

Mormonism in the Early Jewish Christian Milieu

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1999 Fair Mormon Conference

<https://www.fairmormon.org/conference/august-1999/mormonism-in-the-early-jewish-christian-milieu>

Roman Catholic apologist Patrick Madrid recently posed a challenging question for Latter-day Saints. That is, if Mormonism is essentially a “restoration” of primitive Christianity, where can we find historical evidence for some ancient Christian group that “was identical to the Mormon Church of today”? He goes on, “We have records of many controversies that raged in the early days of the Church, and there just is *no* evidence—none at all—that Mormonism existed prior to the 1830s.”¹ Whether Mr. Madrid is adequately informed about LDS claims and the state of the evidence concerning them, is beside the point. If Latter-day Saints want to make a rigorous historical case for our faith, we need to demonstrate at least some probability that a group of “Former-day Saints” really existed. What evidence for such a group should we expect to find, and what evidence is there? In this paper I attempt to answer these questions, at least in part, and show a high probability for the proposition that a group of “Former-day Saints” existed within the early Jewish Christian milieu.

The Spectrum of Early Christian Belief

What was the “early Jewish Christian milieu” and what was its relationship to other forms of Christianity? It is an irrefutable fact that the first Christians were Jewish Christians, and consequently their theology made use of Jewish thought-forms and Jewish categories. Since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, it has become increasingly apparent that the Christianity of the New Testament had clear ties to the kind of Apocalyptic Judaism² represented by the Essenes of Qumran.³ In his landmark study of Jewish Christian theology, Jean Daniélou writes, “The thesis is that *there was a first form of Christian theology expressed in Jewish-Semitic*

terms.”⁴ And with reference to the first Christians, J.N.D. Kelly writes that their theology “was taking shape in predominantly Judaistic moulds.”⁵

The Jews of the diaspora “provided the initial basis for church growth during the first and early second centuries.”⁶ However, by the mid-second century we can speak of three major movements within Christianity-Jewish Christianity, Hellenistic or “Gentile” Christianity, and Gnosticism. It must be remembered that these are artificial categories, and in reality there was a spectrum of belief. That is, there were Jewish Gnostic Christians, Gentile Christians with Gnostic tendencies, Gentile Christians who retained many Jewish Christian traditions, etc. In Latter-day Saint belief, all of these groups participated in or fell victim to the general apostasy. How did this happen?

THE APOSTASY IN JEWISH CHRISTIANITY

The New Testament gives evidence that certain factions within Jewish Christianity rebelled against the authority of the Apostles, and refused to accept the fact that Christ had fulfilled the Law of Moses. As the missionary efforts of the Church moved beyond Palestine, the question came up as to whether Gentile converts should be circumcised and be subject to the Law of Moses. Acts 15 describes a council in Jerusalem where the “Apostles and elders” considered the matter and decided that the converts *did not* have to keep the ritual requirements of the Law. However, many of those who had originally insisted on the continuity of the Law would not accept this decision, and insisted on preaching their views to the churches. For instance, Paul complained that the Galatians had turned to “another Gospel” (Galatians 1:6), and specifically censured those who desired “to be under the law.” (Galatians 4:21) Paul also dealt with this issue in other letters, such as his Epistle to the Romans, and he further warned Titus against “giving heed to Jewish fables.” (Titus 1:14) It is clear that New Testament Christianity grew from the soil of Apocalyptic Judaism, but there were a great number of competing and contradictory apocalyptic traditions which some Jewish Christians may have inherited and been unwilling to give up.

DaniÈlou⁷ describes a host of Jewish Christian heretical sects, including the Ebionites, Elkesaites, Cerinthians, and others. These ranged from strictly Jewish groups who merely believed in Jesus as the greatest of the prophets—the son of Joseph and Mary⁸, to quasi-Gnostic speculations that drew heavily on miscellaneous Jewish apocalyptic traditions. Apart from these were more moderate strains of Jewish Christianity known to us from the New Testament, miscellaneous apocryphal texts, as well as such writings as *Barnabas*, the *Pastor of Hermas*,⁹ and miscellaneous traditions scattered throughout the writings of more Hellenized Christians. Gradually, these groups lost their vitality and were melded into the Hellenized congregations.¹⁰

THE Gnostic HERETICS

For a few centuries there existed alongside the Catholic Christian tradition various heretical groups categorized as “Gnostic.”¹¹ This name comes from *gnosis*, the Greek word for “knowledge.” Hans Jonas explains that Gnostics believed they were saved by knowledge, specifically the knowledge of God, or that knowledge was the form of salvation itself.¹²

While it may be tempting to equate this sentiment to Jesus’ statement: “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32) or to Joseph Smith’s that “a man is saved no faster than he gets knowledge,”¹³ upon further reflection it becomes obvious that the Gnostic belief was very different from the original Christian teaching. Knowledge itself cannot save without the atonement of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, in Gnostic circles Christ’s incarnation and atonement were thought to have been illusory, since Gnosticism radicalized the common Hellenistic notion that matter is a lesser reality into the doctrine that matter is evil. (If matter is evil, how could a divine being associate himself with it?) And while true Christians viewed the physical body as necessary, the Gnostics thought of it as a prison into which the pre-existent spirit had fallen and from which it must escape.¹⁴ In order to promote their reputations as masters of hidden knowledge, the Gnostic teachers put together a bewildering array of eclectic theologies utilizing a hodgepodge of “oriental mythologies, astrological doctrines, Iranian theology,

elements of Jewish tradition, Christian salvation-eschatology, [and] Platonic terms and concepts.”¹⁵

The birth of the Gnostic Christian movement took place during the Apostolic period, but Gnostics probably never became terribly prevalent at that time because the Apostles actively combated this heresy, calling it the “knowledge falsely so called.” (1 Timothy 6:20) John condemned these “docetists” (from the Greek *dokein* = “to seem”) who claimed Jesus only “seemed” to come in the flesh as antichrists. “And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist.” (1 John 4:3) But according to Eusebius (a fourth century Catholic historian), Gnostic teachers came out of the woodwork in great profusion after the Apostles were all gone.¹⁶

THE “HELLENIZATION” OF CHRISTIANITY

Hellenized Christianity grew out of the original Jewish Christianity as the faith moved more and more into a Gentile world saturated by Greek, or “Hellenistic” culture and thought. As Adolf von Harnack observed, this move catalyzed “the greatest transformation which the new religion ever experienced.”¹⁷

Certainly the entire Mediterranean world was touched to one degree or another by Hellenistic culture and thought, and Israel was no exception, but the Palestinian Jews proved to be a particularly resistant group, and in large part retained their own distinctive thought-forms and traditions.¹⁸ Therefore, when Gentiles and Hellenized Jews outside of Palestine came to form the majority of the Christians, it was natural that some would attempt to make the Christian message more palatable to the Greek mind by building bridges with the popular philosophy of the day, which was an amalgamation of the thought of various Greek philosophical schools, especially the Middle Platonists and the Stoics.

At first, Christian thought was quite foreign to Greek philosophy, although there were certainly important points of contact upon which the Christian missionaries capitalized.¹⁹ As Harnack notes, “Yet we cannot say that the earliest Christian writings, let alone the gospel, show, to any

considerable extent, the presence of a Greek element.”²⁰ For instance, Paul warned, “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.” (Colossians 2:8) Referring to this passage, James Shiel of the University of Sussex writes, “Saint Paul’s letters [contain] a severe warning against Greek philosophy as a dangerous deception”²¹ Cardinal DaniÈlou writes that “If we now examine the forms of thought and philosophical systems current at the time when Christianity first made its appearance in the world, it is clear that they were by no means ready to assimilate this Christian conception: on the contrary, they were wholly antagonistic thereto.”²² However, Shiel notes that a few generations after the Apostles, one “comes upon a reversed situation. The religious message is now framed in philosopher’s language, reminiscent at every turn of Heraclitus or Plato or Aristotle or Cleanthes or Epictetus. Indeed, the Christian religion is now occasionally called a philosophy and its founder described as a philosopher.”²³

Beginning in the mid-second century, this shift in attitude was accomplished thanks to the efforts of a class of Christian writers later historians have dubbed the “Apologists.” These included Aristides, Justin, Tatian, Athenagoras, and others. Intellectuals themselves, they sought to express their faith in intellectually respectable terms, but the net result of their labors was not just to translate Christian ideas into a Hellenistic idiom. Rather, they imported philosophical ideas into their thought that had been anathema to the original Christians.²⁴ One can certainly understand the temptation to make such accommodations, since the Greeks normally saw the Christians as intellectually feeble barbarians, but in the end Rebecca Lyman notes that “the efforts of the apologists succeeded in enabling Christianity to be labeled a third-rate philosophy rather than a first-rate superstition.”²⁵

The philosophical assumptions and definitions these early Apologists adopted have profoundly affected Christian theology to this day. Edwin Hatch summarizes:

A large part of what are sometimes called Christian doctrines, and many usages which have prevailed and continue to prevail in the Christian Church, are in reality Greek theories and Greek

usages changed in form and colour by the influence of primitive Christianity, but in their essence Greek still.²⁶

It should be clear from the foregoing discussion that the various branches of early Christianity based their thinking upon fundamentally different sets of axioms, and each branch was not entirely homogenous. However, if Joseph Smith was correct in his claim to restore the original Christian theology, we must look for historical confirmation among the specifically Jewish Christian documents and traditions. As DaniËlou stated, Jewish Christian teaching was the “first form of Christian theology”.

