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The Teachings of Silvanus: A Little-Known Gem from Nag Hammadi

Dennis Newton

Abstract: *Scholars have recently suggested that* The Teachings of Silvanus*, a text from Nag Hammadi Codex VII, is the product of several authors with the earliest portion dating to the late first or early second century and the latest portion to the third or early fourth century.* Silvanus' *provenance, therefore, allows this single document to serve as a potential microcosm evidencing the change and alteration of early Christian thought and doctrine. Latter-day Saints have long contended that the Restored Gospel is more closely aligned with the earliest strains of Christianity vis-à-vis the creedal form. Through the lens of* Silvanus*, Latter-day Saint and Calvinist positions are evaluated relative to the early and late* Silvanus *authors and are found to be most compatible with the early and late portions of the text, respectively.*

As a teenager my first exposure to the Nag Hammadi texts came via a series of Einar Erickson audio tapes that my mother purchased. I still remember his vivacious voice reading tantalizing snippets from ancient texts and favorably comparing them to aspects of the restored gospel of Christ. He would always conclude his presentation with the question, "Where did Joseph Smith get this?" After hearing about all of these remarkable discoveries, I eagerly anticipated the impending wave of confirmatory evidences from ancient hidden texts that would definitively prove the miracle of the restoration. It is forty years later, and Erickson's prediction of a tidal wave of faith affirming scholarship has yet to emerge; at least it has not emerged from the sands near Nag Hammadi. While these texts have had an intensely dramatic effect on New Testament scholarship, they have had relatively little impact upon members of the Restored Church of Christ, especially its lay members. Why is this?

One reason is that many of the Nag Hammadi texts were produced and cherished by Gnostics — groups whose writings and beliefs were directly attacked by early Church Fathers. For example, Irenaeus famously designated Gnostic writings as "an abyss of madness and blasphemy against Christ."[1] While the Nag Hammadi corpus has proven a treasure trove for secular scholars, traditional Christians have generally dismissed the documents as Gnostic heresy and doctrinally trivial.[2] This line of argument was the essence of the evangelical response to Erickson's audio series. Melanie Layton shares the argument that the early Christian/Latter-day Saint similarities highlighted by Erickson "do not confirm, they condemn if one considers the source of the parallels."[3]

For similar reasons, Latter-day Saint scholars have also preached caution when reading the Nag Hammadi texts.

> [I]n a particular document we may see ideas standing side by side which, on the one hand, are very similar to Latter-day

1. Saint Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Jackson, MI: Ex Fontibus, 2017), 26.

2. See Kings Church Eastbourne, "Why do Christians deny the Nag Hammadi texts?," YouTube video, 2:00, June 13, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TvXJiuDWrSM, for a representative example of the traditional Christian response to the Nag Hammadi library. The final statement from this talk is "they're Gnostic corruptions or distortions of the Jesus story that come from 200 years afterwards and as such they are probably not historically reliable and that is why Christians don't take them very seriously." On the other hand, secular biblical scholars are quicker than Christian apologists to understand the historical dogma associated with labelling beliefs as heretical. For example, Sheila E. McGinn acknowledges ancient political realities when she states "this notion that there are socio-political dynamics involved in 'heresy-making' has by now become commonplace in early Christian studies." Earlier in her essay she postulates "what if Paulinism is no longer the hallmark of the 'insider' but rather a version of Christianity that may have been 'outside' the mainstream?" Sheila E. McGinn, "Internal Renew and Dissent in the Early Christian World," *The Early Christian World*, ed. Philip F. Esler (New York: Routledge, 2017), 842–44.

3. Melanie Layton, *The Truth About the Dead Sea Scrolls and Nag Hammadi Writings in Reference to Mormonism* (Wheeling, IL: np, 1979), 54, quoted in Eugene Seaich, *Mormonism, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Nag Hammadi Texts* (Murray, UT: Sounds of Zion, 1980), 16. Seaich aptly summarizes the traditional Latter-day Saint approach to the Dead Sea Scrolls and Nag Hammadi texts around the time Erickson was making his audio tapes. "All scholars today recognize that the new discoveries were connected in very intimate ways with Primitive Christianity. They were in fact much closer to the central core of original belief than the 3rd and 4th century amalgam of Greek metaphysics and Canon which came to be known as 'orthodoxy.'" Ibid., 58.

> Saint notions and, on the other hand, diverge strikingly. Because of this situation, attempts to establish authenticity on the basis of LDS parallels in such apocryphal literature should be tempered and evidence carefully weighed.[4]

The Nag Hammadi texts were hidden by Christians near the ancient Egyptian settlement of Chenoboskian. No one is exactly sure who hid these texts, although some scholars have assumed that a small faction of nearby Christian monks desired to preserve these texts as groups considered heretical were actively persecuted by the church establishment in the fourth century.[5] Included in the thirteen papyrus codices are 46 different texts of which 31 were previously unknown to scholars.[6] The wide-ranging corpus has "source material on early Christian, Neoplatonic, Hermetic, Sethian, and Valentinian thought."[7] All of the texts are believed to have been originally composed in Greek and translated into Coptic.[8]

In contrast to the time when Erickson was recording his audio tapes, today's scholars are hesitant to apply the label of "Gnostic" to any one particular historical group or set of beliefs. In fact "the term 'Gnostic' itself is an embattled term."[9] According to Marvin Meyer, the four groups of texts from the Nag Hammadi scriptures are those of "(1) Thomas Christianity, (2) the Sethian school of Gnostic thought, (3) the Valentinian school of Gnostic thought, and (4) Hermetic religion."[10] Often there is little commonality among texts that fall within these groupings, thus supporting further possible divisions. Meyer

4. S. Kent Brown, "The Nag Hammadi Library: A Mormon Perspective," in *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-Day Saints*, ed. C. Wilfred Griggs (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 258.

5. Elaine Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (Toronto: Random House, 2004), 97. "But in 367 C.E., Athanasius, the zealous bishop of Alexandria — an admirer of Irenaeus — issued an Easter letter in which he demanded that Egyptian monks destroy all such writings, except for those he specifically listed as 'acceptable,' even 'canonical' — a list that constitutes virtually all of our present 'New Testament.'"

6. Portions of 52 total texts are included in the corpus but several are repetitious.

7. James M. Robinson, "Preface," *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The Revised and Updated Translation of Sacred Gnostic Texts*, ed. Marvin Meyer (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), xi.

8. Ibid. Scholars argue that several of the texts might have Syrian origins as well.

9. Marvin Meyer, "Epilogue," *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures,* 777.

10. Ibid., 778.

concludes that "scholars today more often analyze each one separately or in relationship with contemporaneous Jewish, Christian, and pagan sources."[11] This is the approach that I will take in this paper.

While most of the documents discovered at Nag Hammadi espouse either some variation of a Gnostic or Hermetic worldview, there are some very interesting exceptions. Birger A. Pearson argues that nine of the texts are either from very early sources (e.g., portions of Plato's *Republic*) or are clearly non-Gnostic because their content argues against Gnostic positions.[12] Most of the texts from the Thomas school fall into this category as does the text of interest for this paper, *The Teachings of Silvanus* (hereafter referred to as *Silvanus*), a text that is sourced independent of Meyer's major four schools and that is demonstrably non-Gnostic.[13] The fourth of five texts in Codex VII, *Silvanus* is extant only in this Nag Hammadi Codex, although there is a short Coptic fragment preserved in the British museum (originally attributed to St. Antony), which scholars now believe is either a quotation from *Silvanus* or from an earlier unknown text that both sourced.

The Teachings of Silvanus

Compared with other writings from the Nag Hammadi library such as *The Gospel of Thomas* or *The Apocryphon of John*, *Silvanus* has received scant attention from biblical scholars and lay readers alike. So I will provide a short introduction to *Silvanus* here followed by a brief source analysis.

11. Marvin Meyer and Elaine H. Pagels, "Introduction," *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, 9.

12. The nine texts are *Gospel of Thomas*, *Book of Thomas the Contender*, *Dialogue of the Savior*, *Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles*, *Authoritative Teaching*, Plato's *Republic*, *Act of Peter*, *Sentences of Sextus*, and *Teachings of Silvanus*. Birger A. Pearson, *Gnosticism and Christianity in Roman and Coptic Egypt* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 76–79. This list does not include three texts, which Pearson argues are reflective of Hermetic beliefs. Later Pearson argues that early Christianity in Alexandria was likely not Gnostic. "While it is possible that Christian (and Jewish) Gnostics could be found in first-century Alexandria, it is more likely, prima facie, to suppose that other, more dominant, varieties of Christianity existed there, more reflective of the Jerusalem origins of the Christian mission and of the dominant varieties of Judaism in Alexandria at the time." Ibid., 89.

13. Only one scholar contends that *Silvanus* is Gnostic. See Jerry L. Sumney, "The *Teachings of Silvanus* as a Gnostic work," *Studies in Religion* 21, no. 2 (1992): 191–206.

The Writings of "Second-Rate Theologians"

Why spend time with a text written by "second-rate theologians," as scholar Roelof Van Den Broek labelled them?[14] Because *Silvanus* is a document unique to the entire Christian corpus. First, it is one of the few non-Gnostic texts included in the Nag Hammadi library. Second, it is reflective of Jewish wisdom traditions, which makes it a "most important witness to the Gentilic Wisdom literature of Early Christianity."[15] Third, the text is the product of at least two (and possibly more) authors who are likely time-distanced by at least a century and possibly more.[16] Fourth, while it is generally agreed that *Silvanus* was compiled in the fourth century, portions of the text "may be as early as the first century," which would make these portions contemporary with several books in the New Testament canon, the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Epistle of Barnabas*, and the *Didache*.[17]

> Although its Greek original could be as late as the early fourth century, it clearly incorporates much older traditions and can therefore shed light on the development of Alexandrian Christian theology from the second, or even the first, century.[18]

Finally, and most surprisingly, there seems to be some tension between the authors of the early and late portions of *Silvanus*. As Van Den Broek states, "it must be doubted whether the man who wrote the theological and christological passages was also the original author of

14. Roelof Van Den Broek, "The Theology of the Teachings of Silvanus," *Vigiliae Christianae* 40, no. 1 (March 1986): 18.

15. Malcolm L. Peel and Jan Zandee, "The Teachings of Silvanus" from "The Library of Nag Hammadi," *Novum Testamentum* 14, fasc. 4 (October 1972): 294. "In fact, it does not possess a form which is readily identifiable with any of the other major types into which New Testament apocryphal writings have been divided, viz. the epistle, book of acts, or apocalypse. Rather, its closest correspondence is with what Johannes Kroll has called 'Spruchweisheit' literature (his example of which is 'The Sentences of Sextus'), as well as with OT and Apocryphal Wisdom literature, such as Proverbs, *Wisdom of Solomon*, and *Sirach*." Ibid., 297, emphasis added.

16. Van Den Broek states "I can only conclude that the materials contained in the *Teachings of Silvanus* come from different times and represent different stages of early Alexandrian theology." Van Den Broek, "The Theology of the Teachings of Silvanus," 17.

17. Birger A. Pearson, "The Teachings of Silvanus," *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, 500.

18. Pearson, *Gnosticism and Christianity in Roman and Coptic Egypt*, 78–79.

the rest of the work. The ethical parts in particular contain ideas which are difficult to reconcile with those of the theological portions."[19]

All five of these characteristics should make *Silvanus* of interest to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Faithful Latter-day Saint scholars have long argued that Latter-day Saint teachings are restored from the original teachings of Christ and that creedal Christianity is a manifestation of fundamental alterations to some of the foundational doctrines of early Christianity (examples include the Godhead, creation *ex materia*, divine embodiment, deification, etc.).[20] A common argument involves comparing the earliest sourced canonical and non-canonical Jewish and Christian texts and highlighting similarities between Latter-day Saint doctrine and these early texts. By way of contrast, Latter-day Saint scholars argue that creedal Christianity is better aligned with later Christian texts and writings. Therefore, the dichotomous nature of *Silvanus* provides an interesting microcosm to test this approach. Within this one document are at least two voices — one early and one late — which can be juxtaposed to illustrate the dramatic change in Christian thought across just a few centuries.

Silvanus was most likely a product of the Alexandrian Christian community. After the crucifixion, Christianity slowly grew among the Jews of the diaspora.[21] Many of these communities were influenced by a

19. Van Den Broek, "The Theology of the Teachings of Silvanus," 17.

20. A small sampling of the wide range of examples of such Latter-day Saint scholarship include: Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks, "Comparing LDS Beliefs with First-Century Christianity," *Ensign* (March 1988); David L. Paulsen, "Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity: Origin and Augustine as Reluctant Witnesses," *Harvard Theological Review*, 83 (1990): 105–16; Barry Robert Bickmore, *Restoring the Ancient Church: Joseph Smith and Early Christianity* (Phoenix: Cornerstone Publishing, 1999); Truman G. Madsen, *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaeo-Christian Parallels* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980); Seaich, *Mormonism, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Nag Hammadi Texts*; Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Early Christians in Disarray: Contemporary LDS Perspectives on the Christian Apostasy* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2005); David L. Paulsen, "Are Mormons Christians? Reassessing Joseph Smith's Theology in His Bicentennial," *BYU Studies* 45, no. 1, (2006): 35–128; Richard R. Hopkins, *How Greek Philosophy Corrupted the Christian Concept of God* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon Publishers, 1998); and Donald W. Musser and David L. Paulsen, *Mormonism in Dialogue with Contemporary Christian Theologies* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007).

21. Rodney Starks argues that "contrary to the received wisdom, Jewish Christianity played a central role until much later in the rise of Christianity — that not only was it Jews of the diaspora who provided the initial basis for church growth during the first and early second centuries, but that Jews continued as a

specific apostle or teacher — the most prominent being Peter, James, John, Thomas, and Paul. An influential community of Jewish Christians took hold in Alexandria with traditions crediting the founding to either Mark or James.[22] Pearson argued that "the earliest Christianity in Egypt (i.e., Alexandria) was Jewish, and that the earliest Christians in Egypt would have been an integral part of the Jewish community in Alexandria. That community, as is well known, came to a brutal end with the catastrophic revolt of the Jews against Rome 115–117" CE.[23] Although Walter Bauer has argued that "the original and most dominant form of Christianity in Alexandria … was 'heretical' and, specifically, Gnostic,"[24] more recent scholars have demonstrated that what Bauer calls "Gnostic" Christianity developed after the second century[25] and that it was only one of six distinct forms of Christianity to be found in Alexandria.[26] In addition to the Nag Hammadi texts, this vibrant community of theological thought produced many well-known Jewish and Christian thinkers and writers including Philo, Apollos, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Arius, and Athanasius.

So who was the named author *Silvanus*? Although it is possible that the title refers to a teacher active in Alexandria during the fourth century, it is most likely that *Silvanus* is meant to recall one of Paul's companions (2 Corinthians 1:19, 1 Thessalonians 1:1–2, 2 Thessalonians 1:1). While

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significant source of Christian converts until at least as late as the fourth century and that Jewish Christianity was significant in the fifth century." Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 49.

22. Birger A. Pearson, "Cracking a Conundrum: Christian Origins in Egypt," *Studia Theologica* 57 (2003): 61. One of the best known examples of Christian literature produced by early Alexandrian Christians is the *Epistle of Barnabas*; Barnabas tradition holds that he is Mark's cousin. James makes appearances in other Alexandrian documents such as the *Gospel of the Hebrews*. Pearson recounts these traditions but cautions that neither "can hardly be credited with historical veracity."

23. Ibid., 62.

24. Birger A. Pearson, "Christians and Jews in First-Century Alexandria," *The Harvard Theological Review* 79, nos. 1/3 (January–July 1986): 211.

25. Pearson, "Cracking a Conundrum," 62. "Much more plausible is the view put forward by papyrologist Colin Roberts based on his study of the earliest Christian literary papyri, dating from the second century. These earliest papyri provide absolutely no support for Bauer's view that Gnosticism was the earliest and, for a long time, most dominant form of Christianity in Egypt."

