



4-2009

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Samuel M. Brown

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### Recommended Citation

Brown, Samuel M. (2009) "Open and Relational Theology An Evangelical in Dialogue with a Latter-day Saint," *BYU Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 48 : Iss. 2 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol48/iss2/4>

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## MORMONISM IN DIALOGUE WITH CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN THEOLOGIES



EDITED BY  
DONALD W. MUSSER AND DAVID L. PAULSEN

FOREWORD BY MARTIN MARTY

*Mormonism in Dialogue* contains a longer and more thoroughly foot-noted dialogue between David L. Paulsen and Clark H. Pinnock. Published by a southern Christian university (Mercer University Press) and bringing together some of today's foremost theologians to talk about Latter-day Saint faith, this book is the first of its kind. It also includes dialogues between Mormons and Christians on process theology, liberation theology, feminist theology, black theology, and myth theology, as well as dialogues on the theologies of Karl Barth, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Paul Tillich.

# Open and Relational Theology

## An Evangelical in Dialogue with a Latter-day Saint

*Clark H. Pinnock and David L. Paulsen*

*The following lively exchange began with a lecture given by Clark H. Pinnock at Brigham Young University in 2004. David L. Paulsen responded to that presentation, and further dialogue ensued. BYU Studies is happy to present their formalized dialogue, which is a model of mutually beneficial interfaith discussion.*

**CLARK H. PINNOCK:** For all of us, God is a great mystery and a major challenge to speak about. Therefore, a humble spirit is required if we wish to attempt it, which (of course) we do, because we must talk about God, who is the first and principal topic of Christian doctrine. Augustine sets the tone for any inquiry into the mystery of God when he begins a tract entitled “On the Holy Trinity” by asking readers to keep him company when they are in agreement, to dialogue with him when they are hesitant, and to call him back when they think he is in error. Augustine hopes that such practices will ensure that we advance together toward God. He also adds that there is no “inquiry more laborious” nor where “error [is] more dangerous,” but also none where the “discovery of truth [is] more profitable.”<sup>1</sup>

When I refer to open and relational theologies, I have in mind a cluster of models of the divine that strive to bring out the personal nature of God and want, in their own distinctive ways, to lift up the conviction that God is “open” and that he exists in a significant relationship with the creature. Open and relational theologies envisage a situation where there is genuine interaction between God and his creations, where God enters into reciprocal give-and-take relations with his creations, and where God responds to what his creations do. In all this, God willingly (sometimes necessarily) accepts a degree of conditionality and risk taking. Although

these theological themes are quite old, traditionalists have not usually allowed such open models to hold sway. But many theologians are adopting similar models today. These theologians are keen to recover such relational themes as God's loving, God's risking, God's suffering, God's changing.

The desire to formulate a more relational model is widespread among theologians across the spectrum of Christian thought. As for myself, I have worked with a relational model that has been named "the openness of God"—sometimes called free-will theism—and have done so in the evangelical context.<sup>2</sup> As hinted at above, this model is by no means limited in time or number. Relational nondeterminist theology is as old as Christianity itself. Although I am a relational theist who swims in the streams of tradition flowing from Wesley, I believe that there are different ways of approaching relational theism, and that subscribers to these various approaches need to be conversing with one another. Who knows—we may learn something from the methodologies and discoveries of others. We know the things of God only "in part" (1 Cor. 3:12), which should make us open to insight from whatever direction.<sup>3</sup>

Relational theists have a lot in common with Latter-day Saints, commonality that should lead to fruitful interaction. Social Trinitarianism, the view that the Godhead is best understood by starting from the threeness of the persons, is one example. Another is my own personal openness to considering the idea of a divine embodiment, taboo in traditional theology but central to LDS thinking. There are other commonalities: of a mutual dissatisfaction with classical theism, the espousal of libertarian freedom, the denial that God has a monopoly on power, the belief that God experiences pathos in interaction with creatures, and the belief that God prefers to exercise persuasive rather than coercive power. There may be more. And of course there will be divergences alongside the convergences.<sup>4</sup>

In this presentation, I will explain open and relational theologies in an attempt to call attention to possible points of contact with LDS thought and to open lines of communication. As a non-Mormon who is not an anti-Mormon, I cherish the hope that the Holy Spirit will open doors to dialogue between Latter-day Saints and traditional Christian believers. Obviously there will be differences and limits to agreement at this stage, but there may be areas of promising growth also.

I know that Latter-day Saints debate with each other as to what ideas are necessary beliefs in their faith and as to how these beliefs are best articulated. I know that they do not now follow some practices that were followed by Latter-day Saints in the nineteenth century (for example, the practice of polygamy or denying priesthood to blacks). LDS thinking does not stand still, and we should not impute to them things that they do

not now hold or practice. I will give David L. Paulsen the opportunity to clarify things that puzzle me.

In this conversation, of course, we are coming from very different places. The Latter-day Saints appeal to the broad canon of their scriptures and to the restoration gospel contained therein, and I will not. But the simple fact that we both accept the Holy Bible means that there will still be a lot in common. On the subject of canon, let me add this: I freely grant that, for there to have been a restoration of Christianity through Joseph Smith, it follows that there would have been fresh scriptures to bear witness to it. Scriptures arise in such contexts. I find the existence of the Book of Mormon and other uniquely LDS scripture to be consistent with religious tradition and entertain no dogma of a closed canon that would rule out such modern revelation.<sup>5</sup> As for a restoration, this is a familiar theme in American church history. One thinks of the Anabaptists, the Campbellites, and the Pentecostals, who rival even the Latter-day Saints in world outreach. All these organizations think of themselves in restorationist terms, and it seems to this Canadian that the Americans have a flair for restoring, rectifying, and renewing religion!

A distinguishing feature in the doctrine of God today is the debate surrounding the traditional absolutist model of God, a model that was developed in the ancient and medieval periods of church history and that is inclined to employ abstract and deterministic categories for understanding the nature of God and God's relationship to the world. Many theologians today, including some who think of themselves as classical theists, are critical of this approach. A great many tend to emphasize the perfections of a personal God, who engages in give-and-take relationships with creatures. There is a trend in contemporary theology toward relational theism, a shift in doctrine toward more dynamic categories and away from the more static categories. Open theists think (and I believe that Latter-day Saints agree) that this does greater justice to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, who is not an apathetic and immobile God but a compassionate, loving, and responsive person.

Donald G. Bloesch, a leading evangelical theologian, expresses this strongly when he writes:

A compelling case can be made that the history of Christian thought shows the unmistakable imprint of a biblical-classical synthesis in which the ontological categories of Greco-Roman philosophy have been united with the personal-dramatic categories of biblical faith. The attempt at synthesis began already with the early apologists, who sought to vindicate the claims of Christianity to the pagan culture of their time. The Hellenising of Christian faith was particularly apparent in Clement and Origen, who introduced "elements of religious speculation and

intellectualistic spirituality belonging to a world altogether different from that of the Gospel.”<sup>6</sup>

The God of biblical faith interacts with people in the drama of history, whereas the God of the Hellenistic ethos is a self-contained absolute, characterized by imperturbability and impassibility. But believers do not want a cold, immutable, and philosophical kind of God. They want a God who reveals himself, listens to prayer, and can (to some extent) be grasped in human terms. Shaye Cohen writes:

The God of the Hebrew Bible is for the most part an anthropomorphic and anthropopathic being, that is, a God who has the form and emotions of humans. He (it is a he) walks and talks, has arms and legs, becomes angry, happy, or sad, changes his mind, speaks to humans and is addressed by them, and closely supervises the affairs of the world. The God of the philosophers is . . . abstract, . . . immutable, and relatively unconcerned with the affairs of humanity. The tension between these rival conceptions of the Deity is evident in the work of Philo, who is . . . particularly careful to sanitize the anthropomorphic and anthropopathic passages.<sup>7</sup>

This kind of criticism is made by many: liberals like Adolph von Harnack, Reformed scholars like Vincent Brümmer, open theists like John Sanders,<sup>8</sup> and LDS academicians like Stephen E. Robinson. Robinson writes, “There isn’t a single verse of the Bible that I do not personally accept and believe, although I do reject the interpretive straight-jacket imposed on the Bible by the Hellenized church after the apostles passed from the scene.”<sup>9</sup>

Robinson’s statement clearly converges with the beliefs of other varieties of relational theology. Belief in some kind of mistake by certain theologians of absolutism is not limited to Latter-day Saints, although they see it radically. But even here we need not exaggerate the difference. Robinson continues, “Informed Latter-day Saints do not argue that historic Christianity lost *all* truth or became *completely* corrupt. The orthodox churches may have lost the ‘fullness’ of the gospel, but they did not lose all of it nor even most of it.”<sup>10</sup> This is a remarkable concession and a conciliatory tone that is seldom heard among the sometimes vicious evangelical critics of LDS thought. At the same time, Latter-day Saints disagree on this point, given the fact that Joseph Smith’s account of the First Vision uses strongly negative language about traditional Christianity. However, Robinson warns against misinterpreting Joseph Smith’s intent, and Benjamin Huff warns that Latter-day Saints ought to be careful how they see the precise nature of the Apostasy and should not distort things.<sup>11</sup>

Open theism, which also associates itself with the evangelical movement in North America, belongs to the family of relational approaches. Sharing themes with others, we open theists too are in pursuit of a personal God who is dynamically related to the world. We hold that God by grace has granted humans significant freedom to cooperate with or work against God's will for us, and that God enters into dynamic give-and-take relationships with us. We also espouse the belief that the future is not settled in every respect, and that God knows both what will be and what might be. Open theism is a biblical theology rather than a metaphysical construct, though open theists are not averse to its philosophical, scientific, and existential credibility. In their efforts to engage in biblical theology, the Latter-day Saints are closer to open theism than they are to process thought. However, they tend more to process theism in some matters such as creation out of nothing.

The openness version of the relational models has been marketed under that "openness" logo to evangelicals because the chief proponents of open theism are themselves evangelicals. We present a biblical theology in sync with our relational piety. In spite of opposition, mostly from the paleo-Calvinist strongholds in the evangelical movement, the message has been getting out. (Indeed their vociferousness in criticism has given us a great deal of free publicity as well as sympathy.) We also have some advantages. For example, it is hard to find an evangelical who does not believe in a relational God who responds freely to prayer. Also, young people often gravitate toward open theism because it encourages them to make a difference in a future that is not altogether settled.

Meanwhile, one might see open theism in a mediating position between classical theism on the one hand and process theism on the other. This gives us three explanatory models to compare, offering us a well-rounded explanation of God's nature and God's relation to the world.<sup>12</sup>

To start with, classical theism is an absolutist understanding of the nature of God in which God has no need of the world and is not internally related to it. God's joy is not increased by the world's beauty or diminished by its pain. God's being is perfect and fully actualized apart from the world. Any alteration to God's character would only decrease it. In this understanding, God is immutable in a static sense, essentially unrelated to the world and unaffected by what happens in it and to it. Classical theists see absoluteness and impassibility as basic attributes of God that determine how the revelation of God in Christ is understood. This model has dominated Christian thinking through most of church history and defines the God that atheists love to hate. One wonders how many people have



rejected faith in God because of such a definition of him. It presents God as, in the words of Dallas Willard, “a great unblinking cosmic stare.”<sup>13</sup>

At the other extreme stands process theology. Here God and the world are coeternal and interdependent. According to process theology, God created the world and the world creates God. He is evolving along with the universe and dependent on the world for the content of his life experience. In effect, as the saying goes, God proposes, man disposes. Not at all distant and aloof, God is always involved in the world. There are possibilities for change and improvement. God has a physical pole and is thereby thoroughly passible. God cares about us all and is always trying to lure us toward what is best for us. Being mutable and involved in the process of becoming, his knowledge is finite and undergoes changes. He cannot know the future exhaustively. He knows all possibilities, not which possibility will become actual. Ultimately, all entities receive their life from God and return their life to God. Creativity is everlasting; God is the power that inspires the creative becoming of all things through tender persuasion and that treasures their achieved values in his own everlasting life.

Open theism, as I have said, takes a position between these two extremes, and I believe that LDS thought does also. Open theism appeals to those who cannot accept classical theism and like aspects of process theism but want a more mediating corrective. One might say that these individuals want a neoclassical, not a nonclassical, view. I am not presenting something alien to the Latter-day Saints but something familiar and agreeable to them. Openness thinking has affinities to both process theism and classical theism, plus real differences. Open theists embrace the one God, maker of heaven and earth, who at the same time self-limits to make room for significant creatures. In sovereign freedom, the triune God chooses to create. In particular, he makes a world capable of receiving and returning love and grants the kind of freedom necessary for this. God also decides to make some of his actions contingent on us—on our prayers and actions. He lets himself be affected by what we do, and he responds to what we do. God does not tightly control everything that happens but gives space for us to operate and cooperate in. God is also creative and resourceful in how he works with us. As Sanders puts it, “God has divine purpose with open routes.”<sup>14</sup> We reject the blueprint worldview. History is not a scripted play in which our decisions are simply what God has decided.

Controversially, open theists also say that God knows all that is possible to know, that God knows what will be but also what might be. He knows what he has decided to bring about, but he also knows the possibilities that he has left open. Graciously, God invites us to collaborate with him in bringing the as-yet-open part of the future into being. Open



theists do not want a God as impotent and finite as the process God, so they posit omnipotence but see God as choosing not to use his full power out of respect for libertarian freedom. I realize that this exposes a point of vulnerability for me in that a God who can self-limit can also un-self-limit, but I can live with it.<sup>15</sup> As a *via media*, open theism wants to preserve the classical emphasis on the greatness of God while at the same time highlighting the relational aspects.

Being a pilgrim in theology, I have experienced changes in my thinking over the years, and one such change lies in God's relationship to humans. Over a period of thirty years, I have moved away from the paleo-Calvinist system typified by the canons of Dort to a postconservative, evangelical Wesleyan standpoint. In terms of the doctrine of God, I moved from thinking of God as "an unmoved mover" to thinking of him as "a most moved mover." And it has taken effort over a lifetime to work out the implications of this one thing: what does it mean to believe in a relational God of unbounded love?<sup>16</sup>

Belief in a loving triune God took center stage in my thinking, and I began to see God not as a solitary God, but as a communion of love marked by overflowing life. I got the sense of a totally shared life at the heart of the universe, not of God the monarch, ruling from isolated splendor, but of God the perfect sociality, which embodies the qualities of mutuality, cooperation, and reciprocity—a unity with genuine diversity.<sup>17</sup> I began to see that relationality is central to who God is, in that ours is a personal God, carrying out a project and acting for the sake of others. God is the maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible, and the source of everything, but God is also one who limits himself in ways that preserve his eternal nature while relating to us. God takes a stance of openness toward the world. He chooses to be God for the world and allows himself to be affected by it and opens himself up to vulnerability. God sovereignly restricts his power and risks the pain of rejection. The relationship is a two-way street. Humans can choose for or against God's love, and their decisions genuinely affect him. We gather that God must to some extent be limiting the exercise of his power to give us space to act in.<sup>18</sup>

Thus God, though unchangeable in his qualities, is open to change in other ways. Who God is does not change, but what God experiences does change. So, too, God is not impassible, as the tradition has mostly insisted. The God who loves us is open to experiencing delight as well as anguish. God does not experience fickle emotions or suffer inappropriately as we do. But there is pathos and suffering in God. Similarly, God is not timeless, since he accompanies us in time as we act and he responds. Such interaction reveals that God experiences sequence. God is not in time as we are,

but his experience is sequential like ours. As a result of thinking through the truth of the love of God, I was led to the open view of God.

In 1990, four colleagues and I put together a multi-authored book that would make a case for open theism. We knew that some already held this view (especially some of the Christian philosophers) but that far more people were unaware of it, at least formally. So we became a team to cover the bases, methodologically following the Wesleyan quadrilateral.<sup>19</sup> We asked ourselves questions like the following: What do the scriptures say? How well have we done theologically? What perspective might philosophy contribute? and Are there practical implications?

Now, to bring to the surface issues of interest both to openness and LDS thought, let us scout out the territory that we mapped and, at the same time, interact with the LDS doctrine of God. I will share what open theists found and open the door to critical feedback. I hope it is possible that, as friends, we may agree and disagree amicably.<sup>20</sup>

**DAVID L. PAULSEN:** I hope to respond to these introductory comments and ensuing comments in the same Augustinian spirit that Clark Pinnock exemplifies. I will at times “keep him company” when I am in agreement, at other times I will “dialogue with him” when I am hesitant, and I will not be reluctant to respectfully “call him back” when I think he is in error. At the outset of his introduction, Pinnock identifies the essential elements of a “relational” theology, all of which, I believe, most Latter-day Saints would heartily affirm.

