

**Jesus and the Father. The Book of Mormon  
and the Early Nineteenth-Century Debates on the Trinity**

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**I. Introduction**

Among the more important debates that dominated the theological landscape in early nineteenth-century America were those among and between Trinitarians and anti-Trinitarians. It has long been noted that the Book of Mormon (BofM) takes positions on issues involved in these and other disputes. The BofM itself states that it will clarify the meanings of disputed and ambiguous Biblical passages by “make[ing] known [to its latter-day readers] the plain and precious things which have been taken away [from the Bible]” (1 Nephi 13:40). Accordingly, Mormon opponent Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) famously noted that the BofM contains “every error and almost every truth discussed in New York for the last ten years [i.e. the 1820s]” including the “trinity.” And modern scholar Dan Vogel finds “a rather sophisticated knowledge of nineteenth-century debates about the nature of the Christian godhead.”<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, how early Mormons may have interpreted the BofM is of historical interest because, as Kurt Widmer has observed, the book was the source of their “earliest theological convictions.”<sup>2</sup> Yet, despite the importance of the BofM doctrine of the Trinity, perhaps no passages in the BofM have met with more controversy. Indeed, the BofM has been interpreted by various scholars as endorsing such diverse teachings as Trinitarianism,<sup>3</sup> Sabellianism,<sup>4</sup> a combination of them,<sup>5</sup> the theology of later Mormonism,<sup>6</sup> and others.<sup>7</sup>

This study will first briefly review some early history that gave rise to the Christian orthodox doctrines of the Trinity, then summarize the spectrum of beliefs that existed in early nineteenth-century America with the BofM responses as possibly understood by the book's original audience, and finally examine some of the major suggested BofM interpretations. I shall argue that a case can reasonably be made for multiple BofM interpretations, none of which can conclusively be shown by scholarly means to be the author(s)' original intention.

## **II. Some ancient background on the doctrine of the Trinity**

During the first few centuries of the Christian Era, theologians struggled to understand the nature of Jesus and His relation to the Father. Not unexpectedly, the process included disputes over scriptural interpretation and philosophical ideas. The inherited scriptural problems were summarized by the Yale historian of Christianity, Jaroslav Pelikan (1923- ): "In the [early] Christian effort to provide biblical grounding [for the Jesus-Father relation]...we may discern at least four sets of...passages...; passages of adoption, which...implied that the status of God was conferred on the man Jesus Christ at his baptism or at his resurrection; passages of identity...; passages of distinction...; and passages of derivation, which...suggested that he [Jesus] 'came from' God and was in some sense less than God."<sup>8</sup> Examples of these four types of passages are: "Thou art [as of this moment] my beloved Son" (Mark 1:11); "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30); "I ascend unto my Father" (John 20:17); and "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (John 4:34), respectively. As we shall see, the concepts of Jesus' adoption by God, identity

with God, distinction from God, and derivation from God will figure importantly in the following discussion of the BofM.

Differing interpretations and emphases of these passages would contribute to several heresies on the way to a majority consensus favoring the orthodox doctrine termed *Trinitarianism*. Trinitarianism affirms that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are three distinct and equal “persons,” and yet there is only one God because the three share a single “substance” of Godhood. Some of the major heretical teachings took issue with a part(s) of the Trinitarian formula. *Sabellians*, after the third-century Roman Christian, Sabellius (d. c.260), who is known to us primarily from the writings of opponents, are said to have held that “the same one [person] is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” who sequentially gave the Old Testament Law as Father, then became incarnate as Son, and then visited the apostles as Holy Spirit.<sup>9</sup> Sabellianism is also known as *modalism*. In the early nineteenth-century, some theologians who emphasized the unity of the Godhead were accused by their opponents of leaning toward Sabellianism.

A second heretical group, the *Subordinationists*, argued that the Son is inferior to the Father.<sup>10</sup> There are many types of subordinationism; their distinctions may be blurred, and more than one may apply to a given set of beliefs. *Ontological* subordinationism holds that the *being* of the Father as God is unique to Himself. Often the being of God is contrasted to that of the creation (creatures). Ontological subordinationists may view the Son as no more than a human or as a being between humans and God. *Derivative* subordinationists believe that the Son is inferior to the Father because He was derived (generated, begotten) from the Father. Contrariwise, in the minds of many ancient orthodox theologians, a belief in the generation of

the Son did not automatically imply subordination. In *official* subordinationism the Father directs the Son.

Important early Christian types of ontological subordinationism were *adoptionism* and *Arianism*. Adoptionism is associated with the third-century Christian bishop, Paul of Samosata (c. 260), who held that Mary “gave birth to a [created] man like us.” who was anointed by the Spirit and became the Son of God by adoption at His baptism.<sup>11</sup> A minority of early nineteenth-century Unitarians, the humanitarians, believed that Jesus was human. Arias (c. 256-336), a fourth-century Alexandrian presbyter, taught that there is only “one God [the Father]” who “begot his only begotten Son.” Therefore, “Christ is not true God.” Arias also reportedly taught that the Son was “made out of nothing [i.e., he is a creature]” and “once He was not.”<sup>12</sup> Arianism subsequently became a term attached by opponents to doctrines that placed the status of the Son between the Father and humans, including those of many early nineteenth-century Unitarians and “Christians.”

A third heresy, *tritheism*, holds that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are three entirely separate Gods. Within the orthodox tradition, some theologians over the centuries have tried to explain the unity of the persons in the Trinity by emphasizing their similarity to human societies (the “social analogy”). To their critics, these analogies have seemed to approach tritheism. Social analogies are often traced to the fourth-century Cappadocian Fathers, especially Gregory of Nyssa (c.330-c.395), who characterized the Trinity as being a hierarchy in their “operations:” “Every operation which extends from God to the Creation...has its origin from the Father, and proceeds through the Son, and is perfected in the Holy Spirit.”<sup>13</sup>

Several early Christian theologians contributed important theological terms and concepts to the debates on the Trinity. In the Latin West, Tertullian (c.160-c.230), who was primarily concerned with the successes of Sabellianism and therefore wished to emphasize the distinctions in the Godhead, is credited with being the first to use the term *Trinity*. Tertullian's ideas of one "*substance*" and three "*persons*" to characterize the Trinity "would determine Western Trinitarian theology for centuries."<sup>14</sup> In the Greek East, the Cappadocian Fathers spoke of God as three *hypostases* and one *ousia*, roughly equivalent to the terms *persons* and *substance* in the Latin West.<sup>15</sup> The meanings of these terms had and would subsequently evoke considerable discussion and debate.<sup>16</sup>

Origin (185-c.254) was the brilliant thinker of third century Greek Eastern Christianity whose "imprint was never erased from Eastern theology."<sup>17</sup> However, a number of scholars have pointed out that ambiguities in Origin's theology helped set the stage for subsequent disputes. Origin taught that the Son is "eternally [i.e., "transcending all time, all ages, and all eternity"] generated" from the Father and not "procreated by the Father out of things non-existent."<sup>18</sup> Some of Origin's successors used this teaching to emphasize the similarity of the Father and Son while others interpreted the doctrine as a form of derivative subordinationism. Origin used the term *homoousius* [of the same *ousia* (*substance*)] to define the relation between the Father and the Son although the precise meaning of the term would also continue to be debated.<sup>19</sup>

Not surprisingly then, by the early fourth-century there were considerable differences of opinion regarding the relation of the Father and Son: "some prefer language that emphasizes the *sameness* of the Father and

