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# JOSEPH SMITH AND THE TRINITY: AN ANALYSIS AND DEFENSE OF THE SOCIAL MODEL OF THE GODHEAD

David Paulsen and Brett McDonald

The theology of Joseph Smith remains controversial and at times divisive in the broader Christian community. This paper takes Smith's trinitarian theology as its point of departure and seeks to accomplish four interrelated goals: (1) to provide a general defense of "social trinitarianism" from some of the major objections raised against it; (2) to express what we take to be Smith's understanding of the Trinity; (3) to analyze the state of modern ST and (4) to argue that, as a form of ST, Smith's views contribute to the present discussion amongst proponents of ST.

Harold Bloom, the self-proclaimed "unbelieving Jew"<sup>1</sup> and distinguished scholar, characterized Joseph Smith as "a religious genius," stating that the religion he claimed to restore "is truly a biblical religion."<sup>2</sup> Many others, however, find the religion Smith established to be diametrically opposed to the biblical witness. For example, a recent book claiming to be "truly groundbreaking and epoch-marking" challenges Mormonism's adherence to the Bible in many respects and asserts, "Mormonism's heresies are legion."<sup>3</sup>

Biblical or heretical? It is quite an understatement to say that, since Smith returned from a private prayer in the woods near his home and announced that God had spoken to him, the doctrines he espoused have received mixed reactions. Smith's critics base their arguments against his views (and in favor of their own) upon biblical exegesis, creedal interpretation and philosophical analysis. On the other hand, Smith based the veracity of his views upon direct, personal revelation he claimed came from God. He was neither a philosopher nor a theologian per se, nor even a biblical scholar, although he often appealed to the Bible in support of his views. His controversial claim is epitomized by his declaration concerning "our condition and relationship to God": "Could you gaze into heaven five minutes, you would know more than you would by reading all that ever was written on the subject."<sup>4</sup>

While Smith claimed many such gazes, it is not our intent here to investigate whether or not such claims are true, and, in accordance with this purpose, we will present his revelations as *he* understood and presented them, rather than repeatedly referring to them as "purported" revelations. Instead, we will take as our point of departure one significant area of resultant theology stemming from the visions Smith described:<sup>5</sup> what



Smith's theology has to say about trinitarian theorizing, a reemerging area of interest to Christian philosophers. Our purposes are fourfold: (1) to provide a general defense of "social trinitarianism" (hereafter "ST") from some of the major objections raised against it; (2) to express (as clearly and fully as space permits) what we take to be Smith's understanding of the Trinity;<sup>6</sup> (3) to analyze the state of modern ST and (4) to argue that, as a form of ST, Smith's views contribute to the present discussion amongst proponents of ST.

### I. Defense of ST

In order to set the stage for our upcoming discussion of ST it is necessary to first establish its plausibility as an alternative to Latin trinitarianism (hereafter "LT").<sup>7</sup> This objective may partly be accomplished by defeating the foremost objections to it.

#### (A) Tritheism and Arianism as Heresies

John Gresham has outlined the four major criticisms leveled against ST as (1) The Terminological Criticism, (2) The Monotheistic Criticism, (3) The Christological Criticism and (4) The Feminist Criticism.<sup>8</sup> Gresham examines criticisms (1) and (4) and, because we believe that he shows their complete inadequacy, we will not comment further on either of these criticisms. However, in light of Brian Leftow's strong formulations of the "monotheistic criticism" and the "Christological criticism" we offer the following in response.<sup>9</sup> Leftow provides a succinct statement of the monotheistic criticism leveled against ST through what he calls the "hard tasks" for ST. According to Leftow, "one hard task for ST is to explain why its three Persons are 'not three Gods, but one God' and do so without transparently misreading the Creed."<sup>10</sup> This monotheistic criticism has also been expressed in terms of its corollary, namely, the accusation of tritheism.<sup>11</sup>

Like many terms describing heresies, tritheism is often used with an apparent lack of understanding for its historical application. It is asserted by some that tritheism is simply the idea of three gods, no matter how the idea is understood. For example, Carl Mosser and Paul Owen state, "What must be argued is that the three persons of the Trinity are *only* one God; in other words that they are one God *only*, and not in *any* sense *also* three Gods."<sup>12</sup> Others assert that tritheism is the idea of three different Beings, each of whom "happens to be" divine.<sup>13</sup> In this rendering, tritheism consists of not appropriately expressing the unity among the beings. Stephen Davis has asserted that the idea of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost *actually* constituting a society or community makes one a tritheist, whereas the idea that the relationship between Father, Son and Holy Ghost is in some ways *like* (or *analogous to*) a society or community allows one to avoid tritheism.<sup>14</sup> While all these accusations draw the boundary of heresy at different points, they are all historically imprecise. As Cornelius Plantinga points out, the problem is not three distinct persons who may each properly be called "a God," (consider Thomas's statement to the resurrected Christ: "My Lord, my God"); the real problem is three ontologically graded gods.

In the fourth and fifth centuries, when the doctrine of the Trinity was being developed, there were particular limits on orthodoxy and, accordingly, particular positions outside orthodoxy. As already suggested, virtually everybody who writes on the Trinity during this period identifies the monist heresy as some form of modalism, and then specifies that modalism is unacceptable because it allows belief in only one person. I now want to add that the heresy on orthodoxy's pluralist side is specifiable as well. And it is surely not the view that God includes three distinct persons . . . what is heretical is belief in three *ontologically graded* distinct persons.<sup>15</sup>

J. N. D. Kelly agrees that the pole of the tritheistic heresy was Arius who affirmed that there is one God (the Father) who is unique, transcendent and indivisible, and whose being or essence cannot be shared or communicated.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the Son is a creature formed *ex nihilo* who cannot have any communion with or direct knowledge of the Father. It will simply not do then for critics of ST to maintain, with Leftow, that belief in three distinct beings amounts to the historical heresy of tritheism. ST and the pre-creedal Origen are "not afraid to speak in *one sense* of two Gods, in another sense of one God."<sup>17</sup> ST contends with Origen that the error of modalism lies in treating the Three as numerically indistinguishable and separable only in thought. As will be shown below, ST has no problem using the word "God" in different ways.

Leftow's preoccupation with numerals is further illustrated by his comment, "A second hard task for ST is providing an account of what monotheism is which both is intuitively acceptable and lets ST count as monotheist."<sup>18</sup> In response, it first ought to be pointed out that the word "monotheism" occurs nowhere in the Old or New Testaments. What occurs in the Christian scriptures is the assertion that "one" God rules in the heavens. We argue below that with the acknowledgment of Jesus Christ as a person wholly divine yet distinct from the Father, this "one" can and should be understood in functional rather than numeric terms. ST contends that the relationship of Jesus and His God as portrayed in the New Testament is the key to understanding immanent trinitarian functions. William Hasker expresses this "crucial issue" in terms of a question:

Is the relationship between Jesus and the Father, as depicted in the Gospels, only the relationship of a man with his God, similar to that enjoyed by other men, though perhaps on a higher spiritual plane? Or is Jesus also "God, the Son of God," and was his relationship with the Father not only a relationship between a man and God—though it was that—but also the relationship, lived out on earth, between the eternal Son and his eternal Father—a relationship, in fact, *between God and God*? This is the question of all questions for the doctrine of the Trinity.<sup>19</sup>

If this relationship is understood as *between God and God*, then adherence to so-called "strict Jewish monotheism" seems out of the question. Leftow's insistence that the Christian Godhead, "should be a monotheism a Jew could accept as monotheistic" is not only question-begging

but also shows a lack of historical awareness and biblical scholarship. In particular, Jewish views were not uniform; there was a diversity of views about God and God's relation to the "sons of God" and other divine beings in Second Temple Judaism. Which Jews does Leftow have in mind? Jews of the Second Temple era like those who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls and accepted an entire council of gods and divine beings like Michael? Modern Jews who reject the incarnation of the Son of God? First-century Jews, of whom Jesus said, "Ye neither know me, nor my Father"?<sup>20</sup> If pre-messianic Jews, is it preexilic Jews or postexilic Jews? If the response is "all of them," this proves extremely problematic. While space does not allow for full recapitulation of all the relevant studies in this area, scholars remain less than certain whether the religion of ancient Israel can even be called "monotheistic" and if it can, just how that is the case.<sup>21</sup> ST, and as will be shown, Joseph Smith, argue that monotheism should not be understood as a strictly numerical concept. The question of whether or not this rendering is "intuitive" must be left to the reader.

(B) *Social Trinitarianism and the Creeds*

If ST is biblical, which it seems to be, the question remains whether it can be creedal. As Leftow puts it, are proponents of ST "transparently misreading the Creed"?<sup>22</sup> To this, we answer no, for if scholarship has proved anything in relation to the terms used in the creeds, it is that they set the limits of orthodoxy very broadly and provide sufficient room for a ST reading.<sup>23</sup>

While a full investigation into the doctrinal disputes of Nicaea is beyond the scope of this paper, it must be pointed out "that those who had signed the Nicene Creed could not agree on what it meant."<sup>24</sup> Consider the critical term of Nicaea, *homoousios*. Although not included in the first draft of the creed, Constantine, the as-yet unbaptized emperor, requested its insertion.<sup>25</sup> In his comprehensive study of the term (and the idea of substance), Christopher Stead comments,

Finally we have to consider the term *homoousios* as it occurs in the Nicene Creed; what were its immediate antecedents, and what was its meaning? These two questions have been repeatedly discussed, but without reaching assured conclusions.

