

On Tuesday, December 11, 2007, the Associated Press reported that Republican presidential hopeful Mike Huckabee would, in an upcoming article in the Sunday *New York Times Magazine* ask, "Don't Mormons believe that Jesus and the devil are brothers?"¹ By the end of the following day, Wednesday, December 12, Huckabee had already begun back-pedaling and apologizing for the remark. Earlier on Wednesday Mitt Romney had appeared on NBC's Today show criticizing Huckabee for "attacking" his religion and the "Newsroom" section of the LDS Church's official website posted a brief response on the question of the fraternal connection of Jesus and Satan, though without mentioning Huckabee: "Like other Christians," the response read, "we believe Jesus is the divine Son of God. Satan is a fallen angel. As the Apostle Paul wrote, God is the Father of all. That means that all beings were created by God and are His spirit children. Christ, however, was the only begotten in the flesh, and we worship Him as the Son of God and the Savior of mankind."²

"Indeed, then, the answer to Huckabee's question should have been yes, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, actually does teach that Jesus and Satan were brothers. In truth then the media statement issued by the LDS Church was both misleading and evasive. Such evasiveness is typical of the hyper image-conscious LDS Church, an organization that has turned NOT telling people the particulars of its gospel into one of its most effective strategies for winning converts and quelling opposition."

This response, however, brings no clarity to the matter, but rather ensures that what the informed Mormon and the media person without a nuanced understanding of traditional Mormon doctrine will hear when reading it will be two completely different things. From the perspective of the non-Mormon reader the statement calling Jesus the divine son of God but Satan a fallen angel would seem to represent a negative answer to Huckabee's question, in that, following the traditional Christian definitions of the terms "divine son of God," and "angel," it would appear to be suggesting that Jesus and Satan belong to two different orders of being, Jesus being the higher (divinity) and Satan the lower (fallen angel). Similarly, the second statement, when read through the lens of traditional Christian terminology, appears to grant that Jesus and Satan are brothers, but only in the very broad and unremarkable sense that all beings having their common source in God are brothers and sisters. The reader who understands the LDS Church statement in the way I have just described it however misreads the statement. On the most basic level, from the perspective of both traditional and current Mormon theology, the mere assertion that Jesus is the divine son of God and Satan a fallen angel does not address at all the question of whether the two are in fact brothers or not. According to the Bible and traditional Christian theology, God, the angels, and human beings, are all separate orders of beings, with demons usually bring more closely associated with the angelic orders than with humanity. In contrast, Mormon theology teaches that all these beings represent a single species. LDS writer and BYU religion professor Robert Millet expressed this well when he wrote:

Latter-day Saints believe that angels are men and women, human beings, sons and daughters of God, personages of the same type as we are. Parley P. Pratt, an early apostle wrote, "Gods, angels and men are all of one species, one race, one great family."³

In other words fallen angels, i.e., Satan and the demons, are also part of this one great family, our literal spirit brothers and sisters, only they represent, as it were, its black sheep.

A Tale of Two Sons

On Saturday December 15, Mormon curmudgeon/editorialist, Robert Kirby addressed the issue more

honestly than the Church PR department and with a sense of humor: "The question was perceived by some as an opportunity to hold an element of Mormon theology up for ridicule" Kirby writes. "As a Mormon, I wasn't bothered because, well, it's true. It gets weirder. Not only is Satan our brother as well, he looks exactly like KSL meteorologist Kevin Eubank, only redder. OK, I made that part up. But Mormons do believe a lot of things that seem pretty strange, if not downright crazy. So do you." (Robert Kirby, "No one is fair when it comes to religion," *Salt Lake Tribune* [Dec 15, 2007] C1 [http://www.sltrib.com/ci_7725437]). Kirby makes the point that it is easy to speak of another person's religion in a way that makes it sound bad.)

