

word of the Lord” (D&C 68:4). The Holy Ghost conveys to mankind the mind of the Lord; hence, the Holy Ghost can coherently be understood as the “mind” of the Father and the Son without this being understood as merely some nonpersonal metaphysical link between the two.

The fifth lecture, in fact, teaches that even the human followers of Christ can possess the “same mind” as the Father and the Son. In this way, they “become one in [Christ], even as the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one.”⁴⁷ In also referring to the Holy Ghost as the “mind” of the Father and the Son, the fifth lecture seems to be emphasizing the unity of the Godhead. The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are perfectly unified in mind and will, just as their followers can be through Christ.

The lectures are certainly ambiguous and incomplete, but they do not represent a move toward binitarianism in the mind of Joseph Smith. If they did, we should find more evidence of binitarian teachings in contemporaneous documents and, subsequently, some kind of repudiation of the lectures. In addition, we should not find so much evidence that Joseph knew and understood the separateness and divinity of the Holy Ghost prior to the publication of the *Lectures on Faith*. The most logical conclusion is that a binitarian reading of the fifth lecture is not the best reading and that binitarianism was never a stage in Joseph’s developing understanding of the Godhead.

The Adam-God Theory

One of Widmer’s assertions is that the early Utah period of church history was marked by a new and inconsistent development in the Latter-day Saint concept of God. This concept, espoused by Brigham Young, has come to be known as the Adam-God theory. According to Widmer, the theory was an attempt on the part of Brigham Young to correlate some of the doctrines and sermons of Joseph Smith into an understandable theory. Widmer claims that “the Adam-God doctrine appears to have been the dominant Mormon

47. Ibid.

theological position on the godhead during the latter half of the 19th century” (p. 131). The Adam-God theory may have been taught by Brigham Young, but it was never the dominant position of the church.

At least four reasons lead us to believe that the Adam-God theory was not the dominant Mormon position Widmer claimed it to be. First, the theory itself was so little known within the LDS community that for the first half of the twentieth century, many questioned whether Brigham Young had even held the idea himself.⁴⁸

Second, other than Brigham Young’s discourses; a few sermons by Brigham Young’s close associate and brother-in-law, Heber C. Kimball; and a few items published by Frederick G. Williams in the English Mission, far from the center of the Saints, the church was silent on the subject.⁴⁹ The prominent exception to this, of course, was Elder Orson Pratt, who was quite vociferous in his opposition to the theory.⁵⁰ In his polemical and strongly anti-Brigham Young book, *The Rocky Mountain Saints*, apostate T. B. H. Stenhouse wrote that “The mass of the Mormon people do not believe in the Adam-deity, but of them all, one only, Orson Pratt, has dared to make public protest against that doctrine.”⁵¹

Third, even Brigham Young seems to have granted that his theory was not widely accepted and was, at the least, difficult to understand. In President Young’s later comments on his theory, he admitted that the subject should “not concern us at present.”⁵² Indeed, speaking five years after that statement, President Young admitted that in considering God’s history,

when we arrive at that point, a vail is dropt, and our knowledge is cut off. Were it not so, you could trace back your history to the Father of our spirits in the eternal world. . . . Whether Adam is the personage that we should consider our

48. See, for example, Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, ed. Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954), 1:96–06.

49. Rodney Turner, “The Position of Adam in Latter-day Saint Scripture and Theology” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1953), 38.

50. Widmer admits as much (cf. pp. 133–37).

51. As cited in Turner, “Position of Adam,” 38.

52. *Journal of Discourses*, 5:332.

heavenly Father, or not, is considerable of a mystery to a good many. I do not care for one moment how that is; it is no matter whether we are to consider Him our God, or whether His Father, or His Grandfather.⁵³

Finally, shortly after Brigham Young's death the church officially stated in three First Presidency messages that Adam is not to be confused with God the Father or any other member of the Godhead.⁵⁴ A private letter coauthored by President Wilford Woodruff—fourth president of the church and a contemporary of Brigham Young—and Apostle Joseph F. Smith makes clear that the Adam-God theory was never widely held nor accepted by the church as an official doctrine:

President Young no doubt expressed his personal opinion or views upon the subject. What he said was not given as revelation or commandment from the Lord. The doctrine was never submitted to the councils of the Priesthood nor to the Church for approval or ratification, and was never formally or otherwise accepted by the Church. It is therefore in no sense binding upon the Church.⁵⁵

Widmer's claim that the Adam-God theory was the accepted LDS doctrine during the latter half of the nineteenth century is without basis. The theory was never official doctrine; neither was it widely accepted by the Saints. It was refuted by the leaders of the church not long after Brigham Young's death, and it is not accepted today.

53. *Journal of Discourses*, 4:217. See J. F. Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:100–101, 104–5, in which Joseph Fielding Smith outlines a number of other sermons of Brigham Young's that indicate an understanding of Adam's role in more traditional terms. Likewise, John A. Widtsoe's *Evidences and Reconciliations* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1960), 69, points to both the 9 April sermon and other sermons of near date made by President Young which seem to either contradict or temper the strength of the 9 April statement used so frequently by anti-Mormon critics.

54. "Pre-Existent States," in *Messages of the First Presidency*, ed. James R. Clark (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1970), 4:264 (31 January 1912); "The Identity and Career of Adam," in *Messages of the First Presidency*, 4:265 (20 February 1912); "The Father and the Son," in *Messages of the First Presidency*, 5:25 (30 June 1916).

55. Wilford Woodruff and Joseph F. Smith, letter to A. Saxey, 7 January 1897, Family and Church History Department Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.