

For historic Christianity this form of deification is heretical. It is believed that man would be in the presence of God, but would not become a god. The Orthodox Church does not accept that exaltation and theosis are similar. Bishop Timothy Ware, Spaulding Lecturer in Orthodox Studies at Oxford University wrote in referring to the differences of the views between Mormonism and the Orthodox Church:

"Deification," on the Orthodox understanding, is to be interpreted in terms of the distinction between the divine essence and the divine energies. Human beings share by God's mercy in His energies but not in his essence, either in the present age or in the age to come. That is to say, in *theosis* the saints participate in the grace, power, and glory of God, but they never become God by essence.

Nature of God

The nature of God or the Godhead is defined by Latter-day Saints as three distinct *personages*, the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. The Father and the Son have glorified physical bodies, while the Holy Ghost is a spirit. As the first part of Lorenzo Snow's quote indicates ("As man is, God once was..."), the Latter-day Saints apply the concept of exaltation to God the Father. Hence, it is believed that God the Father was once mortal, as Christ was. A possible implication of this teaching is the existence of other divine beings, a form of henotheism. Nevertheless, God the Father (of the New Testament) is the only God worshipped by Mormons; Christ, as the mediator between mortals and the Father, is worshipped as Lord and Savior. The Holy Ghost, as third member of the Godhead, is sought after and given veneration as well. Mormons consider this teaching to be fully consistent with Biblical evidence. Since Mormons speak of these three as separate beings rather than the same person, traditional Christian groups critical of Latter Day Saints sometimes insist that this is polytheism.

This theology significantly differs from the Trinitarian doctrine of historic Christianity. In trinitarianism, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit

exist as one God in three *persons* or in the Greek *hypostasis*. The three are said to be co-equal and co-eternal and they share a single Divine essence, being, or nature.

Though there is no incontrovertible evidence that Joseph Smith taught this, Latter-day Saints believe that God the Father is married to an exalted woman, whom they speculatively call a Heavenly Mother. Her existence is referred to briefly in the LDS Church hymn titled "O My Father" (Hymn number 292), and it is alluded to in The Family: A Proclamation to the World, which says that each person is "a spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents." Her existence is acknowledged by LDS Church members and leadership, but she is not worshipped explicitly and rarely mentioned. Members are taught that she is held sacred by God and thus rarely mentioned to mortals. Detractors argue that her (albeit slight) presence in Latter-day Saint theology is further proof of polytheistic beliefs.

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Mormonism and Christianity

Mormonism and historic **Christianity** have had an uneasy relationship with each other since shortly after Joseph Smith, Jr. founded the Latter Day Saint movement.

Historic Christianity is characterized as the branches of Christianity that accept the Nicene Creed. This includes, but is not limited to the Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox Church, and most branches of Protestantism. Those who practice Mormonism, Latter Day Saints, consider themselves to be Christians and believe that the Latter Day Saint movement is the restoration of the original Church of Christ as depicted in the New Testament. Latter Day Saints claim the restored church to be the only divinely authorized form of Christianity. Some Christian denominations consider Mormonism to be a heretical or apostate form of Christianity, a departure from the Christian faith, or more pejoratively, a cult.

Some of the reasons for this uneasy relationship can be ascribed to different definitions of sacred texts, doctrines, and core beliefs, uncommon practices, and proselytization on both sides. Some Latter Day Saint denominations such as the Community of Christ have attempted to include dialogue with mainstream Christianity within their theology and practice. Other denominations, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, have adopted a conservative approach, reexamining the church's doctrines and practices rarely.

Divergence of Mormonism from historic Christianity

In March 1830 the Book of Mormon was published. The production of this new volume of scripture, which Joseph Smith, Jr. claimed to have translated by divine power from buried golden plates, marked the first departure of Mormonism from historic Christianity. It purported to recount a history of Christianity in the Western Hemisphere, including a description of civilizations and appearances by Jesus. Latter Day Saints declared it as a companion

and complement to the Bible. Traditional Christian denominations disagreed and attempted to discount Smith's credibility, in some cases citing his alleged skills with divination. They also attacked the doctrines as expounded by Smith.

Passages in the Book of Mormon castigate modern churches for their "incorrect" teaching of doctrines. This appears to echo the view held by many contemporary frontier restorationists in that there had been a Great Apostasy after the death of Jesus Christ and His apostles.

