

LETTERS

Another Look at Adam-God

David Buerger's article, "The Adam-God Doctrine" (Spring 1982) demonstrates a great degree of skill and scholarly research. Nevertheless, he too lightly passes over the times Brigham Young taught against the Adam-God theory and the considerable evidence that Young did not believe Adam to be our God in the normal sense of the word. This information really warrants an article of its own; but here I will try to give some idea of the type of evidence that exists, and put in perspective some of the quotes in Buerger's essay.

Before beginning, I need to reemphasize a point Buerger made well, namely that President Young never equated Elohim and Adam. For example, Young asserts, "Adam. . . is Michael. . . The earth was organized by three distinct characters, namely, Elohim, Jehovah, and Michael."¹

We have seven examples where Young refers to Adam as the "father" of Jesus Christ.² But two may not refer to Adam at all (AG 14, 15). One or two are of questionable accuracy (AG 33, 18), and the rest merely state without elaboration that Adam is the "father of Jesus Christ." Thus it is possible they were intended metaphorically. It is also possible that he was merely citing Joseph Smith and was personally unsure how they should be interpreted. Apparently

¹ *Doctrines of Salvation* by Joseph Fielding Smith, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1977), 1:96-97; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as DS.

² David Buerger, "The Adam-God Doctrine," *DIALOGUE: A JOURNAL OF MORMON THOUGHT* 15 (Spring 1982): 14, 15, 18, 20, 21, 30, 33; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as AG.

Young did not believe Jesus was the Only Begotten Son of Adam, for he explained: it is the Lord who "created Adam and Eve" that sent his Only Begotten Son (AG 59) and that the Father demanded "recompense" for Adam and Eve's transgression and sent his "Only Begotten Son" to die for us.³ He often preached that Adam and Eve sinned the original sin, that Jesus atoned for it, and that no man could be saved without this atonement (BY 21, 26, 27, 30, 60, etc.). He seems to have believed that Adam was dependent upon Jesus for his salvation. All this and more strongly suggests Young did not think of Adam as the literal father of Jesus.

The book of Moses explicitly denotes Jesus as the Only Begotten Son of Adam's God (1:33, 34; 3:18, 20; 4:28; 6:52) and conclusively demonstrates Adam's dependence on Christ for his salvation (5:7-11; 6:59). An exhaustive search through the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants yields only scriptures agreeing with the book of Moses, for example, Alma 12:26; 42:5, 7; D&C 29:1, 26.

Buerger presents convincing evidence that Young did indeed believe Adam to be the literal father of our spirits. One would think such evidence would end all thoughts that Young believed Elohim to be the father of our spirits. Strangely enough, this is not the case. It turns out Young *also* taught clearly that Elohim is the father of our spirits. For instance, he explains that the father of our spirits sent his Only Begotten Son to atone for Adam's sin (BY

³ John A. Widtsoe, comp., *Discourses of Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1978), p. 59; hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as BY.

59). He also proclaimed, "You are well acquainted with God our Heavenly Father, or the great Elohim. . . . There is not a person here to-day but what is a son or a daughter of that Being. . . . If you do not believe it, cease to call him Father; and when you pray, pray to some other character" (BY 50). Another time he said, "We are the children of Adam and Eve. So we are, and they are the children of our Heavenly Father" (BY 222).

Admittedly it is unnerving to have Young teaching so clearly such contradictory doctrines. One possibility is that he was genuinely confused. Or he may have held that Adam, though already resurrected and a god, sent his spirit children to this earth upon which it is Elohim and not Adam whom we consider to be our God, to whom we pray, and whom we call our Heavenly Father. He may have held it proper to speak of Elohim as the father of our spirits because he saw Elohim as our spiritual grandfather, making us his literal spiritual descendants.

We can find some insight into what Young meant when he called Adam our God in the following quote: "Joseph [Smith] said to us 'I am a God to this people & so is any man who is appointed to lead Israel or the Kingdom of God.'" Then Young elaborated, "God did not say worship Moses because he [Moses] was a God to the people. . . . You may say to your wife or son. . . . I am your councillor, Dictator, or you[r] God. Either would be correct . . . yet they should not worship you, for this would be sin."⁴

Here Young demonstrates that in calling Adam our God he need only have meant that Adam presided over us or that we are his descendants. When he referred to Adam as the God of Jesus he may have meant only that Jesus is a descendant of Adam or that Adam presided over some

element of Jesus' earthly life — such as perhaps the sending of angels to instruct him.

