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## EDITORIAL

*David M. Morris*

*Editor*

In a year that some have described as the *Mormon Moment*, due to the media exposure of a Mormon standing for the US presidency, Mormon Studies once again enlarges the academic world. One need only look at current releases of university presses, which demonstrate this interest, many of which are reviewed here. In this issue articles are featured on intellectual and historical foci, as well as theological analysis.

We, as always, extend our appreciation to those who took time to blind peer-review articles and review books fairly and formative as possible. As an editorial board we hope you will enjoy the contents of this issue.

If you wish to make a comment or suggestions on its improvement, please feel free to email us at [editorial@ijmsonline.org](mailto:editorial@ijmsonline.org).

## THE SPECIES DEBATE: GOD AND HUMANITY IN IRENAEUS AND THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS

*Adam J. Powell*

Beginning with B.H. Roberts in the early 20th century, a number of LDS scholars have engaged with the writings of the early Christian fathers. This paper follows the precedent set by those individuals such as Hugh Nibley, Keith Norman, and Jordan Vajda. These scholars investigated potential connections between LDS teachings and those of specific Christian fathers like Irenaeus. He has been cited as an early proponent of deification, creation ex nihilo, and baptism for the dead. This work addresses only the first two of those doctrines. Though the past few decades have witnessed a general consensus within Mormon Studies regarding the disparity between early Christian beliefs and LDS teachings, a thorough examination of the God/Human relationship in Irenaeus is warranted.

By utilizing recent scholarship, this study exhibits the theological and anthropological connection between creation ex nihilo and theosis in the second-century bishop's thoughts. This link distinguishes Irenaeus from Mormonism. The LDS notion of eternal progression witnesses no delineation between God and humanity. Irenaean deification depends on the ontological distinction resulting from having been created from nothing.

The relationship between the Creator and the Creation in Irenaeus and in Mormon thought has been articulated in terms of kind versus degree.<sup>1</sup> The distinction relies heavily on two issues. Despite the

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<sup>1</sup> This language is used explicitly in Richard N. Ostling and Joan K. Ostling, *Mormon America* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 315. Similar terms are employed by LDS philosopher David L. Paulsen in his works on the nature of God: 'Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity: Origen and Augustine as Reluctant Witnesses' (*Harvard Theological Review*), and 'Divine Embodiment: The Earliest Christian Understanding of God' (*Early Christians in Disarray*). It is worth noting that these terms have been employed by a wide range of philosophers and theologians, ranging from the aforementioned to their distinctly different usage in G.K. Chesterton's discussion of the lack of evolution in the human race (*The Everlasting Man*, 34).

claims of some Mormon writers, belief in creation *ex nihilo* (creation out of nothing) separates the Early Church from that of the Latter-day Saints (hereafter, LDS).<sup>2</sup> This disagreement is, in fact, of the utmost importance for any discussion of Irenaean theology. If humans were created from an eternal material, they are not necessarily contingent beings in the sense of owing their very substance to the one, self-existent God. Contingency, in this case, refers to absolute dependence on supernatural power for existence. If not contingent in this manner, certain individuals may indeed possess a transcendent *gnosis* (Gr., 'knowledge') rooted, perhaps, in matter, which has always been. Further, they may originate from inherently evil matter or even a different creative deity (both are "Gnostic" claims refuted by Irenaeus).<sup>3</sup>

Additionally, one must explore the definition of deification found in LDS and Irenaean texts, as this is integral to the discussion. As Daniel Keating points out,

It is crucial, however, to recognize a distinction between the content of the doctrine of deification and its characteristic vocabulary...In other words, we cannot simply follow a terminological trail in order to discover what the content of this doctrine is.<sup>4</sup>

The potential for equivocation is certainly strong in any case involving a heterodox religious group attempting to establish significant connection with the orthodox. This study will assay the importance of creation theology before heeding Keating's warning and entering the somewhat murky depths of *theosis* language and belief.

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<sup>2</sup> In Mormon parlance, early Church also has reference to the period of the nascent nineteenth century Mormon church; however, in this context it refers to the common Christian acceptance of early century Christendom.

<sup>3</sup> In his work, *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus was chiefly concerned with refuting the Gnostics. This religious sect held that only they were privy to the special knowledge of the spiritual world. They also believed that the god of the Old Testament was not the same god revealed in Jesus Christ, that physical matter was evil, and that there was no continuity between the Hebrew Scriptures and the writings of the apostles and evangelists.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel A. Keating, *Deification and Grace* (Naples: Sapientia, 2007), 8-9.

