Counterfeiting the Mormon Concept of God

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<td><strong>Author(s)</strong></td>
<td>Richard R. Hopkins</td>
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<td><strong>ISSN</strong></td>
<td>1099-9450 (print), 2168-3123 (online)</td>
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Francis Beckwith expresses his thesis at the outset of his contribution to *The Counterfeit Gospel of Mormonism* as follows: “Most people, including some Mormons, are unaware of how radically the Mormon view of God differs from the picture of God that one finds in the Bible and traditional Christian theology” (p. 51). This is a controversial statement, but it is certainly true in one respect: Mormons are, indeed, unaware of any difference between their view of God and that taught in the Bible. What Beckwith is really trying to prove, however, is a little narrower. He promises to show “why Christians believe that their concept of God better captures the data of Scripture than does the LDS view” (p. 51).

This statement implies a distinction between “Christians” and Latter-day Saints that does not exist, but it is a worthy goal if only Beckwith would have stuck with it. This review will examine his arguments and show that, in fact, he fails not only to sustain his claim, but he diverts from it so substantially as to suggest that even he does not believe it is provable.

1. As to Beckwith’s claim that the Mormon view of God differs radically from “traditional Christian theology,” there will be little argument from Latter-day Saints. In the latter half of the second century A.D., false views of God reflecting the tenets of popular

Two major problems beset and completely undermine Beckwith's thesis. The first is his assumption that "classical theism" is the same thing as "biblical" theology. He incorrectly asserts that what "one finds in the Bible" and "traditional Christian theology" are one and the same. They are not, of course, but there is little point in addressing that issue historically because all Beckwith says in support of the historical issue is that "this view of God has long been the orthodox theistic position of all branches of the Christian church: Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Eastern Orthodox" (p. 51). That, of course, proves nothing.

The second is Beckwith's interpretation of the LDS view of God. It is understandable, since he seeks to debunk it, that he should portray the LDS view in the worst possible light, but what Beckwith does in this chapter is more an attempt to rewrite Mormonism's tenets than to portray them. His restatements concerning "the Mormon concept of God" are so far from the mark, so often, that one is tempted to accuse him of setting up a straw version of the Mormon concept of God rather than confronting real Mormon doctrine.

The first portion of his chapter attempts to demonstrate his first claim, namely that classical theism most accurately represents the biblical concept of God, so we will start with that issue. His arguments regarding the Bible's support for classical theism are addressed in the order of their presentation.

The Classical Christian Concept of God

Beckwith admits to "variations within this tradition [classical theism]" but claims that his "bare bones" version constitutes the fundamentals of orthodox Christianity (pp. 51–52). In truth, the term orthodox in Christianity was first applied to a set of interpretations of biblical language beginning late in the second century A.D.
that ultimately became the “dogma” of the Roman Catholic Church. As early as the third century A.D., these dogmas started to become inviolate. Denial of them, even improper wording or examples used in teaching, could be grounds for excommunication. These doctrines constituted the official position on theology arrived at by agreement among the various surviving churches.

Does that make them biblical? Actually, they are often directly contrary to passages in the Bible. They are not even based on oral traditions handed down by the original apostles or any other knowledgeable leaders of the early church. They are nothing more than the majority opinions of early Christian thinkers still alive after A.D. 125.

There is no reason to think that orthodoxy or classical theism represents the teachings of the Bible any more than any other person’s opinion about the words contained in scripture. It is simply a fact that by the end of the fifth century A.D., if not earlier, certain interpretations of the Bible were considered “orthodox” and therefore acceptable, while others were believed to be “heretical” and therefore subject to disciplinary action. In fact, many orthodox dogmas were attacked and even renounced in the Protestant Reformation, and many of the opinions of those early thinkers are now considered heretical.

Any student of second-century Christian history can attest to the problems the church had in arriving at a reliable set of biblical interpretations. For one thing, the canon had not yet been established. Many orthodox thinkers (e.g., the highly respected Irenaeus) believed that the Shepherd of Hermas was scripture and based some of their interpretations (e.g., the doctrine of creation ex nihilo) on passages from that work. Others refused to accept either the writings of Paul, the Old Testament, the book of Revelation, or some other portion of the canon that has since been accepted by Protestant denominations.


To make matters worse, church leaders in the second century were confronted with a cacophony of opinions about church doctrine. It was the age of the heretic, and every church teacher espoused a different theory. Many orthodox doctrines (e.g., the genesis of Christ and the doctrine of consubstantiality) appear to have first been formulated by Tatian, a man who later became openly heretical and was excommunicated.

By the end of the fifth century, the church that survived may have resembled early Christianity, but it was highly influenced by the struggles through which it had come and the prevailing views of the Greek education system that pervaded the known world. The fact that the views promulgated by the church that rose from the ashes of Trajan's persecution have prevailed in much of the Christian world for the last seventeen hundred years cannot be denied. But that is hardly evidence that they rely on or agree with the Bible. It can't even be maintained in all cases that they are the same as the views of first-century Christians.

Nevertheless, Beckwith lists the supposed principles of Christianity or orthodox classical theism as follows:

The God of classical Christian theism is at least 1) personal and incorporeal (without physical parts), 2) the Creator and Sustainer of everything else that exists, 3) omnipotent (all-powerful), 4) omniscient (all-knowing), 5) omnipresent (everywhere present), 6) immutable (unchanging) and eternal, 7) necessary and the only God, and 8) triune: one God, three Persons. (p. 52)

This list really identifies twelve separate attributes or characteristics of God, but each characteristic will be reviewed as it is listed by Beckwith for convenience in examining his arguments.

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5. See Tatian, Address to the Greeks 5, in ANF 2:67.
Personal and Incorporeal

According to classical theism, God is "a personal Being." Beckwith says this means he "has all the attributes that we may expect from a perfect person: self-consciousness and the ability to reason, know, love, communicate, and so forth" (p. 52). He then provides biblical authority for that position. So far, Mormons agree with classical theists that this is biblical doctrine.

But classical theism departs from biblical theology when it refuses to acknowledge that, since man was created in the image of God (see Genesis 1:26–27), the concept of personality in God must be the same in him as it is in man. That purely biblical deduction places this attribute of God in direct conflict with the doctrine of consubstantiality, which lies at the core of the classical Trinity. If the idea that man was created in the image of God means anything, it means that if three human persons cannot be one human being (and they cannot), the three persons of the Godhead cannot be one singular person or Being.

This is not to say that the oneness of God is unbiblical. Quite the contrary. God’s "oneness" is unquestionably taught throughout the Bible and other Latter-day Saint scripture. But it means that the biblical message about God’s "oneness," even the very concept of "God" in the sense of "deity," must be reexamined by classical theologians with an eye toward determining what the authors of the Old and New Testaments meant. The idea of consubstantiality promulgated by second-century Christian thinkers just does not capture the meaning of the scriptural passages.

Expressing one important source of confusion, Beckwith maintains that because John 4:24 refers to God as "spirit," he cannot also have a body of flesh and bones (see p. 52). This interpretation conflicts with innumerable eyewitness accounts throughout the Old and New Testaments (e.g., Exodus 24:9–11 and Acts 7:55–56). It also conflicts with the New Testament's unequivocal testimony that Jesus Christ, a resurrected being with flesh and bones (see Luke 24:39), is indeed the express image of the Father (see, e.g., Hebrews 1:3) and is himself divine.
The argument in which Beckwith uses John 4:24 to deny God’s corporeality is credited to Carl Mosser, who paraphrases Christ’s remarks to the Samaritan woman in John 4 as follows:

Jesus in effect says, God is not located either in Jerusalem or at Gerizim. God is spirit—He is not “located” anywhere. You don’t need to go to the right place, you need to worship with the right attitude—in spirit and in truth. Of course, for Jesus to make the point that God’s essential nature is unlocated, ‘spirit’ precludes a physical body also being a part of that nature, since a body is located. (p. 92 n. 3)

It is true that, in prayer, the location of the supplicant is irrelevant, but it is wrong to assume that this is because God has no location. Although Mosser doesn’t acknowledge that he has made this assumption, the unexpressed foundation of his thesis is the idea that a spirit has no location, while a body does.

Such an idea is taught nowhere in the Bible. On the contrary, Solomon, for example, understood that the God of Israel, then a spirit, had a location. In his prayer of dedication for the temple in Jerusalem (see 1 Kings 8:39, 43), he repeatedly asks, “Hear thou [the prayers of the people] in heaven thy dwelling place.” In so saying, Solomon recognized that the God of Israel, the premortal spirit of Christ, had a “dwelling place” “in heaven.” Thus Mosser’s argument must fail. The idea that spirits are “unlocated” is completely without biblical support.

In any event, John 4:24 does not discuss God’s nature at all but relates to the means by which men may communicate with him from any location. They can do so in spirit and in truth. This passage recognizes that there is a spiritual aspect to man’s nature as much as to God’s. To suggest that it precludes God from having a physical nature would necessarily require the same conclusion with respect to men, namely that they also can communicate with God only if they have no physical nature.

Beckwith cites the Old Testament to prove his thesis that “God is not a man” (see, e.g., Numbers 23:19). But the very assumption that lies at the foundation of these verses is in direct conflict with the idea
that God is only a spirit. In Numbers 23:19 God contrasts his perfect
condition with man’s imperfect condition. The passage confirms that
God is not an imperfect man, that fallen men differ grossly from the
perfect, glorified Father of heaven and earth. But it does not contra­
dict God’s basic human nature (see Genesis 1:26–27). Instead, it re­
fects a contrast between the perfect nature of the resurrected God
and the imperfect nature of mortal men.

This understanding is aided by the use of the comparative form
of the word *man* in Numbers 23:19 (and similar passages). There the
Hebrew word *'ish* is translated “man” in the English text. That word
is commonly used in Hebrew to compare one type of man with an­
other (e.g., an older man with a younger man),8 in this case a perfect
man with an imperfect man. Thus this passage actually teaches that
the God of the Old Testament is a man.

Christians worship Christ as God, yet he is clearly a man. Even
classical theists admit that Christ has a human nature as well as a di­
vine nature. How can they lay claim to biblical support for their view
when they teach that the Father of Christ is not a man, especially in
light of such passages as Hebrews 1:3? Did God’s eternal and im­
mutable nature change upon the incarnation of Christ? Did he
change from not being a man in the Old Testament to being a man in
the New? Latter-day Saints answer, “No.” Even Christ’s spirit person­
age had the appearance of a man (see Exodus 24:9–11). He came to
everth as a physical man subject to death (see Philippians 2:5–8), and
he is now an exalted and glorified man, just like his Father (see Luke
24:36–43; Romans 6:9; Colossians 1:15; and Hebrews 1:3). How
could God be anything but a corporeal man? To deny it is tanta­
mount to denying that Christ is God.

Beckwith thinks the fact that God generally keeps himself invisible
to mortal men (see Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17; and Hebrews
11:27) means he is not corporeal. But the inability of some to see God
conveys no such information. More important, some have seen God
and borne testimony of his appearance, always in anthropomorphicterms (see, e.g., Acts 7:55–56).

Beckwith claims that “no mere human person has ever seen or can see God (John 1:18; 1 John 4:12)” (p. 52). The phrase *mere human person* is not in the Bible. It is used by classical theists to get around John 6:46, a passage that directly contradicts the classical position on this issue. It teaches that “he which is of God” has seen the Father. Classical theists claim that this refers to Christ alone, but that explanation undercuts the vision of Stephen the Martyr in Acts 7:55–56, and the appearance of “the God of Israel” to Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel in Exodus 24:9–11, to name but two incidents describing an appearance of God.

Beckwith next uses a rather strange twist of logic. He claims that the fact that heaven and earth cannot “contain” God (see 1 Kings 8:27) proves he doesn’t have a body. The logic of this argument is hard to follow, especially in view of the fact that the Hebrew word translated “contain” means “to keep in” (p. 52), a nuance of containment that relates more to God’s power than to his corporeality.

Finally, using the metaphysical idea that God is the “sustainer of everything else that exists” and citing his role as creator and his omnipotence, immutability, and omnipresence, Beckwith concludes, “it is difficult to see how such a being could be physical” (p. 52). This statement is not a biblical argument at all and simply reflects a lack of familiarity with basic principles of physics. The Bible teaches that Christ has all these attributes, but classical theists as well as Latter-day Saints understand that he has a human as well as a divine nature. If Christ can have a human nature and still be omnipotent, immutable, omnipresent, and the creator of heaven and earth, certainly God the Father could be likewise. Indeed, that is exactly what the New Testament teaches in Hebrews 1:3; Colossians 1:13–15; and 2 Corinthians 4:4. Thus classical theism’s claim that God is incorporeal lacks biblical support.

