MORMON MONOLATRY: SEEKING A HISTORICALLY INFORMED DEFINITION OF THE MORMON GODHEAD

A paper
Presented to
The Southwest Commission of Religious Studies
2017 Meeting in Dallas, TX

by
K. Robert Beshears
kbeshears@umobile.edu
March 11, 2017
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1–3 Ne</td>
<td>1–3 Nephi, book of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BofM</td>
<td>Book of Mormon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D&amp;C</td>
<td>Doctrine &amp; Covenants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEP</td>
<td>Doctrine of Eternal Progression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hela</td>
<td>Helaman, book of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HC</td>
<td>History of the Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JD</td>
<td>Journal of Discourses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KFS</td>
<td>King Follett Sermon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LDS</td>
<td>Latter-day Saint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moro</td>
<td>Moroni, book of</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PGP</td>
<td>Pearl of Great Price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TPJS</td>
<td>Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MORMON MONOLATRY: SEEKING A HISTORICALLY INFORMED DEFINITION OF THE MORMON GODHEAD

“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.”
– Joseph Smith, Jr., 1844

Few doctrines in Christianity are more theologically complex and potentially divisive than the doctrine of the Trinity. Augustine cautiously encouraged exploration of the doctrine because, for the patristic father, “there is no subject where error is more dangerous, research more laborious, and discovery more fruitful than the oneness of the Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.” ² Given the historical and theological claims of Mormonism, it should come as no surprise, then, that one of the most unique, complex, and misunderstood features of the religion is its nature of God, specifically its understanding the Trinity, or Godhead. Defining the Mormon Godhead is notoriously difficult. It seems, at least to the outsider, that what can be denied about Trinitarianism is easier to identify than what can be affirmed. To begin, Mormonism flatly rejects Nicene Trinitarianism³ because, as LDS theologian Robert Millet points out, “Latter-day Saints believe that the doctrine of the Trinity, as taught throughout Christendom today, reflects more of the decisions of post-New Testament church councils than


2 Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 1.3.5

3 For the purpose of this paper, “Nicene Trinitarianism” is defined by the following propositions: 1) There is one, and only one, God. 2) God externally exists in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. 3) Each person is fully God; yet, each of the persons is not confounded into another.
the teachings of the New Testament itself.” Instead, as we will see, Mormonism has opted for an inversion of the creedal formulations of the Trinity; where the councils described a God of three-in-one, Mormonism contends for a Godhead of one-from-three.

For their part, non-LDS theologians have attempted to define the Mormon nature of God either to criticize the religious movement or to understand it for interreligious dialogue. Efforts to discover a mutually satisfying definition of the Mormon Godhead between LDS and non-LDS theologians have typically orbited metaphysics or theological disagreements while ignoring the historical elements that fueled its evolution. By neglecting the historical development of the Godhead in the Mormon tradition, researchers have been hindered in their ability to best articulate this foundational doctrine. This paper traces the contours of the theological development of the Mormon nature of God for the purpose of proposing a historically informed definition of the Mormon Godhead, *Mormon Monolatry*. The story begins with a common misconception—that the Book of Mormon espouses some form of modalism.

**Modalism in the Book of Mormon?**

The Book of Mormon (BofM), published in Palmyra, New York on March 26, 1830, entered the arena of sacred scripture in the midst of tumultuous religious debate in North America. The Second Great Awakening, a Protestant revivalism movement between the late-eighteenth century to mid-nineteenth century, was in full swing with representatives of various Protestant denominations vying for new converts in the American frontier. Aside from modes of

---


worship and means of sacraments, churches theologically distinguished themselves from one another in a bid to advertise their brand of Protestantism to prospective converts. Many Primitivist preachers, especially those of the Campbellite Restorationist movement, abandoned the complex creedal formulations of the established denominations in favor of anti-creedal and purely “biblical” formulations of theology. Unhinged from the canon of historic orthodoxy, Protestants began to reimagine the nature of God, especially the concept of the Trinity, in an array of thought that included Trinitarianism, Unitarianism, modalism, and bitheism. Post-Nicene Trinitarianism, a doctrine rarely challenged with any success after the Patristic Era, had been brought back to the witness stand to testify of its truthfulness. How could God, who is ontologically one, simultaneously exist in three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?

The BofM was forged in this furnace of hot theological debate. Its publication site in upstate New York was dubbed the “Burned-Over District” by historians, a title earned for its weathering of intense theological debates and pugnacious preachers vying with one another for new converts. In part, the book attempted to contribute to its contemporary debates over the nature of God. Indeed, the BofM itself prophetically testifies to this mission of the “confounding of false doctrines and laying down of contentions” that would inevitably arise among those who misunderstood the biblical authors (2 Ne 3:12). Its solution to the debate, at face value, appears to be a form of modalism. Modalism, often attributed to the third-century priest Sabellius (fl. c. 217–c. 220), whose theology can only be reconstructed through his opponents, apparently taught that God, a single and indivisible being, presents himself in three modes; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Godhead, as a monad, operates in three modes (hence, modalism) at three different stages of salvation history: the Father in creation, the Son in redemption, and the Holy Spirit in sanctification. God, then, is like an ancient play-actor who, in certain scenes, swaps masks to appear to the world like a different character while remaining the same actor. The view ascribed

---

7 This doctrine is also known as “modalistic Monarchianism”.
to Sabellius was vigorously attacked by Tertullian (c. 160–c. 225), who argued that the doctrine led to *patripassionism*—the idea that if the Son is merely a mode of God, then the Father, too, suffered and died on the cross. Pope Calixtus, initially intrigued by the idea, eventually condemned modalism and excommunicated Sabellius.

The literal, ontological oneness of God as Father and Son is a consistent theme throughout the entire BofM. The mormonic prophet Abinadi taught that “redemption cometh through Christ the Lord, which is the very Eternal Father (Mosiah 16:15).” Elsewhere, the prophet Moroni preached that “because of the fall of man, came Jesus Christ, even the Father and the Son (Morm 9:12).” Similarly, the prophet Nephi foretold the incarnation of the Son in modalistic fashion; “the Only Begotten of the Father, yea, even the Father of heaven and of earth, shall manifest himself unto them in the flesh (2 Ne 25:12).” This modalistic concept of the incarnation is later reiterated through the prophet Mosiah;

> The Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay [...] And he shall be called Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Father of heaven and earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning (Mosiah 3:5, 8).

