

Every Tree Is Known by Its Own Fruit

Of Mormonism, Trinitarianism and Polytheism*

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When Jerusalem fell, Rome was quite prepared to give the God of Israel a place in her Pantheon. Israel absolutely refused such religious annexation: the one, unique and universal God of Israel alone was a living God; Jupiter and his like were things of naught, figments of the imagination. And the same reasons that would not permit the Jews to bend the knee to gods of pagan Rome, prevented them in later generations from allowing themselves to be absorbed by the two great Religions that issued from Israel's bosom.¹

In its early years, Christianity was essentially a Jewish movement. Gradually, as Greeks and Romans became converted, pagan ideas led to the concept of the Trinity. Traditional Jews could not accept the concept of a triune God, and Trinitarian Christianity became a purely Gentile religion.

Widespread religions can form the basis of derivative theologies. Jesus taught that one can know the nature of something by what it produces. Specifically, Jesus said, "For every tree is known by his own fruit."² It is axiomatic that the derivative fruit carries with it the essential

*Mr. Goldberg writes as an adherent of Judaism. His position necessarily differs at some points from that of this *Journal*. — editors

¹ Theodore S. Reinach, n.p., n.d.

² Luke 6:44; see also Matt. 7:16, 20. All New Testament citations are from the King James Version.

makeup of the parent tree, for its seeds yield another identical tree. Thus the question arises: what insights can be drawn from a derivative Christian theology on the subject of the unity of God? In other words, what will grow out of a Trinitarian medium?

While professing to be monotheistic, Trinitarian Christianity has adopted the concept of three entities in one God. Dogmatic Trinitarianism refers to the three aspects of the Trinity as “persons” distinct from one another (Athanasian Creed, etc.). (Each divine “Person” is endowed with distinction as it relates to the others.) The division of God into three distinct entities and the elevation of the man Jesus to a divinity (or the reduction of God to human flesh) implicates Trinitarian Christianity in a form of idolatry. In its essence, Trinitarian Christianity is polytheistic.

The unitarian teaching of the unity of God is consistent with the Jewish Bible (“Old Testament”) to which Christianity is bound as Israel’s heir. The Jewish Bible, throughout, makes God’s will clear: anything but the worship of the one God is idol worship. Jewish commitment to literal monotheism is stated in such places as Isaiah 43:11: “It is I, it is I who is Lord, and there is no savior beside me.”³

The premise of this article is that the polytheistic nature of Trinitarianism is exposed through an evaluation of Mormonism. The contention of this article is that Mormonism is the fruit of the Trinitarian Christian tree, and through Mormonism we better understand Trinitarian Christianity. In Mormonism we can see a logical progression of Trinitarianism. In essence, that which is derived reveals the “theological genetics” of the source.

I. MORMONISM IS DERIVED FROM TRINITARIAN CHRISTIANITY

The derivation of Mormonism from Trinitarian Christianity is clear. Trinitarian Christianity deified Jesus and elevated him to the status of “eternal Son,” the second member of the triune God. Mormonism shares this basic understanding. The proper name of the Mormon Church is “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.” Jesus features prominently in Mormon theology. The Trinity rests in the basis of Mormon theology. Brigham Young taught that “The Holy Ghost, we believe, is one of the characters that form the Trinity, or the Godhead.”⁴

³ See also Hosea 13:4.

⁴ *Discourses of Brigham Young*, 1954, 30.

Other doctrinal parallels exist between popular Christianity and Mormonism. Biblical Christianity teaches that Jesus is the savior of mankind and that no one has salvation without faith in Jesus (John 3:16; Acts 4:12; Titus 1:4). Mormonism has likewise declared that one must accept its primary prophet, Joseph Smith, in order to enter the kingdom of God and attain salvation. Mormonism unambiguously teaches that no man nor woman will ever enter the kingdom without the consent of Joseph Smith.⁵ Mormonism teaches that the blood shed by Joseph Smith when he was shot to death has the same purpose and salvific effect as the blood shed by Jesus on the cross.⁶ Certainly this concept derives from Christianity and further highlights the resemblance of Mormonism to Christianity.

