

Philosophical Problems with the Mormon Concept of God

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Most Christians who critique the Mormon view of God do so from a strictly biblical perspective. Christian apologists have correctly pointed out that Mormon theology conflicts with biblical doctrine in a number of important areas, including the nature of God, the plan of salvation, and the nature of man.[1]

Although the biblical approach should be the Christian's primary focus, Dr. Stephen E. Parrish and I have suggested another approach in several articles and books.[2] This approach focuses on the *philosophical* rather than the *biblical* problems with the Mormon concept of God.

In this article I will (1) compare and contrast the Christian and Mormon concepts of God and (2) present three philosophical problems with the Mormon view.

THE CHRISTIAN CONCEPT OF GOD

Christians claim that their concept of God is found in the Bible. Known as *classical theism*, this view of God has long been considered the orthodox theistic position of the Western world. Though there are numerous divine attributes that we could examine, for our present purposes it is sufficient to say that the God of classical theism is at least (1) personal and incorporeal (without physical parts), (2) the Creator and Sustainer of everything else that exists, (3) omnipotent (all-powerful), (4) omniscient (all-knowing), (5) omnipresent (everywhere present), (6) immutable (unchanging) and eternal, and (7) necessary and the only God.

Let us now briefly look at each of these attributes.

1. Personal and Incorporeal.

According to Christian theism, God is a personal being who has all the attributes that we may expect from a perfect person: self-consciousness, the ability to reason, know, love, communicate, and so forth. This is clearly how God is described in the Scriptures (e.g., Gen. 17:11; Exod. 3:14; Jer. 29:11).

God is also incorporeal. Unlike humans, God is not uniquely associated with one physical entity (i.e., a body). This is why the Bible refers to God as Spirit (John 4:24).

2. The Creator and Sustainer of Everything Else that Exists.

In classical theism, all reality is contingent on God -- that is, all reality has come into existence and *continues* to exist because of Him. Unlike a god who forms the universe out of preexistent matter, the God of classical theism created the universe *ex nihilo* (out of nothing). Consequently, it is on God alone that everything in the universe depends for its existence (*see* Acts 17:25; Col. 1:16, 17; Rom. 11:36; Heb. 11:3; 2 Cor. 4:6; Rev. 4:11).

3. Omnipotent.

God is also said to be omnipotent or all-powerful. This should be understood to mean that God can do anything that is (1) logically possible (*see* below), and (2) consistent with being a personal, incorporeal, omniscient, omnipresent, immutable, wholly perfect, and necessary Creator.

Concerning the latter, these attributes are not *limitations* of God's power, but *perfections*. They are attributes at their infinitely highest level, which are essential to God's nature. For example, since God is perfect, He cannot sin; because He is personal, He is incapable of making Himself impersonal; because He is omniscient, He cannot forget. All this is supported by the Bible when its writers assert that God cannot sin (Mark 10:18; Heb. 6:18), cease to exist (Exod. 3:14; Mal. 3:6), or fail to know something (Job 28:24; Ps. 139:17-18; Isa. 46:10a). Since God is a perfect person, it is necessarily the case that He is incapable of acting in a less than perfect way -- which would include sinning, ceasing to exist, and being ignorant.

When the classical theist claims that God can only do what is logically possible, he or she is claiming that God cannot do or create what is logically *impossible*. Examples of logically impossible entities include "married bachelors," "square circles," and "a brother who is an only child." But these are not *really* entities; they are merely contrary terms that are strung together and *appear* to say something. Hence, the fact that God cannot do the logically impossible does not in any way discount His omnipotence.

Also counted among the things that are logically impossible for God to do or create are those imperfect acts mentioned above which a wholly perfect and immutable being cannot do -- such as sin, lack omniscience, and/or cease to exist. Since God is a personal, incorporeal, omniscient, omnipresent, immutable, wholly perfect, and necessary Creator, it follows that any act *inconsistent* with these attributes would be necessarily (or logically) impossible for God to perform. But this fact does not count against God's omnipotence, since, as St. Augustine points out, "Neither do we lessen [God's] power when we say He cannot die or be deceived. This is the kind of inability which, if removed, would make God less powerful than He is.... It is precisely because He is omnipotent that for Him some things are impossible." [3]

But what about Luke 1:37, where we are told that "*nothing* is impossible with God?" (NIV) Addressing this question, St. Thomas Aquinas points out that this verse is not talking about internally contradictory or contrary "entities," since such "things" are not really things at all. They are merely words strung together that *appear* to be saying something when in fact they are saying nothing. [4] Hence, *everything* is possible for God, but the logically impossible is *not* truly a *thing*.

