

THE ROLE OF APOLOGETICS IN WITNESSING TO  
MORMONS

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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DIVINITY

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MEQUON, WI

March 7, 2018

## ABSTRACT

Over the last two years, Apologia Church, led by reformed pastor and apologist Jeff Durbin, has posted a number of videos on YouTube of Durbin witnessing to Latter-Day Saints on the streets of Tempe, AZ. Thousands of people have watched these videos. His approach is apologetic in nature as he uses a reasoned argument to prove that LDS teaching is not in line with what Scripture teaches. In these videos one will see Durbin talking at the Mormon temple about the nature of God, the divinity of Christ, and the authority of Scripture. At first glance, this may seem like a worthwhile approach in witnessing to Mormons. However, a closer evaluation of this reformed apologetic approach is necessary as many within Lutheran circles would not endorse such an approach. Why is that? Is there a role for apologetics in witnessing to Mormons? This thesis will explain the reasons why apologetics, as used in Durbin's reformed apologetic approach, should be secondary to the proclamation of sin and grace.

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## INTRODUCTION

One week into my vicar year, I heard a knock on the door of our new home in Las Vegas, NV. When I opened the door, standing before me were two young gentlemen dressed in a shirt and tie. I knew exactly who they were before they opened their mouths. Mormon missionaries! In that moment while they were introducing themselves, my mind tried to recall everything I knew about the Latter Day Saints (LDS). Words like polygamy, temple, and special underwear all were racing through my mind, along with names and titles such as The Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith, and Brigham Young. I knew the focus of their religion, like all other world-religions, centered around work-righteousness, however, the specifics I did not know. I welcomed them in and what I expected to be a short visit turned into a two-hour discussion. Since I did not understand much of the Mormon religion, I allowed them to talk for the majority of the time and explain to me much of what they believed. When I did enter the discussion, I attempted to focus on the fact that salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone. Much of the conversation was the missionaries and I talking past each other. As the frustrating conversation came to a close, I wanted another opportunity to talk to them again, so I invited them back, an invitation which they accepted.

The next week I researched how to witness to the LDS. I pursued two avenues when it came to my resources. The first was to buy Pastor Mark Cares' classic *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*. The second was the internet. While I was waiting for Pastor Cares' book in the mail, I thought I had stumbled upon a worthwhile resource in my search for effective

Mormon witnessing. It came in the form of You Tube videos. In recent years, Apologia Church, a reformed church based out of Tempe, AZ, has posted a number of videos of their pastor and apologist, Jeff Durbin, witnessing to Mormons.<sup>1</sup> With tracts in hand, Durbin and members of Apologia gather on the sidewalks surrounding the Mormon temple in Mesa, AZ. They evangelize during the Mormon Church's Easter and Christmas pageants, which bring in huge crowds.

In each video Durbin's witnessing technique challenges the Mormon to answer two questions: 1) "who is God?", and 2) "how do we come to know him?" He uses two apologetics to answer the first question, an apologetic of the nature of God and an apologetic of the deity of Christ. To answer the second question he uses an apologetic of the authority of Scripture. Playing off the Mormon's responses he uses these three apologetics intermittently to show the Mormon that they are following a false gospel, which in turn, cannot save them.

Initially I was impressed with the way Durbin lovingly and compassionately witnessed to these Mormons, using Scripture to do so. These were techniques I could see myself using in the next conversation with my Mormon missionaries. Then *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons* came in the mail. I quickly realized there was an obvious discrepancy between the two approaches. Rather than focusing on the Mormon Church's teaching of the plurality of gods, Christ's deity, or even the authority of Scripture, Cares approach centers on the subject of perfection: how Mormons strive to attain perfection by what they do, but how Christ has made them perfect and given them salvation through his perfect life, death, and resurrection.

While there may be discrepancies between the two approaches, I found in both cases the gospel of salvation by grace alone was being preached. How should a Christian go about

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1. A good example of Durbin's approach: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEvgE9oNHto&t=374s>

choosing which approach to use in their initial witness to Mormons? Should a Christian neglect apologetics since apologetics brings with it the connotation that one is trying to reason people to faith? Is the apologetic approach mentioned above a worthwhile way of witnessing to Mormons? This thesis will answer those questions by discovering what role apologetics play in a Christian's witness to Mormons. First it will attempt to narrow down a solid definition of apologetics. In this section I will relate this definition of apologetics to witnessing to Mormons, as well as suggesting a few approaches to avoid. Second, I will explain how the three main apologetics mentioned above are used. Third, I will give a common rationale as to why apologetics is used in an approach to witnessing. Finally, this thesis will answer the question of what role apologetics should play in witnessing to Mormons. In a Christian's witness to a Mormon, apologetics should only be used as a secondary tool to the proclamation of the gospel message which states that a person is made perfect by the atonement of Christ alone

## DEFINING APOLOGETICS

Thus far, it has been assumed that Durbin's approach<sup>2</sup> is apologetic in nature. As one will see in the following pages, the reformed approach, when talking about the nature of God, the deity of Christ, and the authority of Scripture, uses mostly Scripture passages to refute the false claims of Mormonism, while sharing the gospel. When one engages in this approach of using Scripture, is

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2. Please note that from now on Durbin's approach, which was mentioned in the introduction, will be called the reformed approach. Most reformed Mormon witnesses use similar apologetic approaches to Durbin's. Recent ones include presuppositional apologetes such as Dr. James White and Sye Ten Bruggencate, along with Matt Slick. Matt Slick, however, has been known to use *ad hominum* polemical approaches against Mormons pertaining to their history and practices.

apologetics even being utilized? Is Durbin's reformed approach even an apologetic approach? An assumption one might have concerning apologetics and its use in witnessing is that it is only used in pre-evangelism. In pre-evangelism an apologete breaks down an unbeliever's doubts concerning, for example, the existence of God, or the reliability of the biblical revelation and the gospel accounts. When those barriers in an unbeliever's heart are torn down (sometimes using logic and extra-biblical evidences to do so), then there is room for proclamation of law and gospel, which the Holy Spirit alone uses to convert. This assumption of apologetics gives the impression that by using a simple biblical response to the false teachings of Mormonism, the reformed approach is not even utilizing apologetics. Thus, a definition of apologetics is in order.

The word apologetics comes from the Greek word *apologia*, meaning defense or reply. In most cases the word *apologia* was used in connection with a courtroom setting. A defendant would make his *apologia* in front of a jury and a judge. A familiar use of the word would be Plato's *Apology*, in which Socrates lays out his arguments as to why he should not put to death. He gives a reasoned defense of the accusations made against him.

The noun *apologia* is used eight times in the New Testament. Four times it is used in relation to Paul making a defense against the unlawful accusations of his enemies. In Acts 22:1 Paul makes an appeal to the Jews to hear his defense against his persecutors, who accused him of defiling the law and the temple. A little later in Acts 25, Festus discusses what happened to Paul with Agrippa. The Jews wanted the Romans to hand Paul over to them, but Festus reminds Agrippa that it is not custom to hand a prisoner over unless they have had an opportunity of an *apologia*. Likewise in 2 Timothy 4:16 Paul makes mention of "his first *apologia*," a defense he made before the Romans, apparently one which no one showed up to. In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul gives an *apologia* to those in the Corinthian church who were judging Paul's theological

practices. In connection with the Gospel, *apologia* is used twice in Philippians. In 1:7 Paul uses it in correlation with the word βεβαίωσις, meaning “confirmation.” As Paul writes this from prison in Rome, he reminds the Philippians that they are in his heart, whether he is in chains, or in the “defense and confirmation of the Gospel” (1 Cor 1:17). Later in the chapter, Paul says he was put in prison for the *apologia* of the Gospel.

