

Are Mormons Christians?

A Review of a Book by Stephen Robinson,
A Prominent Mormon Scholar

Is Mormonism a Cult?

Often, you hear Evangelical Christians refer to Mormonism as a cult. What does that mean? Is the allegation true or false?

As usual, it is important to define terms. The word cult means nothing unless it means something.

Therefore, in an attempt to clarify

(Continued on last page)

From time to time a Latter-day Saint will write a book which attempts to defend the proposition that Mormonism is Christian.

In 1991, Dr. Stephen E. Robinson attempted that feat in the book *Are Mormons Christians?* Actually, Robinson, in his title, asks the wrong question. He should ask, “Is Mormonism Christian?” That is a much easier question to answer.

In the opening words of the preface to his book, Robinson writes:

“In July 1986, a group of evangelical Christians and former Mormons held a news conference in Salt Lake City and subsequently presented a petition to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints demanding that it stop referring to

itself as a “Christian” church. The petition had been signed by 20,543 individuals from 49 states and 31 foreign countries.

I remember the incident well. Ed Decker, of *Saints Alive!* had convened a Capstone Conference in Salt Lake City and this event, headed up by former Mormon, Dick Baer, was one of the interesting events staged during the conference. As I remember it, Baer and his entourage took the petitions in boxes to the Mormon Church Office Building in downtown Salt Lake City. Apparently

the Church’s security department saw them coming and locked the front door. At least that’s how I remember the day.

Robinson continues:

The reaction to this petition in Utah was largely one of consternation.

After all, the Saints asked themselves, is not the name of our church The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints? Do we not worship Christ? Is not the Book of Mormon another testament of Jesus Christ?

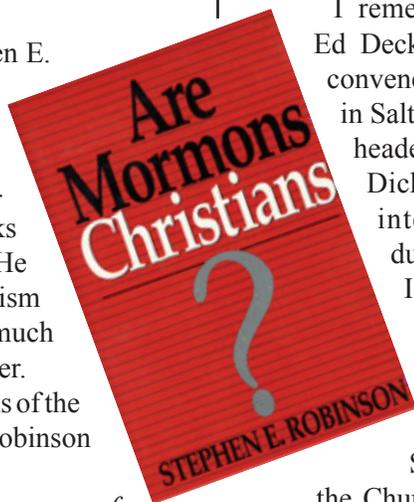
The answers to those three questions are “Yes, no, no.” Here are my reasons for answering those questions as I do:

1). *Is not the name of our church The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?* Yes, that is the name of the organization, and anyone who has ever attempted to enter a discussion with a Mormon about whether or not Mormons are Christians will encounter this same question. You will also encounter the same puzzlement expressed by Robinson. He finds it unthinkable that we don’t agree that posting the name Jesus over the doors of Mormon Churches makes them Christian.

The issue is truth in labeling; It’s what’s inside that counts.

When the eleven Southern States

(Continued on page 2)



seceded from The United States of America in 1860-61 they didn't try to keep the name. They changed the name of the new confederacy to The Confederate States of America. Mormonism wants to have it both ways. First, it wants to distinguish itself as The One True Church and at the same time secede from the Christian Church (or, more correctly, to excommunicate the rest of the Christian Church). Mormon scripture, to this very day, states that *all* other churches are wrong, *all* their creeds are abominable and *all* who profess those creeds are corrupt. (Pearl of Great Price, Joseph Smith v. 19)

On the other hand, Mormonism wants to be one of the boys; to be included in the family of Christian churches. It wants to be the One True Church, when it is convenient, and it wants to be a member of the larger Christian community when *that* is convenient.

In the good old days, Mormons argued what they believed: that they are the One True Church and we mere "Christians" are simply apostates. That's an argument you can get your teeth into. But it is not Robinson's argument.

"It is not my purpose," he writes, "in these pages to prove, or even to argue, that the LDS church is true or that its doctrines are correct, even though I believe both of those propositions."

So what *is* Robinson trying to prove? He says, "...I will attempt to show why the arguments used to exclude Latter-day Saints from the 'Christian' world are flawed." He simply wants to demonstrate that Mormons can't be excluded. To do that he wants to make the definition of "Christian" so broad as to be useless.

2). *Do we not worship Christ?* The answer to the question is a firm "no." The late Mormon Apostle, Bruce R. McConkie, taught the following:

We worship the Father and him only and no one else. We do not worship the Son and we do not worship the Holy Ghost. I know perfectly well what the scriptures say about worshipping Christ and Jehovah, but they are speaking in

an entirely different sense—the sense of standing in awe and being reverentially grateful to Him who has redeemed us. Worship in the true and saving sense is reserved for God the first, the Creator. (BYU Devotional Speech, March 2, 1982)

And, Mormon President Gordon B. Hinckley publicly stated that the Christ his church worships is not the Christ the rest of us worship: The official Mormon Church publication, the Church news, ran an article June 20, 1998, reporting on President

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Hinckley's address to a group of Latter-day Saints in Paris. Here is a direct quote:

In bearing testimony of Jesus Christ, President Hinckley spoke of those outside the Church who say Latter-day Saints "... do not believe in the traditional Christ. No I don't. The traditional Christ of whom they speak is not the Christ of whom I speak."

