

Adam-God: Thoughts and Reconciliations

By Nathan Oman*

“The Adam-God Theory” has long been a staple of anti-Mormon writers bent on discrediting Brigham Young and a source of concern for Latter-day Saints with a historical or doctrinal bent. However, despite the ease with which the term has been bandied about, it is actually difficult to determine exactly what “The Adam-God Theory” refers to. There is no treatise where Brigham lays out his theory. Rather, we have a series of sermons in which he discusses, among other things, the role of Adam. Piecing together a complete “theory” from these statements is difficult at best. Still, it is possible to discern some unifying threads in Brigham’s teachings.

As I see it Brigham Young makes basically four claims that modern Latter-day Saints might find shocking. First, he says Adam is God. Second, he says Adam is the only God with whom we have to do. Third, he says that God literally had sex with Mary in order to produce Jesus. Fourth, he says that Adam is the father of Jesus. However, an analysis and comparison of what Brigham said with more familiar theological concepts reveals his teaching to be less radical than it superficially appears to be. This is not to suggest that in the end Brigham’s teachings will be revealed as a correlation friendly Sunday school lesson. They are not. He uses language and terminology in equivocal and idiosyncratic ways. He places emphasis on different things than we do now. In the end, I think that he teaches some (emphasis on some) things that are inconsistent with our

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current understandings. Thus, I am not suggesting that Brigham can be explained away or made completely “safe.” Nor would I want to do so. Brigham sought in his teachings to challenge the saints. He wanted to expand their ideas and hold the radical possibilities of the Restoration in their minds. I have too much respect for him as a prophet, teacher, and theologian to try to cram him into some kind of neat conceptual straight jacket. I do not think that is why the Lord sent us this great man.

Adam is God

[Adam] is MICHAEL, *the Archangel*, the ANCIENT OF DAYS! about whom men have written and spoken – *He is our FATHER and our GOD.* . .¹

So taught Brigham Young on April 9, 1852. An understanding of this statement requires that we understand what is meant here by the term God. A key to understanding the concept of god used here is to remember the principle of the plurality of gods. Eleven days before his death, a defiant Joseph Smith declared “I will preach on the plurality of Gods.”² Brigham Young remained faithful to this doctrine. There were at least three senses in which Brigham believed in plural gods, and each of these senses sheds light on what the statement “Adam is our Father and our God” might mean.

The plurality of the Godhead. In his 1844 sermon Joseph defended the doctrine of the plurality of gods by reaffirming the Mormon rejection of classical trinitarianism. In May of 325, the Emperor Constantine convened the Council of Nicea to lay to rest controversy over the nature of God. The formulation adopted by the council insisted that all members of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost) were of “one substance” (*homoousios*). Theological controversies continued to rage after Nicea. However, the

¹ *Journal of Discourses* 1:50. Hereafter cited as *JD*.

² Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, ed. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974) 370.

council did solidify the idea that the three members of the Trinity were metaphysically identical. By the time of Joseph Smith, it was axiomatic that God, Christ, and the Holy Ghost were one and the same. Joseph broke with this tradition of unity and (more or less) rigorous monotheism. He declared instead that “these three constitute three distinct personages and three Gods. If this is in accordance with the New Testament, lo and behold! We have three Gods anyhow, and they are plural; and who can contradict it?”³

Brigham took a slight variation on this doctrine. In the same sermon quoted above he taught, “It is true that the earth was organized by three distinct characters, namely, Elohiem, Jehovah, and Michael, these three forming a quorum, as in all heavenly bodies, and in organizing element, perfectly represented in Deity, as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.”⁴ This understanding should be familiar to every Latter-day Saint who has been through the temple⁵. Furthermore, I take it as uncontroversial to assert that Michael is simply the premortal name of Adam⁶. Brigham’s “innovation” consists of identifying Michael as a “god.” Yet given his role in the creation of the world, and the generally uncontroversial way in which we refer to Elohim and Jehovah as gods, it doesn’t seem much of a stretch to say that Adam is also, in some sense, a god.

Eternal Progression and the Plurality of Gods. In the King Follett Discourse, Joseph Smith taught that Elohim is in fact an exalted man who has passed through

³ *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 370.

