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Abstract Review of *How Greek Philosophy Corrupted the Christian Concept of God* (1998), by Richard R. Hopkins.

HOW POLEMICISM CORRUPTED LATTER-DAY SAINT APOLOGETICS

Benjamin I. Huff

Hopkins's subject, as expressed in the title of his book, is an important one that deserves more attention among Latter-day Saint thinkers. First, he presents a "big-picture" view of what Latter-day Saints regard as an apostasy among the early Christians. He explains its origins and mechanisms and the resulting classical theist view of God. Then he proceeds to argue for the Latter-day Saint view of God—as opposed to the traditional Christian¹ view—on historical, scriptural, and philosophical grounds. While few would dispute the idea that Greek and Hellenistic philosophy influenced traditional Christian teaching, Latter-day Saints have a unique perspective on the nature and extent of that influence, particularly on how it may have been destructive.

To address these topics is an ambitious proposition and more than one man could fully accomplish in a lifetime, let alone in one

1. By "traditional Christians," I mean, broadly, Roman Catholics, Protestants, and Eastern Orthodox. Of course, there are important differences of belief among them, but on many points in this review I will treat them as a group, as all maintaining some variation on classical theism.

Review of Richard R. Hopkins. *How Greek Philosophy Corrupted the Christian Concept of God*. Bountiful, Utah: Horizon, 1998. 464 pp., with scripture and subject indexes. \$24.98.

book. I admire Hopkins's willingness to approach these issues.² However, the simple magnitude of the task does not excuse many of the book's shortcomings. Although the book has some very welcome qualities, it also has the unfortunate drawbacks of being chronically inaccurate, unpersuasive, and unfair. If the intent of his arguments was merely to leave his opponents tongue-tied or frustrated, he might succeed, and such a goal may be well suited to, say, a radio talk show. But it is not appropriate for a book that ought, first and foremost, to inform its reader about an important, controversial topic.

Hopkins aspires to present a comprehensive case for the superiority of the Latter-day Saint view of God over the traditional Christian view, and the form of his presentation fits this aspiration. In substance, however, the book only half escapes being an unsatisfying retort to one minor contemporary polemic. Hopkins's work has succumbed to the typical vices of polemic itself, and thus his reasoning is no more sound on the whole than that in the article to which it primarily responds: Francis Beckwith's "Philosophical Problems with the Mormon Concept of God."³ This review will mainly assess what went wrong in the hope of improving the quality of discussion and understanding between Latter-day Saints and traditional Christians. I will conclude with some remarks on what it would take to treat this

2. Hopkins was educated in engineering and law. Besides working in law, he has appeared on a number of radio shows, including "The Bible Answerman," and has hosted his own weekly show, "Religion Today," broadcast in Utah on the Wasatch Front. At the time of publication of *How Greek Philosophy Corrupted the Christian Concept of God*, Hopkins was manager of sales and marketing for the publisher (dust jacket).

Perhaps his experience in law influences the argumentative style of the book. In a United States courtroom, it is not the job of the prosecuting attorney, for example, to mention evidence that strengthens the case for the defense. A scholar, however, must strive for objectivity, presenting in the most defensible way even views he criticizes.

3. Hopkins indicates that the book began largely as a response to Francis Beckwith's article, which appeared in *Christian Research Journal* 14/4 (1992): 24–29. Strangely, Hopkins cites the article as it appears on the Internet, while neglecting Beckwith's more comprehensive book on the same topic, *The Mormon Concept of God*, coauthored with Stephen Parrish (Lewiston: Mellen, 1991). Beckwith's article describes itself as presenting a mere sample of the more thorough work in this and another book.

subject properly. Making the attempt at all is laudable, but we can and must do better.⁴

Perhaps the most unsettling feature of the book is its oscillation between generosity and antagonism. The title is misleading in one sense: the book generously casts Greek philosophy as an almost innocent bystander in the corruption of the Christian concept of God, attributing the main cause to a lack of proper leadership. Hopkins shows us that Greek philosophy contains valuable truths and that the philosophers' work helped prepare the way for Christ's teachings to be more readily received, especially among the Gentiles. Hopkins is also generous in his account of early Christian figures: they unwittingly ushered in false views of God while striving to uphold their faith under difficult conditions, ironically introducing error through their attempts at apologetics.

Unfortunately, the polemical ring of the title is rather representative of the second half of the book. The tension between these two moods comes through strikingly when Hopkins warns Latter-day Saint readers who converse with traditional Christians about the nature of God: "like the Pharisees of Christ's time, many orthodox Christians feel they are listening to blasphemy when anyone disagrees with their concept of God. That reaction must be treated with kindness and consideration" (p. 29). Hopkins is right that we must be kind and considerate. Yet comparing our traditional Christian contemporaries to the Pharisees, whom they, as well as we, remember as archetypes of hypocrisy, is hardly an example of kindness and consideration. Instead, it insults traditional Christians while encouraging Latter-day Saints to be judgmental and dismissive. This same

4. By *we* I mean the Latter-day Saint community, especially thinkers and writers. I am a committed Latter-day Saint and accept part of the responsibility to do better. In this review I will argue that much of Hopkins's attack on traditional Christian views is unfair. Of course, I agree with Hopkins that the LDS view is more correct, reflecting a greater portion of revealed truth. Still, it is imperative that we be fair and charitable in considering traditional Christian views. We must acknowledge what truth we find there, and we must not represent traditional Christians as unreasonable or insincere where their errors arise primarily from a lack of prophetic leadership.

dismissive mood pervades the second half of the book in reasoning too superficial to be persuasive and in rhetoric more insulting than the example above. Thus while Hopkins's presentation on Greek and early Christian belief may cultivate charity in the Latter-day Saint reader, his treatment of traditional Christian belief as it stands today does not. This does not seem in harmony with the gospel that teaches us to love both neighbor and enemy. Surely we must first love our brothers whom we have seen and then worry about whether we love those who have been dead for centuries.

Overview

The most helpful parts of the book are parts 1 and 2, which trace the historical origins of the false teachings that took hold following the deaths of the original apostles. Part 1 surveys Greek and Hellenistic philosophy, highlighting ideas that later caused trouble for Christianity and sketching the spread of Greek ideas and educational practices. Part 2 identifies major intellectual figures in the early Christian community and traces their responses to pressures on the community. It explores the origin of doctrines Latter-day Saints believe to be mistaken and suggests causes for the adoption of these doctrines. Here Hopkins offers a generally sensible perspective that may be helpful to Latter-day Saint readers who wonder what to make of Greek philosophy and its influence on the early Christians. The kernel of his account of how mistaken ideas took hold is persuasive and illuminating, though, regrettably, he misconstrues some of the key ideas themselves.

Part 3 considers traditional Christian beliefs about God as they stand today such as God's status as creator; his omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, and immutability; and the nature of the three persons of the Godhead. Hopkins critiques these beliefs in terms of their historical roots, their foundation in and consistency with scripture, and their philosophical defensibility. In part 4 Hopkins pauses to rebut recent philosophical attacks on the Latter-day Saint doctrine of

God before the final, summary chapter. These latter parts suffer most from the disappointingly cavalier approach Hopkins takes to both his opponents and his reasoning.

Having been trained in philosophy, I will comment briefly on Hopkins's sections on history and theology and will deal at greater length with his reasoning in the philosophical and scriptural defense of the Latter-day Saint doctrine of God. I will also take up several points on which his rhetoric is highly offensive. The book addresses a huge range and number of issues. I will comment on a few of the most important, as well as on others that provide examples of recurring problems with Hopkins's approach. I will close with some reflections on what might be required to effectively carry out the worthy project Hopkins attempts.

Part 1

Hopkins's brief history in part 1 gives the reader a tantalizing glimpse into Greek and Hellenistic philosophy. The main function of this part is to highlight currents of Greek thought that figure prominently in the formation of traditional Christian orthodoxy: Hopkins emphasizes Parmenidean metaphysics; Aristotle's notion of substance, or *ousia*; the notion of a priori knowledge; and the Hellenistic tradition of allegorical interpretation. These currents are important for understanding the historical origins of classical theology. Further, in learning about them, the reader also becomes familiar with concepts necessary for understanding the contemporary theological debate Hopkins pursues in parts 3 and 4. His choice of topics is sensible, but his treatment of each of them has serious problems, as I will demonstrate. There is one conspicuous lapse of coverage, as well: Hopkins does not offer a focused discussion of the disdainful view of matter as corrupt that appears in the writings of Plato and others, although this view certainly contributed to the traditional belief that God is incorporeal.