What happened according to the Mormon story was this. In the pre-existence, God the Father convened a "Grand Council" in which two of his sons, Jesus and Satan, came forward and presented alternative plans for the salvation of humankind. Here is how that event is described in the LDS Church-published manual *Gospel Principles*:⁴

Our Father said, "Whom shall I send?" (Abraham 3:27). Two of our brothers offered to help. Our oldest brother, Jesus Christ, who was then called Jehovah, said, "Here am I, send me" (Abraham 3:27).

Jesus was willing to come to the earth, give his life for us, and take upon himself our sins. He, like our Heavenly Father, wanted us to choose whether we would obey Heavenly Father's commandments. He knew we must be free to choose in order to prove ourselves worthy of exaltation. Jesus said, "Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever" (Moses 4:2).

Satan, who was called Lucifer, also came, saying, "Behold, here am I, send me, I will be thy son, and I will redeem all mankind, that one soul shall not be lost, and surely I will do it; wherefore give me thine honor" (Moses 4:1). Satan wanted to force us all to do his will. Under his plan, we would not be allowed to choose. He would take away the freedom of choice that our Father had given us. Satan wanted to have all the honor for our salvation ... After hearing both sons speak, Heavenly Father said, "I will send the first" (Abraham 3:27).

Satan was not pleased with having his plan rejected. He rebelled, and a third of our spirit brothers and sisters rebelled with him. There was war in heaven:

Because our Heavenly Father chose Jesus Christ to be our Savior, Satan became angry and rebelled. There was war in heaven. Satan and his followers fought against Jesus and his followers.

In this great rebellion, Satan and all the spirits who followed him were sent away from the presence of God and cast down from heaven. One-third of the spirits in heaven were punished for following Satan: they were denied the right to receive mortal bodies. (*Gospel Principles, 1997 ed., pp. 17-18*)

Indeed, then, the answer to Huckabee's question should have been yes, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, actually does teach that Jesus and Satan were brothers. In truth then the media statement issued by the LDS Church was both misleading and evasive.

Protecting Image

Such evasiveness is typical of the hyper image-conscious LDS Church, an organization that has turned NOT telling people the particulars of its gospel into one of its most effective strategies for winning converts and quelling opposition. Nor is it surprising the Mormon Church would attempt to sidestep having to answer Huckabee's question by accusing him of having a bad motive in asking it. In the AP article already mentioned LDS Church spokeswoman Kim Farah remarked that that "Huckabee's question is usually raised by those who wish to smear the Mormon faith rather than clarify doctrine." Yet is it really

possible to “smear” a religion by asking a question that accurately describing what it teaches? The fact is the LDS Church *does teach* that Jesus and Satan are brothers. So where’s the problem?

One of the problems, which may explain why the LDS Church’s PR response team moved so quickly on this matter, is that the issue Huckabee raised touches upon a point that for many Christians represents a definite deal breaker in terms of their willingness to consider Mormonism Christian. For a great many Christians the mere mention of the fact that Mormons believe Jesus and Satan to be brothers is enough to establish for them once and for all and beyond all doubt that the chasm between Mormonism and Christianity is really too great to ever be effectively bridged, that Mormonism is, in fact, irretrievably heretical.

Why Christians React

As to the question why? Why do so many Christians react so strongly, so decisively against this particular point of doctrine? Given the fact that there are so many other points where Mormonism differs just as radically and essentially from biblical Christianity as it does here, it is hard a hard question to answer. But however that may be, the teaching that Jesus and Satan are brothers is a doctrine that fairly bristles with troubling theological implications. Calling Jesus and Satan brothers makes them in some sense equals, so that any differences between them ultimately comes to be seen as resulting from the one behaving better than the other and so being rewarded for it while the other is punished. Was it just this problem that the LDS Church was apparently attempting to conceal from the general public when it said in its statement that “Jesus is the divine Son of God. Satan is a fallen angel.”? The general reader, as we have already noted, assumes that the statement refers to Jesus and Satan belonging to different orders of being, when in reality they begin at the same place and become different only later and in consequence of the one behaving well and the other behaving badly. This point is clarified in a recent LDS Church published manual on a portion of their special scripture known as the Pearl of Great Price: “there are varying degrees of intelligence,” it says, “among Heavenly Father’s Children.” It then offers the following quotation from former LDS president Joseph Fielding Smith by way of explanation:⁵

