

1. Introduction

Of all the sects which we encounter today, perhaps none is so deeply "sectarian" as the sect of the Mormons, born out of an alleged revelation that all existing churches are false and that therefore a completely new church must be initiated, the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints. In his book, *The Christian Church in Canada*, H.H. Walsh makes the following statement, "Despite the fact that the Mormons are increasingly playing an influential role in the political and social life of Canada, they are definitely on the sectarian side of the great religious divide." Indeed, not only do the Mormons accept ongoing divine revelation (a typically sectarian viewpoint, although some established Churches are not void of such trends), but also, beside the Holy Scriptures, they have another "bible," the Book of Mormon, plus a few other inspired documents, and this fact is unique even among the so-called Christian sects.

In his book, *Deceiving Spirits*, A.B.W.M. Kok gives the following general description of Mormonism. "Mormonism is a caricature of Christianity, a strange mixture of Christian, Mohammedan and heathen elements." It is our opinion that Kok has excellently worded the heart of the matter, and in this section we wish to show the truth of his description.

Since Mormonism is essentially an "Americanization" of the biblical history of redemption, the Mormons are most numerous in the United States of America, especially in the State of Utah. The Mormon capital of the world undoubtedly is Salt Lake City, noted for its impressive temple. The Mormon community in Canada was founded in 1880 by Charles Ora Card and is concentrated at Cardston, Alberta, where the first Mormon temple in Canada is located. The number of Mormons outside the U.S. is steadily increasing through an extensive mission program in which almost all Mormons participate, dedicating two years of their life to active mission service. At present the Mormons are estimated to number well over two million.

Even if one might totally disagree with the pagan teachings of the Mormons and regard their fantastic doctrines as lethal to true Christianity, one still cannot help but admire certain qualities and virtues which the Mormons preach and display. Their work-ethic, their sacrificial willingness (of which the tithe is a perfect proof), great zeal, close unity, and their strong rejection of non-Mormon teachings are notable. Farther than this, however, our admiration cannot go, and we come to abhor the Mormon system of thought, so unscriptural that it has become blasphemous.

With this in mind, we proceed to examine first the history and then the doctrine of the Mormons.

2. The Story of Joseph Smith

Sects or pseudo-Christian movements are usually determined by and centralized in one single person with remarkable "charismatic" qualities. As, for example, the story of the Islam basically is the tale of one Mohamed, so the story of the Mormons is essentially the story of Joseph Smith. Smith is the originator of the sect and is recognized without exception among the Mormons as "The Prophet" par excellence. The authority of Joseph Smith is so great that while the Bible is considered prone to errors, the Book of Mormon (as exclusive revelation to Smith) is claimed to be without any flaw.

Joseph Smith, whose youth has aptly been described by Fawn M. Brodie (in the book *No Man Knows My History* in which she noted his almost sickly pre-occupation with hidden treasures and "peep-stones"), belonged to a typical pioneer family of Anglo-Scottish origin which lived in the area of Rochester, in Palmyra, New York, in the early 1800's. The following facts are taken largely from a recognized Mormon authority, Gordon B. Hinkley, elder of the Council of Twelve of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints, who wrote the book, *Truth Restored*. This book was intended as an accurate introduction to Mormonism.

From his youth on, Smith had been fascinated by religious matters and divine revelations. Already at the age of fourteen, dejected by the many dogmatical differences between the existing churches and sects, and inspired by James 1:5 ("If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it shall be given him,")¹ Joseph allegedly received a divine revelation exhorting him not to join any existing church or group because "they worship Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me" (compare Isaiah 29:13 and Matthew 15:7ff.). Instead he was to await further divine instructions. Of course, when Joseph enthusiastically made this event public, he was met with general ridicule and scoffing and the history of Mormon martyrdom begins.

Revelations

Some time later, according to Smith's own accounts, as he was in

¹ Smith conveniently overlooks the fact that James doesn't speak of *revelation* in this text, but of "wisdom," even a wisdom not received *above* the Bible, but from the given revelation. A prayer for revelation cannot be based on this text at all.

prayer asking forgiveness for his sins and also requesting some “manifestation” of the Lord² which would reveal his position before God, a heavenly figure appeared unto him, claiming to be the angel Moroni. This angel announced to Joseph that he was chosen and called to perform a great work among the nations. Also, Moroni revealed to Smith the existence of a hitherto unknown book, written on golden plates, which contained the account of the former inhabitants of America and revealed their origin. These plates, according to the angel, were accompanied by the Urim and the Thummim,³ stones set in silver bows, meant to aid the user in translating the writings on the plates.

The time would come, Moroni continued, that Joseph Smith would receive the plates (with the Urim and Thummim), and in visionary state Smith was able to discern the place where the plates lay buried. The angel appeared more times to Smith, warning him especially not to use the golden plates for his own purposes. Finally the angel sent him to the hill Cumorah, six kilometers outside Palmyra, where the plates were situated. Smith was at first unable to touch the plates and was first put “on trial” during four consecutive years in which he had to travel to Cumorah each year on the same day. On September 22, 1827, it is said, Smith received the plates with the stones into his care and trust. The story has it that many people tried to steal the plates because of their tremendous monetary value, but Smith succeeded in preserving the treasure entrusted to him. After retreating to Harmony, the place where his parents-in-law lived, Smith began translating the plates in December 1827.

