

Independence Day

The aliens are coming! The earth and its inhabitants are about to be destroyed, "spaded under." Is this the script of a Hollywood science-fiction movie? No, these are the real-life beliefs that cost Marshall Applewhite and his followers their lives.

In the aftermath of the Heaven's Gate mass suicide in California this past spring, we were interviewed by television, radio and newspaper reporters as the mainstream media tried to help their viewers, listeners and readers understand how such a thing could happen. *WHY* would 39 people kill themselves at the behest of a man like Applewhite? Were they insane? Wacko? No, their suicides were *rational acts*, given the core beliefs they held as true. These were intelligent people. Nice people. They were not insane; rather, they were dangerously, mortally, deceived. If you truly believed as they did, that the earth was about to be destroyed, and that your only hope for escape was to take up your purple triangle and leave your "container," you might have done just as they did, if you had the courage.

Then were their *beliefs* insane? If your definition of insane is "out of the mainstream of American thought," perhaps you could say their beliefs were insane. Most people are not aware, though, that these beliefs are not at all out of the mainstream of *cultic* thought. Is it insane to believe that wearing certain sacred undergarments will protect you from evil influences, as the Mormons believe? Insane to die, or let your child die, rather than permit a blood transfusion that would save your or her life? Jehovah's Witnesses (JW's) make this decision every day. In fact, as I examined the Heaven's Gate literature I retrieved from their website, I found striking similarities to the mainstream cults that often are viewed by the unwitting public as just other Christian denominations.

I think, at least, some perceptive Jehovah's Witnesses may have been uneasy as they noticed striking similarities between their group and Heaven's Gate, because of all the media attention given to cults and their characteristics after the story broke. I'm sure there was fear at the Jehovah's Witnesses Brooklyn headquarters—fear of people drawing unwanted comparisons, because the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (WTBTS, a.k.a. Jehovah's Witnesses) came out with another "we are not a cult" issue soon after the sensationalism died down.

They always seem to come out with a "we are not a cult" issue when it becomes apparent that they indeed are a cult. For example,

after the fire at Waco, the Watchtower Society published an issue condemning cults to assure its flock that Jehovah's Witnesses certainly are *not* one. It did this by setting up a strawman cult "persona," and then "proving" (to the satisfaction of people who wish to remain snookered) that God's Organization just does not meet the cult criteria that they created. Slick.

The recent June 1, 1997 *Watchtower** magazine warns us all of the threat of "Secret Societies." Is the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society a Secret Society? Why no! Just ask them. They say on p. 6, "If it has ever crossed your mind that Jehovah's Witnesses might be a secret cult or sect, that was likely because you knew too little about them." As a person who knows an awful lot about the Jehovah's Witnesses, I'd make a very slight change to that assertion to make it true. I would add one little letter "n" to the sentence, so it would read, "If it has (n)ever crossed your mind that Jehovah's Witnesses might be a secret cult or sect, that was likely because you knew too little about them." That's more like it.

This same *Watchtower* declares on

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on p. 7, "Those who follow the lead of Satan are characterized by duplicity and deceit. They try to portray themselves in a good light while doing works belonging to darkness." "Works of darkness" like causing the death of innocent children, who believe the Society's ban on blood transfusions is a Bible-based requirement of Jehovah? "Works of darkness" like covering up and even outright lying about the embarrassing facts of their past history? "Works of darkness" like teaching people that lying or deceiving is not necessarily bad if it's for a good cause, such as "protecting" new converts from accessing all of the pertinent facts before joining?

Baldly, they even have coined a phrase for this supposed God-sanctioned duplicity and deceit, calling it "Theocratic War Strategy." Theocratic War Strategy is defined in the May 1, 1957 *Watchtower*, p. 285 as "hiding the truth by action and word for the sake of the ministry." *Hiding the truth???* Yet, with incredible audacity, they roundly condemn secrecy in the "Secret Society" issue, saying on p. 6, "True religion in no way practices secretiveness." But then, on p. 12 of this *same Watchtower*, they tell us that Christians should preach "divinely provided Biblical information while being careful to avoid saying things that might offend others at the outset." I have noted the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society unfailingly skates the most brazenly on the thinnest ice. Amazing.

Are Jehovah's Witnesses a cult? I know there will be some who bristle at the very suggestion. Yet, the Society itself, in the "Secret Societies" issue, correctly labels Aum Shin Rykyo, the Branch Davidians, and the Solar Temple as cults. Was it wrong/unfair/mean for the WTBS to identify these groups as cults, even if doing so might offend a member of one of these groups? No, because it is the simple truth. And if you do not like the label "cult" applied to the Watchtower Society, please remember that the Christian church as a whole and as individual Christians (especially "opposers" like me) are labeled the "whore of Babylon," "false prophets," "false teachers," "pagans," and even "rotten figs" in just about every issue of the *Watchtower* magazine. I never allow myself to take these attacks personally. So let's rein in our defenses and just look at a few of the similarities between Heaven's Gate and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society.

The most obvious similarity is that Heaven's Gate, like the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, teaches that "this old system of things" (our world) is about to be "spaded under" at Armageddon, which is (as it has been for the past century and longer, according to the WTBS) "right around the corner." Somehow, though, like the "rabbit" in a dog race, that corner never gets any closer.

The Heaven's Gate 39 waited in vain for spaceship pickups that were prophesied but never came, and the prophetic failures of the WTBS are numerous and well known. Tragically, Applewhite and Heaven's Gate got tired of waiting for their destiny, and went out to meet it. Why did the Heaven's Gate 39 trust Applewhite's prophecies and strange teachings? It's not that difficult to understand really. They trusted what he said because they believed that Applewhite, far from offering them *his own opinions and imaginations*, was merely a conduit for truth from beyond our world.