## CREATION EX NIHILLO

The orthodox position on creation is creation *ex nihilo*, or creation out of nothing. In this view, God made the earth and its inhabitants from no pre-existing material. God is, therefore, truly the creator of everything that exists. He was, in this view, not limited as an artist is inhibited by his or her chosen medium. God created any material necessary for the achievement of His divine will.

The Mormon concept of time demands that God created the earth by organizing chaos.<sup>5</sup> Matter is eternal and, thus, was already present as the Father initiated the creative process recorded in Genesis. This LDS understanding of creation is undoubtedly sourced in the authoritative texts of the church. The origins of the foundational beliefs, however, may have been more philosophical. Fawn Brodie pointed to Thomas Dick's *Philosophy of a Future State* as influential on Joseph Smith's thoughts.<sup>6</sup> In this text, astronomy and metaphysics collaborate in support of the thesis that matter is eternal. As a result of this reading<sup>7</sup>, Smith began to view the act of creation in a novel fashion. His subsequent teachings, additions to the *Doctrine and Covenants*, and portions of *The Pearl of Great Price* may reflect this philosophical influence.<sup>8</sup>

These principles differ drastically not only from the confession of orthodox Christians but also from the thoughts of Irenaeus himself. In the second book of *Against Heresies* the bishop repeatedly affirms creation *ex nihilo* in the midst of arguing against the special knowledge

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<sup>5</sup> Ostling & Ostling, 304.

<sup>6</sup> Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: the life of Joseph Smith* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 171.

<sup>7</sup> Terryl L. Givens, *People of Paradox* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 85. Givens lists Dick's *Philosophy of a Future State* as one of three titles donated to the Nauvoo Library by Joseph Smith around 1843. One might presume, then, that Smith had read this book as it was in his possession.

<sup>8</sup> *The Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, The Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve, Inc., 1981). Doctrine and Covenants 93:29, 'Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be.' See also, *History of the Church* 6:311 and *Abraham* 3:18,22.



claimed by ‘Gnostic’ leaders.<sup>9</sup> Chapter Ten of *Against Heresies* is dedicated to Irenaeus’ refutation of the Valentinian creation myth. The Valentinians held that the Demiurge created the material world out of materials derived from Achamoth, a female emanation of Sophia.<sup>10</sup> In opposing this creation account, Irenaeus explicitly avers that ‘God is in this point pre-eminently superior to men that He Himself called into being the substance of His creation, when previously it had no existence.’<sup>11</sup>

Later, he repudiates both the notion that humans can know the ineffable mysteries of God and the Valentinian belief that the Demiurge, who created all men including those with special *gnosis*, was of an animal nature. On the first issue, he expresses his belief that ‘all things were made by God’ but that the details of the creative act are beyond human reach.<sup>12</sup> Though the context clearly concerns ‘Gnostic’ mythology, it is difficult to dismiss the explicit affirmation that God created ‘all things’. This is supported two chapters later, when the bishop discusses the irrationality of believing that an inferior being (the Demiurge) could produce a superior being (the pneumatics). On this second point, he asserts that there is one God who made all things through his will, thus everything is inferior to the sole Creator.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps the most frequently quoted passage from Irenaeus in support of creation out of nothing occurs in book four. There, Irenaeus quotes from the first mandate of the *Shepherd of Hermas* in order to support his views: “First of all, believe that there is one God who created and finished all things, and made all things out of nothing. He alone is able to contain the whole, but Himself cannot be contained.”<sup>14</sup> When these conspicuous statements are combined with various others from the third and fourth books of

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<sup>9</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* (hereafter, *AH*), Ante-Nicene Christian Library: Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325, vols. 5 and 9, ed. by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1868), II.28.7. These leaders included Valentinus, Marcion, Saturninus, and Basilides.

<sup>10</sup> This is the Ptolemaic myth of the western Valentinians. In *AH*, II.10.3, Irenaeus mentions that moisture came from the tears of Achamoth, and solid substance came from her sadness.

<sup>11</sup> *AH*, II.10.3

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, II.28.7

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, II.30.9

<sup>14</sup> *The Pastor of Hermas*, in Ante-Nicene Fathers: Writings of the Fathers Down to A.D.325, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1868), II.1.

