

MORMONISM AND THE HERESIES

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MORMONISM AND CREEDAL CHRISTIANITY

On February 23, 2010, Cardinal Francis George delivered Brigham Young University's forum address. As archbishop of Chicago, George was then serving as president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. In the years prior to this address, his organization had been working with Latter-day Saint leaders on humanitarian projects and social issues of mutual interest. That February day was a high-water mark for Mormon interfaith relations. The Lord's Prayer served as the invocation for the event and was offered by a BYU faculty member and devout Catholic. Appropriate to the event, George's remarks focused on areas of common cause among Catholics and Latter-day Saints and emphasized the need for both traditions to advance religious freedom around the world. "However different our historic journeys and creeds might be," he said, "our communities share a common experience of being a religious minority that was persecuted in different ways in mid-19th-century America."¹

A stark example of these differences was manifest just nine years prior in June 2001, when the Vatican officially ruled that Latter-day Saint

baptisms were not legitimate Christian rites. Since the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), the Catholic Church has recognized baptismal ceremonies from other Christian denominations as valid Catholic sacraments. However, questions arose among American bishops as to whether LDS baptisms met the conditions for inclusion, and they forwarded their query to Rome for a ruling. The response came in the form of a *responsum ad dubium* from the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the body charged with the protection of Catholic orthodoxy. The Congregation's response consisted simply of one word: "Negative." Among the more striking features of this case is that the Vatican has ruled on only six baptismal cases since 1970.

Finally, after two months of waiting, an article appeared in the Vatican's official newspaper explaining the Church's rationale for the ruling. The piece was authored by Luis Ladaria, the secretary to the congregation and a member of the Church's International Theological Commission. After a brief excursion into Mormon cosmology, taken in part from Joseph Smith's King Follett Sermon, Ladaria concludes that "the words Father, Son and Holy Spirit, have for the Mormons a meaning totally different from the Christian meaning. The differences are so great that one cannot even consider that this doctrine is a heresy."² The reference to heresy is important because, since the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church has not disqualified baptisms performed by those who are said to advocate heretical positions. Thus the ruling was a clear and very public effort to place Mormonism outside the pale of Christian ecumenical communion.³

Furthermore, between 1995 and 2001, five major denominations formally rejected Mormonism as part of the Christian community of faith. In addition to the Roman Catholic Church, the United Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church USA, the Southern Baptist Convention, and the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church all offered similar rulings on the status of Mormonism.⁴

In the face of these doctrinal repudiations, the LDS Church has accelerated its efforts in the areas of interfaith outreach and cooperation.⁵ Coinciding with these activities, there have been serious attempts to more carefully address theological issues related to the rulings of these major denominations.

Notable among these is the fifteen-year Mormon-evangelical dialogue jointly led by Robert L. Millet and Richard J. Mouw. Among the recurrent themes in these dialogues has been the extent to which Mormonism does indeed diverge from theological positions affirmed by creedal Christianity.⁶ Latter-day Saint scholars have repeatedly found themselves responding to questions implying that Mormon ideas are too radical to be characterized as legitimately Christian. Importantly, these questions are not coming from strident anti-Mormon voices but from serious, well-respected, and friendly interlocutors.

This dynamic has led to more productive efforts to carefully explicate Mormon concepts such as grace, Atonement, revelation, and the Trinity. It has also pressed Mormons to more carefully consider questions regarding the sources of doctrinal authority and inconsistencies manifested in the historical record. On the other side, evangelical scholars have been led to reconsider characterizations of Mormonism within their communities. Furthermore, they have been exposed to the range of theological ideas within Mormonism and have recognized the more redemptive dimensions of Mormon thought. Gerald McDermott underscored this point in his book-length dialogue with Robert Millet. Regarding their discussion of grace, he states that “what I am now about to say may cause all of my evangelical friends to desert me, or think I have lost it. But I think we evangelicals have something to learn from our Mormon friends on this subject.” He goes on: “Perhaps we can learn from Mormons that we have wrongly separated faith from works, that we have created a false dichotomy between justification and sanctification, and that while we are saved from being justified by the law, nevertheless the law is still ‘holy, and just, and good.’”⁷

Earlier in 2004, Richard J. Mouw offered his famous “Tabernacle apology” to Latter-day Saints, saying that evangelicals have often “seriously misrepresented the beliefs and practices of the Mormon community.” Regarding the dynamics of the Mormon-evangelical dialogue, though Mouw confesses he hasn’t succeeded in convincing Mormons to embrace Calvinist Christianity, he does acknowledge that “they’ve been willing to hear me out. And sometimes—not always, but sometimes—they even sound as though they’re moving in the direction of some of the key convictions that are for me rooted in my Calvinism.”⁸ In the weeks following

the dialogue at Wheaton College in 2009, *Christianity Today* reported that “Mouw is not alone in perceiving that Millet and other ‘neo-orthodox’ thinkers at BYU have been migrating closer to belief in salvation by grace alone.”⁹ This is hardly a comfort for skeptics of the dialogue within the Latter-day Saint community. From its very beginnings, the effort has had to continually justify its value and demonstrate that its participants are not advocating a developmental view of doctrine.