I was not at all surprised to learn that Applewhite and Nettles, a.k.a. "Do" and "Ti," a.k.a. "The Two," were believed to channel information to their followers from the higher beings of the Level Above Human. After Nettles died in 1985, she still "communicated" with Applewhite and gave him instructions. Similarly, after the Watchtower Society founder C.T. Russell died in 1916, the JWs (then known as Bible Students), believed that Russell, being their sole source of enlightenment at the time, continued "managing every feature of the harvest work" from "beyond the veil" (*The Finished Mystery*, p. 144). Their second President, Joseph Rutherford, taught the flock that the Holy Spirit had been "taken away" in 1918, and he claimed that angels transmitted information to him directly from Jehovah (*Preparation*, pp. 36-37). Ask yourself what kind of "angels" would channel false information? Today, the Governing Body of the WTBS is somewhat coy about just how it is "enlightened," or exactly how the "revelations" are received, but they still unabashedly claim to be God's channel of communication to mankind.

Is this channeling stuff open to just anyone with a great imagination? No, you must get under the tutelage of the only correct channel to find yourself approved by God, or the higher beings of the next Level Above Human. (I guess this is to keep us from changing channels during

commercial breaks.) To illustrate:

"Our mission here is twofold. One part was to allow new potential graduates into the Next Level the opportunity to gain experiences that would strengthen them, and prove themselves worthy of receiving issue of a true Next Level vehicle ... This can only be realized through the close supervision and guidance of our 'midwives' – the role played by Ti and Do, as Representatives of the Evolutionary Level Above Human" (By Drodry, member of Heaven's Gate).

"Indeed this 'slave', or spirit anointed congregation, is the one approved channel representing God's kingdom on earth" (Watchtower, March 1, 1981, p. 19).

Of course, these two groups are far from the only ones claiming to be giving us messages from beyond. Elizabeth Clare Prophet, a.k.a. "Guru Ma," of the Church Universal and Triumphant, claims to be channeling the "Ascended Masters," including Buddha and Jesus Christ, as well as her late husband Mark, who died in 1979.

Might we reasonably expect that channeled information would prove to be reliably true? I mean, after all, "higher beings," God's angels, or "Ascended Masters" should *know* what they are talking about; that's the only reason I can think of to *listen* to them! And, of course, they would not *lie*, would they? Yet Applewhite, the Watchtower Society, Guru Ma, and all of God's other channels/"prophets"/psychics have instead proved to be reliably *false* in their prognostications and prophecies. Does this cause a problem for the sheep, do you suppose? It doesn't seem so.

Prophet "Guru Ma" explains it this way; she tells her followers she is "human," "imperfect," and that she "makes mistakes." Indeed. She mistakenly predicted Armageddon several times and said that California would fall into the sea in 1987. California didn't go anyplace and neither did Ms. Prophet's followers who stuck with her even though, biblically speaking, such "mistakes" unfailingly label her as a false prophet (Deuteronomy 18:22). So also do the mistakes of the Watchtower Society; Mormon founder, Joseph Smith; Marshall Applewhite; and all the rest. The Bible knows nothing of "mistaken prophecies"; it speaks only of true or false ones.

Applewhite taught his followers that his teachings were subject to change without notice as he received "higher understanding."

"Consequently, new steps and understandings were presented throughout our awakening in a carefully calculated sequence. By this method, the limited human mechanism could, with some effort, be re-

programmed to accept and assimilate the advanced, non-human perspectives we were receiving. As a result, you will notice that throughout our materials, our understandings are constantly being updated and refined as our circuitry adapted. One 'fact' that we learned early on is that, what is truth for us today may be just a stepping stone to a higher understanding that may be given to us tomorrow" (By Jwnody, member of Heaven's Gate).

Oh, I see. These changes in view over time were for his follower's own good. After all, the limited human mechanism might have blown a circuit if it had been given the "correct" understanding the very first time. (Is it easier to assimilate falsehood?) With this explanation, however, Applewhite was hardly going where no man has gone before. The Watchtower Society had long beaten him to the punch to explain away its changes in doctrine and understanding. They explain them this way:

"... The pathway of Jehovah's people has been

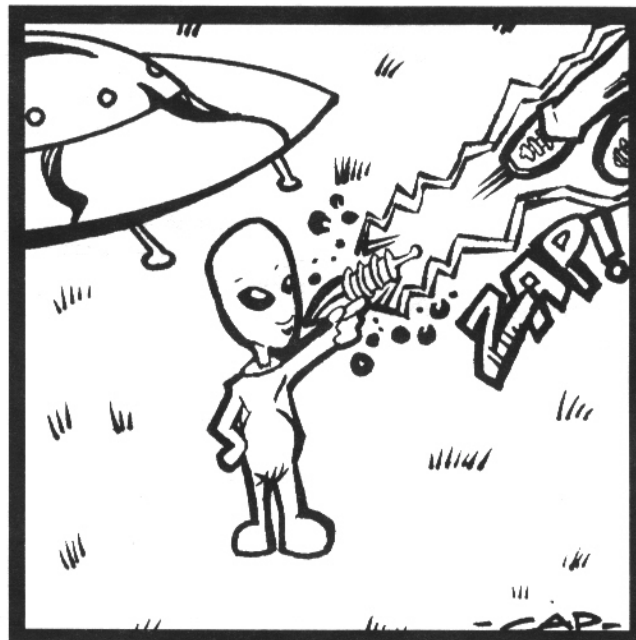
and is like the bright light that gets ever brighter. As they came out of the gross darkness enveloping 'Babylon the Great,' the world empire of false religion, it was not to be expected that they would see all things immediately in their true light. The brilliance of revealed truth could have had a blinding, even a confusing effect upon them spiritually ... We might illustrate this by a man who gets up before daybreak and who sets out on foot to travel across the countryside. He might see an outline of a building in the distance, but at first glance cannot tell whether it is a barn or a house. Gradually, as day dawns and he gets closer he can see that it is a

house. After a while he is able to tell that it is a wooden, not a brick, house. Then later, he can make out the color of the house, and so forth" (Watchtower, December 1, 1981, pp. 26 and 16).

As a person who has studied this group extensively, I must report that this little picture does not at all fit the facts. No, the light on the path of the Watchtower Society is more like this. With progressive light the man sees that there is a building ahead. "It's a house!" he emphatically declares. A while later. "No, it's a red barn for sure!" Later, "It is DEFINITELY a blue snowplow, and if you 'barn people' refuse to keep up with revealed 'truth,' you are free to leave and die at Armageddon!"

