mystery to a good many.”

Young on other occasions, however, clearly meant that his “belief” in the Adam-God doctrine came from divine revelation. He said:

I tell you this as my belief about that personage who is called the ancient of days, the prince, and so on. But I do not tell it because that I wish it to be established in the minds of others, though to me it is as clear as the sun. It is as clear as my alphabet. I understand it as I do the path to go home. I did not understand so until my mind became enlightened with the spirit and the revelations of God, neither will you understand until our father in heaven reveals all these things unto you. To my mind and to my feelings those matters are all plain and easy to understand.

It does appear, then, as David John Buerger has suggested, that Brigham Young is providing some latitude for acceptance of the doctrine by the Saints in establishing the veracity of the doctrine on his own “belief.” However, the implication that Young himself suggested that he received this doctrine after his mind was enlightened by the spirit meant that he was speaking in the capacity of God’s oracle. Why didn’t the majority of the leading lights in the Mormon Church accept it? The answer to that question has been as varied as it is elusive.

Today, however, the idea of Adam as the Father and God of the human race is a dead issue among the Latter-day Saints. It is not a doctrine that carries any weight in Mormon theology, although it stands as a curious episode of its early history. It is the result of somewhat dubious theological speculation by Brigham Young, who otherwise, in his other accomplishments in the political and social arenas as leader of the Utah Saints (such as his genius for organization), endeared himself to Mormon posterity (the largest and most

37 Ibid., 23.
38 It would be finally Charles William Penrose who refuted the Adam-God doctrine.
39 Stated to me by Dr. Patrick Mason, Claremont Graduate School, May 23, 2014.
The prestigious Mormon University is named after him). The Adam-God doctrine that was taught by Young is an example of the kind of speculative theology that is attainable for any Latter-day Saint, so long as such speculations do not stray outside the confines of Mormon orthodoxy. Since there are no professional “theologians” in the Mormon Church, such speculative endeavors are encouraged so long as they do not meander outside the established boundaries outlined in the Mormon canonical scriptures.

The Pratt Brothers and the Beginnings of Mormon Speculative Theology

When Parley P. Pratt40 began his seminal work, Key to the Science of Theology, he established in no uncertain terms the point of major objection with which the Latter-day Saints had among the “different sects.”

Since the decline of the science of Theology, a mystery, dark and deep, has shrouded the human mind, in regard to the person and nature of the Eternal Father, and of Jesus Christ, His Son. . . . The Key to the science of theology is the key of divine revelation. Without this key, no man, no assemblage of men, ever did, or ever will know the Eternal Father or Jesus Christ. When the key of revelation was lost to man, the knowledge of God was lost. And as life eternal depended on the knowledge of God, of course the key of eternal life was lost.41

What Pratt suggested was that with the passing of divine revelation from the earth upon the deaths of the New Testament apostles, so passed away progressive divine revelation from God and consequently true knowledge of God. Revelation was replaced by speculative musings from the Church Fathers who replaced divine revelation with what other Mormon thinkers

40 For the most recent work on the life and work of Parley P. Pratt, see Terryl L. Givens and Matthew J. Grow, Parley P. Pratt: The Apostle Paul of Mormonism (Oxford University Press, 2011).
would identify as Greek Philosophy, which was foreign and antithetical to the Gospel. Thus, when the knowledge of God, which was only attained through the key of the science of theology, i.e. divine revelation, was lost, then true knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ was lost. IMPLIED in his writing, the church's counsels and creeds were futile because the Fathers relied not on divine revelation, but on pagan philosophy. Pratt continued,

Among these theories we will notice one which is, perhaps, more extensively received by different sects than any other. The language runs thus: "There is only one living and true God, without body, parts or passions; consisting of three persons, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost." It is just another way of saying that there is a God who does not exist, a God who is composed of nonentity, who is the negative of all existence, who occupies no space, who exists in no time, who is composed of no substance, known or unknown, and who has no powers or properties in common with anything or being known to exist, or which can possibly be conceived of as existing either in the heavens or on the earth. 42

Thus, in terms reminiscent of Stoic philosophy, Pratt outlined the major difference between Mormon and traditional Christian understanding of ultimate reality and the nature of God. What Pratt and all subsequent Mormon critiques of traditional Christian theology relied upon was the foreign concept of philosophical dualism. According to Pratt, "These elements [the spiritual and the material] have been separated, by philosophers, into two grand divisions, viz. 'Physical and Spiritual.' To a mind matured, or quickened with a fullness of intelligence [Pratt referred to divine wisdom from revelation], so as to be conversant with all the elements of nature, there is no use for the distinction implied in these terms." 43 Thus, according to Pratt, all the elements are composed of both physical and spiritual qualities. All are material, tangible realities. "Spirit is matter, and matter is full of spirit." 44 All that exists, then, is eternal in their elementary composition. There is no dualistic separation between what is physical and what is

42 Ibid., 27-28.
43 Ibid., 44.
44 Ibid.
spiritual (a metaphysical reality). All is one, and thus Pratt explicated a monistic concept of reality. Anything that is tangible to the senses is physical; anything invisible to the senses, or more subtle and refined, is spiritual. This is clearly a Stoic concept. We shall see later how Parley’s younger brother, Orson, took this concept of a monistic concept of reality and applied it to the nature of God.

Now Pratt turned to what he understood to be the solution to the darkness that had beclouded the present age. He says, “Before we can introduce the keys and powers of practical [true] Theology to the understanding of men in this age, we must, of necessity, place within their comprehension some correct ideas of the true God.”45 First, he explained that before anyone could please God, one must first have faith in God as he is, otherwise, “Those who do not please Him can never partake of the powers and gifts of the science of Theology, because the keys and powers of this science emanate from Him as a free gift, but they are never given to those with whom He is not well pleased.”46 But of course, how can he believe in a being “of whom he has no correct idea?”47 Therefore, in answer to the beclouded “mysticism” of the present age, Pratt declared,

So vague, so foreign from the simple, plain truth, are the ideas of the present age, so beclouded is the modern mind with mysticism, spiritual nonentity, or immateriality in nearly all of its ideas of the person or persons of the Deity, that we are constrained to use the language of an ancient Apostle, as addressed to the learned of Athens, “Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I to you.”48

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46 Ibid., 29.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
Next, Pratt launched into what he believed to be the correct understanding of the nature of humanity and God. Observe that the following follows closely the theological principles outlined in Joseph Smith’s “King Follett Discourse.” Pratt, as he understood Smith’s later theological teaching of the early 1840’s, assigned a single substance, or nature to all intelligences, whether they be men and women, or angels and gods. “But every man who is eventually made perfect, raised from the dead, and filled or quickened with a fullness of celestial glory, will become like them [the Gods] in every respect, physically and in intellect, attributes or powers.” Pratt here affirmed Smith’s doctrine of “eternal progression.” Pratt explained how this was achieved: “The very germs of these Godlike attributes, being engendered in man, the offspring of Deity, only need cultivating, improving, developing and advancing by means of a series of progressive changes, in order to arrive at the fountain Head, the standard, the climax of Divine Humanity.” Thus, humanity is divine and shares in germ the very attributes of Deity. “Gods, angels and men are all one species, one race, one great family, widely diffused among the planetary systems, as colonies, kingdoms, nations, etc.” The only real difference between this one race of beings is in the “varied grades of intelligence and purity and also in the variety of spheres occupied by each, in the series of progressive being.” Next, Pratt described the various grades of perfection and purity and what these various stages of development look like.

An immortal spirit, possessing a perfect organization of spirit, flesh and bone, and perfected in his attributes, in all the fullness of celestial glory, is called a God. An immortal man, in progress of perfection, or quickened in a lesser degree of glory, is

49 Ibid., 32.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., 33-34.
52 Ibid., 34.
called an Angel. An immortal spirit of man, not united with a fleshly tabernacle, is called a Spirit. An immortal man, clothed with a mortal tabernacle, is called a man.\textsuperscript{53}

Once again, we observe that Pratt apparently developed this divine anthropology from what he learned from Joseph Smith's own teaching regarding the eternal progression of intelligences.\textsuperscript{54}

The consummation of this development is towards Godhood, so that each individual intelligence develops along the divinely ordained path to the final form of an individual God, full of all the attributes of Deity. As Jesus was the fullness of Deity in bodily form on earth, so each faithful Saint will share in the same destiny upon his/her resurrection and exaltation.

But as each individual intelligence achieves exaltation and godhood, how does this occur in a material universe without the stretching out and diminishing of the divine attributes, which are also material, throughout eternity? This was a similar question that occupied the minds of the early church thinkers regarding the nature of God's substance. If God has a body, then his essence would need to be diminished to fill the universe, unless he was immaterial. This led logically to the notion of God's absolute transcendence. How does any branch of knowledge, for example, for any science, participate among all "intelligences" in the Mormon scheme without being diminished? Pratt's response is very interesting:

Every person knows, by reflection, [sic] that intelligence may be imparted without diminishing the store possessed by the giver. Therefore it follows, that millions of individual beings may each receive all the attributes of eternal life, and light, and power. Again it follows, that in the use of this power, by consent and authority of the Head, any one of these Gods may create, organize, people, govern, control, exalt, glorify and enjoy worlds on worlds, and the inhabitants thereof; or, in other words, each of them can find room in the infinitude of space, and unoccupied chaotic elements in the boundless

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.

storehouse of eternal riches, with which to erect for himself thrones, principalities and powers, might, majesty and dominion, forever and ever.55

In other words, there is room enough in the infinitude of space that—for all eternity—exalted beings may create and people untold numbers of worlds and set up kingdoms similar to the one set up on earth. Pratt answered the question of the impartation of intelligence throughout infinity without diminishing the supply by simply appealing to what everyone already knows, that “intelligence may be imparted without diminishing the store possessed by the giver.” In this answer, however, Pratt defaulted unwittingly to the immateriality of intelligence without realizing its implications. He appeared to be arguing for a transcendence of spirit that was not subject to division by appealing to an absolutist concept of knowledge.

Since 1839, Joseph Smith elaborated upon the idea of man’s eternal existence. According to Blake Ostler, “Joseph enumerated activities of pre-existent man that require individual, self-conscious and autonomous entities.”56 For Smith, individuals existed from eternity as “intelligences,” and while unequal they would always exist because they are eternal.57 Thus he argued for the necessary existence of both God and man. Ostler observes that the “inherently unequal capacity of intelligences implies that they were considered differentiated, individual and autonomous entities from all eternity.”58

Another concept of pre-existence developed soon after Smith’s death, however. This concept was more congenial to absolutism.59 In this concept, only “diffuse spirit element” was

55 Pratt, Key to the Science of Theology, 34-35.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid., 63.
considered to be eternal. Ostler notes that according to this view, the “autonomous individual existence arose only after the organization of this eternal substance into a spirit person.”\textsuperscript{60}

Smith only taught that each individual person existed eternally as a “spirit,” but because the spirit person was eternal and also co-existed with God the Father, the question arose, how is God the Father of our spirits? Parley tried to solve this problem by pushing the existence of an intelligence further back towards a more “primitive spiritual element.”\textsuperscript{61} Thus Pratt modified Smith’s concept of eternal intelligences by considering them as “disorganized” until they were organized or capacitated into a portion of the spiritual element. Thereafter, they are “a spiritual body, an individual intelligence, an agent endowed with life, with a degree of independence, or inherent will, with the powers of motion, of thought, and with the attributes of moral, intellectual, and sympathetic affections and emotions.”\textsuperscript{62} The mechanics of such an “organization” were not explained.

How can an “intelligence,” a material substance, no matter how subtle or refined, be distributed throughout the infinitude of space and time as an individual and passed on to other individuals without being diminished, unless they are immaterial and not subject to division or diffusion? And how can this “material substance,” for the sake of argument, be continually providing more intelligences without the basic material being diminished? Pratt did not go into any detail to explain this dilemma.

Regarding the nature of divinity, Pratt advanced that in the same vein as Joseph Smith there are, in a subordinate sense, a plurality of Gods, “or rather of the Sons of God; although

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 63-64, Parley P. Pratt, \textit{Journal of Discourses}, 1:7-8.
there is one Supreme Head, who is overall, and through all, and in all His sons, by the power of His Spirit." In regard to Joseph Smith's affirmation of the oneness of God, as well as the plurality of Gods, Pratt explained that:

Jesus Christ and His Father are two persons, in the same sense as John and Peter are two persons. Each of them has an organized, individual tabernacle, embodied in material from, and composed of material substance, in the likeness of man, and possessing every organ, limb and physical part that man possesses. There is no more mystery connected with their oneness, than there is in the oneness of Enoch and Elijah, or of Paul or Silas. Their oneness consists of a oneness of spirit, intelligence, attributes, knowledge or power. If Enoch, Elijah, Abraham, Peter, Paul, and millions of others ever attain to the immortal life, and their fleshly tabernacles be quickened by a fullness of celestial life and light, intelligence, They are one, as the Father and Son are one (italics in the original).

Thus for Pratt, the oneness of God was the same as the oneness shared by the whole human race. It is composed of the oneness of our human attributes, within which is the germ of divinity, shared with Gods who also possess a oneness of spirit, intelligence, knowledge and power—except on a much greater scale. The oneness of the Gods was understood in the same way that the oneness of humanity is shared among billions of human beings despite each member possessing their own body and personality. It is the same with the Gods. Thus, Pratt denied the traditional Trinitarian understanding of the oneness of God, as a singular substance shared by three equal Persons without division. For Pratt and all other Mormon thinkers after him, this traditional Christian understanding was "mysticism" that ran against all shared knowledge and experience.

63 Pratt, Key to the Science of Theology, 34.
64 Ibid.
Parley Pratt on the Father and the Son

Pratt had much to say regarding the relationship between the Father and the Son. In his *Key to the Science of Theology*, he wrote:

Here, then, we have a sample of an immortal God, a God who is often declared in the Scriptures to be like His Father, “being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His Person,” and possessing the same attributes as His Father, in all their fullness; a God not only possessing body and parts, but flesh and bones and sinews, and all the attributes, organs, senses and affections of a perfect man.65

Jesus Christ, as perfect man, himself a God, is in the express image of his Father, who also is a perfect and exalted man. This is how Pratt understood the scriptural passage that speaks of Christ as the express image of his Father. This, too, was in keeping with Smith’s King Follett Discourse. Thus, since Joseph taught that because the Son saw and imitated what he saw his Father doing, i.e. taking a body of flesh and bones and becoming an immortal God, so Parley Pratt followed this same line of reasoning. According to Pratt, there were no essential differences between the Father and the Son. “He differs in nothing from His Father, except in age and authority, the Father having the seniority, and, consequently, the right, according to the patriarchal laws of eternal Priesthood, to preside over Him, and over all His dominions, forever and ever.”66 There is a difference, then, between the Father and the Son: the Son is subordinate to his Father in authority and priority, and progeny. But this difference is not of quality, but merely priority of birth. Origen taught that the Son is inferior to the Father only in that he is derived from the Father, because his substance (or hypostasis) as the Son is logically

65 Ibid., 31.
66 Ibid.
posterior to the substance (hypostasis) of the Father, who is the source of divinity. But because there is no sense implied of the Son being the literal progeny of the Father, the difference is logical, nor actual in time. Hence, for Origen, the Son is eternally “generated” as the Son, with a logical posterior existence. For Pratt, however, the Son is literally the progeny of the Father, therefore his divine nature, as the Only Begotten, is his by spirit birth. This is true, as well, for every member of the human race. This is why Mormons speak of Christ as their “Elder Brother,” because he is literally the First Born of the human race, and we share in every way in his attributes by virtue of our spirit organization with the Father and the Son.

Pratt explained this in more detail when he wrote,

While, on the one hand, this God claims affinity and equality, as it were, with His Father, He claims, on the other hand, affinity and equality with His brethren, on the earth, with this difference, however, that His person is a specimen of Divine, eternal humanity, immortalized, and with attributes perfected; while his brethren who dwell in mortal flesh, although children of the same royal Parent in the heavens, are not yet immortalized, as it regards their fleshly tabernacles, and are not perfected in their attributes; and although joint heirs, are younger, He being the first born among many brethren in the spiritual world (emphasis added). They are therefore subject to him.67

Humanity is subordinate to Christ, just as Christ is subordinate to the Father. “The difference between Jesus Christ and His Father is this: one is subordinate to the other, does nothing of Himself, independently of the Father, but does all things in the name and by the authority of the Father, being of the same mind in all things (emphasis added).68 Therefore, just as it is between the Father and the Son, the difference between Jesus Christ and another immortal and celestial individual is that “man is subordinate to Jesus Christ, does nothing in and of

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67 Ibid., 31-32.
68 Ibid., 32-33. It is interesting that Pratt did not add to “being of the same mind in all things,” with “which is the Holy Spirit,” as is taught in the Fifth Lecture on Faith, which was a part of the Doctrine & Covenants in this period.
himself, but does all things in the name of Christ, and by His authority, being of the same mind, and ascribing all the glory to Him and His Father."\textsuperscript{69}

Pratt did not hold that there was an essential difference God and man. He critiqued traditional Christian Christology by his understanding of the double relationship of Jesus Christ with the Father and with humanity. He wrote,

On account of the double relationship of Jesus Christ, with God the Father on one hand, and with man on the other, many have adopted the creed that \textit{“two whole and perfect natures” were blended [he avoids the word united] in the Person of Jesus Christ [a Monophysite concept\textsuperscript{70}], that He was every way a God, and every way a man; as if God and man were two distinct species} (emphasis added). This error came by reason of not knowing ourselves. For just in proportion as we comprehend ourselves in our true light, and our relationships and affinities with the past, present and future, with time and eternity, with Gods, angels, spirits and men, who have gone before us, so, in proportion, we may be able to benefit by the keys of the mysteries of the Godhead, or in other words, to know and comprehend Jesus Christ and His Father.\textsuperscript{71}

The reason that the ancient Church theologians assumed that Jesus Christ is the \textit{“blending” of two distinct natures, or “species,”} in the one Person of Jesus Christ, was, according to Pratt, due to their unfamiliarity with their own humanity. They abandoned their place in time as creatures of infinite time and space. The Fathers abandoned their and Christ’s eternal \textit{“creatureliness”} and replaced that with a transcendent notion of \textit{“two whole and perfect natures [that] were blended in the Person of Jesus Christ.”} In short, as I understand Pratt, the early church fathers abandoned their sense perception and common experience as eternal intelligences in constant motion with the universe and replaced it with transcendent ideas of a nonexistent world.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{70} Monophysitism is the idea that the two natures of God and man before the Incarnation became \textit{“one”} nature in Christ after the Incarnation. For a detailed explication of this ancient Christian theory on the Incarnation, see J.N.D. Kelly, \textit{Early Christian Doctrines}, Rev. Ed. (HarperSanFrancisco: A Division of HarperCollins Publishers, 1978), 331, 334, 342, 444.

\textsuperscript{71} Pratt., 33.
Before I review Pratt’s concept of the Holy Spirit, I want to explore an idea that I have encountered within Mormon cosmology that has piqued my interest whenever I come across it. Pratt wrote, “Each of these Gods, including Jesus Christ and His Father, being in possession of not merely an organized spirit, but a glorious immortal body of flesh and bones, *is subject to the laws which govern, of necessity, even the most refined order of physical existence*” (emphasis added). What laws did Pratt refer to? Were these laws always in existence, as eternal as the intelligences? Was there anyone in eons past who was ultimately responsible for these laws to which all intelligences must be subject? I have not come across in all my reading of Mormon sources any explication of this concept. Pratt, however, wrote about these laws—and even enumerated them—as if they were generally accepted knowledge. “All physical elements, however embodied, quickened or refined, is [sic] subject to the general laws necessary to all existence.” These laws are as follows:

First. Each atom, or embodiment of atoms, necessarily occupies a certain amount of space. Second. No atom, or embodiment of atoms, can occupy the identical space occupied by other atoms or bodies. Third. Each individual organized intelligence must possess the power of self-motion to a greater or less degree. Fourth. All voluntary motion implies an inherent will to originate and direct such motion. Fifth. Motion, of necessity, implies that a certain amount of time is necessary in passing from one portion of space to another. *These laws are absolute and unchangeable in their nature, and apply to all intelligent agencies which do or can exist* (emphasis added).

If these laws are “absolute and unchangeable in their nature,” then there is something in the universe that do not progress, such as laws that transcends the material universe and are immutable. This is absolutist language that I think Pratt borrowed from traditional Christian dualism because he had no other way of expressing the transcendent quality of these laws.

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72 Ibid., 37.
73 Ibid., 37.
74 Ibid., 37-38.
Other than being a type of explication of classical mechanics, Pratt’s enumeration of these laws did not answer the question as to where they came from. The answer may be understood better if we observe that Pratt’s problem arose from the unique Mormon understanding of the pre-existence of spirits, which was a further development of Joseph Smith’s Discourse on the eternal progression of intelligences in various stages of development.

Including what was noted above, Pratt’s understanding of the pre-existence of spirits is also be found in a talk he gave in April of 1853, during which he expressed his conviction that an individual intelligence results from the organization of a more primitive spiritual element.75

Pratt said:

Organized intelligence. What are they made of? They are made of the element we call spirit . . . Let a given quantity of this element, thus endowed, or capacitated, be organized in the size and form of man . . . what would we call this individual, organized portion of the spiritual element? We would call it a spiritual body, an individual intelligence, an agent endowed with life, with a degree of independence, or inherent will, with the powers of motion, of thought, and with the attributes of moral, intellectual, and sympathetic affections and emotions.76

Thus Pratt attempted to push the frontier of Mormon cosmology back through the eons of time without resorting to creation ex nihilo. Since Joseph Smith rejected that doctrine publicly in 1839, all explications regarding the eternal self-existence of intelligences were introduced by that landmark decision.77 As we shall see below, it would not be until Orson Pratt attempted

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77 Ostler, 61.
the first systematic exposition of Joseph Smith's teachings that an explication of the doctrine of the pre-existence would reach a finer point.78

Parley Pratt on the Holy Spirit

Before we complete our overview of Parley P. Pratt's theological contributions to Joseph Smith's later thought on God, we need to examine how Pratt dealt with the third person of the Godhead. For Pratt, the Holy Spirit is the "purest, most refined and subtle of all these substances, and the one least understood, or even recognized by the less informed among mankind, is that substance called the Holy Spirit."79 He said this after first enumerating the types of material substances in existence that are of a finer and subtler substance, such as electricity, galvanism, essence, spirit, etc. We only know these invisible substances by their effects.80 The substance of the Holy Spirit81 is also known by its effects. When he speaks of the Holy Spirit, it is interesting that he appears to view it as an influence of the Head God, and not an individual intelligence in its own right. "This substance, like all others, is one of the elements of material or physical existence, and therefore subject to the necessary laws which govern all matter as before enumerated."82 And, "Like all other elements its whole is composed of individual particles. Like them, each particle occupies space, possesses the power of motion, requires time to move from one part of space to another, and can in no wise occupy two spaces at once. In all these respects it differs nothing from all other matter."

78 Ibid., 64.
79 Pratt, Key to the Science of Theology, 38-39.
80 Ibid.
81 Notice that Pratt does not refer to "it" as the Holy Ghost, but as the Holy Spirit.
82 Pratt, 39.
He also said that, “This substance is widely diffused among the elements of space. This Holy Spirit, under the control of the Great Eloheim [sic] (emphasis added) is the grand moving cause of all intelligences and by which they act.” For Pratt, the Holy Spirit was the great controlling agent of all other elements, and it is omnipresent by virtue of the “infinity of its particles, and it comprehends all things.” Thus, now it can “comprehend all things,” as the great positive, controlling element of all other elements. Pratt at times appeared to assign individual intelligence to the Holy Spirit, but the manner in which he spoke of it in other sections of his work seemed to imply that he also saw it as an influence only of the Head God, Elohim. The Holy Spirit was also called the “executive, which organizes and puts in motion all worlds, and which by the mandate of the Almighty, or any of His commissioned agents, performs all the mighty wonders, signs and miracles ever manifested in the name of the Lord.” In a most interesting passage from his work, Pratt discussed how the Holy Spirit, as the most refined of all physical substances, penetrated all other substances:

It [the Holy Spirit] penetrates the pores of the most solid substances, pierces the human system to its most inward recesses, discerns the thoughts and intents of the heart. It has power to move through space with inconceivable velocity, far exceeding the tardy motions of electricity, or of physical light. . . . It is, also, in its higher degrees, the intellectual light of our inward and spiritual organs, by which we reason, discern, judge, compare, comprehend and remember the subjects within our reach.

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83 Ibid., 39-40. Notice that Pratt relegates the activity of the Holy Spirit under the control of the “Great Eloheim,” which seems to indicate that at this time Pratt (and undoubtedly others in the Mormon community) understood Elohim at this period to be the Father. I shall explore this in more depth in the next chapter.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid., 40.
86 Ibid., 40-41.
We learn from Thomas Alexander that Parley Pratt’s understanding of the Holy Spirit had passed through clarification some years later.87 He observes that the most significant revisions which had derived from clarifications in doctrine (completed as part of James E. Talmage’s Articles of Faith and amplified in John Widtsoe’s work) were “the revisions of the discussion of the Holy Ghost and the nature of spirit.”88 Alexander notes that, “Pratt had viewed the spirit as a ‘fluid’ which could pass from one body to another through the nerves. This discussion was deleted and the term ‘spiritual essence’ replaced where it appeared.”89 Alexander elaborates further that,

Beyond this, Pratt had described the Holy Ghost as the controlling agent through which God operated the universe. In the revision the Holy Ghost was still reported as the “great, positive, controlling element of all other elements,” but the discussion of those attributes which would necessitate an incorporeal, all-pervasive essence were [sic] deleted. The passage indicating that there are “vast quantities of this spirit or element not organized in bodily forms, but widely diffused among the other elements of space” was deleted.90

Be that as it may, Pratt encapsulated his thought on the Holy Spirit by noting that, “It is endowed with knowledge, wisdom, truth, love, charity, justice and mercy, in all their ramifications. In short, it is the attributes of the eternal power and Godhead.”91 Even after reading the so-called revised account of his work, Pratt at times seemed to vacillate between a concept of the Holy Spirit as an influence of the Almighty, and a being who “comprehends the

88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
91 Pratt, Key to the Science of Theology, 40.
past, present and future, in all their fullness . . . [and whose] inherent properties embrace all
the attributes of intelligence and affection.” Or, in short, the Holy Spirit is a personal being.92

**Orson Pratt—A Systematic Lightning Rod**

Orson Pratt, younger brother of Parley P. Pratt, was not to be outdone by his older
brother. Not only was Parley Pratt a member of the Quorum of Apostles like his younger
brother, but he had also been a close personal friend of Joseph Smith. This may have provided
Parley with some significant theological material from the reminiscences of undocumented
discussions he undoubtedly had with his deceased friend, which may be reflected in his own
work. However, Orson Pratt was to accomplish more for the Saints in that his theological
contribution is regarded as the first systematic presentation of Joseph’s thought.93

Orson Pratt’s most significant literary contribution is undoubtedly his *The Seer*, first
published in 1853.94 Contained within it is his own explication of the theological ramifications
of Joseph Smith’s Discourse, and particularly Smith’s ideas on the nature of God and eternal
progression. He began his treatise by describing the cosmology of various worlds and their
inhabitants: “The difference between our world and a heavenly one, consists, not in the
diversity of elements, for they are the same, but in the difference of the organization of these
elements.”95 Like his elder brother, Orson believed in the pre-existence of spirits. What made

92 Ibid.
93 Ostler, “The Existence of the Pre-existence in the Development of Mormon Thought,” 64. Cf. Terryl L. Givens
and Matthew J. Grow, *Parley P. Pratt: The Apostle Paul of Mormonism*, who note that after Joseph Smith and
Brigham Young, Pratt was “the most influential figure in shaping early Mormon history, culture, and theology”, 4,
and that his *Voice of Warning* (1837) and *Key to the Science of Theology* (1855) were “the most influential non-
canonical volumes in nineteenth-century Mormonism,” 331.
the "intelligences" sentient was the degree of organization of their pre-cosmic elements. For Orson, this same principle of organization applies to various kinds of worlds: "A heavenly world has once been in the same condition as our world, but its temporal organization has been dissolved, and the same elements have been reorganized after the pattern of the Heavenly order: it is thus changed from a temporal to an eternal state." Pratt goes on to describe the difference between a heavenly and temporal world, or terrestrial and celestial world, which corresponds to the state of our temporal and celestial bodies after the resurrection, "after suffering death, were redeemed, and glorified, and made Gods."

According to Orson Pratt, all of these Gods are equal in power, glory, dominion, and in the possession of all things. He elaborates: "[E]ach possess a fullness of truth, of knowledge, of wisdom, of light, of intelligence; each governs himself in all things by his own attributes, and is filled with love, goodness, mercy, and justice towards all." Then Pratt's description of the Gods takes an interesting twist in direction. Up to now, he had been speaking of the Gods as persons in their own right.

The fullness of all these attributes is what constitutes God. "God is light." "God is Love." [And now Pratt's personal attribute] "God is Truth." The Gods are one in the qualities and attributes. Truth is not a plurality of truths, because it dwells in a plurality of persons, but it is one truth, indivisible, though it dwells in millions of persons.

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96 Ibid.
97 Ibid.
98 Ibid., 24. As an interesting aside, whenever Mormon writers of this period (and for some time thereafter) write of the Gods and their attributes—such as described by Orson Pratt—they always reference the gods in the male gender. The only time in The Seer that Pratt speaks of Gods of the female gender is in relation to them being the wives of their husbands. For an interesting rejoinder against this tendency, see Linda Wilcox, "The Mormon Concept of a Mother In Heaven," Sunstone 22 6 (1999), 78-87. For example, Wilcox writes, "The Mother in Heaven concept was a logical and natural extension of a theology that posited both an anthropomorphic God who had once been a man and the possibility of eternal procreation of spirit children," 78.
What Pratt has done here is to abstract divine qualities as love and truth into transcendent concepts. Like his elder brother, Orson relied upon traditional Christian dualism to express an idea of immaterial transcendence of divine qualities that are common to all particular Gods, which dwell in all their fullness, without division. Pratt elaborates on this idea further when he writes,

Each person is called God, not because of his substance, neither because of the shape and size of the substance, but because of the qualities which dwell in the substance. Persons are only the temples, and TRUTH (in original) is the God, that dwells in them. If the fullness of truth, dwells in numberless millions of persons, then the same one indivisible God dwells in them all (emphasis mine). As truth can dwell in all worlds at the same instant; therefore, God who is truth can be in all worlds at the same instant.99

Pratt developed this idea that the abstract quality of truth, for example, is what we should call God. "A temple of immortal flesh, and bones, and spirit, can only be in one place at a time, but truth, which is God, can dwell in a countless number of such temples in the same moment."100

Pratt not only tried to reconcile Joseph Smith's idea of the oneness of God with the plurality of God, but in so doing, he also argued for the traditional Christian idea of the omnipresence of God. It is one thing to say that God is Love, or God is Truth, but it is another thing entirely to say that Truth is God. Thus, what we worship, as I understand Orson Pratt, is the incorporeal, abstract idea of Truth, Love and the other non-physical attributes enumerated. We do not worship the individual "God" per se, but the immaterial and eternal quality of that particular God, shared equally among innumerable Gods, such as Love and Truth.

99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
This idea was to cause a great deal of friction between Orson and the current President and Prophet of the Mormon Church, Brigham Young.\textsuperscript{101} For Young, his faith revolved around the idea of eternal progression and eternal increase, as taught by Joseph Smith. Both Gods and Saints would progress forever in the attainment of knowledge, intelligence, independence, and progeny.\textsuperscript{102} Although there is no doubt that Pratt believed in the plurality of Gods, his focus of worship differed from that of Young’s, and apparently Joseph Smith’s, as well. For example:

> When we worship the Father, we do not merely worship His person, but we worship \textit{the truth} (emphasis added) which dwells in His person. When we worship the Son, we do not merely worship His body, but we worship truth which resides in Him. So, likewise, when we worship the Holy Ghost, it is not the substance which we alone worship, but truth which dwells in that substance. Take away truth from either of these beings, and their persons or substance would not be the object of worship.\textsuperscript{103}

This is a significant claim to make from someone who knew Joseph Smith personally, a Prophet who Pratt believed received his revelations from God, and who personally heard Smith’s final sermon. This kind of thinking is not found in Joseph Smith’s King Follett Discourse. As Blake Ostler has noted, President Young rejected Pratt’s view on the nature of God for years after publication of \textit{The Seer}. “The crux of the conflict was Young’s criticism that Pratt worshipped the attributes of Absolute Being rather than God the person, while in turn, Pratt rejected Young’s ultra-personalistic view of God as an exalted man forever becoming greater in dominion and knowledge.”\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 234. See also Jacob T. Baker, The Grandest Principle of the Gospel: Christian Nihilism, Sanctified Activism, and Eternal Progression,” \textit{Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought} 41 3 (2009), 58, who suggests that it was Brigham Young, following Joseph Smith’s Discourse closely, was the first to coin the term “eternal progression,” which became the vehicle for other interrelated concepts promulgated by Smith.
\textsuperscript{103} Pratt, \textit{The Seer}, 24.
\textsuperscript{104} Blake Ostler, “The Idea of Pre-existence in the Development of Mormon Thought,” 65.
It appears to me that Young who was more faithful to the King Follett Discourse, in its emphasis upon God as an exalted man. Nowhere in the Discourse is there any hint of the idea of “Absolute Being” permeating particular Gods, and which becomes the primary focus of worship. It would seem that in this regard Orson Pratt diverged largely from Joseph Smith’s teachings on the matter. Pratt, for example, further explicated this idea of God as an absolute being when he wrote,

It is truth, light, and love that we worship and adore; these are the same in all worlds; and as these constitute God, He is the same in all worlds; and hence, the inhabitants of all worlds are required to worship and adore the same God. Because God dwells in many temples, He frequently speaks to us, as though there were many Gods (emphasis mine): this is true when reference is made to the number of His dwelling places; but is not true, and cannot be true, in any other sense.\(^{105}\)

Pratt diverged even further away from the Discourse when he said that the Father and the Son do not progress in knowledge:

The Father and the Son do not progress in knowledge and wisdom, because they already know all things past, present, and to come. All that become like the Father and Son will know as much as they do, and consequently will learn no more. The Father and Son, and all who are like them and one with them, already know as much as any Beings in existence know, or ever can know.\(^{106}\)

Thus it would appear that Orson Pratt also argued for a traditional concept of God’s omniscience. This lapse into a traditional Christian understanding of Trinitarian theology is understandable if we remember that Pratt is representative of a generation of Mormon converts who came from a Protestant-rich heritage, with its fully developed Trinitarian theology. Young, however, who apparently never slipped back into such Trinitarian notions, wrote in response to Pratt’s highly omniscient and omnipresent God and countered in 1854


\(^{106}\) Ibid., 117.
that "[T]here never will be a time to all Eternity when all the Gods of Eternity will scease [sic] advancing in power, knowledge, experience to Glory."\textsuperscript{107} For Young, God was a personal being; for Orson Pratt, however, God was absolute being. It’s no wonder, then, that such a theological position as advanced by Pratt may be considered as pantheistic.\textsuperscript{108}

Orson Pratt committed an error that is all too common to monistic religious and philosophical systems, as it was in the case of Stoic physics before him. His notion of God as “Absolute Being” carried a pantheistic tone to it. The King Follett Discourse was quite lucid in its affirmation of the radical material existence of an exalted man who has become a God. This was buttressed by Smith’s insistence that all the Saints had to learn to become Gods like their Father-God before them. Orson Pratt must have either forgotten or rejected this principle, and opted for a more traditional understanding of the nature of God. So, when he argued that,

\[ \text{[W]hen we speak of only one God, and state that He is eternal, without beginning or end, and that He is in all worlds at the same instant, let it be distinctly remembered, that we have no reference to any particular person or substance, but to truth (emphasis in the original) dwelling in a vast variety of substances. Where ever you find a fullness of wisdom, knowledge, truth, goodness, love and such like qualities, there you find God in all His glory, power, and majesty, therefore, if you worship these adorable perfections you worship God,} \]

then it appears that he had strayed some distance away from the King Follett Discourse.

\begin{footnotes}

\textsuperscript{108} Ostler, 64. He explains, “In reality, the conflict between Pratt and Young was a much more fundamental dispute over absolutist and finitist theologies. Although Pratt’s idea of eternal, individual particles seemingly implied a materialistic pluralism, Pratt interpreted his doctrine as a Monistic Absolutism and proposed a pantheistic concept of God—a concept which identifies God with whatever is real.”

\textsuperscript{109} Pratt, The Seer, 24.
\end{footnotes}
Perhaps without really realizing it, Orson Pratt spoke of God in absolutist terms. In order to do so, he resorted to speaking of God in transcendent terms by emphasizing less the material God of Joseph Smith and more for the eternal attributes of God that inhabit many temples. When Pratt argued for God who "can be in all worlds at the same instant," and for the "Father and the Son who do not progress in knowledge and wisdom, because they know all things past, present, and to come," he lapsed back into absolutist terms that resemble a more traditional concept of the Trinity.