26. Roelof Van Den Broek, "Studies in Gnosticism and Alexandrian Christianity" (New York: E. J. Brill, 1996), 181–96.

the *Silvanus* text has proven difficult to date, the scholarly consensus is best represented by Pearson who argues that "the tractate consists of two main parts."[27] The first part "may be as early as the first century" and the second part may be as "late as the early fourth century."[28] The final document was likely compiled in the first few decades of the fourth century from the two aforementioned sources.[29]

A Brief Source Analysis

Because a multi-author *Silvanus* text is critical to this analysis, it is worth taking a brief moment to discuss why scholars have concluded that *Silvanus* comes from at least two sources. Since Codex VII was first published, there has been relatively little scholarly interest in *Silvanus* with only a handful of available English translations and few publications focused solely upon the text.[30] When *Silvanus* was first translated with Codex VII, scholars assumed a single author "unified whole" with a late (third or fourth century) date of composition.[31] As scholars paid more attention to the text they noticed a dichotomy between the first and second halves of the book. As early as 1970, the most active *Silvanus*

27. Pearson, "The Teachings of Silvanus," 500. Pearson's point of demarcation between the two is part one (84, 16–98, 20: approximately 40% of the text) and part two (98, 20–118, 7: approximately 60% of the text). Although Pearson and others are wont to group the text into two distinct categories (e.g., old-new, ethical-theological, etc.), it is possible that multiple authors or editors are also silently at work in the final redacted text.

28. Ibid., 500. It has taken several years for scholars to recognize the distinction between the authors and thus the different dates. *Silvanus* scholarship has been hampered by attempts to assign a date that would accommodate this assumption of single authorship.

29. Van Den Broek states "I want to argue that The Teachings of Silvanus were composed in the first decades of the fourth century, though partly based on much older materials." Van Den Broek, "The Theology of the Teachings of Silvanus," 2. Later Van den Broek says "Whoever Silvanus may have been, he was more a compiler than an original author." Ibid., 17.

30. For the easiest available translation see Peel and Zandee, "The Teachings of Silvanus," 294–311, http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/silvanus.html. For more detailed study I recommend either Pearson, "The Teachings of Silvanus" (more easily accessed), or Malcolm Peel and Jan Zandee, "The Teachings of Silvanus," in *Nag Hammadi Codex VII*, ed. Birger Pearson (New York: E. J. Brill, 1996), although this is somewhat difficult to find and expensive.

31. Pearson attributes this phrase to Zandee in "The Teachings of Silvanus," 499.

scholar, Jan Zandee, had divided the text into two parts[32] but remained a supporter of single authorship until his death in 1991. Malcolm Peel, the author of the influential 1996 Brill translation of *Silvanus*, still assumed a single author at the time of this publication but addressed the issue of the text's duality by speculating that it was caused by "a compilation over time of notes by the author."[33]

The pioneering work of two other early scholars questioned this "unified whole" assumption and suggested multi-authors or sources. Wolf-Peter Funk demonstrated that the portion of *Silvanus* (97, 3–98, 22) attested by the St. Antony fragment found in the British Museum was from an older independent wisdom text.[34] This opened the possibility of multiple text sources in *Silvanus* vis-à-vis the "unified whole" theory. Thus, William R. Schoedel, who wrote the *Silvanus* summary for the Anchor Bible Dictionary, notes in 1992 that the text "leaves the impression of being a collection of diverse materials and probably represents the end product of a long literary development."[35]

Nevertheless, as scholars continued to attempt to date *Silvanus* they began to realize the two parts of the work seemed to best fit in two different time frames. Roelof Van Den Broek was the first to try and resolve this conundrum and as early as 1986 argued "the *Teachings of Silvanus* were composed in the first decades of the fourth century, though partly based on much older material."[36] He identified that the ethical portion of the narrative fit a second-century date and argued that

32. Jan Zandee, *God and Man* in "The Teachings of Silvanus," (Proceedings of the XIIth International Congress for the International Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions, Stockholm, Sweden, August 16–22, 1970), 209.

33. See Peel's introduction to *Silvanus* in the definitive translation of Codex VII, *Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies: Nag Hammadi Codex VII*, ed. J. M. Robinson and H. J. Klimkeit (New York: E. J. Brill, 1996), 255. Peel's introduction was heavily influenced by Zandee who he lists as co-author even though he had passed away five years prior to the final publication.

34. Wolf-Peter Funk, "Ein Doppelt Uberliefertes Stuck Spatagyptischer Weishet," *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 103 (1976): 18–19. Since my German is spotty, I am reliant upon Schoedel who summarizes Funk as "a common source may lie behind *Teach. Silv.* And *Ps-Antony*." William R. Schoedel, "Teachings of Silvanus," *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, vol. 6, ed. David Noel Freedman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 342.

35. Ibid., 342.

36. Van Den Broek, "The Theology of the Teachings of Silvanus," 2. Van Den Broek and Zandee are the two scholars who have written most prolifically on *Silvanus*.

the theological portion had some dependency upon Athanasius, which would date it as late as the fourth century.[37] This led him to conclude multiple authorship of *Silvanus*.

> All this points to the second and third decades of the fourth century as the most probable date of composition or, perhaps better, compilation of the *Teachings of Silvanus*. For it must be doubted whether the man who wrote the theological and Christological passages was also the original author of the rest of the work. The ethical parts in particular contain ideas which are difficult to reconcile with those of the theological portions. … I can only conclude that the materials contained in *The Teachings of Silvanus* come from different times and represent different stages of early Alexandrian theology. … Whoever *Silvanus* may have been, he was more a compiler than an original author.[38]

By 2007, when Pearson authored the *Silvanus* introduction for a new translation of the Nag Hammadi corpus, he references the history of *Silvanus* scholarship and gives the most up-to-date conclusion regarding authorship:

> Although attempts have been made to understand the tractate as a "unified whole," it is clearly an agglutinative text that has grown over a considerable period of time. The basic and oldest stratum of material stems from Hellenistic Jewish wisdom and philosophy such as was characteristic of first-century Alexandrian Judaism. The most important exemplars of this variety of Judaism are the *Wisdom of Solomon* and the writings of Philo Judaeus. Of course, the *Teachings of Silvanus* as we know it is clearly a Christian writing, parts of which may be as early as the first century and other parts as late as the early fourth century.[39]

Because so little scholarly attention has been paid to *Silvanus*, there has been little critical debate about the Schoedel, Van Den Broek, and

37. Ibid., 2.

38. Ibid., 17.

39. Pearson, "The Teachings of Silvanus," 499–500. With regards to a "unified whole" Pearson specifically indicates that he is referencing the earlier work by scholar Jan Zandee.

Pearson position concerning multiple *Silvanus* sources.[40] There are a number of compelling reasons for multiple authorship. The sharp contrast in style between the ethical wisdom teachings of the first portion and the philosophical and theological ones of the second is self-evident. The two parts also reflect the writings and teachings of those from different Alexandrian time periods. The first part echoes Philo of Alexandria, Jewish wisdom texts, and Stoicism while the second seems to convey Neoplatonism, Origen, Clement, and possibly even Athanasius.

> The tractate consists of two main parts. The first part (84, 16–98, 20) is devoted largely to moral philosophy and can be regarded as a Jewish compendium of moral teaching influenced by Stoicism and Platonism, to which Christian features have been added. The Christian additions consist largely of crediting Jesus Christ as the source of the teacher's wisdom. The second part (98, 20–118, 7) is more explicitly theological and reflects the theological and Christological teachings of the Alexandrian teachers Clement and Origen.[41]

Zandee's pioneering work on *Silvanus* demonstrated significant dependencies between the text and Alexandrian Christian fathers Clement and Origen. Examples include a) only through Christ "the *Logos*" can the true likeness and image of God be known,[42] b) Christ as personified Wisdom,[43] c) presenting an allegorized version of the temple cleaning,[44] d) Christ as the True Vine that yields the True

40. Ellen Muehlberger's one-page introduction to a recent Silvanus translation does not raise the issues of multiple sources and simply states "the text has no firm dating" other than the codex dating. Ellen Muehlberger, "The Teachings of Silvanus Nag Hammadi Codex VII, Work 4" in *The Cambridge Edition of Early Christian Writings*, vol. 2: *Practice*, ed. E. Muehlberger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 13. Two other recent articles referencing Silvanus seem dependent on Zandee's early scholarship and, likewise, do not address the issue. (See Piotr Ashwin-Siejkowski, "The Teachings of Silvanus [NHC VII, 4] and the Education of the Christian Mind" in *Gnosis: The Journal of Gnostic Studies* 3 (2018): 177–201; and Blossom Stefaniw, "Masculinity as Flight: Vulnerability, Devotion, Submission and Sovereignty in the Teachings of Silvanus," *Journal of Early Christian History* 11, no. 1 (2021): 66–87.

41. Pearson, "The Teachings of Silvanus," 500.

42. Compare *Silvanus,* 100, 23–29 and Clement's *Stromata,* 5.94.4–5.

43. Compare *Silvanus,* 112, 37–113, 7 and Clement's *Stromata,* 7.7.4 or Origen's *Principiis,* 1.2.5, 9–13.

44. Compare *Silvanus,* 109, 15–17 and Origen's *Commentary on John,* 10.16.

Wine,[45] and e) the contention that God is not locatable in space.[46] By my count, Peel, summarizing Zandee's work, presents fifteen examples of textual affinities with Clement or Origen, and each and every one of these examples relates to something in the second part of *Silvanus*.[47] No scholar, to my knowledge, has identified a directly dependent relationship between a passage in the first part of *Silvanus* and Clement, Origen, or any of the later Alexandrian fathers.

The two parts of *Silvanus* also exhibit noticeably different awareness and usage patterns of scriptural texts, particularly the New Testament (see Figure 1).[48] With such an early proposed composition time frame, it is unclear how aware the author of the first portion of *Silvanus* was of the entire New Testament library. The Hebrew Bible and Jewish wisdom texts[49] are as likely to be referenced in this part of *Silvanus* as the New Testament and, importantly, there are no direct New Testament citations and only a small number (12) of "possible or general echoes."[50] For example, there is some commonality between *Silvanus* 88, 15–16, which reads "live in Christ and you will obtain treasure in heaven," and New Testament passages that also reference "treasure in heaven" (Mark 10:21, Luke 18:22). But it is difficult to definitively determine which, if any, of the books of the New Testament the first author might or might not have had access to.[51] This is to be expected if, as the multiple source

45. Compare *Silvanus*, 107, 26–108, 2 and Origen's *Commentary on John,* 1.205–208.

46. Compare *Silvanus,* 99, 29–100, 12 and Clement's *Stromata,* 1.51.1 and Origen's *Against Celsus,* 7.34.

47. Peel, *Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies*, 265–67.

48. Peel acknowledges this — "it may be observed that the first part of the tractate is more philosophical, the latter more explicitly Christian and biblical." Ibid., 254. Importantly both reference the Old Testament equally; the only real difference is the familiarity and use of the New Testament.

49. Specifically *Book of Wisdom* and *Wisdom of Sirach*.

50. Terms suggested by Peel, *Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies*, 259.

51. There are some intriguing parallels between the first author's writings and the first four chapters of 1 Corinthians. Both address the topics of wisdom ("even the hidden wisdom," 1 Corinthians 2:7) and acknowledge the Spirit's role in facilitating it, reference humanity's animalist nature, and are giving advice to "beloved sons" (1 Corinthians 4:14). While these thematic parallels are not sufficient to argue for textual interdependency, Pearson has argued that the similarities could be explained by Apollos who is referenced repeatedly by Paul in 1 Corinthians and who likely found his way to Corinth from Alexandria. "I have commented elsewhere on the relationship between *Silvanus* and 1 Corinthians 1–4, and suggested that Silvanus retains, as part of its Alexandrian Christian tradition,

argument suggests, the first portion of *Silvanus* was written prior to the canonization of the New Testament texts.

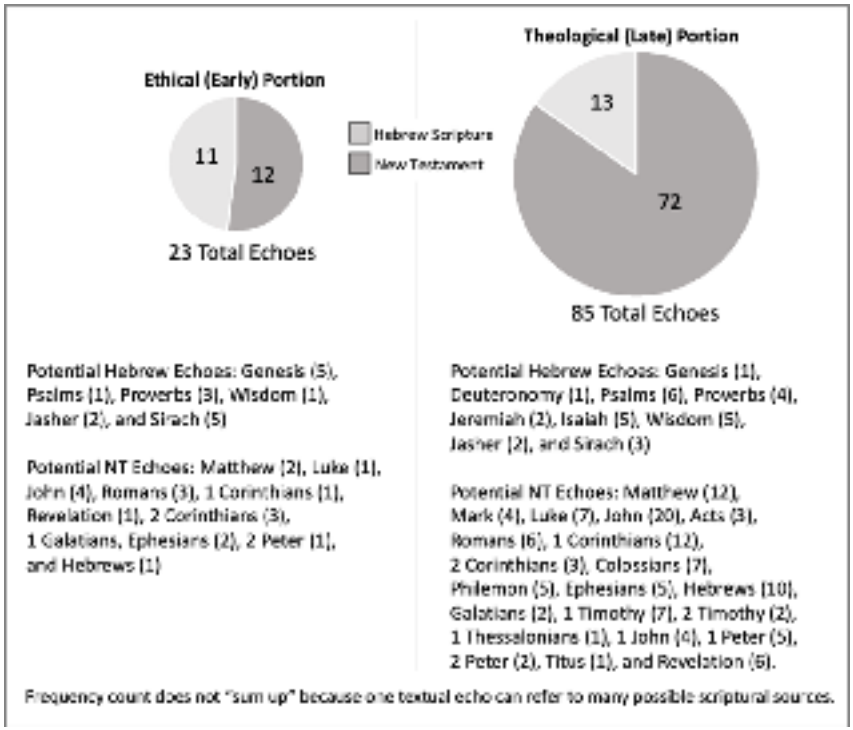

Figure 1. Reliance upon scriptural sources: How frequently the text echos a scriptural source.

In an introduction to non-canonical Christian texts dating to the second century, William Schneemelcher provides a useful summary of the historical context that is applicable to the early portion of *Silvanus*.

> It must be observed that the canon of the NT only developed in the course of the 2nd century and that for a long time its limits were still uncertain. Also we can scarcely assume that all communities immediately possessed a complete exemplar of the NT; probably only separate writings, which were regarded as authoritative, were available. … For our literature we may

a good deal of the 'speculative wisdom' already encountered by Paul in first-century Corinth, presumably mediated by the Alexandrian Jewish teacher Apollos. Apollos, 'an eloquent man, well versed in the scriptures' may very well have been a pupil of Philo." Pearson, "Cracking a Conundrum," 70.

> at any rate determine that for the most part it originated without any reference to a canon of the NT.[52]

On the other hand, the author of the second portion either directly or indirectly references nearly all of the books in the New Testament canon. A complete analysis of biblical references within the *Silvanus* text demonstrates sizeable and noticeable differences with regard to how the two portions of the text utilized the New Testament.[53] Of the 85 biblical references in the second part, most of these (72) refer to a New Testament text, and many are direct citations of New Testament writings.[54] (In contrast, the first part of *Silvanus* has only 23 biblical echoes and only 12 of these echo the New Testament.) In the second part there are references or echoes to all but four of the books of the New Testament.[55] Late in the second part of *Silvanus* the apostle Paul is specifically mentioned by name ("But he who makes himself like God is one who does nothing unworthy of God, according to the statement of Paul who has become like Christ"),[56] a direct reference to 1 Corinthians 11:1. The "scripture of God" is also referenced in a way that likely refers to the New Testament *as scripture* and not just the Hebrew Bible.[57]

52. William Schneemelcher, "Introduction," in *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 2, ed. Wilhem Schneemelcher (Louisville: Westminister John Knox Press, 2003), 3.

53. The intertextual relationship data in Figure 1 is from *Nag Hammadi Texts and the Bible: A Synopsis and Index*, ed. Craig A. Evans, Robert L. Webb, and Richard A. Wiebe (New York: E. J. Brill, 1993). The editors chaired a committee tasked with identifying parallels between Nag Hammadi and Biblical texts. While they acknowledge that their results are not (and never will be) definitive, it is methodologically sufficient and valid for our comparative examination.