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9. The similarity between 1 John 4:12, which is unconditional, and John 6:46 (by the same author), which is conditional, suggests that one of the texts may not conform precisely to the original. There are more textual problems with 1 John than with the Gospel of John. Therefore, it is more likely that 1 John 4:12 is missing the conditional phrase than that it was erroneously added to John 6:46.

10. This is usually explained by saying that Stephen “only” saw “the glory of God” and that he did not, therefore, actually see the Father. In the Old Testament, however, it is precisely “the glory of God” that was the most invisible aspect of Deity (see Exodus
The Creator and Sustainer of Everything Else That Exists

“In classical theism,” Beckwith admits,

all reality is contingent on God—that is, all reality has come into existence and continues to exist because of Him. Unlike a god who forms the universe out of preexistent matter (ex materia), the God of classical theism created the universe ex nihilo (out of nothing)....

... The Bible also teaches that everything that is not God or in God’s mind (e.g., numbers, ideas) has not always existed. (p. 53, emphasis in original)

While the understanding that God created the heavens and the earth is clearly biblical, the extension of that concept described above is not. It is a theory taught for centuries before Christ by Greek philosophers, especially the Platonists. Plato developed the idea, based on the theories of Parmenides, the father of metaphysics, that the universe is essentially a figment of the imagination of God. His suggestion was that God is pure mind and that he only exists in reality along with the “Forms” (numbers, ideas, and so forth) that exist in his mind. This was “being,” “pure being,” or the “ground of all being.” Everything else—the universe, all matter, indeed, all of time and space as man perceives them—was “not being,” formed after the pattern of the Forms out of chaotic and illusory matter that was referred to as “becoming” or phenomenon (Gr. phainomena).11

Plato did not teach ex nihilo creation, of course. That idea can be traced to a Greek philosopher and Christian Gnostic heretic named Basilides, who lived and wrote early in the second century A.D.12 Creation out of nothing, however, is consistent with later Platonist and neo-Platonist thinking.13

33:18–20). Stephen saw enough of God to know that Jesus was standing on his “right hand.” If there is more to see of God besides his “glory,” it is not evident from Acts 7:55–56, which suggests that God’s glory has at least some anthropomorphic measures.

This is a distinctively metaphysical concept, and nothing in the Bible accepts or teaches the metaphysics of classical theism. Metaphysics must be inferred, if it is to be believed at all, from passages in the Bible. Beckwith looks to the following for such inferences: Acts 17:25; Romans 11:36; 2 Corinthians 4:6; Colossians 1:16–17; Hebrews 11:3; and Revelation 4:11 (see pp. 53–54). He receives some aid in making these conclusions from the translators of the Jerusalem Bible, from which his New Testament quotations are taken (see p. 51). However, a careful examination of the original texts, or even the more literal KJV translation, reveals some serious problems with Beckwith’s conclusions. For example, Hebrews 11:3, if translated literally and with an understanding of the philosophical idiom in common use among the Hellenized people of the time (such as the Alexandrian Jews to whom the book was likely written), directly contradicts the metaphysical concept of the universe.¹⁴

In order to understand Beckwith’s inferences, each of his conclusions must be examined individually.

1. “God has always existed” (p. 54). (In support, Geisler cites Genesis 21:33; Exodus 3:15; Deuteronomy 33:27; 1 Chronicles 16:36; Job 36:26; Psalms 90:1–4; 102:12, 24–27; 143:13; Isaiah 40:28; and Romans 1:20.) More will be said about this later, but it is clear that Latter-day Saint theology agrees with this tenet in at least two senses. First, the individual members of the Godhead have always existed, though not necessarily as members of the Godhead. Second, the Godhead itself, the Divine Nature (the words from which “Godhead” is taken), may be viewed as a reference to a singular authority over all the universe. Latter-day Saints teach that this authority has always existed. All the scriptures cited by Beckwith are consistent with this, the LDS position. Hence, they cannot be used to support the classical rather than the Latter-day Saint view.

2. “The universe, including its matter [everything that is not God or in God’s mind], has not always existed” (p. 54). (See Acts 17:25; Romans 11:36;

¹⁴. In the KJV, the passage reads: “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.” The phrase things which do appear is translated from one Greek word, “phainomena,” commonly used by Middle Platonists to identify the supposedly illusionary world that appears to man’s senses. Thus the last half of the passage could be translated,
2 Corinthians 4:6; Colossians 1:16–17; Hebrews 11:3; and Revelation 4:11.) With so many passages listed, one naturally expects some biblical support for this view, but Beckwith does nothing to show how his conclusion follows from any of the passages he cites. In fact, the scriptures that describe creation are in direct conflict with his view. The primary Hebrew word translated “create” or “created” is bārā', which means “to carve out,” implying that God created the heavens and the earth out of preexistent material. That material, in fact, is carefully described in Genesis 1:2, the second verse of the Bible. Even responsible classical theists have admitted that nothing in the Bible teaches the idea of ex nihilo creation.15

3. “God is the creator, sustainer, and sole cause of the universe, which means that the universe has no material cause” (p. 54). (See references in item 2 above.) This is a problematic conclusion at best. First, biblical passages that say God created “all things” are subject to a scriptural context.16 The context for all such passages is established in Genesis, which limits itself to a description of this earth and its surrounding “heavens.” Besides, the Genesis account specifies that the “heavens and the earth” were made out of something, namely the desolate, ruined, and barren planet described in Genesis 1:2. Lacking some specific indication to the contrary, which does not appear in the passages Beckwith cites, any statement about creation contained in the scriptures must be taken in the context established in Genesis. To apply these passages to the universe in general or to some prior creative act not mentioned in the Bible is pure speculation.

“so that things which are seen were not made from phainomena.” This wording conveys the understanding that the things God created, the things that appear to men’s eyes, were not formed out of the illusory chaos from which Plato thought the sensory universe was made (phainomena).


16. In the New Testament, they are translated from one of the various forms of the Greek root word pas, which is specifically contextual in form. Pas basically means “all that are the subject of this discussion.” Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), s.v. pas.
Latter-day Saints, who tend to be strictly biblical, would grant that God is the sole cause in the universe, but they have no basis for assuming that he is the sole cause of the universe in the sense that classical theists claim. The only account of creation man possesses—namely that contained in the scriptures—specifically identifies pre-existing matter as an essential element in the process.

4. "God created light out of darkness, which implies that out of nothing something was created" (p. 54). (See Genesis 1:3.) Here Beckwith tries to find something that was actually created out of nothing in the biblical account, specifically in Genesis 1:3. His conclusion rests on a tenuous implication at best. First, Genesis 1:3 says nothing about God creating light out of darkness. Especially problematic is the fact that darkness remained after the light was created. Genesis 1:4 says God separated the light from the darkness. The Bible never indicates that the “darkness” is “nothing.”

Notwithstanding the weakness of his arguments, Beckwith finishes his “proof” as follows: “Conclusion: Scripture teaches that God created the universe ex nihilo” (p. 54). (No citations.) Clearly, this conclusion is unwarranted. Even such noted classical theologians as Millard Erickson would refrain from making so broad a claim. Still, Beckwith continues as follows: “Consequently, it is on God alone that everything in the universe depends for its existence” (p. 54).

This conclusion does not follow from the idea of creation ex nihilo, even if that concept could be established as biblical. As it is understood in classical theism, this idea is really only consistent with Plato’s metaphysical concept of a God who holds all creation in his mind, literally a figment of his imagination. Nothing in the Bible teaches that concept.

17. In fact, the reference to darkness in Genesis 1:2, when the text is studied in the original Hebrew, suggests that the condition of the earth was such that sunlight could not penetrate to sea level (“darkness was upon the face of the deep”). In that context, the command in verse three could have been a parting of the atmosphere to allow sunlight through. This would be consistent with verse four and is not contradicted by verse five.

Although the Jerusalem Bible’s translation of Colossians 1:17 (“he holds all things in unity”) might seem to support this concept, that translation is far from literal. The KJV translates the phrase by him all things consist, and the word consist is fairly specific. It means “to place together, to set in the same place, to bring or band together.”¹⁹ No support for the classical idea can be found in this passage. LDS scripture teaches that the “power of God” is that “which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed” (D&C 88:13). That idea is consistent with Acts 17:25 and the other passages Beckwith cites, but it is hardly the same as the classical view.

Omnipotent

God’s omnipotence is declared by classical theism, taught in the Bible, and taught by Latter-day Saints, who would even agree with Beckwith (except for his reference to God being incorporeal) when he says:

This should be understood to mean that God can do anything that is 1) logically possible and 2) consistent with being a personal, incorporeal, omniscient, omnipresent, immutable, and wholly perfect creator. (p. 54)

Beckwith deals with such seeming limitations as the fact that God’s omnipotence does not allow him to sin, by quoting Augustine as follows:

Neither do we lessen [God’s] power when we say He cannot die or be deceived. This is the kind of inability which, if removed, would make God less powerful than He is.... It is precisely because He is omnipotent that for Him some things are impossible. (pp. 54–55, quoting Augustine, City of God 5.10)

Beckwith’s discussion of this attribute takes a turn that leaves Latter-day Saints wondering why classical theists don’t listen to their own logic.

When the classical theist claims that God can only do what is logically possible, he or she is claiming that God cannot do or create what is logically impossible. Examples of logically impossible entities include “married bachelors,” “square circles,” and “a brother who is an only child.” But these are not really entities; they are merely contrary terms that are strung together and appear to say something. Hence, the fact that God cannot do the logically impossible does not in any way discount His omnipotence.

... *everything* is possible for God, but the logically impossible is *not truly a thing*. (p. 55)

It is a shame such wisdom is not applied to the Trinity. If a “married bachelor” is a logical impossibility and God cannot do the logically impossible, how is it he can consist of three persons who are only one Being? The doctrine of the Trinity has been recognized as a paradox since the second century, when it was much easier to explain in terms of the Greek metaphysical universe. Why isn’t this paradox recognized today for the logical impossibility that it is and rejected as “not truly a thing”?

**Omniscient**

Beckwith explains the classical position on the attribute of omniscience as follows: “God is all-knowing, and His all-knowingness encompasses the past, present, and future” (p. 55). Most Latter-day Saints agree with this proposition. But there is a vast difference between classical theism and Mormonism on the subject of how God knows the future.

Classical theism views God, consistent with its Platonistic belief in metaphysics, as being outside of time and space. From this vantage, he can supposedly see any point in time he chooses. The trouble
with this view is that no passage of the Bible even suggests that it is true. Certainly Beckwith does not offer any scripture that would uphold the idea.

Some Christian philosophers and theologians also differ with classical theists on this issue. Beckwith cites one such theologian who claims that “some prophecies are ‘predictions based on God’s exhaustive knowledge of the past and present’” (p. 56).

In refutation of this idea, Beckwith cites Deuteronomy 18:22, but his is a very narrow reading of this passage. It fails to state the true crux of the prophetic calling. A reading of the passage in context (see Deuteronomy 18:18–22) reveals that a true prophet is one who speaks the words God commands him to speak. Verse 22 is merely a convenient rule of thumb. Jonah, for example, was definitely a true prophet, even though his prophecy about the destruction of Nineveh (see Jonah 3:4) did not come to pass.

Jeremiah clarifies this point in a way that completely undermines Beckwith’s argument based on Deuteronomy 18:22. In Jeremiah 18:5–10, the Lord responds to certain complaints from his people, explaining:

> At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy it; if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent concerning the calamity I planned to bring on it. (Jeremiah 18:7–8 NASB)

Thus God may know that a calamitous pronouncement will turn a people to righteousness, and he may instruct his prophet to present the announcement unconditionally, as he did with Jonah. If the people repent and the catastrophe is averted, what does that say about God’s omniscience? The fact is that it neither detracts from his perfect knowledge of the future nor supports the classical notion of how he comes to that knowledge.

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20. Beckwith cites the passage as follows: “If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him” (p. 56).
What does the Bible say about how God knows the future? The answer is suggested in Isaiah 46:10–11, a passage Beckwith himself cites (see p. 55). In those verses, God declares the end from the beginning, saying, “I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed [NASB: planned] it, I will also do it.” This passage suggests that God knows the future because, through his infinite knowledge, he has planned it, and through his infinite power, he will bring it to pass. What he promises for the future will be fulfilled. He has the power to do it, he has planned it, and he will do it.

This is not the kind of prescience classical theists attribute to God, but it is the nature of God’s knowledge of the future reflected in the Bible. It essentially says that God knows the future because he knows all things in the past and present and has all wisdom and all power.

