

Worldview Apologetics

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Week 6: Mormonism

Mormonism: The Basic Idea

“In short, man is a god in embryo.”

“God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens! That is the great secret. ... Here, then, is eternal life—to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be Gods yourselves, and to be kings and priests to God, the same as all Gods have done before you...”

Joseph Smith

A Brief History of Mormonism

- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
- Founded in 1830 by Joseph Smith, Jr.
- Smith received various ‘revelations’ from God:
 - *The Book of Mormon* (1830)
 - *The Doctrine and Covenants* (1835)
 - *The Pearl of Great Price* (1851)
- Smith deemed Christian church to be apostate
- Smith succeeded as leader by Brigham Young

Mormonism: Theology

- *Polytheism*: there are many (many) gods
- All reality is material in nature
 - The gods are embodied material beings
 - The gods are part of the material universe
- The gods were once humans like us
- The universe has always existed (not created)
- The universe is essentially a “god factory”
- There *might* be one supreme God (the Father)

Mormonism: Anthropology

- Humans (in this world) were made by God
 - Adam was created *literally* in the image of God
- We pre-existed as spirit-children of God
- We are purely material beings (just like God)
- We are all *potential* gods
 - Gods are nothing less than exalted humans
 - Gods and humans are essentially same species

“As man now is, God once was; as God now is, man may be.”

Mormonism: Knowledge

- The word of God: Bible and Book of Mormon
 - Additional revelation through other Mormon texts
- The Bible must be “translated correctly”
 - Its translation must accord with Mormon texts
- We can know that the Book of Mormon is true
 - A private revelation (testimony) of the Holy Spirit
 - A subjective feeling: “a burning in the bosom”
- Continuing revelation through LDS “prophets”

Mormonism: Ethics

- Morality is based on the will of (our) God
- Ethics from conscience and from Scripture
 - Scripture = Bible + Standard Works of LDS
- Conservative social ethics (“family values”)
- No stimulants allowed (including caffeine)
- Polygamy no longer permitted (since 1890)

Mormonism: Salvation

- Salvation is essentially *divinization*
 - We can attain the exalted state of godhood
- Salvation comes through *grace and works*
 - “...for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.” (2 Nephi 25:23)
- Christ’s atonement makes salvation *available*
 - Salvation “by obedience to laws and ordinances”
- Nearly everyone will end up in (a) heaven

Tool #1: Consistency

- Do the Mormon texts agree with the Bible?
 - Numerous apparent conflicts between the two
- Some clear points of disagreement:
 - Different views of God (Isa. 43:10; 46:9; John 4:24)
 - Different views of creation (Heb. 11:3; Rev. 4:11)
 - Different views of humans (Num. 23:19; Isa. 46:5)
 - Different views of salvation (Rom. 3-4; Eph. 2)
- No evidence that the Bible has been corrupted

Tool #2: Explanation

- Why is there a universe in the first place?
 - The material universe has *contingent* existence
- Christian worldview:
 - God (a transcendent being) freely chose to create
 - God created and sustains the orderly universe
- Mormon worldview:
 - The gods exist *within* the material universe
 - No explanation for existence and order of universe

Tool #4: Coherence

- Can polytheism account for moral absolutes?
 - Absolute moral laws presuppose an absolute God
- Christian worldview:
 - Morality grounded in character and will of God
 - There is only one God: both *personal* and *absolute*
- Mormon worldview:
 - Morality comes from (a) god – an infinite regress?
 - No possible *transcendent* ground for moral laws

Tool #8: Hope

- Could the Mormon gospel change tomorrow?
 - LDS teachings are always subject to revision
- Is the LDS Church really the one true church?
 - Church was completely apostate for 1800 years
 - Christians were utterly deceived for 1800 years
 - Why think Mormons aren't in the same boat?

"I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matthew 16:18)