The most helpful feature of this section is Hopkins's effort to temper the typical Latter-day Saint wariness of philosophy.⁵ His message is welcome because many Latter-day Saints are accustomed to thinking of philosophy as inherently in conflict with faith. True, the philosophies of men have sometimes led people away from revealed truth; yet, Hopkins points out, in its own way Greek philosophy prepared the Gentiles to receive the gospel, much like the law of Moses prepared the Hebrews. Hopkins refers to several philosophical teachings that resemble biblical truths or truths of the restoration. For instance, Aristotle and the Stoics spoke of one God rather than many—one who is perfectly good and just rather than whimsical and selfish, as Zeus and his ilk appear to be in some stories. Plato tells of a time before our births when our souls learned eternal truths firsthand, and he teaches that these truths are the key to happiness, both in this life and afterward. The Stoics taught that all human beings are brothers and sisters.

Though he is right to recognize truths in the classical texts, Hopkins seems a bit too ready to see his own ideas reflected in them. For example, according to Plato's view of our premortal existence, our souls supposedly learned everything there, and our embodied state is something we should be glad to escape; however, according to Latter-day Saint belief, we are blessed with mortality and a body so that we may learn things we could not have learned in the premortal state (see pp. 43–44; cf. Meno 81d; Crito 66b–67b; 2 Nephi 2:22–26; Abraham 3:24–26). Similarly, Hopkins seems simply to read his own LDS interpretation of the soul into Aristotle's discussion of active and passive intellect in *De Anima*; in actuality, what Hopkins says about active intellect has little connection to what Aristotle says. In short, the exposure to these ideas and texts is not as helpful as it could be because Hopkins's eagerness to cast them in a positive light leads him to mischaracterize them at times.

5. Though I will not pretend to be unbiased on this point, I consider it important primarily as an exercise of charity toward those with whom one disagrees. Such an exercise is more important as it appears in part 2, regarding the early Christians, since it relates more directly to our relationships with contemporary Christians who may passionately disagree with us.

Hopkins's summary of Parmenides' ideas is accurate enough for a book of this sort. The problem is that Hopkins writes as though metaphysical thought remained essentially Parmenidean thereafter. It is fair to say that Parmenides was the father of what we now call metaphysics, but Plato and Aristotle each dramatically transformed the field in their efforts to resolve Parmenides' paradoxes. Parmenides affirmed that the cosmos is in perfect unity and that the motion, change, and difference we experience are all illusory. Yet motion, change, and difference are all real, and disarming Parmenides' arguments to the contrary was a project for both Plato and Aristotle,⁶ though how successful they were at explaining change and difference without creating more paradox is a question for further discussion. Paradoxes reminiscent of those in Parmenides appear later, in Neoplatonic thought, which certainly influenced early Christian thought. Hence one might find some of Hopkins's remarks apt in reference to Neoplatonic metaphysics, but the facts do not support his treatment of Greek metaphysics as though it were all one.

Unfortunately, throughout his book Hopkins uses the term *metaphysics* mainly to mean the unabashed assertion of nonsense, justified by the doctrine that since the world of everyday experience is illusory, truth need not make sense in everyday terms—in other words, it need not make sense at all (see p. 115). At one point Hopkins characterizes the founding idea of metaphysics as “the Greek idea that reality is not real” (p. 211). This notion spares him the trouble of trying to make sense of many odd-sounding ideas that appear later in history, but it results in the seriously mistaken premise that their advocates had no intention of making sense. Notable among the ideas Hopkins dismisses in this way is the doctrine of the Trinity, which he describes as “openly irrational” (p. 189). This is hardly a statement calculated to win friends among Trinitarians.

Surprisingly, the brightest spot in Hopkins's history of philosophy is his discussion of Aristotle's conception of substance, or *ousia*—a

6. See, for example, Daniel W. Graham, *Aristotle's Two Systems* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 124–27.

post-Parmenidean metaphysical notion that is influential in the Trinitarian view of the Godhead established at Nicea. He accurately distinguishes the three senses of substance that Aristotle recognizes: matter; form; and the concrete, individual thing that incorporates both matter and form. He even specifies correctly that the Nicene formula, stating that the Father and Son are of the same substance, uses the notion of substance in the sense of form.⁷ Unfortunately, he never puts this account of substance to use to explain the doctrine of the Trinity, even though this doctrine figures prominently in later sections of the book. While he repeatedly reminds us that much confusion has arisen over the years from misunderstanding the various senses of substance (see, e.g., pp. 190–91, 216), by the time Hopkins turns his attention to the doctrine of the Trinity, he seems to have forgotten that there were any different senses to distinguish and settles on a sense other than the one he refers to at first: he uses *substance* as though it refers to an individual thing (see, e.g., pp. 141, 189). An accurate portrayal of Trinitarian doctrine is crucial in a book on the Christian concept of God; I will revisit this issue below.

Another key influence on traditional Christian orthodoxy was “the adoption of *a priori* assumptions common among the Hellenized nations” (p. 208). I will discuss this idea now because it arguably belongs with the other Greek and Hellenistic influences discussed in part 1, though Hopkins addresses it at the beginning of part 3. Presumably the idea of *a priori* knowledge itself was not the immediate source of error. Rather, the sources of error were various particular ideas the early Christians took to be *a priori* truths. Hopkins cites the idea that God must be incorporeal as a main example (see pp. 206–7). Still, he focuses his attack on the very idea of *a priori* knowledge: “In order for a man’s thoughts [e.g., Greek philosophy] to generate truth about God, it must be presumed that *a priori* knowledge of Him is innate in Men, inde-

7. I do not mean to imply that the Nicene formula employs a strictly Aristotelian concept of substance. Rather, of the Aristotelian concepts of substance, the one that is compatible with the intent of the Nicene formula is substance as form or essence. See note 14 below.

pendent of any particular experience. . . . However, there is no scriptural authority for that notion” (p. 208).

This brusque claim is not a good beginning to Hopkins’s assessment. For one thing, earlier he found in Plato reason to believe one can “conceive or imagine the truth through the exercise of reason and imagination,” aside from revelation (p. 44)—that is, he found reason to believe in something like a priori knowledge. Moreover, scriptural authority strongly supports belief in something like a priori knowledge, both in the Bible and in modern revelation—namely, knowledge received by the light of Christ. John 1 refers to Christ as “the Word” (v. 1) and then as “the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (v. 9). Hopkins cites Romans 2:14–15 as an indication that this light, or conscience, gives only a sense of right and wrong; but while that scripture does identify that role, it does not cast doubt on the other role of the light of Christ—that of delivering eternal truths. Moreover, Doctrine and Covenants 93 expands John’s teaching in John 1, repeatedly referring to Christ as the spirit of truth (e.g., in vv. 9, 11, 23, and 26) and specifying that “truth is knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come” (v. 24). Knowledge we receive through the light of Christ gives us insight into eternal truths that transcend our mortal experience, much like a priori knowledge. Consider also how Paul seems to refer to some innate knowledge in saying, “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Romans 8:16). Thus Hopkins ignores many passages of scripture, and misrepresents others, by claiming that scripture gives no support to the idea of a priori knowledge.

Hopkins goes on to give several examples of a priori beliefs that have proven false, as if to undermine all a priori beliefs by association. It is not difficult to give such examples; however, one could also give many examples of obsolete scientific beliefs that were, in their day, supposedly based on empirical evidence, such as the belief that light is a wave in the ether. Yet the empirical scientific method is a good source of knowledge. Similarly, the fact that it has led to some false beliefs is hardly enough to discredit all a priori knowledge. Further, belief in a priori knowledge is alive today among philosophers who

have great respect for the achievements of empirical science. Thus, while pointing out the risks of making a priori claims is worthwhile, this is no substitute for assessing the individual merits of particular claims. I will later treat Hopkins's attempt in part 3 to argue specifically that corporeality is more fitting for God than incorporeality.

