

ARE MORMONS CREATIONISTS?

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A theological richness characterizes the views of LDS General Authorities on the origin of man.

Just as there are many versions of Christians, there are also many versions of creationists. In the loose sense, the term "creationists" has no generally agreed-upon definition nor does its companion word "creationism." If we define the terms to include anyone who believes in a divine creator, then Latter-day Saints would fit the definition—as would virtually any religious person. But in the usage now so common in American non-LDS literature, the terms have a far more restricted meaning. They refer to persons of very "fundamental" Christian persuasion who have banded together to promulgate certain views pertaining to the origin of the universe, earth, man, and so on. These include the tenets that God is omniscient, sovereign, absolute, and omnipotent; that he created all time, space, and matter instantaneously and out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) roughly 6,000-10,000 years ago. From such matter (dust), he then molded a body for man and created Eve from a rib thereof. The creation of all but himself is said to have occurred over a period of six literal 24-hour days, and God merely "spoke things into being"; in other words, God spoke, and things came instantaneously into existence, fully developed and functioning. Such a god is said to be responsible to no power or laws other than his own and works by supernatural processes. Natural laws, those operating in the observable earth and universe, are seen as ungodly, the results of sin and wickedness. Such concepts, it is clear, are demonstrably foreign to the philosophical underpinnings of Mormon theology.

Among the more prominent groups identified with these doctrines are the Bible-Science Association, the Creation Research Society, and their local affiliates. The members of these groups belong predominantly to a rela-

tively small number of Protestant denominations: Southern Baptists, Missouri Synod Lutherans, Seventh-Day Adventists.

Though the above teachings characterize modern creationists, there is no central governing body to delineate what constitutes official doctrine. One can only use their own terminology, as precisely as possible, in referring to the usual doctrines pertaining to the origin of men and women. We turn now to some representative statements.

From John C. Whitcomb, Jr., probably the most visible creationist Bible scholar (*Creation According to God's Word*, pp. 24-26): "Nothing can be clearer than the fact that God directly created the bodies of Adam and Eve . . . women had their ultimate origin in a man. . . . Adam was not *any* kind of a living creature until he *became* one by the creative breath of God. Until that moment, he was inanimate, lifeless matter. The significance of this fact can hardly be overestimated . . . [scriptural analysis] demands that 'dust of the ground' in Gen. 2:7 be interpreted literally. . . . The second chapter of Genesis also makes it perfectly clear that Eve was taken physically, literally, and supernaturally from the side of Adam. . . . We may not know in exact detail how God fashioned the bodies of our first parents, but that He created them miraculously and suddenly is the plain teaching of Scripture."

From Henry M. Morris, president of the Institute for Creation Research, former president of the Creation Research Society and Christian Heritage College, and perhaps the single most prolific writer and influential personality in creationist history: "His [God's] 'creative' acts consisted of calling the physical universe into existence (Gen. 1:1), of calling animal life into existence (Gen. 1:21), and of calling human life in His own image (Gen. 1:27) into existence.

. . . The reason why He took six days instead of only the twinkling of an eye to do this was in order for His work-week of six days to serve as a pattern for man's work-week of six days. . . . Real creation obviously requires creation with an 'appearance of age.' Thus, Adam was made as a full-grown man." (*Evolution and the Modern Christian*, pp. 58, 650, 62).

Lastly, from Richard Niessen, faculty member at Christian Heritage College, writing in the foremost creationist journal (*Creation Research Society Quarterly*, 1980, p. 221): "Man was formed from dust. . . . God breathed the 'breath of life' into the nostrils of a dead object and it became alive. . . . Eve was a direct act of special creation, taken from the side of Adam."

And how have LDS spokesmen historically reacted to these concepts? Among the most direct responses are those of Brigham Young (*JD*, 7:285): "When you tell me that father Adam was made as we make adobies from the earth, you tell me what I deem an idle tale. . . . There is no such thing in all the eternities where the Gods dwell." Apostle Parley P. Pratt instructs us (*Key to Theology*, p. 50): "Man, moulded from the earth, as a brick! A Woman, manufactured from a rib! . . . O man! When wilt thou cease to be a child in knowledge?" John A. Widtsoe asserts (*Rational Theology*, pp. 50-51): "The statement that man was made from the dust of the earth is merely figurative. . . . Likewise, the statement that God breathed into man the breath of life is figurative." And President Spencer W. Kimball (*Ensign*, March 1976, p. 71) has put it very simply: "The story of the rib, of course, is figurative."

