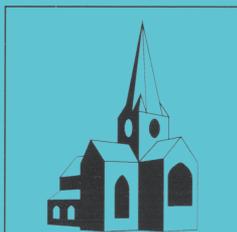
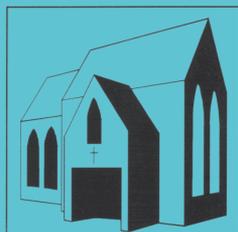
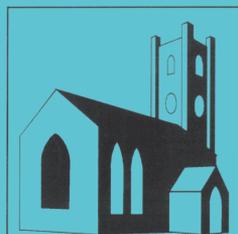


Sample

POINT

by

POINT



A CRITIQUE OF
WHICH CHURCH IS TRUE?
A Process of Elimination Using the Bible

Steven Lee

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Background and Introduction

I first encountered the paper *Which Church Is True?: A Process of Elimination Using the Bible* in 1988 when my wife (who was a casual friend at that time) gave me this series of 27 questions. She was a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (also called the LDS Church or commonly referred to as the Mormon Church). The questions were arranged in the pattern of spokes on a wheel to try to prove the truthfulness of the Mormon religion. She proceeded to explain to me that a person could determine which was the one true church by using this list of questions.

She explained that I was to use this paper in the following way. First, I should make a list of all churches that might be considered to be true. Then, I should work my way through the test point by point and place checks by all the churches that do not meet the test under consideration. She said that when I finished I would, of course, come to the inescapable conclusion that the LDS Church is the only true church.

As I worked my way through the list of questions, my sole purpose in answering the 27 questions was to respond to her personally regarding what I thought about the topics under discussion.

I have always tried to give Christians a way to share their faith intelligently and to understand the LDS Church's teachings while encouraging a healthy discussion of the differences between the historic Christian and the LDS positions. I also hope this written response will help thoughtful Mormon people clearly see the gulf between their faith and that of Christians.

Ever since I first saw this series of tests, I have been curious who the author of the work might be. My wife only knew that while she was attending Weber High School in Ogden, Utah, her seminary teacher used this as a handout in one of his classes. Years later when she asked her former instructor about the paper, he was either unable or unwilling to disclose the author. One of the workers at the seminary seemed to be overly abrupt regarding my wife's inquiry and seemed to try to discourage her from pursuing the matter any further. He even questioned her motives for wanting the information. I don't wish to read too much into the encounter,

however, it always did strike me as odd that the teacher and others would be unable and even unwilling to try to find out who the author of this work was and give credit where it was due. This was particularly strange since the LDS seminary teacher had been passing it out to his students in his classes. Surely, I thought, he must respect, admire and value the work that someone within the LDS Church had labored to create since he was making use of it in his classes.

LDS lists such as this have appeared from time to time. The most widespread and well known may be the small card called the “Seventeen Points of the True Church” which has been published by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This is available at most LDS Church-owned bookstores. Alpha and Omega Ministries has put together a compact response to the “Seventeen Points of the True Church” card.

I am writing this response for the reason that the Mormons continually claim to be true Christians (even to the point of declaring that they belong to the only true church and that all others are corrupt and an abomination in the sight of God) and also because confusion seems to exist as to whether or not the LDS Church represents a legitimate Christian faith. As a result, I hope that Christians may understand where the LDS Church’s teachings are not compatible with commonly held orthodox Christian doctrine.

A second reason I am writing this is out of a sincere and humble love for the Mormon people. I have never doubted their sincerity or the good intentions in their faith. However, no matter how sincere a person may be, sincerity does not—and has never—determined truth. Even the LDS Apostle Orson Pratt said “. . . convince us of our errors of doctrine, if we have any, by reason, by logical arguments, or by the word of God, and we will be ever grateful for the information, and you will ever have the pleasing reflection that you have been instruments in the hands of God of redeeming your fellow beings. . . .” So I write with this open invitation in mind. I only ask for the reader to be willing to read openly and honestly and to see the differences between the Bible and the LDS Church’s teachings.

