

Vacillating, Befuddling and Constantly Adrift Official LDS Doctrine on God

Posted by: **steve benson** ()

Date: November 19, 2016 06:20AM

BYU professor of history, Thomas G. Alexander, in his ground-breaking research, "The Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine: From Joseph Smith to Progressive Theology," lays down an expansive trail of the Mormon Church's historically incomplete, self-negating, wavering, flip-flopping, morphing, perplexing and indeterminate official stances on the core bedrock of its much-ballyhooed "divinely-revealed" doctrine, namely: THE VERY NATURE OF GOD.

Details, details.

Judging from the wild swings over time in official LDS Church doctrine on the supposed nature of God and humanity's supposed relationship to that God, it is evident that Mormonism's purported "prophets, seers and revelators" of God's allegedly "one and only true church" don't know what the hell they're talking about.

Indeed, they seem to have missed the memo from Jesus:

"And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." (John 17:3)

God Who?

Jesus What?

Holy Huh?

Buckle your seatbelts and prepare for a Disneylandish roller-coaster ride through the ever-evolving, wildly-whiplashing, herky-jerky world of official Mormon Church doctrine on that little thing called "God."

--Alexander's Underlying Premise: Official Mormon Church Doctrine Has Not Historically Been Presented as Fully Constructed At Its Supposed Point of Revelation, Nor Has It Been Consistent or Sustained Over Time

"One of the barriers to understanding Mormon theology is the underlying assumption by most Latter-day Saints that doctrine develops consistently, that ideas build cumulatively on each other. As a result, older revelations are usually interpreted by referring to current doctrinal positions. This type of interpretation may produce systematic theology and may satisfy those trying to understand and internalize current doctrine, but it is bad history since it leaves an unwarranted impression of continuity and consistency."

--The Doctrine of God (as Originally Offered in Official Mormon Teaching) Was That of a God Who Was a Single Personage of Spirit but Who Was Physically Manifested as Jesus with a Body

"The Book of Mormon tended to define God as an absolute personage of spirit who, clothed in flesh, revealed himself in Jesus Christ (see Abinadi's sermon to King Noah in Mos. 13-14).

"Two years later, the first issue of the Mormon Evening and Morning Star published a similar description of God in the "Articles and Covenants of the Church of Christ," the church's first statement of faith and practice which, with some additions, became Doctrine and Covenants 20. The "Articles," according to correspondence in the Star, was used with the Book of Mormon in proselytizing and indicated that "there is a God in heaven who is infinite and eternal, from everlasting to everlasting, the same unchangeable God, the framer of heaven and earth and all things which are in them."

"The Messenger and Advocate, successor to the Star, published lectures 5 and 6 of the "Lectures on Faith" of the Doctrine and Covenants (1835), defining the "Father" as "the only supreme governor, and independent being, in whom all fulness and perfection dwells; who is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient; without beginning of days or end of life." In a letter published in the Messenger and Advocate, Warren A. Cowdery argued that "we have proven to the satisfaction of every intelligent being, that there is a great first cause, prime mover, self-existent, independent and all wise being whom we call God . . . immutable in his purposes and unchangeable in his nature."

". . . [T]here is little evidence that early church doctrine specifically differentiated between Christ and God. Indeed, this distinction was probably considered unnecessary since the early discussion also seems to have supported trinitarian doctrine.

"Joseph Smith's 1832 account of his first vision spoke only of one personage and did not make the explicit separation of God and Christ found in the 1838 version.

"The Book of Mormon declared that Mary "is the mother of God, after the manner of the flesh," which was changed in 1837 to "mother of the Son of God." Abinadi's sermon in the Book of Mormon explored the relationship between God and Christ: "God himself shall come down among the children of men, and shall redeem his people. And because he dwelleth in the flesh he shall be called the Son of God, and having subjected the flesh to the will of the Father, being the Father and the Son—The Father, because he was conceived by the power of God; and the Son, because of the flesh; thus becoming the Father and Son—and they are one God, yea, the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth" (Mos. 15:1–4).

--Early Official Mormon Church Doctrine Had No Three-Part Godhead

"The "Lectures on Faith" differentiated between the Father and Son more explicitly, but even they did not define a materialistic, tritheistic godhead. In announcing the publication of the Doctrine and Covenants, which included the lectures, the Messenger and Advocate commented that it trusted the volume would give "the churches abroad ... a perfect understanding of the doctrine believed by this society." The lectures declared that "there are two personages who constitute the great matchless, governing and supreme power over all things—by whom all things were created and made." They are "the Father being a personage of spirit" and "the Son, who was in the bosom of the Father, a personage of tabernacle, made, or fashioned like unto man, or being in the form and likeness of man, or, rather, man was formed after his likeness, and in his image." The "Articles and Covenants" called the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost "one God" rather than "Godhead," a term Mormons use today to separate themselves from trinitarians."