There is, moreover, too little trustworthy evidence for the use of the term in the years immediately preceding Nicaea. Scholars have therefore had to rely, partly on certain broad historical projections, partly on the reports of the Council presented by Eusebius and Athanasius; of whom the former has come under suspicion as offering a tendentious account of the proceedings, designed to excuse his reluctant subscription, while the latter, whether or not he displays an opposing *Tendenz*, records his impressions of the Council after a lapse of twenty-five years.<sup>26</sup>

Stead then elucidates three possible ways in which *homoousios* could be viewed.<sup>27</sup> He concludes:

*Homoousios* guarantees very little; it can be used of things which resemble one another merely in belonging to the created order, or to the category of substance; it can relate collaterals to each other, or derivatives with their source; it does not exclude inequality of status or power.<sup>28</sup>

William Alston concurs with Stead, writing, “and because of this ambiguity the crucial statement of the Nicene creed that the Son is ‘*homoousios* with the Father’ is likewise ambiguous.”<sup>29</sup> Indeed, for more than fifty years after Nicaea, the Church debated exactly what it had affirmed. Various alternatives were tried: “Exact image of the Godhead” (Second Creed of Antioch, 341); “Like the Father who begot Him according to the Scriptures” (Dated Creed, Fourth of Sirmium); “Of like essence with the Father” (Ancyra, 358); “Unlike the Father” (the teaching of Aetius and Eunomius and, by implication, of the Second Creed of Sirmium, 357).<sup>30</sup> Lastly, consider the uncertainty of Hilary of Poitiers concerning the term *homoousion*:

“It is a thing,” says Hilary, “equally deplorable and dangerous, that there are as many creeds as opinions among men, as many doctrines as inclinations, and as many sources of blasphemy as there are faults among us; because we make creeds arbitrarily, and explain them away as arbitrarily. The *homoousion* is rejected, and received, and explained away by successive synods. The partial or total resemblance of the Father and the Son is a subject of dispute for these unhappy times. Every year, nay, every moon, we make new creeds to describe invisible mysteries. We repent of what we have done, we defend those who repent, we anathematize those whom we have defended. We condemn either the doctrine of others in ourselves, or our own in that of others; and, reciprocally tearing one another to pieces, we have been the cause of each other’s ruin.”<sup>31</sup>

If the originators and those who immediately followed could come to no consensus concerning the meaning of the creed, it is clear that modern Christians are *not* bound to a homogenous interpretation of it.<sup>32</sup> Proponents of ST (including Mormons) can accept the Nicene Creed as a declaration of the full divinity of Jesus Christ while rejecting the ontological identity of the three divine persons. This point is important and worth repeating: the Nicene Creed can be (and was historically) interpreted in varying ways, by varying groups, with varying theological commitments. Any number of persons, including modalists and proponents of ST, can subscribe to the creed, each producing its own studies to show why *homoousios* ought to be understood in a particular way.

The other technically critical words in trinitarian discourse, namely *ousia* and *hypostasis*, suffer from the same historical ambiguity as *homoousios*.<sup>33</sup> Consider Joseph Lienhard’s hesitation to strictly define these terms, “I do not offer a uniform translation of *ousia* and *hypostasis*. Such a refusal arises not only from cowardice, but also from the recognition of a fact: fourth-century authors themselves were wary of explaining the meaning of the two words, and generally resorted to comparisons rather than definitions.”<sup>34</sup>

As a result of this brief historical inquiry it is evident that the monotheistic criticism is in fact an issue of Arianism, which in turn is the Christological criticism. If ST is to avoid this criticism it must affirm (1) that the Son is uncreate and eternal and (2) that the Son is fully God. Can it do so while remaining biblically faithful and internally consistent? We argue that it can and that Smith's ideas provide insight into many of the current issues surrounding ST as it tries to satisfy the above criteria. Before discussing what contributions Smith's thought provides to the ST debate, we first turn to an explication of Smith's trinitarian model, a model we shall call "Elyonic Monotheism."

## II. Smith's View of the Godhead

### (A) Three Distinct Divine Persons or "Three Gods"

In 1842, as part of a response to a Chicago newspaperman's inquiry as to what "Mormons" believed, Joseph Smith penned thirteen basic beliefs, which have come to be known as "The Articles of Faith." Though not intended as such, they remain the closest Mormon analog to a creed. The first of these articles affirms belief in the New Testament Godhead: "We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost."<sup>35</sup> Thus, this first Article of Faith identifies a trinitarian Godhead, though it does so without declaring how the members of the Godhead relate to one another. However, as if to underscore the significance accorded the question by addressing it through the *first* Article of Faith, numerous other revelations, writings, and speeches speak to the issues of both unity and distinctness within the Trinity. Clearly, this was an issue about which Smith had much to say.

In his last public sermon prior to his death, Smith declared,

I have always and in all congregations when I have preached on the subject of the Deity, it has been the plurality of Gods. . . . I have always declared God to be a distinct personage, Jesus Christ a separate and distinct personage from God the Father, and that the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit: and these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods.<sup>36</sup>

This affirmation was also based upon revelation. Of such, Smith wrote: "Any person that had seen the heavens opened knows that there are three personages in the heavens who hold the keys of power, and one presides over all."<sup>37</sup> Smith understood the power held by these three persons to be supreme power (including supreme creative power, ruling power, and redeeming power).<sup>38</sup>

Note that Smith did not teach that the Godhead was three different modes or manifestations of the same person or being.<sup>39</sup> Nor did he suggest that the Godhead was in some way merely *like or analogous to* three persons; he taught that it actually consists of three distinct persons. While all trinitarians maintain there are three divine persons in some sense, Smith distinguishes them with particular force and clarity. For Smith, each of these persons is uncreate and self-existent.<sup>40</sup> This is an important point and

bears some elaboration. For Smith, at any time  $t$  the existence of each of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost is an unchanging fact about the universe. None depends upon the others for his existence, nor could one annihilate either of the others. In *this* sense, we could say that the divine persons are “ontologically independent.” This point will be further developed below, in comparison with other formulations of ST.

In addition to metaphysical necessity and self-existence, Smith’s revelations depict each divine person as possessing his own mind, or center of consciousness. For instance, consider this portrayal of the Son’s post-resurrection pleading (or interceding) with the Father:

Listen to him who is the Advocate with the Father, who is pleading your case before him: Saying Father behold the suffering and death of him who did no sin, in whom thou wast well pleased; behold the blood of thy Son which was shed, the blood of him whom thou gavest that thyself might be glorified: wherefore Father spare these my brethren that believe on my name, that they may come unto me and have everlasting life.<sup>41</sup>

“Him,” “thou,” “thy,” “thyself,” “my,” “me”: such language is abundant in Smith’s revelations, portraying interactive relations between the Father and the Son. Smith taught that the mind, speech and actions of both the Son and the Holy Ghost are distinct from the Father’s mind, speech and actions. Furthermore, according to Smith, each of the three possesses his own will. The Book of Mormon implores readers to “choose eternal life, according to the will” of the Holy Spirit.<sup>42</sup> The Doctrine and Covenants discloses Jesus’ agony in Gethsemane and distinguishes between his will and that of the Father.<sup>43</sup> However, while it is clear that the Holy Ghost and the Son each possess their own distinct will, as shall be discussed below, it is the Father’s will that they seek to accomplish. Thus, in another revelation Christ proclaims, “I am Jesus Christ; I came by the will of the Father, and I do his will,” and in relation to the His atoning sacrifice, He declares, “I . . . accomplished and finished the will of him whose I am, even the Father.”<sup>44</sup>

Further evidence of Smith’s strong notion of the distinct personhood of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is found in his portrayal of each as being profoundly passible. The Son experiences emotions *distinct* from those of the Father, while the Father experiences emotions *distinct* from those of the Son.<sup>45</sup> In bodily form, each resembles the manifestation of Jesus incarnate, both in his mortal and glorified resurrected bodily states.<sup>46</sup> For Smith, there are literally three distinct divine persons—or, as he boldly chose to say near the end of his life, “three Gods.” Each of these persons is independently self-existent and each possesses his own distinct center of consciousness, will and emotions. For Smith, the proposition that there are three distinct persons in the Godhead appears to express a nonnegotiable fact, with which any acceptable account of the unity of the Godhead would have to cohere.

(B) *Smith’s Views: One God*

Notwithstanding his explicit declaration that the Father, Son and Holy Ghost are “three distinct personages and three Gods,” Smith’s revelations



also repeatedly affirm that “the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost, are one God.”<sup>47</sup> At face value, these two affirmations appear to be flatly contradictory.<sup>48</sup> However, closer inspection discloses that the contradiction is apparent only, resulting from Smith’s equivocal use of the term “God.” It is therefore important to briefly examine what Smith meant by the term “one God,” and show how these statements, when correctly understood, are actually consistent with his affirmation of three distinct divine persons, or “three Gods.”