In regard to open theism in particular, Mormonism shares unique theological convergences as well as important divergences that ought to be explored. Joseph Smith would undoubtedly agree with such an exchange as he emphatically declared before the Saints in Nauvoo that “we should gather all the good and true principles in the world and treasure them up, or we shall not come out true ‘Mormons.’”<sup>21</sup>

#### TRADITION AND INTERPRETATION

**PINNOCK:** Joseph Smith’s comment here raises an important question of how to recognize and interpret the “good and true principles” in the world’s traditions. Open theism has been seen as a little controversial because it challenges tradition. But ought we not place scripture above tradition? We are critical of a traditionalism that would condition evangelicals not to grow as hearers of the word. At the same time, we do not want to dismiss all catholic traditions and do not actually consider open theism to be a major innovation. Critics exaggerate the degree of innovation in order to stir up passions against us, but we do not see open theism as highly

untraditional. We see it as a not-too-large modification of Wesleyan/Arminian thinking.<sup>22</sup> We wanted evangelicals in particular to encounter relational theism as a scriptural paradigm, unencumbered by any existing and possibly tired-out labels.

What about tradition and the influence it exercises upon our interpretations? Our two groups see themselves differently. Open theists want to be in continuity with history and the community, even though they recognize that there are reforms to be undertaken.<sup>23</sup> Thus they speak of “great tradition,” of the Vincentian canon (what has been believed by “everyone, everywhere, at all times”), and even of “mere Christianity,” as referred to by C. S. Lewis.<sup>24</sup> Admittedly, the great tradition is a nebulous concept and one that open theists do not take uncritically, though we receive it respectfully. It serves as a kind of subordinate third testament and map to the terrain, a canon outside the canon, and a way to identify error. It is a *norma normata* (a norm that is itself normed by scripture), which directs but does not control us.<sup>25</sup> Open theists differ from Latter-day Saints in holding to God’s promise not to let the gates of hell prevail against the church. We take it as a promise to help her to remain in the truth and not to fall into irremediable ruin. We do not find the New Testament warning us of a completely ruinous apostasy.

In contrast, Latter-day Saints do speak of an apostasy and of a restoration, similar in some ways to a reformation, but much more radical. This restoration has been the source of some radical new ways of thinking. For instance, it supplies what Robinson calls “the different ontological frame or view of the nature of the universe” in which Latter-day Saints place “the basic gospel of Christ.” This includes the literal fatherhood of God, God and humans belonging to the same species of being, and God’s having spiritual offspring in a premortal existence.<sup>26</sup> Reading the Bible in this context is bound to take interpretation in a certain direction, just as respect for the “great tradition” would in the case of open theists. Still, there is room for us to relate. LDS traditions from the early days until now, current developments in LDS thinking, and respect for the prophetic office—all of this is likely to produce differently nuanced interpretations over time and to open up points of contact, maybe even surprisingly so. I think both groups, Latter-day Saints and open theists alike, must ask what is really binding in our positions and what is open to re-examination.<sup>27</sup>

**PAULSEN:** We do, as Clark points out, come to our understanding of God from distinctly different perspectives: he from the standpoint of what he calls a “modified classical trinitarian monotheism” (Pinnock, 85, in this article) and I from the standpoint of what I believe to be modern revelation, beginning with the First Vision of Joseph Smith. As Pinnock has

acknowledged, however, we are not without common ground. We both believe in the Bible and in the possibility of divine guidance in our search for fuller understanding. These can indeed bring us closer to the truth, closer to one another, and closer to God. Beyond this, however, is the issue of the bearing of “the great tradition” on our respective interpretations of scripture. Pinnock indicates that for open theists the great tradition, though not inerrant, is significantly normative. However, because of what he takes to be our belief in a “ruinous” and “irremediable” apostasy, Pinnock implies that the tradition is without normative authority in our interpretation of scripture and in our subsequent formulation of doctrine.

Latter-day Saints do believe in a widespread apostasy from New Testament Christianity. In particular we believe (as do open theists) that, as a result of a classical-biblical synthesis, the impersonal, static, absolute God of the philosophers and theologians supplanted the personal, passible, relational God disclosed in the Bible. This facet of the great tradition is normative for neither of us.

More fundamentally, however, Latter-day Saints understand the apostasy as constituted by the loss of apostolic authority and by the loss or corruption of saving gospel ordinances, including the ordinances of the temple. But this does not mean that we believe that the great tradition fell into irremediable ruin, completely lost all truth, or was bereft of divine guidance. To the contrary.

From the inception of the restoration, LDS leaders have emphasized that the Church has no monopoly on truth and encouraged members to seek truth wherever it may be found, including within the great tradition. Joseph Smith said, “Have the Presbyterians any truth? Yes. Have the Baptists, Methodists, etc., any truth? Yes.”<sup>28</sup> Brigham Young repeatedly taught the same doctrine: Mormonism “embraces every principle pertaining to life and salvation, for time and eternity. No matter who has it.” Sectarians possess much truth and sound doctrine, he said, and “as for their morality, many of them are, morally, just as good as we are. All that is good, lovely and praiseworthy belongs to this Church and Kingdom. ‘Mormonism’ includes all truth.”<sup>29</sup> And Apostle Orson F. Whitney observed that God “is using not only his covenant people, but other peoples as well, to consummate a work, stupendous, magnificent, and altogether too arduous for this little handful of Saints to accomplish by and of themselves.”<sup>30</sup>

More recently, the First Presidency of the Church declared:

The great religious leaders of the world such as Mohammed, Confucius, and the Reformers, as well as philosophers including Socrates, Plato, and others, received a portion of God’s light. Moral truths were given to them by God to enlighten whole nations and bring a higher level of

understanding to individuals. The Hebrew prophets prepared the way for the coming of Jesus Christ, the promised Messiah, who should provide salvation for all mankind who believe in the gospel. Consistent with these truths, we believe that God has given and will give to all peoples sufficient knowledge to help them on the way to eternal salvation, either in this life or in the life to come.<sup>31</sup>

And BYU professor Roger R. Keller, former Richard L. Evans Chair for Religious Understanding, wrote:

The meridian of time was principally the dispensation of the Atonement. Yet, at that time, Christ did establish the Church's correct order. He knew full well that the Church would disappear, but the many truths that remained would prepare the way for the gospel's restoration. Those truths would enable men and women to recognize the true Church when its time came in the last days.

I believe that our Catholic and Protestant brothers and sisters were, and still are, an integral part of the Lord's plan to prepare people to receive the fullness of the gospel. They preserved essential gospel truths that made it possible for the Restoration to take place in an environment of light, rather than in one of total darkness with no understanding of Jesus Christ or his mission. They preserved a basic understanding of Jesus Christ, the crucified Lord who died for the sins of the world, as well as the many other teachings about God and his work that are found in the Bible.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, it appears to me that Latter-day Saints have a divine mandate to seek and assimilate truth wherever it may be found—especially, perhaps, that contained in the great tradition. Definitive revelation, canonical or otherwise, trumps tradition. But in areas where we still see through a glass darkly, tradition may, on some occasions, be our safest guide.

**PINNOCK:** Let me emphasize that open theists appeal first and foremost to the Bible. It is for us a basic commitment and one that motivates us to be respectful of its truth and to be wary of alien assumptions. Our primary commitment is to the scriptures rather than tradition, reason, or experience. And, in our appeal to scripture, we have brought neglected truth to light and offered a plausible mode of its interpretation. We give particular weight to the narrative quality of the Bible and to the language of personal relations. The sacred story involves real drama and bears witness powerfully to the interactivity of God. We accept diversity in the biblical witnesses, too, and recognize the dialogical character of the text. Indeed, the Bible does not speak with a single voice but fosters dialogue between different voices. The writings contain a long and complex search for the mind of God. We listen to the Bible as we would listen to a conversation between testimony and countertestimony, aware of the fact that

scripture is inexhaustibly rich and that, when approached prayerfully and with good questions, it will yield ever new insights.<sup>33</sup>

We try not to burden the text with our presuppositions but learn from God's self-revelation. We do not presume the absolutist hermeneutic but listen to the scriptures when they tell us that God changes for our sake and even suffers on our behalf. The scriptures lead us to speak of God as one who humbles himself and who shows his perfection by changing as well as by not changing. We celebrate God's compassionate, suffering, and victorious love. We think that Augustine was wrong to have said that God does not grieve over suffering in the world, that Anselm was wrong to have said that God does not experience compassion, and that Calvin was wrong to have said that the biblical metaphors are merely accommodations to our finite understanding. For much too long, pagan assumptions about the divine nature have skewed our exegetical reflection.<sup>34</sup>

Thus we note in the text such things as God's testing as a way of knowing man's heart. After testing Abraham, God says, "Now I know that thou fearest God" (Gen. 22:12). By testing Abraham, God learned what kind of fellow he was. On one occasion, God had decided to set aside the people of Israel and try some other approach, but, in response to Moses's prayer, "the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring upon his people" (Ex. 32:14). Jeremiah visited a potter's house and noted how the potter would rework the clay when it did not suit him. God says it is thus with the nations. God will bring judgment or not, depending on the circumstances. What God will do or not do depends in part on what his people will do or not do (Jer. 18:4-10). Isaiah the prophet likens Israel to a vineyard that God planted, one in which he worked hard but that still disappointed him. He had expected good grapes but received only wild grapes. God asks rhetorically why it yielded a bad harvest (Isa. 5:1-5). It was not what he had expected and not what he had wanted. In a word to Hosea, God speaks of his compassion despite Israel's ingratitude and even describes his inner feelings: "My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender" (Hosea 11:8). We find many texts that seem to support an openness rather than a classical hermeneutic.

**PAULSEN:** Perhaps the best way to see how our respective approaches to scripture, reason, tradition, and experience actually operate is to consider several doctrinal points case by case.

**PINNOCK:** To that end, then, I wish to put on the table specific items that will foster conversation between open and LDS theists.

## DIVINE EMBODIMENT

**PINNOCK:** In the course of searching out the truth of scripture, I stumbled onto what was to me an unfamiliar and not very congenial idea (though not unfamiliar or uncongenial to LDS thinking or the patristic sources). This idea was evidence of divine embodiment.<sup>35</sup> Divine embodiment has not been something that open theists, much less other evangelicals, have been comfortable with. As one who wanted to take biblical imagery seriously, I found myself having to reckon on the possibility of God's having—or at least assuming, in the case of Jesus—embodied ways.<sup>36</sup> (This is a good illustration of how influential the community is on our interpretations.) So I had to ask myself why I had just let this lie before and had never pursued it. It was not as if some of the early fathers of the church, like Tertullian, had not taken it seriously—he did so, and strongly.

Nevertheless, “the idea that God is not embodied has been the stock-in-trade of Theological orthodoxy” for centuries.<sup>37</sup> John Macquarrie observes, “That God is a purely spiritual being, immaterial, invisible, intangible, is assumed to be a basic truth by the great majority of those who believe in God. To suggest that God might have a body would seem absurd to virtually all of those believers.”<sup>38</sup> But divine embodiment cannot be ruled out so long as one is prepared to elucidate the idea responsibly, which is what Grace Jantzen was trying to do with the suggestion that the universe itself is somehow God's body. I think that relational theists can accommodate this idea under our belief in God's omnipresence.

After I regained my bearing, I remembered a wise question by C. S. Lewis: “What soul ever perished from believing that God the Father really has a beard?”<sup>39</sup> In other words, maybe corporeality is a funny idea to many Christians and not one that we can easily entertain, but why rule it out when it has scriptural backing and when it forms no boundary issue for Christianity? Christians are entitled to peculiar beliefs without its robbing them of salvation, aren't they?

More substantially, I also remembered how Donald G. Bloesch makes room for the idea of divine embodiment when he writes, “[God] stands infinitely beyond materiality, but he has his own divine nature, his own supernatural body.” Again he writes, “God is not a material being, but he can assume a material form, and he has done so in the incarnation of his Son.”<sup>40</sup> This is extraordinary—here we have the premier evangelical systematic theologian speaking of divine embodiment! Granted, LDS theology is not his likely source, but Latter-day Saints are entitled to a bit of “we told you so” to more traditional Christians. Then add these comments



## AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVID L. PAULSEN

**BYU STUDIES:** When did you first become aware of open theism?

**PAULSEN:** I came upon open theism in the mid-1990s while working on my article “The God of Abraham, Isaac and (William) James” [*Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 13, no. 2 (1999): 114–46], in which I argued that while James’s pragmatic view of God differed significantly from traditional Christianity’s, it was nonetheless biblical. I learned that open theists, like James, believe God to be relationally interactive with us and actively and freely engaged in an undetermined universe. For the article, I drew on arguments from *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* in providing a biblical defense of James’s understanding of God.



**BYU STUDIES:** How did the book *The Openness of God* come about?

**PAULSEN:** A lot of anger was expressed against the views of John Sanders and Clark Pinnock at a conference at Wheaton College, the focus of which was, ironically, religious pluralism. Consequently, Sanders and Pinnock set out to correct what they believed to be a gross misunderstanding of their view of God.

**BYU STUDIES:** Who are the main proponents of open theism?

**PAULSEN:** Clark Pinnock, John Sanders, Richard Rice, William Hasker, David Basinger, Randall Basinger, Greg Boyd, Thomas Jay Oord, John Polkinghorne, and Richard Swinburne.

**BYU STUDIES:** How long has open theism been around?

**PAULSEN:** It became a recognizable movement in 1994 with the publication of *The Openness of God*. But even earlier, thinkers like J. R. Lucas and Jürgen Moltmann had espoused similar views. Nineteenth-century theologian Lorenzo M’Cabe wrote two books on the topic.

**BYU STUDIES:** How popular has open theism become?

**PAULSEN:** *The Shack*, a fictional work with some openness ideas, has been on the New York Times bestseller list now for over a year, and *The Openness of God* has sold about 35,000 copies. Pinnock believes that the movement’s freshness breeds its popularity.

**BYU STUDIES:** What kind of tensions have open theists stirred up?

**PAULSEN:** They have reignited some classic arguments between Christian denominations. Some conservative evangelicals, especially those with Calvinist leanings, consider openness thinkers to be heretical and have taken action to marginalize them. Some open theists have been persecuted, including being forced to leave educational institutions. John Sanders was denied tenure and then terminated at Huntington University because of his openness views. A motion was brought before the Evangelical Theological Society to oust Sanders and Pinnock from the Society for the same reason. Open theist literature has been specifically excluded by some denominations and colleges.

**BYU STUDIES:** Such exclusions from institutions of higher education seem unusual.

**PAULSEN:** They are unusual. The major resistance often comes from whichever denomination supports the college. For example, open theist Greg Boyd was an extremely popular and effective faculty member at Bethel College in St. Paul. The college came under great pressure from a faction led by the Hyper-Calvinist John Piper to oust Boyd, but the administration resisted and refused to dismiss him.

**BYU STUDIES:** How did you begin a dialogue with open theists?

**PAULSEN:** I sent a reprint of my published article on William James to Clark Pinnock, who shared it with other leading open theists. Subsequently, I invited Sanders and Pinnock to lecture at BYU and at a meeting of the SMPT [Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology] hosted by Utah Valley University. However, I had become acquainted with Bill Hasker much earlier. The two of us were co-participants in the mid-eighties in an NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities] summer institute for college teachers. Bill shared with me a published article on religious experience in which he referred to Mormons as “non-Christian.” Needless to say, this occasioned some rather passionate discussions. Shortly after returning home from the Institute, Bill mailed me a reprint of another of his published articles, this one on the trinity. On its cover he had inscribed: “To David, my heterodox, Christian friend.” Our paths have often crossed since.

**BYU STUDIES:** What is “open” about open theism?

**PAULSEN:** First, God is relationally open to us. He is receptive and reactive to our faith and influence. He invites us all to be “caught up into the dynamism of the divine life,” as Clark says. Also, God is open to the future, which is as yet largely undetermined.

**BYU STUDIES:** What other fundamental principles do open theists espouse?

**PAULSEN:** Tom Oord lists seven core principles: First, God and creatures are relational, meaning that others do affect them in give-and-take relationships. Second, God is not all-controlling and has not settled the future—thus God’s expectations about the future are partly dependent upon human action. Third, love is the ethical imperative of both God and humans. Fourth, God experiences change, though God’s nature is unchanging. Fifth, although everlasting, God experiences time in a way analogous to how humans experience time. Sixth, God created all nondivine things. Seventh, humans are genuinely free to make choices pertaining to their salvation.