--In Early Official Mormon Church Doctrine, the Holy Ghost Was Not a Separate Member of the Godhead but, Rather, Represented the Mind of God

"The doctrine of the Holy Ghost in these early sources is even more striking compared to our point of view today. The "Lectures on Faith" defined the Holy Ghost as the mind

of the Father and the Son, a member of the Godhead but not a personage, who binds the Father and Son together (D&C, 1835 ed., 53–54). This view of the Holy Ghost likely reinforced trinitarian doctrine by explaining how personal beings like the Father and Son become one god through the noncorporeal presence of a shared mind."

--Significant Changes Were Made by Joseph Smith to Early Mormon Doctrines on the Nature of God--Which Included Giving God a Physical Body, Physically Separating God from Christ, Introducing the Doctrine of Plurality of Gods and Establishing the Doctrine of Eternal Progression from Humanhood to Godhood.

". . . Between 1842 and 1844, Joseph Smith spoke on and published radical Christian doctrines such as the plurality of gods, the tangibility of God's body, the distinct separation of God and Christ, the potential of man to become and function as a god, . . . and the materiality of everything, including spirit. These ideas were perhaps most clearly stated in the King Follett discourse of April 1844.

"It seems clear that certain ideas which developed between 1832 and 1844 were internalized after 1835 and accepted by the Latter-day Saints. This was particularly true of the material anthropomorphism of God and Jesus Christ, advanced perfectionism as elaborated in the doctrine of eternal progression, and the potential godhood of humanity."

--Following the Death of Joseph Smith, More Changes Were Made in Official Mormon Church Doctrines on God, with Adam Taking Over as God

"Between 1845 and 1890, . . . certain doctrines were proposed which were later rejected or modified.

". . . Brigham Young preached that Adam was not only the first man but also the god of this world. Acceptance of the King Follett doctrine would have granted the possibility of Adam being a god, but the idea that he was the god of this world conflicted with the later Jehovah-Christ doctrine. . . .

"The newer and older doctrines . . . coexisted, and all competed with novel positions spelled out by various church leaders.

"The "Lectures on Faith" continued to appear as part of the Doctrine and Covenants in a section entitled "Doctrine and Covenants"—distinguished from the "Covenants and Commandments," which constitute the current LDS Doctrine and Covenants.

"The Pearl of Great Price containing the "Book of Abraham" was published in England in 1851 as a missionary tract and was accepted as authoritative in 1880.

"The earliest versions of Apostle Parley P. Pratt's Key to the Science of Theology and Brigham H. Roberts's The Gospel: An Exposition of Its First Principles both emphasized an omnipresent, non-personal Holy Ghost, although Pratt's emphasis was radically materialistic and Roberts's more allegorical. Both were elaborating ideas addressed in the King Follett sermon. Such fluidity of doctrine, unusual from a twentieth-century perspective, characterized the nineteenth-century church.

"By 1890 the doctrines preached in the church combined what would seem today both familiar and strange. Yet between 1890 and 1925 these doctrine were reconstructed principally on the basis of works by four European immigrants, James E. Talmage, Brigham H. Roberts, John A. Widtsoe, and Charles W. Penrose. Widtsoe, Penrose, and Talmage did much of their writing before they became apostles, but Roberts served as a member of the First Council of the Seventy during the entire period."

--Still More Revamping Was Done to Official Mormon Church Doctrine on the Godhead, as the Holy Ghost Finally Emerges as an Individual Member of the Trinity Instead of Just Being God's Brain

"Perhaps the most important doctrine addressed was the doctrine of the Godhead, which was reconstructed beginning in 1893 and 1894. During that year Talmage, president of Latter-day Saints University in Salt Lake City and later president and professor of geology at the University of Utah, gave a series of lectures on the "Articles of Faith" to the theological class of LDSU.

"In the fall of 1898 the First Presidency asked him to rewrite the lectures and present them for approval as an exposition of church doctrines.

