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Author(s) Daniel C. Peterson

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Abstract In response to the articles in this issue, Peterson notes that Latter-day Saints do not extend themselves to expose and attack other faiths. He further discusses, among other things, an open canon and continuing revelation, salvation as outlined in the scriptures, the ordinances of the gospel, revelation following the incarnation and resurrection of Christ, the biblical canon, inerrancy, biblical texts, the Book of Abraham, and the nature of God.

Afterword

Daniel C. Peterson

This exchange has been fun. Of course, it is also much more than that, for the issues discussed here are serious and of the most weighty possible import. And all involved, I think, have treated them in a manner—and with manners—appropriate to their significance.

At the end, I want to take the opportunity to offer a few closing comments on what has gone before. That is, after all, an editor's prerogative, and I fully intend to avail myself of it. I will comment almost entirely on points raised by Paul Owen and Carl Mosser. This is simply because, for obvious reasons, I tend to disagree with them more than I do with my fellow Latter-day Saints, and because, with William Hamblin, I have already commented on Craig Blomberg.¹ But I don't want to appear to be picking on them. I deeply respect the fairness, charity, and rigor with which they approached their task, as well as the remarkably solid knowledge of Mormonism that—in dramatic contrast to many critics of the church—they have clearly expended so much effort to achieve. Moreover, I admire the courage that their interaction with Latter-day Saint scholarship and scholars has some-

¹ That isn't to say that I agree entirely with all of my Latter-day Saint colleagues. Owen and Mosser were disappointed, for example, that Robinson offered no evidence for, and no defense against, Blomberg's criticisms of the Book of Mormon and the Book of Abraham (pp. 24–25; parenthetical page numbers in the afterword refer to the Owen and Mosser review found on pages 1–102 of this volume). I was disappointed, too. *How Wide the Divide?* could not treat everything, of course, but I regret Robinson's having let so many arguments go unanswered, without offering so much as an allusion to places where responses might be found. And, although I am entirely willing to recognize contradictions in the Bible, I do not find Blake Ostler's claim of a contradiction between 1 Samuel 8:7 and 1 Samuel 12:13 to be at all compelling, at least as he explains it on pages 111–12 in this volume. Finally, I have reservations about Ostler's views on the quondam mortality of the Father and about some aspects of human deification (as expressed at Ostler, pp. 128–33). But I am also well aware—as President Gordon B. Hinckley has been pointing out recently—that we just don't know much about these subjects.

times required; I know that their mutually respectful relationships with us have not come without cost and criticism.

Nonetheless, I here offer some thoughts that occurred to me as I read the Owen and Mosser paper. These are not intended to be complete responses, nor even particularly rigorous, and, in many cases, they “piggyback” upon other replies offered already by my colleagues.



First, a criticism by way of a compliment. The quality and tenor of Owen and Mosser’s essay shine all the more brightly against the generally dismal background of most evangelical writing on Mormonism. Owen and Mosser themselves speak, quite accurately, of “the nauseating errors of so many evangelicals writing on Mormonism: wasting time attacking fringe positions, refusing to interact with Latter-day Saint scholarship, being disrespectful to one’s opponents.” Yet they obscure that depressing reality when they implicitly suggest an equivalence between “pejorative anti-evangelical rhetoric” on the part of Latter-day Saints and the “pejorative anti-Mormon rhetoric” that flourishes among many conservative Protestants.²

I am reminded of the old notion, once popular among many of my politically left-wing friends, of a supposed moral equivalence between the United States and the Soviet Union or Communist China. (Please don’t push this analogy too far: I am *not* equating evangelicals with Stalinist murderers.) We Americans could not point out that the Soviet Union was an oppressive tyranny, they claimed, because our own Founding Fathers had

² Their remarks occur on pages 79–80. Notes 186 and 187, on the same page, imply an equivalence between Joseph Fielding McConkie’s *Sons and Daughters of God* and John Ankerberg and John Weldon’s *Behind the Mask of Mormonism: From Its Early Schemes to Its Modern Deceptions*. But there is no equivalence. The Ankerberg and Weldon book is ugly, hateful, and dishonest. See my review essays on its two editions: “Chattanooga Cheapshot, or The Gall of Bitterness,” review of *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism*, by John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 5 (1993): 1–86; and “Constancy amid Change,” review of *Behind the Mask of Mormonism*, by John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *FARMS Review of Books* 8/2 (1996): 60–98.

been an all-male elite, some of whom owned slaves. We could not object to Stalin's purges, they said, because we once had Joe McCarthy. We could not criticize the Gulag death camps, they said, because our government interned Japanese-Americans during World War II. We had no right to fault Mao's government or Pol Pot's Cambodia for systematically murdering millions upon millions of people, they said, since our own treatment of the American Indian was not unblemished.

But this was nonsense. One doesn't have to be a fan of slavery, or of Joe McCarthy, or of the internment camps, or of Colonel Custer or the "Trail of Tears"—I am certainly not—to recognize that the comparisons are inappropriate. The horror of the Holocaust or of genocide is cheapened when it is invoked to label acts of police misconduct or of rudeness toward homosexuals. Balance and fairness do not require that we treat as commensurate things that are not, by any legitimate stretch of the imagination, on the same scale.

I have said it before, but I will say it again here: One will search in vain for Latter-day Saint Sunday School curricula devoted to "exposing" other faiths. There are no "ministries" among the Mormons focused on criticizing other religions. Our bookstores do not carry books, pamphlets, videos, or audiotapes attacking others. We do not picket other churches, mosques, synagogues, or temples, nor do we seek to block their construction. (Quite the opposite, in fact—for which many examples could be cited.)³ No Latter-day Saint hosts a radio or television show dedicated to critiques of other churches. Our chapels are never turned over to "symposia" denouncing those whose doctrines contradict ours. We would never seek to expel another denomination from a community council of churches, nor to exclude them from use of a shared chapel facility at a resort. Yet such activities, aimed at

³ I will cite just one here: Despite the Southern Baptist Convention's official crusade—by means of videos, pamphlets, Sunday School curriculum materials, and the like—against the faith of the Latter-day Saints, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are, as I write, helping to construct a new building for the First Southern Baptist Church of Bountiful, Utah. See Carrie A. Moore, "Building Ties: Friendships Form as LDS Volunteers Help to Build a Baptist Church," *Deseret News*, 16 October 1999, E1, E2.

combating Mormonism and Mormons, abound on the soil of conservative Protestantism. There is no equivalence.

Now, on to the several arguments.