Harris and Crowder

During this period, others became deeply involved with Smith and his alleged plates of gold. A nearby farmer and friend, Martin Harris, took some transcripts of the plates, with translations by Smith, to a certain professor, Charles Anthon, in New York. Anthon reportedly declared that the translation by Smith was amazingly accurate, identifying the writings as Egyptian, Chaldean, Assyrian, and Arabic letters. Professor Anthon first gave a written declaration to this effect, but later tore up the document when he surmised that Smith had received the plates by revelation and would not give them up to be examined. Later, a certain Dr. Mitchell supposedly confirmed Professor Anthon’s previous statements.

Smith was also joined by a young man, Oliver Crowder, who was especially helpful in writing down the translations of the plates as given by Smith. Crowder became one of the first dedicated followers and would play a prominent role at the beginnings of Mormonism.

On May 15, 1829, when Smith and Crowder were in Prayer, John the

² It is typically sectarian to ask for some kind of manifestation from God, and such a request is even contrary to the Scriptures, as the Lord said, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign . . .” (Matthew 16:4).

³ One cannot ascribe any translating qualities to the Urim and Thummim, because these were simply lots used to decide matters (compare I Samuel 14:41).

Baptist is said to have appeared to them, ordaining them to be priests after the order of Aaron.⁴ They were told to baptize one another, and they did so in the river Susquehanna in Pennsylvania, thus becoming the first priests and members of the restored church of Jesus Christ.

Shortly hereafter the apostles Peter, James, and John appeared to Smith and Crowderly and gave them the "great Priesthood" after the order of Melchizedek.⁵ In this way Smith and Crowderly received the original authority which the first Christian Church had known.

That same year also, the translation of the plates was completed. After the translating, Smith retreated into the forests of the State of New York with three friends, Crowderly, Harris, and a certain David Whitmer. These three became the famous witnesses whose testimony is printed on the first pages of each Book of Mormon, claiming to have seen the alleged plates and having heard a voice, saying, "These plates have been revealed by God's power and were translated by God's power. The translation that you have seen is correct and I command you to witness of what you have seen and heard." Later another eight witnesses were permitted to view and even handle the gold plates, and their testimony, too, is found in every edition of the Book of Mormon, first published in 1830.

Difficulties arose later when the "three witnesses," Crowderly, Harris, and Whitmer left the Church and even became vehement opponents of Smith's teachings. But it is not certain whether they ever did recall their testimony concerning the Book of Mormon. According to faithful Mormons themselves, the truth of the Book is attested by the growth of the Church after 1830.

⁴ Smith seems to overlook the fact that this priesthood of Aaron was fulfilled in Christ and subsequently abolished (compare Hebrews 10:9).

⁵ The priesthood after the Order of Melchizedek, according to Hebrews 7, reflects the office of *Christ*, and after Melchizedek himself was reserved only for Christ. This self-elevation of Smith and Crowderly certainly borders on blasphemy.

3. The Book of Mormon

The Book of Mormon, being the tangible result of Smith's translation of the supposed gold plates, is in itself undoubtedly an impressive account, although clumsily written in a pompous language reminiscent of the King James Version of the Bible, said to contain even a quotation from William Shakespeare. As truth it is incredible; as fiction interesting.

The Book is divided into fifteen main parts, known with one exception as books, comprised from three classes of gold plates, those of Nephi, Mormon, and Ether. The Book covers the historical period from 600 B.C. (the time of the fall of Jerusalem) to 421 A.D., when the last of the Nephite historians, Moroni, sealed the sacred record and buried it in the hill Cumorah, thus preserving it for the moment when it would be handed over to the Prophet Joseph Smith.

The Story

The Book of Mormon, which gives the account of two immigrants to the "new world," deals mainly with the descendants of a certain Lehi, a Jew who lived in the Holy City, Jerusalem, shortly before the destruction and Judah's subsequent deportation to Babylon. Lehi was inspired by the Lord to leave the city, and after residing in the wilderness for some time, he crossed the ocean with his family to one of the American continents, in a ship specially constructed for the occasion by Nephi, Lehi's obedient son. Lehi, of course, had other children who were less willing and one of them, Laman, was an outright rogue.

After the arrival in America, Lehi dies, but out of his children two great families grow and prosper in the new land, the Nephites and the Lamanites. These two peoples prove quite different from one another, like Esau and Jacob, and are engaged in constant battles. The Nephites are depicted to be god-fearing and ambitious, while the Lamanites are described as ungodly, unworthy, and lazy. The Nephites, especially, were concerned with preserving the history and the prophecies of Israel, and also maintained written accounts of their own history, in this way keeping in mind the service of the Lord.

The climax of the Book of Mormon is certainly the account of Jesus Christ's visit to the "new world" after His resurrection (3 Nephi 11), and His Self-revelation to the Nephite nation. Christ instructs them to uphold the same principles He taught in Palestine, gives them the authority to baptize, and institutes His church in their midst. In doing so, the Mormons claim, Christ fulfilled the promise made to His (Palestinian) disciples in John 10:16, "And I have other sheep that are not of this fold, I must bring them also, and they shall heed my voice, so that there will be one flock,

one Shepherd." This passage, however, doesn't offer one ounce of proof for a separate existence of Nephites and Lamanites (who according to Smith resulted out of the *Jews!*), and is generally explained as simply denoting those "who are not within Judaism" (Morris, *Gospel According to John*), pointing to the world-wide scope of the Gospel and a church in which the dilemma Jew/Heathen is overcome in Jesus Christ (see also Ephesians 2:12ff.)

After Christ's departure, the Nephites live in peace and prosperity for many centuries, but gradually they become enticed by their wealth to ungodliness and apostasy. Besides, the people refuse to listen to the many prophets sent to them. One of the most prominent of these prophets is Mormon, who wrote brief accounts of his time on golden plates. Mormon gave these plates to his son, Moroni, later elevated to angelic status, who in turn hid the plates in the hill Cumorah. The Nephites were eventually eradicated by the Lamanites, while Moroni escapes as the sole survivor. Remnants of these Lamanites, in turn, were found among the American Indians, according to Smith.