One critic of ST has written, “The Trinity is an illogical paradox if the three-in-oneness it refers to is conceived in the terms of mathematical logic, that is, if the concept of the oneness of the Trinity is understood primarily as a strictly mathematical number 1.”<sup>49</sup> Smith obviously did not understand biblical oneness scriptures as asserting numerical unity. For instance, in interpreting an oft-quoted oneness passage, Smith says, “I want to read the text to you myself [John 17:21]—‘I am agreed with the Father and the Father is agreed with me, and we are agreed as one.’ The Greek shows that it should be agreed.”<sup>50</sup>

Rather than understanding their oneness as an identity of being, Smith saw the oneness of the Godhead as, amongst other things, a unity in heart, mind, will, attributes and nature. Smith understood this unity to be a result of the willing and free choice of the divine persons to align their distinct wills. Indeed, Smith specifically taught that an “everlasting covenant was made between three personages [Father, Son and Holy Ghost] before the organization of this earth, and relates to their dispensation of things to men on the earth.”<sup>51</sup> Smith understood this covenant to consist of each of the three divine beings covenanting with the others to fulfill a specific role in relation to the salvation of the human family. The Father, according to Smith, is God “the first”<sup>52</sup> and presides “over all,”<sup>53</sup> and it is the Father’s plan of creation and redemption that the Son carries out.<sup>54</sup> Thus, Smith refers to the Son as God “the second” and as “the Redeemer” and “the Mediator.”<sup>55</sup> According to Smith, God “the third,” or Holy Ghost, is “the witness or Testator.”<sup>56</sup> Because of their covenant relationship, a synergetic bond exists between the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, the nature of which is distinctive to the Trinity. This bond was forged not only out of their oneness of minds, hearts, natures and attributes, but also out of their interdependent missions.

In a sermon, Smith asked, “What did Jesus do?” and provided a paraphrased answer: “Why, I do the things I saw my Father do . . . when I get my kingdom, I shall present it to My Father, so that He may obtain kingdom upon kingdom, and it will exalt Him in glory.”<sup>57</sup> Meanwhile, as Jesus performed the roles of a savior and redeemer of the Father’s creations, Smith viewed the Holy Ghost as a person charged with yet another distinct mission, a portion of which he elucidated in an editorial:

We believe that the holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and that holy men in these days speak by the same principle; we believe in its being a comforter and a witness bearer, that it brings things past to our remembrance, leads us into all truth, and shows us of things to come; we believe that ‘no man can know that Jesus is the Christ, but by the Holy Ghost.’<sup>58</sup>

Thus, as the Father needs the Son and Holy Ghost to accomplish his purposes, so do the Son and Holy Ghost need and look to the Father for direction, power and exaltation. By their acts of mutual service, each fulfills, and is fulfilled in, the others. The Book of Mormon declares this unity of will to be complete by saying of Jesus Christ, "Yea, even so he shall be led, crucified, and slain, the flesh becoming subject even unto death, the will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father."<sup>59</sup> In explaining this passage, LDS philosopher Blake Ostler observes:

There is only one God because the will of the Son is "swallowed up" in the will of the Father. There are clearly two wills, for the Son has a will that is distinct from the Father's will, but he willingly subordinates his will to the Father's will so that only one will is actually expressed in the divine relationship, i.e., the Father's. In this sense, by completely subordinating his will to the Father's will it follows that the Father's will is always realized and thus the one God is, *in this sense*, both the Father and the Son.<sup>60</sup>

Thus, while the Son and Holy Ghost possess distinct minds and wills and exhibit distinct actions, the Godhead thinks, wills and acts *ad extra* as one. This is shown explicitly in Jesus' pre-incarnate declaration in the Book of Mormon: "Behold, I come unto my own . . . to do the will, both of the Father and of the Son."<sup>61</sup> As explained above, it is the will of the Father that the Son and Holy Ghost freely take as their own. This loving and free choice of the divine persons to align their wills is expressed in Smith's revelations through the assertions that there is only *one* doctrine,<sup>62</sup> judgment,<sup>63</sup> baptism<sup>64</sup> and record<sup>65</sup> of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Again, as Smith declared, "Any person that had seen the heavens opened knows that there are three personages in the heavens who hold the keys of power, and *one* [the Father] *presides over all*."<sup>66</sup>

Along with explaining the concept of "one God" as relating to a unity of will, Smith also taught that there is "one God" in the sense of only one type of "God-nature" or set of attributes, severally necessary and jointly sufficient, for divinity. We believe that the late Latter-day Saint Apostle Elder James E. Talmage provides a clear explanation of how the possession of a qualitatively indistinguishable set of characteristics makes the Godhead "one":

This unity is a type of completeness; the mind of any one member of the Trinity is the mind of the others; seeing as each of them does with the eye of perfection, they see and understand alike. Under any given conditions each would act in the same way, guided by the same principles of unerring justice and equity.<sup>67</sup>

While the divine nature includes maximal power, knowledge, justice and mercy, Smith understood "the greatest of all" to be love: namely, each God *is* God ultimately because He possesses maximal love.<sup>68</sup> As will be developed more fully below, Smith's view of love as "one of the chief characteristics of Deity" is key to understanding the type of "trinity" he described.<sup>69</sup> For Smith, then, the unity of the Godhead does not

reduce to logical necessity, but instead rests most fundamentally in the binding power of love.<sup>70</sup>

Finally, Smith viewed the biblical designation of Jesus as “the Son of the living God”<sup>71</sup> as much more than an “analogy” of the genetic relationship that would naturally exist between a father and son. The leadership of the LDS Church issued a doctrinal exposition (based on Smith’s teachings) that states: “[God] is literally the Father of the spirit of Jesus Christ and also of the body in which Jesus Christ performed His mission in the flesh.”<sup>72</sup> Thus, not only are the Father, Son and Holy Ghost to be considered “one God” in terms of will, purpose and nature but are also linked through a very literal familial relationship.<sup>73</sup>

What has been said concerning Smith’s understanding of the unity of the Godhead may be summarized as follows: The persons of the Trinity are united as one God (a) through a foundation of profound and abiding love, (b) in their familial relationships, (c) in an “everlasting covenant” that unites their activity and wills and (d) in “the same fullness” of divine attributes.

To repeat a very important point: in Smith’s revelations and discourses, the word “God” is used equivocally to designate, amongst other things, each individual divine person (but especially the Father), the perfectly united divine community, and the divine nature. To avoid misunderstanding while reading Mormon texts, it is imperative to keep these multiple uses of the word “God” in mind.<sup>74</sup> Consistent with his revelations, when Smith declares there are “three Gods,” he means that there are three individual persons, each of whom is divine. When he affirms that there is “one God,” he means that either there is one God the Father, one perfectly united divine community or one generic divine nature.<sup>75</sup>

### *III. Contemporary Social Trinitarianism: Agreement*

The revival of ST has been described as “one of the most significant developments in contemporary theology.”<sup>76</sup> Along with this revival has come a certain amount of confusion concerning what exactly qualifies as a social model of the Trinity. Indeed, a wide variety of views of the Trinity, which contradict each other at crucial points, all lay claim to the social model. This in turn has caused even greater confusion, as critics provide arguments directed at a specific form of ST which may have no application to other forms.<sup>77</sup> While all who affirm ST agree on a few key issues, there remains much work to be done in the refinement and working-out of any version of ST.

Perhaps what is most agreed upon by proponents of ST is the inadequacy of so-called Western theology’s attempts at explicating the doctrine of the Trinity. In contrast to Western theology’s beginning with the one essence, the oft-quoted explanation of ST is that it begins with the three persons. This methodological departure from the norm forms a basic, and most simple, definition of ST. As Jürgen Moltmann explains, “we are beginning with the Trinity of the Persons and shall then go on to ask about the unity.”<sup>78</sup> This much is consistent in all models of ST. They each seek first to explain “three what?” before answering “one what?” In doing so, they often use New Testament evidence as foundational axioms. Leonard

Hodgson, a forerunner of the modern movement, was adamant in asserting the primacy of the “biblical evidence.”<sup>79</sup> Leonardo Boff’s stated thesis is typical of ST methodology: “I propose to try a third way [of understanding the Trinity], starting decisively from the Trinity, from Father, Son and Holy Spirit as revealed in the scriptures and as apparent from the historical actions of Jesus Christ.”<sup>80</sup> Besides forming a foundation for ST, New Testament evidence is being used as a constraint on trinitarian theorizing. Scott Horrell’s thesis is admirable in this respect: “My primary assertion is that the speculations of trinitarian theology are not to supersede revelation.”<sup>81</sup>

While many writers claim that anyone who maintains that the Trinity consists of three distinct divine individuals is a Social Trinitarian,<sup>82</sup> we argue that other important factors must supplement this criterion in determining what constitutes a rationally persuasive and biblically consistent social model of the trinity. Specifically, we will address four issues in ST that currently lack consensus: (A) Internal Consistency, (B) Biblical Correspondence and the Resurrected Christ, (C) Power and Decision Making and (D) *Perichoresis* and Trinitarian “Glue.”

#### IV. Current Issues in ST and Smith’s Contributions

##### (A) Internal Consistency

In his watershed and lucid treatment of ST, Cornelius Plantinga presents a biblically faithful and internally consistent model that sets the standard for future theorizing. For Plantinga, the “one what?” question in the Trinity is answered in three specific ways. There is “only one font of divinity, only one Father, only one God in *that* sense of God,”<sup>83</sup> there is “only one divine essence or set of excellent properties severally necessary and jointly sufficient for their possessor to be divine,” and there is “only one divine family or monarchy or community, namely, the Holy Trinity itself.”<sup>84</sup> Other theologians have sought to answer the “one what?” question with varying levels of success. Despite their insistence on the real and distinct personhood of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, many of these versions of ST fall prey to the traditional trinitarian habit of taking back with one hand what they have just given with the other. For example, some versions of ST assert that while Father, Son and Spirit are divine, only the Trinity is most appropriately God.<sup>85</sup> These models have been labeled “Trinity Monotheism”<sup>86</sup> by Leftow, a fitting description because for them only one thing is most appropriately God, namely the Trinity itself. While this approach saves the numerical unity of the three, it clearly violates what for ST and Christianity is fundamental, namely, that each person of the Trinity is fully God. This defect, in our judgment, certainly disqualifies it as a strong or social model of the Godhead.