In chapter four I will examine the Mormon doctrine of God as it developed between the years 1877 to 1916. This is a pivotal time in Mormon history, during a phase of their history that saw a major reevaluation of doctrinal issues, particularly in relation to the doctrine of God.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE MORMON DOCTRINE OF GOD (1877—1916)

In this chapter I will lay out the further development of the Mormon doctrine of God that occurred from 1877, upon Brigham Young's death, to 1916. I will examine the theological contributions particularly of John A. Widtsoe, James E. Talmage, and B. H. Roberts. Since Young's introduction of the concept that Adam was the God and Father of Christ and the Father of all humanity in 1853, some Mormon scholars have observed a measure of confusion among the ranks of Mormons that was prevalent from the late 1800's to the turn of the twentieth-century regarding the proper names for God the Father and God the Son. This will be discussed briefly as it relates to the writings of Widtsoe, Talmage and Roberts. Others, however, argue that this period was marked by attempts by early twentieth-century writers to present a clear and authoritative statement of Mormon belief in the doctrine of God that had always existed since the time of Joseph Smith. It must be understood, however, that the theological contributions of these writers are regarded as very significant in Mormon history.

For this chapter I will present the theological contributions of John A. Widtsoe, James E. Talmage and B. H. Roberts for review as they relate to the following fields of inquiry: Mormon cosmology, anthropology, and theology (as "theology" relates specifically to the relationships between the members of the Godhead).
Three Branches of Mormon Thought

Mormon Cosmology

Cosmology (or, cosmogony) is the theory and lore concerning the origin and structure of the universe.⁠¹ In the Mormon understanding of the doctrine of God, it is the very basis of its theology. This is true of many religious systems. For the Latter-day Saints, as the progenitors of the true, primitive Christianity restored to the earth, a cosmology is not mythical, such as the collection of legendary, just-so-stories collected for the justification of its historical existence. The King Follett Discourse delivered by Joseph Smith on April 7, 1844 was full of cosmology that had direct relevance to the lives of the audience who personally heard Smith’s sermon. Smith brought the ancient saga of an antiquity, eons old, into full view to the Saints that day as the backdrop to his sermon, when God began his own historical journey to Godhood. Therefore, when Latter-day thinkers write of their cosmology, they write it as real history, not as interesting mythology with perhaps some allegorical significance. Mormon cosmology may be in the distant past and far beyond our immediate experience, but it is real nonetheless because of the divine revelation of its genuine existence given to Joseph Smith. Because God has paved the way by evolving and progressing for eternity from manhood to Godhood, eternal progression is now within the grasp of faithful Mormon followers. Joseph Smith brought to the Latter-day Saints more than a new doctrine of God, but a new cosmology when he introduced an eternal, evolving God.

The evolutionary model of the origin and destiny of the universe and humanity is understood by some early Mormon thinkers as buttressing their particular doctrine of divine progression. We find this especially in the writings of John A. Widtsoe. Widtsoe was at home with modern science, particularly as it related to evolution. He embraced the theory and sought to bring its major scientific tenants into harmony with Mormon cosmology and with the Mormon doctrine of God. As a chemist and college president, and influenced particularly by the social evolutionary theories of Herbert Spencer, the doctrine of eternal progression took center stage for his explication of Mormon cosmology in which God, humanity, and the entire cosmos are eternally evolving. This evolving universe is understood by Widtsoe as the basis of all sound thinking because a material universe is necessary for such thinking. Widtsoe says,

[A]s a cornerstone of theology, the Gospel recognizes a material universe. Without matter, the mind of man would have no material on which to act. The existence of matter in its various forms becomes, therefore, a fundamental conception of the Gospel.

The evolutionary emphasis upon the eternal progress of humanity becomes more evident in his thinking during this time when Darwinian evolution was becoming more popular in the academy and even the pulpit. Widtsoe embraced this evolutionary scheme of the explanation of man’s origins and tied it into Smith’s theology of eternal progression. He says further,

All that is really clear to the understanding is that man has existed “from the beginning,” and that from the beginning, he has possessed distinct individuality impossible of confusion with any other individuality among the hosts of intelligent beings. Through endless ages, man has risen by slow degrees to his present state.

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2 John A. Widtsoe (1872 to 1952) was an Apostle of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. He was also associate editor of the Improvement Era from 1935 to 1952.


4 John A. Widtsoe, A Rational Theology: As Taught by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 7th ed. (Deseret Book Co.: Salt Lake City, 1966), 10.
That being which later became man, even in the first day possessed intelligence. That is, he was aware of the external universe; he was able to learn, and by adding knowledge to knowledge, to learn more. . . . The law of increasing complexity or variety is fundamental. Since man is constantly acting upon and being acted upon by universal materials, he must himself be brought under the subjection of the great law. That is, under normal conditions, he will increase in complexity (emphasis added). 5

Thus, he links the great law of increasing complexity, as he has learned it from his study of evolution and the physical sciences, with the eternal progression as taught by Joseph Smith, undergirded by the great principle of the Gospel that rests upon “eternal, indestructible principles, [that] maintains the living supremacy of the will of man.” 6 This emphasis upon upward complexity through the instrumentality of the human will and intelligence is further elaborated when he says,

“Mormonism” has harmonized science and theology in its conception of God. As has been shown . . . Joseph Smith taught that the central force of the universe is intelligence. Gravitation, heat, light, magnetism, electricity, chemical attraction, are all various manifestations of the all-pervading force of intelligence. Man is superior to beasts because his organization permits a greater use of the universal force of intelligence, man’s organization will become more and more complex. That is, he will increase in his power of using intelligence until in time, he will develop so far that, in comparison with his present state, he will become a God. 7

Thus, as some have understood Widtsoe, God becomes the Master of Science, the Supreme Intelligence, who “masters the eternal laws of the universe.” 8 As God learned to master and control the elements of the universe, so too do those who follow under his guidance.

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5 Widtsoe, 16, 17, 20.
6 Ibid., 18. See also Thomas G. Alexander, Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890—1930 (University of Illinois Press: Urbana and Chicago, 1986), 272-73, particularly 278, wherein Alexander notes, “As Widtsoe then equated this view of creation with Spencer’s views of the development towards increasing complexity which he correlated with the LDS doctrine of eternal progression. As man acquired knowledge, he acquired power and thus moved toward a more advanced state. This acquisition of power, Widtsoe argued, allowed the endless development of man.”
7 Widtsoe, Joseph Smith As Scientist: A Contribution To Mormon Philosophy (The General Board Young Men’s Mutual Improvement Associations: Salt Lake City, Utah, 1908), 136-37.
has learned from Joseph Smith's King Follett Sermon about the eternality of matter and the
progressive advancement of God and wedded it with the new evolutionary advances since the
publication of Darwin's *Origin of Species*. For Widtsoe, then, there was no conflict between
science and faith, not when Smith's doctrine of divine progression fit so well into the material
and evolutionary model of modern science.

For James E. Talmage, cosmology takes on a far less scientific emphasis and reaches far
into the imagination of Joseph Smith for its inspiration. Talmage appeals to the ancient lore of
the perennial battle between good and evil for his material.\(^9\) He describes a war in heaven
between Michael and the good forces and Satan and the evil forces. The struggle involved un-
spiritual (or disembodied) armies who were equally divided. Satan and his opposing forces
betrayed their "first estate" and therefore lost their chance to inherit the "second estate," or
"the glorious possibilities of an advanced condition."\(^10\) Thus, Satan fell. Talmage elaborates on
this theme of spiritual war and resolution in the Heavenly realm:

Thus it is shown that prior to the placing of man upon the earth, how long before we
do not know, Christ and Satan, together with the hosts of the spirit-children of God,
existed as intelligent individuals, possessing power and opportunity to choose the
course they would pursue and the leaders whom they would follow and obey. In that
great concourse of spirit-intelligences, the Father's plan, whereby His children would be
advanced to their second estate, was submitted and doubtless discussed. The
opportunity so placed within the reach of spirits who move to be privileged to take
bodies upon the earth was so transcendentally glorious that those heavenly multitudes
burst forth into song and shouted for joy.\(^11\)

\(^9\) James E. Talmage, *Jesus The Christ: A Study of the Messiah and His Mission According to Holy scriptures both
Ancient and Modern* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book Company, 1958 [Orig. pub. 1915]), 6-7.
\(^10\) Ibid.
\(^11\) Ibid., 8.
Talmage created a Mormon cosmology from various strands of biblical and Mormon canonical sources. He did not appeal to direct divine revelation for his cosmology, but relied upon his powers of biblical exegesis to set forth the true cosmology of the Latter-day Saints, and upon the model outlined in Joseph’s King Follett Discourse.

He found in the Bible and other scriptural sources the basis of a restored cosmic heritage. He found in them fleeting glimpses of the true cosmology, which he weaved together in his work. Talmage embossed it with material from the book of Revelation, the Old Testament and other Mormon works, such as the Pearl of Great Price and Doctrine & Covenants. In his, *Jesus the Christ*, in chapter two, in his chapter on, “Preexistence and Foreordination of the Christ,” Talmage wrote, “John the Revelator beheld in vision some of the scenes that had been enacted in the spirit-world before the beginning of human history.” He wrote further, “He witnessed strife and contention between loyalty and rebellion, with the hosts defending the former led by Michael the archangel, and the rebellious forces captained by Satan, who is also called the devil, the serpent, and the dragon.” We also find here the familiar Mormon narrative of the cause of Satan’s fall. It is worth quoting here.

*Satan’s plan of compulsion, whereby all would be safely conducted through the career of mortality, bereft of freedom to act and agency to choose, so circumscribed that they would be compelled to do right . . . was rejected; and the humble offer of Jesus the First-born—to assume mortality and live among men as their Exemplar and Teacher, observing the sanctity of man’s agency but teaching men to use aright that divine heritage—was accepted.* This decision brought war, which resulted in the

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12 Ibid., 6.
13 Ibid.
vanquishment [sic] of Satan and his angels, who were cast out and deprived of the boundless privileges incident to the mortal or second estate (emphases added).14

This very interesting passage is reminiscent of the theological and historical roots of the early Latter-day Saints. Joseph Smith shared this with Alexander Campbell (and the other Protestant restorationists): they both distrusted and rejected the Calvinist doctrines of prevenient grace and predestination.15 This period in American religious history was marked by a profound belief in the ability of the human will to achieve moral perfection before God. This was based upon the notion of free agency, a decidedly Arminian understanding of the freedom of the will. The war in heaven that Talmage depicts, interestingly enough, begins over a dispute that involves Satan concocting and proposing a plan for the future salvation of the human race that involved the Calvinistic concepts of predestination, rather than “observing the sanctity of man’s agency.”

B. H. Roberts’ cosmological understanding of the pre-existence of intelligences is more technical than Talmage’s, without the overtly scientific overtones evident in Widtsoe’s work. In his technical discussion of “intelligence,” he writes:

It is in this sense, then, that I use the term “intelligence”—a being that is intelligent, capable of apprehending facts or ideas; possessed also of power to think, to will, and to act. In other words, the term “intelligence” is descriptive of the thing to which it is applied. Intelligence (mind), or intelligences (minds), thus conceived, are conscious beings.16

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14 Ibid., 8-9. See also Talmage, A Study of the Articles of Faith: Being a Consideration of the Principal Doctrines of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City, Utah, 1959 [Orig. pub. 1890]), 25-28, for a more “theological” explication of the pre-existence of the spirits of mankind.
15 Prevenient grace is the theological concept that God’s Spirit goes beforehand to enable a person to believe. In predestination, God predetermines beforehand who will be saved based solely on his own will.
Roberts goes on to explain that what he means by “intelligence” is a being that is “intelligent, capable of apprehending facts or ideas; possessed also of power to think, to will, and to act.”\textsuperscript{17} This is similar to a traditional description of the attributes of the human soul, or any rational soul for that matter, such as an angel. He goes on to conflate “intelligence” with “mind,” or “minds.” “Intelligence (mind), or intelligences (minds), thus conceived, are conscious beings.”\textsuperscript{18} These individual minds, thus, are conscious of their own existence and the existence of others, “of the ‘me’ and the ‘not-me.’” We see, then, that Robert’s understanding of intelligence as a rational individual is more in line with that described by Joseph Smith, and less in sympathy to Orson Pratt’s understanding of the term.

Whereas Talmage focused on narrating a macro cosmic history relative to the doctrine of the pre-existence of spirits, Roberts sharpens his focus on the individual “intelligence” itself. In a sense, his description of the pre-existing intelligence carries a certain psychological emphasis in his description. For instance, Roberts says of the “power” of the intelligence: “It may be defined as the power by which intelligence knows its own acts and states.”\textsuperscript{19} And, since for Roberts matter and energy are eternal and are capable of infinite changes, so, too, are intelligences capable of infinite transitions and transmutations.\textsuperscript{20} Therefore, an intelligence is a mind “in awareness.” By awareness, he means consciousness. It is the same awareness that an intelligence comprehends when it is united with a body.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 81.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 77.
Mormon Anthropology

Taking his cue from Joseph Smith, John Widtsoe understood the nature of humanity as a "god" in germ. He wrote,

In the unseen pre-existent world, many other intelligent beings have been engaged in acquiring power over the forces of the universe. There is little probability of any two of these attaining exactly the same degree or place of progress, at the same time. There is, rather, the probability of infinite gradation, from the lowest to the highest development. . . . God, exalted by his glorious intelligence, is moving on into new fields of power with a rapidity of which we can have no conception, whereas man, in a lower stage of development, moves relatively at a snail-like, though increasing pace. Nevertheless, man is moving onward in eternal progression. In short, man is a god in embryo (emphasis added).22

As Widtsoe said elsewhere, man and God are of the same race.23 Thus, the only difference between God and humanity is the degree of exaltation, not a difference in kind or species. Unlike traditional Christian theology, there is no impassible gulf between God and man. Widtsoe elaborates, "True, to our finite minds, God is infinitely beyond our stage of progress. Nevertheless, man is of the order of Gods, else he cannot know the Lord."24 Unless we are of the same order of God, according to Widtsoe, humanity cannot know God. This is a theme that began with Joseph Smith's later teaching regarding the doctrine of eternal progression. Widtsoe called humanity "Eternal man," who lived a personal life with God before the "earth-life began, and he continues a personal existence hereafter."25 And, since there are innumerable intelligences moving onward in development, there must be some "in almost every conceivable stage of development."26 This means, of course, that there are innumerable

23 Ibid., 65-66.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 14.
26 Ibid., 66.
gods in the universe. “If intelligent beings, far transcending the understanding of man, be
called gods, there may be many gods.”

Talmage also acknowledges that humanity is of the same race as the gods. Since man is
created in the image of God, then God must be in the form of a man:

If God possess a form, that form is of necessity of definite proportions and therefore of
limited extension in space. It is impossible for Him to occupy at one time more than one
space of such limits; and it is not surprising, therefore, to learn from the scriptures that
He moves from place to place.

As we possess materiality and personality, so God does as well. “Admitting the personality of
God, we are compelled to accept the fact of His materiality.” In keeping with his
anthropomorphic comprehension of the nature of God and the gods, Talmage says,

We affirm that to deny the materiality of God’s person is to deny God; for a thing
without parts has no whole and an immaterial body cannot exist. The Church of Jesus
Christ of Latter-day Saints proclaims against the incomprehensible God, devoid of
“body, parts, or passions,” as a living thing impossible of existence, and asserts its belief
in and allegiance to the true and living God of scripture and revelation.

In Stoic fashion, Talmage affirms the materiality of God to be as tangible and comprehensible as
that of any human being’s. In the Stoic view, nothing that exists is immaterial. God, the world
and even words were material. A common tendency in any monistic system, however, is the
potential for a pantheistic understanding of reality. Mormon theology attempts to avoid this
tendency by populating the cosmos with an innumerable company of “gods” who are separate
intelligences at various degrees of eternal progression. Although Mormon theology

27 Ibid.
28 Talmage, The Articles of Faith, 45. Talmage refers to Genesis 11:5 and 17:1 to demonstrate that God literally
moves from place to place. Thus Talmage’s view is in direct opposition to that espoused by Orson Pratt.
29 Ibid., 43.
30 Ibid., 48.
31 Everett Ferguson, Backgrounds of Early Christianity, 2nd ed. (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand
Rapids, MI, 1993), 335.
acknowledges that all of reality is matter, which exists to progressively finer matter (spirit), the intelligences are bifurcated and possess individual personality and Godhood.

B. H. Roberts asserted that humanity is made in the “very image of God,” and related to him as being in the “definite form of God—of all Divine Intelligences, who are but incarnations of the One God Nature.” Robert’s reference to the “One God Nature” is reminiscent of Orson Pratt’s absolute being idea. But he does not press this concept too far.

According to Roberts, we are related to God. We are made in the image and likeness of God. In fact, we are “children of the Most High.” He seems to imply that men and women in their pre-earthly existence became the children of the Most High through a spiritual birth process. Stan Larsen informs us that this one distinctive Mormon doctrine is the belief that all human spirits are the “offspring of God through a spiritual birth process.” Two schools of thought regarding the origin of the human spirits, however, are current in Mormon theology: one is the belief that all “intelligences” existed with God for all eternity, which is Joseph Smith’s teaching. The other school is the belief that human spirits came into existence through a spiritual birth process from God, by the spiritual agency of a spiritual Father and Mother. Larsen indicates that this has created something of a philosophical dilemma for Mormon theologians.

33 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
Mormon Theology—the Godhead

For John Widtsoe, God organized the present universe; he did not create it "ex nihilo."\(^{36}\)

The universe is both eternal and material. Since God used pre-existing material to organize the universe, He was not its creator. Thus, God, too, is subject to the laws of the universe. He is not omnipotent in the traditional Christian sense, because "law, rather than God, was fundamental."\(^{37}\) Widtsoe elaborated on this theme when he wrote,

> God, who is a superior organization, using and directing the force of intelligence, must have possessed a simpler organization. Perhaps, at one time He was only what man is today. God, in "Mormon" theology, is the greatest intelligence; it will always remain the greatest; yet, it must of necessity, under the inexorable laws of the universe, grow. God is no sense the Creator of natural forces and laws; He is the direct of them.\(^{38}\)

In asserting that perhaps at one time God was only what man is today implies that at one time God was not God. This is interesting. Was there in the distant past a Head God over the advancing "man" Mormons now call God the Father during his eternal progression? Yet, for Latter-day Saints, "God, the Father, the greatest personage concerned in our progression, is the Supreme. He is the Father of our spirits."\(^{39}\) In this he followed Joseph Smith closely in affirming that at one time the Father was not God, but once a man like us.

For us, Widtsoe defines God the Father as being the highest intelligence "with whom we deal."\(^{40}\) He is not perfection in the absolutist sense, but in relation to us, "his fullness . . . cannot be fathomed by the human mind."\(^{41}\) This is what makes God the Father absolute in his


\(^{37}\) Ibid.

\(^{38}\) Widtsoe, *Joseph Smith as Scientist*, 137.


\(^{40}\) Ibid.

\(^{41}\) Ibid.
being, for in relation to us he is so vastly superior in intelligence and glory that he is essentially
the fullness of perfection. Widtsoe explains:

God, the Father, the Supreme God of whom we have knowledge, is the greatest
intelligence in the infinite universe, because he is infinite in all matters pertaining to us
and transcends wholly our understanding in his power and wisdom. We know no
greater God than the omniscient, omnipotent Father.42

This is an interesting statement in light of Mormon cosmology, because Widtsoe appears to
rule out in any practical sense the idea that there may have been at one time a Supreme
Grandfather, who is the Father of God the Father, with whom we have to deal. In Mormon
cosmology, however, there is the logical possibility of infinite intelligences progressing
throughout eternity. Whether Widtsoe believed that there is an eternal Grandfather or not
was not relevant in his view, because he taught that there is only one God the Father of our
spirits. Any other God who may have been the Father of the spirit of God the Father is not
germane, nor does it appear necessary to know who he is. For us, God the Father is infinite,
which "is always of relative meaning."43 But in so defining "infinite" in this context, does he not
redefine the idea of infinite? The term "infinite" is only a relative term if interpreted as
Widtsoe does to mean a position reached after a period of sequential progression. In which
case, it seems to me, "infinite" no longer carries its original meaning. At one time God was not;
at another time God is. It is a conundrum that Widtsoe apparently cannot avoid in his
explication of Joseph Smith's teaching of eternal progression, and it is unfortunate that Joseph
did not have enough time to work out a solution for this philosophical problem before his
demise.

42 Ibid., 67.
43 Ibid., 25.
James Talmage, on the other hand, seemed to understand the infinitude and knowledge of God in an almost absolutist sense:

His power and His wisdom are alike incomprehensible to man, for they are infinite. Being Himself eternal and perfect, His knowledge cannot be otherwise than infinite. To comprehend Himself, an infinite Being, He must possess an infinite mind. Through the agency of angels and ministering servants He is in continuous communication with all parts of creation, and may personally visit as He may determine.44

Thus, Talmage qualified the infinite mind of God as one that is in continuous communication with angels and ministering servants that provide him with second-hand information from all corners of the universe. It seems to me that an infinite mind would not need the assistance of ministering agents, because classically understood, an infinite mind would have immediate knowledge. But in a material cosmos of eternal progression, an “infinite” mind must be limited in some sense, and therefore finite, unless one concedes that the infinite mind is immaterial and without extension. That idea, however, is rejected by all Mormon thinkers, because this would lead logically to “infinite” in a transcendent sense.

B. H. Roberts, on the other hand, taught unequivocally that the omniscience of God is limited. Stan Larsen has pointed out this fact that in conjunction with the principle of eternal progression, Roberts asserted that God’s omniscience is limited, because he is still progressing in knowledge.45 Roberts offered a modified definition of omniscience, saying that it is not the case “that God is Omniscient up to the point that further progress in knowledge is impossible to

44 Talmage, The Articles of Faith, 43-44.
45 Larsen, 1.
him; but that all the knowledge that is, all that exists, God knows; all that shall be he will
know.”46

When Talmage spoke of God’s omnipotence, he understood this as a proper designation
of his status as the Almighty. He also qualified God’s omnipotence as meaning that “[w]hatever
His wisdom indicates as necessary to be done God can and will do.”47 Thus, for Talmage,

The means through which He operates may not be of infinite power (emphasis added).
A rational conception of His omnipotence is power to do all that He may will to do.48

Even though God’s operation of his power may not be in the sense of omnipotence understood
classically, as far as he is capable of accomplishing what he desires to do, he is omnipotent in
relation to us. In Widtsoe’s understanding, God became greater until he attained at last a
mastery over the universe, which to our finite minds seems absolutely completed. “We may be
certain that through self-effort, the inherent and innate powers of God have been developed to
a God-like degree. Thus He has become God.”49

Widtsoe understood the Son, the only begotten Son on earth, as the First Begotten in
the heavens.50 For Widtsoe, “Because of the central position occupied by Jesus in the Great
Plan, he is essentially the God of this earth.”51 His mission was to come to earth to live and die
an ignominious death “so that all men might be raised from the grave with bodies of flesh and

47 Talmage., The Articles of Faith, 44.
48 Ibid.
49 Widtsoe, A Rational Theology, 25.
51 Ibid.
bones made indestructible and everlasting." In relation to the Father, Widtsoe explains Jesus’ position in the following manner:

He, also, is beyond our understanding; he sits on the right hand of the Father and is one with the Father in all that pertains to the welfare of the human race. To us he is perfect, possessing all the attributes of the Father. Whether he is as far advanced as the Father is an idle question, since he surpasses our understanding. In all matters pertaining to the earth, the Son is the agent of the Father.

Widtsoe explained the unity that exists between the Father and the Son as one of unity of purpose. This is in accord to Joseph Smith’s teaching, as well. In those matters that pertain to the overall welfare of the human race, Father and Son are in one accord in their will and purpose for its salvation. In their natures, however, they are two separate personages of flesh and bone, two distinct Gods.

When Widtsoe spoke of the Holy Ghost, however, he shifted his attention from the unity of wills between the Father and the Son to one of function for the third member of the Godhead. Although he would not deny that a unity of will and purpose exists between the three, the Holy Ghost is not a personage of flesh and bone but a personage of spirit. He is a member of the Godhead, so why is the Holy Ghost not embodied? Widtsoe writes,

The Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost constitute the Godhead, or the Trinity of Gods, guiding the destinies of men on earth. God, the Holy Ghost, is a personage of spirit, who possesses special functions which have not yet been clearly revealed.

Widtsoe seemed to admit that he does not understand how the Holy Ghost can be a God, with special functions “not yet . . . clearly revealed,” but he confesses his deity, nonetheless.

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52 Ibid.
53 Ibid., 67-68.
54 Ibid., 68.
When B. H. Roberts discussed the relationship between the Father and the Son, he focused upon their unity. Jesus demonstrated to his disciples in what way it should be understood that he and the Father are one. This unity is to be understood, according to Roberts, in the same way "that the disciples might be one with him [Jesus], and also one with each other, as he and the Father were one (Jn 14:10-11, 19-20; also, Jn 17:11-23)." He explicates this principle in more detail by saying, "Not one in person, of course—not all merged into one individual, and all distinctions of personality and individuality lost—but one in mind, in knowledge, in love; one by reason of the indwelling in all of the one Spirit, even as the mind and will of God the Father was also in Jesus Christ." Roberts understood the traditional Trinitarian version of the unity of the Godhead as consisting in some sort of mingling of the persons in the Trinity "into one individual." This was an erroneous conclusion on his part. This, in fact, would be more in keeping with a modalist understanding of the Trinity, which Roberts, Talmage and Widtsoe did not hold. What Roberts and the others did hold to is, "The distinct personality of these three individual Deities (united, however, into one Godhead, or Divine Council)." The traditional Trinitarian concept of the unity of essence in the Trinity has been substituted for a unity of the divine "Council," or a corporate consensus. Roberts also said,

Of which Trinity the Father was worshipped in the name of the Son, while the Holy Ghost bore record of both the Father and the Son. And though the Holy Trinity was made up of three distinct personages as being individuals, yet did they constitute but one Godhead, or supreme governing power (emphasis added).

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55 B. H. Roberts, The Truth, the Way, the Life, 209.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid., 209-10.
58 Ibid., 210.
This idea of a corporate, or even a social concept, of the doctrine of the Trinity has been expanded upon more recently by David Paulsen, in relation to our study of the development of the Mormon doctrine of God appears to introduce a new understanding of the theological implications of the King Follett Discourse, which will be discussed more fully later.

We come now to a most interesting development of the Mormon doctrine of God in the contributions of James Talmage. The years following the death of Brigham Young, from 1877 to 1915, there had been some confusion as to the identifications of Jehovah and Elohim in Mormon publications. Under the direction of the First Presidency, Talmage wrote his Jesus the Christ. In this work, published in 1915, Talmage, clearly identified Jesus as Jehovah, and the Father as Elohim. He wrote in Jesus the Christ,

The name Elohim is of frequent occurrence in the Hebrew texts of the Old Testament, though it is not found in our English versions. . . . Elohim, as understood and used in the restored Church of Jesus Christ, is the name-title of God the Eternal Father, whose firstborn Son in the spirit is Jehovah—the Only Begotten in the flesh, Jesus Christ. We do not find such a clear definition of the divine titles for the Father and the Son in the other preceding works. According to Boyd Kirkland, these divine names and their designations were made official in 1916 in the “The Father and the Son: A Doctrinal Exposition by the First Presidency and the Twelve”. God the Father was officially recognized as Elohim, while Jesus, both in spirit and in flesh, was recognized as Jehovah. As Kirkland has summarized the issue,

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60 Talmage, Jesus the Christ, 38.
“While most Mormons are unaware of the diversity that abounds in the history of Mormon doctrine, many Latter-day Saints since 1916 have, despite the risk of heresy, continued to believe or promote publicly many of the alternate Godhead theologies from Mormonism’s past.”63 Other Mormon writers, however, such as Ari D. Bruening and David L. Paulsen, argue that although Talmage did contribute much to present a clear and definitive statement on Mormon doctrine, he certainly did not set out to reformulate Mormon doctrine as suggested by Kirkland and other Mormon writers.64 Be that as it may, it does appear that in 1915, by the direction of the First Presidency for publication of James Talmage’s Jesus the Christ, and the publication of the follow up document, “A Doctrinal Exposition,” published in 1916, were meant to lend official sanction to Talmage’s rendering of a clear and definitive statement on Mormon doctrine regarding the Godhead.65

In Talmage’s work, he clearly delineated the differences between the Father and the Son. Of Christ’s deity prior to his incarnation Talmage noted, “It would appear unnecessary to cite at greater length in substantiating our affirmation that Jesus Christ [as Jehovah, the God of Israel] was God even before He assumed a body of flesh.”66 One of those major differences was in the status of the Father in relation to Christ’s “antemortal” state of existence. The Father had already passed through the experiences of mortal life, including living in a body, death and resurrection, and then became a being possessed of immortalized flesh and bones, while at this

65 No doubt this discussion will continue for some time among Mormon thinkers.
66 Talmage, Jesus the Christ, 38. See Kirkland, “The Development of the Mormon Doctrine of God,” 41-42, who notes that Apostle George Q. Cannon was one of the first Mormon authorities to claim that Jesus was “the Being who spoke to Moses in the wilderness and declared, ‘I am that I am,” quoting Juvenile Instructor 6 (30 Sept. 1871): 155. This was conjectured during the tenure of President Brigham Young.
time the Son was still disembodied. After Jesus was crucified and resurrected, he became a Being just like the Father in all essential characteristics. In speaking about the roles played throughout redemptive history by the Father and the Son, Talmage was quite clear in his designations of the divine persons when he writes,

A general consideration of scriptural evidence leads to the conclusion that God the Eternal Father [now affirmed as Elohim] has manifested Himself to earthly prophets or revelators on very few occasions, and then principally to attest the divine authority of His Son, Jesus Christ. As before shown, the Son was the active executive in the work of creation; throughout the creative scenes the Father appears mostly in a directing or consulting capacity. These are the instances of record in which the Eternal Father has been manifest in personal utterance or other revelation to man apart from the Son. God the Creator, the Jehovah of Israel, the Savior and Redeemer of all nations, kindreds and tongues, are the same, and He is Jesus the Christ.

In discussing the nature of the Godhead, Talmage clearly set forth the reason for such a needful explication of the nature of God in the restoration of pure doctrine, not only by himself but by other faithful followers of Joseph Smith, who were called out to be the progenitor of God’s faithful witness to the world. In The Articles of Faith he says,

The consistent, simple, and authentic doctrine respecting the character and attributes of God, such as was taught by Christ and the apostles, gave way as revelation ceased and as darkness incident to the absence of divine authority fell upon the world, after the apostles and the Priesthood had been driven from the earth; and in its place appeared numerous theories and dogmas of men, many of which are utterly incomprehensible in their inconsistency and mysticism.

Key to the understanding of the Mormon doctrine of God is the authority by which it comes to humanity. It is not just that Joseph Smith claimed to receive visions and revelations regarding the nature of God, but he also claimed to have received the keys to the Priesthood. With the

67 Ibid., 38-39. As conjectured by Apostle Cannon, he was Jehovah, the God of Israel.
68 Ibid., 39.
69 Ibid., 39-40.
70 Talmage, The Articles of Faith, 47.
Priesthood, Joseph Smith and all faithful Mormon men endowed with the keys of authority have the capacity to speak in God’s name to a darkened world. Revelation and authority are the keys to understanding the commitment that Mormons have to their religious faith. It is an existential commitment to their faith just as much as it is an ascent to Mormon doctrines that drives the Saints onward in their quest for getting the word out with worldwide missionary endeavors.

In *The Articles of Faith*, Talmage went to great lengths to explain the Mormon doctrine of the Holy Ghost. Unlike what was explained in the “Lectures on Faith,” the Holy Ghost is endowed with full personhood:

> The Holy Ghost is associated with the Father and the Son in the Godhead. In the light of revelation, we are instructed as to the distinct personality of the Holy Ghost. He is a being endowed with the attributes and powers of Deity, and not a mere force, or essence. The term Holy Ghost and its common synonyms, Spirit of God, Spirit of the Lord, or simply, Spirit, Comforter, and Spirit of Truth, occur in the scriptures with plainly different meanings, referring in some cases to the person of God the Holy Ghost, and in other instances to the power or authority of this great Personage, or to the agencies through which He ministers.\(^{71}\)

In addition, Talmage attributed personal powers and affections, which exist in him in perfection,\(^{72}\) this despite the fact that he is not embodied. From the Book of Mormon, Talmage showed that the Holy Ghost teaches, guides, speaks, commands, commissions, makes intercessions and entices.\(^{73}\) Even though the Holy Ghost is a personage of spirit, he is quite capable of manifesting himself as a man when it suits him. Once again, Talmage appealed to the witness of the Book of Mormon: “That the Spirit of the Lord is capable of manifesting

\(^{71}\) Ibid., 159.

\(^{72}\) Ibid.

\(^{73}\) Ibid., referring to Mosiah 3:19.
Himself in the form and figure of man, is indicated by the wonderful interview between the
Spirit and Nephi, in which He revealed Himself to the prophet questioned by him concerning his
desires and belief, instructed him in the things of God, speaking face to face with the man."74

A Christian response to the Latter-day Saint doctrine of God, as we have seen it
explicated above, may well echo that of Novatian, the third-century Latin Father:

The belief that Christ is God does not contradict the belief that there is one God, even
though heretics have wrongly used logical arguments to prove him either God the
Father or mere man. . . . We hold that there is one God, maker of heaven and earth, but
since we may not neglect any portion of scripture, we rely on plain scriptural proofs of
Christ's deity. A mixture of reverence and logic will reconcile apparent contradictions.
There is only one God; yet Christ was addressed as "My Lord and my God" (Jn. 20:28).75

Novatian wrote these words some seventy years prior to Nicaea. Yet prior to that, there was a
general consensus among many in the church which followed that of Novatian, that Christ as
the Son derived his divinity from the Father. "The secret of generation is known to none but
Father and Son. He is always in the Father. The Son is before all time; the Father is always
Father, without origin and therefore prior to the Son, who is generated by him and therefore
less than him."76 And yet, as Novatian was fond of pointing out, Christ was addressed as "My
Lord and my God." As I noted in chapter one of this study, an overarching concern in the early
church leading up to Nicaea was for monotheism and the unity of God. Any idea that there was
more than one God in the Godhead was struck down consistently and in short order. This is
observed in the rise of Monarchianism, which was a reaction against the theory of Christ as a
"second God." And when speaking of Christ's relationship with the Father, Novatian also

74 Ibid.
Concerning the Trinity* ANF 5:642.
76 Ibid.
wrote, “His deity does not deprive the Father of the glory of being the one God. Christ is God, not as being unborn, unbegotten, without origin. He is not the Father, invisible and incomprehensible. To give him these attributes would be to affirm the existence of two gods. The Son is what he is not of himself but from the Father.”

In other words, as understood in the early church, Christ’s deity is not his own attribute, but derived from the Father’s deity. Otherwise, he would be an independent god, not God the Son. Once again, the anchor for this line of reasoning was the all-essential concern to maintain monotheism. However, in Mormon theology, we find that Christ is a separate and distinct God. Such a formula for Christ’s “derived” deity, I would suggest, can only be affirmed of an incorporeal God (prior to Christ’s incarnation), without material substance and wholly transcendent; otherwise, Christ as God may be regarded either in a modalistic (I include patripassianism here, as well) or in a polytheistic sense. This was perhaps the single most important project of the Christian church for its first three years leading up to Nicaea: how to affirm the deity of Christ while also affirming his own distinct existence alongside the Father without betraying its monotheistic tenant.

In order to avoid the twin pitfalls of strict monotheism (modalism and adoptionism) and polytheism, a tension of opposites had to be maintained in order to be consistent with the church’s reading of scripture that affirmed both Christ’s individual existence and deity, as well as the unity of the Father and the Son. This was the great Mystery. If God was conceived of as a corporeal, embodied Being, then it would be impossible logically to speak of Father and Son as one God in essence. If Father and Son are embodied, corporeal beings, then their “oneness”

77 Ibid., 159-60.
can only be understood in the Mormon sense of shared will and purpose. In the Mormon sense of the Godhead, there would have to be of necessity a division of the corporeal substance of deity, as we see in their doctrine of the multiplicity of Gods. This the Christian theologians prior to Nicaea would not allow. They insisted that there was but one God; they also insisted that Christ (as a distinct entity) was also God, as Novatian summarized it. Hence, there exists the Christian tension, or paradox of opposing poles.

Now, as I have studied the arguments of the pre-Nicene theologians from Justin to Origen (and Novatian), the only solution logically in maintaining this tension, this "delicate balance" between monotheism and polytheism, was to conceive of God as an incorporeal, intellectual existence, wholly distinct from matter, not subject to division or abscission, and to regard the Son as God from God, light from light, begotten, not made. The only suitable philosophical model that was available to these Christian theologians that best described the nature of God depicted in scripture was the Middle Platonic model of a transcendent Monad existing with other Entities derived from it, or a concept of the unity of the one and the many.\footnote{78} The Platonic model was not a perfect one, to be sure, but as an apologetical tool it served its purpose.