The Mormons and the Bible

The Mormons will be the first to emphasize that they recognize and accept the Bible as God's revelation. And much of what they say in their evangelistic and missionary activities is based on the Bible. But, we should not be fooled for one instant, because their acceptance of the Bible is based on certain conditions which are intolerable.

While the Reformed Churches strongly maintain that God's revelation has been completed in Christ's work and the apostolic ministry, and therefore is sufficient revelation, the Mormons attest to an ongoing process of revelation. In Article 9 of the Mormon Confession of Faith we can read that "God will yet reveal great and important things concerning the Kingdom of God." The Mormons stress that the Bible cannot be understood in itself, but must be complemented with other revelations, especially the Book of Mormon. This is contrary to the clear teaching of the Bible itself (see Revelation 22).

Not only is the Bible insufficient as revelation, according to Mormonism, it is also considered to be inferior to the Book of Mormon. The Mormons like to claim that the King James Version of the Bible is full of flaws and errors, and it was precisely for this reason that Smith at one time proceeded to "revise" the existing translation, a work which he, however, did not complete because of his sudden, violent death. A group which broke away from the Mormons in 1844, and later called itself the "Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints," published what Smith had completed of this revision, the so-called "Inspired Version." It has been noted from this work that Smith did not merely revise, but also changed the text of the Bible, and the Mormon church officially recognizes these alterations!

The audacity of Smith and the Mormons on this point is simply amazing. A.A. Hoekema (in the "Four Major Cults") has correctly pointed out

that Smith “dared to assume an authority which Christ never claimed — dared to tamper with God’s Word.” The Lord always maintained the Holy Scriptures, often quoted them over against his adversaries and disciples, but *never* did our Lord change or alter what was written. If we already saw that Smith put himself on an *equal* plane with Christ (in the matter of the priesthood) we now see that he elevates himself *above* the Christ. And over against the Mormons, one must defend both the sufficiency and the infallibility of the Scriptures (Jude 3; John 10:35). The Mormon view is nothing less than an outrageous, diabolical attack on the Word of God.

For this reason, we can understand that it is possible, even logical, that many Mormon doctrines radically contradict the Scriptures and the Reformed teachings. Proof from the Book of Mormon (and other inspired documents) is accepted above Scriptural proof. The Mormon view-point of the Bible is not a mere difference in approach, but an essential and vital matter, and here is, basically, where the difference lies between Christianity and paganism.

This haughty attitude towards the Bible amazes us all the more if we realize that the Book of Mormon does not have any of the historical and canonical antecedents which the Bible does have. There are even many pertinent questions which make the Mormon claim look quite ridiculous. The so-called testimony of the “three witnesses,” for example, is not based on *fact*, but on subjective, visionary experiences. The characters of the other witnesses do not make their trustworthiness any more credible. Besides, there are many acknowledged historically-authentic manuscripts of the Bible, which have been studied and examined by scholars of international repute, while no recognized scholar has seen the plates of Smith or the original manuscript. The Book of Mormon also is said to have been written in “Reformed Egyptian,” but this language — even the Mormons admit this — is totally *unknown*, while all “other” divine revelations are consistently written in well-known languages, the New Testament being written even in an internationally used language, Greek. The question is fully in place whether the Lord would give us such an important revelation in a manner so totally different from all others! And while the contents of the Scriptures are constantly being vindicated by archeological findings, no such process has taken place or is taking place with respect to the American continent. One is surprised, indeed, that a book which has so little authenticity and historicity is given so much prevalence above other works.

Meanwhile the Mormons have not been consistent themselves, even in their approach to the Book of Mormon. While they believe that it has been fully inspired, and that Smith’s translation is perfect (made possible by the Urim and the Thummim!), yet editions from 1830 have shown many changes in grammar, punctuation, and doctrinal contents. It seems that Mormons show a strong disrespect for *any* form of written revelation.

Besides the Book of Mormon, the Mormons accept a few other major documents, the Pearl of Great Price (also containing the ten articles of faith) and Doctrine and Covenants (containing rules for life like the tithe, abstinence from liquor, tobacco, coffee, etc., and elaborating on many

particulars out of the life of Joseph Smith). These documents, dating from a later time, are also considered to be inspired and without flaw.

In their mission-work, as indicated above, the Mormons will use and quote the Bible. But to them the Bible is important only insofar as it affirms and underlines the testimonies of the Book of Mormon and the other mentioned documents. The Bible alone is hardly enough, but only combined with the classic Mormon documents (and future revelations) does it achieve its full value. In itself the Bible is an out-dated, incomplete revelation. Here already our discourse with the Mormons becomes virtually impossible, because we recognize a different foundation.

4. Further History

Shortly after Smith and Crowder were ordained to the priesthood after the order of Melchizedek, Smith was told to found and reorganize the Church of Jesus Christ again on earth. This act took place during a meeting on April 6, 1830, at Peter Whitmer's home in Fayette, New York.

During this meeting Smith and Crowder "ordained" one another to elders in the newly-formed church and confirmed the others present as members of the church, giving them the gift of the Holy Spirit. Also, Smith received an important revelation designating himself as "the Seer, the Prophet and Apostle of Jesus Christ," and became known since then as "The Prophet."