Other models, which Leftow calls “Group Mind Monotheism,”<sup>87</sup> place the unity of the Trinity in a shared mind. “Group Mind” monotheism asserts that the three divine Persons have but one mind between them, which is God or the mind of the one God, or that they comprise a fourth divine mind.<sup>88</sup> Even if intelligible, this approach quite clearly rules out any real distinctness of the trinitarian persons.<sup>89</sup>

Another example of a less-than-adequate attempt to develop an internally consistent version of ST is that of William Hasker. Throughout his paper "Tri-Unity," Hasker does an admirable job developing "a reconstruction of the doctrine of the Trinity developed in terms of contemporary philosophy of mind."<sup>90</sup> In so doing he defines a person's nature as a specification of "a set of characteristics which together delimit the range of [a person's] actual and possible experiences within the field of *all* possible experiences."<sup>91</sup> Thus, Hasker continues,

If we agree to call the continuing characteristics of a given individual his 'dispositions,' then *his nature is the ontological ground of the dispositions*. Or to put it differently, the nature is that *in virtue of which* the self is able to have experiences of various kinds; it is the *real capacity* or the *real potentiality* for having such experiences. Or again, the self as subject is that *which* acts or has experiences; its nature is that *by which* it does so.<sup>92</sup>

In a footnote, Hasker points out the obvious in regards to the nature of a person being a universal or particular: "it should be clear that natures, as here defined are particular rather than universal; *each individual person* has his own distinct nature. (There is, however, no *logical* reason why two persons might not have natures which are qualitatively indistinguishable.)"<sup>93</sup> So far, Hasker's account is both illuminating and seemingly helpful. However, it is in his application to the persons of the Trinity that Hasker's thesis seemingly falls into incoherence.

In explaining what he takes to be one about the Godhead Hasker asserts, "The doctrine of the Trinity, stated in these terms, means that *the one individual and indivisible Nature of God is possessed by three Subjects, each of whom is really distinct from the other two.*"<sup>94</sup> Hasker's apparent contradiction can be stated in formal terms, for he asserts:

- (1) Natures are particulars, that is, "each individual person has his own distinct nature."<sup>95</sup>
- (2) The Trinity consists of three persons, "each Person is to each other Person as an 'I' to a 'Thou.'"
- (3) The persons of the Trinity share "the one individual and indivisible Nature of God,"<sup>96</sup> not only generically, but "numerically."<sup>97</sup>

How does Hasker explain this contradiction? He does not, but in another footnote admits, "At this point the question naturally arises: How is it that the same individual divine Nature is possessed by three distinct Subjects? This of course has been answered in classical trinitarianism by saying that the Son and the Holy Spirit 'proceed' from the Father—but that is another story."<sup>98</sup> Unless this story is told in a logically satisfying way, Hasker's model remains internally inconsistent. There is of course a way out for Hasker, and that is to admit that the persons of the Trinity each possess a distinct nature, but assert that these natures are, in his words, "qualitatively indistinguishable." Hasker's attempt seems to be one of trying to maintain *some sort* of ontological oneness, and such endeavors are, of course, nothing new.

*(B) Biblical Correspondence*

While the tendency to affirm some sort of ontological oneness within the Trinity has been the dominant tradition in the West since some time after Nicaea,<sup>99</sup> we maintain, with Smith, that any such attempts cannot do justice to the Biblical witness of Jesus' physical resurrection.

As a modern witness to the historically indispensable doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, Smith's witness presses this Christological issue into the trinitarian discussion. Smith often accused sectarian ministers of trying to "stuff" the Father, Son and Holy Ghost into "one body."<sup>100</sup> While seemingly naïve, Smith's point can be stated in more sophisticated terms, bringing the issue into focus. Smith believed, based upon the Bible and personal experience, that Jesus currently possesses a resurrected body complete with "flesh and bones."<sup>101</sup> This body is *his* and *not* God the Father's. If the question is one of "counting God," then this resurrected body must be counted or, at least, accounted for.

We have noticed, in the academic arena, a lack of integration between the doctrine of the bodily resurrection of God the Son<sup>102</sup> and theological models of the Trinity. For example, William Alston says, "The basic trouble is that it simply does not seem at all appropriate to think of incorporeal persons being constituted of any material or stuff."<sup>103</sup> Furthermore, Keith Yandell asserts, "By nature, God is not located in space. . . . Hence one cannot distinguish between one trinitarian member and another by reference to spatial properties (God has none)."<sup>104</sup> No explanation is given as to why the Son, after affirming his bodily resurrection to many, is now incorporeal or lacks spatial properties. Did Jesus leave his resurrected body? The biblical witness seems to condemn this idea, for as James says, "the body without the spirit is dead,"<sup>105</sup> and according to Paul's testimony, "Christ being raised from the dead *dieth no more*; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God."<sup>106</sup>

To remain consistent with the biblical witness Christian theologians must maintain a Son whose spirit possesses a distinct physical body. As argued above, it seems that Jesus' spirit, once reunited with his body through resurrection will not and cannot be separated from his body. If Jesus' body is *not* the Father's body and Jesus' spirit will forever inhabit his body, it seemingly follows that the Father and the Son are *not* one identical Spirit. Thus, if Christianity maintains (as it has historically) that God is a Spirit, then the Spirit of the Father must be distinguishable from that of the Son because one inhabits a body eternally that the other does not. For adherents of ST, the resurrected Son seems to necessitate the real ontological distinctness of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Indeed, any attempt to identify the oneness of the Trinity through ontology seems incoherent in the face of Jesus' physical resurrection. Furthermore, the reality of the resurrection seems to pose a problem for the LT who deplores *counting* more than one numerical God. The possession of a corporeal body by the Son seems to preclude the persons being differentiated by "relationship" or "name" only.

Perhaps it may be responded that, since it is well accepted in Western Christianity that Christ was both fully human and fully divine, Christ's

embodiment can be an aspect of only his *human* nature and not his divine nature. Thus, since the Father and the Son share only the same divine nature and not the human nature, Christ can have a resurrected body and the divine nature without the Father sharing His body.<sup>107</sup> We believe that this response fails on several grounds: first, it fails to respond to the fact that, while incarnate, Jesus was fully God in that His human nature *and* His divine nature resided in a physical body, thus leaving the problem of the Father's spirit's location unresolved. Moreover, the biblical record clearly indicates that Jesus' body was itself divine in the sense that it is "spiritual" and "glorious" (1 Cor. 15:44; Philip. 3:21); why would Jesus' divine nature not reside in His resurrected, spiritual and glorious body in a way that proves problematic to the supposed numeric identity of the Father and Son? Finally, the radical separation of the human nature from the divine nature needed for this argument tends too readily toward Nestorianism, the belief that two persons, one human and one divine, are embodied in Christ.

With the failure of this attempted resolution, other responses suggest themselves. Perhaps the fact that spatial predicates apply to the Son but not the Father can simply be understood in a similar fashion to other predicates. Traditional theology has no particular problem with statements like "The Son, not the Father, is the Redeemer," as it relates to the specific, differentiated roles of members of the Trinity. Since having a body is essential to the Son's mission, and only to the Son's mission, the predicates relating to His body do not need to apply to the Father any more than other such predicates. Again, this response comes up short. Above all, it enters dense philosophical woods by claiming that numerically identical beings can have different properties. It also seems to trivialize the Son's resurrected body by consigning it a solely functional purpose. While it may be the case that a body is necessary in order to suffer and die for mankind, it seems much less the case that having a body is necessary for overcoming death and being eternally glorified. Why, then, on this view, did Jesus keep his body? Why do we keep our bodies? The Son's body is not simply related to His earthly mission, and thus this response fails.

Finally, the respondent may attempt to argue that it is in some sense true that the Father and the Son share a body, perhaps in the sense of which the Bible speaks of the unity between husband and wife. Perhaps a theory like this could allude to scriptures like Col. 2:9, "For in him dwelleth the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Thus, as the husband's body is in some sense the wife's, Christ's body is in some sense the Father's, removing the obstacle. Again, though, the response misfires. We can't *fully* say that the Son's body is the Father's, which we seem required to do in order to escape the problems caused by numerical identity. If we can fully say that the Son's body is the Father's, then it is difficult to see how we can avoid patripassianism or, in Joseph Smith's words, "stuffing" the Father, Son and Holy Ghost into one body. Since both of these are unacceptable to traditional theology, this response comes up short. Another account of the relationship between the resurrected Son and the Father is in order.

