

Editorials

THAT'S JUST HIS OPINION?

Mormon doctrine is often hard to grasp, not just intellectually but in trying to understand what is and isn't a legitimate tenet.

From its inception, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has been overrun with evolving revelations, scriptural alterations and theological contradictions. The late prophet and president of the sect, Ezra Taft Benson, sought to reduce the confusion by decreeing, "The Living Prophet is more vital to us than the standard works" (i.e., *The Book of Mormon*, *Doctrine and Covenants*, *The Pearl of Great Price*, and the Bible).

Anyone who discusses with an LDS missionary the theological edicts issued by their leadership eventually will hear the retort, "That's just his opinion!"

Gilbert Scharffs, in his 1986 book, *The Truth About "The God Makers,"* used this evasive technique when he wrote, "Church leaders are entitled to their own opinions like everyone else. Official doctrine in the LDS church is determined by canonization of scripture and official statements by the First Presidency or the prophet himself when he speaks for God" (pg. 243).

Yet, at times, even the "prophet himself," speaking for God, is not immune from this tactical diversion.

Take, for example, the overwhelming and irrefutable evidence that Brigham Young taught that the pre-mortal Adam of the Garden of Eden was none other than God the Father (Elohim). This teaching, denounced in 1978 by then-president and prophet Spencer W. Kimball, has become known as the "Adam-God" doctrine. While not directly stating Young's declarations were "just his opinion," a publication by Mormon apologist Van Hale purported to debunk this unscriptural belief by calling the doctrine a "theory."

Another example is the LDS teaching on the birth of Jesus Christ. While the Bible clearly teaches that Jesus' physical body was supernaturally conceived by the Holy Spirit (i.e., through a virgin apart from any human relations or agency) and born of the Virgin Mary (Matthew 1:18), Mormonism rejects this fundamental doctrine.

In the Mormon system, the first "spirit child" born to the Father (Elohim) and one of his goddess wives was Jehovah (Jesus). When the time came for Jesus to receive a mortal body, Elohim (who himself is a man exalted to godhood) came to Earth and took the Virgin Mary as his wife, had sexual relations with her, thereby personally begetting a physical body for his firstborn Son.

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The words of Thomas Ice and Robert Dean are a fitting conclusion and warning in regard to the demons in Christians teaching:

“We are calling on the body of Christ to reject the proliferating superstitions in Christendom. These beliefs are the products of human thoughts and experiences, but cannot be verified from the Bible. Possibly the fact that so many people have recently been converted out of the occult explains why spiritual warfare in many circles is increasingly resembling a ‘tit-for-tat’ battle between two sorcerers. But the Bible says that our minds are to be renewed by *God’s Word itself*, and not by the Word of God as interpreted from a non-Christian framework, especially a framework which has much in common with the occult.”³⁶

Endnotes:

1. See the accompanying article, “The Curse

of Curse Theology — The Return of Rebecca Brown, M.D.,” found in this *Journal*.
 2. See for example *Reclaiming Spiritual Ground* by Jim Logan, Moody Press.
 3. Mark Bubeck, *The Adversary*, pg. 129.
 4. *Good News Broadcaster*, Nov. 1983, pp. 26-28.
 5. Donald Grey Barnhouse, *The Invisible War*, pg. 166.
 6. See further, “The Diversion of Deliverance,” *PFO Newsletter*, Vol. 5, No. 3, July-Sept. 1985, pg. 2.
 7. *The Adversary*, op. cit., pg. 121.
 8. Thomas Ice and Robert Dean Jr., *A Holy Rebellion*, pg. 30. This book is now available under the title, *Overrun by Demons*.
 9. *The Adversary*, op. cit., pg. 88.
 10. *Ibid.*, pp. 90-92.
 11. *Ibid.*, pg. 125.
 12. *Ibid.*, pp. 144-146.
 13. David Powlison, *Power Encounters*, pg. 46. Emphasis in original.
 14. Mark Bubeck, *The Rise of Fallen Angels*, pg. 59.
 15. C. Fred Dickason, *Demon Possession and the Christian*, pg. 210. For a critique of Dickason and his work, see *The Quarterly Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 2, April-June, 1988, pp. 2, 9-10.
 16. *The Rise of Fallen Angels*, op. cit.
 17. C. Peter Wagner, *How to Have a Healing Ministry in Any Church*, pg. 53-54.

18. Michael Horton, editor, *Power Religion*, pg. 64.
 19. See further, Mike Taylor, *Do Demons Rule Your Town*, Chapter 9.
 20. *The Rise of Fallen Angels*, op. cit., pg. 25.
 21. James Friesen, *Uncovering the Mystery of MPD*, pg. 231.
 22. *Ibid.*, pg. 257.
 23. Richard Ofshe, *Making Monsters*, pp. 202-203.
 24. W.H. Daniels, editor, *Moody: His Words, Work, and Workers*, pg. 389.
 25. David Wells, *God in the Wasteland*, pp. 180-181.
 26. *The Adversary*, op. cit., pg. 149.
 27. *The Rise of Fallen Angels*, op. cit., pg. 45.
 28. *Biblical Perspectives*, Vol. 5, No. 2, March-April 1992, “An Examination of False Spiritual Warfare Cliches,” pg. 5.
 29. *The Adversary*, op. cit., pg. 89.
 30. *Ibid.*, pg. 95.
 31. *Ibid.*, pp. 117-122.
 32. *The Divine Principle*, pg. 148.
 33. Brent Grimsley and Elliot Miller, *Christian Research Journal*, Summer 1993, “Can a Christian Be Demonized?,” pp. 16-19, 37-38.
 34. Eric Sauer, *In the Arena of Faith*, pp. 51-52.
 35. *Biblical Perspectives*, op. cit., pg. 6.
 36. *A Holy Rebellion*, op. cit., pg. 194. 