Obviously, this response does not attempt to give an exhaustive handling of each of the tests that will be examined any more than

does the LDS paper of 27 questions. This work is an introductory survey to show that the LDS understanding of the Biblical passages used in these tests is often not in line with the historic teachings of Christianity. Each LDS test is enclosed in a box at the top of the page with its accompanying references from the Bible and the instructions for the placing of marks to eliminate churches from consideration. A Christian response to the LDS test question being considered is given next. Some responses include additional information from LDS sources that demonstrate contradictions to the LDS question being asked.

Christians and others must realize that there are certain core doctrines (such as a monotheistic concept of God) that must be agreed upon in order to legitimately call a faith system Christian. At the same time there are other areas of teaching and practice (e.g., mode of baptism and style of worship) where complete conformity and unanimity are not required. The inability to make such distinctions between essentials and non-essentials of belief has often been something that I have witnessed in Mormons and other pseudo-Christian groups. As a Christian theologian stated so beautifully:

In essentials—*Unity*,
In non-essentials—*Liberty*,
In all things—*Charity*.

Test #1

DOES GOD HAVE A BODY?

Genesis 1:26-27; Genesis 5:1-3; Luke 23:46; 24:36-39;
Hebrews 1:1-3 & James 2:26

Put a mark by any church which does not believe
God is as these describe Him.

Christian Response

Genesis 1:26-27 and Genesis 5:1-3

The words *image* and *likeness* are to be understood as synonyms. This is true not only here but throughout both the Old and New Testaments. This *image* or *likeness* is a moral and spiritual capacity and a statement of the kind of beings we were created by God to be. These terms can not be understood to be referring to the physical nature of mankind for the following reasons. First, if these passages mean a physical nature for God then his omnipresence would be a logical impossibility. However, scripture clearly teaches that God himself is present simultaneously throughout all of the universe and yet is not to be identified or equated with the created world but that he transcends the whole of creation (see 1 Kings 8:27 and Jeremiah 23:24). Furthermore, this idea that mankind has been created in the physical likeness of God would certainly be in conflict with other passages of scripture where it teaches that God is beyond all that has ever been created and all that ever will be created and that he is by very nature a being of Spirit (see also John 1:1-4, 12, 14, 18; 4:24).

Luke 23:46

The phrase “in your hands” is a figurative expression which if given literally would be “into your care.” This should not seem unfamiliar to anyone today since we use the same phrase figuratively

to mean not literally someone or something being placed into the hands of someone but rather that the person is understood to be caring for and being given responsibility for someone or something.

Luke 24:36-39

Compare this passage with John 4:24. Furthermore, John 1:14 makes it clear that God (Jesus) became a man [flesh] to save us. Christians affirm the reality of the bodily resurrection of Jesus. However, this in no way proves the Mormon claim that God the Father has a body. John 1:1-4 and John 1:14 prove that Jesus has always been God himself and there is not anything in existence that he (Jesus) did not create.

Hebrews 1:1-3

The phrases “express image of his person” and “on the right hand” are again figurative language. The former speaks of having the same inward nature. The latter declares that Christ is in the position of authority and power. This is precisely what Stephen was testifying to when he saw Jesus during his stoning in Acts chapter 7. This is what the right hand represents, even in the use of the phrase today when someone is referred to as a “right-hand man.”