Robinson's argument for an open canon, Owen and Mosser contend, "rests on an argument from silence" (p. 9): "Why doesn't the Bible *say* it's closed?" But they feel that the counter-question would be equally powerful: "Why doesn't the Bible *say* it's *open*?"

But it seems obvious to me that the presumption has to be for an open canon, all else being equal. After all, it was open for all the centuries of the biblical record. Why would it suddenly—and silently—cease to be open? And how could Owen and Mosser argue against a claim that the canon suddenly and silently closed after Moses or after Malachi? The latter claim is that of Jews generally, while the former may be something like the position of the ancient Sadducees.⁴ Modern Jews could certainly endorse the sentiments of W. D. Davies, cited by Owen and Mosser as a concern common to Protestants, Catholics, and the Orthodox regarding Latter-day Saint faith in continuous revelation:

Progressive and continuous revelation is certainly an attractive notion, but equally certainly it is not without the grave danger of so altering or enlarging upon

⁴ Contrary to Owen and Mosser's claim on page 86, the Sadducees' apparent rejection of the authority of scripture beyond the Mosaic law seems to account for their disbelief in angels, in the resurrection, and perhaps even in survival after death. For none of these concepts is clearly taught in the Pentateuch as we have it. Hellenization is not needed to account for their disbelief. And, in any event, the Pharisees were just as Hellenized as were the Sadducees, yet they believed in resurrection (and, it seems, in complex angelologies). But nothing is certain with regard to the Sadducees, for only the accounts of their enemies survive. Thus, it is as difficult to know for sure what they taught as it would be to reconstruct the beliefs of the Latter-day Saints solely from the works of Reachout Trust, Concerned Christians, Ed Decker, and "Dr." Walter Martin.

the original revelation as to distort, annul, and even falsify it.⁵

Wouldn't most Jews regard Christianity as a distortion, annulment, or falsification of the revelation their ancestors received in the ancient past?



If the Bible contains sufficient information for salvation, write Owen and Mosser, no further scripture is necessary. Thus evangelicals and others are right to be skeptical of Latter-day Saint claims to additional revelation (see pp. 9–10).

But do we really need all four Gospels? Is the book of Jude necessary for salvation? Is it really essential that we know the number of the beast, or that we have the book of Revelation at all? Surely we could dispense with Ecclesiastes, or Obadiah, or, for that matter, with Leviticus. Indeed, from some of my conversations with evangelicals, it would almost seem that the basic essence of the gospel can be located in, at most, a handful of verses from Paul.

Owen and Mosser's principle, were it consistently adopted, could justify us in jettisoning virtually the entire biblical canon. But if it cannot be used to justify abandoning vast sections of the Bible, it is not clear how it can be used to argue for scrapping the scriptures peculiar to the Latter-day Saints.



Seeking support for their insistence on a closed scriptural canon—closed, in their opinion, because the Bible already contains enough to bring us to salvation—Owen and Mosser turn to the third and fourth Articles of Faith (see p. 10). They point out that the fourth article mentions faith, repentance, baptism, and the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost and describes these as the “first principles” and ordinances of the gospel.

⁵ W. D. Davies, “Reflections on the Mormon ‘Canon,’” *Harvard Theological Review* 79/1–3 (1986): 64; cited by Owen and Mosser, with added emphasis, on page 12.

“According to the third Article of Faith,” they continue, “salvation is available to all who comply with these laws and ordinances.” And, of course, all four of the items listed in the fourth Article of Faith are discussed in the Bible. Thus, Owen and Mosser conclude, the Bible contains all that is needed, even according to Latter-day Saint understanding.⁶

However, they seem to be misreading the texts. The third Article of Faith can hardly be referring to “*these* laws and ordinances” (i.e., to the four explicitly catalogued in the fourth Article of Faith), because, at that point, they have not yet been mentioned. Moreover, the demonstrative pronoun *these* does not occur in the third article, but only in Owen and Mosser’s summary of it. The third Article of Faith simply declares that obedience to “the laws and ordinances of the Gospel” is a necessary element in salvation; the fourth article specifies faith, repentance, baptism, and the laying on of hands as “the *first* principles and ordinances of the Gospel” (emphasis added). It does not say that the four enumerated items exhaust the ordinances. And, anyway, faith and repentance are not “ordinances” at all in Latter-day Saint understanding, nor are they “laws.”

How can we be sure that everything we should have is present in the scriptures? Absent an explicit scriptural statement to that effect, it seems that something like the ongoing “oral tradition” of a living church would be necessary to establish such a dogma. Without such a tradition, we may not even know how to read the scriptural text properly. To illustrate, one cannot possibly deduce the details of Latter-day Saint temple worship and its ordinances from the scriptures alone—as our critics often charge and as we readily, even cheerfully, acknowledge. Yet we Latter-day Saints clearly and indisputably believe temple ordinances to be required for exaltation in the celestial kingdom. Let us leave aside, for a moment, the issue of truth or falsity in order to ask another kind of question: If the practices, obligations, and beliefs of a sizeable faith community such as that of the Latter-day Saints are not reducible, without remainder, to its canon of scripture, why are we

⁶ Owen and Mosser claim (at p. 10 n. 16) that Robinson himself agrees with their reading on page 157 of *How Wide the Divide?* I do not concur. His position seems to be much more nuanced than theirs. In any event, if Robinson holds the position they ascribe to him, without careful nuancing, he should not.

obliged to assume that those of the ancient Christian community were?



After the incarnation of Christ, say Owen and Mosser, any further revelation is anticlimactic (see p. 13).

Of course, no believing Latter-day Saint would ever deny that the advent of the Savior is the central event of world history. It marks the meridian of time. Prophets before Christ prophesied of his coming; prophets after Christ testify that he came, the divine Son of God and Redeemer of humanity. The ordinance of the sacrament memorializes the atonement of Jesus Christ in much the same way that Aaronic sacrifices (which the sacrament replaces) foreshadowed it. "The fundamental principles of our religion," declared Joseph Smith, "are the testimon[ies] of the Apostles and Prophets, concerning Jesus Christ, that He died, was buried, and rose again the third day, and ascended into heaven; and all other things which pertain to our religion are only appendages to it."⁷

That being said, I can see no compelling reason why the expression of God's concern for his children should be governed by anybody else's sense of proper dramatic unfolding or of what might be "anticlimactic." The Lord is not subject to the rules of Aristotle's *Poetics*. If he cared enough to specify, by revelation, that the ark of Moses should be constructed of shittim wood and measure $2\frac{1}{2} \times 1\frac{1}{2} \times 1\frac{1}{2}$ cubits (see Exodus 25:10)—which, by the way, scarcely seems essential to salvation—isn't he likely to be at least as concerned about the divisions rending Christendom at the end of the second millennium?