Hopkins points to a Greek tradition of allegorical interpretation as another source of corruption in early Christian belief. He claims that allegorical interpretation originated in Greek efforts to "find themes of goodness and virtue consistent with the new monotheism in the old pagan stories," which depicted a plurality of gods in anthropomorphic terms, complete with human vices (p. 75). As with a priori reasoning, the main mischief Hopkins attributes to allegorical interpretation is support for the idea that God is incorporeal—references to his face, hands, feet, and the like were interpreted as metaphorical allusions to other attributes, such as his approval, power, or changelessness (see, e.g., p. 76). Similar methods of interpretation were used to finesse other scriptural references to God, including texts that attribute to him such humanlike emotions as anger or regret.

By contrast with Greek interpretation, which is always labeled "allegorical," Hopkins refers to Hebrew methods of interpretation as either "literal" or "figurative," acknowledging that there is "figurative language used by the prophets in their statements about God" (p. 73). Hopkins does not explain what carefully drawn distinction allows him to approve of figurative interpretation while consistently disapproving of allegorical interpretation. As he employs the notion, though, the operative distinction is captured in statements like the following: "Some Greek exegetes became almost indifferent to the original meaning of the writer, interpreting all passages allegorically to suit their pet theories" (p. 76), or "The result was to impress on scripture the views of the interpreter, rather than the reverse process intended by God" (p. 77). This is a roundabout way to criticize the practice of simply wresting the scriptures to suit one's preconceptions. Using the term *allegorical* in this peculiar way, Hopkins leaves untouched the real and difficult question of how to know what scriptural language is to be read literally and what figuratively (or al-

legorically in its usual sense). “Allegorical interpretation” in the sense Hopkins uses it threatens to become any nonliteral interpretation that conflicts with one’s own view. Presumably, the real task is to assess the preconceptions that drive any given interpretation.

Thus part 1 has some real virtues—first, simply in familiarizing the reader with some basic ideas from Greek philosophy, and second, in cultivating openness to and appreciation of the fragments of truth to be found there. However, as an explanation of the Greek roots of error in traditional theology, it is unsatisfying. His account of substance would be helpful had Hopkins drawn upon it in his later discussion of the Trinity. His accounts of metaphysics, of the notion of a priori knowledge, and of the Hellenistic tradition of allegorical interpretation are confused and obstruct serious engagement with the Greek roots of Christian beliefs Hopkins means to criticize. These Christian traditional beliefs have their roots in particular metaphysical views, particular preconceptions that drive false interpretations, or particular claims that are taken to be a priori truths. Rather than explaining what is wrong with the various Greek ideas, Hopkins’s words *metaphysics*, *a priori*, and *allegorical interpretation* become little more than labels he uses to prematurely dismiss ideas he disagrees with.

Part 2

Part 2 is the most successful portion of this book. It introduces many of the key figures in the Christian community just after the deaths of the apostles, portrays their predicament, highlights truths they still possessed, and offers an explanation of why and how these truths were replaced by errors. As he had earlier done with the Greek philosophers, Hopkins now celebrates the efforts and achievements of the early Christians even though they also failed in many ways: “Perhaps the greatest testimony this book bears to Latter-day Saints is that they should not be critical or disparaging of these outstanding and well-meaning early leaders as they become acquainted with them in the pages that follow” (p. 30). After the intense persecutions that took the lives of the apostles, the early Christians were left without

proper leadership, were confused over which teachers and writings were trustworthy, and had no authority to resolve the many differences and disputes that arose.

Hopkins emphasizes the role of a group known as the Apologists, who were active in explaining and defending Christian faith during the second century. Though violent persecution had abated, the Apologists were pressed by critics of the church, many of whom were trained in Greek philosophy. In the process of answering these questions and challenges, and without proper guidance, the Apologists misconstrued some doctrines and fabricated others. In particular, as they tried to answer questions and challenges that were formulated from the perspective of philosophy, they were led to express Christian beliefs in the language of philosophy. Not knowing better, they often portrayed Christian beliefs as being more similar to the doctrines of the philosophers than they should have. Thus, rather than calling philosophy the cause of error, it may be appropriate to say that ignorance was the cause of erroneous beliefs and that philosophy simply filled the gap left when revelation ceased. I would love to see more Latter-day Saints exposed to this sort of account of how the early church fell into error. Too many LDS Sunday School lessons evoke only images of scheming priests tailoring doctrines and editing scriptures to suit their selfish purposes. The view Hopkins supports better helps us approach both past and present traditional Christians in love and fairness, as our brothers and sisters.

In part 2, as in part 1, Hopkins may be a bit too quick to draw parallels between the beliefs of early Christians and Latter-day Saint beliefs. Still, the Saints should be more aware of these interesting writings and should value the efforts of their authors. Becoming familiar with their names and reading some of their texts makes these authors human and helps to counterbalance the Latter-day Saint tendency to simply define that period of history with a single word—*apostasy*. With such a short history of our own and with our eyes always turned to our living prophets, Latter-day Saints may think of the true church as existing timelessly, in a perpetual present.

But while the gospel is timeless, our understanding of it is not, and we have much to gain from a careful study of Christian history. First, we can learn from powerful Christian writers in history, as we do from such insightful contemporaries as C. S. Lewis. Second, it would be instructive to examine the development of the Christian community as it spread and faced a variety of challenges over the centuries. We Latter-day Saints will face some of the same challenges as we more fully become a world church. Third, we should consider to what extent we are shaped by the Christian community in which the early members of the restored church were all raised and from which most of our numerous converts still come. Then, as now, converts bring old beliefs and habits with them, and we as a people may not have fully disentangled ourselves from false traditions. We have been chastised many times in our history for paying insufficient attention to the Book of Mormon. As traditional Christians read Greek presuppositions into the Bible, so some of us may be reading traditional Christian presuppositions into the Bible, the Book of Mormon, and our other modern revelations. For example, Latter-day Saint discussions of Christ's atonement often reflect a view of the atonement that appears to derive from the work of Anselm centuries ago and is difficult to reconcile with Alma's teachings in the Book of Mormon.⁸

While we are rightly mindful of the danger that studying erroneous traditions may lead one into error, we should also acknowledge that being ignorant of those traditions may keep us from recognizing how they have already shaped our beliefs. Recent attention among Latter-day Saints to the role of grace in our salvation often reflects a notion of grace as it is currently understood in Protestant circles, but I believe that the scriptural notion of grace is closer to a Catholic understanding of grace as found in the writings of Thomas Aquinas. In my view, modern revelation shows that neither the Protestant nor the Catholic view of grace is adequate, but without considering

8. While I do not agree with all his conclusions, Dennis Potter has an interesting treatment of this issue in "Did Christ Pay for Our Sins?" *Dialogue* 32/4 (1999): 73–86.

Aquinas's view I might never have realized that I needed to rethink the Protestant view I had inherited from my surrounding culture.

I applaud Hopkins's detailed attention to important early Christians like the Apologists. I also find his account of the basic causes of their theological error persuasive, though his discussion of the particular origins of this or that mistaken belief may be unsatisfying. Hopkins considers the historical evidence in only enough detail to illustrate how he envisions these causes operating; to argue convincingly that his view is historically correct would require a more thorough study.⁹ However, anyone who doubts Hopkins's basic account of how false doctrines entered the church through the work of the second-century Apologists may find it interesting to consider some features of Hopkins's own work as a modern apologist. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of his book is that it displays some of the same tendencies he attributes to the work of the early Apologists during the first few centuries after the time of Christ. Thus the latter portion of the book might serve as a case study in support of the theory of error advanced in the earlier portion of the book. Examples of the following elements of the process of error appear in parts 3 and 4:

- *Hopkins appeals to the philosophy of the day to support his view of God, as did some early Christians.* Early Christians built respect for their views by showing them to be in harmony with prevailing Hellenistic philosophical views. For example, they identified Christ with the Logos, or Word, so important in Stoic and other Greek thought, and they took an incorporeal view of God that fit with the Greek view of matter as corrupt. Hopkins, for his part, appeals to modern science and mathematics to deflect traditional Christian objections to Latter-day Saint cosmology. He also appeals to the modern view of the relationship of matter to energy to argue that God is better understood as corporeal than incorporeal.