Son,...while others emphasize *diversity* between the two...frequently of a hierarchical nature [the Son being]... subordinate.”<sup>20</sup> To clarify the orthodox positions, church councils were convened, resulting in the adoption of the “Ecumenical Creeds” as the standards of faith. The first of these, the Apostles Creed (second century with subsequent modifications) had already been formulated and begins: “I believe in GOD the FATHER Almighty; Maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ, His only [“begotten” added later] Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary....”<sup>21</sup>

The Council of Nicea (325), convened to address the Arian controversy, expanded on the Apostles Creed to define Arias’s ontological subordinationism as heresy. However, unfortunately, it appears that there are no surviving records of the debates at Nicea. Thus the Council’s positions on such important issues as derivative subordinationism and the meaning of *homoousius* have remained matters of debate. The Creed was modified at the Council of Constantinople in 381. The Nicene Creed begins [some additions of 381 in italics]: “We believe in one God, the FATHER Almighty...And in one Lord JESUS CHRIST, the *only begotten* Son of God, begotten of the Father *before all worlds*...of the essence [ousia] of the Father... very God of very God...begotten, not made, being of one substance [homoousius] with the Father...”<sup>22</sup>

In the Greek East, Athanasius (c.296-373) and the Cappodocians defended and extended the Nicene orthodoxy against the Arians. Their task was to define the doctrine of *homoousius* in such a way that the full deity of the Son was preserved against the Arians and His distinction from the Father was maintained against the Sabellians. Athanasius argued that the

Son “is very God, existing one in essence (*homoousius*) with the very Father...[and shares all Godly attributes including] eternal, immortal, powerful, light, King, Sovereign, God, Lord, Creator, and Maker.”<sup>23</sup>

In the Latin West, the great Church doctor, Augustine (354-430), left no question regarding his view of the relation of Father and Son. The Son is “consubstantial [of one and the *same* substance],” “equal” and “co-eternal” with the Father.<sup>24</sup> Augustine stressed the unity of the Trinity because God is not “to be thought triple.”<sup>25</sup> While maintaining that there are distinctions in the Godhead, Augustine believed that the term “person” could be “understood only in a mystery” and the word had been used because of the lack of a more suitable one.<sup>26</sup> After Augustine, Bothius (c.480-524) would define “person” as “the individual substance of a rational nature,” following which, according to Justo Gonzalez, “Some of the most outstanding medieval theologians devoted long pages to clarify the meaning of this definition.”<sup>27</sup>

The Athanasian Creed (sixth-century), generally regarded as strongly influenced by Augustine, states in part, “...we worship one God in Trinity [three persons], and Trinity in Unity [one God]; Neither confounding the Persons [the error of Sabellianism]: nor dividing the Substance [the error of tritheism]. For there is one Person of the Father; another of the Son...the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one: the Glory equal, the Majesty coeternal. Such as the Father is: such is the Son...The Son is of the Father alone: not made, nor created: but begotten.”<sup>28</sup>

Thus, the disputes over the Trinity left a number of questions that would arise again in early nineteenth-century America. Is the doctrine of the eternal generation of the Son compatible with the equality of the Father and

Son, or does it commit one to subordinationism? Does the doctrine of three persons imply tritheism? Does the doctrine of *homoousius* imply Sabellianism, an insistence on a single person? And isn't the definition of God as a "trinity in unity" a contradiction? As the Russian Orthodox historian of Trinitarianism, Boris Bobrinskoy, has noted: "Modern Trinitarian thought will always be tempted to fluctuate between Modalism [Sabellianism] and Tritheism."<sup>29</sup>

Before leaving this section, an additional pertinent controversy, which arose over the nature of Jesus Himself, should be mentioned. Was Jesus a divine being, a human, or both? And if both, was He one person or two? The Council of Chalcedon (451) attempted to resolve these questions by concluding that Jesus was composed of both a divine nature and a human nature combined somehow in a mysterious manner so that "the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union... [and yet somehow Jesus was] not parted or divided into two persons..."<sup>30</sup>

### **III. Some opinions on the Trinity in early nineteenth-century America**

In interpreting the literature involved in the Christian controversies of the early nineteenth-century, as that of other times, it is important to keep in mind that the arguments chosen are often based on what Mark Thomas has termed "political theology" (i.e., "theology" primarily aimed at advancing one's own belief and group in debates with opponents), a concept that has important implications for assessing the reliability of theological statements.<sup>31</sup> Generally reliable sources regarding the beliefs of a particular group are their own accepted creeds and confessions. Potentially less reliable are the characterizations of opponents and the responses to these. For

example, a favored technique has been to characterize an opponent as reproducing a well-established heresy. In response, a group might tend to defend themselves by overemphasizing certain aspects of their own belief thus giving an unbalanced presentation of their true views.

Beliefs regarding the Trinity in early nineteenth-century America were diverse. A major debate was between the Trinitarians such as the Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Methodists, who accepted the early Christian Creeds and their later denominational Confessions, and the anti-Trinitarians, who did not. The major accepted confessions for American Christian denominations generally reflected the Ecumenical Creeds in relation to the Trinity. For example, the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England (1571, [American Revision, 1801]) states that “There is but one living and true God...And in unity of this Godhead there be three Persons, of one substance, power and eternity...The Son...begotten from everlasting of the Father, the very and eternal God, and of one substance with the Father...” Likewise the Calvinistic Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) noted that “There is but one only living and true God...In the unity of the godhead there be three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity...The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father...” And the Methodist Articles of Religion (1784) is substantially the same as the Thirty-Nine Articles with the interesting exception that “begotten from everlasting of the Father” is deleted.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, as we shall see, many early American Methodists defended the doctrine of eternal generation.

The early nineteenth-century New York Trinitarian, Samuel Luckey, included “*Socinians*” (Unitarians) and “*Christians*” (a variety of Arians)

among his major anti-Trinitarian opponents.<sup>33</sup> In the United States, Unitarianism emerged as a liberal movement within New England Congregationalism. Unitarians, who were well educated, found Trinitarianism unscriptural and irrational, and most of them replaced it with a form of Arian ontological subordinationism. The self-styled American “Christian” movement, which began at the turn of the nineteenth-century, accepted only the Bible as the rule of faith and practice. Their Northeastern origins were traced by David Millard (1894-1873), the first “Christian” minister ordained in New York, to movements initiated by New England Baptists Abner Jones (1772-1841) and Elias Smith.<sup>34</sup> “Christians” also could not find Trinitarianism in the scriptures and accepted an Arian theology as well. “Christians” were influential in New York, which, by the early 1820s, contained over 75 “Christian” ministers and had become the new center of the Northeastern “Christian” movement.<sup>35</sup> Alarmed Trinitarians such as Luckey responded with publications, having received, as Luckey says, “many solicitations from friends...to publish something on the subject of the Trinity [in response to the ‘Christians’].”<sup>36</sup>

The anti-Trinitarians attacked their opponents on the grounds that Trinitarian belief is “one of the corruptions of Christianity.”<sup>37</sup> In response many Trinitarians defended the traditional terminology and interpretations of the ancient creeds and denominational confessions and sometimes recapitulated them in even more modern formulations such as the *Creed of the Theological School at Andover*: “that in the Godhead are three *persons*, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and that these three are One God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.”<sup>38</sup> In this paper hereafter, those early nineteenth-century Trinitarians who defended the traditional ideas of

three “persons,” the eternal generation of the Son, and the title “Son” for the second person in the Godhead will be termed *traditional* Trinitarians.

