

# DOCTRINAL TRENDS IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY AND THE STRENGTH OF THE MORMON POSITION<sup>1</sup>

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Christianity as a whole is a historical religion. That is, its truth claims are based on the historical reality of certain events, such as the resurrection of Jesus Christ. In addition, each Christian denomination is bound to a particular view or range of views of Christian history that tie into its reason for existence. These views range from direct continuity with the New Testament Church among Catholics and Orthodox, to some measure of apostasy and reformation back to New Testament Christianity among Protestants. Latter-day Saints believe there was a total apostasy from New Testament Christianity, and a complete restoration of primitive Christianity was necessary, although we believe elements of the true faith from all past dispensations have been included, as well as things which have been “kept hid from before the foundation of the world.”<sup>2</sup> To some degree, these propositions can be tested.

My intent here is to outline a brief historical argument for the proposition that the Latter-day Saints represent, in the main, a restoration of primitive Christianity. I am going to do that by showing that in some of the most important areas of theology, early trends in Christian doctrine point *from* something very like LDS doctrine and *toward* the doctrines of later Christianity. Finally, I will examine how different Christian traditions try to deal with these facts, and show that the meaning we attach to early Christian doctrinal development follows quite naturally, while other interpretations are usually very forced.

## DOCTRINAL TRENDS IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

I have chosen three areas of doctrine to illustrate my point. They are the nature of God, the relationship between God and the material universe, and the nature of the Divine Unity.

### THE NATURE OF GOD

The question of the nature of God is absolutely fundamental to any theology. Joseph Smith preached that “if you were to see [God] today, you would see him like a man in form,”<sup>3</sup> and that “the Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also.”<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, mainstream Christians generally accept definitions such as that of the First Vatican Council of 1869–1870, where God was said to be “eternal, immense, incomprehensible...who, being a unique spiritual substance by nature, absolutely simple and unchangeable, must be declared distinct from the world in fact and by essence.”<sup>5</sup> The implications of this difference in doctrine are enormous. For instance, if the Father and Son both have their own anthropomorphic bodies, it doesn’t make any sense to postulate that they are “one Being,” as mainstream Christians do. Also, it doesn’t make any sense to speak of God creating matter from nothing, if God Himself has a material nature. I’m going to talk more about both of these issues later, but from the outset I wanted to point out the importance of differences in assumptions about the nature of God.

The idea that God has a body in human form stems from the first chapter in Genesis, which says, “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. ... So God created man in his [own] image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.”<sup>6</sup> We might add that in every case where a theophany was reported by biblical prophets, God was described as having human form in passages such as Ezekiel 1:26, Revelation 4:2–3, and Acts 7:56. Christopher Stead of the Cambridge Divinity School summarized, “The Hebrews...pictured the God whom they worshipped as having a body and mind like our own, though transcending humanity in the splendour of his appearance, in his power, his wisdom, and the constancy of his care for his creatures.”<sup>7</sup>



On the other hand, the mainstream Christian doctrine of God is nowhere attested in the Bible, and appears in Christian writings by the mid-second century. The definition of God as an indivisible, simple, immaterial, unique, and eternally unchangeable spirit essence appears to derive from the Greek philosophical schools popular during this period. Some Christian writers frankly admitted this correspondence, and in fact promoted the doctrine as a ready defense against the attacks of pagan critics. Around the turn of the third century, Tertullian wrote, "Whatever attributes therefore you require as worthy of God, must be found in the Father, who is invisible and unapproachable, and placid, and (so to speak) the God of the philosophers."<sup>8</sup> In the mid-third century the Christian philosopher Origen wrote, "The Jews indeed, but also some of our people, supposed that God should be understood as a man, that is, adorned with human members and human appearance. But the philosophers despise these stories as fabulous and formed in the likeness of poetic fictions."<sup>9</sup> As Origen indicated, anthropomorphism seems to have been the standard Jewish interpretation during the first centuries of Christianity, and we find the Christian philosopher Justin Martyr making the same generalization about Jewish teachers in a discussion with his Jewish acquaintance, Trypho, in the mid-second century:

And again, when He says, "I shall behold the heavens, the works of Thy fingers," unless I understand His method of using words, I shall not understand intelligently, but just as your teachers suppose, fancying that the Father of all, the unbegotten God, has hands and feet, and fingers, and a soul, like a composite being; and they for this reason teach that it was the Father Himself who appeared to Abraham and to Jacob.<sup>10</sup>

During the period when the philosophical concept of God was being adopted in Christianity, a moderate position was adopted by some writers, who tried to harmonize a literal interpretation of biblical anthropomorphism with the new doctrine. For instance, Irenaeus, who wrote during the late second century, explicitly stated belief in a philosophical concept of God the Father,<sup>11</sup> but stated that the Son was the one who appeared in human form to Moses and the prophets.<sup>12</sup> Irenaeus also said this:

But man He fashioned with His own hands, taking of the purest and finest of earth, in measured wise mingling with the earth His own power; for He gave his frame the outline of His own form, that the visible appearance too should be godlike—for it was an image of God that man was fashioned and set on earth.<sup>13</sup>

So on the nature of God we can make the following points:

1. The standard Jewish concept of God during the early Christian period was anthropomorphic.
2. We find some anthropomorphic statements such as Stephen's vision of the Father and Son in the New Testament.
3. The concept of God adopted by later Christians was identical in essentials to that taught by the contemporary Greek philosophical schools.
4. No Christian writers are known to have explicitly taught a philosophical concept of God before the mid-second century.
5. Some of the earliest Christians to adopt the philosophical definitions took Biblical anthropomorphism quite literally, but ascribed it to the Son.
6. Therefore, we can see a definite trend *from* Jewish anthropomorphism *toward* the God of the philosophers.

#### CREATION FROM UNFORMED MATTER

The idea that God is an eternally indivisible, simple, unchangeable spirit essence is the basis for the mainstream Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*—creation from nothing. That is, if God is "distinct from the world in fact and by essence," as was stated by the Vatican Council, the question naturally arises as to whether matter is another fundamental principle apart from God. On the other hand, Joseph Smith taught that "The pure principles of element are principles which can never be destroyed; they may be organized and re-organized, but not destroyed. They had no beginning, and can have no end."<sup>14</sup>

In his 1990 Presidential address to the British Association for Jewish Studies, Peter Hayman asserted the following:

Nearly all recent studies on the origin of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* have come to the conclusion that this doctrine is not native to Judaism, is nowhere attested in the Hebrew Bible, and probably arose in Christianity in the second century C.E. in the course of its fierce battle with Gnosticism. The one scholar who continues to maintain that the doctrine is native to Judaism, namely Jonathan Goldstein, thinks that it first appears at the end of the first century C.E., but has recently conceded the weakness of his position in the course of debate with David Winston.<sup>15</sup>

I don't have time to go into this subject more deeply, but I want to note two points about the doctrine of creation before we move on. First, the Christians who wrote the New Testament lived before anyone was teaching a doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, so again we have a doctrinal trend going *from* something like Joseph Smith's doctrine and *toward* that of mainstream Christianity. Second, there was no reason for the question of the origin of matter to even come up until Christians adopted the concept of a God who is absolutely distinct from the material universe. The fact that the question *didn't* come up until Christians started explicitly teaching a philosophical concept of God's nature is good corroborating evidence that the original Christian God was anthropomorphic and material, just as in normative Judaism.