- *Beyond simply supporting the scriptures and the teachings of modern prophets by an appeal to science, Hopkins interprets them in*

9. Presumably part of the job is done by Edwin Hatch in *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), which Hopkins cites frequently.

terms of ideas drawn from contemporary science (the philosophy of our day). Again, this is similar to how he portrays early Christians, who interpreted their beliefs in terms of the philosophy of their day.

- *Hopkins represents the Latter-day Saint position on certain points in a way that is convenient for the discussion he has entered but is not authoritative,* just as the early Christian Apologists took it upon themselves to answer questions that were pressed on them, even though no clear answers were to be found in the authoritative sources they possessed. In order to present a focused opposition to the traditional Christian views he cites, Hopkins takes controversial positions regarding the human conscience, God's omniscience, the relation of human freedom to divine providence, God's relationship to space and time, and the Edenic creation. All these views involve his own speculation, beyond what can be supported with authoritative Latter-day Saint sources. He also frequently represents the scriptures as upholding his view much more obviously than they do, such as in his discussion of God's transcendence. In the case of conscience, or the light of Christ, which I discuss above in relation to a priori knowledge, Hopkins misrepresents both ancient and modern scripture to support his idiosyncratic view.

It is essential to realize that each of these basic tendencies (as identified above in italics) is a legitimate way to approach the work of apologetics, or the work of building understanding with those of differing beliefs. I will argue this point at greater length below. These tendencies do not necessarily lead to error, but they may; and all of them arguably did, both in the early church and, on a smaller scale, in Hopkins's book. Of course, some mistakes are sure to appear in any human undertaking, and what allowed the second-century Apologists' errors to mislead the entire church was the absence of continuing revelation and proper priesthood leadership.

These examples boost the plausibility of Hopkins's view of how the early church fell into error long ago. If they occur in his own work, similar developments could understandably have occurred in the work of the early Apologists. Perhaps more important, these examples show that the same causes could easily lead to problems today

if Latter-day Saint thinkers are not careful. As the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints becomes less a Rocky Mountain fortress and more a global church, we become engaged in projects similar to those of the ancient Apologists: we increasingly seek acceptance and mutual understanding from those of other faiths and from the secular world. Hence we should be wary of repeating the mistakes the Apologists made, as Hopkins does at times. I will elaborate on these examples in the latter part of my discussion of parts 3 and 4.

Parts 3 and 4

In part 3, Hopkins turns to a number of traditional Christian beliefs about God as they stand today. In the earlier sections he has sketched explanations for error: loss of revelation, pressures to assimilate Greek ways of thinking, various influential strands of Greek thought, and so forth. The task of part 3 is to show more particularly what beliefs arose from these influences and that such beliefs are, in fact, mistaken.

Problems of Polemicism

Unfortunately, this section is chronically unpersuasive and, what is worse, frequently discourteous to those whose views it attacks. In many cases Hopkins seriously understates the plausibility of views he disagrees with. Sometimes he is simply inaccurate in explaining the belief he opposes. More often he fails to acknowledge what makes the belief reasonable. Hopkins also habitually overstates his own case. Not only does each of these problems prevent him from being persuasive, but their sheer frequency suggests a serious lack of respect for his opponents. Moreover, in several places Hopkins more directly implies that his traditional Christian opponents are insincere or intellectually irresponsible. Perhaps my comments will serve in part as a sort of apology to those Hopkins has offended.

Inaccuracy. The discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity—particularly the belief that the members of the Godhead are consubstantial—is perhaps the most prominent example of inaccuracy in explain-

ing a belief. This inaccuracy is particularly irksome because at certain points Hopkins goes to some effort to acknowledge that the doctrine is subtle (see pp. 19–91, 216),¹⁰ but when he actually tries to explain it, he ignores that subtlety. Moreover, this is a crucial doctrine, and Hopkins revisits it repeatedly without improvement. While he refers to the words in which it is traditionally stated, he does not acknowledge, let alone explain, their intended sense. For example, he alleges:

The elements of this doctrine are directly contradictory in a real space-time universe, but each was considered essential. They are (1) *the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are three entirely separate persons*; and (2) *the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one singular substance (ousia)*. (pp. 141–42)

Here, Hopkins's verbal statement of the two elements is acceptable, though some might prefer to say that the members of the Godhead are *of* one substance. Yet everything rides on capturing the proper sense of *substance*, which Hopkins fails to do. The way in which he prefaces the statement suggests that the sense of substance in this context is *individual thing*, so that three persons are described as one individual thing.¹¹ Hopkins thus casts Trinitarians as self-consciously making a pair of claims that cannot both hold in one world: one or both must be understood as holding true only in an alternate, metaphysical world—the “unreal reality” (p. 141) on which Hopkins erroneously centers his account of metaphysics.¹² Yet, as it is intended in the statement of the doctrine of the Trinity—and as observed in the above discussion of Parmenidean and post-Parmenidean metaphysics—*substance* does not mean exclusively an individual thing. Thus Hopkins badly misrepresents the

10. Indeed, Hopkins makes use of an interesting sense of *substance* in giving his account of the LDS view of the relationship of the Father and Son (see pp. 198, 231–32), but he allows no such flexibility to Trinitarians.

11. It seems reasonable to claim this would be a contradiction, but one might still have doubts. A chess set, for example, would seem to be both one thing and many things. How about a basketball team?

12. Likewise on page 231: “Metaphysics allowed the Apologists the illusion of rational thought in the formulation of this doctrine.”

doctrine. Many traditional Christians misunderstand their own doctrine in much the way Hopkins does, but it remains a misunderstanding and should not be perpetuated.

In fact, the term *substance* is subtle and can be used in a variety of senses. Further, the study of these senses belongs to metaphysics. Yet there is much more to metaphysics than Hopkins acknowledges, including much that belongs to common sense. Consider this dialogue for illustration:

Q: What is in this box?

A: A copper wire, a copper bracelet, and a copper coin.

Q: How many things are in the box?

A: Three.

Q: How many substances are in the box?

A: One; the things are all copper.

There is nothing puzzling about this use of *substance*; it would be at home in a high school science classroom. Yet in this case, there is clearly no contradiction when we state, parallel to Hopkins's statement of the doctrine of Trinity:

1. The wire, the bracelet, and the coin are three separate objects or things, and
2. The wire, the bracelet, and the coin are one substance.

Thus Hopkins is too quick in claiming a contradiction between elements (1) and (2) of the doctrine of the Trinity: being three things can be compatible with being one substance. Of course, God is not a mineral. Trinitarians have a different sense of substance in mind; my point is that there are several to choose from.¹³

Because Hopkins disregards the variety of meanings that adhere to the term *substance*, he fails to properly identify the traditional doctrine of consubstantiality, let alone to criticize it effectively. Ad-

13. In fact, there appears to be a variety of ways Trinitarians understand the doctrine of consubstantiality: even the bishops who participated in the Council of Nicea were divided over the choice of the word *homoousios* and were not in consensus as to what it meant. Robert Jenson, *The Triune Identity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 86.

mittedly, traditional Christians often have trouble explaining it, and they do not all agree, but this is no justification for Hopkins's casual dismissal. A critic, more than anyone, has a responsibility to identify properly that which he means to criticize.¹⁴

Acknowledging too little. A more pervasive problem is the misrepresentation of scriptural grounds for the various traditional Christian beliefs. Hopkins habitually examines fewer scriptural passages than could be cited to support the traditional views; sometimes he claims a complete lack of scriptural support. For example, returning to the doctrine of consubstantiality, Hopkins alleges, "The only verse in the Bible that sounds remotely Trinitarian, 1 John 5:7, has been rejected by scholars as a later addition to the text" (p. 244). This claim is embarrassingly inaccurate since anyone conversant with the Bible can identify many verses that at least *sound* Trinitarian: "he that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9), "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30), and "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1) are only three of them. Moreover, Hopkins's eagerness to discount 1 John 5:7 is ill-suited to a Latter-day Saint since several Book of Mormon passages sound even more Trinitarian (I will return to this point below). Something like consubstantiality seems to be at work in many biblical passages about persons other than God, as when Christ says of husband and wife, "they are no more twain, but one flesh" (Matthew 19:6), or when the

14. At this point, having defended the traditional Christian view against Hopkins, perhaps I should say a few words to clarify my own position. My own objection to the Nicene statements about the Godhead is less with the particular statements themselves than with their status as a creed and with their obscurity. The Book of Mormon explicitly teaches that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are one God. I suspect there is a meaningful sense of *substance* according to which they are one substance, or at least are *of* one substance. For starters, they are one heavenly government, and they are of one mind and one will. I believe the main inadequacy of the traditional Christian understanding of the Godhead is that it does not reflect how fully God's other children can join in the Godhead's unity. The LDS perspective on the Godhead is preferable most of all because it reflects just how much like God, and how unified with him, his children can become. As Christ reflects in his intercessory prayer, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us" (John 17:21).

creation story says, “Male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam” (Genesis 5:2).