But other Trinitarians took a different path that placed them in a more favorable position to defend themselves against their anti-Trinitarian opponents. Historian of Trinitarian doctrine, Levi L. Paine (1832-1902), termed this novel and *alternative* Trinitarian group the *New England* Trinitarians, although their ideas were not confined to New England or the United States. Paine traced the doctrines in America to two Congregationalists: Massachusetts minister Nathaniel Emmons (1745-1840) and Moses Stuart (1780-1852) of Andover Theological Seminary.<sup>39</sup> Similar doctrines were put forth by the Methodist Adam Clarke and others in Europe.<sup>40</sup> The following sections will briefly examine (1) the most important Trinitarian/anti-Trinitarian issue, the status of the Son, (2) three of the more important disputes between the traditional and the alternative Trinitarians, and (3) how the BofM’s initial readers may have interpreted the book’s responses to these disputes.

### ***The key Trinitarian/anti-Trinitarian issue: the deity of the Son***

Trinitarian Samuel Luckey emphasized that the most important issue with the anti-Trinitarians was the nature of Jesus, for “The DEITY of the Son will consequently be the only thing of importance to be maintained, as the whole [Trinitarian] controversy will turn upon *defending* or *not* defending this point.”<sup>41</sup> Trinitarians believed that Jesus in his divine nature is fully God, one of the three “persons” in the Godhead, and one in “substance” with the Father. In short, Jesus is “*the Eternal God.*”<sup>42</sup> Conversely, Unitarians “believed in the doctrine of God’s UNITY” defined as “one being [the

Father], one mind, one person....”<sup>43</sup> Unitarian James Yates distinguished two groups among his colleagues: “Unitarians differ among themselves concerning the Miraculous Conception and Pre-existence of Christ, some rejecting [humanitarians], and others believing [Arians] these tenets, yet *they all deny that he was the Eternal God*” but rather “inferior and subordinate to the Father” and “a distinct being from him.”<sup>44</sup> Like most Unitarians, the “Christians” were also Arians. New York “Christian” minister David Millard noted: “they [“Christians”] are not Trinitarians, averring that they can neither find the word nor the doctrine in the Bible...[and] are not Socinians or Humanitarians. Their prevailing belief is that Jesus Christ existed with the Father before all worlds, and is therefore a Divine Saviour...Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God...[but there] is *one* Lord [the Father], and purely *one*.”<sup>45</sup>

In this dispute, the BofM leaves no question regarding its position. From the title page onward, “JESUS is...the ETERNAL GOD.”

***Traditional Trinitarian/alternative Trinitarian issue 1:***

***Are there three persons in the Godhead?***

All agreed on the Biblical doctrine of the unity of God (Deuteronomy 6:4), for as Timothy Dwight (1752-1817), president of Yale, noted: “That there is but one God, is a doctrine acknowledged in this country by every man.”<sup>46</sup> Therefore anti-Trinitarians focused on the doctrine of three persons as logically incompatible with the notion of a single God. Unitarian Andrews Norton (1786-1853) characterized the Trinitarian belief “that there are three Gods...[with] *three equal divine mind[s]*... and that there is but one God” as “essentially incredible.”<sup>47</sup> And Unitarian William Channing (1780-

1842) added: “From the many [Biblical] passages which treat of God, we ask for one, one only, in which we are told that He is a threefold being, or that He is three persons, or that He is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.”<sup>48</sup>

In their responses many traditional Trinitarians retained something like Boethius’s definition of “person.”<sup>49</sup> and tried their best to point out that God is not three and one “*in the same sense*.”<sup>50</sup> But alternative Trinitarians rejected both the word and concept of “persons.” Emmons noted that “it is very immaterial, whether we use the name person, or any other name...there is no word, in any language, which can convey a precise idea of this *incomprehensible distinction* in the divine nature...”<sup>51</sup> And Stuart agreed: “We profess to use it [the term “persons”], merely from the poverty of language; merely to designate our belief of a real *distinction* in the godhead; and NOT to describe independent, conscious beings...”<sup>52</sup> Other alternative Trinitarians replaced the term “persons” with “offices” or “attributes,” or “relations.”<sup>53</sup>

Traditional Trinitarians were particularly hostile to the idea of replacing “persons” with other terms, which they viewed as one step closer to Sabellianism, the doctrine that there is only one person in the Trinity. Methodist traditional Trinitarian Elijah Bailey criticized the alternative Trinitarians for being “over-zealous to defend the doctrine of the Trinity [against the anti-Trinitarians]” in teaching a Trinity of “offices” rather than “persons.”<sup>54</sup> He accused his colleagues of “falling into” ancient heresies “under the *name* and cover of Trinitarianism” in failing to “keep up a clear distinction, between the Father and the Son in point of *personality* [persons].”<sup>55</sup> Likewise, traditional Trinitarian Samuel Luckey observed that: “I have heard those who aim at supporting the truth [Trinitarianism], in

order to compliment a vociferation against the term *persons* [by the anti-Trinitarians] use that of *offices*—which is pure Sabelianism.”<sup>56</sup>

The author(s) of the BofM seem to take much less interest in exploring these subtle Trinitarian disputes than in establishing the nature and deity of Jesus. The book does not use the terms “persons,” “Being,” “distinctions,” “office,” “mode,” or “relation.”

### ***Traditional Trinitarian/alternative Trinitarian issue 2:***

#### ***In what sense is Jesus the Son of God?***

The scriptural doctrine that Jesus is the “only Begotten Son” (John 3:16) of the Father was universally accepted. Anti-Trinitarians pointed out that the Trinitarian doctrine of the equality of the Son and Father seems incompatible with the title “Son” for the second “person” in the Godhead and with the idea of “eternal generation,” both of which imply derivation and inferiority. “Christian” David Millard asked: “Can the Son be *begotten*, if [He is a] self-existent [God like the Father]?”<sup>57</sup>

In their defense of the “Deity of the Son,” alternative Trinitarians agreed with the anti-Trinitarians that the title “Son” and the doctrine of eternal generation implied derivative subordinationism and rejected both. Emmons noted that “we feel constrained to reject the eternal *generation* of the Son” because the doctrine “sets the Son as far below the Father.”<sup>58</sup> Likewise, Stuart insisted that “Derivation [of the Son] in any shape...[including] generation...appears essentially incompatible with proper divinity.”<sup>59</sup> And Methodist Adam Clarke: “if Christ be the Son of God, as to his *divine* nature, then the *Father* is of necessity *prior*, consequently *superior*, to him.” Therefore, “the doctrine of the *eternal Sonship*

of Christ is...anti-scriptural, and highly dangerous.”<sup>60</sup> And if it no longer made sense to speak of the “Son” in describing Jesus’ divine nature, then how is Jesus the “only Begotten Son”? According to Emmons: “The second Person assumes the name of Son and word, by virtue of his incarnation, and mediatorial conduct”; and to Stuart: “Christ is called the Son of God because, in respect to his human nature, he is derived from God.”<sup>61</sup>

Traditional Trinitarians such as Bailey found it “most astonishing and mysterious” that “many professing Trinitarians of the present day” would teach a “modern kind of Trinitarianism” that denies “that the Son proceeded [was generated] from the Father...a doctrine [eternal generation] which [they say] cannot be defended by scripture. They contend that Jesus Christ is not the Son of God, in his divine nature, but in his human nature.”<sup>62</sup> Bailey accused his opponents of teaching “Arianism,” reasoning that denial of eternal generation implied that the Son did not share in the “substance” of the Father. Interestingly, the alternative Trinitarians rendered a similar judgment against traditional Trinitarians, whom they characterized as believing in eternal generation and derivative subordinationism, for not making “the Son equal with the Father.”<sup>63</sup>

The BofM would probably have been initially interpreted as siding with the alternative Trinitarians in this dispute. The book does not mention “eternal generation.” But it does emphasize that Jesus’ divine nature “was, and is from all eternity to all eternity” (Mosiah 3:5). In addition, the title “Son of God” seems to be associated with the incarnation: “because he [the divine nature of Jesus] dwelleth in flesh he shall be called the Son of God. (Mosiah 15:2) and “a virgin...[shall] bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God.” (Alma 7:10).