Taking adequate account of the resurrected Son can help future ST models adhere to what Cornelius Plantinga calls the minimum "three conditions" that a model must meet to qualify as "a strong or social theory of the Trinity":

(1) The theory must have Father, Son, and Spirit as distinct centers of knowledge, will, love, and action. Since each of these capacities requires consciousness, it follows that, on this sort of theory, Father, Son, and Spirit would be viewed as distinct centers of consciousness or, in short, as persons in some full sense of that term. (2) Any accompanying sub-theory of divine simplicity must be modest enough to be consistent with condition (1), that is, with the real distinctness of trinitarian persons. And (3) Father, Son, and Spirit must be regarded as tightly enough related to each other so as to render plausible the judgment that they constitute a particular social unit.<sup>108</sup>

We argue that these three conditions provide a suitable and necessary measuring rod for all theologians seeking to develop a legitimate *social* model of the Trinity. However, biblical correspondence and internal consistency and, more particularly, integration with Christ's bodily resurrection are not the only obstacles that ST is presently seeking to overcome. Two other issues prominent in ST discourse are those of division of power and the perichoretic indwelling of the trinitarian persons. We assert that Smith's teachings come to bear on both these issues where ST currently lack consensus.

### (C) *Power and Decision Making*

If the persons of the Trinity are allowed their real personhood and divinity and therefore real distinctness, many theologians have been concerned with how characteristics entailed by their divinity are *shared*.<sup>109</sup> The conventional proposal for such an unsharable characteristic is omnipotence. Two theologians who have dealt with this issue at length are Richard Swinburne and Timothy Bartel. Both are concerned with the possibility of a conflict of wills or even a "permanent creative stalemate"<sup>110</sup> between the persons of the Trinity.

While a full critique of their positions lies outside the scope of this paper,<sup>111</sup> a few comments are in order to clarify the issues of power and love in the Trinity. Both assert that in order to rule out a conflict of wills between the three omnipotent beings, each person of the Trinity must agree upon some sort of decision-sharing proposal.<sup>112</sup> In resolving this issue, Swinburne argues for a form of "monarchism" arising out of the Son and Holy Ghost's ontological dependence upon the Father.<sup>113</sup> Coined by the Cappodocians, "monarchism" expresses the view that the Father is the "sole source or sole origin" (Greek "*monarchē*") of the Son and the Spirit.<sup>114</sup> Swinburne suggests that with the Father's necessary creation of the Son and Holy Spirit came a decision-sharing proposal:

Such unity of action could be secured if the first God [i.e., the Father] solemnly vows to the second God [the Son] in creating him that he will not frustrate any action of his in a certain sphere of activity, and expresses the request that in return the second God should not frustrate any action of his in the other sphere.<sup>115</sup>

Bartel, on the other hand, rejects monarchism of any kind on the reasoning that,



“On any natural reading,” monarchism commits us to the inferiority of the Son and the Spirit, and that if the Social Trinitarian wants her position to be coherent, she ought to hold that none of the members of the Trinity depends for his existence on any of the others—a view that also lacks a convenient label, but which I propose we should call “republicanism.”<sup>116</sup>

Bartel’s republicanism is of itself not strictly worked out, but he does offer three decision-sharing scenarios that would allow the Trinity to resolve a conflict of wills. The underlying premise of Bartel’s proposals is the *complete* equality of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit such that each person of the Trinity may (and presumably does) “table decision-sharing proposals.”<sup>117</sup> The intent of Bartel’s proposals is a unity of will and power such that only one will and power are realized and of course only one will is recognizable in divine history. This is equivalent to what Leftow labels “functional monotheism.”<sup>118</sup> Despite its democratic appeal, Bartel admits an uneasiness of abandoning all notions of the supremacy of the Father.<sup>119</sup>

Which of these, if either, ought the proponent of ST adopt? We argue that while well-intentioned and logically plausible, neither Bartel’s nor Swinburne’s model does full justice to biblical revelation. In connection with this claim, we argue that Smith’s model for decision making and power sharing is more biblically consistent and ought to be adopted.

As stated above, Smith explicitly endorses Bartel’s “republicanism” in that, according to Smith’s revelations, none of the Persons of the Godhead depend on the others for their existence. Moreover, while the Father, Son and Holy Ghost each possess their own distinct will, it is the Father’s will that each seek to accomplish. This view, we argue, is more in line with the Bible. While the idea of such a functional subordination without inequality in being is not novel, where Smith’s theology supersedes previous explanations of divine power sharing is in the *why* of the submission. Smith’s affirmation that the Son and Holy Ghost submit to will of the Father purely out of love is an important addition. As will be more fully explicated below, Smith conceived of love as the most “Godlike” attribute. We believe that Christian theology has been unduly influenced by the idea that *power* ought to be understood as coercive power.<sup>120</sup> Contrastingly, Smith taught that “the powers of *heaven* . . . *can* or ought to be maintained . . . only by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness and by love unfeigned.”<sup>121</sup> The power and decisionmaking of the Father is that of love, not of coercion. No person in the Godhead would do anything to contravene the freedom of another. Out of love for the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost entered before creation into an “everlasting covenant”<sup>122</sup> to freely submit to the Father’s will.

What has been said above concerning Smith’s view of the immanent trinitarian functions may be summarized in four points:

- (1) The Father is the loving head of the Trinity such that he “presides over all.”
- (2) Love induces and maintains the operational or functional subordination of the Son and Holy Ghost to the Father.

- (3) The Son and Holy Ghost are self-existent and, therefore, have ontological equality with the Father.
- (4) As a result of (1) and (2), (i) only one will is realized and acted upon in salvation history and (ii) it is the will of the Father.

As stated above, we call Smith's understanding of divine decision making "Elyonic Monotheism." There is but one "Most High God," the Father,<sup>123</sup> who is loved and obeyed by the Son and Holy Ghost. As set forth "Elyonic Monotheism" is a species of the genus "functional monotheism" and is, we argue, biblically consistent and rationally persuasive.

(D) *Perichoresis and Trinitarian "Glue"*

Another ST concept yet to be fully worked out is that of the divine indwelling, or *perichoresis*.<sup>124</sup> The issue arises out of passages such as John 10:38, wherein Jesus asserts, "The Father is in me and I am in the Father."<sup>125</sup> Once again, while full discussion of the issue lies beyond the scope of this paper, a few comments are in order. Some proponents of ST seem to take this perichoretic unity as asserting (1) some sort of logically necessary unity or (2) some sort of ontological mixing of the persons. We assert that neither (1) nor (2) is appropriate and that once again Smith's insights come to bear on the issue.

In regards to (1) consider how St. John Damascene, apparently the first person to use the term, illustrates it:

The remaining and residing of one in the other of the three Persons means that they are inseparable and *cannot* be parted but have among themselves a compenetration without confusion, not in such a way that they themselves are dissolved in one another or mixed together but in such a way that they are joined. . . . One and identical is the movement because the impetus and the dynamism of the three persons is one, something which is not found in created nature.<sup>126</sup>

In the contemporary ST debate, this idea of the metaphysical necessity of the perichoretic unity is upheld by many, including Cornelius Plantinga. For Plantinga, the "patreity, fileity and spireity" entail the essential relatedness of the three persons. Through these relations the persons of the Trinity are bound "in unbreakable bonds" which are both "eternal" and "metaphysical."<sup>127</sup> We have, up to this point, been in agreement with Plantinga's model; however, we cannot follow him on this issue. We suggest that Smith's insight concerning the nature of love itself must play a central role in conceiving of the unity of the Godhead.

As stated above, Smith understood the will of intelligent beings to be inherently, libertarianly free and viewed love as *the* defining characteristic of deity. These two fundamental commitments lead to Smith's conclusion that even friendship amongst "intelligent beings" "must arise from love, and that love grows out of virtue."<sup>128</sup> Surely it is an understatement to say that the persons of the Godhead are *friends*, but this principle is easily extrapolated to Smith's view of the unity of the Godhead, where each divine person is indeed an intelligent being. The unity that is maintained *cannot*

be one of coercion of any type, nor can it be simply a matter of necessity. Instead, any and all unity within the Godhead must principally arise and be maintained through freely given and freely reciprocated love.<sup>129</sup> In this view, the binding power of love guarantees the eternal unity of the Trinity rather than some mode of logical or metaphysical necessity. If the persons of the Trinity are bound either logically or metaphysically, then their unity is *necessary*. However, *necessary unity* is incompatible with divine free will and makes the divine love a hollow form of self-love.<sup>130</sup>

For “other-love” to obtain, two conditions are necessary. First, the other must truly be other. If the very being of one is tied to (or identical with) another, they cannot be truly other to each other. The second necessary condition for “other-love” is the possibility (logically at least) of one saying “no” to the other. In other words, if one posits divine persons that are free, then it is not compossible to also assert necessary unity between the three.<sup>131</sup> Of course, it might be argued that such a model allows for the *logical possibility* of a split amongst the Persons of the Trinity. In other words, in Smith’s model it is logically possible that one member of the Trinity could oppose the other’s plans. Some may see this as a deficiency. However, we argue that the utility gained by positing free divine persons outweighs this logically possible but practically impossible scenario of divine rebellion.

In regards to (2) or the actual elucidation of the perichoretic unity, we agree with Dale Tuggy’s critique:

More to the point are dark assertions about the *periochoreisis* or “co-inherence” or “mutual permeation” (etc.) of the three divine persons. The point of these claims, I take it, is that the three persons are somehow ontologically, or metaphysically, and not just relationally “mixed together.” This kind of periochoreisis-talk seems firmly stuck at the metaphorical level. . . . It appears that there is no way to “cash out” this metaphor into literal assertion, and that no-one can say why the metaphor is appropriate.<sup>132</sup>

Tuggy’s criticism is ironically validated by those who assert, “the Father and the Son mutually indwell one another, and the Holy Spirit, in an ontological sense which can never be true of man.”<sup>133</sup> While many LDS-specific scriptures assert the “indwelling” of the Persons of the Trinity,<sup>134</sup> on this issue, Smith’s insights serve as a limit to trinitarian theorizing. The logic of real love precludes understanding perichoreisis in terms of an ontological unity.