Noteworthy, however, is the extent to which these concerns are nothing new and have come from both sides of the Mormon intellectual spectrum. Fifty years ago, Sterling McMurrin voiced similar questions regarding theological convergence with mainstream Christianity—and most especially in its more conservative forms. In his *Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (1965), McMurrin was unapologetic in his defense of Mormon heterodoxies. He was particularly fond of showcasing the more liberal strands in Mormon theology and believed them to possess “the authentic spirit of the Mormon religion.”¹⁰ In fact, McMurrin’s project was designed to call out for criticism precisely the theological tendencies that Mouw and Millet have welcomed and encouraged. Referring to these tendencies as the “old orthodoxy,” McMurrin worries that an emphasis on human depravity and helplessness could push Mormonism too close to the doctrine of original sin. The issue was so important to him that he believed how it was treated “may determine much of the character of Mormon theology in the future.”¹¹

Referring to these trends in Mormon thought as a kind of “Jansenist movement,” McMurrin maintained that “such negativism in the assessment of man, whether scriptural or otherwise, is a betrayal of the spirit and dominant character not only of the Mormon theology but also of the Mormon religion, which draws heavily on doctrinal foundations in supporting its practical affirmation of man and its positive moral ideal.”¹²

In this respect, McMurrin was prescient. Few would question that a theological pivot has occurred as it relates to questions of redemptive theology. At this point, the dispute surrounds the implications of this new orientation and the extent to which it is a form of revisionism. Though Millet agrees with McMurrin in identifying similar trends as a “movement,” it is one that is “in harmony with the teachings of the Book of Mormon and one that may be long overdue.”¹³ These include the need

to emphasize human helplessness in sin and thus the need for a robust theology of grace.

One can certainly contest McMurrin's characterizations, and there has been no shortage of critical responses.¹⁴ Nevertheless, it is a mistake to discount the direction in which he hoped to point the conversation in clarifying the relationship to mainstream Christianity. Though Latter-day Saints possess no obligation to the creedal tradition, they have not been anxious to connect themselves with explicitly heretical positions. Given the politics of interfaith dialogue, there are good reasons for this reluctance, but there are also important respects in which Mormonism resonates more strongly with heresiarchs like Pelagius or Arius than with Augustine or Luther.

With these considerations in mind, the second part of this essay will seek to clarify Mormonism's relationship with two momentous heresies, namely Pelagianism and Arianism. Both of these heresies dealt with critical areas in Christian self-understanding—grace and the Trinity—and have set the theological agenda for the past seventeen centuries.

PELAGIANISM: GRACE AND FREEDOM

McMurrin famously claimed that Mormonism is “essentially Pelagian in its theology” and demonstrates “a quite remarkable similarity to the Pelagian doctrines.”¹⁵ We begin here because Pelagianism is often viewed as the most pernicious of all the heresies in the Christian tradition. It is named after Pelagius, a fourth-century monk from Britain whose ideas were hotly contested in the churches of his day. Most notable among his detractors was Augustine, who succeeded in his effort to anathematize Pelagian teachings and whose ideas gave decisive shape to the direction of Christian thought. Augustine's accounts of sin, providence, and grace were developed and sharpened in response to Pelagius, who rejected original sin and argued that human beings naturally possess the freedom to choose between good and evil.

In his treatise “On the Possibility of Not Sinning,” Pelagius offers up a moral argument. If God commands the avoidance of sin, then the *ability* to do so must be present. Only an unjust God would command actions impossible to obey. Pelagius declares “how perverse it is to believe God

to be capable of something which not even the nature of mortals would respect.”¹⁶ His arguments intend to show both the inconsistency and ethical deficiencies that follow from accounts of human sinfulness as inevitable by necessity. If this were the case, he argues, human beings would be falsely secure in thinking it impossible for them to avoid sin. Given genuine choice, the human being “would have to exert himself to fulfill what he now knows to be possible” and would work “to achieve his purpose for the most part, even if not entirely.”¹⁷