Limitations of This Study

There are certainly limitations to our inquiry. Few Jewish Christian documents have survived, and those that have are from a range of different groups within that milieu. In any case Joseph Smith said that things would be revealed in this dispensation which have been “kept hid from before the foundation of the world,” (D&C 124:41) so some LDS doctrines may *not* have been taught by the ancient Saints. We should also expect some *cultural* differences to affect some matters of interpretation and practice. The prophet Alma wrote, “For behold, the Lord doth grant unto all nations, of their own nation and tongue, to teach his word, yea, in wisdom, all that he seeth fit that they should have; therefore we see that the Lord doth counsel in wisdom, according to that which is just and true.” (Alma 29:8) Nevertheless, it is clear that in most of the basics, at least, our hypothetical “Former-day Saints” would have to have been very much like the Latter-day Saints, so we can expect to find a good deal of Latter-day Saint doctrine and practice within the ancient documents. The balance of this paper will demonstrate that this is, indeed, the case.

Jewish Christian and LDS Theology/Anthropology

W.D. Davies of Duke University observed that “Mormonism is the Jewish-Christian tradition in an American key. What it did was to re-Judaize a Christianity that had been too much Hellenized.”²⁷ This is true with respect to any number of issues, but in order to keep this study to an acceptable length, we will restrict ourselves to matters of theology and anthropology. It is our

doctrines regarding the nature of God, the nature of man, and the relationship between the two, that differentiate LDS thought most strikingly from mainstream Christianity. While there are many important commonalities, close analysis reveals a chasm between the two worldviews that profoundly affects many other areas of doctrine. And yet, nearly every major tenet of LDS theology and anthropology can be found within the early Jewish Christian milieu.

THE ANTHROPOMORPHIC GOD

What kind of being is God? How can He be described? Joseph Smith preached that “if you were to see [God] today, you would see him like a man in form,”²⁸ and that “the Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also.” (D&C 130:22)

On the other hand, mainstream Christians generally accept definitions such as that promulgated by the Vatican Council, where God was said to be “eternal, immense, incomprehensible, who, being a unique spiritual substance by nature, absolutely simple and unchangeable, must be declared distinct from the world in fact and by essence.”²⁹ This sort of definition was readily accepted among second-century Gentile Christians because it exactly coincided with those being taught by the contemporary Greek philosophers. For instance, the Middle Platonist philosopher Plutarch wrote the following:

Socrates and Plato held that (God is) the One, the single self-existent nature, the monadic, the real Being, the good: and all this variety of names points immediately to mind. God therefore is mind, a separate species, that is to say what is purely immaterial and unconnected with anything possible.³⁰

Gentile Christian thinkers frankly admitted this correspondence, and in fact promoted the doctrine as a ready defense against the attacks of pagan critics. Tertullian wrote, “Whatever attributes therefore you require as worthy of God, must be found in the Father, who is invisible and unapproachable, and placid, and (so to speak) the God of the philosophers.”³¹

This was not, however, the case for the Jews or the Jewish Christians, except insofar as they had been influenced by Hellenistic thought. Thus, even in the third century Origen could say, “The Jews indeed, but also some of our people, supposed that God should be understood as a man, that is, adorned with human members and human appearance. But the philosophers despise these stories as fabulous and formed in the likeness of poetic fictions.”³² Notice that Origen did not appeal to unanimous Christian tradition to establish his doctrine of the incorporeality of God, but to the philosophers. Indeed, in another passage Origen admitted this was the subject of some confusion among Christians. “For it is also to be a subject of investigation how God himself is to be understood-whether as corporeal, and formed according to some shape, or of a different nature from bodies-a point which is not clearly indicated in our teaching.”³³

A second-century Jewish Christian document, the *Clementine Homilies*, explicitly taught anthropomorphism. The following is part of a conversation that is said to have occurred between Simon Magus and Peter. “And Simon said: ‘I should like to know, Peter, if you really believe that the shape of man has been moulded after the shape of God.’ And Peter said: ‘I am really quite certain, Simon, that this is the case. It is the shape of the just God.’”³⁴

The anthropomorphic teaching of the Jews and Jewish Christians was based upon a literal interpretation of the Bible. Many examples of anthropomorphic Bible passages could be cited, but for now a few explicit statements will suffice. Ezekiel’s vision of the heavenly throne is described thus: “Above the vault over their heads there appeared, as it were, a sapphire in the shape of a throne, and high above all, upon the throne, a form in human likeness.” (Ezekiel 1:26 NEB) Just prior to his martyrdom, Stephen said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.” (Acts 7:56) John reported a similar vision of God. “And immediately I was in the spirit: and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.” (Revelation 4:2) Edmond LaB. Cherbonnier of Trinity College summarizes this phenomenon as follows: “In short, to use the forbidden word, the biblical God is clearly anthropomorphic-not apologetically so, but proudly, even militantly.”³⁵ Christopher Stead of the Cambridge Divinity School agrees that, “The Hebrews pictured the God whom they worshipped

as having a body and mind like our own, though transcending humanity in the splendour of his appearance, in his power, his wisdom, and the constancy of his care for his creatures.”³⁶

Mainstream Christians usually interpret the Biblical statements allegorically, and offer two major points of scriptural evidence. First, they cite John 4:24, “God is Spirit” or “God is a Spirit.” If God is a Spirit, they say, He cannot have a body. However, John’s statement “God is Spirit” is parallel to two passages in his first epistle, “God is light” (1 John 1:5) and “God is love” (1 John 4:8) In context, all of these passages seem to be referring to God’s activity toward men rather than to the nature of His “Being”. Furthermore, Christopher Stead explains how such statements would have been interpreted within ancient Judaism. “By saying that God is spiritual, we do not mean that he has no body but rather that he is the source of a mysterious life-giving power and energy that animates the human body, and himself possesses this energy in the fullest measure.”³⁷

Second, mainstream Christians appeal to passages like John 1:18. “No man hath seen God at any time.” Latter-day Saints can harmonize these passages with those that describe visions of the Father by referring to Moses’ vision of God, as described in the Pearl of Great Price. “And he saw God face to face, and he talked with him, and the glory of God was upon Moses; therefore Moses could endure his presence. [Moses said] For behold, I could not look upon God, except his glory should come upon me, and I were transfigured before him.” (Moses 1:2, 14) An identical solution is offered by Peter in the Jewish Christian *Clementine Homilies*:

For I maintain that the eyes of mortals cannot see the incorporeal form of the Father or Son, because it is illumined by exceeding great light. For he who sees God cannot live. For the excess of light dissolves the flesh of him who sees; unless by the secret power of God the flesh be changed into the nature of light, so that it can see light.³⁸

The point of these passages is not that no one has or will have a vision of God’s person, but rather that men cannot see God as He is. We must be changed and protected by the grace of God

to withstand His presence. However, this will not always be the case. As John further wrote, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him *as he is*.” (1 John 3:2, emphasis added)

THE UNITY OF THE GODHEAD

One feature of the New Testament all Christians must come to terms with is the fact that in some passages the Father is represented as “the only true God” (John 17:3), while in others the Son and Holy Spirit are also called “God” (John 1:1; John 14:26; Acts 13:2). How can this apparent contradiction be resolved? It can readily be seen that the two disparate definitions of God discussed above must lead to different conclusions regarding this question.

In harmony with their definition of God as an indivisible, eternal, unchanging spiritual “essence”, mainstream Christians say that the members of the Trinity are separate “persons” who share a single “Divine Being”. All three persons have always existed in the same relationship to one another, and there is no hierarchy within the Trinity. That is, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit do not differ in rank or glory. On the other hand, Latter-day Saints believe the members of the Godhead are separate beings, and so in a sense we believe in more than one God. However, Latter-day Saints also speak of “one God” in two senses. First, the Godhead is “one” in will, purpose, love, and covenant. Second, the Father is the absolute monarch of the known Universe, and all others are subject to Him.

In order to find a historical basis for the Latter-day Saint doctrine of the Divine Unity, we need not look exclusively among the Jewish Christians, because it was almost universally accepted among Christians before the Nicene Council of 325 A.D. that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost were united in will, but separate in rank and glory. J.N.D. Kelly of Oxford University notes that even at the Council of Nicea the majority party believed “that there are three divine hypostases [or “persons”], separate in rank and glory but united in harmony of will.”³⁹ This doctrine is called “subordinationism”, and R.P.C. Hansen writes, “Indeed, until Athanasius began writing,

every single theologian, East and West, had postulated some form of Subordinationism. It could, about the year 300, have been described as a fixed part of catholic theology.”⁴⁰ Henry Bettenson writes that “‘subordinationism’ was pre-Nicene orthodoxy.”⁴¹ Paul wrote that the Father is “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 15:6, NEB), and revealed that *after* the resurrection Jesus will “be subject unto him [the Father] that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.” (1 Corinthians 15:24-28) Indeed, Jesus Himself said, “My Father is greater than I.” (John 14:28)

This doctrine took various forms, depending on the particular concept of God involved. Within Jewish Christianity, where God was often conceived of as having a body in human form, Jesus and the Holy Spirit were described both as gods, worthy of worship, and the chief among the archangels.⁴² While Latter-day Saints generally do not refer to the Son and Spirit as “angels”, such a designation is consistent with our belief that Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and all angels and men are “sons of God” (Job 38:7), differing in degree and power, but not in essential nature. This belief is graphically illustrated in the Jewish Christian apocryphal text, *The Ascension of Isaiah*:

Then the angel who conducted me said to me, “Worship this one”; so I worshiped and praised. And the angel said to me, “This is the Lord of all glory whom you have seen”. And while the angel was still speaking, I saw another glorious one, like to him, and the righteous drew near to him, worshiped, and sang praise. And I saw the Lord and the second angel, and they were standing; but the second one whom I saw was on the left of my Lord. And I asked, “Who is this?” and he said to me, “Worship him, for this is the angel of the Holy Spirit”. So my Lord drew near to me, and the angel of the Spirit and said, “Behold, now it is granted to you to behold God, and on your account is power given to the angel with you.” And I saw how my Lord worshiped, and the angel of the Holy Spirit, and how both together praised God.⁴³

An early second century Jewish Christian document, the *Shepherd of Hermas* spoke of “the angel of the prophetic Spirit”⁴⁴ and Jesus as the “‘glorious angel’ or ‘most venerable angel’.”⁴⁵ Justin Martyr, a converted philosopher who lived in Rome in the mid-second century,

was no Jewish Christian, but Robert M. Grant suggests that in passages like the following, he was influenced by the Jewish Christian writings of Hermas, who lived in the same congregation.⁴⁶ Justin Martyr wrote that the “first-begotten,” the Logos, is the “first force after the Father:” he is “a second God, second numerically but not in will,” doing only the Father’s pleasure.⁴⁷ He designated the Son as “this power which the prophetic word calls God and Angel”⁴⁸, and in the same vein stated the following. “We reverence and worship Him and the Son who came forth from Him and taught us these things, and the host of other good angels who are about Him and are made quite like Him, and the Prophetic Spirit.”⁴⁹ He also maintained that the Son is “in the second place, and the prophetic Spirit in the third.”⁵⁰ Finally, the Jewish Christian *Clementine Recognitions* had this to say regarding Jesus’ status:

For the Most High God, who alone holds the power of all things, has divided all the nations of the earth into seventy-two parts, and over these He hath appointed angels as princes. But to the one among the archangels who is greatest, was committed the government of those who, before all others, received the worship and knowledge of the Most High God. Thus the princes of the several nations are called gods. But Christ is God of princes, who is Judge of all.⁵¹

THE NAMES OF GOD

The above-mentioned text from the *Clementine Recognitions* brings up the issue of how Latter-day Saints use the names of God in the Bible. Four names or titles are commonly used to connote God in the Old Testament—El (“God”), Elohim (“God” or “gods”), Elyon (“Most High”), and Yahweh (equivalent to “Jehovah”).⁵² Most mainline Christians see all these designations as referring to one divine being. However, the Latter-day Saint usage is much more complicated. On one hand, the Divine names can refer to specific Persons, i.e. El or Elohim usually refers to the Father, and “Yahweh” usually refers to the Son. On the other hand, they have also been used as titles in reference to more than one Divine Person. Both the Father and the Son have been called “Jehovah” or Yahweh (D&C 109:34, 42, 68; D&C 110:3)⁵³, and it is believed that the Bible passages which link Yahweh with Elohim or Elyon (e.g. Isaiah 43:12-13; Isaiah 45:21-22

NEB) refer to a “divine investiture of authority”, where the Son is allowed to speak in the first person as the Father.⁵⁴

When one examines the context of passages such as the foregoing reference to the *Clementine Recognitions*, it becomes clear that the usage of the Divine Names/Titles was similarly complicated in the Jewish Apocalyptic and Jewish Christian traditions. The *Recognitions* was referring to a particular passage which occurs in both the Septuagint and Dead Sea Scrolls manuscripts of Deuteronomy. “When the Most High parcelled out the nations, when he dispersed all mankind, he laid down the boundaries of every people according to the number of the sons of God; but the LORD’s [Yahweh’s] share was his own people, Jacob was his allotted portion.” (Deuteronomy 32:8-9 NEB) Based on this and other passages, some Biblical scholars now conclude that the Israelites originally believed El to be the high God, and Yahweh to be the chief among the “sons of El”-the second God and chief archangel who had special responsibility for Israel.⁵⁵

Certainly this is a debated point, and beyond the scope of this paper, but it is beyond debate that this was a standard early Christian interpretation of the passage. As late as the fourth century, the great historian and bishop, Eusebius of Caesarea, could write:

In these words [Deut. 32:8] surely he names first the Most High God, the Supreme God of the Universe, and then as Lord His Word, Whom we call Lord in the second degree after the God of the Universe. And their import is that all the nations and the sons of men, here called sons of Adam, were distributed among the invisible guardians of the nations, that is the angels, by the decision of the Most High God, and His secret counsel unknown to us. Whereas to One beyond comparison with them, the Head and King of the Universe, I mean to Christ Himself, as being the Only-begotten Son, was handed over that part of humanity denominated Jacob and Israel, that is to say, the whole division which has vision and piety.⁵⁶

According to Alan Segal, in a number of Jewish Apocalyptic texts there were actually two Yahwehs. Both the High God and principal angel were so designated.⁵⁷ Similarly, in the Jewish Christian *Apocalypse of Abraham*, preserved only in the Slavonic language, God is designated both as El and “Jaoil”, and in some manuscripts the angel accompanying Abraham is also named “Jaoil”.⁵⁸ Indeed, Segal notes that during the first Christian centuries, the rabbis engaged in debates with various sects, including the Christians, who all seem to have claimed there was a second God, in many cases identifying him with Yahweh or “the bearer of the divine name.”⁵⁹ Significantly, Jean DaniÉlou writes that “the Name of God” was one of the principal designations of the Son within Jewish Christianity.⁶⁰

CREATION FROM UNFORMED MATTER

The idea that there are multiple Divine Beings who have material bodies with human form is sharply at odds with the axiom of the theologians that God’s “Essence” is “wholly other” than the rest of the universe. This assumption on the part of mainstream Christians is based on the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* – creation from nothing. In his 1990 Presidential address to the British Association for Jewish Studies, Peter Hayman asserted the following:

Nearly all recent studies on the origin of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* have come to the conclusion that this doctrine is not native to Judaism, is nowhere attested in the Hebrew Bible, and probably arose in Christianity in the second century C.E. in the course of its fierce battle with Gnosticism. The one scholar who continues to maintain that the doctrine is native to Judaism, namely Jonathan Goldstein, thinks that it first appears at the end of the first century C.E., but has recently conceded the weakness of his position in the course of debate with David Winston.⁶¹

The Apostle Peter was quite explicit about his belief in creation from a watery chaos, rather than from nothingness. He wrote, “There were heavens and earth long ago, created by God’s word out of water and with water.” (2 Peter 3:5 NEB) The background for this passage is the first two verses of Genesis: “In the beginning of creation the earth was without form and void, with darkness over the face of the abyss, and a mighty wind that swept over the surface of the waters.”

(Genesis 1:1-2 NEB) David Winston writes that the Rabbis presupposed the same watery chaos. For instance, he notes that *Mekilta, Shirta* 8 states that “to make a roof man requires wood, stones, dirt, and water, whereas God has made a roof for his world out of water. God’s first act of creation thus presupposes the existence of water.”⁶² Similarly, the *Sefer Yesira* states, “He formed substance from chaos and made it with fire and it exists, and he hewed out great columns from intangible air.”⁶³ In the *Bereshit Rabbawe* find, “R. Huna said, ‘If it were not written explicitly in Scripture, it would not be possible to say it: *God created the heaven and the earth. From the earth was chaos, etc.*’”⁶⁴

However, the interpretation of some of the early texts can be confusing, and indeed, a few seemingly contradict creation from chaos. In the Apocrypha, 2 Maccabees asserts that “God made [the sky and the earth] out of nothing, and man comes into being in the same way.” (2 Maccabees 7:28 NEB) On the other hand, the *Wisdom of Solomon* says, “For thy almighty hand, which created the world out of formless matter, was not without further resource.” (Wisdom of Solomon 11:17 NEB) Paul seemed to imply creation out of nothing: “God summons things that are not yet in existence as if they already were” (Romans 4:17 NEB), and yet we saw that Peter’s language recalled the Genesis account of creation from a watery chaos. Indeed, in the very same verse Paul wrote that God “fashioned” (Greek *katertisthai* = “adjusted, put in order again, restored, repaired”) the universe, but in such a way that “the visible came forth from the invisible.” (Hebrews 11:3 NEB) The second-century *Pastor of Hermas* asserted that God “made out of nothing the things that exist,”⁶⁵ but in another passage clearly presupposed creation from a watery chaos: “By His strong word [He] has fixed the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth upon the waters.”⁶⁶

Gerhard May has convincingly shown that where these early texts say God created out of “nothing” or “non-being”, etc., they were using a common ancient idiom to say that “something new, something that was not there before, comes into being; whether this something new comes through a change in something that was already there, or whether it is something absolutely new, is beside the question.”⁶⁷ For instance, the Greek writer Xenophon wrote that parents “bring forth

their children out of non-being'.⁶⁸ Philo of Alexandria wrote that Moses and Plato were in agreement in accepting a pre-existent material, but also that God brings things “out of nothing into being” or “out of non-being”.⁶⁹ Therefore, in view of this common usage, and the many explicit statements by ancient authors regarding the pre-existent matter, we must rule out a belief in *creatio ex nihilo* unless it is explicitly stated otherwise.