Thus I have completed my review of the Mormon doctrine of God. The problem with such a study I have found is not the paucity of material in Latter-day Saint literature, it is the sheer bulk. I have striven to leave out nothing of critical importance to this portion of my study of the principal doctrines of the Latter-day Saints regarding the nature of the Godhead.

\footnote{78 As I will show in chapter seven, the church’s use of allegory since Clement and Origen was an attempt to maintain the immutability and transcendence of God.}
Chapter Five begins my review of the development of the doctrine of God in the early church. I will begin in Chapter Five with Ignatius of Antioch, followed by a study of Theophilus of Antioch in Chapter Six, and conclude with my lengthy exposition of Origen’s doctrine of God in Chapter Seven. At the end of chapters five through seven, I will offer a concise analysis of the most salient differences and similarities between the two doctrinal systems. In chapter eight I will summarize what we have learned in this comparative study.
CHAPTER FIVE

IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH

AND

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

Historical Trajectory of the Idea of God in the Second and Third Centuries and the Divinization of Christ

Before commencing my study of Ignatius’ doctrine of God, it would be helpful for the reader to understand the historical trajectory of the development of the idea of God in the second and third centuries and the special problems that arose over the Church’s divinization of Christ within the context of monotheism.

First, Christianity arose within the Hellenistic Roman milieu, a world richly attendant with the worship of numerous Greek, Roman and Egyptian gods and goddesses. These and other local deities of other major cities and regions of the Empire formed the background of all political, civic and religious life in the first three centuries of the Christian era. As Eric Osborn characterizes it, it was a world of “exuberant variety,” shaped by a profusion of polytheism where all were tolerated and reverence for the past guaranteed that none was forgotten.¹ Such tolerance, however, was juxtaposed by an intractable hatred for atheists and monotheists, and in particular for Christians, who had abandoned the ancient faith of their Jewish

forefathers. “Dancers and actors drew crowds to theatres for religious spectacles. Processions of different kinds dominated the annual cycle of events and travel was governed by religious shrines. The gods were honoured [sic] by eating, drinking and energetic orgies.” Everything that a human being could ever want or aspire to in this life had the appropriate god or goddess to whom supplications and sacrifices were offered for surety of success.

In contrast to this, Christians taught of the existence of only one God who alone existed and had no rivals. This bedrock belief was inherited from the early church’s Jewish roots, as well as affirmed by Christ and his apostles. In addition, the Church also claimed that Jesus Christ was God, yet insisted that there was only one God. How could the worship and devotion to this one God, the Jewish God of the Old Testament, include Jesus alongside him also as God? The worship of Jesus Christ as God alongside YHWH came amazingly early in the first century, and, just as remarkably, among devout Jewish monotheists. This needed explanation, because it was simply without precedent. This is due to the fact that early Christian devotion and liturgical practice does not express itself as involving two deities, even though there are two foremost figures who are the recipients of this devotion. There is only one God and yet multiple voices are detected within the emerging New Testament and identified with the one God. Thus, the problem arises.

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2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
From the New Testament comes the majority of the material upon which the fledgling Church draws its doctrine of the Trinity. As K. Bracht has noted, the cornerstones of the doctrine of the Trinity are derived from texts from the New Testament, and in particular, the Great Commission: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). In this one text we have what appears to be an encapsulated definition in germ of what would eventually become the doctrine of the Trinity. There are three distinct names referring to three distinct entities (or persons), all three of whom are referred to by name in the singular. Thus, we find three named entities in one God. Despite this observation, however, within the New Testament itself, there appears to be disparate evidence. On one hand, we see that the NT texts refer to not only the Father, but the Son and the Holy Spirit as God. Yet, according to other texts, Jesus and the Father are distinguished from each other. The Son is even different from the Father, and who at one time even requested his will prevail in opposition to the Father’s will (Luke 22:42).

How did the apostles and early devotees to Jesus, as strict Jews of the Second Temple era, reconcile their monotheistic belief in one God with their innovative worship and devotion to Jesus Christ? Larry Hurtado suggests that early “Jesus-devotion” constituted a radically new development “within Jewish monotheistic tradition, in effect a novel kind of monotheistic devotion that included Jesus as a second, distinguishable figure with an unprecedented place in early Christian devotional practice, and yet Jesus reverence and defined in relation to the one

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6 Unless otherwise noted, all translations of the biblical text are taken from the New King James Version.
7 Bracht, 14.
8 E.g., John 1:1, 9:58, 20:9, 2Cor 3:17.
What this is, in effect, according to Hurtado, is a “mutation” within and then alongside of Jewish monotheistic practice and belief. Thus, we find early Jewish converts to Christianity compelled to express their devotion to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob by now obeying the Father by worshipping Christ alongside him as God. Did in fact early Christians abandon their Jewish monotheistic faith by incorporating Jesus—as another—to be worshipped alongside the Father? I concur with J. D. G. Dunn, who does not believe so. Because Jesus Christ from the first was at the very center of the new Way, the movement had to redefine its monotheism in light of their faith in the one God of Jewish monotheism. It was thus a redefinition, not an abandonment of that monotheism: “It is thus a fundamental insight and assertion of Christianity that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is but a restatement of Jewish monotheism.”

We find in the apostolic fathers (a period following the death of the apostles, and just prior to the period of the apologists) a Christocentric emphasis in their theological expression of devotion to the one God. For example, in the writings of Ignatius of Antioch, we find a firm belief in the deity of Jesus Christ. As we shall see below, Ignatius does not concern himself with the question of how Jesus can be another person and still be a part of the one God, he merely accepts it unequivocally and without reservation. As Cullen Story has rightly noted, “Taken . . . in the larger context of the Ignatian corpus, the claim ‘Jesus Christ our God’ expresses a firm conviction of the various persons of the Godhead distinguished from each other yet united to

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10 Ibid., 385.
12 Ibid., 336.
each other in person and work.”

For Ignatius, then, is Jesus God? Yes, for he is spiritually united with the Father. Is he fully human? Yes, for after his resurrection he ate with and allowed his disciples to handle him. Ignatius essentially represents the Christological understanding of Christ during this period. There was no explicit reflection on the Trinity per se. For the most part, God the Father is referred to only in reference to the Son. Often times, the Holy Spirit is not even mentioned. Their primary focus is on the Son of God.

Whereas the apostolic fathers directed their writings towards the church, the apologists directed their writings to the Jews and the Gentiles. It was during this period, roughly the early second century through the early third century that creative and innovating thinking on the nature of God begins to manifest. And whereas the problems that were created in the church over the divinization of Christ in light of monotheism were largely passed over during the first to early second century, it was in the apologetical period that we first find Christian thinkers struggling to understand and express the problem rationally and philosophically. It was specifically, then, in the second century that early Christians began to delve into this process of theological reflection. It was also during this period that Christian writers seriously addressed the prevailing Greek philosophical tenants that appeared to have any bearing upon biblical

14 Story, Ibid.
15 William Schoedel, 20. Schoedel suggests that Ignatius’ view on Christ tends towards a Monarchian position. I would suggest that this is not totally accurate. Ignatius’ references to Christ as a distinct character in relation to the Father would place him more towards a “soft” Monarchianism, wherein the Son may act for, or take on the role of the Father, but not at the expense of his own divinity and identity. For Ignatius, Jesus is God just as the Father is God.
17 Bracht, 15.
revelation, primarily from School Platonism. They also availed themselves of arguments found in Stoicism, Skepticism and even Epicureanism when these suited their apologetical purpose. However, according to the majority of Christian writers during this period, Middle Platonism, that period when Platonism resurfaced in popularity (in the first century BCE to the second century ACE), was regarded as having the closest affinity with the emerging Christian faith.

We find in Justin, for example, perhaps the most important of all the apologists of the second century, in his Apologies and Dialogue a "Christianized" synthesis of Greek philosophy that is harmonized with the scriptures. Thus, in the Apologies, we find Justin appealing to the Greek world by demonstrating the Greek philosophical affinity with the one God as a legitimate means of knowing him, although only partially. In his Dialogue he appeals to the Jewish mind by reference to a profuse use of verses from the Old Testament to demonstrate that Christ is indeed the Son of God. It was here that Justin would offer his explanation for understanding the relationship between the Father and the Son by introducing the idea of the Logos, not only as the subject of the Old Testament theophanies, but as "another God", in differentiation to the Father himself, who could not possibly appear in a particular time and place (Dialogue with Trypho 56.11). This concept of a second God as distinct to the Maker and Father of all things

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18 Godfrey Vesey, The Philosophy in Christianity, ed. Godfrey Vesey (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1989), ix. School Platonism was a tradition inaugurated by Plato's successor Xenocrates, who brought together Plato's disconnected ideas into a coherent system. Due partly to his influence and others who followed him, Platonism as a "school" was reestablished in the first century BCE. Ibid.
20 Ibid.
would cause a great deal of consternation and debate within the Church for two to three centuries thereafter. It was the catalyst, I believe, that ignited the Monarchian movement.21

An alternative idea of God that came into existence and competed with Christianity’s emerging reinterpreted monotheism during the mid second to mid fourth century was Gnosticism.22 Osborn has noted correctly, I believe, that it should properly be seen in all its variety as theosophy, because of its general lack of logical argument.23 He elaborates, “Gnosticism began from a vision of the universe, in response to the great questions of human origin and destiny. There was some thought behind the myths or pictures; but vulgarization and proliferation stifled the process of reason.”24 In general, they all held to a belief in a strange God who was the first principle of all things who had no contact with this world or its Creator. The Creator God of the OT was an ignorant and malevolent demon. The God of the Jews is a rejected aeon who creates man and the material world. According to The Testimony of Truth, for example, Jesus is “[T]he Son of Man [came] forth from Imperishability, [being] alien to defilement.”25 Since Jesus, as the Redeemer, was from the world of light, he was not truly a man, but merely appeared in such form for the sake of convenience. In general, Jesus came to manifest the true origin and destiny of all those who possessed the spark of divine life from the one God above all creation and every power. Jesus was in no wise connected to the God of the

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21 Monarchianism was an attempt by churchmen of the late second century to re-establish the biblical doctrine of the unity of God.
22 I am aware of the current debate regarding the general usage of this term. I use “Gnosticism” simply for convenience to mark an empire-wide movement of the period.
23 Osborne, 15. Osborne argues elsewhere that because Christianity’s account of one God was so convincing (173), Gnostic and Marcionite dualism had to lose ground. Christianity was eminently logical in light of Gnostic dualism.
24 Ibid., 14.
Old Testament, he was an emanation who only “appeared” to be corporeal. Thus, due to its disconnect of Christ from YHWH, and because Jesus was an emanation only, there was no Trinitarian problem within the Gnostic movement.

The Gnostic movement was in stark contrast to that Jewish movement that came to be known as Ebionism. This was a strict sect of Jewish followers of Jesus who held onto their equally strict form of Jewish monotheism by rejecting the divinity of Christ altogether. For them, Jesus was the prophet like Moses who was to come after him. By perfectly fulfilling the Jewish law, God “adopted” him as his Son when John baptized him in the Jordan River. Jesus, however, was only a man whom God adopted, who died, rose from the dead, and became a supernatural being. Since Jesus was a man, he could never be mistaken as “another God” who was equal to the one God. Thus, there was no Trinitarian problem here because Jesus was in no wise considered equal to or derived from the one God.

Thus, we see that the Gnostics depict a Christ who was a divine being (of a lower order) who came only in the appearance of a man, while the Ebionites show us a Christ who as a man became divine-like by adoption. Justin became the first to develop a doctrine of the Logos as a philosophical means of resolving this dichotomy by following the general underlying principles of Stoic and Platonic thought. He accomplishes this by uniting the Stoic Platonized concept of God’s Wisdom as the rational structure of the universe with the Son of God. Since

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27 Ibid., 8.
28 Ibid., 8-9.
the Middle Platonic God is so transcendent so as to be completely aloof from creation, the gulf is bridged by the Logos, who is numerically distinct from the Father but derived of the Father’s own substance. Unfortunately, Justin employs language that subordinates the Son to a form of inferior divinity and suggests an apparent temporal and voluntary generation.29

All this talk of “another God” caused a considerable reaction among church leaders who feared that a Christianized form of polytheism would encroach in their doctrine of Christ. The Church was also in the midst of a growing debate over the Christological question of how divinity and humanity could be brought together into Jesus Christ. Despite Justin’s influence, the Church was primarily concerned over the question bearing on the puzzle of Christ’s divine and human natures.30 Thus, it appears that the foundational basis for the doctrine of the Trinity was of Christological origin.

Modalistic Monarchianism was an answer to the Christological question of the second and third centuries. In a substantial way, much of the Church at this time was “Monarchian” in its understanding of the nature of God (without necessarily being overtly “modalistic” or “Sabellian”). Although they heard the multiple voices within the one God from Scripture, they conceived of God primarily as God the Father, the fount of all that is divine. They simply did not know how to relate the multiple voices within the one God. They similarly struggled to answer the question of how Jesus could be both divine and human. There were basically two major approaches to answering this question, which usually followed the pattern of emphasizing one

29 See also, 1 Apol. 13, 3: “It is Christ who taught us these things, who was begotten for this purpose,” and who Christians rank second after the Father and before the Spirit.
30 Bract, 15.
facet of his nature over the other. No synthesis had been successful up to this period. Justin’s conception of a second God born from God was a bold and perhaps brash attempt, but it left the question mostly unsettled. One approach emphasized Christ’s humanity, and in extreme cases resulted in the loss of his divinity such as in Adoptionism or Ebionism. The other approach emphasized Christ’s divinity, and in extreme cases resulted in the loss of his humanity such as in Docetism and Modalistic Monarchianism. I am in agreement that Justin’s proposal of Christ being “another” God caused a drastic reaction within the Church in the second and early third centuries towards an emphasis of the monarchy of God in order to preserve its commitment to monotheism.

Two fathers from the second to early third centuries specifically addressed the latter approach, represented by two church writers who forcefully advocated for the Monarchy of God, who we know as Noetus and Praxis. The fathers who opposed them were Hippolytus and Tertullian. Hippolytus addresses the Noetus controversy in his Contra Noetum; Tertullian addresses the Praxis controversy in his Adversus Praxean. Noetus attempted to solve the problem of Christ’s nature by completely denying Christ’s humanity. For Noetus, divinity and humanity cannot co-exist within the same person, thus Christ is God, not man. He has emphasized Christ’s divinity at the expense of his humanity. Thus, Noetus’ concern was

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31 Ibid.
32 Harkins, 10. Sabellius “the Lybian” brought the concept of Modalistic Monarchianism to a new level of sophistication in the early second century. He maintained that the same Person underlay all aspects of his manifestation as the Word in creation, The Father as Lawgiver in the Old Testament, the Son as Redeemer and the Holy Spirit as Sanctifier. It was one God who appeared in the economy of salvation in three separate and successive modes. Ibid, 10-11.
33 In recent times, the “fathers” have been referred to as “heresiologists” by a number of scholars.
34 I am in agreement with K. Bracht that Hipployus’ Contra Noetum was written independently and thus is prior to Tertullian’s Adversus Praxean, who relied upon Noetus. “Product or Foundation?”, 15.
35 Bracht, 17.
soteriological: “For Christ was God, and suffered on account of us, being Himself the Father, that He might be able also to save us” (Noet. 2, 13). Christ was, therefore, the Father, who suffered and died and rose again for our salvation. The same teachings found in Noetus are found also in Praxeus, if we compare the information provided us by Hippolytus and Tertullian. Thus, from two fundamental axioms, that Christ is God, and that there is only one God, Noetus and Praxeus conclude that Christ is God the Father. It was this Christological controversy that eventually developed into the Trinitarian concept of God.

Hippolytus responded to this by first acknowledging with Noetus that Christ is God: “He now, coming forth into the world, was manifested as God in a body, coming forth too as a perfect man” (Noet. 17, 7). Having acknowledged Christ’s divinity in agreement, but rather than coming to the conclusion that Christ is the Father, Hippolytus redefined the terms of the debate, not by asking how Christ’s humanity and divinity can co-exist, but instead focused on the question of the relationship between the Father and the Son. How can the unity of God as well as the differentiation of the Father and the Son be maintained at the same time? He did this by juxtaposing God’s power with a new concept he invented, the “economy” (oikonomia). Thus, in power God is one; in activity he is three. There are three different functions within the economy among the Persons, but the same Power relates them into the one God, not the same Person. Hippolytus avoided equating Jesus Christ with the Father while maintaining his

37 This came to be known as Patrpassianism.
38 Two New Testament texts from John were fundamental to their argument: John 10:30 (“The Father and I are one”) and John 14:9 (“Whoever has seen me, has seen the Father”). With these two texts they supplemented with other texts from the Old Testament and the Apocrypha to support their contention that Christ is the Father.
40 Brackt, 19.
41 Ibid.
divinity. He is also the first to employ the term “prosopon” (person) to argue that although the three are different, they are not separate from each other (he employed this term for the Father and the Son only, and not for the Holy Spirit).42 Thus, Hippolytus argued that there is real separation of the “persons” within the one God, but without division because they are united in one Power: One God in two (perhaps three) prosopa.43 However, Hippolytus did not address the Monarchian question regarding the relationship of Christ’s divinity and humanity.44 “Hippolytus has therefore directed a purely Christological development of Second Century Christianity as represented by Noetus in a new direction, i.e. towards the development of a Trinitarian doctrine.”45

Tertullian addressed the Christological question from another angle. Rather than focus upon the Christological issue like Hippolytus, he addressed first God’s uniqueness,46 in which a single God is differentiated in the dispensatio (dispensation, or economy), and then addressed the thorny problem of how this God can suffer number without division. In the economy, this one God has a Son. Tertullian thus began with a Trinitarian formulation of the issue.47 He employed two key terms to express his idea of unity in triplication: Una Substantia and tres personae.48 He elaborated on these terms in Contra Praxeas chapters three through twenty-six.

42 Ibid., 20.
43 Hippolytus is also the first to employ the following metaphors to explain how a separation within the Trinity can be understood without division. Those metaphors are light from light, water from a stream, and the sunbeam from the sun. Sabellius and other modalists could readily agree with these metaphors but, however, as being different aspects or “modes” of the one Person of God. The truly definitive response to Modalistic Monarchianism would not come until Tertullian’s one substance in three persons axiom, and until Origen in the third century who will argue for the unique hypostasis of each member of the Trinity.
44 Bracht, 21.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid., 22.
48 Ibid.
The differentiation of the three *persona* is the result (he focused more attention upon the Holy Spirit than any writer of this period) that the Son and the Holy Spirit are derived from the substance of the Father, or, as he says, “deduced” from the Father (*deduco*). He does not mean any *division* from this derivation, but was to be construed as being a *portion* of the whole.\(^4\)\(^9\) Having established his Trinitarian formulation (unlike Hippolytus), Tertullian returned to the Christological question in answer to the Monarchianists. Jesus Christ, in the incarnation, is *una persona*, but *duae substantiae*, in that a second substance has been added to the divine (*Prax. 27*). Tertullian, then, saw Jesus as simultaneously divine and human, which, up to this point, second-century theologians strove to express with little success.\(^5\)\(^1\) Thus, by emphasizing his terminology of substance and person he answered the Christological question posed by the modalistic Monarchians, specifically their contention that Jesus is the Father and that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are the same Person.\(^5\)\(^2\)

In the third century, Origen elaborated upon the problem of the divinization of Christ within a monotheistic belief system to new heights. In this Alexandrian theologian, we see truly for the first time a high Christology. However, a study of his extant writings seems to confirm that he subordinated Christ to the Father to such a degree that it has been maintained by some that he taught that Christ was a created being, because in places he maintained that nothing is

\(^4\)\(^9\) Ibid. Cf. Harkin, "Pre-Arian Christology," 11, who maintains that even though Christ the Logos is of the same substance as the Father, he does not possess the same amount of deity as the Father.

\(^5\)\(^0\) Tertullian employed two metaphors inaugurated by Hippolytus to describe the unity without division, the sunbeam from the sun and the spring from the river. He also employed his own biological metaphor, that being the shoot from the root. He thus argued that the Trinity is three in degree, mode of appearance and aspect; yet, they are one in substance, condition and power (*ANF*, v. 3, *Against Praxeas*, II, p. 598). Bracht, 22.

\(^5\)\(^1\) Bracht, 24.

\(^5\)\(^2\) Ibid., 24-25.
“uncreated” except the Father alone. In the chapter on Origen, I will argue that the Alexandrian believed in the deity of Christ, but because of his commitment to Middle Platonism, he subordinated the Son and the Holy Spirit to secondary ranks within the Trinity that suggested less than full divinity. This would cause a great deal of trouble in the Church in the early fourth century when Arius would appeal to the arguments of Origen for his insistence that Christ is a created, divine-like being, but not an eternal being alongside the Father. For Arius, the Son existed before the world, but was not eternal; there was a time when he was not. In the opinion of Arius and his followers, a coeternal, uncreated Son would topple monotheism. Unlike the Father, who alone was uncreated (or unbegotten), the Son was originated and had not always existed. He was a changeable creature. And because the Logos dwelled in Jesus, he did not have a human soul. Thus, for Arius, Jesus was neither truly God nor truly man.

Ignatius of Antioch and the Doctrine of God

For the balance of this chapter, I shall explore the theological thought regarding the doctrine of God from the second bishop of Antioch, Ignatius. After which, I will compare his doctrine of God to that of the Mormon doctrine of God.

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54 Harkin, 14-15.
55 Ibid.
Ignatius was sentenced to die under the reign of Trajan (98-117), to be devoured by wild beasts as a spectacle for the citizens of Rome.\(^5\)\(^6\) Perhaps nothing else in life than one's own impending demise does more to focus one's priorities, and this was certainly the case for Ignatius, as is evident in his epistles. He was placed under arrest by armed guard and "escorted" from Syria to Rome to suffer his martyrdom. On the way to Rome he penned seven Epistles that have been passed down to us as a memorial to his theological convictions and to the depth of his pastoral heart. Of these, five were written to the Christian communities of Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, Philadelphia and Smyrna. As he journeyed on to the Eternal City, these cities sent their Christian representatives to greet and minister to him on the way. Another letter was written to Bishop Polycarp of Smyrna, a beloved colleague. The most important letter of all of them was addressed to the Christian community of his destination, Rome. The epistles addressed to Ephesus, Magnesia and Tralles were written at Smyrna. In these he thanks the communities for their many demonstrations of love and sympathy in his fate, and exhorts them to obedience to their ecclesiastical leaders and warns them in graphic terms of the dangers of the host of heretical teachings. It was from this city that he sent the letter to the Church of Rome, begging them not to take any steps in securing his release and defraud him from his ardent desire to die for Christ. For Ignatius, death was but a door to the presence of Jesus Christ and the beginning of true life: "[W]orthy to be found at the (sun's) setting having sent him from the (sun's) rising. It is good to set from the world to God that I may rise to him" (Rom. 2, 2). And, "For I fear that your love lest precisely it may do me wrong. I

am the wheat of God, and I am ground by the teeth of wild beasts that I may be found pure bread” (Rom. 1, 2; 2, 1; 4, 1).57

The seven letters of Ignatius are also a valuable source of information regarding the theological convictions, organizational structure and societal situations of churches in Asia Minor in the early years of the second century.58

The Core of Ignatius’ Theology – Jesus Christ is God

There are numerous passages throughout his epistles that demonstrate that, for Ignatius, Jesus Christ is God. Christ is either called God outright (theos, ho theos), or such an identification to deity is strongly alluded to. For example, “[B]y the will of the Father and Jesus Christ our God” (Eph. Inscr.), and, “Under the Divine dispensation, Jesus Christ our God was conceived by Mary . . . “(Eph. 18.2). And, “. . . to the church beloved and enlightened in her love to our God Jesus Christ. . . (Rom. Inscr.), and, “All perfect happiness in Jesus Christ our God” (ibid.), and finally, “Farewell always in our God Jesus Christ” (Polyc. 8.3).


58 Graham Stanton, “Other Early Christian Writings; Didache, Ignatius, Barnabas, Justin Martyr.” *Early Christian Thought in Its Jewish Context*, eds. John Barclay and John Sweet (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1996), 177. Ignatius had a profound effect upon the thinking of his successors in the second century, as is evident in a writing of Hippolytus against Noetus (18, 1). “Thus, then, too, though demonstrated as God, He does not refuse the conditions proper to Him as man, since He hungers and toils and thirsts in weariness, and flees in fear, and prays in troubled. And He who as God has a sleepless nature, slumbers on a pillow” (*ANF*, 5, p. 230). Compare this with Ignatius’ epistle to the Ephesians, 7.3: “There is one physician, both fleshly and spiritual, begotten and unbegotten, come in flesh, God, in death, true life, both of Mary and of God, first passible and then impassible, Jesus Christ, Our Lord.” See also John A. Adair, “The Power and Will of God: Justin’s Christological Confession.” *Studia Patristica* 45 361-365, wherein Justin’s confession that Christ’s incarnation is the product of God’s power and will (*Dial* 84. 2-4) is quite similar to Ignatius’ use of virtually the same terminology in *Smyrneans* 1.1: “Convinced as to our Lord (that his is) truly of the family of David according to the flesh, Son of God according to the will and power of God.”
Those passages that strongly allude to Christ’s deity are as follows: “[For] God was now appearing in human form to bring a new order” (Eph. 19.2), and, “Very flesh, yet spirit too; Uncreated, and yet born; God-and-man in one agreed, very-life-in death indeed, fruit of God and Mary’s seed (Eph. 7.2). In addition, “Whatever we do, then, let it be done as though He Himself were dwelling within us, we being as it were His temples and He within us as their God” (Eph. 15.3).

In writing to these various churches, Ignatius’ references to Jesus Christ as “our God” is done so without any hint of controversy or reservation on his part. He does not explain himself when referring to Christ as God. It appears that he assumes that such epithets are an established fact among the churches in the region of Asia Minor, Syria and Rome. The core of his theology, therefore, appears to be that Jesus Christ is God. This proposition appears to be an accepted fact among the churches to which he writes. He is not introducing a novel idea, but rather, his style suggests that he is merely affirming an established belief about Christ without reservation. Against the backdrop of a strong Jewish presence in Antioch, this emphasis is significant for the churches there and in Syria. Thus, his use of such bold terminology to describe Christ as God would be a corrective against any Judaizing tendencies in the churches that might abrogate against a divine status for Christ. And by his style, referring to Christ as God appears to be an accepted form of Christian belief and corporate worship empire-wide.

His letters are imbued with words that clearly reveal a profound devotion and worship of God through Christ. For Ignatius, the goal and ambition of every Christian should be to do
everything “as though He Himself [Christ] were dwelling within us, we being as it were His
temples and He within us as their God” (Eph. 15.3). This is powerful language, and appropriate
for deity only, not a mere mortal. Thus, there was already by his time an established tradition
in the conviction of Christ’s divine status within the Church, a conviction that Ignatius weaves
freely throughout his letters.⁵⁹

_Early Creedal Statements on Jesus Christ_

Two interesting passages in Ignatius’ letters deserve attention. There are found in
Ephesians and Polycarp. Their forms suggest that they were either early Christian hymns, or
creeds, or both. Our first passage from Ephesians 7.2 reads:

> There is one physician, both fleshly and spiritual, begotten and unbegotten, come in
> flesh, God, in death, true life both of Mary and of God, first passible and then
> impassible, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

This passage has long been thought to be an ancient Christian hymn. This is believed due to its
rhythmical meter. This pattern lends itself to easy memorization, and thus may have been
utilized as a creedal hymn. The passage is focused upon Christ depicted in a series of doublets
and of contrasts between the spiritual and physical, and between what is sensible and
transcendent. Ignatius first calls Christ the one (“only”) “physician,” meaning, as William
Schoedel correctly observes, that Christ is the ultimate panacea for all the church’s problems.⁶⁰

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⁵⁹ See M. J. Svigel, “The Center of Ignatius of Antioch’s Catholic Christianity.” _Studia Patristica_ 45, 2010, 367-371, who suggests that the center of Ignatius’ catholic identity is the proper confession of the incarnational narrative, which would also include the confession that Jesus Christ is God. Although there were no set creeds, canon and cathedra, it appears fairly clear that there was a shared catholic identity in Antioch, Asian Minor and Rome, centered on a shared Christological confession. See also Cullen I. K. Story, “The Christology of Ignatius of Antioch.” _Evangelical Quarterly_, 56 J1, 1984, 173-182. She argues that taken together in the larger context of the Ignatian corpus, the claims that Jesus Christ is God expresses a firm conviction of the deity of Christ.

In Christ this early creed unites both spirit and flesh in what may be regarded as an early—yet, astute—account on the “hypostatic union.” Christ is both “fleshly and spiritual,” a statement that refutes the claims of the Docetists and the Ebionites. He is “begotten and unbegotten,” linking Christ’s person to both the eternal and temporal, to he who has no beginning, and to he who also came to be. Whether Ignatius ever pondered this paradox is not indicated in any of his extant letters. He made no reference to the unmistakable paradox inherent in the aforementioned statement. He was one intoxicated with Christ himself, and it apparently made no difference to him whether he or the church at large would ever resolve the paradox. He accepted this creedal axiom along with the rest without reservation. He wrote as one who was confident that very soon he would know the answer to the riddle of the God-and-man in Christ, when—as he obviously believed—he would see the “riddle” face-to-face. Be that as it may, there was a strong philosophical background for the terminology that Ignatius employed, such as “unbegotten” (agennetos), which was a term particularly appropriate for God as understood in Middle Platonic terms specifically.

This proto-hypostatic union affirmation continues with Jesus as “God, come in flesh.” As noted above, this paradoxical union of God and man in Christ was accepted by Ignatius and his

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61 Schoedel also notes here that we have the kernel of the later two-nature christologies, ibid.
62 See John A. Adair, “The Power and Will of God: Justin’s Christological Confession,” Studia Patristica 45, 364, who argues that Ignatius’ further development of the idea of Christ’s Davidic lineage on the one hand and his virgin birth on the other, he maintains a deep connection between Christ’s humanity and deity. “This along with the implicit harmonious reading of the Old and New Testaments, further strengthen his argument with the Docetists;” see also Michael D. Goulder, “Ignatius’ ‘Docetists’.” Vigiliae Christianae 53, 16-30, who makes a forceful argument for the identification of the Judaizing influences in some of the churches with the Ebionites.
64 Schoedel, 61.
contemporaries because of the strong referents to this theme found in the developing New Testament corpus of this period. Ignatius never made any direct references to any of the New Testament books, but his language throughout his epistles betrayed a thorough knowledge of the New Testament, and in particular the Gospel of John, with its lofty portrayal of the divinity of Christ.

Ignatius did not attempt to explain how the union of God-and-man in Christ worked out in reality, but it is certain that he held to it unswervingly. In this he certainly was not a speculative theologian. Attempts to understand and explicate the "hypostatic union" would come later that century and culminate in the fifth century. For Ignatius, however, it was enough to affirm a stalwart loyalty to what he understood to be the apostolic tradition regarding Christ's person.

Does Ignatius suggest that God died when he writes, "In death, true life..."? I would argue that what Ignatius did affirm was that Christ, the source of all life, subjected himself to death in his body, but not in his divine spirit, or divine nature. He juxtaposed the death and life anti-thesis in order to demonstrate that even in death, Christ could never be held by the bonds of death. He may also have affirmed—contra the docetists—that his death on the cross was an actual historical occurrence, and not illusory. Jesus died and was buried. Even so, Christ the "true life" could not be held by death.

In portraying the origin of Christ, Ignatius confirmed by writing, "Both of Mary and of God." Once again, he set up a paradoxical dilemma and a hindrance to credulity, particularly for the philosophically-oriented mind of this period. However, Ignatius was writing to the
Church, who accepted this doctrine as he did. He no doubt understood the problem, but nevertheless subscribed to it as a bishop ordained to defend it. Perhaps, as Tertullian was to note a century later, that it was too wonderful, too unbelievable not to be true. He understood that in natural terms, this divine union of God and man in Christ was beyond the grasp of mortal comprehension, and yet, nowhere in his writings did Ignatius betray the least bit of incredulity in its veracity. For Ignatius, Christ is the union of both God and humanity. It was beyond his capacity at this time to describe in human terms how Christ could be both God and a man in his person, and not default to the then pagan motif of divine-human hybrids of Greek mythology. He lacked the compliment of theological and philosophical language that would have assisted him in explaining how one man, Jesus Christ, could be both God and man, who was both eternal and temporal, without either nature being diminished or eradicated or somehow confused. This kind of attempt at theological precision, of course, would not begin to develop until some decades later with Justin.

In the next line we find, “first passible, then impassible.” This appears confusing at first because, if he is setting up the contrast of Christ being passible in flesh and then impassible spirit, then the order is reversed. We see in Polycarp 3.2 that Ignatius reverses the order of the language. We find a clear antithesis between what is impassible and passible, two terms that refer to Greek negative theology. Ignatius must be referring to the two-fold nature of Christ, as Schoedel suggests, in comparison with the Polycarp passage. Like the others, this contradictory statement is left alone as is and no further explanation is rendered. It is assumed

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65 Schoedel recognizes this, and explains that in both passages Ignatius is referring to the two-fold nature of Christ, (61).
66 Ibid. And Schoedel suggests further that Ignatius is emphasizing the humanity of Christ in opposition to what he regarded as the heart of false teaching of his opponents, the docetists.
to be divine truth, taught by Christ and transmitted by his apostles to the churches in the line of apostolic succession. As a creed, it is a part of the church, including its worship. Thus, in this instance, “lex orandi, lex credendi” certainly appears to be the rule here for all church doctrine of this period.

The last line, “Jesus Christ, our Lord,” is the answer to the first line, “There is one physician.” The series of antitheses between the first and the last lines act as Christ’s divine and human pedigrees, before revealing the final and authoritative designation of “Lord”.

Our next passage for consideration is from Polycarp 3.2, which reads:

Look for him who is above time—non-temporal, invisible, for our sakes visible; Intangible, impassible, for our sakes passible. One who endured in every way for our sakes.

It does not appear that Ignatius was an economic Trinitarian, in that Christ’s divine Sonship began at his incarnation. The phrase, “Look for him who is above time—non-temporal,” is a clear reference to his eternal pre-existence. Christ is eternal because he comes from the Father, who is eternal. How the pre-existent “non-temporal” Christ, who is God, can share divinity with the Father is not explained.

We have in this passage another set of antitheses brought together to demonstrate the uniqueness of Christ. Ignatius was not describing an angel, a supernatural creature or a divinized human being, but a man of flesh exactly like us, subject to change and alteration, who was also united with the divine elements of eternality and transcendence. “Invisible, for our sakes visible,” is another couplet that describes the paradox of Christ’s person. He who was invisible—transcendent—for all eternity became visible in his incarnation—manifested to all
creation—for the sake of rescuing humanity from its forlorn destiny. And as we have seen before, Ignatius is not referring to Jesus’ manifestation to creation in a docetic sense, but as the eternal one come in flesh and blood. He did not appear as a man in “appearance” only, but as a real man, conceived in Mary’s womb and born, like all other human beings, to walk our earth. There is no attempt on his part to prove that Jesus Christ is the visible manifestation of the invisible God. After all, he is writing to members of a meta-community that appears to share his faith in Christ and in his attributes in all respects. Nor is there any attempt made towards a philosophical and theological resolution of this paradox of an eternal, impassible God walking on earth in human flesh. To indulge in this kind of theological speculation may never have occurred to him.

We come to a familiar passage that hearkens back to Ephesians 7.2 (“first passible and then impassible”), “intangible, impassible, for our sakes passible.” In this instance, as well as in the passage in Ephesians, the reference is to Christ’s incarnation and his humanity in contrast to his prior and subsequent divine impassibility with the Father. Like the Ephesians passage, we recognize the use of Middle Platonic terminology employed to describe Christ in context of negative theology. Was Ignatius deliberately relying upon Greek philosophical terms to describe Christ’s transcendence? Ignatius was not a philosopher, but a Christian bishop of considerable theological accomplishment. How well versed he was in current Greek philosophy is any one’s guess. However, such philosophical terms under discussion, such as “unbegotten,” “passible,” “intangible,” “invisible,” and “impassible,” were woven into the common fabric of the language for this time and were thus a part of the God-talk in late antiquity, much as current philosophical terms are a part of our own modern language stock. Thus, it is most likely
that Ignatius relied upon language that was common stock in his cultural and theological milieu. Such language, common to members of the church of that time, was adapted and fitted into their creedal statements to highlight Christ's immanence and transcendence. What's more, the fact that Christ became *passible* for our sakes enforces Ignatius' and the church's view at this time that Jesus became fully human at his incarnation. "For our sakes," the pre-existent Christ became a human being. He did not merely "appear" human, but was human in every way, as Ignatius strives to demonstrate in opposition to the docetists.67

Regarding the full humanity of Christ, Ignatius was quite explicit. "God being revealed as human to bring newness of eternal life" (*Eph. 19.2*). And in a more extensive passage he writes to the Trallians,

> Be deaf, then, when someone speaks to you apart from Jesus Christ [unless he affirms the Christ] of the family of David, of Mary, who was truly born, both ate and drank, who was persecuted under Pontius Pilate, who was truly crucified and died, as heavenly, earthly, and sub-earthly things looked on (*Tral. 9.1*).

