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AN ANALYSIS OF MORMONISM FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

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BY

DANIEL L. ARTER

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Introduction

Mormonism is a collection of religious groups that adheres to different interpretations of the visions, dreams, and writings of Joseph Smith and his successors.¹ Despite the majority of non-Mormon's lack of understanding concerning the divisions of Mormonism, Mormonism is not one, singular religious movement or religion, but a collection of religious movements with two major divisions and sects that were the result of infighting and disruption within the Mormon church.² Because of Mormonism's claim to be Christian and even the United States government's previous claim that Mormonism was Protestant, it is wise for those who adhere to Christian teachings today to not only understand what Mormonism teaches, but also how it differs from orthodox Christian doctrine.³ This paper will describe the two major divisions of Mormonism, the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints and the Community of Christ, before providing a theological and philosophical evaluation of Mormonism. The paper will then conclude by providing a missiological approach for evangelizing adherents of Mormonism from a thoroughly orthodox Christian perspective.

Description of Mormonism

A Brief History of Mormonism

Mormonism claims its origin from the receipt of golden tablets or plates found by Joseph Smith on September 22, 1827, in Manchester, New York on Cumorah from the angel Moroni.⁴

¹ Richard Lyman Bushman, *Mormonism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 1.

² Arthur Carl Piepkorn, "Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 40, no. 9 (October 1969): 619.

³ David J. Howlett and John-Charles Duffy, *Mormonism: The Basics* (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 35.

On the golden plates were written the *Book of Mormon* by previous prophets, which was then quoted and abridged by “a prophet-historian named Mormon.”⁵ In this book is a record of two civilizations in America, the work of Jesus Christ among the Nephites, and the doctrines of the gospel.⁶ After the author of the *Book of Mormon* completed his writing, his son added his own writings to the plates before hiding them in the Hill Cumorah before their discovery and subsequent translation from the supposed Reformed Egyptian language by Joseph Smith in 1823 into English.⁷ From this book along with subsequent writings of Joseph Smith and others, both The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints (LDS) and The Community of Christ (CofC)⁸ base their religious, philosophical, and theological beliefs.

After the translation of the *Book of Mormon* into English by Joseph Smith, Smith proceeded to organize the church by claims of special revelation from God through visions and dreams in 1830. And through a series of events including persecution from non-Mormons, adherents of Mormonism eventually moved westward from New York to Ohio, Missouri, and eventually Utah while the propagation of Mormon doctrine and theology spread around the world.⁹ Though there was unrest amongst adherents within the Mormon church before significant division, the first significant break within the Mormon church occurred after the

⁴ Ivan J. Barrett, *Joseph Smith and the Restoration: A History of the Church to 1846* (1967; repr. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1973), 75.

⁵ *The Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013), vii.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Formerly known as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints.

⁹ Barrett, 127-618.

murder of Joseph Smith on June 27, 1844.¹⁰ Smith as mayor of Nauvoo, Illinois had ordered the destruction of a newspaper established by those who rejected Mormon teaching. Outrage from the destruction of the press caused a riot and as Smith awaited trial for charges including treason, an armed mob stormed the building, shot, and killed Smith as well as a fellow church leader. After the death of Smith, the Mormon Twelve Apostles assumed leadership of the Mormon church with Brigham Young as the primary leader. However, despite Young's leadership of the Mormon Twelve Apostles and thus, the Mormon church, there was significant disagreement as to whether these men usurped authority from those who actually should have had the authority to lead the Mormon church.¹¹ This disagreement concerning succession of leadership in the Mormon church led to the creation of several different Mormon sects including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and several other much smaller groups.¹² This paper is concerned with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) and the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints with Joseph Smith III as its prophet, which later became the Community of Christ (CofC).¹³ While the LDS church maintained leadership with the Twelve, which also included Brigham Young as its leader or president, the CofC maintained leadership of the descendants of Joseph Smith until they eventually broke from the tradition of Smithian succession in 1996 with W. Grant

¹⁰ *The Doctrine and Covenants of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1844), Section 135.

¹¹ John G. Turner, *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), 111.

¹² Chrystal Vanel, "Community of Christ: An American Progressive Christianity, with Mormonism as an Option," *Dialogue* 50, no. 3 (Fall 2017): 89.

¹³ David J. Howlett, "'We're Not the Mormons': Alterity and Church History in the Community of Christ," *Fides et Historia* 45, no. 1 (Winter/Sprint 2013): 102.