"In the process, Talmage reconsidered and reconstructed the doctrine of the Holy Ghost. In response to questions raised by Talmage's lectures, George Q. Cannon, of

the First Presidency, “commenting on the ambiguity existing in our printed works concerning the nature or character of the Holy Ghost, expressed his opinion that the Holy Ghost was in reality a person, in the image of the other members of the Godhead—a man in form and figure; and that what we often speak of as the Holy Ghost is in reality but the power or influence of the spirit.” The First Presidency on that occasion, however, “deemed it wise to say as little as possible on this as on other disputed subjects.”

"In 1894 Talmage published an article in the *Juvenile Instructor* elaborating on his and Cannon's views. He incorporated the article almost verbatim into his manuscript for the Articles of Faith, and the presidency approved the article virtually without change in 1898.

"The impact of the Articles of Faith on doctrinal exposition within the church was enormous. Some doctrinal works, including B.H. Roberts's 1888 volume *The Gospel*, were quite allegorical on the nature of God, Christ, and the Holy Ghost. In the 1901 edition, after the publication of the Articles of Faith, Roberts explicitly revised his view of the Godhead, modifying his discussion and incorporating Talmage's more literal interpretation of the Holy Ghost."

--Darwin's Theory of Organic Evolution Further Reshaped (and Muddied) Mormonism's Official Doctrines on God

'By 1900 it was impossible to consider the doctrines of God and humanity without dealing with organic evolution. Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* had been in print for four decades, and scientific advances together with changing attitudes had introduced many secular-rational ideas. Talmage and John A. Widtsoe had confronted these ideas as they studied at universities in the United States and elsewhere. In a February 1900 article, for example, Talmage argued that science and religion had to be reconciled since "faith is not blind submission, passive obedience, with no effort at thought or reason. Faith, if worthy of its name, rests upon truth; and truth is the foundation of science."

"Just as explicit in his approach was Widtsoe, who came to the conclusion that the "scriptural proof of the truth of the gospel had been quite fully developed and was unanswerable." He "set out therefore to present [his] modest contributions from the point of view of science and those trained in that type of thinking." Between November

1903 and July 1904, he published a series of articles in the Improvement Era under the title "Joseph Smith as Scientist." The articles, republished in 1908 as the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association course of study, argued that Joseph Smith anticipated many scientific theories and discoveries.

"Joseph Smith as Scientist, like Widtsoe's later A Rational Theology, drew heavily on Herbert Spencer's theories and ideas. The Mormon gospel, Widtsoe argued, recognized the reality of time, space, and matter. The universe is both material and eternal, and God organized rather than created it. Thus God was not the creator, nor was he omnipotent. He too was governed by natural law, which was fundamental.

"Although the publications of Talmage, Roberts, and Widtsoe established the church's basic doctrines of the Godhead, some members and non-members were still confused. In 1911 Apostle George F. Richards spoke in the tabernacle on the nature of God. Afterward a member challenged him, arguing that Father, Son, and Holy Ghost were one God rather than three distinct beings. Richards disagreed and cited scriptural references, including Joseph Smith's first vision."

--The Mormon Church Ends Up Dumping Its Previously LDS Church President-Taught Doctrine of "Adam-God"

"In February 1912 detractors confronted missionaries in the Central States Mission with the Adam-God theory. In a letter to the mission president, the First Presidency argued that Brigham Young did not mean to say that Adam was God, and at a special priesthood meeting during the April 1912 General Conference, they secured approval for a declaration that Mormons worship God the Father, not Adam."

--The Mormon Church Further Tweaks Its Official Doctrine on the Relationship Between God and Christ, Deciding to Finally Give Jesus a Mission Statement

"Reconsideration of the doctrine of God and the ambiguity in discourse and printed works over the relationship between God the Father and Jesus Christ pointed to the need for an authoritative statement on the nature and mission of Christ.

"From 1904 to 1906 Talmage delivered a series of lectures on "Jesus the Christ" at

Latter-day Saints University. The First Presidency again asked Talmage to incorporate the lectures into a book, but he suspended the work to fill other assignments. In September 1914, however, the presidency asked him to prepare "the book with as little delay as possible." In order to free him "from visits and telephone calls" and "in view of the importance of the work," Talmage was "directed to occupy a room in the Temple where" he would "be free from interruption." After completing the writing in April 1915, he said that he had "felt the inspiration of the place and ... appreciated the privacy and quietness incident thereto." The presidency and twelve raised some questions about specific portions, but they agreed generally with the work, which elaborated views expressed previously in the Articles of Faith."