There is no question here that Ignatius was affirming the full humanity of Jesus Christ against the docetist's claim that Christ merely "appeared" to the world as a real man in flesh and blood. Such an idea of God touching matter in any way was philosophically repugnant to their Greek-conditioned minds: that any divine being, much less a divine aeon, would become flesh. Ignatius unequivocally asserted in the face of this fierce philosophically inspired opposition that Jesus Christ as God has taken on our human flesh upon his person.

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67 Goulder, 20f.
Ignatius on the Distinction between the Father and the Son

A number of passages strongly allude to Ignatius’ belief in the distinction of the Father and the Son as separate entities. “Farewell in God the Father and in Jesus Christ, our common hope” (Eph. 21.2). There do not appear to be any proto-modalistic or Sabellian tendencies apparent in his thinking regarding the relationship of the Father to the Son. In fact, in other passages, he clearly subordinated the Son to the Father: “As, then, the Lord did nothing without the Father—being united (with him)—neither by himself nor through the apostles, so you too do nothing without the bishop and presbyters” (Magn. 7.1). And, “Be initiators of Jesus Christ, as he himself (emphasis added) is of his Father” (Phil. 7.2). Even though we find a clear understanding of the distinction between the Father and the Son, as well as an understanding of the Son’s subordinate position to the Father—just as a church member is subordinate to the authority of the bishop—Ignatius did not understand this subordination position of the Son to mean that he is a subordinated God, or God of an inferior or lesser divinity. He would no more consider the Father and the Son to be unequal in their essential nature any more than he would consider the church catechumen and the bishop to be unequal in their human nature. The distinctions that exist between the Father and the Son for Ignatius are in function and role, not in essence. Thus, Jesus Christ is not subordinate in his being, but in his flesh in the incarnation as a Servant. A clue to this understanding is found in Magnesians 13.2, “Be subject to the bishop and to each other as Jesus Christ (was subject) to the Father [according to the flesh], and the apostles to Christ.”
Ignatius' view of the subordination of the Son to the Father's authority along with their relational distinction came down to us long before those Christological and Trinitarian controversies such as Monarchianism, Subordinationism, Adoptionism, and Modalism erupted within the Church. The question that begs to be answered is how Ignatius and other Christians in this period reconciled a belief in the distinction of the Persons in the Godhead while simultaneously affirming a belief in one God. As we know, various proposals were offered as solutions to this problem later on, but for Ignatius and his contemporaries (as far as we know) no such solution was ever sought. Nor do we find in the apostolic literature any inkling of a realization that there was a problem. It is even more remarkable, then, that such a tension between monotheism and the divinization of the Son held together without controversy in their minds with no regard for the problems it raised. Ignatius dealt with issues over Docetism and Judaism, but never over this very problem. It seems apparent that the philosophical problem never played a part in Ignatius' theology. At least, we have no record that any such dilemma played out in his mind. The antitheses, i.e. the impassible becoming passible, the eternal God possessing an eternal Son who is also called God, such premises were merely accepted as facts of apostolic teaching and never called into question.

An example of a clear subordinate passage is Magnesians 7.1, which was briefly examined above. Ignatius thrusts home his argument that the bishop is in charge of ecclesiastical affairs and draws upon the example of his own God, Jesus Christ, who "did nothing without the Father." A manifest hierarchy of authority between the Father and the Son is being sustained in Ignatius' theology. Like a good soldier, who does not act without express orders from his superior officer, Christ does nothing without express orders from his Father.
This is the thrust of Ignatius’ argument regarding Christ’s subordination to the Father. For him it is a matter of role, not essence.

Another passage that clearly subordinates the Son to the Father is: “Be imitators of Jesus Christ, as he himself is of his Father” (Phil. 7.2). There is an obvious allusion to a hierarchy of authority within the Godhead between Father and Son, in that the inferior recognizes the higher authority of the superior. Undoubtedly, Ignatius is familiar with those Gospel passages within which Jesus refers to his Father as “greater than I” and when he says to his disciples, “I go to my God and to your God.” Characteristically, Ignatius never explained how Jesus Christ could exist as God and yet be inferior to his Father, who is also God. He did not attempt to explain this anomaly by appealing to one God who manifests himself as different persons, such as we find later in modalism, nor as an attribute of God as we shall see in Theophilus of Antioch. Rather, Ignatius believed in Jesus Christ who existed as the Son from all eternity (before all the ages). “Who before the ages was with the Father and appeared at the end” (Magn. 6.1); and, “to one Jesus Christ who proceeded from the one Father and was with the one and returned (to him)” (Magn. 7.2); and lastly, “Look for him (Jesus) who is above time—“ (Polyc. 3.2). In these passages, Ignatius tells his readers that prior to the incarnation Jesus Christ as the Son always existed with the Father. Unlike Theophilus of Antioch, Ignatius does not locate the Son in his pre-existence within the Father’s “bowels”, or his inner being. Rather, he proceeded from Silence, which is another way of expressing the ineffable quality of God. Yet, he characteristically placed such speculations aside (if he ever entertained such) and stuck to the fundamentals of the apostolic faith. Jesus Christ was a real person, who was fully man
and fully God, and who existed as his own existence distinct from the Father. In what would later be Origenist parlance, he is his own hypostasis. He was not an adjectival activity that proceeded from the Father in any monarchian sense, only to be reabsorbed into God at the end of the age.

**Ignatius on the Trinity**

One of the most notable of Ignatius’ discussions in my opinion is his simile concerning the Trinity (or perhaps, more accurately, the divine Triad) found in Ephesians 9.1. Here he described the three-person God in the imagery of a hoist employed in the construction of the Temple of God. “Since you are stones of the Father’s temple, made ready for the building of God the Father, carried up to the heights by the crane of Jesus Christ (which is the cross), using the Holy Spirit as a rope.”

In the immediate context, Ignatius compared the Ephesian church (albeit all Christians) to stones, deaf to the subtle rhetoric of others who came from without to draw away unwary disciples. They are, instead, “deaf stones,” and yet stones fit for God’s own temple. And it is here that Ignatius then launches into his tritheistic simile of the hoist, or crane. It is interesting to consider why Ignatius would choose this particular image of a crane engine in relation to the building to describe the Triune God. Ephesus was a magnificent city of truly impressive buildings and temples. It was home, for example, to one of the largest temples ever built by the Greeks, the Temple of Artemis, a temple some four to five times larger than the Parthenon.

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68 I am not in agreement with Schoedel on this point, who describes Ignatius’ position as monarchian (20). He may evince a naïve tendency towards a monarchian view of the Godhead, but I think he amply emphasized the distinctiveness between the Father and the Son to such a point that he did not confuse the two in his own mind. For a more balanced view in my opinion, see Virginia Corwin, *St. Ignatius and Christianity in Antioch*, 140-41.
It is not too difficult to imagine the all too common sight of numerous hoists used by craftsmen in the construction and renovation of buildings within the city at any given time. Thus, Ignatius employs a common feature of everyday life in Ephesus as useful imagery of the Triune nature of God. Christians are the stones “of the Father’s temple, made ready for the building of God the Father.” We have, then, the first Person of the Trinitarian formula.69 He continues with, “carried up to the heights by the crane of Jesus Christ (which is the cross).” Jesus occupies the second aspect of the formula. He ends with, “using the Holy Spirit as a rope.” He thus assigns a critical role for the Holy Spirit, which rounds out his simile of the hoist.70 It would be unadvisable to read more into his simile. He is not suggesting that each member is co-eternal and co-equal. Such concepts were foreign to him and the Church at this time. He is suggesting, I believe, that God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit, were all somehow linked together in an eternal unit of purpose in the one God, that also for now, under the divine dispensation, involves our faith that actually powers the mechanism: “and your faith is your upward guide, and love the way which leads up to God.”

Ignatius painted an image for the Ephesian congregation, with which they could well identify and use as a scaffold of thought, as they, too, struggled to understand the mystery of God’s unity and plurality. Not only that, but he joined them (indeed, the entire Church) in a type of divine building program that unites them intimately with God—not as mere spectators of the project, but as participants and members of God’s new temple. This is meant to offer

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69 Corwin notes that this Trinitarian formula is rare in the Apostolic Fathers (142). Outside of Ignatius, it only occurs in I Clem. 58.2 and Didache 7.1, 2, referring to Matt. 28:19.

70 Ignatius’ references to the Holy Spirit are rare. Usually in his writings, the Holy Spirit is mentioned together in reference to the Father and the Son. See for example Magnesians 13.1, “… in the Son and the Father [and in the Spirit].”
hope and encouragement to members of an otherwise persecuted group, as is evinced in all of his letters.

A Comparison of the Mormon Doctrine of God to that of Ignatius

There is no doubt that the Jesus of the Latter-day Saints is understood differently from the Jesus of traditional Christianity. Stephen Webb, for example, has seen this and finds that one major difference is that Mormons connect the atonement more with the Garden of Gethsemane than with the cross.71 There is, however, a significant similarity between the Mormon and traditional Christian adherent that has also been noticed by Webb, who has seen what he describes as a deep devotion to Christ.72 In this aspect, as well, Mormons share a similar devotion to Christ as did Ignatius of Antioch. In addition, in Mormon theology there is an unmistakable belief in the utter uniqueness of Jesus, which they maintain is exclusively their province, because it is undergirded by divine authority through direct revelations to Joseph Smith.

In other ways, as well, Latter-day Saints share the same understanding of Christ as did Ignatius. For example, Mormons would acknowledge that Jesus is God. We have seen that in the Mormon doctrine of God, Jesus Christ is the Son of God. When one looks closer, however, a significant difference arises: for Ignatius, Jesus is God: “. . . to the church beloved and enlightened in her love to our God Jesus Christ” (Rom. Inscrp.). As I have shown in this study, although there is no monolithic Mormon doctrine of God, in the revelations given to Joseph Smith, Jesus Christ is a God. In most recent times, for example, this insight was expressed by

72 Ibid., 21.
Mormon apologist, Bruce R. McConkie, who described Jesus Christ in what many Mormons regard as an authoritative LDS statement of faith: “He is the Firstborn of the Father. By obedience and devotion to the truth he attained that pinnacle of intelligence which ranked him as a God, as the Lord Omnipotent, while yet in his pre-existent state” [McConkie is most likely referring to Christ’s pre-incarnate state].

Today in Mormon theology, Jesus Christ is endowed with the Old Testament moniker as “Jehovah:” “He is the Eternal Jehovah, the promised Messiah, the Redeemer and Savior, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. . . . Thereafter, with the righteous saints, he shall reign to all eternity as King of Kings, Lord of Lords, and God of Gods.”

Thus, as has been also demonstrated in earlier chapters, the Latter-day Saints came to believe that Jesus Christ is a God, a Personage of flesh and bones, having reached the pinnacle of human attainment, which is the attainment of eternal godhood. This, however, was not Ignatius’ understanding of the deity of Christ. He never characterized the Son’s deity in language that portrayed him as a God in any of his letters. In fact, no document of the apostolic period showed tendencies of any acceptance of a plurality of “Gods” in the Godhead. There was certainly an acknowledgment of a multiplicity of Voices in the Godhead, but never any suggestion of a plurality of Gods. They all believed in the existence of only one God exclusive to all others. The entire history of the early Christian church was a story of how Christians grappled to understand the place of Christ with the Father as two distinct divine Persons within the context of one God. It was not the concept of a multiplicity of Gods that anchored the early church throughout its development of a coherent doctrine of God, but the

73 Bruce R. McConkie, Mormon Doctrine, 2nd ed. (Bookcraft: Salt Lake City, Utah, 1966), 129.
74 Ibid.
concept of monotheism. It was this primal belief in monotheism that perennially defined the terms of the debate until the Trinitarian concept of God was established at Nicaea (later refined at Constantinople).

Another significant difference between the Latter-day Saints and Ignatius of Antioch is the former's rich theology of the Holy Ghost (Holy Spirit in traditional Christian parlance). In all the letters of Ignatius, he hardly mentions the Holy Spirit by name. But in Mormon theology, the exact opposite prevails. McConkie, for example, describes a generally accepted Mormon position on the Holy Ghost, when we read:

The Holy Ghost is the third member of the Godhead. He is a Personage of Spirit, a Spirit Person, a Spirit Man, a Spirit Entity. He can be in only one place at one time, and he does not and cannot transform himself into any other form or image than that of the Man whom he is, though his power and influence can be manifest at one and the same time through all immensity... He is the Comforter, Testator, Revelator, Sanctifier, Holy Spirit, Holy Spirit of Promise, Spirit of Truth, Spirit of the Lord, and Messenger of the Father and the Son, and his companionship is the greatest gift that mortal man can enjoy.75

Although McConkie does not say it overtly in this section of his work, we do know from our prior study that the Holy Ghost, as the third member of the Godhead, is also a God. Ignatius and the Primitive Church of this period were more or less in the dark regarding the exact identity and the particular functions of the Holy Spirit, but they did not regard him as a distinct Spirit Personage, or as a numerically distinct member of the Godhead. Nor did Ignatius subscribe to the idea that the Holy Ghost was a “Spirit Man,” incapable of being in more than one place at any given time. Such a concept was foreign to his thinking when it came to understanding the basic concept of “spirit” in the age he lived. Ignatius understood spirit to be

75 Ibid., 359.
incorporeal, or immaterial. I suggest this in light of his contrasting symbols between the “impassible” and “passible” natures of Christ. I also suggest this in light of the prevailing philosophical zeitgeist of the period in which Ignatius lived, which was Middle Platonic. As we know, a key feature of Middle Platonic theology is the transcendence of God. And, according to William Schoedel, Ignatius went further than any New Testament writer in speaking of God’s transcendence in terms that largely reflected Hellenistic (or Hellenistic-Jewish) thought. It was his use of the distinctions “passible” and “impassible” to describe his understanding of the incarnation of Christ, the union of two diametrically diverse substances, that demonstrated a clear reference to philosophical dualism. This concept of dualism was a prevalent philosophical feature in the Hellenic world at that time. It was embedded deep in its zeitgeist. The idea of the materialistic nature of all reality, on the other hand, is a primary feature in Latter-day Saint theology. In fact, nothing is more characteristic of the Mormon conception of reality than its materialism, the strongly held conviction that whatever is real is material. So, although matter and spirit are distinguishable, they are both essentially “material,” (so that spirit is understood as a form of refined matter). Mormon writer Sterling M. McMurrin has expounded on this principle in his exposition of the theology of B. H. Roberts. He says, “Although this extreme materialism was a violent departure from the traditional Christian metaphysics, which described the spirit or soul as immaterial substance, the Mormon materialism seemed to LDS writers to be compatible with the strong materialistic trend in nineteenth-century science and

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76 Schoedel, 18.
philosophy." Is this to suggest, then, that one’s concept of reality is inexorably linked to the influence of one's cultural background? That is to say, are the Mormon and traditional Christian concepts of basic reality (materialism or dualism) determined by one’s philosophical environment? Were Joseph Smith and other pivotal Mormon writers of the nineteenth-century merely products of their time, who developed their extreme materialism because of the heavy influence of their culture? In like manner, were the apostolic fathers, such as Ignatius of Antioch, including particularly the apologists who followed after them, merely products of their time, who insisted on God's transcendence only because of the pervasive influence of Platonic theology? Ultimately, however, the two traditions that we are examining must appeal to divine revelation as the basis of their concept of reality, otherwise such questions become stuck in a morass of special pleading and question begging. For example, David E. Paulsen observes for the Mormon case that,

Of all Joseph's challenges to the theological world, none is more fundamental than his claim to direct revelation from God. This claim challenges every variety of Christian thought and, at the same time, grounds all of Joseph's additional claims. However biblically consistent, rationally plausible, or existentially appealing Joseph's theological insights may be, the force of their challenge hinges most critically on his claim they were directly revealed by God. The authoritativeness of the Bible for Christians hinges on a similar claim to its being God's revealed word. The question becomes, ultimately, which of the two traditions' appeal to divine revelation is the most authoritative. Which of the two is based on “true truth”? That is the ultimate epistemological question that is considered by participants of many religious traditions, and particularly in Mormonism and traditional Christianity. This is because in both Mormonism and in traditional Christianity, the claim to hold exclusive truth has been

78 Ibid.
historically the evangelistic task of both traditions. When it comes to comparing, for example, the truth claim of Mormonism for an extreme material reality, with the traditional Christian truth claim for dualism, it becomes readily apparent that both cannot be true at the same time and in the same sense. On the other hand, when it comes to comparing the level of devotion to Jesus Christ, both traditions share a common core belief that his mission and teaching is and uniquely significant among all other religious traditions in the world. Within a cultural atmosphere of philosophical relativism today, however, such questions of divine authority become lost in subjective expressions of loyalty to one's religious tradition. In the final analysis, it is the meaningfulness of a person's religious experience that matters most, not whether it is ultimately true or not. One's private, subjective experience of one's religious faith is just as legitimate and meaningful as anyone else's. It does not appear, however, that this sort of relativistic attitude towards religious truth was a part of the religious zeitgeist of Ignatius' time. It is certain that quite the opposite prevailed. And as I have suggested previously, both the Mormon and traditional Christian traditions share a common belief that their claims of religious doctrine cannot both be true in the same sense and at the same time. Either both are wrong, or only one is right.

In the next chapter, I shall turn my attention to the doctrine of God as developed by Theophilus of Antioch. I shall then follow the same procedure of comparing his theological development with that of the Mormon doctrine of God.
CHAPTER SIX

THEOPHILUS OF ANTIOCH

AND

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

Theophilus of Antioch: the Apologist

We know very little of Theophilus' personal life. We do know that he was born in the mid second-century somewhere between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers and was brought up as a pagan. He tells us that he became a Christian as an adult after reading the Old Testament, particularly the prophetical books. How he came to read these in the first place is not known. He was Bishop (Patriarch) of Antioch between 169 and 183. Eusebius tells us that he contended against the "wild beasts from the fold of Christ, by admonitions and exhortations to the brethren and at other times by open oral discussions and refutations and by most accurate proofs" in written form.¹ Eusebius mentions of particular note a work that Theophilus wrote against Marcion. "And that Theophilus also, with the others, contended against them, is manifest from a certain discourse of no common merit written by him against Marcion."² He also wrote a work against a certain Hermogenes. Today, however, we have only one extant work: the three books comprising Ad Autolychum (to Autolychus).

² Ibid.
Theophilus on the Doctrine of God

Theophilus uses the standard procedure of the other apologists before him, who employed Greek philosophical categories in their description of the nature of God. He relies upon Middle Platonic philosophical terminology primarily in his description of God for a largely ambivalent audience at best. In his Ad Autolycus, he does have the luxury of addressing only one individual (as far as we know) and focuses his appeal to the worldview of one particular individual, with whom Theophilus apparently has already developed a rapport and friendship. In this regard, then, it is unique among all apologetical literature.3 Being familiar with his interlocutor, Theophilus tailors his apologetic towards the particular issues that concern Autolycus.4 It was his purpose to bring to Autolycus a true account of the nature of the one, true God, creation, and the history of mankind. Theophilus intended to demonstrate to his friend that the Christian account is the only true account, because he was aware that Autolycus had read “the histories and genealogies of the so-called gods” (II, 2).5

In keeping with Middle Platonic and even some Stoic content, his description of God appears most often in the form of negative theology. In this he followed Justin and Athenagoras, and hence is not innovative in this regard. Among the apologists, Middle Platonism was the most amenable of the Greek philosophical schools to Christianity, thus was it used liberally and gratefully by Christian writers familiar enough with philosophy and rhetoric

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4 I am assuming for the balance of this chapter that Autolycus was a real person who the bishop knew personally. It would not be a stretch to assume that Theophilus had other Greeks in mind like Autolycus whom he hoped would read his book.
to explain the nature of God to the Greek mind. Unlike the Hellenistic philosophical conception of God, however, Theolophilus aggressively pushed for creation ex nihilo. He regarded it as the definitive difference between Christian theology and Greek philosophy. Thus, Christianity's (and Judaism's) God is far more powerful than anyone ever thought, for he is the only one capable of creating everything out of nothing and to create whatever he willed for whatever purpose he so willed (II, 4). Further, although his was quite willing to borrow from Greek philosophical categories for his appeal to God's nature, the bishop was hostile to all Greek philosophy and literature in general (III, 2-8).

When Theophilus wanted to describe God as beyond the pale of human comprehension or imagination, he wrote, "For he is in glory uncontainable, in greatness incomprehensible, in loftiness inconceivable, in strength incomparable" (I, 3). He extended human finite categories to infinitude through negation to demonstrate how unlike the gods of Greek mythology were to the Christian concept of God. Assuming that he was a well-educated Greek, Autolycus would have immediately recognized the significance of Theolophilus' usage of Platonic terms and that he was identifying the lofty and unsurpassable God of Plato with the Christian God. Theophilus asserted that the one divine principle, the Good of Plato's Republic, was in fact the God of the Christians. What Plato and other philosophers following in his train understood only dimly, Theophilus told Autolycus that he is more fully known through divine revelation through the Christian Scriptures.

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6 Bentivegna, 109. See also N. Joseph Torchia, "Theories of Creation in the Second Century Apologists and their Middle Platonic Background" Studia Patristica 26, 195, who also maintains that Theophilus' approach to creation ex nihilo is a marked departure from what usually was found among Christian writers of this period. "Theophilus grounds this statement upon 2 Maccabees 7.28 and its unequivocal pronouncement of creation from complete nothingness" (ibid.). Theophilus' supreme critique of Greek philosophical theology is expressed in his understanding of God as supreme Creator in the fullest sense.
God is Invisible to All, Save the Morally Pure

Before launching into his philosophical description of God, Theophilus admonishes Autolycus regarding his moral responsibility before God, and further entreats him that although God is invisible to the naked eye, he is most certainly seen by those whose hearts have been purified through observance of the Christian laws. "Just as a man must keep a mirror polished, so he must keep his soul pure. When there is rust on a mirror, a man's face cannot be seen in it; so also when there is sin in a man, such a man cannot see God" (I, 2). Thus, to be able "to see" God is not through intense intellectual effort through negation of the sensible realm in order to apprehend the intelligible, but only after moral and spiritual preparation is made by those who first "cleanse themselves from all defilement" (I, 2). God is known by the pure of heart, not the intellectually elite. So, when the bishop is asked by Autolycus, "Show me your God," Theophilus responds with, "Show me your man and I will show you my God" (I, 2), meaning, that, before the issue of the nature of God can be discussed, or even fully grasped and appreciated, the issue of the nature of the inner man asking the question must first be confronted. Thus, in contrast to the prevailing Platonic religion of the day, i.e. the pursuit of the "likeness to God," the vision of God was not achieved by an arduous and life-long intellectual exercise leading to a religiously conceived participation in God. The way to the vision of the true God was achieved, rather, by those who first had their spiritual eyes opened by God:

For God is seen by those who are capable of seeing him, once they have the eyes of the soul opened. All men have eyes [and thus the potential to see God], but some have eyes which are hooded by cataracts [moral blindness through sin] and do not see the light of the sun. Just because the blind do not see, however, the light of the sun does not fail to shine; the blind must blame themselves and their eyes. So you also, O man, have cataracts over the eyes of your soul because of your sins and wicked deeds (I, 2).

It is interesting to conjecture here if Theophilus was alluding to the blindness of the men trapped in Plato’s simile of the cave, men who were completely ignorant of the true sun that shines outside their own darkened world of shadows and images. If he did, then he presented it with a distinctly Christian perspective that rejected the Hellenistic ideal of rigorous intellectual and philosophical contemplation for a Christian concept of radical obligation to moral virtue. Finally, boldly, the bishop casts the gauntlet down at Autolycus’ feet by declaring, “All this brings darkness upon you, just as when a flux of matter comes over the eyes and they cannot see the light of the sun. So also, O man, your ungodliness brings darkness upon you and you cannot see God” (ibid.). Theophilus’ relentless pursuit of what he perceives to be Autolycus’ true dilemma—a complete moral and spiritual blindness—was emblematic of what would later become a hallmark of the Antiochene tradition, namely, a special emphasis upon ethics and moral uprightness before God.

*Theophilus on the Nature of God*

Having established the Christian ground rules for achieving a vision of God, Theophilus proceeds to pique Autolycus’ interest by presenting a description of God that would instantly appeal to his own Greek education.
You will say to me, then, “Since you [emphasis added] see, describe the form of God to me.” Hear me, O man: the form of God [to eidos theou] is ineffable and inexpressible, since it cannot be seen with merely human eyes (I, 3).

Theophilus employed classic Middle Platonic terminology to describe the immaterial nature of God. This era of Platonic philosophy in the second-century was characterized by the use of apophatic language in metaphysics, which were negations of finite terms used to denote what an infinite being was by defining what he was not. This was typical for Middle Platonic contemplative reflection upon the nature of the One, or the Good. Theophilus continues, “For he is in glory uncontainable, in greatness incomprehensible, in loftiness inconceivable, in strength incomparable, in wisdom unteachable, in goodness inimitable, in beneficence inexpressible” (ibid.). In short, Theophilus was deliberately identifying the God of Platonism with the God of the Jews and the Christians, but not in the sense of a direct correspondence.

What Theophilus and the other apologists hoped to achieve with their borrowing of Greek philosophical terminology was not a one-to-one correspondence with Greek philosophical thought, but an enhancement, or a refinement of what the Greek pagan philosophers got only partially right. When Theophilus and other Christian writers of this period employed these terms, they did so with the intention of integrating and filtering them through the mesh of divine revelation unique to the Old and New Testaments. They firmly believed that these philosophical terms were supported by Scripture, when allegorically interpreted.8

8 Beginning with Philo of Alexandria (and even earlier), then later taken up by the Greek apologists and refined to an art by Origen, this theological project of the Alexandrians brought biblical interpretation to the level of philosophy. See D. S. Wallace-Hadrill, *Christian Antioch: A Study of Early Christian Thought in the East*, 97, who suggests that within this cultural milieu that was so heavily influenced by Platonism, a Christian could be open to Platonist influence without even realizing it, “and it could find a place in his unexpressed assumptions particularly in respect of elements in Platonist thought which were not altogether inconsistent with a Christian standpoint.” Such an example is the Platonist concept of transcendent Ideas. He cautions us, however, in that overall, Antiochene theology was in its essence unphilosophical, because Antiochens thought primarily in terms of history and Scripture (102).
Thus, relying upon Middle Platonic categories of describing divinity, Theophilus portrayed God as immaterial, transcendent, and incorporeal.\(^9\) We find no allusion to God’s “body” as we do later in Tertullian.\(^{10}\) There is only one God, about which Theophilus was emphatic, and who is therefore regarded as radically monotheistic. This is particularly demonstrated in his attacks against idolatry and polytheism.\(^{11}\) His biblical approach to the doctrine of God is in response to the particularly pernicious charge of atheism, which was a popular allegation against Christianity at this time.\(^{12}\)

Theophilus was now asked a rather pointed question by Autolycus, which had the potential of becoming an opportunity for embarrassment if the bishop did not answer wisely. “Is God angry?” Theophilus answered, “Certainly he is angry with those who do evil deeds, but good and kind and merciful toward those who love and fear him. He is the instructor of the godly and the father of the righteous, but the judge and punisher of the ungodly” (I, 3). He did not take Autolycus’ bait, for he surely would have pounced upon his friend for any perceived philosophical inconsistency in his response. When pressed with such a provocative question, Theophilus did not abandon his earlier Middle Platonic descriptions of God by giving an anthropomorphic response from the Christian Old Testament; nor did he repent of his earlier use of Platonic terms for God. He answered directly by appealing to the character of God

\(^{9}\) Cf. Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians* 10, “That we are not atheists, therefore, seeing that we acknowledge one God, uncreated, eternal, invisible, impassible, incomprehensible, illimitable, and who is apprehended by the understanding only and the reason . . .” (*ANF* 2, 133). When Athenagoras said that God is apprehended by the understanding and reason only, he means to say that the substance of God is “intellectual,” that is, incorporeal.

\(^{10}\) Tertullian thought of God in the Stoic sense, of God being in the form of a very fine spiritual substance, yet invisible, and not at all in the Platonic sense of an intellectually apprehended, totally transcendent substance. I think Tertullian’s concern here (despite the primarily Stoic philosophical and ethical influence appreciated by the Romans of this time) is to describe God as a real, concrete being, who really exists, not some “idea” in a vacuum.

\(^{11}\) Grant, *Ad Autolycum*, xv.

\(^{12}\) Laszlo Perendy, “The Outlines of Systematic Theology in the *Ad Autolycum* of Theophilus of Antioch,” *Studia Patristica* 45 2007, 413.
understood even by common sense: "Certainly he is angry with those who do evil deeds. . . ." In this response, Theophilus was implying two things: first, the Platonic philosophical description of God, despite its theological and metaphysical precision, fell far short of describing the God who Christians believed is the only true God. And second, that ultimately the scriptural description of God’s character in the final analysis trumps even the highest form of Greek philosophical concepts of God. In the Scriptures, God is described as displaying emotions of particular range and magnitude. Thus, Theophilus answered his friend directly and honestly. He realized that Autolycus knew enough about the Christian God and Platonic philosophy that any equivocation on his part would be fatal to his credibility as a teacher of Christian doctrine, and therefore fatal to his apologetical concern to win Autolycus’ intellectual ascent to the Christian faith. He answered unequivocally, that the God he had been describing in high philosophical categories was more than what the Greek philosophers conceived of him. So how did Theophilus reconcile the idea of an “angry” God with the alleged aloof and impassible God of Middle Platonism? Notice that Theophilus never referred to God directly as “impassible,” which was a major Platonic axiom for the nature of God. He did, however, use the term “immutable” (I, 4), but only in the sense of God being immortal and eternal, not subject to decay or change in his being. He did not imply that God was subject to change or possessed human passions like ours. Theophilus utilized Platonic terms when they were in agreement with his understanding of scriptural allusions to God’s nature. He did not try to squeeze the biblical God into a Platonic procrustean bed. He would not sacrifice the biblical God who possesses emotion (anger over human misdeeds, for example) for the stark and passionless God of Greek metaphysics. Had he tried—and even if he had succeeded—to win over
Autolycus with a softened version of the biblical God, it would have been a pyrrhic victory at best in my opinion. Theophilus was not interested in identifying the biblical God with any of the Greek conceptions of God, either the Platonic Good, or the One, or with Aristotle’s Unmoved Mover, or with the pantheistic God of the Stoics. In his opinion, they were all wrong, and possessed only a glimmer of the whole truth about God’s being. He borrowed language from the Hellenistic traditions that suited his purpose and that best described his concept of the biblical God.

In chapter four of book I, Theophilus provides us with a more detailed description of God, once again utilizing recognizable Platonic terms.

He has no beginning because his is uncreated (agenetos); he is immutable because he is immortal (athanatos). He is called God because he established everything on his own steadfastness and because he runs; the word “run” means to run and set in motion and energize and nourish and provide and govern everything and to make everything alive (I, 4).

This description is in stark contrast to Aristotle’s Unmoved Mover, as well as to the aloofness of the One of the Platonists. The God that Theophilus describes displaces the Platonic concept of the World Soul. He employs the word “run” to describe God’s active maintenance of the cosmos in his providence. This is an unusual word to use to describe the Providence of God and it is peculiar to Theophilus. He means to point out that the biblical God is intimately involved with his creation, as its Sustainer and not just as its Creator. Once again, Theophilus is distancing himself ever further from the Greek philosophical concepts of God. He continues this anti-Greek campaign by telescoping the concept of the Demiurge and Maker into unity with the one God, collapsing the Middle Platonic debate over the Demiurge being a second God: “He
is Lord because he is Master of the universe, Demiurge and Maker because he is Creator and Maker of the universe, Most High because he is above everything, Almighty because he controls and surrounds everything” (I, 4).

Whenever Theophilus speaks of God in such language he is referring exclusively to the Father, whom he only refers to a couple of times. When he describes God as being “Most High, because he is above everything, Almighty because he controls and surrounds everything,” he is referring to God’s transcendence, which for him means that God has no locus but is the locus of everything. Whenever he does refer to God as being in a particular locality, it is always in reference to his Logos. Whenever we see Platonic terms used, Theophilus is referring to the Father, never in reference to the Logos or Sophia. In some respects, his doctrine of God appears to be Monarchian. In other respects, however, he appears to consider the Logos and Sophia as being equal to the Father (I, 7), with whom they dwell prior to creation (II, 10). I shall have more to say about this later. I shall simply note for now that for Theophilus, God the Father surrounds everything that exists, including his Logos and Sophia. He never describes the Logos (or Sophia) as being “alongside” the Father, but only within his bowels, his innermost being, as a thought exists within his mind until it is ready to be expressed as a spoken word.

Theophilus continues his description of God as Demiurge and Maker of everything, the Creator, as not only the source but also the Craftsman of all that exists. He does not associate the Logos with the Hellenic Demiurge. “For the heights of the heavens and depths of the abysses and the ends of the world are in his hand, and there is no place of his rest. The

13 Grant, xv.
14 Bentivegna, 117.
15 As the Fourth Gospel unmistakably locates the Logos (Jn. 1:1).
heavens are his work, earth is his creation, the sea is of his making, man is his fabrication and
image, sun and moon and stars are his elements, created for signs and for seasons and for days
and for years, for service and slavery to men” (I, 4). Contrary to much of Greek cosmological
speculation at this time, that the stars in the cosmos (particularly the planets) were
supernatural beings imbued with intelligence and soul, and contrary to that ancient notion that
the stars were the source of destiny of all human beings, Theophilus asserted through means of
Old Testament passages that the stars are inanimate objects created by God to serve humanity
in the reckoning of time. Humanity was never meant to be slaves to the movements and
conjunctions of the stars and planets; rather, the immensity and seeming collaboration of the
cosmos is the servant of humanity.

God is Invisible

Theophilus next describes the true God as being invisible. “Just as the soul in a man is
not seen, since it is invisible to men, but is apprehended through the movement of the body, so
it may be that God cannot be seen by human eyes but is seen and apprehended through his
providence and his works” (I, 5). Thus, he compares the invisible nature of the divine to the
invisible nature of the human soul. The bishop is on very solid ground here, since it is certainly
unlikely that Autolycus does not believe in the existence of human souls. To some degree,
Theophilus is employing a Stoic concept of the providence of God, particularly with his analogy
of the unseen pilot guiding the ship (I, 5). Thus, “... one must suppose that the pilot of the
universe is God, even if he is not visible to merely human eyes because he is unconfined” (I, 5).
And for the same reason that a mere mortal cannot stare at the relatively small sun, “how
much more is it the case that a mortal man cannot view the glory of God which is inexplicable!” (ibid.).

Theophilus’ insistence on the unconfinedness of God leads him naturally to describe the vastness and limitlessness of God. He writes,

As a pomegranate, with a rind surround it, has inside many cells and cases, separated by membranes, and has many seeds dwelling in it, so the whole creation is surrounded by the spirit of God and the surrounding spirit, along with the creation is enclosed by the hand of God. As the pomegranate seed, dwelling inside, cannot see what is outside the rind since it is itself inside, so a man, who with the whole creation, cannot see God (I, 5).

This is actually a very interesting analogy, in that—not only is it peculiar to Theophilus—it is emblematic of his ability to take common objects that surround him and apply them as visual aids for understanding the nature of God. Because God is the locus of everything, thus surrounding everything, no mortal can ever see God as he is. Such a God cannot have a body, even in the Stoic sense because God is not in matter, but surrounds it in an unlimited sense.

In Book I, 6, Theophilus touches upon the concept of God the Creator. This section to come appears to be an elaboration of Paul’s thought in Romans that the eternal God is known through his works in creation.16 Such knowledge of God as self-evident in the works of creation renders humanity culpable for disregarding it as testimony to his absolute monarchy, in that “God made everything out of what did not exist [2 Macc. 7:28], bringing it into existence so that his greatness might be known and apprehended through his works” (I, 4).

Consider his works, O man: the periodic alteration of the seasons and the changes of winds, the orderly course of the stars, the orderly succession of days and nights and months and years, . . . and the providential care which God exercises in preparing

16 See Perendy, 413
nourishment for all flesh, . . . the complex movement of the heavenly bodies, with the
morning star rising and giving notice of the coming of the perfect luminary, the
conjunction of the Plieades and Orion [Job 38:31], Arcturus [Job 9:9], and the chorus of
the other stars in the orbit of heaven, to all of which the manifold Sophia of God [Eph.
3:10] gave individual names [Ps. 146:4]” (I, 6).

This extended quote from Theophilus demonstrates that all the machinery of creation, from the
vast cosmos down to the tiniest living thing on earth, from the perennial movement of the
ordered seasons down to the smallest speck of matter, are all under God’s watchful
providence. There are strong Stoic overtones in this depiction of God’s ordering of creation.

We even find what appears to be an allusion to the Pythagorean concept of the music of the
spheres when he writes of “the chorus of the other stars in the orbit of heaven.” However, the
bishop is not affirming Greek philosophy here. On the contrary, utilizing commonly understood
terms, he is affirming the unique character and activity of the God of the Old Testament as the
ture God of creation, and the lack of any coeternity of any other created being.17 We see this in
his allusions to the Old Testament passages that relate to God’s activities. Theophilus continues
this association when he writes,

This is my God, the Lord of the universe, who alone spread out the heavens [Job 9:8]
and determined the breadth of what is under heaven [Job 38:18], who stirs up the deep
of the sea and makes its waves resound, who rules over its power and pacifies the
movement of the waves, who establishes the earth upon the waters . . . .” (I, 7).