*Against Heresies*, there can be little doubt that Irenaeus affirmed creation *ex nihilo*.<sup>15</sup>

Keith Norman and Philip Barlow have both addressed the task of drawing comparisons between the early Christian concept of *theosis* and the Mormon doctrines of eternal progression and exaltation. In doing so, each has espoused the notion that the earliest forms of deification gradually morphed in order to become more compatible with the belief in creation *ex nihilo*. Norman says, ‘...the principal reason the doctrine of Divinization could not survive in the church’s theology proper was that it conflicted with the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* to which most ‘orthodox’ Christians adhered by the middle of the third century.’<sup>16</sup> This follows his claim that Irenaeus was the ‘first explicit advocate of divinization’.<sup>17</sup>

Barlow echoes Norman in asserting that this doctrine of creation inhibited the spread of *theosis*. In fact, he asserts that a ‘fundamental’ connection exists between the thoughts of deification expressed by the ‘earliest church fathers’ and those of Mormonism, adding that these similarities preceded the ‘creedal formulations of the Trinity or of creation *ex nihilo*.’<sup>18</sup> Their belief, then, suggests that the earliest Christian fathers held a specific view of deification, which was incompatible with the theology promulgated by the creeds of the mid-fourth century.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> AH, III.8.3; IV.20.7. Compare the portion of book III, ‘There is one God the Father, who contains all things, and who grants existence to all’ to Acts 17:28, ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ In the passage from book IV, Irenaeus appeals to John 1:3 as well as Psalm 33:6 for additional support. *The Holy Bible*, New International Version (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984). All scripture references are taken from this translation unless otherwise noted.

<sup>16</sup> Keith Norman, ‘Divinization: The Forgotten Teaching of Early Christianity,’ *Sunstone* 1 (1975): 17.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Philip L. Barlow, ‘Unorthodox Orthodoxy: The Idea of Deification in Christian History,’ *Sunstone* 41 (September–October 1983): 16, 19.

<sup>19</sup> It should be noted that both scholars present a rather nuanced view of the relationship between Mormon exaltation and Irenaean deification. For instance, Barlow (16) unreservedly points out that he does not “wish to be misunderstood as implying that any or all of the thinkers referred to herein thought of *theosis* just as the Mormons do.” Their argument hinges more on

Claiming Irenaeus as a proponent of divinization may seem justified in light of much of his diction. To imply, however, that his view of deification was incompatible with creation *ex nihilo* is to betray a fundamental misunderstanding of Irenaeus' theology.<sup>20</sup> In fact, Norman himself composed an insightful work on the soteriology of Athanasius in which he explicitly remarks, "Long before Athanasius' time, the view that every creature, even matter itself, came into being *ex nihilo* by the fiat of God, was adopted almost universally by ecclesiastical Christianity."<sup>21</sup> As J.T. Nielsen highlighted, the progress of humankind was initiated, not with the first sin of Adam, but at the moment of creation.<sup>22</sup> In the *Dispositio*<sup>23</sup> (economy) of salvation, the inevitable result of creation from nothing is the need to experience advancement. Thus, Irenaeus may be both an early advocate of a form of *theosis* and of the standard creation doctrine of his day.

### DEIFICATION AS QUALIFICATION

Any discussion of ontology and natural/supernatural relationships that combines Patristics and LDS theology must touch on varieties of deification. Perhaps there can be no more influential thought for the individual than the notion that, by any number of events and efforts, one can become 'deified'. This is unequivocally crucial to the formation of identity amongst religious adherents. Self-actualization is, indeed, taken to a new height if conceived of within the

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the assertion that Augustine began to alter the understanding of *theosis* from a more literal progression to godhood to a sort of mystical union.

<sup>20</sup> In fairness, Keith Norman published an article ('*Ex Nihilo: The Development of the Doctrines of God and Creation in Early Christianity*,' *BYU Studies* 17 (Spring 1977)) a bit later in which he explicitly claims Irenaeus as the first Christian to formulate a creation *ex nihilo* doctrine. The confusion, however, still remains. How can Irenaeus be an early proponent of both creation *ex nihilo* and *theosis* if the two doctrines are fundamentally incompatible?

<sup>21</sup> Keith Norman, *Deification: The Content of Athanasian Soteriology* (PhD Diss. Duke University, 1980), ch.5.

<sup>22</sup> J.T. Nielsen, *Adam and Christ in the Theology of Irenaeus of Lyons* (Assen: Van Gorcum & Comp, 1968), 62.

<sup>23</sup> *On the Apostolic Preaching*, 6. 'Christ Jesus our Lord, who was revealed...according to the economies of the Father.' The Greek word *oikonomia* (Latin, *disposition*) refers to the organization of someone's affairs and is used in early Christian writers to refer to God's ordering of the plan of salvation.

framework of deification. To wonder at the potentiality of becoming a god is to posit the metaphysical as the ideal for the material.

After presenting his audience with a handful of examples of deification among orthodox Christians, LDS scholar Stephen Robinson claims that the theology of the Mormons represents ‘the same theology and the same goal.’<sup>24</sup> Robinson argues that the doctrine of deification is the same in LDS thought as it is in the thoughts of notable Christians such as Athanasius and Irenaeus. Unfortunately, Robinson does not appear to tackle the substantial evidence that stands in opposition to his thesis.