Do we have any evidence that Adam presides over us or presided over some element of Jesus' life? Joseph Smith preached that whenever keys of the priesthood "are revealed from heaven, it is by Adam's authority" (DS 1:99). Young may have taken this to imply that Adam presided over sending Moses and Elias to Jesus on the mount of transfiguration. Joseph also taught "Christ is the Great High Priest, Adam next" (ibid.) and that Adam "presides over the Spirits of all men" (AG 25). We know the twelve apostles will judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28). Young may have reasoned that Adam will also be one of the great judges of mankind — even greater than the apostles. At Adam-Ondi-Ahman, every man will return the keys of the priesthood he holds to Adam. In the Old Testament, Daniel graphically describes Adam sitting on his throne in glory (7:9, 21, 22). It was Adam who led the war in heaven against Satan (Rev. 12:7), who will lead the last great battle against Satan (D&C 88:112–115), who is called "the father of all, the prince of all" (D&C 27:11), who is "set . . . upon high and given . . . the keys of salvation under the . . . Holy One" (D&C 78:16), and who is a "prince" over us "forever" (D&C 107:55).

Certainly most members of the church are not aware of just how exalted a character Adam is. We seldom think of Adam as presiding over our spirits, as being a judge over us, as being a prince over us forever, or of our being accountable to Adam in any sense. Yet Young seems to have believed Adam was only slightly less exalted than Jesus Christ. He was aware that his views on Adam were unusual and difficult for many to accept.

On the other hand, there are significant areas in which Young did not seem to exalt Adam. Though the relevant resources at my disposal are limited to *Discourses of Brigham Young*, *Doctrines of Salvation*, and two recent articles in *DIALOGUE* (Summer

⁴ Gary James Bergera, "The Orson Pratt-Brigham Young Controversies," *DIALOGUE: A JOURNAL OF MORMON THOUGHT* 13 (Summer 1980).

'80 and Spring '82), an investigation of all of them reveals that Elohim is twice named as our Heavenly Father and Adam never is; five times a distinction is made between Adam and "God"; five times Elohim is clearly referred to as "the Father" but Adam never clearly is; six times Elohim is referred to as "the Lord" and Adam never is; three times Elohim is named as the God "whom we serve" and Adam never is; Elohim is named as the God to whom we pray but Adam never is, and twice Adam is said to have assisted Elohim in creating the earth. In other references a distinction is drawn between Adam and the God in whom we believe, the God whose plan it was to send us to the earth, from whom we receive revelations, to whom we pay our tithes, and whose gospel we teach. Adam is never referred to in any of these ways. So when Young says Adam is our God, he apparently means something very different from what we would have meant had we said the same thing.

Young's view of Adam seems to have been this: that Adam is the father of our spirits and came to the earth with a resurrected body but is not our God in any of the senses spoken of above. What are we to make of this theory? There is always the chance he may have been correct. If he is correct, then we must assume that when President Kimball denounced the Adam-God theory (AG 43) he was denouncing the idea that we pray to Adam or the idea that Adam is Elohim, rather than the idea that Adam is the father of our spirits. Also, if Adam came to this earth a resurrected being, then many scriptures would have to be taken symbolically, such as the one declaring that Adam should "surely die" (Gen. 2:17).

In the perhaps more likely case that Young was wrong, we have at least some explanation. Apparently he only mentioned the topic at all because of a misunderstanding of something Joseph Smith had said. He insisted several times that his ideas came from Joseph (AG 25, 30). Furthermore, he made several public remarks

which deemphasized his stand on the issue: "I tell you this as my belief about that personage who is called the ancient of days, the prince, and so on. But I do not tell it because that I wish it to be established in the minds of others" (AG 23). In January of 1860 he advised the apostles to avoid discussing the issue publicly (AG 24).

Strangely enough, it was the times when Brigham Young was trying to deemphasize Adam-God that he (possibly to justify his past remarks) made three of his four statements that he was confident on his stand that Adam is our father and our God (AG 23, 29, 31). His strongest statement called such a belief a doctrine "which God revealed to me" in the midst of explaining that "how much unbelief exists in the minds of Latter-day Saints . . . that Adam is our Father and God—I do not know, I do not inquire, I care nothing about it" (AG 31). The obvious intent of what he was saying was to explain that he did not care what people thought about his idea, not to declare once and for all that the Lord had revealed it to him.