54. A particularly compelling example is cited by both Peel and Pearson. It is clear that both portions of Silvanus are aware of Jewish wisdom literature. But a usage in the second part has sparked considerable interest. "[A] key passage crucial in Alexandrian Christology (viz., Wis 7:25–26 — about personified Wisdom as 'an emanation of the Almighty's glory,' 'a spotless mirror' of 'God's working,' and the 'image of his goodness') is specifically cited in *Teach. Silv.* 112, 37–113, 7. R. M. Grant has maintained that this Hellenistic Jewish wisdom text was not used by either Palestinian or Hellenistic Jewish writers (such as Philo), nor, apparently, by Gnostic authors either." Peel, *Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies,* 259. Clement of Alexandria was the first to use Wisdom 7:25–26 in this manner and the second part of *Silvanus* directly echoes this argument about personified Wisdom.

55. The only books without a distinct echo are 2 Thessalonians, James, 2 John, and 3 John.

56. *Silvanus*, 108, 27–32.

57. *Silvanus*, 104, 3–6.

The two authors also have different vernaculars, lexicons, and word usage patterns. The first author refers to "God" only ten times, three of which are specific titles that writers of the Hebrew Bible favor (Most High God and Holy Father). On the other hand, the second author mentions God often — 57 times — but rarely gives an accompanying title. The second author also refers to the "Lord" while the first author does not. The second author mentions the name of "Christ" much more frequently (5 mentions versus 33 mentions) but only the first author ever uses the proper name "Jesus." The first part includes the term "evil one" as a reference for the devil in a manner similar to Philo's usage[58] while the second part uses the term "adversary."

But the most compelling evidence for the conclusion that *Silvanus* has early and late sources is that the first and second parts' teachings are *not a unified whole*; in fact, they often appear divergent.[59] These differences and how they relate to the restored teachings of Joseph Smith are the focus of the remainder of this paper.

The Teachings of Two Silvanuses

When approaching the Nag Hammadi texts, Tuckett offers good advice about historical context that I will try to adhere to whenever possible.

> Nobody writes in a vacuum. Every literary text presupposes various traditions. The use of language itself is limited by sets of conventions concerning the meaning and use of words and phrases. … Behind every writer there are many different influences: these include linguistic traditions concerning the meaning of the language used, social traditions reflecting the social structures within which the writer works, and, in the case of a religious text, religious traditions presupposed by the author.[60]

Our focus will be upon examining the differences between the two parts of *Silvanus*. However, it should be noted that the majority of the two portions of the text display a number of ethical and theological commonalities. One example of such a similarity is the text's unified

58. Pearson "The Teachings of Silvanus," 504.

59. Van Den Broek provides a list of four differences before stating "I can only conclude that the materials in the *Teachings of Silvanus* come from different times and represent different stages of early Alexandrian theology." Van Den Broek, "The Theology of the Teachings of Silvanus," 17.

60. C. M. Tuckett, *Nag Hammadi and the Gospel Tradition: Synoptic Tradition in the Nag Hammadi Library* (Edinburgh, GBR: T&T Clark, 1986), 1.

teachings about deification. Both the early and late sources comment on the divine nature of man and each are doctrinally consistent with the prevailing beliefs of their respective time periods. Below is an early *Silvanus* passage on deification followed by a late *Silvanus* passage.[61]

> **EARLY:** Do not bring grief and trouble to the divine which is within you. But when you foster it, request of it that you remain pure, and become self-controlled in your soul and body. Then you will become a throne of wisdom and a member of God's household.[62]
>
> **LATE:** He who has exalted man became like man, not in order to bring God down to man but to make man like God.[63]

The topic of deification or *theosis* does not appear to have been heavily disputed in Alexandria during Christianity's formative years, thus the understandable agreement between the early and late parts of *Silvanus*.[64] In fact, the latter author seems to teach *theosis* more explicitly than the early author who merely implies it. Van Den Broek points out compelling similarities between the late *Silvanus* passage and the words of a fourth-century Alexandrian contemporary, Athanasius, who penned the famous statement "for he became man that we might become God."[65]

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61. Unless otherwise noted, all Silvanus quotations are from either the Birger A. Pearson or Malcolm Peel translations. See Pearson, "The Teachings of Silvanus," 504–21 and Peel, *Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies*, 279–369.

62. *Silvanus*, 92, 1–10.

63. *Silvanus*, 111, 7–13. Translation by Van den Broek, "Teachings of Silvanus," 16.

64. As an example see the quick summary regarding theosis among early Christians in Peterson and Ricks, "Comparing LDS Beliefs with First-Century Christianity." Evangelical theologian Clark Pinnock says "we have not felt comfortable saying that humans 'become gods,' as Latter-day Saints have, even though we know that early Christians did speak of our human destiny in such terms. For example, Irenaeus writes, 'Christ became what we are so that we might become what he is," and Athanasius writes, 'He became man that we become divine." Clark H. Pinnock, "A Dialogue on Openness Theology," *Mormonism in Dialogue with Contemporary Christian Theologies*, ed. Donald W. Musser and David L. Paulsen (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007), 504.

65. Van Den Broek, "Teachings of Silvanus," 16. Because of this and other similarities between the late source and Athanasius, Van Den Broek argues that the late author knew of Athanasius' writings. Other scholars prefer a slightly earlier date for the late author (pre-Athanasius).

Another interesting teaching supported in both parts of *Silvanus* is self-assessment and self-determination. "In *Silvanus*' view, human nature is not weakened by ('original') sin."[66] Instead the source of evil is "blindness of mind" or "ignorance."

There are also many individual subjects addressed by one part of the text without corresponding commentary in the other, many of which are intriguing to Latter-day Saint readers and warrant additional investigation. For example, in an early passage the son is told "when you were born again, you came to be inside the bridal chamber and you were illuminated in mind."[67] Contextually, the text implies the bridegroom to be Christ, the bridal chamber analogy being quite popular in later Nag Hammadi texts.[68]

The second part of *Silvanus* almost casually refers to Christ's descent into the underworld and provides some intriguing details:

> **LATE:** How many likenesses did Christ take on because of you? Although he was God, he was found among men as a man. He descended to the Underworld. He released the children of death. They were in travail, as the Scripture of God has said, and he sealed up the very heart of it.[69]

With regards to topics like these where there is no apparent disagreement between the two parts of *Silvanus*, Latter-day Saint readers will find useful and familiar teachings from both the early and later portions. The second author, in particular, cites the New Testament significantly more often than the first author and echoes many of John's and Paul's teachings about Christ. Certainly, Latter-day Saint readers will find doctrinal commonality with many of these passages, especially as Christ's divinity is emphasized (e.g., "He is the Light, the Angel, and the Good Shepherd"[70]).

66. Piotr Ashwin-Siejkowski, "The Teachings of Silvanus (NHC VII,4) and the Education of the Christian Mind," *Gnosis: Journal of Gnostic Studies* 3 (2018): 193.

67. *Silvanus*, 94, 27–28.

68. Strathearn notes seven other texts that mention the bridal chamber (*Gospel of Thomas*, *Dialogue of the Savior*, *Second Treatise of the Great Seth*, *Authoritative Teaching*, *Exegesis of the Soul*, *Tripartite Tractate*, *and Gospel of Philip).* Gaye Strathearn, "The Valentinian Bridal Chamber in the Gospel of Philip," *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 1 (2009): 85.

69. *Silvanus,* 103, 33–104, 8. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out this passage. It is most likely that the text is directly citing Romans 8:22 here although some scholars, such as Pearson, suggest Psalm 7.

70. *Silvanus,* 106, 26–28.

But our interest in this paper lies in those instances where the first and second parts seem to disagree theologically, and our hypothesis is that Latter-day Saint readers will be more comfortable with the first author's position on these specific issues vis-à-vis the second. I also hypothesize that Protestant Christians, as represented by the archetype of Calvinism for this paper, will be more comfortable with the writings of the second author on these same issues. To determine the Latter-day Saint and Calvinist positions, I have used 1) the gospel topics portion of the Latter-day Saint website[71] and 2) a theological guide written by Calvinist scholars on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of John Calvin's birth.[72] The point of this paper is to not create a caricature strawman of the positions of either faith. Rather, if I have done my work correctly, practitioners of both traditions should nod their heads affirmatively at these comparisons.

While scholars have commented on the dichotomous nature of the *Silvanus* text and several have identified some of the differences, no paper that I know of has suggested that the latter author was purposefully commenting on or correcting the earlier author. Given the extent of topical duplication between the two parts, I suggest that "setting the record straight" was a motivating factor for the second *Silvanus* author, particularly in relation to topics such as the Godhead, the nature of God, and especially the personification of the divine feminine (wisdom).

71. I am aware that Latter-day Saint doctrine has evolved over time and that there are nuances and theological disagreements on nearly every subject. Realizing the impossibility of accommodating all of the nuances, I decided that the most definitive and official approach to determine current Church doctrine was to refer directly to the "Gospel Topics" section found at ChurchofJesusChrist.org (quotations from spring 2022).

72. *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, ed. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2008). While the Latter-day Saint position can be reasonably deemed "official," there is no such thing as "official" Calvinist theology. Even the popular moniker of TULIP is highly disputed among Calvinist scholars. For example, "The question as to whether Calvin taught limited or unlimited atonement has been the matter of considerable debate." Robert A. Peterson, "Calvin of Christ's Saving Work," in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, ed. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2008), 246. I selected this collection of essays because it is representative of the active discussion underway regarding the writings and teachings of John Calvin.

The Nature of God

> LATTER-DAY SAINT VIEW:
> God the Father is the Supreme Being in whom we believe, whom we worship, and to whom we pray. He is the ultimate Creator, Ruler, and Preserver of all things. He is perfect, has all power, and knows all things. He "has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man's." … As children of God, we have a special relationship with Him, setting us apart from all His other creations. We should seek to know our Father in Heaven.[73]

> CALVINIST VIEW:
> God is not imaginable. All the things we invent are idols of the mind, products of our own imagination, for God ever remains like himself and is not a spectre or phantasm to be transformed according to our desires. It is a fact, however, that the mind of the fallen man remains a perpetual factory of idols and false imaginations of God, so that he is always projecting his own inventions or figments upon God.[74]

Silvanus is written in the form of a Jewish wisdom text similar to Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the non-biblical *Book of Wisdom* and *The Wisdom of Sirach*. It includes common wisdom elements such as a) a father addressing a son, b) the giving of life advice and common-sense sayings, c) the contrasting between the wise and the foolish, and d) a focus on obtaining wisdom. Both the first and second portions of the text utilize this basic structure.[75]

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73. "God the Father," Gospel Topics, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/god-the-father.

74. T. F. Torrance, "The Hermeneutics of John Calvin" (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1988), 91. Calvin wrote God's "infinity ought to make us afraid to try and measure him by our own senses. Indeed, his spiritual nature forbids our imagining anything earthy or carnal of him." John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., Library of Christian Classics 20–21, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1960), 1.13.1.

75. Discussing the similarity to wisdom texts, Peel argues "even so, the latter half of the text, which is more explicitly Christological and theological than the first half, seems to present a more structured scheme of presentations: warnings alternating with sections of discourse about Christ and/or God." Peel, *Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies*, 254.

God is mentioned eleven times in the first portion of *Silvanus*, and many of these mentions are in the context of his role as a member of the Godhead. But there are some interesting themes that bear detailed examination. First, the early author often adds adjectival titles that modify the word "God." Thus, he refers to "God, the holy Father," "your first Father, God," and God the "Exalted One."[76] This latter title is interesting and brings the Hebrew name *El Elyôn* or "Most High God" to mind; "the title *Elyôn* is an old epithet of *El*."[77]

> In the earliest Hebrew pantheon, the head God was referred to variously as El, Elohim, El Elyon, and El Shaddai, among other epithets. In the patriarchal age, El Elyon was the name of the God whom Melchizedek worshipped and to whom Abraham paid tithes. El Elyon can mean "the Supreme God," or "the Most High God," "El the Highest One," or "El who is the God Elyon."[78]

There are only a handful of occurrences of *elyôn* in the New Testament and nearly all of these are by the author Luke (one of the others found in the book of *Hebrews* is quoting Genesis).[79] This title is not used in first- and second-century Alexandrian contemporary writings like the *Epistle of Barnabas*, *Gospel of Thomas*, or the *Didache*, so to find it here in early *Silvanus* is relatively rare.[80] These titles help establish the preeminence of the Father's position in the Godhead, and their use implies that the early author is trying to distinguish the unique nature of God the Father — a topic that will be discussed in more specific detail later.[81]

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76. *Silvanus,* 91, 7 and 88, 11.

77. Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 56.

78. Blake T. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: Of God and Gods,* vol. 3 (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2008), 17.

79. "The Coptic expression is the equivalent of the Greek uyistoζ. It occurs nine times in the NT as a designation of God, seven of which are found in the writings of Luke." Jan Zandee, "The Teachings of Silvanus (NHC VII, 4) and Jewish Christianity," *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions Presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday* (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 1981), 510.

80. Zandee provides comparative examples of three Christian texts that use the nomenclature "Most High" (*Pseudo-Clementines*, *Acts of Thomas*, and *Odes of Solomon*) but concludes "as the use in the NT is rare, the occurrence in Silvanus might be a trace of Jewish Christianity." Zandee, "The Teachings of Silvanus (NHC VII,4) and Jewish Christianity," 510.

81. Early *Silvanus*' references to God the father also bring to mind similar passages in the contemporary *Gospel of Thomas.* Of the 15 references to "God" in

Second, early *Silvanus* describes God using personal, relational, and intimate terminology. In the first mention of God in *Silvanus*, the father advises his son, using a personal fortress metaphor, to invite God to dwell in his personal camp.

> **EARLY:** Entrust yourself to this pair of friends, reason and mind, and no one will be victorious over you. May God dwell in your camp, may his Spirit protect your gates, and may the mind of divinity protect the walls.[82]

While this passage is clearly metaphorical, it does not seem outlandish for the author to suggest that God can *dwell* within the walls of one's personal camp. To dwell within an inner "camp" suggests the possibility of a deeply personal and intimate relationship with God himself. This metaphor also implies that it is possible to locate God in space or time independent of the other members of the Godhead.

The other mentions of God by the early author build upon this theme of relatability. The son is told "entrust yourself to God alone as father and as friend" and that if the son will "be pleasing to God you will not need anyone."[83] The imagery of father *and* friend implies an interpersonal relationship of depth, love, and respect that is unachievable without an intimate knowledge and shared experiences between two individuals.

The remainder of the early text attempts to establish the reasons for desiring such an intimate relationship. God is the exalted One, he is the pupil's "first" father, and the pupil is a "member of God's household."[84] The pupil's mind has been created in the "image of God," and he has taken shape "from the substance of God."[85] And God is the "spiritual one" upon whom the son should "cast his anxieties."[86] The author is explaining to his son that God is his first father, that he was created from the substance of God, that the son can become a member of God's household, and that God is the son's one true spiritual friend. In short, the son is being told to *seek to know his Father in Heaven*.

Thomas, only two use "God" and thirteen use "Father." The only use of the title God in *Thomas* is the phrase "Give Caesar the things that are Caesar's give God the things that are God's." (*Gospel of Thomas* 100; 2–3) while phrases like "the Father's kingdom," the "Father's light," and the "living Father" are common.

82. *Silvanus,* 86, 13–20.
83. *Silvanus,* 98, 8–10 and 98, 18–20.
84. *Silvanus,* 92, 8.
85. *Silvanus,* 92, 24–25; 93, 27. This will be discussed in greater detail later.
86. *Silvanus,* 89, 16–17; 93, 24–25.

Third, while both authors describe God in anthropomorphic terms, it is only the early author that appears comfortable with the concept of an embodied God the father. The earliest known Hebrew texts described God in anthropomorphic imagery (i.e., Ezekiel 1:26, Genesis 1:26–28) but post-Exilic Judaism consciously attempted to mute these images.