The fact is that the Bible contains several clear instances of revelation after the incarnation and, indeed, after the ascension of Christ. One good example of this would be the Revelation of John, which is surely as dramatic as any revelation could hope to be. Another is the vision granted to Peter in Acts 10, which, against powerful Jewish tradition, opened the door of salvation to the gentiles. A modern issue that agitates more than a few thinkers—even among evangelical Protestants—and that is, in some

⁷ *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, ed. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977), 121.

ways, analogous to that facing Peter and the ancient church, is the question of salvation for those who did not hear the gospel during their mortal lives.⁸ Latter-day revelation and modern prophets and apostles have shed marvelous and satisfying light on this vexing matter, which receives at most ambiguous treatment within the Bible.

Owen and Mosser suggest that no important principle relating to human salvation is lacking from the Bible as we have it (pp. 10, 13). But surely the salvation of billions of the unevangelized dead is a subject worthy of revealed guidance.



Owen and Mosser correctly note that “the traditional criteria for the closed canon” evolved out of the actual historical process of the formation of the biblical canon, which, they add, “God had superintended” (pp. 11–12 n. 19).

Why, though, should Latter-day Saints see this as anything more than an after-the-fact rationalization, with an unsubstantiated and nonbiblical faith-assertion tacked on? Owen and Mosser write, fairly enough, that “The doctrine of sufficiency may be nonbiblical, but that does not make it *unbiblical*” (pp. 12–13, emphasis in the original). Perhaps not. But it gravely weakens the authority of the doctrine. The notion of a closed canon now becomes merely a human deduction, a theory or hypothesis, rather than a revealed divine edict, and is subject to all the uncertainty that inevitably attends deductions by imperfect, sometimes self-interested, and occasionally sinful human minds. Latter-day Saints claim to have a nonbiblical yet still divine source of religious authority; evangelicals do not. The criteria for the canon upon which evangelicals

⁸ See, for example, John Sanders, *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1992); Francis A. Sullivan, *Salvation outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992); Stephen T. Davis, *Risen Indeed: Making Sense of the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1993), 159–65; Gabriel Fackre, Ronald H. Nash, and John Sanders, *What About Those Who Have Never Heard? Three Views on the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1995); Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips, eds., *More Than One Way? Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1995).

are obliged to rely evolved in a church in which living prophecy was dead (as we charge and they admit).



Owen and Mosser suspect that Robinson's views on inerrancy are in the minority among Latter-day Saints (see p. 16). I don't know if this is the case—indeed, I doubt it—but I rather hope so. On page 20, they suggest that his ideas on the subject appear to be incoherent. Here they may perhaps be right. But there is no reason for Latter-day Saints to subscribe to the unbiblical notion of inerrancy. Certainly no revelation demands that we do so.

"I do not . . . believe," declared Brigham Young on 8 July 1855,

that there is a single revelation, among the many God has given to the Church, that is perfect in its fulness. The revelations of God contain correct doctrine and principle, so far as they go; but it is impossible for the poor, weak, low, grovelling, sinful inhabitants of the earth to receive a revelation from the Almighty in all its perfections. He has to speak to us in a manner to meet the extent of our capacities.⁹

Owen and Mosser attempt to enlist Joseph Smith himself as a fellow inerrantist, but their efforts are at best inconclusive (see pp. 18–19). And the Prophet never propounded an inerrantist view as either divinely revealed or required; at most, if he did hold to inerrantist notions (which is not at all clear), he would seem merely to be reflecting the common presuppositions of his day.



Against Latter-day Saint belief that the biblical texts as we currently have them do not fully represent the beliefs and practices of earliest Christianity, Owen and Mosser assert that "many scholars who specialize in textual criticism are confident that we possess almost every word of the original manuscripts" (p. 22 n. 41).

⁹ *Journal of Discourses*, 2:314.

But this statement, while probably true in what it says about the consensus of textual critics, says little or nothing about the real subject at issue. For the proposition that we have “almost every word of the original manuscripts” is a statement of faith. It cannot be empirically demonstrated.¹⁰ Indeed, Royal Skousen’s ongoing work with the text of the Book of Mormon strongly suggests that the proposition is very likely false.¹¹



Regarding the Book of Abraham, Owen and Mosser echo Craig Blomberg’s question: “Should not Joseph’s track record where he can be tested influence our assessment of his work where he cannot be tested?” (p. 23 n. 43).

Two assumptions seem to motivate this question and Owen and Mosser’s endorsement of it. First, the question appears to presume that we have the papyri from which Joseph Smith derived the Book of Abraham. But John Gee’s ongoing work demonstrates that we almost certainly do not.¹² Second, the question seems to expect that its proposed test will produce negative results for the Book of Abraham and, by implication, for Joseph Smith’s claims to have translated other ancient documents. However, it appears that there is substantial support in antiquity for the contents of the Book of Abraham.¹³

¹⁰ The books that were considered scripture by Christians and some of the content of those books changed from the beginning to the end of the second century. During the second century various fragmentary groups of Christians accused other groups of having changed the texts to fit their own ideas. These changes took the form of deletions, some additions, and the redefining of the text. Furthermore, only one of the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament dates before that time period when Christians accused each other of having corrupted the text, and it contains only ten complete words.

¹¹ Professor Skousen’s evaluation of the discipline of textual criticism will eventually appear as part of his Book of Mormon Critical Text Project. In the meantime, interested readers should see Royal Skousen, “Critical Methodology and the Text of the Book of Mormon,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): esp. 121–25.

¹² See John Gee, “A History of the Joseph Smith Papyri and Book of Abraham” (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999).

¹³ See, among other things, Daniel C. Peterson, “News from Antiquity [‘Evidence supporting the Book of Abraham continues to turn up in a wide



Owen and Mosser approvingly cite Peter Appleby to the effect that belief in a "finite" God denies the miraculous divine powers ascribed to him in scripture (p. 27 n. 50).

However, I cannot even begin to imagine why this would be the case.



On page 30, Owen and Mosser declare that an omniscient being not only possesses all possible knowledge, but "always has."

This principle would count as a decisive refutation of most Latter-day Saints' concept of eternal progression, were it true. But there seems no reason to accept it.