John McGuckin has defined the patristic concept of deification as ‘the process of sanctification of Christians whereby they become progressively conformed to God.’<sup>25</sup> McGuckin goes on to say that this ‘bold use of language’ was intended to connote the transformative component of the salvation process, the element that would later constitute one half of the concept of ‘justification’.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, for Eastern Orthodox scholar Jaroslav Pelikan, the patristic view of deification was synonymous with salvation.<sup>27</sup> For the Church fathers, this was the abil-

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<sup>24</sup> Stephen Robinson, *Are Mormons Christian?* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991), 63. This view is perhaps stated too strongly by Robinson. Certainly, other LDS scholars such as Norman, Barlow, Grant Underwood, and Jordan Vajda have been careful to allow the early Christian fathers their own, unique forms of deification.

<sup>25</sup> John A. McGuckin, *The SCM Press A–Z of Patristic Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 98.

<sup>26</sup> Grant Underwood, ‘Justification, Theosis, and Grace in Early Christian, Lutheran, and Mormon Discourse,’ *International Journal of Mormon Studies* 2 (2009): 206–23. Underwood provides a summary of the transformation that *theosis* underwent as the language changed to ‘justification’ and then to ‘sanctification’.

<sup>27</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, ‘The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition,’ *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine* vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 155, 266, 345. Eastern Orthodox scholars such as Pelikan are important for investigations into patristic notions of *theosis* because, as Norman and others have expressed, the tradition of *theosis* was preserved in the Eastern Church. In fact, the most renowned scholars of Irenaeus such as John Behr and Mathew Steenberg are member of the Orthodox Church. The history of LDS scholarship suggests, however, that no consensus exists on this issue. For example, Stephen Robinson (pp.61–63) believes that the patristic

ity to participate in the communicable attributes of God such as grace, power, honour, et cetera.<sup>28</sup>

These early writers, particularly Irenaeus and the Alexandrians (Clement, Origen, Athanasius, and Cyril), sought the optimal means by which their audience might comprehend the transforming nature of Christ's work. To such an end, these individuals borrowed similar language from their Greco-Roman culture.<sup>29</sup> The result was not *apotheosis* with its pagan connection to earthly rulers and the reliance on succession for the attainment of divinity but *theosis*, a process whereby individuals may participate (κοινωνία) in the divine nature because of the atoning work of Christ.<sup>30</sup>

Kallistos Ware's definition of deification echoes the voices of the early writers. In fact, his view aids in the comprehension of the Greek Fathers, as the former (as far as it represents the entire Eastern Orthodox Church) depends on the latter. For Ware, *theosis* is necessarily linked to the image and likeness, and it is the process of assimilation

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understanding has been preserved in the Eastern Church, whereas Daniel Peterson and Stephen Ricks think otherwise (*Offenders for a Word* [Provo: FARMS, 1992], 92).

<sup>28</sup> Chris Welborn, 'Mormons and Patristic Study: How Mormons Use the Church Fathers to Defend Mormonism,' *Christian Research Journal* 28.3 (2005): 5.

<sup>29</sup> Demetrios Constantelos, 'Irenaeos of Lyons and His Central Views,' *St. Vladimir's Theological Seminary* 33.4 (1989): 355. Constantelos explains this well: '...it is beyond any doubt that Irenaeos (sic) was very familiar with Greek thought, and Greek was his native tongue. Following the example of the Apologists such as Justin and Athenagoras, he sought to expound the teachings of Christ in terms understandable to the Greek-speaking world. Irenaeos' (sic) thought was in harmony with that of the Apologists, Justin the Martyr in particular, and other Greek Fathers such as the Alexandrians, the Antiochians, and the Cappadocians who were realists and saw Christianity in its historical and cultural context: they did not seek the dilution of Christianity by Hellenism, but the Christianization of Hellenism and indeed of the whole Cosmos.'

<sup>30</sup> This language originates in 2 Peter 1:4, 'Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.' This passage is utilised by Irenaeus and the LDS as the launching point for discussion of deification. The word 'participate' comes from the Greek *koinonia* (κοινωνία), which is more commonly translated to mean 'communion or intimacy with'.

to God by grace.<sup>31</sup> Deification is, again, synonymous with salvation, but it also entails a separation of essence:

The idea of deification must always be understood in the light of the distinction between God's essence and His energies. Union with God means union with the divine energies, not the divine essence: the Orthodox Church, while speaking of deification and union, rejects all forms of pantheism...The human being does not become God by *nature*, but is merely a "created god," a god *by grace* or *by status*. (Original emphasis)<sup>32</sup>

As Irenaeus maintains a similar partition, his understanding of progression must be examined under this light. The development of each individual is not the means but the goal itself.<sup>33</sup> This is perhaps the distinguishing feature of early Christian deification. In the bishop's own words,

God differs from man, that God indeed makes, but man is made; and truly, He who makes is always the same; but that

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<sup>31</sup> Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), 219.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 232.