### THE DIVINE UNITY

One feature of the New Testament all Christians must come to terms with is the fact that in some passages the Father is represented as "the only true God,"<sup>16</sup> while in others the Son and Holy Spirit are also called "God."<sup>17</sup> How can this apparent contradiction be resolved? Mainstream Christians hold that the members of the Trinity are separate "persons" who share a single "Divine Being" or "Divine Substance." All three persons have always existed in the same relationship to one another, and there is no hierarchy within the Trinity except in a purely "economic" sense. On the other hand, Latter-day Saints believe the members of the Godhead are separate beings, and so in a sense we believe in more than one God. However, Latter-day Saints also speak of "one God" in two senses. First, the Godhead is "one" in will, purpose, love, and covenant. Second, the Father is the absolute monarch of the known Universe, and all others are subject to Him.

It can readily be seen that these two disparate definitions of God must lead to different conclusions regarding the noted apparent contradiction. For example, if "God" is defined as an eternally indivisible, simple, unique, unchanging spiritual essence, it would make no sense to speak of three separate Beings as one God, because that would imply a division in the indivisible, and a plurality of something that is by definition unique. Any sort of hierarchy in the Trinity would imply the same. Furthermore, Frances Young wrote, "underlying the most crucial episode in the emergence of the Christian doctrine of God, namely the reply to Arianism, was affirmation of creation out of nothing."<sup>18</sup> The dogma of creation from nothing puts everything into two categories—God, who is eternally unchanging, and everything else, which is created from nothing. So, if we allow that Jesus Christ is *truly* divine, rather than in some watered down sense as the Arians taught, He has to be identified with the unique "Divine Being." However, if

God is an anthropomorphic Being who is not disconnected from the material universe and did not create everything else from absolute nothingness, it makes perfect sense to speak of three separate Beings who are one God in the sense of absolute mental and moral unity. Since we have no requirement that God be absolutely "simple," or without parts, and indivisible, we have no problem with the idea of hierarchy within the Godhead.

The historical basis for the Latter-day Saint doctrine of the Divine Unity is very strong, because it was almost universally accepted among Christians before the Nicene Council of 325 A.D. that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost were united in will, but separate in rank and glory. J.N.D. Kelly of Oxford University noted that even at the Council of Nicea the majority party believed "that there are three divine hypostases [or "persons"], separate in rank and glory but united in harmony of will."<sup>19</sup> This doctrine is called "subordinationism", and R.P.C. Hanson wrote, "Indeed, until Athanasius began writing, every single theologian, East and West, had postulated some form of Subordinationism. It could, about the year 300, have been described as a fixed part of catholic theology."<sup>20</sup> Henry Bettenson explained "subordinationism"...was pre-Nicene orthodoxy."<sup>21</sup> For example, Paul wrote that the Father is "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,"<sup>22</sup> and revealed that *after* the resurrection Jesus will "be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all."<sup>23</sup> Indeed, Jesus Himself said, "My Father is greater than I."<sup>24</sup>

Subordinationism took various forms in early Christianity, but one of the most popular depicted the Son and Spirit as sort of "super Archangels," who were worshipped as Divine, but subordinate to the Father. In fact, Larry Hurtado of the University of Edinburgh and others have provided a great deal of evidence that the roots of belief in Jesus' divinity were in earlier Jewish beliefs about a principal angelic helper to God.<sup>25</sup>

An early second century Jewish Christian document, the *Shepherd of Hermas*, spoke of "the angel of the prophetic Spirit"<sup>26</sup> and Jesus as the "'glorious...angel' or 'most venerable...angel.'"<sup>27</sup> Justin Martyr was a converted philosopher who lived in Rome in the mid-second century, but Robert M. Grant suggested that in passages like the following, he was influenced by the Jewish Christian writings of Hermas, who lived in the same congregation.<sup>28</sup> Justin Martyr wrote that Jesus is "another God and Lord subject to the Maker of all things; who is also called an Angel." He is "distinct from Him who made all things,—numerically, I mean, not in will."<sup>29</sup> He also asserted the following. "We reverence and worship Him and the Son who came forth from Him and taught us these things, and the host of other good

angels who are about Him and are made quite like Him, and the Prophetic Spirit.”<sup>30</sup> Robert M. Grant noted, “This passage presents us with considerable difficulties. The word ‘other,’ used in relation to the angels, suggests that Jesus himself is an angel.”<sup>31</sup> Catholic scholar Father William Jurgens admitted that here St. Justin “apparently [made] insufficient distinction between Christ and the created Angels.” He continued, “There are theological difficulties in the above passage, no doubt. But we wonder if those who make a great deal of these difficulties do not demand of Justin a theological sophistication which a man of his time and background could not rightly be expected to have.”<sup>32</sup>

