

sequence: God reveals; we respond in awe. God shares His heart with us; we share ours with Him. An intimate bond is formed between creator and creature (near to the heart of God) and out of that bond of intimacy, we trust God enough to share our hearts with Him: our inner most fears and joys. This is worship. It all starts with God, when God reveals something about Himself. And God's greatest, most complete revelation about himself is made in the One called Jesus the Christ.

The Christian message is simply this: God became a man in Jesus Christ in order to show us first hand who he is and what He is really like. And this is what He is like: He loves, period. He loves you, period. It doesn't matter who you are or what horrible thing(s) you've done, God loves you. He said so when He was here in Christ Jesus. He proved it when He went to the cross to die for you. In His death on the cross and by His resurrection from the dead, God opened up a way for you to have a whole new life, a who new beginning, a whole new you.

God initiated. He came in Christ Jesus and died on the cross for you. Now it's your turn. You must respond. In fact, you already have responded and are responding even now in your attitude toward Christ. If your response is one of awe and gratitude and if your gratitude moves you to accept Jesus Christ as your Savior, you have, in effect and in fact, accepted God and you are no longer at odds with God; now you are at peace with God. Now you have a guaranteed place with God in Heaven forever. And now, right now, you are a new creation, a whole new person with a whole new (opportunity for) life.

This is the message of Easter.

Happy Easter!

APRIL 1998

MORMON MATTERS (PART 3) The Biblical Support of a plurality of Gods

by Robert Sivulka

Introduction

Last time we saw that the Christian doctrine of the Trinity teaches that God is eternally three *distinct, not separate*, persons. We said that God is not only one in purpose, not only one in nature (something's whatness— that which makes a thing what it is), but one in being. They all make up one *thing*, not one *person*. We explained this by something called an internal relation. Here, the members are what they are by means of or by virtue of the role they play within the whole relation. So a heart is a heart because of the role it plays in pumping blood within the whole circulatory system. Taken outside of this function, it is no longer a heart. It is simply a hunk of flesh that is in a process of decay rather than pumping blood. So too, the members of the Trinity *must* exist in this relation with each other otherwise they would each cease to be God. God is not unlike a radically connected Siamese twin, minus the body. This was the logic or coherence of the doctrine.

In this article, I'd like to begin to support this doctrine by means of Scripture. But I will begin by proffering various biblical verses Mormons use as rejoinders to the Christian doctrine of monotheism (i.e., the belief in there being only one God).

The Biblical Support

Foundational to the doctrine of the Trinity is the doctrine of monotheism. Mormons like to say that they believe in only one God, even though we shall see they really don't. What they mean by this usually is that there is only one God for us. Sometimes they claim this is the Father, but more often than not they are meaning that there is only one "Godhead" for them. This refers to a divine purpose or function in which the *separate* members of the Trinity comprise (Bruce McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, p. 319). Mormons like to illustrate this by pointing to corporations or their own Church's first presidency, which has one president and his two counselors. So in warping standard categories, Mormons like to claim they're monotheists, while claiming that polytheists are those who *worship* other gods as being sources of power (cf.

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Stephen E. Robinson, *Are Mormons Christians?*, pp. 68-69).

Now even though there is only one "God" for Mormons, they also claim that the Father is a God, the Son is a God, the Holy Ghost is a God, the Father's wife is a Goddess, the Father's Father is a God, the Father's grandfather is a God, and so on *ad infinitum*. Mormons themselves hope to become Gods if they are worthy enough. But what does Scripture say?

The Bible gives no indication that there is more than one true God (a point to be more fully developed next month). Mormons disagree, but say that even if this were true, that is why latter day revelation was needed. It fills in the gaps in going beyond what God has already laid down in Scripture without contradicting it. Christians think that God has already clearly spoken on the subject in such a way as to contradict the Mormon view. But before we examine verses concerning monotheism, let's examine some typical verses Mormons use to support their belief.

Revelation 1:6— Here the King James Version indicates that God the Father has a Father as well. This follows from the simple rules of the English language in which the term "his" refers to the closest proper noun that precedes it. The closest proper noun preceding the terms "his Father" in this verse would be the term "God". Thus, God has a Father.

Rejoinder— Newer versions of Scripture such as the New International have rendered this "to serve his God and Father" in reference namely to the same person, the Heavenly Father. If Mormons want to deny this then the problem becomes that they are to give glory to Jesus' grandfather, which is something contrary to Mormonism.

Genesis 1:26— Who does the "us" refer to if not other Gods? Furthermore the term for God here is "elohim" in the Hebrew, which means "gods".