Beckwith suggests that any knowledge of the future thus acquired is “opinion or highly probable guesses” (p. 55), as if man’s feeble attempts to foretell the future could be compared to a prediction made by the Almighty, who established the laws of the universe, knows man’s every thought, and can pinpoint the location of every quark in the universe from the infinite reaches of the past through the latest instant of the present. Given this level of knowledge, God’s “predictions” cannot be regarded as “opinion or highly probable guesses.” They are nothing short of perfect knowledge.

Nothing presented by Beckwith contradicts the impression given by this passage from Isaiah. He cites Psalm 139:17, 18, but the fact that God’s thoughts outnumber the sands doesn’t support the classical view. He also cites Psalm 147:5, saying that God’s understanding has no limits. Lack of limits, however, does not support the metaphysical view of God’s knowledge, especially in light of the fact that the passage specifically refers to God’s “understanding.” When classical theists speak of God’s knowledge, they are not talking about “understanding.” They are talking about knowledge that exists either because whatever God decides in his mind will happen is what happens, or because God is able to look into the future and see what happens.
As to the latter notion of how God knows the future, Beckwith cites a passage that, at first blush, might be interpreted in a supportive way. Job 28:24 (NASB) says: “For He looks to the ends of the earth, and sees everything under the heavens.” Of course, literally speaking, this passage merely states that God sees everything that is happening on earth in the present. This passage is consistent with Isaiah 46:10-11.

The whole idea of metaphysics was unknown to the Hebrews of Job’s time (and to the Greeks back then as well, for that matter). The Hebrews to whom this passage was written held no belief that God could transcend space and time in order to look at the future. To them, that would have been an impossibility. Therefore this passage should not be interpreted in a metaphysical way.21

The only other argument Beckwith cites for the classical view on this issue is Isaiah 41:21-24 (“Produce your cause, saith the Lord; bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob. Let them bring them forth, and shew us what shall happen: let them shew the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things for to come” [Isaiah 41:21-22]), but that scripture actually supports the understanding of how God knows the future as indicated by Isaiah 46:10-11. It contrasts the inability of idols to foretell the future with the ability of God to do so but suggests God’s method for doing so is the one requested, namely “shew the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them.”

Once again, Beckwith fails to demonstrate that classical theism accurately reflects biblical teaching.

21. Passages of scripture whose literal interpretation would constitute an impossi-
    bility, as understood by the people to whom the passages were given, should usually be inter-
Omnipresent

Beckwith next considers the issue of God’s omnipresence, saying, “It is the Bible’s explicit teaching that God is omnipresent” (p. 57). The passages he cites, however (Deuteronomy 4:39; 1 Kings 8:27; 2 Chronicles 2:5, 6; and Acts 17:24–28), immediately belie this claim, for the fact is that the Bible does not use the word omnipresent anywhere within its pages.

The Bible does nothing more than describe God’s knowledge of the present and his power to be at, or communicate with, any part of the universe at his discretion, from which men are intended to derive some understanding of his omnipresence. The term omnipresent is nothing more than a word that describes the effect of these attributes; it is not the attribute itself. Therefore, one cannot learn what this attribute involves from the word omnipresent. It must be understood from the scriptures.

Passages stating the Lord’s position as God in both “the heavens above and on the earth below” (Deuteronomy 4:39), discussing the inability of any building or place to “contain” him (see 1 Kings 8:27 and 2 Chronicles 2:5, 6), or delineating his refusal to occupy man-made shrines, his independence, and his imminence or nearness to man (see Acts 17:24–28) fail to prove that God is omnipresent in the sense taught by classical theists. Nevertheless, Beckwith claims:

Since God is not a physical being who takes up space, it would be wrong to think of Him as a sort of gas that fills up the universe. In that sense, He is not everywhere, since God is not a thing, like water or air, that can take up space. Rather, God is everywhere insofar as He is not limited by a spatio-temporal body, knows everything immediately without benefit of sensory organs, and sustains everything that exists. In other words, God’s omnipresence logically follows from His omniscience, incorporeality, omnipotence, and role as creator and sustainer of the universe. (p. 58)

Actually, God’s omnipresence follows logically from his omniscience and his omnipotence alone. These are the only attributes cited in passages that describe God’s omnipresence (see, e.g., Psalm
It is entirely unnecessary to argue that God must be incorporeal or claim that he is “not a thing, like water or air, that can take up space.” Nor is it necessary to claim that God is “not limited by a spatiotemporal body” (p. 58). This can readily be demonstrated by noting that the New Testament implies Christ’s omnipresence (see Matthew 28:19–20; Acts 1:8) despite the fact—acknowledged by all classical theists (see, for example, p. 93 n. 11)—that he has a “human nature” and a corporeal, spatiotemporal body (see Luke 24:36–38). In other words, Christ was, and thanks to the resurrection, now is and will forever be, “a thing, like water or air, that can take up space” (p. 58), yet he is also omnipresent.

In an attempt to distinguish the classical concept of God’s omnipresence from pantheism, Beckwith denies that God is “identical to His creation” (p. 58). That was a Stoic notion, but the Stoics were not always pantheists. The essence of the pantheistic view is the absence of a personality that can be located at any specific time or place. Pantheism places God’s “presence,” the center of his consciousness, everywhere in the universe simultaneously. Thus to Stoics God was present in everything and at every location in just the same way Beckwith describes God as “spiritually and personally present at every point of the universe” (p. 58).

The God of the Bible has a distinctly identifiable “presence,” which “comes to” and “departs from” specific spatiotemporal locations. He is also described as imminent, “not far from any of us” (Acts 17:27). The entire concept of God’s imminence, taught by classical theists as well as Latter-day Saints, contradicts the idea that he is actually present at every location in the universe simultaneously. To say that God is close by requires the assumption that he is not actually present.

Some classical theologians have correctly noted that it is antithetical to the notion of personality to claim that God is present everywhere simultaneously. Personality, they note, is necessarily centered at some location. Thus to say that God is present everywhere simultaneously is to rob him of his personality and turn him into a pantheistic deity.

That God is both ubiquitous (accessible anywhere) and imminent (near to man) is consistent with the Bible. However, as part of their claims of omnipresence, classical theists also insist that God is transcendent (not located in the real spatiotemporal universe). Belief in the imminence of God and his transcendent is contradictory. This has led some classical theists to admit that they simply do not understand in what way(s) God is omnipresent.13

Beckwith and other classical theologians frequently cite passages that say God is not limited or contained by anything as proof of God's transcendent omnipresence. Thus Beckwith states that God is not "limited by it [referring to his creations] (as in Mormon theism)" (p. 58). But the implication that if God exists among his own creations, he must somehow be limited by that creation, is not a teaching of Mormonism. The idea that God would be limited if he existed in time and space, or that the eternal existence of "matter" and "intelligence" represents some kind of limitation on God's omnipresence or other attributes, is as shortsighted as many other ancient Greek notions about the physical universe that still hamper classical thought today. Latter-day Saints would rather assume that God imposed on time and space the laws and conditions in which he himself chose to live.24

Immutable and Eternal

According to Beckwith, "when a Christian says that God is immutable and eternal, he is saying that God is unchanging and has always existed as God throughout all eternity. There never was a time when God was not God" (p. 58). What this means, he explains, is that "His nature remains the same" even though "God certainly seems to change in response to how His creatures behave—such as in the case of the repenting Ninevites (see the book of Jonah)" (p. 59).

It is not important what some Christians mean when they use biblical language. Beckwith's thesis relates to what the Bible says, and the Bible is not supportive of his claims on this subject. Malachi 23. See ibid.

24. The latter conclusion is in line with scientific theories about the quantum structure of vacuum.
3:5–6, cited in part by Beckwith, teaches that God’s judgment—that is, his perfect adherence to the best principles of jurisprudence—is unchanging. This is not the same as saying that everything about God is unchanging. Beckwith quotes Alan Gomes’s teaching that God’s counsel, his “intention, resolution, will, or purpose . . . are not subject to change, fluctuation, or failure” (p. 58). (See also Hebrews 6:17 and Isaiah 46:10b, cited by Beckwith.) On these points, classical theists have correctly identified biblical teachings.

But the Bible indicates several major areas of change experienced by God. Some of these are changes pertinent to the classical claim that God has always existed “as God.” Since the Godhead consists of three separate persons, Beckwith’s assertion that “God has always existed as God” is necessarily ambiguous. If it refers to God in the broad sense of the ultimate authority over the universe, it is biblical and unquestionably a tenet of Latter-day Saint doctrine. But classical theists apply the statement to all three persons of the Godhead individually. That notion is demonstrably unbiblical.

For example, Proverbs 8:22 reads that the Messiah, God the Son, obtained “wisdom” before he participated in the creation of the earth. Though translators, influenced by the classical tradition, have routinely translated this passage “The Lord possessed me [wisdom] in the beginning of his way, before his works of old,” the word possessed does not come from the usual Hebrew word for that concept (yārash). The text actually uses qānāh, the Hebrew word that means “to acquire.” Thus we learn from this passage that Christ acquired wisdom before he performed the works described in the Old Testament.

It is well established that Christ went through a notable change relative to his position in the Godhead when he condescended to be born in the flesh, to be incarnated. This change is known as the kēnōsis in classical theology and is described in Philippians 2:5–8. That is clearly a major change in the nature (as that term is used by classical theists) of God. So is the resurrection, since it involved making his human nature permanent.

A number of passages in the Bible also suggest that Christ has not always held the status of divinity. They imply that he was “exalted” to that status at some point in time, presumably the very distant past. These passages include Psalm 45:6–7, 1 Corinthians 15:24–28, Philippians 2:9, and Hebrews 1:8–9.

Notably, though the Bible teaches that God always existed—as Latter-day Saints also teach (in the broader sense described previously)—nowhere are the words as God added to a passage. Beckwith did above. He even put those words in italics to emphasize their importance in his theology. The Bible simply teaches that God “lives forever” (Isaiah 57:15a, cited by Beckwith) or is “undying” (1 Timothy 1:17, also cited by Beckwith).

References to God’s “everlasting power and deity” (Romans 1:20, cited by Beckwith) are even clearer in this respect. They do not refer to God personally at all, but only to his “power” and “deity.” These passages suggest that the position or office of “God”—that which represents the authority of God, his “power” and “deity,” as opposed to his individual identity—is that which has always existed.

Many Old Testament passages refer to “the everlasting God,” and Psalm 90:2 in particular (cited by Beckwith) declares that “from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.” Unfortunately, classical theism assigns a Greek rather than a Hebrew meaning to this passage and thereby misses the understanding of God’s immutability taught in the Bible. The word everlasting in these passages is translated from the Hebrew word ʼōlām, which has a different meaning from the English word infinite. It is relative and does not have the absolute mathematical meaning assumed by classical theists. Specifically, ʼōlām means “hidden time, long; the beginning or end of which is either uncertain or else not defined.” Thus these statements are also unsupportive of the classical claim that any particular member of the Godhead has always existed “as God.”

26. In the New Testament, the word God is most often translated from the impersonal Greek Theos, meaning “object of worship.” This implies use of that term in a broader sense, unrelated to specific individuals who might bear this status.

27. Gesenius, Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon, 612, s.v. ʼōlām.
Necessary and the Only God

Beckwith makes an argument for his idea of “the Only God” as follows:

Since the God of the Bible possesses all power, there cannot be any other God, for this would mean that two beings possess all power. That, of course is a logical absurdity, since if a being possesses all of everything (in this case, power) there is, by definition, nothing left for anyone else. (p. 59)

Although this is a fundamentally flawed argument, it makes some sense when applied to the concept of God in the broader sense of the ultimate “object of worship.” Latter-day Saint theists also teach that there is, and can only be, one ultimate authority over the universe. This truth is attested in numerous Bible verses cited by Beckwith (see Isaiah 43:10; 44:6-8; 45:5, 18, 21, 22; Jeremiah 10:10; John 17:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; and 1 Timothy 2:5). But that does not mean this authority cannot be shared or exercised by more than one being who is divine. The idea of an agent who is himself divine is one that man, in his imperfection, has found difficult to grasp, despite Christ’s clear teachings on the subject (see John 17) and his invitation to all men who “overcome” to join him on the throne of his Father (see Revelation 3:21).

In regard to the more narrow sense of individual divinity, the Bible does not teach that any one of the three who are now known to be divine (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost) is “the Only God.” To the extent it identifies any one of the three in such terms, it always refers to God the Father (see, e.g., 1 Corinthians 8:6).