⁴ *JD* 1:51. It is unclear from this passage precisely how Brigham related the Elohim, Jehovah, Michael threesome to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost of the godhead. The term “organizing element” from the passage above is unclear. It could mean that Brigham thought that the Godhead actually consists of Elohim, Jehovah, and Michael, with Elohim being the Father, Jehovah the Son, and Michael (somehow) being the Holy Ghost. This is, I think, a persuasive way of understanding things, but it does leave the exact relationship between Michael and the Holy Ghost very hazy. Alternatively, the term “organizing element” could simply mean that the three-person quorum is some kind of divine archetype present in both the threesome of creation and the three members of the Godhead. I don’t claim to know which of these interpretations is correct.

⁵ One possible way of understanding Brigham’s sources for Adam-God is to see it, at least partially, as his peculiar interpretation of the temple endowment.

mortality and been deified⁷. He went on to teach that all people, though the Gospel can gain a like exaltation. I assume that this remains an uncontroversial doctrine. For example, Spencer W. Kimball taught, “Exaltation means godhood, creatorship. ‘As man now is, God once was; as God now is, man may be.’ This is in the future.”⁸ However, this is not merely in the future. The Doctrine and Covenants informs us that some of the inhabitants of this earth have already gained their exaltation. In section 132, it teaches that “Abraham received all things, whatsoever he received, by revelation and commandment, by my word, saith the Lord, and hath entered into his exaltation and sitteth upon his throne.”⁹

The possibility that mankind can be exalted like God and the revelation that some men in fact have already reached that point implies a plurality of gods. If Abraham and other ancient notables now sit upon their thrones, then there are multiple gods. Furthermore, Joseph Smith taught that there were gods before Elohim. “You have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done before you.”¹⁰ Thus, inherent in the idea of eternal progression is the plurality of gods. Among this plurality, Brigham saw Adam as a god. While not as clear as in the case of Abraham, the Doctrine and Covenants at least hints at this understanding of Adam’s godhood. Section 137 records a vision given to Joseph Smith in 1836 in which

⁶ See D&C 27:11.

⁷ See *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* 345.

⁸ Spencer W. Kimball, *Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball*, ed. Edward L. Kimball (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982) 62.

⁹ D&C 132:29

¹⁰ *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 346.

he saw, among other things, that “Father Adam and Abraham . . . had obtained an inheritance in [the celestial kingdom].”¹¹

Authority and the plurality of gods. Heber C. Kimball once taught that “Brother Brigham [is] my god and savior – Brother Joseph was his god – the one that gave Joseph the Keys of the Kingdom was his god, which was Peter.”¹² This sentence points to another understanding of the plurality of gods. This understanding is closely linked to the idea of priesthood authority. The term “god” is used to denote one who has been delegated God’s authority and occupies the position of God in relationship to the speaker.

There is scriptural precedent for this use of the term. Exodus reports that “the Lord said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet.”¹³ Furthermore, once one uses the term “god” in this way, there is scriptural support for the idea that Adam is a god. The Doctrine and Covenants teaches that Adam was the first man to receive the keys of the priesthood, “which priesthood continueth in the church of God in all generations, and is without beginning of days or end of years.”¹⁴ Thus, “Adam is our god” can be understood as referring to the divine authority delegated to him. While this use of the term god may seem foreign to modern Latter-day Saints, it is consistent with scripture and with usage in the time of Brigham Young.

¹¹ D&C 137:5-6. Interestingly this section was not canonized until 1974, which says something for the continued vitality of this doctrine.

¹² *The Teachings of President Brigham Young: Volume 3 1852-54*, ed. Fred C. Collier (Salt Lake City: Collier’s Publishing Co., 1987) 95.

¹³ Exodus 7:1. It is worth noting that the word for “god” here is *elohim*. Thus, there is no reason to suppose that the KJV translators chose the wrong word. Furthermore, *Strong’s Concordance* indicates that this term was sometimes used to apply to magistrates or others with great authority.

¹⁴ D&C 84:16-17.

The Only God With Whom We Have to Do

*“He is our FATHER and our GOD and the only God with whom WE have to do.”*¹⁵

The question here is to discover what it means when Brigham says, “with whom we have to do.” To my knowledge he never explicitly explained himself in this passage, but I think that we can nevertheless piece together what this statement might mean. Ultimately, I think “with whom we have to do” refers to our relationships in eternal families and eternal kingdoms.