> The avoidance of anthropomorphic imagery was by no means a general feature of Israelite religion after the Exile. While the tendency away from anthropomorphism marks priestly and Deuteronomistic traditions belonging to the eighth through the fifth centuries, later works belonging to the priestly traditions continued to transmit anthropomorphic imagery. … Nonbiblical Jewish literature from the fourth to second centuries, including 1 Enoch and the Book of Jubilees, represents an additional source of speculation. The anthropomorphic language of Yahweh, other divine beings, and their heavenly realms never disappeared from Israel. The relative absence of this imagery from biblical texts during the second half of the monarchy reflects a religious reaction against Israel's old Canaanite heritage.[87]

The New Testament and other early Christian writings do not attempt to mute this anthropomorphic imagery, rather they tend to embrace it. For example, every major New Testament author references Psalm 110:1 and the "right hand" of God.[88] Notably for our survey, Egyptian Christians were well-known defenders of the concept of divine embodiment. Catholic author Stephen Webb openly wonders what would have happened "if the monks of Egypt had won their battle in defense of anthropomorphism."[89] He cites the example of an elderly fourth-century Egyptian monk named Sarapion who seemed befuddled after being taught the newly decreed doctrine of God's incorporeal nature. When another explained the new teachings to him, he said he understood and agreed to a joint outpouring of prayer. "Amid the prayers, however, the old monk became confused for he sensed that the human image of God which he used to draw before him as he prayed was now gone from his heart. Suddenly he began weeping in an anguished manner, threw

87. Smith, *The Early History of God*, 145–46.

88. Interestingly the second *Silvanus* author also references Psalm 110:1 ("for this hand of the Father is Christ"). *Silvanus,* 115, 5.

89. Stephen H. Webb, *Jesus Christ, Eternal God: Heavenly Flesh and the Metaphysics of Matter* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 244.

himself to the ground, and cried out, 'they've taken my God away from me.'"[90]

The second *Silvanus* author, likely writing in the third century, effectively "takes away" this embodied God. According to the second author, not only is it not right to claim that God is embodied, it is difficult to even imagine what God's true nature is, and even the angels find it difficult to fully comprehend God.

> **LATE:** But we are able to mention what is more exalted than this: for do not think in your heart that God exists in a place. If you localize the Lord of all in a place, then it is fitting for you to say that the place is more exalted than him who dwells in it. For that which contains is more exalted than that which is contained. For there is no place which is said to be without a body. For it is not right for us to say that God is a body. For the consequence would be that we must attribute both increase and decrease to the body but also that one who is subject to these will not remain imperishable. Now, it is not difficult to know the Creator of all creatures, but it is impossible to comprehend the likeness of this One. For it is difficult not only for men to comprehend God, but it is also difficult for every divine being both the angels and the archangels.[91]

In stark contrast to the simple and inviting terminology of the first part of *Silvanus*, the second part describes God in a manner befitting philosophers under the influence of Neoplatonism. God the Father is now incorporeal, ineffable, impassible, unknowable, and incomprehensible. Statements like "it is impossible to comprehend what God is like," "everything is in God but God is not in anything" and "God sees everyone; no one looks at him" are typical of the second author.[92] In comparing the late *Silvanus* text to the writings of Church Fathers Clement and Origen, Peel and Zandee note "both these Fathers under the influence of late Platonic ideas view God as the Hidden One who is known only with great difficulty. Because He is '. . . above place and time, and name and thought' we can know what God is not but not what He really is."[93] Likewise, the second part of *Silvanus* states "for it is incomprehensible and unfathomable to know the counsel of God.

90. Ibid., 92.
91. *Silvanus,* 99, 29–100, 20.
92. *Silvanus,* 100, 16–17; 101, 9–10; and 101, 14–16.
93. Peel and Zandee, "The Teachings of Silvanus," 306.

Furthermore, it is difficult to comprehend him."[94] The pupil is cautioned to "not confine the God of all to mental images"; or, in Calvin's language, to not *project his own inventions of figments upon God*.

While both authors use the word "father" to describe God, the early author paints a portrait of a loving parent who seems to desire to be actively involved in his child's life. The second author, however, tends to use the term "father" primarily as a title and certainly does not emphasize the fatherly aspects of parental patronage and love. While the early author prays that God may physically dwell in our own spiritual encampment, the late author argues that the notion of God dwelling in a specific place is illogical because that would mean "that the place is more exalted than the one who dwells in it."[95]

The second part of *Silvanus* repeatedly mentions "God" (68 times) but rarely uses alternative nomenclature in lieu of this simple title.[96] The term "God" is also commonly used as a prepositional object in phrases such as "word of God," "Spirit of God," "Scripture of God," "temple of God," "Wisdom of God," etc. As will be discussed later, there is also less distinction between the roles of God and Christ in the second part of *Silvanus*.

The second author allows that we can know God "a little" through his power and by partaking of his "truth," but our primary avenue for knowledge of God is through Christ. Christ is now the "friend" and the one whom we are to know personally. Because the author has argued that we cannot truly comprehend God, it is clear that when the second author uses anthropomorphic terms for God, he intends a symbolical understanding. Thus, the phrase "hand of the Lord" is not meant to describe God's physical hands, and a description of Christ as the "image" of God does not mean Christ is a physical "copy" of the embodiment of God but it is meant to represent unity with God's purpose. As readers, however, there is no reason for us to make these same distinctions when the early author, in the context of and consistent with Middle Stoicism, refers anthropomorphically to the father.[97] In early second century Christianity, it was contextually proper to assume that God can dwell

94. *Silvanus,* 116, 19–24.

95. *Silvanus,* 100, 1.

96. Alternative names include "O Lord Almighty" (*Silvanus,* 112, 27) and "O Merciful God" (*Silvanus,* 112, 33).

97. The second part of *Silvanus* "denies that God can be found in a 'place' or occupies a 'body.' In this, he shares the perspective of Plotinus who wrote: 'Finally, the School (i.e., the Stoics) even has the boldness to foist matter on divine beings so that, finally, God himself becomes a kind of matter — and this, though they make

with us, that he is a loving and doting father, and that he sits on a literal throne in heaven.[98] It was also contextually proper to assume that God is embodied in a real and tangible sense.

Christology

> LATTER-DAY SAINT VIEW:
> Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world and the Son of Heavenly Father. He is our Redeemer. Each of these titles points to the truth that Jesus Christ is the only way by which we can return to live with our Heavenly Father. … "He was the Great Jehovah of the Old Testament, the Messiah of the New. Under the direction of His Father, He was the creator of the earth. 'All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.'"[99]

> CALVINIST VIEW:
> We have to think of the terms [Father and Son] as referring *imagelessly* to the Father and Son without intrusion of creaturely images or material forms of thought. … Perhaps Calvin's most fundamental proof of the absolute deity of the Christ is in the New Testament application to him of the covenant divine name revealed by God to Moses in the burning bush of Exodus 3:14: "I am who I am," or the tetragrammaton — *jhvh* ("Yahweh," or in older versions of Scripture, "Jehovah"). … For it is certain that the name "Lord" was put there in place of "Jehovah" [or *Yahweh — jhvh*].[100]

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it corporeal, they describe as a body devoid of quality.'" Peel, *Nag Hammadi and Manchaean Studies*, 261–62.

98. The Biblical record is unequivocal in this regard with the aforementioned exception of post-exile Israel. Cherbonnier made a bold but accurate statement when he claimed "for biblical scholarship is unanimous in confirming what Mormons have always held: that the God of the Bible is a personal Agent with a proper name…from Genesis to Revelation, the Bible conceives of God in the same terms that are peculiar to human beings, such as speaking, caring, planning, judging, and taking action." Edmond LaB. Cherbonnier, "In Defense of Anthropomorphism," in *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaeo-Christian Parallels* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 160.

99. "Jesus Christ," Gospel Topics, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/jesus-christ.

100. Douglas F. Kelly, "The True and Triune God: Calvin's Doctrine of the Holy Trinity," in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, ed. David

> The Son of God takes what is ours, "flesh from our flesh, bones from our bones, that he might be one with us … to impart to us what was his." Specifically, the Mediator assumed flesh and blood in order to "make of the children of men, children of God."[101]

Latter-day Saint and Calvinist Christology have much in common. Both proclaim Christ as the Lord Jehovah, preach his atonement, affirm the many titles given him in the New Testament, and recognize his role in the creation of the world. The primary differences focus on the question of Christ's divinity: the Latter-day Saint view maintains a clear separation between Christ and other members of the Godhead while the Calvinist view blurs some of these distinctions. For Latter-day Saints the process of deifying Christ beyond simple New Testament declarations were taken a step or two too far for our comfort (see the example from the *Gospel of Peter* below).

James M. Robinson and other biblical scholars have tracked this early Christian tendency to make Christ increasingly deified over time. According to Robinson, "Jesus apparently had no Christology. 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone' (Mark 10:18). Probably he would have preferred we deify the cause: the kingdom of God."[102] Yet the New Testament authors clearly proclaimed Christ's divinity with preferred titles of Messiah (Christ), Lord, and Savior, and so it was clear by the end of the first century that Jesus was viewed as uniquely divine and a member of the Godhead. The Church Fathers and other Christian writers (first to fourth centuries) added more titles to Christ and these began to impinge upon the distinctive roles of other members of the Godhead. For example, Christ's familiar lament "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" in Mark 15:34 becomes "My power, O Power, thou hast forsaken me" in the second-century pseudepigraphic *Gospel of Peter*.[103]

> At first, clear subordination was retained ("God" for the Father, "Lord" for Jesus; giving glory to *God* was christianized

W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2008), 68, 79.

101. Derek W. H. Thomas, "The Mediator of the Covenant," in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, ed. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2008), 209.

102. James M. Robinson, "Very Goddess and Very Man: Jesus' Better Self," in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, ed. Karen L. King (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 114.

103. Ibid., 115.

> not as giving glory to *Jesus* but as giving glory to God *through* Jesus). But christological titles nonetheless headed in the direction of Chalcedon and the traditional deification of Jesus (and "subordinationism" ended as a heresy).[104]

The two authors of *Silvanus* illustrate this later tendency towards lessening the distinction between God the Father and Christ. While the first author lays out specific roles for Christ within the Godhead, the second author stresses Christ's centrality within the Godhead at the expense of the other members.

But before I delve into this tendency, it is worth noting that most *Silvanus* discussions regarding Christ, regardless of which portion they are found, would be heartily and universally accepted by both Latter-day Saint and Calvinist readers. Most teachings about Christ found in *Silvanus* are non-controversial. The second *Silvanus* author, in particular, often echoes the New Testament, which both faiths regard as holy writ. For example, the first words found in the second portion of *Silvanus* are:

> **LATE:** Live with Christ and he will save you. For he is the true light and the sun of life. For just as the sun which is visible makes light for the eyes of the flesh, so Christ illuminates every mind and the heart.[105]

It is hard to imagine any Christian having difficulty with this allegory. The vast majority of the Christ-related passages throughout *Silvanus* are similar to this one — affirmations of the importance of Christ to the well-being of the believer. With regards to Christology, the differences between the two portions of *Silvanus* are relatively minor.

So what are these differences? First, both portions of *Silvanus* write about Christ in a manner fitting to their compositional time periods. Take, as an example, the titles each author ascribes to Christ (see Figure 2). The early author, in nine mentions of Christ, employs eight titles; describing him as friend, brother, good teacher, and father.[106] In contrast, the second author mentions Christ 58 times and uses

104. Ibid.

105. *Silvanus,* 98, 20–28.

106. A passage late in the early text reads "this is your king and your father" referring to Christ. As confusing as this may seem, it is consistent with early Jewish Christian writings. "Thus we find in Jewish Christian writings frequent evidence that Christ was named 'father' like the God of the OT." Jan Zandee, "'The Teachings of Silvanus' (NHC VII,4) and Jewish Christianity," 528.

a staggering 38 different titles to describe him.[107] This is indicative of the later time period in which this author writes. According to Van Den Broek "before Origen, similar lists are very rare, after him they are very frequent, especially in the fourth century."[108] Just to illustrate how voluminous and possibly even superfluous this list of titles is, I've used the Book of Mormon as a comparative text. In 531 pages, the Book of Mormon uses 67 different titles for Christ (at a rate of one title for every 7.9 pages of text).[109] The second portion of *Silvanus*, in comparison, gives 38 different titles to Christ in just 13 equivalent pages (a rate of one title for every 0.34 pages of text). The second author seems especially interested in the metaphor of light as a way to describe Christ. Christ is the Sun of Life, the Light, the True Light, the Light of the Father, the Light of Light Forever, the First Light, and the Light from the Power of God.

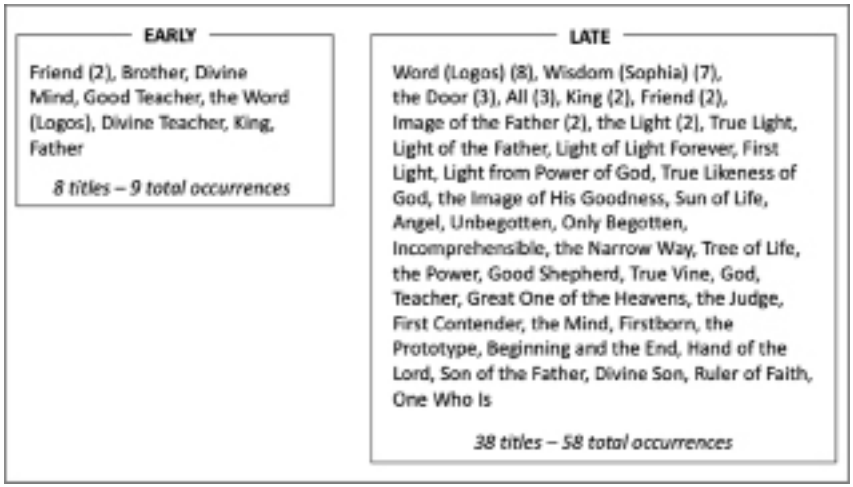

Figure 2. Complete list of the titles of Christ by the early and late *Silvanus*.

It is important to distinguish that this difference between the two authors is more a difference in style than one of substance and does not necessarily illustrate a point of demarcation between Latter-day Saint and

107. This stark disparity has led to some scholars even questioning whether or not the early text is distinctively Christian or not. Pearson reasons that "the Christian additions consist largely of crediting Jesus Christ as the source of the teacher's wisdom." Pearson, "The Teachings of Silvanus," 500.

108. Van Den Broek, "The Theology of the Teachings of Silvanus," 3.

109. John W. Welch and Greg Welch, *Names Used for Christ by Major Book of Mormon Authors* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 1.

Calvinist beliefs. The second difference, however, is more theologically substantive and even possibly dividing. While the Christology of the first portion of *Silvanus* defines clear roles among the members of the Godhead, the second portion of *Silvanus* blurs many of these distinctions.

For example, the second portion of *Silvanus* refers to Christ as "God."[110] The written use of the term "God" as a title for Jesus was not common in early Christian literature. As Lohse explains "it is noteworthy that the New Testament, while in a few places it calls Jesus 'God,' usually displays great reserve toward this form of address. The reason for this was the strict monotheism of the Jewish environment, which would not tolerate such a designation."[111]

> We have in Paul one God, one Lord, and one Spirit. I might add that Paul's habit of reserving the designator *God* for the Father, and indicating the divinity of the Son and Spirit in ways usually other than calling them *God* straight out, is typical of the New Testament generally. This habit, combined with biblical characterizations of the Father as generator and sender, lies behind a Christian trinitarian tradition, especially pronounced in the Greek East, of regarding the Father as God proper, as the source or font of the divinity of Son and Spirit. The latter two may be fully divine, but they are derivatively so.[112]

While John 1:1 famously uses the designation "God" (*theos*) for the Word ("and the Word was God"), John importantly adds a Greek article when he says "the Word was with God" in order to maintain a critical difference between God and Jesus. "The word is also God — but God without the article (theos). However, the God that is with the Logos is *the* God, indicated by the article." These two different designations (God and *the* God), unfortunately, are lost when the text is translated into

110. *Silvanus,* 110, 14–16 states "Know who Christ is, and acquire him as a friend, for he is the true friend. He is also *God* and teacher. He, being divine, became human for your sake."

111. Bernhard Lohse, *A Short History of Christian Doctrine: From the First Century to the Present* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 73.