Perhaps the most well-known use of *apologia* is found in 1 Peter 3:15. This is generally used as the basis for the use of apologetics and as a mandate for Christians to be apologists. Peter states, “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an *apologia* to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.” In the context Peter is encouraging the believers that if they are going to suffer, it should be for doing good. He reminds the believers to not fear the threats of their persecutors or to be afraid of them. Rather “in your hearts revere Christ as Lord.” After he tells them to be prepared to give an *apologia*, he says to do it with gentleness and respect. This gentleness and respect is what is going to cause the unbelievers to see a Christian’s good deeds and feel the shame of slandering them. This verse will be referred to later.

It is important to note that in the case of Scriptural references to *apologia*, it is never used as a theological discipline or study, but rather a defense of the gospel that is spoken with Christian compassion and love. Former MLC Professor Lyle Lange, in a paper about Lutheran apologetics, gives this broad definition of apologetics. It is simply giving a defense of the Gospel. However, the field of apologetics has become much narrower in its definition. Deriving from the use of the word *apologia* in this verse, Christian apologetics is often defined as giving a *reasoned* defense of Christianity. Apologist and professor James E. Taylor in reference to 1 Peter 3:15 gives his definition, “Christian apologetics is a reasoned defense of Christian belief that

starts with a foundation of faith in Jesus Christ as Lord.”<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere he defines it further, “Christian apologetics is a defense of the reasonableness of believing that the Christian worldview is universally and objectively true.”<sup>4</sup> In his *Introduction to Apologetics* Edward Carnell defines it as “that branch of Christian theology which answers the question, Is Christianity rationally defensible?”<sup>5</sup> Even narrower than that, Alan Richardson states a specific role in apologetics; “Apologetics deals with the relationship of the Christian faith to the wider sphere of man’s secular knowledge- philosophy, science, history, sociology, and so on- with a view to showing that faith is not at variance with the truth that these enquiries have uncovered.”<sup>6</sup> To Richardson, apologetics is defending Christianity by showing it’s compatibility with philosophy and science.

Throughout the centuries, the ways in which apologists do apologetics have become vast and wide. In his book *A History of Apologetics* Avery Dulles comments on the shifting goals and methods of apologetics,

The earliest apologists were primarily concerned with obtaining civil toleration for the Christian – to prove that Christians were not malefactors deserving the death penalty. Gradually through the early centuries the apologies for Christianity became less defensive. Assuming the counteroffensive, they aimed to win converts from the other groups. Some were addressed to pagans, others to Jews. Subsequently apologetics turned its attention to Moslems, then to atheists, agnostics, and religious indifferentists. Finally, apologists came to recognize that every Christian harbors within himself a secret infidel. At this point apologetics became, to some extent, a dialogue between the believer and the unbeliever in the heart of the Christian himself.<sup>7</sup>

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3. James E. Taylor, *Introducing Apologetics: Cultivating Christian Commitment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 19

4. *Ibid*, 17.

5. Edward John Carnell, *An Introduction to Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 7

6. Alan Richardson, *Christian Apologetics* (London: SCM Press, 1970), 19.

7. Avery Dulles, *A History of Apologetics* (London: Hutchinson, 1971), xvi.

Apologetic scholarship today deals primarily with apologetic approaches to atheists, agnostics, and indifferentists. The field of apologetics has two very broad divisions: natural theology, and Christian evidences. Apologetics in natural theology seeks to prove the idea of God's existence using different philosophical arguments, while apologetics using Christian evidences seeks to prove that Scripture records true events, such as Jesus' miracles, his death, and resurrection.

Another subdivision of apologetics involves the overall strategy of the apologete.

Gregory Koukl, author of *Tactics*, lays out these two subdivisions,

This strategic advantage includes two areas. The first, called "offensive apologetics," makes a positive case for Christianity by offering, for example, evidence for the existence of God, for the resurrection of Christ, or for the Christian faith through fulfilled prophecy. The second area, often called "defensive apologetics," answers challenges to Christianity like the attacks on the authority and reliability of the Bible, answering the problem of evil, or dealing with Darwinian macro-evolution, to name a few."<sup>8</sup>

There are three main views of how one should use apologetics in a witness to an unbeliever: fideism, evidentialism, and presuppositionalism. In short, fideism claims that one should not use arguments based on reason in apologetics. Fideists try to prove the fact that these arguments would be in conflict with the work of the Holy Spirit. Evidentialism holds the view that reason is useful in apologetics as humans still have the ability to draw logical conclusions. Evidentialists will attempt to show that the historical events of Christ's miracles are reliable facts which the Holy Spirit then uses to convert someone.<sup>9</sup> Presuppositionalists believe that no amount of evidence and logic will convince an unbeliever of Christianity because the fall into sin has put too great a divide between the Christian and unbeliever's world-view. Unless the unbeliever

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8. Gregory Koukl, *Tactics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 25.

9. Lyle Lange gives a nice overview of these three main apologetic viewpoints. In this camp of evidentialists are a few Lutheran apologists such as John Warrick Montgomery, Allen Quist, and Craig Parton. . Lyle Lange, "Lutheran Apologetic: From Our Classroom and into the Word." *Lutheran Synod Quarterly*, vol. 51, no. 4 (December 2011) <http://www.blts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/LWL-Apologetics.pdf>

changes their presuppositions about God and the authority of Scripture, then no argument from the Christian will have any effect, because “the sinful mind is hostile to God” (Romans 8:7). This does not mean the presuppositionalist will not engage in a dialogue with an atheist, rather he will attempt to show that the atheist’s worldview contradicts reality.<sup>10</sup>

This brief overview of the apologetics shows how in depth and complicated the field of apologetics can be. While the methods of apologetics can be vast, the apologetes of today would agree on this simple definition of apologetics: giving a reasoned defense of the truths of Christianity. This paper will adopt this definition.

### **The Definition in Relation to the Reformed Approach of Witnessing to Mormons**

With this definition in mind, apologetics in witnessing to Mormons can be defined as giving a reasoned defense of the Christian faith over against what the LDS church claims. As we use this definition, we see that the reformed approach is apologetic in nature. They use *defensive* apologetics to point out specific teachings of the LDS which are in direct opposition to the words of Scripture. Again, some might assume that if one is using only Scripture to defend Christianity, apologetics isn’t being utilized. However, Durbin does distinguish between a Christian hurling Bible passages at a Mormon and giving a Mormon a reasoned defense. He says in one of his radio broadcasts,

It’s very important for us as Christians, that if we commit to reaching a particular community - it’s important for us to actually know what they believe. It’s not appropriate for Christians to simply say the Word of God is the truth, and so I don’t even need to care what your religion teaches or what you believe because I am going to just quote Scripture to you. It’s the Word of God that obviously changes hearts and minds. The Gospel is the

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10. Jeff Durbin, Sye Ten Bruggencate, and Dr. James White are in the camp of presuppositionalists. This may be a reason why they focus much of their attention witnessing to Mormons.

power of God for salvation. Nobody's denying that, but we're supposed to be always ready to give a reasonable defense.<sup>11</sup>

This quote illustrates the apologetic background from which Durbin and the reformed approach are coming. They will then bring that apologetic background into their conversations with Mormons.