[W]e know they were all innocent in the beginning; but the right of free agency which was given to them enabled some to outstrip others, and thus, through the eons of immortal existence, to become more intelligent, more faithful, for they were free to act for themselves, to think for themselves, to receive the truth or rebel against it.

In other words being divine is not about what you are but what you earn. In addition the question of one brother having better “luck,” or more “breaks,” than the other also has to be considered as having a possible influence on where the two ended up. Thus from the Christian point of view, a Jesus who is Satan’s brother can never be confused with the Jesus of the New Testament. What is said of the biblical Jesus in John 1:3, for example, “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made,” simply doesn’t connect anywhere with the Mormon Jesus, who did not make the system into which he was born, and who therefore cannot be said in relation to it, that he sustains “all things by his powerful word” (Hebrews 1:3). Indeed the Mormon Jesus is in a very real sense a product of his environment. Nor did the Mormon Jesus create his spirit brother Satan, nor any of his other spirit siblings, whether angel, demon, or human. All of us came into existence without his participation and in the same way he did. But how we may ask, did he come into existence?

Mormon Heavenly Father "Father of all"?

You will recall how the LDS statement had said “God is the Father of all. That means that all beings were created by God and are His spirit children.” Again however, the statement is not as straight forward as it seems. In the first place, the Mormon God is not the Father of all. According to traditional Mormon theology he himself was, in his turn, born a spirit child to an earlier set of heavenly parents, into a family of spirit children which, over the course of time, presumably sorted themselves out and became gods, angels, humans, or demons, just as the generation of his children would later do in their turn. Hence again the Mormon God is also of the same order of being, or as the Mormons like to say, of the same species, as the rest of us. Consequently he cannot be called the “Father of All,” without qualification, but

rather merely the “Father of all he is the father of,” which can be said just as well of any and all fathers. Yet even in that he is not alone, since no single one of his children would have been born to him without the participation of one or more heavenly mothers. The teaching that there is both a Heavenly Father and Mother is expressed in a poem by Eliza R. Snow written in 1845, that has today become a popular LDS hymn entitled “O My Father”:

In the heav’ns are parents single?
No, the thought makes reason stare!
Truth is reason; truth eternal
Tells me I’ve a mother there.

When I leave this frail existence,
When I lay this mortal by,
Father, mother, may I meet you
In your royal court on high?

(LDS Hymnal # 292, also in *Gospel Principles*, pp. 350-351, but the Hymns section is not included in the online edition.)

God’s male children bear his image while his female children bear the image of their particular heavenly mother.⁶

The LDS Church statement’s claim that “all beings were created by God,” must also be qualified before it can be properly understood. According to LDS theology two essential ingredients of our beings, matter and intelligence, did not derive from our heavenly parents, but are eternal. Thus the Mormon God, strictly speaking, does not “create” anything, rather it is usually said that he “organizes” it. On this see Joseph Smith’s reworking of the King James Version text of Genesis 1 in chapter four of the Book of Abraham.⁷ As for God’s spirit children, they came to be “organized” into individuals through some sort of heavenly conception process involving both heavenly father and heavenly mother.⁸ Some time afterward those who were worthy came to earth to take on bodies of flesh.