Owen and Mosser write that Robinson's claim that God is omnipresent through his spirit, and that this is not significantly different from mainstream views of omnipresence, breaks down because the God of the Latter-day Saints, being embodied, cannot be *personally* present everywhere. But it is precisely this kind of personal omnipresence, they say, that is required by Psalm 139:7-12 (see p. 30 n. 59).

The fact should not be overlooked, however, that Psalm 139 is not a treatise in systematic theology. The psalms are poetry, and it seems unwise to place more weight on poetic statements than they can bear. The passage in question appears to be stressing the inescapability of God's moral and spiritual challenge, not to be making a statement about metaphysics or ontology.

Furthermore, we do not know the modality of a divine being's spirit and its perceptions, even if that being is localizable in a finite physical body. So I am uncomfortable ruling Robinson's position out. Owen and Mosser themselves allow the possibility that God

variety of sources']," *Ensign* (January 1994): 16-21; John A. Tvedtnes, "Abrahamic Lore in Support of the Book of Abraham" (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999). A large amount of relevant material will be appearing shortly under the auspices of FARMS.

may be embodied (see pp. 34–36), but insist that, in crucially important ways, he would still not be limited to his body. In this regard, I am not sure that the divide between evangelicals and Latter-day Saints is quite so wide as Owen and Mosser think. But their concession of possible divine corporeality, coupled with their insistence that even a corporeal God would transcend his body, seriously weakens (if, indeed, it does not entirely nullify) their discussion of John 4:24 (see pp. 32–33 n. 64). This is so even if one takes that verse, as they want us to, in the sense of an essential predication—a position that they themselves acknowledge to be contested even among evangelicals.



God is spiritual in his essential nature, say Owen and Mosser. And this, they suggest, militates against the teaching of the Latter-day Saints (see pp. 32–33).

But Latter-day Saints need not contest this point. For every human being, too, is spiritual in his or her essential nature. For most Christians, humans are not exhaustively defined by their bodies. I am not my body; I *have* a body. The “I” of Daniel Peterson seems to be distinguishable from the body that bears that name. My body, I am told, does not even exist continuously over its mortal life span. Its cells are entirely replaced over several multiyear cycles. But the identity of “Daniel Peterson” continues—for good or for ill—until my body can no longer renew itself. And even then it does not cease.



Repeating a venerable explanation of the numerous theophanies reported in the Bible, Owen and Mosser admit (on pp. 32–33 and p. 36 n. 74) that God can make himself visible but contend that this fact should not be taken to mean that he is actually corporeal by nature.

Well. On page 22 Owen and Mosser criticize Robinson for what they say is an *ad hoc* position on the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. They even voice the suspicion that Robinson might be motivated by a desire to avoid evidence that seems to contradict his beliefs. But this notion of a God who alternately

takes on a physical appearance and then sheds it strikes *me*, and has *always* struck me, as rather desperately *ad hoc*. Contrived. Jerry-built. There seems to be no biblical support for it, but a great deal of biblical data that it seeks to outmaneuver. Worse still, it seems to involve God in deception, or at least to implicate him as misleading.



Ezekiel, note Owen and Mosser, avoids saying that he saw God directly. They apparently believe that this supports their position that God is essentially invisible (see p. 36 n. 75). They quite correctly observe that Ezekiel did not see God's "essence" (p. 36).

But who *has* ever "seen" an "essence"? Baseballs, frogs, mountains, redwood trees—all these are unquestionably visible objects in the everyday world of mundane, material reality. Yet nobody has ever seen the essence of a redwood, a mountain, a frog, or a baseball. It is hard to imagine what it would even mean to do so.

Ezekiel's claim to have seen "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord" (Ezekiel 1:28) is indeed striking for its obvious attempt to soften what would otherwise be a breathtakingly stark statement. But Jews have traditionally attempted to avoid direct references to God, even in contexts that have nothing whatever to do with anthropomorphic visions. Thus they refused to say the name *YHWH*, but spoke the word *Adonai* ("Lord") instead. And they speak still today of *Ha-Shem*, "the name," instead of *God*, which English-speaking Jews not infrequently write as *G-d*. It is in this context that the discussion in Doctrine and Covenants 107:2–4 about the title of the Melchizedek Priesthood is to be understood: Once known as "the Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God," the higher priesthood eventually came to bear the name of a great ancient priest, king, and prophet "out of respect or reverence to the name of the Supreme Being, to avoid the too frequent repetition of his name." It is a similar humility before the Lord that is reflected in the Book of Mormon's account of a vision of the prophet Lehi, who was Ezekiel's rough contemporary: "He thought he saw God sitting upon his throne" (1 Nephi 1:8). Such language doesn't reflect doubt in

the narrator's mind that Lehi really saw God. It does not suggest that Lehi was not sure whether he was hallucinating. It is an expression of human reverence before deity.



Realizing that, in the person of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ, they do indeed have an embodied God, Owen and Mosser assert that "physicality is an attribute of Christ's *human* nature, not his divine essence" (p. 36 n. 77, their emphasis).

If this were so, however, it would be extremely troubling. Did only Jesus' human nature suffer on the cross? Was Christ's divine nature, being nonphysical, immune to the pains of crucifixion? If so, how could there have been an atonement? How did the physical, human Jesus' death on the cross differ, fundamentally, from the deaths of the hundreds of others who suffered that cruel method of execution? Are we doomed?



Robinson denies that humanity and divinity are incompatible categories. But Owen and Mosser say that, by the sheer act of talking of "humanity" and "divinity," he has already fallen into a two-natures Christology (p. 36 n. 77).

This is a little too verbally tricky to be satisfying. I can speak of Frank's being an "adult," a "parent," and a "human being." In so doing, though, I am scarcely asserting a doctrine of Frank's "three natures." For Latter-day Saints, who see humanity and deity as points along a continuum, as variant manifestations of a single race of the children of God, our speech of "God" and "man" no more implies two metaphysical or ontological natures than does our speech of "humans" and "adults."

Owen and Mosser seem to me to be committing precisely the same error of misplaced reification that, quoting Gerald Bray, they attribute to the fourth-century heresiarch Arius:

Arius, however, was an Aristotelian who believed that if it was necessary to use a different name to describe an object, that object had to be a different thing (*ousia*). If it was necessary, as all were agreed, to maintain a

distinction between the *names* Father, Son and Holy Spirit, then logically there must be some real difference between them as *beings*. To Arius this meant that the three persons could not share equally in the same divine *ousia*, which by definition was unique.¹⁴

A denial that “humanity” and “divinity” constitute distinct categories does not, as such, prove that they have actual being—nor that they are, therefore, distinct categories.