But these rejections of the "speaking into being" and "moulding" interpretations of the scriptures do not reveal the marvelous richness of the LDS commentary on the origin of man. A preliminary point is that the presidents of the Church have repeatedly made it clear that the Church has no official doctrine on the matter (for example, President Joseph F. Smith: "The Church itself has no philosophy about the *modus operandi* employed by the Lord in His creation of the world, and much of the talk therefore about the philos-

ophy of Mormonism is altogether misleading" [*Juvenile Instructor*, 1911, p. 209]). The First Presidency in 1860, and the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve in 1865 (*Deseret News* 25 July 1860; 23 August 1865) emphatically denounced Apostle Orson Pratt's views on this and other subjects but declined to establish any Church view for exactly what method the Creator had employed. In 1909 (*Improvement Era*, Nov. 1909, p. 75f) the First Presidency published a lengthy treatise entitled "The Origin of Man," argued that man's spirit derives from divine parentage, but paid little attention to the origin of man's body. When Adam began his sojourn on this earth, he took upon himself "an appropriate body." They suggested that the body had not derived via the evolutionary methods common to secular science of the day but gave no clues at all as to how it *did* originate. Curious LDS readers inquired for more specific information and were answered in the priesthood instruction's pages of the *Era* (April 1910, p. 570) that the Lord had not revealed his methods. But readers were given three possibilities to consider: divinely directed evolution, trans-plantation from another sphere, or "born here in mortality, as other mortals have been." None of these, one notes, agrees with the creationists.

Space forbids further extensive documentation. A myriad of citations could be produced to demonstrate the theological richness that has characterized the views expressed on this subject by our apostolic and presidential brethren. To some Adam was a resurrected and exalted being; to others such views were unacceptable. To some Adam was a translated being from this or some other planet. For some he was transplanted from another sphere in some form other than translation, but these views were emphatically rejected by yet other prominent brethren. Some have felt that evolutionary science provides a possible answer quite in harmony with the gospel; others have asserted that such ideas are nonsense at best and satanic at worst. But through it all the First Presidency has made it clear that

the Church possesses as yet no precise revealed information as to how man's body was produced by God. In 1931 they ruled against continued discussion of the topic, silencing a running debate on the matter as follows: "Our mission is to bear the message of the restored gospel to the people of the world. Leave Geology, Biology, Archaeology and Anthropology, no one of which has to do with the salvation of the souls of mankind, to scientific research, while we magnify our calling in the realm of the Church." (5 April 1931, communique to the other General Authorities). More recently, President Kimball has echoed such sentiments: "We don't know exactly how their [man's and woman's] coming into this world happened, and when we're able to understand it the Lord will tell us" (*Ensign*, March 1976, p. 72).

To some, the non-position of the Church on this matter may seem surprising or even bothersome. In truth, it is a prime example of theological honesty. Creationists argue that the issue is critical (For example, John Rendle-Short of Australia, *Man—Ape or Image: the Christian's Dilemma*, p. 38: "At least seven doctrines of fundamental importance to the whole human race, but especially to Christians, are directly founded on the fact that Eve was created out of Adam.") But LDS prophets (for

example, Anthony W. Ivins, *Conference Report*, Oct. 1925, pp. 50-51; John A. Widtsoe, *Rational Theology*, p. 51; David O. McKay, *BYU speech*, 10 Oct. 1952, pp. 6-7) have argued that what is important is not the details of the process of creation, but the identity of the creator (the divine father) and the reasons for creation (the mortal experience and eventual exaltation of humans). And these, it seems, are indeed the critical theological issues.

But a final words remains. LDS spokesmen have agreed, overwhelmingly, on two basic points: that Adam and Eve were historical people and that their bodies were produced by some sort of biological procreation. This latter idea is thoroughly repugnant to modern creationists and serves to underscore my final point: that beyond generalities, Mormonism and modern creation are completely incompatible on issues relating to the origin of man. For Mormons it seems clear: believing in creation does *not* make one a creationist. Indeed Mormons would have to reject their entire philosophical framework to become such. This conclusion becomes even more vivid when one examines concepts of the nature of God, of physical law, and of *ex nihilo* creation.

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