Through a program of active mission work, the church continued to grow, but from the start was also met with violent persecution. Smith was arrested often, usually on the charge of "disturbing the peace," but also because of suspect amoral activities (see: Polygamy). This period of Mormonism is described in the novel *God's Own Children* by Vardis Fisher, and is characterized by an ever growing activity and widening radius of action, even among the Indians. The result is that a number of Mormon settlements are established in Ohio and Missouri.

During this period Smith started his revision of the King James Version to remove the flaws and errors which had led to so much dissension among the Christian Churches. At this time also, most of the revelations were received (Doctrine and Covenants) by which the church would be governed and regulated. It is a time of both expansion and consolidation of both the church and its doctrines. Infant baptism, for example, was rejected, a doctrine of universal reconciliation was taught, and many abstinence laws revealed. (According to the Mormons today, these laws are confirmed by present knowledge of nutrition.) Smith founded the "School of Prophets" (a seminary) and a first Mormon temple was built in Kirtland, Ohio.

The organization of the Mormon church was officially completed when in 1835 a Council of Twelve Apostles was chosen (besides the Presidency set up in 1832) and according to the Mormons their church has the same basic structural set-up as the early Christian church had: apostles, the "seventy," elders, high priests, teachers, deacons, evangelists, and bishops.¹

¹ Time and space doesn't permit an extensive discussion of the organization of the Christian church, but we may note a few important things. In the first place the apostolic office is unique and non-transferable, for the apostles were to be eye-witnesses of Christ's total

In 1838 Smith and others were arrested as a result of conflicts and disagreements with other citizens, but were released after five months. During this imprisonment, however, many Mormons fled to Illinois under the leadership of Brigham Young, and later, when Smith rejoined his brethren, a city was built at Commerce, Illinois (called by Smith: Nauvoo, the "beautiful place"). The Mormons sent missionaries even to England, and especially Woodruff, a later president, had excellent success. During subsequent difficulties, Joseph Smith and his brother Hiram were killed by mob violence while awaiting trial on charges of slander in a jail in Carthage on June 27, 1842.

The Mormons continued on in Nauvoo under the leadership of Brigham Young, but when persecutions and difficulties again began to increase, preparations were made in 1845 to leave the area and find a place "where they could serve the Lord according to their conscience."

ministry on earth. The priesthood is abolished because of Christ's one sacrifice on the cross. Elders and bishops have the same office in the New Testament. The "seventy" were evangelists, preparing Israel for the Messiah. Only the offices of the elders (ruling and teaching elders) and the deacons are left. The Mormon church is somewhat "over-organized," I'm afraid.

5. The Story of Brigham Young

Besides Joseph Smith, there is perhaps no man who has influenced the history of the Mormons so much as Brigham Young, the mighty successor to Smith during the difficult years of the "exodus" to Utah and the necessary consolidation in the salty flats. Young had apparently met the Prophet already in 1833 and had entertained a close friendship with Smith from then on. He was a true heir to the Mormon legacy.

In February 1846, the Mormons left Nauvoo and crossed the Mississippi River to head west, under the inspiring leadership of Brigham Young. During this trek (in the cold and the snow!), many travellers died and were buried along the way. Also many temporary camps were set up, so that some crops could be harvested in order to support the continuing flow of Mormon travellers.

After the famous Mormon batallion had been formed (when upon the request of the American government 500 young Mormons marched south to battle Mexico) and many families were temporarily without their men, the Mormons stayed for some time at the bank of the Missouri River, near the present city of Omaha.

In the Spring of 1847 a group of pioneers left to chart a course for the others to follow to the western Rocky Mountains. This was the result of a revelation given to Brigham Young called, "The word and the will of God concerning Israel's camp and travels to the west." This document contained many rules and regulations meant for the trip. The first group left the Missouri on April 5th, followed by subsequent groups. Brigham Young himself was among the second group. On June 21, 1847, two Scouts, Orson Pratt and Erastus Snow, reached the Salt Lake, and two days later Young himself arrived. Young viewed the valley and then spoke his famous words, "This is the place!"

Brigham Young forbade his people to work on the Sunday, or to buy or sell any property, since the land would be equally divided. Water and wood was declared to be communal property so that no strife would result from ownership claims. A beginning was made to build a city in the wilderness and a temple for God. The city was to be called Salt Lake City.

The Legend has it that in the Spring of 1848, when a swarm of locusts was destroying the corn crop, and the Mormons were facing utter starvation, a huge cloud of sea-gulls appeared to take up the locusts and spit them out elsewhere, thus saving the vital crops. There is a monument on Temple Square in Salt Lake City commemorating this "miracle" with the

words, "Erected in grateful remembrance of the mercy of God to the Mormon pioneers." Earlier at Nauvoo, the Mormons had once been supported by a flock of quails, as Israel was sustained in the desert; so this miracle was not "uncommon" among Mormons.

The expanding Mormon settlements could benefit in many ways from the travel and trade stimulated especially by the California Gold Rush. Merchants who could not sell their products in California, passed them on to the settlers in Salt Lake City. Later in 1851 the Mormons established a colony in San Bernardino, California. Needless to say, the contributions of the Mormons were essential in "opening the west."

Mission Work

We have seen that the Mormons from the start were immensely active in missionary activity. Their historians claim that in 1847 there were already twenty thousand Mormons in Great Britain. Mission-work was also conducted in France, Italy, and Scandinavia. Usually, however, the converts left their own country and went up to "Zion" as Salt Lake City came to be known, where they contributed in building up the Mormon establishment.

To help these (often poor) converts, a fund was set up in 1849, called the Perpetual Immigration Fund. The money, however, had to be paid back as soon as possible, so that others, too, could profit from the Fund. Many converts, who could not afford the famous "covered wagon," crossed the continent with handcarts. Some of these groups met with tragedy, and their history is told on two monuments near South Pass, Wyoming.