Pelagius’s insistence on robust human freedom led to the accusation that he denied the fundamental role of divine grace in salvation. As a result, his works were condemned by the synod of Carthage in 418 and later at the Council of Ephesus in 431.¹⁸

A generation after Pelagius, another debate arose surrounding the teachings of John Cassian that came to be labeled “semi-Pelagianism.” In the attempt to reconcile the Augustine/Pelagius divide, Cassian argued that human freedom is indeed disabled through original sin and yet not entirely dead. Though human beings may freely *initiate* a turn toward God, he argues, the Christian life cannot be *sustained* without the ongoing cooperative grace of God. Though popular for a season, this more moderate position was eventually condemned by the Synod of Orange in 529.¹⁹

The debate was revitalized yet again during the Dutch Reformation through the writings of Jacob Arminius. Though schooled in Calvinism, Arminius found aspects of its anthropology thoroughly repugnant. He accepted a version of total depravity, but he also argued that the human will must be free to choose God. This led him to propose a restoration of human freedom to respond to the gift of salvation.

Predictably, this led to charges of Pelagianism and eventuated in the Synod of Dort (1618), which condemned the teachings of Arminius and his followers. Despite this ruling, the influence of Arminian ideas continued to spread and eventually made their way to America through John Wesley and Charles Grandison Finney—a contemporary of Joseph Smith. For traditional Calvinists, these positions remain unacceptable because “we can’t even believe until God in his grace and in his mercy first changes the disposition of our souls through his sovereign work of regeneration.”²⁰

This background leads us to a vital component in Arminian (and later Wesleyan) anthropology, namely the concept of *prevenient grace*. In order to rescue Christian anthropology from the menacing implications of total depravity, Arminius emphasized a form of grace that preceded the confession of faith. This grace is said to restore human freedom that was lost in the Fall such that human beings can choose God. As a conditional form of grace, it “creates both awareness and capacity, but neither is saving unless responded to or exercised by one’s grace-endowed freedom.”²¹ Grace thus occurs at two stages and is said to retain two necessary elements of Christian teaching: total depravity and free response to the gospel. Article VIII of Wesley’s Articles of Religion states that after the Fall “we have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God by Christ.”²² Though not a biblical term, prevenient grace is understood by its advocates as a “theological category developed to capture a central biblical motif.”²³

In the revivalist fervor of his youth, Joseph Smith was exposed to both Calvinist and Wesleyan perspectives. In a remark that portended things to come, he reported that during this critical period “my mind became somewhat partial to the Methodist sect” (Joseph Smith—History 1:8). Given the development of his revelations and reflections, it is apparent that the austerity of Calvinism was repellent to him and remained so from an early age.

The Book of Mormon expresses some key distinctions in these debates. It is closely aligned with positions advocated by other restorationist movements, particularly that of a universal atonement and its role in the restoration of human agency. Among the most important passages is that expressed through the prophet Lehi: “And the Messiah cometh in the fulness of time, that he may redeem the children of men from the fall. And because that they are redeemed from the fall they have become free forever, knowing good from evil; to act for themselves and not to be acted upon, save it be by the punishment of the law at the great and last day, according to the commandments which God hath given” (2 Nephi 2:26). Historically, Latter-day Saints have emphasized the central role of human agency in the cosmological order. Because agency is metaphysically necessary, grace has been seen as a supplement to, and reward for, freely chosen good works.

It is here that important questions emerge and the contest over Mormon anthropology is waged. In what sense is moral agency a *natural* part of human being? In what sense is this agency a gift? How does the restoration of agency in the Atonement work for Latter-day Saints? McMurrin is explicit in his view. “By the fall man gained the possibility of a moral life through the implementation of his freedom, and by the atonement he gained the possibility of salvation in eternal life through merit.”²⁴ This sounds very much like an expression of well-known passages in the Doctrine and Covenants: “Verily I say, men should be anxiously engaged in a good cause, and do many things of their own free will, and bring to pass much righteousness; for *the power is in them*, wherein they are agents unto themselves. And inasmuch as men do good they shall in nowise lose their reward” (D&C 58:27–28; emphasis added).

However, this passage can be taken in at least two very different ways. First, it could be understood as describing the power being “in them” as a necessary and constitutive feature of the human soul “all the way down;” or it could be read more specifically as describing a condition of grace brought about through the universal application of the Atonement.

Returning to prevenient grace, because it “precedes the free determination of the will,” it provides the condition for the possibility of a free response to God’s *saving* grace.²⁵ On this account, freedom is possible only because God acts upon an otherwise depraved and fallen soul. Human beings “are dead in trespasses and sins until the prevenient grace of God awakens and enables them to exercise a good will toward God in repentance and faith.”²⁶ Prevenient grace is not sufficient for salvation, but provides only a “grace-endowed freedom” that allows one to embrace God’s sanctifying grace.