112. Cornelius J. Plantinga, Jr., "Social Trinity and Tritheism," in *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement: Philosophical and Theological Essays*, ed. Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius J. Plantinga (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 1989), 25.

King James English, simply becoming "God" and losing the hierarchal distinction.[113]

The second portion of *Silvanus* blurs many of these important distinctions maintained by Paul, John, and the other New Testament writers between God the Father and Christ. First, the late author begins to transfer some of the attributes traditionally associated with God to Christ. Though Christ is supposed to be approachable, he is also, according to the second author, in a sense "unapproachable." Thus "it is as impossible to look at Christ as it is to look at the sun."[114] Or "on the one hand, he is comprehensible, on the other, he is incomprehensible in terms of his actual being."[115]

Consider these two texts side-by-side; one early and one late.

> **EARLY:** Accept Christ, who is able to set you free. He has taken on that one's devices, so that through these he might destroy him with guile! For this is the king you have, who is forever invincible. Against him no one will be able to fight or speak a word. This is your king and your father. There is none like him. The divine teacher is with you at all times as a helper. He meets you because of the good you have within you.[116]

> **LATE:** For he is light from the power of God, and he is a pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty. He is the spotless mirror of the activity of God, and he is the image of his goodness. For he is also the light of light forever. He is the eye that looks at the invisible Father. … For he is an incomprehensible Word, and he is Wisdom and life. All living things and powers he vivifies and nourishes; just as the soul gives life to all members of the body. He rules over all with power, and gives life to them. For he is the beginning and the end of everyone. He watches over all and encompasses them.[117]

For the later author, Christ is both the Word (*Logos*) and Wisdom (*Sophia*) and, "even if he was begotten, he is unbegotten."[118] Importantly, this author also asserts that "God the Almighty who always exists was

113. See Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: Of God and Gods*, 167–70 for a useful discussion about John's terminology here.
114. *Silvanus,* 101, 13–14.
115. *Silvanus,* 102, 3–4.
116. *Silvanus,* 96, 10–97, 2.
117. *Silvanus,* 112, 37–113, 23.
118. *Silvanus,* 102, 1.

not always reigning as king without also needing the divine Son."[119] In other words, God could not be God without Christ; an idea whose theological implications would require volumes to unravel.

Second, the language of the latter text is more predictive of Nicene theology than the early one is. For the second author, Christ is the "pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty" and is an "image of his goodness" as opposed to the image of the body of the Father. Notice how the text of the following passage interplays back and forth between God and Christ so that the reader is never quite sure what the distinction between the two really is.

> **LATE:** Everything is in God, but God is not in anything. Now what is it to know God? God is all that is in the truth. But it is impossible to look at Christ as at the sun. God sees everyone; no one looks at him.[120]

Throughout this passage it is unclear whether or not the term "God" is referring to "God the Father" distinct from Christ or "Christ as God." This confusion is because elsewhere the second *Silvanus* author makes a stronger statement about "Christ being God" than most New Testament authors seem willing to make.

> **LATE:** Know who Christ is, and acquire him as a friend, for this is the friend who is faithful. He is also God and Teacher. This one, being God, became man for your sake.[121]

Because the only version of *Silvanus* that we have is in Coptic (from a Greek original), it is impossible to determine if the author originally intended to distinguish between "God" and "the God" the way that John did. While Latter-day saint readers could accommodate this passage based on similar exhortations of Christ's divinity in other scriptures, there would be considerable doctrinal discomfort if the use of the title "God" here was extended and equalized to "God the Most High," "the God," or "God the Father."

While both Latter-day Saint and Calvinist theology attest that "Jesus is the Son of Heavenly Father," Latter-day Saint readers view the relationship more literally than Calvinist readers do (who exclaim "we have to think of the terms [Father and Son] as referring *imagelessly* to the Father and Son"). The second part of *Silvanus* conveys Calvinist-like

119. *Silvanus,* 115, 10–11.
120. *Silvanus,* 101, 8–17.
121. *Silvanus*, 110, 15–19.

imagery portraying Christ as the Father's emanation, light and power, and slowly rewriting the parameters of what Christ's role as a Son of God means. In short, the distinctiveness between God the Father and Christ is blurred somewhat by the second author of *Silvanus* in ways that would tend to make Latter-day Saint readers and early Jewish Christians slightly uncomfortable.

Wisdom and the Divine Feminine

> LATTER-DAY SAINT VIEW:
> Little has been revealed about our Heavenly Mother beyond a knowledge of Her existence. Although we do not worship Her, we honor Her as a divine parent. Following the example of the Savior, we pray only to our Heavenly Father. We receive guidance and direction from Heavenly Father and His Son through the Holy Ghost.[122]
>
> CALVINIST VIEW:
> Each God when considered in Himself; as the Father so the Son, as the Son so the Holy Ghost; the Three One God when contemplated together; each God because consubstantial; one God because of the Monarchia.[123]

The average Latter-day Saint and Calvinistic worshiper is likely unaware that the question of the divine feminine (typically in the form of Wisdom or the Greek *Sophia*) permeates the study of ancient Judaism and, consequently, first century Christianity.[124] Depending upon the timeframe and context, Bible scholars are divided as to whether or not

122. "Heavenly Parents," Gospel Topics, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/heavenly-parents.

123. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 40.41. Technically this is not a Calvinist "doctrine" but it is authoritatively quoted by Douglas F. Kelly, "The True and Triune God: Calvin's Doctrine of the Holy Trinity," 85.

124. "The figure of divine Wisdom (Greek: Sophia) spans a literary and iconographic history that emerges in, but is not confined to, the Hebrew Bible, Hellenistic Judaism, and early Christian literature." Deirdre J. Good, *Reconstructing the Tradition of Sophia in Gnostic Literature* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987), xiii. Speaking of *Beatitudes*, a Qumran text, Donald W. Parry says "wisdom is personified as a woman (the word *wisdom* in Hebrew [*hokmah*] is a feminine noun); those who hold her seek her with pure hands; those who attain her walk in God's law." Donald W. Parry, "The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible," *Studies in the Bible and Antiquity* 2 (2010): 20.

the most common representation of the divine feminine, "Wisdom," represents an actual goddess, the feminine nature of an androgynous monotheistic God, a hypostasis of *Yahweh*, a metaphor, or a marginalized teaching of heretics.[125] What is undeniable is Wisdom's presence in ancient Judaism and the long shadow that it casts upon scholars' understanding of the Hebrew Bible, other ancient Jewish texts, and early Jewish manifestations of Christianity.

To better establish the context for the forthcoming discussion, it is worth sharing two summaries from scholars about the divine feminine and early Jewish Christianity. James M. Robinson offers a useful summary of how the divine feminine was slowly yet steadily minimized and marginalized during the first few centuries of Christendom.

> The Hebrew word for "spirit," *ruach*, is usually feminine (though at times it is used masculinely). Thus in a Semitic world of thought the tripartite deity could reflect the core family of father, mother, and child. But the Greek word for "spirit," *pneuma*, is neuter, so that the question became relevant as to whether the third person (the Spirit's position when no longer the mother in the core family) is actually a person at all. Since the Latin word for "spirit," *spiritus*, is masculine, the personality of the Spirit was thereby assured as well as the all-male trinity. Even though a theologian-linguist such as Jerome (in commenting on Isa. 40:9–11) could point out that the three diverging genders of the noun for Spirit show that God has no sex, the metaphorical suggestiveness of the gender of the nouns dominated classical theology. … In the Semitic branch of early Christianity the femininity of the Spirit and her role as Jesus' mother are made explicit. … A parallel development to that which we have sketched

125. "At this point most commentators believe that Asherah was a goddess in monarchic Israel (e.g., Ackerman, Binger, Day, Dever, Dijkstra, Edelman, Hadley, Handy, Keel and Uehlinger, Loretz, Merlo, Niehr, Olyan, Petty, Wyatt, Xella, Zevit, as well as NJPS [the New Jewish Publication Society translation] at 1 Kings 15:13). Some do not (e.g. Cross, Frevel, Korpel, Tigay; cf. Emerton's very cautious formulation, McCarter's asherah as Yahweh's hypostasis, Miller's nuanced position of secondary divinization of the symbol)…In conclusion, I am not opposed in theory to the possibility that Asherah was an Israelite goddess during the monarchy. My chief objection to this view is that it has not been demonstrated, given the plausibility of alternative views." Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), xxxii, xxxvi.

> regarding the Spirit may have been even more significant at the beginning and may be less well known today, since, unlike the Spirit, the protagonist has faded from the theological aristocracy: Wisdom. Here again the Hebrew word, *chokmah*, is feminine, as are the Greek *sophia* and the Latin *sapientia*. Thus the survival of Wisdom in the top echelon of deity would have assured a female part at the top (which may be part of the reason that Wisdom was dropped). Wisdom was fading fast by the time the New Testament itself was written.[126]

And specifically writing about *Silvanus*, Jan Zandee argues that the text fits properly in the historical context of Jewish Wisdom teachings.

> It is a Jewish and Jewish Christian tradition that God has a consort. Wisdom takes the place of the Logos as mediator of creation. There is a Jewish tradition of the Holy Ghost as mother. The best known instance is from the Jewish Christian Gospel of the Hebrews, quoted by Origen, where "the Savior himself says, 'My Mother the Holy Spirit took me … and brought me to … the Tabor." In the *Gospel of Hebrews* the Holy Ghost speaks like personified Wisdom in Jewish wisdom literature, so that the Holy Ghost as mother is not far removed from Wisdom as mother. Thus the "mother" is an element of God.[127]

The divine feminine as both archetypes of Wisdom (*Sophia*) and the "Mother" makes appearances in the *Silvanus* text. By examining the manner in which personified Wisdom is treated by the two portions of the text, we can show evidence of the divine feminine "fading fast" as early Christianity develops.[128] The early author renders a portrait of a divine goddess mother with neither comment nor apology; assuming an

126. Robinson, "Very Goddess and Very Man: Jesus' Better Self," 117–18. Interestingly in his response to Robinson's article, Hedrick cites *Teachings of Silvanus* as "clear evidence of the kind of Wisdom Christology that Robinson finds in Q." Charles W. Hedrick, "Response to 'Very Goddess and Very Man: Jesus' Better Self by James M. Robinson," *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, 133.

127. Zandee, " 'The Teachings of Silvanus' (NHC VII,4) and Jewish Christianity," 517–18.

128. Elaine Pagels dates the disappearance of feminine divine imagery to the time period between our two *Silvanus* authors. "By the time the process of sorting the various writings ended — probably as late as the year 200 — virtually all the feminine imagery for God had disappeared from orthodox Christian tradition." Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979), 57.

audience familiar and comfortable with such imagery. The late author attempts to clarify what the Wisdom tradition means in a manner consistent with the writings of Clement and other later Christian commentators. In short, by the time we get to the second author, the question of the divine feminine has been settled and she has been effectively eliminated from the collective orthodox Christian experience.

Echoing Proverbs 8:22–30 and other Jewish Wisdom literature, the early author gives the following advice:

> **EARLY:** My child, return to your first father, God, and Wisdom, your mother, from whom you came into being from the beginning.[129]

According to Peel, in this *Silvanus* passage "personified 'Wisdom' is called the 'mother' of the pupil" being addressed, and God and Wisdom, conjointly, are modelled as the pupil's Heavenly Parents.[130] Another portion of the early author's writings states:

> **EARLY:** Wisdom summons you, yet you desire folly. It is not by your own wish that you do these things, but it is the animal nature within you that does them. Wisdom summons you in her goodness, saying "Come to me, all of you foolish ones, that you may receive as a gift the understanding that is good and excellent. I am giving you a high-priestly vestment that is woven from every kind of wisdom.[131]

In this passage, according to Peel, Wisdom "appears for the first time, an hypostatized attribute separate from God the Father."[132] In all, personified wisdom appears four times in the early text and it is difficult not to conclude that the early author is referencing a mother deity with qualities that appear human-like (e.g., speaks, invites to come, and desires to bestow gifts).

This divine family motif pattern is consistent with early first-century Alexandrian Jewish Christian thought. Philo, a prolific Jewish

129. *Silvanus*, 91, 5–15.

130. Peel, *Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies*, 264.

131. *Silvanus*, 89, 1–8. Examples of Wisdom calling to the foolish include Proverbs 1:20:23, 8:1–11, and 9:1–6. Also consider Sirach 24:19, which states "approach me, you who desire me, and take your fill of my fruits, for memories of me are sweeter than honey, inheriting me is sweeter than the honeycomb."

132. Peel, *Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies,* 291.

Alexandrian writer who was also a contemporary of Christ and Paul, preferred this pattern when describing the divine.[133]

> With more or less mythological language, Philo is able to describe the relationship between God, Wisdom, and the Word in terms of family, God being the father, Wisdom representing the mother, and the Word being their son.[134]

The early *Silvanus* author clearly parallels Philo's structure. Other Jewish Christian documents such as the aforementioned *Gospel of the Hebrews* do the same.[135] Philo's solution to the problem of how to remedy the logical disparity between the Hebrew requirement for strict monotheism and a three-member Godhead was to depersonalize the mother and son into the godly attributes Word (*Logos*) and Wisdom (*Sophia*). While Jewish Christianity inherited this need to maintain monotheism, a heavenly mother and a divine Son could be possible just as long as both were subordinate to the first father, God the Most High; both possessing divine attributes but also, like the angels, dependent upon the Father's divinity.

Second, as the concept of subordination was being actively debated, the later Patristic Fathers were then forced to explain the unexplainable: How could there be One God (monotheism) and yet three separate beings that were divine? Their solution, echoing Philo, was to declare Jesus the Word of God (*Logos*) and the logical extension would have been to associate Wisdom of God (*Sophia*) with the Holy Ghost and thus complete Philo's aforementioned triune Godhead. Instead, however,

133. Both portions of Silvanus are heavily influenced by Philo's writings. See Peel, *Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies*, 263–64.

134. Torrey Seland, *Reading Philo: A Handbook to Philo of Alexandria* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2014), 35.

135. One of the best known Jewish Christian examples of this are the following passages from the *Gospel of the Hebrews*: "even so did my mother, the Holy Spirit, take me by one of my hairs and carry me away to the great mountain Tabor" and ""when the Lord was come up out of the water, the whole fount of the Holy Spirit descended and rested upon him, and said unto him: My son, in all the prophets was I waiting for thee that thou shouldst come, and I might rest in thee. For thou art my rest, and thou art my first begotten son, that reignest for ever." Excerpted from Ron Cameron, *The Other Gospels: Non-Canonical Gospel Texts* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1982), 85–86. Other examples include the following from the *Acts of Thomas*: "We glorify and praise you and your invisible Father and your holy Spirit [and] the mother of all creation" (IV c.39) and "and they have glorified and praised, with the living spirit, the Father of truth and the mother of wisdom" (I c.7).

Jesus was also declared to be God's Wisdom as well; so Jesus became both *Logos* and *Sophia*. This transformation occurred after the time period of the early *Silvanus* author, and it is debatable whether or not evidence of this transformation (Jesus as Wisdom) can be found in the canonical scriptures. Analyzing the earliest canonical New Testament synoptic Gospels, Hamerton-Kelly concludes that "the evidence therefore seems to confirm Sugg's judgement that Q did not identify Jesus with pre-existent Wisdom."[136] Paul's essay to the Corinthians has both Christ and the Spirit playing Wisdom roles.[137] But by the time of Origen, "the Son is primarily God's Wisdom, his Firstborn, not to be conceived of as a divine quality but as a separate hypostasis."[138]

In the early third century, Clement of Alexandria refashioned a stanza from the Jewish *Book of Wisdom*, recasting all of the divine imagery that describe personified Wisdom into attributes that describe Christ. While the first portion of *Silvanus* alludes to the *Book of Wisdom* several times, the second portion only references it once; echoing *Wisdom* in the exact same place and manner as Clement does. Whereas the *Book of Wisdom* states that feminine Wisdom flows from the "glory of the Almighty" and is the "spotless mirror of the power of God," the second *Silvanus* author declares that Christ is the "emanation of the glory of the Almighty" and the "spotless mirror of the activity of God."[139]

Therefore, the late *Silvanus* author is unequivocally clear with regards to the identity of Wisdom. Wisdom is no longer the mother; Wisdom is personified in Christ. And Wisdom is no longer feminine. The feminine is no longer divine (at least not in relation to God) except possibly in metaphorical ways. Personified Wisdom is mentioned three times in late *Silvanus* and each time the author stresses that the personification is through Christ.