4. Omniscient.

God is all-knowing, and His all-knowingness encompasses the *past*, *present*, and *future*. [5] Concerning God's unfathomable knowledge, the psalmist writes: "How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you" (Ps. 139:17,18). Elsewhere he writes, "Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit" (147:5). The author of Job writes of God: "For he views the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens" (Job 28:24). Scripture also teaches that God has total knowledge of the past (Isa. 41:22). Concerning the future, God says: "I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please,'" (Isa. 46:10). Elsewhere Isaiah quotes God as saying that *knowledge* (not opinion or highly probable guesses) of the future is essential for deity (Isa. 41:21-24), something that distinguished God from the many false gods of Isaiah's day.

5. Omnipresent.

Logically following from God's omniscience, incorporeality, omnipotence, and role as creator and sustainer of the universe is His omnipresence. Since God is not limited by a spatio-temporal body, knows everything immediately without benefit of sensory organs, and sustains the existence of all that exists, it follows that He is in some sense present everywhere. Certainly it is the Bible's explicit teaching that God is omnipresent (Ps. 139:7-12; Jer. 23:23-24).

6. Immutable and Eternal.

When a Christian says that God is immutable and eternal, he or she is saying that God is *unchanging* (Mal. 3:6; Heb. 6:17; Isa. 46:10b) and has *always existed* as God throughout all eternity (Ps. 90:2; Isa. 40:28; 43:12b, 13; 57:15a; Rom. 1:20a; 1 Tim. 1:17).[6] There never was a time when God was not God.

Although God certainly seems to change in response to how His creatures behave -- such as in the case of the repenting Ninevites -- His nature remains the same. No matter how the Ninevites would have responded to Jonah's preaching, God's unchanging righteousness would have remained the same: He is merciful to the repentant and punishes the unrepentant. Hence, a God who is responsive to His creatures is certainly consistent with, and seems to be entailed in, an unchanging nature that is necessarily *personal*.

7. Necessary and the Only God.

The Bible teaches that although humans at times worship some beings *as if* these beings were really gods (1 Cor. 8:4-6), there is only one true and living God by nature (Isa. 43:10; 44:6, 8; 45:5, 18, 21, 22; Jer. 10:10; Gal. 4:8; 1 Cor. 8:4-6; 1 Tim. 2:5; John 17:3; 1 Thess. 1:9). And since the God of the Bible possesses *_all_* power (*_see_* above), there cannot be any other God, for this would mean that two beings possess all power. That, of course, is patently absurd, since if a being possesses all of everything (in this case, power) there is, by definition, nothing left for anyone else.[7]

Moreover, since everything that exists depends on God, and God is unchanging and eternal, it follows that God cannot *not* exist. In other words, He is a *necessary* being,[8] whereas everything else is contingent.

THE MORMON CONCEPT OF GOD

Apart from biblical influences, the Mormon doctrine of God is derived primarily from three works regarded by the Mormon church (the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints [LDS]) as inspired scripture: The Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants (hereafter D&C), and the Pearl of Great Price. (Most of these writings were supposedly received through "revelation" by the movement's founder and chief prophet, Joseph Smith.) It is also found in Smith's other statements and doctrinal commentaries. Although not regarded by the LDS church as scripture *per se*, Smith's extracanonical pronouncements on doctrine are almost universally accepted by the Mormon laity and leadership as authoritative for Mormon theology.

The Mormon doctrine of God is also derived from statements and writings of the church's ecclesiastical leaders -- especially its presidents, who are considered divinely inspired prophets. Additionally, we will consider the arguments of contemporary LDS philosophers who have attempted to present Mormonism's doctrine of God as philosophically coherent.[9]

Because there are so many doctrinal sources, it may appear (with some justification) that it is difficult to determine precisely what the Mormons believe about God. For example, the Book of Mormon (first published in 1830) seems to teach a strongly Judaic monotheism with modalistic (God is only one person manifesting in three modes) overtones (*see* Alma 11:26-31, 38; Moroni 8:18; Mosiah 3:5-8; 7:27; 15:1-5), while the equally authoritative Pearl of Great Price (first published in 1851) clearly teaches that more than one God exists (*see* Abraham 4-5). This is why a number of Mormon scholars have argued that their theology evolved from a traditional monotheism to a uniquely American polytheism.[10]