**BYU STUDIES:** What are the most salient theological similarities and differences among prominent open theists?

**PAULSEN:** Open theists agree quite well on several points: God does not have absolute knowledge of future free decisions; God is attempting, consistent with other commitments, to make our lives as good as possible; God willingly self-limits his powers in order to grant humans meaningful freedom; and God experiences emotional change.

**BYU STUDIES:** And the differences?

**PAULSEN:** The most salient differences include the extent to which God self-limits his powers in order to grant humans meaningful freedom. Oord believes that God almost never intervenes in earthly affairs. Sanders, Hasker, and Basinger believe he sometimes intervenes, but they differ on what principles justify intervention. Boyd emphasizes that God has every possible situation thought out in advance and so has prepared each and every possible response prior to creation. Others think this idea takes away from genuine divine responsiveness.

**BYU STUDIES:** That phrase “genuine divine responsiveness” brings up the issue of a God who freely chooses and freely risks in the face of evil. Is there any controversy among open theists concerning choice and evil?

**PAULSEN:** Differences in their views on freedom and the nature of evil are particularly pronounced when looking at the incarnation of God. Some believe Jesus could have acquiesced to temptation, in which case the incarnation would have been aborted. Others hold a more traditional Christology and believe Jesus’ temptations were real, but that he could not have fallen. But open theists

generally do believe that God takes calculated risks. Sanders's book *The God Who Risks* has been very influential among openness thinkers.

**BYU STUDIES:** What is their position on creation and how that relates to evolution?

**PAULSEN:** Again, there are some differences here. While most open theists defend creation *ex nihilo*, Tom Oord admits to being the most explicit denier of it, and Pinnock admits that creation out of nothing is not described in Genesis. Regarding the evolutionary process in creation, some open theists believe evolution occurred largely without God's intervention, others think God had to be very involved in the evolutionary process, and others don't believe in evolution at all.

**BYU STUDIES:** What do open theologians mean by the word "theology"?

**PAULSEN:** Pinnock explains that since faith seeks understanding, "theology is a continuing search for the fullness of the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ." Sanders says that the purpose of theology is to help Christians better live a Christian life, and so it involves reflection on scripture, traditions, cultural thought-forms, and modes of conduct. Oord says theology involves humble speculation about who God truly is and what God really does.

**BYU STUDIES:** So what does the word "theology" mean to you?

**PAULSEN:** For me, theology means sustained reflection on scriptural and other authoritative LDS discourse about God and his purposes for man with a view to deepen understanding, strengthen trust in God, and increase faithfulness in leading a Christian life. I personally find LDS theology compelling in each of these areas.

**BYU STUDIES:** What do you make of LDS thinkers who say Mormonism does not have a theology, at least in the traditional sense?

**PAULSEN:** Perhaps they mean that, given our belief in continuing revelation, we should not attempt to integrate our beliefs into anything like a complete and final system of thought. But granting this, it does not follow that we should not attempt to articulate our beliefs in a clear and self-consistent way.

**BYU STUDIES:** Although Elder John A. Widtsoe wrote *A Rational Theology*, Latter-day Saints often shy away from theology. Why?

**PAULSEN:** Historically, I don't believe Mormons have shied away from theology. In addition to *A Rational Theology*, there are many books by General Authorities that could appropriately

be considered theological. Widtsoe also wrote *Joseph Smith as Scientist* and *Evidences and Reconciliations*. James E. Talmage wrote *The Philosophical Basis of Mormonism* and *The Articles of Faith*. Major works by B. H. Roberts include *The Seventy's Course in Theology* [five volumes] and *The Truth, The Way, The Life*, as well as *Joseph Smith, the Prophet-Teacher*. Given my understanding of theology, nearly every book by Neal A. Maxwell is theological. Even *Doctrines of Salvation* [three volumes] and *Man: His Origin and Destiny* by Joseph Fielding Smith and *Mormon Doctrine* by Bruce R. McConkie could, perhaps, be included in the list. And these are just a few of the more prominent ones. Of course, such theological discourse, even that done by General Authorities as they often explicitly remind us, does not necessarily represent the position of the Church or have the status of official Church doctrine.

**BYU STUDIES:** In light of the LDS idea of authoritative revelation, is there room for such disciplines as “rational” or “speculative” theology in our tradition?

**PAULSEN:** Our theology is indeed grounded on revelation from God as opposed to human reason or speculative thought. Joseph Smith once said that if you could gaze into heaven for five minutes you would know more on the subject than is contained in all the books ever written. Joseph, and his successors in the prophetic office, I believe, have been granted such privileged gazes. But granted this, it does not follow that individual Church members, as well as individual General Authorities, should not engage in sustained reflection on religious questions. Indeed, such reflection may even serve as a prelude to revelation. Consider the backdrop for President Kimball's revelation on the priesthood being available to all worthy males. Ed Kimball's article in *BYU Studies* [vol. 47, no. 2] chronicles the pondering and questioning that took hold of leaders and Saints worldwide before the revelation.

**BYU STUDIES:** What lasting effect do you hope your book *Mormonism in Dialogue with Contemporary Christian Theologies* might have?

**PAULSEN:** My hope is that it will help spur ongoing theological dialogue between Latter-day Saints and other Christians. We have much to learn about and from each other.

by Richard Swinburne, a world-class Christian philosopher and open theist: “By saying that God is essentially bodiless, I mean that, although he may sometimes have a body, he is not dependent on his body in any way.” In other words, while we need our bodies in order to exist, God does not, though he has one.<sup>41</sup>

Whatever we make of this, I think we have to say that it is God *as personal*, not God *as spiritual*, that dominates biblical thinking. The writers did not worry as much as we do about approximating God too closely to the human. The tradition has wanted to emphasize the spirituality of God but in doing so has obscured the personal nature of God. So a corrective is needed, but a careful one, because there are dangers. Surely deity is not subject to human limitations such as needing to sleep or going to the restroom.<sup>42</sup>

In this area, I was helped by something Stephen E. Robinson said: “Latter-day Saints affirm only that the Father has a body, not that his body has him.”<sup>43</sup> And I also appreciated Blake Ostler’s writing that “the sense in which the Father’s body is like a human body must be qualified.”<sup>44</sup> We have to remember that a glorified body would be very different from what we know of bodies (see Philip. 3:21 and 1 Cor. 15:50). The idea does not have to be taken in a crude way—there may be ways of understanding it that are intellectually viable.<sup>45</sup> It is easier, however, to understand how the Son acquired a body now in glory (we all celebrate that fact) than to understand how the Father acquired a body (if he did) or how the Spirit will (if he or she does). So there are issues to work on here. Meanwhile, in saying that God has a body, the Latter-day Saints have raised an issue for Christian theology and philosophy at large that should not be swept under the rug anymore. Are we traditionalists willing to give them a little credit for that? Can we not let them come in out of the cold?

**PAULSEN:** To be frank, it is particularly refreshing to see a theologian from the Wesleyan tradition seriously considering the many biblical passages that apparently take divine embodiment for granted. While I will refrain from taking the “I told you so” attitude regarding this particular issue, I will say that the Latter-day Saints have waited a long time for competent Christian theologians to release explicitly anthropomorphic and anthropopathic biblical passages from the shackles of merely figurative interpretation.

Pinnock addresses the issue of divine embodiment at greater length in his book *Most Moved Mover*, where he writes:

In tradition, God is thought to function primarily as a disembodied spirit but this is scarcely a biblical idea. For example, Israel is called to hear God’s word and gaze on his glory and beauty. Human beings

are said to be embodied creatures created in the image of God. Is there perhaps something in God that corresponds with embodiment? Having a body is certainly not a negative thing because it makes it possible for us to be agents. Perhaps God's agency would be easier to envisage if he were in some way corporeal. Add to that fact that in the theophanies of the Old Testament God encounters humans in the form of a man. They indicate that God shares our life in the world in a most intense and personal manner. For example, look at the following texts. In Exodus 24:10–11 Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abidu and seventy of the elders of Israel went up Mount Sinai and beheld God, as they ate and drank. Exodus 33:11 tells us that "the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend." Moses saw "God's back" but not his face (Exod. 33:23). When God chose to reveal his glory, Isaiah saw the Lord, high and lifted up (Is. 6:1). Ezekiel saw "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord" (Ezek. 1:28). John saw visions of one seated upon the throne (Rev. 4:2) and of the Son of Man in his glory (Rev. 1:12–16). Add to the fact that God took on a body in the incarnation and Christ has taken that body with him into glory. It seems to me that the Bible does not think of God as formless.<sup>46</sup>

Latter-day Saints have often made similar biblical cases for the doctrine, agreeing with Pinnock's own declaration, "We need to let God's own self-revelation dominate our thinking rather than what natural reason and tradition tell us that God must be like."<sup>47</sup> Pinnock's statement echoes that of LDS scholar B. H. Roberts in *The Mormon Doctrine of Deity* wherein Roberts cites Jesus Christ as being "both premise and argument" for divine embodiment.<sup>48</sup> Is Jesus God? Was he resurrected with a tangible, though glorious, incorruptible body of flesh and bones? In describing to his Apostles the nature of his resurrected body, Jesus uses straightforward declaration rather than allegory, imagery, or parable. "Behold, my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; For a Spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have" (Luke 24:39).

Will Jesus ever lose or discard His resurrected body?<sup>49</sup> James describes death as "the body without the spirit," and Paul affirms that Christ's resurrected body is incorruptible (1 Cor. 15), "that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more" (James 2:26; Rom. 6:9). Latter-day Saints hold to a social model of the Godhead consisting of three distinct persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, who together constitute one God or one mutually indwelling divine community. Did not Jesus declare himself to be the fullest and clearest revelation of God the Father when he declared, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9)? Paul is even more explicit in his letter to the Hebrews: "God . . . hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son . . . Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person" (Heb. 1:1–3). *Strong's Concordance* explains



“express image” as denoting “a graver, i.e., engraving, the figure stamped, i.e., an exact copy or representation.”<sup>50</sup> Therefore, the LDS *biblical* case for divine embodiment can be succinctly stated as follows:

1. Jesus Christ is God.
2. Jesus Christ was resurrected with an incorruptible body.
3. The separation of the spirit from the body is death.
4. Jesus Christ will never die again.
5. Thus, Jesus Christ will be embodied everlastingly (from 2–4).
6. Therefore, Jesus Christ is both God and embodied everlastingly (follows from 1, 2, and 5).
7. Jesus is the express image of the Father (Heb. 1:1–3).
8. Therefore, God the Father is embodied everlastingly (from 5 and 7).

Pinnock states that divine embodiment cannot be “ruled out so long as one is prepared to elucidate the idea responsibly.” What could be more responsible than relying on “the revelation of God in Jesus Christ” as our premise, argument, and understanding for the way in which God is embodied? Is it so “peculiar” (Pinnock, 63) to believe that one member of the Godhead has the same properties (physical as well as moral) as another?

In *Most Moved Mover*, in addition to making a biblical case for divine embodiment, Pinnock proposes (without developing) three arguments for the same conclusion. First, Pinnock opines that God’s agency would be easier to envisage if he were in some way corporeal.<sup>51</sup> Second, Pinnock suggests that embodiment may be a necessary condition of personhood. “The only persons we encounter are embodied persons and, if God is not embodied, it may prove difficult to understand how God is a person. What kind of actions could a disembodied God perform?”<sup>52</sup> Finally, Pinnock hypothesizes that corporeality may be a necessary condition of God’s being passible.<sup>53</sup> Each of these suggestions is provocative and each merits further development. Latter-day Saints should be eager to join in the task.

In regard to tradition, while Latter-day Saints would agree with Pinnock that “the idea that God is not embodied has been the stock-in-trade” of orthodoxy for centuries, they might question how *many* centuries Christians have believed in an incorporeal God (Pinnock, 63). Indeed, divine simplicity and incorporeality were not included in the faith once delivered to Christians, but were introduced into Christian thought from Greek philosophy (Pinnock, 53–54). Pinnock concedes that it is Platonism rather than Biblicism which damns the idea of a corporeal God when he

writes, “I do not feel obliged to assume that God is a purely spiritual being when his self-revelation does not suggest it. It is true that from a Platonic standpoint, the idea is absurd, but this is not a biblical standpoint.”<sup>54</sup> In a previous paper, I provide evidence that ordinary Christians for at least the first three centuries of the current era commonly (and perhaps generally) believed God to be corporeal.<sup>55</sup> It is the tradition of the early centuries, as close to the apostolic era as possible, to which the Latter-day Saints (and maybe openness Saints) would rather associate.

Finally, I will mention two issues in regard to the existential meaning of a belief in an embodied God. First, belief in an embodied God replaces the duality of Greek philosophy wherein the body is relegated to an evil regression from the purely spiritual<sup>56</sup> with an abiding reverence for the body, which finds a divine parallel in God. Thus, as LDS philosopher Truman G. Madsen says, “There are levels of consciousness, powers of expression, ways of fulfillment in thought, feeling, and action that come only when the threefold nature of man is harmoniously combined. To cultivate the soul is to cultivate both the body and spirit.”<sup>57</sup> LDS Apostle Charles W. Penrose summarizes the existential implication of believing in divine embodiment: “The body of flesh is . . . essential to its [the spirit of man’s] progress, essential to its experience on the earth and ultimately in its glorified condition, essential to its eternal happiness, and progress and power in the presence of the Father.”<sup>58</sup>

Second, understanding the literalness of being created “in the image” of God is tremendously ennobling and empowering as one seeks to overcome the trials and temptations of the flesh (Gen. 1:26–27). Current LDS President Thomas S. Monson expressed this idea to a group of Latter-day Saints in Helsinki, Finland: “John Mott, a recipient of the Nobel Prize, indicated that this particular knowledge, a knowledge that we have been created in the image of God, is the single greatest segment of knowledge that can come to man in mortality.” Though in and of ourselves “we can do but little,” President Monson explains, “when we realize that we have actually been made in the image of God, all things are possible.”<sup>59</sup>

In sum, it is important to keep in mind here that while the Latter-day Saints find considerable biblical evidence and rational support for the doctrine of divine embodiment,<sup>60</sup> their affirmation of the doctrine is grounded most fundamentally neither on biblical exegesis nor theological argument. Joseph declared that the Father and Son have tangible bodies, humanlike in form, because this is how these two divine personages revealed themselves to him in a series of divine disclosures beginning with their appearance to Joseph in a tradition-shattering theophany known as the First Vision.<sup>61</sup> These disclosures have served to greatly illuminate

anthropomorphic biblical passages. Modern revelation is thus the bedrock for LDS belief in divine embodiment.

**PINNOCK:** Regarding the divine embodiment, David was encouraged when he found that I had noticed this idea in the Bible and was willing to take it seriously, if not literally. He is right—it is time for self-styled Bible-believing evangelicals to stop sweeping under the carpet biblical ideas that they disapprove of. For my part, I do not mind giving credit where credit is due. The difference is what we imagine it means for God to be embodied. I agree that no soul will perish for having thought that God had a beard, so let's stop nitpicking and start asking, How is it that God can do the things that the Bible plainly says he does?

**PAULSEN:** On this issue our views converge considerably, although Clark is much less certain than I as to the nature and mode of God's embodiment. The divergence in our views is again a function of our initial standpoints. The biblical data on which Clark relies is not sufficient to resolve the issue. Canonized modern revelation accepted by Latter-day Saints is more definitive: the Father and the Son have bodies "of flesh and bones as tangible as man's," while the Holy Ghost is "a personage of Spirit" (D&C 130:22–23).<sup>62</sup> Spirits are also bodies. A "spirit" is a person with a body that is humanlike in form (Ether 3:6–16). "All spirit is matter," but matter so rarefied and pure that it cannot be discerned by normal visual perception (D&C 131:7–8). The conventional idea that spirits are immaterial substances, I believe, is not biblical but a borrowing from Platonist philosophy.<sup>63</sup>

#### **PLURALITY OF GODS AND SPIRITUAL WARFARE**

**PINNOCK:** A similar example of an unexpected result of exegesis among open theists, and of interest to Latter-day Saints, crops up in the work of Gregory A. Boyd. While examining the motif of spiritual warfare in the Bible, he says he is comfortable with biblical references to other gods existing alongside Yahweh.<sup>64</sup> Boyd does not think that these other gods can successfully challenge the creator, since their power is "on loan," but he does think that they have significant power to thwart God's will and can inflict suffering on others. This is a different take on monotheism, which dictates that God is the only god in existence. Boyd sees other "gods" as created but fallen beings and comes close, I think, to the LDS idea of subordinate gods. The Bible does not take the view that there are no gods apart from Yahweh. It presents a more practical kind of monotheism. The Bible says that the nations have their "gods," but Yahweh is the only God one needs to deal with if one is an Israelite (or a Christian). We believers

are unimpressed by rival deities—for us, the Lord, not Baal, is God. The other gods are subject to God. The psalmist says, “God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment” (Ps. 82:1).<sup>65</sup> In this arena, Western theology tends to think of God and the world but neglects to consider the celestial middle world, that is, the powers in between heaven and earth. This cannot be said about churches in the third world nor about the Latter-day Saints.<sup>66</sup> I am unsure whether Mormons also develop, as Boyd does, a scenario of spiritual warfare that may contribute to a relational theodicy, which helps to explain why the world often has the appearance of a battlefield.