***Traditional Trinitarian/alternative-Trinitarian issue 3:***

***How is Jesus one with the Father?***

Bailey noted that “no professed Christians” deny the “distinction” of the Father and Son “but the [nature of their] *union*, they strenuously contest.”<sup>64</sup> If the divine nature of Jesus was derived from the Father by eternal generation, then it could be argued, as it was anciently, that the Son shared in the Father’s unique “substance” of Godhood. But if eternal generation is denied and the equality and eternity of the divine nature of Jesus affirmed, alternative Trinitarians seemed to leave themselves even more open to the anti-Trinitarian charge of the heresy of di- or tritheism, for “if Christ is not a *dependent* [generated] being, are there not two co-ordinate Gods?”<sup>65</sup> In response, alternative Trinitarians had no choice in defending the deity of Jesus’ divine nature but to stress the eternal unity of the Father and the divine nature of Jesus. In doing so, as we have seen, they also tended to minimize the distinctions between the Father and Son. According to Emmons “the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost...are one self existent, independent, eternal *Being*.”<sup>66</sup> This unity of Being made it possible to speak of Jesus’ divine nature as “the *Supreme God*” or “the Eternal Father.”<sup>67</sup>

This development distressed the traditional Trinitarians who felt that the over-emphasis on divine unity and under-emphasis on the three “persons” was leading to Sabellianism. Traditional Trinitarian Elijah Bailey criticized his Trinitarian colleagues who were speaking of the Trinity as “[a] being...[rather than a] Trinity of persons,” a teaching which Bailey interpreted as “a species” of Sabellianism among Trinitarians who Bailey characterized as teaching “that Jesus Christ is the Eternal Father, and that

the Father and the Son, are one without distinction.”<sup>68</sup> While this charge of believing in no distinctions was made by anti-Trinitarians and traditional Trinitarians alike,<sup>69</sup> the extent to which this doctrine was actually held by any alternative Trinitarians is questionable. It was certainly not the position of the major leaders of the movement such as Emmons, Stuart, Clarke, and Wardlaw.

An important proof text in the Trinitarian debates was Isaiah 9:6 (2Nephi 19:6): “For unto us a child is born...and his name shall be called...The mighty God, The everlasting Father...” This was frequently quoted by Trinitarians as evidence that Jesus is God. But the designation “everlasting [eternal] Father” was problematic for traditional Trinitarians. According to Presbyterian evangelist, Charles Finney (1792-1875), traditional Trinitarians carefully distinguished between a “*common or collective name*...which would be given to each and either of the three persons indiscriminately” [for example, “God”] and “*a singular name, or appellation peculiar to [each person],*” [for example “Father, Son or Word, and Holy Ghost”].<sup>70</sup> Thus, for traditional Trinitarians to call the Son “The Father” would suggest “confounding the persons;” and, therefore, there was no “propriety of calling the Father, Son, or the Son, Father, in reference to the doctrine of the Trinity.”<sup>71</sup> When quoting Isaiah 9:6, traditional Trinitarians carefully distinguished the persons in the Godhead by either exclusively emphasizing “The mighty God” or defining “The Everlasting (or Eternal) Father” as a *singular* name for the Son emphasizing “the eternity of his being,” “paternal character in the providence of all his works,” and/or “Creator of the universe.”<sup>72</sup> Conversely, alternative Trinitarians used this passage to defend “the Deity of the Son” by emphasizing His unity, in His

divine nature, with the Father. As Bailey noted: “They [alternative Trinitarians] contend that Jesus Christ [in his divine nature] is [one in being with] the Eternal Father...The scriptures usually cited in support of this doctrine, are found in Isaiah, chapter 9, verse 6.”<sup>73</sup> In addition to teaching that Jesus is the Eternal Father, some alternative Trinitarians also referred to Jesus as both Father and Son: “He [Jesus] is the Father; he is the Son [see the probable meaning of “Son” above].”<sup>74</sup>

Its initial readers likely again interpreted the BofM as leaning to the alternative Trinitarian position. Jesus’ divine nature is “without beginning of days or end of years” (Alma 13:9). In addition, the BofM’s usage of “the Eternal Father” (1 Nephi 11:21, 13:40, Alma 11:39) and “the Father and the Son” (Mosiah 15:2, Ether 3:14) as names for Jesus would have been reminiscent of the alternative Trinitarianian usage.

Before concluding this section, it is important to note that the alternative Trinitarians did not see themselves as teaching ancient heresies. Traditional Trinitarian Bailey noted that “They [alternative Trinitarians] make much pretension to orthodoxy...[as taught] by the Nicean Council, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>75</sup> And historian of Trinitarian doctrine Levi L. Paine held that: “neither [alternative Trinitarians Nathaniel] Emmons nor [Moses] Stuart was conscious of any Sabellianizing tendency...[rather they and their theological descendents felt that] New England [i.e. alternative] Trinitarianism is a lineal descendant of Athanasius and the Nicene creed....”<sup>76</sup> For replacing “persons” with “distinctions” by alternate Trinitarians is not to teach that there is only one person, and rejecting “eternal generation,” which implied to them subordinationism, is hardly Arianism, the doctrine that the Jesus is more than a man but less than the

Father. The real early nineteenth-century “Arians” were among the anti-Trinitarians, and Sabellianism as an official doctrine would not emerge until the Oneness Pentecostals a century later.

#### **IV. What is the Book of Mormon doctrine of the Trinity?**

The BofM contains a number of passages reminiscent of the Biblical passages of adoption, identity, distinction, and derivation, suggesting the possibility of multiple interpretations for the relation of Jesus to the Father. For example, see 3 Nephi 11: 7 (compare Matthew 3:17, John 12:20); 3 Nephi 11:27, 36b (compare John 17:22); 3 Nephi 11:25, 32b, 35, 36a (compare 1 John 5:7); and 3 Nephi 11:11, 32a (compare John 18:11, Luke 22:42, John 7:16), respectively. Certainly one of the greatest, if not the very greatest, problem in defining the BofM doctrine of the Trinity is determining whether the passages that equate Jesus with “the Eternal Father” (1 Nephi 11:21, 1 Nephi 13:40, Alma 11:39) and with “the Father and the Son” (Mosiah 15:2, Ether 3:14) should be interpreted as passages of identity or distinction. The following sections will present some observations on the most important suggested interpretations of the BofM.