While Latter-day Saints aren’t in the habit of calling the Son and Holy Spirit “angels,” such things don’t really raise our eyebrows, because we believe Gods and angels are gradations of the same species. So again we have clear and convincing evidence that the trend in the early Christian doctrine of the Divine Unity went *from* something very like the LDS doctrine, and *toward* the mainstream Christian doctrine. Again we can point to a transitional period, where even those, like Justin, who adopted a philosophical definition of God, were subordinationists. I want to point out once more that Christians from the New Testament on had taught that Jesus was *fully* divine. For instance, Paul wrote of Jesus, “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.”<sup>33</sup> And yet, the idea that Jesus is both fully divine and subordinate to the Father in rank and glory are not compatible with a Greek philosophical definition of God.

## THE MEANING OF EARLY CHRISTIAN DOCTRINAL TRENDS

We have seen so far that in three important and interconnected areas of doctrine there were definite historical trends that point backward to something similar to LDS doctrine. I could have multiplied these examples, and in itself I think this is excellent evidence for LDS claims about the apostasy and restoration. But how do the historical facts square with Protestant and Catholic claims?<sup>34</sup> Certainly they do not fit with simplistic notions that any of these groups—or Mormonism, for that matter—is exactly like any early Christian groups. Latter-day Saints can easily deal with a few discrepancies by citing our belief in an apostasy, and the fact that God told Joseph Smith He would reveal things that had been “kept hid from before the foundation of the world.”<sup>35</sup> I intend to show, on the other hand, that Protestants and Catholics can deal with Christian doctrinal history only with great difficulty.

## CATHOLICISM

The problem of doctrinal development first came into the full light of day with the 1845 publication of John Henry Newman’s *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*. Newman had been an Anglican clergyman and had achieved some notoriety for publishing historically sophisticated tracts in favor of Anglicanism and against Roman Catholicism. The *Essay on Development* was published just before he was formally accepted into the Catholic Church, and represented, at least in part, a justification of his conversion. As an Anglican, Newman argued for the idea that Anglicanism was a return to the Church of the first few centuries, whereas Roman Catholicism had added any number of unwarranted innovations. However, in his historical studies he began to notice that the early Church itself was not static, but showed a definite progression in doctrine and practice. How could this be explained? And on what basis did Anglicans and Protestants reject some doctrinal developments, but accept others?

Certainly this is a powerful argument against Anglicanism or Protestantism, but it does not come without a price for Catholics. Before Newman, a few of the Church Fathers had indicated a belief in some sort of doctrinal progression, but among those who were not posthumously excommunicated and anathematized, this concept did not seem to progress beyond the idea of making logical deductions from the previously established deposit of faith. The vast majority of Catholic writers before Newman had expressed sentiments similar to the following statements by Pope Leo the Great, who died in 461 A.D. In a letter to the Emperor he wrote, “We may not in a single word dissent from the teaching of the Gospels and Apostles, nor entertain any opinion on the Divine Scriptures different to what the blessed Apostles and our Fathers learnt and taught.”<sup>36</sup> Leo also wrote, “And in nothing have I departed from the creed of the holy Fathers: because the Faith is one, true, unique, catholic, and to it nothing can be added, nothing taken away.”<sup>37</sup> The Second Council of Nicea in 787 stated, “We take away nothing and we add nothing, but we preserve without diminution all that pertains to the Catholic Church. . . . We keep without change or innovation all the ecclesiastical traditions that have been handed down to us, whether written or unwritten.”<sup>38</sup>

Newman, who later became a Cardinal, set out to explain how developments in doctrine might be legitimate. He realized that his arguments did not constitute proof of Roman Catholic claims, but were instead meant to “explain certain difficulties in history.”<sup>39</sup> He developed a number of “notes” or “tests” by which one might distinguish authentic from spurious developments.