Consequently, our chief concern will not be the historical development of Mormon theism, but rather, the dominant concept of God *currently* held by the LDS church. Though there is certainly disagreement among Mormon scholars concerning some precise points of doctrine, I submit that the church currently teaches that God is, in effect, (1) a contingent being, who was at one time not God; (2) finite in *knowledge* (not truly omniscient), *power* (not omnipotent), and *being* (not omnipresent or immutable); (3) one of many gods; (4) a corporeal (bodily) being, who physically dwells at a particular spatio-temporal location and is therefore not omnipresent like the classical God (respecting His intrinsic divine nature -- we are not considering the Incarnation of the Son of God here); and (5) a being who is subject to the laws and principles of a beginningless universe with an infinite number of entities in it.

No doubt there are individual Mormons whose personal views of God run contrary to the above five points. But since both the later writings of Joseph Smith and current Mormon orthodoxy clearly assert these five points, Mormons who dispute them are out of step with their church.

The modern Mormon concept of God can best be grasped by understanding the overall Mormon world view and how the deity fits into it. Mormonism teaches that God the Father is a resurrected, "exalted" human being named Elohim who was at one time *not* God. Rather, he was once a mortal man on another planet who, through obedience to the precepts of *his* God, eventually attained exaltation, or godhood, himself through "eternal progression."

Omniscience, according to Mormon theology, is one of the attributes one attains when reaching godhood. Mormons appear to be divided, however, on the meaning of omniscience. It seems that some Mormons believe omniscience to mean that God has no *false* beliefs about the past, present, and future. This view is consistent with the classical Christian view.[11]

On the other hand, the *dominant* Mormon tradition teaches that God only knows everything that can *possibly* be known. But the only things that can possibly be known, traditional Mormons say, are the *present* and the *past*, since the former is occurring and the latter has already occurred. Consequently, since the future is not a "thing" and has never been *actual* (and hence cannot possibly be known), *God does not know the future*. Therefore, the Mormon God is *omniscient* in the sense that he knows everything that can possibly be known, but he nevertheless increases in knowledge as the future unfolds and becomes the present.[12] The common ground of the two Mormon views is that God must, at minimum, have complete and total knowledge of *everything* in the past and in the present.

Once Elohim attained godhood he then created this present world by "organizing" both eternally preexistent, inorganic matter and the preexistent primal intelligences from which human spirits are made. Mormon scholar Hyrum L. Andrus explains:

Though man's spirit is organized from a pure and fine substance which possesses certain properties of life, Joseph Smith seems to have taught that within each individual spirit there is a central primal intelligence (a central directing principle of life), and that man's central primal intelligence is a personal entity possessing some degree of life and certain rudimentary cognitive powers before the time the human spirit was organized.[13]

For this reason, Joseph Smith wrote that "Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be." [14] In other words, *man's basic essence or primal intelligence is as eternal as God's*.

The Mormon God, by organizing this world out of preexistent matter, has granted these organized spirits the opportunity to receive physical bodies, pass through mortality, and eventually progress to godhood -- just as this opportunity was given him by his Father God. Consequently, if human persons on earth faithfully obey the precepts of Mormonism they, too, can attain godhood like Elohim before them.

Based on the statements of Mormon leaders, some LDS scholars contend that a premortal spirit is "organized" by God through "spirit birth." In this process, human spirits are somehow organized through literal sexual relations between our Heavenly Father and one or more mother gods, whereby they are conceived and born as spirit children *prior* to entering the mortal realm (although all human persons prior to spirit birth existed as intelligences in some primal state of cognitive personal

existence).[15] Since the God of Mormonism was himself organized (or spirit-birthed) by his God, who himself is a "creation" of yet another God, and so on *ad infinitum*, Mormonism therefore teaches that the God over this world is a contingent being in an infinite lineage of gods.[16] Thus, Mormonism is a polytheistic religion.