Rejoinder— Granted for the sake of argument that the Bible teaches only one God for any world whatever, then the "us" here could refer to the other members that

comprise the Deity. This would fit the Christian doctrine of the Trinity as described above.

As far as the term "elohim" is concerned, there is a reason why Hebrew scholars have translated it singularly here in all the various versions of Scripture. The reason is there is a third person singular verb that is constantly conjoined with the term "elohim". For example, the Hebrew term for "created" in verse 27 is "bara". It's singular- "God created", not plural- "Gods created". Admittedly, the term "elohim" could also be translated in the plural... *in other passages* (similar to other Hebrew terms like "panim" which could mean "face" or "faces"). In each of these, they refer to false gods or idols (e.g., Exodus 23:24), or possibly angels (Psalms 8:5).

1 Corinthians 8:5-6— Here is mentioned "gods many, and lords many".

Rejoinder— Joseph Smith said that "Paul had no allusion to the heathen gods in this text" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 371). I wonder if Smith really read the whole chapter. Verse one says, "Now as touching things offered unto idols" (emphasis added). Memo to Smith: Read the whole chapter.

Matthew 5:48— Here we are commanded to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect. Thus, we must become perfect gods as our Heavenly Father is.

Rejoinder— Well, does this say that we will become perfect Gods? No. We hope to become perfect as the Father while always remaining human. How are we to be perfect as the Father? This is in the context of the Sermon on the Mount. This sermon prescribes some very daunting moral commands such as turning the other cheek (vs. 39). And in becoming morally perfect as the Father, we will share this quality in common with Him (in theology, the moral character of God is known as a "communicable attribute" of God— it is that which is *communicated* to others). This is quite in contrast to us becoming perfect as the Father in taking on all His attributes (e.g., the "incommunicable attribute" of omnipresence is something humans will

never have). Why do I assume this? Because Scripture makes a distinction between the nature of God and the nature of man (Hosea 11:9 & Philippians 2:5-10).

In attempting to teach a dog various tricks and manners, I may sometimes demonstrate them for him. And then I tell the dog to "be as good as I am." I'm really not expecting the dog to somehow miraculously become a human.

John 10:34— Jesus claimed that there were other gods.

Rejoinder— Who is being referred to as gods and what kind of gods are being referred to here? True gods or false gods? Jesus is here quoting from Psalms 82:6 in which the psalmist Asaph refers to judges, perhaps tongue-in-cheek, as "gods" (even Mormon theologian James Talmage admits that these gods are judges, cf. *Jesus the Christ*, p. 489). They were judges "unto whom the word of God came" (John 10:35), and were thus called "gods" in the same sense Moses was considered a god to Pharaoh (Exodus 7:1). In both the Psalms and with regard to Moses, they were all false gods. With the Psalms, these gods were judging unjustly (vs. 2) and would die like men (vs. 7). This is hardly what Mormons have in mind of exalted beings, who only get to be exalted after the judgment. With Moses, he was a god to Pharaoh, but not to God. Furthermore, if Moses became a true God, how did he pull this off before the judgment? Finally, if Moses was a God, why did he later sin by striking the rock when he was commanded to speak to it (Numbers 20:8 ff.)?

So why did Jesus bring this up? Well, whatever He was doing, it was not to correct the Jews' understanding that He was actually claiming to be God (vs. 33). He could have told them that they had it all wrong. He could have said that He was only claiming to be one in purpose with God just as much as they intended to be.

My own understanding was that Jesus was reaffirming the Jews' correct understanding that He was claiming to be God. He was telling them that He is not God in the same sense that those in the

Psalms were referred to as gods. Rather, He is God in the sense that He is in the very nature of God manifested in human flesh. He is the one, in contrast to the gods in the Psalms, who was "sanctified, and sent into the world" by the Father (vs. 36). Jesus was accused of blasphemy since He, in contrast to the gods in the Psalms, was claiming that He was the Son of God (vs. 36). According to that culture, claiming to be the Son of God was tantamount to claiming to be God. Jesus went on to claim that His works ought to establish this very point (vss. 37 & 38).

Romans 8:17— If we are joint heirs with Christ, then surely we will obtain all that He obtains, including His divine nature.

Rejoinder— This passage teaches that we will share in having glorified bodies to manifest that we are adopted sons of God (vss. 15-23). This is what Jesus inherited and we know that when He appears we will be like Him (1 John 3:2). Mormons mistake this to mean that we can take on the nature of God (i.e., become a god ourselves). But just because we may be an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ, it does not follow that we will take on the nature of God. The passage never says we will become gods. We will always be finite, whereas God is eternally infinite (Psalms 90:2 & Malachi 3:6).