Millet, in an effort to find common ground with his evangelical interlocutors, explicitly accepts prevenient grace as an acceptable Latter-day Saint theological category. Though prevenient grace is not found in Mormon discourse, Millet employs it in connection to Latter-day Saint categories and distinctions. “The effects of the Fall tend to entice humankind away from God, from godliness, and from an acceptance of the gospel of Jesus Christ. To counteract this influence, there are unconditional blessings and benefits—graces, *prevenient graces*, that flow from the Almighty.”²⁷ The first of

these he identifies as the “Light of Christ,” which is given to all human beings as a kind of “inner moral monitor” that leads them to the Christian gospel. The second of these benefits is the ability of human beings to choose between good and evil. On this account, the Atonement is understood to liberate humanity from the effects of the Fall and allow for a genuine kind of freedom, otherwise known as “libertarian free will.”²⁸

Importantly, however, there is a connotation traditionally associated with the term that is left unspecified in Millet’s writings. This is the extent to which prevenient grace is said to affect *individual* human capacities, particularly with regard to agency. More specifically, to what extent can prevenient grace be said to be *regenerative* for Mormons? Regeneration was clearly involved in the theologies of Arminius and Wesley, both of whom accepted the doctrine of total depravity and understood prevenient grace as regenerating a devastated human nature. Those who receive it are said to be taken from a state of total enslavement to sin to a state of freedom wherein one is able to choose the saving grace of Christ.²⁹ Because Millet rejects the doctrine of total depravity, he cannot accept Arminius’s and Wesley’s notion of prevenient grace whole cloth, or can he?³⁰ He does talk about grace as a “divine enabling power”: “The Lord agrees to do for us what we could never do for ourselves—to forgive our sins, to lift our burdens, to renew our souls and *recreate our nature*, to raise us from the dead and qualify us for glory hereafter.”³¹ So the interesting question here is the extent to which Millet’s anthropology allows for a nature that stands in need of regeneration and, if there is such a need, how this might affect other areas of the Mormon redemptive narrative.

On this latter point, McMurrin is emphatic. Though he does not reject regenerative grace by name, the implication is clear. He declares that “the release from the bad consequences of the fall is fully achieved by Christ’s sacrifice and the *individual soul* is unaffected, therefore, by Adam’s transgression.”³² As we have seen, McMurrin is most anxious to distance Mormon theology from views that connect the condition of human fall-*enness* with the need to re-create human nature: “The sacrifice of Christ immediately compensates for the act of Adam, and mankind, who had no part in the act, is free of its negative consequences.”³³

This approach hearkens back to the homilies of Brigham Young, who, in an 1882 Tabernacle address, stated that it has been “fully proved” that human beings “naturally love and admire righteousness, justice, and truth more than they do evil.” He goes so far as to explicitly refute a staple of biblical theology: “Paul says in his Epistle to the Corinthians, ‘But the natural man receiveth not the things of God,’ but I say it is the unnatural ‘man that receiveth not the things of God.’ . . . The natural man is of God. We are the natural sons and daughters of our natural parents, and spiritually we are the natural Children of the Father of light and natural heirs to his kingdom.”³⁴

President Young’s declarations notwithstanding, one of the most oft-quoted passages in the Book of Mormon comes from King Benjamin’s sermon in which he states that “the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam” (Mosiah 3:19). The 1985 edition of the Latter-day Saint scriptures cross-references this passage with 1 Corinthians 2:14. This is, of course, yet another example of the challenges involved in trying to connect and synthesize the seemingly disparate strands of Mormon thought; yet the implications are critical as they relate to theological discourse.

Millet understands his project as an attempt to provide an account of grace that is more consistent with the Mormon scriptural canon and which may take account of theological insights obtained through his engagement with evangelical Protestant theology. The implication has been the extension of Mormon thought in the direction of Arminian anthropology and away from the Pelagian sensibilities of McMurrin and others who understand the Mormon project as a radical departure from orthodox conceptions of sin, grace, and human freedom.

ARIANISM: THE BEGOTTEN SON

The Vatican’s ruling on Latter-day Saint baptisms raises a variety of intriguing questions related to theological boundary maintenance. Notable among these is the extent to which Mormon concepts of God depart from the language and intent of the Trinitarian language of Nicea. The issue that led to the creed involved the relationship between the Father

and Son. The Gospel of John opens as follows: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” In subsequent verses, the Word is described as being “made flesh” as “the only begotten of the Father” (John 1:1, 14).

