

# **Chapter 11**

## **Jesus Christ and the Atonement**

### **Straw-man caricatures of Mormon Christology**

Mike and Ann Thomas present a number of statements that serve to straw-man the Christology of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on page 134. I will deal with these inaccurate depictions of Latter-day Saint theology individually.

#### **Mormonism and Arianism**

[Jesus] had a beginning because he was born as a spirit child of God.

Mormon theology does not state that Jesus had a beginning, but that He is eternal. It is a distinct precept in Mormon theology that, before taking on the form of the Spirit Son of God, Christ existed from all eternity, His form being that of a perfect intelligence. Intelligences are uncreated according to Mormon theology (D&C 93:29). Thus, Mormonism does not believe that Christ came into being “out of nothing” or that he “had a beginning.” All that LDS theology states is that out becoming the spiritual sons and daughters of God means nothing more than the formation of a spirit body in which a pre-existing, eternal personality or “intelligence” (Abraham 3:22) dwells, being “begotten” by Heavenly Father in the same way as one is “begotten” as a mortal person on earth.

#### **Jesus as God**

Mormons do not accept Jesus as God, only as “a God.”

This is false. The very title page of the Book of Mormon states that “Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God.”

#### **Oneness and Unity of God**

The authors use John 10:30-33 as evidence conducive to their views on the Trinity. However, the Greek is cast into the neuter, therefore, it does not indicate oneness of being but of purpose.

In John 17:21-23, Jesus clarifies such oneness, asking the Father “That they [the Apostles] all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.”

This pericope teaches that, in fact, the sense in which the Father and the Son are one is

exactly the same as the sense in which Christ sought to have His disciples be one with Him. That was clearly a figurative, or composite form of unity. Nothing more mysterious or paradoxical was intended by Christ's prayer. The word *homo-ousios* is notably absent in the Greek of John 17. Indeed, such is precluded in this pericope, as man and divine are, in Orthodox Christianity, utterly different from one another, therefore, such oneness that the Father and Son hold could *not* be shared with mortals.

Even more important, the pericope shows *how* the Father and the son are "one" (and, correspondingly how men may become one with them). The passage says that the *glory* which the Father gave His Son was, in turn, given by the Son to His disciples so that they too could become "one."<sup>1</sup>

## **The conception of Jesus**

[Mormons teach that] Jesus was conceived by physical sexual intercourse between God and Mary (P. 135)

The Church has no official position on the question of "how" Jesus was conceived. The only thing that the Church officially declares is that Jesus is the Son of God the Father. Although Matthew states that Mary was "found with child of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 1:18) and "that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 1:20), Luke provides us a more detailed and clear account. While Matthew describes the visit of an unnamed angel to Joseph in only two verses, Luke takes ten verses to describe the visit of the angel Gabriel to Mary. The additional insight provided by Luke's account helps clarify Matthew's statement in this instance. He tells us initially that Jesus "shall be called the Son of the Highest" (Luke 1:32) and thereafter affirms Christ's divine Sonship by informing us that the angel told Mary: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore, also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God" (Luke 1:35) - not of the Holy Ghost. Luke and other inspired writers clearly used the titles "highest" and "Majesty on high" to refer to God the Father (e.g., Luke 1:76; 6:35-36; Hebrews 1:1-3). They also unmistakably believed that Jesus Christ was the Son of God the Father (e.g., 2 John 3).<sup>2</sup>

Critics of the Church have, through the years, made attempts to portray LDS doctrine on this subject as radically anti-Christian. Some, for example, have tried to use texts such as Brigham Young in the *Journal of Discourses* 1:51 and Bruce McConkie's entry for "Son of God" in *Mormon Doctrine* (pp. 741-42) and other writings by Church leaders to show that Mormons believe God had sex with Mary. These quotes, however, when read in context, simply emphasise the fact that Christ was both the spiritual and physical Son of

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<sup>1</sup> Richard R. Hopkins, *Biblical Mormonism: Responding to Evangelical criticism of LDS theology* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon Publishers and Distributors, 1994), 85

<sup>2</sup> Michael W. Hickentboham, *Answering challenging Mormon questions* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon Publishers and Distributors, 1994), 95

God and that Christ's *birth* (not conception) was as normal as any other child's. No such source states that God had sexual relations with Mary as some critics contend.<sup>3</sup>

## **Was Jesus Married?**

The critics make huge deal about some statements made by Church leaders to the effect that Jesus was married. Nothing in the Gospels preclude Jesus from being married. Indeed, not being married was a source of great shame in the ancient Middle East, as was not having children. Notwithstanding, not once in the whole gospel accounts did any of Christ's detractors use such against Him. Furthermore, Jesus was called "rabbi" on occasion (e.g., John 1:38), something reserved for only married men.