### **Approaches This Thesis Does Not Address and Should Be Avoided**

Most books about responding to Mormons center their approach around this paper's definition of apologetics, namely, defending the Christian faith over against what the LDS church claims. However, there are some authors who turn to polemics and an unscriptural apologetic with the intention of shaming Mormons out of the LDS faith rather than defending the Christian faith with Scripture. The goal is to shatter the Mormon's trust in their false teachings by showing the immorality of their church founders or the corruption of the Book of Mormon. Much literature goes into the alarming history of the Mormon Church, along with exposing odd Mormon practices. For example, Robert Morey, a pastor and apologist known for criticizing non-Christian belief systems, revolves his whole witness to Mormons around the false prophecies of Joseph Smith. He lists six "necessities" for when missionaries come to your door. Two of special note are: 1) "A Christian must realize that the real problem which must be dealt with when witnessing to a Mormon is the question of religious authority," and 2) "A Christian should initially deal with only one issue when confronting a Mormon. This crucial issue is Joseph Smith's claim to be a true prophet of God."<sup>12</sup>

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11. Jeff Durbin, "Want to Learn How to Talk to Mormons," <https://apologiastudios.com/shows/1/episodes/182>

12. Robert Morey, *Howe to Answer a Mormon* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1983), 13-14.

Morey claims that if one can prove Joseph Smith to be a fraud,<sup>13</sup> the whole Mormon religion “collapses like a house of cards.”<sup>14</sup> The Mormon only has two options; either remain loyal to a false prophet, which their God condemns, or reject every teaching and practice of the Mormon Church. The idea is then to put Christ and Scripture in front of them as the only alternative.

This specific approach ought to be avoided, because the moment a Mormon hears an accusation against Joseph Smith from a non-Mormon, their ears are closed to anything the Christian has to say. This does not only relate to disproving his prophecies, but also bringing up the many skeletons in Joseph Smith’s closet. A temptation is to attack the immoral actions of Joseph Smith, such as his plural marriages, lying, stealing, drinking, and racism.<sup>15</sup> In doing this, the Christian witness will lose all credibility with the Mormon. An analogy to this would be if a Jehovah Witness tried to proselytize a Lutheran by attacking Martin Luther. Two things would happen to the Lutheran: 1) they would immediately become defensive, and 2) they would question the Jehovah Witness on how he knows more about Martin Luther than they do.

In addition to avoiding the flawed history of Joseph Smith, one should avoid discussing Mormonism’s unusual practices. Edgar Kaiser warns,

Because Mormonism contains many unique and unusual beliefs and practices, there is a great temptation to become involved in lengthy discussion on peripheral matters. Don’t! Coffee drinking, tobacco smoking, consumption of alcoholic beverages, paid professional clergy, marriage in heaven – these are just a few of

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13. Morey deals with 8 of 60 false prophecies Joseph Smith prophesied. Using historical documents, he both affirms Joseph Smith made these prophecies and meticulously destroys any argument that the prophecies either came true or are prophecies which haven’t been fulfilled yet. He believes that the witness can prove Joseph Smith to be a false prophet using these documents.

14. *Ibid*, 116.

15. Joseph Smith had a total of 32 wives. Critics of Mormonism like to point out that many of these women already had husbands at the time Joseph married them.

the topics which can be discussed at great length. Interesting though such discussions might be, they often miss making a true Christian witness.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to these odd practices, showing the many changes and contradictions in the Book of Mormon only puts the Mormon on the defensive to the point where they will close their ears to any message you have to offer them.

## A REFORMED APPROACH

### **An Apologetic of the Nature of God**

Now that a clearer definition of apologetics has been introduced, along with the apologetic approaches one should avoid, we now turn to a study of a reformed approach to witnessing to Mormons. The research done in this section focuses mostly on videos which demonstrate a typical encounter with Mormons. A description of the reformed approach comes from videos which involve Jeff Durbin and Aaron Shafovaloff<sup>17</sup> witnessing to Mormons at certain Mormon “pageants” in Utah and Arizona. The following pages include 1) a brief description of the Mormon doctrine at hand, and 2) a reply common in the apologetic approach to witnessing. A study of LDS doctrine, however brief, is vital in understanding the arguments of the apologetic approach. Note that in these sections many sentences start with “Mormonism teaches,” rather than “Mormons believe.” Mormons have an implicit faith. They claim they believe that the LDS church is the one true church. However, Mormons will display a lack of knowledge in what their church teaches, so they often claim they don’t believe in something the apologete brings up.

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16. Edgar Kaiser, *How to Respond to The Latter Day Saints* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1977), 37.

17. Shafovaloff is a former Mormon and now contributor to Mormonism Research Ministries (mrm.org). He is in the camp of evangelicals and follows a similar thought process in his witness to Mormons as the reformed approach displays.

Therefore, it is important for the apologete to stress to the Mormon that the things he says about the Mormon Church are not coming from a person trying to bash their faith, but rather they are coming from their church leaders themselves.

The nature of God is usually a starting point in the reformed approach. It is brought up first because the apologist has ample evidence from the Bible to disprove Mormonism's teaching on this important topic.

### Mormon Teaching

Mormonism teaches that God, or Heavenly Father, was once a man who exalted himself to godhood. Since that is the case, they also teach that each man has the ability to exalt himself to the status of godhood by “obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.”<sup>18</sup> One of the clearest examples of this teaching comes from Joseph Smith himself in one of his most important sermons called the *King Follett Discourse*. He says,

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. 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...Here then is eternal life – to know the only wise and true God; and you have got to learn how to be gods yourselves...the same way all gods have done before you.<sup>19</sup>

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18. This phrase comes from the 13 articles of the Mormon faith. This is an obvious contradiction in terms for Christians. However, this is no problem for the Mormon, since they don't understand the Gospel in the narrow sense.

19 Joseph Smith's *King Follette Discourse* as quoted by Bruce McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1966), 321.

It is stressed in LDS teaching that the Father has a body of flesh and bone in the same way man does. They use Genesis 1:26 to justify this teaching. If man was created in the image of God, then it only stands to reason that God was a physical man.

Mormons reason that one cannot truly know Heavenly Father, unless they become like Heavenly Father. LDS official teaching is that Heavenly Father is from another planet in the cosmos. He inhabited a human body, progressed to godhood, married goddess wives, and populated a planet near a star called Kolob. There, with his goddess wives, Heavenly Father populated his planet with spirit-children. Heavenly Father is not the first god, but rather a man who came from one god, who came from another god, and so on. Theoretically, there could be millions, even billions of gods. No one knows this information, because the church cannot (nor do they try to) determine when the first god existed. Former church president, Bruce McConkie says, “In addition [to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit] there are an infinite number of holy personages, drawn from worlds without number, who have passed on to exaltation and are thus gods.”<sup>20</sup> Second LDS president Brigham Young also says in his *Journal of Discourses*, “How many Gods there are, I do not know. But there never was a time when there were not Gods and worlds, and when men were not passing through the same ordeals that we are now passing through.”<sup>21</sup> Therefore, since men have the ability to become gods themselves, one can say that Mormonism is the most polytheistic religion in the world.

Mormon teaching does not use the word Trinity in connection with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Rather, the term godhead is common. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three

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20. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 577.

21. Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* (Payson, AZ: Leaves-of-Autumn Books, 1980), 7:333.

separate gods who are one in purpose and “united as one in the attributes of perfection.”<sup>22</sup>

Mormons consider the Christian doctrine of the Trinity an abomination.<sup>23</sup> In a sermon on the plurality of gods, Joseph Smith says concerning the Trinity,

Many men say there is one God; the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost are only one God! I say that is a strange God anyhow—three in one, and one in three! It is a curious organization. All are to be crammed into one God, according to sectarianism. It would make the biggest God in all the world. He would be a wonderfully big God—he would be a giant or a monster.<sup>24</sup>

Mormons have a false view of the Trinity, because they are confused by the logic of the Christian. They believe Christianity teaches that the Father is the same as the Son, and the Son is same as the Holy Spirit.

### The Response

There are two points in the Mormon doctrine of the nature of God that a typical reformed approach would bring up: 1) the Mormon teaching of many gods, and 2) the Mormon teaching that God was once a man.

Durbin often starts his engagement with Mormons quoting from Joseph Smith’s *King Follet Discourse*.<sup>25</sup> He wants the Mormon to see that Joseph Smith clearly taught that God was once a man and that there is a plurality of gods. By quoting this, he attempts to solidify to the

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22. McKonkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 319.