It is beyond my intention here to examine these criteria, except to note that they go far beyond logical connectedness. Newman used the analogy of organic growth from an original seed, and insisted that at certain stages the Church might not be cognizant of what it “really believes.” For instance, in a letter to Giovanni Perrone he wrote, “It can happen that, with regard to one or another part of the deposit, the Church might not be fully conscious of what she felt about a thing.”<sup>40</sup> Subsequent Catholic theologians have taken a variety of approaches to the problem raised by Newman. Some have insisted that logical connectedness is the only legitimate criterion, but one of the classic counterexamples is the declaration of the dogma of the Bodily Assumption of Mary by Pius XII in 1950. It is obvious to any clear-thinking person that there is no way to logically deduce such a doctrine from scripture, and we find no mention of such a belief in the earliest Christian centuries, even in spurious or heretical writings.<sup>41</sup> Father Luigi Gambero recently wrote, “As far as we know, no Christian author before Epiphanius [who died in 403 A.D.] had ever raised the question of the end of the Blessed Virgin’s earthly existence.”<sup>42</sup> Giovanni Perrone thought that the deposit of faith had been given to the Church in complete form by the Apostles, but in such a way that it was scattered among the local churches, so it had to be gathered together over the centuries.<sup>43</sup> The previously made point about the dogma of the Assumption of Mary applies equally well to this thesis. Modernists like Alfred Loisy and George Tyrrell reasoned that if the Church had already undergone a series of drastic changes, more were to be expected in order to “modernize” the Church.<sup>44</sup> You can probably imagine how well that went over in the Vatican. A number of more moderate theologians, e.g. Karl Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx, and Yves Congar, have carried on the debate in the spirit of Newman. For instance, Karl Rahner held that one could not formulate exact laws for doctrinal development, but argued that inexact laws could still be found that insured there would not be doctrinal anarchy.<sup>45</sup>

Let me point out a few reasons why I believe Catholic responses to the fact of doctrinal development have been problematic. First, Catholicism rejects the possibility of new public revelation.<sup>46</sup> However, it has often been asked how doctrinal developments are different than new revelation.<sup>47</sup> Newman wrote, “Supposing the order of nature once broken by the introduction of a revelation, the continuance of that revelation is but a question of degree.”<sup>48</sup> Aidan Nichols describes Dominican Francisco Marín-Sola’s and Jesuit Henri de Lubac’s differing reactions to this question.

So as to guard himself against the charge of denying that revelation is completed with the death of the last apostle, Marín-Sola had revived the ancient Thomist idea that the apostles and they alone of all early Christians, knew all doctrine in an explicit fashion. But, remarks de Lubac, what a price is being paid here in terms of historical verisimilitude! How could the apostles have expressed to themselves truths whose formulation presupposes later habits of thought? How can we explain their refusing or neglecting to pass on these truths to their successors? Or, if they did pass them on, how are we to explain...this “flood of forgetfulness”, which must have overwhelmed the Church in the second Christian generation?

Our problem admits no resolution until such time as we re-formulate—so de Lubac contends—our very idea of revelation itself. ... The content of revelation is that divine redemptive *action* which is summed up in God’s gift of His Son. ... But this is not to say, de Lubac hastens to add, that propositional truth is alien to revelation. It is simply that such propositions are arrived at on the basis of revelation only by a process of abstraction.<sup>49</sup>

It is difficult to argue against de Lubac’s answer to the problem, except to ask how we are to know when propositional truth has been sufficiently “abstracted” from the original revelation to be definitive. This leads us to the next problem—the Catholic doctrine of infallibility.