<sup>33</sup> Irenaeus so adamantly emphasizes the developmental process over the final attainment in his writings that he eventually came to hold a special position in the theories of religious philosophers. The bishop's teachings on the advancement of the individual now represent 'Irenaeian Theodicy'. This solution to the problem of evil existing in the world of a good God relies on Irenaeus' understanding of necessary maturation. Irenaeian Theodicy utilizes the words of Irenaeus, such as those found in *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching*, which explicate how Adam 'was a young child, not yet having a perfect deliberation.'<sup>33</sup> John Hick, perhaps the most widely known proponent of such a theodicy, describes the Irenaeian-based theory in these words: 'The Irenaeian claim is not that each evil which occurs is specifically necessary to the attainment of the eventual end-state of perfected humanity in the divine Kingdom. What was necessary was a world which contains real contingencies, real dangers, real problems and tasks and real possibilities of failure and tragedy as well as of triumph and success, because only in a world having this general character could human animals begin their free development into "children of God".' John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 375.

which is made must receive both beginning, and middle, and addition, and increase...God also is truly perfect in all things, Himself equal and similar to Himself...but man receives advancement and increase towards God. For as God is always the same, so also man, when found in God, shall always go on towards God.<sup>34</sup>

Here lies the connection between creation *ex nihilo* and deification. That which is made from nothing is necessarily in need of progression. Julie Canlis expresses the Irenaean concept well by drawing a close connection between creation and individual growth: “Our ongoing status of being created is the corollary of God’s ongoing creation – not due to sinfulness, but to the way that God has structured creation for participation. Growth is not a deficiency but is inextricably linked to anthropology as made...”<sup>35</sup> She goes on to say that progress is essentially a component or fulfilment of our status as Creation.<sup>36</sup> This does not mean, however, that the bishop possessed no belief in an ultimate salvation experience. On the contrary, his understanding of participation involved a sort of final hope of intimacy.<sup>37</sup> This communion was not one of absorption into the divine; it maintained the complete individual (body, soul, and spirit).<sup>38</sup>

A number of similarities do exist between the *theosis* of Irenaean theology and LDS exaltation. For instance, there is a special value placed on the progression process as well as on Peter’s notion that individuals should participate in the ‘divine nature’. This maturation process is itself catalysed by the participation and occurs within a divinely sanctioned soteriological scheme, the *Dispositio* for Irenaeus and the Plan of Salvation for LDS. Jordan Vajda highlights a teleological similarity between the two:

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<sup>34</sup> AH, IV.11.2; IV.20.7. In chapter 20, Irenaeus articulates his view that the Word of God was sent to reveal God to humanity so that the latter might have something ‘towards which he might advance’.

<sup>35</sup> Julie Canlis, “Being Made Human: The Significance of Creation for Irenaeus’ Doctrine of Participation,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58.4 (2005): 445.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 447.

<sup>37</sup> In the words of Irenaeus, this is *adsuesceret* or being accustomed to God. This is said to occur in both directions, God becoming accustomed to humanity and humanity to God (AH, III.20.2).

<sup>38</sup> Constantelos, 355, 361.

the doctrines of *theosis* and exaltation are functionally equivalent while being ontologically distinct. In other words, in both cases the results of human divinization are equivalent—humans come to possess divine qualities and attributes, a new manner of life, which they did not possess before and which they could not attain of their own volition.<sup>39</sup>

Though the particulars are distinct, each involves a sort of intimate relationship between God and humans, which facilitates the necessary development.<sup>40</sup>

In *Doctrine and Covenants* section 88, one encounters a clear similarity between LDS exaltation and the patristic view of deification: ‘and the saints shall be filled with his glory’ (D&C 88:107). Here, the doctrine of exaltation is said to include participation in the communicable attribute of divine glory; however, the remaining portion of the verse illuminates a significant distinction: ‘and be made equal with him’. In Mormon doctrine, eternal progression can result in becoming equal with Father God. Often, this is expressed as synonymous with receiving God’s inheritance. Those who enter the Father’s kingdom are also given all that the Father has.<sup>41</sup> This goes beyond the communicable attributes to include, among others, a sort of omniscience.<sup>42</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith even claimed, ‘those who are worthy to become his sons...would be heirs of the Father’s kingdom, possessing the same attributes in their perfection, as the Father and the Son’<sup>43</sup> This echoes the teaching that Joseph Smith presented to church elders in Kirtland in the winter of 1834/35.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Jordan Vajda, *Partakers of the Divine Nature* (BYU: FARMS Occasional Papers), ch. 5, ‘Theosis and Exaltation: In Dialogue.’