McMurray's appointment as their church president.¹⁴ Of course, the division between the succession of leadership following Smith's death caused significant animosity.

As both larger groups of Mormons separated and grew, they not only followed their own distinctive leaders, but they also developed their own doctrines and teachings despite sharing a core system of doctrines and teachings. The shift of doctrine and teaching occurred primarily as the CofC began looking for ways of entering what it considered to be mainstream Protestantism in the United States during the 1960s.¹⁵ However, despite the differences in doctrine between the CofC and the LDS, there has been a return to cordiality between the two main branches of Mormonism, primarily due to the cordiality modeled by scholars in areas of historical scholarship including their combined efforts of research in their collective church history.¹⁶

Mormonism as a Worldview

Metaphysics

Theologically, Mormonism shares much in common with mainstream Christianity. Both major divisions of Mormonism believe in a singular God and they both believe that this singular God loves mankind, knows men and women personally, and is calling people to himself.¹⁷ Both groups are somewhat trinitarian in their conceptions of God, though the LDS church claims to not believe in the traditional concept of the Trinity;¹⁸ and both churches have a significantly high

¹⁴ Bill McKeever, "Mormonism and the Community of Christ: Similarities and Differences," Mormonism Research Ministry, n.d., <https://www.mrm.org/rlds>.

¹⁵ William D. Russell, "The LDS Church and Community of Christ: Clearer Differences, Closer Friends," *Dialogue* 36, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 185.

¹⁶ Russell, 185.

¹⁷ "God Knows and Loves You," What We Believe, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, n.d., <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/welcome/what-do-latter-day-saints-believe?lang=eng>.

view of Jesus, even if they differ somewhat concerning Jesus' role within the Trinity. Like orthodox Christianity, the Holy Spirit provides wisdom, it sanctifies, equips, and gives the fruits of the Spirit to those who believe.¹⁹ Ultimately, between both churches there is a willingness to express the incomprehensible of God, particularly concerning the Trinity.²⁰ Essentially, Mormons agree with much of what orthodox Christianity teaches concerning Theology Proper, Christology, and Pneumatology; however, the differences in doctrine create significant problems particularly in the area of the Trinity.

Cosmologically, both groups of Mormonism believe that God created all things (Mosiah 3:8; Helaman 14:12) and that God created all things by or through Jesus Christ (Doctrine and Covenants 14:9). As Creator, Mormons believe that God and Jesus chose to create mankind in their own image (Ether 3:15; Doctrine and Covenants 20:18); and that due to God's creation of all things, He alone deserves all worship.²¹ LDS beliefs include a statement concerning the greater purpose of life to learn and grow to become more like Him and that ultimately, He wants mankind to be happy. (2 Nephi 2:25)²² In addition, there is a consistent belief between the two groups concerning God's ability and willingness to sustain all of creation in time and space by

¹⁸ "Do Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Believe in the Trinity?" The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saint, n.d., <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/comeuntochrist/article/do-latter-day-saints-believe-in-the-trinity#:~:text=Like%20many%20Christians%2C%20we%20believe,who%20are%20one%20in%20purpose..>

¹⁹ "The Holy Spirit," Basic Beliefs, The Community of Christ, n.d., <https://cofchrist.org/our-beliefs/>.

²⁰ Anthony J. Chvala-Smith, *Exploring Community of Christ Basic Beliefs: A Commentary* (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 2020), 2:7.

²¹ "God," Basic Beliefs, The Community of Christ, n.d., <https://cofchrist.org/our-beliefs/>.

²² "Your Life Has Purpose and Meaning," What We Believe, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, n.d., <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/welcome/life-has-purpose?lang=eng>.

and because of His love.²³ Essentially, Mormons would agree that all things were created by God and that He still interacts with His creation beyond the deistic concept of God.

Concerning anthropology, Mormons believe that man was created by God in the beginning in His own image (Mosiah 7:27; Doctrine and Covenants 20:18) and the LDS church believes that individual souls lived prior to their human birth in their premortal state, which is simply the state of the soul before conception on earth, as children of God.²⁴ Both the LDS and CofC churches believe in a plan of redemption or salvation through Jesus Christ as their Savior (Doctrine and Covenants 20:17-29); and they both believe that this plan of salvation was ordained before the foundations of the earth (Doctrine and Covenants 128:22). However, unlike orthodox Christianity, Mormonism does not rely on Jesus to accomplish the work of salvation, but rather ties salvation into their way of life as the adherents to Mormonism live in communion with God.²⁵ It is worth noting that in Mormonism, salvation is broad and is close to Universalism with the exception that few are denied Jesus' salvific work.²⁶ In fact, the CofC makes the argument that individual salvation is only meaningful when spoken of in light of the redemption of communities and really all of creation.²⁷ Essentially, both churches of Mormons agree with orthodox Christianity's view of Anthropology and even Hamartiology; however, issues concerning soteriology vary significantly and removes Mormonism from any semblance of genuine Christianity.