#### ***Can the Book of Mormon be reasonably interpreted as endorsing Trinitarianism?***

Thomas Alexander has interpreted BofM theology as “essentially Trinitarian,” and Mark Thomas has interpreted it as reproducing “Trinitarian formulas, theological discussions, and concepts throughout.”<sup>77</sup> That at least some in the early nineteenth-century also read the BofM as Trinitarian is supported by the 1832 Pennsylvanian publication, *The Herald*

of *Gospel Truth*, and *Watchman of Liberty*, that concluded after a review of the BofM that “The *trinity*, the doctrine of all doctrines most essential to the [Christian] creeds—this too, is a doctrine of Mormonism...They [Mormons] are...orthodox in their ideas [of the Trinity].”<sup>78</sup> Although some caution in interpretation is indicated because a Unitarian wrote the review, the author clearly associates the BofM with his Trinitarian opponents and with the orthodox Ecumenical Christian Creeds. The Community of Christ currently places a Trinitarian interpretation on the BofM.<sup>79</sup> Also, the BofM reproduces the New Testament passage “entitled to hold the first place,”<sup>80</sup> which was emphasized by early nineteenth-century Trinitarians in support of their position against anti-Trinitarians: “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one” (1 John 5:7; also see 3 Nephi 11:32).<sup>81</sup>

However, one of the problems for those advocating a Trinitarian interpretation is that the BofM does not include such basic Christian creedal terms as “substance” and “person.” This forces the student who wishes to argue for a Trinitarian interpretation to read these into the BofM. Kurt Widmer and Mark Thomas have attempted to explain this deficiency by postulating that the BofM reflects an unsophisticated “layman’s Trinitarianism” or a “vague” Trinitarianism.<sup>82</sup> Alternatively, one might propose that the BofM author(s) is more interested in arguing against the anti-Trinitarians than in deciding the subtleties within Trinitarianism. In this instance, like early nineteenth-century Trinitarians, the primary focus of the BofM author(s) would be to demonstrate the deity of the Son. And as with early nineteenth-century Trinitarians, from the title page of the BofM onward it is clear that “JESUS is...the ETERNAL GOD.”

***Can the Book of Mormon be reasonably interpreted  
as endorsing Sabellianism?***

Several scholars have argued that the BofM doctrine of the Trinity is Sabellian, interpreting the Father and the Son as the same person.<sup>83</sup> The obvious strength of this approach is that it interprets the Jesus-as-Father passages as straightforward passages of identity. The most eloquent exponent of the Sabellian interpretation of the Jesus as Father passages is Dan Vogel. In his writings Vogel has concluded that (1) the doctrine of Sabellianism was endorsed by some in the early nineteenth-century, (2) Sabellianism was the theology of very early Mormonism, and (3) the primary intention of the BofM author(s) was a Sabellian conception of the Trinity.<sup>84</sup> While Vogel has made many important contributions to the study of early Mormonism, I believe that his conclusions in the area under consideration are questionable.

As evidence for the first conclusion, Vogel has relied on an attack directed against Trinitarians by the “Christian” apologist, David Millard: “A great part of Trinitarians [argue]...that one God only acts in three distinct offices. They sometimes indeed call these *persons*, as they say for want of a better *term*, but when confuted upon the ground of *three persons*, they immediately assert that God acts in three *offices*, which is direct Sabellianism. It is therefore worthy of remark, how near many Trinitarians approach to the old doctrine of *Sabellianism*.”<sup>85</sup> But Millard, writing in the 1820s, is clearly differentiating between the “old [ancient] doctrine of Sabellianism” and that taught by some contemporary Trinitarians who were “approaching” the heresy. While Millard does not specifically tell us his target, his arguments are essentially identical to those of traditional Trinitarians Elijah Bailey and

Samuel Luckey, mentioned above, against the alternative Trinitarians, a group that would hardly classify their doctrines as a form of Sabellianism.

For evidence supporting Sabellianism as a theology of early Mormonism, Vogel has used a quotation from Lucy Mack Smith's history and a discussion between a "Christian" and an early Mormon published in the weekly "Christian" periodical, the *Christian Palladium* (1837). In relation to the BofM, Lucy Mack Smith, who is writing retrospectively and whose work was published in 1853, observed that "the Methodists...rage, for they worship a God without body or parts, and they know that our faith comes in contact with this principle." But Smith's meaning is at best unclear. She may be referring to the appearance of the pre-incarnation divine nature of the Son as a spirit "body" in human form in the BofM (Ether 3:16). Or she may be referring to Joseph Smith's description of the appearance of the Father and Son in human form, which was ridiculed by a "Methodist preacher" (Pearl of Great Price, Joseph Smith History, 1:17,21). Or she may be referring to the doctrine later taught by Joseph Smith that both "the Father" and "the Son" have "a body of flesh and bones" (D&C 130:22), a possibility admitted by Vogel himself. Vogel ingeniously argues that the most likely interpretation of Smith implies an early Mormon Sabellian doctrine, i.e., "Jesus is God the Father and...after the resurrection, [He] is a corporeal being."<sup>86</sup> Given the information presented here and below, Vogel's interpretation, while not absolutely ruled out, seems unlikely.

Furthermore, Vogel notes that the *Christian Palladium* "commented on the Book of Mormon's unorthodox view of God."<sup>87</sup> Vogel refers to an interchange between a "Christian" named Barr and a Mormon named Post. Barr attacks the BofM by using the standard arguments of early nineteenth-

century anti-Trinitarians against Trinitarians, i.e., the Mormon doctrine of God is unscriptural and irrational. Barr accuses Mormons of teaching that the Father and Son are two separate Gods. Not unexpectedly, Post responds by emphasizing the oneness of God. Post notes that “Were the Father and Son united in the same person? They were: Col. i.19-ii.9 [probably best interpreted as a passage of distinction].” Vogel apparently concludes that this statement should be interpreted as Post’s belief that the Father and Son are the same person. Even if we ignore the highly “political” nature of the discussion, its authorship and publication by an opponent, and the obscurity of the reference, the larger context of the article still suggests otherwise. Post clearly distinguishes the Father and the Son (the Father is spirit, the Son flesh; the Son is in the bosom of the Father; the Son is in the image of the Father; the Son was begotten of the Father). According to Post, the Father and Son are one because the Son’s “tabernacle contained the fullness of the spirit of the everlasting God” and because the Son was “begotten” and is “eternal.” Thus, for Post, the Father was united with the Son because (1) the Son was derived from the Father and (2) the Son received the “fullness” which resides necessarily in the Father but which He voluntarily shares with the Son. It therefore seems to me that Vogel is mistaken in his interpretation of the foregoing exchange. Taken as a whole, the “Christian” Barr seems to be classifying the Mormon Post among the Trinitarians and Post argues for both the distinction and unity of the Father and Son.

Some have argued that changes in the 1837 edition of the BofM that added “Son of” to four passages (1 Nephi 11:18, 21, 32; 13:40) imply either a Sabellian or a Trinitarian interpretation among early Church members, and the changes were occasioned by a discomfort as the Church doctrine evolved

toward “tritheism.”<sup>88</sup> Actually, the reasons behind the changes remain obscure. Only two of these passages refer to Jesus as “the Eternal Father” (changed to “the Son of the Eternal Father”). The other two refer to Jesus as “God” (changed to “Son of God”), an appellation accepted by Mormon theology throughout its history. Significantly, the other “Sabellian” sounding Father passages in the BofM were not changed.

In sum, the evidence is not convincing that ancient Sabellianism was an active doctrine of any early nineteenth-century group, including the early Mormons. This conclusion is supported by a well-known early nineteenth-century theological dictionary, which recognized both ancient and contemporary “Arians” but described “Sabellians” only as “a sect in the third century.”<sup>89</sup> This evidence strongly suggests that informed early nineteenth-century readers such as Alexander Campbell, who felt that he recognized a doctrine of the Trinity present in New York during the 1820s, understood the Book of Mormon teaching on the Trinity to be something quite different than ancient Sabellianism. However, these observations do not prove that a Sabellian interpretation of the BofM doctrine of the Trinity is unreasonable. Indeed, as Boyd Kirkland has demonstrated, such a view was held by a proportion of Mormons in the latter nineteenth- and early twentieth centuries.<sup>90</sup>

***Can the Book of Mormon be reasonably interpreted  
as endorsing later Mormon teaching?***

Defining the official Mormon doctrines of the Trinity can be challenging,<sup>91</sup> and one must always keep in mind the third Proclamation of the Church (21 October 1865), which states that “no member of the Church

has the right to publish any doctrines as the doctrines of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints without first submitting them for examination and approval to the First Presidency and the Twelve.”<sup>92</sup> Without doubt, the most distinguished scholarly works on Mormon theology that meet these criteria are James E. Talmage’s *The Articles of Faith* (1899) and *Jesus the Christ* (1915).