In a well-known mormonic narrative, Zeezrom, a lawyer, interrogated the prophet Amulek over his theological positions. During the exchange, Amulek repudiated polytheism, which inevitably led Zeezrom to ask, “Is the Son of God the very Eternal Father (Alma 11:28, 38)?” Amulek responded in a very patripassian manner; “Yea, he is the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth, and all things which in them are; he is the beginning and the end, the first and the last (Alma 11:39).” Mormon prophets are not alone in expressing modalistic thought. Perhaps the most explicit statement comes from the Son himself who declared: “Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son (Ether 3:14).” Indeed, a little over half of the books of the BofM

---

8 I prefer to use term *mormonic* as a descriptor of anything deriving from the Book of Mormon, similar to the use of the term *biblical* as a descriptor of anything deriving from the Bible. This does away with the cumbersome phrasing of “Book of Mormon” to describe its own people, narrative, events, theology, etc. (i.e., Book of Mormon prophecy vs. mormonic prophecy).
appear to display at least some semblance of modalism. Thus, for some readers, the BofM espouse a form of modalism.  

**“Mormonic Unitarianism” as the Book of Mormon’s Nature of God**

I contend that the BofM has no interest in presenting God in a modalistic fashion, but rather opts for a form of Unitarianism. The book of Mosiah offers readers a key text in unlocking the BofM’s nature of God.

And because he dwelleth in flesh he shall be called the Son of God, and having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father, being the Father and the Son—The Father, because he was conceived by the power of God; and the Son, because of the flesh; thus becoming the Father and Son—And they are one God, yea, the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth (Mosiah 15:2–4).

Here, Mosiah helps the reader understand why one God can be called by two different names. “Father” and “Son” are not names of different persons but merely titles of the same person. Perhaps the titles “Father” and “Son” are best understood as substitutes for “divinity” and “humanity,” respectively. Importantly, unlike modalism, these are not separate roles, like when a man is “father” to his children and “husband” to his wife. There are times when the man relates differently to his children than he does to his wife—he is never a father to his wife, nor a husband to his children. He can be either “father” or “husband” depending on with whom he is interacting, but the roles are not interchangeable and certainly not used simultaneously. This is not what Mosiah tells us about the nature of God. Rather, the titles “Father” and “Son” are better understood as the husband being both “human” and “George.” There is never a time when he is only one or the other, only “human” and not “George” or vice versa, and, more importantly,

---

9 1 Ne 11:21, 2 Ne 25:12, Mosiah 3:8, Alma 11:38-39, Hel 14:12, 3 Ne 1:14, Mormon 9:12, Ether 3:14

unlike modalism, these terms are not roles to be acted, i.e., he cannot act as “George” apart from acting as “human” and vice versa. Thus, after the incarnation, there is never a time when God, “one God,” is not both Father in his divinity (“because he was conceived by the power of God”) and Son in his humanity (“because of the flesh”). Elsewhere, the BofM further clarifies this point; “Behold, I come unto my own, to fulfil all things which I have made known unto the children of men from the foundation of the world, and to do the will, both of the Father and of the Son—of the Father because of me, and of the Son because of my flesh (3 Ne 1:14).”

This understanding helps explain why the BofM revised some of Christ’s Gospel teaching to conform to the author’s concept of God. For example, compare Matthew 5:48 with 3 Nephi 12:48 where the BofM slightly revises Jesus’s words to reflect the author’s explanation in Mosiah 15:2–4. “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect (Matt 5:48, KJV)” whereas the BofM alters Jesus’s words slightly to read, “Therefore I would that ye should be perfect even as I, or your Father who is in heaven is perfect (3 Ne 12:48, emphasis added).” If there is no distinction between the Father or the Son, then it does not make sense that Jesus, teaching on earth, could speak of the Father in heaven—the one God, simultaneously named “Father” and “Son,” are both on earth.

Thus, where modalism understands one God operating in three modes, the BofM understands one God described with two titles. The Father and the Son are not two masks worn by one play-actor; rather, they are the same mask described in two different ways.11 Also, the BofM describes God as simultaneously Father and Son, not Father or Son. Thus, the BofM cannot be said to espouse true modalism. Instead, it espouses a sophisticated form of

11 An objection may be raised at this point concerning the Trinitarian formulas of 3 Nephi, which highlight the three persons of the Godhead. 3 Nephi holds the climax of the BofM narrative, when Christ visits the New World shortly after his resurrection. The Son recapitulates his teaching ministry in Palestine to the mormonic peoples, using much of the same language found in the Gospels, and, consequently, readers may construct similar Christologies to the Gospels. Yet, it must be argued that the content of 3 Nephi is largely unoriginal to the mormonic prophets and writers. It seems that if modalism is to be found in the BofM, it appears when mormonic characters are left to their own creativity, such as in the books of 1 Nephi, Mosiah, Alma, Helaman, 3 Nephi, Mormon, and Ether. When the BofM’s author imports content from the Gospels, however, modalistic thought is more difficult to perceive.
Unitarianism—one God who is described as “Father” and “Son,” divine and human, and whose Spirit is ontologically distinguishable from himself. I will call this “Mormonic Unitarianism,” for, although this form of Unitarianism may have existed before the BofM, it is nevertheless the position expressed by the mormonic prophets and authors.

Mormonic Unitarianism, however, is not the nature of God that Joseph Smith taught toward the end of his life in 1844. Instead, he taught that the Godhead, a deity among many other deities, is constituted by the corporeal god Elohim, who is covenantly unified in will and purpose with another corporeal god, his son Jehovah, and an incorporeal god, the Holy Ghost—three gods that are ontologically distinguishable from one another. This doctrine is best described as Mormon Monolatry, a term that I will explain throughout the paper as it develops historically.

How, then, did Joseph go from, presumably, being raised in Nicene Trinitarianism to discovering Mormonic Unitarianism in the BofM and finally landing on Mormon Monolatry?