Classical theism also teaches that God is “necessary” in a very unbiblical sense. Beckwith argues for this concept as follows: “Since everything that exists depends on God, and God is unchanging and eternal, it follows that God cannot not exist. In other words, he is a necessary being, whereas everything else is contingent” (p. 60).

Actually, there is nothing logical about the conclusions Beckwith draws here. Except to the extent that it teaches man’s utter dependency on God, this concept is not derived logically from anything in
the Bible. It was adopted entirely from the metaphysical views of Greek philosophy. The distinction between “necessary” and “contingent” beings is rooted in the Greek conception of God as the only real Being, with all of space-time a figment of his imagination.\footnote{For an in-depth study of this issue, see Hopkins, \textit{How Greek Philosophy Corrupted the Christian Concept of God}, chap. 2.} Not surprisingly, Beckwith offers no biblical support for his claim that “there is no doubt that the Bible teaches that God is a necessary being” (p. 60). He even admits that “Christian philosophers and theologians do not all agree on the precise meaning of God’s necessity” (p. 60).

\textbf{Triune: One God, Three Persons}

Through nearly seven pages of this chapter, Beckwith next attempts to show that the doctrine of the Trinity is biblical. Unfortunately, he loses the argument in the very first paragraph when he explains the doctrine as follows:

In the nature of the one God there are three centers of consciousness, which we call Persons, and these three are equal. Each human person is one \textit{who} and one \textit{what}; that is, there is one person per being. God is three \textit{Whos} and one \textit{What}; that is, there are three Persons who are one Being. (p. 60)

Only a philosopher would imagine that a “person” could be as different from a “being” as a “who” is from a “what.” This statement violates a fundamental teaching of the Bible. Man was created in the “image and likeness” of God (Genesis 1:26–27). How then can classical theists teach that something as fundamental about man’s nature, image, and likeness as his personhood is completely unlike the personhood of God and still claim that their idea is biblical?

Actually, they don’t—exactly. Beckwith admits that “‘Trinity’ is merely the term employed by theologians and church historians in order to describe the phenomenon of God they find in the Bible” (p. 60). Thus he admits that the Trinity is not biblical in itself but is
merely one attempt to understand what is taught in the Bible about God.

Beckwith then proves two basic truths that every Christian knows, namely, that the Bible teaches “there is only one God,” and “there are three distinct Persons called God” (p. 62). What he does not prove is that the Bible applies the term person to the Father, the Son, or the Holy Ghost in any way similar to the way in which classical theists use that term. Thus the problem doesn’t lie with Beckwith’s proof of his premises. Nor does it lie with his conclusion that “the three Persons ... are the one God” (p. 62). Mormonism fully acknowledges the biblical source of these teachings.

His problem lies with the assumption that the oneness of the three Persons is ontological in nature. Classical theologians from the late second century have insisted that these teachings imply something about God that has to do with his substance or being. But that was only true of the Supreme Being of Greek philosophy. He and his Logos were considered to be the same Being. That may have been true of Plato’s god, but it was never true of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

What, then, is the Bible's explanation of the oneness of God? One explanation is found in John 17:20-23 where Christ explains:

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

This expresses a form of composite unity not foreign to either the understanding or experience of Christ’s audience. It is the only biblical explanation of God’s oneness, and it is the one Mormonism accepts. The ontological unity of the three Persons promulgated by classical theists is nowhere similarly attested in the Bible.
The Mormon Concept of God

Unfortunately, Beckwith is intentionally disingenuous in presenting “The Mormon Concept of God.” His section on Mormon theology begins:

Although the Mormon Church claims biblical influence on its theology, the Mormon doctrine of God is derived primarily from three groups of sources. 1) The first group consists of works regarded by the Mormon Church as inspired scripture: The Book of Mormon (BM), the Doctrine and Covenants (DC), and The Pearl of Great Price (PGP). 2) The Mormon concept of God is also derived from Joseph Smith, Jr.’s other statements and doctrinal commentaries, such as the seven-volume History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (CHC). . . . 3) Authoritative presentations of the Mormon doctrine of God can also be found in the statements and writings of the church’s ecclesiastical leaders, especially its presidents, who are considered divinely inspired prophets. (p. 66, emphasis in the original)

The obvious absence of the Bible from the list of “works regarded by the Mormon Church as inspired scripture” cannot be an oversight. Beckwith spends four pages trying to justify his refusal to accept what Mormons openly teach as Mormonism only to say, “Nevertheless, our chief concern will not be the historical development of Mormon theism, but rather the dominant concept of God currently held by the LDS Church” (p. 69).

29. A footnote to the above remark cites BYU philosophy professor David L. Paulsen’s doctoral dissertation, Comparative Coherency of Mormon (Finitistic) and Classical Theism (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1975–76), and claims “this list of sources of Mormon theology is nearly identical to the one presented” by Paulsen. How “nearly identical” the two lists really are can be readily ascertained by comparing Beckwith’s list to the one in Paulsen’s dissertation (see p. 66), which reads:

I shall rely on (1) doctrinal statements found in the primary LDS datum discourse which includes the Pearl of Great Price, the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Holy Bible. These books have been officially sanctioned as scripture and as doctrinal canons for the church; (2) doctrinal
That approach would be fine, if only he did study and present the teachings of the church, which are readily available from any number of mainstream sources. But he does not. Instead, he argues with Latter-day Saint scholars, claiming they don’t know what their own church teaches. He then discards all the sources cited above and uses spurious references and misquotations in order to arrive circuitously at the following gross misstatement of Latter-day Saint doctrine:

Although there is certainly disagreement among Mormon scholars concerning some precise points of doctrine, I believe it is safe to say, based on documents the Church currently considers authoritative, that current LDS doctrine teaches that God is, in effect, 1) a contingent being, who was at one time not God; 2) finite in knowledge (not truly omniscient), power (not omnipotent), and being (not omnipresent or immutable); 3) one of many gods; 4) a corporeal (bodily) being, who physically dwells at a particular spatiotemporal location and is therefore not omnipresent (as is the classical God); 5) a being who is subject to the laws and principles of a beginningless universe with an infinite number of entities in it; and 6) not a trinity, but rather, there exists three separate Gods who are one in purpose but not in being. (pp. 69–70)

Though Beckwith pretends that “disagreement . . . concerning some precise points of doctrine” exists among Latter-day Saint scholars, his numerous efforts to qualify his conclusions reveal at least a suspicion that his list would not be accepted by Latter-day Saints as

statements of Joseph Smith which, although lacking doctrinal canonization, are almost universally accepted as normative for LDS theology; (3) doctrinal statements of presidents of the church, who as successors to Joseph Smith, are uniquely entitled to speak authoritatively on points of doctrine; (4) propositions entailed by or inferable from the aforesaid doctrinal statements; and (5) principles which are consistent with (as contrasted with entailed by) the datum discourse which seem fruitful in theological construction. (emphasis added)

30. A more complete analysis of this portion of Beckwith’s chapter is included in the appendix to this review, pages 268–74.
an accurate statement of their beliefs. Furthermore, his use of the words "in effect" indicates that he has put his own interpretive spin on those tenets.

Though he should know this is a very distorted list—questionable, at the least; disputable, certainly; and totally inaccurate, possibly—he has no qualms about repeating it in a table at the end of the chapter for easy reference by his readers (see p. 91). Clearly, this list of so-called Mormon doctrines is used to delude Christian readers into thinking that Latter-day Saints actually harbor these beliefs, among which are certain obviously unbiblical statements about God. If this was done intentionally it constitutes the promotion of bigotry. If it was done in order to prove his thesis, it is flawed reasoning. If it was done unintentionally, it is incompetence. Any way it is viewed, this is unworthy of a man who teaches philosophy at the university level.

Having concocted a strange admixture of Mormonism, Greek philosophy, and error, Beckwith sets out to explain his version of the Mormon concept of God. He starts by describing "the overall Mormon worldview and how the Deity fits into it" (p. 70) and explains the concept of eternal progression as follows:

Mormonism teaches that God the Father is a resurrected, "exalted" human being named Elohim, who was at one time not God. He was once a mortal man on another planet who, through obedience to the precepts of his God, eventually attained exaltation, or godhood, himself through "eternal progression." (p. 70)

One would think that his footnote might cite some proof that Mormon theology does teach the idea that God "was at one time not God," but it does not. Instead it supports the mundane point that common parlance in the LDS Church frequently uses the name Elohim to designate God the Father. Actually, nothing in any authoritative source of LDS theology can be cited for the point Beckwith has emphasized with italics.

Beckwith does cite Joseph Smith's King Follett Discourse, Lorenzo Snow's famous couplet, Joseph Fielding Smith, and Milton R.
Hunter to prove Latter-day Saints teach that God was once a man and that man can become like God. But Christ was God before his incarnation and then became a man like us, so the belief that God the Father was also once a man does imply that he was not always God.

Joseph Smith asserts, “God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did” (cited on p. 70). This may sound strange to the ears of classical theists, but it is hardly an unbiblical idea. Divinity, in the person of Jesus Christ, did, in fact, dwell on this earth as a man (see Philippians 2:5–8), and John 5:19 says Christ “can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do” (emphasis added). Sadly, Beckwith does not address these biblical passages.

Instead he says: “The Mormon God, located in time and space, has a body of flesh and bone and thus is neither spirit nor omnipresent as understood in their traditional meanings” (p. 70). This reasoning simply proves the error of “their traditional meaning.” Christ was clearly located in time and space while on earth as a man, and he is now so “located” as a resurrected being (see, e.g., Luke 24:36–43). Classical theism accepts the idea that he also has a divine nature, which must certainly involve a spirit (see John 4:24 and James 2:26) and omnipresence. Clearly, the fact of being located in time and space does not require the false conclusions Beckwith has drawn about Mormon theology.

Latter-day Saints do not teach that God is not spirit or that he is not omnipresent. Beckwith merely implies such a teaching so he will have some point on which to claim Mormon theism is not biblical. He may win against his straw man, but it is unfortunate that he doesn’t even show up for the debate with real Mormonism.

Beckwith next acknowledges that Mormon theism agrees with the classical view that omniscience is an attribute of God. He even asserts, “some Mormons believe omniscience means that God knows all true propositions about the past, present and future” (p. 71). For this proposition, he cites Neal A. Maxwell, as good an authority as he could possibly find for Latter-day Saint doctrine on this subject (see p. 94 n. 40). Then he spoils it all by saying, “on the other hand, the
**dominant** Mormon tradition” differs from Elder Maxwell’s teachings. The “dominant Mormon” position, according to Beckwith, is that “God does not know the future” (p. 71).

In an effort to show that this idea, rather than the teachings of an LDS apostle, constitutes Mormon doctrine, Beckwith first cites Blake Ostler, an attorney and philosophy aficionado who sometimes teaches at Brigham Young University. Ostler has personally expressed to me some chagrin that his thoughts about *how* God knows the future have been transformed into a statement that God does *not* know the future. Anyone who actually reads Ostler’s article, “The Mormon Concept of God,” will have the same reaction.

It would be convenient for Beckwith if Latter-day Saints really did teach that God is not omniscient. He could then point to a Mormon teaching that is unbiblical. Unfortunately for him, that just isn’t the case.

The next subject Beckwith tackles in his effort to show that Mormon theism isn’t biblical is the question of whether God is a “necessary” or a “contingent” being, a “creature” (something that is created) or “uncreate.” The problem with this effort is that these are unbiblical notions from the start. They were drawn from popular Greek philosophy of the second century A.D. Hence, Latter-day Saints can easily disagree with them and remain totally biblical in their teaching. Beckwith doesn’t mind stating clearly the teachings of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on this subject because he doesn’t have to compare them with the Bible. In fact, he neither cites nor discusses a single passage from the Bible. To do so would emphasize the nonbiblical source of his own position. Likewise, he doesn’t bother to address the numerous passages Latter-day Saints point to in support of their position on these issues.

Beginning with the Mormon concept of man’s premortal existence, most recently as a spirit and originally as an “intelligence,”

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32. The term *intelligence* has come to be used in Mormon parlance to describe the pre-spirit nature of man, about which the scriptures reveal little.
Beckwith notes that Mormon theism teaches “man’s basic essence or primal intelligence is as eternal as God’s” (p. 72, emphasis in original). From there, he paraphrases a common speculation in Mormonism:

Since God the Father of Mormonism was himself organized (or spirit-birthed) by his God, who himself was a “creation” of yet another God, and so on ad infinitum, Mormonism therefore [sic] teaches that the God over this world is a contingent being in an infinite lineage of gods. (p. 73)

This conclusion attempts to state Mormon doctrine, but it goes well beyond LDS speculation, using terms like creation in a context familiar only to classical theists. He then expresses conclusions not drawn by Latter-day Saints. Mormonism teaches nothing about God being “a contingent being.” Neither does the Bible. Thus Mormonism, once again, takes the biblical position.