Comparing the Mormon concept with the classical Christian concept of God (*see* the chart for a breakdown of this comparison[17]), Mormon philosopher Blake Ostler writes:

In contrast to the self-sufficient and solitary absolute who creates *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), the Mormon God did not bring into being the ultimate constituents of the cosmos -- neither its fundamental matter nor the space/time matrix which defines it. Hence, unlike the Necessary Being of classical theology who alone could not *not* exist and on which all else is contingent for existence, the personal God of Mormonism confronts uncreated realities which exist of metaphysical necessity. Such realities include inherently self-directing selves (intelligences), primordial elements (mass/energy), the natural laws which structure reality, and moral principles grounded in the intrinsic value of selves and the requirements for growth and happiness.[18]

Mormonism therefore teaches a metaphysical pluralism in which certain basic realities have *always* existed and are indestructible even by God. In other words, *God came from the universe; the universe did not come from God* (although he did form this planet out of preexistent matter).

It follows from what we have covered that in the Mormon universe there are an infinite number of intelligent entities, such as gods (exalted humans) and preexistent intelligences. If this is denied, however, the Mormon must somehow reconcile a *finite* number of these beings with an *infinite* past. For instance, if there is only a finite number of gods in a universe with an infinite past, then there was a time when no gods existed (which Joseph Smith denies[19]). For a finite number of gods coming into being cannot be traced back infinitely. Moreover, if there is only a finite number of gods, then the continually repeated scenario of a god organizing intelligences so that they can begin their progression to godhood would have never begun. This is so because in Mormonism one needs a god in order for another to become a god, and no being has always been a god.

Furthermore, if there were only a finite number of preexisting intelligences in the infinite past, then there could no longer be any preexistent intelligences who could become gods, since they would all certainly be "used up" by now. An infinite amount of time is certainly sufficient to use up a finite number of preexistent intelligences. At any rate, in order for Mormonism to remain consistent, it must teach that there is an *infinite* number of gods and preexistent intelligences in an infinitely large universe.

CHRISTIAN
CONCEPT OF GOD

MORMON
CONCEPT OF GOD

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1. Personal and incorporeal
 2. Creator and sustainer

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1. Personal and corporeal (embodied)
 2. Organizer of the world, of contingent existence, but subject to the laws and principles of a beginningless universe

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|-------------------------------|--|
| 3. Omnipotent | 3. Limited in power |
| 4. Omniscient | 4. Limited in knowledge |
| 5. Omnipresent in being | 5. Localized in space |
| 6. Immutable and eternal | 6. Mutable and not eternal
(as God) |
| 7. Necessary and the only God | 7. Contingent and one of many gods |
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SOME PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS WITH THE MORMON CONCEPT OF GOD

In our two books, Dr. Parrish and I deal with a number of philosophical problems with the Mormon concept of God.[20] In this article I will present three of these. Because of space constraints, however, I cannot reply to all the possible Mormon responses to these problems. For this reason, I refer the reader to the detailed replies in my two books.

The Problem of an Infinite Number of Past Events

It is evident from what we have covered that Mormonism teaches that the past series of events in time is *infinite* or *beginningless*. Joseph Fielding Smith, the Mormon church's tenth prophet and president, writes that Joseph Smith "taught that *our Father had a Father and so on.*"[21] Heber C. Kimball, who served as First Counselor in the church's First Presidency, asserts that "we shall go back to our Father and God, who is connected with *one who is still farther back*; and this Father is connected with *one still further back, and so on....*"[22] Apostle and leading doctrinal spokesman Bruce R. McConkie writes that "the elements from which the creation took place are eternal and therefore had no beginning." [23] O. Kendall White, a Mormon sociologist, points out that because Mormon theology assumes metaphysical materialism it "not only assumes that God and the elements exist necessarily, but so do space and time. In contrast, traditional Christian orthodoxy maintains that space and time, along with everything else except God, exist because God created them." [24]

There are several philosophical and scientific problems in asserting that the series of events in the past is beginningless. Philosopher William Lane Craig has developed four arguments -- two philosophical and two scientific -- along these lines.[25] In this article, I will apply Craig's second philosophical argument to the Mormon concept of God:

- 1.) If the Mormon universe is true, then an infinite number (or distance) has been traversed.
- 2.) It is impossible to traverse an infinite number (or distance).

Conclusion.) Therefore, the Mormon universe is not true.

Premise 1 is certainly true. We have seen already that the Mormons fully acknowledge that the past is infinite. And if it is infinite, then certainly an infinite number of events has been traversed to reach today.

But can an infinite number actually be traversed, as premise 2 denies? I think it is clear that it cannot. Consider the following example.