On April 3, 1836 in the Kirtland Temple, Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery received a divine visitation. After an open vision of the Lord they were visited in succession by Moses, Elias, and Elijah who committed the “the keys of this dispensation” to them¹⁶. We understand those keys to include the sealing power exercised in the temples. Through the ordinances for the living and the dead, mankind will be sealed into one eternal family stretching all the way back to Adam and Eve.

The doctrine of sealing and eternal families is linked to the doctrine of deification and exaltation. In declaring the blessings of those who are sealed in the new and everlasting covenant of marriage, the Lord said “then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue; then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them. Then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them.”¹⁷ Like Elohim, the exalted reign over their endless posterity in the eternities, peopling “worlds without number.” Interestingly, one of the sets of keys committed to Joseph and Oliver in the

¹⁵ *JD* 1:50.

¹⁶ See D&C 110.

Kirtland Temple was “the dispensation of the gospel of Abraham.”¹⁸ Abraham’s blessing was that his posterity would be numberless. The Lord promised, “I will make thee exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.”¹⁹ Abraham’s name itself means “father of a multitude.” Thus, at its restoration the sealing power was linked to the divine promise of eternal increase.

In the early church, there was a great deal of concern about kingdoms. Just as God now presides over his posterity upon the earth, people thought that in the resurrection they would preside over the kingdom of those who were sealed to them (and these people in turn would preside over the people sealed to them, and so on). Wilford Woodruff records:

In the commencement of adopting [sealing] men and women in the temple at Nauvoo, a great many persons were adopted to different men who were not of the lineage of their fathers, and there was a spirit manifested by some in the work that was not of God. Men would go out and electioneer and labor with all their power to get men adopted [sealed] to them. . . . Now, what are the feelings of Israel? They have felt that they wanted to be adopted to somebody.²⁰

This desire to be adopted into the kingdom of another accounts for the vast web of posthumous sealings to prominent early leaders of the church that has so confused generations of genealogists. Yet this approach did not sit well with Brigham and his associates. Again, Wilford Woodruff records, “President Young was not satisfied in his mind with regard to the extent of this matter.”²¹

With this background a possible meaning for Brigham’s cryptic “the only one with whom we have to do” emerges. We can understand this statement as saying two

¹⁷ D&C 132:20

¹⁸ D&C 110:12

¹⁹ Genesis 17:6

things. First, it refers to Adam's position as the exalted patriarch of the family of this earth. In the eternities we will be sealed to him and will have nothing to do with the patriarchs of other earths among the "worlds without number." Second, it affirms the priority of family relationships. We are sealed along family lines, not according to adoption "electioneering."²² This seems obvious to modern Latter-day Saints, but that was not the case in the 1850s.

God Had Sex With Mary to Produce Jesus

"And when the VIRGIN MARY was begotten with Child it was By the Father and in no other way ownly as we were begotten."²³

I am always surprised to learn that some Latter-day Saints find the idea that Christ was conceived through sexual intercourse between God and Mary very controversial. Needless to say, such a doctrine would be foreign and scandalous to traditional Christianity. Forged in the intellectual milieu of late antiquity, traditional Christian theology affirms a radical divide between the human and the divine and a deep uneasiness with sexuality. To the Hellenically trained theologians of early Christianity scriptural references to God's body were embarrassments that had to be explained away as allegorical. God, for them, was a being defined in terms of modified Platonic metaphysics. He was a completely immaterial and utterly transcendent being. As for

²⁰ Wilford Woodruff, *The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, ed. G. Homer Durham (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1946) 155.

²¹ *The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, 155.

²² Wilford Woodruff received a revelation clarifying the use of adoption sealings. He said that "Joseph Smith did not live long enough to enter any further upon these things" but that the Lord had confirmed to him and the Twelve that "the Latter-day Saints from this time [should] trace their genealogies as far as they can, and to be sealed to their fathers and their mothers." *The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, 156-57.

²³ This is Wilford Woodruff's record of Brigham Young's words in the sermon quoted at the beginning of the preceding two sections. Wilford Woodruff, *Waiting for World's End: The Diaries of Wilford Woodruff*, Susan Staker, ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 150.

sex, one historian of ideas has summed up the birth of traditional Christian thinking on the subject by saying that:

To distance itself from the highly sexualized contemporary pagan culture, much of early Christianity stressed the need for a spiritual purity that held little room for nature's spontaneous instincts, particularly sexuality. Celibacy was the ideal state, and marriage a necessary allowance for human cupidity so that it be kept within divine boundaries.²⁴

In such a climate, it is not surprising that Christians latched onto Isaiah's prophecy that "behold, a virgin shall conceive"²⁵ and interpreted the sexual imagery literally.