We do not find such explicit statements anywhere until the mid-second century with the Gnostic teacher Basilides and later the Christian apologists Tatian and Theophilus of Antioch.⁷⁰ Even as late as the turn of the third century, Tertullian had to take the more ancient usage into account when arguing for the new doctrine. “And even if they were made out of some (previous) matter, as some will have it, they are even thus out of nothing, because they were not what they are.”⁷¹

Given the state of the evidence, we can be fairly certain that when Joseph Smith said matter is eternal, and that God fashioned the earth from pre-existent matter⁷², he was restoring the earliest Jewish Christian belief.

THE PRE-MORTAL EXISTENCE OF SOULS

Latter-day Saints not only reject the notion that the material world was created from nothing, but that the spiritual world was so created. Joseph Smith taught that the “intelligence” of man is eternal, and at some point God organized this “intelligence” into the spirits of men. (Abraham 3:22-23) Thus, the spirits of men pre-existed their bodies.

R.G. Hammerton-Kelly, professor of New Testament at McCormick Theological Seminary, reports that “the idea that certain things pre-exist in the mind of God or in heaven has a long history in the Biblical and early Jewish traditions.”⁷³ For instance, “in Job 15:8 the primal man is pictured in the council of the gods before the world was made.”⁷⁴ David Winston reports that the *Bereshith Rabba* and *Ruth Rabba* tells of God consulting the souls of the righteous before deciding to create the world.⁷⁵ *The Wisdom of Solomon*, in the Apocrypha, states: “As a child I was born to excellence, and a noble soul fell to my lot; or rather, I myself was noble; and I entered into an unblemished body.” (Wisdom of Solomon 8:19-20 NEB) *The Midrash Kee*

Tov says that all the souls of the righteous, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, etc. “were with God before the creation of the world.”⁷⁶ And an important Jewish theologian at about the time of Christ, Philo, taught that “the heavenly man is God’s offspring while the earthly man is merely the work of an artificer.”⁷⁷

Origen quoted a Jewish apocryphal document called the *Prayer of Joseph*, which asserted that Jacob was one of the archangels in his premortal existence:

Thus Jacob says: “I, Jacob, who speak to you, arid Israel, I am an angel of God, a ruling spirit, and Abraham and Isaac were created before every work of God; and I am Jacob, called Jacob by men, but my name is Israel, called Israel by God, a man seeing God, because I am the first-born of every creature which God caused to live.”⁷⁸

The *Enoch* texts also contain the common element of the pre-existence. (This is significant, since the early Christians apparently took at least one of these documents very seriously. Indeed, Jude referred to one of them in his general epistle. (See Jude 1:14) *2 Enoch* states that, “all souls are prepared to eternity, before the formation of the world,”⁷⁹ and cites Adam as the prime example:

And I placed on the earth, a second angel, honorable, great and glorious, and I appointed him as ruler to rule on earth and to have my wisdom, and there was none like him of earth of all my existing creatures. I called his name Adam.⁸⁰

1 Enoch relates that before God created the world he held a consultation with the souls of the righteous.⁸¹

Clearly the pre-existence of souls, and even their identification with the angels of God, was a commonplace in the soil of Apocalyptic Judaism from which Christianity sprang. But did the Jewish Christians continue this tradition? Certainly the pre-existence of Christ is explicitly taught in the New Testament (John 1:1; 1 Peter 1:19-20; Colossians 1:12-15), but what about the rest of us? Hammerton-Kelly writes that the pre-existence of the Church, at least, is everywhere

presupposed in the New Testament.⁸² For instance, Paul wrote to Titus, “In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.” (Titus 1:2) Similarly, two of the earliest Jewish Christian writings, the *Shepherd of Hermas* and *2 Clement* say the following about the Church. “She was created first of all and for her sake was the world made.”⁸³ “Moreover, the books and the Apostles declare that the Church belongs not to the present, but existed from the beginning.”⁸⁴ However, it must be remembered that some of the ancients believed the creation pre-existed in the mind of God, rather than as a number of distinct entities. Which concept formed the background of the New Testament anthropology? Commenting on Paul’s doctrine of foreordination as expounded in Romans 8:28-30, Hammerton-Kelly explains that the Greek verb for “foreknow” used in the passage means “to take note of”, ‘to fix regard upon’ something, preliminary to selecting it for some special purpose.” But when did this selection occur? “Most commentators believe that it took place in the eternal counsels of God, before the creation of the world.”⁸⁵ Thus, it is clear that, according to Paul, in the eternal counsels of God we existed as specific entities.

This belief continued within Jewish Christianity even after the Apostolic age. For instance, in the Jewish Christian *Clementine Recognitions* Peter states, “after all these things He made man, on whose account He had prepared all things, whose internal species is older, and for whose sake all things that are were made.”⁸⁶ Regarding the “internal species” of man mentioned here, the Presbyterian translators of this passage declare in the footnote: “That is, his soul, according to the doctrine of the pre-existence of souls.” Even more striking, from a Latter-day Saint point of view, is Abraham’s vision of the pre-existent host as reported in the Jewish Christian *Apocalypse of Abraham*, also called the *Book of Abraham* in some manuscripts. Compare the following to Abraham’s vision of the pre-existent host in the Pearl of Great Price, Abraham 3.

And everything I had planned to be came into being: it was already pre-figured in this, for all the things and all the people you have seen stood before me before they were created. And I said, Mighty and Eternal Ruler, who then are the people in this picture on this side and on that? And he said to me, Those on the left side are the many peoples which have existed in the past, and

after you are appointed, some for judgement and restoration, some for vengeance and perdition, until the end of the age. And those on the right side of the picture, they are the people set apart for me from the people with Azazel [Satan]. These are the people who are going to spring from you and will be called my people.⁸⁷

THE DEIFICATION OF MAN

At this point it should be clear that within both Jewish Christianity and Mormonism, men are thought to be more than some “rational animal”, brought into existence out of nothing by God. Joseph Smith went on to teach that those who fully keep God’s law will “be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue; then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them.” (D&C 132:20) For the Prophet, this went hand in hand with the doctrine of pre-existence. Humans are the same species as God, and hence have the potential to become like Him.

When we search for similar deification doctrines within early Christianity, we are deluged with examples. Within Gentile Christianity, we find numerous texts like the following from Justin Martyr (ca. 150 A.D.), who wrote that “all men are deemed worthy of becoming ‘gods,’ and of having power to become sons of the Highest.”⁸⁸ Hans Jonas writes that the ultimate object of the Gnostics was to obtain the knowledge of God, and become a partaker in the divine essence.⁸⁹ One text states, “This is the good end of those who have attained gnosis: to become God.”⁹⁰ There is also considerable support for this doctrine in the New Testament. For example, John wrote, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” (1 John 3:2.) And Jesus Christ told John that, “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.” (Revelation 3:21) Also, “He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.” (Revelation 21:7) Paul wrote to the Romans, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” (Romans 8:16-17) Such statements would not have been out of place in

Apocalyptic Judaism, for in the Dead Sea Scrolls we find the appellations “*el*” and “*elohim*” applied to Melchizedek. “A godlike being has taken his place in the council of God; in the midst of the divine beings [*elohim*] he holds judgment.”⁹¹ Similarly, the *War Scroll* says that God will “exalt the authority of Michael among the gods and the dominion of Israel among all flesh.”⁹²

The question, therefore, is not *whether* the primitive Church believed men could become gods, but what that meant to them. The fourth century theologian Gregory of Nazianzus gave us an interpretive key: “I too might be made God so far as He is made Man.”⁹³ Within early Christianity there were any number of views about who Christ was in relation to the Father, and with respect to men. However, given the Hellenistic assumptions of the Gentile Christians, it was usually thought that men could become “gods” in a different sense than the Father, though not necessarily in a different sense than the Son. The idea was that there are two classes of beings – God, who is an eternal, unchangeable, simple, spiritual “essence”, and everything else, which is created out of nothing. And those who are created out of nothing can only approach the status of the Eternal God, but never reach it.

We have already seen, however, that within the Jewish Christian milieu, the following precepts were taught: 1) the Father has a body in human form; 2) there is more than one Divine Being, though they are united in will under the monarchy of the “only true God”, the Father; 3) creation out of pre-existent materials; 4) the pre-existence of the human soul, and the identification of human souls, the Son, and the Spirit with the angels of God. But are humans really “the offspring of God” (Acts 17:28), as Paul put it, in the sense that we are the same “species”? Christopher Stead writes, “In a Palestinian milieu it was still possible to picture the heavenly Father in human form and to see the contrast between heaven and earth as one of light and glory against relative darkness and indignity.”⁹⁴ Thus, among the Jews God was thought to be above every other being, but still fundamentally akin to mankind. This concept is brought out clearly in a fascinating passage in the Jewish Christian *Clementine Homilies*:

Learn this also: The bodies of men have immortal souls, which have been clothed with the breath of God; and having come forth from God, they are of the same substance, but they are not gods. But if they are gods, then in this way the souls of all men, both those who have died, and those who are alive, and those who shall come into being, are gods. But if in a spirit of controversy you maintain that these also are gods, what great matter is it, then, for Christ to be called God? for He has only what all have.⁹⁵

Several things should be noted about this passage. First, it is maintained that the Father is “the only true God”. (John 17:3) All others, including Jesus, can be called gods in a subsidiary sense. Second, the “immortal souls” of men are said to “come forth from God” and are “of the same substance” as God. Prior to the fourth century, phrases such as “of one substance” or “of the same substance” implied a generic unity of species, meaning something like “made of the same kind of stuff”.⁹⁶ Finally, Jesus is said to have exactly the same kind of soul as the rest of humanity.