Imagine that I planned to drive on Interstate 15 from my home in Las Vegas to the Mormon temple in Salt Lake City. The distance is 450 miles. All things being equal, I would eventually arrive in Salt Lake. But suppose the distance was not 450 miles, but an *infinite* number. The fact is that I would never arrive in Salt Lake, since it is by definition impossible to complete an infinite count. An "infinite" is, by definition, *limitless*. Hence, a *traversed* distance by definition cannot be infinite. Consequently, if I *did* eventually arrive in Salt Lake City, this would only prove that the distance I traveled was not infinite after all. That is to say, since I could always travel one more mile past my arrival point, arriving at *any* point proves that the distance I traveled was not infinite.

Now, let us apply this same logic to the Mormon universe. If the universe had no beginning, then every event has been preceded by an infinite number of events. But if one can never traverse an infinite number, one could never have arrived at the present day, since to do so would have involved traversing an infinite number of days. In order to better understand this, philosopher J. P. Moreland provides this example:

Suppose a person were to think backward through the events in the past. In reality, time and the events within it move in the other direction. But mentally he can reverse that movement and count backward farther and farther into the past. Now he will either come to a beginning or he will not. If he comes to a beginning, then the universe obviously had a beginning. But if he never could, even in principle, reach a first moment, then this means that it would be impossible to start with the present and run backward through all of the events in the history of the cosmos. Remember, if he did run through all of them, he would reach a first member of the series, and the finiteness of the past would be established. In order to avoid this conclusion, one must hold that, starting from the present, it is *impossible* to go backward through all of the events in history. But since events really move in the other direction, this is equivalent to admitting that if there was no beginning, the past could have never been exhaustively traversed to reach the present moment.[26]

It is clear, then, that premises 1 and 2 are true. Given the fact that the argument is valid, the conclusion therefore follows: the Mormon universe is not true. And if the Mormon universe is not true, then *the Mormon God does not exist*, since his existence is completely dependent on the existence of the Mormon universe.

The Problem of Eternal Progression with an Infinite Past

In this second objection, unlike the first, I am arguing that even if we assume that the past series of events in time is infinite, it is impossible for the Mormon doctrine of eternal progression to be true. Although Dr. Parrish and I present three arguments for this view in one of our books,[27] I will limit myself to one argument in this article. Mormon theology teaches that all intelligent beings have always existed in some state or another and progress or move toward their final eternal state. McConkie writes:

Endowed with agency and subject to eternal laws, man began his progression and advancement in pre-existence, his ultimate goal being to attain a state of glory, honor, and exaltation like the Father of spirits.... This gradually unfolding course of advancement and experience -- a course that began in a past eternity and will continue in ages future -- is frequently referred to as a course of *eternal progression*. It is important to know, however, that for the overwhelming majority of mankind, eternal progression has very definite limitations. In the full sense, eternal progression is enjoyed only by those who receive exaltation.[28]

Here is the problem: if the past series of events in time is infinite, *we should have already reached our final state by now*. Yet, we have *not* reached our final state. Therefore, the Mormon world view is seriously flawed.

The Mormon may respond by arguing that we have not yet reached our final state because there has not been enough time for it to have transpired. But this is certainly no solution, since the Mormon's own world view affirms that an infinite length of time has already transpired. One cannot ask for more than an *infinite time* to complete a task.

We must conclude, then, that since none of us has reached his or her final state -- whether it be deity or some posthumous reward or punishment -- the past series of events in time cannot be infinite in the sense the Mormon church teaches. For even if we assume that the past *is* infinite, since we have not yet reached our inevitable fate the Mormon world view is still false.

The Problem of Achieving Omniscience by Eternal Progression

McConkie explains the Mormon doctrine of *eternal progression* when he writes that "during his [an evolving intelligence] earth life he gains a mortal body, receives experience in earthly things, and prepares for a future eternity after the resurrection when he will continue to gain knowledge and intelligence" (D&C 130:18-19). McConkie then states that the God of this world (Elohim) went through the same process until he reached a point at which he was "not progressing in knowledge, truth, virtue, wisdom, or any of the attributes of godliness." [29] That is to say, the Mormon God progressed from a point of *finite* knowledge until he reached a point of omniscience (*infinite* knowledge). I believe, however, that this view is incoherent. Consider the following inductively strong argument:

- 1.) A being of limited knowledge gaining in knowledge entails the increasing of a finite number.
- 2.) Starting from a finite number, it is impossible to count to infinity.
- 3.) The Mormon view of eternal progression entails a being of limited knowledge gaining in knowledge until his knowledge is infinite (remember, the Mormon universe contains an infinite number of things).