**PAULSEN:** Very simply, yes, Mormons do develop “a scenario of spiritual warfare that may contribute to a relational theodicy.” However, the LDS understanding of “spiritual warfare” is a result of the conjunction of two foundational doctrines, both of which are addressed by Pinnock. The first is the belief in the eternality of intelligences<sup>67</sup> (or primordial individuals<sup>68</sup>) while the second is the belief in libertarian free will.

These two concepts lay the foundation for LDS belief in a premortal “war in heaven.” Since individuals have always existed and have always possessed free will, it is possible that there have always been wills in opposition to the divine will, and hence the possibility of “spiritual warfare” is something that God has always had to deal with. Latter-day Saints believe this battle of competing agencies was what John the Revelator was describing when he wrote of a war in heaven. “Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not.” Satan, the dragon, was banished from heaven, being “cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” (Rev. 12:7–9).

Scriptures revealed to Joseph Smith are even more explicit in describing the rebellion of Lucifer and his attempt to persuade the children of God to follow him (see Moses 4:1–6). This belief in premortal war is congruent with the LDS conception of mortal life as a testing and trial period (see Abraham 3:25). Jude records that there were angels “which kept not their first estate” (Jude 1:6). LDS theology recognizes mortality as man’s second estate and the next phase in the battle, which started in the premortal realm, to overcome evil and develop Godlike qualities. This insight becomes especially profound when one attempts to develop a relational theology that effectively deals with the problem of evil, for if intelligences (or spirits) are self-existently eternal and autonomous, then God cannot determine or control the choices that these intelligences may make. His only option is persuasion. Thus, God is relational not solely by choice but by ontological necessity. He must, in order to accomplish his plans and

purposes, resort to persuasion, longsuffering, and loving relationships when dealing with others.

### THEOSIS AND DEIFICATION

**PINNOCK:** Yet another exegetical surprise for me, also in the realm of “the gods,” arose in the idea of “theosis” drawn from Eastern Orthodox thinking, to which both Latter-day Saints and open theists appeal. Theosis is the idea that believers will share the glory of God and become partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). Evangelicals accept this notion too and indeed are thrilled by it; however, they have not taken theosis so literally that they call it deification. Open theists have thought of it as believers sharing the glory of God without ceasing to be creatures.<sup>69</sup>

We have not felt comfortable saying that humans “become gods,” as Latter-day Saints have, even though we know that early Christians did speak of our human destiny in such terms. For example, Irenaeus writes, “Christ became what we are so that we might become what he is,”<sup>70</sup> and Athanasius writes, “He became man that we might become divine.”<sup>71</sup> However, I wonder whether these Greek theologians thought of it quite in Latter-day Saint terms. Bridging the gap a little, Ostler makes the point that these “gods” are not to be identified with the supreme God. Lesser deities can partake of the divine nature but cannot surpass God, who is ruler of the universe and the God of gods.<sup>72</sup> Robinson too writes, “Latter-day Saints do not, or at least should not, believe that they will ever be independent in all eternity from their Father in heaven or from their Savior Jesus Christ or from the Holy Spirit.” They “will always be subordinate to the Godhead.”<sup>73</sup> This narrows the gap between open theists and Latter-day Saints. With these comments in mind, how far apart are we really? (I suspect that the exponents of theosis in the early church and even in modern exponents like C. S. Lewis would have held onto a gap remaining between the uncreated God and a created humanity, even a humanity in this future blessed condition.)<sup>74</sup>

**PAULSEN:** Pinnock seems to accept theosis to a point, yet maintains an ultimate and inherent “gap” between God and humans. Latter-day Saint tradition holds that there exists no *ontological* barrier preventing mankind from becoming all that God is and enjoying the *same* kind of life that God lives, and I have been puzzled by LDS scholarly claims to the contrary.<sup>75</sup>

The logic behind this concept of existence is quite simple: man is an eternal intelligence, and so is God. God has advanced (staggeringly) far beyond man, and thus, in the words of Joseph Smith, “God himself, finding he was in the midst of spirits and glory, because he was more intelligent,

saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest could have a privilege to *advance like himself*.” Our relationship to God “places us in a situation to advance in knowledge. He has power to institute laws to instruct the weaker intelligences, that they may be exalted *with Himself*.”<sup>76</sup>

Thus God, our Father in Heaven, analogously to an earthly father, becomes our mentor, our confidant, and our guide as we pass through the experiences of our mortal lives. We are dependent upon Him for the means and guidance to survive physical and spiritual death and to flourish spiritually, but not because we are of a different ontological species—we simply lack the requisite knowledge, experience, and spiritual strength to do so on our own. Thus God’s purpose becomes the immortality and exaltation of the “weaker intelligences.” Indeed, in a revelation to Joseph Smith, Jesus Christ promises, “You may come unto the Father in my name, and in due time receive of his fulness. For if you keep my commandments you shall receive of his fulness, and be glorified in me as I am in the Father” (D&C 93:19–20). Elaborating upon this promise, Joseph taught:

What is it [to be joint heirs with Christ]? To inherit the *same* power, the *same* glory, and the *same* exaltation, until you arrive at the station of a God, and ascend the throne of eternal power, *the same as those who have gone before*. What did Jesus do? Why; I do the things I saw my Father do when worlds came rolling into existence. *My Father worked out his kingdom with fear and trembling, and I must do the same*; and when I get my kingdom, I shall present it to My Father, so that he may obtain kingdom upon kingdom.<sup>77</sup>

In short, God’s purpose is to help man realize his divine potential, and until recently LDS thinkers have recognized no limits upon this potential. One of the biggest differences between LDS and open theology is that in LDS theology there is no inherent or unbridgeable ontological gap between human beings and God. Pinnock notes the differing ontological frame from which Mormons view the world. If this is the case, the question for open theism is what to do with the overwhelming biblical evidence that humans are offspring of God, not creatures merely.<sup>78</sup> If humankind is of the same species as God, then it is rational to believe in a more ennobling version of theosis or deification.

For traditional Christianity, the doctrine of deification<sup>79</sup> has a unique history. Biblically, Peter, John, and Paul all spoke of the idea that man can become God (2 Pet. 1:4, John 14–17, Rom. 8). In the writings of Irenaeus of Lyons, Clement of Alexandria, Athanasius, and Cyril of Alexandria, one can find references to the idea that “God became man, that man might become God.”<sup>80</sup> Indeed, the doctrine of theosis has always played a distinctive role especially in the East; Vladimir Lossky refers to theosis

as the “very essence of Christianity.”<sup>81</sup> By contrast, however, acceptance or enumeration of an explicit doctrine of deification in Western theology has been minimal, if not absent. D. B. Clendenin says:

Western theologians in general and Protestants in particular have given only scant attention to the central importance of theosis in Orthodox thought. Nor do they address the doctrine as an important biblical category in its own right. New Testament theologies such as those by George Ladd (1974) and Leon Morris (1986), for example, do not even mention theosis. On the other hand, as early as Gregory Palamas’s fourteenth-century work *On Divine and Deifying Participation*, Orthodox thinkers have systematically analyzed the doctrine at length.<sup>82</sup>

But things are changing. The past fifty years reflect a steadily increasing interest in the issue of deification. Some scholars are asserting that deification is not only compatible with Augustinian theology, it is central to it.<sup>83</sup> References to deification have even been found in Aquinas’s *Theologica*.<sup>84</sup> The result of this awakening has been a virtual explosion of research, dialogue, and publication regarding the doctrine of deification.<sup>85</sup> And it crosses every denominational line. Latter-day Saints are eager to continue the conversation.

As to the existential meaning of belief in theosis, Latter-day Saints identify with Catholic theologian Mark O’Keefe. After noting that “reference to deification is virtually absent from the major Roman Catholic ascetical and mystical manuals of this century,” O’Keefe mourns its loss and the fact that it “could not regain a central place in Roman Catholic spiritual theology.”<sup>86</sup> He speaks repeatedly of “retrieving” the idea of theosis and believes that this doctrine contains a powerful pragmatic punch that should be vital in spurring believers to live a more moral and spiritual life. He explains, “To understand the Christian life as a path of *theosis* is to suggest that the human person is called not ‘merely’ into relationship with God—as truly incredible as that is in itself—but that human persons are invited and called into a share in the divine life itself.”<sup>87</sup>

While I believe that scripture, tradition, and reason compel us to this stronger formulation of deification, I do think Robinson is essentially correct when he said that deified humans “will always be subordinate to the Godhead”<sup>88</sup> as long as such subordination is not held to be an ontological necessity. Deified humans will forever be subordinate to the Godhead because, as Charles Hartshorne argues, God is unsurpassable in certain respects, but eternally self-surpassing in others. But never is God to be surpassed by something else.<sup>89</sup> Hence even those who reach the status of god will never catch up to God himself because he is continually



progressing with respect to these great-making attributes. I think B. H. Roberts had it right when he taught that exalted intelligences

may be regarded as available for *assignments* to presiding stations among the Presiding Intelligences of the universes of the Gods—the sons of Gods, to preside in worlds or systems of worlds as may be required. . . . Of such may be chosen sons to preside *as Deities* over worlds and world systems as the Gods of eternity may determine or appoint.<sup>90</sup>

God will continue to direct the future of the cosmos, but within a community of those who possess the same nature and attributes rather than as a solitary, “unmoved mover.”

**PINNOCK:** A real difference here is my belief in the ontological gap between God and the creation and David’s denial of it. The God I worship was not once a man like me. We are not (God and I) of the same species. I am create—God is uncreate.

**PAULSEN:** Clark is correct, I believe, in pointing out that Latter-day Saints hold a more robust view of deification than most Orthodox theologians, owing to a difference in their theological anthropology. Given Clark’s premise, it follows logically that man can never be exactly like God, for that which is create can never become uncreate. I ask, however, what conceivable limits are there in eternity to human development and transformation with God as guide, sanctifier, and enabler? Peter and Paul both affirm that in the eschaton Christ will transform man into his likeness (Philip. 3:21; 2 Pet. 1:4). And John writes, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (1 Jn. 3:2). Sacred scripture affirms that God is both able and willing to transform us into his likeness. Why then should we call such transformation impossible or even qualify God’s promises in ways he does not?

#### THE OMNISCIENCE OF GOD

**PINNOCK:** When it comes to God’s omniscience, there is a discussion among Latter-day Saints, much as there is among evangelicals, with some holding to exhaustive definite foreknowledge and others holding to present knowledge, that is, to a foreknowledge that considers the future as not completely settled and, therefore, as not completely foreknown.<sup>91</sup> Belief in libertarian freedom beckons both groups to move in the latter direction. For instance, open theists hold to a self-limitation on God’s part, one aspect of which involves God’s making a world with a future that would not be foreknowable in its entirety. Open theism takes self-limitation one step further than classical Arminians do, who believe in

libertarian freedom but maintain God's exhaustive foreknowledge. This is an important step but not a huge one. It sounds to me as if in this matter the two communities are in just about the same place.

**PAULSEN:** Pinnock challenges the traditional understanding of omniscience by contending elsewhere that although God knows "everything that could exist in [the] future," he does not possess exhaustive specific foreknowledge.<sup>92</sup> For Pinnock, "exhaustive foreknowledge would not be possible in a world with real freedom."<sup>93</sup> Critics of the openness model are quick to contend that any qualification of the notion of God's complete knowledge of the future diminishes his power and worshipability. To the contrary, open theologians argue, this only makes God more praiseworthy for his wisdom and resourcefulness in responding to emerging contingencies. I would agree with Pinnock's assessment that in the area of divine foreknowledge the LDS and open "communities are in just about the same place."

Latter-day Saints differ among themselves in their understandings of the extent of God's foreknowledge.<sup>94</sup> Some, including Presidents Brigham Young and Wilford Woodruff, have thought that God increases endlessly in knowledge and, hence, presumably, lacks exhaustive foreknowledge. Brigham Young stated that "the God I serve is progressing eternally, and so are his children; they will increase to all eternity, if they are faithful."<sup>95</sup> And, in agreement with Young, Wilford Woodruff explained: "If there was a point where man in his progression could not proceed any further, the very idea would throw a gloom over every intelligent and reflecting mind. God himself is increasing and progressing in knowledge, power, and dominion, and will do so, worlds without end. It is just so with us. We are in a probation, which is a school of experience."<sup>96</sup>

Other Latter-day Saints hold to a more traditional view that God's knowledge, including the foreknowledge of future free contingencies, is exhaustively complete. Joseph Fielding Smith asserted: "Do we believe that God has all 'wisdom'? If so, in that, he is absolute. If there is something he does not know, then he is not absolute in 'wisdom,' and to think such a thing is absurd." God progresses not by learning hidden truth, "for if there are truths which he does not know, then these things are greater than he, and this cannot be."<sup>97</sup> Bruce R. McConkie expressed a similar sentiment:

God progresses in the sense that his kingdoms increase and his dominions multiply—not in the sense that he learns new truths and discovers new laws. God is not a student. He is not a laboratory technician. He is not postulating new theories on the basis of past experiences. He has indeed graduated to that state of exaltation that consists of knowing all things.<sup>98</sup>

Despite these differing views within the LDS tradition, there is accord on three fundamental points: (1) Man is an agent with power to choose other than what he, in fact, chooses; (2) Whatever the extent and nature of God's foreknowledge, it is not inconsistent with man's freedom—God's knowledge does not causally determine human choices; and (3) God's knowledge, like God's power, is maximally efficacious. No event occurs that he has not anticipated at least *qua* possibility or has not taken into account in his planning.

Pinnock's statement concerning the attractiveness of open theism could well describe Mormonism: "Young people often gravitate toward open theism because it encourages them to make a difference in a future that is not altogether settled" (Pinnock, 55). Libertarian free will contains tremendous emotional and practical appeal. We find it ennobling to understand ourselves as agents, free to choose, and thus to accept responsibility for our choices. It is motivating to believe that our futures are not yet settled and that our present choices will impact the world's outcomes. Indeed, we live as if these self-understandings were true, no matter what our theological creeds may say.

**PINNOCK:** David and I are quite close and find debating partners within our own groups on the subject of divine omniscience. Were it the case that God possessed exhaustive definite foreknowledge, it would mean that the future is completely settled and no issues need to be resolved. It leaves no room for the historical biblical drama or to our own dignity to make contributions as co-laborers with God. It prevents us from being possibility thinkers and makes us into a people of resignation, as if whatever will be will be.

### GOD, GENDER, AND THE DIVINE FEMININE

**PINNOCK:** A delicate point and a point of divergence concerns God and gender. If God is personal, even embodied, one might conclude that God would have to be either male or female. And, since God is our "Father," he is presumably male. And, if God is male and begets offspring, there must be a goddess, a Mrs. God, somewhere. (Unless God were male and female, since humankind, male *and* female, was made in God's image.) So what, if any, sexual characteristics apply to God?

Open theists assume that none literally do, except in sociological ways. That is, we have taken the term "Father" not to indicate a sexual being so much as a patriarch, pointing to God's qualities of leadership, headship, and transcendence. We have not and do not think of God as having a consort. True, Jesus is the "Only Begotten" of the Father, but we have not

thought of this in sexual terms either. I have always thought of the Father/Son relation not in terms of physical patriarchy but in terms of intimacy and mutual fidelity. We think of God as male-like in depiction but also as female-like—that is, as manifesting feminine qualities like nurturing and tenderness (for example, God’s feeling the pangs of childbirth on behalf of his people in Isa. 42:14). Similarly, activities of the Holy Spirit are taught with the use of feminine images—activities like comforting, encouraging, yearning, and birthing. Some prefer the masculine traits in God, which bring out ideas of initiating, commanding, and establishing. But open theists, along with many others, are drawn in the direction of balancing both male and female traits in God.