When the American government suspected that the Mormons were setting up an independent state of Utah (under Governor Young), an army was sent to the West. But a peace commission in the Spring of 1858 could resolve the difficulties and remove the misunderstandings.

The West was opened more and more, first by the pony express, and especially by the Union Pacific Railroad. Gradually the Mormons became less isolated. The State of Utah sided with the Union during the Civil War, and this choice later gave the Mormons a favourable position with the central government in Washington. In 1875 President Ulysses S. Grant visited Utah and Salt Lake City.

Brigham Young, whom the Mormons themselves have lovingly dubbed "a modern Moses," died on August 29, 1877, presumably of acute appendicitis, at the age of 76. It seems that his last words were, "Joseph . . . Joseph . . . Joseph . . .," a tribute to the man whom he had so unwaveringly followed and so brilliantly succeeded.

Exodus

One cannot help but appreciate the energy and zeal which the Mormons showed under the leadership of Brigham Young, in travelling thousands of miles under difficult circumstances and in changing a barren desert into a flowering garden. And the Mormon history is certainly an integral and interesting part of general American history.

However, it must be noted that also other groups throughout the world have undergone similar migrations and hardships and achieved similar feats. We cannot accept the terms under which the Mormons interpret their history, as a repetition of the Exodus under Moses from the land of bondage to the promised land. The story of Brigham Young certainly has spectacular aspects, but it cannot be compared to the Lord's guiding His people from Egypt to Palestine. Such exemplarism is unacceptable.

Mormonism seems to have a fascination with the "exodus" concept. The Book of Mormon basically is the story of an exodus. The history of the Mormons themselves is largely woven around the exodus concept. But the Mormons fail to understand the real "exodus" in its Scriptural depth and scope: being led out of sin and death to life and light in Jesus Christ. Despite their many travels and their great endurance, the Mormons still have a "long way" to go before they have encountered and entered into the "promised land," a Kingdom not of this world, but out of God, not made with hands but a heavenly Jerusalem (Hebrews 12:18ff.).

6. Important Mormon Doctrines

We have used up much space now on the history of the Mormons, simply because a doctrine doesn't stand on its own, but comes up out of a definite history. But it is now high time to examine some of the fundamental Mormon teachings. We cannot do so extensively, but will point out the main differences with the Reformed faith. We hope to make clear especially how the Mormon doctrine radically conflicts with the clear testimonies of God's Word.

In discussing the major doctrines, we follow the order generally maintained by the Reformed dogmatics, from the theology (the doctrine of God) to the eschatology (the doctrine of the last things). For further documentation see the excellent work of A.A. Hoekema, *The Four Major Cults*.

Theology

The Mormon Confession (the Ten Articles) seems to start out rather positively, "We believe in God, the Eternal Father, in Jesus Christ His Son, and in the Holy Spirit." Although the Book of Mormon clearly teaches the *trinity* (the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), later teachings have strongly denied that God is *one*. Therefore we can say that Mormonism *denies* the Trinity. Besides, it is taught that the Father and the Son both have *material* bodies, since an "immaterial" body cannot exist. The Holy Spirit seems to form an exception, although He is regarded to be finite and bound to one place. Also, if God has a material body, then sexual distinctions can be applied to Him!

The theology of the Mormons also teaches *Polytheism*, the existence of many gods. Smith pointed to the Hebrew *Elohim* to justify this idea, but this is no proof at all, for this plural has been regarded generally as one of the majesty or intensity. It also contradicts the clear testimony of the Scriptures, "Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God is one LORD" (Deuteronomy 6:4) and "For there is *one* God" (I Timothy 2:5). Joseph's explanation of these texts that out of many gods *one* God was *appointed* to rule mankind is certainly not Scriptural, but totally pagan. Mormons even promote the idea that there are many worlds, each with its own particular god, among whom God the Father (Elohim) has received the highest position. This doctrine reminds us of the pantheon idea entertained by the Greeks and Romans, a hierarchy of gods with Zeus (Jupiter) as the most prominent.

Mormons dare to go one step further. They teach that God is essen-

tially an exalted *man* who was once like us. Man is destined to go the same path. Eternal life means, basically, to be deified. One realizes that we are far removed here from the Biblical manner of speaking, as for instance in Isaiah 40. In the Scriptures eternal life is bound to Jesus Christ and knowing Him (John 17:3) and the Bible teaches that there is a principle difference between divine and human beings, a difference which Mormons reduce to a matter of degree. Mormon theology is nothing less than glorified anthropology.

Predestination or Fore-Ordination?

The Mormons have labelled the Reformed doctrine of predestination to be a false doctrine. It is inconceivable, they say, that an individual is powerless and bound to a certain predestination. There is such a thing, however, as Fore-ordination; that is, that although men retain their own freedom (of choice), God gives the *opportunity* to serve Him, and He does so only if He knows beforehand that the "chosen one" will live up to divine expectations. This doctrine reminds us somewhat of Arminianism, which claims that God acts upon foreseen faith, and therefore does not *make* the facts, but only concludes from them.

It appears from this viewpoint that God is not considered to be "in charge" as such, but only guides and directs, giving opportunities, while each man himself determines his destiny. The Mormons fail to understand the comforting word of Paul to the Ephesians that we are "chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world" and also "destined in love to be His sons through Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 1:3ff.). Choosing and giving destiny to someone is something far more conclusive and coercive than merely "granting an opportunity."

Creation or Organization?