Events that led to Nicea were ignited by a young Alexandrian named Arius, who openly challenged Bishop Alexander on the relationship between the Father and the Son. Arius and his followers interpreted the biblical language of John to mean that the Son, though unique, was a created being and thus subordinate to the Father. They describe him as “the perfect creature of God, but not as one of the creatures; offspring, but not as one of things begotten.”³⁵ Arius also relied heavily on biblical passages describing the Jesus as the “firstborn of every creature” (Colossians 1:15) and “firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:29). An important consideration for the Arian theologians was the preservation of the oneness and transcendence of the Father. God had to be separate from the world of change and becoming that was said to be inherent in the created order. To qualify this status would make the Father “composite and divisible and mutable and a body” and thus a reducible to a form of blasphemy.

Led by Alexander and later Athanasius, opponents of Arius argued that the divinity of Jesus Christ would be compromised by making the Son a creature. If the Son were not eternally of the same substance with the Father, they argued, he could not be truly divine; and only a divine being is able to save humanity from death and sin.

After lengthy deliberations, the Council of Nicea determined that the Son, though *begotten*, was not *created*. The creedal confession expresses this distinction as follows: “We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, *begotten, not made*, of one Being with the Father.”³⁶

The theological position of the creed revolved around the Greek term *homoousios*, which has often been translated as “of the same substance.” Contra the Arians, the creed employs this term precisely to express the oneness of God and the coeternal status of the Son with the Father. The Nicene position thus came to be articulated in the doctrine of three persons (*hypostases*) in one divine substance (*ousia*).³⁷

Arians preferred the weaker *homoiousios*, which means “of *similar* substance.” In 360, a “homoian creed” was formulated under the imperial leadership of Constantine’s son Constantius II that served as the official statement of orthodoxy for nearly twenty years before reverting back to the Nicene formula. It reads, “We believe in one God, the Father, Almighty, from whom are all things. And in the only-begotten Son of God, who was begotten from God before all ages and before all beginning.”³⁸

This intriguing and lesser-known part of this story involves an epic theological struggle in which the authoritative position shifts back and forth between variants of Arian and Nicene positions for nearly sixty years. Bishops and emperors alike contended over the correct formula until 381, when the matter was firmly settled at the First Council of Constantinople.

MORMONISM AND ARIANISM

Latter-day Saints are widely understood to embrace a form of Arianism in connection with the spirit birth of the Son. Church leadership made this point explicit in their 1916 authoritative document “The Father and the Son,” which explicitly identifies the Son as among the created spirit children of the Father. However, the document goes on to point out that “He is essentially greater than any or all others, by reason (1) of His seniority as the oldest or firstborn; (2) of His unique status in the flesh as the offspring of a mortal mother and of an immortal, or resurrected and glorified, Father; (3) of His selection and foreordination as the one and only Redeemer and Savior of the race; and (4) of His transcendent sinlessness.”³⁹

Thus Arianism and Mormonism share in the effort to maintain both a form of dependence and a unique status for the Son in relationship to the rest of creation. Beyond this, however, their differences quickly emerge. For Arians, affirming a created Son protects the uniqueness and sovereignty of the Father. This sovereignty was conceptualized within an account of creation *ex nihilo* of which the Son is a part. Though brought into being “before all ages,” the Son was, nonetheless, created from nothing and thus in a relation of complete ontological dependence. This position was chided by the Nicene camp as both offensive and unbiblical.

Latter-day Saint theology begins from a different set of initial conditions as seen through their rejection of creation *ex nihilo*. In one of Joseph Smith's key revelations, the Lord discloses not only that "I was in the beginning with the Father, and am the Firstborn," but that "ye were also in the beginning with the Father" (D&C 93:21, 23). All human souls are coeternal with the Father in the qualified sense that they share with the Son a form of everlasting existence. This shared ontology comes in the form of a more rudimentary and undeveloped state of existence prior to spirit birth known as "intelligence." A pivotal revelation to Joseph Smith in 1833 pronounces that intelligence "was not created or made, neither indeed can be" (D&C 93:29).

Thus, in a narrow sense, Mormonism can join orthodox Christianity in rejecting the Arian slogan "there was a time when He [the Son] was not." However, Mormonism diverges in the way it understands the eternal nature of the Son. Though it is central to Latter-day Saint belief that Jesus Christ is "the Eternal God," this does not necessarily imply that Jesus Christ has been *God* from the eternities.⁴⁰ In fact, if the Son is the firstborn of the spirit children, then his spirit had a beginning in time and thus cannot be eternal. Latter-day Saint writers have navigated these straits by describing the Son as an eternal *being*, though not eternal *as God*.