On the other hand, Latter-day Saints seem to believe in a literal male deity. This being the case, I wonder why we hear practically nothing of a female deity. Is she everlasting too? Can she be prayed to? Do Latter-day Saints speak of goddesses? Is there procreation among God and Goddess? Evangelicals have great difficulty imagining God in this way. We have heard of such things in the religions of the ancient Near East, where gods are begotten and come into being, but we have not seen it in the Bible. Might it be that, just as classical theism was influenced by Hellenism (as open theists and Latter-day Saints agree), LDS theism runs the risk of buying into a different kind of paganism, a paganism not from Athens but from Ugarit? Is it possible that in their tradition of a procreating God and Goddess, Latter-day Saints have let some pagan Semitic ideas exercise undue influence?<sup>99</sup>

Issues such as this one suggest certain questions about the role of tradition in theology. While open theologians are perhaps unwilling to partake in the drastic revision of tradition that a notion like God’s gender would require, certain theological revisions need to be made in light of the openness view, revisions which Latter-day Saints presumably could agree with. For open theism, certain of the divine attributes need to be redefined so as to bring out the perfections of a personal God. We need to introduce such categories as God’s changeable faithfulness, God’s self-limitation, God’s relationality, the divine pathos, the divine temporality, the divine foreknowledge, and the divine wisdom and resourcefulness.<sup>100</sup> New categories need to come into play, and some may need to be retired or, if not retired, at least reworked.

For example, there is no love without openness to rejection, suffering, and loss. To believe in the triune God is to believe in a God who shares our suffering, a suffering that is not a sign of impotence but of strength and that leads to final victory. God’s unity is not a mathematical oneness but a living unity with diversity. God’s steadfastness is not a dead immutability

but a dynamic constancy of character and purpose that includes movement and change. Here is a power that is not raw omnipotence but that reigns with a sovereignty of love that is strong even in weakness. Here is an omniscience that is not a trivial know-it-allness but a wisdom that includes the foolishness of the cross. An openness hermeneutic requires revision in the ways we think about and define some of the divine attributes. It requires subtle changes across the spectrum of the attributes, if they are to be the perfections of a personal God.<sup>101</sup>

**PAULSEN:** Pinnock astutely notices at the outset that “if God is personal, even embodied, one might conclude that God would have to be either male or female.” In regards to such a “delicate point” of God and gender, I return once again to Jesus Christ as both premise and argument.<sup>102</sup> Was Jesus Christ literally a man? Is Jesus Christ God? The same argument asserted in favor of divine embodiment may be used again in regards to God being literally male. Assuming God is male (as Latter-day Saints do), Pinnock asks a variety of questions, including “Do Latter-day Saints speak of goddesses?” and “Is there procreation?” To both of these questions, LDS theology answers yes. The idea of a Mother in Heaven is deeply enshrined in LDS thought and even hymnology. The idea found its clearest and most moving expression in a poem written by Eliza R. Snow, first published November 15, 1845, in the *Times and Seasons*. It was subsequently set to music and included in an LDS hymnal first published (without a title) in 1851 in Liverpool.<sup>103</sup> Titled now “O My Father,” it has been one of the most beloved LDS hymns for over 150 years. It is partially quoted here:

I had learned to call thee Father,  
Thru thy Spirit from on high,  
But, until the key of knowledge  
Was restored, I knew not why.  
In the heav'ns are parents single?  
No, the thought makes reason stare!  
Truth is reason; truth eternal  
Tells me I've a mother there.<sup>104</sup>

The belief that we have a Mother in Heaven was officially accorded doctrinal status in 1909 when the Church's First Presidency, in a statement called “The Origin of Man,” declared: “All men and women are in the similitude of the universal Father and Mother, and are literally the sons and daughters of Deity.”<sup>105</sup> The doctrinal status of a Heavenly Mother was again officially reaffirmed in the “Proclamation on the Family” issued in 1995 by the Church's First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles:

All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God.  
Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such,

each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.<sup>106</sup>

Perhaps more surprising than present Christian theological interest in a divine feminine is the emerging body of scholarship which indicates that the idea of a Heavenly Mother is no modern innovation but has biblical support. A great many Bible scholars believe that ancient Israel believed in a goddess named Asherah. Mark S. Smith goes further than this, suggesting that perhaps the majority of experts in this field agree that ancient Israel believed in this goddess.<sup>107</sup>

LDS leadership and scholars have spoken to some extent of the existential meaning of Joseph's doctrine. In speaking to the women of the church, President Spencer W. Kimball said, "God made man in his own image and certainly he made woman in the image of his wife-partner. . . . You [women] are daughters of God. You are precious. You are made in the image of our heavenly Mother."<sup>108</sup> President Harold B. Lee spoke of the influence of our Mother in Heaven: "We forget that we have a Heavenly Father and a Heavenly Mother who are even more concerned, probably, than our earthly father and mother, and that influences from beyond are constantly working to try to help us."<sup>109</sup> Another church leader, Vaughn J. Featherstone, said, "Women are endowed with special traits and attributes that come trailing down through eternity from a divine mother. . . . Theirs is a sacred, God-given role, and the traits they received from heavenly mother are equally as important as those given to the young men."<sup>110</sup> This existential meaning is deeply significant to Latter-day Saints.<sup>111</sup>

Pinnock's curiosity concerning "Mrs. God" is valid, and his honest inquiries deserve reasoned responses.

"Is she everlasting?" The Latter-day Saints hold that *all* intelligence is everlasting in the sense that it cannot be created or destroyed, and hence the intelligence possessed by "Mrs. God" is just as everlasting as that possessed by God the Father.

"Can she be prayed to?" Latter-day Saints, like their fellow Christians, follow the pattern outlined by the Savior in the Lord's Prayer: they address the Father, give thanks, ask for blessings, and close in the name of Jesus Christ. This pattern holds true for all LDS prayers, both public and private. President Gordon B. Hinckley reiterated this pattern: "Logic and reason would certainly suggest that if we have a Father in Heaven, we have a Mother in Heaven. That doctrine rests well with me. However, in light of the instruction we have received from the Lord Himself, I regard it as inappropriate for anyone in the Church to pray to our Mother in Heaven." However, he hastens to add that "the fact that we do not pray to our Mother

in Heaven in no way belittles or denigrates her.”<sup>112</sup> In our prayers we simply strive to follow the example that Jesus Christ set for us.

“Do the Latter-day Saints speak of goddesses? Is there procreation?” While the Latter-day Saints admittedly do not often speak of “gods and goddesses” in their Church meetings, this idea *does* occupy a central place in LDS theology as well as in temple ceremonies—of which eternal marriage is one. And as noted before, the ability to enjoy an “eternal increase” is one of the main characteristics by virtue of which God is considered to be divine. Hence, the LDS concept of deification holds that this divine, procreative power can be communicated to those who qualify for exaltation in the celestial kingdom. Thus it is clear that deification requires *both* the male and female genders, and that *both* are to be considered “gods” and “goddesses” respectively, and the doctrines of the eternality of families and the ability to exercise procreative powers beyond the grave are cherished by the Latter-day Saints.

Moreover, since the doctrine of a Heavenly Mother is not explicitly stated in the revelations, sermons, or writings of Joseph Smith, Pinnock’s suggestion of LDS theological borrowing from Ugarit is understandable.<sup>113</sup> However, the doctrine was implicit in Joseph’s revelations regardless whether he explicitly drew it out.<sup>114</sup> Indisputably, the idea of a Mother in Heaven was openly expressed and published within months of Joseph’s death. W. W. Phelps<sup>115</sup> referred to the idea in a poem,<sup>116</sup> which he composed and read at the dedication of the Nauvoo Seventies Hall on December 26, 1844. The poem was published in the Church newspaper the following month. It seems significant that this first known publication of the idea presented the doctrine matter-of-factly, as if commonplace. Several months later, in October 1845, Eliza R. Snow published her poem “O My Father.”

**PINNOCK:** I, in my innocence, prodded David to talk about divine gender a little, and he put a number of interesting ideas on the table. His discussion of the hymnody, for example, reveals how proud Latter-day Saints are of their doctrine of divine gender. They love to think that they have a Mother in Heaven who models for them what it means to be female, including the conception and rearing of children. But questions arise in my curious mind. Do the gods and goddesses have intimate relations? Do their bodies process waste? Did Yahweh have a wife and consort? David responds that he may have had one, and her name was possibly Asherah. One marvels at how literal the Latter-day Saints are willing to be in working out their beliefs in divine embodiment and human theosis. They really mean it when they say that we are “like God” and God is “like us,” whiskers and all. I think that non-Latter-day Saints will take a while to come around to these ideas.



I come to the issue of God from the standpoint of a modified classical trinitarian monotheism, while Dr. Paulsen comes at them from the insights (nay, revelations) found in the LDS standard works and later documents. The result is that when I encounter these LDS concepts of God, I am amazed. I find myself scratching my head and asking: “What did he just say?” Partly this is due to my not having come across some of the ideas before and partly it is due to what seems to me to be its fantastic aspects: the golden bible, a radical doctrine of deification, private temple rituals, a remarkable history, Joseph Smith’s King Follett Discourse, and so on. I am only trying to register the point that the intellectual and cultural distance between us is considerable, and the evangelical/LDS dialogue is at an early stage. We are not going to get things altogether right the first time around, and the best thing for us to do is just to get on with it. We can trust God to use such conversations to bring us closer to the truth.

**PAULSEN:** In the context of discussing LDS belief in a Mother in Heaven, Clark “marvels at how literal Latter-day Saints are willing to be in working out their beliefs in divine embodiment and human theosis” and poses some of the questions to which these beliefs give rise. “Do the gods and goddesses have intimate relations? Do their bodies process waste?” Very simply, we do not know. Of course, it is fallacious to assume that since God is like us in some respects—for example, in having a body (D&C 130:1, 22) that is humanlike in form—he must be like us in all respects—for example, in having a body that is exactly like ours in all of its operations and functions.<sup>117</sup> To make such an assumption is to be guilty of “reverse anthropomorphism.”

Scriptures, both biblical and LDS-specific, definitively mark out ways in which a divine body differs from ours. Paul provides the fullest biblical account of different modes of embodiment; he sharply distinguishes the mortal body from a resurrected or divine body: “So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power” (1 Cor. 15:42–43).

Similarly, in his epistle to the Philippians, Paul again strikingly contrasts these two kinds of bodies when he affirms that Christ “shall change our vile<sup>118</sup> body that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Philip. 3:21). James E. Faulconer has reminded us that “Luke 24:31 tells us that Christ is able to disappear immediately from view and Luke 24:36 tells us that he can enter a [shut] room just as suddenly.”<sup>119</sup> This ability is also shown in Acts 1:1–11 when Christ ascends bodily into heaven.

Mortal and divine bodies are also contrasted in modern revelations. Joseph Smith describes the Father and the Son as standing above him in

the air—apparently divine bodies are not subject to or can override the effects of gravity. He reports that their “brightness and glory” was beyond “all description” (Joseph Smith—History 1:17). And in the report of Moses’ face-to-face encounter with God, when “the presence of God withdrew from Moses,” he “fell unto the earth.” It was “many hours before Moses did again receive his natural strength like unto man; and he said unto himself: Now, for this cause I know that man is nothing, which thing I never had supposed.” So glorious is God’s personage that Moses had to undergo a temporary transfiguration simply to withstand God’s presence (Moses 1:9–11). Notwithstanding the fact that our knowledge of both male and female divine bodies is scant, it is clear that they are not subject to all of the limitations of mortal bodies.<sup>120</sup>

### THE SOCIAL TRINITY

**PINNOCK:** Remarkably, both Latter-day Saints and open theists hold to a “social Trinity.” Open theists believe in one God and three persons. We see God’s eternal life as personal life in relationship. God exists in community and constitutes a communion, or *koinonia*, of persons joined in love. The divine life is social and the basis of community among creatures. (Indeed, our human experience of community is the best clue we have for understanding God’s triune life.) The three persons find their identity in their relationship with one another. They “indwell” each other, they make room for each other, and they are united in a divine dance. But what is the nature of the unity? The Trinity seems to be quite unlike anything on earth. It involves a rich and complex oneness and is closer to an organic than to a mathematical unity.<sup>121</sup> Open theists do not think of the Trinity as a self-enclosed group of divine beings (like Peter, James, and John in Gregory of Nyssa’s analogy), which smacks of tritheism. Instead, open theists are dealing with a mysterious symbol of a God who saves us and whose triune nature is something incomprehensible in theory but intimate in relational terms. God is a community of persons knit together in a bond of love and beyond complete understanding. It calls believers to enter the dance and to love without judging.

For Latter-day Saints, the Trinity is a little differently understood. It consists of three individual personal and separate beings, collectively constituting the object of faith. They are distinct persons. Yet Latter-day Saints use the term “God” to refer to the Godhead, which the three comprise, and which is close to what open theists believe. For Latter-day Saints, as for open theists, there is a three-in-oneness and a plurality of persons united by being in relationship with one another. Neither of us

really knows exactly how the three are one, but it is LDS doctrine and openness doctrine that they *are* one. What Latter-day Saints do not hold is that the three persons are ontologically one being, as the creed says. Their emphasis is on a functional rather than on an essential Trinity. At the same time, I hear Robinson denying polytheism and affirming that the three are only one God.<sup>122</sup> Are we not both trying to retain belief in one God (Deuteronomy 6:4) with a trinitarian structure that is faithful to the gospel narrative? On the other hand, the LDS idea makes membership in the Trinity somewhat voluntary and therefore potentially subject to breaking up (for example, if Jesus had succumbed to temptation)—an unsettling thought that takes God’s risking to a much higher level.

**PAULSEN:** LDS understanding and openness thought both reject the conventional view that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost constitute one metaphysical substance, affirming rather that they are so lovingly inter-related as to constitute one perfectly united community. This understanding of the Godhead is known in contemporary Christian discourse as “social trinitarianism” or as “the social analogy of the Trinity.”

Pinnock’s brief treatment of the LDS understanding of the Godhead was very straightforward, perceptive, and correct. In 1842, in response to a Chicago newspaperman’s inquiry as to what Mormons believed, Joseph penned thirteen basic beliefs. These “Articles of Faith” remain the closest LDS analogue to a creed. The first article affirms belief in the New Testament Godhead: “We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.”

Complicating the matter are Joseph’s revelations and translations, replete with the statement that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, are one God (2 Nephi 31:21; Mosiah 15:2–5; Alma 11:44; 3 Nephi 11:27, 36; Mormon 7:7; D&C 20:28) and his declaration that “we have three Gods anyhow, and they are plural.”<sup>123</sup> Thus, as Cornelius Plantinga writes about the Creed of the (Eleventh) Council of Toledo, “The main problem or puzzlement here is that of threeness and oneness. What are the referents of these numbers? Three what? One what? And especially, how are these three and this one related?”<sup>124</sup>

Joseph’s revelations respond to each of these questions. Three what? Joseph answers, “I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and that the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit.”<sup>125</sup> One what? Joseph answers that Jesus “possesses the same mind with the Father.”<sup>126</sup> The Book of Mormon also helps to answer “one what?” with words like “doctrine,” “judgment,” “baptism,” and “record.”<sup>127</sup>

And especially, how are these three and this one related? Joseph answers that the Son possesses “*the same fullness* with the Father. . . . And he being the *Only Begotten of the Father*, full of grace and truth, and having overcome, received a fullness of the glory of the Father.”<sup>128</sup> Further, Joseph taught, “everlasting covenant was made between three personages [Father, Son, and Holy Ghost] before the organization of this earth.”<sup>129</sup> In short, the persons of the Trinity are bound by genetics, by “everlasting covenant,” and by “the same fullness” or set of divine attributes.

Thus, Joseph explicitly rejected the traditional belief that the Godhead, or Trinity, constituted one metaphysical substance.<sup>130</sup> Rather, Joseph understood the Trinity to be constituted by three distinct persons who together form one mutually indwelling divine community, perfectly united in mind, will, work, and love.<sup>131</sup> In his revelations, the word *God* is used to designate the divine community as well as to designate each individual divine person.<sup>132</sup> In order to avoid misunderstanding, it is imperative to keep this dual use of the word *God* in mind. Thus, consistent with his revelations, when Joseph declares there are “three Gods,” he means that there are three distinct divine personages. When he affirms that there is “one God,” he means that there is one perfectly united mutually indwelling divine community.<sup>133</sup> There is no contradiction here. Perhaps the late LDS Apostle James E. Talmage provided the clearest formulation of Joseph’s understanding of the Godhead when he wrote:

This unity is a type of completeness; the mind of any one member of the Trinity is the mind of the others; seeing as each of them does with the eye of perfection, they see and understand alike. Under any given conditions each would act in the same way, guided by the same principles of unerring justice and equity. The one-ness of the Godhead . . . implies no mystical union of substance, nor any unnatural and therefore impossible blending of personality.<sup>134</sup>

As stated in the LDS Bible Dictionary, *mystery* “denotes in the New Testament a spiritual truth that was once hidden but now is revealed, and that, without special revelation, would have remained unknown.”<sup>135</sup> Thus, the Latter-day Saints recognize the doctrine of the Trinity as a mystery, a spiritual truth re-revealed through Joseph Smith.