<sup>40</sup> Underwood, 214.

<sup>41</sup> D&C 84:34–38.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 93:27–28.

<sup>43</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, vol.2 (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft Publishers, 1955), 35.

<sup>44</sup> Joseph Smith, *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1985), 60. ‘and all those who keep his commandments shall grow up from grace to grace, and become heirs of the heavenly kingdom, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ; possessing the same mind, being transformed into the same image or likeness, even the express image of him who fills all in all; being filled with



Later in *Doctrines of Salvation*, Joseph Fielding Smith explicitly asserts that men may become perfect just as God is perfect.<sup>45</sup> This is clearly an allusion to the words of Peter, ‘but just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “be holy, because I am holy”’ (1 Peter 1:15–16). In the LDS Church, scripture is often interpreted in a literal manner, facilitating the pragmatic approach to religion that has existed from the very beginning of the Mormon tradition. In this case, Peter’s words are not taken as an exhortation or charge with Christ’s holiness as the ultimate model toward which one should strive. Instead, the holiness of Christ is literally something, which humans have the opportunity to inherit.<sup>46</sup>

Through the developmental process, including the highest level of commitment and obedience to the Church, an individual may become an heir to God’s kingdom. Again, this is taken in a literal sense, so that those who become heirs are not only equal (joint-heirs) to Christ but also look forward to the future time in which they receive all that the Father enjoys. Logically, then, the attainment of exaltation is the attainment of godhood. Joseph Fielding Smith expresses the logic well. Quoting from *Doctrine and Covenants* 76:59, he says, ‘and if they receive his fullness and his glory, and if “all things are theirs, whether life or death, or things present, or things to come, all are theirs,” how can they receive these blessings and not become gods? They cannot.’<sup>47</sup>

In attacking the ‘Gnostic’ teaching that the demiurge was separate from the God of the New Testament, Irenaeus uttered a profound statement germane to the present discussion. He rhetorically asked, ‘Now to whom is it not clear, that if the Lord had known many fathers and gods, He would not have taught His disciples to know one God?’<sup>48</sup> Here, the bishop is castigating the ‘Gnostic’s for ‘inventing’ other gods. His reprimand extends to their application of the term ‘gods’ to mythical fabrications.

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the fullness of his glory, and become one in him, even as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one.’

<sup>45</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith, 45.

<sup>46</sup> It is important to note that this eventual exalted state is only attainable after many ages in the Celestial realm. In LDS belief, it is not to be expected in the mortal life on earth.

<sup>47</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith, 39.

<sup>48</sup> AH, IV.1.2

### THE CREATOR/CREATION RELATIONSHIP

In *Against Heresies*, one encounters an explicit delineation between the Creator and the Creation:

the origin of all is God, for He Himself was not made by anyone, but everything was made by Him. And therefore it is proper, first of all, to believe that there is one God, the Father, who has created and fashioned all things, who made that which was not to be, who contains all and is alone uncontainable.<sup>49</sup>

He is not only careful to make this distinction, but also claims that the created have a later origin than the Uncreated.<sup>50</sup> In the Bishop's reasoning, the fact that God creates humanity necessarily means that humanity is ontologically separate from its maker.<sup>51</sup> In fact, this chronology results in an infantile and subordinate position to the Creator. Humanity is situated in a receptive position, prepared to accept God's glory.<sup>52</sup>

This relationship of God to humanity hinges on the concept of recapitulation (Latin, *recapitulans*). Christ, acting as a sort of second Adam, summed up God's *Dispositio* in his divine and human natures. In conquering death, obeying his Father, being born of a virgin, et cetera, Christ set humanity back on a path of 'divine destiny'.<sup>53</sup> Irenaeus elaborated on this concept in *Against Heresies* partly in response to 'Gnostic' assertions concerning material evil.<sup>54</sup> The life of Christ is set over and against the life of the first man. Just as Adam lacked patience,

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<sup>49</sup> On the Apostolic Preaching, 3.

<sup>50</sup> AH, IV.38.1

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., IV.3.1; V.36.1

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., IV.14.1

<sup>53</sup> The terminology of 'divine destiny' is borrowed from McGuckin, 185.

<sup>54</sup> AH, III.16.6, III.23.1; *On the Apostolic Preaching*, 32. Here, Irenaeus expounds his idea that Christ had a 'likeness of embodiment to Adam' and was essentially recapitulating the first man in order to sum 'up all things in Himself.' AH, V.20.2 also expounds on recapitulation as a refutation of the Valentinian teachings reported in I.3.4 in which there are said to be two Christ's as the result of Sophia's fall from the Pleroma.

maturity, and self-discipline, so Jesus diligently obeyed and carried out God's will. Consequently, there is restored potential to 'see God'.