We will never know for sure whether or not Jesus was married, but the biblical texts are neutral towards the question.

On the very same page, the authors make another mistake in regards to LDS teaching:

[T]he revelation on the degrees of glory in heaven states that only married couples sealed together for eternity can inherit the celestial kingdom (p. 136)

D&C 76 states no such thing. Furthermore, couples sealed for all eternity will stand to inherit the highest degree in the Celestial Kingdom (D&C 131). Those who are not sealed for all eternity, nonetheless, contra the authors will stand to inherit the Celestial Kingdom.

## **Limits on the atonement**

Although many Christians today believe that all sins may be forgiven, the Lord has declared that some sins will not be washed away by his atoning sacrifice. We are told, for example that "blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men" (Matt. 12:31). We are likewise informed by Paul that "if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins" (Heb. 10:26; see also D&C 29:17).

As to David's sin of murder (the shedding of Uriah's innocent blood), it would be premature to assume that David was fully forgiven this sin just because several Old Testament scriptures seem to imply that he was (2 Sam, 12:13; Ps. 16:9-11; 30:3; 86:13). We should first note that Joseph Smith's inspired revision of 2 Samuel 12:13 indicates

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 97. Brigham Young and Orson Pratt did speculate that Mary may have been, albeit, temporally, the wife of the Father during the conception. No doubt this was influenced by the Puritan background they came from where only people who were married to one another could have children. Notwithstanding, they never mentioned sexual intercourse nor anything as explicit as critics of the Church make such unofficial proclamations from the *Journal of Discourses* and *The Seer* out to be.

that the Lord had *not* put away David's sin (JST 2 Sam. 12:13). We should also note that although David was promised that his soul (spirit) would not be left in hell (Ps. 16:10; 30:3; 86:13), Peter remarked that David had still "not ascended into the heavens" at the time of Christ's resurrection (Acts 2:29, 34) when the graves of the saints were opened and "many bodies of the saints which slept arose" (Matt. 27:52-53). David's sepulchre was apparently untouched at that time (Acts 2:29).

We should also note that although David's soul (spirit) would not be left in hell (prison – JST Acts 2:27), the intent was only to show that David would eventually be resurrected. The reference to the resurrection of Jesus Christ cited by Peter (Acts 2:27, 31) still remains in the Septuagint version of Psalms 16:10 but is absent in the Hebrew Masoretic text. Thus, the meaning of this particular scripture has been obscured to include spiritual salvation in modern Bibles when only physical salvation was originally intended. We are also told by John that "no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him" (1 John 3:15; see also Gal. 5:19-21 and Rev. 22:15) and this truth has been confirmed by modern revelation (D&C 42:18-19; Alma 39:5-6). Although forgiveness of the sin of murder is available to some degree to those who do so ignorantly, as did Paul (1 Tim. 1:13), and to those who sin before receiving a knowledge of the truth (Luke 23:34; Rom. 4:15; 5:13), as did the Jews (Acts 2:36-38), it is not available to those who have received a full knowledge of the truth (Heb. 10:26). Modern revelation indicates that partial forgiveness may be achieved with great difficulty (Alma 39:5-6) and after suffering by the sinner himself (D&C 76:103-106; 132:26, 39).

The Prophet Joseph Smith indicated that "murderers...cannot have [complete] forgiveness. David sought repentance at the hand of God carefully with tears, for the murder of Uriah; but he could only get it through hell; he got a promise that his soul should not be left in hell" (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, p. 339; see also 188, 356-57).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 133-34. It should be noted that the Doctrine and Covenants states that having no forgiveness in respect to committing murder only applies to those who are Latter-day Saints (e.g., D&C 42:18)