According to Talmage: “The Trinity...[consists of] three...separate individuals, physically distinct from each other...The one-ness of the Godhead...implies no mystical union of substance, nor any unnatural and therefore impossible blending of personality.”<sup>93</sup> Jesus is the “firstborn Son in the spirit...the Only Begotten in the flesh...”<sup>94</sup> Thus, Talmage would be quite comfortable with BofM passages of distinction and identity. And the BofM’s lack of doctrines of divine substance and of Jesus as “Only Begotten” prior to the incarnation would not present problems.

To explain the unity of God, Talmage, like Gregory of Nyssa from early Christianity, envisioned the Trinity, “the great presiding council of the universe,” as a cooperative hierarchical society with a “unity of purpose and operation.”<sup>95</sup> In support, Talmage quotes a Biblical text which is also found in the BofM: Jesus prays “that I may be in them [the disciples] as thou, Father, art in me, that we may be one” (3 Nephi 19:23,29; see John 17:22). Talmage denied the ontological subordination (that the Father and Son are different types of being) but affirmed the derivative and official subordination of the Son. The Father “is the literal Parent of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” from whom the Son has received “divine investiture of authority...to carry out the will of His Father.”<sup>96</sup> Thus, BofM passages of derivation/subordination presented no problem for Talmage.

However, like the previous two interpretations, Talmage's synthesis is not without problems. For example, as we have seen, Talmage taught that the pre-incarnation Jesus was the "firstborn Son in the spirit," a doctrine in apparent tension with the BofM doctrine that Jesus "was, and is from all eternity to all eternity" and is "without beginning of days or end of years" (Mosiah 3:5, Alma 13:9). Talmage clearly recognized this problem and attempted a solution: Jesus had an "existence or duration that shall have no end, and which, *judged by all human standards of reckoning*, could have had no beginning...."<sup>97</sup>

In addition, like the traditional Trinitarians, who also emphasized the distinction of persons, the BofM designations of Jesus as "Father" clearly presented challenges for Talmage and some later Mormons. For when these passages were interpreted as passages of identity, they suggested ancient Sabellianism. This problem ultimately necessitated the Church's 1916 statement on the Father and the Son, which was largely authored by Talmage.<sup>98</sup> Like the traditional Trinitarians, Talmage avoided the title "Father" in reference to Jesus in his works and when forced to confront the issue, also interpreted "Father" as a singular name for the Son signifying Him as "Creator," Father "of Those Who Abide in His Gospel," and Father "by Divine Investiture of Authority." Talmage added the 1916 statement to later editions of the *Articles of Faith* along with the following statement that demonstrates the ongoing difficulties with a Sabellian interpretation: "That Jesus Christ...is designated in certain scriptures as the Father in no wise justifies an assumption of identity between Him and his father..."<sup>99</sup>

## V. Possible interpretations of Book of Mormon passages in which Jesus is “Father”

As an illustration of the spectrum of possible interpretations of the BofM doctrine of the Trinity, let us examine the interesting debate between the apostate lawyer, Zeezrom, and the prophet Amulek (Alma 11:26-39).

**Zeezrom**: “Is there more than one God?”

**Amulek**: “No”

**Zeezrom**: Then how is it that “there is but one God; yet...the Son of God shall come”?

**Amulek**: No response (unfortunately) to Zeezrom’s accusation that Amulek has contradicted himself by believing in one God and two Gods (the Father and Son) at the same time.

**Zeezrom**: If there is only one God, then “Is the Son of God the very Eternal Father?” That is, if Amulek really does believe in one God, then he logically must admit that the Father and Son are the same person.

**Amulek**: “Yes, he is the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth...”

Early nineteenth-century readers would have had no problem identifying Zeezrom as an anti-Trinitarian and, of course, the prophet Amulek as teaching the true doctrine. But who is Amulek, and what is the meaning of his response to the last question? If Amulek is a traditional Trinitarian, then Zeezrom is attacking the doctrine of one God and three persons as a contradiction and attempting to get Amulek to “confound the persons.” In that case, Amulek’s answer tricks Zeezrom by using “the Eternal Father” as a singular name for Jesus. But if Amulek is an alternative

Trinitarian, then he is also tricking Zeezrom, for while Zeezrom is implying that the Father and Jesus are the same person, Amulek is emphasizing that they are identical in substance or Being. Furthermore, if Amulek is a Sabellian, then he is agreeing with Zeezrom that the Father and the Son are the same person (probably the least likely since Zeezrom and Amulek are adversaries). Finally, if Amulek is a later Mormon, he agrees that there is one God (existing as a hierarchical community of Gods) and also uses “the Eternal Father” as a singular name.

## **VI. Conclusions**

The results of this study suggest the importance of distinguishing between the original intention of the BofM author(s) and subsequent interpretations of BofM theology that may have been held by one group or another. Regarding the first, the BofM text itself seems to contain inadequate information to either eliminate or to unequivocally select any of the suggested interpretations of the BofM doctrine of the Trinity as the original intention of the author(s). As we have seen, the BofM reproduces many of the Biblical passages of adoption, identity, distinction, and derivation/subordination, yielding multiple possible interpretations. Also complicating the problem is that the BofM does not present a systematic theology, contains many ambiguous passages, and makes no statements at all on a number of key issues. Thus, in order to justify a particular interpretation of the Trinity, a scholar must invariably argue for (1) a given interpretation of ambiguous passages, (2) inclusion of important doctrines not actually present in the BofM, and/or (3) the priority of favorable proof texts.

The interpretations of the BofM chosen by any group will, in large part, depend on the options made available by the background theological environment. Given the following—(1) many of the earliest Church members, including Joseph Smith, came from a Trinitarian background; (2) the BofM takes a strong stand on Jesus’ divinity against the anti-Trinitarians; and (3) the BofM reproduces some of the language and interpretations used by the Trinitarians in the early nineteenth-century Trinitarian/anti-Trinitarian debates—it is likely that many of the earliest Mormons and non-Mormons interpreted the BofM as endorsing Trinitarianism, perhaps with alternative Trinitarian leanings. As the early nineteenth-century Trinitarian debates fell from memory and new revelations on the nature of the Godhead appeared, it seems that for a time there was some confusion among Church members about whether “Father” as a name for Jesus should be understood in a Sabellian way or as a singular name for the Son. Although in 1916 the question was officially answered in favor of the latter for faithful Mormons, the interpretation of the BofM doctrine of the Trinity has continued and undoubtedly will continue to be debated among readers and within the scholarly community.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Alexander Campbell, "The Mormonites," *Millennial Harbinger* 2 (January 1831): 93; Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), 150.

<sup>2</sup> Kurt Widmer. *Mormonism and the Nature of God: A Theological Evolution, 1830-1915* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1989), 27.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas G. Alexander, "The Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine: From Joseph Smith to Progressive Theology," *Sunstone* (July-Aug, 1980):24-33; Mark Thomas, "Scholarship and the Book of Mormon" in Dan Vogel, *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 72-73.