The Three Periods of Development of the Mormon Nature of God

It appears that the Mormon nature of God developed through a three-stage period during Joseph’s prophetic career. I am certainly not the first to suggest the evolution of the Mormon Godhead and, more specifically, that it developed through multiple stages. Kurt Widmer posited that Joseph’s thought began with monotheism, evolved around the modalism of the BofM, through bitheism, and landed on “cosmic henotheism.”12 Like Widmer, I agree that the development of the nature of God occurred in three periods, but I disagree with two of Widmer’s positions; that Joseph ever held a binitarian view of the Godhead and that the BofM, with exception of its “traditional Christological” passages, espoused modalism.13 Instead, I believe, like Widmer, that Joseph began with monotheism (or, at least, Nicene Trinitarianism);


13 Ibid., 32.
however, the Godhead then evolved around a unique form of Unitarianism (not modalism) in the BofM, through tritheism (not bitheism), and landed on monolatry (not “cosmic henotheism”). This evolution, like Widmer, occurred in three periods.

The first period, Nicene Trinitarianism (1828–35), resembles what many parishioners of nineteenth-century Anglicanism, Episcopalianism, Methodism, Presbyterianism, or Anabaptism would likely hear from the pulpit. The First Period hosted the earliest Mormon nature of God; a doctrine that could sit comfortably amid mainstream, nineteenth-century American Protestantism. During this time, Joseph frequently borrowed from biblical expressions of Christ in most of his revelations. Yet, simultaneously, with Unitarianism lurking in the pages of the BofM, it must be acknowledged that a competing nature of God existed during the first period. Given the infrequency of quotations from the BofM compared to the quotations of the Bible in early LDS revelation, it is entirely possible that Joseph was unfamiliar with the work, which helps explain how the First Period saw both Nicene Trinitarianism and Mormonic Unitarianism coexisting in the young religious movement. Around 1835, however, it becomes apparent that Joseph grows familiar with the BofM. He was briefly influenced by its Unitarian representation of God, even going so far as to retranslate portions of the Bible to conform certain passages to the BofM. Ultimately, Joseph only flirted with Mormonic Unitarianism and markedly rejected it—or mistook it for modalism—opting instead for a more tritheistic understanding of the nature of God.

The second period, Tritheism (1835–38), represented a noticeable departure from Nicene Trinitarianism. It is marked by the publication of the 1835 edition of Doctrine & Covenants, which included a series of theological lectures. This collection of lectures offers a rare glimpse into the Mormon nature of God during this stage of its development. The adaptation and redefinition of term *Godhead* allowed early Mormons to describe the relationship between two distinct and separate gods, the Father and the Son. During this Middle Period, it becomes evident that Joseph’s nature of God diverts from both Nicene Trinitarianism and Mormonic Unitarianism.
Finally, the third period, Mormon Monolatry (1838–44), is marked by the openness with which Joseph spoke of a controversial idea, the doctrine of eternal progression (DEP), whereby humans are merely gods in embryo awaiting *theosis* to become ontologically like God in the future. Naturally, DEP necessitates the existence of a plurality of gods, which widens the category of tritheism to polytheism. During the Third Period, Latter-day Saints were taught that they must learn to become gods just as all gods had before them. The DEP was explained in detail in one of the most theologically provocative sermons ever delivered by Joseph, the *King Follett Sermon* (KFS). Tritheism moved aside during the Third Period to make way for a form of monolatry; the worship of a one-from-three Godhead—the Father, Elohim, and his son, Jehovah, in union with the Holy Ghost—among the existence of other gods.  

For the purpose of this paper, these three periods of doctrinal development will be labeled as follows:

(1) The Early Period: Nicene Trinitarianism (1828–35)
(2) The Middle Period: Tritheism (1835–38)
(3) The Late Period: Mormon Monolatry (1838–1844)

**The Early Period: Nicene Trinitarianism (1828–35)**

As its title implies, the Early Period begins with Nicene Trinitarianism and ends with a departure from the orthodox position. The Early Period began in 1828 and lasted until about 1835. During this period, Joseph taught a fairly orthodox Trinitarianism through preaching not unlike the Methodism of his day. In July 1828, the first official revelation with a Trinitarian statement was recorded in the *Book of Commandments and Revelations*, later to become D&C. The revelation contains the first available glimpse into the earliest Mormon nature of God.

---

14 While *henotheism* is helpful in pulling attention towards a “one among many” concept of polytheistic belief within Mormonism, I will argue later that *monolatry* may offer a better description of the Mormon nature of God rather than *henotheism* in the Third Period.
A Book of Commandments & Revelations of the Lord given to Joseph the Seer & others by the Inspiration of God & gift & power of the Holy Ghost which Beareth Re[c]ord of the Father & Son & Holy Ghost which is one God Infinite & eternal World without end Amen.

This Matthean formula for the Godhead appears moored to traditional Protestant and Catholic expressions of Trinitarianism. Indeed, it reads very closely to the Anglican Book of Common Prayer, which, in editions from the early eighteenth-century to present, offers glory to the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost to “world without end.”

Joseph’s earliest revelations were magnets for attracting all manner of orthodox descriptions of God. A chronological reading of these revelations promptly ushers one to the conclusion that the Bible and Nicene Trinitarianism guided Joseph’s thought. Among other titles, Jesus is primarily described as; “Jesus Christ, the Son of [the living] God” (D&C 6:21; 14:9; 10:57; 11:28; 35:2; 36:8), “Jesus Christ, your Lord and your Redeemer, [the Great I Am]” (D&C 15:1; 16:1; 29:1), “Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (D&C 20:4, 31), “Jesus Christ, your Redeemer (D&C 31:13, 34:1), and, in a clear nod to the Apostle Thomas’s famous confession before the post-resurrected Christ, “Jesus Christ, your Lord and your God” (D&C 17:9; 18:47). Were it possible to listen to an early homily by Joseph, he might be understood as a charismatic, yet theologically vanilla, Protestant preacher whose differed very little from his contemporaries. Yet, Joseph wasted no time in differentiating himself from his competing Protestant preachers. If the BofM itself would not set him apart, his reinterpretation of Genesis would.

June 1830: The book of Moses

Immediately following the publication of the BofM in March 1830, Joseph and his scribe, Oliver Cowdery, turned their attention towards writing revelation that would become the book of Moses. Today, the book of Moses is a part of a larger collection of LDS scripture in the Pearl of Great Price (PGP). The book of Moses is a revised account of the Genesis creation narrative and was purportedly revealed to Smith by God between June 1830 and February 1831.