Similarly, Hopkins says of a priori knowledge: “there is no scriptural authority for that notion” (p. 208). Yet several New Testament scriptures, as well as a much more extended passage in Doctrine and Covenants 93, seem to refer to something of the kind, as I explain when discussing part 1. Again, as Hopkins considers in what sense Christ was begotten or created by the Father, he states, “Nothing in the Bible even suggests that Christ was ‘generated’” (p. 239). Yet three sentences later he refers to the biblical Greek term *monogenes*, meaning “only child.” The English term *generation* and its relatives are all lexical descendants of the same Greek root and refer precisely to the distinctive process whereby children are produced. Hopkins, who emphasizes that Christ was begotten by God, should have no complaint about the term *generated*.

While Hopkins seriously understates the scriptural support for various traditional Christian beliefs, he also is often too quick to read scriptural passages as supporting his own view, as I illustrate below when considering Hopkins’s interpretation of scripture in terms of science and other dubious presentations of Latter-day Saint doctrine. In all these examples, Hopkins seems more eager to contradict his opponents than to convey the truth about the scriptures. In considering the traditional Christian idea that God is a radically different sort of being from humans, and before laying out his criticisms, Hopkins says flatly, “There is no biblical basis for this doctrine” (p. 394). Again, Hopkins’s claim is completely untenable. Many passages in the Bible emphasize the great differences between God and his mortal children. Two passages from the Old Testament come to mind right away. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:9). The difference in height between the heavens and the earth suggests far more than a mere matter of degree: what could be more different in height from the earth than the heavens? More directly: “And also the Strength of Israel [God] will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent” (1 Samuel 15:29). If this sentence does

not appear to suggest that God is a different kind of being from a man, what would? Other examples could be brought forward in support of the traditional view. Of course, I believe that a careful reading of the Bible as a whole softens the meaning of these passages and ultimately supports the Latter-day Saint view. In particular, the description of us as God's children should be understood to mean that we are rudimentary instances of the same type of being. Still, to insist that the Bible provides no basis for the traditional belief is to ignore the obvious.

Insensitivity. Further, this claim is likely to alienate any self-respecting traditional Christian and to disturb a sensitive Latter-day Saint reader. For not only is the claim false, but it also implies a charge of bad faith. A reasonable Christian should pay attention to whether core beliefs such as this one have a basis in the Bible. The claim that there is no biblical support for differences between God and man thus implies that those who believe this doctrine are irresponsible in the adoption of their beliefs. It is bad form for a scholar to say an insensitive thing like this at all, let alone when it is factually untenable.

Early in this review I referred to Hopkins's comparison of traditional Christians to the Pharisees of Christ's time. To lightly call someone a hypocrite is bad, and to call one an idolater is presumably worse; but Hopkins does not flinch: "The idea that God is incorporeal is the very essence of idolatry" (p. 274). Certainly, some traditional Christians have compared the Latter-day Saint belief that God is corporeal to idolatry, but one unreasonable and offensive allegation does not excuse another. In his eagerness to press this upsetting claim, Hopkins becomes incoherent. On one page he asserts, "The gods of idol worshippers see, and hear and smell in exactly the same way the God of classical theism does—without benefit of sensory organs" (p. 274), only to refer on the next to idols as "the work of man's hands, wood and stone, *which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell*" (p. 275, quoting Deuteronomy 4:28). He seems prepared to represent idols as seeing or not seeing, hearing or not hearing, as it may suit his argument from one point to the next. It is unfortunate that such uncharitable ranting should obscure a truly interesting argument from

scripture that God is indeed corporeal, that he not only sees, hears, and smells but even eats. Indeed, the classic Old Testament criticism of idols appears to presuppose that the true God does these things, as idols do not.

Seeds of Error

I have illustrated how Hopkins repeatedly misrepresents traditional Christian belief and its basis in scripture and how his remarks are often insensitive or worse. I now turn to a set of more ambiguous points about parts 3 and 4, in which Hopkins's work exemplifies key elements of the very process of error he describes in part 2 as leading to apostasy in the early church. I consider most of the examples I cite to be failures insofar as they were meant to defend Latter-day Saint belief. However, they provide interesting support for Hopkins's view of how the mistaken beliefs took hold.

Initially, I highlight instances in which Hopkins offers as support for his claims—including Latter-day Saint beliefs—the argument that they harmonize with contemporary scientific views. As Hopkins portrays them, the Apologists tried to improve Christianity's reception in the dominant Hellenistic culture by emphasizing its harmony with the prevailing Hellenistic philosophical views where possible. This was a reasonable thing to do then and is so now. Truth will harmonize with truth, and we should recognize truth wherever it is found. Indeed, the great missionaries Paul (e.g., Acts 17:23) and Aaron (Alma 22:9–11) both used a similar technique, appealing to ideas familiar to their audiences to introduce their message. Without the guidance of the Holy Spirit, however, it does have dangers. One is that the credibility of revealed truth can be damaged in the long run by seeming to rely on foreign philosophical or scientific claims that may prove to be false. A graver peril is that, in the process of parsing one's beliefs about God in terms that can be related to scientific theories, one may distort those beliefs. Hopkins claims that the Apologists distorted the truth as they parsed their beliefs about God in terms of Greek philosophy. Similarly, I will examine instances in which

Hopkins interprets Latter-day Saint theology or scriptures in terms of ideas taken from modern science and technology, arguably distorting those scriptures in the process.

In other cases Hopkins represents the Latter-day Saint position on certain points in a way that is convenient for the discussion he has entered but is not authoritative. In these cases, it is not science but some other feature of Hopkins's agenda that leads to the distortion. Again, it is reasonable—even inevitable—that in discussing the nature of God one will face questions to which one has not received an authoritative answer. It is often appropriate to answer these questions if one acknowledges that the answer is one's personal view. Indeed, even the authors of scripture do this on occasion. The problems arise when unauthoritative views conflict with, are mistaken for, or supplant authoritative teachings. Throughout this section I will also comment on whether Hopkins's arguments against his opponents are cogent.

Appeals to Science. Appealing to modern science in criticizing the metaphysical notions behind the traditional Christian conception of God, Hopkins asserts, "Modern science provides no support whatever for the metaphysical notion of a timeless eternity outside the real universe" (pp. 211–12). This is an empty assessment that passes too quickly even to verify that it makes a relevant claim. For one thing, the Parmenidean metaphysics he has described is not the metaphysics behind the traditional Christian view of God; for another, it is not certain what sort of support we should expect from modern science for *any* metaphysical view, since science generally investigates particular empirical phenomena. Still, this statement illustrates Hopkins's reliance, legitimate or not, on the authority of modern science.

Hopkins makes a similarly vague appeal to scientific authority to more specifically support his claim that three persons cannot be one individual thing: "Both scientists and philosophers recognize that the idea of a personal being, as opposed to a legal entity, involves a distinct *center of consciousness* that has a specific location in time and space. This understanding of personality simply does not fit into the makeup of a being like that imagined in the Trinity of classical theism" (p. 225).

Presumably, some scientists and philosophers would subscribe to this view of personhood, but Hopkins does not say who, and there is certainly no consensus to this effect among philosophers. Moreover, it is doubtful that this question lies within the scope of authority of any coalition of scientists or philosophers; for while it may be clear what it means for a human body or a brain to have a location in time and space, it is far from clear what it would mean for a “center of consciousness” to have such a location. Where is a person’s center of consciousness when that person is contemplating the events of creation or is asleep? The empirically minded might insist that it is always in the brain or body, but this assumes that a person must be corporeal, which is precisely one of the questions in dispute in a discussion of the Godhead.