<sup>4</sup> Melodie Moench Charles, "Book of Mormon Christology," in Brent Lee Metcalfe, *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 81-114; Widmer, *Mormonism and the Nature of God*, 32-3; Robert N. Hullinger, *Joseph Smith's Response to Skepticism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 156-157; A. Bruce Lindgren, "Sign or Scripture: Approaches to the Book of Mormon," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 19, no. 1 (Spring 1986):73; Boyd Kirkland, "An Evolving God," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 28, no. 1 (Spring 1995): v. For more extended discussions of the opposing views on the Sabellian interpretation of the BofM, see Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* and Barry R. Bickmore, "Does the Book of Mormon Teach Mainstream Trinitarianism or Modalism?" available at the FAIR website, <http://www.fairlds.org/pubs/BoMTrin.pdf>. Sabellianism, also called modalism, teaches that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are different manifestations of the same person.

<sup>5</sup> Clyde Forsberg, "The Roots of Early Mormonism: An Exegetical Inquiry," (M.A. thesis, University of Calgary, 1990), 196, 203; LDS Church Archives.

<sup>6</sup> James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City, Deseret Book, 1899) and *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City, Deseret Book, 1915).

<sup>7</sup> For another view see Ronald V. Huggins, “Joseph Smith’s modalism: Sabellian Sequentialism or Swedenborgian Expansionism?,” Institute for Religious Research: Mormons in Transition, (2004), <http://www.irr.org/mit/bom-modalism.html> (Accessed April 8, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine. 1: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago, University of Chicago, 1971), 175.

<sup>9</sup> Few writings of Sabellius remain. Those quoted here are found in the ancient writings of Epiphanius, Theodoret, and Eusebius as reproduced in Frances Young, Lewis Ayres, and Andrew Louth, eds., *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge, Cambridge University, 2004), 203.

<sup>10</sup> For a recent discussion of subordinationism, see Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> There are few surviving quotations from Paul of Samosata. This one from Eusebius is quoted in W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia, Fortress, 1984), 385.

<sup>12</sup> These quotations from Arias are found in Robert C. Gregg and Dennis E. Groh. *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 8; Bernard Lonergan, *The Way to Nicea* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 70-71, as quoted in Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 146-7; and from Athanasius, “Four Discourses against the Arians,” in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Second Series* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 4:308.

<sup>13</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, “On ‘not three Gods’” in Schaff and Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series*, 5:334-335.

<sup>14</sup> Tertullian, “Against Praxeas,” in Alexander Roberts, and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 3:598; Giles, *Trinity and Subordinationism*, 61.

<sup>15</sup> Basil, “To his Brother Gregory, Concerning the Difference between *ousia* and *hypostasis*,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series*, 8:137-141.

<sup>16</sup> For example, Christian historian Justo Gonzalez has suggested that Tertullian was originally most likely applying the terms *substantia* and *persona* in the sense of legal terminology in which *substance* was “the property and the right that a person has to make use of it” and *persona* was “one who has a certain ‘substance.’” Thus, the three *personae* in the Godhead share the same *substance*, the creation. Subsequently quite a different interpretation would be placed in these terms. Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 3 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 1:179.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:247.

<sup>18</sup> Origin, “Origin de principiis” in Roberts and Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 4:376-377.

<sup>19</sup> Edmund J. Fortman, *The Triune God* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1982), 56. For a recent discussion of the fourth-century uses of *ousia*. see Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2004), 92-97.

<sup>20</sup> Ayers, *Nicaea and Its Legacy*, 41.

<sup>21</sup> The Christian creeds and confessions are quoted from Philip Schaff and David S. Schaff, eds., *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, Baker, 1931, reprinted 1983).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 28-29.

<sup>23</sup> Athanasuis, “Four Discourses against the Arians,” 315, 318.

<sup>24</sup> Augustine, “On the Trinity,” in Philip Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 3:17-23, 85.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 109-110.

<sup>27</sup> Gonzales, *History of Christian Thought*, 2:67-68.

<sup>28</sup> Schaff and Schaff, eds., *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes*, 2: 66-70.

<sup>29</sup> Boris Bobrinskoy, *The Mystery of the Trinity* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary, 1999), 219.

<sup>30</sup> Schaff and Schaff, eds., *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes*, 2: 62-63.

<sup>31</sup> Personal communication.

<sup>32</sup> Schaff and Schaff, eds., *The Creeds of Christendom with a History and Critical Notes*.

<sup>33</sup> Samuel Luckey, *A Defence of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Troy NY: Parker and Bliss, 1818), 42-108.

<sup>34</sup> David Millard, "History of the Christians, or Christian Connexion," in *History of All the Religious Denomination in the United States* (Harrisburg PA: John Winebrenner, 1848), note 29. Electronic version posted by Ernie Stefanik, November 28, 1998, <http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/dmillard/HCCC.HTM>, accessed April 8, 2007.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Foster, *The Christian Register and Almanac for 1823*, quoted in Thomas H. Olbricht, "Christian Connexion and Unitarian relations 1800-1844," *Restoration Quarterly* 9, no 3(3) available on line at [http://www.acu.edu/sponsored/restoration\\_quarterly/archives/1960s/vol\\_9\\_n\\_o\\_3\\_contents/olbricht.html](http://www.acu.edu/sponsored/restoration_quarterly/archives/1960s/vol_9_n_o_3_contents/olbricht.html), accessed May 2, 2007.

<sup>36</sup> Luckey, *Defence of the Trinity*, ix.

<sup>37</sup> Samuel Miller, *Letters on Unitarianism* (Lexington KY: Thomas T. Skillman, 1823), 20-21.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in Charles Morgridge, *The True Believer's Defence* (New-Bedford, MA: William Howe, 1837), 27. Emphasis his.

<sup>39</sup> Levi Leonard Paine, *A Critical History of the Evolution of Trinitarianism* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1900), 97-138. See also Frank Hugh Foster, *A Genetic History of the New England Theology* (Chicago, University of Chicago, 1907), 289-301.

<sup>40</sup> The great British Methodist Bible scholar, Adam Clarke (1762-1832), rejected eternal generation in his New Testament commentary (on Luke 1:35). A similar position was adopted by the Scottish Congregational minister and theologian, Ralph Wardlaw (1779-1853). The works of both were popular in early nineteenth-century America.

<sup>41</sup> Luckey, *Defence of the Doctrine of the Trinity*, 180-1. Emphasis his.

<sup>42</sup> Whether Jesus is “the Eternal God” was the fundamental question. See, for example, the debate between Trinitarian Samuel Spring and “Christian” Thomas Worcester in Thomas Worcester, *Call for Scripture Evidence that Christ is the “selfexistent eternal God,” a Letter to Rev. Samuel Spring, D.D.* (Boston: Thomas Worcester, 1811).

<sup>43</sup> William Channing. “Unitarian Christianity” (1819) in *The Works of William E. Channing, D.D.* (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1882), 371.

<sup>44</sup> James Yates, *Vindication of Unitarianism in Reply to Mr. Wardlaw's Discourses* (Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1816), 74. Emphasis mine.

<sup>45</sup> David Millard. “History of the Christians, or Christian Connexion” in *History of All the Religious Denomination in the United States* (Harrisburg PA: John Winebrenner, 1848), Restoration Movement Texts, <http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/dmillard/HCCC.HTM>; 4. (Accessed April 11, 2007). Emphasis his.

<sup>46</sup> Timothy Dwight, *Theology; Explained and Defended in a Series of Sermons*, 4 vols. (New-Haven: S. Converse, 1825), sermon IV, 114.