Thus he clearly communicated that his belief need not be accepted by others and was not to be considered church doctrine. This is very different from teaching his ideas as church doctrine in the name of the Lord. Moreover, after Young's manner of speaking, what he said was revealed to him was technically correct. Adam is our father in the same sense that Abraham is our father. He is our God in the broad sense Young called Joseph Smith and Moses gods to their people. Apparently Young did not view himself as using the word *God* loosely or metaphorically but believed any enlightened person would use the term God in this manner. We should note that every recorded instance where he expressed confidence in a specific point of his belief, he used the same words—he was confident that Adam was "our Father and God" (AG 29, 31). It is possible he was merely voicing his confidence in the words themselves which the Lord had "revealed" to him through Joseph Smith.

In conclusion, it seems Young did not consider Adam to be literally the father of Jesus. Since any father may correctly say to his son, "I am your God," Young need not have meant much by calling Adam our God. He was correct in his belief that Adam presides over us. His questionable belief seems to have been seeing Adam literally as the father of our spirits. But he did not believe Adam is the God to whom we pray, in whom we believe, whom we serve, from whom we receive revelations, whose gospel we teach, or even whom we call our Heavenly Father. If President Young was wrong about Adam being the father of our spirits, at least he did not teach his idea as church doctrine, believed he heard it from Joseph Smith, and also referred to Elohim as the father of our spirits. These points need further elaboration as many other relevant statements exist on both sides of the argument. This letter abridges a much longer paper which comes to the same conclusion. Though not everyone will agree with my view in all its particulars, the evidence that Young did not view Adam as our God in the usual sense of the term cannot afford to be overlooked.

Carl Broderick, Jr.
Cerritos, California

A Synthesis Desirable?

Re: Lester Bush's valedictory (Summer 1982). Isn't it likely that the synthesis he desires of Mormon theology cannot exist except in a personal framework? Once a person has complied with the few requirements, such as baptism, priesthood (for the males), temple marriage, sacrament, tithing, etc. he/she can — in fact, must — develop his/her own Mormonism, as long as he/she stays within the fairly loose boundaries of the knowledge and suggested/implied doctrines now available. The true substance of Mormon doctrine is, except for relatively few "doctrines" and corollary actions, the kind of understanding each person works with. This understanding changes con-

stantly and is evaluated by increasingly absolute standards as one's spirituality, discipline, and sense of knowledge change (grow). That is, each individual starts with what he/she understands and can do. As he/she "grows" in the gospel, so do the standards by which God ultimately will judge him/her.

The equation involved is an individual one and requires the knowledge, love, and justice we expect God possesses for its solution. Each equation is made up of elements including such things as each day's expenditure of energy, on what the energy is spent, of the attitude motivating the expenditure, the circumstances of learning and growth each person happens upon, and the degree of control he/she can exercise over life's happenstances, etc. Not the least of the elements is what each person makes of the less-than-skeletal body of doctrine available and the sometimes free-for-all interpretations given him/her or more importantly, determined by him/her.

Threaded through Mormon belief are two doctrines that can only mean a highly personal interpretation and judgment: free agency and personal revelation.

I think this personalness baffles the hierarchy. Free agency means that persons of quite widely differing interpretations can achieve the celestial kingdom. Application of free agency threatens the values of the hierarchy. They are trying to persuade us that prophets do not disagree. They are trying to give us what God has not: absolute patterns of morality, belief, and happiness. And temporal standards of measurement.

Charles Larson
Pasadena, California

Read It Again, Sam

During the past five years Sam Taylor may have been reading *DIALOGUE* or he may have been reading *BYU Studies*, but when he says, "The baptized *DIALOGUE* [i.e., under Mary Bradford's editorship] is identical with *BYU Studies*," I know he hasn't

been reading both! I read both consistently. As fine a job as *BYU Studies* does, it is still only a limited “voice for the community of LDS scholars.” There are some things published in *DIALOGUE* over the past five years that might have been published in *BYU Studies*, but the majority of it would not even have been seriously considered for publication there.

Robert A. Rees
Los Angeles, California

A Note from “Dr. Smith”

Recently Heath showed how Henry Eyring dealt with some problems of great concern to Mormon scientists (Autumn 1982). It was interesting to read his excellent account of events of thirty years ago, which I watched from close range as an Eyring associate of that period, the “Dr. Smith” mentioned in the letter from Eyring to Bennion.

Certainly Eyring helped many young people stay in the Church and come to terms with it, but I wonder if Joseph Fielding Smith didn’t carry the day with Church leaders. There have been some surprising developments in recent years which must bother many a Mormon scientist.

First, as Sherlock pointed out in *DIALOGUE* (Autumn 1982), both a recent Melchizedek Priesthood manual and a Gospel Doctrine text commend for study and discussion some of Joseph Fielding Smith’s extreme antievolution views. Sherlock stated that there had been no change in the official position of the First Presidency. The priesthood manual lists no authors but opens with a letter from the First Presidency. Perhaps that doesn’t make it official, but many readers must have assumed that it does.