(Conclusion 1/Premise 4) Therefore, the Mormon view cannot be true, for it is impossible -- given premises 1, 2, and 3 -- for eternal progression to entail that a being of limited knowledge gains knowledge until his knowledge is infinite.

5.) The Mormon doctrine of eternal progression is entailed by the Mormon concept of God.

(Conclusion 2) Therefore, the Mormon concept of God is incoherent.

Let us review each of these premises. Premise 1 is clearly true: Mormon theology teaches that all beings are limited in knowledge unless or until they attain godhood (*see* D&C 130:18-19). Consequently, every time one of these beings acquires a new item of knowledge on his or her journey to godhood it amounts to an increase in a finite number of items of knowledge.

Premise 2 asserts that it is impossible to count to infinity if one starts at a finite number. For example, if one begins counting -- 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and so on -- no matter when one stops counting one can always add one more member to the count. But if one can always add one more member, then one can never arrive at an infinite number -- which is, by definition, *limitless*. To use an example cited earlier, one can never arrive in a city an infinite distance away, since it is impossible to complete a count (or a distance) which has a limitless number of members.

Premise 3 -- that the Mormon view of eternal progression entails that a being of limited knowledge gains in knowledge until his knowledge is infinite (since there are an infinite number of things for the Mormon god to know in his universe) -- is a doctrine clearly taught by Joseph Smith:

Here, then, is eternal life -- to know the only wise and true God; and you have 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...*When you climb up a ladder, you must begin at the bottom, and ascend step by step, until you arrive at the top; and so it is with the principles of the gospel -- you must begin with the first, and go on until you learn all the principles of exaltation.[30] (emphasis added)

Therefore, given that premises 1, 2, and 3 are established as valid, then conclusion 1 logically follows. And if conclusion 1 is linked with premise 5 (a foundational belief of Mormon theism), the final conclusion of the argument logically follows: *the Mormon concept of God is incoherent*.

Someone may argue that the Mormon God receives his infinite knowledge from his own "Heavenly Father" God all at once when he reaches a particular point in his progression. Although there are a number of replies to this argument,[31] one is to point out that this response does not *really* explain how the Mormon God acquires his infinite knowledge. It merely places the problem on the shoulders of a *more distant* God, who acquired *his* supposed omniscience from an *even more distant* God, and so on into infinity.

Appealing to an endless series of contingent beings as an explanation for why all the Mormon gods are omniscient explains nothing. Consider the following: If Being A does not have the sufficient reason for his omniscience in the being who created him (Being B), but requires other prior conditions (i.e., B receiving his omniscience from

his creator, Being C, and C receiving his omniscience from his creator, Being D, *ad infinitum*), then the necessary conditions for the omniscience of *any one* of the gods in the series are never fulfilled and can never be fulfilled in principle. It follows from this that none of the gods in the Mormon universe could have ever actually attained omniscience. Whether a Mormon god "progresses" to infinite knowledge or receives it all at once from his own superior God, the Mormon concept of God is nevertheless incoherent.

In conclusion, I began this article by defining both the Christian and Mormon concepts of God, showing them to be radically different. I then presented three related philosophical criticisms of the Mormon concept of God: (1) the problem of an infinite number of past events; (2) the problem of eternal progression with an infinite past; and (3) the problem of achieving omniscience by eternal progression. I believe these criticisms clearly demonstrate that philosophically the Mormon concept of God is irredeemably flawed.