Consider the following three *Silvanus* passages:

136. R. G. Hamerton-Kelly, *Pre-Existence, Wisdom, and the Son of Man: A Study of the Idea of Pre-Existence in the New Testament* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 36.

137. See 1 Corinthians 1–4.

138. Van Den Broek, *Studies in Gnosticism and Alexandrian Christianity,* 129.

139. *Book of Wisdom* 7:25–26. *Silvanus,* 112, 37–113, 4. Zandee remarks: "This is virtually a literal rending [rendering?] of *Wisdom of Solomon* 7:25–26 where personified Wisdom is the subject … the transfer of these properties of Wisdom to Christ was not difficult for *Silvanus* since it equates Christ with Wisdom several times." Zandee, "'The Teachings of Silvanus' (NHC VII,4) and Jewish Christianity," 565.

> **LATE:** Give them life, and they will live again. For the tree of life is Christ. He is Wisdom. He is Wisdom and also the Word. He is the life, the power, and the door. … Since he is Wisdom, he makes the foolish person wise. She is a holy kingdom and a shining robe. Having much gold, she gives you great honor. The Wisdom of God became for your sake a foolish form, that she might pick you up, O foolish one, and make you wise.[140]
>
> **LATE:** It is he who has come forth from your mouth, the firstborn, Wisdom, the prototype, the first light.[141]
>
> **LATE:** For he is an incomprehensible Word, and he is Wisdom and life.[142]

Not only is Christ Wisdom, he is also the "tree of life," an image historically associated with feminine Wisdom (Proverbs 3:18). In this way, the late author is purposely clarifying and correcting the early author's reliance upon Jewish Wisdom texts and Philo's *Logos* and *Sophia*.

Interestingly, the personified mother is only mentioned once in the second portion of *Silvanus*. Predictably, this mention also argues that the functions of the "mother" are actually responsibilities of Christ.

> **LATE:** Only the hand of the Lord has created all these things. For this hand of the Father is Christ and it forms all. Through it, all has come into being since it became the mother of all. For he is always Son of the Father.[143]

Thus with regards to the divine feminine, the differences between the two portions of *Silvanus* are substantial and difficult to reconcile. The son pupil is initially taught that he is a child of loving heavenly parents. In accordance with early Jewish Christianity, the son is led to assume that the Spirit is feminine; a belief commonplace to the time but rejected by both Latter-day Saint and Calvinist teachings. Over time the distinctly feminine qualities of the Godhead dissipate until the second *Silvanus* author declares that each of these attributes were actually incarnated in the distinctly male form of Christ and that two specific and important

140. *Silvanus*, 106, 20–26; 107, 3–9.
141. *Silvanus,* 112, 33–36.
142. *Silvanus,* 113, 14–15.
143. *Silvanus,* 115, 3–10.

emanations of God, "reason and mind are male names."[144] At this point each of the three "triune" Gods is to be considered in HIMSELF.

The Godhead

> LATTER-DAY SAINT VIEW:
> The Church's first article of faith states, "We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost." These three beings make up the Godhead. They preside over this world and all other creations of our Father in Heaven. … Where Latter-day Saints differ from other Christian religions is in their belief that God and Jesus Christ are glorified, physical beings and that each member of the Godhead is a separate being. … The Father is the ultimate object of [members'] worship.[145]

> CALVINIST VIEW:
> The one true God for whose glory we were created, and whom to know is life eternal, is (1) infinitely spiritual in being and (2) triune in person. … Let us not then, be led to imagine a trinity of persons that keeps our thoughts distracted and does not at once lead them back to that unity. Indeed, the words "Father," "Son," and "Spirit" imply a real distinction — let no one think that these titles, whereby God is variously designated from his works, are empty — but a distinction, not a division. In order reverently to explicate the biblical doctrine of the triune God, Calvin — in company with the whole Christian tradition both East and West — finds it necessary to employ a few crucial nonbiblical terms to set forth and safeguard the biblical truth. Such words as "person" and *homoousios* ("of the same substance or reality") were developed by the church to provide an accurate and balanced explication of the scripture truth of who God is. … Gregory refused to use the word "origin" for any of the Trinitarian persons, and taught that to subordinate any person of the three is to "overthrow the Trinity."[146]

144. *Silvanus,* 102, 15–16.

145. "The Godhead," Gospel Topics, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/godhead.

146. Douglas F. Kelly, "The True and Triune God: Calvin's Doctrine of the Holy Trinity," 66, 71, and 85.

A triune godhead, in some form or another, makes four appearances within the early source text (see Figure 3). The first is in the context of parental advice ("listen, my child, to my advice") about guarding one's camp with the words and counsels of God. The speaker petitions "may God dwell in your camp, may his Spirit protect your gates, and may the divine Mind protect the walls."[147] Pearson argues that the "divine Mind" is a reference to Christ.[148]

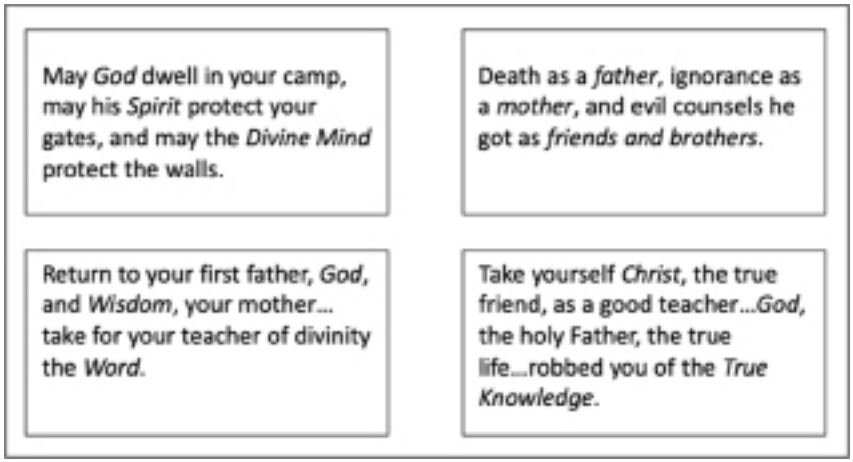

Figure 3. Four early *Silvanus* author references to a triune godhead.

The second appearance is an anti-trinity of sorts. The son is warned against three wrongs: "tossed to and fro by three evils: he got himself death as a father, ignorance as a mother, and evil counsels he got as friends and brothers." Here the triune structure is father, mother, friend or brother. We know that this anti-trinity is purposely reflective of a triune godhead because the author explicitly contrasts the negative with a positive one later on.

> **EARLY:** Take for yourself Christ, the true friend, as a good teacher. Cast death from yourself, which had become a father to you. But since you cast from yourself God, the holy Father, the true life, the spring of life, you have consequently inherited death as your father, and ignorance you have gotten as your mother. They have robbed you of the true knowledge.[149]

147. *Silvanus,* 86, 16–20.
148. Pearson, "The Teachings of Silvanus," 505.
149. *Silvanus,* 90, 31–91, 8.

Here the son is told to cast away death "which had become a father to you" and accept "God, the holy Father, the true life, the spring of life." He is told to gain "true knowledge" instead of "ignorance." And to cast away "these deceiving evil friends" and take upon himself "Christ, the true friend."

The final appearance is the early author's summary of the triune model:

> **EARLY:** My child, return to your first father, God, and Wisdom, your mother, from whom you came into being from the beginning. Return, that you might fight against all your enemies, the powers of the adversary. My child, listen to my advice. Do not be arrogant, opposing every good opinion, but take for your teacher the divinity of the Word.

Thus, this triune pattern (Father, Spirit/Wisdom/Mother, Christ/Word/Friend) is repeated four times in the early *Silvanus* text. In the context of the late first or early second century, we can almost certainly assume that a) both Christ and the Spirit were deemed as separate from the Father and b) both Christ and the Spirit were subordinate to the Father. None of these four descriptions betray these assumptions. In the late first century, the three persons of the Godhead were assumed *homoiousios* (similar substance but not same substance) and Theophilus had yet to coin the word "trinity."

James McGrath effectively explains the purview of the ancient world in relation to what strict monotheism actually meant:

> [T]here was a common cosmology accepted by nearly all, whether pagans, Jews or Christians, right through until at least the second century. The clearest evidence is perhaps the statement made by Maximus of Tyre in the second century CE: "In spite of all this discussion … one finds in the whole world a unanimous opinion and doctrine that there is one God, the king and father of everything, and many gods, God's co-regents. So says the Greek, so says the barbarian." There was apparently widespread agreement that there was what might be termed a "hierarchy of being," with God at the top, his Logos or powers next, then various or angelic beings, then humans, and so on.[150]

150. James F. McGrath, *John's Apologetic Christology: Legitimation and Development of Johannine Christology*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph, Series 111 (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 2001), 75–76. In fairness

There are clearly echoes of the ancient world's "common cosmology" in the portrait of the Godhead presented by the early author. As discussed earlier, the specific role of each Godhead member is also referenced in detail separately by the early author. There are clear role distinctions and subordination between the three members of the Godhead consistent with late first- and early second-century teachings.[151] The Father is "God the exalted one" and the Spirit and Christ are his subordinate yet divine "co-regents."

In the later source text, on the other hand, there are only two mentions of the entire triune Godhead. Leading up to the first mention, the author describes an "invisible" God whose true visible image is that of Christ.[152] Thus "you cannot know God through any means except through Christ, who bears the image of the Father. For this image reveals the true likeness of God in a visible way. A king is usually not known

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Protestant scholars contest this view of history and argue that the strict monotheism of Judaism carried over to early Christianity and that the New Testament authors understood the distinction that would lead to the doctrine of the trinity. "Primitive Christianity, like Judaism, was distinguished from paganism by its unqualified monotheism. … In various ways, the early Christians confessed both Christ and the Spirit to be 'Lord,' and spoke of them and their work in terms proper to God himself — albeit less explicitly of the Spirit — than of the Son. The correlation of these new data of the Christian revelation with faith in one God had already begun in the New Testament, in semiformal confessional statements; both twofold (Father and Son: 1 Corinthians 8:6, 1 Timothy 2:5–6, Timothy 4:1, Galatians 1:3, 2 John 3, 1 Thessalonians 3:11) and threefold (Ephesians 4:4–6, 1 Corinthians 12:4–6, 1 Peter 1:2). … The Greek apologists, who flourished ca. 150–200, were the pioneers of a more articulated account of the relation between God and his Word or son. To refute objections that, for example, creation and incarnation were incompatible with divine transcendence and immutability, they pressed into service, no doubt partly prompted by John 1, the concept of the Logos. . . .familiar to Hellenisitic philosophical theology, especially in Philo, where it tended to merge with the figure of God's Wisdom." David F. Wright, s.v. "Trinity," *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 1142–43.

151. There are a number of examples of subordination in the early source. The order of presentation follows the consistent pattern of Father, Spirit, and Son; the first mention of the Spirit is preceded by the possessive "his"; we are to fear none "except God alone"; the ultimate goal of salvation is to become "a member of God's household"; etc.

152. The use of the term "invisible" brings to mind the Eusebius Creed where God is described as the maker of all things "visible and invisible." But it also brings to mind New Testament passage such as Colossians 1:15, which states that Christ "is the image of the invisible God."

apart from an image."[153] Likely written before the Council of Nicaea, the specific roles of the Godhead are somewhat murky in the second author's writings with Christ assuming many of the functions that the early text ascribed to other members.

The late author summarizes his view of the triune Godhead as follows:

> **LATE:** This hand of the Father is Christ, and it fashions all things. Through it everything has come into being, since it became the mother of everything. It is he alone, existing always as Son of the Father.[154]

This passage was discussed earlier. While the "mother" makes an appearance, it is not as a fully personified member of the Godhead per se, and it is not clear whether or not the author meant this mention to be representative of the role of the Holy Ghost or not. Instead, in this refashioning of the Godhead, the emphasis is upon Christ as the lynchpin. It is not difficult to envision a path from this text to the creedal faith declaration — "the Son is of the Father alone; not made, nor created; but begotten" — found in the Athanasian Creed written a few short years hence.

The second mention of the Godhead suggests that the author may have been more sympathetic to the position later espoused by Arius than that of Athanasius. A fundamental issue at the Council of Nicaea was the question of subordination, a doctrine clearly taught in the New Testament canon.[155] The proponents of Arianism struggled to reconcile the concept of three fully eternal and equal "Gods" with scriptural verses that implied the Son and the Holy Ghost were subordinate to the Father. This theological quandary was highly debated throughout the fourth century with Arianism making a comeback for much of the fourth century. Little known is that after the adoption of the Nicene Creed (325 CE), the Alexandrian church returned to a form of Arianism for the next forty years as attested by the Rimini-Seleucia Creed, which was

153. *Silvanus*, 100, 20–31.

154. *Silvanus*, 11 5, 4–8.

155. A sampling of New Testament verses that imply subordination include Matthew 27:46 — "My God, my god, why hast thou forsaken me?," John 14:28 — "I said I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I," and Matthew 24:36 — "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only."

adopted in 359 CE.[156] Thus, it is understandable that the second author, who likely wrote before Nicaea, had not fully abandoned subordination. The second mention of the triune Godhead gives a specific example of a situation where both Christ and the Spirit are subordinate to the Father. The author, talking about how difficult it is to find God, states:

> **LATE:** For he (God) is who dwells in every place and in no place. For no one who wants to can know God as he is, not even Christ or the Spirit, or the chorus of angels, or the archangels.[157]

In his analysis on this passage, Pearson concludes that the knowledge of God "is denied here even to Christ" — a clear example of subordinationism.[158] Consistent with the time period, the late author vacillates between passages that imply subordination (Christ described as the "right hand" of God) and passages that blur the subordinate distinction between God and Christ. Consider the aforementioned passage, which quickly pivots from God to Christ and back again:

> **LATE:** Everything is in God, but God is not in anything. Now what is it to know God? God is all that is in the truth. But it is as impossible to look at Christ as at the sun. God sees everyone; no one looks at him.[159]

It is unclear whether or not Christ is assuming his "God" role in this passage or if the author is merely describing an attribute that both God and Christ share. But what is clear is that the second author is using the titles Christ and God almost interchangeably and thus blurring the distinction between these two members of the Godhead.

Both the early and late authors present their versions of the triune Godhead. Members of the early author's Godhead have well-defined

156. Richard E. Rubenstein, *When Jesus Became God* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1999), 187–89. With regards to subordination, the creed states: "There is no uncertainty about the Father being greater: it cannot be doubted by anyone that the Father is greater in honor, in dignity, in glory, in majesty, in the very name of 'Father,' for he himself witnesses … that 'He who sent me is greater than I.'"

157. *Silvanus*, 116, 25–32.

158. Pearson, "The Teachings of Silvanus," 520. This translation has proven controversial. Others have translated the passage to imply that God, Christ, and the Spirit are each unknowable. Consider this translation of the same passage from Peel and Zandee: "For no one who wants to will be able to know God as he actually is, nor Christ, not the Spirit, nor the chorus of angels, nor even the archangels."

159. *Silvanus,* 101, 9–17.

roles, are separate beings, and have a subordinate hierarchy. While it appears as if the late author has retained some elements of subordination, Christ has become the visible image of the invisible father with much less separation between the two; the role of the Spirit also appears to have been minimized. Historically it is slightly too early for a fully developed belief in *homoousios* (beings of the same substance), but we can certainly witness the groundwork being laid.