²³ Chvala-Smith, 2:2.

²⁴ "Premortal Life," Study Helps, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, n.d., <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/gs/premortal-life?lang=eng>.

²⁵ Chvala-Smith, 8:14.

²⁶ Ibid., 8:11.

²⁷ Ibid., 8:13.

Epistemology

Epistemologically, Mormonism finds its knowledge in multiple written works that provide their doctrines, stories concerning morality and ethics, historical records of not only Jesus in the Gospels, but the lives of Joseph Smith and other church founders, and accounts of visions and dreams.²⁸ Mormons refer to these books as their Scriptures and they consider these books as holy books from God written by prophets.²⁹ Both the LDS church and the CofC church agree that the Bible, including the Old Testament and New Testament, the *Book of Mormon*, and the *Doctrine and Covenants* are all God's Word; but the LDS church also includes the *Pearl of Great Price*, which the CofC church claims contradicts the Bible, as part of their holy writings.³⁰ It is important to note that there is no teaching in Mormonism concerning biblical inerrancy or sufficiency; in fact, Mormons typically assume that the canon of Scripture is still open and that God can continue His writing of additional Scripture at any moment.

In addition to the writings of the Bible, the *Book of Mormon*, the *Doctrine and Covenants*, and for some, the *Pearl of Great Price*, there is a heavy emphasis on the church's authority concerning the proper interpretation of Scripture.³¹ This heavy emphasis on church authority provides the church the ability to reinterpret different doctrines throughout the Mormon church's history, including its former teachings concerning polygamy.³² The issue concerning ecclesiastical authority is the reason for the two major branches of Mormonism's division and existence despite the claim from different Mormon scholars of the preeminence and authority of

²⁸ "Scriptures," Study Helps, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, n.d., <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/gs/scriptures?lang=eng>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³¹ Russell, 181-182.

³² Melvin C. Johnson, *Polygamy on the Pedernales: Lyman Wight's Mormon Villages in Antebellum Texas, 1845 to 1858* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 2006), 199.

Scripture.³³ What the focus on ecclesiastical authority has done is allowed many doctrinal and theological changes throughout the history of the church and it has caused the Mormon worldview to suffer with inconsistencies that are ignored by placing Mormon epistemological understandings in what Joseph Smith claims as God's prophet.³⁴

Ethics

Mormons have a reputation today concerning their lifestyle and ethical outlook concerning the world around them. Though often misunderstood, Mormons are typically seen as ethical and moral people even if non-Mormons find themselves disagreeing with Mormon thinking and a large part of this impression is due to Mormon practices in life. Mormons are typically church-centered, Sabbath-keeping, and seemingly morally upright.³⁵ When considering that Joseph Smith and his successors each sought to develop societies in which they could live out their convictions despite persecution, it is easy to see how those around them would perceive them to be misunderstood people following a religious belief system that is also misunderstood.³⁶ Both LDS and CofC churches emphasize morals standards that were taught by Jesus Christ including integrity, obedience, and marital fidelity; hold mostly conservative political views; and conservative views concerning homosexuality, polygamy, and abortion.³⁷ In addition, despite the post-modern worldview of the surrounding world today, the *Book of Mormon* leaves no room for

³³ Chvala-Smith, 10:2.

³⁴ Robert L. Millet and Shon D. Hopkin, *Mormonism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 88-89.

³⁵ Stephen H. Webb, *Mormon Christianity: What Other Christians Can Learn from the Latter-day Saints* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013), 11.

³⁶ Patrick Q. Mason, "Visions of Zion: Changes in Mormon Social Ethics," *The Christian Century* 129 no. 17 (August 22, 2012): 22.

