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Christ, The Firstfruits of Theosis

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After receiving bachelor's degrees in philosophy and history from the University of Utah, **Roger Cook** was pleasantly surprised to be invited to teach philosophy at Brigham Young University. He has been a part-time member of the faculty since 1995, and begins his seventh year of teaching at BYU this fall. He is currently doing graduate work at BYU, pursuing a Masters in Education with a minor in Philosophy. His thesis, which is currently in process, emphasizes the education found in the Christian Cult of the Martyrs that developed in the second and third centuries, with the belief that one could improve their salvation/exaltation in the afterlife by being martyred for Christ. Roger hopes to enter a Doctoral program in either 2003 or 2004, where he will continue his work in late antiquities and ancient philosophy.

Roger has had several articles published with FARMS and FAIR, and is currently coauthoring a paper with Dr. Dave Paulsen of the BYU Philosophy Department on the anthropomorphic nature of God found in Early Judaeo/Christian pseudepigraphal literature, and a chapter on the nature of God in FAIR's 'Mormonism 201' project.

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ROGER COOK: As you might imagine, theosis is a hot topic in Christianity today. Usually when members of the Church talk about theosis, they jump to the Church Fathers and they begin to discuss the fact that people such as Augustine, Clement and Origen will have suggested that we can become like Christ or like God. Or that Christ became man so that we could become like God.

The problem with jumping directly to the Church Fathers for finding evidence of theosis is that it's difficult to say what influenced the Church Fathers. At the time of Christ, there are numbers of influences that will be creating different avenues for theosis.

For example, there's a Platonic—more particularly a Middle Platonic and Gnostic theosis—in which it's understood that the purpose of mortality is to escape from the material world and return back to the immaterial ethereal realm where God lives.

There's also a theosis seen in the emperors of both Greece and Rome in which the emperors, after they have died, and I suppose we could also say this is true in Egyptian lore as well, that they will become deified—they will become Gods.

There is of course the classical Christian theosis where people become as much like God as is possible and this tradition is still very strong in the Greek Orthodox Church today.

And finally, we can talk about the early Judaeo/Christian theosis. This is the area that I wish to talk about today.

This is important because if we can show that there is a independent theosis that appears in the Judaeo/Christian tradition around the first century, around the time of Christ, then we can show that this is not influenced necessarily by these other traditions. If we can show this and if we can show that it's a complete theosis like is held in Latter-day Saint thought, then we have gone a long way in showing the parallels then between the latter-day and the former-day Church.

With that then, let me begin my paper.

Among the most radical departures of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from mainstream Christian thought is the belief that we can become like God. This is the much disputed Judaeo/Christian doctrine of theosis—the belief that the faithful can attain a level of divinity in the hereafter.

Members of the Church believe that faithful men and women have the potential to become like God himself. This means that we have within ourselves seeds of divinity that will allow us to eventually return to the presence of God as perfected beings of great glory, with an exaltation so great that we will mirror the physical, spiritual-moral perfection of the Father and the Son.

Orthodox Christians also hold the doctrine of theosis but they limit the extent to which we can share the divine nature to a spiritual-moral likeness and/or the ability to emulate the celestial humanity of the dual-natured Christ of creedal thought.

This paper will discuss the early Judaeo/Christian doctrine of theosis. It will be shown how the majority of the Jews living immediately before and after Christ and essentially all Christians of the first century church accepted the belief that the faithful would experience an extreme exaltation as part of the process of salvation with the faithful fully reflecting the divinity of the Father and the Son. In fact, just as Christ was “the firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Cor. 15: 20) so it will be shown that Christ is the firstfruits of the exaltation of God's children.

Mainstream Christians were often troubled with the extreme theosis held by members of the Church of Jesus Christ; for the ontological gulf between God and man demanded by classical thought insures that men could never become like God.

They hold that God is a metaphysically ‘other’ being. He's an absolute noetic entity that statically exists above the chaos and alteration of the universe we dwell in. For

classical Christians, God is a being more akin to thought or myth rather than a person in the usual sense of the term. As the only self-existing thing, God created the universe out of nothing and he continues to exist outside and above the universe of time and space we find ourselves in. Man's relationship to him is creature to Creator for we would have no existence without his creative act and the existence of the universe itself is contingent upon his goodwill.

He is necessarily the single ground of existence and because of this unique ontological status, as existence itself, it is ontologically impossible that a mere creature could be raised to his level.