Over all, the book is essentially Trinitarian. In fact, it focuses less on the nature of God than it does on rejecting the doctrine of original sin (Moses 6:53–56) and restoring the supposed clarity of the NT gospel message peppered throughout the OT narrative. At various points, Joseph inserts—or, perhaps, reinserts by his rationale—NT theological statements throughout the preaching ministry of Enoch (Moses 6:52,57; 7:50) and Noah (Moses 8:24). For Joseph, the gospel was plainly preaching in continuity from Adam to Jesus, from First to Last Adams, but these “plain and precious things” were detracted from biblical manuscripts by miscreants with nefarious agendas (1 Ne 13:40).

Nevertheless, by at least June 1830 the Mormon nature of God was still within the realm of Nicene Trinitarianism. The book of Moses reaffirmed Joseph’s commitment to Trinitarian monotheism; “There is no God beside me, and all things are present with me, for I know them all (Moses 1:6).” As a side note, and as a matter of later importance, note how Joseph interacts, whether knowingly or unknowingly, with a Hebrew word for ‘god’ elohim. In his translation—or, better, revision—of Genesis, Joseph opts to follow in the long line of translators prior to him in rendering Elohim—literally “gods”—as “God”. In fact, he doubled-down on monotheism when he provided an explanation why the lone God of Judaism and Christianity spoke in plural while narrating the creation of humanity; “And I, God, said unto mine Only Begotten, which was with me from the beginning: Let us make man in our image, after our likeness (Moses 2:26).” Here, Joseph added God the Son to the story, indicating that elohim is plural because the Son attended the Father at creation. Joseph reiterated this point later in the post-Fall aspect of the narrative; “And I, the Lord God, said unto mine Only Begotten: Behold, the man is become as one of us to know good and evil (Moses 4:28).” The young prophet circumvented the troublesome “us” and “our” of Genesis to maintain monotheism by adding the Son to the dialogue, a common Christian explanation for a word that would otherwise indicate either other heavenly beings made in the image and likeness of God or polytheism.

However, later in Joseph’s career, this reinterpretation of Genesis would become arcane as the terms “us” and “our,” and specifically elohim, would move away from representing
Father and Son and come to describe an entire council of gods in the forthcoming book of Abraham (1835). Until then, Joseph took great pains in the book of Moses to revise scripture so that, at least in his view, they would reflect a clear and proper Nicene Trinitarianism within the book of Genesis. Yet, as more time moved along, Joseph’s theology would drift further and further away from historic orthodoxy.

Spring 1833: The Transition from Nicene
Trinitarianism to Tritheism

One of the earliest major steps away from Nicene Trinitarianism is seen in a May 1833 revelation that clarifies what it means for God to exists in the mysterious “oneness” of God. The revelation begins with the words of Christ; “I am in the Father, and the Father in me, and the Father and I are one (D&C 93:3),” an apparent recitation of Christ’s profound statement to the same effect in John 14:11–20. Joseph’s clarification comes immediately afterward, “The Father because he gave me of his fulness, and the Son because I was in the world and made flesh my tabernacle, and dwelt among the sons of men (D&C 93:4).” Here is Joseph’s unique commentary on the Johannine passage; the reason that Jesus can be said to be “one” with the Father is because the Father gave his “fullness” to the Son. They are not necessarily one in an ontological sense—although that might be true, we are not told—but because the Father, one personage, gave to his Son, a second personage, his “fullness.” This explanation appears to represent a sort of reverse kenosis, whereby the Father filled the Son with his “fullness” before or in the incarnation rather than, as Paul explained, Christ emptied himself (Phil 2:7).

In Joseph’s expansion of the prologue to the Gospel of John, the LDS prophet further explained that this fullness was not an eternal quality of the Son; rather, he received it “grace to grace” it in due course;

A “[Christ] received not of the fulness at the first, but received grace for grace; And he received not of the fulness at first, but continued from grace to grace, until he received a
fulness; And thus he was called the Son of God, because he received not of the fulness at the first (D&C 93:12–14).”

The title Son of God, then, is not only a messianic reference in the same sense that it has been traditionally understood, but, in at least this sense, a reference to Christ’s continuing progression toward his divine fullness. He is not intrinsically divine, but has become so. In other words, there was a point in which the Son of God, the Word, was not “full of grace and truth (D&C 93:8, 11–12).” In other words, the Son was not always divine, as Nicene Trinitarianism asserts, but became divine over time through progression.

The implication of this continuing progression will become apparent later when Joseph revealed one his most unique and controversial teachings, the doctrine of eternal progression. DEP has rightly been described as a doctrine that “cannot be precisely defined or comprehended, yet [is] fundamental to the LDS worldview.” In essence, DEP teaches that the ultimate human potential is apotheosis, to become like God. LDS President John Taylor (1808–87) taught, and is often echoed, that human beings are gods in embryo, sharing in ontological likeness, and, through a successful mortal probation, may become gods in the afterlife. In Joseph’s words, speaking to his followers, “God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man [. . .] you have got to learn how to be gods yourselves.” There is a sense in which all beings, including God, have or are currently progressing from one degree of glory to another.

---

16 Unsurprisingly absent from Joseph’s revision of John’s prologue is “and the Word was God (John 1:1)” Instead, it reads “the Word was, for he was the Word (D&C 93:8).” This reinterpretation first appeared—by at least February 1833, perhaps earlier—in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible when the Joseph revised the first verse of John to read, “In the beginning was the gospel preached through the Son. And the gospel was the word, and the word was with the Son, and the Son was with God, and the Son was of God.” Thus, by 1833 Joseph’s tritheism was budding in the midst of both Mormonism’s early Nicene Trinitarianism and the competing mormonic Unitarianism. When faced with two competing trinities, orthodoxy and mormonic Unitarianism, instead of choosing one over the other, Joseph created a third avenue, one that would lead him towards the possibility of exaltation. The Son was not always divine as Nicene Trinitarianism contends, but neither is he literally the Father as the BoM indicates. Instead, Jesus is the Son who became divine.