³⁷ Gregory Smith, "Mormons in America: Certain in Their Beliefs, Uncertain of Their Place in Society," *The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, 2012), 36-58.

moral relativism and emphasizes the need of obedience to God’s commands, which are not moralistically relativistic whatsoever.³⁸

Ultimately, the Mormon worldview finds its ethical and moralistic values from not just what it considers Scripture, but also how the church interprets said Scripture. While there is an emphasis for the personal reading of the different books of Scripture, there is no doctrine in Mormonism concerning the inerrancy, completeness, or sufficiency of the Bible.³⁹ Thus, it is ultimately the church’s prophets who determines what is right and wrong according to their interpretation of the books, which finds a significant comparison in Roman Catholicism’s insistence on the church’s authority to interpret their Scripture and doctrines.⁴⁰ Again, the ecclesiastical authority over written Scriptures provides an unstable understanding of the world around them and thus, makes their ethical commitments dependent on the prophet or leader tasked with interpreting their Scriptures during their time of question. And this unstable understanding of the world around them necessitates continued dependence on the chosen prophet or leader regardless of whether the person is affiliated with the LDS church or the CofC church.

Evaluation of Mormonism

Theological Evaluation

³⁸ Daniel L. Belnap, “The Book of Mormon and Modern Moral Relativism,” *Ensign* (February 2014): n.p.

³⁹ Robert L. Millet, “What Latter-day Saints Believe About Jesus Christ, Additional Resource, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (March 2001), <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/what-mormons-believe-about-jesus-christ>.

⁴⁰ Stephen H. Webb and Alonzo L. Gaskill, *Catholic and Mormon: A Theological Conversation* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 11.

Theologically, both branches of Mormonism claim a mostly orthodox Christian belief system concerning God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. In fact, it is common for not just Mormons to claim that they are another branch or denomination of Christianity, but it is also common for unbelievers to assume that Mormonism is another branch or denomination of Christianity as well as Christians to assume that Mormonism is another branch or denomination of Christianity. Clearly, there is much in common, but the differences between the LDS and CofC churches with orthodox Christianity are significant enough to emphatically state that Mormonism is not compatible with orthodox Christianity and that the “gospel” preached by Mormonism is not the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. And these theological issues that differentiate Mormonism and orthodox Christianity are primarily seen in Mormonism’s adding to the Bible, its twisting of salvation, and its universalistic tendencies.

The first theological issue with Mormonism stems from its addition of writings to the Bible and its willingness to accept the teachings and proclamations of so-called prophets and ecclesiastical leaders just as authoritatively as the Bible while ignoring key truths from the Bible, such as the Apostle Paul’s condemnation of those who “want to distort the gospel of Christ” in Galatia and his exhortation to reject anything contrary to the Gospel that they had already received (Gal 1:6-9)⁴¹ or John’s warning condemning the adding to or removal of words from the Bible (Rev 22:18-19). Of course, Mormons typically claim that the adding of the *Book of Mormon*, the *Doctrines and Covenants*, and the *Pearl of Great Price* is justified because they do not replace the Bible or improve it, but rather to confirm it;⁴² however, that negates the Bible’s own teachings concerning its sufficiency (2 Tim 3:15-17) and it fails to see Paul’s warning to the

⁴¹ Unless otherwise specified, all Bible references in this paper are to the English Standard Version (ESV) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

⁴² See the nine affirmations given by the Community of Christ concerning their beliefs of Scripture.

church in Colossi and their rejection of the Bible's sufficiency (Col 2). Clearly, Mormonism rejects Christianity's claims of biblical inerrancy, biblical sufficiency, and biblical completeness.

Second, it's clear in the writings of the Mormon church that there is a twisting concerning God's Words and salvation. There is a tendency amongst Mormon adherents to view salvation as a more communal or societal salvation rather than a personal repentance from sin and belief in Jesus Christ. The issue with this is the Bible's clear teaching on what genuine salvation actually entails and involves. Romans 10:9-11 clearly teaches that salvation requires confession including repentance and belief in Jesus Christ's resurrection; whereas Mormonism teaches a works-based system of earning salvation that requires a moralistic living combined with baptism to provide the salvation of one's soul. This ultimately rejects Ephesians 2:8-9's premise of salvation being completely by faith and faith alone.

Third, Mormonism's twisted understanding of salvation eventually leads to Universalist concepts concerning salvation, which negates the exclusivity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Whereas Jesus speaks of salvation in terms of a narrow gate with a hard way that leads to life (Matt 7:13-14), Mormons teach a much larger gate that is easier to travel because of its teachings concerning communal salvation rather than individual repentance and belief for salvation. Essentially, what Mormonism teaches is completely contrary to Scripture despite the CofC's efforts to become more Protestant in its teachings.