It is to scripture rather than the historic creeds of Christianity that the Latter-day Saints wish to conform, which is precisely the criticism open theology is making. Christianity should be defined by God’s own revelatory disclosures rather than by our rational constructions. In the words of Pinnock:

We must stop attributing to God qualities that undermine God’s own self-disclosure. Let us not treat the attributes of God independently of the

Bible but view the biblical metaphors as reality-depicting descriptions of the living God.<sup>136</sup>

[For] what we are doing, in effect, is seeking to correct the Bible; to derive truth about God not from biblical metaphors but from our own intuitions of what is “fitting” for God to be.<sup>137</sup>

The Latter-day Saints claim that “God’s own self-disclosure” continues through living prophets today, and when God the Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, appeared to Joseph Smith in the spring of 1820 as separate individuals, the LDS conception of the Trinity began to unfold.

**PINNOCK:** I take it then, regarding their interpretation of the social Trinity, Latter-day Saints can be called tritheists, which fits their polytheistic outlook in general. The Father, Son, and Spirit refer to three individual and separate deities who collectively constitute a Trinity or the cosmic committee of three. This is not what I have taken the social Trinity to be. By the term, I have meant to affirm that the eternal life of the one and only God is personal life in relationship. They are three ways in which God is God. It is like, but not exactly like, a *koinonia* of persons in love. It is like, but not exactly like, a loving community and the picture of hospitality. Obviously I am assuming monotheism when thinking of the persons, while David is not.

**PAULSEN:** My understanding of the Godhead is what contemporary theologians refer to as a social Trinity, but Clark labels my view “tritheistic.” At the same time, Clark’s view seems closer to classical trinitarianism than to a social model inasmuch as Clark seems to pull away from affirming the real distinctness of the three divine persons when he says, “The eternal life of the one and only God is personal life in relationship. They are three ways in which God is God.” While this may be his understanding of the social Trinity, others present a stronger model. In his lucid presentation on the subject, Cornelius Plantinga specifies three conditions a view of the Godhead must satisfy in order to be a “strong or social theory”:

(1) The theory must have Father, Son, and Spirit as distinct centers of knowledge, will, love, and action. Since each of these capacities requires consciousness, it follows that, on this sort of theory, Father, Son, and Spirit would be viewed as . . . *persons* in some full sense of that term. (2) Any accompanying sub-theory of divine simplicity must be modest enough to be consistent with condition (1), that is, with the real distinctness of trinitarian persons. . . . (3) Father, Son, and Spirit must be regarded as tightly enough related to each other so as to render plausible the judgment that they constitute a particular social unit.<sup>138</sup>

The LDS understanding of the Godhead clearly satisfies Plantinga’s criteria of a social model. So when I say that Latter-day Saints are social

trinitarians, it is to these conditions that I appeal. It is not clear to me that Clark's model satisfies Plantinga's second condition. If not, then given Plantinga's criteria, it is Clark's view, not the LDS view, of the Godhead that fails to constitute a social model of the Trinity. There is, of course, much more to consider here. Would Clark endorse Plantinga's criteria for a social model? If not, what would he offer as alternative criteria? Perhaps a more important question is: what model coheres best with the New Testament? Plantinga acknowledges that his model might be considered tritheistic by Christians who hold to a strong simplicity theory. But if so, Plantinga says, he is in good company, for by the same criteria Paul and John would also be tritheists. Latter-day Saints would also be proud to be in this company.

### GOD AND THE CREATION

**PINNOCK:** The ultimate metaphysical fact—is it God-and-world or is it God, period? For process thought (and LDS thought), the ultimate metaphysical fact seems to be God-and-world. Without a world, God would have no actuality and no real existence. Thus God needs the world almost as much as the world needs God. So God is inherently limited. For open theists, the situation is different. For us, the ultimate metaphysical fact is not God-and-world but God only. We believe that God could exist without creation, even though he chooses not to. Thus the world owes its existence to God's free choice, not to any metaphysical necessity.

Both open theists and process theists appeal to the logic of love to explain creation but do so differently. For process theists (and perhaps Latter-day Saints), the divine love entails a necessary world—God must have creatures to love and care for. For open theists, on the other hand, God's love excludes a necessary world because love must be a voluntary commitment. Love requires a degree of divine independence and a creation freely chosen. Open theism is thus neoclassical in certain ways (for example, creation by the word of God and not the result of some other power). Nor do open theists believe that God began creation with something preexisting, as Latter-day Saints do. As Langdon Gilkey puts it, "God is the source of all that there is"; "creatures are dependent but real and good"; and "God creates in freedom and with purpose."<sup>139</sup>

The term *creatio ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing) was meant by theologians to lift up the notion of a sovereignly chosen creation. I myself would rather speak of creation *ex amore*—that God in the act of creating acted out of love for creatures. I believe this is the most important point to make in discussing creation.<sup>140</sup> Still, open theists are impressed by God's

creating “all things, visible and invisible” (Col. 1:15). We believe that “God calls into existence things that do not exist” (Rom. 4:17). We hold to creation by God’s word such that “what is seen was made from things that are not visible” (Heb. 11:3). The key issue here is whether there is reality that is a given for God and that God is stuck with. Open theists believe that everything is ontologically dependent on God and has not existed everlastingly. At the same time, I have never thought that Genesis chapter one taught “creation out of nothing.” Genesis 1:2 seems to describe a situation preexisting when God begins the six-day work. So I do not draw the idea of *creatio ex nihilo* from there and would not even claim that my texts prove *creatio ex nihilo* outright. I would also admit that, even with *creatio ex nihilo*, God soon finds himself confronted by serious opposition in the world we have to live in. So what difference does it really make in practice?

For Latter-day Saints, there seem to exist several metaphysical factors that, in their interaction with each other, have helped to produce the present world. It seems as if there is a struggle involving a diversity of ultimate principles. In that case, what do we make of the structurally unified character of the world? It does not seem to be something on the verge of breaking up. Open theists believe that there are no metaphysical first principles alongside God, having their being from themselves and not from him. We see creation as God’s decision and the meaningful expression of his will, not the outcome of struggles between gods or primary principles. I am not denying that, at the present moment, real conflict exists between God and the gods, owing to the freedom they have been given, which can be used to frustrate God’s will. The gods do have a certain autonomy without being radically independent from God. However, they were created by God and are sustained by him and are gradually being lured, in spite of themselves, to a future that God has planned.

I sense that Latter-day Saints may feel that, were God to have created the world out of nothing, it would put God far away from us and jeopardize his interactions with us. It is almost as if God has to be a mortal being in order to relate to mortals. Surely not. God could have created the world by his word alone without being totally beyond it himself. God is exactly as far from it and as near to it as he wants to be. He can behold the world from his heavenly glory and, at the same time, enter into its life as fully as he wants to. God decides what his relations with creation will be.

**PAULSEN:** Open theology accepts libertarian free will but then rejects the eternity of spirit or intelligence (and matter) in favor of creation *ex nihilo*. Creation out of nothing is one of the core doctrines of conventional



Christianity with which open theists have no quarrel. Indeed, according to Pinnock, they have “resisted tossing out creation *ex nihilo*.”<sup>141</sup> Why? It even seems as if some of Pinnock’s statements about creation are incongruous with creation *ex nihilo*. For example, Pinnock states, “The acts of creation as recorded in Genesis chapter 1 brought chaos under control and reintroduced God’s order, but they did not eliminate the threat of this mysterious ‘formless void’ factor. It is a situation where, although God has the upper hand, he is not now totally in control.”<sup>142</sup> If God brought all things out of nothing, only extreme self-limiting in regard to the processes of nature would allow him to be not totally in control. For a theology that holds to the primacy of scripture, it is interesting for Pinnock to admit, “I have never thought that Genesis chapter one taught creation out of nothing.” Thus, it seems pertinent to question why openness clings to the idea of creation *ex nihilo* when they have rejected many other concepts because they conflict with the Bible.<sup>143</sup>

Pinnock recognizes that the idea of a self-limiting God “exposes a point of vulnerability” of open theism yet is willing to “live with it” in order to retain the doctrine of classical omnipotence (Pinnock, 57). Yet, elsewhere, Pinnock concurs with John Sanders that “sometimes the attributes of God are derived on the basis of the *dignum deo* (what it is dignified for God to be according to natural theology).”<sup>144</sup> Furthermore, Pinnock speaks negatively about theology that “think[s] of God abstractly as a perfect being and then smuggle[s] in assumptions of what ‘perfect’ entails.”<sup>145</sup> Pinnock’s unyielding defense of conventional conceptions of creation out of nothing and its corollary that God is subject to no nonlogical conditions or constraints appears to be an expression of *dignum deo*, not biblical, theology. This is puzzling. Perhaps openness is concerned about its relationship to the evangelical movement and is therefore wary of departing too far from conventional Christian thought.

Nevertheless, Pinnock does offer a subtle defense of the openness interpretation of creation when he criticizes the LDS theology that “without a world, God would have no actuality and no real existence.” This statement seems to indicate that the creator-God of openness and conventional Christianity is superior to that of the LDS faith because of his ability to have “real” existence without a world. If true, that might provide a rationale for openness thinkers to stick to the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. However, I believe this is a mischaracterization of LDS thought. Joseph Smith affirmed that God is a self-existent being and further elaborates, “God himself found Himself in the midst of spirits and glory. Because he was greater He saw proper to institute laws whereby the rest, who were less in intelligence, could have a privilege to advance like Himself.”<sup>146</sup>

In LDS theology God does *not* depend on the world for his “actuality” or “real existence.” As we have seen, God and the world (or, rather, the elements from which God organized the world) are both “actual” and “real” *metaphysically*. Matter is eternal and cannot be created or destroyed. God likewise is eternal, existing *independently alongside* matter, and neither is dependent on the other for “actuality” or “real existence.”

Thus, in LDS thought, God *could exist* without creation. Pinnock questions whether for LDS thought the divine love entails that God engages in creative activity. I believe it does. Indeed, while in conventional Christianity, God’s nature forbids that he should have equals, in LDS theology God’s very nature entails that he seeks to share with others all that he is and has.

Conversely, the openness view is that “God does not need a world in order to experience love.” Hence, according to open theology, the world becomes “not something God needs, but something he wants. . . . A world would provide for God an external expression of his own perfect goodness.”<sup>147</sup> To me this appears to differ but little from conventional Christianity’s claim that God created in order to provide himself with creatures who would worship him. Although open theology attempts to change this motivation from “the desire for adoration” to “the need for love,” for me their argument ultimately fails because, in short, given an openness worldview, we are not necessary in the eternal scheme of things. God would be just fine without us!

Finally, I must say that Latter-day Saints view the causal/teleological order of the cosmos in the same light as conventional Christians: namely as a testimony of the reality of a Supreme Creator or Organizer. While process theology might argue for “a struggle involving a diversity of ultimate principles” (Pinnock, 91), LDS theology holds that “all kingdoms have a law given; and there are many kingdoms; for there is no space in the which there is no kingdom” (D&C 88:36–37). God’s creative power, therefore, is not only reflected in chaos, but also stems from his knowledge of the eternal laws and principles by which the universe is inherently structured! The application of “higher laws” can overcome “lesser laws” (just as Bernoulli’s principle can in a sense overcome gravity), and through their application God was able to “create” or “organize” what we see today. Thus it seems that both LDS and open theologies view creation as God’s decision and the meaningful expression of his will, not as the outcome of struggles between gods or primary principles.

I have asked relevant and difficult questions concerning creation *ex nihilo* and the implications of holding to it. Joseph Smith’s revelations present a viable alternative to this troublesome doctrine. Is Joseph’s

doctrine not both scripturally as well as practically sound? Indeed, there are many scriptures that testify that man is the offspring of God (see Deut. 14:1, Ps. 82:6, Hosea 1:10, Mal. 2:10, Acts 17:29, Rom. 8:16), created in his image (Gen. 1:27), and endowed with His knowledge (Gen. 3:22). From my understanding of the openness model, it seems like a rejection of creation *ex nihilo* would be a more consistent position to hold for three reasons: First, it would be much easier to explain God's desire to enter into relations with us as well as his ability to interact with us dynamically. Second, it would extricate the open model from the problem of evil by attributing ontological self-existence and agency to entities other than God, thereby making evil an eternal possibility or something that God has always had to deal with. Finally, it would make the existential appeal already enjoyed by the open model even greater by elevating the status of human persons from brute creations to sons and daughters of God, who, through obedience and the grace of God, might one day become "joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17).

**PINNOCK:** Regarding divine limitations and the problem of evil, I believe that God is not limited by anything outside of himself but that he loves to constrain himself voluntarily, especially where love is concerned. God gives room to creatures to love him freely. In a one-sided emphasis, classical theologians have overstudied God's transcendence, while neglecting God's condescendence. This has resulted in the image of an omnipotent God and an impotent man that lacks the "strength in weakness" motif that took our Lord to the cross. Unlimited power fosters subservience and not the loving fellowship that God desires. God is, as it were, unwilling to be omnipotent without us, because he wants partners, not slaves.

#### THE OMNIPOTENCE OF GOD

**PINNOCK:** Concerning omnipotence, open theists and Latter-day Saints agree that there are limitations on God's power but do not explain it in quite the same way. Open theists use the language of voluntary self-limitation, while Latter-day Saints think of God's being limited by uncreated matter and intelligences, which are entities external to himself.<sup>148</sup> To my understanding, Joseph Smith saw such inherent limitations as entities coeternal with God, and that God has to deal with chaotic matter and built-in law-like structures.<sup>149</sup> But Ostler adds this: "God could prevent an intelligence or natural substance from *exercising power* freely by overpowering it through coercive power. . . . [However,] God will

generally refrain from such coercive power because it is not consistent with his loving nature."<sup>150</sup> Ostler seems to be saying that God has obstacles to overcome but that he can overcome them. This would approximate the view of open theism that God is not so much limited in power as he restrains its exercise. As in his loving relations with us, God does not force himself on us. Open theists see a restraint of power for the sake of love, and I think that Latter-day Saints do, too.

By accepting some limitations and conditionality within God, both open theists and Latter-day Saints make room for a more modern understanding of the world and its processes. This understanding and the powers of reason that helped formulate it also have a role to play in theology, if we value coherence and intelligibility in our work and if we want the message to be timely and compelling. Philosophers can help us if they have good data to work with.

Relational philosophies and theologies are good at relating to the dynamic understanding of reality that is characteristic of our time. They give us a metaphysics of love. They help us negotiate the shift we are seeing from a static to a more dynamic understanding of reality. The old Newtonian assumption that the world moves forward in a deterministic fashion is being replaced in quantum theory and by an understanding of causation that includes an intrinsic element of indeterminism. The old assumption that the world is a stable, solid, deterministic, thoroughly rational, and utterly predictable system is being replaced by a view of the world as a dynamic process that is to some extent indeterministic and unpredictable. The more it shifts this way, the less classical theism will have anything to say and the more relational theism will have to offer.

**PAULSEN:** Pinnock is right when he says that in the LDS perspective God is inherently limited (which may be another reason why open theology accepts *ex nihilo* creation). Indeed, the difference between LDS and open theology is quite clear: for the Latter-day Saints this limitation is a *metaphysical* reality, while openness thinkers claim that God *voluntarily* limits himself. This assertion by open theism of self-limitation on the part of God is for me the greatest point of divergence between LDS and open thought, especially in view of the fact that self-limitation combined with creation *ex nihilo* does not succeed in exonerating God from the responsibility of creating evil. For if God did create the world *ex nihilo*, as open theology holds, then is not God still, at least ultimately, responsible for all the evil (both natural and moral) in the world since he produced by fiat the natural structure of the world and gave his creatures agency? Could he not, for instance, have created humans with a nature far less prone to

gross sinfulness? I am not sure that the openness solution to the problem of evil would survive an attack such as Dostoevsky's and still be able to justify that such a risk was "worth it."<sup>151</sup> God really could prevent genuine evils; he really could possess exhaustive specific foreknowledge.

Pinnock deserves commendation once more for his lucid portrayal of LDS belief on the subjects of creation and the ultimate constituents of being. Joseph rejected the idea that God is the "ground of all being." Instead, he taught that a plurality of original entities exist coeternally with God, including matter and mankind. In the words of the Prophet: "We say that God himself is a self-existent being. Who told you so? It is correct enough; but how did it get into your head? Who told you that *man did not exist in like manner upon the same principles*? Man does exist on the same principles."<sup>152</sup> Thus, in LDS thought God *is* ultimately limited by the structure of uncreated reality, and hence there are ontological (not merely logical) limits on what he can do or bring about (for example, he cannot force free intelligences to act against their wills or impart knowledge that can be gained only through personal experience).