Then it becomes an outhouse of indeterminate color, then a little boy with an umbrella. NOW it's a house again; who knows WHAT it will be tomorrow! 'Round and 'round and 'round she goes, and where she stops, nobody knows. All this is DOGMA,

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I Am Your Leader!



And Along Came A Spider...

The Mormons and God: Christians ... or Not?

By Dave Moore

Many people think The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS, a.k.a. Mormon) is just another denomination of Christianity, like Baptist, Evangelical Free, or Presbyterian. In April 1996, the popular CBS television series *60 Minutes* correspondent, Mike Wallace, showed the Mormon church in a very favorable light, likening them to just another Christian denomination. The LDS also encourage this association by using many religious terms that Evangelical Christians use, which only adds to the appearance that they are simply another Christian denomination.

In a recent video produced by the LDS church, Mormon missionaries talk to prospective converts using terms many of us would recognize, like "Heavenly Father" and "Jesus Christ." So then, many people think there is little difference between what the LDS believes and what biblical Christianity believes. But, is this true? Mormons, themselves, are under no such misconceptions. Ask a Mormon missionary if his church is the only true church and he will usually say yes. So, the important question we should ask is: Is the LDS church REALLY just another Christian denomination OR do they have a completely different gospel than biblical Christianity?

Probably the best way of examining differences between the LDS church and historic, biblical Christianity is to determine what each teaches concerning the nature of God. Does the LDS church REALLY believe in the same God the Bible teaches or do they have a different God and other sources of authority that teach them about God? Is the Jesus of the LDS church the same Jesus that the Apostles knew? Is the Mormon view of God the same as what official LDS scripture, the *Book of Mormon* (BoM), teaches?

Authority

Before understanding what LDS believe about God, it is important for Christians to understand the sources from where the LDS receive their doctrine. They DO NOT receive their teachings solely from the Bible. Joseph Smith, founder of LDS, said, "We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly" (*The Pearl of Great Price*, 1842 ed., p.60). However, if the Bible contradicts other LDS scriptures, the latter supercede the Bible, as they are considered to "complete" the Bible. Often, when speaking with Mormons, this fact is not completely grasped by Christians who attempt to reason with the Mormons from the Bible.

Other Scriptures

The following list describes sources of authority for the doctrines of the LDS church besides the Bible. These include the *Book of Mormon* (BoM), *The Pearl of Great Price*, and *Doctrine and Covenants*. These, together with the King James Bible, are considered the "Standard Works." The BoM was allegedly translated from golden plates by Joseph Smith and is a purported history of a people's migration to America and how Jesus appeared to them. *The Pearl of Great Price* is a book that contains revisions of the Bible, sections of Joseph Smith's history, and the controversial *Book of Abraham*, which was supposedly translated from an Egyptian papyri. *Doctrine and Covenants* is a book containing a series of Joseph Smith's so-called revelations (prophecies) that he claimed he received from God.

Living Prophets

The sayings and writings of the presidents of the LDS church, who are considered "living prophets," are considered scripture and authoritative for the LDS. The first "living prophet" of the LDS church was Joseph Smith. The late LDS prophet, Ezra Taft Benson, stated the following:

"The prophet is the only man who speaks for the Lord in everything."

"The living prophet is more vital to us than the standard works."

"The prophet does not have to say 'Thus saith the Lord' to give us scripture."¹

The teachings of the living prophets and the standard works of the church constitute "continuing revelation" for the LDS church, thus making the Bible just an additional and incomplete (and incorrect) source of authority for the Mormons.

Comparisons on the Doctrine: The LDS View of God

The LDS view of God is unique among groups claiming to be Christians. Following is a summary of Mormon beliefs about God:

God was once a man, but now is a God.

The LDS Prophet Joseph Smith said the following about God:

"God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens ... I say, if you were to see him today you would see him like a man in form - like yourselves, in all the person, image, and very form as a man ... for I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity, I will refute that idea, and will take away the veil, so that you may see ... It is the first principle of the Gospel to know for a certainty the character of God and to know that we may converse with him as one man converses with another, and that he was once a man like us; yea, that God himself the father of us all, dwelt on an earth the same as Jesus Christ himself did." ²

God is one of many Gods who exist.

Again, Joseph Smith said:

"In the beginning, the head of the Gods called a council of the Gods; and they came together and concocted a plan to create the world and people it." ³

"I will preach on the plurality of Gods. I have selected this text for that express purpose. I wish to declare I have always and in all congregations when I have preached on the subject of the Deity, it has been the plurality of Gods. It has been preached by the Elders for fifteen years ... Hence, the doctrine of a plurality of Gods is as prominent in the Bible as any other doctrine. It is all over the face of the Bible. It stands beyond the power of controversy ... Paul says there are Gods many and Lords many. I want to set it forth in a plain and simple manner; but to us there is but one God - that is pertaining to us; and he is in all and through all." ⁴

Man can become a God.

Joseph Smith said:

"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, - namely, by going from one small degree to another, and from a small capacity to a great one, - from grace to grace, from exaltation to exaltation, until you attain to the resurrection of the dead, and are able to dwell in everlasting burnings and to sit in glory, as do those who sit enthroned in everlasting power." ⁵

Summary

According to Joseph Smith and succeeding prophets of the LDS church:

1. God is a contingent being who was at one time not God, but instead, a man.
2. God is a finite being.
3. God is one of many Gods who exist.
4. God is a corporeal being who lives at a particular place in space and time, although his influence is all-persuasive.
5. God is a being who is subject to the laws and principles

of a beginningless universe with an infinite number of entities in it. ⁶

The Biblical View of God

Contrast the LDS view of God with what the Bible teaches about the nature of God:

God has always existed as God.

And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you (*Exodus 3:14*). ⁷

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God (*Psalms 90:2*).

Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen: that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour (*Isaiah 43:10-11*).

God is an infinite being.

And Abraham planted a grove in Beersheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the everlasting God (*Genesis 21:33*).