While the Reformed doctrine teaches that God created "ex nihilo" (that is, out of nothing), and this in accordance with Romans 4:17 and Hebrews 11:3, Mormons deny such a thought. God only "organized" existing matter into an ordered "cosmos," but He does not have the ability to originate or destroy matter itself. This basically makes God subject to matter and elevates this matter above God Himself. Polytheism here comes quite close to pantheism (deification of matter).

It is taught that Jesus Christ (Who is called Jehovah) organized this matter into earth under the guidance of Elohim, the Father, who dwells on the star Kolob. It is also believed that Christ was aided in this work by many others, like Abraham and Moses, and possibly even Smith himself!

It will be clear that if God has no ultimate power to create or no final power over matter itself, He can hardly be appreciated in His divine government and providence. Although Mormons admit to some general guidance, basically (as indicated above) every man determines his own lot, taking or rejecting the God-given opportunities.

Pre-existence

Mormons do not believe that the history of mankind starts as such with the creation of Adam and Eve, but that men have a spiritual pre-exis-

tence before they come to inhabit this earth. Such a doctrine is not new, however, and was taught long ago by Greek philosophers like Plato.

Since the Mormons do not recognize an immaterial body, this "spiritual existence" is only of a finer, more pure, refined form of matter, which can only be discerned by purer and sharper vision. This pre-existence period is one in which men are tried and tested, and their life on earth is based on their previous stature.

Such theories declare man "eternal." But the Scriptures make clear that eternity is a characteristic only of God Himself, and that He created man at His own set time and in a way determined only by Himself (I Timothy 6:16, Colossians 1:16). The creation "after God's image" is not taken in a spiritual sense (as, for example, the Heidelberg Catechism does, when it states "that is, in true righteousness and holiness") but in an absolute, physical sense, possible, of course, since Mormonism ascribes a material body to God.

The Fall: Blessing or Curse?

One is truly amazed at the manner in which Mormons regard the fall into sin. The Reformed doctrine teaches that the Fall was the terrible moment when, through man's willful disobedience and the Satan's instigation, sin came into the world and the nature of man was wholly corrupted. But the Mormons seem to regard the fall as a very happy circumstance.

To understand this, one must know how the Mormons evaluate marriage and children. According to Brigham Young, the greatest command was to be fruitful and replenish the earth. But the contention is that before the fall into sin, in the state of "innocence," Adam and Eve were unable to have children, and conception and birth became possible only *through* the Fall! This ridiculous assumption, however, is disclaimed by the Scriptures, since this command was given *before* the fall, and God does not give impossible commandments.

The Book of Mormon states that if Adam and Eve had not fallen, they would have been in a sad situation, "having no joy, for they knew no misery; doing no good, for they knew no sin." The purpose of Adam's fall was even to bring men to this joy of procreation. Thus Adam and Eve can gratefully praise the Lord for their fall into sin, and Mormons can speak of the Fall as a "blessing in disguise."

You will understand that Mormons do not speak of Adam and Eve's sin as a transgression, but rather a progression, a step ahead. And it is clear that we have now entered into a doctrine which is totally strange to the Biblical revelation. Sin and misery may be a blessing to the Mormons, but the Bible speaks of the great depths of misery to which man has come through sin, a sin so grievous and heinous that only the sacrifice of God's only begotten Son would remove its curse and effect. Mormons simply make white what God has called black. And thus they remove the necessity and the effect of the cross. Here we see the roots of the total negation of Jesus Christ as the Mediator sent by God to reconcile the world unto Himself. If misery is not correctly acknowledged, deliverance

will not be understood or appreciated. When speaking of the "blessing" of the fall, Mormons bare their anti-Christian character.

The Mormons also do not accept the doctrine of hereditary sin (as explained, for example, by Paul in Romans 5 and confessed by David in Psalm 51). Article 2 of the Mormon Confession states: "We believe that a man is punished for his own sins and not Adam's transgression." Again, this is not a new doctrine (for Pelagius already taught such unscriptural views), but in this frame it only underlines the typical Mormon idea that man has his own free will. The Mormons do not know of *grace*, but anything which a man receives is a matter of correct reward or recompense. Mormons do not know of "a holy calling, not in virtue of our works, but in virtue of His own purpose and the *grace* which He gave us in Christ ages ago" (II Timothy 1:9). As with all false religions, Mormonism is *Autosoterical*; that is, man saves himself and does not need his Saviour.

What about the Christ?

We come now to a very important question: "What about the Christ?" What role exactly does the Lord play in this twisted, pseudo-Christian system of thought?

Like the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mormons believe that Christ does not differ from men in principle, but only in degree. Christ is only the first of Elohim's children. Also like the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mormons do not believe in the divinity of Christ, at least not an equality with the Father and the Spirit (as Paul teaches in Philippians 2:6), but Christ is subjected to the Father.

Since all men pre-exist as spirits, the incarnation of the Lord is not a very special event at all, because all men undergo the same procedure more or less. Although Mormon doctrine seems somewhat confused as to the exact conception and birth of Christ, it is clear, as A.A Hoekema states, that He "is the product of the physical union of God the Father and the Virgin Mary" (*ibid* page 56), a fully irreverent thought!

If the Mormons regard the Fall as a step ahead, as we noted, what is then the purpose and function of Christ's suffering on the cross? Amazingly, the notion is preserved that Christ's death is necessary as a form of atonement, but *only* to give men the opportunity to save themselves from the terror and anguish of hell. Like the Jehovah's Witnesses proclaim with their "ransom" idea, Christ opens the door for men to act. Mormons also teach that all men will rise from the dead, regardless of faith, and Christ's sacrifice is only a door-opener through which men *themselves* must pass and can pass, as we read in Article 3 of the Confession, "We believe that through the atonement of Christ all mankind *may* be saved (emphasis mine, Cl. S.) by obedience to the laws and the ordinances of the Gospel." One is not only justified by faith alone, according to the Mormons, but by own works (of which faith is a foremost part).