The idea here is similar to a pet receiving an inheritance. The pet, again, does not become a human like its master, it simply inherits whatever the master leaves it.

A final problem here is that Mormons presuppose that Godhood is something Jesus inherited. But the Bible teaches that Jesus never inherited Godhood. Rather, Jesus was always God (Philippians 2:6 & John 1:1, 14). So, in His *human nature*, Jesus inherited all the riches given to humans who are heirs of God, viz., those who become His sons.

Conclusion

I only had time to deal with the arguments Mormons use to try to support a plurality of Gods from the Bible. We have seen that their arguments fail. In this article I have done the task of what may be called "negative apologetics". I have simply

rebutted or deflected arguments; I have yet to refute Mormonism. We will have to wait for the task of next month's article, when I will give a positive apologetic for why Mormonism should be rejected in its claim that there are other gods for other worlds.

GET READY!!!

By Pastor Martin

YOU DON'T WANT TO MISS-- LISTEN TO ME NOW-- YOU DO NOT WANT TO MISS THE UPCOMING SIXTH ANNUAL CELEBRATION OF THE INTERMOUNTAIN WEST DISTRICT OF THE EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCH OF AMERICA!

YOU'LL BE ANGRY AT YOURSELF IF YOU DO BECAUSE YOU WILL HAVE MISSED A GREAT TIME OF WORSHIP AND CELEBRATION WITH THE EVANGELICAL FREE CHURCHES ALL OVER THIS AREA (UTAH, IDAHO AND WYOMING).

AND YOU WILL HAVE MISSED HEARING SOME OF THE BEST SPEAKERS AND PREACHERS OF THIS DISTRICT SHARE THE HEART OF GOD WITH US, EACH IN THEIR OWN WAY!

AND, YOU WILL HAVE MISSED BEING AS PROUD (YES, PROUD!) OF OUR WORSHIP TEAM AS I'M GOING TO BE AS THEY LEAD THE ENTIRE DISTRICT IN WORSHIP RIGHT HERE AT OUR CHURCH ON THURSDAY EVENING, MAY 7TH.

YUP, YOU HEARD ME RIGHT. THE INTERMOUNTAIN WEST DISTRICT OF THE EFCA IS HAVING ITS ANNUAL BASH AT OUR CHURCH! CORNERSTONE EFC WILL BE THE HAPPENIN' PLACE NEXT MONTH, MAY 7TH-9TH.

WHAT AN HONOR!! PLEASE BE WILLING TO MAKE YOURSELF AVAILABLE TO HELP. WE'LL NEED EVERYTHING FROM FOOD PREPARATION TO BABY SITTING (IN OUR NURSERY, EVENINGS ONLY) TO HOSTING PEOPLE IN YOUR HOME (GIVING THEM A PLACE TO STAY) TO SETTING UP CHAIRS AND TABLES AND HELPING LEO TO PUT UP THAT HUGE BIG TOP TENT IN THE PARKING LOT! (SOUNDS LIKE FUN, DOESN'T IT!?) STAY TUNED TO THE BULLETIN FOR DETAILS AND FOR

OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOU TO GET INVOLVED.
COME ON, MAKE OUR CHURCH SHINE!

Theme Park

The Desert Becomes a Fertile Field

by Rachael Coonrad

Turn on the news these days, and you're more likely than not to hear one more story about the destructive power of El Niño. From flooding to mudslides to blizzards, all nature seems to be under the control of this weather phenomenon. Not a day goes by that El Niño's negative impact seems to be the topic of conversation.

But not everything about El Niño is destructive. Believe it or not, there's an upside to all this freakish weather. It seems that the record amounts of rain pouring down on California have made Death Valley – that desolate American desert – bloom. That's right. All the water has opened up rarely seen blossoms that in a "normal" year would never grow in the harsh desert. According to park rangers, there are some flowers growing in Death Valley right now that have been waiting **twenty years** for enough moisture to bloom.

What's my point? Well, this month's theme is "the Heavens declare the glory of God." How amazing that in the midst of all the disaster brought on by El Niño there is a beautiful respite. The weather and the waiting seeds add up to something so unusual, it can only be the hand of God.

And if you'll allow me to stretch the metaphor a little further, just like the disruptive El Niño, the Namesake for this strange weather didn't come to bring peace, but a sword. Yet in the middle of it all, there is amazing beauty.

May's theme is "Grace." If anyone is interested in sharing their thoughts in this column, or if you have a response to this month's editorial, the deadline is April 19th. The newsletter box is on the shelf above the coatrack at the back of the sanctuary. I look forward to hearing from you!