Smith’s revelations further limit trinitarian theorizing by their insistence that any talk of trinitarian co-inherence *must* be informed by Jesus’ prayer-promise, “that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us. . . . And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one.”<sup>135</sup> Thus, perichoretic unity claims must be consistent with Jesus’ promise that the same kind of indwelling which occurs among the members of the Godhead may be achieved by all worthy Christians.

Like other Greek interpolations, *perichoreisis* can be an ambiguous word. While many use the term, there remains no consensus concerning

its meaning.<sup>136</sup> Smith realized that an essential property of divinity is a relationship of sacred and intimate unity with the persons of the Godhead. For example, in an 1833 revelation Smith records this perichoretic-type passage:

I am in the Father, and the Father [is] in me, and the Father and I are one—

The Father because he gave me of his fullness, and the Son because I was in the world and made flesh my tabernacle, and dwelt among the sons of men.

I was in the world and received of my Father, and the works of him were plainly manifest. . . . And he [Christ] received all power both in heaven and on earth, and the glory of the Father was with him, for he dwelt in him.<sup>137</sup>

However, the passage does not end there, but ends in a promise much like the promise expressed in the John 17 intercessory prayer,

I give unto you these sayings that you may understand and know how to worship, and know what you worship, that you may come unto the Father in my name, and in due time receive of his fullness. For if you keep my commandments you shall receive of his fullness, and be glorified in me as I am in the Father; therefore, I say unto you, you shall receive grace for grace.<sup>138</sup>

One of the distinctive theological ideas Smith espoused was this strong notion of theosis, wherein all persons are invited to partake of the same unity that currently obtains between the Godhead. A social model of the Trinity provides a coherent conception of the divine unity which in turn provides ordinary Christians with an understandable hope for a future unity based on the love exhibited between the members of the Godhead. Even critics of ST admit that “This interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity [ST] is commendable to the extent that it depends upon the fundamental insight that God is love, and love is something that God wishes people to share without condition amongst themselves.”<sup>139</sup> To this, Smith adds the declaration that God is love and wishes people to share in the *same love* and relationship that currently obtains between the persons of the Trinity.

Smith’s conception of the Godhead is thus an especially robust form of ST, deeply informed by his view of love as the foremost attribute of God. It clearly distinguishes three divine beings while giving an internally consistent and biblically faithful account of their unity in power and decision, and in perichoresis. It explains the sharing of power and decision making by recognizing the Father as fount of divinity, distinct in role but freely sharing the fullness of divinity with the Son and Holy Ghost. It explains *perichoresis* not through ontology, but as free and intimate cooperation, based on love, and hence communicable to all who are willing to fully participate in this love.

## V. Conclusion

This paper was an attempt to compare, contrast and involve the beliefs of Joseph Smith with the thoughtful and well-articulated views of modern trinitarians. In so doing we have defended ST from its theological critics and argued that Joseph Smith's understanding of the Trinity throws needed light on several of the contemporary issues surrounding ST. We maintain that incorporating these insights into the ongoing trinitarian discussion can help combat what many commentators see as "the current situation in which we find ourselves, namely, the virtually total irrelevance of the doctrine of the Trinity."<sup>140</sup> Surely this is a battle worth fighting.<sup>141</sup>

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## NOTES

1. Harold Bloom, *The American Religion* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), p. 30.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 80, 82, 96–97, 106.

3. Carl Mosser, "And the Saints Go Marching On" in *The New Mormon Challenge*, ed. Francis Beckwith, Carl Mosser, and Paul Owen (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), p. 85. The essay in *The New Mormon Challenge* that directly deals with the Godhead (Paul Owen's article) doesn't explicitly denounce the Mormon model as heretical (although that conclusion is easily drawn).

4. Quoted in *The Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith's Teachings*, ed. Larry Dahl and Donald Cannon (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2000), p. 577.

5. The major compilations of revelations which came to or through Smith, all of which will be referenced in this paper, include the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants (hereafter D&C, designated by section and verse) and the Pearl of Great Price (includes the Book of Abraham and the Book of Moses). These are widely available through the church's Web site, <http://www.lds.org> (select "order Church materials," then select "scriptures" on the side bar to view the various options available). A "triple combination" contains the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price. The full text may also be browsed at <http://www.scriptures.lds.org>.

6. Latter-day Saints use the terms "Godhead" and "Trinity" interchangeably in referring to the three divine persons, though they use the former term much more frequently.

7. In this essay we adopt the usual explanation that Latin/Western Trinitarianism (LT) begins from the oneness (usually construed as numerical oneness) of God and tries to explain how one God can nonetheless be three divine Persons. While this distinction is useful for our purposes, Fred Sanders's observation concerning oversimplification bears repeating, "the most irritating oversimplification is probably the rule of thumb, which somehow has become ubiquitous even at the popular level, that Eastern trinitarian thought begins with the three persons while Western trinitarian thought begins with the one essence. Anybody who has tried to engage a few of the church fathers closely has probably experienced the disjunction between that organizing schema and the kind of arguments and idioms actually found in the texts."

Fred Sanders, "Trinity Talk, Again," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 44:3 (Fall 2005): 264–72; the quoted material is found on p. 270.

8. John L. Gresham, Jr., "The Social Model of the Trinity and Its Critics," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 46 (1993): 325–43.

9. Others have responded to Leftow, including Tom McCall, who points out problems with Leftow's conception of and reliance upon "Perfect Being" theology. See "Social Trinitarianism and Tritheism Again: A Response to Brian Leftow," *Philosophia Christi* 5.2 (2003): 405–30.

10. Brian Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism" in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, ed. Stephen T. Davis, Daniel Kendall, and Gerald O'Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 203–50. The quoted material is found on p. 206.

11. Ralph Norman argues, "Neither the 'Social Trinity,' nor its ancient predecessor, is capable of avoiding the charge of tritheism." Ralph Norman, "Problems for the 'Social Trinity'—Counting God," *Modern Believing* 41:3 (2000): 3–13. The quoted material is found on p. 7. Other attacks on ST are more obscure; for example, Mark Chapman criticizes the model for avoiding "the conflicts and tensions which characterize this world and the formulation of appropriate doctrines." Mark D. Chapman, "The Social Doctrine of the Trinity: Some Problems," *Anglican Theological Review* 83.2 (2001): 239–54.

12. Carl Mosser and Paul Owen, "Mormonism," in *To Everyone An Answer: A Case for the Christian Worldview*, ed. Francis Beckwith, William Lane Craig, and J. P. Moreland (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), pp. 324–49. The quoted material is found on p. 338. See also Catherine LaCugna, *God for Us* (Chicago, IL: Claretian Publications, 1993), p. 69. Emphasis added.

13. See William Hasker, "Tri-Unity," *Journal of Religion* 50.1 (1970): 1–32; the quoted material is found on p. 3.

14. Stephen T. Davis, "The Mormon Trinity and Other Trinities," *Element* 2:1 (Spring 2006): 1–14; the referenced material is found on p. 8.

15. Cornelius Plantinga, "Social Trinitarianism and Tritheism," in *Trinity, Incarnation and Atonement*, ed. Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), pp. 21–47. The quoted material is found on p. 34.

16. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* rev. ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1978), p. 227.

17. Kial. Heracl. 2. As quoted in J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 129. Emphasis added. It is worth noting that another advantage of the social model is its commonality with the earliest Christian thinkers. In particular, in some of the Apostolic Fathers (Ignatius of Antioch, the author(s) of the *Didache*, and the author of the *Epistle of Barnabas*), we see "solid evidence of a belief in three pre-existent beings, both from their actual words and more especially from the fact that they ascribed strict divinity to the Father, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. There is in them, of course, no trinitarian doctrine and no awareness of a trinitarian problem." Edmund J. Fortman, *The Triune God: A Historical Study of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1972), p. 44. The apologists, who were the first to try to frame an intellectually satisfying explanation of the relation of Christ to God the Father, were very far from having worked the tri-unity into a coherent scheme (see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 103). However, as Fortman writes in his comprehensive history of the Trinity, the apologists, "stress the unity of God as well as the trinity of persons. To the question, what kind of unity is there between these three who are really distinct and yet only one God, they answer: a unity of power, a unity of rule" Fortman, *The Triune God*, pp. 50–51.

18. Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," pp. 207–08.

19. Hasker, "Tri-Unity," p. 6.

20. John 8:19

21. N. M. L. Nathan, "Jewish Monotheism and the Christian God," *Religious Studies* 42 (2006): 75–85. Nathan shows that the relation of the Father to the Son is of one self to another self, not to the same self. See also Blake Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2001). The forthcoming third volume has a chapter entitled "Monotheism and the Council of God(s)" which provides an investigation into the issue as well as relevant bibliographies.

22. Leftow, "Anti Social Trinitarianism," p. 206.

23. Many ST writers have made this point, including J. Scott Horrell. See his "Toward a Biblical Model of the Social Trinity: Avoiding Equivocation of Nature and Order," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47.3 (September 2004): 399–421. See also Hasker, "Tri-Unity," p. 1.