Psalm 82 and John 10, say Owen and Mosser (see p. 39 n. 84), do not support the Latter-day Saint view of theosis.

This is not the place to enter into a lengthy discussion of the rather thorny exegesis of Psalm 82, nor even of its dependent text in John 10. I would suggest, though, that interested readers consult the very instructive correspondence on Psalm 82 between the professional anti-Mormon James White, of Alpha and Omega Ministries in Phoenix, Arizona, and Professor William J. Hamblin of Brigham Young University.¹⁵ An article of mine will shortly appear, entitled “‘Ye Are Gods’: Psalm 82 and John 10 as Witnesses to the Divine Nature of Humankind,” which I hope will shed some interesting light on the subject.¹⁶



We become the children of God through adoption, say Owen and Mosser. Contrary to the teaching of the Latter-day Saints, we are not natively children of God (see p. 42 n. 91).

It is obviously true that, as the scriptural passages cited by Owen and Mosser indicate, there is a critically important sense in

¹⁴ Gerald Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1993), 127, cited by Owen and Mosser at p. 59.

¹⁵ The complete and unedited correspondence is available at shields-research.org/A-O_Min.htm. The version furnished on Reverend White’s web site is only partial and somewhat misleading.

¹⁶ It is scheduled to appear in *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (forthcoming 2000).

which we become the children of God, if we do at all, by divine adoption. But the scriptures seem plainly to indicate that there is another sense in which we are, all of us, Christian or not, children of a Heavenly Father. Acts 17:28–29 seems to teach this most clearly. In this passage, the apostle Paul approvingly cites a *pagan* poet to an audience of Athenian *pagans* on the Areopagus, to the effect that we (evidently including his *pagan* hearers) are the “offspring” of God. And the word translated as “offspring” by the King James Bible, *genos* (related to Latin/English *genus* and to English *kin*), indisputably has the sense of “family,” “race,” or “kind.”¹⁷



Owen and Mosser cite Gerald Bray to support their assertion that belief in Trinitarianism is required for belief in the atonement of Christ (see p. 44).

But there seems no particular reason to accept this claim. Only belief in Christ’s deity seems indeed to be required—although, as we have seen above, at least one form of “two-natures” Christology appears to leave it strangely irrelevant and impotent. But why must that belief in his deity take the form of ontological Trinitarianism? More than mere assertion is required to make this claim plausible.



Union with a nontrinitarian Christ, say Owen and Mosser, would not be union with God himself (see p. 49).

I disagree. It seems obvious to me that perfect union with a Christ who is in perfect union with the Father *would* be union with the Father. Moreover, the only unity with the Father that the evangelical Christ possesses but the Latter-day Saint Christ does not is *ontological* unity, a unity of *being*. Otherwise, in the Latter-day Saint view, both the Father and the Son are unified in such respects as love and will and purpose. Evangelicals, I presume, would grant that we can—indeed, would exhort us that we

¹⁷ My forthcoming paper, “‘Ye Are Gods,’” contains a somewhat fuller discussion of this and other related passages.

should—seek after a unity of love and will and purpose with the Father. But I think they would also say that we should never aspire to ontological oneness with him, to a oneness of being, for such can never be available to us. So the kind of unity with the Father that Mormonism fails to offer is also the kind that evangelical Protestantism cannot offer.



Owen and Mosser observe that Latter-day Saints routinely misunderstand the doctrine of the Trinity (see pp. 44–45).

This is undoubtedly the case. Yet some Latter-day Saints (I count myself among them) understand the doctrine well—to the extent that it is comprehensible at all. (Many Protestants misunderstand it, also. Time and again I have had zealous evangelicals try to explain Trinitarianism to me, only to hear some form of the ancient modalistic heresy instead of the “orthodox” doctrine. And I have no doubt that many Catholics and Orthodox, were they pressed, would find themselves in much the same boat.) Latter-day Saints simply believe Trinitarianism to be wrong, incoherent, irretrievably Hellenized, and not demanded by the biblical data.

The topic of the Godhead merits much further work, of course. It is an inexhaustibly rich and profound subject for reflection. In some ways, I suspect, almost every fundamental doctrine of our faith is implied by and contained in an appropriately deep understanding of the Godhead.



On page 53, while discussing the oneness of the Godhead, Owen and Mosser suggest that John 10:30 and John 14:11 should take interpretive priority over John 17:21–22 because they precede that passage in the narrative.

But I can see absolutely no reason why this should be the case. It is at least as likely that the explanation or clarification of an enigmatic passage should *follow* it. Most probably, though, the order of the passages in the narrative has no interpretive significance at all.



Modern revelation, say Owen and Mosser, cannot contradict previous, biblical revelation (see p. 56 n. 124).

I am not sure that we need to admit the implicit notion behind this and similar assertions, that latter-day revelation as accepted by the Latter-day Saints does indeed contradict previous, biblical revelation. Contradiction, it seems to me, is often in the eye of the beholder.

Wouldn't Jews see the New Testament as contradicting the Old? What about circumcision, for example? When the Lord instituted circumcision with Abraham—the practice predates Moses and the Mosaic law by many generations—there was no hint that it was only a temporary measure. Quite the contrary. All male children in Abraham's line were to be circumcised "in their generations." "My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant" (Genesis 17:9, 13–14). Under the Mosaic law, even resident aliens among the Israelites had to receive circumcision if they wished to participate in the Passover (see Exodus 12:48–49). The seriousness with which the Lord took the rite is reflected in such passages as Joshua 5:2–8.

On the other hand, when Jews heard Paul say things like "in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision" (Galatians 5:6), or "he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter" (Romans 2:29), they could certainly be pardoned for concluding that this "modern revelation" of Paul's contradicted "previous, biblical revelation."



Owen and Mosser argue that John 5:25–29; 1 Peter 3:18–20; and 1 Peter 4:6 do not support Latter-day Saint teaching that there is hope for the unevangelized dead (see pp. 73–76).

This is a big and interesting subject, on which I hope to write more. In the meantime, I suggest that those who might be interested in recent Latter-day Saint thinking on the subject look at articles by Daniel C. Peterson, Matthew Roper, John A. Tvedtnes,

and John W. Welch that have been written within the past few years.¹⁸



Alma 34:32–34, say Owen and Mosser (on pp. 78–79 n. 185), contradicts Latter-day Saint hopes for the postmortem salvation of those who have not heard the gospel.