Examination of the concept of the incarnation of God in human form not only shows the derivative nature of Mormon theology, but also highlights the evolutionary dynamic of this derivative theology. Trinitarian Christianity laid the foundation for the idea that the God of Israel had become a physical being. Jesus, a man, is declared to be the deity — God in the flesh.⁷ In adopting this theology Mormonism evolved the concept, and declared that God the Father had the physical form of a man and passed through life and death.⁸ Mormonism teaches that after God created spirits, He then created “tabernacles” (bodies of human flesh) “precisely as he had been created in this flesh himself.”⁹ Joseph Fielding Smith teaches “Christ was begotten of God. He was not born without the aid of man, and *that man was God!*”¹⁰ Trinitarian Christianity had one of the members of its Trinity physical; Mormonism made two parts physical, both the Father and the Son. This is a mere quantitative, not qualitative, difference. The belief in the physical manifestation of God as a man on earth is consistent with both Trinitarian Christianity and Mormonism. This concept does not exist in Judaism nor in unitarian Christian theology.

⁵ Joseph Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, compiled by McConkey, 1954, 1:189-190.

⁶ *Ensign*, June 1, 1994, 22.

⁷ See, e.g., *Clement's Second Letter to the Corinthians*, 1:1; *Letter to Diognetus*, 7:2 (where Jesus is described as “the Designer and Maker of the universe”); and *Athenagoras' Plea*, ch. 10.

⁸ *Doctrines of Salvation*, 10, 11.

⁹ *Discourses of Brigham Young*, 50.

¹⁰ *Doctrines of Salvation*, 18 (emphasis in original).

The idea of the God of Israel being manifested as a man is contrary to God's will, which is clear throughout the Jewish Bible. The book of Numbers teaches us that "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent."¹¹ Human forms are clearly included in God's admonition not to worship any idol of "any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above or that is in earth beneath."¹² Therefore, the belief in God as a man is idol worship because it is contrary to God's will regarding worship. Yet, it is specifically that concept which sets the theological foundation for Mormonism to evolve and declare that God the Father was also a man.

With an examination of these similar major theological doctrines, the conclusion that Mormonism is derived from Trinitarian Christianity appears reasonable.

II. THE MERE CONCEPT OF "DIVISION OF GOD" PROVIDES THE THEOLOGICAL BASE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT INTO A MULTITUDE OF GODS

Once an initial division of God occurs, each subdivision becomes distinguished from the others. In the case of Trinitarianism, distinct names were assigned to God: "God the Father" became distinguished from "God the Son" who became known as Jesus. Once distinguished, each segment can be treated differently by the faithful. Justin Martyr ranked the separate segments of God when he described Jesus as "the Son of the true God himself, and holding him to be in the second place and the prophetic spirit in the third rank."¹³ Though each "person" of God is treated distinctly in Trinitarian theology, the claim is made by Trinitarian apologists that the three are, in reality, one.¹⁴

While the church was accepting Trinitarian developments, it never lost the corresponding need to defend and justify its theology as monotheistic through apologetic writings. The struggles of Christian theologians to defend this view highlight the doubts which were held about Trinitarian dogma. This line of apologetics is unnecessary in unitarian theology.

Whether one accepts or rejects the Trinitarian Christian position that the three are in reality one it is clear that Trinitarian Christianity departed

¹¹ Num. 23:19; see also 1 Sam. 15:29.

¹² Exod. 20:4; see also Deut. 5:8.

¹³ *First Apology of Justin*, ch. 13.

¹⁴ *Athenagoras' Plea*, ch. 8-9, etc.

from Judaism by splitting the concept of God into three identifiable, named and ranked concepts. This crucial theological development laid a foundation for derivative polytheism.

Once the idea for three independent acting entities of God takes root, the derivative theology no longer benefits from the protective fence, built by Judaism and maintained by unitarianism, around the concept of absolute oneness. With the fence eliminated, the derivative theology is free to develop and evolve consistently with its Trinitarian foundation. In the case of Mormonism, the theology exploded into a multitude of gods only limited to the number of persons who live their lives according to the *Book of Mormon*.