After demonstrating to Autolycus the vastness, the immensity of his God and his glory, who
watches over his creation and the daily affairs of humanity, Theophilus invites him to take the
leap of faith and come to God. “Deliver yourself to the physician, and he will touch the eyes of

17 Perendy, 416. “As to the relationship between God and the world . . . in Theophilus’ mind God not only created
the world, but also he constantly gives life to the universe, and thus everything is governed by divine providence.
As the world bears the traces of God’s hands, Theophilus follows Paul’s steps when saying that God can be
recognized through his works.”

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your soul and heart. Who is the physician?” (ibid.). Here is the perfect segway to introduce Jesus Christ into the discussion. “He is God, who heals and gives life through Logos and Sophia, for by his Logos the heavens were made firm and by his spirit all their power” (ibid.). Why does Theophilus avoid the name Jesus Christ as identified with the Logos? This appears to be an anomaly to us, and modern scholarship has pondered this fact for years. However, it is a typical literary feature of apologetical writing of this period that the name Jesus Christ is typically avoided. Not having the benefit of his other writings, we can only speculate as to his motives for avoiding the name of Jesus Christ in *Ad Autolycum*.

There must be some reason why Theophilus would not mention Jesus by name, or allude to the rule of faith and Christ’s work of salvation. Eusebius and Jerome both laud him as a tireless defender of the Christian faith, perhaps because they had read his other works. Perhaps *Ad Autolycum* was the bishop’s means of establishing philosophical common ground between himself and Autolycus. When we consider his literary format—definition of the true God, a revealed biblical history, and then Christian piety—Theophilus appears to be pulling Autolycus closer to the door of the Church by laying down the welcome mat, while simultaneously pulling the Greek philosophical rug from underneath him. Once Autolycus passes the church threshold, then the real dialectic will begin at his conversion, attendant with

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18 See for example Mark Carpenter, “A Synopsis of The Development of Trinitarian Thought From The First Century Church Fathers To The Second Century Apologists,” *Trinity Journal* ns 26 no 2 Fall 2005, 311. The reader would not realize that Jesus died for his sins, was buried, and three days later rose from the dead and presented himself to the Father on behalf of the world. Just like Athenagoras’s work, a Gnostic could read Theophilus and walk away in almost total agreement.”

19 There are exceptions, however, such as in Justin.

20 Curry, 320. See also Bentivegna, 107, who suggests that the essentials of the Christian faith are laid out in outline form that can be accepted without difficulty by someone like Autolycus. At this juncture in Autolycus’ life, “A Christianity without Christ is, therefore, all he can demonstrate to his religious addressee or to anyone who identifies himself with him.”
the Church’s hymns, liturgy and catechism. Only then may Theophilus introduce Autolycus to the deeper mysteries of the Faith. Otherwise, at least in this literary work, the Jesus of Theophilus appears to be far removed from humanity.\textsuperscript{21}

There appears to be a tendency towards monarchian thinking in Theophilus’ doctrine of God. God’s Logos and Sophia appear to be only aspects or modes of God’s being and activity in the world. I am not suggesting, however, that he was a Modalistic Monarchian. Throughout his work, we do not find any real attempt to understand the relationship of the Father, or God, to the Logos and the Sophia, save that they function as “his hands.” We do not find a carefully crafted theology on the nature of God. He connects the Spirit to the Sophia, but only tenuously it seems: “His Sophia is most powerful: God by Sophia founded the earth” (I, 7). As he does the Logos, Theophilus assigns specific tasks and activities to Sophia and Logos through which God acts in creation as aspects of God, but not as “hypostases” (as Origen would later point out) in themselves.

Theophilus returns to his earlier admonition to Autolytcus to turn his heart in holiness to God, thereby guaranteeing immortality and hence the ability “to see” the immortal God:

If you know these things, O man, and live in purity, holiness, and righteousness, you can see God. But before all, faith and the fear of God must take the lead in your heart; then you will understand these things. When you put off what is mortal and put on imperishability, then you will rightly see God. For God raises up your flesh immortal with your soul [a clear reference to the resurrection]; after becoming immortal you will

\textsuperscript{21} Carpenter, 310. Cf. Deirdre Good, “Rhetoric and Wisdom in Theophilus of Antioch,” Anglican Theological Review 73 no. 3 Sum 1991, 323, who suggests that the heart of Theophilus’ argument in\textit{Ad Autolycum} is to demonstrate the truth of Christianity through the inspired writings of the prophets. Wisdom, thus, is the “muse” that inspired them, thus appealing to Autolycus’ familiarity with Hellenistic accounts of muses inspiring Homer and Hesiod. This suggests that Theophilus was writing as an apologist primarily in order to entice his interlocutor with\textit{ familiar ground upon which they may meet together}. A\textit{ spirited presentation of Jesus Christ} too soon to this individual may, Theophilus feared, have been premature.
then see the Immortal, if you believe in him now. Then you will know that you unjustly spoke against him (I, 7).

According to the bishop, one does not come to know God (or “see” him) in philosophical abstraction upon years of rigorous intellectual training, or through the Greek religious experience through Platonic contemplation of the divine, but by first taking the leap in faith and in fear of the God of the Christians in all moral purity. It is in contrition of the heart, not in intellectual contemplation, that one finds God, according to Theophilus. Again, he is taking an Antiochene approach to Christian piety.

Next, Theophilus introduces the concept of God’s omnipresence, which is another feature of Middle Platonism in this period. However, he identifies this attribute with Old Testament epithets for God in order to reinforce the distinction between the Greek concepts of God and his Christian understanding of the biblical concept of God. He begins his discussion of God’s omnipresence by employing OT names for God as the “Most High,” and the “Almighty God.” Writing primarily as an apologist, Theophilus is concerned, I think, with denuding the Grecian philosophical concepts of God of their power and authority and applying whatever was rightly understood by the Greeks to the sole provenance of the biblical God. On God’s omnipresence, Theophilus says,

But it is characteristic of the Most High and Almighty God, who is actually God [and not as the Greeks understood him], not only to be everywhere but to look upon everything and hear everything, and not to be confined in a place; otherwise, the place containing him would be greater than he is, for what contains is greater than what is contained. God is not contained but is himself the locus of the universe (II, 3).

In essence, then, for God to be omnipresent he must be immaterial, or incorporeal. He is outside of—and hence encompasses—all reality. Since God cannot be confined in any place, he
must be everywhere at once, enfolding reality, which is the gist of what he is trying to convey to Autolycus.

*Creation Ex Nihilo*

A developing feature of this genre of Christian writing is the notion of creation *ex nihilo.* This idea is particularly important to Theophilus as he strives to prove the superiority of the Christian God over and against Greek concepts of God and polytheistic religions. The God portrayed by Theophilus is far superior to theirs, so that he does not need preexistent matter, but creates even the matter itself by virtue of his absolute power. Thus, in Theophilus, we find a marked departure from earlier approaches by Christian writers. It would appear that for him, the idea of creation *ex nihilo* is a graphic demonstration of the absolute superiority of the Christian God over any other previous humanly devised notions of the divine, for there is no example of any God, Greek or otherwise, including the concept of deity put forward by Greek philosophers, whose God creates matter out of that which does not exist. In Theophilus’ mind, this is true creation derived from absolute power, and the kind of power possessed only by the God he has been describing to Autolycus. He is not ashamed to boast of it a little, I think.

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22 Prior to Theophilus, we find allusions to creation in Justin, Athenagoras and Tatian. However, they do not make the technical distinction of creation “ex nihilo.” They continue to rely upon the Platonic model of creation as an imprint of form upon substrate matter. See N. Joseph Torchia, “Theories of Creation in the Second Century Apologists and their Middle Platonic Background,” 195.

23 Torchia, 195f.
Thus, if the God portrayed by Theophilus is the locus of all reality, who himself has no locus, then the power to create *ex nihilo* is a logical corollary of an omnipresent and omnipotent being. Only a being that possesses *all* power can create something out of nothing.

Theophilus describes the Greek philosophical dilemma to Autolycus:

> What would be remarkable if God made the world out of preexistent matter? Even a human artisan, when he obtains the material from someone, makes whatever he wishes out of it. But the power God is revealed by his making whatever he wishes out of the nonexistent. . . . As in all these instances God is more powerful than man, so he is in his making and having made the existent out of the nonexistent; he made whatever he wished in whatever way he wished (II, 4).

N. Joseph Torchia is quite right when he notes, “This understanding of God as supreme Creator in the fullest sense is further operative in Theophilus’s critique of Greek philosophical theology.”

Theophilus apparently has Plato’s *Timaeus* 28 in mind when he criticizes what he believes is a fatal flaw in Platonic cosmology. If God and matter are uncreated, eternal, and immutable, then God’s absolute sovereignty cannot be maintained logically. In effect, the Greek Divine is dependent upon a contingent being (substrate matter) in order to fashion the universe. Torchia observes, “Theophilus clearly places himself at odds with a Platonic viewpoint, opposing any attempt to define ‘creation’ as a shaping or ordering of matter.”

*Theophilus’ Doctrine of the Logos*

It is not proper to speak of Theophilus’ “Christology,” for he does not exposit a theology of Christ for Autolycus. In fact, he never mentions Christ or Jesus by name. He rarely attempts to draw an affinity between Christ and the Logos. When he speaks of “others” who are within

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24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
God's being, he concentrates upon the Logos and Sophia. These two entities are eternally immanent within God until such time they are needed for creation, inspiration of the prophets, and redemption.

We observed above that for Theophilus God does not have a locus, but is the locus of all reality. However, when the Scriptures do speak of God being located in a place, Theophilus maintains it is always referring to his Logos. Even though the Logos can be confined to a place, because he is "derived" from within God's "bowels" he is immanent within God and thus shares his divine nature. A mere creature could never hold this position in God, and yet, like a creature, God's Logos is able to appear in time and space to be seen and heard by mortals. This appears to be a contradiction, and I am sure that Theophilus was aware of it. He struggled to assign full deity as well as immanence to the Logos. Hence, he writes to Autolycus:

Hence the holy scriptures and all those inspired by the Spirit teach us, and one of them, John, says, "In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God" [Jn. 1:1]. He shows that originally God was alone and the Logos was in him. Then he says, "And the Logos was God; everything was made through him, and apart from him nothing was made" [Jn. 1:1-3]. Since the Logos is God and derived his nature from God, whenever the Father of the universe wills to do so he sends him into some place where he is present and is heard and seen. He is sent by God and is present in a place (II, 22).

Theophilus' language is reminiscent of the Platonic concept of the necessity of an intermediate principle between two opposing poles. In this instance, the intermediary role of the Logos stands between the Supreme God, or Father, and matter, the cosmos. It is typical of Platonism in this period to postulate a creative link (such as an idea or Form) or middle term of a triadic (Platonic) scheme between the two extremes of God and matter.26 Although Theophilus

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excoriates the Greek philosophers for their contradictory and inconsistent theories (II, 4; III, 1-8), he nonetheless is not above the use of some philosophical ideas when it suits him, or, rather, when the principles he uses are in agreement with scripture and supports his apologetical task. The Supreme God (the Father) because he is the locus of the entire universe, cannot be seen or heard in a particular place and time. Theophilus is in agreement with this Platonic principle. For such an occasion, however, he sends his Logos. He does not elaborate on how this can be done by the Logos who, also being God by nature, can subsist at will in time and space. For Theophilus, it appears that the reason the Logos can be sent to a particular place is because his divinity is derived. He exists as a subordinate being within God, and when the Father commands, may appear among mortals and interact with them.

I address now that well-known passage where Theophilus presents his theory of the origin of the Logos:

He wished to make man so that he might be known by him; for him then, he prepared the world. For he who is created has needs, but he who is uncreated lacks nothing. Therefore God, having his own Logos innate in his bowels, generated him together with his own Sophia, vomiting him forth [Ps. 44:2] before everything else (II, 10).

The *logos endiathetos* is a Stoic term that denotes the thought process of the unspoken word within the mind, as opposed to the spoken word, the *logos prophorikos*. Here Theophilus is basing his Christology on John 1:1, but not precisely, for in that passage the Logos is portrayed as being "with", or "alongside" God. However, to err closer on side of unity, he places the

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27 It is interesting to me why there is no reference (that I am aware of) from the Fathers to the incident of Christ’s baptism by John, specifically why the thunderous voice from the Father, “This is my Son, . . .”, is not referred to by any of them as a counterpoint to the Greek concept of the Divine transcendence.

28 I use the term advisedly, but if the Logos is sent, it must be at the command of a superior. This renders the “sent one” a subordinate.
location of the Logos “within” God. When he is brought forth, the Logos is generated (egenenesen) by being “vomited forth,” which is a rather course way of referring to his generation. 29 It appears that Theophilus employs the terms generated and vomiting as a means of maintaining the intimate connection of the Logos with God the Father. He wants to avoid any association with the idea of the Logos being created ex nihilo like creation. He is also careful not to associate the generation of the Logos and Sophia in a biological sense. But the vomiting forth is used of the Logos, not the Sophia. This is strange; but it may be a literary ploy to focus attention on God’s creative activity through the Logos. The Sophia is certainly there with the Logos in the beginning, but it seems to be a mere spectator with no real specific activity, except perhaps as a participant. This still does not answer why Thophilus used such crass anthropomorphic terms to describe the generation of the Logos. Why does he tell us the Logos was vomited forth from within the inward parts (splanchna) of God? Carl Curry has demonstrated that such terminology that Theophilus uses is the same used in Hesiod’s Theogony. 30 What he says in essence is that Theophilus is trying to Christianize pagan terminology and use it “to offer an explanation of the relationship between the Logos and God that could be understood by Autolycus.” 31 I find that Curry has perhaps found the pulse of Theophilus’ heart and intention in an attempt to meet Autolycus where he lives religiously and philosophically in order to point him to a better way.

29 Some translations have “belched,” but the graphic terminology and impact it has is not lost regardless of which term is chosen. Whatever term he can use to maintain the unity of God is appropriate.
30 Curry, 324.
31 Ibid.
The relationship between the Logos and Sophia appears to be uncertain in Theophilus' mind. In a confusing passage he writes, "It was he, Spirit of God and Beginning and Sophia and Power of the Most High who came down into the prophets and spoke through them about the creation of the world and all the rest" (II, 10). It is not clear if Theophilus is personalizing "Spirit of God," "Beginning," "Sophia," and the "Power of the Most High," or if he is using these terms to describe various divine activities of God (the Father) or of the Logos, or both. To make matters worse, he writes, "For the prophets did not exist when the world came into existence; there were the Sophia of God which is in him and his holy Logos who is always present with him" (Ibid.). Now he tells us that it is the Sophia who is in him (endiathetos) and the Logos who is "always present" with him. In a later passage we shall see what appears to be a clarifying statement (II, 22) that appears to give us a clue as to how to interpret the meaning of Power and Wisdom (Sophia). Theophilus is posed another penetrating question by Autolychus: "You will ask me, 'You say that God must not be confined in a place; how then do you say that he walks in Paradise?'" (II, 22) At this juncture the bishop must clarify the role and nature of the Logos in order to avoid any confusion between it and the Father. Thus he launches into his most elucidating discussion of the role of the Logos.

Hear my reply. Indeed the God and Father of the universe is unconfined and is not present in a place, for there is no place of his rest (Isa. 66:1). But his Logos, through whom he made all things, who is his Power and Wisdom (I Cor. 1:24), assuming the role of the Father and Lord of the universe, was present in Paradise in the role of God and conversed with Adam" (Ibid.).

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32 This concept of the Logos assuming the role of the Father is similar to the Mormon concept of divine investiture, which I shall say more about below.
So far, Theophilus’ discussion raises more questions than it answers. Is the Logos a demi-god, such as a demiurgic being? Is he a projection or an image of the Father? Is he an accident adhering to the Father? Or, is he a mode or a mask, representing the Father in creation and redemption in a modalistic sense? He associates the Logos with God’s Power and Wisdom, so presumably he must also be identified with the other epithets listed previously, the “Beginning” and the “Spirit of God.” This again is confusing, for in another place he identifies the Logos and Sophia as God’s two hands (II, 18). It is evident that Theophilus does not develop in a systematic approach a theology of the Logos, or of the nature of God for that matter. His language is often picturesque and lucid, but his descriptions of the Logos and Sophia, and of the other epithets used of God and the Logos, are not worked out in any systematic sense. This may be due to the state of Autolycus’ own religious beliefs, which at this time would have been very eclectic.33

Theophilus continues his discussion of the Logos, who is God’s Power and Wisdom, as assuming the “role of the Father and Lord of the Universe,” in paradise in the “role of God” and who conversed with Adam. I do not believe that Theophilus is assigning an existence of its own to the Logos, as a hypostasis, as a separate individual or subsistence. The Logos, rather, appears to play the role of the Father as an aspect of God’s power and wisdom. He is not an individual as such, but appears on earth in a place representing the Father as an individual by

33 See William R. Schoedel, “A Neglected Motive for Second-Century Trinitarianism,” Journal of Theological Studies n.s. 31 pt. 2 Oct 1980, 356-367, who notes, quite rightly, that many pagan thinkers of the second century attempted to interpret polytheism in terms similar to the way Philo had adapted the concept of divine monarchy as administration through many angels. The supreme God is similar to a Persian King or a Roman emperor ruling their empires through subordinate beings. Sometimes the emphasis is upon the gods as various aspects of the one God and sometimes on the subordination of the many gods to the highest power. He suggests that apologists of this period understood this and were dependent upon this tradition (362). It is interesting to note that this synthesis of Greek religion and philosophy may have been that held by Autolycus, and may help to explain Theophilus’ apologetical approach in his mentioning of the various aspects of God’s being.
proxy in the role of the Father. Although on the face of it this appears to be an adumbration of Monarchianism, I do not think that Theophilus intends to represent himself as such. It may be, I think, that Theophilus avoids assigning a real, separate existence to the Logos (or to the Sophia, for that matter) in reaction to Justin’s Logos doctrine of “another God.” He defaults to the ancient monotheism of the Jewish-Christian tradition. Thus, he maintains the immanent association of the Logos and the Sophia within God as a means of preserving God’s unity, to be set upon the world assuming the role of the Father when required to be in a time and place.  

This, unavoidably, becomes a Monarchian view of God. Thus, Theophilus propounds a strict monotheistic belief in the unity of God, while simultaneously acknowledging, if inadequately and dimly, the existence of “others” within God’s being assigned specific roles for specific purposes.

Theophilus continues his discussion of the Logos by describing how it is recorded in Genesis that Adam “heard” the voice of God, who is the Logos: “What is the voice but the Logos of God, who is his Son (II, 22)?” We find here a rare inference to Jesus Christ. Theophilus—for his own reasons, we must finally admit—cannot bring himself to mention Christ by name and to acknowledge to Autolycus, at least, that the Logos is Christ. This is as far as he can go—at least for now. This reticence to mention Jesus Christ directly, with a few exceptions, again is a trait of apologetical writing of this period. He then hastens to qualify the term “Son” by dismissing any reference or association it may have with Greek mythology, gods cohabitating with human beings.

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34 See Curry, 324-25. “What is the connection between the two? Is the Logos identical with God? Was the Logos derived from God at some point in time? Is the Logos inside of God, and if so how can he be found outside of Him? Are they two separate beings, and, if they are, how can they appear at times to be identical? Theophilus used the information at his disposal, which included pagan writings, in an attempt to answer these questions. His conclusions were unacceptable, but has anyone since satisfied everyone concerning these questions?”
females and baring "sons" who are hybrids of both: "Not as the poets and the mythographers describe sons of gods begotten of sexual union, but as the truth describes the Logos, always innate (endiatheton) in the heart (kardia) of God" (II, 22). He contrasts the generation of the Logos sharply with any pagan notion of mythological procreation of hybrid gods. This may be the reason that Theophilus is unwilling to associate the name of Jesus, or the Son, with the Logos, for fear of even remotely associating the birth of the Savior with any mythological undertones to Autolycus' pagan imagination.

We come next to the well-known passage in Ad Autolycum that describes the generation of the Logos, where Theophilus deliberately employs Stoic technical language to differentiate two real aspects of the Logos in relation to the human mind.

For before anything came into existence he had this as his own Counselor, his own Mind and Intelligence. When God wished to make what he had planned to make, he generated (egennesen) this [very] Logos, making him external (prophorekon), as the firstborn (prototokon) of all creation (cf. Col. 1:15). He did not deprive himself [separate from] of the Logos but generated the Logos, and constantly converses with his Logos (II, 22).

It is important to note here, once again, that Theophilus is not endorsing Stoic philosophy, or any other Hellenic philosophical school. We have already seen how antithetical his attitude is towards Greek philosophy in general. He is merely employing what he regards as useful philosophical metaphors to illustrate his teaching on the generation of the Logos to his philosophically literate friend. He refers to a well-known Stoic doctrine regarding the inseparable link between the word in the mind and the word expressed in human speech. What Theophilus is trying to convey to his friend is that the two are one and the same. It is this idea that he wants to impress upon Autolycus regarding the nature of the Logos. The Logos is
not another God, second in rank to God the Father—as Justin taught. He wants to show Autolycus that the Logos of God is fully God, derived from the Father’s inner being as speech is derived from the inner mind. In this illustration Theophilus hopes to avoid any allusion to any polytheistic understanding of the Christian God by demonstrating his uniqueness, while simultaneously emphasizing the unity of God. What we do not find in Theophilus’ theology is any idea that God and the Logos share the same essence, as some apologists would do.35 Nor does he launch into a comparative series of metaphors of the Logos’ relation to God, such as light from light, water from a stream or the sunbeam from the sun. In this regard, his theology appears most Jewish. For him, the Logos is positioned “in” God (II, 22), which was an idea that the Church would eventually reject.36

Theophilus on the Trinity

Theophilus has long held the distinction of being the first Christian theologian to use the word trias in reference to the Trinity. But as we have seen above, he does not really offer a coherent Trinitarian description of the nature of God as it would be described during and after Nicaea. Hence, his reference to the Trinity is actually in a rather amorphous context and not at all clearly defined. The passage in question is as follows:

Similarly the three days prior to the luminaries are types of the triad of God and his Logos and his Sophia. In the fourth place is man, who is in need of light—so that these might be God, Logos, Sophia, man. For this reason the luminaries came into existence on the fourth day (II, 15).

35 Such as Athenagoras.
36 Grant, xvi.
Theophilus, then, is not offering a doctrine of the Trinity, but offering rather, in his usual lucid and picturesque fashion, an account of the Genesis creation cosmology as types of God and man. The first three days are referred to as convenient markers for God, his Logos and his Sophia. They represent those first three days of creation before the creation of the luminaries. It is only on the fourth day that the luminaries begin to make their appearance to assist Adam and Eve with the light they will need in order to observe and marvel at the creation wrought for them. In this context, then, his use of the word *trias* almost appears as an off-hand remark, as if he really did not understand or appreciate the significance the work would have not many years later. Although he goes further than any other Christian writer in emphasizing the crucial role in creation by the Logos, and in his distinguishing between the two states of the Logos, he does not go far enough in distinguishing between God, his Logos and his Sophia. I believe Laszlo Perendy is correct when he observes that the terms Logos and Sophia describe God's activities only and not his essence. As a matter of fact, the Logos and the Sophia are intimately linked, particularly in the event of creation, and especially in the event of the creation of man, which we shall see in a moment. There is no attempt to identify the Logos with being one and the same with the Sophia, as Origen will do later. Nor is there any apparent thought to provide each personified power listed by Theophilus with their own personal existence or hypostasis, as Origen will do.

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37 After all, invisible beings have no need of light. This is something that Origen will stress later.
38 Laszlo Perendy, 416.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid. Perendy also notes the contribution of Nicole Zeegersvander Voist who points out the role of the enigmatic Sophia as associated with the Logos in the event of creation, and the role of the Pneuma as the life-giving principle of the world in Theophilus' system. "Theophile d'Antioch, in Dictionnaire de spiritualite, 15 (Paris, 1990), 530-42, 536."
We come now to Theophilus' account of the creation of man in Genesis. Here he wants to make a particular point in emphasizing the dignity of humanity by contrasting its creation with the rest of the created order. For Theophilus, the sum total value of the entire cosmos is merely incidental to the sublime worth of humanity represented in the first man. Theophilus informs Autolycus:

As for the creation of man, his fashioning cannot be expressed by man, yet the divine scripture contains a summary mention of it. When God said, "Let us make man after our image and likeness" (Gen. 1:26), he first reveals the dignity of man. For after making everything else by a word, God considered all this as incidental; he regarded the making of man as the only work worthy of his own hands. Furthermore, God is found saying, "Let us make man after the image and likeness" as if he needed assistance; but he said "Let us make" to none other than his own Logos and his own Sophia (III, 18).

Undoubtedly, Theophilus is implying that the divine trias is intimately involved in this special task of the creation of humanity. It appears to me that Theophilus is pairing the Logos and Sophia of God, i.e. God's Word and Wisdom, deliberately as necessary components of his inner being for this unprecedented divine act, and "expressed" (prophorikos) here in time and space for this utterly unique, creative act. The once "alone" Father is now accompanied by "others" who join him, who assist him, in this very special activity. But other than for such special occasions, the Logos and the Sophia remain immanent within God (endiathetos). This idea resembles what will be known as the expansion of God's inner being, or what I refer to as the oscillating deity. Certain aspects of God's inner attributes, his Power, his Pneuma, his Beginning, including his Logos and his Sophia, are projected outwards in time and space for special creative and redemptive purposes, in what Hippolytus would hereafter coin the
**oikonomia** of God. Theophilus is trying to do here is to express the immanence of God, or his *nearness* to creation, without compromising his unity or transcendence. He will not allow the Logos or Sophia to have independent existence from the Father for fear of separating them, and thus, proclaim the existence of other Gods, or god-like intermediaries. In this, Theophilus’ Monarchianism comes shining through. So he resorts to a Stoic conception of Word, of *endiathetos* and *prophorikos*, in order to maintain a strict monotheistic interpretation of the Powers’ activities. Thus, we see what historical theologians have termed the “expanding and contracting divinity” concept. God’s monarchy, his essential unity, is maintained while simultaneously allowing for the occasional appearances of the Word, Wisdom, and the Spirit when needed, in order to remain faithful to the church’s confessional statements regarding the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

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*Footnotes:*

41 See Diedre Good, “Rhetoric and Wisdom in Theophilus of Antioch,” 323-330, who argues that Wisdom (Sophia) not only plays a special role in creation, but also becomes for Theophilus the “Muse” that inspires the prophets and the apostles.

42 See James G. D. Dunn, “Was Christianity A Monotheistic Faith From the Beginning?” 318-19, who notes this fact. Although God is wholly transcendent, in Jewish rabbinical thought, his transcendence is maintained without resorting to the need of intermediaries between divinity and creation. In this sense, if Theophilus really is influenced more by Hellenistic Judaism than by Middle Platonism, then such a theory holds true for him. Such concepts as *Word* and *Wisdom* are ways of asserting the transcendent God’s closeness, his *nearness*, to his people, not separate beings consisting of their own natures.

43 See Joseph T. Lienhard, “Basil of Caesarea, Marcellus of Ancyra, and ‘Sabellius’”. *Church History*, 58 no. 2 Je 1989, 157-167, whose discussion regarding the “enthusiastic monotheism” of Marcellus’ theology that forced him to propose a theory on the Godhead in which he described the Word and the Spirit going forth from God when needed, is quite similar to Theophilus’ own vision. “[H]e [Marcellus] tried to explain God as a Monad that temporarily expanded into a Triad, but without any division. But he was unable to explain what is triadic in God,” 158-59. This is virtually the same idea in germ that Theophilus articulated, with virtually the same attendant problems that Marcellus faced. Theophilus, like Marcellus, insisted on monotheistic language when describing the Godhead, but was inadequate to the task in his explanation of the church’s triadic confession with his successive, temporary activities (or economies). See also Christopher A. Beeley, “Eusebius’ *Contra Marcellum* and Orthodox Christology.” *Zeitschrift fur Antikes Christentum*, 12 no. 3 2008, 433-452. Beeley shows that Eusebius of Caesarea was critical of Marcellus for his insistence on describing the Trinity as merely one hypostasis with three faces and three names (436). If one compares this idea once again with Theophilus’ understanding of the Trinity, one is hard pressed to find any disagreement. Theophilus does describe the Logos, for example, as assuming the “role” of the Father when called upon to make an appearance.
The Mormon Doctrine of God in Comparison to that of Theophilus

The most obvious difference between Theophilus' doctrine of God and the Mormon doctrine of God is over the issue of monotheism. As we discovered above, Theophilus was adamantly in his insistence that there was but one God over all Creation. His literary work is permeated with this belief. This belief is so strong that, while acknowledging the existence of a plurality of persons within the Godhead, his adherence to the belief that there is but one God precluded him from developing a truly Trinitarian concept. For Theophilus, the Monarchy (the sole rule of God) is indispensable, since the Father is the fountain head of Divinity. His doctrinal development of the two stage theory of the *immanent* logos and the *expressed* logos was meant first to acknowledge the Three Persons worshipped in the Church liturgy and second to maintain a strict adherence to the confession of one God, which was the bedrock of the religion of Israel and of Christ. This was meant to maintain both the sole rule of God and the divinity of the Logos in harmony with the New Testament witness.

Indeed, there is no reticence on the part of Mormon thinkers to distance themselves from the traditional orthodox insistence on monotheism. Sterling M. McMurrin, for instance, explains, "Perhaps more radical even than its tritheism is Mormon theology's frank affirmation of a plurality of gods, a doctrine that abandons the dominant and defining characteristic of Occidental theology, its monotheism."44 I have shown in the preceding chapters on the Mormon doctrine of God that the concept of a plurality of Gods is at the center of Mormon theology. It is as important as their belief in an eternal, material universe. As is evident by

now, there is no similarity at all between the Mormon doctrine of God and the thought of Theophilus regarding monotheism. Although he believed in the one God of Jewish Hellenism, still he taught of the real existence of a plurality of persons, or powers, within the being of God. Theophilus was never accused of having polytheistic tendencies, but it has been shown that he certainly evinced Monarchian tendencies, which is a feature of strict monotheism, not polytheism.

This leads me to my discussion of the other significant difference between traditional orthodox and Mormon theology, that of their varying concepts of Creation.

As we saw above, Theophilus is noteworthy for his insistence on creation *ex nihilo*. He stressed this idea in order to prove the distinctly superior status of the Christian God over the aloof Hellenistic God. According to McMurrin, this is a major weakness of Christian orthodoxy. It involves the orthodox concept of the absolutism of God, which, as he sees it, is derived from his power to create *ex nihilo*. McMurrin writes,

The crucial idea that more than anything else determines the character of Mormon theology is the nonabsolutistic or finitistic conception of God. It is here that the theology so radically undercuts the chief foundation of Christian orthodoxy, both Catholic and Protestant—the divine absolutism inherited from the Hebraic concept of God as creator and lawgiver, joined with the Platonic absolutism in the theory of ultimate reality.45

McMurrin is quite right in what he points out, because it is a fundamental difference between the two systems. From his point of view, Theophilus believed that he was correct in not only criticizing the teachings of Hellenic philosophy as being largely incompatible with the Christian faith, but also in highlighting the major difference between the Hellenic and the Christian

45 Ibid., xv.
doctrines of Creation. Mormon theology insists that an eternal, infinite cosmos is necessary in order to sustain the teaching of Joseph Smith on the plurality of Gods and in its corollary, the eternal progression of spirits. However, if the doctrine of the plurality of Gods is doubtful, then there would be no need to insist on a finitistic conception of God. If the early Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is doubtful, then there would be no need to insist for the absoluteness of God. Theophilus pointed out to his interlocutor that the Hellenistic concept of a coeval cosmos was logically inconsistent. The Hellenistic concept, particularly in Middle Platonism, refined the concept of God's absolutist nature by highlighting his transcendence. To continue to maintain a coeval cosmos alongside God was simply a throwback to the time of Plato and Aristotle, when an eternal cosmos was taken for granted. While innovative philosophers, they were still tied to much of the cultural baggage inherited from their pagan past.

Theophilus cut to the heart of the matter by comparing the Hellenistic concept of God as an artificer, to that of the God of the Jews and the Christians, who is so powerful that He needs no existing matter to fashion—He created it "from nothing." It's as if Theophilus was saying directly to Plato and Aristotle (and all the rest of them), "Now that's power: true creation—to speak something into existence is *absolute* power!" And he insisted that such absolute power had to exist eternally with God. Why? Because within an eternal, material universe, there can never be a situation when anything becomes actualized in an absolute sense—only something with more potential than before. This line of thinking Theophilus probably inherited from the strong Hellenistic-Jewish influence in Antioch.
If Plato and the Greek philosophers in general were mistaken regarding the eternality of the universe, as Theophilus understood them to be, then he would have so counseled Joseph Smith. Regardless, the Mormon tradition holds strictly to the idea of a material universe. John Widtsoe, for example, noted that a great deal of confusion had resulted from the notion that all that exists was derived from what did not exist. He also said, “God, the Supreme Power, cannot conceivably originate matter; he can only organize it. God is the Master, who, because of his great knowledge, knows how to use the elements, already existing, for the building of whatever he may have in mind.” This is very similar to the Platonic conception found in the Creation account of Timaeus. There, the Demiurge takes existing matter from the substratum and fashions the cosmos. In Mormon and ancient Greek narratives, a similarity between becomes apparent: both operate from the assumption of an eternal, material universe.

There is something deeply existential at the root of the Mormon insistence for a dynamic, temporal universe. It is the basic desire to touch God. I have encountered examples of this desire on numerous occasions during my research of Mormon literature. It has been brought out lucidly by McMurren, who explains,

A very important corollary of the acceptance of divine temporality is the basic doctrine that God is in process—that God is not a timeless, static being, but is in a dynamic world of movement and development. The Hebrew Bible is the prime exhibit of a scripture that describes God as a creative power in human history.

What is repugnant to any faithful Latter-day Saint is the idea of a static, timeless and passionless God. A God who cannot be seen, or felt, or heard, or experienced at all by any of

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47 McMurrin, xvi.
the five senses, is an empty, timeless entity with no apparent involvement in our lives. The Latter-day Saints want to embrace the Gods who exist in time and space. "Nothing is more important in Mormon theology than the doctrine that God is a temporal, dynamic being. . . . To place God within the context of time gives purpose to moral endeavor and meaning to human history."48 This is the root desire of all Latter-day Saints—to know that God exists truly and to know the touch of his hand.

But to know the touch of his "hand" would imply that God has a body. Such an idea, I shall show, Origen and other like-minded Christian and philosophical thinkers did not tolerate. In chapter seven, I will summarize the theology of God from the greatest Christian Alexandrian and compare it to the Mormon doctrine of God.

48 Ibid.
CHAPTER SEVEN

ORIGEN OF ALEXANDRIA

AND

THE DOCTRINE OF GOD

The role of Philosophy within Orthodox Christianity

And the History of Philosophical concepts

Before we examine the doctrine of God in Origen’s theology, I would like to make some comments on the debate within orthodox Christianity over the role of philosophy and the history of certain Platonic philosophical concepts as immutability, impassibility and incorporeality as they shed light on the development of the doctrine of God in the second and third centuries.

In the early second century, the use of Greek philosophical concepts in the Church was rare. We found that although Ignatius of Antioch did employ a few Middle Platonic terms, for the most part the apostolic writings were bereft of Greek philosophical ideas.1 It was not until the end of the second century that the debate over the use of Greek philosophy in the Church became an issue of contention in the Church. We see two extremes of attitude towards the use of philosophy. We find in Tertullian, for example, one who is hostile overall to the use of Greek philosophy in the exposition of Christian theology. He shares this attitude with Hippolytus and

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1 See D. W. Palmer, “Atheism, Apologetic, And Negative Theology in the Greek Apologists of the Second Century,” *Vigilae Christianae* 37 no. 3, 5 (1983) 238, who argues that although the *Epistle to Diognetus* is placed in modern editions of the apostolic fathers, the basic theme, plan, argument, doctrine, and the vocabulary suggest that it should be related to the surviving corpus of writings of the Apologists. Or, *Ad Diognetum*, I would suggest, could be related to a transitional phase between the two bodies of writings.
Theophilus of Antioch, who believe that in Greek philosophy are embedded the seeds of heresy. Tertullian rails, “What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there between the Academy and the Church?” (Prescription Against Heretics, 7; ANF, 3.246). The predominant view among the apologists, however, particularly in the East centered in Alexandria (as well as Athens), was the opinion expressed by Clement of Alexandria. He writes,

I am not oblivious of what is babbled by some, who in their ignorance are frightened by every noise, and say that we ought to occupy ourselves with what is most necessary, and which contains the faith; and that we should pass over what is beyond and superfluous, which wears out and detains us to no purpose, in things which conduce nothing to the great end. Others think that philosophy was introduced into life by an evil influence, for the ruin of men, by an evil inventor” (Stromata, or miscellanies, 1.2; ANF, 2.303).

