

**Examining Mormonism from a Christian Perspective: Critiques and Reflections**

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## Examining Mormonism from a Christian Perspective: Critiques and Reflections

In this paper I will provide a critical analysis of Mormonism from both a Biblical and secular perspective. Through an examination of the religions history, beliefs, and practices, I will evaluate key theological distinctions between the two faiths, notably with regard to the attributes of God, the notion of exaltation, and redemption. This paper will also examine the Book of Mormon's historical and social criticisms, the controversy surrounding church leadership, and if it meets the requirements to be called a religion.

One of the primary criticisms of Mormonism when looking from a Biblical perspective is the significant theological differences between the two. While both believe in God, the nature of God is fundamentally different. Christians believe in a Trinitarian Godhead, consisting of three persons in one divine essence. Additionally, Mormons believe in the idea of exaltation, in which faithful Mormons can become gods themselves in the afterlife. This belief is also incompatible with Christian doctrine, which emphasizes that there is only one God.<sup>1</sup> Craig Blomberg, a professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary, "The Christian doctrine of the Trinity, the existence of only one true God who exists eternally as three persons, is a foundational belief of orthodox Christianity. Mormonism's teaching of multiple gods, with the potential for human beings to become "Gods" themselves, contradicts this belief and puts it outside the bounds of historic Christian faith."<sup>2</sup>

Another significant theological difference between the two religions is the idea of salvation. Christians believe that salvation is a gift of grace from God and cannot be earned through good works or obedience to commandments. Mormons, however, believe that salvation

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<sup>1</sup> Blomberg, Craig L. "Mormonism." In *Five Views on Apologetics*, edited by Steven B. Cowan, 180-181. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Blomberg, Craig L. "Mormonism: A Christian Denomination?" *Denver Journal* 2 (1999): 1-17.

is achieved through faith and works, and determines your value in Heaven. This difference is reflected in the Mormon practice of baptism for the dead, in which living Mormons can be baptized on behalf of deceased individuals in order to give them the opportunity for salvation. This practice is not accepted in the Christian faith.<sup>3</sup>

Another piece of Biblical evidence that refutes Mormonism is the concept of the priesthood. In Mormonism, the priesthood is considered an essential part of the faith, with two levels: the Aaronic priesthood and the Melchizedek priesthood. Regardless, this concept contradicts scripture which states that there is only one high priest, Jesus Christ, and that all believers have equal access to God through Him. In Hebrews 7:24-25, it says, "But because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them." This passage emphasizes that Jesus is the only high priest, and that all believers have direct access to God through Him. The Mormon concept of the priesthood therefore contradicts scripture.

Mormonism's belief in additional scripture beyond the Bible is one of the most significant differences between Mormonism and traditional Christianity. While Christians believe that the Bible is the only source of divinely inspired scripture, Mormons believe in the Book of Mormon and other scriptures such as the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price. However, the Book of Mormon has been subject to significant academic and historical critiques. Despite its detailed descriptions of ancient civilizations in the Americas, there is no archaeological evidence to support the existence of these civilizations.

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<sup>3</sup> Richard J. Mouw and Robert L. Millet, *Talking Doctrine: Mormons and Evangelicals in Conversation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 75-76.

Michael D. Coe noted that "Nothing in Mesoamerican archaeology supports the Book of Mormon. In fact, all New World archaeology contradicts it".<sup>4</sup> The Book of Mormon contains numerous anachronisms, such as the mention of horses and chariots in ancient America and the use of steel weapons. These did not exist in the Americas until the arrival of Europeans. Dr. Thomas W. Murphy also affirms "The Book of Mormon appears to contain anachronisms and contradictions that suggest it is not what its supporters claim it to be".<sup>5</sup>

The origins of the Book of Mormon itself are also a matter of controversy. Observers point to the numerous changes and revisions made to the book since its original publication, as well as the lack of evidence to support Joseph Smith's claims of receiving divine revelation and translating the book from golden plates. Historian Richard Bushman says that "We cannot know exactly how Joseph Smith produced the Book of Mormon. The most we can say is that he claimed divine assistance".<sup>6</sup> These issues cast doubt on the authenticity and credibility of the Book of Mormon and its role as an additional source of divine revelation.

Mormonism has also been widely criticized for its cult-like practices and beliefs. Janja Lalich who is an expert on cults and coercion, describes a cult as "an authoritarian, hierarchical, and totalitarian organization that employs mind control techniques to exploit and manipulate its members".<sup>7</sup> The Mormon Church has been accused of using mind control techniques, such as manipulation of language and thought-stopping, to maintain control over its members.<sup>8</sup> Another

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<sup>4</sup> Michael D. Coe, "Mormons and Archaeology: An Outside View," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 46, no. 4 (2013): 13-26.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas W. Murphy, "Lamanite Genesis, Genealogy, and Genetics," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 41, no. 3 (2008): 1-35.

<sup>6</sup> Max Perry Mueller, "Race and the Making of the Mormon People," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 27, no. 1 (2017): 1-30.

<sup>7</sup> Janja Lalich, *Bounded Choice: True Believers and Charismatic Cults* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 26.

<sup>8</sup> Steven Hassan, *Combating Cult Mind Control: The #1 Best-Selling Guide to Protection, Rescue, and Recovery from Destructive Cults* (Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 2015), 90-91.

scholar, Robert Lifton, argues that the Mormon Church fits the criteria of a cult as it relies heavily on the charismatic authority of its leaders and has a “totalistic” ideology that demands unquestioning obedience from its members.<sup>9</sup> Lifton also states that the emphasis on obedience is so strong that it may even override the moral code of the individual.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the Mormon Church has been known to use shunning as a form of punishment for those who dissent or leave the church.<sup>11</sup> This practice is seen as a means of exerting control over members and preventing them from leaving the organization.

Personally, learning about the Mormon faith has only brought me closer to Jesus. It is hard to believe something your whole life and completely drop all of those walls and be curious about something like another religion. I believe in reflection this faith seems twisted in a way that is unexplainable. The completely obvious ignoring of scripture should be enough but for some it is harder to understand. I enjoyed researching and learning more about this faith, it has definitely provided me more insight into the Mormon faith.

In conclusion, the examination of Mormonism from Both a Biblical and secular perspective has revealed significant differences between the two. Mormonism's unique beliefs and practices, including its view of God, the idea of exaltation, and the role of good works in salvation, are incompatible with Christian doctrine. As Christians, we are called to love our neighbors and engage in respectful dialogue, even when we disagree on matters of faith. Through critical analysis, we can communicate our faith in Jesus.

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<sup>9</sup> Robert Jay Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of “Brainwashing” in China* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 423-425.

<sup>10</sup> Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*, 432.

<sup>11</sup> Lalich, *Bounded Choice*, 29.

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