Latter-day Saints, in contrast, exalt sexual union in marriage as the highest state. We declare that God himself is married and that we were begotten spiritually from the union of he and his eternal companion.²⁶ Rather than viewing sexual desire as being a regrettable effect of the fall of man, Mormons affirm that when passions, appetites and desires are kept within the bounds the Lord has set, sexuality is the highest kind of godly power delegated to mortals.²⁷ Furthermore, we believe that in the resurrection we gain a glorified body like God's body, and that the union of the sexes continues in eternity. Given this understanding, the idea that Christ was born of a sexual union between a divine father and a mortal mother should not scandalize us.

Uncomfortable Latter-day Saints continue to appeal to the prophecy in Isaiah. However, it is far from clear that Isaiah was referring to the sexual status of Mary of Nazareth. The word that Isaiah uses is *almah*. This word is simply the feminine form of

²⁴ Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991) 141.

²⁵ Isaiah 7:14

²⁶ "All human beings – male and female – are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and as such, each has a divine nature and destiny." Gordon B. Hinckley, et al., *The Family: A Proclamation to the World* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1995).

²⁷ See Jeffrey R. Holland, "Of Souls, Symbols, and Sacraments" in *Things of Heaven and Earth* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988).

the word *elem*, which means “stripling or young boy.” Thus, the word Isaiah used simply means “a lass or a young girl.”²⁸ Furthermore, an archaic meaning of the word “virgin” is simply “a young woman or girl.”²⁹ This usage would have been current at the time of the King James Translation. Of course, it is entirely possible that the KJV translators specifically chose the word “virgin” rather than some other word to reflect the traditional reading they no doubt gave this prophecy. Regardless, an understanding of the underlying words seriously undermines the authority of this verse as a proof text for the sexless conception of Christ.

Adam was the Father of Jesus Christ

“The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ – Who is He? He is Father Adam – Michael –The Ancient of Days.”³⁰

This is far and away the most difficult claim in “Adam-God” for modern Latter-day Saints. If we construe the word “father” in this passage to mean the literal father of Christ in the sense outlined in the previous section, there can be no doubt but that this is NOT the doctrine of the church. In 1916, the church issued “The Father and the Son: A Doctrinal Exposition by the First Presidency and the Twelve.” This extensive document, endorsed by all of the prophets, seers, and revelators of that day, laid to rest any uncertainty on this point. It declared, “God the Eternal Father, whom we designate by the exalted name-title ‘Elohim,’ is the literal Parent of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”³¹

²⁸ See “Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary” in *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1997) 87.

²⁹ s.v. “Virgin” *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) 2:3584.

³⁰ Brigham Young February 9, 1854 in *The Teachings of President Brigham Young*, 252.

³¹ Joseph F. Smith, et al, *The Father and the Son: A Doctrinal Exposition by the First Presidency and the Twelve* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1916)

This statement has never been repealed or modified. With this background, there are three possible ways of understanding Brigham's teachings.

He was Misrecorded. Some people, including Joseph Fielding Smith, have argued that Brigham's words were actually misrecorded³². The *locus classicus* for "Adam-God" is Brigham's sermon of April 9, 1852 recorded in volume one of the *Journal of Discourses*. These were heady times for the saints. Later that year Orson Pratt would publicly announce the doctrine of plural marriage³³. After five years in the Salt Lake Valley and five years before the arrival of real outside power in the form of Johnston's Army, the saints were at the height of their independence as a "peculiar people." Much of the kind of sacred and speculative doctrinal teachings that modern Mormons keep secluded in temples and private conversations were openly discussed over the pulpit. And, of course, there was nothing like modern correlation. In such an atmosphere it would be surprising if there wasn't a certain amount of confusion.

It may be unclear exactly what Brigham said in his April 9, 1852 sermon. The stenographic version that found its way into the *Journal of Discourses* reads this way:

When the Virgin Mary conceived the child Jesus, the Father had begotten him in his own likeness. He was *not* begotten by the Holy Ghost. And who is the Father? He is the first of the human family; and when he took a tabernacle, it was begotten by *his father* in heaven, after the same manner as the tabernacles of Cain, Abel, and the rest of the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve.³⁴

³² Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation, Vol. I*, ed. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954) 96.