18 John Taylor, Teachings of Presidents of the Church: John Taylor (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2011), xxvi–10.

19 TPJS, 345.
This was true of the Father and Son, as seen in its fledgling form in the previous verses from D&C 93.

The proposition that Christ became the Son of God “grace to grace” charted a course of radical departure from Nicene Trinitarianism. The Son was not with the Father “in the beginning” as an equally divine person; rather, at some point, the Son came into his full divinity sometime after “the beginning,” which the reader may take to understand as either the beginning of Son’s existence, the cosmos, or a combination of both. Then, only after a period of progression to a fuller divinity, the Son assisted the Father in his creative work of the physical universe.

The worlds were made by him; men were made by him; all things were made by him, and through him, and of him. [...] And now, verily I say unto you, I was in the beginning with the Father, and am the Firstborn; And all those who are begotten through me are partakers of the glory of the same, and are the church of the Firstborn. Ye were also in the beginning with the Father; that which is Spirit, even the Spirit of truth (D&C 93:10, 21–23).

The “ye” in this context are those who belong to “the church of the Firstborn,” a point made explicit later in the revelation; “man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be (D&C 93:29).” Thus, human beings not only have a premortal existence but share a commonality with Christ in having been brought into existence at some point in the past and are journeying toward divinity.

Accordingly, if the Son was in the beginning with the Father, but was not ontologically identifiable with the Father because he eventually received the Father’s glory “grace to grace,” and through the Son “men were made by him,” yet men “were also in the beginning with the Father,” while the Father created the spiritual being of man, the physical being of man was created by the Son. Here, then, is a sharp departure from mormonic Unitarianism towards a unique blend of (potentially) Arianism and premortal Adoptionism. According to mormonic Unitarianism, there would have been no distinction between the Father or the Son at the creation of the physical universe. Yet, Joseph describes a clear distinction between the two personages, where the Father predates the Son, who is a personage that has become the Son of God via
progression through grace. Additionally, the Son of God only became so through an eventual assumption to the role of God’s Son as Messiah.

D&C 93 represents one of Joseph’s first major steps toward Mormon Monolatry. It would seem that as early as 1833, Joseph may have taught that the Son was an exalted being—or even a created being—who worked toward his glory, a feat that humans may also eventually accomplish through his atoning work on the cross in combination with their own salvific progression (D&C 93:18–20). If the Father and the Son were two separate beings, and both work in tandem with the Holy Ghost, then it only follows that Joseph’s thought during this time would hold to some form of tritheism.

The Middle Period: Tritheism (1835–38)

The transition from the Early to Middle Periods, or Nicene Trinitarianism to tritheism, is marked by the publication of the first edition of the Doctrine & Covenants. By early autumn of 1835, LDS leaders had received, transcribed, complied, edited, and printed many of the revelations given to date. The result was the D&C (1835), a corpus of Mormon revelations, many of which are still in use today. Unique to this first edition, and absent from editions published after 1921, is a section called Lectures on Faith, a collection of discourses delivered at the School of the Prophets in Kirtland, Ohio. The lectures offer invaluable theological insight during the Middle Period. The editorial decision to remove the lectures from D&C in the early twentieth century suggests that the information does not accurately reflect nineteenth-century Mormon thought. However, the inclusion of the lectures in D&C (1835) equally suggests that they played some significant role in both defining and shaping Mormon theology at that time.

20 It was noted by the LDS Church Historian’s Office that “by September 1835, some copies of the book had been bound in Cleveland and were available for sale.” “Doctrine and Covenants, 1835, Page i,” p. [i], The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed January, 2017, http://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/doctrine-and-covenants-1835/9.
Pertinent to this paper, the lectures introduce—at least officially introduce—the term *Godhead* into popular Mormon theological vocabulary. Joseph understood the Godhead to constitute “the Father and the Son possessing the same mind,” which is identified as the Holy Ghost, who is described as the “Mind” of the Godhead with subsequent traits of “glory” and “power.” Accordingly, the Trinity is two distinct and separate personages, the Father and the Son, united by the same mind, the Holy Spirit. To clarify this point, the prophet added catechesis in which students are asked: “How many personages are there in the Godhead?” The answer to this straightforward question is simple, “Two: the Father and the Son.” Later, they are asked: “Do the Father and the Son possess the same mind?” They do, and this mind turns out to be the Holy Spirit.

It is quite possible that from around this point forward when Smith speaks of God being “one,” he means the Godhead, a relationship of two ontologically separate personages, the Father and the Son, united in mind by a third personage, the Holy Spirit. They are “one” so far as unity, purpose, and thought is concerned, but the three do not represent an ontological monad since they are separate and distinct personages. This definition of the Mormon Godhead has remained largely unchanged, so far as the nature of God is concerned. However, at this point in 1835, the function of the personages within the Godhead and their ability to progress are still undeveloped thoughts. Nevertheless, Joseph’s definition of *Godhead* in the lectures represents decidedly heterodox form of tritheism. Divinity within the Godhead was no longer exclusive to one god alone, which rubs against the Unitarian God of the BofM. Soon, Joseph would have additional scripture to bolster his revised nature of God.

---

21 Though the terms Holy Spirit and Holy Ghost are used interchangeably early in Joseph’s writings, the latter seems to have eventually become preferred.

22 D&C (1835), 54.

23 D&C (1835), 57.
July 1835: The Transition from Nicene Trinitarianism to Tritheism

In July of 1835, while the finishing arrangements were being made for the D&C’s publication, Michael H. Chandler, an exhibitioner of antiquities, traveled to Kirtland to display a private collection of Egyptian artifacts. There, he was told of a man who had the ability to translate ancient artifacts. In the early nineteenth century, when Egyptian hieroglyphs were still a mysterious code, such a talent was incredible. Chandler arranged to meet with the man, Joseph, and the artifacts were transferred to the Church on July 6th, 1835. That same day, Joseph, along with two scribes, W. W. Phelps and Oliver Cowdery, began to decipher the text (so far as they believed they could). The resulting work would eventually become the book of Abraham, a section of the PGP.