Smith expressed what he saw as important flaws in the Christian denominations of his day. He once said:

We may look at the Christian world and see the apostasy there has been from the apostolic platform; and who can look at this and not exclaim, in the language of Isaiah, "The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinances, and broken the everlasting covenant"?

In another instance, Smith said:

"The teachers of the day say that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, and they are all in one body and one God. Jesus prayed that those that the Father had given him out of the world might be made one in them, as they were one [one in spirit, in mind, in purpose]. If I were to testify that the Christian world were wrong on this point, my testimony would be true."

Regarding Catholicism and Protestantism, Smith had these words:

"Here is a principle of logic...I will illustrate by an old apple tree. Here jumps off a branch and says, I am the true tree, and you are corrupt. If the whole tree is corrupt, are not its branches corrupt? If the Catholic religion is a false religion, how can any true religion come out of it?"

Smith began to organize a church that would embody the new insights he found in the Book of Mormon and later in his own revelations. He deemed this necessary as he alleged that the Christian

churches had lost their authority centuries before which could not be recovered without a restoration. Therefore, on April 6, 1830, Smith formed the Church of Christ, which purported to be the restored Gospel of Jesus Christ, and a continuation of "true" original Christianity.

A need for a church restoration was a departure from traditional Christian thought. Although most traditional Christians acknowledged corruption and mistakes within Christianity, only the restorationists viewed Christianity as so fundamentally broken that a restoration was required, rather than a mere reformation such as the Protestant Reformation. To non-Restorationist Christians, departures from the truth were seen as continuously being overcome, through councils and decrees. Hence, to these Christians, the fundamental "apostolic succession" made by Catholic and Orthodox branches, or the broader "apostolic tradition" claimed by most Protestant denominations, remained intact.

Accepted canon

Traditional Christians believe that the canon of scripture is closed, making the Bible the only sacred text for Christians, although the precise number of books in the Bible is disputed among different Christian denominations. Many Protestants consider it the only infallible authority, a doctrine called *Sola scriptura* (the Bible alone). Although Catholics give equal weight to Sacred Tradition, they subscribe, de facto, to *Prima scriptura* (the Bible above all). This difference results in the differences seen between the churches. However, the clear primacy of the Bible has resulted in basic beliefs that are largely shared between the churches.

Latter Day Saints believe that the Book of Mormon is another sacred text in addition to the Bible. Each denomination adds their own versions of the Doctrine and Covenants as scripture. Some denominations add the Pearl of Great Price, which contain additional important Latter-day Saint scriptures such as the Book of Moses and the Book of Abraham. These additional scriptures provide the basis for the foundational doctrines found solely among the churches of the Latter Day Saint

movement. The LDS church has also had General Authorities announce at General Conference (c. 1973) that all General Conference talks by General Authorities and their written transcriptions if "... they shall speak when moved upon by the Holy Ghost shall be scripture...". In addition, many Mormons believe that other prophets in other regions went under personal revelation and wrote scriptures that have been lost and may, one day, be restored. Hence, the belief in these additional scriptures and their derived doctrines is what defines the Latter Day Saint movement to be uniquely different from historic Christianity.

Nature of man

In the 1840s, Joseph Smith made significant and unusual assertions concerning the nature of humanity and its relationship with God. Smith argued that the human soul existed with God before the creation of the Earth. Thus, Latter-day Saints believe in a pre-mortal existence, in which humans are literally the spirit children of God, and that some element of the human spirit, called *intelligence*, has existed eternally in the same sense that God existed eternally, but in a less progressed form of energy or matter, and this existence was even before God organized them as spirit children. This may explain the Church's teaching that man and God are co-eternal (carefully distinguishing "co-eternal" from "equal"). Historic Christianity is generally silent on anything prior to birth or beyond the resurrection of the dead, and has always taught that man is made or created.

Regarding the afterlife, Latter-day Saints teach of a potential deification or exaltation of all of humanity who are worthy of it. The oft-quoted saying (by Lorenzo Snow, a Latter-day Saint Apostle) that captures this idea is, "As man is, God once was; as God is, man may be." Simply put, this means that God was once a mortal man, and that man can become gods. They consider this tenet to correspond with Biblical teachings and early Christian writings. Some Mormons further note that the doctrine of *theosis* of the Orthodox Church is evidence that this doctrine is based on early Christian teaching.