Robert Millet employs this distinction in *Claiming Christ*—his book-length dialogue with Gerald McDermott: "Jesus Christ is truly from everlasting to everlasting. He is, as stated on the title page of the Book of Mormon, 'The Eternal God.' He existed from eternity past, and he will exist into eternity future." Though he explicitly asserts no inconsistency between spirit birth and eternal divinity, he does go on to say that this relationship may serve as a kind of "blessed mystery" not unlike mainstream Christian responses to the Trinitarian relationship.⁴¹

McDermott, however, does not allow the issue to pass by without further notice. "It is not clear to me what Professor Millet means when he concludes that Jesus 'is the Eternal God.' . . . If Jesus was the eternal God, wouldn't that mean he was just that from before the beginning of time?"⁴² This point relies on a commonly held understanding of "eternal" as "everlasting."⁴³ McDermott would have done well to clarify this meaning because Millet's rejoinder is suggestive of alternative ways of applying this

term to the Son. These include etymological issues over the Greek *aeon* and the Hebrew *olam*, both of which can be translated as a finite epoch rather as everlastingness or even timelessness. Of course, these considerations take the debate in a new direction involving the equivocal use of theological concepts—no small issue in religious studies. However, for the purposes of this treatment, it is most useful to employ Joseph Smith’s straightforward description of the term in his 1840 statement: “Eternity means that which is without beginning or end.”⁴⁴

Finally, we must say a word or two about the concept of *adoptionism*. As we noted above, the common reading of Arianism involves God creating the Son *ex nihilo* “before all ages.” Adoptionism, by contrast, is the position that the Son *grew into* divinity at some point during his lifetime.⁴⁵ Traditional candidates for this divination event include Jesus’ baptism, resurrection, or ascension. The Mormon twist involves the event occurring in the premortal realm at some point after his spirit birth but before the creation of the world. The adoptionist dynamic plays a rather critical role in tying together the propositional triad we have been considering: (1) the *eternal nature* of the Son, (2) the *spirit birth* of the Son, and (3) the *premortals godhood* of the Son.⁴⁶

CONCLUSION

As Latter-day Saints extend their efforts to engage more deeply with the Christian community, the opportunities for respectful dialogue and scholarly exchange appear boundless. Furthermore, Mormonism is a theological free agent. It has the ability to find connections and resonance in new and unexpected places, and this includes positions among the traditional Christian heresies. As Joseph Smith famously said, “We should gather all the good and true principles in the world and treasure them up, or we shall not come out true ‘Mormons.’”⁴⁷

NOTES

1. Francis Cardinal George, “Catholics and Latter-day Saints: Partners in the Defense of Religious Freedom,” Brigham Young University forum address, February 23, 2010, 8, speeches.byu.edu.

2. Fr. Luis Ladaria, S.J., “The Question of the Validity of Baptism Conferred in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, August 1, 2001, 4. This publication is the official newspaper of the Holy See.
3. See Alonzo Gaskill, “*Maximus Nothus Decretum*: A Look at the Recent Catholic Declaration Regarding Latter-day Saint Baptisms,” *FARMS Review* 13, no. 2 (2001): 175–96.
4. See Presbyterian Church, USA, “Position Paper: Relations with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Its People” (Salt Lake City: Presbytery of Utah, January 11, 1995); E. Brian and Jennifer L. Hare-Diggs, “Sacramental Faithfulness: Guidelines for Receiving People from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,” General Board of Discipleship of The United Methodist Church, 2000; “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormonism): Beliefs and Practices,” Commission on Theology and Church Relations, the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. See also Kent P. Jackson, “Are Mormons Christians? Presbyterians, Mormons, and the Question of Religious Definitions,” *Nova Religio* 4, no. 1 (October 2000): 52–65.
5. In addition to Cardinal George, the Mormon Church has recently hosted a handful of evangelical leaders and provided them a public platform at Brigham Young University and the Salt Lake Tabernacle to address areas of common interest. Guests have included Al Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (Louisville, Kentucky); Richard Land, president of Southern Evangelical Seminary (Charlotte, North Carolina); and Ravi Zacharias, founder of Ravi Zacharias International Ministries.
6. See, for example, Kent Jackson, “Are Christians Christians?,” in *No Weapon Shall Prosper: New Light on Sensitive Issues*, ed. Robert L. Millet (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center), 43–59; Bruce D. Porter and Gerald McDermott, “Is Mormonism Christian?,” *First Things*, October 2008, 35–41; Richard Mouw, *Talking with Mormons: An Invitation to Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012); Richard Mouw, “The Possibility of Joseph Smith: Some Evangelical Probing,” in *Joseph Smith Jr.: Reappraisals after Two Centuries*, ed. Reid L. Neilson and Terryl L. Givens (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 189–99; Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *How Wide the Divide: A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007); Jan Shipps, *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years among the Mormons* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 335–57; and Terryl L. Givens, *Wrestling the*