³³ See Orson Pratt, "Celestial Marriage," *JD* 1:53.

³⁴ *JD* 1:50.

Later in the same record of the sermon, it reads, “Jesus, our elder brother, was begotten in the flesh by the same character that was in the garden of Eden, and who is our Father in Heaven.”³⁵

It is certainly possible to understand the words of Brigham recorded in the *Journal of Discourses* to mean that “Adam is the father of Jesus Christ,” but it is not the only possible construction. “The first of the human family” could refer to Elohim rather than Adam, since we are all the posterity of Elohim. The “same character that was in the Garden of Eden” could likewise refer to Elohim, since he walked “in the garden in the cool of the day.”³⁶ Brigham’s meaning is even more ambiguous in Wilford Woodruff’s record of the sermon. He records that Brigham said, “And when the VIRGIN MARY begotten with Child it was By the Father and in no other way ownly as we were begotton.”³⁷ This apparent opacity has led some people to claim that Brigham’s true words in this case have not been accurately recorded.

However, it is clear that at least some of Brigham’s contemporaries did understand him as referring to Adam in his April 9, 1852 sermon. Two eyewitness accounts of the sermon record that Brigham taught “Christ was not begotten of the Holy Ghost, but of Father Adam” and that “Adam was the father of Jesus.”³⁸ It is well documented that on other occasions Brigham taught more explicitly as in the quotation at the beginning of this section demonstrates. For example, Wilford Woodruff records that at the first meeting of the reorganized School of the Prophets in 1867, Brigham taught that “Adam was Michael the Ark angel & he was the Father of Jesus Christ & was our

³⁵ *JD* 1:51.

³⁶ Genesis 3:8.

³⁷ *Waiting for World’s End*, 150.

God & was the Father of Jesus Christ. . . .”³⁹ Furthermore, Brigham’s counselor, friend, and cousin Heber C. Kimball preached that “the God and Father of Jesus Christ was Adam.”⁴⁰

Alternative Understandings of the Word “Father.” Yet we still might offer an alternative understanding of the word “father.” Such multiple use of the word father has a good doctrinal pedigree. For example, the “Doctrinal Exposition” of 1916 outlines at least four different meanings for the word “father” in reference to God the Father and Jesus Christ. Brigham also used the term father equivocally. In an 1854 sermon he spoke of God as being “not only the Father of our spirits, but also of our flesh, He being the founder of that natural machinery through which we have obtained our bodies.”⁴¹ Thus, we could understand Adam as the father of Christ in the same way – Adam was responsible for the “machinery” that resulted in the birth of Mary and, by extension, Jesus. Thus, Brigham’s reference to Adam could be understood as informing us about the mortal side of Christ’s nature rather than the details of his literal parentage.

Brigham was Simply Inconsistent. In the end, I think the most plausible understanding of Brigham’s teachings on Adam and the parentage of Jesus is simply that he was inconsistent. Brigham conceived of the past eternities as being filled with succeeding generations of gods. Adam, he taught, was a god, but he had had a father who was also a god, and that god had a father who was a god. He declared “I believe in the eternities of worlds, saints, angels, kingdoms, and gods: In eternity without

³⁸ Samuel Holister Rogers and Hosea Stout respectively in *The Teachings of President Brigham Young*, 88-89.

³⁹ *Waiting for World’s End*, 292.

⁴⁰ *Teachings of President Brigham Young*, 95.

⁴¹ *Teachings of President Brigham Young*, 349.

beginning. I believe the gods never had a beginning . . .”⁴² Among these gods, he knew that one was the literal father of Christ and the father of our spirits. During one period he taught that that god was Adam and at other times he pushed it back another generation and taught it was Elohim. Thus, it seems certain that on some occasions he said that Adam was the father of Christ and Wilford and Heber certainly understood him in this way. Yet on other occasions he taught that Adam and Jesus were of the same generation and shared the same father. Speaking on another occasion Brigham taught that “[Adam] honored his calling, believed in his Saviour, or Elder Brother, and by his faithfulness, was redeemed, and got a Glorious Resurrection.”⁴³