Since the First Vatican Council, it has been dogmatically defined that certain doctrinal and moral declarations are to be considered infallible. For instance, the Council declared, “It is not permissible for anyone to interpret holy scripture in a sense contrary to...the unanimous consent of the fathers.”<sup>50</sup> When Catholics speak of the “unanimous consent” of the Fathers, it should be admitted, they do not mean literal unanimity, but rather an overwhelming consensus. But when exactly did this infallibility kick in? We have already noted that every orthodox pre-Nicene theologian was a subordinationist, and that several passages from the New Testament seem to imply this. Even though this doctrine took different forms, doesn’t this count as an overwhelming consensus that the Son and Spirit are subordinate in rank and glory to the Father?

A third problem that can be mentioned is the development of the concept of doctrinal development itself. I mentioned earlier that the vast majority of Catholic

Fathers had claimed they were teaching exactly what the Apostles taught. A few exceptions may be noted, but the only pre-Nicene examples I have seen put forward by Catholics on this point are a very shaky foundation. For instance, in support of the proposition that “there is a certain progress in dogma,”<sup>51</sup> Father William Jurgens cites one statement by Irenaeus that actually contradicts his point, two from Tertullian during his proto-Montanist and Montanist periods, and one from Origen. It seems significant that the only passages Father Jurgens could cull from the entire pre-Nicene corpus to support the Roman Catholic concept of doctrinal development come from Origen, who was posthumously excommunicated for his doctrinal speculations, and Tertullian, who wrote the relevant passages when he was at least leaning toward the Montanists, who were a pseudo-prophetic sect condemned by the Catholics! At least in Tertullian’s case, it is not even clear that he thought the development of doctrine wasn’t supposed to happen via new public revelation. If public revelation ceased with the Apostles and the Church was supposed to “develop” that deposit of faith in various other ways, wouldn’t the Apostles have passed on at least this knowledge to the next generations?

A fourth problem may be discussed in connection with the third. That is, nobody seems to have known that public revelation was supposed to have ceased with the Apostles until around the turn of the third century. For instance, the early second century Christian document, *The Shepherd of Hermas*, was a revelation given to Hermas, a prophet who was the brother of the one of the Roman bishops. Several of the pre-Nicene Fathers accepted this document as authoritative scripture,<sup>52</sup> but later it was excluded from the canon because it was not written by one of the Apostles or their associates. So not only are we faced with a situation where Apostles didn’t pass on the information that doctrine was supposed to develop upon the basis of the original deposit of faith, but they didn’t even pass on the information that the original deposit of public revelation was complete!

### PROTESTANTISM

I have quite a bit less to say about the Protestant reaction to the fact of doctrinal development, because it has largely been ignored or dismissed without much of a hearing, or they claim they only adhere to developments that can be logically deduced from scripture. I believe that’s why we recently had Evangelicals Carl Mosser and Paul Owen arguing in the *FARMS Review of Books* that the New Testament is Trinitarian in the same sense as the classical creeds.<sup>53</sup> Such people rarely acknowledge that one can only deduce such things from scripture if we assume a Greek philosophical definition of

God. Since most of the early Palestinian Jews, and a large faction of early Christians did not share this assumption, what justification do we have for insisting that the New Testament writers did? At least it should be acknowledged that they are incorporating something besides the New Testament text into their formulations. Furthermore, there is no historical support for the proposition that the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity was believed by anyone before the fourth century, so we again have to bring up Henri de Lubac’s questions about the neglect of the Apostles in passing on their knowledge, or the great “flood of forgetfulness” that must have occurred.