This doctrine of classical theism reduces all created things, including any and all “created beings,” to illusions entirely “contingent” on God’s existence. The concept is not only demeaning to God’s creative powers (see Ecclesiastes 3:14), but it is entirely nonbiblical. Beckwith cannot cite Mormonism’s refusal to accept these doctrines as evidence that its teachings are unbiblical.

From the concept of eternal progression, Beckwith concludes that Mormonism is a polytheistic religion. In support of that conclusion, he cites Joseph Smith’s teachings in the King Follett Discourse about “the plurality of Gods” (cited on p. 73). The problem with his argument is that such teaching is entirely biblical. The New Testament clearly identifies three persons as divine: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. That constitutes a “plurality of Gods” under any mathematical analysis. Without knowing more, such passages suggest that Christians are polytheists, and, indeed, Jews and Muslims have accused Christians of being polytheistic in the same way Beckwith accuses Latter-day Saints.

But the New Testament also states that there is one God, one Theos, or one object of worship. This is just as valid a position in Mormon theism, and whether one is dealing with the three revealed in the New Testament or some other “plurality,” the principle is the
same. There remains but one God. That is as much a teaching of
Joseph Smith as it is of the New Testament (see D&C 20:27–28).
Contrary to Beckwith’s claim, Mormonism is not a polytheistic reli-
gion . . . any more than any other Christian faith.

Beckwith continues by citing authorities for the well-known re-
fusal of Mormonism to accept the nonbiblical doctrine of creation
out of nothing. He does not try to prove that creation ex nihilo is bib-
lical. That is because it is not, of course. As previously indicated, that
doctrine does not come from the Bible and is not supported by it. In-
stead, Beckwith jumps to the following wholly unsupported and
unsupported conclusion:

For Mormonism, God, like each human being, is merely an-
other creature in the universe. In the Mormon universe, God
is not responsible for creating or sustaining matter, energy,
natural laws, personhood, moral principles, the process of
salvation (or exaltation), or much of anything. Instead of the
universe being subject to Him (which is the biblical view),
the Mormon God is subject to the universe. (p. 74)

This is not an attempt to restate Mormon theology; it is an insult
to it. That God is “like each human being” is an undeniable conclu-
sion based on Genesis 1:26–27 and is thus biblical. But the balance of
this assertion is neither Mormonism nor a reasonable conclusion
based on any of its teachings. This may be the limit of Beckwith’s
ability to understand the God Latter-day Saints worship, but it has
nothing to do with what Mormons think about the Most High.

Perhaps Beckwith is trying to be deceptive here, but it is more
likely that he simply cannot comprehend the truth. Perhaps he is un-
acquainted with the real universe, having grown up with classical
theism and its unbiblical acceptance of metaphysics. Maybe he is in-
capable of understanding the parameters of a real God in a real uni-
verse. Whatever the reason for his error, it is clear that instead of
defining the Mormon concept of God, he has redefined it in terms of
the imaginary universe with which he is familiar. That is both unfair
and inaccurate.
Continuing in that same vein, nevertheless, Beckwith argues that God, as identified in Mormon theology, could not be “omnipresent in being” (p. 74). Here he is correct, given the way he has expressed his argument. God is not “omnipresent in being,” and nothing in the Bible says he is. That description of God is only compatible with the Stoic belief system known as “pantheism.”

Beckwith acknowledges LDS belief that “God’s influence, power, and knowledge are all-pervasive” (p. 75), but he ignores the concomitant understanding Mormonism has of God’s power to travel anywhere he wishes with speed incomprehensible to man.

Perhaps Beckwith is unable to grasp the idea of a physical God who is not as ignorant as man. That God can do many things in the physical universe he organized that seem impossible to man should not come as a surprise to Christians. God, a resurrected, physical as well as spirit being, is capable of many things mortal men are not. That understanding is supported by a number of Bible passages. The resurrected Savior had the ability to appear suddenly in a place to which physical access was limited—namely, the locked upper room in which the disciples met the day of his resurrection (see Luke 24:36). He was able to disappear out of the sight of his disciples on the road to Emmaus (see Luke 24:31). Clearly, the fact that Christ’s body “exists at a particular place in time and space” and that he is a resurrected being with “flesh and bones” (Luke 24:39) does not prevent him from being omnipresent in the biblical sense.

That Beckwith cannot comprehend a real God, like the resurrected Christ, is unfortunate. That he cannot properly define LDS theology about God because of his lack of comprehension is inexcusable. Beckwith knows that Latter-day Saints believe God is omnipresent in exactly the sense the Bible teaches. His inability to comprehend the nature of a God who, like Christ, is part of the real space-time universe but still omnipresent is no excuse for his failure to correctly state Mormon teachings to that effect.

Beckwith makes another false allegation about Mormon theism in connection with his discussion of omnipresence. He says, “Because Mormon theology does not teach that the universe is contingent
upon God to either bring it into being or to sustain its existence, there is no need for Mormon theology to hold to the classical Christian view of omnipresence” (p. 75). Aside from the fact that this conclusion is a non sequitur, it again distorts LDS teachings on the position of God with respect to the universe.

Even though Latter-day Saints do not teach the doctrine that the universe is a figment of God’s imagination (embodied in the belief that “the universe is contingent upon God”), they do teach that he did, in fact, “bring it into being,” that he is the creator of all things in the precise sense taught in the Bible. Further, it cannot be denied that Mormonism teaches the great sustaining role of God in the universe. The nature of that role, though as important as anything classical theists imagine about God, is different from the Greek construct in that it relates directly to a real universe. It is described in Doctrine and Covenants 88:6–13 as follows:

He that ascended up on high, as also he descended below all things, in that he comprehended all things, that he might be in all and through all things, the light of truth;

Which truth shineth. This is the light of Christ. As also he is in the sun, and the light of the sun, and the power thereof by which it was made.

As also he is in the moon, and is the light of the moon, and the power thereof by which it was made;

As also the light of the stars, and the power thereof by which they were made;

And the earth also, and the power thereof, even the earth upon which you stand.

And the light which shineth, which giveth you light, is through him who enlighteneth your eyes, which is the same light that quickeneth your understandings;

Which light proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space—

The light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed, even the power of God who sitteth upon his throne, who is in the bosom of eternity, who is in the midst of all things.
Either Beckwith is ignorant of these teachings or he is disingenuous in his portrayal of Mormon doctrine on the subject.

Beckwith next claims that “Mormon theology denies the doctrine of the trinity” (p. 75). On this point, he has no difficulty discerning and stating Mormon doctrine. Again, this is because he will not need to compare it to the Bible, since the Bible doesn’t teach the Trinity either. From this point, he jumps to a conclusion as erroneous as that aimed by Rome at the church in the second century. Roman authorities during the reign of Marcus Aurelius accused the church of being atheistic because it taught belief in one God but worshipped three—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. In like fashion, Beckwith accuses Latter-day Saints of being polytheists because they teach the distinctive separateness of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, just as the New Testament does.

Beckwith opines: “Mormon theology affirms tritheism, the belief that there exist three gods with which this world should be concerned (though Mormon theology teaches that there exist many other gods as well): Elohim (the Father), Jehovah (the Son), and the Holy Ghost” (p. 75). This is not a true statement. As previously noted, Mormonism teaches that there is but one God, and that these three (and all others who might be or become deified) constitute one God. Classical theists are wrong to think there is no explanation for biblical teachings about God other than the idea of consubstantiality taught in traditional trinitarianism. It is well past time for men like Beckwith to stop claiming that Mormonism is polytheistic because it teaches the separate reality of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, or speculates that others might have taken Christ up on his offer “to sit with [him] on [his] throne” (Revelation 3:21).

That they have not done so demonstrates the inability of classical theists to think outside the confines of Greek philosophy. The extent

34. The convention Mormons use, applying the word Elohim to the Father and the word Jehovah to the Son, is for convenience only and not meant to suggest that these are the titles by which they are consistently designated in the scriptures. In scripture, the names are quite interchangeable. Beckwith doesn’t address this issue, but it is a common point of misunderstanding among critics of the church.
of that disability is reflected in a comment by Beckwith, as follows: “And even the Holy Ghost is not really a spirit, since, according to Smith, there is no such thing as a nonphysical reality” (p. 75).

Nothing in the Bible provides man with any scientific knowledge about the nature of spirits. The word immaterial isn’t even employed in the Bible. It is purely a Hellenistic assumption that a spirit is “a nonphysical reality.” All the Bible says about the physical aspects of spirits is that they do not have “flesh and bones” (Luke 24:39). This does not mean they are “immaterial.” There are many other materials in the real universe besides flesh and bones. Science has only recently made real progress in the effort to understand what is material in our universe. Doctrine and Covenants 131:7-8 (quoted by Beckwith) reflects an insight that was not even considered by religionists until the developments in physics that have recently taken place. There is nothing inconsistent about Joseph Smith’s teachings against nonphysical reality and his statement that the Holy Ghost is a personage of spirit.

Beckwith’s final comments in this section of his chapter are an attempt to make the words used by David Paulsen in the title of his doctoral thesis (The Comparative Coherency of Mormon [Finitistic] and Classical Theism) appear to contradict the comments of Stephen Robinson in How Wide the Divide? Beckwith claims that Paulsen’s thesis “presents the LDS view of God as a form of finite theism” (p. 76), but his view of that “form” must be very different from Paulsen’s, for Paulsen and Robinson teach at the same university, yet Robinson claims that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints does not teach the kind of “limited, finite or changeable God” evangelicals say they do.

Refusing to accept Robinson’s word on this point, Beckwith charges him with ignorance of his own colleague’s teachings, as if Beckwith understood Paulsen’s teachings better than does Robinson. The claim is nothing more than an attempt by Beckwith to set himself up as a higher authority on the teachings of Mormon theism than the BYU professors who teach it on an academic level.

Like so many critics of Mormonism, Beckwith makes no effort to understand what both Paulsen and Robinson are saying and never
cites or quotes a single comment from Paulsen's thesis. Had he been honest with his readers, he would have revealed that Paulsen's thesis defines the phrase *God is finite* in the following terms: "There are logically-possible-states-of-affairs which God cannot bring about."\(^3\) For example, God cannot bring about the state of affairs in which he tells lies. Though lying is a logically possible activity, the scriptures clearly teach that God "cannot lie" (Titus 1:2). Thus the God of the Bible, whom classical theism claims to worship, is also *finite* as that term is specially defined by Paulsen. This is not a new concept. Indeed, Augustine, quoted earlier by Beckwith, says essentially the same thing: "It is precisely because He is omnipotent that for Him some things are impossible."\(^3\)

It is apparent, looking back over this section (including the material covered in the attached appendix), that Beckwith has failed in his effort to show that classical theism is more biblical than Mormonism. The nature of that failure is significant because he does not even attempt to confront Mormonism's teachings head-on. Instead, he restates LDS beliefs and attacks the straw man thus created.

**Philosophical Problems with the Mormon Concept of God**

Beckwith next tries to use logical syllogisms to prove that the Mormon concept of God is not philosophically coherent. Unfortunately, it is plain to even a freshman college student that it is Beckwith whose logic lacks coherence.

**The Problem of an Infinite Number of Past Events**

Beckwith begins by making an obvious comment about Mormon theology, namely that it assumes infinite past duration. Why he chooses to attack this particular tenet is a mystery, especially since

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biblical references to an “eternal” God are too numerous to list (see, e.g., Deuteronomy 33:27). If the past is not eternal, that is, if the universe does not predate this earth by a substantial length of time, Beckwith has a lot more to explain than Latter-day Saints do.

The problem, again, is that Beckwith assumes we live in the metaphysical universe of the Greeks, which postulated a beginning for time. If he were, in fact, living in that kind of a universe, his logic might be sound, though even then it would be both circular and based on unstated and false assumptions.

One of those assumptions is that time is something that can be created. Entirely aside from time as a property of matter, the idea of duration exists independently in everything capable of action. The mere presence of order in the universe implies the existence of time in the form of chronology or duration. The entire notion that God created time in this sense can be dissolved by the simple question, “What did God do before he created time?”

Notwithstanding, Beckwith argues as follows:

Reason 1: “If the Mormon universe is true, then an infinite number of past events has been traversed.”
Reason 2: “It is impossible to traverse an infinite number.”
Conclusion: “Therefore the Mormon universe is not true.”