The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them (*Deuteronomy 33:27*).

Thy throne is established of old: thou art from everlasting (*Psalms 93:2*).

I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty (*Revelation 1:8*).

There is only one God who exists.

Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God (*Isaiah 44:6*).

Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared it? Ye are even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any (*Isaiah 44:8*).

I am the LORD, and there is none else, there is no God beside me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none beside me. I am the LORD, and there is none else (*Isaiah 45:5-6*).

Tell ye, and bring them near; yea, let them take counsel together: who hath declared this from ancient time? who hath told it from that time? have not I the LORD? and there is no God else beside me; a

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why The DIVIDE DIVIDE?

by L. L. (Don) Veinot

At our "Defend the Faith Conference" a few weeks ago, a representative of Intervarsity Press (IVP) handed me one of IVP's books entitled, *How Wide the Divide?* by Craig L. Blomberg, Professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary, and Stephen E. Robinson, Professor of Ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University (a Mormon institution). The subtitle is *A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation*. Joy (my wife) and I host a weekly radio show, "Defend the Faith," on WYLL, 106.7 FM, and we regularly interview authors of books we feel would be helpful in educating our listeners about cult and apologetic issues. Therefore, it is not unusual for Intervarsity Press or other publishers to send us new books for our appraisal as possible subject material. I did not have much opportunity to look at it until a few days later when another ministry pointed out to me the concluding 12 affirmations of these two authors on page 195. The authors state, "... we jointly and sincerely affirm the following foundational propositions of the Christian gospel as we both understand it." To say the least, I was shocked to see what followed:

"1. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one eternal God."

I thought there must be some mistake for, unless something has changed in the last ten days that I am unaware of, Evangelicals and Mormons do not agree on this statement. The same can be said of the remaining eleven affirmations. This launched me into dialog with many of the apologetics ministries around the country as well as with Bill McConnell, the Assistant to the President of Intervarsity Press; Craig L. Blomberg; and James Hoover, editor of *How Wide the Divide?*. Although we do not ordinarily do book reviews in this periodical, I believe this work warrants attention as attempted Evangelical suicide.

Can't we all just get along?

In Stephen Robinson's portion of the introduction, he seems to try to make the case that Evangelicals and Mormons not only have much in common morally and socially, but that their beliefs are essentially the same. The "problem," as he sees it, is that Evangelicals and Mormons just do not understand each other's language. Among the main obstacles to getting along are what Stephen Robinson and Craig Blomberg call "fundamentalist anti-Mormons," "extreme fundamentalists," and "anti-cultists" who disseminate (what they assert) is faulty information and outright lies about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS, a.k.a. Mormons).

I dialogued with Dr. Blomberg by e-mail and phone prior to writing this article. When I asked him what was meant by these terms, he was unsure. He said he didn't have anybody in particular

in mind. I pointed out to him that the LDS routinely attach these labels to anyone who reviews their beliefs from original LDS source materials and exposes the false teachings of the LDS. Dr. Blomberg, far from defending the right and obligation of Christians to expose false teachings and false prophets, seems to side with the LDS on this issue.

On page 23 he writes, "Undoubtedly, the most famous Evangelical anti-cult writer, Walter Martin ... had a penchant for phrasing his displeasure with groups he identified as non-Christian ...". Does this mean that Dr. Walter Martin and other "anti-cultist, extreme fundamentalists" consider LDS non-Christian, but Dr. Blomberg and IVP do not? When I asked Bill McConnell and James Hoover this question, they agreed that LDS are not Christians. Dr. Blomberg said he, too, believes that the LDS is non-Christian. When I asked Dr. Blomberg if he disagreed with Dr. Walter Martin's assessment that Mormonism is a non-Christian group, he said no, but the reason he phrased the quote about Dr. Walter Martin the way he did was "for the sake of dialog in this slightly less dogmatic way." I believe Dr. Blomberg to be an honest man, but his view that Mormonism is not Christian, which he insists he holds, was neither apparent nor implied in what he wrote.

While I agree we need to dialog with non-believers "with gentleness and reverence" (1 Peter 3:15), some statements in *How Wide the Divide?* remind me of the criticisms leveled at Harold Lindsell, who wrote *Battle for the Bible* in 1976. In this book, he exposed the slide of conservatives into liberalism. He subsequently was accused of opposing intellectual freedom. He was not an anti-intellectual, and what he pointed out about the "slide" actually was true. In a similar way, some may wrongly accuse Midwest Christian Outreach, Inc. of being anti-dialog. We do support dialog, and have promoted such as a basic philosophy of our ministry. Dr. Blomberg asserts his intentions were good, and IVP insists they simply want to open dialog between Mormons and Christians. I believe them both, but strongly believe that their book will serve only to muddy the waters further as to why the divide.

Bad information

Dr. Robinson and Dr. Blomberg both insist Evangelicals get their information from unreliable, mean-spirited sources. Dr. Robinson writes that "anti-cultists," or as "... Professor Blomberg calls them fundamentalists—usually attack us and usually tell whoppers about us when they do (i.e., are mean-spirited and dishonest) ..." (p.11). It may be Dr. Robinson is eager to conceal the "whoppers" the LDS has told over the years and is upset that others point them out.

Dr. Blomberg adds to this idea by stating that, "Most

Evangelicals gain their information about the Mormon Church, more properly known as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), from three sources: (1) anti-cult literature, written by fellow Evangelicals in an often polemical spirit, (2) doorstep conversations as members of the two groups share their faith house to house using a standardized and extremely simplified presentation of their beliefs, and (3) information from ex-Mormons who have left the church because they are bitter about how it treated them" (p.22).

What about Evangelicals who have studied Mormon teachings from the original LDS source documentation? What about ex-Mormons who left the LDS because they found Mormonism to be a false religion that was claiming to be Christian, but discovered it was based on the teachings of false prophets, namely, Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, et. al.?

The Apostle Paul in Romans 9 expressed a deep love and concern for his "brethren," his "kinsmen according to the flesh." So too, many Evangelicals and ex-Mormons have a strong love for Mormons and desire to reach them with the *true* gospel based upon the *true* Jesus.