Hopkins makes a more involved call upon modern mathematics to support certain points of Latter-day Saint cosmology that have come under criticism: “Modern mathematics has shown that the finite and the infinite are not so far removed from each other as the ancient Greeks supposed” (p. 401). Hopkins responds specifically to Beckwith’s formulation of these criticisms, which is in some ways reminiscent of ancient Greek reflections on the infinite. While he correctly states that Beckwith’s criticisms of Latter-day Saint views do not stand up in the light of modern mathematics, his own defense fares little better, for he gets key points of the mathematics wrong. Indeed, many of Hopkins’s and Beckwith’s arguments have been obsolete since the Middle Ages, when al-Ghazali, Maimonides, and Thomas Aquinas thoroughly studied questions like this about space and time. This is hardly the place for a complete exposition of the mathematics of infinity or the topology of beginnings and ends, but I will give examples of key confusions in Hopkins’s discussion: Beckwith argues that the Latter-day Saint understanding of eternal progression implies the present existence of infinitely many gods and intelligences, and he objects to this implication. Hopkins responds by claiming that “In the real universe . . . there could be an infinite number of ‘kingdoms,’ and each of those kingdoms could be infinite in dimension.” He argues for this as follows:

Not only can infinite space be divided into an *infinite* number of infinitesimal points, it can include an infinite number of *finite* spatial segments (e.g., sixteen-cubic-inch cubes). Each of these segments has at least one finite measurement (length, area or volume), but in infinite space it does not matter how big or how small those finite measurements are. They could even be infinitely large or infinitely small. (pp. 402–3)

Here Hopkins simply ignores the distinction between the finite and the infinite. There is no such thing as an infinitely large finite measurement: *infinite* means “not finite.”¹⁵ Hopkins goes on to draw several convenient consequences from this nonsensical claim.

Beckwith also objects to the Latter-day Saint belief that the universe has no beginning. Hopkins counters that it is “fundamentally irrational” to believe that the universe does have a beginning (and hence that there is a beginning of time). He argues:

If, in the classical view of heaven, there was no time before the creation of the sensory universe, either events would have to occur without any chronological order, or God would have to be doing absolutely nothing. The latter notion is inconsistent with the character and attributes of the God described in the Bible, and the former idea is impossible. (p. 415)

Perhaps Hopkins is right to exclude the option of events occurring without chronological order, but the alternative is reasonable—not exactly that God would be doing nothing, but that there would be no change. Time is the measure of change: We can only judge the passing of time by observing changes, such as the motion of the sun or of the hands of a clock, or the turning of the leaves in autumn. Thus, if God’s activity were unchanging, there might be no time. In fact, traditional Christians typically claim that God is and has always

15. It would be appropriate to say, “These finite measurements could be *indefinitely* large,” meaning that for any finite size one picks, they could be bigger; but *indefinitely large* is not *infinitely large*.

been unchanging in essential respects and that time only makes sense in relation to created things, which do change. They draw upon scriptures like Malachi 3:6, which says, “For I am the Lord, I change not,” or James 1:17, which refers to “the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness.” Similar statements appear in the Book of Mormon, such as in Mormon 9:9. Thus Hopkins once again dismisses the opposing view prematurely.¹⁶ Of course, Beckwith’s arguments that there must be a beginning to time are also unconvincing, but not for the reasons Hopkins gives.

Hopkins cites various facts of neurology in a speculation on the suitability of the human brain for holding Godlike knowledge (see p. 321). He refers to developments in “Gestalt psychology” to support his view of how resurrected humans might progress toward omniscience (see p. 435). He pauses for an especially elusive comment on the colorful topic of the quantum structure of vacuum (see pp. 286–87). He refers to modern telecommunications to support his view that God is omnipresent despite having a specific spatial location (see pp. 316, 340–42). In all these cases, Hopkins tends to mischaracterize the claims of science or mathematics to support his understanding of revealed truths, rather than the other way around. Thus his appeals to the received wisdom of his day seem less likely to lead to a corruption of revealed truth than those of the early Christian Apologists did. Still, he presents some odd renderings of Latter-day Saint beliefs along the way, such as when he alludes to infinite intervals between events in spiritual progression or marks the distinction between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in terms of centers of consciousness—a notion whose connection with scripture is dubious. These are the sorts of renderings that could lead to distortions of revealed truth if they were more plausible.

Parsing of Scripture and Doctrine in Terms of Science. In other cases Hopkins seems so bent on interpreting revelation in terms of

16. Again, my own view on these questions differs from the view of traditional Christians, but I do not attribute their view to irrationality or intellectual carelessness; I attribute it to their lacking the benefits of modern revelation.

modern science that he disregards the integrity both of revelation and of science. For example, as a prelude to addressing Beckwith's criticisms of Latter-day Saint cosmology, Hopkins rehearses a number of surprising points in the mathematical theory of infinite sets. During this rehearsal he distinguishes two orders of infinity: the order of the natural, or of the rational numbers; and the order of the real numbers, or of the points in a continuous space, plane, or line. Hopkins alleges that God has the distinction between these two orders of infinity in mind in several scriptural passages:

Indeed, it is the meaning of God's reference to the sands of the sea as "innumerable" (e.g., Gen. 22:17; Jer. 33:22; Heb. 11:12). The "sands of the sea" is simply an analogy that refers to "the number of points in the universe [or in a continuous space]." (p. 403; cf. 427)

Hopkins offers no support for this claim. Though connecting the word of God with the most obscure pronouncements of science may impress some readers, this claim is quite baseless. First, there is no indication that the Hebrews had language to distinguish orders of infinity; second, it is hard to imagine why God would care to distinguish between orders of infinity in his communication with the Hebrews; third, mathematically speaking, the sands of the sea are not analogous to the points of the universe in this respect. Since grains of sand are finite in size (even if there are infinitely many grains of sand), the grains are countably infinite, like the natural or rational numbers, rather than uncountably infinite, like the points of space.

Though there is no substance to these appeals to mathematics and science, one can see why Hopkins would be powerfully drawn to make them and how they would have a significant effect on readers who are unaware of their error. It would be surprising if the early Christian Apologists did not succumb to similar temptations and sometimes distort both philosophy and revelation as a result.

A use of science that leads to a more disturbing rendering of Latter-day Saint belief is Hopkins's attempt to support the belief that God is corporeal by drawing upon Einstein's celebrated equation for

mass-energy equivalence, $E=mc^2$. Admittedly, the high esteem in which Latter-day Saints hold matter, as expressed in Doctrine and Covenants 93:33, fits more easily with modern scientific views than Platonic views do. Yet though this appeal to $E=mc^2$ may be impressive or entertaining to some readers, as a piece of reasoning it is a total failure.¹⁷

Hopkins's basic line of reasoning is as follows (see pp. 308–9):

1. A particle of matter at rest represents an amount of energy (E) equal to the particle's mass (m) times the speed of light (c) squared ($E=mc^2$).

2. The speed of light is 3×10^{10} cm/s.

3. The speed of light squared is 9×10^{20} cm²/s².

4. Thus a unit of mass represents 9×10^{20} units of energy.

5. Thus a being made of matter would be 9×10^{20} times as powerful as a being made of energy.

6. Thus a corporeal state, as in Latter-day Saint belief, is more worthy of God than an incorporeal state, as in traditional Christian belief.

There are multiple serious problems with this reasoning. First, to represent God's power by a finite, calculable quantity of energy is wholly inadequate. The fact that energy and power are not the same thing, scientifically speaking, may be the least of Hopkins's difficulties. More important is the fact that the scientific notions of energy, mass, and power all have little to do with the kind of power we ascribe to God, or to almost anything, in usual speech. Which corporeal entity, for instance, is more powerful: a 20-ton heap of sand (the most massive), a 3/4-ton sports car, a 500-pound bomb, a few ounces of weapons-grade anthrax, or a sincere note written in a difficult hour (the least massive)? For these items we hardly think of mass as the index of power; for God it is surely even less relevant.