24. William C. A. Placher, *A History of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983), p. 75.

25. See Hefele, *Histoire des Conciles d' Apres les Documents Originaux*. 14 vols. (Paris: Letouzey, 1907–1938), 1.1: 449–50.

26. Christopher Stead, *Divine Substance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 242–43.

27. (1) The first possibility amounts to saying that the so-called two or more things are actually one and the same. (2) Two or more beings could be called "homoousios" because there is one single *ousia* to which they belong, and of which they are aspects, parts, or expression. Thus three divine Persons might be described by the term *homoousios* as belonging to a single complex *ousia* which needs the three distinct Persons for its full expression. (3) The term "homoousios" could be applied to two or more beings because they severally have (and not 'jointly constitute') a single *ousia*; that is, if they have the same generic or specific characteristics, or the same material constitution. Thus the term "homoousios," used of angels, might suggest that they all belonged to the same glorious company; used of stones, it might rather suggest that they share those features which inseparably attach to stones, in being inanimate, heavy, and hard.

28. Stead, *Divine Substance*, p. 248.

29. William P. Alston, "Substance and the Trinity" in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, pp. 179–202. The quoted material occurs on p. 185.

30. See John H. Leith, *Creeeds of the Churches* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1977), p. 29.

31. Quoted in Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. 2 vols. *The Modern Library* (New York: Random House), p. 688.

32. On this point see Ramon D. Smullin, *The Father is not the Son* (Salt Lake City, UT: Camden Court Publishers, 1998), pp. 155–75.

33. The "Cappadocian settlement" expressed in the oft-quoted formula, "one *ousia* and three *hypostaseis*," is frequently presented as one that was accepted with enthusiasm and widely employed. But the exact formula is, in fact, more a piece of modern academic shorthand than a quotation from the writings of the Cappadocians. In the short form just quoted, the formula is rarely found in their writings. One also reads, sometimes, that the Council of Constantinople of A.D. 381 canonized the formula. But it is not found in the creed of that council. See Joseph T. Leinhard, "Ousia and Hypostasis: The Cappadocian Settlement and the Theology of 'One Hypostasis,'" in *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity*, pp. 99–122.

34. Leinhard, "Ousia and Hypostasis," p. 103.

35. The Pearl of Great Price, pp. 60–61.

36. In *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, ed. Joseph Fielding Smith, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), p. 370.

37. In a Sabbath address in Nauvoo, IL, 11 June, 1843. In *The Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith's Teachings*, p. 298.

38. Consider Smith's declaration, "We admit that God is the great source and fountain from whence proceeds all good; that He is perfect intelligence, and that His wisdom is alone sufficient to govern and regulate the mighty creations and worlds which shine and blaze with such magnificence and splendor over our heads, as though touched with His finger and moved by His Almighty word." Letter to the Brethren Scattered from Zion, Kirtland, 22 January 1834. In *The Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith's Teachings*, pp. 388–89. Furthermore, he taught, "God has made certain decrees which are fixed and immovable; for instance . . . God set the sun, the moon, and the stars in the heavens, and gave them their laws, conditions and bounds, which they cannot pass, except by His commandments" (Sabbath address, Nauvoo, 20 March 1842). In *The Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith's Teachings*, p. 389. Much has been made over (1) Smith's affirmation that all who are "exalted" "shall be gods" and (2) by Smith's insinuation of Gods existing in other multiverses. However these statements are taken (and they are taken in different ways by believing Latter-day Saints) it does not mitigate the fact that for Smith and all Latter-day Saints there is but one Godhead. In everything related to the multiverse with which we are even faintly aware, it is God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost who jointly created, will jointly redeem and jointly rule while holding all the "keys of power." The same holds true for the Mormon belief (attributed by some to Smith) in a Heavenly Mother. Little has been revealed concerning her. Though a divine person, she is not understood to be a member of the Godhead and because of this, she is not worshiped. As Smith taught, "Our only confidence can be in God; our only wisdom obtained from Him; and He alone must be our protector and safeguard, spiritually and temporally, or we fall." Editorial in the Nauvoo newspaper *Times and Seasons*, 15 July 1842. In *Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith's Teachings*, p. 14.

39. William P. McIntire records the following during Smith's instruction to the Nauvoo Lyceum, "Joseph said concerning the Godhead [that] it was not as many imagined—three heads and but one body. He said the three were separate bodies. . . . And these three agree in one." In *The Prophet Joseph Smith's King Follett Discourse: A Six Column Comparison of Original Notes and Amalgamations*, ed. Donald Q. Cannon and Larry E. Dahl (Provo, UT: BYU Studies Religious Center, 1983), p. 298. For a careful study of the nature of the Godhead in LDS-specific scripture see David Paulsen and Ari Bruening, "The Development of the Mormon Understanding of God: Early Mormon Modalism and Other Myths," *FARMS Review of Books* 13.2 (2001): 109–69.

40. Smith said, "We say that God Himself is a self-existent God. Who told you so? It's correct enough." Quoted in Stan Larson, "The King Follett Discourse: A Newly Amalgamated Text," *BYU Studies* 18.2 (1978): 11. Cf. D&C 93: 29.

41. D&C 45:3–5. See also D&C 29:5.

42. 2 Nephi 2:28

43. See D&C 19:18–19. This passage parallels the account of the Gethsemane experience found in Luke "Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." (Luke 42:22–24).

44. D&C 19: 24, 2. Cf. Alma 31:13.

45. The scriptures which Joseph Smith brought forth are replete with testimony of God's personal passibility. See, for example, Moses 7:28–29, 32–33, 37. See David L. Paulsen, "Joseph Smith Challenges the Theological World," *BYU Studies* 44.4 (2005): 175–212.



46. While not the focus of this paper, Smith also taught that God the Father possesses a glorified body of flesh and bones and the Holy Ghost a body of spirit, which according to Smith, is refined matter. See David Paulsen's "Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity: Origen and Augustine as Reluctant Witnesses," *Harvard Theological Review* 83.2 (1990): 105–16. Also, see David Paulsen's "The Doctrine of Divine Embodiment: Restoration, Judeo-Christian, and Philosophical Perspectives," *BYU Studies* 35.4 (1995–96): 6–94.

47. 2 Nephi 31:21; Mosiah 15:2–5; Alma 11:44; 3 Nephi 11:27, 36; Mormon 7:7.

48. Some students of Mormon intellectual history make this very claim, hypothesizing that Smith's understanding of the Godhead developed from an initial modalism, through trinitarianism and tritheism before finally ending up as a form of henotheism, the two latter views flatly contradicting the earlier monotheisms. David Paulsen challenges this hypothesized trajectory in the above mentioned article, "The Development of the Mormon Understanding of God: Modalism and Other Myths."

49. Norman, "Problems for the 'Social Trinity,'" p. 5.

50. In *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2002), p. 386. Modern translations of the Bible corroborate Smith's rendering. See, for instance, John 17:21 in The Message Bible and John 17:21 in the Worldwide English Bible. While the word "agreed" does not appear in the Greek, the word for "one" is best translated as signifying unity of purpose rather than unity of being. Proponents of ST seem to recognize this. See Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society*, trans. Paul Burns (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988), p. 5.

51. In *The Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith's Teachings*, p. 345.

52. "Extracts from Wm Clayton's Private Book," pp. 10–11. Manuscript housed in the L. John Nuttall Collection as part of BYU Special Collections. In *The Words of Joseph Smith*, ed. Lyndon Cook and Andrew F. Ehat (Provo, UT: Grandin Books, 1991), pp. 87–88.

53. In a Sabbath address in Nauvoo, Ill., 11 June, 1843. In *The Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith's Teachings*, p. 298.

54. See the Book of Moses, chap. 4.

55. "Extracts from Wm Clayton's Private Book," in *The Words of Joseph Smith*, pp. 87–88.

56. *Ibid.*

57. The sermon is recorded in *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts 7 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: 1902–1912), 6:305, p. 306

58. In *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 99.

59. Mosiah 15:7.

60. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: God, Godhead and gods*. Emphasis added.

61. 3 Nephi 1:14

62. 2 Nephi 31:21

63. Alma 11:44

64. 3 Nephi 11:27

65. *Ibid.*, 11:36

66. In a Sabbath address in Nauvoo, IL, 11 June, 1843. In *The Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith's Teachings*, p. 298. Emphasis added.

67. James Talmage, *A Study of the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1988), p. 37.

68. See Moroni 7:45–48.

69. *The Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith's Teachings*, p. 107.

70. In Doctrine and Covenants 121: 41, Jesus declares that the powers of heaven can only be exercised by “persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned.”

71. John 6:69

72. “A Doctrinal Exposition by the First Presidency and the Twelve,” dated 30 June 1916. In *Messages of the First Presidency*, ed. James R. Clark, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1970), pp. 5.23–24.

73. Some Latter-day Saint scholars have suggested that “the Holy Ghost is . . . a spirit son of God the Father.” Joseph Fielding McConkie, “Holy Ghost,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), p. 2.649.

74. We would argue that the same equivocation with the word “God” is found in the Bible.

75. See David Paulsen’s interview, “Are Mormons Trinitarian?” in *Modern Reformation* (November/December 2003), pp. 40–43, wherein he answers common questions concerning the LDS understanding of the Godhead. For a discussion of the equivocal uses of “God” in Trinitarian theology, see A. N. Williams, “Does God Exist?” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58.4 (2005): 468–84.