We believe the same things

Dr. Robinson writes in his introduction on page 18, "The real sticking point is not what the LDS think of Christ and his gospel ...". Contrarily, this is *exactly* the "sticking point." It is crystal clear in LDS writings, teachings, and this book that the Mormons believe in a different Jesus and a different gospel, ones based on the teachings of latter-day "prophets." Prophets are either false or true; there is no third category for "prophet wanna-be's" who wrap themselves in an authoritative prophetic mantle, but then wish to distance themselves from prophetic errors.

Jesus warned us to be on the lookout for false prophets who would look like sheep. They would be wearing sheep's clothing, doing good works, and would appear to be true believers. According to the Lord, we are to judge them based on their fruit, which is not their "good works," but their prophetic utterances, as to whether they are true or false prophets (Matthew 7:15-23). Paul

warned about those who preach a different Jesus and a different gospel (2 Corinthians 11:4; Galatians 1:6-9).

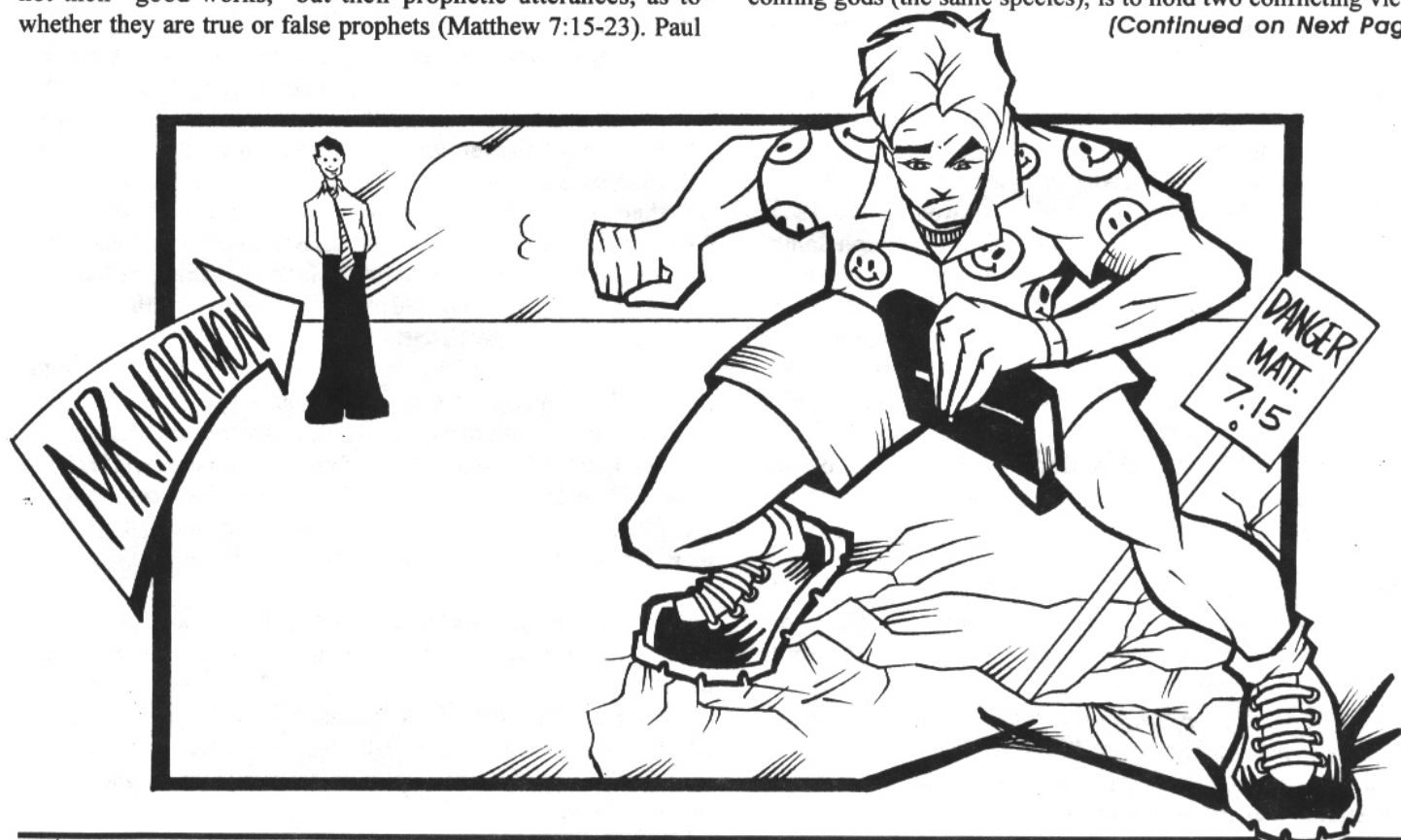
The Jesus of Mormonism was born through physical relations between "Heavenly Father" and "Heavenly Mother" on another planet. The biblical Jesus was eternally co-existent with the Father and did not come into existence at some past point in time. Dr. Robinson maintains that modern-day Christianity is not based on the Bible, but on pagan mythology which was brought in through the creeds. What is more accurate is that the Mormon's Jesus and *their* view of God originates in pagan mythology. The Mormons, like the Greeks, Romans, Norse, and others, believe gods (*plural*) are born through normal conceptions and *progress* to godhood.

Dr. Robinson confirms this view very early in *How Wide the Divide?*. On page 18 he writes that, "Latter-day Saints also believe in the *literal* fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of humanity. We believe that God and humans are the same species of being and that all men and women were his spiritual offspring in a premortal existence." (Italics in original.)

The Bible teaches (and Evangelicals affirm) that God and man are NOT the same "species of being." God is the creator. Man is part of the creation. God is infinite. Man is finite. The gap between God and man is as wide as the distance from east to west.

Dr. Blomberg generally does a good job of presenting the Orthodox Christian view in these areas. He points to the polytheistic view of the LDS and says the Bible calls this idolatry (p.105). He goes on to say, "Robinson helpfully repudiates this popular misconception, but it is not clear how he can do so and *consistently* still believe in a finite man on his own becoming God." (Italics in original.)