Some Protestants, on the other hand, have acknowledged that a great deal of development has occurred in their own doctrines. For instance, some liberal theologians like Adolf von Harnack have posited some sort of “bare essence” of Christianity that has been obscured by corruptions through the centuries, and has at least partially been uncovered by the Reformation.<sup>54</sup> Naturally, this hasn’t proven too popular among Protestants who want to keep doctrines like the Trinity. Others, like the Evangelical scholar Peter Toon, have acknowledged that there have been both legitimate and spurious developments as the Church has moved through time and cultures.<sup>55</sup> But if so, how do we decide which ones are which? At least the Catholics have the Pope and councils to decide such matters definitively. Toon laid out several criteria of his own to distinguish legitimate developments, including positive coherence with what has been believed in the past, and especially with scripture. Since Protestants disagree on any number of points about how to interpret scripture, Toon suggests that legitimate developments should not be based on anything that “has not found general acceptance among believing theologians.”<sup>56</sup> Of course, that raises the question of who is to be defined as a “believing theologian.”

I hope it is clear by now why I think the conservative Protestant reaction to the fact of doctrinal development has been even less satisfactory than that of the Catholics.

### CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, I want to emphasize again a point I brought up earlier. Whatever one may think about the various explanations Catholics and Protestants have given for the fact of doctrinal development—and I certainly haven’t given them a full treatment here—I think it has to be admitted that they were formulated *after the fact*. That is, Catholics over the centuries loudly proclaimed that they were teaching exactly what the Apostles explicitly taught, or at least only what could

be deduced from it, until a resurgence in historical investigation brought about massive evidence to the contrary. The Reformers and the vast majority of their followers thought that they were in all essentials returning to New Testament Christianity. Most Protestants still hold to this belief, but certainly there is no historical basis for it. On the other hand, Joseph Smith never made any study of Christian history, but he claimed to restore doctrines that now appear to have at least been present among the earliest Christians, and some of them, like subordinationism and creation from chaos, are almost certain to have been the original teaching. He restored the belief in continuing revelation that the earliest Christians evidently held, and as I believe I have shown, this is really the only principle that can adequately explain doctrinal development within a Christian religious tradition.

What I hope to have accomplished in this paper is to convince you that Latter-day Saints need to write more than we have about Christian history, because we are in a unique position to tell the story of Christianity. I say this because, frankly, I think we are the only believing Christians who can make any sense out of it.

## FURTHER READING

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## NOTES

1. This paper was originally presented at a FARMS brown bag lecture, 7 November 2001.

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3. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, edited by Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City; Deseret Book Company, 1976), 345.

4. D&C 130:22.

5. George Brantl, *Catholicism* (New York: George Braziller, 1962), 41.

6. Genesis 1:26–27.

7. Christopher Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 120.

8. Tertullian, “*Against Marcion* 2:27,” *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, 10 volumes (Buffalo, New York: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1885–1896), 3:319. Hereafter cited as ANF.

9. Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 3:1, translated by Ronald E. Heine (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 89. (From the *Fathers of the Church* translation series.)

10. Justin Martyr, “*Dialogue With Trypho* 114,” ANF 1:256.

11. Irenaeus, “*Against Heresies* 4:3:1,” ANF 1:465.

12. Irenaeus, “*Against Heresies* 4:7:2–4,” ANF 1:470.

13. Irenaeus, “*Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* 11,” in *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation*, edited by Quasten, Johannes and J.C. Plumpe (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America): 16:54; see also “*Against Heresies* 5:6:1,” ANF 1:531.

14. Joseph Smith, *Teachings*, 350–352.

15. Peter Hayman, “Monotheism—A Misused Word in Jewish Studies?”, *Journal of Jewish Studies* 42 (1991): 1–15. See also Jonathan Goldstein, “The Origins of the Doctrine of Creation Ex Nihilo”, *Journal of Jewish Studies* 35 (1984): 127–135; Jonathan Goldstein, “Creation Ex Nihilo: Recantations and Restatements”, *Journal of Jewish Studies* 38 (1987): 187–194; David Winston, “Creation Ex Nihilo Revisited: A Reply to Jonathan Goldstein”, *Journal of Jewish Studies* 37 (1986): 88–91.