But here the question becomes, if the person of Jesus came together in the process of his being formed for birth as a spirit child of the Heavenly Father and mother, where was he before? Was he, or any one of his other spirit brothers and sisters for that manner, in any sense an individual person prior to entering the process of becoming a spirit child? To answer that question we need to begin by looking into what Mormonism theology means by “intelligence.” The use of the term ultimately derives from statements in the LDS Standard Works (Scriptures) and the teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith himself. Doctrine & Covenants 93:29 says that “Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be.” The Prophet Joseph elaborated on this in his famous King Follett Discourse, a funeral sermon which, as Stephen E. Robinson of Brigham Young University points out, is not “scriptural or canonized in the technical sense,” but is nevertheless “so widely accepted by Latter-day Saints that this technical point has become moot.”⁹ Said the Prophet: ¹⁰

I have another subject to dwell on which is calculated to exalt man...the resurrection of the dead—the soul—the immortal spirit—the mind of man. Where did it come from? All doctors of divinity say that God created it in the beginning, but it is not so. The very idea lessens the character of man, in my estimation. I don’t believe the doctrine. Hear it, all ye ends of the earth: I know better for God has told me so

Joseph went on to say that “the mind of man—the intelligent part—is as immortal as, and is coequal with, God Himself.” And lest his hearers doubted, he confirmed this statement with, “I know that my testimony is true.” He also said that “God never had the power to create the spirit of man at all. God Himself could not create Himself,” and that “Intelligence is eternal and exists upon a self-existent principle. It is a spirit from age to age and there is no creation about it.”

Mormon Intelligences - Two Views

On the question whether this eternal intelligence had in any sense separated out into individual personalities prior to their beginning the process of becoming spirit children, opinions are divided. LDS writer Brent L. Top, who dedicates the third chapter of his 1988 book, *Life Before*, to the question, has described two schools of thought on the subject. According to the first, "Man did not exist as a separate, individual intelligence prior to spirit birth; the spirit was 'organized' from uncreated eternal elements known as "intelligence" (p. 41), but according to the second, "Each person has existed eternally. Prior to spirit birth people existed as individual intelligences with unique characteristics and capacities, inherently able to be enlarged upon through agency" (p. 45). The first view pictures a sort of big pool of unindividualized impersonal intelligence out of which distinct personalities were distilled through the process of organization during spirit birth. According to the second view, distinct personalities always existed even before spiritual birth. Both views have been defended by LDS luminaries. Brigham Young, Parley P. Pratt, Charles W. Penrose, and Bruce R. McConkie defended the first, while Orson Pratt and Brigham H. Roberts (two of Mormonism's greatest intellectuals) defended the second. Traditionally the LDS Church has been somewhat hesitant to take a position on the issue, but a recent church-published, college-level text on the Pearl of Great Price takes the side of the first view, according to which there were no separate individual intelligences prior to spirit birth.¹¹

If that is so then Jesus did not exist as an individual person prior to his birth as a spirit child. If that is so then Mormon Christology justly falls under the condemnation of the Council of Nicaea, which anathematized anyone who said of Jesus, "there was when he was not." Interestingly, on the same terms the same condemnation also applies to the Mormon God the Father, who himself only became an individual at a particular moment in the history of the universe when he was born a spirit child.

Did Jesus Earn Deity?

Finally, given the fact that the Mormon Jesus achieved his current status as a result of a combination of good fortune and the good decisions he made along the way in the course of exercising his free will in the midst of variable circumstances, it would seem, would it not, that had he acted differently his outcomes and rewards might have also turned out quite different. Had the Mormon Jesus, for example, come up with a different, inferior plan of salvation, and Satan a better one than he at that "Grand Council," could it not have turned out that the tables might have been turned in such a way that Jesus ended up as the fallen angel and Satan as the one worshipped as the divine son of God? Similarly, suppose that some other spirit child of God, take you or me for example, had been called upon instead of Jesus at that "Grand Council" and had offered the approved plan of salvation, would it now be one of us who had become the divine son or daughter of God, worshipped by all the rest of humanity, including Jesus? In that case, of course, the attribution of deity to Jesus, would mean something quite different from what we read in the New Testament. A deity that can be earned, and that by one person as well as another, is really no deity at all, at least not in the biblical sense. As a rule Mormons these days don't like to delve much into such questions. But the implications are there in their claim that Jesus and Satan are brothers when understood in its broader theological context. This, I would submit, goes a long way toward explaining why Christians take such a strong exception to the concept. It is really not a matter of trying to "smear" anybody, it simply represents the hearty rejection by Christians of a radically inadequate theological formulation. I agree with the words of Jack Nicholson, when he said in his role as a mob boss in the movie *The Departed*: "I don't want to be a product of my environment, I want my environment to be a product of me." By the same token who wants their God to be, like the God of Mormonism, a product of his environment? Happily the Bible and historic Christianity know nothing of such a God.