Due to a seven-year gap in the translation project, the book of Abraham offers yet another unique snapshot into the different stages of the development with the Mormon nature of God. The passages of Abraham 1:1–2:18 and 2:19–5:21 were translated seven years apart, giving Joseph plenty of time to develop doctrine. In fact, given the span of time between Joseph’s two stretches translation, Abraham 1:1–2:18 was translated during the Middle Period while the rest was completed in the Late Period. One key insight that Abraham 1:1–2:18 offers is Joseph’s use of the name Jehovah prior to the Late Period when he had come to identify Jesus as Jehovah. By comparison, God as a whole, without distinction of Father or Son, is identified as Jehovah only twice in the entire Book of Mormon (2 Ne 22:2; Moro 10:34). The first reference is an import from Isaiah 12:2 while the second is, essentially, a part of the epilogue to the entire BofM. In stark contrast, the relatively small book of Abraham, unlike the scant use of the tetragrammaton throughout the large corpus of the BofM, calls God Jehovah twice in proximity (Abraham 1:16;


2:8). A question arises: If Joseph has come to understand the Father and the Son as two separate persons, as indicated in D&C (1853), with whom does he identify the name Jehovah?

For now, this question goes unanswered, set aside to be addressed later in an 1836 theophany. The book of Abraham simply calls God Jehovah without reference to the Father or the Son, despite having already ontologically dissociated the two into distinctly separate personages. Interestingly, Abraham 2:1 calls God by the common LORD God, yahweh elohim, a title that frequently appears in the Old Testament. If Joseph had the opportunity to differentiate between the Father and the Son in the names LORD (Yahweh, Jehovah) and God (Elohim), this would seem as good a time as any. Yet, because he does not, it is unlikely that Joseph knew or understood the significance behind “LORD God,” as will be demonstrated in his eventual distinction of the two with Elohim as the Father and Jehovah as the Son. For now, Joseph is content to understand Jehovah as, perhaps, the title of the Godhead, but this contentment would not last.

April 1836: The Hebrew School and Temple Theophany at Kirtland

Six months after acquiring the book of Abraham artifacts, Joseph hired Joshua Seixas of Oberline College to teach him and his colleagues Hebrew in Kirtland. Seixas, who lauded the prophet for his “indefatigable industry,” began teaching lessons in January 1836 and completed that March.26 Joseph was quick to put his new language knowledge to use, which is evident in his creation of unique cosmological terms in the book of Abraham such as “Kolob” and “gnolaum.”27 While these terms may initially appear like nothing more than fanciful fabrications, they are likely faithful attempts by Joseph to incorporate the Hebrew language into his revelation. For example, it is not far-fetched to imagine kolob as a derivative of the Hebrew word

[Footnotes]


At any rate, the Hebrew lessons seem to have introduced Joseph to another, more impactful, idea—the meaning of *yahweh* and the plurality of the word *elohim*. After these lessons, Joseph began to use the term *elohim* for the first time in his writings and *yahweh*, Anglicized to *Jehovah*, much more frequently. In fact, the Sunday before his completion of Hebrew studies, Joseph referenced Jehovah four times, a significant increase from only a handful references between 1828–36. Up until this homily, delivered on March 27th, 1836, the name Jehovah was largely unknown to Smith’s writings. Now, coincidentally after his Hebrew studies, it became a favored title of God.

By April 1836, one month after completing Hebrew lessons, Joseph explicitly associated the name Jehovah with the Son as a separate personage from the Father in a vision of Christ.

The vail [sic] was taken from their minds and the eyes of their understandings were opened. They saw the Lord standing upon the breast work of the pulpit before them, and under his feet was a paved work of pure gold, in color like amber: his eyes were as a flame of fire; the hair of his head was like the pure snow, his countenance shone above the brightness of the sun, and his voice was as the sound of the rushing of great waters, even the Voice of Jehovah, saying, I am the first and the last. I am he who liveth. I am he who was slain. I am your Advocate with the Father.

Finally, the hazy intention behind Joseph’s use of the name Jehovah comes into focus. Jesus is Jehovah, “he who was slain” and humanity’s “Advocate with the Father.” The name Jehovah is not a descriptor of the Godhead inclusive of the Father, since Jehovah identifies his role as an advocate with the Father. Instead, Jehovah is a separate personage altogether—the Son, Jesus Christ. Here, the Mormon nature of God takes yet another step away from both Nicene Trinitarianism and the BofM. The Son of God went from an orthodox understanding, to the Unitarian Father-Son deity of the BofM, and now settled in his tritheistic role as Jehovah who received his position “grace to grace” as discovered through Joseph’s own progressive revelation. This understand of the nature of God, however, had one last phase of development.
The Late Period: Mormon Monolatry (1838–44)

By the beginning of the Late Period, DEP was on the precipice of becoming a public doctrine. Until mid-1844, the doctrine appears to have been known only to a few of Joseph’s associates, although he would later claim that he had always taught a plurality of gods, the necessary ingredient for DEP. One of the earliest hints of DEP is found in a letter that Joseph wrote from a Missouri jail. The prophet sought to comfort his people in December 1838, reminding them that an eternal rest from the violent turmoil they had recently experience was soon to arrive. In the letter, Joseph briefly mentioned, almost in passing, the existence of a “Council of the Eternal God of all other Gods.” Here is a necessary step towards DEP, the acknowledgement of other deities outside of the Godhead.

Later, in the spring of 1839, Joseph escaped while in transit to another jail and fled to Illinois. Joseph would spend his next few years seeking legal justice over the wrongs experienced by Mormons in Missouri, building a temple in the LDS colony at Nauvoo, growing the colony into a city, leading a militia, and embroiled in controversy over polygamy. It seems that Joseph was far too busy with all the demands of civic and religious life as head of a theocracy, so public steps in doctrinal development were rare. A notable exception, pertinent to this topic, is a clarifying statement made in early 1841 concerning the bodies and roles in which each personage of the Godhead operates.

[It is] the province of the Father to preside as the Chief or President, Jesus as the Mediator, and the Holy Ghost as the Testator or Witness. The Son [has] a tabernacle and so [does] the Father, but the Holy Ghost is a personage of spirit without tabernacle.

The reason that the Holy Ghost does not have a physical body while the Father and Son do is simple: “Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us.” On this point, Terryl

---


29 TPJS, 42.

30 D&C 130:22
Givens rightly notes that the oneness of the Godhead, “is therefore more than a solidarity of shared purpose: it is a covenantal relationship of unity, in which each has separate functions but each can—and does—represent the whole.”