So, if Mormons don't believe in the Traditional Christ of the Bible, they certainly cannot worship Him. Worship for Christians is reserved exclusively for *God*. Not for a demi-god—some kind of second level god. Worship is reserved for The one true and living God of the Old Testament; the unique, self-existent, creator and first cause of all things. If Christ is not He, then He cannot receive worship. We must, with the Apostle Thomas, be able to say, "My Lord and my God." (John 20:28) All Mormons know that in Mormon theology Jesus is not the one true and living God.

This issue—true worship of the unique

Creator of the universe—really is at the heart of the debate Evangelicals have with Mormonism. It is what drove 20,543 individuals from 49 states and 31 foreign countries to petition the Mormon Church not to use the title "Christian."

3. *Is not the Book of Mormon another testament of Jesus Christ?* No, it is not. More properly, it is a testament of another Jesus Christ:

But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning, your minds may somehow be led astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ.

For if someone comes to you and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus we preached, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it easily enough. (II Cor. 11:3-4)

Evangelicals say that Mormonism brings another Jesus to us: a Jesus who is not the Creator God of all the Universe, a Jesus who was conceived by the god Elohim in exactly the same way you, I, and Satan were. The Jesus of Mormonism is, indeed, not only your spirit-brother and my spirit-brother, but he is the spirit-brother of Lucifer. Mormonism does not bring us another testament of the real Jesus Christ, but a testament of a counterfeit Christ.

Robinson argues that Mormons are Christians because there is no way to exclude them

Robinson's argument really boils down to his assertion that there is no way to exclude anyone from the Christian Church if such a person wants to say he is a Christian. That seems largely at odds with Jesus' statement:

Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?"

Then I will tell them plainly, "I

never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" (Mt 7:21-23)

Robinson writes:

At one time Protestant and Catholic denominations did make charges against each other each claiming that the other (or others) was not Christian. But in the almost five hundred years since the Reformation Protestants and Catholics have become used to each other and, with the exception of certain fundamentalists groups, are willing to tolerate the differences between themselves. They see these differences as being "all in the family," and refer to each other as "Christians" in a generic sense, though they may still disagree with each other's doctrines.

What Robinson misses—and what I find Latter-day Saints consistently miss—is that no true Christian is willing to assign the title "Christian" to anyone simply on the basis of belonging to a certain church, whether that church is Protestant or Catholic. One can be a Methodist or a Lutheran and yet not be a Christian. True Christians—whether they are Protestant or Catholic—know that one becomes a Christian when one meets certain *personal* faith requirements. We routinely say something like: "Just because your cat has kittens in the oven, that doesn't make them biscuits!" We mean that church membership has nothing to do with conversion to Christ.

Methods of exclusion

Robinson maintains that some Christians exclude Mormons using as many as six different methods. I cannot, in this newsletter, go into all of the so-called exclusionary methods, but I will look—in a general way—at Robinson's charges.

Exclusion by definition. Robinson in effect suggests two categories of definitions for the term "Christian." One definition—the definition he thinks is the only reasonable one—is very broad: "Someone who believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and the Savior of the world, and who believes that the Old and New Testaments contain

his teachings." I submit this definition is no good at all. If we use it, then certainly *Satan must be considered a Christian—he believes all of those things!*

Robinson suggests the other category of definitions for the term are simply narrow, sectarian definitions. He wants us to believe that mainline churches accept his definition and only narrow-minded Christians (in his opinion—Fundamentalists) don't. The truth, however, is that within all churches exists another, hidden church. It is the *real* church. In fact the Greek New Testament term translated "church" is *ekklesia*. This word literally means "the called-out" ones, those who have been redeemed from every nation, tribe and tongue. They are literally "called out" of the world, into the Kingdom of God. The Book of Revelation gives a beautiful picture of the heavenly reunion which awaits these people:

"We worship the Father and him only and no one else. We do not worship the Son and we do not worship the Holy Ghost."
—Mormon Apostle
Bruce R. McConkie

And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. (Rev. 5.9)

Again, what Robinson and Mormons in general seem to miss is that a large, trans-denominational group exists which defines itself as Christian based on the *experience* of salvation. These are those who testify that they have passed from death to life, that they were blind, but now they see. And though they subscribe to many secondary doctrinal distinctives they adhere to equally many doctrinal points which they believe—*on the basis of scripture*—cannot be given up!

Robinson writes:
Fundamentalists and other sectarians

are free, I suppose, to define the Word Christian any way they want to for their own purposes. They can define themselves as the only genuine Christians in the whole world and then shut everybody else out...