On the other hand, why is Jesus called God’s “only begotten Son” in the New Testament (John 1:18; 3:16; 3:18; Hebrews 11:17; 1 John 4:9) if we are all the children of God? The answer lies in what was meant by the word “begotten”. Within modern mainstream Christianity, it has been held that the Son was eternally generated, or “begotten”, from the Father since before the beginning of time, hence there was never a time when the Father was not a Father, and the Son was not a Son. However, Jean DaniÉlou points out that Origen (early third century) was the first Catholic Christian to explicitly state a doctrine of eternal generation, although some Gnostics had expressed a similar view in the second century.⁹⁷ Commenting on a passage from the writings of Ignatius of Antioch (ca. 110 A.D.), J.N.D. Kelly notes the following:

His divine Sonship dates from the incarnation.... In tracing His divine Sonship to His conception in Mary’s womb, he was simply reproducing a commonplace of pre-Origenist theology; the idea did not convey, and was not intended to convey, any denial of His pre-existence. So far as

Ignatius is concerned, he definitely states that He “existed with the Father before the ages”, and that He “came forth from the unique Father, was with Him and has returned to Him”.⁹⁸

This is completely in harmony with the LDS teaching that all are the spiritual children of God, but Jesus is the only one begotten by God *in the flesh*. Given all this, it is also clear that in the early Jewish Christian milieu, deified men would have been considered subordinate to the Father, but not fundamentally different than Him in nature.

ETERNAL MARRIAGE

In Latter-day Saint thought, deification is intimately related to marriage. That is, in order to obtain the highest degree of heaven and be deified, “a man must enter into this order of the priesthood [meaning the new and everlasting covenant of marriage].” (D&C 131:2) Men and women are deified together, and their marriage, performed in an LDS Temple, is an eternal covenant. (D&C 132:15-17) This principle is not clearly taught in the New Testament, but as we shall see, it is not incompatible with it. Consider the following account of a conversation Jesus had with some of his detractors:

The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him... Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh. And last of all the woman died also. Therefore in the resurrection whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her. Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. (Matthew 22:23-30)

At first glance, this passage seems to contradict the LDS doctrine, but several points can be made to show that this is not necessarily so. First, Latter-day Saints believe Jesus’ answer was strictly true, since the apostate Sadducees said the seven brothers “were with us”.

If a man marry him a wife in the world, and he marry her not by me nor by my word, when they are out of the world they neither marry nor are given in marriage; but are appointed angels in heaven, which angels are ministering servants, to minister for those who are worthy of a far more, and an exceeding, and an eternal weight of glory. (D&C 132:15-16)

But why didn't Jesus, or at least the writers of the New Testament, explain the doctrine in its entirety? In fact, it was common practice within early Christianity and Judaism to preserve the highest and holiest doctrines for the ears of mature disciples.⁹⁹ Jesus commanded, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you." (Matthew 7:6) Paul told the Corinthians, who had been Christians for years, "I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able." (1 Corinthians 3:2) Peter explained the same principle to the apostate Simon Magus in the *Clementine Homilies*:

And Peter said: "We remember that our Lord and Teacher, commanding us, said, 'Keep the mysteries for me and the sons of my house.' Wherefore also He explained to His disciples privately the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven. But to you who do battle with us, and examine into nothing else but our statements, whether they be true or false, it would be impious to state the hidden truths."¹⁰⁰

Robert M. Grant notes that, "In Ephesians 5:22-33 the prophecy of Genesis 2:24 { 'the two shall become one flesh.' } is described as "a great mystery" and is referred not only to Christ and the church but also to Christian marriage in general."¹⁰¹ And Paul may have hinted at this mystery when he said, "Neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 11:11) Thus, it seems doubtful that Jesus would have explained His doctrine of marriage in full to the Sadducees.

Second, we must ask what Jesus was referring to when he said, “Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures.” Which scriptures? John Tvedtnes argues that Jesus was referring to a passage in the book of Tobit, in the Apocrypha:

In the Apocrypha... we read of a young woman, Sarah, who had been married to seven husbands (all brothers), each of whom was killed on the wedding night by a demon. But in the story (*Tobit* 6:10-8:9), Sara ultimately marries an eighth husband, Tobias, son of Tobit, who, following instructions from the archangel Raphael, manages to chase the demon away and is therefore not slain. Of special interest is the fact that the archangel (who, according to *Tobit* 3:17, had been sent to arrange the marriage) tells the young man that his wife had been appointed to him “from the beginning” (*Tobit* 6:17). This implies that she had not been sealed to any of her earlier husbands, which would explain why none of them would claim her in the resurrection, as Jesus explained. But if she were sealed to Tobias, the situation changes. Assuming that the Sadducees (whose real issue was one of resurrection, not of eternal marriage) were alluding to this story but left off part of it, this would explain why Jesus told them, “Ye do err, *not knowing the scriptures*, nor the power of God” ¹⁰²

Finally, many Jewish Christians *did* practice a form of celestial marriage, and this can be traced back to the first century. The Christian philosopher Origen complained in the third century about the Jewish Christians and others who believed in a literal millennial reign of Christ, and he added this:

Certain persons are of the opinion that the fulfillment of the promises of the future are to be looked for in bodily pleasure and luxury. And consequently they say, that after the resurrection there will be marriages, and the begetting of children. Such are the views of those who, while believing in Christ, understand the divine Scriptures in a sort of Jewish sense, drawing from them nothing worthy of the divine promises. ¹⁰³

Cardinal Dani lou infers a similar interpretation from an enigmatic passage in the *Didache*, a first-century Jewish Christian document, where prophets are mentioned as performing something called “the cosmic mystery of the Church”.¹⁰⁴ Dani lou links this mystery to the type of “spiritual marriages” some Gnostic groups practiced:

The expression “cosmic mystery of the Church” seems to stand in opposition to a “heavenly mystery of the church”. This heavenly mystery is the celestial marriage of Christ to the Church, which also finds its expression in this world. The allusion in this passage would therefore seem to be to those spiritual unions which existed in Jewish Christianity between prophet-apostles and a sister. . . The relation of these unions to their heavenly ideal is explicitly stated by the Gnostics: “Some of them prepare a nuptial couch and perform a sort of mystic rite (*mystagogia*) affirming that what is performed by them is a spiritual marriage after the likeness of the unions above” (Adv. haer. I, 21:3).¹⁰⁵

The Gnostic rite is described in the *Gospel of Philip* as being performed in “the mirrored bridal chamber”,¹⁰⁶ and “those who have united in the bridal chamber will no longer be separated.”¹⁰⁷ Stuart George Hall writes that Melito, Bishop of Sardis in the late second century, may have preserved a fragment of the ancient bridal chamber ceremony in his writings, as well.¹⁰⁸

HEAVENLY MOTHER

If men and women are deified together as husband and wife, the question naturally arises, “Does God the Father have a wife?” Latter-day Saints believe this to be the case, and it was also the case among the ancient Israelites and Jewish Christians.

It is well known that the Israelites worshipped a goddess, from time to time, who was believed to be the consort of “Yahweh” or Jehovah. Theodore Robinson explains:

From our Old Testament alone we should never have guessed that Israel associated a goddess with Yahweh, even popularly, but the conclusion is irresistible, and we are justified in assuming that she played her part in the mythology and ritual of Israel.¹⁰⁹

Widengren also reports that in Jeremiah's day a goddess called the "Queen of Heaven" received officially sanctioned worship in Jerusalem. He sees this as connected to the year-rites, in which a sacred marriage was performed for the god and goddess, who then gave birth to a Savior-King:

In much later times there was a goddess called the Queen of Heaven(s), to whom official sacrifices were offered by kings and princes, both in Jerusalem and in other cities of Judah, [Jer. 44:17]. That the sacred marriage should bring as its fruit the birth of the Savior-King is in accordance with the general myth and ritual pattern.¹¹⁰

The worship of the Queen of Heaven was forbidden by Jeremiah, but this also is consistent with LDS practice, since Mother-worship is not permitted for Mormons, either.¹¹¹

All of this is consistent with the creation account in Genesis. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. So God created man in his image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." (Genesis 1:26-27) Given the fact that the Israelites and the earliest Christians believed in an anthropomorphic God, it is significant that God said "Let *us* make man in *our* image," and that the image of God is defined as "male and female".

Origen quoted a lost Jewish Christian *Gospel According to the Hebrews*, where the Savior Himself says, "My mother, the Holy Spirit took me just now by one of my hairs and carried me off to the great mount Tabor,"¹¹² Melito of Sardis (late second century), who was not a Jewish Christian, but believed the Jewish Christian doctrine of an anthropomorphic deity, preserves this fragment, which may have come from the liturgy of the bridal chamber ritual. "Hymn the Father, you holy ones; sing to your Mother, virgins."¹¹³ In many Gnostic documents, as well, there is a Trinity of Father, Mother, and Son. For instance, the *Secret Book of John* speaks of "the three: the Father, the Mother, and the Son, the perfect power."¹¹⁴

Certainly there are differences in detail here with the LDS belief, but it is perfectly clear that a Heavenly Mother played a role in ancient Israelite and Jewish Christian thought.