Philosophical Evaluation

There is a lot to commend concerning Mormonism philosophically in that it does provide a mostly cohesive way of viewing the world. Despite its inconsistencies with orthodox Christianity, Mormonism provides its adherents with the basic constructs needed for it to be a fully formed worldview. Mormonism provides mostly consistent beliefs concerning metaphysics,

epistemology, and ethics, which are the primary concerns that ought to be answered by a belief system or philosophy for it to be considered a worldview.⁴³ However, despite providing answers to these concerns, there is a very real issue concerning validity and veracity of Mormonism's claims. Despite providing answers for these concerns, non-Mormon scholars have largely been skeptical of many of Mormonism's claims including those found in the *Book of Mormon* itself, inconsistencies between doctrine of the church and the Bible, as well as Mormonism's consistent claim to essentially be something that it is not. And it is this skepticism towards key ideas of Mormonism that causes the worldview of Mormonism to be less philosophically sound.

Scholars have made known legitimate issues with many of the claims found in the *Book of Mormon* concern historical claims and even language use. For instance, the *Book of Mormon* speaks of two ancient civilizations who resided on the American continent—the first was destroyed due to their own wickedness, the second group emigrated to the American continent from Jerusalem in 600 B.C. The second group eventually divided into two camps including the Nephites and the Lamanites, who were cursed with more melatonin. Eventually, Jesus appeared to the Nephites, but the Lamanites defeated the Nephites in battle and what was given to the Nephites by Jesus and what was recorded in Reformed Egyptian were lost and were not found until Joseph Smith found them fourteen-hundred years later. The issues with this account are that even Mormon scholars differ in their view of where exactly these tablets were lost, there is no physical evidence of these ancient civilizations, and Reformed Egyptian is essentially unheard of except in Mormon historiography.⁴⁴ In addition, there have been multiple corrections of the *Book*

⁴³ Thorvald B. Madsen, "Philosophy for Understanding Apologetics," (Kansas City, MO: Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary), 6.

⁴⁴ Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2003), 208-209.

of Mormon in an effort to fix errors and remove contradictions throughout its various major and minor revisions.⁴⁵

A significant philosophical concern of Mormonism and epistemology involves where the Bible claims knowledge and wisdom is from and where Mormonism claims knowledge and wisdom is from. Mormonism insists on the authority of its prophets, church leaders, and additional writings to interpret and reinterpret the Bible, lead their church, and dictate the lives of their congregants. The Bible, however, insists that the only authority that the local church has to lead or dictate lives is found in the proper interpretation of the Bible according to the original author and then applied to the lives of believers today. What this results in is an epistemological question of where true knowledge and wisdom is found—is it found in the Bible or is it found in ecclesiastical leadership and authority? Mormonism, again, insists on ecclesiastical leadership and authority, but then, much like Luther’s concern about the Papacy’s errancy, the Mormon church admittedly has also erred concerning doctrine, teaching, and theology. If true wisdom and knowledge is to be found in ecclesiastical leadership and authority and their interpretation of Scripture, what should a Mormon adherent do if the ecclesiastical leadership proves to be wrong?

Finally, Mormonism, particularly those from the CofC church claims to be similar, if not equal to Protestant Christianity, but it is clear from the teachings of the LDS and CofC churches that their teachings do not adhere to orthodox Christian beliefs; and yet, the claim still exists. The issue with this consistent claim to be something that it is not causes the worldview itself to be unstable. Worldviews depend on stability to be worthwhile and substantial enough for an individual to continue living within a specified worldview. If the leadership constantly claims

⁴⁵ Martin, 217-219.

that their worldview is the same as another worldview, it degrades the structure and thus, the veracity of said worldview. Mormonism is not orthodox Christianity and to claim that it is causes its own worldview to rely on another worldview that already rejects it as a legitimate worldview.

Missiological Approach to Mormonism

Much like any religious belief or worldview that ought to be confronted in hopes of evangelizing the adherents, Mormonism requires patience and understanding. A Christian hoping to evangelize a Mormon individual needs to make the effort to fully understand what the individual actually believes before even trying to evangelize that individual. In the case of Mormonism, knowing which sect or group of Mormonism a person follows actually influences what the Christian ought to say. For instance, it would be foolish for a Christian to confront issues in *The Pearl of Great Price* with someone of the CofC church because the CofC church already rejects *The Pearl of Great Price* due to its inconsistencies with the Bible. Likewise, it would be foolish for a Christian to confront the leadership of Stephen M. Veazey to someone of the LDS church because Veazey has no ecclesiastical authority within the LDS church. To make foolish mistakes like these though easy to avoid might cause disrepair to an evangelistic conversation with a Mormon adherent. Any Christian evangelizing a Mormon needs to first patiently ask questions to confirm what the Mormon individual actually believes. Showing any interest in their beliefs will help develop rapport, which will be necessary as the Christian then works to systematically point the Mormon to the true Jesus Christ found in the Bible alone.