I disagree. Properly read, the passage does not invalidate the work that goes on in Latter-day Saint temples around the world. For one thing, it is addressed to people who have already received “many witnesses” (Alma 34:30; see 34:33) and certainly not to the unevangelized. Furthermore, it occurs in the midst of a longer sermon, the burden of which is the need for repentance and moral renewal (see, for example, Alma 34:17–29), and the division it recognizes is not so much between members and nonmembers of the church as between the “wicked” (Alma 34:35) and the “righteous” (Alma 34:36). Latter-day Saints still believe in a broad division in the spirit world between the abode of the wicked and the abode of the righteous, but that by no means negates their divinely assigned mission to perform the ordinances of the temple for all those who have ever lived.¹⁹ Alma 34:32–34 simply teaches that deathbed repentance is a snare and a delusion, that

¹⁸ See, for example, Daniel C. Peterson, “Skin Deep,” review of *Die Mormonen: Sekte oder neue Kirche Jesu Christi?* by Rüdiger Hauth, *FARMS Review of Books* 9/2 (1997): 99–146 (the relevant pages are 131–39); John A. Tvedtnes, “The Dead Shall Hear the Voice,” review of “Does the Bible Teach Salvation for the Dead? A Survey of the Evidence, Part I,” by Luke P. Wilson, and “Did Jesus Establish Baptism for the Dead?” by Luke P. Wilson, *FARMS Review of Books* 10/2 (1998): 184–99. Matthew Roper has an article on the subject: “Salvation for the Dead: A Response to Luke Wilson,” in *Proceedings of the First Annual Mormon Apologetics Symposium* (Felton, Calif.: Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research, 1999), 187–204. Also relevant are John W. Welch, review of “Corinthian Religion and Baptism for the Dead (1 Corinthians 15:29): Insights from Archaeology and Anthropology,” by Richard E. DeMaris, *FARMS Review of Books* 8/2 (1996): 43–46; and John A. Tvedtnes, “Baptism for the Dead in Early Christianity,” in Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *The Temple in Time and Eternity* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1999), 55–78.

¹⁹ See Joseph F. Smith’s great “Vision of the Redemption of the Dead,” Doctrine and Covenants 138 (particularly verses 11–23, 29–37, 57–60).

those who have knowingly chosen evil will enter the next life without having undergone any magical transformation and will be the same evilly inclined, Satan-dominated souls that they were when they died. It says nothing about the good and humble people of other faiths who lived as best they could according to the light and truth they had received.



Robinson, say Owen and Mosser, thinks that Hellenistic ideas are “mad, bad and dangerous to know” (p. 82). Indeed, they imply, Latter-day Saints generally hold this notion, and need to abandon it (see p. 101). For, they say, *Jesus* didn’t think that everything Greek was bad (see p. 86).

This is the one section of Owen and Mosser’s essay that I found somewhat irritating. Although Robinson’s position on Hellenism is admittedly not fleshed out with any great precision or detail, their response to him verges at several places on caricature. At one point, they playfully suggest that it may be—but probably isn’t—Euclid’s geometry or Aristotle’s logic that Robinson abominates (see pp. 88–89). They know better. And surely they know, too, that Latter-day Saints do *not* “characterize every use of Hellenistic thought as a move toward apostasy” (p. 101). They paint with too broad a brush when they refer to “Robinson’s overly negative attitude toward *all* things Greek” (p. 86 n. 202, emphasis mine) and when they imply that Latter-day Saints in general and Robinson in particular imagine that “Christian theology is *nothing more* than an offspring of speculative philosophy” (p. 94, emphasis added). In a respectful dialogue, Latter-day Saints deserve more credit for intelligence, learning, and nuanced understanding than Owen and Mosser allow in these passages. It isn’t even clear to me that Robinson is really “ascribing to philosophy the primary role in the creation of orthodox Christian theology” (p. 93). That certainly wouldn’t be my position; I am perfectly willing to grant that biblical data have played something of a role, and even a relatively important one, in the formulation of “orthodox” Christian theology.

Along with the element of caricature here, I was put off by what seems to me, rightly or wrongly, a kind of *faux* naivete in

Owen and Mosser's discussion of Hellenism and Christian theology. I am reminded of a famous text by the great Islamic Aristotle commentator, jurist, and philosopher Averroës (Ibn Rushd). In his *Al-faṣl al-maqāl* or "Decisive Treatise," Averroës sets out to defend philosophy as a legitimate pursuit for Muslims.²⁰ By the end of the treatise, however, he is arguing that philosophy is not only permissible but *mandated* by the Qur'an, since the Qur'an commands believers to reflect upon the universe. But this, in my view, is to play something of a game. For Averroës knew, and Owen and Mosser must know, that ancient Greek philosophy was not merely rigorous thinking, a set of value-neutral, concept-free logical tools. It was itself a lifestyle and a comprehensive, life-orientational system, based upon specific assumptions and ways of looking at the world. Socrates, with his *daimon*, and Plato and Plotinus were religious figures every bit as much as were the prophets of ancient Israel. In other words, Greek philosophy brought with it a great deal of religious baggage.²¹

The simple fact is that it is not only Latter-day Saints who recognize that Christianity underwent a major transformation in its encounter with Hellenism. "It is impossible for any one," the British scholar Edwin Hatch declared in his famous Hibbert lectures for 1888,

whether he be a student of history or no, to fail to notice a difference of both form and content between the Sermon on the Mount and the Nicene Creed. The Sermon on the Mount is the promulgation of a new law of conduct; it assumes beliefs rather than formulates them; the theological conceptions which underlie it belong to the ethical rather than the speculative side of theology; metaphysics are wholly absent. The Nicene

²⁰ An English version of the *Decisive Treatise* appears in George F. Hourani, trans. and ed., *Averroës: On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy* (London: Luzac, 1961). A new translation, by Charles E. Butterworth, is scheduled to appear shortly in a dual-language edition as part of Brigham Young University's Islamic Translation Series, distributed by the University of Chicago Press.

²¹ I discuss this subject at somewhat greater length in a paper, "What Has Athens to Do with Jerusalem?" *Apostasy and Restoration in the Big Picture*, in *First Annual Mormon Apologetics Symposium*, 225–50.