In short, classical Christians reject the doctrine of theosis of the Church of Jesus Christ because God is demoted from the status of an absolute ontologically 'other' noetic entity to a person who exists in space, time and alteration. And man is promoted from the status of mere creature to a being who is ontologically akin to God.

However the earliest Christians and Jews pictured God and man in a way that is strikingly similar to that of the Church of Jesus Christ.

God was seen as the archetypal celestial man in early Judaeo/Christian thought and man was thought to be cast in a spiritual-moral image. The tradition unequivocally declares that God is the original man, or archetype, after whom all men and women are patterned and he physically dwells in the celestial realm or the highest of three heavens.

He can be accurately described as a human-like or anthropomorphic person who is physically embodied or corporeal.

He is a person who is a citizen of the universe and he passionately acts within time and space on behalf of his children.

This God have a face, heart and hands, and will walk, talk and act in a manner similar to other men but his celestial form is vastly superior to the earthly bodies we find ourselves in.

Man was cast in God's exact physical and spiritual-moral image because God desired to give man supreme glory and honor. In other words, the Father desired to share the most glorious and beautiful thing in the universe—his own likeness and more especially his resplendent face with his children. Thus bestowing upon them the greatest glory and honor possible.

Indeed, early Jews and Christians would have believed that man and God are of the same race with no vast ontological gulf separating the nature of God from the nature of man.

In addition to God creating man in his own image, it should be understood that God and man are not the only anthropomorphic beings in the universe. Early Christians and Jews inherited a belief in the council of the gods from their Hebrew forebears.

This is the belief that God surrounds himself with other beings who are given the title of gods and that he rules as God, Lord and King over the universe while the gods rule with him as gods, lords and princes. Other titles these divine beings are known by include angels, or archangels, holy ones, watchers, spirits, men and sons of God. In other words, the most exalted angels of the Old Testament—including the archangels Michael, Gabriel, Raphael—are gods who are enthroned to the left and right of God in the Holy of Holies of the heavenly temple with Christians placing Christ at the very right hand of God as the second-in-command of heaven.

The gods are divine beings in their own right with extreme amounts of holiness, power, glory and honor. But they cannot match the fulness of holiness, power, glory and honor possessed by the Father. The gods have an active participation in the governing of the universe acting as messengers for the heavenly council; an advisory board for God; members of God's heavenly court; and as his heavenly entourage and making decrees and judgments independent of God within their own stewardships—God however gets the final word and when his decree is made, the members of the council faithfully carry out his command.

The gods are also cast in God's physical, spiritual-moral image and because they have greater honor, glory, power and holiness than earthly man they more exactly resemble the resplendent likeness of the Father. Nevertheless, women and men were created to be just a little lower than the gods (or *elohim*) themselves thus showing the close kinship between God, the gods and mankind.

Early Christians of course believed that Christ is in the exact image and likeness of God seeming to say that God and Christ look exactly alike and that one can identify them only because the Son is enthroned to the right of the Father.

Biblical belief therefore should be described as monarchic rather than monotheistic for these ancient peoples would have been fully unaware of the Greek metaphysical abstractions that lie at the foundations of classical monotheism.

God, for Hebrews, Jews and early Christians, is not an absolute ontologically 'other' noetic entity who is existence itself. He is not wholly divorced from the universe nor does he call the universe into existence out of nothing.

God and the Hebrew and early Judaeo/Christian tradition is the primal archetypal anthropose, the epitome of physical and spiritual-moral perfection. He is the God of gods and Lord of lords, the first and foremost but not the only citizen of the universe.

God, the gods and men are all kindred beings of a like ontological status who exist within the universe and as such each experiences location, duration and alteration.

Furthermore, God creates from pre-existing elements as he places cosmos upon chaotic element.

But these beliefs are incompatible with the classical monotheism which demands that God exist above and outside the universe of space and time; and which would demand that God not be limited by the confines of permanently residing in a body.

As pointed out by Peter Hayman, the better term for the biblical tradition is 'monarchism', for God rules in the universe of space and time as its monarch and the gods as near ontological equals rule at his side.

Of course, if the ontological gulf between God and man as demanded by mainstream Christianity is not found in early biblical thought and if it is understood that God and men are of the same race, then the original theosis held by early Christians would necessarily be much different than classical Christian metaphysics would demand.

Hebrews, Jews and early Christians believed that men are in the physical, spiritual-moral likeness of God and that there is no great ontological gulf between the nature of God and man. Early Christians believed that the faithful would dwell in the presence of God, Christ and the gods as resurrected beings of physical and spiritual-moral perfection. Nothing unclean or unholy can dwell in the presence of God so men and women who have followed Christ's example and have overcome all things through his grace will necessarily be clean and holy before they may live in his presence.