23. This Mormon teaching is developed from Joseph Smith’s “First Vision” found in Joseph Smith’s History which is located in the *The Pearl of Great Price*. Smith supposedly was visited by Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ when he was a teenager. Smith asked them which church was right. Smith records, “I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong; and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight”

24. Joseph Smith, “History of the Church,” <https://www.lds.org/scriptures/pgp/js-h/1?lang=eng>.

25. See footnote 21.

Mormon that this is not coming from a Christian perspective, but actually coming from the prophet they hold most dear. In this quote, Joseph Smith recognizes that it has been historically accepted that “God was God from all eternity.” In other words, this is what Christians believe. Smith goes on to clearly and boldly refute that idea, stating that God was a man in the same way we are, and that it is the Mormon’s goal to become a god as all gods have done in the past. The apologete will then ask the Mormon if they believe this. If they say no, then they are showing contradictions in what their prophet said, something engrained in a Mormon never to do. If they say yes, then the apologete can go straight to Scripture to prove what Joseph Smith said directly contradicts the Bible.

The Scripture passage that comes up most often in response to Joseph Smith’s quote is Isaiah 43:10. It says, “Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.” This might quickly be followed by quoting Isaiah 44:8, which reads, “Is there any God besides me? No, there is no other Rock; I know not one.” Deuteronomy 4 more than once says, “The Lord is God; there is no other besides Him.” For a Christian, this is a direct contradiction of what Joseph Smith says. However, often times Mormons will try to explain this away by saying that Isaiah is talking about the God of this world as opposed to the gods of the endless worlds in the universe. They will also claim that drawing a teaching of monotheism from the Isaiah 43 is just a matter of interpretation. A normal response to that claim is to reread Isaiah 44:8. The fact that God doesn’t even know of any other gods is an absolute statement. This knowledge of no other gods extends absolutely to all other worlds and universes.

In conversations with Mormons, when you ask them if they believe that there is one God, the answer is surprisingly “yes.” While they would affirm they can become gods and inhabit their own planet one day, they divert the argument to say that there is only one God which they

worship. This still does not answer the claim of Isaiah 43:10. Again, the response from Durbin would be to revert back to Isaiah and make them understand that their teaching is not in line with what Scripture says. This argument shows that the Mormon is following a false prophet and a false god.

Shavolahoff's approach is similar to the reformed approach but I believe he adds an interesting proposition to a Mormon when it comes to the nature of God. The only person of the godhead which a Mormon prays to and worships is Heavenly Father.<sup>26</sup> Many Mormons on a regular basis do not think about how God was once a man and exalted to godhood. This is the God they worship and praise. It follows that since they have the ability to exalt themselves to godhood, they too will be worshiped and praised by the spirit-children they will produce in the afterlife. So Shafovaloff asks the question,

Would you agree that the purpose of your god is to share all of his glory with everyone as much as he can, in the sense that he wants to help others have all the knowledge and the power and dominion. He wants to help others become God and have their own spirit children?<sup>27</sup>

As I watched Shafovaloff asking this question, the Mormon seemed very uneasy about the idea that he could be worshiped and praised in the same way that he worships and praises his Heavenly Father. This leaves the door open for the apologete to use Isaiah 42:8 "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not yield my glory to another or my praise to idols." This shows the Mormon that God, as the only God in the universe, will not give up his glory to anyone.

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26. It seems today that many Mormons will worship Jesus, however, Heavenly Father is the only one they pray to.

27. Aaron Shafovaloff, "Interview with a Mormon Fundamentalist." YouTube. August 26, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7thlCZmeMk>.

### **An Apologetic of the Deity of Christ**

The defense of the nature of God attempts to show the Mormon that what they believe is contrary to Scripture. Defending the doctrine of the deity of Christ flows logically from the conversation about the nature of God. One might assume that the goal of defending Christ's deity would keep with the theme of proving to the Mormon that their teaching is contrary to Scripture. That is always a goal. However, the purpose of discussing it is a little different. The main reason of defending this point of doctrine is to help the Mormon realize they are following a different Christ, one which has no power to save them.

#### Mormon Teaching

One of the difficult things about witnessing to Mormons is they are convinced that they are Christian.<sup>28</sup> They often allude to the fact that they have the name Jesus Christ in the name of their church. But when one digs into their official teaching about Jesus, they'll soon realize they are anything but Christian.

Mormonism does teach that Christ is divine. He is one of the three gods of the godhead. However, they severely minimize his role in the world. The Mormon concept of Jesus starts in the pre-existence. The pre-existence refers to the time before the creation of the world. LDS teaches that after Heavenly Father had become a god, he and his goddess wives conceived billions of spirit-children. These spirit-children would later receive a body on the earth that

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28. This is relatively a new idea in the Mormon Church. Ex-Mormon writer Latayne Scott says, "Hinckley and others hedged and parried in an attempt to solidify their public image as a Christian church. When I was a Mormon, LDS leaders would have cut off their tongues rather than pretend to be "like other Christian churches." (Mormon Mirage, 161)

Elohim<sup>29</sup> had created for them. Mormons maintain that all people on earth were once those spirit-children, Jesus being the first, and Lucifer being the second.<sup>30</sup> In the pre-existence Jesus already had progressed to godhood. McKonkie states, “The Christ, the Firstborn, was the mightiest of all the spirit children of the Father.”<sup>31</sup> Mormonism teaches that after Adam<sup>32</sup> and Eve had sinned, Elohim planned to save the world through Jesus. To do this Jesus had to receive a physical body. The story goes that Elohim came down to earth in bodily form and had sex with the virgin, Mary. Therefore, both in the pre-existence and on earth, Jesus was the literal offspring of Heavenly Father.

Mormons like to talk about the plan of salvation. While they make special mention of Jesus’ atoning work of salvation, they mean it in a very different way. LDS teaching states,

The atonement of Christ ransoms all men from the effects of this temporal death in that all are resurrected, all are brought into immortality, and the bodies and the spirits of all men are united again inseparably... The atonement of Christ ransoms men from the effects of spiritual death in that by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel they can be born again and have spiritual life.<sup>33</sup>

When Christ’s atonement is mentioned, a Mormon might think of two things. First, Christ’s atonement means that there will be a resurrection of the dead, which means Christ only saved

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29. Elohim was the name Heavenly Father received as a spirit-child of his Father. Mormons associate the Father with this name from the Old Testament and associate Jesus with the name Jehovah.

30. Mormon President Gordon B. Hinkley in a 2002 sermon, “When the great War in Heaven was fought, Lucifer, the son of the morning, came forth with a plan that was rejected. The Father of us all, with love for us, His children, offered a better plan under which we would have freedom to choose the course of our lives. His Firstborn Son, our Elder Brother, was the key to that plan.” Hinckley, Gordon B. “We Look to Christ,” <https://www.lds.org/general-conference/2002/04/we-look-to-christ?lang=eng>.

31. McKonkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 590.

32. Some fundamental Mormons still believe a teaching from Brigham Young which claims that Adam was actually God the Father. This was dubbed the “Adam-God doctrine.” This teaching caused much controversy and was later denounced by the LDS church. (<http://www.mrm.org/adam-god-teaching>)

33. Tract: “What Mormons Think of Christ” by Elder Bruce R. McConkie, published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, pp. 22-23) as quoted by Kaiser, *How to Respond to The Latter Day Saints*, 20.

them from temporal death. Second, Christ's atoning work on the cross gives Mormons the ability to live out their lives in obedience to Christ's decrees. It gives them the power to be more like him. This altered view of Christ's atonement gets at the heart of the Mormon religion. It is a man-centered religion. In Mormonism, Christ came only as a helper of a Mormon's salvation. Christ initiates it by dying and the Mormon does the rest.