I find it particularly ironic that Robinson has just described *Mormonism*, not Fundamentalism. For Mormonism, from its inception, has "defined out" every other church of Christendom. Remember, Mormonism steadfastly maintains it is the *only* true church—all the rest are apostates. Many modern Mormons are ashamed of that position—ashamed of Joseph Smith's first Vision—but it still is the only reason for the so-called Restoration. God—so Mormonism teaches—*restored* the Church of Christ, *because it was totally lost from the earth!*

Robinson is Right about one thing

Robinson is right that the definition for the term "Christian" determines who is one and who isn't one. As we have seen, if we adopt *his* definition, then no one can be left out, including the devil himself. If we say any group which hangs the sign "Christian" over its building must be considered a Christian group, then we can exclude no one.

We must, therefore, ask ourselves if it is reasonable to expect to find *any* legitimate definition for the term. I think it is.

I think reasonable men have been able to reach agreement on this—in spite of many secondary disagreements—throughout the history of the Church.

Three things are necessary

1. *To be a Christian, one must be born again.* Both the Old and New Testaments, as well as the teaching of Jesus Christ and the Apostles sets forth one common fact. That fact is that there are two classifications of people: the saved and the unsaved. Various terms are used to describe these two groups: righteous-unrighteous; children of God-children of the devil; sheep-goats; elect-lost; redeemed-damned. There are not three groups, just two.

This is the central teaching of the Bible, that mankind is separated from God, lost in sin. Into this world of sin God sojourns

to rescue fallen mankind. Those who are rescued are saved, those who are unrescued are lost.

To be born again, one must have passed from death to life. This experience is unmistakable to anyone who has experienced it. Perhaps some Mormons have. My experience tells me that this concept is foreign to nearly every Latter-day Saint. When they are honest they will tell you something like this: "Well, I'm doing the best I can to please God; I love Jesus Christ; I'm trying to live a life in accordance with the teachings of scripture." None of those statements has anything to do with being born again. They speak of what the person would *like* to become, not what he *has* become—a great difference.

2. *A Christian must be a monotheist.* It is impossible to please God without exercising faith in God. (Heb. 11:6) Faith cannot be exercised in God if a person does not understand that—just as there are only two classifications of *people* in the universe—there are only two kinds of *beings* in the universe: first, there are all those beings which have been created; second, there is only *One Being* which is uncreated—God.

Mormonism has no clear handle on that. Mormonism teaches two distinct (and mutually exclusive) doctrines about God. One doctrine is the doctrine of eternal progression which says that men become gods through progressing in knowledge,

wisdom, and power. That the god of this planet, Elohim, was himself born to another older god, who was in turn born to another, still older, god.

The Mormon doctrine of first things says that all of us are "co-eternal" with God. That God "*found himself* in the midst of spirits and intelligence." Neither of these theories remotely approaches the biblical minimum understanding that in all the universe there is but one God. (Deut. 6:4) There is none like Him in all the universe. The Bible states:

You are my witnesses," declares the LORD, "and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. (Is. 43:10)

Likewise, Mormonism apparently is oblivious to the biblical description of mankind: that we are finite creatures which he has made:

A voice says, "Cry out." And I said, "What shall I cry?" "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field.

The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass. (Is. 40:6-7)

3. *A Christian must understand that he is powerless to save himself.* Nothing can be more repugnant to God than to encounter fallen men who suggest to Him that they

are able to bootstrap themselves into righteousness. One who would be saved must understand that he is *lost*:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. (Eph. 2:1-2)

Are Mormons Christian?

I repeat that any Mormons who are Christians must have become so in spite of the clear teachings of Mormonism. I am not suggesting this isn't possible. However, I would give this advice to a Latter-day Saint who is convinced he meets the three requirements I have listed above: Leave the Mormon Church and affiliate with a denomination, church, or group which ascribes to those same three principles.

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(Continued from front page) Is Mormonism a Cult?...

rather than cloud the issue, I will try to define the term.

In the first place, there are two common uses for the word "cult," a sociological one and a theological one. The word, when used to describe a sociological system, normally connotes a group with a charismatic leader who holds the membership of the group captive by sociologically manipulative means. We think of the late Jim Jones, who led 900 of his followers to suicidal deaths in Guyana. Or, the late Marshall Applewhite who also led his disciples to suicide in attempt to connect up with a space craft following in the wake of the comet Hale-Bopp.

This is normally not the definition Evangelical Christians are thinking of when they use the word cult in reference to Mormonism. They are thinking of a somewhat different concept. The theological definition of the word used by Evangelicals stems from a non-pejorative word that means "locus." A cult simply identifies a subgroup of a larger group.

When, for example, Catholics speak of the Cult of Mary, they often are not implying anything negative. They are identifying a specific group within the Catholic Church.

In the Bible, Paul referred to "The cult of the Pharisees." He, of course disagreed with the Pharisees (often in the strongest of terms), but he was not resorting to name calling. For Paul, the word meant something like "The party of the Pharisees."

The history of Christianity includes the discussion of subgroups which have departed from mainstream or orthodox theology to become "heterodox" or "heretical." These are groups which continued to claim to be essentially Christian, but which were regarded by the mainstream Christian churches as having "departed the faith."

This is the viewpoint orthodox Christians have of groups like Mormonism and the Jehovah's Witnesses. It is not that they are considered evil people; they are considered to be in serious theological error.