If this understanding is correct, it need not diminish our regard for Brigham as a prophet. Brigham once taught that men “must live in Revelation,”⁴⁴ and more perhaps than any other latter-day prophet he sought to articulate a vision of life in which everything is imbued with the Spirit of God. But he did not insist that all his understandings came as a direct dictation from deity. In an 1854 sermon discussing the role of Adam, he outlined the source of his teachings. “I will tell you what I think about it, and as the [Southerners] say I reckon, and as the Yankees say I guess: but I will tell you what I reckon. . . . How are we going to know this? I reckon it.”⁴⁵ Brigham pondered on what he had learned from Joseph, the scriptures, the temple, and revelation, and then he offered his best understanding of things. To the extent that he taught that Adam was the literal father of Jesus, his interpretation has since been replaced by one endorsed by a unanimous First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve. Brigham himself

⁴² *Teachings of President Brigham Young*, 345.

⁴³ *Teachings of President Brigham Young*, 357.

⁴⁴ *Waiting for World’s End*, 249.

⁴⁵ *Teachings of President Brigham Young*, 359.

had a healthy skepticism about the importance of some of his teachings. “I do not pretend to say that the items of doctrine, and ideas I shall advance are necessary for the people to know, or that they should give themselves trouble about them whatever.”⁴⁶

Brigham Young and Orson Pratt: A Postscript

Joseph Smith opened some exciting theological questions. God, he taught, had a body and was actually located someplace “near unto Kolob”⁴⁷ and he boldly insisted on preaching the plurality of gods. This struck at the heart of two fundamental points of Christian orthodoxy. The first point was God’s unity. From at least Nicea on, Christians had been united by their insistence that there was but a single god, and that the three members of the godhead were subsumed into a single person. The second point was God’s omnipresence. Christians had insisted the God was everywhere. Joseph, in contrast, insisted that God had a body, which by definition could not be present everywhere.

Orson Pratt, one of the brightest Mormon minds of his generation and a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, offered a theory that attempted to save these two concepts while remaining true to the new doctrines announced by Joseph Smith⁴⁸. In a newspaper called *The Seer*, which he published in Washington, DC, Orson argued that Latter-day Saints worshipped the attributes rather than the person of God. It was the “godness” of Elohim, rather than Elohim the individual, who Mormons identified as God. This preserved the unity of God because there was but a single “godness” that Mormons could worship. It preserved the omnipresence of God, because Orson insisted that this

⁴⁶ *Teachings of President Brigham Young*, 344-45.

⁴⁷ See the Book of Abraham Facsimile

⁴⁸ Orson Pratt did not articulate his teaching in precisely these terms, but I think this is an accurate description of what his doctrine was seeking to do.

“godness” was present whenever the attributes of godhood were present. Brigham had little patience for this theory. He insisted that it was the person of God that Latter-day Saints worshipped. Orson’s doctrine of worshipping attributes was false, and unless he recanted it, Brigham insisted that he would disfellowship Orson. After a confrontation and some soul searching, Orson repudiated his earlier theory.

In the course of his confrontation with Orson, Brigham made some statements that, I think, form a fitting conclusion to a discussion of “Adam-God.” He said:

The trouble between Orson Pratt & me is I do not know Enough & he knows to[o] much. I do not know evry thing. There is a mystery Concerning the God I worship which mystery will be removed when I Come to a full knowledge of God. One of the greatest things Joseph Smith ever did was to Familiarize Heaven & Earth and Cause them to shake hands together and become Familiar Together.⁴⁹

Given this, it is not surprising that Brigham should devote such attention to the person of Adam. It is Adam, more than any other mortal, who stands archetypally at the juncture of “Heaven & Earth.” It is also fitting that Brigham should acknowledge “the mystery Concerning God” and the limitations of our “reckoning” in understanding him. Finally, Brigham’s teachings about Adam hammer home the central point of his contention with Orson Pratt. Gods are persons. They are not transcendent abstractions. Our Father in Heaven is a real and literal parent. As I understand it, *that* is very good doctrine indeed.

⁴⁹ *Waiting for World’s End*, 243.

Appendix: Brigham's Sermon of April 9, 1852

To the extent that there is a *locus classicus* for "Adam-God," it is this sermon. In it, Brigham dealt with several subjects. The parts relevant to "Adam-God" are reproduced below. They are recorded in *Journal of Discourses* 1:51-52 .