### The Response

Enough has been said about the LDS doctrine of Christ's deity to give a clear picture of the reformed argument against this LDS false teaching. In a couple videos, Durbin engages in a dialogue with a Mormon who claims that he, as a Mormon, is a Christian. Durbin will ask if he believes in Jesus Christ, and of course, the Mormon says, "yes!" Durbin will then respond by asking, "which Christ?" This approach is effective in getting the Mormon to think in ways he's never thought before. They have always had the basic viewpoint that if a church has the name of Christ in it, then it basically teaches the same thing about Christ.

The method of the reformed approach in their witness will always be to quote John 1:1; "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." Verse 3 is also important to mention: "Through him all things were made, without him nothing was made that has been made." This is the one of the clearest scriptural proofs of Jesus not being just *a* god, but the true God.<sup>34</sup> In connection with these verses, Durbin will summarize to the Mormon the LDS teaching of Jesus, paying particular attention to Jesus being the literal offspring of Heavenly Father and the brother of Lucifer. Durbin will stress to the Mormon that it is an impossibility for Jesus to be Lucifer's brother if the Bible says that Jesus created everything,

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34. Colossians 1 is also used

including Lucifer himself. There's an obvious contradiction. Again, this is all to show the Mormon that just because they have Christ in the name of the church does not mean they believe in the true Christ.

Often times at this point, the apologete will have to answer questions about the Trinity. As mentioned above, most Mormons have a false idea that Christians teach that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are the same person. They question how Jesus could be equal to the Father if he was the first-born from the Father. Durbin will point to Colossians 1 where it talks about Jesus being the first-born and true God in the same exact context. He explains that "only begotten" and "first-born" means that Jesus is the special heir of all things. It doesn't mean that Jesus is God's literal offspring

One method to illustrate how the Mormon believes in a different Christ is to bring up other non-Christian religions. Jehovah Witnesses teach that Jesus was Michael the Archangel before he became man. Muslims deny the crucifixion and the resurrection. By bringing this up, the apologete tries to give the Mormon something that they both can agree on. A Mormon would concur that both Jehovah Witnesses and Muslims are not in the true church, even though they believe in Christ. The apologete will inform the Mormon that Muslims have a Jesus who can't save. The Jehovah Witnesses have a Jesus who can't save. And since LDS teaches that Jesus is not true God, they also have a Jesus who cannot save them.

Jesus words in Matthew 24:24 are used in connection with this method. Talking about the end times, Jesus warns that there will be false messiahs and false prophets who will come and try to deceive people and rob them of their faith. If the Mormon disagrees with the statement that they have a false Christ, the apologete will avert their attention back to John 1 and help the

Mormon understand that by disagreeing with what the apologete is saying, they are really disagreeing with God.

### **An Apologetic of the Authority of Scripture**

Without question, the authority of Scripture is what an apologete will spend most of his time discussing with a Mormon. When a Mormon finds that he/she cannot explain the contradictions between LDS teaching on the nature of God or the deity of Christ and the Bible's teachings on those subjects, the Bible is what will be attacked next. There are methods the Christian apologete will use to defend the authority of Scripture, but first a word on the Mormon's teaching of authority.

#### Mormon Teaching

Mormonism has four Scriptures<sup>35</sup> they claim as their authority: The Bible, The Book of Mormon, Doctrines and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. Concerning the Bible, in article eight of Mormonism's articles of faith, it says, "We believe the Bible to be the Word of God as far as it is translated correctly." The words "as far as it is translated correctly" are a Mormon's calling card when an apologete shows that Mormonism's teaching contradicts the Bible. When they say the word "translate," the Mormon has more of the idea of the "transmission" of text in their head, rather than the "translation" of the text. They believe that the original words, which the authors

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35 "To a Christian the words "Scripture" and "Bible" are interchangeable, but not to a Mormon. The Bible is just one of four books that they consider scripture" (Cares, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*, 92). This is important to know when witnessing. Usually context indicates for a Mormon when the Christian is talking about the Bible but one should still be cautious of using the word Scripture to mean the Bible.

wrote down, are God's Word, but as Joseph Smith states, "Ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors."<sup>36</sup> To a Mormon, the Bible is not completely reliable. Therefore, much of what the Bible says is unfamiliar to a Mormon.

The Book of Mormon is the so-called "keystone of Mormonism."<sup>37</sup> It lays out the history of Israelite people who came to the Americas after persecution in the Holy Land. It then tells the story of those people in the land of the Americas. Included in the Book of Mormon are some teachings of Jesus when he supposedly appeared to the natives in America after his resurrection. Although they hold the Book of Mormon in the highest regard, not many of Mormonism's unique teachings are recorded there. In fact, the Book of Mormon contains a similar doctrine of the Trinity as the Bible does. However, this would not bother a Mormon.

Doctrines and Covenants (D&C) is where most of Mormonism's unique teachings<sup>38</sup> come from. This Mormon scripture is a list of "revelations" Joseph Smith received from God. Smith used these revelations to introduce new teachings to the church and to predict future events.

The last Scripture Mormons declare to be God's Word is the Pearl of Great Price. The shortest and least familiar of the four Mormon scriptures, the Pearl of Great Price contains five short works. Two worth mentioning are the Book of Abraham, which tells a story of the pre-existence, and the history of Joseph Smith, which in part contains the story of his "First Vision." From the First Vision, Mormonism gets their teaching that the LDS church is the only true church on earth and only those belonging to it have hold of the priesthood.

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<sup>36</sup> Joseph Smith quoted in the Book of Mormon Student Manual, p. 14. (Cares, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*, 94)

<sup>37</sup> Cares, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*, 97.

<sup>38</sup> Such as baptism for the dead, spirit prison and spirit paradise, plurality of gods, three levels of heaven, celestial marriage, plurality of wives, and attaining godhood.

This concept of the priesthood is essential to Mormon teaching. Cares says, “The priesthood is vitally important to Mormons because they feel it endows them with God’s authority and power.”<sup>39</sup> LDS teaches that after the apostles died, there was no priesthood on the earth until it was restored to Joseph Smith. Supposedly John the Baptist appeared to Joseph Smith and gave him the authority of the Aaronic Priesthood. Likewise, a while later, Peter James, and John appeared to Smith and bestowed on him the authority of the Melchizedek priesthood.<sup>40</sup> With this authority come the keys, which in turn give those who possess either the Aaronic or the Melchizedek priesthood the power of direct revelation from God.

The Mormon Church teaches that there is continuing revelation. Revelation from God doesn’t end with their four scriptures, but continues today to and through their living prophet, the president of the church. With the new revelations can come new teachings, even if those teachings contradict former Mormon writings. The Mormon Church is clear on how they treat what the living prophet says:

The words of our living prophets are also accepted as scripture... 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.<sup>41</sup>

This is a point of pride with the Mormon as they celebrate the fact they are always receiving new and improved revelation from God.

Perhaps the most important thing to understand about Mormon authority, especially in relation to witnessing to them, is their reliance on their own feelings as a basis for truth. If Mormon missionaries approach you stating that they know that the Book of Mormon is true and

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39 Cares, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*, 104.

40 The Bible clearly states that only Jesus is a priest in the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7). I have seen this argument against Mormons only once in the reformed approach. Thus, it is only mentioned here in this footnote.

41. *Gospel Principles* (Salt Lake City Utah: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 2009) 49,51.

that Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God, and you ask them why they believe that, they will say, “because I prayed about it and God told me it was true.” They will point to the warm and happy feeling they had when they came to know that the Mormon Church was the only true church. This otherwise is known as the “burning in the bosom.” Mormon logic concludes that if it feels good, it must mean it *is* good. Even if they agree that there may be some contradictions in their teachings, a Mormon will always revert back to what is called their testimony, a story of how they came to faith. In fact, this is what Mormon missionaries are taught to do in case they cannot answer objections to their religion. They will always tell those who are opposing them that they read the Book of Mormon, prayed about it, and received an answer from God that it was true.