76. John Mark Hicks, “An Introduction to the Doctrine of God,” Harding University Graduate School of Religion, 18 July 1996. This paper was presented at the “Theology in Service of the Church” seminar held July 17–18 in conjunction with the 1996 Christian Scholars Conference in Nashville, Tennessee.

77. See for example Dale Tuggy, “The Unfinished Business of Trinitarian Theorizing,” *Religious Studies* 39 (2003): pp. 165–83. Tuggy critiques “Group mind” monotheism without recognizing that his argument fails to address most ST models.

78. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, trans. Margaret Kohl (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), p. 19. See also p. 149 ff.

79. Leonard Hodgson, *The Doctrine of the Trinity. Croall Lectures, 1942–1943* (London: James Nisbet, 1943), p. 229.

80. Boff, *Trinity and Society*, p. 4.

81. Horrell, “Toward a Biblical Model of the Social Trinity,” p. 420.

82. See for example, T. W. Bartel “Could There Be More Than One Lord?” *Faith and Philosophy* 11.3 (July 1994): 357–78.

83. In explicating how the Father acts as this “font,” Plantinga writes, “One might suppose, therefore, that these two persons are essentially related to each other not only generically but also in some quasi-genetic way. We could say, then, that Father and Son are not just members of the class of divine persons, but also members of the same family.” Plantinga, “Social Trinitarianism and Tritheism,” p. 28.

84. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

85. Proponents of this view include Stephen Layman, David Brown, Keith Yandell, William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland. See Layman, “Tritheism and the Trinity,” *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988): 291–98; Brown, *The Divine Trinity* (London/La Salle, IL: Duckworth/Open Court, 1985), pp. 300–301; Yandell, “Trinity and Consistency,” *Religious Studies* 30 (1994): 201–18, especially pp. 205–06 and p. 216; William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), pp. 575–96, 593–94. Daniel Howard-Snyder effectively critiques this view in “Trinity Monotheism,” *Philosophia Christi* 5:2 (2003): 375–404.

86. Leftow “Anti Social Trinitarianism,” p. 209.

87. *Ibid.*

88. Leftow sees John Champion, Charles Bartlett and perhaps Hodgson as proponents. *Ibid.*, p. 221.

89. This is also the approach effectively critiqued by Tuggy. See footnote 76.

90. Hasker, "Tri-Unity," p. 3.

91. *Ibid.*, p. 23. Hasker continues, "we could simply say that the characteristics, taken collectively, *are* the nature . . . the characteristics in question are 'dispositional', they specify not what a person is doing (or experiencing) at any given moment, but what he will *tend to do* under given circumstances."

92. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

93. *Ibid.*, note 62. Emphasis added.

94. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

95. *Ibid.*, note 62.

96. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

97. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

98. *Ibid.*, p. 30, footnote 72.

99. Stead writes, "Theologians have been rightly convinced that the ultimate effect of Nicaea has been to assert, not merely the equality, but also the essential unity, of the three Persons; and they have attempted, I think incautiously, to represent this as the original and express intention of the Nicene fathers." Stead, *Divine Substance*, p. 250.

100. Wilford Woodruff Journal: 11 June 1843. In *The Words of Joseph Smith*, p. 214. See also pp. 63 and 212 in the same work.

101. Luke 24:39.

102. N. T. Wright has provided a comprehensive examination of the bodily resurrection of Christ. See his *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2003).

103. Alston, "Substance and the Trinity," p. 190.

104. Keith E. Yandell, "The Most Brutal and Inexcusable Error in Counting?: Trinity and Consistency" *Religious Studies* 30 (1994): 201–17; the quoted material occurs on p. 203.

105. James 2:26.

106. Romans 6:9–10. Emphasis added.

107. An argument very similar to this one is offered on a Catholic apologetics website, [http://www.catholic.com/library/God\\_Has\\_No\\_Body.asp](http://www.catholic.com/library/God_Has_No_Body.asp).

108. We accept Plantinga's criterion as the best to date because of its intelligibility, biblical coherence and internal consistency. It also has yet to be successfully challenged (we are unaware of any competing criteria for ST that are as well developed). Plantinga, "Social Trinitarianism and Tritheism," p. 22.

109. A common method of challenging the coherence of ST is to select an attribute that is essential for being fully divine and arguing that there is no possible world in which more than one being can have this attribute. Customary attributes proposed as "unsharable" include omnipotence and sovereignty. Adequate defenses against such charges have already been offered. For sovereignty, see Bartel "Could There Be More Than One Lord?" pp. 357–78. For almightiness/omnipotence see T. W. Bartel "Could There Be More Than One Almighty" *Religious Studies* 29 (1993): 465–95; Thomas Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 213–14; and Richard Swinburne, "Could There Be More Than One God?" *Faith and Philosophy* 5.3 (1988): 225–41, especially pp. 230–31.

110. Bartel, "Could There Be More Than One Almighty?" p. 485.

111. Ostler provides a critique of Swinburne. See Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: God, Godhead and gods*.

112. See Bartel, "Could There Be More Than One Almighty?" p. 484.

113. See Swinburne, "Could There Be More Than One God?" p. 231. While dependent upon the Father for their existence, Swinburne believes this dependence to be necessary, thus allowing each of the three metaphysical necessity. See also Swinburne's *The Christian God* (New York: Oxford University Press,

1994). Ostler provides a critique of Swinburne in *Exploring Mormon Thought: God, Godhead and gods*.

114. It must be noted that the Cappodocians categorically denied that derivation of being implied "a difference in being." Quoted in Kevin Giles, *The Trinity and Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God and the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), p. 14.

115. Swinburne, "Could There Be More Than One God?" p. 232.

116. Bartel, "Could There Be More Than One Almighty," p. 473.

117. *Ibid.*, p. 483.

118. Leftow, "Anti-Social Trinitarianism," p. 209.

119. Bartel, "Could There Be More Than One Almighty?" p. 475.

120. The idea that God could do anything logically possible was formulated most forcefully by Aquinas in *Summa Theologica*, ed. Anton C. Pegis (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), pp. 262–64. (The material occurs in Part 1, Question 25, Article 3.) In modern times, process (and to a certain extent open) theology has recognized the superiority of persuasive power and the impossibility of coercive. There is no reference to *logical* modalities, as such, in either the Bible or LDS-specific scriptures.

121. D&C 121: 36–43.

122. See our discussion of this everlasting covenant above.

123. God Most High, or *El Elyon*. In other biblical terms, *Melek-el elohim*: The Father God is king of gods.

124. Since the patristic period, "*perichoresis*" has been a technical term to describe the interrelations of the Persons of the Trinity. The noun comes from a Greek verb *perichorein* that means "dancing around," "enveloping," "to contain" or "to penetrate," and describes the three Persons of the Trinity as mutually "indwelling," "permeating" or "interpenetrating" one another.

125. See also John 14:9ff.; 17:22, etc.

126. John Damascene, *De Fide Orthodoxa* I 14: PG 94, 860. Emphasis added.

127. Communication from Cornelius Plantinga to Carl Mosser and Brett McDonald dated 7 June 2006.

128. Letter to James Arlington Bennett, Nauvoo, 13 November 1843. In *Encyclopedia of Joseph Smith's Teachings*, p. 110.

129. In *Doctrine and Covenants* 121: 41, Jesus declares that the powers of heaven can only be exercised by "persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned."

130. Obviously those who believe in compatibilistic freedom will disagree about the necessary divine love being "hollow" and about all love arising without necessity. We join openness and process theologians in thinking that libertarian free will best describes our personal experiences and best satisfies our intuitions about words like "love" and "choice" but do not have the space to argue the point in detail here.

131. Other philosophers who have tried to show that essential perfect goodness is incompatible with other properties typically attributed to God include Nelsen Pike, "Omnipotence and God's Ability to Sin," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 6 (1969): 208–16; Bruce Reichenback, *Evil and a Good God* (New York: Fordham, 1982), chap. 7; and Stephen T. Davis, *Logic and the Nature of God* (London: Macmillan, 1983), chap. 6.

132. Tuggy, "The Unfinished Business of Trinitarian Theorizing," p. 170.

133. See Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1996), p. 102.

134. See for example, D&C 93:3–5, 12–14, 17, 19–20.

135. John 17:21, 22–23.

136. Many credit Gregory Nazianzen with the introduction of "*perichoresis*" as a technical term. Gregory used the term to describe the way in which the

divine and human natures of Christ “coinhere in one another without the integrity of either being diminished by the presence of the other.” However, it seems that St. John Damascene was the first to use the term in regards to the trinity. See main text above. Perhaps the most quoted on the topic is Hilary of Poitiers who asserts that the concept is one “which the wit of man will never solve, nor will human research ever find an analogy for.” Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity*, 3.1 (available at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/330203.htm>. No translator listed.) Others, including Plantinga don’t use the word “*perichoresis*” at all but do talk of “the mysterious in-ness or oneness relation in the divine life” and interpret that as “short of personal identity, but much closer than mere common membership in a class. For it includes a divine kinship relation as well.” Plantinga, “Social Trinitarianism and Tritheism,” pp. 28–29. Plantinga also talks of the divine life as being devoid of isolation, insulation and secretiveness. Hence as he says, “there may be penetrating, inside knowledge of the other as other, but as co-other, loved other, fellow” (p. 28).

137. D&C 93:3–5, 17.

138. D&C 93:19–20.

139. Norman, “Problems for the ‘Social Trinity,’” p. 5.

140. LaCugna, *God for Us*, p. 7.

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