I would call Robinson's seeming ability to reconcile these opposing views "double think." To say, on the one hand, you are a monotheist believing in *one God*, and yet, assert there are *other gods* (polytheism) who existed before us, and that we also are becoming gods (the same species), is to hold two conflicting views
(Continued on Next Page)



"Divide" (Continued from Page 7)

simultaneously. This is "double think" and in dialog form becomes double-talk. Will all the readers of this book be able to discern the fallacy of this position or will some be taken in?

I asked Dr. Blomberg about the joint affirmations on page 195 starting with, "1. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one eternal God." Did the authors really mean the same thing? He assured me they did. When pressed a little further, I was informed the statement means they both believe in monotheism. It surely *seems* both are affirming the Orthodox view of the Trinity. This statement is at best misleading because, even if the intent was to affirm monotheism (the belief in one God), Mormonism teaches (as Dr. Robinson points out) god and man are the same species. Men becoming gods is a pagan, polytheistic belief, which would make Dr. Robinson's affirmation of monotheism false.

Only what we believe today counts

Dr. Robinson managed to set the criteria for the discussion: only what he says Mormons hold today as canonical sources are admissible for discussion. Dr. Blomberg points out that the doctrine of the deification of man is shown in one of the sources that Robinson considers canonical, *Doctrine and Covenants* 130:22. But it must also be said that Dr. Robinson is either being less than honest or is ill informed about official LDS doctrine.

In the LDS book, *Gospel Principles*, 1988 edition, pages 49-51, the LDS enumerate that which it considers Scripture *today*: the Bible, ("... as far as it is translated correctly"), the *Book of Mormon* (no qualifier), *Doctrine and Covenants* (which contains several false prophecies), and *The Pearl of Great Price*. On page 51, it gives the reader a fifth source of Scripture, saying, "In addition to these four books of scripture, the inspired words of our living prophets become scripture to us. Their words come to us through conferences, Church publications, and instructions to local priesthood leaders."

Stephen Robinson seems to have left out this fifth canonical source when listing the official Mormon scripture on page 17 of *How Wide the Divide?*, naming only the Bible, the *Book of Mormon*, *Doctrine and Covenants*, and *The Pearl of Great Price* as the word of God. Since he admits on page 14 he does not speak for the LDS church, but only for himself, we must accept the official statements of the LDS church about what is *their* official scripture.

At the conference held near the temple in Navoo, April 6, 1844, then-President and Prophet of the Mormon Church, Joseph Smith, delivered a speech in which he said, "God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man ...". He went on further to say, "... for I am going to tell you how God came to be God. We have imagined and supposed that God was God from all eternity. I will refute that idea, and take away the veil, so that you may see." Joseph Smith then challenged those at the conference, "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 ..." (*History of the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 305, 306).

In the LDS church publication, *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 1, the second paragraph of the introduction states, "It affords me great pleasure in being able to put into your possession the words of the Apostles and Prophets, as they were spoken in the assemblies of the Saints of Zion, the value of which cannot be estimated by man, not so much for any great display of worldly learning and eloquence, as for purity of doctrine, simplicity of style, and extensive amount of theological truth which they develop."

This official publication sets forth "purity of doctrine," and an "extensive amount of theological truth." On April 9, 1852, President and Prophet Brigham Young brought forth the following teaching: "When our father Adam came into the garden of Eden, he came into it with a *celestial body*, and brought Eve, *one of his wives*, with him. He helped make and organize this world. He is MICHAEL, the Archangel, the ANCIENT OF DAYS! about whom holy men have written and spoken—He is *our Father and our God, and the only God with whom WE have to do*. Every man upon the earth, professing Christians or non-professing, must hear it, and *will know it sooner or later*."

He also says with regard to Jesus' conception, "He was *not* begotten by the Holy Ghost." Who *was* the father of Jesus, you ask? "Jesus, our elder brother, was begotten in the flesh by the same character that was in the garden of Eden, and who is our Father in Heaven." Jesus was born on this earth by physical relations between Heavenly Father and his daughter Mary. In other words, Jesus is the product of incest! How important was this teaching? We'll let Brigham Young tell us in his own words; "Now, let all who may hear these doctrines, pause before they make light of them, or treat them with indifference, for they will prove their salvation or damnation." He went on to reiterate in the next paragraph, "... Jesus Christ was not begotten by the Holy Ghost." (All quotes from *Journal of Discourses*, vol. 1, pp. 50-51, all italics in original.)

According to the president of the church at that time (who was "God's Prophet"), accepting these "doctrines" determines a person's salvation or damnation. This sounds pretty official to me. Dr. Blomberg writes on page 109, "Robinson insists that the Adam-God theory, as proposed by the various interpreters of Brigham Young, makes no sense and was never officially endorsed."

Robinson may "insist" anything he chooses, but we have cited official Mormon publications to show what is *official scripture* according to the LDS church. We also have traced the teachings Robinson denies are "official" directly to the LDS presidents and prophets themselves, who presented them as "doctrine" and would bring "salvation" if accepted or "damnation" if rejected. The LDS may at some time officially say these were false teachings. If and when they do, however, they will be admitting they have been following false prophets.

However, the problems with this book in review are enormous. Dr. Blomberg, from what I understand, is an excellent teacher and a valued faculty member at Denver Seminary. In talking with him, I find him to be a gentleman and truly concerned for truth.

How to solve the problem

In my opinion, Dr. Blomberg was not the right individual to carry on this "conversation" with Dr. Robinson. Oddly enough, Dr. Stephen Robinson gives us support for that statement on page 11: "Ironically, what I most appreciate about Prof. Blomberg is his fairness and honesty. If I say to him, 'Look, I just don't believe that' (as I frequently do), he ACCEPTS [reviewer's emphasis] it, whereas most Evangelicals of my acquaintance merely smile and think me a liar."