--Reconstruction of Official Mormon Church Doctrine on God Eventually Starts Swinging Back to the Teachings of Joseph Smith

"By 1916 the ideas which Joseph Smith and other leaders had proposed (generally after 1835) were serving as the framework for continued development of the doctrine of God. Talmage, Widtsoe, and Roberts had undertaken a reconstruction which carried doctrine far beyond anything described in the "Lectures on Faith" or generally believed by church members prior to 1835."

--The Mormon Church Continues Reinventing God, Jesus and the Holy Ghost in Its Attmpt to Get It Right

"Official statements were soon required to canonize doctrines on the Father and the Son, particularly because of the ambiguity in the scriptures and in authoritative statements about the unity of the Father and the Son, the role of Jesus Christ as Father, and the roles of the Father and Son in the Creation.

"A statement for the church membership prepared by the First Presidency and twelve apostles, apparently first drafted by Talmage, was published in 1916. The statement made clear the separate corporeal nature of the two beings and delineated their roles in the creation of the earth and their continued relationships with this creation. The statement was congruent with the King Follett discourse and the work of Talmage, Widtsoe, and Roberts.

"This elaboration, together with the revised doctrine of the Holy Ghost, made necessary the revision and redefinition of works previously used. By January 1915, Charles W. Penrose had completed a revision of Parley P. Pratt's Key to the Science of Theology. Penrose deleted or altered passages which discussed the Holy Ghost as non-personal and which posited a sort of "spiritual fluid" pervading the universe."

--The Mormon Church Ultimately Removes the Lectures on Faith from the Doctrine & Covenants

"Less than two years later, in November 1917, a meeting of the twelve apostles and First Presidency considered the question of the "Lectures on Faith," particularly lecture 5. At that time, they agreed to append a footnote in the next edition, apparently clarifying the lecture's teachings on God. This proved unnecessary when the First Presidency appointed a committee to revise the entire Doctrine and Covenants.

"Revision continued through July and August 1921, and the church printed the new edition in late 1921. The committee proposed to delete the "Lectures on Faith" on the ground that they were "lessons prepared for use in the School of the Elders, conducted in Kirtland, Ohio, during the winter of 1834-35; but they were never presented to nor accepted by the Church as being otherwise than theological lectures or lessons."

"How the committee came to this conclusion is uncertain. The General Conference of the church in April 1835 had accepted the entire volume, including the lectures, as authoritative and binding upon church members. What seems certain, however, is that the 1916 official statement, based upon Talmage's, Widtsoe's, and Roberts's reconstructed doctrine of the Godhead, had superseded the theology of the lectures."

--The Science of Organic Evolution Continues to Force Changes in the Mormon Church's Official Doctrines on God and Mortal Man's Eternal March to Godhood

"Basically, concern over the increasing vigor of the theory of evolution through natural selection seems to have outweighed all other considerations on the doctrine of man. The First Presidency wanted to see the truths of science and religion reconciled, and much of the work of Talmage, Widtsoe, and Roberts dealt with that challenge.

"On evolution, for instance, they generally took the view that while evolution itself was a correct principle, the idea of natural selection was not. The First Presidency's official statements of 1909 and 1925 specifically addressed the problem of evolution and of human nature, which was an important part of Talmage's, Widtsoe's, and Roberts's works.²⁶

"Because evolution was constantly in the background, it seems apparent that two things happened. First, church members internalized the implications of the doctrine of eternal progression, assuming that men and women, as gods in embryo, were basically godlike and that the flesh itself, since it was common to both God and humanity, posed no barrier to human perfectibility. Second, members seem to have concluded that Joseph Smith's statement in the "Articles of Faith" that God would not punish man for Adam's transgression was a rejection of the doctrine of original sin, which held that humanity inherited a condition of sinfulness. In general, it seemed, the doctrine of absolute free will demanded that any evil which man might do resulted not from the flesh but from a conscious choice. How these, and related doctrines, will change in the future remains to be seen."

There you have it in all its glorious tinkering.

Would someone please tell me when the Mormon Church finally gets its official ducks in a row per its down-home doctrines on God, Christ, the Holy Ghost, their body parts or lack thereof, their actual job descriptions, the multiple-gods thing, eternal progression to Master of My Universe, etc.?

It's only had since, like, 1830 to figure it out.