Because most Mormons hold multiple writings just as authoritatively as Scripture, it would be worth helping a Mormon to see inconsistencies between the different writings with the Bible, itself. In addition, explaining the other contradictions, errors, and changes that have been made concerning the *Book of Mormon* can help a Mormon individual recognize that the *Book of*

Mormon pales in comparison to the Bible itself. Pointing out the Bible's own teachings concerning its sufficiency might help a Mormon who is used to relying on not just the Bible, but also the *Book of Mormon*, the *Doctrine and Covenants*, the *Pearl of Great Price*, and ecclesiastical leaders to see that Bible rejects any teachings that claim to be the Word of God while differing from what it actually says. Showing the sufficiency of Scripture to someone who has been taught that the Bible is errant and needs the interpretation of the church should cause some significant questions to start occurring to the individual. Likewise, because Mormons are taught that the Bible is errant, a Christian seeking to evangelize Mormons should be able to answer any questions that a Mormon has concerning claims of errancy in the Bible according to the Mormon church. If a Christian cannot confidently answer concerns about the Bible's supposed errant teachings, then the Mormon individual is less likely to believe that the Bible is sufficient for matters of faith and life.

Mormons are essentially trained from a young age to trust and obey what their ecclesiastical leadership says, especially if their leadership is considered to be prophetic. After all, it is the ecclesiastical leadership's responsibility to interpret their canonical writings properly for the church as a whole. However, because of mankind's sinfulness, it does not take significant effort to see the fallible nature of man especially if the person is a leader of a larger organization. While it could possibly help to for a Christian to point out issues of corruption within the organization as a whole, what would be particularly beneficial for a Mormon to understand is issues of church polity, theology, or other religious beliefs in which current church leaders have rejected or repudiated previous church leaders. Seeing the fallibility of man from a logical standpoint could help the Mormon individual recognize that following a human organization that errs on its own teachings should warrant at least reconsideration. Ideally, a Mormon adherent

who sees the flawed leadership of their church despite their claim to be authoritative would start to ask more questions concerning the veracity and validity of their church.

As the Christian evangelizing a Mormon individual causes the Mormon to question their own belief system, it becomes easier for the Christian to show the consistency of a true, biblical worldview. Unlike the *Book of Mormon*, the Bible has not been corrected or adjusted in a way that changes meaning. Unlike the *Doctrine and Covenants*, which is really no more than a collection of beliefs dictated by human leaders and the *Pearl of Great Price*, which is known to contradict the Bible, the Bible itself does not contradict itself. Unlike the ecclesiastical leadership of the Mormon church, which has been divided for several hundred years, orthodox Christianity does not recognize any human leader claiming to be as authoritative as God, Himself.

Essentially, a Christian attempting to evangelize a Mormon needs to be comfortable enough with the Mormon worldview to see what flaws in their worldview already cause doubt in their belief system. Only then will a Christian evangelizing a Mormon be able to slowly convince the Mormon individual that true, orthodox Christianity provides a more consistent worldview in contrast to the Mormon worldview, which would hopefully then lead the Mormon individual to seek out Jesus according to the Bible alone rather than according to the Mormon church with the Christian evangelist's aid.

Conclusion

Mormonism is a large movement of multiple groups of churches claiming to be the rightful heirs of Joseph Smith's writings. Despite the modern-day confusion of non-Mormons concerning the beliefs of Mormons, the Mormon claim to be Christian, and the lack of realization concerning different sects of Mormonism, it is vitally important for Christians to know the basics of Mormonism. As Mormonism continues to grow, Christians need to

understand that Mormonism is not true Christianity, and that Mormons need to know the biblical Jesus. This paper sought to provide a brief history of Mormonism and its two major divisions for the purpose of explaining their core beliefs before theologically and philosophically evaluating their beliefs. Only with understanding the basics of Mormonism can a Christian develop a proper missiological approach that helps a Mormon adherent truly find the biblical Jesus.

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