ADAM, OUR FATHER AND OUR GOD

My next sermon will be to both Saint and sinner. One thing has remained a mystery in this kingdom up to this day. It is in regard to the character of the well-beloved Son of God, upon which subject the Elders of Israel have conflicting views. Our God and Father in heaven, is a being of tabernacle, or, in other words, He has a body, with parts the same as you and I have; and is capable of showing forth His works to organized beings, as, for instance, in the world in which we live, it is the result of the knowledge and infinite wisdom that dwell in His organized body. His son Jesus Christ has become a personage of tabernacle, and has a body like his father. The Holy Ghost is the Spirit of the Lord, and issues forth from Himself, and may properly be called God's minister to execute His will in immensity; being called to govern by His influence and power; but He is not a person of tabernacle as we are, and as our Father in Heaven and Jesus Christ are. The question has been, and is often, asked, who it was that begat the Son of the Virgin Mary. The infidel world have concluded that if what the Apostles wrote about his father and mother be true, and the present marriage discipline acknowledged by Christendom be correct, then Christians must believe that God is the father of an illegitimate son, in the person of Jesus Christ! The infidel fraternity teach that to their disciples. I will tell you how it is. Our Father in Heaven begat all the spirits that ever were, or ever will be, upon this earth; and they were born spirits in the eternal world. Then the Lord by His power

and wisdom organized the mortal tabernacle of man. We were made first spiritual, and afterwards temporal.

Now hear it, O inhabitants of the earth, Jew and Gentile, Saint and sinner! When our father Adam came into the garden of Eden, he came into it with a celestial body, and brought Eve, one of his wives, with him. He helped to make and organize this world. He is MICHAEL, the Archangel, the ANCIENT OF DAYS! about whom holy men have written and spoken--HE is our FATHER and our GOD, and the only God with whom WE have to do. Every man upon the earth, professing Christians or non-professing, must hear it, and will know it sooner or later. They came here, organized the raw material, and arranged in their order the herbs of the field, the trees, the apple, the peach, the plum, the pear, and every other fruit that is desirable and good for man; the seed was brought from another sphere, and planted in this earth. The thistle, and thorn, the brier, and the obnoxious weed did not appear until after the earth was cursed. When Adam and Eve had eaten of the forbidden fruit, their bodies became mortal from its effects, and therefore their offspring were mortal. When the Virgin Mary conceived the child Jesus, the Father had begotten him in his own likeness. He was not begotten by the Holy Ghost. And who is the Father? He is the first of the human family; and when he took a tabernacle, it was begotten by his Father in heaven, after the same manner as the tabernacles of Cain, Abel, and the rest of the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve; from the fruits of the earth, the first earthly tabernacles were originated by the Father, and so on in succession. I could tell you much more about this; but were I to tell you the whole truth, blasphemy would be nothing to it, in the estimation of the superstitious and over-righteous of mankind. However, I have told you the truth as far as I have gone. I have heard men preach upon

the divinity of Christ, and exhaust all the wisdom they possessed. All Scripturalists, and approved theologians who were considered exemplary for piety and education, have undertaken to expound on this subject, in every age of the Christian era; and after they have done all, they are obliged to conclude by exclaiming "great is the mystery of godliness," and tell nothing.

It is true that the earth was organized by three distinct characters, namely, Eloheim, Yahovah, and Michael, these three forming a quorum, as in all heavenly bodies, and in organizing element, perfectly represented in the Deity, as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Again, they will try to tell how the divinity of Jesus is joined to his humanity, and exhaust all their mental faculties, and wind up with this profound language, as describing the soul of man, "it is an immaterial substance!" What a learned idea! Jesus, our elder brother, was begotten in the flesh by the same character that was in the garden of Eden, and who is our Father in Heaven. Now, let all who may hear these doctrines, pause before they make light of them, or treat them with indifference, for they will prove their salvation or damnation.

I have given you a few leading items upon this subject, but a great deal more remains to be told. Now remember from this time forth, and forever, that Jesus Christ was not begotten by the Holy Ghost. I will repeat a little anecdote. I was in conversation with a certain learned professor upon this subject, when I replied, to this idea--"if the Son was begotten by the Holy Ghost, it would be very dangerous to baptize and confirm females, and give the Holy Ghost to them, lest he should beget children, to be palmed upon the Elders by the people, bringing the Elders into great difficulties."

Treasure up these things in your hearts. In the Bible, you have read the things I have told you tonight; but you have not known what you did read. I have told you no more than you are conversant with; but what do the people in Christendom, with the Bible in their hands, know about this subject? Comparatively nothing.