**Lightning Apologetics**

Note to Readers:

I have received several requests to do an article on the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, i.e., the Mormons. I am going to postpone the rest of my article on Lutheranism for the present to answer those requests. What is Mormonism? What do they believe? Are they considered a Christian denomination? We will answer all of your questions. So let’s begin.

Mormons have been publicly asking to be accepted as “Christians” and have their church, viewed as just another Christian denomination for many years now. However, their own history makes it problematic. Their founder was Joseph Smith. He claimed to have been told in a vision regarding Christian churches that God “forbade me to join any of them” and “all their creeds were an abomination in his sight.” Couldn’t one make the case that it is Mormons (not Christians) who established, from the beginning of their group, an antagonistic relationship with those Christian groups already in existence? It more recent years Mormons have tried to downplay this antagonism but facts are facts.

In one sense, Mormonism is Christian . If you were going to categorize Mormonism according to world-religion criteria, you would have to say they are Christians. World religions are the major belief systems found around the world that frame a tradition of enough cultural richness to support a civilization. The major world religions are Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Shintoism, Confucianism and Islam. Clearly Mormonism fits into the broad “Christian” category.

Also, we have to remember that individual Mormons may be Christians in spite of being Mormons. Some Mormon converts were baptized as Christians at some point before becoming Mormons. So when we talk about whether Mormons are Christians, we really are talking about whether Mormonism as a *belief system* is Christian, not judging the faith claims of an individual.

It may be that in the not-too-distant future, we will have to categorize Mormonism as a separate world religion. It is the fifth-largest religious group now in the US, having passed the Lutherans, and the LDS are experiencing rapid expansion in other countries. In many ways its development parallels that of Islam. Both religions were founded by prophets who claimed to have been visited by an angel. They borrow heavily from Judaism and Christianity, yet reject their central tenets. Both rely upon strange revisions of history. The Koran identifies Mary, the Mother of Jesus, with Miriam the sister of Moses, who lived over fourteen centuries earlier. The Book of Mormon makes numerous claims regarding the peoples of the Americas (including the idea that the American Indians descended from a lost tribe of ancient Israelites) that have been refuted by history, archeology, and anthropology. Both Islam and Mormonism claim that where there sacred writings contradict the Bible, the Christian and Jewish scriptures have been corrupted.

One could argue that Mormons have the right to say that they are “Christians” and no one should deny what they say about themselves. It is possible, however, for us to respect their right to call themselves whatever they wish without feeling compelled to validate that claim ourselves. This is complicated by the fact that to many Catholics, Mormonism seems no more strange than the Baptist faith, or that of any other Protestant denominations. In part this is because Mormons themselves generally use the language and terminology common to (especially Protestant) Christians. In their initial approach to you, they will do all they can to hide or gloss over the distinctive beliefs of their church. Statements of Mormon belief sound so much like statements of the Christian faith that many Catholics and Protestants are quite willing to recognize Mormons as “Christians,” not merely in the world-religion sense, but in the sense in which we Catholics recognize Protestant Christians as our “separated brethren.” This is a serious error with two major consequences.

First, Christians (including Catholics) are misled into the Mormon church where they are indoctrinated in a religion which rejects the central tenets of the Christian faith, resulting in them bringing up their children as non-Christians. Second, Christians embrace Mormons as fellow Christians instead of **evangelizing** them. In order to protect the faithful from this deception and to help Mormons learn the truth, we must now understand how Mormon doctrine differs from the historic Christian faith. Part Two next week. Thanks to Mary Kochran for help in this article. Phillip Bellini, DRE.