Any quantity of energy, scientifically speaking, or power, which is the rate of output of energy, is of dubious relevance when considering God's power. God made the sun, which radiates energy equivalent to

17. Delivered in the right tone of voice, this argument might be a creative and effective satire of some of the philosophical arguments that a corporeal state would be unworthy of God. Unfortunately, in its context I doubt most readers will hear it in that way.

millions of metric tons of mass each second. The energy represented by the mass of a human body would not fuel the sun for an eye blink, and yet Christ is the light of the sun and of the stars (see D&C 88:7–9). Thus, clearly the particular mass of God’s body is no indication of how powerful he is. Moreover, this immense outpouring of energy in the sun and stars is not his most wonderful power. How much energy, scientifically speaking, does it take to purify a human heart? Clearly these scientific concepts are of little use in considering the power of God, even though he is corporeal. To attempt to apply them suggests a lack of appreciation of the wonder of God’s power.

Second, the traditional Christian God simply is not a being of energy as physicists use the term. The comparison may have value as a metaphor, and certainly God is the source of light and other energy. Yet from a Platonic perspective, for example, energy in the physicist’s sense belongs clearly to the realm of matter: it moves through space and changes form dramatically, as God does not. The traditional Christian God is not “composed of pure energy” (p. 308). He is not “composed of” any other thing; he is the source of everything. Thus Hopkins’s comparison of matter to energy tells us nothing about the nature of the traditional Christian God, and his argument against such an incorporeal God thus has no force.

One might hope to find that the third problem is a misunderstanding of some subtlety of relativistic dynamics, but it is much more basic. Hopkins’s reasoning involves a misunderstanding of the role of units in an equation, a concept carefully treated in a forum no less arcane than the average high school physics class. Essentially, the mistake occurs in separating the numbers involved in the equation from the units in which the various quantities are expressed. This is like trying to tell which of two rulers is the longer merely by asking what number it ends with. Of course, a ruler that ends with “30” (centimeters) may simply be the flip side of a ruler that ends in “12” (inches). The fact that a distance of 100 yards is expressed with a larger number does not mean that it refers to a distance longer than 2 miles. In gauging an actual quantity, knowing the unit is as crucial as knowing the number.

When Hopkins says, “it would require nearly 900 quintillion (900,000,000,000,000,000,000) units of energy to be equivalent to just one unit of mass” (p. 308), he neglects to acknowledge that this number depends entirely on the choice of units. Many different units are used to measure energy, as well as to measure mass or linear distance or speed. If he had chosen to express the speed of light in kilometers per second, he would have derived a ratio of only 90 billion (90,000,000,000) to 1. If he had expressed it in astronomical units (the average distance from the earth to the sun) per hour, he would have derived a ratio of about 52 to 1. If he had expressed it in light-years per second ($c=3.17\times 10^{-8}$ ly/s), he would have found his result reversed: it requires 1 quadrillion (10^{15}), or 1,000,000,000,000,000 units of mass, to equal one unit of energy. How many units of mass equal one unit of energy simply depends on the arbitrary choice of units; it says nothing about the relative “power” of matter and energy.

That an argument involving such an elementary error should appear in print at all is disturbing. It is also troubling that Hopkins expresses the speed of light in units that seem chosen to boost the number generated by his flawed reasoning. Among a great variety of units one might use to express the speed of light, the most standard are either meters per second or centimeters per second. Convenient to Hopkins’s purpose, choosing centimeters per second instead of meters per second as the unit for the speed of light—the c in Einstein’s equation—adds four zeroes onto the end of the number the calculation produces (100^2). The choice of units thus increases “the ratio of corporeality to incorporeality” (p. 309) by a factor of 10,000, boosting one’s impression of how much more powerful a corporeal God would supposedly be than an incorporeal God. One worries that his might be a deliberate effort to inflate an argument that lacks rational substance of its own. With its distorted representations of God and his power, and of the implications of science, this argument easily compares with the distortions of truth Hopkins attributes to the early Christian Apologists.

Dubious or Problematic Presentation of Doctrine. If Hopkins’s use of science in his reasoning is problematic, it must be said that his

representations of the Latter-day Saint position on certain points are just as precarious. In some instances, what he says is consistent with authoritative Latter-day Saint teaching, but in others it is not.

On the subjects of God's omniscience, his foreknowledge, and the relationship of human freedom to divine providence, Hopkins takes positions that are reasonable and theologically acceptable for a Latter-day Saint to take, although they are somewhat controversial (see pp. 313–15, 317–18). Some Latter-day Saints would take different positions, all more or less equally compatible with modern revelation. However, in the course of explaining how LDS belief differs from classical theism, Hopkins frequently takes just one of a few views open to Latter-day Saints, presenting it as though it were the only viable view.

For example, in opposing the traditional view that God is outside of time, Hopkins criticizes the view that God has direct knowledge of future events. He maintains instead that God knows the future because he can predict it based on his knowledge of past and present events and of his own plans. However, another Latter-day Saint might hold that God, while acting in time, knows the future directly in much the same way as he knows the present: "all things are present before mine eyes" (D&C 38:1). In a situation like this it would be better to acknowledge the variety of views that Latter-day Saints may reasonably take. Paradoxically, Hopkins cites a drive toward unification of belief as one of the factors that accelerated the apostasy among the early Christians (see p. 147). When the points on which unity was pursued could not be resolved through inspiration, people became unified in error, rather than holding a variety of views among which the truth was still to be found. It would be fitting, then, for Hopkins to more readily acknowledge and respect variation in belief among Latter-day Saints.

Hopkins is particularly emphatic about unity of belief among Latter-day Saints in his rejection of Beckwith's five-point summary of Latter-day Saint theology. He claims that "with the exception of one or two statements, the entire Mormon Church would stand in disagreement with Dr. Beckwith's summary of its teachings" (p. 23). Though some would disagree, I also know thoughtful and faithful

Latter-day Saints who agree with all five points of Beckwith's summary. Though Hopkins denies Beckwith's contention that "both the later writings of Joseph Smith and current Mormon orthodoxy clearly assert these five points" (as cited in Hopkins, p. 23), he does not address the issue with argument. As it happens, in the course of his book Hopkins himself eventually grants four of the five points and concedes most of the fifth.

In other cases Hopkins presents a view that is very problematic for a Latter-day Saint to take. Hopkins's zeal leads him to misrepresent the scriptures' teaching on two rather important points: the light of Christ and the purpose of the Edenic creation. In my discussion of part 1 above, I examined how Hopkins seriously distorts the scriptural teachings about conscience, or the light of Christ, in Romans 2 and in Doctrine and Covenants 93 when he attacks the Greek notion of a priori knowledge. He seems to approach these passages with his mind already made up as to what they should say, much like the ancient practitioners of allegorical interpretation whom he criticizes elsewhere.

Further, in critiquing the traditional Christian sense of the gap between God the creator and his creatures, Hopkins claims that the creation was perfect as it was first created. He argues purely from one phrase used in Genesis: "When He finished the earth and all that He created in it, He pronounced it 'very good.' . . . For God, a perfect being, that statement can only be taken as an indication that His creation was perfect." He further claims, "What God made was perfect, not inferior, and it was meant to last forever" (p. 238). It is rather bold to equate "very good" with "perfect" on no other basis than this. This inference is made even more dubious by the fact that the first humans chose the path of disobedience. They were part of God's creation, but evidently their wills, at least, were imperfect.

Moreover, Hopkins's claim conflicts with the Latter-day Saint understanding of the Edenic state and the fall. According to Abraham 3:24–26, a key part of God's purpose in creating the earth and placing his children on it was to test their obedience, opening to them the possibility of a stage of development much greater than just the embodiment Adam and Eve received in Eden. Second Nephi 2:22–25

further clarifies that the fall was necessary for this plan to go forward: if not for the fall Adam and Eve would have had no children, “wherefore they would have remained in a state of innocence, having no joy.” Yet joy is a crucial part of God’s plan for us: “Adam fell that men might be; and men are, that they might have joy.” God did not intend his creations to remain forever in the state in which he left them when he pronounced them “very good” in Genesis 1. Rather, the mortal state that all earthly life entered through the fall of Adam was a necessary phase leading to one even more perfect than the idyllic Eden. Mistakes on fundamental points like this, uncorrected, led the early Christians into apostasy.