GOD AS A DEIFIED MAN

At the end of his prophetic career, Joseph Smith revealed one final point that sheds brilliant light on all the other doctrines we have examined here. Namely, “God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens!”¹¹⁵ Unfortunately, the above quotation summarizes essentially all we know about this truth. We do not necessarily expect this doctrine to have been known among the ancient Christians, since Joseph Smith taught that “things that have not been before revealed” would be known in this dispensation. (D&C 124:41) This marvelous key lies at the pinnacle of the Prophet’s teaching, and at the very outskirts of our knowledge about God. Two questions must be answered in this context, however. That is, does the doctrine contradict previously revealed scripture, and did anyone hold such a view among the ancient Jewish Christians?

Our detractors constantly point out Bible verses concerning God’s unchanging and eternal nature to show that the scriptures do contradict the Prophets teachings. Even the Book of Mormon states, “I know that God is not a partial God, neither a changeable being; but he is unchangeable from all eternity to all eternity.” (Moroni 8:18) However, it can easily be shown that the LDS interpretation of the scriptures is in harmony with the mindset of the ancient Hebrews, while mainstream Christians apply Hellenistic assumptions to the text.

The ancient Greeks were absolutely enamored with metaphysics—with “being,” “essence,” “eternity,” etc. The Greek philosophers pondered incessantly about how the material world relates to the true reality, whereas for the Hebrews the material world *was* reality. When they wrote about God, they didn’t obsess about his “being” or “essence,” but rather focused on His relationship to men and the world. Likewise, when they spoke of God’s nature and eternity, they used *relative* terms — relative, that is, *to them*. For example, many of the Biblical passages which speak of God’s immutability do so in terms of His honesty, justice, mercy, and constancy. (See Titus 1:2; Numbers 23:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; Hebrews 6:18; Genesis 18:25; Ezekiel 18:14-32; Isaiah 46:10-11; Mark 13:31; Matt. 24:35; Luke 1:20; James 1:17; Daniel 6:26; Hebrews 6:18-19) Christopher Stead explains, “The Old Testament writers sometimes speak of God as

unchanging. In Christian writers influenced by Greek philosophy this doctrine is developed in an absolute metaphysical sense. Hebrew writers are more concrete, and their thinking includes two main points: (1) God has the dignity appropriate to old age, but without its disabilities; and (2) God is faithful to his covenant promises, even though men break theirs.”¹¹⁶ (Cf. Isaiah 40:28; Exodus 34:9-10) When God is described as “From everlasting to everlasting” (Psalm 41:13 NEB), the word translated as “everlasting” is the Hebrew *olam*, which means “(practically) eternity” or “time out of mind.”¹¹⁷ Another Psalm (104:5 NASB) says that God “established the earth upon its foundations, so that it will not totter forever and ever.” And yet Isaiah (24:20 NEB) saw a future time when “the earth reels to and fro like a drunken man.” To the Hebrew mind these passages were not contradictory, because terms like “everlasting” and “forever” were relative terms, and they had no conception of “eternity” and “infinity” as modern people see them.

So it is with the Latter-day Saints. We see such scriptural statements about the “everlasting” and “unchanging” God as an indication of God’s perfect and unchanging moral character, as well as God’s eternity *relative* to men. God is spoken of as the “only true God,” because *in relation to us* this is perfectly true. Given this Hebrew mindset, it is easy to see how Latter-day Saints can accept the biblical statements about God and also believe that God was once a man, having a Father Himself. And as it turns out, some early Christians may have believed the same type of doctrine. Consider the reasoning of Irenaeus of Lyons (ca. 180 A.D.) while arguing against the Gnostic belief that the Creator was only a secondary God.¹¹⁸ Irenaeus pounded home the fact that the true God *is* the Creator, but what about the possibility that there is a God above God? And what was God doing before the creation of the world? Irenaeus cited Matthew 24:36, where Christ indicates that only the Father knows the time of the Second Coming, and asserted that since even Jesus doesn’t know everything, we ought to leave such unrevealed questions to God.

If, for instance, any one asks, “What was God doing before He made the world?” we reply that the answer to such a question lies with God Himself. For that this world was formed perfect by God, receiving a beginning in time, the Scriptures teach us; but no Scripture reveals to us what

God was employed about before this event. The Father, therefore, has been declared by our Lord to excel with respect to knowledge; for this reason, that we, too, as long as we are connected with the scheme of things in this world, should leave perfect knowledge, and such questions [as have been mentioned], to God, and should not by any chance, while we seek to investigate the sublime nature of the Father, fall into the danger of starting the question whether there is another God above God.

Certainly Irenaeus, as a Gentile Christian with a philosophical viewpoint, believed no such thing. Irenaeus was not shy at all about labeling the Gnostic heresies as damnable and ridiculous falsehoods, yet in this case his language was strangely subdued. It is not clear whether this particular doctrine had been revealed to the early Christians, but certainly the Hebrew conception of God had not died out in all quarters of the Church, and in this mindset these “speculations” could be seen as a distinct possibility. There were some Christians – probably Jewish Christians — who were “speculating” about these things, or Irenaeus would have said things differently.

Conclusions

In the preface to his book, *On First Principles*, the early Christian theologian Origen listed several questions for which he said there was no uniform answer in the Church of his time. These included the origin of the Holy Spirit, the origin of the soul and of angels, what existed before the creation of the world and what will exist after, whether God has a body, and some others also of interest to Latter-day Saints. Robert M. Grant comments on Origen’s list, “If one takes all these questions together, it is obvious that they are concerned with the basic question as to what kind of philosophical-theological framework is to be provided for the apostolic preaching.”¹¹⁹ It should be clear from the information presented here that one of the competing philosophical frameworks was very similar to that taught by the Prophet Joseph Smith.

What are we to make of this fact? Detractors often point to various disparate sources contemporary with Joseph Smith as the inspiration for this or that doctrine. But wherever he got his ideas, Joseph Smith put them together in a coherent and complete system, which can be

found almost in its entirety within ancient Jewish Christianity. Finally, he went beyond what we now find in the ancient documents with striking insight and clarity. How did he accomplish this amazing feat at a time when very little was known about the Jewish origins of the Church?

Personally, I can think of no other reasonable explanation than the one Joseph Smith gave, and to which the Holy Spirit testifies. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a divinely ordained Restoration of the ancient Apostolic Church.

Notes

¹ Patrick Madrid, “In Search of ‘The Great Apostasy,’” Catholic Answers tract.

² “The term ‘apocalyptic literature’ is taken to refer to a body of revelatory writing produced in Jewish circles between 250 BCE and 200 CE and subsequently taken up and perpetuated by Christianity. It includes not only the genre ‘apocalypse’ but may also include other related types of literature, such as testaments, hymns, and prayers, which share some of its more important characteristics and motifs; that is, it does not have a common literary form but is diverse and even hybrid in its literary expression. The apocalypse type of writing, which forms the core of this literature, is a record of divine disclosures made known through the agency of angels, dreams, and visions. These may take different forms: an otherworldly journey in which the ‘secrets’ of the cosmos are made known, or a survey of history often leading to an eschatological crisis in which the cosmic powers of evil are destroyed, the cosmos is restored, and Israel (or ‘the righteous’) is redeemed.” Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan, eds., *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 34.

³ For a good summary of much of the evidence, see Jean DaniÉlou, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Primitive Christianity*, translated by Salvator Attanasio (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979).

⁴ Jean DaniÈlou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, translated by John A. Baker (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1973), 10, emphasis in original; cf. Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, 7 vols., translated by Neil Buchanan (New York: Dover, 1961), 1:287.

⁵ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, Revised ed. (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1978), 6.

⁶ Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 49.

⁷ DaniÈlou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, 55-85.

⁸ Some have suggested that these anti-Pauline, Judaizing sects represented the most primitive form of Christianity. E.g. Hans-Joachim Schoeps, *Jewish Christianity: Factional Disputes in the Early Church*, translated by Douglas R.A. Hare (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969). However, this interpretation is based on the assertion that there was a major rift between the Hellenizing Christians, led by Paul, and the original Church, led by Peter and James the Lord's brother. While Latter-day Saints can recognize the tensions that must have existed within the Church as it moved beyond the borders of Palestine, we see no reason to discount the portrayal of the relationship between Paul and the rest of the Apostles in the New Testament, as we have received it.

⁹ Hermas was an early Christian prophet who lived in Rome during the early second century, and was the brother of bishop Pius. DaniÈlou believes that Hermas was a converted Essene. Jean DaniÈlou, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and Primitive Christianity*, 125-128.

¹⁰ DaniÈlou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, 8.

¹¹ Kelly (*Early Christian Doctrines*, 26) points out that Gnosticism was not really a movement, as such, since although there were a multitude of Gnostic teachers, there was no single Gnostic organization or church.

¹² Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 32, 34.

¹³ Joseph Smith, in Joseph Fielding Smith, ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 217. Hereafter cited as TPJS.

¹⁴ Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 49-51.

¹⁵ Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 25.

¹⁶ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3:32, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds. *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Series 2, 14 vols. (New York: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1890-1900), 1:164. Hereafter cited as NPNF Series 2.

¹⁷ Adolf von Harnack, *What is Christianity?*, tr. Thomas B. Saunders (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957), 191-192.

¹⁸ In reality the interaction between Judaism and Hellenism was quite complex. Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism: Studies in their Encounter in Palestine during the Early Hellenistic Period*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974). On the other hand, consider how classicist James Shiel describes the reaction of the student of Greek thought to the Greek New Testament. "Yet when he attempts to read this document of the ancient mind he is surprised. Its style of expression is not that of the Greek he knows. It feels rather like a veneer of Greek over a Semitic mode of expression." James Shiel, *Greek Thought and the Rise of Christianity* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1968), 1.