Creation

> LATTER-DAY SAINT VIEW:
> Under the direction of Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ created the heavens and the earth. From scripture revealed through the Prophet Joseph Smith, we know that in the work of the Creation, the Lord organized elements that had already existed. He did not create the world "out of nothing," as some people believe. … We are all literally children of God, spiritually begotten in the premortal life. As His children, we can be assured that we have divine, eternal potential and that He will help us in our sincere efforts to reach that potential.[160]

> CALVINIST VIEW:
> From this history we shall learn that God by the power of his Word and Spirit created heaven and earth out of nothing. … Although Calvin will argue that the Hebrew term *bará* should be used exclusively for the creation *ex nihilo*, he does not depict the subsequent acts as results of second causes. Rather, the creative word of God works in the primal mass to bring forth the things that God created.[161]

Three aspects of creation theology are pertinent to this discussion: 1) the creation of matter *ex nihilo* or *ex materia*, 2) the pre-existence of the soul, and 3) what it means to be spiritually begotten. All three are discussed, to some degree or another, in *Silvanus*. Unless explicitly stated to the contrary, the historical assumption for the first and second century is creation *ex materia* vis-à-vis *ex nihilo*. As David Winston

160. "Creation," Gospel Topics, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/creation; also "God the Father," Gospel Topics.

161. Joseph A. Pipa Jr., "Creation and Providence," in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, ed. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2008), 125–27.

states, "the theory of the creation of the world out of primordial matter finds its parallel in the *Wisdom of Solomon*, in Philo, in Platonism, and in rabbinic literature."[162] Freidman states that "creation of matter in the Torah is not out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*), as many have claimed."[163] And, according to Latter-day Saint scholar Barry Bickmore, Christian belief in creation *ex nihilo* was not adopted until after the second century.

> Christian philosophers of the late second century discarded the early Christian and Jewish idea of creation from chaos in favor of the theory of *creatio ex nihilo*, as formulated by the Gnostic philosopher Basilides.[164]

So the shift from *ex materio* to *ex nihilo* is nestled between the time periods when the *Silvanuses* were writing. Hubler claims "*creatio ex nihilo* marked a major redefinition of the material cosmos by the Christian apologists of the late second century."[165] Importantly, it is useful to realize that two influential Alexandrian writers of the second and third centuries, Clement of Alexandria and Origen, held different opinions on this specific question; thus it is difficult to ascertain the prevailing thought from when the second *Silvanus* author was writing, especially given that his writings were influenced by both Clement and Origen.[166]

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162. David Winston, "Preexistence in Hellenic, Judaic and Mormon Sources," *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaeo-Christian Parallels*, ed. Truman G. Madsen (Salt Lake City, Bookcraft, 1980), 34. The *Wisdom of Solomon* (a text echoed by both portions of *Silvanus*) states: "For not without means was your almighty hand, that had fashioned the universe from formless matter." *Wisdom of Solomon* 11:17. Philo states: "This cosmos of ours was formed out of all that there was of water, and air, and fire, not even the smallest particle being left outside." Philo, *De Plantatione* 2:6

163. Richard Elliott Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah with a New English Translation and the Hebrew Text* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001), 6.

164. Barry Robert Bickmore, *Restoring the Ancient Church: Joseph Smith & Early Christianity* (Phoenix: FAIR, 1999), 100. Ostler claims "the vast majority of scholars agree that the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* was first formulated around AD 200 in arguments with the Gnostics, Stoics, and Middle Platonists." Blake T. Ostler, "Out of Nothing: A History of Creation ex Nihilo in Early Christian Thought," *FARMS Review* 17, no. 2 (2005): 254. Ostler argues that *creatio ex nihilo* "seems to appear rather suddenly about AD 180 in the writings of Tatian and Theophilus." Ibid., 319.

165. James N. Hubler, *"Creatio ex Nihilo": Matter, Creation, and the Body in Classical and Christian Philosophy through Aquinas* (PhD Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, Religious Studies, 1995), v.

166. Clement: "Out of a confused heap who didst create this ordered sphere, and from the shapeless mass of matter didst the universe adorn." Clement of Alexandria,

Second, the pre-existence of souls was the predominate belief among Jews and early Christians. Truman Madsen notes that while there is a dearth of canonical sources explicitly teaching man's pre-existence, "early Christian and Jewish writings have accumulated in recent decades … the idea that man himself had a premortal life. … One scholar estimates that there are well over eight hundred references to the premortal existence of mankind in Jewish and Christian source materials."[167]

Third and less often discussed in Jewish and early Christian writings is the question of where the soul actually comes from; or what it means anthropomorphically to be considered a child of God. Origen argues that there was no clearly accepted answer to this question in the early church:

> But with respect to the soul, whether it is derived from the seed by a process of traducianism[168], so that the reason or substance of it may be considered as placed in the seminal particles of the body themselves, or whether it has any other beginning; and this beginning, itself, whether it be by birth or not, or whether bestowed upon the body from without or no, is not distinguished with sufficient clearness in the teaching of the Church.[169]

The early portion of *Silvanus* includes two lengthy passages discussing man's nature in relation to his creator. Previously the son

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The Instructor, 3:12. Origen: "And I cannot understand how so many distinguished men have been of opinion that this matter, which is so great … was uncreated, i.e., not formed by God himself, who is the Creator of all things." Origen, *De Principiis,* 2:1:4.

167. Truman G. Madsen, *Reflections on Mormonism: Judaeo-Christian Parallels* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 13. Likewise, Joseph F. McConkie gives the following summary: "Historically the story is simply this: belief in the premortal existence of the soul was dropped from Christianity in A.D. 553 by an edict known as the Anathemas against Origen, promulgated by the Roman emperor Justinian. The Pope consented under extreme duress. A quotation from the Secrets of Enoch serves well to introduce our subject. 'All souls,' he said, 'are prepared to eternity, before the formation of the world' (2 Enoch 23:5)." Joseph F. McConkie, "Premortal Existence, Foreordinations, and Heavenly Councils," *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-Day Saints*, ed. C. Wilfred Griggs (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 174. It is also interesting to note that Origen taught that spirits preexisted and had agency.

168. This is the belief that every soul was created in Adam and then individually propagated through earthly parents.

169. Origen, *De Principiis,* Preface 5.

had been admonished to return to his first Father, God, and his Mother, Wisdom, and that he should desire to join God's household. The author then explains his view of the divine origin of man.

> **EARLY:** Know yourself, that is, from what substance you are, or from what race or from what species. Understand that you have come into being from three races: from the earth, from the formed, and from the created. The body came into being from the earth, with an earthly substance, but the formed, for the sake of the soul, came into being from the thought of the divine. The created, however, is the mind that came into being according to the image of God. The divine mind has substance from the divine, but the soul is that which he formed within them.[170]

This teaching seems to have much in common with Philo's exegesis of Genesis 2:7 ("Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul").

> The "image of God" only concerns the "mind, the sovereign element of the soul". … The first human being was created in a composite nature consisting of body and soul. He was created mortal, i.e., mortal in respect of the body but immortal with respect of the mind, because God breathed the soul into him, in reality a divine breath.[171]

The teachings that man has been given part of God's "substance" is then repeated by early *Silvanus*.

> **EARLY:** But I say that God is the spiritual one. Man has taken shape from the substance of God. The divine soul shares partly in this One; furthermore it shares partly in the flesh.[172]

There is much to unpack in these two passages. *Silvanus* distinguishes, at least in relation to man, three creative sources or substances: the earth, the formed, and the created. The body is from the earth, but the soul is from the "formed" (implying pre-existent matter and creation *ex materia*) and the mind, Philo's "sovereign element of the soul," is from the "created." This portion of the soul was somehow created in the image of God and has "substance from the Divine." Thus, Van Den Broek

170. *Silvanus,* 92, 10–29.
171. Torrey Seland, *Reading Philo*, 37–38.
172. *Silvanus,* 93, 24–29.

specifically cites this passage as evidence for an early date of authorship for this portion of *Silvanus*.

> There is also the idea that the essence of man derives from God: "Man has taken form from the substance of God" (*Silvanus* 93:26–27). Neither Origen nor Eusebius, let alone Athanasius, would ever have said this.[173]

While Eusebius might never have written this passage, nineteenth-century Latter-day Saint writers such as Orson Pratt, W. W. Phelps, and Brigham Young, contemplating what it means for the soul to be "spiritually begotten," could possibly have speculated along these paths.[174] From a Latter-day Saint perspective, it is reasonable to imagine an eternal intelligence (e.g., formed) whose "mind" (the most important part) is begotten through some unknown process by heavenly parents, retaining a portion of their divine "substance." This seems as adequate an explanation of "being spiritually begot in the premortal life" as any I have seen.

By the time of the late author, in contrast, a "major redefinition" of the Christian understanding of the cosmos was well underway (although not yet fully complete). So the latter part of *Silvanus* lives in a milieu where creation is effectuated solely by God and his Son, where everything seems to come into being via God's creative acts, and the presumptions of creation *ex materia* and the pre-existence of souls were actively being questioned and redefined.[175]

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173. Van Den Broek, "The Theology of the Teachings of Silvanus," 17. This passage is one of the first he cites as evidence when arguing for a multi-author *Silvanus*.

174. "The doctrine that God, through a procreative act involving a heavenly mother, is the literal father of our spirits expresses the most fundamental and important relationship between God and humankind in LDS theology. Surprisingly, however, nowhere is this doctrine explicitly taught in any of the standard works, neither is it found in any of Joseph Smith's recorded teachings. … The first clear allusion to the doctrine of spirit birth in LDS literature appeared in Orson Pratt's *Prophetic Almanac*. … Pratt explained that human mortal existence was preceded by a spiritual state. In answer to the question of how humans began that state, Pratt wrote, 'He was begotten and born of God.' The next public mention of spirit birth was at the dedication of the Nauvoo Seventies Hall in December 1844 where Brigham Young, John Taylor, and W. W. Phelps all alluded to it." Charles R. Harrell, *"This is My Doctrine": The Development of Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011), 138, 141–42.

175. While Clement of Alexandria argued for *creatio ex materia*, Origen advocated *creatio ex nihilo*. Since most scholars date the later part of *Silvanus* post-Origen, it would be surprising if the second author advocated *ex materia*. With

The late portion of *Silvanus* does not focus exclusively on different aspects of creation but rather describes Christ's role in creation in Christological terms. The most relevant passages are the following:

> **LATE:** You cannot know God through anyone except Christ who has the image of the Father.[176]
>
> **LATE:** Only the hand of the Lord has created all these things. For this hand of the Father is Christ, and it fashions all things. Through it, everything has come into being, since it became the mother of everything. It is he alone, existing always as Son of the Father. Consider these things about God: the Almighty who always exists was not always reigning as king without also needing the divine Son. Everything subsists in God, that is, the things that came into being through the Word, who is the Son as the image of the Father.[177]

There are three overtones from these passages especially relevant to our discussion. First, there was a long tradition in early Christianity regarding the "actual" pre-existence of both the Word *and* Wisdom.[178] In the latter passage, however, the author seems to verify Christ's "actual" pre-existence but has purposely redefined elsewhere the role of Wisdom as Christ. Thus while the Son is "existing always," Wisdom's role has become the generic "mother of everything" and is no longer personified. This implies that the wisdom role is also no longer pre-existent but is a designation applied *a posteriori* by the hand of the Lord after the creative act.[179] Second, if Wisdom is no longer pre-existent, this would also then question the pre-existence of the human soul and the mind. Third,

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regard to the pre-existence of souls, however, Origen argued positively towards the idea so it is likely that both *Silvanus* authors would concur.

176. *Silvanus,* 100, 23–27.

177. *Silvanus,* 115, 3–19.

178. R. G. Hamerston-Kelly offers two definitions of pre-existence: "ideal," which means existing only in God's mind prior to creation and "actual," which means actually existing in some form. Both types of pre-existence are found within early Jewish and Christian thought. Hamerston-Kelly, *Pre-Existence, Wisdom, and the Son of Man*, 2.

179. "The *Wisdom of Solomon* contains three different conceptions concerning the creator, 1. God as creator, 2. God as creator while Wisdom is present, 3. Wisdom as creator. It is the view of Alexandrian philosophical theology that the transcendent God cannot be directly involved in creation, so that one of his personified properties, Wisdom, acts as a mediator in creation." Zandee, "'The Teachings of Silvanus' (NHC VII,4) and Jewish Christianity," 570–71.

the late author seems to presuppose creation *ex nihilo* while the early author seems to presuppose *ex materia*. The phrase of interest here is "everything has come into being." Compare this to the earlier author's statement that man has three "races": earth, formed and created. The distinction between these forms of creation have been removed. Thus, it is not much of a stretch to take the imagery of the latter part of *Silvanus* and conclude that "God by the power of his Word and Spirit created heaven and earth out of nothing."

Soteriology

> LATTER-DAY SAINT VIEW:
> To be cleansed from sin through the Savior's Atonement, an individual must exercise faith in Jesus Christ, repent, be baptized, and receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. … Salvation is conditional, depending on an individual's continuing in faithfulness, or enduring to the end in keeping the commandments of God. Individuals cannot be saved in their sins; they cannot receive unconditional salvation simply by declaring a belief in Christ with the understanding that they will inevitably commit sins throughout the rest of their lives. However, through the grace of God, all can be saved from their sins as they repent and follow Jesus Christ.[180]

> CALVINIST VIEW:
> Faith originates in response to the Word of God. Faith rests firmly upon God's Word; it always says amen to the Scriptures. … Thus Calvin's line of reasoning proceeds like this: (1) The purpose of election embraces salvation. (2) The elect are not chosen for anything in themselves, but only in Christ. (3) Since the elect are in Christ, the assurance of their election and salvation can never be found in themselves or even in the Father apart from Christ. (4) Rather, their assurance is to be found in Christ; hence communion with him is vital. … Self-deception is a real possibility because the reprobate often feels something much like the faith of the elect.[181]

180. "Salvation," Gospel Topics, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/salvation.

181. Joel R. Beeke, "Appropriating Salvation: The Spirit, Faith and Assurance, and Repentance," in *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis*,

It is reasonable to ask the question "why did the monks cherish *Silvanus* enough to hide it along with the other documents?" One possibility is due to the texts' teaching about *gnosis* (knowledge). Both the early and the late authors admonish the son to search for knowledge as part of the salvific equation. Unlike traditional Gnostic teachings, however, this *gnosis* is meant to be neither secret nor particularly status enhancing.[182] The son is told to "know" himself, to illuminate his mind with heavenly light, to control his thoughts, and to allow God to dwell in their inner temple.[183] Most 21st-century Christian readers, regardless of denomination, would generally be comfortable with these themes.

Soteriological declarations are frequently found within both parts of *Silvanus*, are fairly consistent with New Testament teachings, and are not especially controversial. Both authors urge their pupil to accept Christ, keep the commandments, do what is good and right, control his thoughts, avoid sin, reject his animalistic nature, be humble, and return to the Father. With one notable exception that will be discussed below, the two parts consistently teach the message of salvific self-control. Below are two examples of the fatherly advice given, one early and one late.

> **EARLY:** Put an end to every childish time of life, acquire for yourself strength of mind and soul, and intensify the struggle against every folly of the passions of love and base wickedness, and love of praise, and fondness of contention, and tiresome jealousy and wrath, and anger and the desire to avarice.[184]

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ed. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2008), 278, 291–93.

182. According to Bernhard Lohse, there was a decisive church-wide struggle in the second century over Gnostics' teachings related to salvation. "Furthermore, in opposition to Gnosticism the necessity of works had to be set forth in no uncertain terms. Most Gnostics were of the opinion that the redemption offered by Christ affects only a part of man, his divine spirit-substance, which is encased in nonspiritual matter. Man, they taught, is redeemed if he comes to know his true self and thus initiates the return of his divine spark to God the Redeemer. The emphasis here was upon 'knowledge.'" Lohse, *A Short History*, 103.

183. He is also admonished to "not swim in any water and do not allow yourself to be defiled by strange kinds of knowledge." In other words he is being warned specifically against secret *gnosis*. *Silvanus,* 94, 29–32. He is also told that the adversary "casts spurious knowledge into your heart disguised as mysterious sayings." *Silvanus,* 96, 3–5.

184. *Silvanus,* 84, 16–26.