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- Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: God, Cosmos, Humanity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).
7. Robert L. Millet and Gerald R. McDermott, *Claiming Christ: A Mormon-Evangelical Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 177.
 8. Richard Mouw, *Talking with Mormons: An Invitation to Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), x, 2.
 9. Richard N. Ostling, "Most Improbable Dialogue: Mormon Tabernacle Revival Service Is Latest Sign of Openness to Evangelicals," *Christianity Today*, October 30, 2009.
 10. Sterling McMurrin, *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1965), 111.
 11. McMurrin, *Theological Foundations*, 71.
 12. McMurrin, *Theological Foundations*, 67–68.
 13. Robert L. Millet, "Joseph Smith and Modern Mormonism: Orthodoxy, Neoorthodoxy, Tension, and Tradition," *BYU Studies* 29, no. 3 (1989): 66. See also O. Kendall White, *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy: A Crisis Theology* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987); Joseph M. Spencer, "Taking Grace for Granted: A Roundabout Review of Adam Miller's *Immanent Grace*," *Element: The Journal of the Society for Mormon Philosophy and Theology* 4, no. 2 (Fall 2008): 89–108; Blomberg and Robinson, *How Wide the Divide*; Robert L. Millet, *A Different Jesus? The Christ of the Latter-day Saints* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005).
 14. See the initial responses to *Theological Foundations* in *Dialogue, a Journal of Mormon Thought* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1966): 107–21.
 15. McMurrin, *Theological Foundations*, 82.
 16. Pelagius, "Letter to Demetrias," in *The Christianity Reader*, ed. Mary Gerhart and Fabian Udoh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 312.
 17. Pelagius, "Letter to Demetrias, 313.
 18. After being cleared of heresy in the Synod of Jerusalem (c. 412), Pelagius was later excommunicated by Pope Innocent I in 417. However, the condemnation was lifted and then reinstated by Pope Zosimus a year later.
 19. Protestant theologians have frequently portrayed the Eastern Orthodox tradition as embracing a form of semi-Pelagianism, though Orthodox theologians have consistently rejected this characterization.
 20. R. C. Sproul, "The Pelagian Captivity of the Church," *Modern Reformation* 10, no. 3 (May/June 2001): 25.

21. H. Ray Dunning, *Grace, Faith, and Holiness* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1988), 339.
22. The term “preventing” is used by Wesley and his contemporaries to communicate “preceding” or “prevenient” grace. On the Catholic side, the Council of Trent’s “Decree on Justification” states, “If any one saith, that without the prevenient inspiration of the Holy Ghost, and without his help, man can believe, hope, love, or be penitent as he ought, . . . let him be anathema.”
23. Dunning, *Grace*, 388.
24. McMurrin, *Theological Foundations*, 71–72.
25. *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone.
26. Roger E. Olson, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 159.
27. Robert L. Millet and Gerald McDermott, *Claiming Christ: A Mormon Evangelical Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 185; emphasis added.
28. Libertarian free will is the *ability to choose* between two or more actions. This stands in contrast to Augustine’s and Calvin’s compatibilist account in which freedom is understood as merely *acting in accord with one’s nature*.
29. See Roger E. Olsen, *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 137–50.
30. See Millet, *A Different Jesus?*, 82–88.
31. Millet, *A Different Jesus?*, 97; emphasis added.
32. McMurrin, *Theological Foundations*, 83; emphasis added.
33. McMurrin, *Theological Foundations*, 83. Douglas Davies joins McMurrin in arguing that Mormonism’s distinctive connection between the Fall of Adam and the Atonement is such that “human nature itself is not infected by any negative inevitability.” See his *An Introduction to Mormonism* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 189.
34. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints’ Book Depot, 1862), 9:305. It must be noted that Brigham Young made a number of statements related to human agency that gesture in different directions. See, e.g., *Journal of Discourses*, 2:134; 8:160; 12:323. Young’s considered view is difficult to determine, but his diverse thoughts are expressive of the challenge of reconciling agency in connection to the Fall.
35. David M. Gwynn, *Christianity in the Later Roman Empire: A Sourcebook* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 75.