### The Response

An apologetic of authority of Scripture is rarely the starting point for the reformed apologete. It usually follows the discussion on the nature of God and the deity of Christ. Because the Mormon will feel trapped by the Bible’s clear teaching of God, the Mormon will say one of two things. The first is “how do you know that passage is translated correctly?” The second is “Well, that’s just your interpretation.” Sometimes Mormons will recall a short version of the story of how Joseph Smith came to start his own church. Looking at all the different churches in the area with different beliefs and interpretations, Smith read James 1:5<sup>42</sup> and asked God which one to join. God told him to join none of them because they were all wrong. In telling this story the Mormon wants to establish the idea that there can be no right interpretation of the Bible. Once the

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42. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. (NIV)

Mormon can show this, they will recount their own testimony that God told them the Book of Mormon is true and that the Mormon Church is the true church.

The main goal in Durbin's response to these objections will be to prove to the Mormon that God's Word is infallible and that it cannot change. An approach in answering these question starts with the question, "Do you believe that the Bible is God's direct revelation?" This establishes some foundation to start on, because the Mormon will say yes.<sup>43</sup> However, this statement of belief comes with the qualification that what we have now is not what the original authors wrote down. To that qualification, the apologete will ask the Mormon if he believes Jesus when he says, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" (Luke 21:33). In Isaiah 40:8 it also says, "The grass withers, the flowers fade, but the Word of our God stands forever." The apologete will then remind the Mormon of what Smith said in 1 Nephi (Book of Mormon) about the Bible losing its truths,

25Wherefore, these things go forth from the Jews in purity unto the Gentiles, according to the truth which is in God. 26 And after they go forth by the hand of the twelve apostles of the Lamb, from the Jews unto the Gentiles, thou seest the formation of that great and abominable church, which is most abominable above all other churches; for behold, they have taken away from the gospel of the Lamb many parts which are plain and most precious; and also many covenants of the Lord have they taken away. (1 Nephi 13:25-26)

This passage is quoted to show again that what Joseph Smith said was in direct violation of God's Word, which clearly says that God will preserve his Word. The question for the Mormon then is "do you believe that Jesus can preserve his Word like he says or do you believe Joseph, a 19<sup>th</sup> century American Prophet who said that Jesus didn't."<sup>44</sup>

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43. Cares mentions that even though the Mormons believe that many truths were lost as the text was handed down, they still have a high respect for the Bible. This can be used to the witness's advantage.

44. "Beautiful Argument w/Mormon at the Temple." Apologia Studios, 18 Mar. 2016, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEvgE9oNHto&t=374s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wEvgE9oNHto&t=374s).

If a Mormon still presses the issue about interpretation, sometimes Durbin will give an illustration of a map. Scripture is like a map. A map will tell a person exactly how to get to a certain location. The person reading the map can either follow those directions or convince themselves they have a better way to get to the location. Durbin will then ask, "If the person reading the map gets lost, whose fault is it? The person's or the map's?" Of course, it is the person's problem. So it is with the Bible. If a person interprets a passage incorrectly, the fault is on the person, not God's Word. This in no way means that God's Word is unclear. What it does mean is that the Mormon does not want to admit that their teaching contradicts God's revelation in the Bible.

The Mormon will usually turn the conversation over to their feelings. They know Mormonism is true because they prayed about it and received a burning in their bosom. The apologete's mission is to point them back to God's Word in the Bible as the only authority of truth and the only authority for gaining truth. I have seen a couple ways the reformed approach does this. One is by pointing the Mormon to Acts 17 and the story of the Bereans. When Paul came to Berea on his second missionary journey, he began to preach the gospel to them. The Bereans were excited about this, but wanted to know if what Paul was saying was true. Verse 11 tells us how they did this. They didn't pray about it like the Mormon might want to do, rather they examined the Scriptures every day to see if it was true. In using this story the apologete hopes to instill in the Mormon that God's Word, and nothing else, is the standard for truth.

Another common method I've seen to show Mormons that their feelings cannot be a standard of truth is to refer to another example of a non-Christian religion. When Mormons say they've prayed about the Book of Mormon and know that is true, the apologete might ask them, "What about a Muslim? What if a Muslim claims that he prayed to God asking him whether or

not Islam was true, and God said yes?” If the Mormon is consistent with his belief that his church is the only one true church, he would have to say the Muslim was wrong. The apologete then points out that there is absolutely no difference between what the Mormon did and what that Muslim did. He asks the question, “What makes you right?” Or a similar method I’ve seen is to ask the Mormon what they would say to the couple who is having sex outside of marriage and tries to justify the sin by saying they prayed about it and God told them it was fine. The Mormon has to conclude that the couple is breaking God’s commands. In saying that, the Mormon has proven the apologete’s point that, when it comes to truth, one must go to God’s Word. It doesn’t end there. The apologete will grant that the Mormon will go to God’s Word in the case of the couple, but asks the crucial question, “Why don’t you do that with Joseph’s revelations?” By showing the Mormon the Bible is the only source of truth, the conversation turns back to Joseph’s false teachings about the nature of God and the deity of Christ.

### **The Apologist’s Message of Sin and Grace**

The reformed apologetic approach ends up in a situation where the gospel message can be preached. As the Mormon hears they are following a different Christ, the apologist then warns them they are following a different gospel altogether. The Galatians often come up in a reformed approach as an example of a people who let a false gospel into their church. What was that false Gospel? It was a similar one to the Mormon gospel. Judaizers came into the Galatian church teaching that it was by faith in Christ *and* keeping the Old Testament law which saved a person. Paul’s warning concerning that is striking; “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse!” (Gal 1:8)

That is the same warning the reformed apologete would give to a Mormon. They're following a false gospel which tells them that "it's by grace you are saved, after all you can do."<sup>45</sup> After the urgent warning, an apologete turns into an evangelist and proclaims the true Gospel of Jesus that "a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law" (Rom 3:28). The invitation to believe is then finally presented to the Mormon. In ending the conversation, it is Durbin's practice to challenge them to read Romans 3-8 in private, while inviting them to talk with him about it over lunch.

## AN EVALUATION OF THE ROLE OF APOLOGETICS

At this point, the reasoned defense of the reformed apologetic approach might make sense to the reader. It uses apologetics as a pre-evangelism tool to break down the barriers of Mormon unbelief and leaves room for a message of sin and grace. The next section deals with the reasons why apologetics might be used in evangelism in general, and objections to it. It will then look at Mark Cares' approach in contrast to the reformed approach and finally conclude with my thoughts on the issue.

### **Rationale for an Apologetic Approach to Witnessing in General**

James E Taylor gives a rationale for doing apologetics. He says, "It is really difficult to trust and obey Jesus if you have a hard time believing that he is God or that there is a God at all."<sup>46</sup> The implication to this statement is that in a case of an atheist or even a Mormon, what is the only

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45 2 Nephi 25:23

46. James E. Taylor, *Introducing Apologetics*, 11.

way someone is going to gain trust in Jesus? It's by first convincing them through apologetics that Jesus being God is reasonable to believe, and then letting the Holy Spirit work through those facts to create saving faith in Jesus. This seems to be the thought process of some Lutheran apologetes today. John Warwick Montgomery states in his book *Faith Founded on Fact*,

The apologetic task is justified not as a rational substitute for faith, but as a ground for faith; not as a replacement for the Spirit's working, but as a means by which the objective truth of God's Word can be made clear so that men will heed it as the vehicle of the Spirit who convicts the world through its message.<sup>47</sup>

The apologetic task is a ground for faith. It proves things to be true so that the Holy Spirit can use that message of the facts to convict the world. Allen Quist also seems to be saying this about apologetics; "The role of apologetics is to help us realize that this glorious Gospel message is true, and when we heed this message, the Holy Spirit creates a living faith within us."<sup>48</sup> Once apologetics helps an unbeliever see the Gospel message is true then the Holy Spirit can create living faith.