Their bodies will no longer be subject to decay, disease and death for they will be like Christ, perfect and resplendent in form. If this is so, then what would separate the nature of resurrected and perfected man from that of the gods or that of the Father and the Son?

If we mirror Christ's resplendent celestial body then will we not mirror the power, honor and glory of Christ himself? And if Christ is in the exact image of the Father, then it seems that men would also mirror the image of God himself.

The remarkable conclusion is that if God and mankind are of the same race, kindred beings who already share many of each other's anthropomorphic attributes, then not only is it ontologically possible that men and women could eventually become like God but it is also probable.

Let us look then at different depictions of theosis as seen in the early Judaeo/Christian thought.

The first indications of theosis in Hebrew religion are found in the role of prophets of ancient Israel. It is understood that part of the prophetic calling is to act as a messenger of the heavenly council.

E. Theodore Mullen, Jr. points out that the prophet Haggai is called the “Messenger of Yahweh” in precisely the same manner that the gods on the council are called messengers.

He indicates that the designation *Nabi* “implies the background of the council, for the prophet was called to proclaim the will of the deity which was issued from the assembly.”

He translates Jeremiah 23:

18 For who among them has stood in the council (*sod Yahweh*) of the LORD
to perceive and to hear his work,

22 . . . if they had stood in my council,
then they would have proclaimed my words to the people.

He also explains that Amos 3:7 implies prophetic presence in the heavenly council.

Martha Himmelfarb concurs saying that in ancient Israel the prophets claim for themselves the role of messengers alongside the regular members of the council. In fact the only reason we have a detailed account of the heavenly assembly in 1 Kings 22 is because the prophet Micaiah used his presence in the heavenly assembly as evidence of his authority as the messenger of the council of the gods.

Mullen even argues that a mortal member of the heavenly council can be an important part of the council’s deliberations. He indicates that the intervention of one of the participants can help to bring about the end of the council’s deliberations and that a human or angelic agent will be commissioned to carry out the decisions of the council.

The prophets Isaiah and Zechariah are good examples of this human intervention in heavenly affairs.

Isaiah is called into the heavenly assembly, sees God enthroned in majestic splendor upon his throne and is cleansed of iniquity. He then listens as God addresses the assembled members and asks “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” (Isaiah 6: 8) Isaiah ends the deliberations of the heavenly assembly by volunteering to act as the messenger of the council. “Here I am. Send me.” (Isaiah 6:8)

The prophet Zechariah, who acts as God's prophetic messenger, is a member of the council and actively participates in the induction of Joshua, the high priest, into the divine assembly as he calls for the gods to place a priestly headdress (a turban or cap) on Joshua as part of his heavenly initiation.

After he calls out to the gods, "Let them set a fair mitre upon his head." (Zec 3: 5) the gods accede to his wishes and they dress Joshua in the same heavenly clothing they wear.

Indeed when Joshua is told that he will have access to the gods, those that "stand by", and that the gods are his "fellows" (or "associates" or "colleagues") it is seen that the High Priest of Israel is also a member of that divine body. It is seen therefore that mortal men were welcomed into and became members of the heavenly council of the gods.

What these texts do not explain is whether prophets and other prominent figures will retain these exalted positions in the hereafter. Also not explained is the differences that remain between the nature of the gods and the mortal serving on the council. To explore these issues further we must turn to the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and other non-canonical early Judaeo/Christian writings.

The extent to which Second Temple Judaism and early Christianity will have deified prophets as well as Old Testament patriarchs and other Hebrew Jewish heroes is seen in Old Testament pseudepigraphal documents—these ancient documents written by Jews in the centuries immediately before and after Christ, and occasionally edited or expanded upon by Christians—were exclusively preserved by Christians after the Rabbinic period.

They illustrate that a significant portion of Jews and Christians, after the first century, effectively retained their early Judaeo/Christian roots. These are folk who, like most of their first century counterparts, were essentially unaware of the Greek metaphysical tradition that had influenced some Jews and had begun to penetrate Christianity through the educated elite in the beginning of the second century.

The theosis of prophets, patriarchs and heroes is quite pronounced in these documents as the major figures of the Old Testament become exalted members of the council and are enthroned in the highest heaven with a majesty equal to that of the gods.