Irenaeus presents his readers with a poignant expression of this belief:

Now it was necessary that man should in the first instance be created; and having been created, should receive growth; and having received growth, should be strengthened; and having been strengthened should abound; and having abounded, should recover; and having recovered, should be glorified; and being glorified, should see his Lord. For God is He who is yet to be seen, and the beholding of God is productive of immortality; but immortality renders one near to (*proximum*) God.<sup>55</sup>

The bishop's terminology is important. He sets, as the ultimate goal of humanity, the 'beholding of God'. Noteworthy, however, is the fact that equal emphasis seems to be placed on achieving proximity to God. Immortality is, perhaps, penultimate. It is for this reason that Christ's recapitulative work is significant. The often quoted line from the preface to the fifth book of *Against Heresies*, 'our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself',<sup>56</sup> must be interpreted in light of this recapitulation doctrine. Without the *theanthropos*, or God-man, humans would have no hope of seeing 'He who is yet to be seen'. There is a crucial component of reciprocity at work.<sup>57</sup> God became man, and man now may approximate God.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> AH, IV.38.3

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., V Preface

<sup>57</sup> See, Adam Powell, 'Irenaeus and God's Gifts: Reciprocity in *Against Heresies*, IV.14.1,' presented at XVI *International Conference on Patristic Studies*—Oxford University (2011).

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. IV.33.4. 'Or how shall man pass into God, unless God has passed into man?' Underwood rightly notes that this 'exchange formula' is just that, exchange. It is not change. As he states it, 'the "exchange" signifies an exchange of characteristics and attributes, not a change in being or substance (212).' Constantelos offers valuable insight into Irenaeus' concept of the creator/created relationship: 'His anthropocentrism however is rooted in his theocentrism. Man and God are not placed at opposite poles but on the two ends of the same pole. Each one moves toward a meeting with the other. Man searches and God responds and moves forward to seek. The two meet in the

In Mormon theology, the relationship of God to humanity is quite different. Of note is the notion that God and humans are of the same species.<sup>59</sup> This is strikingly at odds with the Irenaean notion of the Uncreated/Created divide. The doctrine of pre-mortal existence is, of course, paramount to LDS faith. The intelligence in each of us has no beginning or end.<sup>60</sup> Clothed by a spirit body, we each existed with God from the beginning. In this teaching, then, one encounters the LDS understanding of the link between God and humanity. The events of the first two chapters in Genesis comprise a formation rather than a creation. This formation is articulated in terms of reproduction, resulting in the belief that humans are truly the offspring of God.<sup>61</sup>

In contrast, Irenaeus saw Adam (the representative of every individual) as having been created with an animal nature composed of body and animated by soul.<sup>62</sup> Absent from this concept of the individual is the idea of 'spirit'. Irenaeus joined with Paul in claiming a carnal nature as part of the self.<sup>63</sup> The bishop was interested in emphasizing the value of this physical characteristic, or *plasma Dei*.<sup>64</sup> He may have

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person of the Logos, the eternal God who appears among men as the Emmanuel. Thus Christ becomes the end of one process and the beginning of a new one (p.361).’ God’s economy includes the extension of His son toward humanity. That is the principal movement of God toward His creation, bridging the ontological gap.

<sup>59</sup> Stephen E. Robinson, ‘God the Father,’ *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, vol. 2, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1992), 549. Robinson explicitly states, ‘Gods and humans represent a single divine lineage, the same species of being, although they and he are at different stages of progress.’

<sup>60</sup> *The Pearl of Great Price*, Abraham 3:22. ‘intelligences that were organized before the world was.’

<sup>61</sup> For a thorough explication of these beliefs, see Blake Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought*, vols. 1–3 (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books).

<sup>62</sup> *AH*, I.5.4. Irenaeus is, of course, using the Gnostic terminology of ‘animal’ man and redefining it in order to oppose them.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* III.20.3. Irenaeus twice quotes from the seventh chapter of Paul’s epistle to the Romans. He first cites 7:18, ‘I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature.’ Then, 7:24 is quoted, ‘What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?’

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* IV.20.2–4. Nielsen, 56. Nielsen is justified in highlighting the pivotal role that the physical played in Irenaeus’ theology. The various Gnostic movements all denigrated the material body, finding support in Paul’s claim that

noted the role of the spirit in God's *Dispositio*, but he did not claim any previous existence preceding the animal nature of Adam. In the act of God's creation (*ex nihilo*), the individual came to be.