James 2:26

Notice in this passage, which Mormons use in an attempt to prove that God is a physical being, that the words are “the body without the spirit is dead.” However, the LDS are attempting to reverse what this actually says. This axiom can not be turned around and still be true. Many times error creeps into our thinking by inadvertently using the truths of one discipline to try to show the truths in another area of study. For example, in math class we all learned that if A is equal to B then B must also be equal to A. While this is true and it is good mathematics it is not true for good logic. Consider this example: *All humans are mammals*. Surely, that is a true statement; but, the statement can not be reversed and still be true. (*All mammals are humans* is not a true statement.) Likewise, in James 2:26 it is certainly true that the body without the spirit is dead. However, the reverse of this statement (the spirit without

the body is dead) is most certainly not true nor does it necessarily follow from the stated text. This is an example of eisegesis (an interpretation that expresses the interpreter's own ideas, bias, or the like, rather than the meaning of the text itself) rather than exegesis (an interpretation that expresses the meaning of the text itself).

Finally, one would have to admit that God would be a very strange being indeed if every description of him were to be taken literally and not as figures of speech. Anthropopatheia (which is the ascribing of human attributes, etc. to God) is employed by the authors of the books of the Bible to express a truth about the God of scripture in a relatable way. For example, in Deuteronomy 4:24 God is referred to as a consuming fire. God is called a fountain of living waters in Jeremiah 2:13 and is said to cover people with his feathers and his wings (Psalm 91:4). Surely the Psalmist is not attempting to imply that God is some sort of bird. In like manner it is quite certain that no one believes that Peter is teaching in 1 Peter 2:4-5 that we worship a God made out of stone and that when we become believers in God that we ourselves are literally transformed into stone too.

While some may want to say that John 4:24 only teaches that God has a Spirit, that is not what this passage says. It is one thing if I tell others that I *have* a transistor radio and quite another if I start to claim that I *am* a transistor radio. In the first case there is no real need for special interest to be paid. However, in the latter case if I truly believed what I was claiming then others would have valid reasons for seriously having deep concern for my mental sanity. Here Jesus does not merely assert that God has a Spirit but that he is Spirit in his very nature. And this declaration is made even more forceful by the deliberate use of the figure of speech known as ellipsis where in this case the being verb is omitted. In the Greek language this omission adds emphasis to the fact that the nature of God is one of spirit.

LDS Contradictions

Further evidence that these passages can not be properly understood as referring to the physical make-up of God in bestowing upon mankind the attribute of image and likeness are the ideas

that flow from LDS teaching itself. First, there is the problem as to why God would say “let us make man in *our* image” [emphasis added] if only God the Father possessed a physical body at the time when these words were uttered. In order to be consistent with LDS teaching wouldn’t God have had to say “let us make man in *my* image” [emphasis added]? The Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible identifies the Father as the one who is speaking and the Son as the one being addressed (see JST, Genesis 1:27, 29; 6:9).

How can these passages be understood to be referring to a physical likeness of God when mankind is so diverse in his make-up physically? If the physical likeness is literal then does that include God’s racial identity as well? Joseph Smith apparently related to those around him that he saw God was “a personage in the fire light complexion blue eyes” (*Improvement Era*, April, 1970, p. 12, note 12). There are so many different physical appearances which one should be seen as the true representation of the image of God? In the past, this sort of thinking has given legitimacy to racist dogma.

To further complicate the issue is the fact that Genesis 1:27 tells us “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” and in Genesis 5:2 “Male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created.” So the question which obviously arises is this: if the image of God is both in the male and the female how can the image be related to the physical make-up of the female?

Many may be interested to learn that the Mormon scriptures themselves do not agree with the current LDS Church’s dogma concerning whether God has a body or not. Alma 18:26-28, 22:8-11 and 31:15 in the *Book of Mormon* clearly teaches that God is a God of Spirit.

Finally, listen to what Joseph Smith taught to a class of elders in the LDS Church regarding the nature of God. This was recorded in Section V of the Lectures on Faith as originally published in the 1835 *Doctrine and Covenants*:

The Father being a personage of *spirit*, glory and power: possessing all perfection and fulness: The Son, who was in the bosom of the Father, a personage of *tabernacle*, made, or fashioned like unto man, . . . and is called the Son because of the flesh. (paragraph 2, p. 53) [emphasis added]

End of sample pages.
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