Second, *Church News* editorials regularly let go broadsides at science — not only at biology and geology but even at benign astronomy. We have been told that we should not try to figure out Book of Mormon geography; that there was no evolution

even from one lower form to another (1 Sept. 1979); that we need not speculate as to how the earth or the heavens were created (20 Dec. 1980); and that we must not believe the big bang theory of the origin of the universe (17 Oct. 1981). Since the Church urges everyone to subscribe, many readers must assume high-level approval, even though the author is not identified.

I find these developments confusing. I was brought up on books by John A. Widtsoe, Merrill, and Pack. Those authors — and Henry Eyring — taught me to see science and Mormonism as extensions of each other. Both are revealed, as Brigham Young emphasized. They have developed in parallel because both are essential parts of the dispensation of the fulness of times. (Of course there is some error in science, but there is constant purification.) Now, over a narrow interpretation of a verse or two of scripture, we find much science condemned. What effect does that have on young people studying science?

I urge *DIALOGUE* to find authors qualified to discuss the Mormonism-science relationship of the 1980s. Are large numbers of Church members still choosing to be educated in science? In biology and geology? How do students and scientists reconcile science and Mormonism today? Are there currently any staunch Mormons having great stature as scientists? Who are they? How do they view these problems? Henry Eyring dealt with Joseph Fielding Smith. How can we deal with anonymous manuals and editorials? Is anyone trying?

Richard Pearson Smith
Westfield, New Jersey

Addendum on “Truth”

Your Autumn 1982 issue was excellent — a testimony that you will carry on the fine tradition established by your predecessors.

I am writing to make a number of corrections to my own article in that issue: “Thoughts on the Mormon Scriptures:

An Outsider's View of the Inspiration of Joseph Smith." Never have I known any author who felt that his finished product was perfect, and my own work is certainly no exception.

In the section of my article on pp. 52-53 dealing with "truth" and "historicity," I did not intend to imply that historical fact is not a kind of truth. What we are dealing with is relevant or existential truth, and factual or historical truth. Mere fact or historical truth may leave us unaffected, whereas a fictitious construction may contain more relevant truth. What may be of more interest in dealing with religious scriptures is not historical fact, but rather what it means for us. For someone coming from outside the Mormon community, the importance of the Book of Mormon must be what it means rather than whether it came forth in a particular way or whether it is a literal historical record.

On pp. 50-51 is an interpolation to explain *tablet*. The Arabic word *lawh* refers to any kind of written record or document. In a specifically Baha'i sense, it means a written document of or letter by a Baha'i central figure. Mormon readers might mistakenly understand *tablet* as a stone record or ancient record, analogous to Joseph Smith's Book of Mormon plates.

The articles on Fletcher and Eyring in this issue were fine. I hope there will be continuing discussion of the tensions between scientific investigation and religious orthodoxy in the Mormon community.

William P. Collins
Haifa, Israel

One of the "Less Literate"

As a new subscriber to *DIALOGUE*, I was excited when my first issue arrived. I managed to read every page, some twice, and looked forward to my next issue with pleasant anticipation. However, I was only a few pages into that next issue (Autumn 1982) when I began to wonder if I were getting in over my head.

How does one prove, for instance, that she is an "educated member" and not one of the "less literate"? Should I forward a copy of my transcripts from graduate school? Or would you prefer a rubbing of my Phi Beta Kappa key?

And I'm certain that no one could single me out as he sat in the back of my chapel, looking for his "kind of Mormon." I look like any other overworked, middle-aged Mormon lady. I even gave a pie-making demonstration in a homemaking meeting once.

It goes without saying that I would never be able to submit an article for publication. However, I would like to offer my services as a proofreader of editorials. I've not taught English for some time, but I know a misplaced modifier when I see one. Unless, of course, it is indeed *you* who are "loaded with thoughtful essays, marked by good scholarship, and sprinkled with pithy quotations," in which case I must try to wangle a dinner invitation the next time I'm in Salt Lake. Your dinner-table conversations must be wonderful.

Mary Anne Andersen
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CHART CHANGE

We regret a serious error on the LDS corporate chart accompanying David J. Whittaker's article, "An Introduction to Mormon Administrative History" (Winter 1982, p. 16). During production, Deseret Trust and Deseret Management Corporation were reversed, putting the wrong business in the profit/nonprofit sectors. Please note this change in your issues.