Joseph Smith saw the orthodox view of creation and everlasting life as irrational. For the Mormon prophet, eternity implied exemption both from termination and from origination. In *Doctrine and Covenants*, Smith claims that 'intelligence' cannot be 'created or made'.<sup>65</sup> This belief influences the way in which LDS view God's relationship to time. If humans were with God in the beginning and had no essential moment of initial creation, then God and humanity are both subject to a linear timeline. This line extends infinitely in both directions.<sup>66</sup> Every person is at a certain location along this linear continuum that not only applies to time but to eternal progression.<sup>67</sup>

In the early Church, special care was taken to maintain an essential distinction between God and His creation.<sup>68</sup> This gulf may constitute the most significant difference between Mormon exaltation and the 'participation' of Irenaean anthropology.<sup>69</sup> Participation is an

'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God' (1 Cor. 15:50). Irenaeus wished to show that possessing earthly bodies was a unique aspect of the *plasma Dei* and was necessary for the redemptive work of the *theanthropos* (God-man), Jesus Christ.

<sup>65</sup> D&C 93:29.

<sup>66</sup> Ostling & Ostling, 304.

<sup>67</sup> Robinson, *Encyclopedia*, 549. 'The important points of the doctrine for Latter-day Saints are that Gods and humans are the same species of being, but at different stages of development in a divine continuum.'

<sup>68</sup> This is especially the case with Clement of Alexandria (*The Instructor*, 3) and Justin Martyr. The latter going so far as to say that there is no God other than the God of the Old Testament (*Dialogue with Trypho*, 11 and 56).

<sup>69</sup> Though LDS affirm that Heavenly Father sits eternally in a place of authority over us, deification is an act of addition not communion. Simply stated, as an individual is deified, another deity is added to reality. In D&C 76:58 and 121:28,32, Smith speaks of multiple 'gods' and the ability of those in the Melchizedek Priesthood to achieve godhood. Logically, then, the process of becoming a god would mean that another deity has entered reality, thus the need for the plural form of the term. This is, undoubtedly, the doctrinal outcome of Smith's creative excitement upon learning that the Hebrew *Elohim* is in the plural form in the Old Testament. Related to this concept is the belief that these gods are progressing. Smith said, 'God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man...' (*King Follett Discourse* (Eborn Books, 2008), 5).

incessant state of communion with that which is otherwise separate.<sup>70</sup> By seeing the unseen God, humans may know the inconceivable and associate with deity. This is possible only as a function of Christ's recapitulative work within the saving scheme of the *Dispositio*. In creating humans from nothing, God contains and defines them; the redemptive plan begins. This is Matthew Steenberg's concern when he repeatedly emphasizes the role of God's economy in Irenaeus' thought. Steenberg says that, for Irenaeus, humans are born into economy; Adam was created (out of nothing) by God to exist within a scheme of advancement.<sup>71</sup> In other terms, human contingency allows for human progress, ever maintaining and minimizing the ontological partition between Creator and Created.<sup>72</sup>

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The Heavenly Father's authority results from his having progressed enough to reach full exaltation; the reward for which is spiritual procreation. Consequently, the LDS notion of 'self' in relation to Divine hinges more on shared experience, the lack of it in the case of Father God's authority over mortal humanity and the potential for it in the case of deification. Whereas Irenaeus promulgates a divine communion void of ontological homogeneity, the LDS present the faithful not with divine union but with uniformity of process resulting in a sort of essential reproduction.

<sup>70</sup> Irenaeus, *On the Apostolic Preaching*, 31, 40. Jesus Christ is said to call 'man back again to communion with God, that by this communion with Him we may receive participation in incorruptibility.' This is almost verbatim from his earlier comments that Christ was sent so 'we might, in all ways, obtain a participation in incorruptibility.'

<sup>71</sup> M.C. Steenberg, *Of God and Man* (New York: T& T Clark, 2009), 41-52. Steenberg is considered by many to be one of the leading authorities on Irenaeus. It is worth noting that he concludes his chapter on Irenaeus with a brief discussion of the constitution of man within Irenaeus' work. Ultimately, Steenberg resolves the inherent difficulty of comprehending Irenaeus' beliefs on body, soul, and spirit by claiming that the bishop did not see spirit as a component of the individual. Dependent on God for their existence, humans (body and soul) require advancement (through the Son and Spirit) toward that which will be pleasing in God's sight, a chance to see the unseen Father and participate in His incorruption.

<sup>72</sup> Ben C. Blackwell, *Christosis: Pauline Soteriology in Light of Deification in Irenaeus and Cyril of Alexandria* (PhD Diss. Durham University, 2010), 56. Blackwell succinctly summarizes the Irenaeus view by stating "the goal of humanity is not to transcend that distinction of Creator and creature but to fulfil it by God becoming reproduced in them, as a portrait reproduces the person."