36. As printed in the Lutheran Book of Worship and the Anglican Book of Common Prayer (emphasis added). The Nicene Creed was later modified by the Council of Constantinople in 381. Technically, the above is the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed.
37. More precisely, the Greek term *ousia* is often translated as “essence,” while *hypostasis* is often translated as “substance”—hence, three substances in one essence. In the Latin, however, the term *ousia* is translated into the term *substantia*, while *hypostasis* is translated as “person.” Hence, three persons in one substance. For more, see Pier Beatrice, “The Word ‘Homoousios’ from Hellenism to Christianity,” *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture* 71, no. 2 (June 2002): 243–72; T. E. Pollard, *Johannine Christology and the Early Church* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Lewis Ayers, *Nicea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); R. P. C. Hanson, *Searching for the Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy, 318–81* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006); and Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, vol. 1: *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971).
38. David M. Gwynn, *Christianity in the Later Roman Empire: A Sourcebook* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 75.
39. “The Father and the Son: A Doctrinal Exposition,” *Improvement Era*, August 1916, 934–42.
40. Scriptural and authoritative references to eternity of the Son include the title page to the Book of Mormon, which states that the book is intended to convince “Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD.” Though radical in its implications, the concept of intelligence is scarcely mentioned in Mormon scripture—and even these references leave much to the imagination. As a result, two schools of thought emerged regarding the nature of intelligence. The first approach employs the term in the plural and describes “intelligences” as possessing attributes such as consciousness and will. B. H. Roberts and Truman Madsen were well-known advocates of this position. See, for example, B. H. Roberts, *Seventy’s Course in Theology*, vol. 2, part 1, lesson 1; and Truman G. Madsen, *Eternal Man* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1966), chapters 1 and 2. The second position understands intelligence as undifferentiated such that individual identity had a beginning at spirit birth. Orson Pratt, Joseph Fielding Smith, and Bruce R. McConkie defended various forms of this approach. See, for example, Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Progress of Man: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*

- (Salt Lake City: Genealogical Society of Utah, 1936), chapter 1; and Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1966), 278.
41. Robert L. Millet and Gerald McDermott, *Claiming Christ: A Mormon-Evangelical Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 46. In his other book-length treatment, *A Different Jesus*—written primarily for an evangelical Christian audience—Millet dispenses with the issue in just a few sentences. See Millet, *A Different Jesus?*, 20. Andrew Skinner, Millet’s colleague at Brigham Young University, echoes these same ideas but is more confident in his assertion that there is “no contradiction when one understands the true nature and order of existence as revealed by enlightened prophets.” See “The Premortal Godhood of Christ: A Restoration Perspective,” in *Jesus Christ: Son of God, Savior*, ed. Paul H. Peterson, Gary L. Hatch, and Laura D. Card (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2002), 50–78.
 42. Millet and McDermott, *Claiming Christ*, 58.
 43. See, for example, Nicholas Wolterstorff, “God Everlasting,” in *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Steven M. Cahn and David Shatz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 181–203; Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970); and Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, “Eternity,” *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981): 429–58.
 44. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Grandin Books, 1991), 61. Another important construal of “eternal” in Mormon theology is found in Smith’s application of the term to mean simply another name for God. Thus, rather than understanding “eternal punishment” as a state of everlasting punishment, it is construed to mean merely another name for the punishment of God. “For, behold, I am endless, and the punishment which is given from my hand is endless punishment, for Endless is my name. Wherefore—eternal punishment is God’s punishment. Endless punishment is God’s punishment” (D&C 19:10–12).
 45. Adoptionism was debated and ultimately rejected in second-century synods of Antioch. Advocates of this position have differed regarding the decisive point at which Jesus was adopted as divine Son. Candidates include the baptism, resurrection, and the ascension.
 46. For more on Mormon Trinitarian thought, see Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, “Christ and the Trinity,” in *How Wide the Divide: A Mormon and An Evangelical in Conversation* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 77–110; David L. Paulsen, “Joseph Smith and the Social Trinity: An Analysis and Defense of the Social Model of the Godhead,” *Faith and Philosophy* 25,

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- no. 1 (2008): 47–74; Stephen T. Davis, “The Mormon Trinity and Other Trinities,” *Element* 2, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 1–14; Daniel C. Peterson, “Mormonism and the Trinity,” *Element* 3, nos. 1–2 (Spring/Fall 2007): 1–43; Blake T. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: Of God and Gods* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2008); Paul Owen, “The Doctrine of the Trinity in LDS and ‘Catholic’ Contexts,” *Element* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 59–84.
47. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 5:517.