In his effort to distance himself from traditional Christian Trinitarians, Hopkins goes so far as to call into question the authenticity of 1 John 5:7, which he sees as the most Trinitarian-sounding verse in the Bible. It reads: “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.” Apparently, Hopkins is uncomfortable with the statement that the three members of the Godhead are one. Indeed, in my experience many Latter-day Saints are uncomfortable with this way of speaking because it sounds reminiscent of traditional Trinitarianism. This is problematic, however, because it leads us to be selective in reading not just the Bible, but even the Book of Mormon. Consider 2 Nephi 31:21: “And now, behold, this is the doctrine of Christ, and the only and true doctrine of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which is one God, without end.” Alma 11:44 similarly refers to these three as “one Eternal God,” and Mosiah 15:4–5 twice calls the Father and Son “one God.” To top it off, when Christ says in 3 Nephi 11:36, “the Father, and I, and the Holy Ghost are one,” he is affirming that the other members of the Godhead will bear record of him and of the doctrine he is presenting; in other words, his point is exactly parallel to the point of 1 John 5:7. Clearly, Hopkins’s attempt to discount 1 John 5:7 for sounding too Trinitarian is a mistake. This type of mistake is very tempting for an apologist in any century, and we must beware of it.

It is interesting to note that whereas the general drift of error among Christians after the deaths of the apostles was to assimilate their views to those of Hellenistic philosophy, Hopkins's tendency is to exaggerate differences between the Latter-day Saint view and the traditional Christian view. Thus his tendency in expressing unauthoritative views is opposite to theirs. However, error in either direction is destructive. Whether we draw nearer to or farther from our opponents through overzealous apologetics, if we neglect the message of revelation, we fall into error.

My examples hardly exhaust the problems with Hopkins's text. I present them as points calling for correction in their own right but also as illustrations of the generally polemical construction of parts 3 and 4. At times Hopkins's drive to disagree with classical theists overpowers his attention to the integrity of his own Latter-day Saint tradition and belief. Even in cases in which Hopkins is merely unpersuasive, the sheer number of times he raises a thesis and dismisses it too quickly suggests disrespect for our traditional Christian brothers and sisters. And by heaping up masses of unconvincing arguments, I fear that he actually makes the Latter-day Saint view look less plausible.

Reflections

The overall format of Hopkins's presentation is well chosen, beginning with highlights of Greek philosophy, looking with some care at the period following the deaths of the original apostles, and, with that historical and conceptual background, proceeding to a closer examination of the various doctrinal disagreements between traditional Christianity and the restored church. The history helps one understand the contemporary debate, besides being interesting in its own right. The charitable tone of Hopkins's history also represents a very welcome corrective to the dismissive manner prevalent in popular Latter-day Saint discussions of the few centuries following the deaths of the original apostles. Unfortunately, in some of its details Hopkins's presentation is still disappointing.

We Latter-day Saints need a book like this one aspires to be. However, we need a book that proceeds much more cautiously and shows a much greater attention to and respect for opposing views, neither co-opting them prematurely (as in parts 1 and 2 of Hopkins's book) nor dismissing them prematurely (as in parts 3 and 4). It should acknowledge how much of traditional Christian thought is reasonable for someone without the benefits of modern revelation. It should not only be accurate in characterizing individual opposing views, but it should address the great variety of views to be found in traditional Christianity. It should acknowledge the major views present not only in recent evangelical thought, such as Beckwith represents, but in Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and other Protestant thought, both now and historically. To vindicate the teachings of the restoration, it is not enough to discredit just one of the many traditional views. Further, the agenda of this book should be set in response to great thinkers—such as Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin, who represent the best traditional Christianity has to offer—rather than to minor contemporaries.

The work I am describing would involve far more than one volume can establish. Hopkins draws heavily on Edwin Hatch's *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity*¹⁸ for his account of the origins of apostate views. Book X would also have to draw on several books' worth of work by Latter-day Saint scholars, much of which has not yet appeared. To effectively compare Latter-day Saint belief with traditional Christian belief will presuppose a finely honed assessment of the boundaries of each body of beliefs. This involves establishing both the authoritative core and the scope of acceptable variations in belief.¹⁹ It is not enough simply to compare some beliefs Latter-

18. See note 9 above.

19. For example, both Alma (Alma 40:20) and Paul (1 Corinthians 7:25) express in scriptural writings opinions which Latter-day Saints today would consider mistaken. Still, they both were great prophets and teachers, pillars of the church in their time. Clearly, then, there is a range of acceptable variation in belief among members and even leaders of the Church of Jesus Christ. Today some Latter-day Saints believe God was always God, but some don't. To assess the scope of acceptable variation is a challenging task.

day Saints hold with some beliefs traditional Christians hold; book X must address how far the core of traditional Christian belief—or the cores of the major Christian traditions—conflicts with the core of LDS belief. Allegations of harmony or dissonance between Greek philosophy or pre-Nicene Christianity and corresponding Latter-day Saint thinking should take into consideration the context of the Greek or pre-Nicene thinker's work as a whole. In many cases like this, book X should rely on a more focused book or article.

More important, appeals to the Bible to support a Latter-day Saint view must acknowledge how far LDS readings of the Bible rely on assumptions drawn from modern revelation and how far assumptions from other Christian traditions could be reconciled with the biblical text in the absence of modern revelation. Book X should also comment on the viability of tradition itself, beyond the Bible, for shaping religious belief. Roman Catholics, for example, do not believe in relying on sola scriptura; they appeal as well to the authority of a continuous tradition of teaching traced to the original apostles, much as Latter-day Saints appeal to a line of priesthood authority. Book X might be largely self-contained in presenting its philosophical arguments, which tend to be compact in comparison to historical or textual arguments. Still, to be persuasive, its author would have to write from a familiarity with the best philosophical arguments about God and related questions as drawn from the entire history of philosophy, not merely from the work of one contemporary polemicist.

Amid all this, book X would need to avoid either minimizing or exaggerating the differences between Latter-day Saint and traditional views, remaining anchored in a careful reading of the scriptures and the teachings of modern prophets. Hopkins is not the only person prone to define his views in the terms set by a controversy. In the debate between Latter-day Saints and evangelicals, we see the tendency both to minimize differences and to exaggerate them. The latter tendency seems to show itself in the position taken by the evangelical authors of *The New Mormon Challenge*. Among three points of evangelical belief that they take to be nonnegotiable, they include the two points Latter-day Saints are most prone to criticize: belief that the

members of the Godhead constitute one metaphysical substance and belief in creation *ex nihilo*.²⁰ On the other hand, LDS author Stephen Robinson arguably goes too far in minimizing differences in *How Wide the Divide?*²¹

Of course, book X as I describe it would be a monumental work, and I certainly don't fault Richard Hopkins for not producing it. However, having set itself roughly the same task, *How Greek Philosophy Corrupted the Christian Concept of God* greatly suffers by not drawing on the depth of preparation needed to accomplish the task well.

We Latter-day Saints need a book like Hopkins's book aspires to be, a single volume that addresses a general audience and shows how strong the case is for LDS teachings about God, on the basis of the Bible, history, and philosophy. Although these evidences are no replacement for the witness of the Holy Spirit, they are still substantial and are worth studying, even aside from their persuasive force. I hope that Hopkins's work will spur other Latter-day Saints to revisit the project more methodically and carefully.

20. Francis J. Beckwith, Carl Mosser, and Paul Owen, eds., *The New Mormon Challenge: Responding to the Latest Defenses of a Fast-Growing Movement* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002), 399–400. They refer here to the doctrines of creation *ex nihilo* and monotheism, but it is clear from the rest of the book that by monotheism they mean the belief that God is one metaphysical substance.

21. David L. Paulsen and R. Dennis Potter argue as much in their contribution to the *Review* issue on that book: "How Deep the Chasm? A Reply to Owen and Mosser's Review," *FARMS Review of Books* 11/2 (1999): 221–64. Still, in many respects Blomberg and Robinson's book, *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997), is a fine example of respectful and well-informed dialogue.