Those in favor of using apologetics as an approach to evangelism often cite Peter as proof of the Bible's endorsement. Quist says about 1 Peter 3:15, "Peter urged us to be ready to defend the Christian Gospel message and to do so from logic, that is, by providing arguments and evidence to substantiate the truth of the Gospel message."<sup>49</sup> Apologists also look at Paul and the apostles. They see the apostles' basis for evangelism was to prove to people that the resurrection did happen. In Thessalonica, "Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead" (Acts 17:2,3). Later in Athens, Paul delivered a sermon which appealed

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47. John Warwick Montgomery, *Faith Founded on Fact: Essays in Evidential Apologetics* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978), 40.

48. Allen Quist, *The Reason I Believe: The Basics of Christian Apologetics* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 13.

49. *Ibid*, 11.

to Athenians' reason and intellect. After seeing the statue to an "unknown" God, Paul used this as an opportunity to tell them about true God who has created everything, a God in whom we "live and have our being." Paul seems to be using reason to argue a general revelation from God before he goes into preaching anything about the Gospel.

### **Objections**

In regard to Quist and Montgomery, they allude to the fact that a proof of historical facts plays a huge, if not, necessary, part in conversion because the Holy Spirit uses the message of historical facts of Christ's death and resurrection to bring people to faith. The question has to be "would Paul agree?" While the apostle Paul does allude to evidence of the resurrection (1 Cor 15:1-8), and that belief in the resurrection is necessary for salvation, I do not believe he feels the need to prove Christ's death and resurrection. Rather he states these as facts and invites people to believe. Paul says to the Corinthians,

When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. <sup>2</sup> For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. <sup>3</sup> I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. <sup>4</sup> My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power. (1 Corinthians 2:1-4)

Paul self-admittedly states that his message didn't come with human wisdom as a reasoned defense. Rather all he did while he was with them was preach and proclaim Christ crucified. He recognized it had the Spirit's almighty power behind it. Francis Pieper speaks to this point;

The arguments supplied by the science of apologetics – and there is a great wealth of them – cannot change the human heart or produce an inner acceptance of the Gospel. Accordingly, St Paul refused to employ the psychological contact point of enticing words of man's wisdom; he simply preached the Gospel- with its demonstration of the Spirit

and of power' in order that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.<sup>50</sup>

Pieper's point is clear. Rather than focusing on human wisdom and flattering speech, Paul simply proclaimed the Gospel. That was his witnessing approach. He did that in Thessalonica too as he reasoned from Scripture that Christ *had* to suffer and die. He proved from Scripture that those things had to happen. It was a given. Luther was also adamant of letting the truth of the Gospel stand by itself. Pieper quotes him;

The sophists say the Scriptures are far too weak that we should silence heretics with them; reason must do it, and it must come forth from the brain; thus one must prove that the faith is the right one. But our faith is above all reason, and it alone is the power of God. Therefore, if the people will not believe, then be silent; for you are not held to compel them to receive Scripture as God's book or Word.<sup>51</sup>

When Paul does talk about God revealing himself through nature and in the hearts of people, he does not feel the need to prove these things by apologetics; rather he assumes that people already know them. In Romans 1 Paul says,

Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.<sup>20</sup> For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. (Romans 1:19-20)

Paul says that from nature God's power has been clearly seen. It's obvious that he exists! So repent! Paul illustrates this thought from Romans 1 in his sermon in Athens. By appealing to the Athenians' natural knowledge of God, Paul was not so much using apologetics to prove that the true God existed as he was finding common-ground with people to proclaim the true God. He says, "I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. So you are ignorant of the very thing you worship—and this is what I am going to proclaim to you" (Acts 17:23). Paul

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50. Franz Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House), 65.

51. *Ibid*, 242.

did not use reason in apologetics but he did use reason to find a connection with the Athenians to show them who the true God is.

In regard to Quist's interpretation of 1 Peter 3:15, he may be reading into Peter's words more than it says. Peter does not use the words logic or evidence to describe this kind of defense, as though it is a calculated reply. Peter simply says to be prepared to answer those who ask about the hope they have. The use of *apologia* does give us the sense to be prepared as if we are on trial, but in the context of the verse one does not need logic and evidences to tell people about our hope.

There needs to be a clear distinction between proclaiming the truth and proving the truth in evangelism. The former uses the power of the gospel, while the latter uses apologetics. To distinguish between a proclamation and an apologetic in evangelism, consider this example. If a stranger asks you why you believe Christianity to be true, what is the response? A scriptural proclamation might be, "because the Holy Spirit has created faith in my heart through the Word of God which tells me that I am a sinner in deep need of God's forgiveness, which he has given to me through Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection." A scriptural apologetic response might be, "I believe because the death and resurrection of Jesus are true events, which grant me life and salvation." Now a good Lutheran apologete would not disagree with the fact that the Holy Spirit creates faith in unbeliever's heart through the Word of God. The Holy Spirit is the only one that can bring about the conversion of the unbeliever. And in the same way, a good Lutheran, who might stay away from apologetics in an approach to evangelism, would not disagree with the fact that we base our beliefs on the true events of Jesus' death and resurrection. However, the difference is in what the two people feel they must do with these truths. The apologete of today feels the need to prove that his beliefs are true (whether by

Scripture or by extra-biblical resources), which in turn breaks down the unbeliever's unbelief, which in turn paves the way for the Holy Spirit's work of conversion through the gospel message. The proclaimer, on the other hand, gives the person the gospel message that Christ's death and resurrection *did* happen for the forgiveness of their sins, and then simply invites the person to believe.

This might give the impression that there is no role at all for apologetics in our conversations with unbelievers and Mormons. This is falling too far on the other side of ditch. Apologetics has a very specific role in that it can be used to show, not the reasonableness of our belief, but rather the irrationality of unbelief.<sup>52</sup> There comes a point when unbelievers will have honest questions about the existence of God, or the reliability of Scripture's accounts. When these questions do arise in witnessing, apologetics can be utilized to show that the person has no basis for their unbelief. Knowing when to employ apologetics is a practical issue. However, this is not the starting point for an evangelist.

The reason I have brought up these apologetic thoughts and my objections is Durbin and other reformed evangelists take these ideas of apologetics and implement them into their witnessing to Mormons. In their approach to witnessing, they feel the need to break down the barriers of unbelief by a reasoned defense so that the Holy Spirit has room to work with the gospel message. I am not saying this is a terrible approach, because they are basing their arguments on Scripture. I am saying that there is a better approach with which the apostle Paul would have started out if he had the opportunity to witness to Mormons.

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52. This idea is taken from Siegbert Becker's article on Luther's apologetics from *The Foolishness of God*. Becker writes, "While [Luther] would never have written a book on the reasonableness of Christianity, he might conceivably have been the author of one with the title *The Irrationalism of Unbelief*." Siegbert Becker, *The Foolishness of God* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House), 175.