<sup>47</sup> Andrews Norton, *A Statement of Reasons for Not Believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians* (Boston: Hilliard, Gray, 1833), 2,3,14. Emphasis his.

<sup>48</sup> Channing, "Unitarian Christianity," 372.

<sup>49</sup> As an example of a similar definition, see Charles Buck, *A Theological Dictionary* (Philadelphia: James Kay, 1831), 336.

<sup>50</sup> E. Cornelius, *A Sermon on the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Andover: Flagg and Gould, 1826), 9. Emphasis his.

<sup>51</sup> Nathaniel Emmons, "On the Doctrine of the Trinity," 68. Emphasis mine.

<sup>52</sup> Moses Stuart, *Letters to the Rev. Wm. E. Channing* (Andover: Flagg and Gould, 1819), 22. Emphasis mine.

<sup>53</sup> Norton, *A Statement of Reasons*, 8.

<sup>54</sup> Elijah Bailey, *Primitive Trinitarianism Examined and Defended* (Bennington, VT: Darius Clark, 1826), 24, 191.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 186, 121. Emphasis his.

<sup>56</sup> Luckey, *Defence of the Trinity*, 106. Emphasis his.

<sup>57</sup> David Millard, *The True Messiah* (Canandaigua, NY: J. D. Bemis, 1823), 16, 21, 27.

<sup>58</sup> Emmons, *Doctrine of the Trinity*, 81. Emphasis his.

<sup>59</sup> Moses Stuart, *Letters to Dr. Miller on his Eternal Generation* (Andover: Flagg and Gould, 1822), 92, quoted in Frank Hugh Foster, *A Genetic History of the New England Theology*, 294.

<sup>60</sup> Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible, A Commentary and Critical Notes*, 8 vols. (1810-1826); new edition London: Thomas Tegg and Son, 1836), 1:376. This quotation was reproduced unapprovingly by Elijah Bailey, *Primitive Trinitarianism Examined*, 174, 160.

<sup>61</sup> Emmons, *doctrine of the Trinity*, 73; Stuart, *letters to Dr. Miller*, 111.

<sup>62</sup> Bailey, *Primitive Trinitarianism Examined*, 84-85.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 174. Emphasis his.

<sup>66</sup> Nathaniel Emmons, "On the Doctrine of the Trinity," in Nathaniel Emmons, *Sermons on Some of the First Principles and Doctrines of True Religion* (Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1815), 75. Emphasis his.

<sup>67</sup> For examples see R. Smith. *Truth without Controversy: A Series of Doctrinal Lectures* (Saratoga Springs, NY: G. M. Davison, 1824): 67. Emphasis his; Bailey, *Primitive Trinitarianism Examined*, 117.

<sup>68</sup> Elijah Bailey, *Primitive Trinitarianism Examined*, 24, 191.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*; Norton, *A statement of Reasons*, 8.

<sup>70</sup> Charles G. Finney, *Skeletons of a Course of Theological Lectures* (Oberlin, OH: James Steele, 1840) reproduced as *Finney's Lectures on Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1968), 108. Emphasis mine.

<sup>71</sup> Bailey, *Primitive Trinitarianism Examined*, 127.

<sup>72</sup> David Harrowar, *A Defence of the Trinitarian System* (Utica, N.Y.: William Williams, 1822), 152; R. Smith, *Truth without Controversy: A Series of Doctrinal Lectures, Intended Principally for Young Professors of Religion*

(Saratoga Springs, NY: G. M. Davison, 1824), 74; Bailey, *Primitive Trinitarianism Examined*, 127.

<sup>73</sup> Bailey, *Primitive Trinitarianism Examined*, 24.

<sup>74</sup> Barton Stone, untitled, *The Christian Messenger* (February 24, 1827): 1:83-86.

<sup>75</sup> Bailey, *Primitive Trinitarianism Examined*, 84.

<sup>76</sup> Paine, *critical history*, 109.

<sup>77</sup> Alexander, "The reconstruction of Mormon doctrine," 25; Thomas, "Scholarship and the Book of Mormon," 72.

<sup>78</sup> "Mormonism" in *The Herald of Gospel Truth, and Watchman of Liberty*, 1, no. 7 (December 19, 1832). Published in Montrose, PA.

<sup>79</sup> Anthony Chvala-Smith, "A Becoming Faith," *Saints Herald* 145 (April 1998): 17, as quoted in Grant H. Palmer, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 123.

<sup>80</sup> Ralph Wardlaw, *Discourses on the Principal Points of the Socinian Controversy*, 15.

<sup>81</sup> See, for example, the extensive defense of the passage against "Anti-Trinitarians" who attacked the validity of 1 John 5:7 as "spurious—the insertion of an uninspired pen" in Harrowar, *A Defence of the Trinitarian System*. Harrowar argues that "if the divinity of this passage is admitted, the doctrine of a Trinity of persons in God, is at once established," 9.

<sup>82</sup> Widmer, *Mormonism and the Nature of God*, 30; Thomas (personal communication).

<sup>83</sup> See endnote # 4. Charles, "Book of Mormon Christology"; Widmer, *Mormonism and the Nature of God*; Hullinger, *Joseph Smith's Response to Skepticism*; Lindgren, "Sign or Scripture: Approaches to the Book of

Mormon”; Kirkland, “An Evolving God”; Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet*; and Bickmore, “Does the Book of Mormon Teach Mainstream Trinitarianism or Modalism?”

<sup>84</sup> See especially Vogel, “Earliest Mormon Concept of God” and *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet*.

<sup>85</sup> Millard, *True Messiah*, 36, quoted in Vogel, “Earliest Mormon Concept of God,” 20. Emphasis Millard’s.

<sup>86</sup> Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet and his Progenitors for Many Generations* (Liverpool: S. W. Richards, 1853), 146; Vogel, “Earliest Mormon Concept of God,” 21, and *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet*, 484-5.

<sup>87</sup> I thank Dan Vogel for making an extended transcript of the article available.

<sup>88</sup> Charles, “Book of Mormon Christology,” 108; Thomas, “Scholarship and the Book of Mormon,” 72; Widmer, *Mormonism and the nature of God*, 32.

<sup>89</sup> Buck, *A Theological Dictionary*, 21-2, 404.

<sup>90</sup> Boyd Kirkland, “Jehovah as the Father,” *Sunstone* 9 (Autumn 1984): 36-44.

<sup>91</sup> Some problems of relating Mormon theology to the history of Christian thought, including the inclusion of passages of identity and distinction in the BofM, are discussed in Van Hale, “Defining the Contemporary Mormon Concept of God” in Bergera, *Line upon Line*, 7-15.

<sup>92</sup> “Proclamation of the First Presidency and Twelve, October 21, 1865” reproduced in James R. Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965), 2:239. The First Presidency recommended that this principle be generalized to all works by “General Authorities” of the Church in 1960. See Gregory A. Prince and William Robert Wright, *David O.*

McKay *and the Rise of Modern Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 2005), 49-53.

<sup>93</sup> James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1899), 38-40.

<sup>94</sup> James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1915), 35.

<sup>95</sup> Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 38,40.

<sup>96</sup> These quotes are from “The Father and the Son: A Doctrinal Exposition by The First Presidency and The Twelve” (1916), reproduced in Clark, *Messages of the First Presidency*, 5:26-34, and added to later editions of *The Articles of Faith* as Chap. 2, note 11.

<sup>97</sup> Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 37. Emphasis mine.

<sup>98</sup> For a summary of issues leading up to the 1916 statement, see Kirkland, “Jehovah as the Father.”

<sup>99</sup> Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, Chap. 2, note 11.