16. John 17:3.

17. John 1:1; John 14:26; Acts 13:2.

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21. Henry Bettenson, *The Early Christian Fathers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 330. See also Linwood Urban, *A Short History of Christian Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 54.

22. Romans 15:6, *New English Bible*.

23. 1 Corinthians 15:24–8.
24. John 14:28.
25. Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism*, Second Edition (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1998).
26. “*The Pastor of Hermas*, Commandment 11,” ANF 2:27–28.
27. Specifically, Hermas seems to have identified Jesus with Michael. Jean Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, translated by John A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 123–124. However, this may not be particularly significant, since other Jewish Christian texts speak of Jesus appearing to mortals disguised as one of the archangels. Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, 131.
28. Robert M. Grant, *The Early Christian Doctrine of God* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1966), 81.
29. Justin Martyr, “*Dialogue with Trypho* 56,” ANF 1:223.
30. Justin Martyr, “*First Apology* 6,” in William A. Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1970), 1:51.
31. Grant, *The Early Christian Doctrine of God*, 81.
32. Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, 1:56, n. 1.
33. Philippians 2:6.
34. For an excellent survey of how Catholics have confronted the problem, see Aidan Nichols, *From Newman to Congar: The Idea of Doctrinal Development from the Victorians to the Second Vatican Council* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990). For a survey of Protestant thought on the subject, see Peter Toon, *The Development of Doctrine in the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979). The reader will notice that I am heavily indebted to both these authors.
35. D&C 124:41.
36. Pope Leo the Great, “Letter 82,” *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 2*, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York: The Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1890–1900,) 12:67. Hereafter cited as NPNF Series 2. I thank Ted Jones for pointing this reference out to me.
37. Pope Leo the Great, “Letter 124,” NPNF Series 2, 12:91.
38. Timothy Kallistos Ware, “Christian Theology in the East 600–1453,” *A History of Christian Doctrine*, edited by Hubert Cunliffe-Jones (Edinburgh 1978), 184. I thank Ted Jones for this reference. The documents of the Second Nicene Council can be accessed at: <http://www.piar.hu/councils/ecum07.htm>.
39. Newman, *Essay on Development*, vii.
40. John Henry Newman, quoted in “The Newman Perrone Paper on Development; 1847,” *Gregorianum* 16 (1935): 402–447.
41. For a survey of the early development of beliefs about Mary, see Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 490–499.
42. Luigi Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, translated by Thomas Buffer (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), 125.
43. Nichols, *From Newman to Congar*, 60.
44. *Ibid.*, 6–7, 71–135.
45. *Ibid.*, 217–219.
46. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1994 edition, paragraph 66–67.
47. For example, see Owen Chadwick, *From Bossuet to Newman: The Idea of Doctrinal Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 195.
48. Newman, *Essay on Development*, 85.
49. Nichols, *From Newman to Congar*, 210.
50. First Vatican Council, Session 3: Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Faith, chapter 2, paragraph 9. See [www.piar.hu/councils/ecum20.htm](http://www.piar.hu/councils/ecum20.htm).
51. William Jurgens, *The Faith of the Early Fathers* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1970), 415. Father Jurgens’ work is a compendium of statements found in early Christian documents, and is heavily used by contemporary Catholic apologists. The reason for this is that it has a “Doctrinal Index” meant to list passages that support current Catholic dogma and practice. The references cited here were taken from under the heading “Tradition.”
52. John G. Davies, *The Early Christian Church* (New York: Anchor Books, 1965), 81; *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, edited by Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland Publishing, 1990), 421.
53. Carl Mosser and Paul Owen, Review of C.L. Blomberg and S.E. Robinson, *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity, 1997), in *FARMS Review of Books* 11/2 (1999): 1–102.
54. See Adolf von Harnack, *What is Christianity?*, translated by Thomas B. Saunders (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1957).
55. Toon, *The Development of Doctrine in the Church*, 105–126.
56. Toon, *The Development of Doctrine in the Church*, 117–120.



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