We are not equipped to judge what is in Dr. Robinson's heart. He may actually believe he can "adjust" Mormonism to suit his own fancy, and yet, remain an "orthodox" Mormon. He cannot. Then again, I have talked with representatives of many religions who knowingly *misrepresented* the doctrines of their faith in order to make them appear reasonable and defensible, thereby misleading the unwary.

In 2 Timothy 3:13 the Apostle Paul wrote, "But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." Dr. Robinson may himself be deceived and, in turn, is deceiving others. Someone more familiar with Mormonism than Dr. Blomberg is needed to be in this "conversation," someone who would know what questions to ask.

Intervarsity Press has produced one of the best evangelistic tools the Mormon church has had in a while. When an Evangelical tells a Mormon missionary at his door that Mormonism is not true Christianity, but is a different faith altogether, the missionary will be able to pull from his bag of materials a book by an Evangelical publisher which says on page 195, "... we jointly and sincerely affirm the following foundational propositions of the Christian gos-

pel as we both understand it."

Intervarsity Press and Dr. Craig Blomberg need to realize their grave error and either retract the book or correct it to show that, in fact, Evangelicals and Mormons do *not* agree on these areas.

As the apologetic techniques of the cults become ever more sophisticated by deceptively using Christian language and utilizing evasive tactics in order to blur the distinctions, Christians must be ever-more willing to make a clear defense of the true gospel. The divide is *very* wide, and necessarily so, between true Christianity and pretenders to the title. The gap cannot be wished away by utilizing "slightly less dogmatic" phraseology in the most well-intentioned dialog. The unvarnished truth will have to be told. Ω

"Mormons" (Continued From Page 5)

just God and a Saviour; there is none beside me. Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else (*Isaiah 45:21-22*).

Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me (*Isaiah 46:9*).

God is a non-corporeal being whose existence transcends space and time, who is all knowing and omniscient.

God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth (*John 4:24*).

God is not subject to the laws and principles of the creation He made, which is finite.

And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail (*Hebrews 1:10-12*).

As seen from these comparisons, the LDS concept of God is far removed from the biblical description of God. When these differences are pointed out to Mormons (as I have pointed out to Mormon Missionaries who visited my home), they will often claim that the God described in the Bible is the "one God for this world only," implying that the scripture isn't really denying the existence of other gods. A simple reading of the cited biblical texts in context clearly refutes that argument, unless one "reads into the text" something that isn't there. Mormons will also claim the biblical text is unreliable, in order to refute what it says about the nature of God. However, the Mormons aren't always specific about which texts are actually corrupt. They have difficulty explaining why their church continues to use the King James translation as one of the "Standard Works" if parts of it are allegedly corrupt.

The Book of Mormon and God

Joseph Smith said of the BoM:

"I told the brethren that **the Book of Mormon was the most correct of any book on earth**, and the key-stone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book."

The LDS hold the BoM as more authoritative than the Bible. Interestingly, the BoM does not teach the plurality of Gods, finite godism, or other LDS doctrines of God. It teaches something rather different even from Joseph Smith's previously cited statements. In fact, it teaches something similar to what the Bible describes about God. Many Mormons are surprised to learn this. This contradiction has proven to be a good witnessing tool for Christians when dialoguing with Mormons about the nature of God. The following are some of the more interesting BoM references:

And Zeezrom said unto him; Thou sayest there is a true and living God? And Amulek said: Yea, there is a true and living God. Now Zeezrom said: Is there more than one God? And he answered no. Now Zeezrom said unto him again: How knowest thou these things? And he said: An angel hath made them known unto me (*Alma 11: 26-31*).

For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed (*3 Nephi 24:6*).

For do we not read that God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, and in him there is no variable-ness neither shadow of changing? And now if ye have imagined up unto yourselves a god who doth vary, and in whom there is a shadow of changing, then have ye imagined up unto yourselves a god who is not a God of miracles (*Mormon 9: 9-10*).

And if there were miracles wrought then, why has God ceased to be a God of miracles and yet be an unchangeable Being? And behold, I say unto you he changeth not: if so he would cease to be God; and he ceaseth not to be God, and is a God of miracles (*Mormon 9:19*).

For I know that God is not a partial God, neither a

(Continued on Page 11)

"Day" (Continued from Page 3)

and to disagree with any of it is to disagree with God himself ... until the light flickers again, that is. You gotta hang on tight, if you are to keep up with "the truth!"

What is this "Babylon the Great" they speak of? Oh, don't you know? "Babylon" is all of the various denominations of big, bad, old "Christendom." The Watchtower Society holds the churches in complete contempt, along with all of her pastors, teachers, missionaries, etc. But, they are certainly not the only cult group that disdains the church. Most cult groups teach that true Christianity was lost off the earth and is now being restored by the cult's leader/group. The Christian church is the enemy, the root of all of the world's ills, hypocrites, war-mongers, flea bitten, immoral. Applewhite agrees:

ORGANIZED RELIGION (ESPECIALLY CHRISTIAN) HAS BECOME THE PRIMARY PULPIT FOR MISINFORMATION AND THE "GREAT COVER-UP"

"Those who are unhappy with what this world has to offer, or are seeking the *real* Truth, have turned to New Age, Eastern Religions, or simply have 'dropped out' to indulge in whatever excesses might bring them pleasure ... Who can blame them? Nowhere, especially not in the churches, can they find the answers to the purpose of their existence or any hope for a soul's future. The most significant information, that which was offered two thousand years ago by a representative from the 'future' — the Evolutionary Level Above Human (the real Kingdom of Heaven), has been completely ignored or obscured. That Representative's 'hard core' teaching — the formula for entering 'His Father's Kingdom' (that Evolutionary Level Above Human) — cannot be found anywhere on the planet, least of all in the teachings of the churches. The Christians have unwittingly become their own dreaded *Anti-Christ*" (*Heaven's Gate*).

How come we in the churches always have to be the Antichrist or the whore of Babylon? Is that fair? I am gratified to learn, though, that whatever Christendom's faults might be, Applewhite's view of Jesus' hard-core teaching formula cannot be found in the churches!