Brigham Young declared that the Mormon faithful “will become gods.”¹⁵ He also declared the polytheistic nature of Mormonism when he taught that “Gods exist, and we had better strive to be prepared to be one of them.”¹⁶ The *Ensign* declares that: “Anyone who believes and teaches of God the Father, and accepts the divinity of Christ, and of the Holy Ghost, teaches a plurality of God.”¹⁷ It is a fundamental principle of Mormonism that “As man is, God once was; as God is, man may be.”¹⁸ The Mormon position does not seem out of place when viewed in light of the early Christian teaching of Irenaeus about “bringing God down to men by the working of the Spirit, and again raising man to God by his incarnation.”¹⁹

Mormonism teaches the deity of Jesus and the Trinity, and freely admits that its followers recognize many gods. Trinitarian Christianity denies that it is in any way polytheistic, but is it not the same basic qualitative form of theology? It is not a perversion of Trinitarian theology to draw a parallel to Mormonism. Yet, it would be impossible to draw this parallel from Judaism or unitarian Christianity, neither of which ever recognized component parts of God, nor ever made God a man.

It is clear that, except for differences in degree, the same basic principles form the foundation of Trinitarian Christianity and Mormonism. The qualitative similarity is that both teach multiple divine entities. The qualitative difference is that Mormonism admits it.

¹⁵ *Discourses of Brigham Young*, 98.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 227.

¹⁷ Nov. 1984, 68.

¹⁸ James Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 1947, 430.

¹⁹ *Against Heresies*, Book V: Redemption and the World to Come, ch. 1.

III. CONCLUSION: "BY THEIR FRUITS YOU SHALL KNOW THEM"

Jesus said, "For every tree is known by his own fruit" (Luke 6:44). In this analysis, Mormonism is treated as the fruit of the Trinitarian Christian tree. The above analysis is sufficient to show that Mormonism is not only derived from Trinitarian Christianity, but through Mormonism, Trinitarianism and the concept of incarnation further evolved. In fact, Mormonism depends upon Trinitarian Christianity for its theological base. Jesus' comment above allows the conclusion that we can know the nature of Trinitarianism from its fruits. The parallels in theology between Mormonism and Trinitarian Christianity are clear, and in them we can see the character of Trinitarian theology.

The conclusions to be drawn are astounding. Mormonism has caused God to be lowered to the level of people who are born and die, and teaches that people can achieve Godhood. Thus, all rational and intellectually honest minds should have no trouble concluding that Mormonism is unabashedly polytheistic. Since it can be shown that Mormonism exists only because of the prior existence of Trinitarian Christianity, and that Mormon theology regarding the division of God differs only quantitatively from Trinitarian Christian theology, one should be comfortable concluding that Mormonism is the fruit of the Trinity. Mormonism could not develop in a system in which God exists only as unity. Since we can know the tree by its fruit, and the fruit is clearly polytheistic, then the conclusion is unmistakable: Trinitarian Christianity is polytheistic.

Trinitarian Christianity made fertile ground for Mormonism when it broke from pure monotheism, split God into the Trinity, and deified Jesus. Mormonism did not change the fundamental division-of-God concept, it only increased the number of entities which can be identified as gods. It did change the number of physical manifestations of God. Mormonism manifests and clarifies the basic nature of Trinitarian Christian theology.

Some may suggest that Judaism must have planted the seed of Christianity because Christian roots are planted in Israel. However, it is Mormonism and Trinitarian Christianity which share the fundamental theology regarding multiple entities of God and the incarnation of God. Judaism shares no such concepts. Though certainly Judaism influenced the development of biblical Christianity, Jewish and Trinitarian Christian *theology*, at least as they relate to the unity of God, have nothing in common.

In conclusion, Mormonism is admittedly a polytheistic religion, and subscribes to the concepts of the Trinity, Jesus' divinity, and the division of God. The consistency of these beliefs with Trinitarian Christianity, coupled with Jesus' statement that by their fruits we shall know them, reveals the polytheistic nature of Trinitarian Christian theology.