(p. 77)

It should be apparent to any calculus student that Reason 2 is a glaring and ludicrous fallacy. Any movement whatever involves traversing “an infinite number.” The fact that the infinite number traversed involves infinitesimal points is quite irrelevant to the argument since Beckwith has failed to specify his units of measure. He is speaking philosophically and, like his Greek predecessors, fails completely to perceive the complexities of a real universe.

Aside from his units of measure, given an infinite length of time, which is entailed in Beckwith’s Reason 1, it is entirely possible to traverse an infinite number, even an infinite number of infinite units, whether of distance or of time. To accomplish this, one merely needs an infinite past. Such a past is fully entailed in the Mormon concept of the universe.
Nevertheless, Beckwith gives an example in which he sets the units of measure at “miles” and reasons that it is impossible to count off an infinite number of miles, because “an ‘infinite’ is, by definition, \textit{limitless}” (p. 78). Aside from the circularity of that reasoning, what Beckwith has failed to note is that a limitless period of time is entailed in Reason 1. It is most certainly possible to count off a limitless number of miles in a limitless period of time. Thus God, or any eternal being (such as man, in Mormon theology), can travel an infinite number of miles.

Changing the units of measure to days, Beckwith tries to prove that a beginningless universe is impossible. The problem with his proof, and with that of J. P. Moreland, whom he quotes (see pp. 78–79), is that it assumes its own validity in order to establish its own proof. Moreland argues that it would be impossible to remember all the events of past history if the past were, in fact, infinite. Unfortunately, he fails to give the person remembering the infinite past an infinite future in which to accomplish the task. Since Reason 1 entails an infinite future as well as an infinite past, Moreland’s proof fails, and with it this philosophical objection to the Mormon concept of the universe.

The Problem of Eternal Progression with an Infinite Past

In Beckwith’s second “philosophical problem,” he cites the Latter-day Saint belief “that all intelligent beings have always existed in some state or another.” He then notes the LDS concept that they can “progress or move toward their final state” (p. 79). From this, he reasons that “we should have already reached our final state by now” (p. 80). In response to the objection that men have not all had time to reach their final state, he argues, “one cannot ask for more than \textit{infinite time} to complete a task” (p. 80).

Of course, that is not true. A man who has been sitting around wasting his time for an \textit{infinite period of time} may well ask for another \textit{infinite period of time} in which to make some progress in preparing for the judgment. Whether a man has reached his final state by now depends on what he has been doing with the infinite period of time in question.
Contrary to Beckwith’s notions about infinity, the man in the example above could easily get his wish—another infinite period of time in which to progress. To understand how that is possible, it will help to know that there are orders of infinity, three of which have been identified by mathematicians. Each order of infinity is infinitely greater than the order below it.\(^\text{37}\)

The lowest order of infinity is the number of numbers in the universe. Mathematically, this is the order at which Beckwith’s argument lies when he claims that no one could ask for more. In fact, there is infinitely more for which to ask, such as the number of points on a line (or lines in a plane, or planes in a cube). Infinitely greater than that is the number of curves in the universe. Clearly, one can ask for more than an infinite time in which to complete a task. One can ask for an infinite number of infinite times in which to complete it.

Of course, before even reaching this point, Beckwith’s argument breaks down in its fundamental assumptions. He has assumed first that all individuals are progressing toward their goal at a measurable rate and second that they all started measurable progress at approximately the same moment. Neither of these assumptions can be made in any real system involving independent beings. One person could spend an infinity not progressing at all before he even begins to make real progress toward his eternal goal, while another may progress at a much faster rate.

The universe is exactly as Mormon theology envisions it—a vast array of beings, all at different levels of progression. This includes, no doubt, an infinite number who have not begun to progress toward their ultimate goal as well as an infinite number who have reached that goal.

Beckwith’s last argument in this section is such a stretch that it is better described as a prejudice than a logical conclusion. He claims, “If the Mormon universe is false, then the entire theological system . . . collapses” (p. 80). That is certainly true of classical theism, for its

doctrines are derived from Greek concepts about the universe that are assembled like a logical house of cards. But it is not the same for any system of thought based on reality. Such a system sees its weak points strengthened as men learn more about reality. That is the nature of Mormonism: it improves as men gain greater understanding.

This is what Robinson, whom Beckwith quotes, says with the words, “the ontological frame . . . , while a vital part of our theology, is secondary to the truth of the gospel itself” (p. 80). Mormonism is a system based on reality, not one that, like classical theism, teeters precariously on the unsupportable foundation of metaphysics. To Latter-day Saints, every other truth is secondary to the truth of the gospel and whatever the truth is about the universe, it will be found compatible with the truth of the gospel. Mormons are not required to believe anything that is not true. Hence, to designate the universe as “Mormon” is to designate it as true. It is simply not possible for the “Mormon” universe to be false, because what is real and true cannot be false, whether Mormons fully understand it now, or not.

Some points of doctrine taught by Latter-day Saints about the universe and God are divinely revealed truth. Other points are the product of speculation based on what has been divinely revealed. There are important differences between these two. Speculation can be false or incomplete. Thus Mormons do not claim that every thought they have about God and the universe is the absolute truth. But Beckwith never seems to recognize this fact. He mixes the two even in his most accurate statements about Mormon theology. This results in many erroneous notions on his part regarding LDS doctrine and many entirely ineffectual arguments against it.

Answers to Questions

Beckwith next undertakes to answer some questions that have apparently been put to him by Latter-day Saints as the result of his various statements about their teachings. Not only is he selective in choosing these questions, but he also refrains from expressing the complete Mormon argument entailed in them. Nevertheless, he attempts to respond to scriptures Latter-day Saints frequently cite to
prove that God has a body and that many “gods” exist, and then he tries to rationalize the claim that orthodox Christianity has been influenced by Greek philosophy.

The Scriptural Proof Question: God Has a Body

Beckwith notes that Deuteronomy 34:10 and Exodus 33:21–23 speak of God anthropomorphically. Then he claims, “There are several problems with this use of the Bible” (p. 81). What follows only demonstrates that the main problem with this use of the Bible is that it does, in fact, prove what Latter-day Saints have said all along, namely, that God is anthropomorphic.

Beckwith claims that Latter-day Saints are wrong to cite these passages because they refer to the preincarnate Christ, “a god before he acquired a physical body” (p. 81). Thus he argues that Moses could not have seen Christ’s real physical body because he didn’t have one when the events described in Deuteronomy and Exodus occurred.

On this point Beckwith further demonstrates that he does not understand Mormon doctrine. Mormonism teaches that Christ’s physical body is patterned after the body of his spirit (see Ether 3:16). Hence, even Christ’s spirit body would be described anthropomorphically, just as Moses did.

Beckwith next retreats into philosophical definitions, claiming that no biblical passage claims that God is by nature a physical being, while the passages cited and discussed previously say God is by nature a spirit.

The fact is that the Bible nowhere employs such philosophical terms. It never even uses the words by nature to describe God the way classical theists do. Second Peter 1:4, cited by Beckwith, refers to the divine nature but does not describe it as he does, and Paul in Galatians 4:8 (also cited by Beckwith) actually does damage to the orthodox view by referring to idols as “them which by nature are no gods” (emphasis added). This suggests God’s nature is not like that of idols. But the point on which God’s nature differs from the nature of idols is not a point classical theists accept. The Bible notes that the
dissimilarity between God and idols is based on the very anthropomorphic attributes classical theists deny. Idols lack these attributes: sight, hearing, and the ability to eat, smell, and walk (see, e.g., Deuteronomy 4:20 and Revelation 9:20), but God does not.

Of course, even if Beckwith were able to prove his point from Bible passages, it would not contradict Mormonism nor prove that God is not anthropomorphic. Mormonism teaches that both man and God have a spiritual nature as well as a physical one (see Ether 3:15–16).

Beckwith also argues that a physical being could not be God. He tries to wriggle out of the overwhelming testimony of scripture to the contrary by claiming that “the passages Mormons cite to prove God’s corporeality should be seen as . . . the use of physical language by the biblical authors to convey a particular meaning of God’s actions in human terms” (p. 82).

What exactly does this mean? What does Beckwith think God is trying to convey? He never says, but it isn’t difficult to determine what God is trying “to convey . . . in human terms” when one looks at such passages as Exodus 33:21–23. God is saying, “This is what I look like.” If men were meant to take some other message from this eyewitness account, Beckwith doesn’t let us know what that message is.

Alternatively, Beckwith suggests that such appearances might be “instances in which God temporarily assumes a physical form (i.e., a theophany)” (p. 82). However, there is no indication of why God would do this in the context of the Exodus passage. Beckwith doesn’t even suggest any possible reasoning behind “theophanies,” and it is important to note that God never says, while appearing in clearly anthropomorphic form, “I am just doing this because you couldn’t comprehend my real form.” Such a disclaimer, if it were true, is something one would expect from an honest God. Its absence suggests that the form in which God has consistently appeared to man is not a temporary convenience.

The balance of Beckwith’s argument on this point is decidedly antibiblical. He claims once again that a being who is physical “by nature” would be limited in time and space, could not be the creator and sustainer of everything that exists, and could not be omnipotent,
immutable, or omnipresent. Latter-day Saints wonder why not. His physical nature doesn’t limit him according to classical theism. He is recognized and worshipped as God by them as well as by Mormons.

Of course, these questions are not answered by Beckwith. His entire argument is that of a man whose philosophical and scientific insight is limited to the technological level attained by the ancient Greeks. In essence, his reasoning amounts to a claim that the Bible must be wrong when it describes God anthropomorphically. Mormonism rejects that view and refuses to see an anthropomorphic God as limited in anything like the ways iterated by classical theists.

Beckwith’s last argument against an anthropomorphic God is the clichéd insistence that, if Mormonism requires a literal interpretation of the eyewitness accounts describing God in anthropomorphic terms, it must also accept a literal interpretation of various similes and metaphors used in the scriptures to describe God’s movements or feelings, references to wings, etc.

This is semantic nonsense, of course, not to be entertained by anyone capable of the most elementary hermeneutic analysis. Under well-known rules, references to the Holy Ghost descending “as a dove” or even “in a bodily shape like a dove” (Luke 3:22, emphasis added) at the baptism of Christ, or to God wanting to protect Israel as a hen covers her chicks with her wing, and similar poetic language referring to God as a consuming fire are not to be interpreted in the same way as eyewitness descriptions of God’s form. This argument is nothing but desperate double-talk and should be abandoned by knowledgeable thinkers like Beckwith.

The Scriptural Proof Question: Many Gods Exist

Beckwith next claims to have shown that “the Bible teaches that there is no being who is by nature God except for Jehovah (or Yahweh)” (p. 82). Yet there is not a single passage in the Bible that makes

the point Beckwith thinks so important that he has put the words in italics. Having failed on that score, he unsuccessfully argues against such passages as Exodus 7:1, Psalm 82:1, and 1 Corinthians 8:4–6 and then tries to throw the burden of proof (that these passages do not teach the existence of many gods) back on Latter-day Saints, claiming that they have to prove something more than what the passages actually say in order for classical theists to accept them at face value.

His argument against 1 Corinthians 8:4–6, including his quotation of theologian Gordon Fee’s obscure commentary (see p. 84), misses the most obvious point of that passage. After mentioning both “gods” and “lords,” Paul writes in verse 6 that “to us there is but one God, the Father . . . and one Lord Jesus Christ.” That is two divine beings by anyone’s count (except, perhaps, someone trained in second-century Greek philosophy). Mormonism never rejects the concept of “one God,” nor does it seek to find some strained meaning in Paul’s words “unto us.” It merely acknowledges, in light of passages such as John 17:20–23 and Revelation 3:21, that the oneness of God spoken of in the scriptures cannot be physical but must be found in the composite unity of those divine individuals who make up the Godhead.

Of course, Beckwith doesn’t even touch the best arguments for the Mormon view of progression. For example, he doesn’t try to explain Revelation 3:21, in which Christ invites “him that overcometh”39 to join him on the Father’s throne; nor does he say how many “gods” there would be if a million or so of those who “open the door” to Christ (see Revelation 3:20) were to take the Savior up on his offer.

The Greek Philosophy Question

In response to the question of Greek philosophy and its influence on classical theism, Beckwith attempts to defend the indefensible with the following unconvincing arguments.