### A Uniquely Lutheran Approach

The approach I am referring to is laid out in Pastor Cares' book *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*. Pastor Cares received a call to Messiah in Nampa, Idaho in 1981 amidst a heavy Mormon population. He tried many methods and tactics of the day, including the reformed apologetic approach of talking about the nature of God. This did not get him far. He says,

I tried to talk with as many Mormons as I could. I would even stop LDS missionaries on the street and invite them over to my house. I would frequently spend all afternoon debating with them about the nature of God, or about the truthfulness of the Bible and the Book of Mormon, or about the character of Joseph Smith. Many times, however, I never got around to sharing the gospel with them. I would touch on it, but I wouldn't focus on their need for a Savior and how Jesus fully fills the need. More often I debated Mormonism with them than I witnessed to them about what Jesus had done for them.<sup>53</sup>

Cares and the members at Messiah seized the opportunity to know Mormons and understand them better. It was so important to understand that the Mormon people have their own unique culture. They had unique stressors they were dealing with, and the one main stressor was their obsession with perfection. While initiating a witness to a Mormon always puts them on their guard, Cares says, "we can lessen that feeling considerably and, in the process, lower their defenses measurably, if we focus on perfection and how to obtain eternal life."<sup>54</sup> This is what is in the heart of a Mormon: the insatiable desire to become perfect and attain godhood. This is what they want to talk about. By talking about perfection, a direct proclamation of sin and grace can be used in dealing with their main stressor.

The approach of proclaiming sin and grace starts with the law passage Matthew 5:48; "Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect." This is an effective passage to use because it is a heavily quoted passage in Mormonism. It rolls off the Mormon tongue. They believe that

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53. Cares, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*, 162.

54. *Ibid*, 163.

because Jesus says to be perfect as Heavenly Father is perfect, there is a possibility to achieve that. Why else would Jesus say it? Notice, however, that Jesus uses the present tense of *be*. This does not mean to become perfect; this means that we are to be perfect right now. This gives the proclaimer an opportunity to hit them with the law that “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). There is no one righteous, not even one.” (Rom 3:10). This hard-hitting law shows them they aren’t doing everything that God expects of them.

This gives the proclaimer the chance to show the Mormon exactly how to become perfect. This approach has the Mormon turn to Hebrews 10:14 which says, “For by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.” This is the way to become perfect. It’s not anything perfect we have done which makes us worthy to be with Heavenly Father; it’s through the perfect work Jesus did on the cross.

This simple approach will be effective because it has the power of the gospel message behind it. Cares does not diminish the role of a reasoned defense against Mormon claims. Those conversations will come up; however, the goal is always to go back to the message of perfection through Christ alone.

Using apologetics in our witness to Mormons really is a case of majoring in minors. I had opportunity to speak with four Ex-Mormon Lutherans about their journey out of Mormonism. Not one of them pointed to a conversation about the nature of God, or the deity of Christ, or even the authority of Scripture as a reason why they came out of Mormonism into the Lutheran faith. In fact, it was an immediate turn off when people approached them with these conversations. They are taught from an early age to not engage in these types of conversations. One interviewee tells of the advice she received from her father; “There’s going to be a lot of people who don’t believe in Mormonism. You don’t engage with anybody who’s going to try to tell you something

that’s against Mormon belief because that would be false doctrine. You just stay away from it.”

When asked if these topics should ever come up in an initial conversation, another interviewee said,

It would take getting to know someone for a long time or a missionary for a long time to be able to pull out really specific examples to prove their church is wrong. Nobody wants to hear that. You can’t just go up and tell someone their doctrine is wrong, either in a loving way or in a mean way. You have to take your time.

This same interviewee also had her reservations with these topics being discussed in Bible Information Class. Being from Utah, she mentioned that Mormon teaching came up in many of the subjects they would discuss, i.e. creation, doctrine on Jesus, etc. The pastor would show the students that what the LDS Church taught was wrong. Even in a setting like this, proving the Bible’s doctrine on God and Jesus’ deity is not what a Mormon wants or needs to hear. She said, “I didn’t like it. I don’t think it should be our focus, because I think it sidetracks conversations.”

Cares made an interesting point to me in a conversation we had. Talking about the nature of God is appealing because it focuses on something that’s very important to the Christian. However, the nature of God is not a stressor for the Mormon. It might be the opposite. Cares talks about Christians who became attracted to the LDS church; “They said they were drawn to Mormonism because it was the only church that made God understandable. Often they would go on at length explaining how they had previously struggled with the doctrine of the Trinity.”<sup>55</sup>

Two the interviewees admitted that this topic of the Trinity was one with which they struggled.

For these ex-Mormons, it wasn’t a witness trying to prove Mormonism false, but it was the relief from the guilt of their sin through the message of God’s forgiveness — this is what brought them out of Mormonism. One interviewee told of her upbringing in a Mormon household. As a child, she and her siblings were physically abused by her father. When she was

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55. Cares, *Speaking the Truth in Love to Mormons*, 147.

older, she developed a relationship with a Christian man, who had been inviting her to his church. I asked her if there was a singular moment when she knew the Mormon Church was wrong. While she couldn't pinpoint one specific moment, she did remember going to a Lutheran church one Father's Day. She said that as a Mormon "I always pictured Heavenly Father as a guy on this throne waiting to slap me down for all the things that I've done wrong, because I had a father on earth waiting to slap me down for the bad things I've done." What she heard from the pastor was completely different than anything she had ever known. She said, "God our Father is not like our earthly father. God our Father loves us no matter what. I remember sitting in the pew trying to fight back tears. God loves me? Even when I'm not perfect? That was probably one of the biggest things for me." The gospel message of Christ's perfection was the only thing which could overcome the stress of perfection. As she heard the proclamation of the Gospel this interviewee said, "You can't believe the weight that comes off your shoulders. It's life changing."

These interviews showed two very important things in regard to witnessing to Mormons. First, it is through meaningful relationships with Christians that Mormons will become receptive to hearing the gospel. In each interviewee's case, apologetics in pre-evangelism was not a factor in a willingness to listen to the gospel. Rather, it was pre-evangelism in the form of meaningful relationships which made them receptive to hearing the proclamation of sin and grace. Second, only the message of perfection through Christ has the power to change the hearts and lives of the LDS people.

In using an apologetic approach to Mormons, Durbin appeals to the reason and the intellectual side of the Mormon. Of course one can prove that Mormon teaching contradicts what Scripture says about God. Of course Mormon teaching of the deity of Christ has them following

a false Christ. Of course having their feelings as their ultimate authority is contrary to Jesus' words. There's an obvious logical flow to the arguments that gives no out for the Mormon doctrinally. But although these teachings are extremely important teachings of the church (ones that if someone would deny, they would not have saving faith) defending these doctrines in an initial witness does not meet Mormons where they are. The Mormon missionary needs to strike the unbelieving heart of the Mormon, a heart which tries to make religion reasonable in the same way all other non-Christians hearts do: by feeding the sinful nature which tells them the only reasonable way to God is by their actions. Striking that heart is not done by using a sound reasoned defense against their teaching about the nature of God and the authority of Scripture. It's done by wielding the power of God for the salvation of all who believe. It's done by the message of sin and sins forgiven. It's done by giving them a message of how we actually become perfect: through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Communicating the gospel message of forgiveness to a Mormon is the end goal of the reformed apologetic approach, while for the proclaimer it is the foundation on which he builds his approach.

## CONCLUSION

The role of apologetics in witnessing to Mormons should be secondary to the message of perfection through Jesus Christ. By secondary, I mean it should be used at appropriate times when it is called for (and there will be those times). I have no problem with the reformed approach in its use of Scripture to defend against false Mormon claims. They do it in such a loving way, and their sincere care for Mormons is evident in their witness. What happens too

often though is that they major in minor points, all of which are not stressors for a Mormon. More often than not the conversation turns to a casual debate with nothing getting done. More often than not, the gospel is the message which becomes secondary.

When the time comes when a Mormon speaks false claims contrary to the Bible, one can use the reformed arguments to effectively get at the heart of their claim. However, these reasoned arguments should not be the starting point in evangelism to Mormons.

The LDS people are a lost and burdened people who desperately need the grace of God preached and proclaimed in their lives. What might seem like an impossible task is made possible by the promise of the Holy Spirit to be with us as we proclaim first the gospel of salvation.

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