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Mormon Apostle Bruce R. McConkie acknowledges this teaching in *Mormon Doctrine*. Under the heading, “Only Begotten Son,” he writes:

“Beloved Son, Christ, Son, Son of God, Christ is the *Only Begotten ... the Only Begotten Son ... the Only Begotten of the Father ...* These name-titles all signify that our Lord is the only Son of the Father in the flesh. Each of the words is to be understood literally. Only means *only*; Begotten means *begotten*; and Son means *son*. Christ was begotten by an Immortal Father in the same way that mortal men are begotten by mortal fathers” (pp. 546-547, italics in original).

Under the heading, “Son of God,” in the same book, he writes:

“God the Father is a perfected, glorified, holy Man, an immortal Personage. And Christ was born into the world as the literal Son of this Holy Being; he was born in the same personal, real, and literal sense that any mortal son is born to a mortal father. There is nothing figurative about his

paternity; he was begotten, conceived and born in the normal and natural course of events, for he is the Son of God, and that designation means what it says” (pg. 742).

When this writer has confronted Latter-day Saints with these statements, he repeatedly has been told, “That’s just his opinion!”

There seems to be little hesitation by Mormons to distance themselves from awkward areas of theology proclaimed by their church leaders. Yet one of the LDS church’s tactics to buttress its claim as the only true church is an appeal to the Bible.

A small cardstock handout used by Mormons is said to contain the “Seventeen Points of the True Church.” This circular says its author consulted the Bible to identify the characteristics of the first-century Christian Church, thereby allowing him to discover which is the one true Church upon the Earth today. The circular goes on to say that he found 17 distinctive characteristics of this true church, all of which the LDS church possesses. Some of them were: a restored church, a foundation of apostles and prophets, the teaching that God (the Father) and Jesus Christ (the Son) have bodies of flesh and bone, and the practice of baptism

for the dead.

Absent from the list is the principle that the first-century believers “continually devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching” (Acts 2:42). Adam Clarke, in his *Commentary on the Bible*, writes the Church’s response to the apostles’ doctrine: “They received it, retained it, and acted on its principles” (pg. 962).

Early believers subscribed to the apostles’ authority on the teaching of Scripture and accepted it as the very Word of God. In Christ’s true Church there is nothing optional about believing the apostles’ doctrine. We do not find any record of early Christians dismissing the apostles’ clear teaching with “That’s just Peter’s opinion!” or “That’s just Paul’s opinion!” Those who opposed it, such as Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Timothy 2:18), were branded heretics.

Equally troublesome for Mormons is the extent to which one can apply the rationalization of “that’s just his opinion.” Does it apply to Joseph Smith Jr.’s claim that God and Jesus Christ told him that all the churches were wrong and an abomination? Can we apply it to Smith’s teaching that God himself was once as we are now and is an exalted man? Or can we apply it to Spencer W. Kimball’s 1978 proclamation that allowed black people to join the Mormon priesthood?

Utah Mission’s Robert McKay highlighted this error in Mormon logic recently:

“Do you see where this leads? If statements that a Mormon doesn’t want to accept can be brushed off as private opinions without authority, so can other statements. If declarations that make the church look bad are mere opinions, so are statements that make the church look good. If a General Authority said something that the Mormon doesn’t believe and it was just that man’s opinion, then the things that the Mormon does believe are also just someone’s opinion” (*The Evangel*, January/February 1996, pg. 8).

Christians need to be aware that in Christ’s Church, adherence to the apostle’s doctrine has never been an option. Their divinely inspired teachings were far more than “just someone’s opinion.”

—MKG

News Updates

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riality” and that He now possesses a “nonfleshly” body in heaven. Harris further asserted that the “believer’s resurrection body will come from heaven, not the grave.” (See further, *The Quarterly Journal*,

Vol. 11, No. 2, pp. 5-8 and Vol. 12, No. 3, pp. 2, 14-15.)

At the forefront of bringing resolution to the disagreement was Duane Magnani of Witness, Inc. Magnani, a former Jehovah’s Witness, had charged that Harris’ statements paralleled the heretical beliefs of the Watchtower Society. “If there was not a physical resurrection, there wasn’t a resurrection. The only kind of resurrection in the Bible is physical,” Magnani said.

In its statement of reaffirmation, the Evangelical Free Church said, “[its] leadership reaffirms unitedly and unequivocally the belief that the same body in which Jesus was crucified and was raised again, an immortal body, but nevertheless a physical body with flesh and bones; and that the dead bodies of believers will be raised immortal from the grave when Christ returns.”

A resolution letter dated Jan. 29, 1996, and jointly signed by Magnani, Dr. Paul A. Cedar, president of the EFCA, and renown Christian apologist Dr. Norman L. Geisler stated that the “disagreement has passed” and announced that “through much prayer and good discussion, we have seen that God is faithful to bring us together in brotherly reconciliation.”

—MKG

Book Reviews

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careful exegete who brings to his work years of experience as a biblical counselor. His logic is flawless and meticulous. His research is practical and valuable in helping readers understand how to wage war against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

His conclusion expresses his deep desire to help us reclaim true spiritual warfare:

“Reclaiming spiritual warfare means learning afresh how God pursues His glory in our lives. It means gaining an understanding of progressive sanctification in a Christian culture habituated to look for quick fixes. It means learning to see heroic dramas played out in tiny corners of life. It means becoming human, renewed in the image of Jesus Christ — the pioneer and perfecter of faith. It means learning how to become Christians.”

So-called “power encounters” may seem to have excitement and drama. But they are really a detour from Christ’s walk. This book could bring biblical sanity back to believers and help heal divisions caused by erroneous teachings.

—GRF