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NOTES

1. E.g., Walter R. Martin, *The Maze of Mormonism*, 2d ed. (Santa Ana, CA: Vision House, 1978); Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *The Changing World of Mormonism* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980).
- 2 Francis J. Beckwith and Stephen E. Parrish, *The Mormon Concept of God: A Philosophical Analysis*, Studies in American Religion, vol. 55 (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1991); Beckwith and Parrish, *See the Gods: Four Rivals to Christianity* (College Press, 1997); Beckwith and Parrish, "The Mormon God, Omniscience, and Eternal Progression," *Trinity Journal* 12NS (Fall 1991):127-38.
3. Saint Augustine, *City of God* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1958), 5.10.
4. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, 25, 3, as contained in *Introduction to Saint Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Anton C. Pegis (New York: The Modern Library, 1948), 231.
5. Some contemporary theists have denied this classical view of omniscience, claiming that God does not know the future. They do *not* deny, however, that God knows everything. Like many Mormon thinkers, they argue that since the future is not a *thing* (because it has not happened yet), it is impossible for God to know it. For a defense of this position, see Clark Pinnock, "God Limits His Knowledge," in *Predestination and Free Will*, eds. David Basinger and Randall Basinger (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 141-62. For the opposing view, see the responses to Pinnock by John Feinberg, Norman L. Geisler, and Bruce Reichenbach, 163-77.
6. Although all orthodox Christians agree that God is *eternally* God, they dispute whether He exists *in* time (i.e., the temporal eternity view) or *out of* time (i.e., the timeless eternity view). See Thomas V. Morris, *Our Idea of God: An Introduction to Philosophical Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 119-38; and Ronald H. Nash, *The Concept of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 73-83.
7. It is true that *by* His power God *grants* power to His creatures. But unlike this hypothetical other God, their limited power is always subject to His unlimited power. Thus God "possesses" all power in that all other power comes from, and is under, His power.
8. Orthodox Christians all agree that God is in some sense necessary, but they do not all agree on what that means. See Morris, 107-13; and Nash, 106-13.
9. For example, Gary James Bergera, ed., *Line Upon Line: Essays in Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1989); Sterling M. McMurrin, *The Philosophical Foundations of Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1959); Sterling M. McMurrin, *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1965); Blake Ostler, "The Mormon Concept of God," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 17 (Summer 1984):65-93; David Lamont Paulsen, *The Comparative Coherency of Mormon (Finitistic) and Classical Theism* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1975); Kent Robson, "Omnis on the Horizon," *Sunstone* 8 (July-August 1983):21-23; Kent Robson, "Time and Omniscience in Mormon Theology," *Sunstone* 5 (May-June 1980):17-23; and O. Kendall White, Jr., *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy: A Crisis Theology* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987), 57-67.
10. James B. Allen, "Emergence of a Fundamental: The Expanding Role of Joseph Smith's First Vision in Mormon Religious Thought," *Journal of Mormon History* 7 (1980):43-61; Thomas G. Alexander, "The Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine: From Joseph Smith to

- Progression Theology," *Sunstone* 5 (July/August 1980):32-39; Boyd Kirkland, "The Development of the Mormon Doctrine of God," in Bergera, 35-52.
11. Neal A. Maxwell, "A More Determined Discipleship," *Ensign* (February 1979):69-73; Neal A. Maxwell, *All These Things Shall Give Thee Experience* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Books, 1979).
12. Ostler cites four Mormon leaders who have held views consistent with this view of omniscience: presidents Brigham Young, Wilford Woodruff, and Lorenzo Snow; and scholar B. H. Roberts. See Ostler, 76-78.
13. Hyrum L. Andrus, *God, Man and the Universe* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 175.
14. D&C 93:29.
15. Bruce McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 386-87, 516-17, 750-51.
16. See Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (hereafter HC), 7 vols., introduction and notes, B. H. Roberts, 2d rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: The Deseret Book Company, 1978), 6:305-12.
17. This chart, changed slightly for this article, originally appeared in Beckwith and Parrish, *The Mormon Concept of God*, 38.
18. Ostler, 67.
19. Joseph Smith declares, "Hence, if Jesus had a Father, can we not believe that *He* had a Father also?...." (HC, 6:476). See also McConkie, 577.
20. *Ibid.*, chapters 3 and 4; and Beckwith and Parrish, *See the Gods Fall*, chapter 3.
21. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1959), 1:12.
22. *Journal of Discourses, by Brigham Young, President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, His Two Counsellors, the Twelve Apostles, and Others*, 26 vols. reported by G. D. Watt (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1854-86), 5:19.
23. McConkie, 77.
24. White, 61.
25. William Lane Craig, *The Kalam Cosmological Argument* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1979). A popular version of his arguments can found in his *The Existence of God and the Beginning of the Universe* (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, 1979).
26. J. P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 29.
27. Beckwith and Parrish, *The Mormon Concept of God*, 59-63.
28. McConkie, 238-39.
29. *Ibid.*, 239.
30. HC, 6:306-7.

31. See Beckwith and Parrish, *The Mormon Concept of God*, 75-76.

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