The Ascension of Isaiah details the exaltation of the prophet Isaiah. The text records that Isaiah experiences an increase of glories as he is escorted to the highest heaven to stand before God. Isaiah questions the glorious angel who is sent to escort him into the presence of God.

The glory and office of the angel indicate that he is a member of the council of the gods:

2 I saw a glorious angel; his glory was not like the glory of the angels which I always used to see, but he had great glory, and an office, such that I cannot describe the glory of this angel.

3 And I saw when he took hold of me by my hand, and I said to him, “Who are you? . . . And where are you taking me up?”

7 . . . And he said to me, “You will see one greater than me, . . .

8 and the Father of the one who is greater you will also see, because for this purpose I was sent from the seventh heaven, that I might make all this clear to you.”¹

Isaiah notes a transformation taking place in him as they ascend through each heaven. He notes that “the glory of my face was being transformed as I went up from heaven to heaven”², meaning that Isaiah began to shine with celestial light as he entered the first heaven and that each time he enters the next higher realm, he experiences a further transformation and glorification.

Isaiah is told that after his transformation is complete, after he enters the highest heaven, that the Lord will resemble “your appearance and your likeness”³ — indicating that Isaiah’s glory upon entering the seventh heaven will mirror that had by the Son of God. The angel escorting him also tells Isaiah that he has a throne, robes and a crown waiting for him in the highest heaven.

22 For above all the heavens and their angels is placed your throne, and also your robes and your crown which you are to see.

14 . . . “Hear then this also from your companion: [when from the body by the will of God you have come up here], then you will receive the robe which you will see, and also other numbered robes placed (there) you will see,

15 and then you will be equal to the angels who (are) in the seventh heaven.”⁴

The astonishing promise contained in the Ascension of Isaiah is in that in the hereafter, Isaiah will be equal to the angels. He will be equal to the members of the council of the gods.

In the Ascension of Isaiah, the prophet Isaiah is challenged as he attempts to enter the highest heaven with his angelic guide. But Christ himself declares, “The holy

¹ Ascension of Isaiah, Chapter 7.

² Ascension of Isaiah, Ch. 7: 25.

³ Ascension of Isaiah, Ch. 8: 11.

⁴ Ascension of Isaiah, Ch. 7: 22 and Ch. 8: 14-15

Isaiah is permitted to come up here, for his robe is here.”⁵ Isaiah sees and worships Christ and experiences a final transformation so that he becomes like the angels of the seventh heaven. He is then welcomed into the presence of the Father and the Holy Spirit, worships the Father and then engages in intimate conversation with the Son and the Holy Spirit.

What is seen in the Ascension of Isaiah then is a complete transformation and divinization of the prophet Isaiah. He experiences a temporary transfiguration as he has to return to the earth and testify of Christ. But he is promised an exaltation in the future that will make him equal to the gods. His glorification is so complete that he stands in the presence of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit even in this exalted station still, interestingly enough, merits the title of an angel. He has a closeness and an intimacy with the Son and the Holy Spirit that shows no drastic ontological subordination between the gods worthy of worship and the yet mortal Isaiah.

The text also notes that Adam, Abel and Seth also have an honored place among the exalted beings of Heaven. More explicit is the theosis promised to Adam in the Testament of Adam.

In this text, Adam’s wish to become a member of the heavenly council is revealed but rather than rebuke Adam for his arrogance, conceit and sin, Christ tells him that his theosis must wait until after his incarnation, death and resurrection.

Adam is told that he will be redeemed because he was created after his image and eventually he will be set at the very right hand of God himself.

“He spoke to me about this in Paradise after I picked some of the fruit in which death was hiding: ‘Adam, Adam do not fear. You wanted to be a god; I will make you a god, not right now, but after a space of many years. . . . But after a short time there will be mercy on you because you were created in my image, and I will not leave you to waste away in Sheol. . . .

““And after three days, while I am in the tomb, I will raise up the body I received from you. And I will set you at the right hand of my divinity, and I will make you a god just like you wanted. And I will receive favor from God, and I will restore to you and your posterity that which is the justice of heaven.””⁶

Note that the same closeness and intimacy shown to Isaiah in the Testament of Isaiah is mirrored in the Testament of Adam. Adam will sit at the right hand of God, a position second only to that of Christ himself who is seated at the right hand of God.

⁵ Ascension of Isaiah, Ch. 9: 2-3.

⁶ Testament of Adam, 3: 2-4.