Thus, we find two opposing attitudes towards the existence and use of Greek philosophy in the Church. Clement was not at all sympathetic towards those who found in philosophy only dangers and pitfalls to be avoided. He wished that Christians would stop being afraid of philosophy and use it for the building up of the Church, as he believed God had intended.

Clement’s irenic attitude towards Greek philosophy was rejected by Theophilus of Antioch, who believed that for the most part philosophy was inspired by demons and not by a pure spirit (Ad Autolycum, 2,8), as the Hebrew prophets were.2

On the positive side of the ledger, we find in Justin a liberal use of Greek philosophy when he became the first to give an extensive philosophical study of the Logos since the writing of John’s gospel.3 He was the first to employ Stoic terminology for the logos, such as Logos

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2 Ibid., 249. But Theophilus is not completely hostile, or even ambivalent towards philosophy. Thus, he approves of the Platonists’ use of negative definitions of deity, but totally rejects the same eternal status they give to matter.
3 John Behr, “The Word of God in the Second Century,” Pro Ecclesia 9 no. 1 Wint. 2000, 87-88. This is interesting since Justin had also renounced his prior vigorous pursuit of all forms of philosophy in his quest for the truth.
spermatikos (the sowing Word) and sperma (seed), as means to explain the ability of humans to think rationally and even to live their lives as best they can in accordance with the Logos.4 Thus, by utilizing an eclectic blend of Stoicism, Middle Platonism, and the writings of Philo, Justin developed his Logos theology.5 He desired to create (as we find in his Apologies) a “Christianized” synthesis of the eclectic philosophy of his day with the Scriptures. But why does Justin feel justified in using Greek philosophy? Because he, like other Christians of this period, recognized the significant apologetical value in this enterprise in order to legitimize the fledgling Christian faith in the eyes of the Greek speaking world.6 Although Justin was quite willing to see in philosophy at least a partial means of knowing God, he made a case that the Greek philosophers actually had read and plagiarized Moses (1 Apol., 44, 9-10): “And whatever both philosophers and poets said about the immortality of the soul or punishments after death or of the contemplation of the heavens or other such doctrines, they have been able to know and have expounded by beginning from the prophets, hence there appear to be seeds of truth among all.” In other words, as John Behr points out, the reason such seeds of truth appear in human beings is because of their familiarity with Scripture.7 As I alluded to above, this was an apologetical opportunity too significant to ignore. Such an affinity that then existed between

4 Ibid., 88.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid., 89. Behr elaborates, “Whatever one thinks of the possibility of the Greek philosophers or poets actually having read the Hebrew Scriptures (a point used by the apologists to demonstrate that Moses was older, and so more authoritative, than them all), it is a point of importance for Justin; it is the principle by which he explains whatever truths may be found in their writings.”
the eclectic blend of Hellenic philosophy and the Christian faith demanded some kind of explanation.8

What began with Justin was carried on by Christians in Athens and the East, particularly in the great intellectual and cultural center of late Antiquity, Alexandria. From this rich philosophical and scientific environment lived and wrote Pantaenus (only fragments of oral teaching extant), Clement and Origen. But before them, and even before Plato and Socrates, a group of Greek natural scientists theorized and wrote the first ruminations on the nature of negative language (apophatic) to define deity, the Pre-Socratics.9 I shall have more to say on the development of Greek negative theology below, particularly the technical terms impassibility, immutability and incorporeality.

For the majority of thoughtful, intellectually-oriented Christians, the idea of ignoring the vast contributions of Greek philosophers was simply not an option, despite the well-meaning admonitions of fellow Christians less inclined to see in Greek philosophy a useful means of doing Christian theology. Those like Clement appreciated philosophy for its high degree of truthfulness and reasonableness.10 Thus, their forays into Greek philosophy, and the theological reflection that emerged, appeared to be governed by logic and a philosophy that for

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8 See Eric Osborn, *The Emergence of Christian Theology* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 38, who points out that like the Old Testament, Greek philosophy had shown a parallel concern for unity in complexity. This would become even more applicable when Christology would eventually inform Trinitarian thought. See also D. W. Palmer, “Atheism, Apologetic, And Negative Theology in the Greek Apologists of the Second Century,” 234. Palmer notes that Middle Platonism, especially that propounded by Albinus, was particularly relevant for Justin’s theology. And of late, other scholars have been demonstrating that other ancient sources were utilized by the apologist, such as Hellenistic Judaism.

9 Palmer, 234, 235.

them harmonized with the truth.\textsuperscript{11} Far from being the seeds of heresy, Greek philosophy for these Christian thinkers (and for other Christians who would follow) became the preparation for the one truth of the gospel.\textsuperscript{12} Greek philosophy, anchored to the Scriptures, became the prescription \textit{against} heresy. As Eric Osborn has observed, “People were not called irrational because they were heretics. They were called heretics, partly because they were irrational, and this was part of a total account of one truth as seen in rule, scripture and philosophy.”\textsuperscript{13}

Therefore, the proper exposition of Christian theology as reflected in the rule of faith at that time meant that a proper education grounded in Greek classical literature, philosophy, and even Greek natural science, was encouraged. This approach was taken for granted by these Christian writers because it was a given that all truth was God’s truth ultimately. And, in order to effectively expound the vast collection of God’s enscribed revelation to their cultured Greek audience, a finely honed mind was essential. Thus, regardless of how Greek poets, philosophers and natural scientists came upon divine truth, the diligent sifting out of these truths by Christian writers was carried out towards the desired end of a harmonious synthesis of Greek philosophy and Christian theology. It was towards a demonstrative proof that Plato, indeed, was Moses speaking Attic Greek that Eastern theologians in particular strove.\textsuperscript{14}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\item See Osborn, 309, where he states that although Numenius’ statement regarding Moses should only be accepted on the surface level, Platonism did assist with early Christian problems of one God, divine transcendence, faith and reason, free will and determinism, spiritual perception, and the unity of virtues. As for what modern theologians have criticized as the second century church’s unfortunately borrowings of Greek philosophy, and the utter ruin of God’s unique revelation that attended it, Osborn, I think, correctly concludes, “The distinctive claim of the second century was that God in Christ was a more credible first principle than the Platonic good” (313).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
A major impetus during the second and third centuries towards the adoption and use of negative theology was for the purpose of responding to the charge of atheism against the fledgling Christian community. In addition, it was also employed to critique the prevalent idolatry in Greek religious life and to present the Christian God as utterly unique in the context of monotheism. Such terminology as is typical of negative theology used by Greek philosophers, particularly of the Platonic persuasion, became the common stock of what is known as Middle Platonism, which was so prevalent during this time. The use of apophatic language became most prominent among the writings of the apologists. By the time the apologists came to use these terms, apophatic language in Platonic philosophy had become traditional. For the remainder of this introduction, I shall offer a brief analysis of the historicity and meaning of the philosophical terms, impassibility, immutability and incorporeality, as they relate to the attributes of God.

The terms impassibility, immutability and incorporeality are Platonic derivations. They reflect the overarching Platonic doctrine of God’s transcendence. These terms, used to emphasize God’s transcendence and ineffability, all developed in similar ways in order to demonstrate the Platonic doctrine of God’s ineffability. These philosophical terms are all integral and related to one another. God’s impassibility is the doctrine of God’s absolute independence from the emotional states of created beings. God does not feel passions, or

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15 Palmer, 235, 236, 238; Osborn, 111; and Gedaliahu Stroumsa, “The Incorporeality of God,” who observes, “Among second century Middle Platonists, apophatic language seems to have been a most common way of expressing God’s transcendence. Apuleius, Maximus Tyrius, Celcus, Numenius, the Chaldean Oracles, all develop, in rather similar ways, the Platonic doctrine of God’s ineffability” (345).

16 Stroumsa, 345.

emotions as we do. Because of his “immutability,” God cannot change, and hence he cannot be subject to emotional states in reaction to the activities of creatures. This has been seen as a consequence of God’s aseity, i.e. God’s absolute independence and existence in and of himself. This idea goes back to Plato and is developed further in Middle Platonism. This idea is picked up by the apologists and other second century and third century theologians (in particular Clement and Origen) and developed within the confines of Christian theology. This notion, however, is in conflict with Hebrew conceptions of God. In the Old Testament, God is portrayed as possessing a full range of emotions, from happiness to burning wrath. This is in direct conflict with the Greek philosophical understanding of God, and yet the church’s insistence that God is “love” is more in keeping with the Hebrew understanding of God’s character, revealed in the Incarnate Christ as God’s loving and merciful response to sinful humanity, and especially in Christ’s Passion. In order to understand the scriptural depiction of God’s emotions, Origen, for example, would employ allegory as a tool to “spiritualize” the graphic anthropomorphic conceptualizations of God into philosophical concepts that do not contradict the Platonic understanding of deity. God’s immutability is like his impassibility in that it suggests no change in his nature. In this instance, however, immutability is an ontological description of God’s being. He does not change in his being because he is fully actualized with no potentiality for change to a bigger, better, more knowledgeable being. Such changes are part and parcel for all creatures, but not for the Creator. God can never be any more than what He is for eternity: “I Am Who I Am” (Ex. 3:14).
An important Greek philosophical concept that will be particularly important for Origen is the idea of incorporeality. In fact, the core of Origen's exegetical system was the equivalence of the biblical "invisibility" of God and the philosophical incorporeality of God.\textsuperscript{18} God can be known, but He cannot be seen because He is incorporeal, according to Origen. He is incorporeal, but not \textit{angostos} as in the Gnostic God.\textsuperscript{19} The science of medicine does not have a corporeal existence, but it can be known. Numbers do not have a corporeal existence, but they can be known. God is known the same way, because He is incorporeal. Thus, a vision of God for Origen is a cognition of the mind, not of the sight as in physical, corporeal objects. Thus Gedaliahu Stroumsa observes, "By his acceptance of a main tenet of Platonism and its integration into a basically Christian epistemology, Origen was thus able to develop what could be called an intellectual mysticism—for which any \textit{visio} of God is a \textit{cognitio}, the incorporeal soul knowing, by nature, its likeness, the incorporeal God."\textsuperscript{20} This will prove to be a significant difference between Origen's concept of God and that developed by Joseph Smith in his King Follett discourse.

The Life and Times of Origen of Alexandria

Origen is undoubtedly one of the most influential theologians the early Church ever produced, second only to Augustine. In this chapter I shall first outline briefly the Origen's life. I shall then examine his thought and method, followed by an analysis of his doctrine of God. Since Origen's theology, particularly his thought on the nature of God, has had such a

\textsuperscript{18} Stroumsa, 350.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 351.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
significant impact on successive generations of Christians, it is important to understand properly the forces that influenced him. In keeping with the two previous chapters, after having outlined his doctrine of God, I shall compare it with the Mormon doctrine of God.

Origen\textsuperscript{21} was born in Alexandria about 185, and became a teacher in Alexandria while he was still a young man. By the time he was eighteen, he taught as a private tutor, but soon thereafter was eventually entrusted with the catechetical school by Bishop Demetrius as early as 203. He was by all accounts a truly remarkable young man, both in intellect and in his personal bearing. The persecution that occurred at that time was aimed primarily at converts, thus instruction in the catechetical school was dangerous for both student and teacher alike. His father was apparently a convert and lost his life as a catechumen in the persecution. He had given his son’s name Origen, a pagan name derived from Osiris. His family now destitute, a wealthy patroness housed him along with a Valentinian teacher, whose support was to cause embarrassment for Origen later. In order to continue supporting himself and his family and to continue with his duties as a teacher of catechumens, he sold his extensive library composed of classical works and devoted himself to a harsh, ascetic lifestyle.

The account of Origen’s eventful early life is supplied to us by Eusebius from word-of-mouth stories still prevalent among Origen’s followers a century later, including sketches from letters written by Origen himself in defense of his career.\textsuperscript{22} He is said to have attended the lectures of the Platonist philosopher Ammonius Saccas, who also taught Plotinus, the primary

\textsuperscript{21} Stuart G. Hall,\textit{ Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church}, 100-101. I am indebted to Hall for this section.

\textsuperscript{22} See Eusebius,\textit{ The Church History Of Eusebius}, 6:2-36 (NPNF 1:249-279). Stories include tales of his youthful precociousness, and of him making himself a eunuch to preserve his chastity.
progenitor of Neoplatonism. Origen fell out of favor with Demetrius, the powerful bishop of Alexandria, and took to travelling abroad about 215 in order to avoid political intrigue in that city. He was welcomed in Jerusalem by the city's bishop, where he preached, although at this time he was not ordained. Demetrius of Alexandria protested and thereafter Origen resumed his role as private tutor. Travelling further afield, Origen visited Cappadocia, Athens and Rome. He was finally ordained as presbyter in 231-32 by the bishops of Palestine, who employed him as a teacher and private theological consultant. Despite being consequently condemned by Demetrius, Origen finally settled down in Caesarea in Palestine, where he lived as a private teacher and resumed his scholarly work with the aid of a wealthy public servant named Ambrosius, Origen's beloved “taskmaster,” whom he had converted from Valentinianism, and who supplied him lavishly with writing materials and scribes for most of his career. After being tortured for his faith during the persecution of 250 under Decius' reign, he died two to three years later a Confessor.

Origen produced a staggering amount of writings during his life. Although the greater portion of what he wrote is no longer extant, a large number yet survive, either in the original

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23 It has been suggested that Origen's thought resembles that of Plotinus in certain respects. Cf. Eusebius, 6:19:5-7 (NPNF 1:265-266); Hall, 100; Joseph Wilson Trigg, Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third-century Church, 66-68, who informs us that besides knowing Clement of Alexandria during Origen’s formative years, he was also acquainted with the great Alexandrian teacher, Ammonius Saccas, who was perhaps more remarkable in his erudition than Clement, although it is not easy to estimate what influence he had upon Origen. He did have the distinction of being the teacher of the most influential thinkers of the third century, as well as other eminent men in their time. We are not sure if Origen and Plotinus ever attended Ammonius' classes together, and although he was most certainly a non-Christian, he had no objection to Christians and non-Christians attending classes together. He also taught Heraclas, a future bishop of Alexandria. It is not difficult to imagine why Origen would value a philosophical education, even if Clement was not in Alexandria to encourage him. Philosophy and Rhetoric were the two principle disciplines with which to complete a classical education in Origen's time, and studying philosophy was less likely to offend Christians than the study of literature he had already completed. Hence, innocuous philosophical terms such as “the One” or “the idea of the Good,” were legitimate if inadequate ways of speaking about divine reality. In addition, philosophy was free of Greek pagan mythology, and had the advantage over poetry of having no necessary link to pagan worship.
Greek or in Latin translation. He composed many commentaries and homilies on Scripture, including significant works on Genesis, Psalms, Song of Songs, and the Gospels of Matthew and John. In response to Celcus’ attack upon Christianity, he wrote “Against Celsus” (*Contra Celsum*).

**Origen on the Doctrine of God**

All who believe and are convinced that grace and truth came by Jesus Christ (Jn 1:17) and that Christ is the truth with his saying, “I am the truth” (Jn 14:6) [Gr. Fragment 1]²⁴....derive the knowledge which calls men to lead a good and blessed life from no other source but the very words and teaching of Christ [Latin, Rufinus, Butterworth, 1, n. 1.]

Thus Origen of Alexandria begins his monumental systematic theology. (For this chapter I shall rely chiefly upon G. W. Butterworth’s translation of Koetschau’s critical edition of *De Principiis*).

He began his study with a preface sketching apostolic doctrine in outline form, which he expands and develops throughout his work. He explained that there were many who professed Christ who yet held differing opinions regarding the nature of God as well as other matters that range from the trivial to the significant. It was for this reason that Origen embarked on this work. It was his desire, then, to illuminate “the teaching of the church, handed down in unbroken succession from the apostles”, which, “is still preserved and continues to exist in the churches up to the present day,” which, “we maintain that that only is to be believed as the truth which in no way conflicts with the tradition of the church and the apostles” (*Preface*, 2).

Due to the sheer bulk of Origen’s extant literary work, I will be very selective for this chapter in the material I choose in discussing his doctrine of God. I will use primarily the *De Principiis* (Gr. *Peri Archon*). I will also call upon two of his other works as they shed light on this subject, i.e. *Commentary on John* (one of his early literary works) and from his *Against Celsus* (*Contra Celsum*, a later work written towards the end of his life). This is for the purpose of measuring the consistency of his thought on the nature of God during his career.

Origen in his preface set out what he believed were the fundamental teachings of the apostles transmitted to the Church in the plainest of terms. These are eight in number. First, that God is one, “who created and set in order all things, and who, when nothing existed, caused the universe to be” (Ibid., 4). In this statement Origen seems to put his approval squarely upon the Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, which began to gain in acceptance early in the second century, beginning tentatively with Justin, and which reached full maturity under Theophilus of Antioch. He continues with, “He is God from the first creation and foundation of the world, the God of all righteous men, of Adam, Abel, Seth, Enos, Enoch, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, of the twelve patriarchs, of Moses and the prophets” (Ibid.). He writes that it was the same Creator God, in accordance with Jewish prophecy, who sent Jesus Christ first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. “This just and good God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, himself gave the law, the prophets and the gospels, and he is God both of the apostles and also of the Old and New Testaments” (Ibid.). In this one concise statement, Origen has contradicted Marcion and all other Gnostic systems that differentiated between the God of the Old Testament, and the God of Jesus Christ of the New Testament. This is obvious when he
begins by referring to God as both “just and good,” which all Gnostic systems, particularly Marcion, differentiated between the “One” and the God of the Old Testament.

Second, that Christ Jesus “… came to earth, was begotten of the Father before every created thing” Ibid., 4).25 Origen goes on to assert that after Christ had ministered to the Father in the foundation of all things, he emptied himself and was made man, “was made flesh [sarx], although he was God; and being made man, he still remained what he was, namely, God. . . And this Jesus Christ was born and suffered in truth and not merely in appearance [contra Docetism], and truly died our common death. Moreover he truly rose from the dead, and after the resurrection companied with his disciples and was taken up into heaven” (Ibid.). In this encapsulated statement on the person and work of Christ, Origen has presented him as God who took on human flesh, born of a virgin, although he was still God, lived a real life on earth and not in appearance only. He denounced any docetic understanding of Christ often. In fact, throughout this work and others, he often corrects what he regards as unacceptable notions of God that were prevalent in his day in the churches. For example, in his Com. Jn. he mentions the Gnostic teacher Heracleon on numerous occasions and contrasts his teachings regarding various matters with the official church version.

Third, that the apostles passed down this doctrine, “that the Holy Spirit is united is united in honour and dignity with the Father and the Son. In regard to him it is not yet clearly

25 See Butterworth, 3, n. 1, who quotes Jerome, Epistle Ad Avitum 2, who says that at the beginning of De Principiis Origen wrote that “Christ was not begotten the Son of God, but made such,” (Latin factum = Gr. Geneton). Butterworth charges Rufinus with altering Origen’s original statement, but he also admits that in Origen’s time geneton and genneton may not have been clearly distinguished. He also notes further that, “Origen certainly taught that the Son and the Holy Spirit were created, but he thought that the alternative to this was to assert that they were unbegotten [agennetos], which was true of the Father alone.”
known whether he is to be thought of as begotten or unbegotten,\textsuperscript{26} or as being himself also a Son of God or not; but these matters which we must investigate to the best of our power from holy scripture, inquiring with wisdom and diligence” (Ibid.). G. W. Butterworth notes that Rufinus has altered Origen’s “created or uncreated” to “begotten or unbegotten” in his Latin translation. This was presumably an effort on Rufinus’ part to soften the theological impact this doctrine would have on Latin theological sensibilities of the late fourth century.\textsuperscript{27} We find Origen’s explanation for this doctrine in his \textit{Com. Jn.} (II, 6i; \textit{ANF}, 9:328).

Now if, as we have seen, all things were made through Him [Christ], we have to inquire if the Holy Spirit also was made through Him. It appears to me that those who hold the Holy Spirit to be created, and who also admit that “all things were made through Him,” must necessarily assume that the Holy Spirit was made through the Logos, the Logos accordingly being older than He! And he who shrinks from allowing the Holy Spirit to have been made through Christ must, if he admits the truth of the statements of this Gospel, assume the Spirit to be uncreated. . . . We consider, therefore, that there are three hypostases, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; and at the same time we believe nothing to be uncreated but the Father. We therefore, as the more pious and the truer course, admit that all things were made by the Logos, and that the Holy Spirit is the most excellent and the first in order of all that was made by the Father through Christ.

Thus, Origen took the position that \textit{all things} made (or created) by God through the Logos included the Holy Spirit. I shall have more to say on this below in the section on the Holy Spirit.

Origen continued his preface by discussing in descending order the doctrines of the human soul, the devil and his angels and other powers, of creation, and of the divine inspiration of the scriptures. Interestingly, it is just after his discussion of the scriptures, and that only

\textsuperscript{26} Butterworth quotes Jerome at this juncture, \textit{Ep. ad Avitum}, 2, who says: “As third in dignity and honour after the Father and the Son he (i.e. Origen) adds the Holy Spirit, of whom, though he professes to be ignorant whether he was created or uncreated, yet later on he has expressed his real opinion, when he insists that nothing is uncreated except God the Father alone.” Rufinus has changed Origen’s “created or uncreated” to “begotten or unbegotten,” 3, n. 4.

\textsuperscript{27} See Butterworth’s extensive discussion on Rufinus’ interpretation, xxxi-iii. In Rufinus’ day, Latin orthodoxy regarding the Trinity was based upon the Nicene-Constantinople Creed of 381.

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those gifted with the grace of the Holy Spirit in the word of wisdom and knowledge can understand them, that he digresses for a moment to address the concept of incorporeality.

The term “incorporeal” is unknown not only to the majority of Christians but also to the Scriptures (Gr. Fragment 2)\textsuperscript{28} . . . . Nevertheless we shall inquire whether the actual thing which Greek philosophers call asomaton or incorporeal is found in the holy scriptures under a different name. We must also seek to discover how God himself is to be conceived, whether as corporeal and fashioned in some shape, or as being of a different nature from bodies, a point which is not clearly set forth in the teaching [of the apostles]. The same inquiry must be made in regard to Christ and the Holy Spirit, and indeed in regard to every soul and every rational nature also” (Ibid., 9).

The issue of the incorporeality of God will be shown to be foundational to Origen’s thought. It is also foundational to his concept of the nature of all rational souls before and after the Fall, which I will touch briefly upon below in another section. It is important here to demonstrate that Origen’s concept of incorporeality is linked irretrievably to his philosophical worldview, which is overwhelmingly Platonic, in which he took for granted key Platonic concepts as axiomatic. I shall discuss how these Platonic principles inform Origen’s view of God below.

Next, Origen discussed the apostolic teaching of the existence of certain “angels (Gr. Fragment) and good powers, who minister to the salvation of men; but when they were created, and what are their characteristics, no one has in any way made plain” (ibid., 10)\textsuperscript{29}

Origen concluded his introductory remarks by saying, “Every one therefore who is desirous of constructing out of the foregoing a connected body of doctrine must use points like these as elementary and foundational principles, in accordance with the commandment which says, ‘Enlighten yourselves with the light of knowledge’” (Hos. 10:12 [Septuagint]) (Ibid.). Thus,

\textsuperscript{28} Butterworth, 5, n. 1, Koetschau, from Antipater of Bostra in John of Damascus, \textit{Sacra Parallela} ii. 770.
\textsuperscript{29} Gr. fragment 3, Koetschau, from Antipater of Bostra in John of Damascus, \textit{Sacra Parallela} ii. 770, Butterworth, 6, n. 1.
with the aid of clear and cogent arguments, as well as through scriptural illustrations, any
inquirer will be able to formulate a single body of Christian doctrine that follows logically to
rightly understood conclusions. Although others before Origen had attempted to formulate a
body of Christian doctrine patterned after philosophical thought, as first principles in a
systematic fashion (such as Pantaenus and Clement), Origen is the first church theologian to
complete a systematic theology on such a vast scale for just such a project.

*The Incorporeality of God*

As mentioned above, Origen placed great emphasis upon the concept of the
incorporeality of God. This was a foundational principle that he maintained throughout his life
and is amply attested to throughout his writings. He was adamant that God is not a body, or
of a corporeal nature, and in this conviction he was certainly not original.30 Parallels between
him and Albinus (in particular) have long been known.31 This denial of the corporeality of God
is the result of centuries of Middle Platonic disputes with Stoics over this very issue.32 The
Middle Platonists were the heirs of a protracted historical tradition of rationalist and
philosophical criticism of traditional Greek religion and its attendant anthropomorphic
conceptions of God.33 Origen argued, for example, against those who maintained that, “even
according to our scriptures God is a body, since they find it written in the books of Moses, ‘Our
God is a consuming fire’ (Deut. 4:24), and in the Gospel according to John, ‘God is spirit, and

31 Ibid. See, for example, the 10th chapter of Albinus’ *Didaskalikos*, where he argues that the unity and simplicity of God implies his incorporeality (345).
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
they that worship him must worship in spirit and in truth” (Jn. 4:24) (De Princ. 1, 1.1). To this Origen responded by quoting an epistle of John (1 Jn. 1:5), “God is light and in him is no darkness.” He is not referring to light in the sensible realm, but an intellectual light of the intelligible realm. “For what other light of God can we speak of, in which a man sees light, except God’s spiritual power, which when it lightens a man causes him either to see clearly the truth of all things or to know God himself who is called the truth?” (Ibid.). And, more cogently still, “For what does God ‘consume’ by virtue of this fact of being a ‘fire’? Are we to suppose that he consumes bodily matter . . . ? Let us rather consider that God does indeed consume and destroy, but that what he consumes are evil thoughts of the mind, shameful deeds and longings after sin, when these implant themselves in the minds of believers . . . “ (Ibid., 1, 1.2).

What Origen was contending against was a Stoic concept of God as a being that possessed physical properties, such as in a very fine ethereal substance that rendered him concrete. It was also the case that there were Christians who believed that God possessed some form of body as he is often portrayed in the Old Testament, which Origen also wished to correct. 

Hence, to argue against the Stoic concept of spirit, Origen said, “. . . that a thing in which many have a share is not necessarily to be regarded as a body” (Ibid., 1, 1.3). In other words, God is not distributed in minute particles to believers (to be thinned out, divided, abscised), he is an intellectual existence (ref. Contra Celsum, 6.71; ANF, 4.606), and not subject to division.

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Thus, an incorporeal God is an intellectual existence: “God therefore must not be thought to be any kind of body, nor to exist in a body, but to be a simple intellectual existence, admitting in himself of no addition whatever, so that he cannot be believed to have in himself a more or a less, but is Unity (Monas), or if I may say so, Oneness (Henas) throughout, and the mind and fount from which originates all intellectual existence or mind” (Ibid., 1.1.6). Origen abstracts God to the total exclusion of any sort of material existence. He is mind and spirit in the sense of mental existence only. Origen explains the concept further:

That mind needs no space in which to move according to its own nature is certain even from the evidence of our own mind . . . . For we men are animals, formed by a union of body and soul, and thus alone did it become possible for us to live on the earth. But God, who is the beginning of all things, must not be regarded as a composite being, lest perchance we find that the elements, out of which everything that is called composite has been composed are prior to the first principle himself (Ibid.)

Origen maintained that the “sense of mind” is far superior to all other senses associated with the body, such as sight, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. “But it is clear to all that the sense of mind is far superior to the senses above mentioned” (Ibid., 1.1.7). He then asks a rather pointed question: “Does it not then appear absurd that these inferior senses should have substances connected with them, as objects towards which their activities are directed, whereas this faculty, the sense of mind, which is superior to them, should have no substance

35 Butterworth notes here that Rufinus has retained Origen’s original Greek philosophical concepts, Monas and Henas, most likely due to the lack of appropriate Latin equivalents. He goes on to point out that some Neo-Pythagorean philosophers seem to have distinguished, as Origen does here, between the Monad, the primal unity which gives rise to plurality, and the bare One, the Henad, a sort of Absolute which they attempted to conceive as unrelated to anything. This kind of distinction Origen may have inherited from the Neo-Pythagorean philosopher, Numenius, and his former teacher of the Catechetical School, Clement of Alexandria. Butterworth quotes Clement regarding the Monad: “Abstract from body its physical qualities, taking away the dimension of depth, then that of breadth and then that of length. The point which remains is as it were a unit having position. Take away its position, and you get the conception of unity” (Stromata V, 71, 2f), Butterworth, 10, n. 1.
whatever connected with it, and that this faculty of an intellectual nature should be a mere
accidents arising out of bodies?” (Ibid.).

Thus, in purely Platonic fashion, Origen argued that the mind is a spiritual, or
intellectual, existence with its own substance to act upon, with which the mind is intrinsically
linked. The mind is not in any sense connected with the body in the sense that it is the product
of the body. This lead Origen to maintain that the mind, itself an intellectual existence,
possessed an affinity with God.

Those who assert this [that the mind is a by-product of the body] are undoubtedly
speaking in disparaging terms of that substance which is the better part of their own
nature; nay, more, they do wrong even to God himself in supposing that he can be
understood through a bodily nature, since according to them that which can be
understood or perceived through a body is itself a body; and they are unwilling to have
it understood that there is a certain affinity between the mind and God, of whom the
mind is an intellectual image, and that by reason of this fact the mind, especially if it is
purified and separated from bodily matter, is able to have some perception of the divine
nature” (Ibid.).

This is a Platonic doctrine of the mind, but Origen linked this Greek concept with scripture when
he asserted that God's nature surpassed the nature of bodies: “See then, whether the apostle,
too, does not say the same thing, when he speaks as follows about Christ: ‘Who is the image of
the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation’ (Col. 1:15). It is not, as some suppose, that God’s
nature is visible to one and invisible to others; for the apostle did not say ‘the image of God
who is invisible to men’ or ‘invisible’ to sinners, but he makes an absolutely unvarying

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36 Butterworth comments here that Origen maintains that the senses, which are regarded as bodily or material
things, have their appropriate subject matter, which is material. The mind, however, which Origen maintains is
purely spiritual, or of an intellectual existence, must also have its appropriate subject matter, or "substance" to act
upon. This "substance" (Lat. Substantia; Gr. ostitos) is to be understood strictly in a spiritual sense. Origen
contradicts the idea that the mind is an “accident,” or a by-product, of a body. Butterworth, 12, n. 1.
declaration about God’s very nature in these words, “image of the invisible God’” (Ibid., 1.1.8).

Origen, then, links God’s invisibility to the fact of his incorporeality.

Origen comments on God’s incorporeality in his *Comm. Jn.* In one passage he writes,

But it is quite absurd to suppose God’s heart to be a part of Him as ours is to our body. We must remind such writers that as when the hand of God is spoken of, and His arm and His finger, we do not read the words literally but enquire in what sound sense we may take them so as to be worthy of God, so His heart is to be understood of His rational power, by which He disposes all things, and His word of that which announces what is in this heart of His (1.42; *ANF*, 9.321).

When discussing the Stoic understanding of God in his *Contra Celsum* over against his view of God’s incorporeality, he wrote,

Then the world would not have been filled with opinions which either disallow or enfeeble the action of providence, or introduce a corrupt corporeal principle, according to which the god of the Stoics is a body, with respect to whom they are not afraid to say that he is capable of change, and may be altered and transformed in all his parts, and, generally, that he is capable of corruption, if there be any one to corrupt him, but that he has the good fortune to escape corruption, because there is none to corrupt” (I, 23; *ANF*, 4.405).

Having established the Stoic understanding of the divine nature and critiqued it, Origen then contrasted it with the Jewish and Christian concepts of God’s nature:

Whereas the doctrine of the Jews and Christians, which preserves the immutability and the unalterableness of the divine nature, is stigmatized as impious because it does not partake of the profanity of those whose notions of God are marked by impiety, but because it says in the supplication addressed to the Divinity, “Thou are the same” (Ps. 52:27), it being, moreover, an article of faith that God has said, “I change not” (Mal. 3:6) (Ibid.).

According to Origen, because God is incorporeal, he is also immutable and unalterable. He cannot allow for a God with a body to possess such attributes. These aforementioned
attributes, according to Origen and Platonic doctrine, are proper only to a spiritual nature, without extension or a composite body of parts. Again, in *Contra Celsum* he wrote:

> How much more manifest . . . is it that, convinced by what we see, in the admirable order of the world, we should worship the maker of it as one Author of one effect, and which, as being wholly in harmony with itself, cannot on that account have been the work of many makers; and that we should believe that the whole heaven is not held together by the movement of many souls, for one is enough, which bears the whole of the non-wandering sphere from east to west, and embraces within it all things which the world requires, and which are not self-existing! For all are the parts of the world, while God is no part of the whole. But God cannot be imperfect, as a part is imperfect. And perhaps profounder consideration will show, that as God is not a part, so neither is He properly the whole, since the whole is comprised of parts; and reason will not allow us to believe that the God who is over all is composed of parts, each one of which cannot do what all the other parts can (Ibid.).

Origen offered an explanation for the Old Testament depiction of God in anthropomorphic terms. We noted an example above from his *Commentary on John*. These anthropomorphisms used for God were not to be taken literally, then, but in a “sound sense” that is worthy of God. For example, in *Contra Celsum*, he wrote:

> For those who do not understand these and similar expressions in the sacred scriptures, imagine that we attribute to God who is over all things a form [schema] such as that of a man; and according to their conceptions, it follows that we consider the body of God to be furnished with wings, since the scripture literally understood, attribute such appendages to God (IV.37; *ANF*, 4.513).  

In the same vein, Origen wrote, “. . . for God is perpetually bestowing of His own Spirit to those who are capable of receiving it, although it is not by way of division and separation that He dwells in (the hearts of ) the deserving. Nor is the Spirit in our opinion a ‘body’, any more than fire is a ‘body,’ which God is said to be in the passage, ‘Our God is a consuming fire.’ For all these are figurative expressions, employed to denote the nature of ‘intelligent beings’ by

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37 My usual impression of Origen is that of a serious, stoic sort of individual, not endowed with much of a sense of humor. I would regard him, then, as a somber man. It is tempting to think, however, that here he is not only pointing out a logical fallacy in his opponents’ position, but resorting to a bit of humor in his own way.
means of familiar and corporeal terms" (Ibid., VI.70; *ANF*, 4.605). Corporeal terminology, employed for the description of an incorporeal being, must mean that an incorporeal being is invisible, according to Origen. In a passage reminiscent of Theophilus of Antioch, Origen said, "God, moreover, is in our judgment invisible, because He is not a body, while He can be seen by those who see with the heart, that is, the understanding; not indeed with any kind of heart, but with one which is pure" (Ibid., VI.69; *ANF*, 4.65). Thus, Origen’s exegetical method—borrowed from the Stoics and strengthened by Platonic doctrine of the intelligible realm—was the key to understanding the anthropomorphistic texts of Scripture, of which Aristobulus and Philo were the pioneers. In this he instituted a revolutionary biblical hermeneutic that would take hold and influence generations of Christians afterward.

In a passage that answers the question he posed much earlier in his *De Princ.* (Pref., 9), whether the Greek term *asomaton* is found in scripture under a different name, Origen showed:

> After this Celcus relates at length opinions which he ascribes to us, but we do not hold, regarding the Divine Being, to the effect that “he is corporeal in his nature, and possesses a body like a man” . . . . For the scriptures plainly speak of God as of a being without body. Hence it is said, “No man hath seen God at any time” (Jn. 1:18); and the First-born of all creation is called “the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15), which is the same as if it were said that he is incorporeal (Ibid., VII.27; *ANF*, 4.621).

Origen found his biblical equivalent to the Greek term *asomaton* (incorporeal) in the word “invisible,” (Gr. *aoratos*), particularly in the New Testament passage alluded to in Colossians (1:15, 16). Thus, according to Origen, an invisible God is necessarily incorporeal, as he
understood it to mean. Other examples from Origen could be marshaled in support of his opinion on the incorporeal nature of God. I think that what I have shown is ample evidence of his position on this matter.

*Origen on the Father*

We have already learned from Origen that the Father is incorporeal, meaning that he is not only invisible to all mortal and angelic creatures, but invisible even to the Son and the Holy Spirit (*De Princ.* I, 1.8). Origen writes,

And if you should ask me what is my belief about the Only-begotten himself, whether I would say that God's nature, which is naturally invisible, is not even visible to him, do not immediately think this question to be impious or absurd, because we shall give it a logical answer. (For as it is incongruous to say that the Son can see the Father, so it is unbefitting to believe that the Holy Spirit can see the Son). It is one thing to see, another to know. To see and to be seen is a property of bodies; to know and to be known is an attribute of intellectual existence. . . . It is, therefore, because the expressions "to see" and "to be seen" cannot suitably be applied to incorporeal and invisible existence that in the gospel the Father is not said to be seen by the Son nor the Son by the Father, but to be known.