> **LATE:** My child, guard yourself against evil, and do not let the spirit of evil throw you down into the abyss. For he is mad and bitter. He is terrifying, and throws everything he can into a pit of mud. It is a very good thing not to love fornication, and not even to think of that wretched subject at all, for to think of it is death. It is not a good thing for any person to fall into death. For a soul that is dead will be without reason. It is better to not live at all than to acquire an animal's life. Watch yourself, so that you are not burned by the fires of fornication. Many shooters of the arrow are slaves to it. These whom you don't know are your enemies. O my child, strip off the old garment of fornication, and put on the clean and shining garment. In it you are beautiful.[185]

A singular soteriological theme common to both parts is that of overcoming a person's inherent carnal nature. In the early part, the father pleads with his son to "cast out the animal nature which is within you and do not allow based thought to enter you."[186] In the late part, the second author elaborates upon this analogy with the following caution:

> **LATE:** Do not become the nest of foxes and snakes, nor a hole of serpents and asps, nor a dwelling place of lions, or a place of refuge of vipers.[187]

Nevertheless, despite all of the commonality between the two portions of *Silvanus*, there is one interesting difference between the two parts that relates to divine foreknowledge and free will. During the first and second centuries, the prevailing Christian attitudes towards salvation, divine foreknowledge, and free will were hopefully optimistic.

> Yet the generally prevailing conviction among the early fathers is that man is equipped with a free will, and that no sin can effectively keep him deciding for the good and from avoiding the bad.[188]

The early Church Fathers did not question the existence or theological limitations of true free will. Men were free to choose right or wrong. The gift of the atonement is freely offered to all but the individual choice to

185. *Silvanus*, 104, 24–105, 10.
186. *Silvanus,* 87, 27–31.
187. *Silvanus,* 105, 27–32.
188. Lohse, *A Short History*, 104. Notably both parts of *Silvanus* "blame," at least partially, the deceptiveness of the "Adversary" for sinful behavior.

accept this gift is based upon the singular purview of the recipient. The early part of *Silvanus* thus explains:

> **EARLY:** My son, listen to my teaching which is good and useful and end the sleep which weighs heavily upon you. Depart from the forgetfulness which fills you with darkness, since if you were unable to do anything, I would not have said these things. But Christ came in order to give you this gift. Why do you pursue the darkness when the light is at your disposal?[189]

The pertinent phrase here is "for if you were powerless to do anything, I would not have said these things to you." Therefore, the pupil is empowered with the freedom to choose righteousness and, if he decides to "live in Christ," he will receive "treasure in heaven." Notably he will not be compelled to choose Christ and, if he turns his back to Christ, will suffer the consequences of this choice.

By the fourth and fifth centuries, however, Christian theologians were wrestling with whether or not God's divine foreknowledge implies limitations upon free will. What does it mean to have free will if God already knows what will happen (predetermination)? While it would not be until the late fourth century that St. Augustine formulated answers to these questions by arguing for the "election of God,"[190] the latter *Silvanus* author appears to be contemplating some these same issues as his contemporaries were, thus ultimately helping to lay the groundwork for Augustine.

> **LATE:** The soul that is a member of God's household is one that is kept pure, and the soul that has put on Christ is one that is pure, and it is impossible for it to sin. Where Christ is, sin is idle.[191]

189. *Silvanus,* 88, 25–34.

190. Lohse describes the situation: "Salvation from this sinful state is possible only through grace, a grace which, however, is grounded wholly in the election of God. This gracious election precedes every merit on the part of man. In saying this Augustine did not deny the freedom of will altogether. To be sure, man's will cannot of itself find salvation. Divine election is decisive. Still, the will must will, for without this volitional act the offer of grace would be futile. Even in this tract, however, Augustine already says 'Clearly it is vain for us to will unless God have mercy. But I do not know how it could be said it is vain for God to have mercy unless we willingly consent.'" Lohse, *A Short History*, 112.

191. *Silvanus*, 109, 4–11.

This passage states that it is impossible for any true follower of Christ to sin. While this is a romantic ideal, it has tremendous ramifications upon the doctrine of man's agency and free will along with Calvin's idea of self-deception. Recall that the early author had told his son that he has the power to choose Christ. The late author alternatively states "it is not you who will throw him (meaning Christ) out, but he will throw you out." The implication when comparing these two passages is that one puts the onus on the individual ("if you were unable to do") while it is Christ controlling the process in the other ("he will throw you out"). This is a remarkable difference between the early part's exhortation that one is fully free to choose Christ and the second part's declaration that Christ's power is the prime salvific determinant and that man's desire is, ultimately, subordinate to God's.

Another interesting passage reads:

> **LATE:** But you, on the other hand, with difficulty give your basic choice to him with a hint that he may take you up with joy. Now the basic choice, which is humility of heart, is the gift of Christ.[192]

Here the late author is talking about the faculty of free choice. Zandee notes "in order to strip it (choice) of every trace of merit, it is said that free choice is identical with humility, and that this human endowment ultimately is a gift of Christ's grace."[193] Thus, at least in the hypothetical presented by the second author, it is practically impossible to separate our free choice and the causality of Christ's gift.

Near the end of *Silvanus*, the late author makes this fascinating statement to his son:

> **LATE:** But this divine is not pleased with anything evil. For it is this which teaches all men what is good. This is what God has given to the human race so that for this reason every man might be chosen before all the angels and the archangels. For God does not need to put any man to the test. He knows all things before they happen, and he knows hidden things of the heart. They are all revealed and found wanting in his presence.[194]

192. *Silvanus*, 104, 15–19. Translation by Zandee.
193. Zandee, "Silvanus" 546.
194. *Silvanus*, 115, 27–116, 5.

This passage illustrates the paradoxical contradictions underlying the doctrines of agency and God's omniscience. The claim that "God does not need to test man because He already knows what each individual outcome will be" theoretically impinges upon the concept of free will espoused by the early author. While it is unlikely that the late author wholly contemplated the ramifications of these statements, I am assuming these ideas are just reflective of his time period; a milieu of theological mulling, which, just a few years later, would produce Augustine's famous treatise on free will and ultimately Calvin's doctrine of irresistible grace.

Conclusions

By now I am hopeful that I have effectively demonstrated that because the two portions of *Silvanus* stem from two different time periods, the teachings of the early and late authors differ substantively on topics such as the nature of God, Christology, the divine feminine, the Godhead, soteriology, and the creation. By way of conclusion, I formally summarize the differences and commonalities between the two portions of *Silvanus* and Latter-day Saint and Calvinist beliefs and then I make some final general remarks regarding *Silvanus* and Latter-day Saint scholarship.

Silvanus, the Restored Church, and Calvinism

A few words of caution are in order here as we examine teachings from the Restored Church and Calvinism side by side with those of the early and late *Silvanus* sources. First, it is important to realize that most biblical faiths are generally able to accommodate canonical teachings that seem, *a priori*, inconsistent with their core teachings. Few Latter-day Saints are troubled by the triune formulation found in the so-called Johannine Comma (1 John 5:7–8), and Protestants have long learned to treat passages conveying *imago dei* metaphorically (e.g., Genesis 1:26). But Latter-day Saints are more doctrinally comfortable when all three members of the Godhead are present at Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3:16–17) and Calvinists are more comfortable with John's declaration that "God is a spirit" (John 4:24). It is important to emphasize that this analysis will focus more on comfort and not how a particular faith is able to doctrinally accommodate difficult passages.

Second, Latter-day Saint scholars S. Kent Brown, Stephen E. Robinson, and C. Wilfred Griggs have each independently and, in my mind, appropriately urged restraint when comparing Latter-day Saint doctrine with the writings from both Qumran and Nag Hammadi.

In a statement I consider representative of the opinions of these three scholars, Robinson preaches caution:

> But is it not dishonest to represent an apocryphal book as being firm evidence for the truth when it agrees with us, and yet quietly look the other way when it does not? The truth is that it's just as easy to support Catholicism or Lutheranism or Calvinism by proof-texting the apocrypha as it is to prove our views. It's all a matter of which passage one decides to use. … Indeed, the apocrypha do have great value, but not because they teach Mormonism; for by and large they do not.[195]

Germaine to conducting a fair comparative evaluation is the full examination of the complete text, warts and all, not just a selection of handpicked passages supportive of the pundit's hypothesis.[196] While *Silvanus* is not considered a Gnostic text, our comparative analysis should consider the writings of the two *Silvanus* authors in their entirety. As I have analyzed *Silvanus*, I have not discovered any significant "warts" that would alter my fundamental conclusion: *Latter-day Saints beliefs are much closer aligned with the early Silvanus author and Calvinist beliefs best align with the later author.*

It is also important to realize that the point of this comparison is not to prove or disprove the tenets of any particular faith. Rather the point is to establish which historical milieu alternative faiths best align with. The two authors of *Silvanus* were neither Latter-day Saint nor Calvinist. But I believe they are useful representations of their respective Alexandrian time periods and can, therefore, help illuminate how Jewish and Christian doctrine changed over time.

Figure 4 portrays my assessment of the comparability between Latter-day Saint and Calvinist beliefs with the early and late *Silvanus* authors. According to this assessment, Restored Church beliefs are

195. Stephen E. Robinson, "Lying for God: The Uses of the Apocrypha in Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-Day Saints," *Apocryphal Writings and the Latter-Day Saints,* ed. C. Wilfred Griggs (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 148.

196. An example of a troublesome Nag Hammadi text comes from "The Secret Book of John." "The first ruler defiled Eve and produced in her two sons, a first and a second: Elohim and Yahweh. Elohim has the face of a bear, Yahweh has the face of a cat. One is just, the other is unjust. He placed Yahweh over fire and wind, he placed Elohim over water and earth." "The Secret Book of John," in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, 127. Obviously Latter-Days Saints do not believe that Elohim and Yahweh are offspring of a defiled Eve.

generally compatible with nearly all of the early *Silvanus* author's doctrinal positions; there is only one single notable exception, the early author's suggestion that the Holy Spirit is feminine.[197]

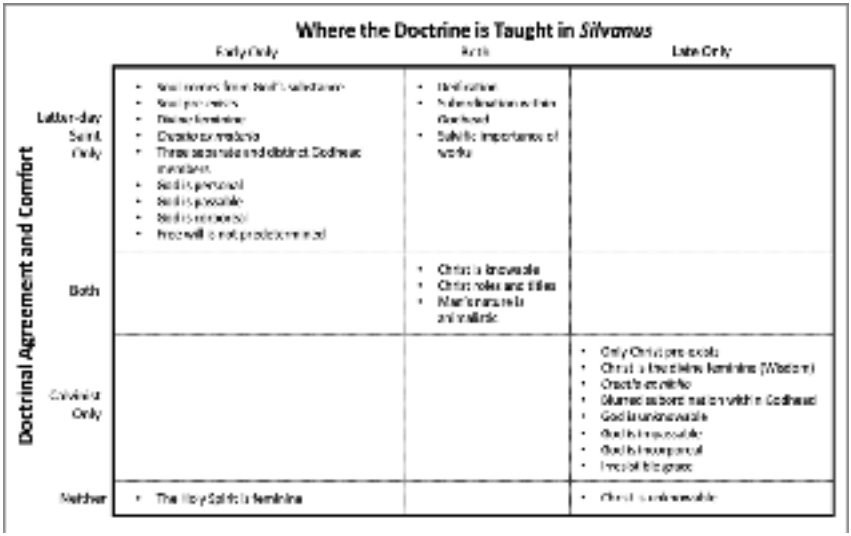

Figure 4. Latter-day Saint and Calvinistic comfort with *Silvanus* by early and late portions.

On the other hand, Calvinist beliefs are generally most compatible with the doctrinal positions of the late author. The only substantial exceptions are the teachings on the Son's subordination to the Father, our inability to fully know Christ, and the deification of Man.[198]

197. The early *Silvanus* author twice links the third member of the Godhead, the Spirit, with feminine Wisdom (*Sophia*). This is consistent with Jewish tradition and is represented in Wisdom literature. Zandee notes "It is a Jewish and Jewish Christian tradition that God has a consort. Wisdom takes the place of the Logos as mediator of creation. There is a Jewish tradition of the Holy Ghost as mother. The best known example is from the Jewish Christian *Gospel of the Hebrews*, quoted by Origen, where 'the Saviour himself says, 'My Mother the Holy Spirit took me … and brought me to … the Tabor." In the *Gospel of the Hebrews* the Holy Ghost speaks like personified Wisdom in Jewish Wisdom literature, so that the Holy Ghost as mother is not far removed from Wisdom as mother." Jan Zandee, "Silvanus and Jewish Christianity," *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions,* ed. R. Van Den Broek and M. J. Vermaseren (Leiden, NDL: Brill, 1981), 517–18. In contrast, Latter-day Saint doctrine proclaims the third member of the Godhead to be masculine.

198. I acknowledge the difficulty of generalizing orthodox Christian beliefs. The comparison I have created is, I believe, reasonably aligned to the Protestant Calvinist position. Other groups of believers such as Evangelical practitioners of open-

Therefore, within the confines of this one document from Nag Hammadi Codex VII, *The Teachings of Silvanus*, we see dramatic evidence of the alteration of Christian belief from a structure that echoes many major Latter-day Saint doctrines to a structure that is almost creedal and much more representative of the Western Christian tradition. There is a wealth of supporting evidence of this doctrinal change to be found in early Christian writings and history, yet the uniqueness of *Silvanus* is its juxtaposition of these contrasting views in a single text; a veritable microcosm portraying the development of early Christian thought.

Towards a Latter-day Saint "Discovery" — Warts and All

It seems apparent that the late author was, in a sense, attempting to "answer" the claims of the earlier author. This is most evident with regards to the figure of Wisdom; a topic in which the late author not only responds to the early text but also recasts a poem found in another Jewish Wisdom text, the *Wisdom of Solomon*, to purposely redefine the role of Wisdom and to cast the imagery of the divine feminine upon Christ. But he also responds to nearly every other thematic element in the early text: the nature of God, Christ, Wisdom, creation, salvation, deification, and the nature of man. Between the first and the fourth century, Christian doctrine undoubtedly changed and the two portions of this one document highlight many of the relevant theological issues and disputes.

Latter-day Saint scholars have yet to "discover" *Silvanus*. The only Latter-day Saint mention of *Silvanus* I could find was by C. Wilfred Griggs who simply refers to its non-Gnostic status.[199] This is somewhat understandable since biblical scholars have only reached a tenuous "consensus" regarding the dual authorship of the text and *Silvanus* is underappreciated within the body of Nag Hammadi scholarship. My analysis hopefully demonstrates that the earliest portions of the *Silvanus* text should be of great interest to church members who are interested in

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theism, for example, would likely disagree with the late *Silvanus* author's positions on topics such as divine embodiment, subordination, and divine foreknowledge. Roman Catholic practitioners would likely embrace the importance of works and the deification of Man.

199. "A very few texts, such as the fragment of Plato's *Republic* and the *Teachings of Silvanus* are arguably non-gnostic and therefore non-apocryphal in the esoteric meaning of the term." C. Wilfred Griggs, "Origin and Formation of the Corpus of Apocryphal Literature," in *Apocryphal Writing and the Latter-Day Saints,* 48. Gaye Strathearn also mentions *Silvanus* in a footnote.

understanding early Jewish Christianity. I look forward to further work by Latter-day Saint scholars as they discover this hidden gem.

As I conclude my analysis on *Silvanus*, the words of Roman Catholic scholar Stephen H. Webb come to mind:

> I think of both Mormonism and Calvinism as branches on the Christian tree. Calvinists will protest that surely they are closer to the trunk, but Mormonism actually goes deeper in trying to restore neglected practices and overlooked beliefs from ancient Christianity. … Both branches, as far as I can see, bear good fruit, and both return ample nourishment to the tree's roots, but I must admit that the Mormon branch looks to me like it begins closer to the center of the tree and that it is reaching farther toward the light. I would go so far as to say this: No other branch of the Christian tree is so entangled in complex and fascinating ways with the earliest and most neglected doctrines of the church, and no other branch extends so optimistically and brazenly upward as it stretches toward a horizon bound only by the cosmic significance of Christ. To drop the tree image, if I had to choose between Smith and Calvin, I would unhesitatingly choose Smith. … Mormonism is just a bigger set of ideas than Calvinism.[200]

Using *Silvanus* as my guidepost, I share Webb's fascination at just how effectively Joseph Smith was able to locate the earliest roots of the Christian movement.

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200. Stephen H. Webb, *Mormon Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 181–82.