Creed is a statement partly of historical facts and partly of dogmatic inferences; the metaphysical terms which it contains would probably have been unintelligible to the first disciples; ethics have no place in it. The one belongs to a world of Syrian peasants, the other to a world of Greek philosophers. The contrast is patent. . . . [T]he question why an ethical sermon stood in the forefront of the teaching of Jesus Christ, and a metaphysical creed in the forefront of the Christianity of the fourth century, is a problem which claims investigation.²²



Owen and Mosser write (on pp. 91–92, 96) that Robinson's claim that Christianity was connected with philosophy, and most particularly with Platonism, is refuted by the fact that the Platonists were among its bitter enemies.

This is wholly unpersuasive. For one thing, it simply is not true that all Platonists were opposed to Christianity. A particularly spectacular counterexample is the pagan Neoplatonist Synesius of Cyrene, who had studied with the famous female philosopher-martyr Hypatia at Alexandria and then, in A.D. 410, at one fell swoop, became not only a Christian but the bishop of Libyan Ptolemaïs. Had he converted? Not really. He simply seems to have recognized that paganism was doomed and that the future lay with Christianity. The best way to preserve the Hellenism that he loved was in the church. And, boiled down to its essentials, as he saw them, Christianity wasn't all that far from the truth. Accordingly, when Christian leaders, recognizing his moral earnestness and high character, pressed him to accept the bishopric, he acquiesced. Just before his consecration, though, he openly stated his objections to certain Christian doctrines. "Synesius," says his modern biographer Jay Bregman, "was a Platonic 'philosopher-bishop'

²² Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity* (Gloucester, Mass.: Smith, 1970), 1.

whose acceptance of Christianity was provisional and remained secondary to his commitment to Neoplatonism."²³

Wilamowitz sees Synesius more as a political than as a religious convert—as having never abandoned his basic Neoplatonic tenets although he accommodated himself to Christianity in some respects. He reconciled himself only with those aspects of Christianity close to his philosophical notions (e.g., he understood the doctrine of the Trinity well because it was based on Neoplatonism, as was most Christian theology). “But the teaching, life and death of Jesus were without significance for him”; nor did the entire Jewish inheritance of Christianity, including Paul, exist for him. The Christ near to him in his living presence was the [Platonic] Demiurge active in the creation and in whom the World Soul and human soul had their being. Even as a bishop he relied more on metaphysics than on the gospel.²⁴

And Synesius was not entirely alone. It is child’s play to name Christian Platonists. Clement and Origen of Alexandria come readily to mind. “Origen,” the famous patristic scholar G. L. Prestige writes with approving enthusiasm, “and not the third-rate professors of a dying sophistry and nerveless superstition, stood in the true succession from Plato and Aristotle in the history of pure thought.”²⁵ “Gregory of Nyssa,” says Jay Bregman, “made Neoplatonism the handmaiden of his mystical theology: in his mind the two were as one.” He “was basically a Neoplatonist rather thinly disguised as a Christian.”²⁶

But even where the Platonists were hostile, Owen and Mosser’s argument is unconvincing. Hostility can sometimes be a struggle over shared turf and can reflect perceived (and resented) relation-

²³ Jay Bregman, *Synesius of Cyrene: Philosopher-Bishop* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 6, citing U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, “Die Hymnen des Synesios und Proklos,” *Sitzungsbericht der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 14 (1907): 272–95 (esp. 286, 295).

²⁵ G. L. Prestige, *Fathers and Heretics: Six Studies in Dogmatic Faith with Prologue and Epilogue* (London: SPCK, 1940), 65.

²⁶ Bregman, *Synesius of Cyrene*, 10, 14–15.

ships as much as differences. Islam and Christianity, for example, have a long history of mutual hostility because they literally share geographical borders, but also because they share theological territory. There is no such history of conflict between, say, Christianity and Buddhism, because the two are so very distant from each other, in all senses of the word *distance*. Owen and Mosser themselves observe, in another context, that "Augustine readily admitted that the Platonists' views, out of all the philosophies, came closest to the truth revealed by God. . . . But Augustine was also quite willing to dispute Platonic views that were at odds with the Christian faith. . . . It was also Augustine's view that *since the Platonists came closest to the truth, it was with the Platonists that Christians ought primarily to dispute* rather than wasting time on other less plausible systems of belief" (p. 97 n. 221, emphasis mine).

Consider, too, the case of gnosticism, which Owen and Mosser remark "could aptly be described as Platonism on steroids" (p. 89). They cite James W. Thompson as saying that "Gnosticism is discussed today by classical scholars as a category within the Platonic tradition. Because Platonism itself was no unified movement, it is impossible to distinguish its worldview from Gnostic views."²⁷ Thus, by Owen and Mosser's implicit rule, Platonists should not be hostile toward the beliefs of their gnostic cousins. Yet Plotinus, the illustrious founder of the Neoplatonic version of Platonism, positively *loathed* gnosticism. His great treatise "Against the Gnostics," *Enneads* 2.9, is one of the most scorching polemics to survive from the ancient world. Plotinus obviously regarded the gnostics as heretical and a threat.



Seeking support for their claim that Greek philosophy and developed Christian theology were fundamentally distinct, Owen and Mosser quote Gerald Bray to the effect that Christian theology possesses a strong mystical element that is diametrically opposed to Greek philosophy (see pp. 94–95).

²⁷ James W. Thompson, *The Beginnings of Christian Philosophy: The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1982), 15, cited by Owen and Mosser at p. 89 n. 206.

But this is simply not true. From its beginnings in the fourth century B.C., with Plato's notion of the Form of the Good and his famous Allegory of the Cave (in *Republic* 7), Platonism has manifested a powerful mystical dimension. And Plotinus, the third century A.D. pagan founder of Neoplatonism, must surely rank as the philosopher of mysticism par excellence. As his ancient disciple and biographer, Porphyry of Tyre, wrote, "Plotinus, the philosopher of our times, seemed ashamed of being in the body."²⁸ Accordingly, Plotinus not only theorized about mysticism but practiced it, and both he and his student reported actual experience of mystical union with the divine.

He sleeplessly kept his soul pure and ever strove toward the divine which he loved with all his soul and did everything to be delivered and escape from the bitter wave of blood-drinking life here. So to this god-like man above all, who often raised himself in thought, according to the ways Plato teaches in the *Banquet*, to the First and Transcendent God, that God appeared who has neither shape nor any intelligible form, but is throned above intellect and all the intelligible. I, Porphyry, who am now in my sixty-eighth year, declare that once I drew near and was united to him. To Plotinus "the goal ever near was shown": for his end and goal was to be united to, to approach the God who is over all things. Four times while I was with him he attained that goal, in an unspeakable actuality and not in potency only.²⁹

Plotinus's dying words were "Try to bring back the god in you to the divine in the All!"³⁰ His great work the *Enneads*, which can reasonably be viewed as one long (and notoriously difficult) mystical meditation, closes with the statement, "This is the life of gods and of godlike and blessed men, deliverance from the things of this world, a life which takes no delight in the things of

²⁸ Porphyry, *On the Life of Plotinus* 1. I use A. H. Armstrong's translation of Porphyry's biography found in *Plotinus*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

this world, escape in solitude to the solitary.”³¹ Or, as the last phrase (*φύγη μόνου προς μόνον*) is often rendered, “flight of the alone to the Alone.”