Geezus.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wfmvkO5x6Ng>

Source:

The above excerpts from Thomas G. Alexander's examination of official Mormon doctrinal evolution are taken from "Line Upon Line: Essays on Mormon Doctrine," Gary

James Bergera, ed., Signature Books, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1989, Chapter 5, "The Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine," pp. 53–65. For the full text, see:
<http://signaturebookslibrary.org/?p=9423>

Alexander's examination was first presented as a paper on 3 May 1980 at the Mormon History Association in Canandaigua, New York. At the time, Alexander was professor of history and associate director of the Charles Redd Center of Western Studies at Brigham Young University. His paper was published in "Sunstone" magazine, vol. 5, no. 4, July–August 1980, pp. 24–33. For a pdf copy, see:
http://www.mormonismi.net/pdf/Reconstruction_of_Mormon_Doctrine_Alexande...

For an understanding of what the Mormon Church is supposedly officially teaching when it comes to figuring out who God is and what God is supposed to be doing, see a shrink, put your finger to the wind, or both.

**(For a related thread, see "Why was Joe's 5th Lecture Yanked from the D&C? Cuz It Said God Had NO Body," by Steve Benson, RfM discussion board, 19 November 2016, <http://exmormon.org/phorum/read.php?2,1907020,1907020#msg-1907020>)

**Re: Vacillating, Befuddling and Constantly
Adrift Official LDS Doctrine on God**

Posted by: **cantsay** ()
Date: November 19, 2016 06:35AM

Drink your juice Shelby.

**Re: Vacillating, Befuddling and Constantly
Adrift Official LDS Doctrine on God**

Posted by: **skskipper** ()
Date: November 19, 2016 08:43AM

Once again, we see the utter lack of anything that might be called leadership on the part of the leaders of the LDS organization. Thank you, Mr. Benson.

**The only Mormon doctrine is there is no
Mormon doctrine. (n/t)**

Posted by: **anybody** ()
Date: November 19, 2016 09:16AM

**Re: Vacillating, Befuddling and Constantly
Adrift Official LDS Doctrine on God**

Posted by: neogalileo ()
Date: November 19, 2016 09:31AM

This this this...and this...and this...

This is one of several, key smoking guns that indicates where Joseph and his Successors got their "doctrines" and teachings and supposed truths. And it ain't from "God".

In essence, as Alexander masterfully documents, Mormon Doctrine, from the outset until now, is the result of conjecture, debate, negotiation, and decree amongst LDS HQ, with whomever is the prophet at the time having the final say.

Other sources that indicate from where Joseph et al. co-opted and amalgamated their beliefs are:

- Swedenborg's writings
- Kabbalah (see Lance Owens' writings)
- Old / New Testament
- Contemporary Theories & Social Trends
- Masons

...just to name a few.

Now, TBMs will say that all these sources are part of the "one great whole of Truth" that Mormonism encompasses and that the Prophet has the right to continuing revelation from God and earthly sources. Thus, TBMs rely on the prophetic calling of Joseph and his Successors to "own" all Truth. It's actually a brilliant way to allow for changes and contradictions in doctrine over time and still maintain a supposed moral high ground, all in the name of "continuing revelation".

However, once the prophetic calling of Joseph dissipates under the weight of the overwhelming and conclusive circumstantial evidence that Joseph made up the First Vision and the Priesthood Restoration, all moorings to any divine authority or Exclusive Divine Mandate fall by the wayside.

And, Mormons are thus truly left with the "Teachings of Men, Mingled with

Scripture".

Neo-Galileo

Edited 4 time(s). Last edit at 11/19/2016 10:31AM by neogalileo.

**Re: Vacillating, Befuddling and Constantly
Adrift Official LDS Doctrine on God**

Posted by: **getbusylivin ()**
Date: November 19, 2016 10:21AM

The great leap of faith that many theists make is that their minds are capable of discerning the existence of a supreme or supernatural being. Downstream, they color in the characteristics of said being like a kindergartner coloring in between the lines. So "God" does or does not have a body, or dresses in white, or has a beard, or speaks perfect English with a slight British accent.

The teacher hands out the coloring books and reminds the children to only color between the lines. Only parrot the definition of God that we give you. That is the sign of your "faith": that you obey. As if obedience and faith are the same thing. (They are, however, two different ways of being wrong.)

It doesn't bother me that JS changed his story, or that the church has revised and tweaked and hidden and denied and otherwise altered his early blatherings. It would make no difference to me had he produced only one first and final story with no subsequent revisions by him or anyone else. Regardless of its details theism is still theism, a concept I lack the capacity to embrace, even as others claim such a capacity, down to the details of beard color or what not.