However, this does not mean that Latter-day Saints should have less confidence in God than their Christian counterparts have—Latter-day Saints believe in the same Bible, which constantly testifies that God is able to accomplish *all* of his plans and purposes. In fact, the Lord gave us this promise through Joseph Smith: "I, the Lord, am bound when ye do what I say, but when ye do not what I say, ye have no promise" (D&C 82:10), meaning that when we are obedient, the Lord *will* do what he has promised, whatever that may be. Hence the Latter-day Saints take seriously all promises God makes in the Bible and look forward to their fulfillment. This fact not only makes a difference theoretically, but also existentially. Does the open view of God have similar positive existential consequences? For example, can petitionary prayer affect God to the extent that He will un-self-limit in order to meet the needs of humans? The biblical narrative speaks of a God who does *all he can* to benefit his children who are endowed with agency. If God could un-self-limit at any time, then he is not doing all he can. Why would God then allow evils to occur that do not serve some greater good? Surely openness thinkers do not consider *all* evil to be logically necessary for a greater good. It seems much easier to relate to a loving God who does all he can to prevent seemingly pointless evil than to one who deliberately chooses, for personal reasons, to do less than he can.

**THEODICY: THE PROBLEM OF EVIL**

**PINNOCK:** This brings us to the issue of theodicy, or the issue of God's causing or allowing evil. Open theists think that light is shed on this issue from the direction of God's voluntarily, not essentially, limited power. This contrasts with LDS thought, which sees the limit on God's power to be not the result of God's decision but in the nature of things; there is a limitation on the power of God that is inherent in the structure of the world. In this regard LDS theory is closer to process theism than it is to open theism.<sup>153</sup>

Latter-day Saints see that if God's power is inherently and not only voluntarily restrained, then God cannot be blamed for many of the evils that happen because God is already doing the best that he can in the face of stubborn resistance. On the other hand, open theists prefer to say that God does have the power to overturn evil but rarely does so because he values human freedom. (Latter-day Saints agree with us that God can perform miracles, which puts them closer to us than to process theorists.) It seems that God has set himself a limit that he will not cross in taking away freedom.

God's problem (if I may speak thus) is that God loves. Love complicates his life, as it does ours. So there is a reason (a creation covenant) why he does not prevent certain evils. Hence there are psalms of lament in the Bible where believers ask God why he is not doing more, on the assumption that he *could be*. We have to trust God when things do not seem to be lining up in our understanding. In the last analysis, however, we both agree that God does not cause or will our suffering; rather, we believe that God identifies with our suffering and works faithfully and everlastingly to transform that suffering into the highest possible good.<sup>154</sup>

**PAULSEN:** Belief in *ex nihilo* creation greatly exacerbates the logical problem of evil. It posits God as the ultimate cause of all things, making him an accessory before the fact and, thus, seemingly ultimately omniresponsible for all the world's evils. While Clark hedges on the biblical standing of *ex nihilo* creation, he does acknowledge that it is not supported by the Genesis account of creation (Pinnock, 91). However, I do not understand how this admission serves to exculpate God from ultimate responsibility for the world's evil, for Clark suggests that the elements then present (and, indeed, all things) were ultimately *ex nihilo* creations of God (Pinnock, 90–91). I hope Clark and other open theologians will address this issue more directly as our conversations continue.

**PINNOCK:** Regarding the vexed question of theodicy, open theism (we grant) does not resolve the theodicy problem completely. But who

(pray tell) has the full solution? Surely, only God himself can shoulder that burden. There can be no complete theodicy without eschatology, that is, without the hope of a great victory over the reality of evil and the resurrection of the dead. It is to these divine promises and not to human speculations that I look. I am not much comforted by LDS speculations about God or gods who are too weak to put a stop to evil because they are inherently limited.

**PAULSEN:** In its rejection of *ex nihilo* creation, modern revelation provides Latter-day Saints resources for resolving the logical problem of evil.<sup>155</sup> These revelations indicate that intelligences (or primal persons), chaotic matter (D&C 93:29, 33), and “the laws of eternal and self-existent principles”<sup>156</sup> are realities coeternal with God. Given a plurality of coeternal realities, it follows that God is neither an accessory before the fact to all the world’s evils nor ultimately responsible for them. Further, given this plurality of coeternal realities, it follows that God is not unlimitedly powerful. B. H. Roberts has proposed that Latter-day Saints understand divine omnipotence as the power to bring about any state of affairs consistent with the natures of eternal existences.<sup>157</sup>

From these theological premises, it does not follow that the existence of God and the existence of evil are logically incompatible. Neither does it follow, as Clark infers, that God is “too weak” to prevent the evils that occur in the world. It does follow that he cannot prevent all evils without an overriding diminution in the overall value of the world. Lehi, a Book of Mormon prophet, sets out some of the eternal principles to which even God is subject. Lehi teaches that “men are that they might have joy” (2 Nephi 2:25). But, Lehi explains, not even God can bring about joy without moral righteousness, moral righteousness without moral freedom, and moral freedom without an “opposition in all things” (2 Nephi 2:11, 13).<sup>158</sup> Modern revelation sheds considerable light on the unavoidability of evil in our present existence.

Nonetheless, Clark does well to remind us that even with the light of modern revelation Latter-day Saints also “see through a glass darkly” (1 Cor. 13:12) in our attempt to understand the “why” of many of the world’s actual evils. We, too, must look to the eschaton for fuller light. Latter-day Saints, like openness thinkers, believe that God is redemptively sovereign. We trust that he can and will fulfill all of his purposes and promises. As Joseph Smith reassured the early Saints, “All your losses will be made up to you in the resurrection, provided you continue faithful.”<sup>159</sup>



## RELATIONAL THEOLOGIES AND THE PRAGMATIC LIFE

**PINNOCK:** For many of the reasons set forth above, theologies that emphasize relationships between beings have tremendous practical appeal. Open theism supplies “existential fit” in the way we handle our walk with God and the life of prayer. It energizes us by imputing real “say so” to human beings. (Remember that Latter-day Saints and open theists are both strongly Arminian.) Open theology confirms our deepest intuitions that our choices are not predetermined and the future is not altogether settled. Thus it enjoys an “as if” advantage. That is, we notice that people act “as if” the relational gospel were true even when they do not believe that it is, which is a fine compliment. Open theology is a theology where our lives really matter and where what we do (or do not do) makes a real difference. Thus it is a theology for revival and for missions (a passion to evangelize the world is yet another factor that Latter-day Saints and open theorists share). I resonate with William James, who wondered what difference divine aseity or God’s self-love or God’s simplicity or God’s pure act make, without agency. James wrote, “If they severally call for no distinctive adaptations of our conduct, what vital difference can it possibly make to a man’s religion whether they be true or false?”<sup>160</sup> The pragmatic test for truth may not be everything, but it counts for something. Open theism works in the lives of those who espouse it. Here the open and LDS views seem indistinguishable.

**PAULSEN:** Latter-day Saint Church President John Taylor once said:

When “Mormonism” was presented to me my first inquiry was, “Is it Scriptural? Is it reasonable and philosophical?” This is the principle I would act upon today. No matter how popular the theories or dogmas preached might be, I would not accept them unless they were strictly in accordance with the Scriptures, reason, and common sense.<sup>161</sup>

I think that these words offer a summation of the success of both “Mormonism” and other relational theologies: they are scriptural, reasonable, and practically appealing. Indeed, both find an “existential fit” within the lives of their adherents and even within the lives of their enemies, as Pinnock astutely notices. Neither theology claims to have all the answers, yet both believe that these answers are within our reach, and it is *this* belief that keeps the conversation alive. As we progress towards a greater understanding of each other’s beliefs, I am reminded of the words Joseph Smith:

The inquiry is frequently made of me, “Wherein do you differ from others in your religious views?” In reality and essence we do not differ so far in our religious views, but that we could all drink into one principle

of love. One of the grand fundamental principles of “Mormonism” is to receive truth, let it come from whence it may.<sup>162</sup>

## CONCLUSION

**PINNOCK:** Open theism is part of a larger movement of relational theologies, which include LDS theology and which seek to recover the perfections of a personal God and the dynamic relationships into which God enters with his creatures. It is a biblical theology that seeks to bring our definitions of God’s attributes into line with the perfections of a personal God. It celebrates God’s true glory, which is not static perfection but loving relationships with his creatures and partnerships in which God allows himself to be made vulnerable.

Open theism is being discussed widely, and its prospects seem promising.<sup>163</sup> It is scripturally compelling. Its doctrine of God appeals in a modern context where classical theism can be a hard sell. It promotes intimacy with God and posits a real “say so” to human beings. In the evangelical context, it needs to overcome the paleo-Calvinist charge that it is heretical and the classical Arminian intuition that it goes too far. In terms of connecting with other relational theologies, a beginning has been made in our interaction with process theology. I myself have not had Latter-day Saints as dialogue partners before, but I welcome it. Of course, not everyone approves of our talking to Latter-day Saints, process theists, and others. They see it as proof positive that we are not evangelical ourselves and perhaps not even Christian. But we do not believe in closing doors that God has opened and do not allow ourselves to be governed by our fears.

None of us controls the outcomes of our deliberations, and God’s providence will see to it that what is valid is sorted out from what is invalid and what is significant from what is insignificant. As St. Paul says, “Now we know in part—then we will know as we are known” (1 Cor. 13:12). Meanwhile, our work is tentative, though we hope it is worthwhile.

**PAULSEN:** It is worthwhile. I have learned much in my dialogue with Professor Pinnock. He is an ideal conversation partner. He takes my ideas seriously, and his responses are always respectful yet thought-provoking, compelling me to refine my ideas. I am richer both as a person and as a thinker for our interactions.

**PINNOCK:** Latter-day Saint thought challenges evangelical thought in its complacency toward other varieties of Christian faith. Latter-day Saint scholars are working hard at the defense of their faith. The opposite is also true. The quality and quantity of evangelical work is improving and could

benefit from the interaction we are seeing. Let the iron sharpen iron. May God lead us all into the fuller truth of what Jesus brought into the world. I appreciate interacting with Dr. Paulsen very much, both in person and in print, and am the richer for it as a theologian and as a person.

**PAULSEN:** Without doubt, LDS and evangelical scholars are hard at work in more clearly articulating and defending their faith. Both can benefit from the interaction we are seeing. I thus say “amen” to Clark’s concluding appeal: “Let iron sharpen iron.” Let God bring us to the truth.

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Clark H. Pinnock (pinnock@mcmaster.ca) is Professor Emeritus of Christian Interpretation at McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, Ontario. He received his PhD at the University of Manchester and has authored, edited, or coauthored fifteen books. He has taught at the University of Manchester, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and Regent College in Vancouver. He, along with four other authors, wrote *The Openness of God* (InterVarsity, 1994), and he more recently authored *The Most Moved Mover* (Baker, 2001).

David L. Paulsen (david\_paulsen@byu.edu) is Professor of Philosophy at Brigham Young University, where he specializes in the philosophy of religion. He received his PhD at the University of Michigan, where his doctoral thesis explored the comparative coherency of classical and Mormon theism. Paulsen has published widely, exploring the bearing of LDS revelation on issues in the philosophy of religion. He held the Richard L. Evans Chair for Religious Understanding at Brigham Young University from 1994 to 1998. Thanks to Garrett Sens, who contributed significantly to the research for and preparation of this interview and dialogue.

1. Augustine, “On the Trinity,” in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 3, bk. 1 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1956), chap. 3.

2. See the manifesto written by Clark H. Pinnock, John Sanders, Richard Rice, William Hasker, and David Basinger, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1994). John Sanders filled out the picture in *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1998).

3. See Sanders, “Divine Relationality in the Christian Tradition,” in *The God Who Risks*, chap. 5.

4. In the dialogue book *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation*, co-authored with Craig Blomberg (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997), 195–96, Stephen E. Robinson lists the most important points of agreement and disagreement that were discovered.

5. Robinson has expressed the wish that some evangelical would say that the Book of Mormon could be inspired by God. Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?* 71. I will say it. Of course it *could* be inspired. But the possibility does not prove that it is or that there may not be some explaining left to do.

6. Donald G. Bloesch, *God the Almighty: Power, Wisdom, Holiness, Love* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1995), 205–6, quoting Vladimir Lossky, *The*

*Vision of God*, trans. Asheleigh Moorhouse (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983), 67. Notice, however, that Bloesch wants a relational theism but not quite an open theism (254–60).

7. Shaye J. D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 86–87.

8. Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, chap. 2.

9. Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?* 59, 138.

10. Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?* 61; emphasis in original.

11. Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?* 161–62, 165–66; Benjamin Huff, “How Polemics Corrupted Latter-day Saint Apologetics,” *FARMS Review* 15, no. 1 (2003): 273–309, believes that Richard R. Hopkins is too unnuanced in Hopkins's book *How Greek Philosophy Corrupted the Christian Concept of God* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon, 1998).

12. See John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2001), 62–73.

13. Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 244–45. Francis Beckwith and Stephen E. Parrish are classical theists who have written about LDS thought: *The Mormon Concept of God: A Philosophical Analysis* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen, 1991).

14. Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 230–35, 244.

15. Tyron L. Inbody, *The Transforming God: An Interpretation of Suffering and Evil* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 67–78, 142–43, 148–49.

16. The story of my shift in thinking is told in my biography by Barry L. Callen, *Clark H. Pinnock: Journey toward Renewal—An Intellectual Biography* (Napanea, Ind.: Evangel, 2000); and in Clark H. Pinnock, “The Need for a Scriptural, and Therefore a Neo-Classical Theism,” in *Perspectives on Evangelical Theology*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer and Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1980), 37–42.

17. Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1996), chap. 1.

18. John Polkinghorne, ed., *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001).

19. For the use in theology of multiple sources, see Donald A. D. Thorson, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason and Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1990).

20. From my standpoint, Joseph Smith had stimulating and even prophetic insights that I can appreciate, even though I do not hail him as the Prophet of the latter days.

21. Joseph Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1971), 5:517.

22. John Sanders, “Open Theism: Radical Revision or Miniscule Modification of Arminianism?” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 38 (2003): 69–102. See also Roger Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2002), 192–96.

23. We are part of a living tradition, two thousand years old: see Thomas C. Oden, *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy: Signs of New Life in Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003).

24. I have noticed an appreciation by Latter-day Saints of C. S. Lewis and have thought to myself what an important factor that might prove to be. Certainly he

is quoted more often by the LDS leadership than any other non-Latter-day Saint writer. A friend of a friend is a friend of ours. See Nathan Jensen, *Restored Gospel according to C. S. Lewis* (Springville, Utah: Bonneville, 1998).

25. On scripture and tradition, see Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief*, chaps. 1–2.

26. Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?* 18–19.

27. Latter-day Saints enjoy the luxury of having living prophets and therefore need to depend less than evangelicals on written texts. What God said in the past is somewhat secondary to what God is saying now. And who knows where that will take them? The evangelical fixation on the past makes it hard for them to change and reform. It happens, but it is undisciplined.

28. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1976), 316.

29. John A. Widstoe, *Discourses of Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977), 3.

30. Orson F. Whitney, Conference Report 91 (April 1921): 32–33.

31. Official Statement of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, February 15, 1978.

32. Roger R. Keller, “Do I Know My Neighbor?” *Ensign* 21 (March 1991): 25.

33. Walter Brueggemann features the motif of testimony and counter-testimony in his work *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997).

34. Pinnock, “Overcoming a Pagan Inheritance,” *Most Moved Mover*, chap. 2.

35. See, for example, Terence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), chap. 6.

36. See Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 33–35.

37. Grace Jantzen, *God’s World, God’s Body* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1984), 21; and David L. Paulsen, “The Doctrine of Divine Embodiment: Restoration, Judeo-Christian, and Philosophical Perspectives,” *BYU Studies* 35, no. 4 (1995–96): 7–94.

38. John Macquarrie, forward to Jantzen, *God’s World, God’s Body*, ix.

39. C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (New York: Harvest-Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1964), 22.

40. Bloesch, *God the Almighty*, 50, 89.

41. Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 127.

42. Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 1:206–20.

43. Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?* 88.

44. Ostler, *Attributes of God*, 352.

45. For example, David L. Paulsen, “Must God Be Incorporeal?” *Faith and Philosophy* 6, no. 1 (January 1989): 76–87.

46. Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Baker, 2001), 33–34; see also 80–81.

47. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 79.

48. B. H. Roberts, *The Mormon Doctrine of Deity* (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1998), 119.

49. Paul uses the word “spiritual” to mean resurrected body in 1 Corinthians 15:44.

50. *The New Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1990), paragraph 5481, page 77 of Greek Dictionary of the New Testament.

51. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 34.

52. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 34; see 80–81.

53. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 81; 81 n. 54.

54. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 34.

55. David L. Paulsen, “Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity: Origen and Augustine as Reluctant Witnesses,” *Harvard Theological Review* 83, no. 2 (1990): 105–16.

56. The work of St. Thomas and the Scholastics revolved around this issue, with Platonic and Aristotelian premises—the relegating of the “heavenly” to immateriality (the angels, for example, are “pure species”), and the “earthly” to materiality or corporeality.

57. Truman G. Madsen, *Eternal Man* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1966), 47.

58. Charles W. Penrose, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 26:21 (November 16, 1884). For a recent article discussing the existential implications for the LDS view, see Russell M. Nelson, “We Are Children of God,” *Ensign* 28 (November 1998): 85–87.

59. Rulon T. Burton, comp., *We Believe: Doctrines and Principles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Tabernacle, 1994), 429.

60. Genesis 1:27; 5:1; 9:6; 32:30; Exodus 24:10; 31:18; 33:11; Luke 24:39; John 14:9; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Philippians 3:21; 1 John 3:2; Revelation 22:4; Doctrine and Covenants 130:22.

61. See Joseph Smith—History 1:15–17.

62. Doctrine and Covenants 130:22–23. Compare the words of the resurrected Lord to his Apostles: “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have” (Luke 24: 39).

63. Rabbinic anthropology, for instance, does not consider the soul to be immaterial or radically distinct from the body. Alon Goshen Gottstein, “The Body as Image of God in Rabbinic Literature,” *Harvard Theological Review* 87, no. 2 (April 1994): 176–77. See also J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 5th rev. ed. (London: Adams and Charles Black, 1977), 14, 16.

64. Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997), chap. 4. I have spoken of other gods myself in Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God’s Mercy* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992), chap. 4.

65. Ostler, *Attributes of God*, 9, quoting an observation by Hans-Joachim Kraus.

66. Eichrodt, “The Celestial World,” in *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2:186–209.

67. The term “eternalism” was coined by B. H. Roberts to describe the Mormon position. B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Century One*, 6 vols. (Provo, Utah: Corporation of the President, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1965), 2:410.

68. That “intelligence” is coeternal with God is universally held, but whether or not the term “intelligence” refers to individuals has been debated in the LDS



faith. For both sides, see B. H. Roberts, “The Immortality of Man,” *Improvement Era* 10 (April 1907): 419; and Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1979), 387. See also Andrew Ehat and Lyndon Cook, comps. and eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Orem, Utah: Grandin, 1991), 341–62.

69. Compare Robert B. Rakestraw, “Becoming like God: An Evangelical Doctrine of Theosis,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40 (1997): 257–69.

70. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, book 3, chapter 10.

71. Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, paragraph 54.

72. Ostler, *Attributes of God*, 9–10.

73. Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?* 86.

74. This point is discussed in Richard N. Ostling and Joan K. Ostling, *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), chap. 18.

75. See, for example, Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?* 86.

76. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:312; emphasis added.

77. Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:306; emphasis added.

78. See for example, Acts 17:28–29, Deuteronomy 14:1, Psalm 82:6, Hosea 1:10, Malachi 2:10, Ecclesiastes 12:7, Romans 8:16, Ephesians 4:6, and Hebrews 12:9.

79. To follow suit with recent theologians, I will use the terms *deification* and *theosis* as synonyms in this dialogue.

80. Norman Russell, “Partakers of the Divine Nature’ (2 Peter 1:4) in the Byzantine Tradition,” in *Kathegetria: Essays Presented to Joan Hussey for Her 80th Birthday* (Camberley, UK: Porphyrogenitus Publications, 1998), 51–67. See also “Deification,” *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 3d ed., ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 467.

81. Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974), 97. See also D. B. Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: A Western Perspective*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2003), 120–21.

82. Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity*, 121. See also “Deification,” *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 465.

83. David L. Balas, “Divinization,” *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2d ed., 2 vols., ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland, 1997), 1:339; Gerald Bonner, “Augustine’s Conception of Deification,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s., 37, no. 2 (1986): 369–86.

84. A. N. Williams, “Deification in the Summa Theologiae: A Structural Interpretation of the Prima Pars,” *The Thomist* 61 (1997): 219–55.

85. A relatively current bibliography reveals that since 1950, 195 of 222 total publications (or 88 percent) on deification were published. Bibliography in Paulsen’s possession.

86. Mark O’Keefe, “Theosis and the Christian Life: Toward Integrating Roman Catholic Ethics and Spirituality,” *Eglise et Théologie* 25 (1994): 56.

87. He continues: “Because *theosis* is a present reality—though only partially realized—Christians strive to live a life in conformity to the awesome dignity to which they are called. . . . To believe that one already shares in the divine life demands of the Christian an authentic response to the divine life and love, especially as this has been revealed in Jesus Christ. Christians strive to model in their lives those perspectives, dispositions, virtues, attitudes, intentions, and affections



that seem authentically conformed to the deified life which they have already begun to live, although as yet incompletely and imperfectly. Believers strive to decide and to act in a way consistent with their new life and with the character which flows from it. Christian ethics—both of doing and of being—must be profoundly rooted in the reality of *theosis*.” O’Keefe, “Theosis and the Christian Life,” 60–61.

88. Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?* 86.

89. Charles Hartshorne, *Man’s Vision of God and the Logic of Theism* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1964), 46.

90. B. H. Roberts, *Discourses of B. H. Roberts* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1948). 95–96; emphasis added.

91. Ostler, *Attributes of God*, chap. 10.

92. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 100.

93. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 100.

94. David L. Paulsen, “Omnipotent God; Omnipresence of God; Omniscience of God,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 3:1030.

95. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 11:286–87 (January 13, 1867).

96. Wilford Woodruff, in *Journal of Discourses*, 6:120 (December 6, 1857); emphasis added.

97. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954), 1:5–7.

98. Bruce R. McConkie, *Sermons and Writings of Bruce R. McConkie*, ed. Mark L. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1998), 24–25.

99. Jim Adams, “The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Joseph Smith? God, Creation, in the Old Testament and Mormonism,” in *The New Mormon Challenge: Responding to the Latest Defenses of a Fast-growing Movement*, ed. Francis J. Beckwith, Carl Mosser, and Paul Owen (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002), 153–91. This is an informative book, but it is too negative and unsympathetic to the Latter-day Saints.

100. Consider Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1979), chaps. 18–22.

101. I appreciate Daniel L. Migliore’s treatment of this in *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), 72–74.

102. Roberts, *The Mormon Doctrine of Deity*, 119.

103. Jill Mulvay Derr, “The Significance of ‘O My Father’ in the Personal Journey of Eliza R. Snow,” *BYU Studies* 36, no. 1 (1996–97): 98.

104. Eliza R. Snow, “O My Father,” *Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1985), 292. For an early Christian parallel to Snow’s poem, see John W. Welch and James V. Garrison, “The ‘Hymn of the Pearl’: An Ancient Counterpart to ‘O My Father,’” *BYU Studies* 36, no. 1 (1996–97): 127–38.

105. “The Origin of Man, November, 1909,” in *Messages of the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, comp. James R. Clark, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965), 4:203. In 1925, the First Presidency reaffirmed the Mother in Heaven doctrine using the exact language of the 1909 statement. “Mormon’ View of Evolution, September, 1925,” in Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 5:244.

106. "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign* 25 (November 1995): 102.

107. "Does the biblical and extrabiblical evidence support the view that Asherah was a goddess in ancient Israel and that she was the consort of Yahweh? Or, alternatively, does the data point to the asherah as a symbol within the cult of Yahweh without signifying a goddess? The first position perhaps constitutes a majority view, represented by the older works of H. Ringgren, G. Fohrer, and G. W. Ahlstrom, and the more recent studies of W. G. Dever, D. N. Freedman, R. Hestrin, A. Lemaire, and S. Olyan." Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990), 88–89. Smith himself holds to a minority position held by B. Lang, P. D. Miller, J. Tigay, and U. Winter, who maintain on the paucity of evidence that Asherah neither referred to a goddess nor symbolized the goddess of Israel. See also Daniel C. Peterson, "Nephi and His Asherah," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9, no. 2 (2000): 15–25, 80–81.

108. Spencer W. Kimball, *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 25.

109. Harold B. Lee, *The Teachings of Harold B. Lee* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996), 70.

110. Vaughn J. Featherstone, "A Champion of Youth," *Ensign* 17 (November 1987): 28.

111. See, for example, Carol Lynn Pearson, "Healing the Motherless Home," in *Women and Authority: Re-emerging Mormon Feminism*, ed. Maxine Hanks (Salt Lake City: Signature, 1992), 231–46; "Emerging Discourse of the Divine Feminine," in Hanks, *Women and Authority*, 257–96; and Cheryl B. Preston, "Feminism and Faith: Reflections on the Mormon Heavenly Mother," *Texas Journal of Women and the Law* 2 (1992): 337–86.

112. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Daughters of God," *Ensign* 21 (November 1991): 100.

113. At least one LDS scholar has questioned whether the doctrine can be ascribed to Joseph. See Blake T. Ostler, "The Idea of Pre-existence in the Development of Mormon Thought," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15 (Spring 1982): 59–78, 76. Others find convincing the total evidence—circumstantial, testimonial, and otherwise—that Joseph taught the doctrine. See Derr, "Significance of 'O My Father,'" 98–101; Charles R. Harrell, "The Development of the Doctrine of Preexistence, 1830–1844," *BYU Studies* 28, no. 2 (1988): 75–96; and Linda P. Wilcox, "The Mormon Concept of a Mother in Heaven," in *Women and Authority*, 5–6. Daniel Peterson's study of 1 Nephi 11:8–13 shows that Ugaritic and Canaanite religious connections between the tree of life and a feminine divine being are not borrowings—ancient or modern—from pagan sources but were at home in biblical Israel; see his chapter in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 191–243.

114. Wilcox, "Mormon Concept of a Mother in Heaven," 4, 6.

115. W. W. Phelps was closely associated with Joseph Smith, serving as both clerk and scribe to Joseph in Nauvoo, and, earlier, as counselor in the first stake in Missouri. Sydney Marie Hughes, "Phelps, William W.," in Arnold K. Garr, Donald Q. Cannon, and Richard Cowan, eds., *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 917–18.

116. This poem in part reads: “Come to me; here’s the myst’ry that man hath not seen: / Here’s our Father in heaven, and Mother, the Queen.” W. W. Phelps, “A Voice from the Prophet. ‘Come to Me,’” *Times and Seasons* 6 (January 15, 1845), 783.

117. But compare Luke’s account of the appearance of the resurrected Christ wherein he eats fish and honeycomb (Luke 24:41–43).

118. The Greek word used here means literally “an unpretentious state or condition, lowliness, humility, humble station.” Paul is referring to “the humble body, of the material body in contrast to the glorified body.” *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker, 3d ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 990.

119. James E. Faulconer, “Divine Embodiment and Transcendence: Propaeudetic Thoughts and Questions,” *Element: An E-journal of Mormon Philosophy and Theology* 1 (2005): 1.

120. For instance, Grace Dyck (now Jantzen) has shown there is no incoherence in holding a divinely embodied person to be omnipresent. Grace M. Dyck, “Omnipresence and Incorporeality,” *Religious Studies* 13 (March 1977): 90–91. Stephen E. Robinson makes a similar point: “If an immaterial God can be immaterially omnipresent, then a material God can also be immaterially omnipresent (even where his body is not), in the same way.” Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?* 88. See also Paulsen, “Must God Be Incorporeal?” 81.

121. On twentieth-century efforts to understand the Trinity, see Roger E. Olson and Christopher A. Hall, *The Trinity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), 95–115.

122. Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?* 131–32.

123. *History of the Church*, 6:474; Larry E. Dahl and Donald W. Cannon, eds., *Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith’s Teachings* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997), 297.

124. Cornelius Plantinga Jr., “Social Trinity and Tritheism,” in *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement*, ed. Ronald Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga Jr. (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 21.

125. *History of the Church*, 6:474; Dahl and Cannon, *Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith’s Teachings*, 297.

126. Dahl and Cannon, *Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith’s Teachings*, 345.

127. 2 Nephi 31:21, Alma 11:44, 3 Nephi 11:27, and 3 Nephi 11:36, respectively.

128. Dahl and Cannon, *Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith’s Teachings*, 344–45; emphasis added.

129. Dahl and Cannon, *Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith’s Teachings*, 712.

130. Christopher Stead writes, “Theologians have been rightly convinced that the ultimate effect of Nicaea has been to assert, not merely the equality, but also the essential unity, of the three Persons; and they have attempted, I think incautiously, to represent this as the original and express intention of the Nicene fathers. In support of this view, it has been argued that homoousios was adopted at Nicaea to express the form of trinitarian theology prevailing in the West.” Christopher Stead, *Divine Substance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 251.

131. “Many men say there is one God; the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are only one God. I say that is a strange God anyhow—three in one, and one in three! It is a curious organization. ‘Father, I pray not for the world, but I pray for them which thou hast given me.’ ‘Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one as we are.’ All are to be

crammed into one God, according to sectarianism. It would make the biggest God in all the world. He would be a wonderfully big God—he would be a giant or a monster. I want to read the text to you myself—‘I am agreed with the Father and the Father is agreed with me, and we are agreed as one.’ The Greek shows that it should be agreed. ‘Father, I pray for them which Thou hast given me out of the world, and not for those alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word, that they all may be agreed, as Thou, Father, are with me, and I with Thee, that they also may be agreed with us’ and all come to dwell in unity, and in all the glory and everlasting burnings of the Gods.” *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 372–73. See also John 17:21 in *The Message Bible and Worldwide English Bible*, for other variant translations.

132. Joseph said, “The heavens declare the glory of a God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork; and a moment’s reflection is sufficient to teach every man of common intelligence, that all these are not the mere productions of chance, nor could they be supported by any power less than an Almighty hand.” *History of the Church*, 2:14; Dahl and Cannon, *Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith’s Teachings*, 291; emphasis in original.

133. See my interview, “Are Mormons Trinitarian?” in *Modern Reformation* (November/December 2003), 40–43, wherein I answer common questions concerning the LDS understanding of the Godhead.

134. James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1988), 37.

135. LDS Bible Dictionary, *Holy Bible* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1979), s.v. “Mystery,” 736. (Compare Rom. 16:25–26; Eph. 1:9; 3:3–10; Col. 1:26; 4:3; 1 Tim. 3:16).

136. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 27.

137. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 67.

138. Plantinga, “Social Trinity and Tritheism,” 22, 31.

139. Langdon Brown Gilkey, *Maker of Heaven and Earth: The Christian Doctrine of Creation in the Light of Modern Knowledge* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959), chap. 3.

140. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2:99–106. Consider Paul Copan and William Lane, *Creation out of Nothing: A Biblical, Philosophical and Scientific Exploration* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2004).

141. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 78.

142. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 36.

143. For example, in the openness publication by Pinnock, Sanders, and others, *The Openness of God*, 101–25, Pinnock himself argues against the traditional conceptions of omnipotence, immutability, impassibility, and omniscience on biblical grounds.

144. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 67, quoting John Sanders.

145. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 67.

146. Stan Larson, “The King Follett Discourse: A Newly Amalgamated Text,” *BYU Studies* 18, no. 2 (1977–78): 204.

147. Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 185.

148. On divine self-limitation, see Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 224–28.

149. David L. Paulsen, citing Doctrine and Covenants 93:23, 29, in “Joseph Smith and the Problem of Evil,” *BYU Studies* 39, no. 1 (2000): 58.

150. Ostler, *Attributes of God*, 132.

151. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (New York: Penguin, 1993), 271–83.
152. Roberts, *Comprehensive History of the Church*, 2:393; emphasis added; see also Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 346, 352, 359.
153. See Paulsen, “Joseph Smith and the Problem of Evil,” 53–65.
154. Blake Ostler presses the critique of openness theodicy: “Evil: A Real Problem for Evangelicals,” *FARMS Review* 15 (2003): 201–13.
155. See Paulsen, “Joseph Smith and the Problem of Evil,” 53–65.
156. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 60.
157. See B. H. Roberts, *The Seventy’s Course in Theology*, 5 vols. (Dallas, Tex.: S. K. Taylor, 1976), 2:70.
158. I call this passage “Lehi’s theodicy.”
159. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 296.
160. See William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2002), 445.
161. John Taylor, in *Journal of Discourses*, 13:14 (March 14, 1869).
162. *History of the Church*, 5:499.
163. See William C. Davis, “Why Open Theism Is Flourishing Now,” in *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity*, ed. John Piper, Justin Taylor, and Paul Kjoss Helseth (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2003), 111–45.