The Testament of Abraham also describes the exaltation of Adam. Here the patriarch Abraham is given a tour of heaven by the archangel Michael. As they enter the first gate of heaven, Abraham sees a person of such transcendent splendor that he resembles the Master or God himself. He is told that this person whom he sees, is Adam, who is seated on a golden throne of glory and all who die must pass before him.

And outside the two gates of that place, they saw a man seated on a golden throne. And the appearance of that man was terrifying, like the Master's [or God] . . . And when the wondrous one who was seated on the throne of gold saw few entering through the strait gate, but many entering through the broad gate, immediately that wondrous man tore the hair of his head . . . And when he saw many souls entering through the strait gate, then he arose from the earth and sat on his throne, very cheerfully rejoicing and exalting. Then Abraham asked the Commander-in-chief, ". . . who is this most wondrous man, who is adorned in such glory . . .?" The incorporeal one said, "This is the first-formed Adam who is in such glory, and he looks at the world, since everyone has come from him."⁷

In the Life of Adam and Eve, God tells Adam, who has just passed on, that he will be given Satan's throne which now lies vacant in heaven.

And the Lord God said, "Adam, why did you do this? If you had kept my commandment, those who brought you down into this place would not have rejoiced. . . . I will establish you in your dominion on the throne of your seducer. But that one shall be cast into this place, so that you might sit above him. Then he himself and those who listen to him shall be condemned, and they shall greatly mourn and weep when they see you sitting on his glorious throne."⁸

Significantly, it is seen that Satan was a god who fell out of favor because of rebellion and he has lost his divine position on the council of the gods. Adam is promised that he will eventually take his place.

The Testament of Abraham also describes the exaltation of Adam's son Abel. In the text Abraham describes the exalted Abel, who is clearly superior to the angels who assist him, and he judges mankind from a massively large book. The effulgent glory, which streams from Abel's person is described as "bright as the sun", and his throne has "the appearance of terrifying crystal, flashing like fire." The text calls him "like unto a son of God"—one of the titles given to the members of the council of the gods.

And between the two gates there stood a terrifying throne with the appearance of terrifying crystal, flashing like fire. And upon it sat a wondrous man, bright as the sun, like unto a son of God. . . . On its right and on its left stood two angels holding papyrus and ink and pen. . . . And the wondrous man who sat on the throne was the one who judge and sentenced the souls.

⁷ Testament of Abraham (Recension A), 11: 4-10.

⁸ Life of Adam and Eve (Apocalypse), 39.

The Commander-in-chief said, “Do you see, all-pious Abraham, the frightful man who is seated on the throne? This is the son of Adam, the first-formed, who is called Abel, whom Cain the wicked killed. And he sits here to judge the entire creation, examining both righteous and sinners. For God said, ‘I do not judge you, but every man is judged by man.’⁹

Significantly then, it’s not just God or Christ who are given judgment over mankind. But judgment is also given to the exalted faithful as well.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob join the ranks of notable figures of the Old Testament who are enthroned in the highest heaven. The Testament of Isaac records that as Isaac was about to die he was visited by Michael—one of the chief angels.

Michael, whose face Isaac compares to God, is told that he will soon join Abraham who is enthroned in heaven and that eventually Jacob will join them. Each of the patriarchs will be seated in a glorious throne. Each will be exalted above the other inhabitants of heaven.

The Apocalypse of Zephaniah records the equality of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Enoch with a great angel of heaven. As Zephaniah puts on an angelic garment, he understands the language of the angels.

They helped me and set me on that boat. Thousands and thousands and myriads of myriads of angels gave praise before me. I, myself, put on an angelic garment. I saw all of those angels praying. I, myself, prayed together with them, I knew their language, which they spoke with me.

Then a great angel came forth having a golden trumpet in his hand, and he blew three times over my head, saying, “Be courageous! O one who has triumphed. . . .” I wanted to embrace him, (but) I was unable to embrace the great angel because his glory is great.

Then he ran to all the righteous ones, namely, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Enoch and Elijah and David. He spoke with them as friend to friend speaking with one another.¹⁰

2 Enoch records the installation of Enoch as a member of the heavenly council. The text shows that God nominates Enoch to join the heavenly council and that after the gods give their approval, he becomes like one of God’s glorious ones. A cleansing motif similar to Zachariah 3 is seen as the archangel Michael initiates Enoch into the council of the gods.

And Michael, the LORD’s archistratig,¹¹ lifted me up and brought me in front of the face of the LORD. And the LORD said to his servants, sounding them out, “Let

⁹ Testament of Abraham (Recension A), 12: 4-12 and 13: 2-4.