Origen was so insistent on the incorporeality of the Father (this would also include the incorporeality of the Son and the Holy Spirit) that even the Son and the Holy Spirit cannot see

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38 Origen is so insistent on this issue that in his *De Princ.* (I, 8) he says: “And if you should ask me what is my belief about the Only-begotten himself, whether I would say that God’s nature, which is naturally invisible, is not even visible to him, do not immediately think this question to be impious or absurd, because we shall give it a logical answer. (For as it is incongruous to say that the Son can see the Father, so it is unbefitting to believe that the Holy Spirit can see the Son)... To see and to be seen is a property of bodies; to know and to be known is an attribute of intellectual existence. . . .” In addition, it is not likely that Origen was conjuring up a connection between “invisible” and “incorporeal,” as he was thoroughly trained in Greek philosophy and would have known if the two terms could not legitimately be used synonymously.

39 Butterworth informs us here that in Koetschau’s translation he inserts this sentence taken from Jerome, *Com. loh. Hieros* c. 7. He adds that Origen was frequently attacked for this belief that the Son cannot see the Father and that the Holy Spirit cannot see the Son, which Rufinus has softened considerably. Epiphanius (*Haer.* 64, 4) tells us also that Origen taught that “Angels could not see the Spirit, nor could men see angels.” For further evidence of this, see also Justinian, *Ep. ad Mennam* (Mansi IX. 489 B) and Jerome, *Ep. ad Avitum* 2. Butterworth also says that Arius used Origen’s language, ref. *Athanasius, Con. Arian.* I.6. Butterworth, 13, n. 3.
Him. For Origen, the Father’s (and the Trinity’s) incorporeality is the same as his invisibility, such that he can never be seen by any one.

When Origen spoke of “God” he had God the Father in mind primarily. God the Father is the fount of deity. Origen elaborated on this in his *Commentary on John* by saying, “As the Father who is very God [*autotheos*] and the True God is to His image and to the images of His image—men are said to be according to the image, not to be images of God—so He, the Word, is to the reason (word) in every man. Each fills the place of a fountain—the Father—is the fountain of divinity . . .” (II, 3; *ANF* 9.323). For Origen, he alone is the “uncreated”: “This point must above all be upheld by those who allow nothing to be unbegotten (uncreated), that is, unborn, except God the Father only” (*De Princ.* 1.2.6). Thus, only the Father is uncreated.41 This is in keeping with what he says later on about the Son and the Holy Spirit being “created,” as we shall see. Rufinus, in his translation, altered Origen’s statements in this regard considerably, in order to present his doctrine to Roman ears of the Post-Nicene era in the late fourth century.

As we saw above, Origen compared God the Father to the Platonic concept of the One, or Unity (*Monas*) and even went so far as saying “if I may say so” Oneness (*Henas*). “If I may say so,” appears to indicate some hesitancy on Origen’s part to identify the Father with such a restricted sense of “Oneness.” It’s not because he is uncertain about the appropriateness of the term. He is thoroughly committed intellectually to the Platonic view of the oneness of the

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40 See Butterworth, who informs us here that according to Jerome, *Ep. ad Avitum* 2, what Origen actually said here was that “nothing is uncreated except God the Father only. Butterworth, 19, n. 3.

41 See Origen, *Comm. In.* II, 6; *ANF* 9.328, where he also writes, “. . . and at the same time we believe nothing to be uncreated but the Father.”

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divine and thus applies *Monad* and *Henad* to the Father. He seemed to realize that to push the concept even further to the idea of *Henad* he was pushing the envelope too far for some to accept. As we saw above, Origen’s former teacher and predecessor to the Catechetical School, Clement, described the *Monad* as a complete abstraction, without any physical qualities, i.e. the dimensions of depth, width, length or height, and thus continued abstracting to a point without position, so that one finally arrived at the concept of the *Monad* (Unity).42 He was indebted to Middle Platonism here in his description of the Father as a Greek concept of Unity. He did this to reinforce his argument that God—strictly incorporeal and invisible—was a complete intellectual abstraction. Not only could he not be seen by mortal eyes, he was barely “seen” in the mind upon being completely abstracted. As a matter of fact, once completely abstracted, he could not be envisioned or mentally perceived at all, it would seem. Origen elaborated on this concept:

For he who has understood the Son has understood the Father also. It is in this manner then that we must suppose Moses to have seen God, not by looking at him with eyes of flesh, but by understanding with the vision of the heart and the perception of the mind, and even this in part only” (Ibid., 2.4.3).

I shall now examine three attributes of the Father as understood by Origen: his omnipotence, his impassibility, and his eternality. That God is omnipotent, or “Almighty,” as Origen understood it, is readily acknowledged; but his argument for this concept is quite interesting. In order to do this, he must argue for the Platonic idea of the eternality of the universe and minds, or intelligences. In essence, Origen argues for the omnipotence of God the Father by assuming that there must have been always existed creatures (even if only within God’s mind) over whom he has always been the Almighty:

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Now as one cannot be a father apart from having a son, nor a lord apart from holding a
possession or a slave, so we cannot even call God almighty if there are none over whom
he can exercise his power. Accordingly, to prove that God is almighty we must assume
the existence of the universe [implying throughout eternity]. For if anyone would have
it that certain ages, or periods of time, or whatever present creation did not exist, he
would undoubtedly prove that in those ages or periods God was not almighty, but that
he afterwards became almighty over whom he could exercise power. Thus God will
apparently have experienced a kind of progress, for there can be no doubt that it is
better for him to be almighty than not to be so (ibid., 1.2.10).

For Origen, there was never a period in the past when God was not almighty, or omnipotent.

Thus, it follows that there must have been for eternity a universe and creatures over whom this
power has been fully actualized. Any perceived progress in God, as an increased ability and
province in lordship, from one age to another, is impossible in Origen’s philosophical system.

This is a Platonic idea. But I believe that what is actually doing the work here for him, at least as
equally in relation to the concept of God’s full actuality, is his prior commitment to another
Platonic concept of the pre-existence of souls. First, we read that, “If then particular things
which are ‘under the sun’ have already existed in the ages which were before us—since ‘there
is nothing fresh under the sun’—then all genera and species have for ever existed, and some
would say even individual things; but either way, it is clear that God did not begin to create
after spending a period in idleness “(ibid., 1.4.5). Then, he is even more explicit when he
conjectures, “Whole nations of souls are stored away somewhere in a realm of their own, with
an existence comparable to our bodily life, but in consequence of the fineness and mobility of
their nature they are carried round with the whirl of the universe” (ibid., 1.8.4). This idea of

43 This is a non sequitur argument. It does not necessarily follow that because God is almighty he must always
have that over whom he is almighty. His omnipotence is not an accidental quality that inheres in his being, but an
attribute of his being.
44 Gr. fragment 10, from Justinian, Ep. ad Mennam (Mansi IX. 528), Butterworth, 43, n. 2.
45 Gr. fragment 17a, Koetschau, a composite passage from Gregory of Nyssa, De Anima et Resurr. (Migne P.G. 44,
pp. 132 C-113 D) and De Hom. Opificio c. 28 (Migne P.G. 44, p. 250), Butterworth notes that this passage describes
the pre-existence of souls is Platonic in origin and is found in Plato's *Phaedrus*. Since God's reign as the Almighty is eternal over beings that pre-exist, then, they, too, as pure spiritual intelligences, must also have existed for eternity. This appears to be Origen's teaching on the matter of God the Father's omnipotence.

As for Origen's teaching on the impassibility of God the Father, we have very little extant material on this subject. During his discussion of the true meaning of scripture he writes,

> For ourselves, however, whenever we read of the anger of God, or when he is said to repent, whether in the Old or the New Testament, we do not take such statements literally, but look for the spiritual meaning in them, endeavoring to understand them in a way that is worthy of God. But we dealt with these points, according to our poor ability, when expounding that verse of the Second Psalm in which it says, "Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and trouble them in his fury," where we showed, as best we could, in what way this ought to be understood (Ibid., 2.4).  

Because Origen was largely informed by a Middle Platonic understanding of divinity, he readily acknowledged the same Platonic concept of the impassibility of God. Since such human emotions as anger, wrath, sorrow, and the host of others, are attributable to creatures alone, such attributes cannot be ascribed to an incorporeal being. An impassible God is an unalterable God, and yet such an unchanging God as envisioned by Origen—the God of the Platonic Monad—is foreign to the Old Testament in particular. When passages are read that portray God as angry, wrathful, or as repenting, such emotional states are dismissed out of hand as literal and therefore unworthy of God the Father. Origen first uncritically accepts the Platonic

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Origen's teaching on the pre-existence of souls, and the successive bodies they receive as they fall or rise on the chain of being. This is a Platonic doctrine found in Plato's *Phaedrus* 245-249. Butterworth, 72-73. Other passages from Origen that discuss this theme are found in *De Princ.* 3.1.21 and 3.3.5, Butterworth, 204f, 227.  

46 Origen refers to Psalm 2:5. Butterworth notes here that we do not possess Origen's explanation to which he refers. However, in his *Hom. in Jerem XVIII*, 6 he says, "If you hear of the anger of God and the wrath of God, do not suppose that this anger and wrath are passions of God." Butterworth, 100, n. 3.
presupposition of God’s impassibility, then on that basis allegorizes scriptural passages that contain any anthropomorphic portrayal of God the Father. He basis his justification for such a procedure on such spiritual authorities as the apostle Paul, whom he claims used the very same method for yielding the true spiritual meaning from Old Testament texts (cf. I Cor. 9:10). He employs this technique himself numerous times in his writings. For example:

And the expulsion of the man and the woman from paradise, and their being clothed with tunics of skins (which God, because of the transgression of men, made for those who had sinned), contain a certain secret and mystical doctrine (far transcending that of Plato) of the soul’s losing its wings, and being borne downwards to earth, until it can lay hold of some stable resting place (Contra Celsum, IV.40; ANF, 4.516).

Origen readily accepts the doctrine of the eternality of God. For example, he says,

This phrase that we use, however, that there never was a time when he did not exist must be accepted with a reservation. For the very words, when, or, never, have a temporal significance, whereas the statements we make about the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit must be understood as transcending all time and all ages and all eternity. For it is this Trinity alone which exceeds all comprehension, not only of temporal but even of eternal intelligence” (De Princ., 4.4.1; Butterworth, 316).

It is axiomatic for Origen that the Father, the only uncreated, the fountain of deity, is eternal. This also applies, of course, to the Son and the Holy Spirit. God is above time, existing in the “eternal now.” He is a non-contingent Being who is the very Father and source of being, the maker and sustainer of all measurable time and all multi-layered realms of reality, both intelligible and sensible. This also ties in to his understanding of God’s incorporeality and invisibility, for only such a “spiritual” being can exist outside of time, exceeding not only all rational comprehension, but even eternal existence.

I believe this poses a problem for Origen, as it did for all Hellenic philosophers since Plato, who maintained the coeval existence of the creation alongside the divinity. When Origen
argued for the omnipotence of God, he did so primarily upon the basis of his sovereignty over all other rational intelligences. For God’s power to be fully actualized, he required other beings over which to exercise his power. This is a major inconsistency in Platonic thought that Theophilus of Antioch so ably pointed out in his Ad Autolycum. By relying upon Platonic thought on the coeval existence of creation, Origen painted himself into a corner with no way out. He had to accept the consequences of his philosophical predilection. God could not be alone if he is omnipotent, therefore Origen must maintain the eternal existence of creation alongside God. He must have been blind to this issue, for he never once tried to resolve this inconsistency (as Theophilus did) in any of his extant writings.

In a discussion regarding the origin of the Son, Origen wrote,

None of these testimonies, however, sets forth distinctly the Savior’s exalted birth; but when the words are addressed to Him, “Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee” (Ps. 2:7), this is spoken to Him by God, with whom all time is to-day, for there is no evening with God, as I consider, and there is no morning, nothing but time that stretches, along with His unbeginning and unseen life. The day is to-day with Him in which the Son was begotten, and thus the beginning of his birth is not found, as neither is the day of it” (Comm. Jn. 1, 32; ANF, 9.314).

Therefore, according to Origen, God does not exist within a finite succession of moments, for there is no passage of time within his inner life. His existence is not measured by a sequential passage of time. Thus, there is no “age” in God, only boundless, timeless existence. Therefore, as Origen is trying to establish in this passage, “today” is the eternal “now.” And yet, to communicate the derived existence of the Son, God the Father (whom Origen understands to be speaking in Psalm 2:7) must resort to language that translates to sequentially-oriented creatures like us a concept of birth that amounts to an incident that occurred within a specific moment of time. This particular scriptural passage, then, “…this day have I begotten you,”
must be understood in light of Origen's assertion elsewhere that—for the Son—there never was a time when he was not. His "conception," therefore, is eternal. It always has been—and always will be—an eternal conception.

Origen on the Son

Prior to Origen, attempts had been made by Christian thinkers in various ways to expound a theology of Christ, or a Christology. It is not until we come to Origen that we begin a period of theological development of what may be regarded as high Christology.

Everything that was said above of God the Father’s incorporeality and invisibility can be said of Christ. “But in regard to the Son of God, of whom we are now speaking, the image may be compared to our second illustration; for this reason, that he is the invisible image of the invisible God, just as according to the scripture narrative we say that the image of Adam was his son Seth” (De Princ., 1.2.6; Butterworth, 19). And again, in an important section of the same work, Origen expounds,

Let no one think, however, that when we give him the name “wisdom of God,” we mean anything without hypostatic existence,47 that is . . . that we understand him to be not as it were some wise living being, but a certain thing which makes men wise by revealing and imparting itself to the minds of such as are able to receive its influence and intelligence. If then it is once rightly accepted that the only-begotten Son of God is God’s wisdom hypostatically existing, I do not think that our mind ought to stray beyond this to the suspicion that this hypostasis or substance could possibly possess bodily characteristics, since everything that is corporeal is distinguished by shape or color or size (Ibid., 1.2.2).

47 Butterworth notes here that the Latin aliqua insubstantivum, almost means “something impersonal,” but also observes that Origen’s intent is to show that personal existence does not involve the possession of a body. Butterworth, 15, n. 4.
Here Origen points out a number of things. First, that the Son is Wisdom (Sophia), not wisdom as an aspect or influence of God the Father, but one who possesses his very own existence, what Origen call his "hypostatic existence." And second, once this premise is accepted, that his existence as God's Wisdom cannot be anything other than as an incorporeal existence, "since everything that is corporeal is distinguished by shape or color or size." Origen also establishes the Son's deity as his one nature: "First we must know this, that in Christ there is one nature, his deity, because he is the only-begotten Son of the Father, and another human nature, which in very recent times he took upon him to fulfill the divine purpose" (Ibid., 1.2.1; Butterworth, 15). For Origen, Christ is God's only-begotten Son existing as his own separate existence from the Father. Origen stressed this fact repeatedly in his writings, in order to counter the then popular and prevalent theological opinion that stressed God's unity at the expense of his plurality, or what we know as Monarchianism.

In order to establish the eternal unity between the Son and the Father, while simultaneously asserting the Son's separate existence, which was then a radical departure from the way most Christian writers understood the relationship between the Father and the Son, Origen offered his theory of the Son's eternal generation:

Our first task therefore is to see what the only-begotten Son of God is, seeing he is called by many different names according to the circumstances and beliefs of the different writers. He is called Wisdom (Sophia), as Solomon said, speaking in the person of Wisdom: "The Lord created me the beginning of his ways for his works. Before he made anything, before the ages he established me. In the beginning before he made the earth, . . . he begets me".48 He is also called First-born, as the apostle Paul says: "who is the first-born of all creation" (Col. 1:15). The First-born is not, however, by

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48 Prov. 8:22-25. Butterworth notes here that Origen in his Hom. In Jerem. IX. 4 ad fin lays heavy emphasis on the present tense of begets (Gr. genna; Latin generat) as evidence of his doctrine of the Son's eternal generation by the Father.
Thus, Christ is created in eternity, by the Father, who eternally begets him. The use of the present tense, "begets," was deliberate by Origen. He accepted the Old Testament verses from Proverbs 8 (so often then the theological bailiwick of orthodox and heterodox writers alike) without hesitation or qualification. The reason is simple: Christ is an eternal being—a separate existing "existence"—just as the Father is an eternal being, existing as his own separate existence and substance. The Father created the Son (Wisdom is identified only with the Son by Origen), as the beginning of his ways. As Origen understood the eternal existence of God as being without successive moments or occurrences in sequential time, any idea of creating from his mind by his will Wisdom’s existence in a moment of time was impossible. Because we are time-bound creatures and dimensionally shackled, that is, we simply cannot comprehend this idea: how God the Father created the Son in the act of eternal begetting.

Origen also dispelled any notion that such appellations as “wisdom” and “first-born” were in reference to other beings other than Christ. He asserted unequivocally that these titles refer to Christ alone. Other titles such as the “power of God” and the “wisdom of God” applied solely to Christ. This was a far cry from what we observed in Theophilus of Antioch, whose use of the same appellations were presented in a confusing, monarchian array of terms, at best.

Origen continued his discussion of the eternal generation of the Son by acknowledging that not only is the only-begotten Son indeed born of and derives his being from the Father, but begotten yet without beginning. He sets up this logical tension between a significant act within the being of God the father, and the act itself occurring without a beginning in time: "Whereas
we recognize that God was always the Father of his only-begotten Son, who was born indeed of him and draws his being from him, but is without any beginning. . . . Wisdom (Sophia), therefore, must be believed to have been begotten beyond the limits of any beginning that we can speak of or understand" (Ibid., 1.2.2; Butterworth, 16).49

In an important section of his De Principiis, Origen explained in more detail just what he meant to convey in this crucial doctrine regarding the Son’s eternal generation.

"It is impious and shocking to regard God the Father in the begetting of his only-begotten Son and in the Son’s subsistence as being similar to any human being or other animal in the act of begetting; but there must needs be some exceptional process, worthy of God, to which we can find no comparison whatever, not merely in things, but even in thought and imagination, such that by its aid human thought could apprehend how the unbegotten God becomes Father of the only-begotten Son. This is an eternal and everlasting begetting, as brightness is begotten from light (emphasis added).50 For he does not become Son in an external way through the adoption of the Spirit, but is Son by nature (Ibid., 1.2.4; Butterworth, 17-18).

The ability to procreate eternally is a quality available only to an incorporeal (invisible), omnipotent and eternal being, which resides strictly within the province of God the Father alone, according to Origen. The Son is the very image of the Father because he is begotten from the eternal mind of God the Father:

Rather must we suppose that as an act of will proceeds from the mind without either cutting off any part of the mind or being separated or divided from it,51 in some similar fashion has the Father begotten the Son, who is indeed his image; so that as the Father is invisible by nature, he has begotten an image that is also invisible (Ibid., 1.2.6; Butterworth, 19).

49 See Origen, Contra Celsum, V.37; ANF, 4.560, when later in his life he writes, “For the Son of God, ’the First-born of all creation,’ although he seemed recently to have become incarnate, is not by any means in that account recent. For the holy scriptures know Him to be the most ancient of all the works of creation; for it was Him that God said regarding the creation of man, ‘Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness.’”

50 See Butterworth, who notes that this thought can be found in Wisdom 7:26 and Hebrews 1:3.

51 In similar fashion to Theophilus of Antioch, Origen refers to the analogy of thought and act of will but without any direct reference to Stoic terminology.
Thus, the Son is an invisible image of the Father. Next, I shall examine a most fascinating and controversial aspect of Origen’s Christology, his doctrine of the origin of the human soul of Jesus.

The Origin of Jesus’ Human Soul

In order to come among human beings to be the propitiation for their salvation, Origen believed fully in the dual nature of Christ’s person. “The Son of God, therefore, because for the salvation of the human race he wished to appear to men and to dwell among them, assumed not only, or some think, a human body, but also a soul, in its nature indeed like our souls, but in will and virtue like himself, and of such a kind that it could unswervingly carry into effect all the wishes and plans of the Word and Wisdom” (Ibid., 4.4.4; Butterworth, 318).

Now, when Origen said that Jesus possessed a human soul, he was not implying that that soul was the “only-begotten” and “the first-born of all creation,” nor “God the Word, who is superior to his soul, as the Son of God himself says: ‘I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it up’” (Gr. Frag., Ibid.; Butterworth, 318), he is most certainly implying that the soul of Jesus pre-existed prior to assuming a human body through Mary. As Origen explained it, “But the soul that was in Jesus ‘chose the good, before it knew the evil;’ and because it [the pre-existent soul of Jesus] ‘loved righteousness and hated iniquity, therefore God anointed it with the oil of gladness above its fellows’” (Ibid.; Butterworth, 318-19). Origen interpreted this scriptural text (Ps. 55:7) as being a reference to the union of the human soul “in spotless

52 See De Principiis 4.4.1; Butterworth, 313.
53 Butterworth informs us here that Koetschau suspects an omission by Rufinus at this point. He recommends a sentence, Fragment 35 from Justininan, Ep. ad Mennam (Mansi IX. 506), “that the soul of the Lord pre-existed, and that God the Word was united to it before he took flesh of the Virgin.”
partnership” with the Word of God. This one human soul (or mind), alone, of all the others who cooled and fell away, was found worthy to be united to the eternal Word. Thus, for Origen, the Son of God did not receive a human soul through his union with Mary’s body, but through a prior union, or “partnership,” with the one worthy human soul that did not fall.

For Origen, it appeared that the one soul that did not fall away like the rest received the “oil of gladness,” a “spotless partnership” with God the Word as a reward for its steadfastness in the wake of the mass cooling of the other souls who congealed with sin, and fell into their respective levels of punishment. This appears to be so based upon Origen’s following comment:

This is why Christ is set forth as an example to all believers, because as he ever chose the good, even before he knew the evil at all, and loved righteousness and hated iniquity, wherefore God anointed him with the oil of gladness; so, too, should each one of us, after a fall or a transgression, cleanse himself from stains by the example set before him, and taking a leader for the journey proceed along the steep path of virtue, that so perchance by this means we may as far as possible become through our imitation of him, partakers of the divine nature” (Ibid.; Butterworth, 319).

Origen is saying here that to the extent of one’s pursuit of the ascent back to the perfection of pure virtue, following the soul of Christ as example, then to that extent of perfection and participation in the divine nature will one achieve. Whenever Origen referred to the human soul of Jesus and the Son of God, he was implying a complete unity between the two: “As the Son and the Father are one, so also the soul which the Son assumed and the Son himself are one” (Ibid.; Butterworth, 319).54 And upon this union this particular soul, “received into itself the whole wisdom of God and his truth and life” (Ibid.; Butterworth, ibid.). So when Origen

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54 Gr. Fragment 37, Koetschau, from Theophilus Alex. Ep. pasch. II. 16. The Greek is found in Theodoret, Dial. II C. 4 (Migne P.G. 83, pg. 197); see Butterworth, 319, n. 2.
speaks of this one solitary soul that did not fall, he says that, "For who else can be meant by this Christ, who is said to be hidden in God and to be destined afterwards to appear, except him who is related to have been anointed with the 'oil of gladness,' that is, filled with the essence of God, in whom now he is said to be hidden" (Ibid.; Butterworth, ibid.).

And yet Origen had not reached his desired conclusion regarding the soul of Jesus. Commenting on Philippians 2:6, 7, which Origen quotes "'Who, though he was in the form of God, counted it not a prize to be equal with God, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant,'" he noted how some refer to this particular New Testament passage as a reference to this very soul at the time when it assumed a body from Mary. He states, "'[T]he object being, doubtless, to restore the soul into the form of God by superior examples and precepts, and to recall it to that fullness from which it had emptied itself'" (Ibid., 4.4.5; Butterworth, 320). Now Origen comes to his conclusion, a conclusion that would cause a great deal of controversy for years to come:

But as by participation in the Son of God a man is adopted among God's sons, and by participation in the wisdom which is in God he becomes wise, so, too, by participation in the Holy Spirit he becomes holy and spiritual. . . . And all that we have said about the participation of the soul is to be understood of the angels and heavenly powers in a similar way to that in which it is understood of souls; for every rational creature needs to participate in the Trinity" (Ibid.; Butterworth, 320).

G. W. Butterworth comments on this section by first noting that in Rufinus' translation, what Origen actually said was modified and abbreviated considerably.55 The following quotations are drawn from later writers who give us an idea of what Origen actually said in the Greek text.

From the Anathema VII, Second Council of Constantinople (553 ce), "If anyone shall say that

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55 The following discussion is adapted from Butterworth's comments, 320, n. 1).
Christ, who is said to have been ‘in the form of God’ and to have been united with God the Word before all ages and in the last days to have emptied himself to the level of man, because he pitied (as they say) the various falls that had happened to those who originally belonged to the same unity, and wished to restore them, went through all modes of being and was invested with different kinds of bodies and took different names, becoming all things to all, being changed into an angel among the angels, into a power among the powers, and into other ranks or species of rational beings according to the necessities of each particular case, and then shared at last in flesh and blood like us and became a man among men, . . . let him be anathema.” This is equivalent to the Fourth Anathema of the emperor Justinian (527-565 ce) against Origen which reads: “If anyone shall say or think that the Word of God has become like all the heavenly orders, having become a cherub for the cherubim, a seraph for the seraphim and something equivalent to every single one of the powers above, let him be anathema.” And from Jerome (d. 420) who had also written a Latin translation of Peri Archon (no longer extant except in fragments), Apol. II. 12, where he says the following teaching from Origen in First Principles as being particularly heretical: “that the soul of the Savior existed before it was born of Mary, and that it was this soul which was in the form of God, and thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but emptied itself, taking the form of a servant.” In addition, Theophilus of Alexandria (d. 412), Ep. synod. 4 (Jerome, Ep. 92) writes: “besides, in the books on “First Principles,” he even endeavors to persuade us that the living Word of God did not assume a human body; for he writes, contrary to the statement of the apostle (i.e. in Philip. 2:7), that he who being in the form of God was equal with God was not the Word of God, but a soul that descended from the heavenly region and emptying itself of the form of its eternal majesty.
assumed a human body. In saying this he most clearly contradicts John who writes: 'And the Word was made flesh.' Nor is it credible that it was the soul of the Savior and not the Word of God which possessed the form of and equality with the Father's majesty.'

From these ancient sources commenting on Origen's teaching (ostensibly from his original Greek text) on the pre-existence of the soul of Christ, we learn two things: first, that he believed that the soul assumed the natures of all rational beings, and by so doing, wrought their salvation by bringing them into full participation with the Trinity. Second, that the one soul of the Savior who did not fall became essentially an image of the "image of God" by full participation with God the Word and inherited the essence of deity by being assumed in the Word, which hearkens back to an Adoptionist theology. The soul of Jesus became a God by proxy as the image of the image of God, who took on human flesh through May. But the obvious question is why Origen felt it necessary to concoct such a process of theosis of the soul of Jesus with God the Word. Why did he imbue the "soul of the Savior" with the form and equality of God, and not simply assert, as his critics pointed out, that the Word of God became flesh? I think the answer lies in what Origen said about the need for a medium between God and the flesh:

This soul, then [which retained its original pristine condition], acting as a medium between God and the flesh (for it was not possible for the nature of God to mingle with a body apart from some medium), there is born, as we said, the God-man, the medium being that existence to whose nature it was not contrary to assume a body. Yet neither, on the other hand, was it contrary to nature for that soul, being as it was a rational existence, to receive God, into whom, as we said above, it had already entered by entering into the word and wisdom and truth" (Ibid., 2.6.3; Butterworth, 110-11).

56 See also De. Princ., 2.6.3; Butterworth, 110.
Thus, we see how deeply committed (perhaps unwittingly) Origen was to the Platonic concept of God's utter transcendence. The transcendent God may never "mingle with a body," so a "medium" was required to bridge the impassible gulf with qualities of a rational and a material soul that could mingle not only with a body but also with God. Origen explains:

> It is therefore right that this soul, either because it was wholly in the Son of God, or because it received the Son of God wholly into itself, should itself be called, along with that flesh which it had taken, the Son of God and the power of God, Christ and the wisdom of God; and on the other hand that the Son of God "through whom all things were created," should be termed Jesus and the Son of man. And for this reason, therefore, throughout the whole of scripture, while the divine nature is spoken of in human terms the human nature is in its turn adorned with marks that belong to the divine prerogative" (Ibid., 2.6.3; Butter, 111).57

**Origen on the Holy Spirit**

In the preface of *De Principiis*, Origen explained that the Holy Spirit was united in honor and dignity with the Father and the Son. "In regard to him it is not yet clearly known whether he is to be thought of as begotten or unbegotten, or as being himself also a Son of God or not; but these are matters which we must investigate to the best of our power from holy scripture, inquiring with wisdom and diligence" (*Pref.* 1.4; Butterworth, 3). He does clearly assert, however, that it is but the one Spirit who inspired the prophets and the apostles (Ibid.; Butterworth, 3-4).

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57 Here Butterworth says that this is an example of the principle called the *Communicatio Idiomatum*, "by which qualities that are in strictness only applicable to the divine nature are sometimes predicated of the human, and vica versa" (111, n. 1).

58 Butterworth informs us that Rufinius has altered the Origen's "created or uncreated" to "begotten or unbegotten." Jerome (*Ep. ad Avitum* 2) says: "As third in dignity and honor after the Father and the Son he (i.e. Origen) adds the Holy Spirit, of whom, though he professes to be ignorant whether he was created or uncreated, yet later on he has expressed his real opinion, when he insists that nothing is uncreated except God the Gather alone."
Origen implied that what can be affirmed of the Father and the Son regarding their incorporeality, omnipotence and eternality, can also be implied of the Holy Spirit. He says, “From all of which we learn that the person of the Holy Spirit is of so great authority and dignity that saving baptism is not complete except when performed with the authority of the whole most excellent Trinity, that is, by the naming of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit; and that the name of the Holy Spirit must be joined to that of the unbegotten God the Father and his only-begotten God the Father and his only-begotten Son” (Ibid., 1.3.2; Butterworth, 30).

We also learn from Origen that the Holy Spirit is not a mode or aspect of God, but one who possesses his own personal existence and identity. “But no one except those who are familiar with the law and the prophets, or those who profess their belief in Christ, could have even a suspicion of the personal existence of the Holy Spirit” (Ibid., 1.3.1; Butterworth, 29), and, “Of the existence of the Holy Spirit, however, we are taught in many passages of scripture’ (Ibid.).

The Holy Spirit a Created Being

Just as Origen insisted that the Son was a created being, so he taught the same regarding the Holy Spirit, for two reasons: first, only the Father is uncreated, and only the Son is the “only-begotten.” “Following the same reasoning we believe that everything whatever except the Father and God of the universe is created” (Gr., Ibid., 1.3.3; Butterworth, 31).

Origen reaffirmed his belief that the Holy Spirit is created elsewhere:

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59 This is from the Greek Fragment 7, Koetschau, from Justinian, Ep. ad Mennam (Mansi IX. 528). Justinian also writes, “That he (i.e. Origen) called the Holy Spirit a created being as well as the Son, and included them in the
We consider, therefore, that there are three hypostases, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; and at the same time we believe nothing to be uncreated but the Father. We therefore, as the more pious and the truer course, admit that all things were made by the Logos, and that the Holy Spirit is the most excellent and the first in order of all that was made by the Father through Christ. And this, perhaps, is the reason why the Spirit is not said to be God's own Son. The Only-begotten only is by nature and from the beginning a Son, and the Holy Spirit seems to have need of the Son, to minister to Him. His essence, so as to enable Him not only to exist, but to be wise and reasonable and just, and all that we must think of Him as being (Comm. Jn., 2.6; ANF, 9.328).

Thus, for Origen, the Holy Spirit is a created being, primarily because, for the same reason that the Son, also, is created, only the Father can be the "uncreated." The Father is the sole fount of deity by virtue of his title and primacy of the divine essence. The Son, by virtue of his title, is the Only-begotten, hence his divine essence is derived from the Father. And finally, as Origen concludes by logical inference, the Holy Spirit receives his divine essence from the Son. Origen pushes this theory even further along when he writes,

Our examination of this point has been somewhat extended, since we were anxious to make it clear that if all things were made by Him, then the Spirit also was made through the Word, and is seen to be one of the "all things" which are inferior to their Maker (Ibid., ANF, 9.329).

Thus, according to Origen, the Holy Spirit is a created "thing," one of the "all things" made through the Word. This statement would have a jarring effect on the ears of many Christians not only then but for years to come. "For the unbegotten (uncreated) God commanded the first born of all creation, and they were created, not only the world and what is therein, but also all other things [which includes the Holy Spirit], whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers, for all things were made through Him and unto Him, and He is before all things" (Ibid., 2.7; ANF, 9.331).

number of the other created beings; and accordingly he terms them 'ministering creatures.'” Koetschau inserts these last two words in the text. Rufinus deleted Origen’s original statements.
One wonders if what Origen had in mind was an idea of the eternal generation of the Holy Spirit, as he taught regarding the Word. This is a tempting option to consider as a possible solution, but some caution should be exercised. It appears to me that perhaps Rufinus in his Latin translation may have attempted such a solution. His translation reads,

The “Spirit of God,” therefore, show “moved upon the water,” as it is written, in the beginning of the creation of the world, I reckon to be none other than the Holy Spirit, so far as I can understand; which indeed I have demonstrated in my exposition of these passages [no longer extant] not however, according to their literal but according to their spiritual meaning” (De. Princ. 1.3.3; Butterworth, 31).

What I am suggesting is that what Rufinus has attempted to make Origen say is that just as the creation of the world is not adduced in the literal sense, so likewise the Holy Spirit—as a member of the class of “all things”—a created being, should also be rendered in the intelligible sense, not in the sensible. After all, according to Platonic (and particularly in Middle Platonic) thought, the Forms of all things are eternal and not subject to change in the passage of time. However, unlike the account of the Son’s eternal generation that Origen meticulously and assiduously works out (De Princ. 1.2.1-5), there is no such explanation with regards to the Holy Spirit in any of his extant writings. We do find, however, not an eternal begetting for the Holy Spirit, but instead the concept of the Holy Spirit’s eternal and essential relationship within the Trinity with the Father and the Son. “That could not be, for the Holy Spirit would never have been included in the unity of the Trinity, that is, along with God the unchangeable Father and with his Son, unless he had always been the Holy Spirit” (Ibid., 1.3.4; Butterworth, 33).60

60 Butterworth refers us here to Origen’s homily, In Num. Hom. XI.8, “I think therefore that the Holy Spirit is holy without ever having been made holy. For there did not come to him from some external source a holiness which he did not previously possess, but he always was holy, and there can be no progress in God, the Holy Spirit was always holy and therefore always essential to the unity of the Trinity.”
Is the Holy Spirit a Creature?

We have seen above that because of Origen’s strictly enforced axiom that only the Father is uncreated, both the Word and the Holy Spirit must be “made” or “created,” that is, their divinity, existence, and attributes must flow from the eternal activity of the fount of all deity, the Father. But are the Son and the Holy Spirit “creatures”? Origen seems to imply this unequivocally when he writes,

My Hebrew master used to say that the two six-winged seraphim in Isaiah (6:2f) who cry one to another and say, Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts, were the only-begotten Son of God and the Holy Spirit. And we ourselves think that the expression in the song of Habakkuk, “In the midst of the two living creatures thou shalt be known” (Hab. 3:2 [Sept.]) is spoken of Christ and the Holy Spirit (Gr., Ibid., 1.3.4; Butterworth, 32). Even though these passages suggest that Origen thought of the Holy Spirit (including the Son) as a creature (on the basis of his scriptural exposition and instruction from his former Hebrew teacher), it is also certain that he thought of the Holy Spirit as being eternally present within the Trinity, just as the Son. So the notion of the Holy Spirit being a “creature” is to be understood in the context of an eternal being whose eternality transcends all notions of finitude and reach well beyond the capacity of human comprehension. Like the Son, the Holy Spirit is subordinate to the Father at the “third” rank, whose divine activity extends only to the sanctification of the Saints (Ibid. 1.3.5; Butterworth, 34). “Only in those who are already turning to better things and walking in the ways of Jesus Christ . . . who are engaged in good deeds and who abide in God is the work of the Holy Spirit, I think, to be found” (Ibid.).

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61 Koetschau, Justinian, Ep. ad Mennam
When he discussed the Trinity, Origen was emphatic regarding the invisible—in incorporeal—quality of its substance. "But the substance of the Trinity, which is the beginning and cause of all things, 'of which are all things and through which are all things and in which are all things,' must not be believed either to be a body or to exist in a body, but to be wholly incorporeal" (Ibid., 4.3.15; Butterworth, 312). We saw this also in the depiction of Origen's teachings regarding the substance of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit above. For him, there can be no corporeality in God.

We have observed that Origen was largely indoctrinated in the Platonic idea of the real existence of the intelligible world. He equated, for example, the Greek word *asomaton*, incorporeality, with the biblical word, "invisible" (Gr. *aoraton*). Therefore, there can be no separation, or division, in the Trinity. Origen argued assiduously for the unity of the Godhead. He allowed, for example, for no separation (*probole*) between the Father and the Son.

It is now time for us, in summarizing our discussion concerning the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, to deal with a few points previously omitted. In regard to the Father, though he is whole and indivisible yet he becomes the Father of the Son, but not by an act of separation [*probole*] as some suppose. For if the Son is something separated from the Father and an offspring generated from him, of the same kind as the offspring of animals, then both he who generated and he who was generated are of necessity bodies (Ibid., 4.4.1; Butterworth, 313).