39. Lest anyone misunderstand this term, it is quite clear from John’s other writings, as well as Revelation, that it refers to the effort of everyday Christians to overcome the evil one. See, for example, 1 John 2:13–14; 4:4.
First, he claims it is not clear what Mormon critics mean when they say Greek philosophy has influenced classical Christianity (see pp. 84–85). Like all classical theologians before him, he sees nothing wrong with the philosophical analysis of theological truths and doubtless feels that man's understanding of the gospel of Christ has actually benefited from such analysis. The real problem, however, is that he cannot even see how his entire frame of reference has been influenced by the ancient Greek view of the universe. In this, he is more like the second-century apologists and less like the late first-century and early second-century apostolic fathers, who generally eschewed philosophy as commanded by Paul (see Colossians 2:8).40

Second, he notes that alleged similarities between classical theism and Greek philosophical principles is not in itself a valid argument against any particular theological dogma. Truth is truth, he argues, and if Greek philosophy is true in some measure, it is no problem to incorporate it into one's theology (see pp. 85–86).

This would be true if one were simply observing truth in a pagan system. The problem with classical theism is that it takes its fundamental perspective on the universe from Greek philosophy quite apart from the Bible and attempts to reconcile biblical truths using that perspective rather than the original Hebrew perspective on which the Bible was founded.

Third, Beckwith claims that it is the Bible that reshaped Greek thought (see pp. 86–87) rather than the other way around. That claim can certainly be sustained in many instances. Neoplatonism was, in fact, a Greek response to the influence of Christian ideas on the existing philosophical schools of thought. But the change was by no means unidirectional,41 and that is where the concern arises.

Unfortunately, Beckwith does not address the true situation. In fact he attempts to obfuscate it by asserting that Greek philosophy was part of a pagan system and that monotheism represented the dividing line between the church and that system. This is simply untrue. The Greek philosophers were as much reformers of paganism as

Christians were of Judaism. Indeed, the philosophers included their share of martyrs to that reformation. By the time of Christ, Greek philosophy was decidedly monotheistic. The problematic influence of Greek philosophy on Christianity did not involve a contrast between pagan polytheism and biblical monotheism. It involved the integration of two very similar systems of thought.

Surprisingly, Beckwith quotes Norman L. Geisler as follows: “The Greeks never identified their ultimate metaphysical principle with God” (p. 87). This displays an ignorance one does not expect from a man of Geisler’s background. Parmenides, the father of metaphysics, attributed the existence of the supposedly unreal sensory world (the real universe men perceive with their senses) to the collective consciousness of man. But Plato and the later philosophers attributed it to God. The relationship of the Greek’s Supreme Being to the pleroma of Plato’s metaphysical universe was adopted by the early apologists and is taught by classical theists today.

Beckwith quotes Cornelius Van Til’s effort to contrast Aristotle’s Unmovable Mover with the Christian concept of God. Unfortunately, he does not address such obvious inroads of Greek thought as Justin Martyr’s second-century adoption of Aristotle’s formula for God as the valid Christian description of the Father. That alone is overwhelming evidence of the second-century adoption of Greek philosophical ideas as though they were biblical principles, even by the most influential of the early church fathers. Other examples of adoption abound.

As a red herring, Beckwith notes that Greek philosophers did not subscribe to the notion of creation out of nothing, but taught, as does Mormonism, that God made the worlds out of existing matter (of a sort). They also believed in the pre mortal existence of man (see p. 87).

42. See ibid., 171–72.
43. See ibid., 238.
44. See Ronald H. Nash, Christianity and the Hellenistic World (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 32.
45. See Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew 127, in ANF, I:263.
46. See Hopkins, How Greek Philosophy Corrupted the Christian Concept of God, chap. 6.
But Mormonism has had no historic contact with Greek philosophy. It is completely anomalous to claim that it adopted concepts from Greek philosophy at any time. The similarities between Mormonism and Greek philosophy found in these two doctrines only demonstrate that Beckwith's second argument can, indeed, be true. Many beliefs found in non-Mormon, even non-Christian religious systems are true.

Beckwith next quotes Paul Copan, who claims that the early church fathers who agreed with Mormon views on these subjects got their doctrines from Greek philosophy and paganism (see p. 88). The problem with that argument is that these doctrines are entirely defensible from the Bible, while the idea of *creatio ex nihilo*, for example, which negates any notion of a premortal existence, is non-biblical.

Fourth, Beckwith argues that early Christian scholars and Latter-day Saint scholars alike have "used philosophical terminology and concepts to convey certain biblical and theological truths" (p. 88). This is entirely beside the point. The appropriate question to ask is this: What is biblical and what comes from outside anything taught in the Bible? It is not the language of the expression that matters, as Beckwith himself argues at one point. It is the existence of the teaching in the Bible.

Why, if Beckwith understands this, has he spent little or no time addressing the fundamental issues in his chapter on the Mormon concept of God? Why has he not presented accurately the position of Mormon theism and its basis in the Bible and then addressed the question of which biblical interpretation is truer to the original writers? One can only surmise that he fails to do these things because, if he did, he could not defend his position against that taken by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

**Conclusion: The Divide Is Wide**

In his conclusion, Beckwith reiterates his view of the differences between the Mormon concept of God and the classical concept that he identifies as "Christian." Specifically, he cites the following:
1. “Christians believe that God is by nature an immaterial Being, whereas Mormons believe that God is by nature a material being” (p. 89). This is a difference that falls outside the original manifest goal of Beckwith’s treatise—namely to show that the scriptural facts better support the view of classical theism than the view of Mormonism. While it is true that classical theists believe this, the idea of material as opposed to immaterial beings is a Greek, not a Christian or Jewish, concept. Nothing in the Bible ever says God is an immaterial being. The word immaterial is not even used in the Bible.

2. “Christians believe that God is the creator and sustainer of everything else that exists, whereas Mormons believe that God is merely the organizer of the world and is subject to the laws and principles of a beginningless universe” (p. 89). The idea that God is the sustainer of everything else that exists in the manner taught by classical theists is derived from the Platonic view of a Supreme Being who forms the unreal world where man exists using his mind. This notion is not Christian. While Latter-day Saints believe God organized this world, exactly as the Bible says he did, they do not believe that this world is the extent of his works. The passage from Doctrine and Covenants 88 quoted above should suffice to demonstrate that Beckwith is misstating Mormon doctrine on this subject.

3. “Christians maintain that God is omnipotent, while Mormons believe that God’s power is limited by certain forces in the universe which have always existed and thus have been around long before God became God” (p. 89). Classical theists and Latter-day Saints both proclaim that God is omnipotent. Classical theists speak of limitations on God in the same sense as do Latter-day Saints. To paint a difference here is to be disingenuous. The idea that there was ever a time when there was no God, when there was no Creator in existence, is also entirely contrary to Mormon doctrine. Mormons believe God created the laws of the universe, not that he is limited by them.

4. “Christians hold that God is omniscient and thus has knowledge of the past, present, and future, whereas Mormons believe that God knows the past and present but not the future and that God is increasing in knowledge (some Mormons, however, disagree on this point and hold the classical view)” (p. 89). Actually, all Mormons
disagree on this point and hold to the view that God knows the past, present, and future. Some Mormons have offered unique philosophical views as to how God, a real being in a real universe, can know the future, but all agree that he does. It is a solid tenet of Mormon theism, and Beckwith's effort to make it look otherwise is dishonest.

5. "Christians believe that God is omnipresent, while Mormons believe that God is localized in space" (p. 89). Classical theists believe God is omnipresent in the same way the ancient Stoics did. Mormons believe he is omnipresent the way the Bible teaches. It never uses the term omnipresent, but God can be described as "omnipresent" despite the fact that his "presence" is localized in space. If that were not true Christ himself could not be omnipresent.

6. "Christians maintain that God is unchanging (immutable) and eternal, whereas Mormons hold that God is a changing being who has not always existed as God" (p. 89). Classical theists claim they believe in an unchanging God, while they proclaim such major changes as the doctrine that he no longer reveals himself to man. That point aside, they believe God has gone through the same changes Mormons recognize, including incarnation and resurrection. Mormons hold the same view of God's immutability as that taught in the Bible. They make no claims as to whether God the Father has "always existed as God." However, they definitely teach that he has always existed and that he has been God from "everlasting to everlasting" (Psalm 90:2). Furthermore, they teach that "God," Theos, or the "Godhead" referred to by Paul has always existed as the one and only ultimate power over the universe just as the Bible teaches.

7. "Christians claim that God is a necessary Being and the only true and living God in existence, while Mormons believe that God is a contingent being and one of many gods" (p. 89). Christians, at least those who believe in the Bible, do not properly make any claims about God being either a "necessary" or a "contingent" being. That is not in the Bible. Classical theists have adopted this doctrine from the Greek philosophy of the second century A.D. Neither the Bible nor Mormonism draws the same distinction as Greek philosophers and classical theists do on this issue. As to Mormons believing in "many
gods,” one must ask, How many is three? If the answer can be one for classical theists, it can be one for Mormon theists ... and it is!

8. “Christians maintain that God is a trinity (three Persons, one Being), whereas Mormons are tritheists who believe that each member of the Christian trinity is a separate, finite, and personal God” (p. 89). The earliest Christians did not proclaim the Trinity nor can this concept be found in the Bible. It was the second-century apologists who came up with the notion. Latter-day Saints reject the claim that there can be three persons in one being, but they nevertheless maintain that the three persons described as divine in the New Testament are one God. Beckwith and other classical theists are simply wrong if they say otherwise. Latter-day Saints are not tritheists in the sense in which that word is used by classical theists.47 Mormon theism teaches of only one God, though many separate individuals clearly can and do share that designation. These individuals include the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, whom Mormons believe to be separate and personal, but not “finite” in the sense Beckwith and other classical theists claim. They are separate eternal beings who share all the infinite powers and attributes of God in perfect unity one with another, thereby constituting one God or “object of worship.”

Having thus imperfectly defined both Christianity and Mormonism, Beckwith concludes: “Stephen Robinson ... denies that much of what we have covered is really the Mormon concept of God” (p. 90). Of course Robinson denies it! because Beckwith’s representations about Mormonism are not accurate, a fact Beckwith should have known or determined before he wrote an article on the subject.

Instead of learning about Mormonism from Robinson, however, Beckwith cites Joseph Smith in supposed opposition to Robinson’s statements. In so doing, he proves nothing more than the fact that Latter-day Saints know better how to understand and interpret

47. Some in the Mormon community have used words other than monotheism to describe Mormon theism, but they do not mean thereby to imply that Mormons believe in any more than one God. Instead such terminology is normally used to emphasize LDS beliefs in the total separateness of the three individuals in the Godhead.
Joseph Smith than he does. Beckwith does not see this, however. Instead, he goes so far as to claim that his personal interpretation of Joseph Smith's teachings, coupled with his meager understanding of how the statements of living prophets affect Mormon doctrine, must be accepted as true Mormon doctrine above anything said by mainstream Latter-day Saint authorities.

To compound his error, Beckwith has the effrontery to claim that any effort to clarify his misinterpretations of Mormon doctrine "must go through Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and numerous other church authorities and prophets" (p. 90). One is prompted to ask, What does Beckwith know about how Mormon doctrine is established? Obviously no more than he does about how to interpret the writings of the very men he claims as the dead guardians of Mormon doctrine.

Beckwith's final insult is to set up a dichotomy between Robinson and Joseph Smith or, rather, his own personal misinterpretations of Joseph Smith, and ask, "If President Hinckley says that Smith was wrong about God's nature, would Robinson believe him?" (p. 90). He continues, "If Smith can't be trusted to tell us the truth about God's nature, why should we believe Hinckley's claim to divine authority, since it, after all, is contingent upon the veracity of Joseph Smith?" (p. 91). Would he also claim that Jeremiah's veracity is contingent upon the veracity of a misinterpretation of Isaiah's teachings? It is unlikely, but that is exactly what Beckwith is doing here. The problem is not with what Joseph Smith actually said, but what Beckwith has decided Joseph Smith meant. The entire argument is not only invalid for this reason but egotistical and insulting as well.

Beckwith closes by citing Robinson's statement: "I think I am the world's authority on what I believe, and I consider myself a reasonably devout well-informed Latter-day Saint" (p. 91). He then argues:

However, when we ask another Mormon, Joseph Smith, he tells us something contrary to what Robinson tells us, which forces one to ask Robinson the question: Does Joseph Smith speak for the LDS Church? If Robinson answers yes, then LDS doctrine does affirm a finite, changeable, contin-
gent God. . . . If Robinson answers no, then the only difference between him and evangelicals is that the latter disbelieve in a larger number of things said by Joseph Smith than does Robinson. (pp. 91–92)

This argument supposedly leads to the conclusion that “the more interesting divide is not between Robinson’s version of Mormonism and Christianity, but between Robinson and the founder of Mormonism” (p. 91).