¹⁰ The Apocalypse of Zephaniah (The Akhmimic Text), 8-9.

Enoch join in and stand in front of my face forever!” And the LORD’s glorious ones did obeisance and said, “Let Enoch yield in accordance with your word, O LORD!”¹²

And the glorious ones did obeisance and said, “Let him come up!”¹³

And the LORD said to Michael, “Go, and extract Enoch from [his] earthly clothing. And anoint him with my delightful oil, and put him into the clothes of my glory.” And so Michael did, just as the LORD had said to him. He anointed me and he clothed me. And the appearance of that oil is greater than the greatest light, and its ointment is like sweet dew, and its fragrance myrrh; and it is like the rays of the glittering sun. And I looked at myself, and I had become like one of his glorious ones, and there was no observable difference.¹⁴

The text further declares that after Enoch had been exalted and instructed in heavenly things, God placed him to the left of himself closer than Gabriel.

The exaltation of Enoch is also a major feature of 1 Enoch, The Book of the Similitudes. Here Enoch is told that he is the son of man and that he, as the son of man, will be seated upon a throne of glory.

Enoch also undergoes a dramatic transformation and becomes, Metatron, the Lesser YHWH or the second-in-command in heaven in the late 3 Enoch part of the Merkabah literature.

A number of scholars recognize that the exaltation of Old Testament figures is a vital part of the early Judaeo/Christian tradition. JDG Dunn claims that the degree to which, despite its monotheism, Judaism in the first century A.D. and thereafter could accommodate talk of some of its great figures of the past in terms approaching deity is striking.

Christopher Rowland writes, ‘What has emerged is a complex pattern of ideas concerning the heavenly position of righteous men. For the Jew to have called another being God or to have supposed that the divine characteristics may have been showed by an exalted man of God seems to be part of an accepted part of Jewish thought among some of the groups during this period.’

Larry Hurtado points out, ‘The Old Testament patriarchs are exalted figures in post-exilic Judaism.’ He claims that the glorification of Old Testament patriarchs is standard fare in the literature and that they are given a glorious place of

¹¹ “Archistratig” is a military term, analogous to the title of archangel in Jude 1:9; see Old Testament Pseudepigrapha (James H. Charlesworth, ed., Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, 2 vols. (Doubleday, New York: 1983, 1985) vol 1, 138 n. i.

¹² 2 Enoch [J], 22: 6-7.

¹³ 2 Enoch [A], 22: 7.

¹⁴ 2 Enoch [J], 22: 8-10.

heavenly power and honor and that these patriarchs were in this way real precursors of the exalted Jesus.

However the early Judaeo/Christian tradition does not limit theosis to only the elite of the Jewish tradition. The extant texts reveal that all the faithful will become as the gods.

1 Enoch, for example, explains that the elect are to be enthroned in the presence of God. Enoch sees the dwelling places of the holy ones, or gods, who are in the presence of God and that the righteous and the elect ones will stand in God's presence as well.

There I saw other dwelling places of the holy ones and their resting places too.

And I saw a dwelling place underneath the wings of the Lord of the Spirits; and all the righteous and the elect before him shall be as intense as the light of fire. Their mouth shall be full of blessing. . . . There (underneath his wings) I wanted to dwell; and my soul desired that dwelling place. Already my portion is there; for thus has it been reserved for me before the Lord of the Spirits.¹⁵

1 Enoch further promises that the righteous and elect will wear garments of glory.

The righteous and elect ones shall be saved on that day; and from thenceforth they shall never see the faces of the sinners and the oppressors. The Lord of the Spirits will abide over them; they shall eat and rest and rise with that Son of Man forever and ever. The righteous and elect ones shall rise from the earth and shall cease being of downcast face. They shall wear the garments of glory. These garments of yours shall become the garments of life from the Lord of the Spirits. Neither shall your garments wear out, nor your glory come to an end before the Lord of the Spirits.¹⁶

1 Enoch, like the Ascension of Isaiah, records that women and men were created to become eventually like the angels.

For indeed human beings were not created but to be like angels, permanently to maintain pure and righteous lives. Death, which destroys everything, would have not touched them, had it not been through their knowledge by which they shall perish; death is (now) eating us by means of this power.¹⁷

1 Enoch also promises the faithful that they will sit upon thrones and become resplendent.

I shall bring them out into the bright light, those who have loved my holy name, and seat them each one by one upon the throne of his honor; and they shall be

¹⁵ 1 Enoch 39: 4, 7-8

¹⁶ 1 Enoch 62: 13-16

¹⁷ 1 Enoch 69: 11-12.

resplendent for ages that cannot be numbered; . . . the righteous ones shall be resplendent.¹⁸

The Fourth Book of Ezra shows how Christ takes a personal part in the exaltation of the faithful. The elect who have been sealed will dwell in glorious light and will feast with Christ in heavenly kingdoms. He personally gives glorious white garments to them and he places crowns upon their heads because they confessed his name while in mortality. Suggested in the text is an initiation for the faithful similar to that of Enoch in 2 and 3 Enoch.