¹⁹ Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), 1:9-10.

²⁰ Harnack, *What is Christianity?*, 200.

²¹ James Shiel, *Greek Thought and the Rise of Christianity*, 1.

²² DaniÈlou, J., *The Lord of History: Reflections on the Inner Meaning of History*, translated by N. Abercrombie (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1958), 1.

²³ Shiel, *Greek Thought and the Rise of Christianity*, 1.

²⁴ Harry Wolfson of Harvard University gives three reasons for the rise of this “philosophized Christianity.”

First, it came about through the conversion to Christianity of pagans who had been trained in philosophy. Second, philosophy was used by Christians as a help in their defense against accusations brought against them [by the pagans]. Third, philosophy was found to be of still greater usefulness as an immunization or an antidote against the heresy of Gnosticism. The Gnostics happened to have done what Paul said he was not going to do: they adorned the faith of the New Testament with ‘persuasive words of wisdom’. [Therefore, some of the Fathers] undertook to set up a new Christian philosophy in opposition to that of the Gnostics
Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Church Fathers*, 1:11-14.

²⁵ J. Rebecca Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology: Models of Divine Activity in Origen, Eusebius, and Athanasius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 10.

²⁶ Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1914), 350.

²⁷ W.D. Davies, “Israel, the Mormons and the Land,” in Truman G. Madsen, ed., *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaeo-Christian Parallels* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1978), 91.

²⁸ Joseph Smith, in TPJS 345.

²⁹ George Brantl, *Catholicism* (New York: George Braziller, 1962), 41.

³⁰ Plutarch, quoted in Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 14:16, translated by E.H. Gifford (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1903), 812.

³¹ Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 2:27, in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 vols. (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885-1896), 3:319. Hereafter cited as ANF.

³² Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 3:1, translated by Ronald E. Heine (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 89.

³³ Origen, *De Principiis* Preface 9, in ANF 4:241.

³⁴ *Clementine Homilies* 16:19, in ANF 8:316. The *Clementine Recognitions* also seem to imply that God is cognizable only through the senses:

Then said Peter: "Give us then, as I have often said, as being yourself a new God, or as having yourself come down from him, some new sense, by means of which we may know that new God of whom you speak; for those five senses, which God our Creator has given us, keep faith to their own Creator, and do not perceive that there is any other God, for so their nature necessitates them." Peter, in *Clementine Recognitions* 2:60, in ANF 8:114.

The so-called "Pseudo-Clementine" literature, including the *Homilies* and *Recognitions*, were likely put into their present form during the third and fourth centuries, but trace their roots to a common second-century source. R.M. Grant calls the *Recognitions* "a favourite piece of 'Sunday afternoon literature'" of the second century. Robert M. Grant, *Second-Century Christianity* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1946), 10. Many scholars consider them to be a product of a widespread branch of Jewish-Christianity of which we have

no other witness. Fergusen, ed., *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), 768-769.

³⁵ Cherbonnier, E. LaB., "In Defense of Anthropomorphism," in Madsen, ed., *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaeo-Christian Parallels*, 162; cf. G.E. Wright, *God Who Acts* (London: SCM Press, 1952), 49-50.

³⁶ Christopher Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 120.

³⁷ Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity*, 98.

³⁸ *Clementine Homilies* 17:16, in ANF 8:322-323.

³⁹ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 247-248.

⁴⁰ Hansen, R., "The Achievement of Orthodoxy in the Fourth Century AD," in Rowan Williams, ed., *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in honour of Henry Chadwick* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 153.

⁴¹ Henry Bettenson, *The Early Christian Fathers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 330. See also Linwood Urban, *A Short History of Christian Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 54.

⁴² DaniÉlou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, 146.

⁴³ *The Ascension of Isaiah*, in Willis Barnstone, ed., *The Other Bible* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984), 528.

⁴⁴ *The Pastor of Hermas*, Commandment 11, in ANF 2:27-28.

⁴⁵ Specifically, Hermas seems to have identified Jesus with Michael. DaniÈlou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, 123-124. However, this may not be particularly significant, since other Jewish Christian texts speak of Jesus appearing to mortals disguised as one of the archangels. DaniÈlou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, 131.

⁴⁶ Robert M. Grant, *The Early Christian Doctrine of God* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1966), 81.

⁴⁷ Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church*, 268.

Then I replied, “I shall attempt to persuade you, since you have understood the Scriptures,[of the truth] of what I say, that there is, and that there is said to be, another God and Lord subject to the Maker of all things; who is also called an Angel, because He announces to men whatsoever the Maker of all things—above whom there is no other God—wishes to announce to them.... I shall endeavour to persuade you, that He who is said to have appeared to Abraham, and to Jacob, and to Moses, and who is called God, is distinct from Him who made all things,—numerically, I mean, not[distinct] in will.” Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 56, in ANF 1:223, brackets in original.

⁴⁸ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue With Trypho* 127, in ANF 1:263.

⁴⁹ Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 6, in William A. Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1970), 1:51. Father Jurgens insists that this is the correct translation of Justin ‘s statement, and admits that here Justin “apparently [made] insufficient distinction between Christ and the created Angels.” Father Jurgens continues, “There are theological difficulties in the above passage, no doubt. But we wonder if those who make a great deal of these difficulties do not demand of Justin a theological sophistication which a man of his time and background could not rightly be expected to have.” Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, 1:56, n. 1. “This passage presents us with considerable difficulties. The word

‘other,’ used in relation to the angels, suggests that Jesus himself is an angel.” Grant, *The Early Christian Doctrine of God*, 81.

⁵⁰ Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 13, ANF 1:167.

⁵¹ Peter, in *Clementine Recognitions* 2:42, in ANF 8:109.

⁵² Metzger and Coogan, eds., *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, 548-549.

⁵³ “Let us plead the justice of our cause; trusting in the arm of Jehovah, the Eloheim, who sits enthroned in the heavens.” Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 1980), 5:94. Likewise, Brigham Young spoke the following with reference to the Father, “We obey the Lord, Him who is called Jehovah, the Great I Am, I am a man of war, Elohim, etc.” Brigham Young, in J. Watt, ed., *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: 1854-1886), 12:99.

⁵⁴ See “The Father and the Son: A Doctrinal Exposition by the First Presidency and the Twelve”, in James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 1984), 420-426.

⁵⁵ Otto Eissfeldt, “El and Yahweh,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 1 (1956): 25-30; Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel’s Second God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992). For a good summary of the current scholarly debate, see Larry W. Hurtado, “What Do We Mean by ‘First-Century Jewish Monotheism’?,” in E.H. Lovering, Jr., ed. *Society of Biblical Literature 1993 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 348-368.

⁵⁶ Eusebius, *The Proof of the Gospel* 4:7, tr. W.J. Ferrar (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1920), 1:176.

⁵⁷ Barker, *The Great Angel*, 81.

⁵⁸ See *Apocalypse of Abraham* 17:11 and 13:1 (footnoted alternate reading), in H.F.D. Sparks, ed., *The Apocryphal Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 381, 378.

⁵⁹ Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports About Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977), 262, 149.

⁶⁰ DaniÈlou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, 147-163.

⁶¹ Peter Hayman, “Monotheism – A Misused Word in Jewish Studies?”, *Journal of Jewish Studies* 42 (1991), 1-15. See also Jonathan Goldstein, “The Origins of the Doctrine of Creation Ex Nihilo”, *Journal of Jewish Studies* 35 (1984), 127-135; Jonathan Goldstein, “Creation Ex Nihilo: Recantations and Restatements”, *Journal of Jewish Studies* f38 (1987), 187-194; David Winston, “Creation Ex Nihilo Revisited: A Reply to Jonathan Goldstein”, *Journal of Jewish Studies* 37 (1986), 88-91.

⁶² Winston, “Creation Ex Nihilo Revisited: A Reply to Jonathan Goldstein”,

⁶³ *Sefer Yesira* 20, quoted in Hayman, “Monotheism – A misused Word in Jewish Studies?”, 2.

⁶⁴ *Bereshit Rabba*, quoted in Hayman, “Monotheism – A misused Word in Jewish Studies?”, 2, emphasis in original.

⁶⁵ *Pastor of Hermas*, Vision 1:1, in ANF 2:9, brackets in original.

⁶⁶ *Pastor of Hermas*, Vision 1:3, in ANF 2:10.

⁶⁷ Gerhard May, *Creatio Ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of ‘Creation out of Nothing’ in Early Christian Thought*, tr. A.S. Worrall, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 8.

⁶⁸ Xenophon, quoted in May, *Creatio Ex Nihilo*, 8.

⁶⁹ May, *Creatio Ex Nihilo*, 9-22.

⁷⁰ Young, F., “‘Creatio ex Nihilo’: A Context for the Emergence of the Christian Doctrine of Creation,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 44 (1991), 141. The one text that might bear negatively on this view is from Rabban Gamaliel II (ca. 90/110 A.D.) A philosopher challenged him by stating that God was indeed a great artist, but he had also found pre-existent material to help him. To this Gamaliel responds that all this primitive material is created by God. May, *Creatio Ex Nihilo*, 23. However, David Winston has pointed out that Gamaliel likely reacted negatively to the philosopher’s statement because he used the verb *sy*’ to imply that God was “actively assisted” in the creation. Winston also provides prima facie evidence that the Rabbis did *not* hold to any doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. Winston, “Creation Ex Nihilo Revisited: A Reply to Jonathan Goldstein”, 91.