Joseph’s distinction between the roles of each personage is certainly not unique to Christianity, but the tritheism underlining this statement introduces a potential shift in the focus for a Mormon worshipper. Nicene Trinitarian Christians make no distinction between the focus of their worship within the Trinity; for example, they can comfortably praise and worship the Holy Spirit as God, as is the case in charismatic and Pentecostal forms of worship. Mormons, however, might be drawn to focusing their worship to strictly the Father. LDS Apostle Bruce R. McConkie (1915–85) certainly held this position when he argued that Latter-day Saints “do not worship the Son, and we do not worship the Holy Ghost . . . worship in the true and saving sense is reserved for God the first, the Creator.”

Whether Joseph intended McConkie’s conclusion is debatable.

Also, the Father and Son, at least in part, need physical bodies so that they could have laid them down and taken them back up in resurrection as a step in their eternal progression. Joseph elaborated:

The Scriptures inform us that Jesus said, “As the Father hath power in Himself, even so hath the Son power”—to do what? Why, what the Father did. The answer is obvious—in a manner to lay down His body and take it up again. Jesus, what are you going to do? To lay down my life as my Father did, and take it up again.

Perhaps the need for a physical body is tied to the requirement that both Elohim and Jehovah sacrifice them in accordance with their journey toward exaltation. At any rate, this passage

---


33 TPJS, 346.
introduces us to an influential discourse in the development of Joseph’s nature of God—the *King Follett Sermon*.

**Spring 1844: The King Follett Sermon and the Sermon on the Plurality of Gods**

On a rainy spring day in 1844, Joseph took the stage to deliver what would become one of his last public addresses prior to his untimely death. Mounting external criticism from his former advisor, William Law, prompted Joseph to take a defensive public posture. Law published the first edition of his new periodical, *The Nauvoo Expositor*, on June 7th, 1844, which he used to air stinging grievances against his former prophet and friend. Among the “many items of false doctrine” taught by Smith, Law took issue with “the doctrine of many Gods,” calling it “blasphemy, for it is most unquestionably speaking of God in an impious and irreverent manner.”

Knowing that such an attack was on the horizon, the weathered LDS prophet could not stand idly by while yet another enemy subverted his authority. So, he took to public defense in the KFS. This sermon would become the most important source for the DEP and, consequently, Mormon nature of God in the Late Period.

In a later sermon, following the publication of the *Expositor*, Joseph preached yet again on the subject of the plurality of gods. “Now,” he began his sermon, “you know that of late some malicious and corrupt men have sprung up and apostatized from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and they declare that the Prophet believes in a plurality of Gods, and, lo and behold! we have discovered a very great secret, they cry—‘The Prophet says there are many Gods, and this proves that he has fallen.’”

Silence, I imagine, must have fell over the audience because the prophet had rarely addressed the mysterious doctrine of eternal progression that was still maturing in his mind. Only two months before, on April 7th, were they treated to a lengthy talk on the new doctrine in the KFS, perhaps prompting Law’s complaint in the first place.

---


35 TPJS, 369.
Joseph elaborated:

I will preach on 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 the Holy Ghost was a distinct personage and a Spirit: and these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods.\textsuperscript{36}

Joseph further contrasted his doctrine against Nicene Trinitarianism, a position he apparently once held early on in his career, as a “curious organization” where three persons are “crammed into one God.” By the prophet’s reckoning, this god would be “a giant or a monster.”\textsuperscript{37} Here, the alternative was not one God in three persons, but three personages as one Godhead. Further, the Godhead lives in the presence of other deities. Joseph also opened the possibility that these other deities include gods who are further in their glory that Elohim. There is, according to logical inference, a father of God the Father.

Why, then, does Joseph insist on three personages as one Godhead? The answer is the same to the question over why I have proposed that the Mormon nature of God is rightly defined as monolatry—the worship of one god while acknowledging the existence of other gods. First, through DEP, other gods exist in conjunction with Elohim and Jehovah, though they are certainly not as powerful or glorified as he. In Mormon thought, the moment that a created being achieves apotheosis and becomes like God, the strict monotheism of Nicene Trinitarianism expires. There are others who have become like God, which defies the Creator-creation distinction of orthodoxy. Again, to call upon Joseph himself, “God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man [...] you have got to learn how to be gods yourselves.”\textsuperscript{38} If someone, just one human, has achieved the lofty goal set forth by Joseph, which we are left to assume is possible, then the status of “god” is no longer unique to the Godhead. Surely, the degree to which power

\textsuperscript{36} TPJS, 370.
\textsuperscript{37} TPJS, 369.
\textsuperscript{38} TPJS, 345.
and glory reside in these new gods pales in comparison to the Godhead, for the Godhead now has
created begins who have become gods, but they have achieved the status of “god” nevertheless.

Second, Joseph cracked open the door of possibility that gods greater than Elohim
exists, or, at the very least, have existed in the past.

If Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and John discovered that God the Father of Jesus Christ
had a Father, you may suppose that He had a Father also. Where was there ever a son
without a father? And where was there ever a father without first being a son? Whenever
did a tree or anything spring into existence without a progenitor? And everything comes in
this way. Paul says that which is earthly is in the likeness of that which is heavenly, Hence
if Jesus had a Father, can we not believe that He had a Father also?39

At face value, Joseph’s words were controversial to his audience and certainly rub against the
grain of most Christian natures of God with few exceptions, i.e., Gnosticism. Even most of the
Christologies condemned as heresy by the councils—such as Arianism, wherein the Son was
created by the Father—refuses to recognize a god higher than the Creator God. To date, Mormon
theologians and philosophers have spent little time teasing out the implications of Joseph’s
words, and, perhaps, with good reason—they are few and unclear. If Joseph meant to
communicate that Elohim has a Father, if God the Father’s father exists, then, naturally, there is a
potential that gods exist with greater power and glory than the Godhead. Yet, because humans are
the handiwork of Elohim through Jehovah, we are not to concern ourselves with those greater
gods—thus, monolatry. If not, then the Mormon nature of God still remains monolatrous; we are
certainly not to worship those humans-turned-gods who have gone before us. The Godhead alone
is deserving of our admiration and worship.