Basically it boils down to this: all men are saved, irrespective of their faith, and they partake in a general salvation (again, an old, well-known

heresy, promoted by many), but some achieve a higher individual salvation through their obedience to the Gospel. Of course, if the Mormons do not accept predestination, they must also reject the doctrine of reprobation.

What about the Christ? As in all false religions, Christ is robbed, also in Mormonism, of the exclusive position which He has as the only Mediator between God and man, Whose sacrifice is sufficient for the sins of the whole world (I John 2:2). Therefore Mormonism falls under the strong *anathema* (Curse) which Paul spoke with regards to any gospel which would want to "pervert the Gospel of Christ," whether it be an angel like Moroni or a self-proclaimed prophet like Joseph Smith (Galatians 1:6-9). It is fully a humanistic, man-centered, and therefore anti-Christian teaching.

Sacraments

I noted already that Mormons reject infant baptism, because infants are regarded to be innocent and without hereditary sin; yet the Mormons teach that *child*-baptism is essential for salvation, and it is administered when the children are eight years old. The Lord's Supper is celebrated weekly by all members from eight years up, and is only a confession of faith from the side of the participants themselves. Instead of wine, water is used as a symbol at the table. From this brief description we already note how the sacraments of the Mormons are far removed from Christ's original institutions, not just outwardly, but especially inwardly, for sacraments do not attest to our goodness, but to God's covenant promises confirmed in the blood of Christ.

An interesting matter is formed by the so-called "Baptism for the Dead," a practice based by the Mormons on I Corinthians 15:29, "Otherwise what do people mean by being baptized on behalf of the dead?" The Mormons claim that this baptism can form a link between the living and the dead or function as a bridge between the generations. This simply implies that a living person may be baptized in the place of someone who passed away without being baptized and without faith, and thus by the law of substitution "restore" the deceased person unto God. This practice elevates not only the Mormon church, but also individual members, as "saviours" or "mediators" in their own right, who act as stand-ins for unbelievers. The less Christ is esteemed by the Mormons, the more they seem to esteem themselves as agents of salvation!

Paul's words, however, even if they constitute some exegetical difficulty, cannot be interpreted in that sense, because only Christ stands as Mediator between God and man, and our deeds never reconcile ourselves or others to God (compare Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 6). Even if such a custom did exist (in Corinth?) and Paul alludes to it, this certainly does not mean that Paul condones such practices. He does not include himself among the practitioners, and speaks of "they" as opposed to "we" in the next verses.

It does appear that such practices of baptizing for the dead did occur later with the Corinthians and Marcionites, and could have been familiar in

and around Corinth when Paul wrote his letter (cf. Hodge, *Corinthians*). Paul could be saying, "Others believe the resurrection of the dead (proven in their baptism for the dead); well, the church of the Lord has much more reason to do so!" The whole matter is clearly a *reference*, not the main point of the thought-development. And certainly an important practice of the Church (in the sense of a divine ordinance) cannot be based on this mere reference.

The inference seems to be that if there is no resurrection of the dead (Paul's main theme) an act like baptizing would be ridiculous, because baptism means being buried with Christ and partaking in the power of His resurrection (Romans 6:5).

Eschatology: The Last Things

As far as the eschatology (the doctrine of the last things) is concerned, we note the following points. There is the expectation of a literal gathering of the tribes of Israel and a building of Zion on the American continent. Christ is expected to descend towards personal reign, and the world will be restored to the splendour of paradise, as Article 10 of the Mormon Confession states.

This gathering of Israel is to take place in various phases or stages. First the gathering of Ephraim (The Mormon Church; Joseph Smith is claimed to be a descendant of Joseph, son of Jacob!), then the gathering of the Jews (the tribe of Judah in Palestine), and finally the gathering of the lost Ten Tribes. Christ will then appear to rule in a Millennial kingdom. In the Millenium (the thousand-years reign), the believers alone shall live on this earth, while the unbelievers are "imprisoned" in a spirit world. At the end of this Millenium, Satan will be loosed for the final battle, will be defeated, and the present earth will be dissolved to be resurrected as a heavenly body.

The Mormons distinguish three kingdoms: the Celestial Kingdom on the new earth, for the righteous who will live before God with their families in a blessed celestial marriage; the Terrestrial Kingdom on some planet other than earth for otherwise honourable unbelievers and insincere Mormons; and the Telestial Kingdom, on yet another earth for the unclean who form a most numerous group.

The Mormons do believe that the devil and his angels, plus those who have blasphemed the Spirit, and thus committed the unforgivable sin, together called "The Sons of Perdition" are forever doomed to the exceeding torment of hell. For this reason A.A. Hoekema points out that the Mormons are not in the full sense "Universalists" (who believe in salvation for all men, that is, universal salvation) but are "virtual universalists" since indeed the "vast majority" receives some form of higher or lower salvation.

The Scriptural doctrine of the last things is much more simple than the rather complex Mormon eschatology. When the church has been gathered, the Lord will descend to a restored new world, meeting the

saints on the clouds of heaven (I Thessalonians 4:16-18) and God will dwell forever with His people (Revelation 21:1-4). And especially, even if there is a diversity in glory and rank on the new earth, as there is throughout history, (compare Prof. Dr. K. Schilder's statement about "pluriformity" on the new earth in "Wat is de Hemel?" page 222), yet salvation is the *same*, and in this there is full unity: one House, many mansions; one Lord with many subjects; one body with many members. The Mormon distinctions of various kingdoms are totally unscriptural.

