

A Different Jesus? The Christ of the Latter-day Saints
Reviewed by Bill McKeever, director of Mormonism Research Ministry

Long is the list of differences that separate Mormonism from Christianity, but one of the greatest is how each faith understands the person and role of Jesus Christ. For all but four years of its history, the LDS Church has had the name of Jesus in its official title, but how this Jesus has been described by Mormon leaders has led most of the professing Christian world to balk when it comes to accepting them as part of the Christian fold.

Robert L. Millet, a professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University, has been one of the foremost apologists for the LDS Church in recent years. However, what makes him different from all the rest is that he does not come into this arena with the arrogance that so often accompanies other defenders of the LDS faith.

Make no mistake about it, *A Different Jesus?* is a Mormon apologetic that is specifically written for an evangelical audience. Most books written to Mormons by Mormons normally do not include an 18-page glossary defining terms unique to the LDS faith, nor do they normally include an explanation of the unique books included in the Book of Mormon.

Perplexing, however, is that *A Different Jesus?* does not come to us from an LDS publisher like Deseret Book or Bookcraft, or even Signature. No, it is published instead by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, a company that is normally known for producing Christian books. Why would a company that has a history of publishing Christian books publish a book that clearly defends Mormonism?

Because of Millet's association with BYU, he is naturally viewed as a spokesman for the LDS Church (despite the fact that he has said time and again that he does speak in that capacity). It is difficult to make a clean disconnect between Millet and his church simply because it is common knowledge that the LDS Church could put a stop to his public interaction with evangelicals at any time church leaders deemed it necessary. Obviously the LDS Church sees something to be gained from Millet's notoriety among evangelicals. Call me skeptical, but I have every reason to believe that this *gain* comes in the form of a long-sought validation that will result in even more converts.

Being very familiar with Millet's writings, I can say that one of the more irritating habits he has is the constant name dropping of prominent evangelicals. Names like C.S. Lewis, John MacArthur, John Warwick Montgomery, J.B. Phillips, F.F. Bruce, John Stackhouse and even Norman Geisler are peppered throughout the book. (Millet's constant use of MacArthur's name compelled the latter to write a statement that clearly explains that he does not agree with Millet's positions as a Mormon nor does he see Mormonism as a Christian religion.). No doubt this is to give the impression that Millet's Mormonism is not all that far off from the views of the men he likes to constantly mention.

To hear Millet quote C.S. Lewis, you might assume he was a closet Mormon. While I mean no undue disrespect to Lewis, I think we need to understand that he was a philosopher and not a theologian. As such, he, on occasion, approached theological issues from a philosophical understanding as opposed to a strictly biblical interpretation. Interestingly, Millet seems to gravitate to such aberrations, as well as to aberrations of other thinkers who were/are professed Christians and in so doing quite often misrepresents their own views.

For example, concerning Lewis, a comment that really jumps out can be found on page 116. Here Millet attempts to use a statement by Lewis to somehow support the LDS doctrine of deification. After devoting seven lines to this quote, he concludes, "*I honestly don't know what Lewis meant fully (and certainly what he understood or intended) by these statements.*" He then wonders if Lewis would have agreed with "*such notables as Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Justin Martyr, Athanasius and Augustine on deification – or, for that matter, with what the Latter-day Saints teach – I cannot tell.*" First of all, let me make this very clear – we have absolutely no evidence whatsoever that any of the above mentioned men believed at all like Mormons when it comes to the doctrine of deification or *theosis*. In fact, Eastern Orthodox scholars have so much as said so (see *Mormon America* by Richard and Joan Ostling, 1999, pp.308-314). Yet, despite this clear denial, we still have Mormons like Millet trying to make a comparison that is not there. Second of all, if Millet is not sure what Lewis meant in the quotation he cites, wouldn't it have been more prudent (honest?) to have not mentioned it at all?