The KFS and the sermon that follow cemented into Mormon theology a new and
unique expression of the nature of God within Christianity, which, when partnered with his
previous teachings and revelations of human exaltation, finally matured into DEP. Unfortunately,
clearity and canonization of Joseph’s nature of God and view of salvation were never reified, as

39 TPJS, 373.
he cut the sermon short due to rain and, sadly, he would later succumb to an untimely death by violent mobocracy in a Carthage, Illinois jail in June 1844, shortly after the KFS was delivered.

**Mormon Monolatry Defined**

Having briefly examined the historical development of Joseph’s nature of God from the Early to Late Periods, one question remains: How should we define his concept of the Godhead? Joseph died before he was ever able to clarify his nature of God, so LDS and non-LDS thinkers alike are left to formulate the prophet’s theology for him. I will now, humbly, attempt to construct a historically informed definition of Joseph’s nature of God.

In sum, while the Son of God began as the Nicene “Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,” Joseph was introduced to a competing Christological perspective from the Mormonic Unitarianism of the BofM messiah who declared, “Behold, I am Jesus Christ. I am the Father and the Son (Ether 3:14).” Joseph grew dissatisfied with both the Nicene Trinitarianism of nineteenth-century American Protestantism and the Mormonic Unitarianism of the BofM, so the prophet took his first step away from both towards tritheism. This step was no doubt fueled by the prospect of Christ growing “grace to grace” to become the Son of God, something that, on some level, all of humanity has the potential to experience. This spiritual growth towards theosis is the grand secret to eternal life, the idea that all moral beings in the universe have the ability to eternally progress through obedience to certain principles, thus populating the cosmos with gods. Yet, because the Godhead is our Creator, we reserve our worship for only him, though we acknowledge the existence of other gods, be they lesser or greater than the Godhead. With this history in mind, I propose that Joseph believed the following six statements about the nature of God prior to his death, which I have called *Mormon Monolatry:*
(1) The Father is God, an ontologically distinct personage named Elohim.
(2) The Son is God, an ontologically distinct personage named Jehovah.
(3) The Holy Ghost is God, an ontologically distinct personage of spirit.
(5) The Godhead exists among other gods.
(6) The Godhead alone is the focus of our worship.40

I believe Mormon Monolatry should be a preferred description of the Mormon nature of God according to Joseph’s thought. The following descriptions fall short to the complexity of Joseph’s Godhead and certainly lack the historical background to create an informed definition: (1) \textit{monotheism}, because it discounts the tritheistic element—three distinct and separate personages—of the Godhead, (2) \textit{polytheism}, because it merely states that other gods exists, but does not limit worship to the Godhead, (3) \textit{tritheism}, because, while it rightly highlights the tritheistic Godhead, it discounts the existence of other gods, (4) \textit{henotheism}, because, while it rightly limits worship to one \textit{(heno–)} God among other deities, it discounts the tritheistic element of the Godhead.

The closest definition I found outside the LDS community that accurately describes Joseph’s Godhead comes from Stephen Parrish’s and Carl Mosser’ proposition that the Mormon Godhead is best described as \textit{Mormon Monarchotheism}, “the theory that there is more than one God, but one God is clearly preeminent among the gods; in effect, he is the monarch or ruler of all the gods.”41 However, Parrish and Mosser propose this definition based on contemporary

\footnote{40 On this point, it must be said that a form of subordinationism exists in contemporary Mormonism where the focus of worship is the Godhead, yet the locus of our worship is Elohim. For example, Latter-day Saints pray to God the Father through God the Son by the Holy Ghost. The late LDS Apostle Bruce R. McConkie is helpful here; “there is only one true and living God. He is the Father, the Almighty Elohim, the Supreme Being, the Creator and Ruler of the universe. . . . Christ is God; he alone is the Savior. The Holy Ghost is God; he is with the Father and the Son. But these two are the second and third members of the Godhead. The Father is God above all, and is, in fact, the God of the Son.” \textit{A New Witness for the Articles of Faith}. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 51.}

sketches of the nature of God within Mormonism, apparently without considering its historical
definition. As a result, I believe this definition ignores the philosophical possibility of a greater
God than the Godhead, i.e., God the Father’s father. If Parrish’s and Mosser’s description of the
Mormon Godhead is correct, then contemporary Mormonism has likewise ignored the potential
meaning behind both the KFS and the sermon that follow it, for “where was there ever child
without a father?”

Furthermore, in support of their definition, Parrish and Mosser cited Joseph as
teaching the Godhead is the “Eternal God of all other gods (D&C 121:32),” but neglected to
include the full description of the “eternal God.” It is not the “Eternal God of all other gods,” but
the “Council of the Eternal God of all other gods.” For clarification, that the term council is
meant to be understood as an advisory committee of deities is verified by Joseph noting that an
ordination made “in the midst of” the council. Thus, it could be argued that the council, which is
set above God, is higher and greater, perhaps inclusive of God the Father’s father. Also, Joseph
wrote the revelation that Parrish and Mosser cite on March 20, 1839, during the time when he
was transitioning from tritheism to monolatry, the Middle to Late Periods. D&C 121 presents to
us a small snapshot of Joseph’s transition away from two gods, Elohim and Jehovah, to many
gods, a “Council of the Eternal God of all other gods.” This is why it is important to consider the
historical development of the Godhead, rather than jumping back and forth along the timeline.

In conclusion, the Mormon nature of God is a well-known theological distinction
between mainstream Christianity and Latter-day Saints (LDS). While this division remains a
centerpiece of their ongoing interfaith dialogue, its exact definition is notoriously elusive. I
believe the coveted mutually-satisfying definition of the Mormon Godhead has remained elusive
because many have labored to construct a definition through metaphysics or theological
disagreements without considering the historical elements that fueled its evolution. By

Zondervan, 2002), 195.

42 TPJS, 373.
considering the historical development of the Godhead in the Mormon tradition, researchers can better articulate this foundational Mormon doctrine. This paper has briefly traced the contours of the theological development of the Mormon Godhead for the purpose of creating a historically informed definition of the Mormon nature of God, Mormon Monolatry.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