Notes

¹ Libby Quaid, "Huckabee Questions Mormon Beliefs," (http://www.breitbart.com/article.php?id=D8TFL9B81&show_article=1).

² “Answering Media Questions About Jesus and Satan.” (<http://www.lds.org/Ldsnewsroom/eng/commentary/answering-media-questions-about-jesus-and-satan>).

³ Robert L. Millet, *The Mormon Faith: A New Look at Christianity* (Salt Lake City, UT: Shadow Mountain / Deseret Books, 1998) 39.

⁴ *Gospel Principles* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997) 17-19: (<http://lds.org/library/display/0,4945,11-1-13-6,00.html>).

⁵ *The Pearl of Great Price Student Manual* (Religion 327; Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2000) 37.

⁶ Although the widely publicized *The Family: A Proclamation to the World*, issued by the First Presidency and the Twelve Apostles of the LDS Church in 1995, declares that “All human beings — male and female — are created in the image of God,” it immediately goes on to say that “Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gender is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.”

Given that gender is, “an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose,” it is often noted in LDS literature that males share the image of the Heavenly Father but females that of the Heavenly Mother. “You are daughters of God,” declared President Spencer W. Kimball, “You are made in the image of our heavenly mother” (*The Latter-day Saint Woman: Basic Manual For Women, Part A* [rev. ed.; Salt Lake City, UT: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter day Saints, 2000] 61). “There is a Heavenly Father and a Heavenly Mother; and ... we were made in their image: male and female children” (Ida Smith, “The Lord as a Role Model for Men and Women,” *Ensign*, Aug. 1980, 66). As a result, says Patricia T. Holland, women “are endowed with special traits and attributes that come trailing down through eternity from a divine mother,” and so they “have special God-given feelings about charity, love, and obedience. Coarseness and vulgarity are contrary to their natures. They have a modifying, softening influence on young men.” And hence “the traits they received from heavenly mother are equally as important as those given to the young men” (“One Thing Needful”: Becoming Women of Greater Faith in Christ,” *Ensign* [Oc 1987]).

Adam’s and Eve’s bodies were also patterned after the bodies of the Heavenly Father and Mother. In *A Parent’s Guide* at the place where an LDS father is trying to explain the birds and the bees to his son Dean we read:

“Who made our bodies first of all?” [the father asks,]

“Heavenly Father” was the prompt answer.

“That’s right, son. Heavenly Father made Adam and Eve. Who did they look like?”

“Heavenly Father and Jesus, and I guess our heavenly mother too,” said the now attentive boy.

“Well, we really don’t know much about our heavenly mother, but we can expect that Eve looked like her and Adam looked like Heavenly Father” (*A Parent’s Guide* [Salt Lake City, UT: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985] 31)

⁷ See further my discussion in Ronald V. Huggins, “Joseph Smith and the First Verse of the Bible,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 46.1 (March 2003) 29-52.