7. Polygamy

It is necessary to devote a separate section of our survey to the infamous Mormon concept of marriage. Marriage plays such an important role in Mormon thought and practice that the *unmarried* hardly have a place and task in the Kingdom of God. In his book *Mormonen op Mars* (Mormons on the March), Rev. H.J. Spier even wonders what meaning people like the Apostle Paul or even the Lord Himself (who were not married) can have among the Mormons, especially when Paul even seems to advise against marriage!

The Mormons entertain basically two deviations from the Scriptures regarding marriage; namely, that marriage is eternal (celestial) and that marriage can be plural (polygamous).

We can start with the polygamous practices which are so interwoven with Mormon history and teaching. It should be noted, then, that polygamy was not advocated and defended at first by Smith, but *later*, in an apparent attempt to appease his wife Emma, and to condone his own immoral practices by "divine revelation." The Book of Mormon even strongly speaks out *against* polygamy: "Wherefore my brethren hear me, and hearken to the Word of the Lord, for there shall not any man among you have save it be *one* wife; and concubines he shall have none" (Jacob 2:27). But the practices of Smith and others are subtly excused by what follows in the same chapter. "For if I will, saith the Lord of hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people, otherwise they shall hearken unto these things" (Jacob 2:30). In this text, the Mormon scholars claim, the possibility is opened for a subsequent revelation to Smith in which polygamy is encouraged. And in "Doctrine and Covenants" Smith indeed delivered a tremendous testimony in favour of polygamy to bring forth seed unto the Lord, making plural marriage even a *command* of the Lord. Those who objected against this command (like Smith's own wife Emma, for example) were threatened with divine wrath.

Even if we note a clear discrepancy in Mormon teaching on this point and the principles are molded to fit the practices, we must point out that the Bible speaks vastly different. And even if the practice of polygamy is noted in the Scriptures and was practised by prominent men of Israel (as Mormons like to point out!), nowhere is it condoned, but on the contrary, throughout the Scriptures, such practices are frowned upon. In the New Testament the command to have only one wife is more than evident (I Corinthians 7:2 and I Timothy 3:2).

We must admit that the Mormon church has officially recalled the practice of polygamy. This was done under President Woodruff, who

issued a statement to the effect that no marriage shall be solemnized which is against the laws of the land. But this statement does not retract Mormon doctrine on this point and is nothing more than a practical rearrangement.

Concerning the idea of "celestial marriage" we can now be brief. Mormons believe that a marriage, legally solemnized in a Mormon temple, is a marriage for eternity and can never be undone. Even plural marriages are maintained and valid in the celestial state, and "spiritual children" will be born out of these marriages. The Christian doctrine that a marriage is dissolved at death, is regarded by Mormons as illegal divorce. But it may suffice to note that Christ said to the Sadducees, "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given into marriage, but are like angels in heaven" (Matthew 22:30). Mormonism is nothing less than "spiritualized sensualism."

8. Conclusion:

Sola Scriptura

In the introductory word, I quoted Kok who termed Mormonism a “caricature of Christianity with Christian, Mohammedan and heathen elements.” Christian elements, because Christ does play a role, be it a very minor one; Mohammedan elements, because of the strong legalistic tendencies; pagan elements, because of polytheistic and pantheistic theories in which man is “deified” and God is “humanized.” By now it will be clear to the reader that Kok has not exaggerated at all.

The final question is: “How do we approach these Mormons who are increasingly active in our society and continue to confront us with these pagan theories?” And perhaps a few remarks can be made about the approach from our side.

1. It must be stressed from the very beginning that Reformed Christians cannot accept any revelation other than the Holy Scriptures alone, as confessed in Articles 3-7 of the Belgic Confession. Especially over against Mormon claims that the Bible is fallible and insufficient, we must uphold the absolute sufficiency and trustworthiness of the Scriptures. We do not need Smith’s additions to “restore” the truth; the Bible presents itself as a complete and fully adequate revelation. And any attempt to move from the Bible to the Book of Mormon must be diagnosed and declined.

2. In all confrontations with others (not only the Mormons!) we must take care to hit the heart of the matter. Do not debate over all kinds of topics, but call the Mormons to seek *all* justification in Christ alone through faith. Without this self-denying faith, it must be stressed, salvation is impossible. Show the Mormons how they deny Christ as a complete Saviour because they have let go of the Scriptures, and therefore have no real right to call themselves “Church of Jesus Christ.”

3. One will find, generally, when the true Gospel is being explained, that even polite and friendly Mormons will become exasperated and arrogant in an attempt to ridicule the trustworthiness of the Bible. It might then be wise to show the Mormons how inconsistent their own teachings are (as explained above at many occasions) and that their beliefs are based only on the whims of apostate men. There is no historical or archeological proof for *any* of Smith’s claims.

4. No evangelism or confrontation from our side will be possible or

effective if we ourselves do not have excellent knowledge of God's Word and train ourselves in a life according to that Word. Sects win many a member by their persuasiveness and example. In this respect we are often shamed by others. If Satan drives his victims into gruesome slavery, let us be guided by the Holy Spirit into newness of life in Christ, confessing His Name freely before men.

I conclude with the wish that this introduction has again showed the overwhelming riches the Church, which is faithful to God's Word and the Reformed confessions, has received. Sola Scriptura, because the Church which preserves the Scriptures in fulness learns to live sola fide and sola gratia. And that means, finally, soli Deo gloria (I Corinthians 1:30, 31).

CL. STAM
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