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62 For Origen's extended discussion on Platonism, see his *Contra Celsum* 3.45-47; *ANF* 4.629-631.
63 Gr. Fragment 31, Koetschau, from Marcellus, found in Eusebius *Contra Marcellum* I. 4, frag. 32. Butterworth here directs our attention to Jerome, *Apol. adv. Rufin.* II. 19: "There exists in Greek a dialogue between Origen and Candidus, the defender of the heresy of Valentinus . . . . Candidus admits that the Son is of the same substance of the Father, but errs in asserting a *probole*, that is, an act of separation. On the other side Origen, in the manner of Arius and Eunomius, controverts the assertion that the Son was produced or born, for fear of dividing God the Father into parts; but he asserts that he is a sublime and pre-eminent creature who came into existence by the will of the Father like all other creatures."
Bearing in mind that Origen unequivocally believed in the unity of the Trinity, he then asserted from the Old Testament (Prov. 8:22) that the Son was begotten, or created.

Now the Son was begotten of the Father’s will, for his is the “image of the invisible God” [Col. 1:15]. . . . For wisdom itself says: “God created me in the beginning of his ways for his works” (Prov. 8:22). If he is an “image of the invisible God,” he is an invisible image; and I would dare to add that as he is a likeness of the Father there is not time when he did not exist. . . . And when did the image of the unspeakable, unnamable, unutterable substance of the Father, his impress, the Word who knows the Father, not exist? Let the man who dares to say, “There was a time when the Son was not,” understand that this is what he will be saying, “Once wisdom did not exist, and life did not exist” (Ibid.; Butterworth, 314).64

By identifying the Word with Wisdom, Origen guaranteed the eternal existence of the Son. For when was the Father ever without his wisdom? The obvious response that Origen illicited was, never. But why does he insist on using the word “created” (ktisma) in reference to the Son’s generation (gennema)? Partly, I think, because the Greek Old Testament (LXX) retains the word ktisma for the creation of Wisdom; and, partly (and perhaps primarily), due to his concern in contradicting the prevailing Monarchianism that still held many adherents at this time. He was particularly concerned with the modalistic variety. Origen addressed this issue in another place.

Now there are many who are sincerely concerned about religion, and who fall here into great perplexity. They [who uphold the monarchia of God] are afraid that they may be proclaiming two Gods, and their fear drives them into doctrines which are false and wicked. Either they deny that the Son has a distinct nature of his own besides that of the Father [modalistic monarchians], and make Him who they call the Son to be God all but the name, or they deny the divinity of the Son [dynamic monarchianists], giving Him a separate existence of His own, and making His sphere of essence fall outside that of the Father, so that they are separable from each other” (Com. Jn., 2.2; ANF, 9.323).

64 Gr. Frag. 32, Koetschau, from Justinian, Ep ad Mennam (Mansi IX. 525). Butterworth says that Rufinus has omitted this section from his translation.
But Origen’s solution for this dual tendency among those who feared that they may be proclaiming two Gods\textsuperscript{65} is illuminating, when we consider it in light of his own firm belief in the unity of God. “To such persons we have to say that God on the one hand is Very God (\textit{Autotheos}, God of Himself) . . . but that all beyond the Very God is made God by participation in His divinity [emphasis added], and is not to be called simply God (with the article), but rather God (without the article)” (Ibid.). Thus, Origen argued that there are not two (or three) Gods, but one God by nature, in three distinct hypostases (substances), who, by the will of the \textit{Autotheos}, have been “created” in eternity to participate uniquely in God’s deity. Origen understood that if each member of the Trinity was designated as \textit{ho theos}, then a real problem would exist, because such a designation would imply three distinct Gods for the three distinct Persons. This would pose an insoluble problem logically; but by removing the Greek article from the title of divinity for the Son (and for the Spirit), the logical dilemma was avoided. The Son and the Spirit are fully divine and distinct, but not to be confused with \textit{Ho Theos}.

Therefore, according to Origen, there are three distinct hypostases, with their own distinct substances and origins in eternity, who are the Trinity, as one composite unity of Persons with the Father. Just prior to Origen, and even contemporaneous with him, only Hippolytus and Tertullian came closer to formulating such a doctrine before Nicaea. But for Origen, unlike his predecessors, his main contribution was his unrelenting emphasis upon God’s incorporeality, his transcendence, which made this unity of three distinct hypostases logically possible because, “the nature of the Trinity is one and incorporeal” (\textit{De Princ.}, 4.4.5; Butterworth, 320).

\textsuperscript{65} Since Justin’s influence.
A Comparison of the Mormon Doctrine of God with that of Origen

There are a number of differences and similarities between Origen's thought and that of Mormon theology. For the sake of space, I will mention a few of the most significant. No area of Origen's thought focused more heavily than upon the conviction of the incorporeality of God. Origen tirelessly insisted that God does not have a body, or a nature that consists of any corporeal substance, no matter how fine or subtle. He writes in De Principiis (1.1.6):

God therefore must not be thought to be any kind of body, nor to exist in a body, but to be a simple intellectual existence admitting in himself of no addition whatever, so that he cannot be believed to have in himself a more or a less, but is Unity, or if I may so say, Oneness throughout, and the mind and fount from which originates all intellectual existence or mind. Now mind does not need physical space in which to move and operate, nor does it need a magnitude discernible by the senses, nor which are suitable to bodies and matter.

We know from our study of Mormon theology, on the other hand, that God most certainly has a body of flesh and bones. God the Father and God the Son are glorified human beings who have attained the status of Godhood by virtue of their obedience to the Gospel and by sheer force of will and superior intellect. We read in the Doctrine and Covenants (130:22) that "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible’s as a man’s." Thus, particularly since the King Follett discourse of 1844, Mormonism committed itself to a theology of materialism. Because it is a theology that rejects all intelligible existence for God, such as taught by Origen and the church at large, Mormon theology has rejected all theological descriptions of God that have any resemblance to the idea of absolute transcendence. In Mormon philosophy, there is no incorporeal mind (intellectual existence) that Origen insisted upon, only free-willed
“intelligences” that inhabit the universe (material beings, nonetheless), existing within various
degrees of evolutionary development along their paths of eternal progression. All reality is
composed of matter in varying degrees of composition and at various evolutionary stages of
development. These “intelligences,” then, are refined, ethereal matter.

A cogent critique, then, from the Mormon side should be considered. Did the Church,
particularly after Origen’s influence, go too far in its assimilation of Platonic categories
regarding the notion of the incorporeality and the impassibility of God? Was Origen compelled
to apologize for the anthropomorphisms expressed in the Old Testament, and, based upon the
slimmest of New Testament warrant, proceeded to engage upon an aggressive campaign of
allegorization of biblical passages in order to denude God of any semblance of similarity to
human form and emotions? If that was indeed the case, then I would admit that there was an
issue of philosophical bias at work. In such a case, it would be fair to admit that Origen went
too far in reinterpreting the biblical anthropomorphisms for God in proper “spiritual” fashion in
keeping with Platonic theology. But as we observed in Origen’s writings, we find him
thoroughly convinced of the idea of divine transcendence. A Mormon may ask, If God indeed
existed in an absolutist sense, as an incorporeal “intellectual existence” as Origen insisted, then
why was it necessary to portray him as such through dubious allegorical techniques than as he
is actually portrayed in the Old Testament? Without the benefit of Platonic theology, would
anyone be at fault for taking God’s written depiction of his nature too literally? For example,
did any of the Old Testament figures who lived prior to the period under discussion, such as

66 Particularly his reference to Paul’s use of allegory in Gal. 4:21-31.
67 This is not to say that there are no scriptural passages, particularly from the Old Testament, that describe God in
absolutist terms.
Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David or Solomon, believe God to be embodied? Not having had the
benefit of later philosophical dualism to draw from, or not having been exposed to an
understanding of allegory and transcendent concepts, how else would they understand the
nature of God? It is quite probable to conjecture that none of these Old Testament figures
would have understood God to be an “intellectual existence” as described by Origen, or as
incorporeal in the Platonic sense of being wholly devoid of matter. As a matter of fact, David L.
Paulsen suggests that even in the first century, Jews in Alexandria, as well as in Palestine,
“almost universally believed in an embodied God.”68 He continues this idea by extrapolating
such a belief into the early Christian community by noting, “[t]hough data pertaining to
Christian belief during the earliest period of Christian history is meager, that date strongly
supports the thesis that the earliest Christians generally believed God to be embodied.”69 He
concludes by saying, “Thus Joseph’s claim that his doctrine of divine embodiment was a
restoration of primitive Christian understanding seems well corroborated.”70 It may be true that
the idea of an embodied God may have been the prevailing belief of Jews in Palestine and
Alexandria in the first century, but surely at the popular level I would hold. I do not hold to the
idea that the idea of divine embodiment was in fact the actual Jewish and Christian teaching of
the nature of God, despite the anthropomorphic language in scripture. We know this from the
regula fidei, that rule that the early church (particularly in the second century) believed
encapsulated the cardinal truths about God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.71 We

69 Ibid., 51-52.
70 Ibid., 52.
40-41.
know that the *regula* did not teach that God was embodied, either in the Stoic or Mormon sense of the term. Theologians such as Irenaeus and Tertulian, for example, represented all in the church in this period who believed that “the indispensable key to Scripture belonged exclusively to the Church, which in the *regula* had preserved the apostles’ testimony in its original shape.”

Again, there was no concept of an embodied God taught in the church empire-wide because this idea was not found in Scripture or in the *regula fidei*.

Now, it is certainly true that in Origen's writings we find that he was also concerned to address the issue of whether God was corporeal or incorporeal, because this was still an issue of some importance during his own time in the third-century church. But why was this idea of divine embodiment still an issue? Is it because the idea of divine embodiment, as Paulsen suggests, had been a teaching of the Primitive church taught by Jesus and the apostles and restored by the Joseph Smith in modern times? I would suggest that an alternate reason for the prevailing notion of divine embodiment in the early church up to Origen's time may have been the cause. Early converts to Christianity up to the end of the fourth century came from a predominantly pagan environment. These early converts to Christianity formerly were believers of gods and goddesses, such that formed the basic core of their pre-Christian religious experience. Their initial exposure to the Christian scriptures and Christian liturgy, with its worship of God the Father, God the Son and the Holy Spirit, and acknowledging the work of angels, would remind them no doubt of the pantheon of gods they once worshipped before. Now, for the first time, early converts to Christianity, before thoroughly enculturated in the existence of their pagan gods, became subject to the church's teaching about the one God. As

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72 Ibid., 41.
R. M. Grant has rightly observed, "Converts to Christianity could recognize that Jesus the Son of God, did what the cosmic gods did. But since Christians denied the reality of these gods, he was the only Demiurge there was."73

Prior to their baptisms and confirmations, Christian converts would have been subjected as catechumens to the church's teaching of the one God as a corrective to their lingering pagan belief in the gods. As catechumens, they would have learned that there is only one God the Father, one Lord Jesus Christ, in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and at this time would have learned something like a monarchianistic concept of the Christian Triad. Any such concepts of their former religious experience, such as God as an embodied being, would have been regarded as a residual by-product of a pagan past that, with sound church teaching on monotheism, would pass away in time. In fact, this is what history shows, i.e. the demise of paganism and the victory of the Christian faith over it.

Be that as it may, we may pose the question in a different way. Was Origen engaged in allegorical interpretations of the divine merely to apologize for the graphic anthropomorphisms evident in the Old Testament, or was he engaged in something other than trying to eradicate what he considered to be embarrassing and obsolete references to the divine? I have suggested earlier74 that a major reason for the adoption of Platonic theology of this period was due to its emphasis on the transcendence of God. It was recognized by the apologists, for instance, that to regard God as a transcendent being meant that he could not be subject to division in his nature. Following the apologists, Christian writers continued and argued for the

74 Chapter One and throughout this work.
unity of God by arguing for his absolute transcendence. This is particularly true of Origen’s work. A tension was developed and maintained between the monotheism inherited from their Jewish heritage and the New Testament revelation of multiple Voices all speaking as God. An overemphasis either upon the monotheism of God, or upon the multiple Voices in God, could result either in monarchianism (and eventually modalism) or polytheism. Thus I am suggesting that Origen and other theologians before and after him in the period leading up to Nicaea were more concerned with maintaining the unity of God by arguing for his transcendence than they were in reinterpreting difficult passages of the Old Testament merely to suit a Hellenistic concept of the divine. Since Origen and Clement believed that all truth was God’s truth, then the philosophical truth of classical Platonic theology on the transcendence of God was just as valid as biblical truth. In fact, to some extent Clement, and certainly with Origen, the application of the allegorical method of interpretation to the scriptures’ anthropomorphic descriptions of God, to their minds, was a necessary step towards the proper understanding of God’s transcendent nature. If God was not understood within the context of utter transcendence, then God the Father and God the Son would never have become the *homoousion* of the Nicene-Constantinople Creed. Instead, the Christian Triad would have resembled (under different names) more the vast pantheon of gods prevalent within their own Greco-Roman culture. The preservation of monotheism along with the Triad within the early church was the primary impetus for the doctrine of God’s divine transcendence. Thus I contend that theologians of the second and third centuries sought to maintain a “delicate balance” between strict monotheism and polytheism because they were primarily biblical theologians and loyal churchmen who sought to maintain what they found in the scriptural witness, which
is of one God manifested in distinct Voices. In order to maintain this tension between the one and many without division or abscission, the apologists (and those following in the third century) instinctively relied upon the Middle Platonic doctrine of God’s utter transcendence, his ontological independence from all matter. Only in this way could they affirm from the scriptures of its teaching of Christ’s shared divinity as well as his unity with the Father. A material being is subject to division, but not an immaterial being.

We find that Mormon theology shares a similar idea with Origen in his teaching of the eternal existence of souls. Origen writes (De Princ. 1.2.10):

Now as one cannot be a father apart from having a son, nor a lord apart from holding a possession or a slave, so we cannot even call God almighty if there are none over whom he can exercise his power. Accordingly, to prove that God is almighty, we must assume the existence of the universe . . . . But if there was no time when he was not almighty, there must always have existed the things in virtue of which he is almighty; and there must always have existed things under his sway, which own him as their ruler. Of these we shall treat more fully in the proper place, when we come to discuss the subject of God’s creatures.

The eternality of intelligences (or souls) has been a long-standing doctrine in Mormon theology since the contributions of Orson Pratt, John A. Widtsoe, B. H. Roberts and James E. Talmage. As we have already learned, these Mormon thinkers procured this from Joseph Smith’s King Follett discourse and his teaching of the eternal progression of God. It must be remembered that in the Mormon doctrine of God, humanity and God are one in essence, only differing in degree of progressive glory. While Origen believed in and taught the eternal existence of souls, he did not hold that they were one in essence with God. He enforced this Platonic idea only because for God to be eternally omnipotent, he needed creatures over which to exercise His omnipotence. This idea never became an integral part of Christian doctrine because the
concept of God’s omnipotence took on a different meaning than Origen’s notion of God’s necessary eternal rule over all rational creatures, which also exist for eternity. For the church after Origen, the notion of God’s omnipotence took on the idea of absolute power over all of creation and Origen’s doctrine of the pre-existence of rational souls was condemned. In addition, Origen differed in his understanding of the pre-existence of souls (intelligences understood in Smith’s terms) in that they were completely incorporeal, like God. Matter would dissolve completely after the resurrection so that all rational, redeemed souls would return to their incorrupt, incorporeal states of being as they were before they fell.

Another apparent similarity between Mormon theology and that of Origen is the concept of the deification of mankind, or *apotheosis*. For Origen, the incarnate Lord is the divine pattern and model for the ultimate salvation of humanity. “[W]hen they see that from Him there began the union of the divine with the human nature, in order that the human, by communion with the divine, might rise to be divine, not in Jesus alone, but in all those who not only believe, but enter upon the life which Jesus taught” (*Cels.* 3.28).75 Thus, salvation is deification, or a participation in the essence of God, that was enjoyed by all souls, or “intelligences,” prior to the Fall of rational beings from their prior state of blessedness. This constitutes a major difference between Mormon theology and that of Origen, however. For him, while the Incarnation is a revelation of God, it is primarily the ladder by which we ascend from the flesh to the Spirit, from the Son of man to the Son of God.76 In the Mormon understanding of deification, the body, after resurrection, is glorified and made immortal for

76 Ibid.
eternity in genuine flesh and bone. Origen, however, down-played the resurrection of
humanity in immortal, glorified flesh, and argued in Platonic fashion for the eventual spiritual
ascent back to the Father of all souls. For him, embodiment was a temporary state of probation
until the final ascent to God as pure spirit. In Mormon theology, however, the flesh is a
glorified physical body and constitutes ultimate salvation for an individual.

In chapter eight I will conclude this work with a synthesis and re-articulation of my
overall project.
Although this work has shown that there are a number of significant differences between traditional orthodox metaphysics and theology with those of Mormonism, there are a number of similarities, which I have already outlined in preceding chapters. For example, we have seen that the cosmologies of Mormonism and that of Origen on the pre-existence of rational minds, or intelligences, are similar. There is no clear differentiation between them. The “minds” of Origen can readily equate to the “intelligences” as taught by Joseph Smith. The difference between them is that this teaching has been the accepted Mormon explanation of human origins since its inception in the King Follett Discourse, whereas not too many centuries after Origen’s introduction of this concept the church universally condemned the notion. The major difference between the two religious traditions (and this is a major—if not crucial—distinction) is the understanding of the foundation of ultimate reality between them. In the Mormon scheme, all that exists is matter, so that even spirit is only a rarified and refined form of ethereal matter. Nothing exists outside of the time-space matrix but matter in all its infinite varieties. There is no metaphysical reality outside of the continuum of infinite space and time. Any transcendent reality has no real existence, and is therefore a vacuum. There is no transcendent reality that is completely devoid of matter and time. This would classify Mormonism as a monistic religion. In contrast, traditional Christianity quite early in its history
adopted dualism as its basic understanding of reality.\(^1\) There exists a meta-reality that transcends all time and space. In Mormonism, God originates from, develops and masters all material reality; in traditional Christianity, God exists independently of all physical categories of existence, so that he is a non-creature, and designated by the early church as Creator of all that exists. God, understood in dualism, is a metaphysical being who is the originator of all space, matter and time, and therefore exists outside of all spatial, material and temporal realities.

In our discussion regarding the comparative study between the LDS and traditional Christian doctrines of God, it has been observed that, although the Mormon Church is a relative newcomer in church history, there has been of late a significant amount of scholarly activity from Mormon intellectuals, historians, and theologians who are anxious to explain Mormon doctrine that proportionally far out performs anything (to my knowledge) comparable within Christendom.\(^2\) Their level of commitment to their truth claims is laudable, and their apologetical endeavors for the advancement of the validity of their faith are not eclipsed by any other branch of traditional Christianity. In addition, there is an intellectual propensity in their writings that betray a strong preference for apologetics. However, no matter how committed one is to one’s own theological tradition, there is no guarantee that one’s truth claims are ultimately true in an absolutist sense as measured by the level of devotion to that tradition. As any Mormon would agree, there are many followers of other religious traditions (who also exhibit strong devotion to their religious tenants) who would disagree with the Mormon concept of divine authority and their doctrine of God.

\(^1\) If we accept Judaism as a dualistic religion, then the tradition of dualism existed within Christianity from its inception. Here I am referring to the Platonic idea of dualism.

Mormonism is the presentation of the Christian Gospel with a radical twist. It is characterized by a materialistic philosophy that is radically opposed to any idea of transcendent realities. It opposes the notion of a God who is immaterial and transcendent, because in their worldview such a God in effect cannot exist in reality. A God who is not endowed with a body and body parts is a God with nothing in common with our material existence. This, I would suggest, underscores an existentialist concern for ultimate meaning in an otherwise mundane and banal earthly existence. Such a desire for real connectedness with the divine here and now is intimately linked with the Mormon materialistic concept of reality. We have also seen that this idea of the radical exclusion of immaterial reality is an old Stoic concept, with which the Mormons share philosophical common stock. Thus, a strong existential commitment to a material understanding of God and the cosmos, plus a desire for communion with God excludes any consideration of a God who is “Wholly Other”. In the Mormon conception of God, matter is sanctified and pure because God himself has not only originated from it, but he has mastered it. This is ultimately the existential concern of all Mormons who take their faith seriously: the mastery of their environment, the harnessing of their intellectual potential, and, ultimately, the fulfillment of their destiny following the example of the Father and the Son, which is Godhood.

Mormonism is a religion that regards itself as the true rebel united against a compromised Christianity, which it regards as the unfortunate illegitimate child of a union of Greek philosophy and Hebrew religion. We have observed that in the Mormon scheme of things they are the only true church because they are the restored church. This leads to the idea of the exclusive nature of their truth claims. It is with this understanding that they reject

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all past “Greek” inspired Christian theology regarding the divine because Joseph Smith received revelation that all of the Christian churches and sects had corrupted themselves with it. Therefore, all immaterialism is excluded and finitism is affirmed. The exclusive nature of their truth claims rests firmly upon divine revelation, particularly in the revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith. This exclusiveness is based upon a faith commitment to the fact that Joseph Smith as a teenage did in fact have a vision of the Father and Son in bodily form who proclaimed him to be the founder of a restored Christianity. Unfortunately, there were no witnesses present to corroborate this event. Therefore, one may legitimately ask by what authority does Joseph Smith (or any other Mormon holding the Priesthood) ask us to accept such a faith claim on Smith’s word alone? The response is usually the same: that Joseph Smith was in fact chosen by the Father and the Son, who in bodily form came down and gave him the lost apostolic authority to proclaim the restoration of a lost faith. But this resorts to circularity in reasoning. The basis of authority has not been demonstrated and we are right back to our original question: by what authority? Randall Balmer has recognized this problem and makes the following observation:

The Latter-day Saints, having recognized Smith and all successors as prophets, take the notion of authority to another level altogether. But for non-Mormons, that position begs the question: Why Smith? Was it merely . . . that Smith claimed to a prophet, a source of divine revelation? Why not, say, Mother Ann Lee or William Miller or Emmanuel Swedenborg or Father Divine or the Noble Drew Ali? Mormons reply that the difference lies in the fact that Smith really is [in original] a prophet.4

Thus, it becomes an issue of special pleading. However, this is not confined to the Mormon experience. Many Evangelical Christians, for example, engage in the same circular reasoning:

for example, how do we know that the Bible is the inspired Word of God? Because the Bible says so (2 Tim. 3:16): “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.” On this, Balmer notes, “If this is as far as one’s argument extends, circularity leaves such assertions unsupported.”5 This casts a pall on a great deal of the entire apologetical enterprise itself, regardless of who is engaged in it. In the case of either the Mormon or Evangelical believer, the ultimate recourse for demonstrative proof is in the leap of faith, the existential decision to embrace the faith by relying upon one’s religious experience as more important than logical analysis.6 Thus, a Mormon adherent chooses (despite the doubt) to accept the validity of Smith’s visions and his revelations, embraced through religious experience, not because they are necessarily true, but because Mormonism has been accepted as true by the believer in a leap of faith.7

And yet, despite this heritage of divine revelation, Mormon writer, Blake Ostler, has observed that “while Mormonism espouses an unrefined finitist theology, it is tempted to return to the Catholic/Protestant understanding of an absolute God, against which it rebelled in its origins.”8 With so much revelatory material at its disposal for a finite God, from Joseph Smith in particular, why is there still this temptation to return to an absolutist concept of God? The answer may lie in what has been recognized by historians as the ancient movement from polytheism towards monotheism, from material substance to transcendence when contemplating the divine. This ancient drive towards a monotheistic understanding of the

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5 Ibid., 227
6 Ibid., 229.
7 The unique Mormon revelations concerning God are accepted as true because Joseph Smith’s authority as Prophet of God is first affirmed, thus validating the truth of his revelations.
8 Ostler, 65.
divine saw light in the Pre-Socratic philosopher, Xenophanes.⁹ Robert M. Grant observes that, “Xenophanes described Homer as the poet ‘from whom all men have learned since the beginning,’ but he did not agree with what Homer taught about the gods. Instead, ‘one god is the greatest among gods and men; in neither form nor thought is he like mortals.’"¹⁰ Indeed, the one god “ever abides in the selfsame place without moving; nor is it fitting for him to move hither and thither, changing his place.”¹¹ Grant thus shows that Xenophanes believed, “His creative and formative activity is mental, not physical.”¹² For Xenophanes, then, He “moves all things by the power of his mind alone”.¹³ Thoughtful speculation regarding the divine nature from a Pre-Socratic philosopher spurred on a movement that would erect a strong intellectual argument against polytheism.

In concluding this thought, Grant notes:

Against this background we can readily see why Xenophanes was so hostile towards the old poets. . . . Xenophanes therefore denounced anthropomorphic depictions of the gods. . . . This whole attitude passed into later Greek criticism of traditional gods and was eagerly appropriated by the Christian authors. . . . The negative side of Xenophanes’ thought was immensely popular among later philosophers and notably Plato, who rejected poetry from his ideal Republic simply because it was harmful to true theology.¹⁴ And so, for the apologists in particular, the early church carried on an older Greek tradition of philosophical theology, beginning with Xenophanes, which they firmly believed was in accord with their own scriptural and liturgical theology.

¹⁰ Ibid., 76.
¹¹ Ibid.
¹² Ibid.
¹³ Ibid.
¹⁴ Ibid., 76-77.
I have suggested throughout this work that the reason for the adoption of an absolute, transcendent God by the early church was because of the concept's intuitive weightiness in light of the church's understanding of Scripture regarding God's nature. Thus, a partnership was forged between Christian theology and Middle Platonism in the writings of the apologists. This partnership was occurring at the same time that a deeper understanding of the Trinity was developing in the church when serious reflection on its own liturgical tradition and interpretation of Scripture began in earnest. In answer to the Mormon claim that the Primitive church originally believed in the multiplicity of Gods, a traditional Christian response would be that the early church did not replace an original polytheism for monotheism, but rather incorporated its monotheistic heritage with the revelatory data in the New Testament of the multiple Voices in the Godhead in a transcendent unity.15 As history demonstrates, the church did not abandon its monotheistic heritage, but instead strove tenaciously against the almost overwhelming tide of the prevailing Greco-Roman culture of paganism with its myriad of gods and goddesses until monotheism eventually triumphed over polytheism. Within its own ranks, the church won the battle against the largely popular Monarchian understanding of the Godhead (with its often attendant modalism).16 We see Christian writers moving church theology along towards a synthesis of the one and the many. Thus, as we find it expressed in the Nicene Creed, the solution to the unity of Father and Son was accomplished by the adoption of a technical Greek term, *homoousios*, one substance. I suggest that the adoption of

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15 Ibid., 52. Grants observes quite rightly I believe, that "The 'popular' faith perhaps expressed in the *Acts of Paul* thus agrees with the more learned assaults of the apologists on idolatry and to their presentation of monotheism."

16 There were those in the pre-Nicene period who held to a "soft" view of Monarchianism, such as Theophilus of Antioch. He did not hold that the Father and the Son were one person in two different roles, as in Patripassianism. For Theophilus and others in the church, the Son, from within the Father's bowels, took on the "role" of the Father as divine emissary whenever God appeared on the earth, which suggests two "persons".
the term *homoousios* only makes sense if, first, the Father and the Son (and the Holy Spirit) were understood to be transcendent (independent of all physical categories) in their shared essence. This is what the early church (beginning with the apologists) understood intuitively and eventually accepted, and answers the question why they incorporated the Greek term, *homoousios*, into the Nicene Creed. The unity of God was maintained; the plurality of the Persons of the Godhead was affirmed.

Thus, the bishops of Nicaea opted for the *one substance* in order to preserve monotheism and at the same time affirm the revelatory data from the New Testament corpus, which led to an understanding that God is understood as one being comprised of distinct, multiple Persons. The Mormon narrative, however, challenges this understanding. Mormon theology maintains that the original teaching of the Christian church was of the embodiment of God in the material, physical sense, and of a belief in the multiplicity of Gods. If we consider this option, then how do we explain the Christian church’s opposition to an understanding of the Triad as multiple Gods in a polytheistic sense, and the church’s immediate reaction to this threat by developing various Monarchian arguments for God’s unity? It was the monotheism of Judaism and Christianity that was under assault by the pagan world, not the belief in embodied Gods. I would suggest to my Mormon interlocutors that the only way we can sufficiently demonstrate that the ancient church, beginning with Christ and the apostles, believed in an embodied God and in the multiplicity of the Gods, is by finding explicit references to these beliefs from the apostolic fathers and the apologists, who lamented the loss of the once pristine faith. Because, if the Mormon narrative is true, then the loss of a belief in an embodied God and in the multiplicity of Gods, over to the idea of strict monotheism and absolutism, such a
move would be the occasion of a monumental apostasy producing a great deal of literary reaction. In fact, we do not find any literary evidence of such an apostasy having ever occurred; nor do we find any evidence of lamenting over the loss of a once pristine and materialistic conception of God as we find described in the King Follett discourse. In my reading of the material from this period, I find nothing in the early Christian literature that suggests a common belief that God the Father and God the Son are embodied persons, humanoid in form. Mormon writer, David L. Paulsen, however, disagrees that there is no evidence of a once early belief in an embodied God. He argues that in Origen, for example, his very acknowledgment of the existence of those in the church who believed in an embodied God is evidence that the concept of God as embodied and multiple evinces the remnant of a once pristine faith that came under assault by Greek metaphysics in the second century.

I have suggested elsewhere that such evidence of the existence of an embodied God may also be explained as the vestiges of a prior pagan belief system held onto by all Christian converts, who by the early second century were predominantly of Gentile origin. These vestiges of paganism eventually died out over decades of concentrated catechetical training under the tutelage of Christian bishops throughout the Greco-Roman world. The peculiar Christian version of monotheism eventually won out over the polytheism of a dying Greco-Roman culture.

I would suggest that, from the view of the Traditional Christian, Joseph Smith’s rejection of all previous centuries of Christian teaching and accumulated wisdom on the concept of God’s

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transcendence was premature. Certainly, the early Mormons were correct, in my opinion, to jettison much of what they believed were centuries of human religious accretions of dubious origin. This attitude was shared by most in the Christian fringe groups who participated in the restorationist movement in American history. I would also suggest that the trend towards thinking of God in absolutist terms, beginning with Xenophanes, would become the intellectual scaffolding used by Christian writers to erect a theological edifice that would eventually become the doctrine of God as outlined in the Nicene Creed. Greek theological terms were adopted by philosophically trained Christians to explicate a doctrine of God that would not have been possible in their day without the use of such technical Greek philosophical terms. The Christian doctrine of the Trinity would not have developed without them. As I've stated before, it would have been impossible, in my opinion, for Christian writers to produce a synthesis of monotheism and the multiplicity of distinct Persons in the Godhead without a prior understanding of and a commitment to the one, shared nature of God being utterly transcendent. Athenagoras was the first Christian author to deal with the specific issues of Trinitarian doctrine.\textsuperscript{18} He begins with rational arguments for proof of the unity of God. He then calls upon Scripture to buttress his arguments (Embassy for the Christians 8-9) and then concludes, “We have brought before you a God who is uncreated, eternal, invisible, impassible, incomprehensible, and infinite, who can be apprehended by mind and reason alone\textsuperscript{19}(emphasis added), who is encompassed by light, beauty, spirit, and indescribable power, and who created

\textsuperscript{18} Grant, 157-58.
\textsuperscript{19} Meaning that God’s essence is just as incorporeal (devoid of matter) as human thought. God cannot be grasped by the senses, only by the mind, although God’s “effects” can be apprehended by the senses.
and now rules the world through the Logos who issues from him “(10.1). This is clearly relying upon Middle Platonic theology that emphasized the transcendence of God, as a being totally without matter. Athenagoras views, therefore, the “thoughts of God” in the Platonic “ideal form” concept as the one thought, or the sum total of the ideas. Commenting on Athenagoras’ style and usage of Greek terms to describe the Trinity, R.M. Grant notes, “Theologians less intelligent than Athenagoras sometimes used more anthropomorphic models. Theophilus refers to the ‘two hands’ of God.”21 Grant’s bias notwithstanding, he does accurately describe the move of the early Church as a gradual trend away from anthropomorphic references to God (beginning with Xenophanes) to those descriptions of God that are absolutist. The introduction of Greek metaphysical terminology into the explication of Trinitarian doctrine was, in the opinion of the apologists, a legitimate enterprise for describing the God of Scripture to a pagan world.

I would also suggest that in the view of the traditional Christian the apologists who argued for a transcendent God understood that the one God, as depicted in the Scriptures—particularly in the early New Testament corpus—and in their church liturgy, had more in common with the Middle Platonic model of a transcendent, immaterial essence, or as incorporeal in the Platonic sense. Their choice of the Middle Platonic concept of incorporeality allowed them to discuss the Persons of the Godhead without compromising their fundamental belief in monotheism. This, I maintain, was the only way that they could maintain the tension between a synthesis of the one and the many without the Godhead careening off to either

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20 Ibid., 157.
21 Ibid., 158.
monism or polytheism. A material God of fire, ethereal “spirit-matter,” as advanced in the Stoic system and in the Mormon concept of spirit-matter, led to either a strict monism, such as pantheism, or led to polytheism—or a multiplicity of Gods—as in the Mormon system.

Mormon writers, however, continue to condemn this theological enterprise as the introduction of an alien philosophical system into the once pristine faith of Jesus and the apostles. They do this primarily not because the historical data supports such a theory, but because of their prior commitment to the belief that Joseph Smith was a Prophet of God who could never be wrong in matters of theological revelation. We have already explored the circularity in this reasoning. Despite the Mormon claim that the Primitive church, beginning with Jesus, believed in the multiplicity and corporeality of God, I find rather a firm belief in monotheism. What was believed by many at the popular level in the church about the nature of God is one thing; what the church leaders believed was apostolic tradition is another and it was their theological influence that won the day for monotheism. It was essential for them to maintain the unity of God in the face of a predominately polytheistic world. This is why Monarchianism became very popular beginning in the second century. Those who taught Monarchianism in the church advanced the idea (in opposition to the Mormon claim) that monotheism was taught by Jesus and the apostles, not in the multiplicity of Gods. Monarchianism was advanced and taught up to the fourth century in order to satisfy this fundamental belief. It affirmed unequivocally the unity of God while at the same time acknowledged the existence of multiple Voices in the one God. They struggled to understand how the Voices interrelated to one another in various ways, as we find in modalism’s response to this problem. Thus, the non-modalist variety of Monarchianism (as advanced by Irenaeus,
Tertullian, Hippolytus and Theophilus of Antioch) affirmed the unity of God while acknowledging the existence of the Son and the Holy Spirit (the Holy Spirit was not always acknowledged as God in this period). A problem that presented itself, however, was that the New Testament corpus often showed that the Father and the Son spoke in different voices, and who spoke to one another as separate individuals (this is what caught Origen’s attention). If the New Testament witness was to be taken seriously, then the various Persons had to be acknowledged as separate Persons in their own right, each possessing their own separate existence. Origen’s task included marking out a strict demarcation between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit as distinct substances sharing the same essence. We know, of course, that Origen stretched the distinction between the Father and the Son to the breaking point in a hyper-subordination of the Son to the Father. Yet, he maintained that the separate substances were members of the one transcendent, incorporeal God. Thus, from our historical analysis, we do not see a trend away from a belief in the multiplicity of Gods to a strict monotheism as presented in the Mormon narrative, but instead we find a trend from Jewish monotheism to monotheism of a peculiar Christian variety. Origen contributed to this trend by correcting the monarchianistic form of monotheism in his own day.

Therefore, as I would advance it, a plurality of distinct Persons may only exist together within the one substance of an immaterial, ultra-dimensional Being who is not subject to division as in the case of a corporeal being. This principle idea was assumed by the apologists who began to reflect upon the problems of the Trinity, who for this reason adopted the Middle Platonic model of transcendence and incorporeality as the only appropriate model to properly describe God’s nature. As Athenagoras maintained, we see God the Father and God the Son
united in spirit and in power, sharing in the one spirit (incorporeal in the Platonic sense) their unity and equality as the one God.

The Mormon case for the materiality of God as an embodied being rests, I believe, upon an existential need to touch the Creator. This is an understandable impulse. The traditional Christian would explain, however, that the very purpose of the Incarnation was to bring God in all His deity to us in bodily form. But if we commit ourselves beforehand to the notion of God as an embodied being among a multiplicity of Gods, then according to the traditional Christian, this would remove the significance of the Incarnation. Therefore, for the Incarnation to have existential and theological meaning to the traditional Christian, God first must be one. Jesus is the Son of God by virtue of his deity that he shares with the Father and not a second God in the Mormon sense. Thus, worshipping Jesus is no less significant than worshipping the Father, because they are both the one God.22

Is Alexandria in the shadow of the Hill Cumorah? Is the theology of the pre-Nicene writers regarding the transcendence of God eclipsed by the proclamation of an embodied God through Joseph Smith the Prophet? That, of course, would depend on your point of view.

22 Doubting Thomas fell upon his knees and acknowledged without any embarrassment or hesitation that Jesus was his God: “My Lord and my God!” This was something that good Jewish boys in those days simply did not do before mortals or lesser gods.
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