I, Ezra, saw on Mount Zion a great multitude, which I could not number, and they all were praising the Lord with songs. In their midst was a young man of great stature, taller than any of the others, and on the head of each of them he placed a crown, but he was more exalted than they.¹⁹

There are a number of other Pseudepigraphal passages that talk about the exaltation of the faithful; how they are to become like the angels; how they will rule over the angels; how they will rule with Christ; how judgment will be given to them over the heavens and the earth.

It's also seen in the documents from Qumran that the faithful also expected to become like God.

Let me skip to the point however, where the New Testament begins to describe how Christ is the firstfruits of theosis.

Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians indicates that Christ has experienced an increased exaltation but he carefully ties Christ's exaltation to that of the faithful. Christ, the epistle indicates, has overcome all things and has been raised by God to his right hand in the heavenly realms putting all things in subjection to Christ's feet and placing Christ as the head of the Church. But with Christ's supreme position of authority, he will also lift us up with him at his right hand for above all earthly and heavenly authorities, referring here to lesser gods who are not on the divine council over whom the elect will reign, Paul emphatically states that God has raised the elect with Christ and enthroned them with him in the highest heaven so that they are now part of God's house.

18 The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,

19 And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,

¹⁸ 1 Enoch 108: 12-15.

¹⁹ 4 Ezra 2: 42-43.

20 Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places,

21 Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:

22 And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church.²⁰

Literally, Christ was exalted from among the members of the heavenly council at some time and he has been placed at the right hand of God and now is Lord over the Universe.

Christ then is the firstfruits of theosis just as he was the firstfruits of resurrection. I continue with Ephesians:

4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us,

5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;)

6 And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:

7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God.²¹

This is more than enough to show that a strong tradition of theosis in early Judaeo/Christian thought. Men and women were created after the image and likeness of God; they are little lower than the elohim and their destiny is to take their place by God and Christ as his sons and daughters. They will be gods, greater even than the angels and so close in glory to Christ and the Father that their theosis mirrors that of God Himself.

And while members of the Church of Jesus Christ normally include the idea that the saved may gain a dominion independent from God as part of their theosis, it is clear that both the early and latter-day members of Christ's Church share a core doctrine of theosis that most Christians have long since rejected.

Thank you.

²⁰ Ephesians 1: 18-22.

²¹ Ephesians 2: 4-7, 19.

Q 1: Okay Roger, I'm really looking forward to your comments on this. I happen to post on an apologetics website—apologetics.com—and battle it out with Christians, since this is a Christian website, I do my best to defend our beliefs. And they seem to directly relate theosis or deification to the eternality of God and also the standard showdown between *creatio ex nihilo* and *creatio ex materia*.

And so, I gave them an explanation generally that Blake Ostler had given in his review of Robinson's "How Wide the Divide" where he had talked about: it's necessary to define terms and how you view God, that God is really defined at the Godhead and that he would define each individual member as Father, Son and Holy Ghost, and went on to just talk about persons and things. Anyway, he defined some terminology and then he went through to go ahead and give this explanation.

My question to you would be, you define God as being three different things in your address. You said that he has location, duration and alteration. I would definitely say location and alteration is definitely something God experiences but as a divine being don't we believe that intelligence is eternal so technically there is no duration to a divine being?

COOK: Good question. If I understand and try to define terms here though, 'eternity' demands a passage through time—in other words, an eternity of time. If someone uses the term 'eternity' they automatically imply then 'duration'.

Classical Christians, quite frankly, should not use the term 'eternity' to describe God because it is fully formed to the Greek metaphysics upon which they are placed. Whenever they use 'eternity' they should say 'timelessness' for God cannot be subject to time since he's not a part of the universe and is above and beyond it.

So anytime the word 'eternity' is used, quite frankly, this is a bit of an equivocation and you need to get them to define that term more carefully. Does that help?