⁸ Vivian Adams, in her “Our Glorious Mother Eve,” which she contributed to Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet, eds., *The Man Adam* (Salt Lake City, UT: Bookcraft, 1990), writes:

Eve was born in the premortal life to heavenly parents, an eternal Father and an eternal Mother, in an eternal family unit. Intelligence was organized through a birth process to become her spirit body (see D&C 93:29; 131:7-8). She was born a female spirit in the similitude of the universal mother in heaven, and her nature by divine inheritance was feminine. We may surmise that she was radiant and beautiful, and that her spirit was in the likeness of her heavenly mother and would mold the likeness of her mortal person yet to be (see D&C 77:2; Ether 3:14-17). Eve was endowed with every capacity to become, in time, exalted as her heavenly parents. She was literally a daughter of Deity. (p. 88)

This passage underscores not only what we were speaking about in the previous section, i.e., that women are made in the image of the heavenly mother, but moves beyond it to speak of both the past and the future. In terms of the past, it talks first of all about how “intelligence was organized through a birth process to become her [Eve’s] spirit body.” These words describe Eve’s first birth as a spirit child to our Heavenly Father and Mother. Her being “organized” into a spirit child through birth touches upon the issue of where we came from prior to our being born as spirit children. In most of the current LDS literature the story opens with our living with our heavenly parents prior to being born into this world, without anything much being said about what went on before.

⁹ Stephen E. Robinson and Craig L. Blomberg, *How Wide the Divide?* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997) 85.

¹⁰ Stan Larson, "The King Follett Discourse: A Newly Amalgamated Text," *BYU Studies* 18.2 (Winter 1978) 203-204. Reprints of the full text and selections of the King Follett Discourse are widely available:

Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret, 1977) 342-62; Richard N. and Joan K. Ostling, *Mormon America: The Power and the Promise* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1999) 387-394; JD 6:1-11 ; Joseph Smith's History 6:302-317; Donald Q. Cannon and Larry E. Dahl, *The Prophet Joseph Smith's King Follett Discourse: A Six-Column Comparison of Original Notes and Amalgamations* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1983).

¹¹ *The Pearl of Great Price Student Manual* (Religion 327; Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2000) 37-38. Several examples are provided:

Abraham 3:18-19. Our Spirits Are Eternal

The Prophet Joseph Smith taught: "I am dwelling on the immortality of the spirit of man. Is it logical to say that the intelligence of spirits is immortal, and yet that it has a beginning? The intelligence of spirits had no beginning, neither will it have an end. That is good logic." (*History of the Church*, 6:311 [King Follett Discourse]).

Speaking of the eternal nature of our spirit, President Brigham Young stated:

"Mankind are organized of element designed to endure to all eternity; it never had a beginning and never can have an end. There never was a time when this matter, of which you and I are composed, was not in existence, and there never can be a time when it will pass out of existence; it cannot be annihilated.

"It is brought together, organized, and capacitated to receive knowledge and intelligence, to be enthroned in glory, to be made angels, Gods — beings who will hold control over the elements, and have power by their word to command the creation and redemption of worlds, or to extinguish suns by their breath, and disorganize worlds, hurling them back into their chaotic state. This is what you and I are created for" (*Discourses of Brigham Young*, p. 48; see also D&C 93:29-33).

Regarding the origin of our spirits in the premortal life, President Marion G. Romney, who was a counselor in the First Presidency, taught: "In origin, man is the son of God. The spirits of men `are begotten sons and daughters unto God' (D&C 76:24). Through the birth process, self-existing intelligence was organized into individual spirit beings" (in Conference Report, Sept.-Oct. 1978, 18; or *Ensign*, Nov. 1978, 14)

Elder Neal A Maxwell wrote: "Admittedly we do not now understand all the implications of the words, "spirits ... have no beginning; they existed before ... for they are ... eternal" (Abraham 3:18). Yet we surely understand enough to see a loving and redeeming God at work, striving to help us become as He is — a cause for our deep gratitude and joy, instead of despair and doubt, and for a willing submission to whatever He perceives will further that purpose" ("*Not My Will But Thine*," 40).