The claim that Christianity had a mystical element while pagan philosophy lacked such, and that the two are therefore proved to have been historically opposed, simply will not withstand scrutiny.



Islam and Judaism were also exposed to Greek philosophy, say Owen and Mosser, but developed very differently than did Christianity, which, they say, proves that Christianity was fundamentally different in the first place (see pp. 94–95).

Well, of *course* Christianity was different. For one thing, it was committed to the notion of a three-person Godhead, which greatly complicated attempts to assimilate it to Greek philosophical notions of the primacy of “oneness,” and which therefore led to the contortions of Trinitarianism. Both Judaism and Islam were truly monotheistic and had a much easier time relating to Greek metaphysics.

And it is obviously correct that Islam, Judaism, and Christianity developed along different lines. But why shouldn’t they have? (Owen and Mosser’s argument seems to me to rest upon an implicit—and simplistic—historical determinism.) Unlike Christianity, Judaism and Islam continued to be expressed predominantly in Semitic languages. The three religions had dramatically different histories. There are uncountable factors, innumerable contingent elements, that affected the three. Nonetheless, nobody familiar with the writings of Moses Maimonides, nor even with al-Ghazali’s *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, can fail to note that Judaism and Islam, too, had to reckon with, and were not unaffected by, the powerful force of Greek philosophy.³²

³¹ Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.9.11.48–51. The translation is from Armstrong, trans., *Plotinus*, vol. 7 (1988).

³² See, for instance, al-Ghazali, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, trans. Michael E. Marmura (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1997).



Orthodox Christians, Owen and Mosser observe, hold to a belief in creation *ex nihilo*, from nothing, while Greek philosophers such as Aristotle believed in an eternally existent universe. This, they think, manifests another huge gulf between Christianity and Hellenistic thought (see p. 96).

But the gulf is problematic. For the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* appears to be postbiblical. And, while it most likely arose out of concerns peculiar to the Abrahamic revelatory tradition of Judaism, Christianity, and, later, Islam, its formulation seems to be dependent upon conceptual resources provided by Hellenistic thought.³³



Owen and Mosser dismiss Robinson's claim that the God of Christian orthodoxy is "virtually indistinguishable from the God of the Hellenistic philosophers." "This statement," they declare, "is simply false" (p. 96).

But it isn't so simple. The eminent historian Robert Wilken, discussing the third-century pagan critic of Christianity Porphyry of Tyre, whom we have already had cause to mention, observes that,

For over a century, since the time when the Apologists first began to offer a reasoned and philosophical presentation of Christianity to pagan intellectuals, Christian thinkers had claimed that they worshipped the same God honored by the Greeks and Romans, in other words, the deity adored by other reasonable men and women. Indeed, Christians adopted precisely the same language to describe God as did pagan intellectuals. The Christian apologist Theophilus of Antioch described God as "ineffable . . . inexpressible . . . uncontainable . . . incomprehensible . . . inconceivable

³³ See the discussion and, more importantly, the references supplied at Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks, *Offenders for a Word: How Anti-Mormons Play Word Games to Attack the Latter-day Saints* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992), 95-96.

... incomparable ... unteachable ... immutable ... inexpressible ... without beginning because he was uncreated, immutable because he is immortal" (*Ad Autol.* 1.3–4). This view, that God was an immaterial, timeless, and impassible divine being, who is known through the mind alone, became a keystone of Christian apologetics, for it served to establish a decisive link to the Greek spiritual and intellectual tradition.³⁴

These efforts to demonstrate that the God of Christianity was fundamentally the same as the God of sophisticated Greek paganism continued well into the fifth century after Christ, and only ceased when paganism was no longer worth the attention.³⁵ Wilken observes that rank-and-file Christians seem to have been deeply mistrustful of these intellectuals and their attempts to clothe Christianity in the borrowed garments of Greek philosophical paganism.³⁶ Yet the process nonetheless continued, and prospered.³⁷

My comments here have been critical. But I do not wish my reservations to becloud my admiration and enthusiasm for what has happened in *How Wide the Divide?* and in this volume of the *FARMS Review of Books*. I commend Craig Blomberg, Paul Owen, and Carl Mosser for their willingness to enter into a serious, honest, rigorous conversation with Latter-day Saints. I am grateful to my Mormon friends and colleagues for their readiness to respond in kind. May such discussions continue.

I take the opportunity now to close with a kind of testimony. I made my first careful reading of the Owen and Mosser essay in February 1999, while staying in the Jesuit house in Beirut, Leba-

³⁴ Robert L. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984), 151.

³⁵ See *ibid.*, 151–52, 154.

³⁶ See *ibid.*, 78–79.

³⁷ A recent look at this process, written by a Latter-day Saint lawyer, is Richard R. Hopkins, *How Greek Philosophy Corrupted the Christian Concept of God* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon, 1998). The same topic, along with several other topics related to the ancient apostasy and modern restoration of the gospel, is treated in Barry R. Bickmore, *Restoring the Ancient Church: Joseph Smith and Early Christianity* (Ben Lomond, Calif.: Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research, 1999).

non. The "Résidence des pères jésuites" is situated very near to the famous "Green Line," that wide and once lethal swath of rubble that separates the Christian portion of the city from its Muslim portion. I am a professional Islamicist. I have spent many thousands of hours on the study of Islamic history, culture, languages, and theology. I have a number of Muslim friends and, I hope, a fairly deep and sympathetic understanding of them and their beliefs. Nonetheless, despite my background or perhaps because of it, there is no doubt whatsoever in my mind as to which side of that divide is mine. Latter-day Saints are Christians. I hope that our understanding of our fellow Christians, and theirs of us, will continue to grow. Differences should not be ignored, but they should be accurately understood. (The lesson of Beirut should not be forgotten.) And commonalities should be recognized and appreciated. I am very pleased that the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies has been able to participate, via this *Review*, in a conversation that promises to further those objectives.