Q 1: Yes. I think I understand what you mean. So you're saying that eternality refers to a space- well the lack of a space of time when they say that God exists outside time he is not subject to it. So he doesn't have any time to him. So technically he can't be described as 'eternal'.

COOK: That is correct. Here is one other thought to consider.

For classical Christians, God cannot experience any alteration at all. The difficulty is that- when you say that God thinks, you're demanding that God has rational discursive thought. In other words, you're saying that God has one thought which

is proceeded by another thought, and another thought, and another thought. You and I do that all the time.

When we speak, or when we think, a rational process simply has a discursive quality to it. Well for classical Christians if God is not subject to alteration, then God literally cannot think. God would be thought itself. And yet, it seems that classical Christians demand that God would think.

Thinking implies time. Thinking implies alteration. So in the effort to try and take Greek metaphysical absolutism, and in the early Judaeo/Christian understanding of God and process and combining together, it seems that classical Christians have created for themselves a debacle—something that can never ever be solved.

Q 1: Not to mention the difficulty they create with the fact that Jesus Christ experienced a mortal existence and as a member of the trinitarian entity, experienced change. So- anyway. Thank you.

Q 2: I'm making this really short. The problem is, I'm not a scholar so I can't make it short because I don't even the words of the vocabulary in the background to keep up with what you've been saying- and Br. Cook, I love what you said. I'm glad we can be like Heavenly Father.

But when I deal with my Evangelical friends who tell me that I'm a cult person, and that I am using outside sources beside the Bible, you talk about classical Christians—I call them Biblicists, and that's very offensive but you know I've got to stop doing that and I've got to call them classical.

You are using other evidences that they are automatically going to say- the cover comes over the eyes, just like it did for those of us in this room who don't have the background that you've got.

So I'm saying, how in the world can I translate that knowledge into other than my testimony. That's all I've got. So- help me.

COOK: You can have a little bit of comfort- in normative Biblical scholarship, that would be scholarship that lies outside of fundamentalist or Evangelical Christians, very simply use the historical documents we've talked about. They dig into the Dead Sea Scrolls. They use the Pseudepigrapha and the Apocrypha. They go into the Rabbinical Literature. They are not ashamed; neither are they worried about using extra-canonical sources to try and explain Christianity.

Literally then, what you could claim is those who refuse to step outside of the canon are not scholarly. And that-

(INAUDIBLE)

COOK: Understood. You can say, if you would like to remain within your narrow interpretation you can; but then you essentially stand outside of what scholarship today demands.

Q 3: We hear the claim that we're polytheistic and we can defend that and say we're monotheistic or even henotheistic but you used a term that's fairly new to me. Could you make a distinction on the monarchistic- but the distinction of that with the other three?

COOK: Yes, very briefly. Around the 1920s Biblical scholarship began to recognize that the Old Testament wasn't entirely monotheistic because you have obviously, these references to the gods who are found in the Old Testament. And so, the charge of polytheism begins to immediately appear. But of course it's immediately seen that this isn't the polytheism of the Greeks or the Romans.

And so several other phrases were coined, one of them is monolatry. Monolatry would suggest that originally Israel was monotheistic but that it became corrupt over time and that there would have been some gods that were allowed in and eventually Israel returned back to monotheism.

The term henotheism sort of goes in the other direction; the suggestion is that the original Hebrews would have believed in many gods but that over time God essentially reigned supreme and that it became monotheistic.

Henotheism at least refers to God in this way- that God rules as the supreme king of the universe but that there are other gods who are at his side.

The term monarchism first surfaced in the 1960s but has been resurrected by Hayman. Yet it really is a way of interpreting the text again in a henotheistic way but I like it. It just sounds better and so that's the reason that I use it.

It's fair enough to say critical scholars who still use the term 'monotheism' to refer to the Old and the New Testament drastically redefine it so that it's utterly unlike classical Christian monotheism. Classical Christian monotheism is based on Greek metaphysical absolutism which demands that God be one single perfect and alone.

Monotheism, if you're even going to use that term in the New Testament and Old Testament terms, essentially means that God rules as the supreme monarch of the universe but that other beings of almost like glory, honor and power are at his sides.

So you can use monotheism but you're going to have to drastically redefine, as Larry Hurtado does, or you can use monarchism and you will mean exactly the same thing.

Watch this entire lecture on our Youtube site at:

Pt. 1- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYKvjU4iKD0>

Pt. 2- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JW2VIU15TKg>

Pt. 3- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VbpCcy3692U>

Pt. 4- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WJwixR19mrQ>