Beckwith may think he is clever with this argument, but all he has done is set up his personal interpretation of Joseph Smith’s writings as the standard against which Robinson and other Mormon theologians are supposed to be judged. Joseph Smith did not say that God was “finite, changeable, [or] contingent.” These are Beckwith’s words, his personal misinterpretation of Joseph Smith’s teachings. To set that misinterpretation up as the standard by which Robinson is to be judged is the ultimate in egotism.

It also reveals the true goal of Beckwith’s chapter. It is neither an effort to warn others about false doctrine nor an attempt to present intelligent rebuttals to Mormonism. It is an effort to set up a counterfeit gospel of Mormonism and use it to heap ridicule on the Latter-day Saints. Such effrontery is hardly worthy of response. This one has been made only because the person issuing the affront is a professor of philosophy who should know better.
Appendix

On the Difficulty of Determining Mormon Doctrine

Critical to Beckwith's thesis is his effort to ensure that his readers are misinformed as to Mormon doctrine. It would be impossible to make light of Mormonism were the true strength of its position on biblical issues exposed to other Christian believers. Accordingly, a bit of misdirection is undertaken by Beckwith at the beginning of his section on "The Mormon Concept of God" to make his readers believe he is correct in his statements about Mormonism. In this misdirection, Beckwith almost reveals what Latter-day Saints look to as the source of their beliefs, but then he carefully diverts his readers to the sources he really wants to use, nonauthoritative sources better known for their shock value than their reflection of Mormon theism.

In anticipation of using these nonauthoritative sources to derive his "Mormon concept of God," Beckwith tries to create a nonexistent contradiction between Stephen Robinson of Brigham Young University and other LDS authorities. He quotes Robinson's statement in How Wide the Divide? as follows:

To the scriptural passages above I would add Lorenzo Snow's epigram and Joseph Smith's statement in the funeral address for King Follet that God is an exalted man. Neither statement is scriptural or canonized in the technical sense, and neither has been explained or elucidated to the church in any official manner, but they are so widely accepted by Latter-day Saints that this technical point has become moot. (p. 67)

Before this, Beckwith presented a statement by the late Bruce R. McConkie as follows:

Concerning these latter two groups of sources [referring to statements and commentaries by Joseph Smith Jr. and other LDS Church leaders], the late Mormon Apostle Bruce McConkie writes, "When the living oracles speak in the name of the Lord or as moved upon by the Holy Spirit, how-
ever, their utterances are then binding upon all who hear, and whatever is said will without any exception be found to be in harmony with the standard works.” (p. 67)

Latter-day Saints see these two statements as without contradiction. Indeed, they are barely, if at all, on the same subject. To the extent that they address a similar issue, Robinson’s implication is that the declarations of President Snow and Joseph Smith are inspired as demonstrated by the fact that they are widely accepted by Latter-day Saints.

Nevertheless, Beckwith claims that “Robinson’s qualifications of Smith’s and Snow’s statements (both of which will be cited below) are not consistent with the Church’s official pronouncements” (p. 67). Of course, Robinson does not “qualify” Smith’s and Snow’s statements at all. He points out obvious historical facts, then supports those statements as widely accepted by Latter-day Saints.

Beckwith next cites Henry D. Taylor as follows:

As Latter-day Saints we accept the following scriptures as the standard works of the Church: the Bible (consisting of the Old Testament and the New Testament), the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and official statements made by our leaders. (pp. 67–68)

This is the same point made in the Gospel Principles manual, which Beckwith quotes as follows:

In addition to these four books of scripture, the inspired words of our living prophets become scripture to us. Their words come to us through conferences, Church publications, and instructions to local priesthood leaders. (p. 68)

So where is the inconsistency here? Is it really that hard for a professor of philosophy to interpret these statements? Can it be ignorance that caused Beckwith to miss such qualifiers as “when the living oracles speak in the name of the Lord or as moved upon by the Holy Spirit,” or “the official statements made by our leaders,” or “the inspired words of our living prophets”? Does he not know that not all
the statements of Joseph Smith or the other presidents of the church have been so labeled?

That is precisely what Robinson points out, but still Beckwith pretends that Robinson is contradicting himself when he says, “the LDS ‘church’s guarantee of doctrinal correctness lies primarily in the living prophet and only secondarily in the preservation of the written text’” (p. 68).

The value of current and authoritative oral tradition providing doctrinal clarification of the written word has been recognized since the early Christian era. Noted church historian Henry M. Gwatkin decried the lack of such tradition in the Christian church of the early second century A.D. A living oracle of God who can give authoritative explanations of the written text is obviously more valuable than the text alone, especially after a lapse of nearly two thousand years has obscured some of the meanings and even cast doubt on the accuracy of parts of the text itself. Can Beckwith deny that explanations of the Old Testament given by Christ and his apostles are more valuable than that esteemed scripture alone? Yet he pretends not to understand this principle when it is pointed out by Robinson.

Why has he done that? Clearly it is to justify his decision to use his own authorities for what it pleases him to call “Mormon theism.” He makes this point abundantly clear in the following statement: “Additionally, I will consider the insights of contemporary LDS scholars who have attempted to present Mormonism’s doctrine of God as philosophically coherent” (p. 68).

In his footnote to this sentence, Beckwith identifies these “contemporary LDS scholars” as Gary J. Bergera, Sterling M. McMurrin, Blake Ostler, David L. Paulsen, Kent Robson, and O. Kendall White Jr. None of these individuals is a General Authority of the LDS Church. With the exception of David Paulsen, none is an employee of the Church Education System or an LDS university, or even a mainstream LDS author of doctrinal works.

David L. Paulsen is a BYU professor of philosophy and an excellent source of Mormon doctrine. Unfortunately, Beckwith doesn’t actually cite him as such. Apparently his only purpose was to use the word *finitistic* from the title of Paulsen’s doctoral thesis. He does not quote a single passage from Paulsen’s thesis and fails to inform his readers that Paulsen uses this term very differently than do evangelical critics of Mormonism. So what do these men contribute to Beckwith’s idea of Mormon theism?

Nothing. Beckwith has assembled a group of scholars whom he can either misquote or misuse and still label the result “Mormon doctrine.” That this is disingenuous on his part can hardly be doubted. It is revealed in his next remark:

Because there are so many doctrinal sources, it may appear (with some justification) that it is difficult to determine precisely what the Mormons believe about God. (p. 68)

This is the crux of Beckwith’s chapter, and it is simply untrue. Beckwith frequently argues with the very Latter-day Saint scholars who could clarify Mormon doctrine for him. It is obvious that he doesn’t want to hear what Mormons really believe. With the sources he has selected and the way he uses them, his goal is to obfuscate rather than to clarify Mormon doctrine.

If there were any doubt about that conclusion, it is removed with his next point. He presents a supposed contradiction between two LDS scriptures as follows:

For example, the Book of Mormon (first published in 1830) seems to teach a strongly Judaic monotheism with modalistic overtones (see Alma 11:26–31, 38; Moroni 8:18; Mosiah 3:5–8; 7:27; 15:1–5), while the equally authoritative *Pearl of Great Price* (first published in 1851) clearly teaches that more than one God exists (see Abraham 4, 5) and that these gods are finite. (p. 68)

No modalism is taught in the passages Beckwith cites nor anywhere else in the Book of Mormon, and it should be no surprise that this volume of scripture, consistent with all the standard works of the
church, teaches monotheism. That system of theistic belief is not only Judaic but most definitely LDS (see, e.g., 2 Nephi 31:21 and D&C 20:28).

The New Testament speaks of the Father as “God” and Jesus Christ separately as “Lord” in John 17:3; Romans 15:6; 1 Corinthians 8:6; and 1 Timothy 2:5 and 5:21. Yet Christ himself repeated Deuteronomy 6:4 in Mark 12:29, teaching that there is but one God. Is that a contradiction? Abraham, in the Pearl of Great Price passage cited by Beckwith, uses the word Gods in his account of the creation just as Moses did in the book of Genesis, where he used the plural Hebrew word elohim, literally “gods,” in the same context. Yet Moses also taught the oneness of God in Deuteronomy 6:4. Why claim that this is a contradiction if not to foment misunderstanding?

The existence or more than one person who is designated as “God” is the foundation of the two-thousand-year-old problem classical theists have resolved through their belief in the Trinity. If this seeming inconsistency can be tolerated in the Bible, it is disingenuous to pretend that it is a contradiction when it appears in LDS scripture. It would be more appropriate to complain if this “contradiction,” a teaching that has uniquely marked Christianity for centuries, were absent from LDS scriptures.

Finally, no part of the Book of Abraham or any other LDS scripture teaches that “these gods are finite.” It may be Beckwith’s misguided opinion that Latter-day Saints believe in a finite God, but that is no excuse for him to misrepresent what Mormon scripture actually says.

His next statements are the pièce de résistance of his effort to muddy the waters of Mormon doctrine. He cannot resist mentioning the officially debunked “Adam-God” theory, once apparently expressed by Brigham Young and a few other early church leaders. In so doing, Beckwith reveals that he is not navigating through unknown waters. He is aware of what Latter-day Saints say they believe, but he pretends otherwise in the hope that his readers will believe the version of Mormon theism he intends to weave for them.

Despite the fact that the Adam-God theory appears to have been contradicted in other contemporary statements by Brigham Young
himself and stands as one of the most fascinating but irrelevant co-
nundrums in LDS history, Beckwith introduces his extensive recital of this unique, convoluted, and controversial doctrine with this re-
vealing sentence:

This finite view of God culminated in the theology of Joseph
Smith's successor, Brigham Young, in sermons that were con-
sidered authoritative at the time but are now disputed by
Mormon authorities. (p. 68)

Actually, the sermons Beckwith introduces were not considered
authoritative at any time. They were speculative, perhaps inaccurate
in whole or in part, and were never accepted by the church in any of-
ficial action—either through an official statement of the First Presi-
dency or by common consent of the church membership. Beckwith's
footnote to the contrary does nothing to prove otherwise.

What is really significant about his statement is its acknowledg-
ment that current LDS teachings by "Mormon authorities" dispute
the inspiration of these declarations. This is an admission that Beck-
with knows he is misstating Mormon doctrine when he presents
these arguments. Yet he presents them anyway, proving that his mo-
tive can be nothing but disingenuous.

In a misguided effort to prove that these statements should
somehow be considered authoritative in spite of official pronounce-
ments to the contrary, Beckwith argues in a note:

Brigham Young's statements on the Adam-God doctrine
come primarily from the Journal of Discourses, about which
the publisher said in the preface to volume 3, "The 'Journal
of Discourses' is a vehicle of doctrine, counsel, and instruc-
tion to all people, but especially to the saints." . . . Brigham
Young himself said that he had "never yet preached a sermon

49. It is "irrelevant" because Brigham Young said it was. In a discourse published in
the Deseret Weekly News 22/20, June 1873, 308–9, he said, "How much unbelief exists in
the minds of the Latter-day Saints in regard to one particular doctrine which I revealed to
them, . . . namely that Adam is our father and God—I do not know, do not inquire, I care
nothing about it."
and sent it out to the children of men, that they may not call Scripture” (JD 18:95). (p. 94 n. 29)

The lapse in Beckwith’s logic on this point is apparent from the footnote itself. It correctly cites that G. D. Watt, not Brigham Young, was the publisher of the sermons found in the Journal of Discourses. Thus Watt, not Young, is the person sending them “out to the children of men.” That takes them completely outside the purview of Young’s statement, which relates to a far more official and carefully considered presentment.

The most important point is that Beckwith refuses to take the word of current LDS authorities about the authoritative value of the Journal of Discourses in general and the Adam-God doctrine specifically. That he is aware of their position is evidenced by his note 30, which cites both Bruce R. McConkie’s and Joseph Fielding Smith’s refutation of that doctrine.

Beckwith is not trying to advocate Adam-God as a personal belief, of course. His motive is clearly more devious. It is because this theory is an easily ridiculed notion. Beckwith wishes Mormons taught this doctrine so he could refute it with greater ease than he can anything Mormons actually do teach. He claims the existence of the theory demonstrates that “the Mormon doctrine of God . . . evolved from a traditional monotheism to a uniquely American polytheism” (p. 69). But there is no truth to that claim either. (Nor is it supported by his quotation from another so-called “Mormon scholar” (p. 69), Boyd Kirkland, whom Beckwith either misquotes or misuses.

Beckwith’s true purposes are revealed in his claim that it is difficult to determine what Mormons really teach about God. His effort is to obscure Mormon doctrine and make it sound unclear or difficult to determine. That way he can present an illegitimate list of characteristics that supposedly constitute the Mormon concept of God and claim some semblance of support from the Latter-day Saint community. It is a sad thing that Beckwith’s intelligence and capabilities were bent to such a demeaning and unworthy chore in this paper.