What happens to all who may find they disagree with Applewhite and his gang? It's the sheep and the goats all over again!:

"Luciferians through their human devotees, who presently find their main stronghold among the seeming religious, will, in fact, be the catalyst for the Age's end judging process. All who condemn this truth and its bearers will be condemned by the NEXT LEVEL — all who acknowledge this truth and its deliverers, will be 'saved' for future nurturing" (*Heaven's Gate*).

"Your attitude toward the wheatlike anointed 'brothers' of Christ and the treatment you accord them will be the determining factor as to whether you go into 'everlasting cutting-off' or receive 'everlasting life' " (*Watchtower*, August 1, 1981, p. 26).

"And the witness is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son, has the life; he who does not have the Son does not have the life" (1John 5:11-12).

The main charge leveled at the church by cultists is that the church teaches salvation is truly and totally a free gift and not a reward for prescribed behavior. Applewhite calls the hope of attaining heaven "through His [Christ's] shed blood" a "worthless religious precept." All cult groups teach that one's "salvation," however defined by the particular group, is based upon one's own efforts, and these necessary works are the ones demanded by the leadership of the group.

"The transition to becoming a beginning Next Level member is the most difficult undertaking any human can undergo or even imagine — yet the reward is priceless" (*By Drrody, Heaven's Gate*).

"It is for the reward of eternal life that every last person should now be working ... The man who does not shrink back from the hard work of being a Christian will come in line for the splendid and ultimate reward — eternal life" (*Watchtower*, August 15, 1972, p. 492).

"Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor but as what is due [a reward]. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness.

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, that no one should boast" (*Romans 4:4-5; Ephesians 2:8-9*).

And, of course, no one *outside the cult group* can be saved whether or not he does the works required. That is, one cannot be saved unless he is under the tutelage of the cult group, as well as performing the required works.

THE ONLY WAY OUT OF THIS CORRUPT WORLD

"How membership in the true Kingdom of God is attained: by overcoming all human-mammalian characteristics and behavior under the direct personal tutorship of a member of that Kingdom" (*Heaven's Gate*).

"A third requirement is that we be associated with God's channel, his organization ... To receive everlasting life in the earthly Paradise we must identify that organization and serve God as part of it" (*Watchtower*, February 15, 1983, p. 12).

"I am the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father but by Me" (*John 14:6*).

In stark contrast to Applewhite's assertion that his way was the only way, Jesus claimed to be THE WAY, and THE TRUTH. Applewhite blasphemously named his group Heaven's Gate, but Jesus said in John 10:9-10 that *He* was THE DOOR and that salvation could only be attained by entering through HIM. Then He proved his claim by rising from the dead, something Applewhite has yet to do. Jesus came "that they might have life and might have it abundantly." Jesus also claimed that any other contenders for His rightful title were thieves who come "only to steal, and kill, and destroy," while His words are so true. Cults kill and destroy their members.

"CAUTION: If the above information is consumed or assimilated, you may experience such side effects as loss of marriage, family, friends, career, respectability, and credibility. Continued use may even result in the loss of your membership in the human kingdom" (*USA Today*, 1993; Heaven's Gate advertisement).

"In former times, *thousands of youths died* for putting God first. *They are still doing it*, only today the drama is played out in hospitals and courtrooms, with blood transfusions the issue" (*Awake*, May 22, 1994, p. 2). (Italics added for emphasis.)

Are Jehovah's Witnesses a life-threatening cult? Yes. Their own words condemn them. With their unwarranted ban on blood transfusions, they are responsible for more deaths than Jim Jones, David Koresh, and Marshall Applewhite together.

In the June 1, 1997 *Watchtower*, p. 7 they tell us:

"[Jehovah's Witnesses] made the choice (to join the group) according to their own free will without coercion. And they continued to have freedom of will and action."

I guess whether or not you accept that depends upon your definition of "coercion" and "free will." Interestingly, Guru Ma says that she is not a cult leader and insists her followers have "free will" to consider what she says and make their own decisions.

"Mormons" (Continued from Page 9)

changeable being; but he is unchangeable from all eternity to all eternity (*Moroni 8:18*).

Conclusion

We have seen that the LDS view of God and the biblical view of God are completely different. It has been pointed out that the LDS view even differs from what their own scripture (BoM) teaches about God. Therefore, the LDS God cannot in any way be equated to the monotheistic God of historic, biblical Christianity. God himself condemns teachings like those of Joseph Smith and the LDS Church with the following statement:

What about Heaven's Gate? Did they practice coercion on their members? Their advertisement in *USA Today*, 1993 continues:

"Some religious 'cults' might participate in physical or mental abuse, hold members against their will, have weapons, or break laws in general, while we have long been aware that that type of behavior is inappropriate."

Cults rarely use physical coercion to gain or keep members. The coercion practiced by these groups is the coercion of terrible fear, while the "free will" they enjoy is the freedom to get "spaded under" along with the rest of humanity at Armageddon, which is "right around the corner" ... Ω

Love to all,

Joey

Independence Day

"If therefore the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed" (*John 8:36*).

Endnotes:

¹Fifteen-year-old Adrian died refusing a blood transfusion. Adrian said: "To disobey God and extend my life for a few years now and then because of my disobedience to God lose out on a resurrection and living forever in his paradise earth — that's just not smart!" (*Awake!*, May 22, 1994, pp. 4-5).

²*Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines are bi-weekly publications of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, a.k.a. Jehovah's Witnesses.

And it shall be, if thou do at all forget the Lord thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish (*Deuteronomy 8:19*). Ω

Endnotes:

¹Benson, Ezra Taft, *14 Fundamentals in Following the Prophet*, pp. 1-16, 1980.

²*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 6, p. 3, 1844.

³*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 6, p. 5, 1844.

⁴*History of the Church*, vol. 6, p. 474, 1844, emphasis in the original.

⁵*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 6, p. 4, 1844.

⁶Beckwith, Dr Francis J. "Study Notes for Workshop, 'The Mormon Concept of God: A Philosophical Analysis'." 1994.

⁷All Bible quotes are from the Authorized KJV.

⁸*History of the Church*, vol. 4, p. 461, 1841.

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