Recently a graduate student at Marquette University, Paul Copan, has challenged the notion that *creatio ex nihilo* is a post-Biblical invention in an Evangelical scholarly forum. Paul Copan, “Is *Creatio Ex Nihilo* a Post-Biblical Invention? An Examination of Gerhard May’s Proposal”, *Trinity Journal* 17NS (1996), 77-93. However, Copan does not deal with May’s primary evidence – the description by ancient authors of creation as “out of nothing” where pre-existent matter is clearly presupposed. And while he cites Jonathan Goldstein’s views, he nowhere mentions the fact that Goldstein has conceded the weakness of his position in debate with David Winston.

⁷¹ Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 2:5, in ANF 3:301.

⁷² TPJS 350-352.

⁷³ Robert G. Hammerton-Kelly, *Pre-Existence, Wisdom, and the Son of Man* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 15.

⁷⁴ Hammerton-Kelly, *Pre-Existence, Wisdom, and the Son of Man*, 28.

⁷⁵ David Winston, “The Iranian Component in the Bible, Apocrypha and Qumran,” *History of Religions* 5 (1965): 212.

⁷⁶ *Sefer Haparshiyot, Midrash Kee Tov, “Alef” Machon Lehotzaat Sefarim*, 31, quoted in Nissim Wernick, “A Critical Analysis of the Book of Abraham in the Light of Extra-Canonical Jewish Writings” (Ph.D. diss., Brigham Young University, 1968), 22.

⁷⁷ Hammerton-Kelly, *Pre-Existence, Wisdom, and the Son of Man*, 138.

⁷⁸ Origen, *Commentary on John 2:25*, in ANF 10:341.

⁷⁹ *Secrets of Enoch 23:2*, in Rutherford H. Platt, Jr., ed., *The Forgotten Books of Eden* (New York: Random House, 1980), 89.

⁸⁰ *Secrets of Enoch 30:12-13*, in Platt, ed., *The Forgotten Books of Eden*, 92.

⁸¹ *I Enoch 39:4-7, 40:5, 61:12*. Quoted in Wernick, “A Critical Analysis of the Book of Abraham in the Light of Extra-Canonical Jewish Writings,” 23.

⁸² Hammerton-Kelly, *Pre-Existence, Wisdom, and the Son of Man*, 22, 134, 224, 270.

⁸³ *The Pastor of Hermas, Vis. 2:4*, in ANF 2:12.

⁸⁴ *2 Clement 14:2*, in Robert M. Grant, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers*, (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1964-1968), 2:126.

⁸⁵ Hammerton-Kelly, *Pre-Existence, Wisdom, and the Son of Man*, , 154.

⁸⁶ *Clementine Recognitions 1:28*, in ANF 8:85.

⁸⁷ *The Apocalypse of Abraham 22*, in H.F.D. Sparks, ed., *The Apocryphal Old Testament*, 384.

⁸⁸ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue With Trypho* 124, in ANF 1:262.

⁸⁹ Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 35.

⁹⁰ *The Poimandres of Hermes Trismegistus*, quoted in Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 153.

⁹¹ 11Q13, in Michael Wise, Martin Abegg, Jr., and Edward Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 456.

⁹² *War Scroll* 17, in Wise, Abegg, and Cook, *The Dead Sea Scrolls: A New Translation*, 165.

⁹³ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 29:19*, in NPNF Series 2, 7:308.

⁹⁴ Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity*, 188.

⁹⁵ Peter , in *Clementine Homilies* 16:16, in ANF 8:316.

⁹⁶ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 234-235; Christopher Stead, *Divine Substance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977); Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity*, 160-172.

⁹⁷ Jean DaniÉlou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture*, tr. John Austin Baker, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1973), 376-378.

⁹⁸ Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 92-93.

⁹⁹ Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 125-130; Morton Smith, *The Secret Gospel* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 84; Ernst M,eller, *A History of Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1995), 44; Stroumsa, G. G., *Hidden*

Wisdom: Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism, (New York: E.J. Brill, 1996); also Cardinal Daniëlou's *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*.

¹⁰⁰ *Clementine Homilies* 19:20, in ANF 8:336. "For the most sublime truths are best honoured by means of silence." Peter, in *Clementine Recognitions* 1:23, in ANF 8:83.

But if he remains wrapped up and polluted in those sins which are manifestly such, it does not become me to speak to him at all of the more secret and sacred things of divine knowledge, but rather to protest and confront him, that he cease from sin, and cleanse his actions from vice. Peter, in *Clementine Recognitions* 2:4, in ANF 8:98.

¹⁰¹ Robert M. Grant, *After the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 184.

¹⁰² John Tvedtnes, "A Much-Needed Book That Needs Much", *FARMS Review of Books* 9 (1997): 33-42, see p. 41.

¹⁰³ Origen, *De Principiis* 2:11:2, in ANF 4:297. Even where eternal marriage was not necessarily implied, many Jewish Christian groups regarded marriage as a requirement for those of marriageable age. A.F.J. Klijn and G.J. Reinink, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 33, 79.

¹⁰⁴ *Didache* 11, in ANF 7:380-381.

¹⁰⁵ Daniëlou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, p. 351.

¹⁰⁶ *The Gospel of Philip*, in James M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1977), 139.

¹⁰⁷ *The Gospel of Philip*, in Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 142.

¹⁰⁸ Stuart George Hall, ed., *Melito of Sardis On Pascha and Fragments* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), xxxviii.

¹⁰⁹ Robinson, T., “Hebrew Myths,” in Samuel H. Hooke, ed., *Myth and Ritual* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 185. Some have seen the Hebrew Goddess as a foreign importation, but Margaret Barker notes that there is not complete correspondence between the goddess of Israel and those of other nations, and concludes that she was not a foreign goddess at all. Barker, *The Great Angel*, 52, 57.

¹¹⁰ Widengren, G., “Early Hebrew Myths and Their Interpretation,” in Samuel H. Hooke, ed., *Myth, Ritual, and Kingship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 183.

¹¹¹ Gordon B. Hinckley, in R. Clayton Brough, *Teachings of the Prophets* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon Publishers, 1993), 121.

¹¹² Origen, *Commentary on John 2:6*, in ANF 10:329-330.

¹¹³ Melito, Fragment 17, in Hall, ed., *Melito of Sardis On Pascha and Fragments*, 85.

¹¹⁴ *The Apocryphon of John*, in Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 103.

¹¹⁵ Joseph Smith, in TPJS 345.

¹¹⁶ Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity*, 102. Stead uses the example of Revelation 1:4: “From Him who Is and who Was and who Is to Come’ expresses God’s perpetuity within and throughout all ages.” However, he points out that when Christianity became Hellenized, “This doctrine came to be developed in an absolute sense which goes well beyond anything that we find in the Bible.” Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity*, 128, emphasis in original. For an excellent discussion of the scriptural evidence for this point, see Richard R. Hopkins, *How Greek*

Philosophy Corrupted the Christian Concept of God (Bountiful, UT: Horizon Publishers & Distributors, Inc., 1998), 345-370.

¹¹⁷ James Strong, *The New Strong's Complete Dictionary of Bible Words* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), 470.

¹¹⁸ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2:27:1-9, in ANF 1:399-402.

¹¹⁹ Grant, *The Early Christian Doctrine of God*, 124.

Mormons believe that God re-established the early Christian Church as found in the New Testament through Joseph Smith.[39] In particular, Mormons believe that angels such as Peter, James, John, and John the Baptist appeared to Joseph Smith and others and bestowed various Priesthood authorities on them.[40] Mormons thus believe that their Church is the "only true and living church" because.Â There has been some controversy involving Jewish groups who see the actions of some elements of Mormonism as offensive. In the 1990s, Jewish groups vocally opposed the LDS practice of baptism for the dead on behalf of Jewish victims of the Holocaust and Jews in general. Mormons have a very difficult time understanding why Orthodox and other Christians deny that they are Christian. The simplest answer to this question is that the Mormon god is simply not God--at least not the God worshiped by Orthodox Christians (and other Trinitarians).Â In Mormonism, the only way to become a Son of Perdition is to have an absolute knowledge of God, to reject Him, to commit murder, and to seek to destroy His church and His work.Â In the early history of the LDS Church in the 1830s up through the early 20th century, the cross appears in many places. Historian Michael G. Reed found the cross all over early Mormondom. It appeared as jewelry on Mormon Prophet Brigham Young's wives and daughters. It appeared in floral arrangements in funerals. Mormonism is (debatably) a Christian sect that arose in the United States in the early nineteenth century. Mormons, who follow the religion's holy book, the Book of Mormon, are generally members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), though smaller splinter churches with slightly different doctrine than the mainline LDS Church exist, such as the Community of Christ. The LDS, based in Salt Lake City, Utah, is descended from the original congregation founded by Vermont-born conman Mormonism rejects Christian orthodoxy as the very argument for its own existence, and it clearly identifies historic Christianity as a false faith. So, what does Mormonism reject?Â Contemporary Mormonism presents the Book of Mormon as "another testament of Jesus Christ," but the Jesus of the Book of Mormon is not the only begotten Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, or the one through whose death on the cross we can be saved from our sins.Â As one leading figure in the early church explained, the true faith is recognized and affirmed everywhere, always, and by all (Vincent of LÃ©rins defined the orthodox tradition as those truths affirmed "ubique, semper, ab omnibus").