Another problem I see with the book is that readers can never really be sure if what they are asked to accept is actual LDS doctrine or Robert Millet's personal opinions. Mormon philosopher David Paulsen, in his blurb on the back cover of the book, insists that Millet has "*clearly articulated the doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.*" However, he then writes in the same paragraph, "*Though Millet does not profess to be speaking for the Latter-day Saints church, I believe LDS leaders and laity alike will find his presentation to be faithful and penetrating representation of commonly shared convictions.*" This "plausible deniability" in the first part of this sentence is why I don't like getting my information from the LDS laity. None of them speak with any authority.

A luxury afforded Mormon apologists is the vast amount of contradictory statements made by LDS leaders. What I mean by this is when a Mormon is confronted with a problematic quotation by one leader, he can often grab another statement from another leader that seems to cancel it out. Like Islam, Mormonism has its own doctrine of *abrogation*.

For example, under the subheading of “Justification and Sanctification,” Millet cites LDS Seventy D. Todd Christofferson who insists that given the magnitude of grace, we would never suppose “*that we had earned it*” (p.99). Such language becomes extremely confusing when you consider that in a 1988 conference message, Thomas Monson, first counselor to Gordon Hinckley, taught “*It is the celestial glory which we seek. It is in the presence of God we desire to dwell. It is a forever family in which we want membership. Such blessings must be earned*” (“An Invitation to Exaltation,” *Ensign*, May 1988, p. 53). Consider also that Spencer Kimball, in his book *The Miracle of Forgiveness*, spoke of members who are “*doing nothing seriously wrong except in their failures to do the right things to earn their salvation*” (pp.211-212).

Sometimes we can even find examples where Mormon leaders contradict themselves. On page 82, Millet cites Mormon Apostle Bruce McConkie who stated, “*Salvation is free. Justification is free. Neither of them can be purchased; neither can be earned*” (*The Promised Messiah*, p.346). Yet in another book McConkie writes, “*‘Salvation is free’ (2 Ne. 2:4), but it must also be purchased; and the price is obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel*” (*Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* 3:462).

Throughout the book Millet expresses his anxiety over those who refuse to accept Mormons as Christians. Like most Mormons, he seems to be unaware that the LDS doctrine of a complete apostasy most certainly challenges any non-Mormons’ claim to Christianity. That being the case, perhaps he can understand our anxiety when Brigham Young said, “*Should you ask why we differ from other Christians, as they are called, it is simply because they are not Christians as the New Testament defines Christianity*” (*Journal of Discourses*, 10:230, July 8, 1863).

ENDORSED BY CHRISTIANS

Dr. Richard Mouw - A great cause of concern regarding *A Different Jesus?* isn’t so much what Millet actually says in the book, but rather it has to do with Christian endorsements of the book. Richard Mouw, the president of Fuller Theological Seminary, writes the foreword and afterword to *A Different Jesus?* On page viii he takes full responsibility for Millet writing the book and Eerdmans for publishing it. “*Indeed, I encouraged him to write this book, and I urged the Eerdmans folks to publish it.*”

Mouw has been a part of a small group of evangelical scholars who have been meeting behind closed doors with Mormon scholars to discuss theological issues. Clearly this book is a product of those discussions.

Mouw has also gained a reputation over the years for the many apologies he has given on behalf of Christians whom he feels have been bearing false witness against the Mormons. He uses his foreword to take another shot when he writes, “*The fact is that many of my Christian friends think they know what the LDS believe, even though they have never seriously attempted to understand those beliefs from the LDS perspective. What they know about Mormonism is what they have learned from books on ‘the cults’ by Christian writers*” (p.ix). Mouw doesn’t bother to explain where he thinks these “Christian writers” get the misleading information they allegedly include in their books. I guess he automatically assumes they purposely make it all up or have with fiendish intent, purposely embellish it to make Mormonism appear worse than it is. He never seems to acknowledge the slightest chance that they may have gleaned their information from the same sources Mormons themselves go to in order to better understand the LDS faith.

Mouw does say that he is “*no closer to accepting the historical claims of Mormonism than I was the night I listened to Walter Martin make the case against Mormon teachings. I do not accept the Book of Mormon as divine revelation, nor do I believe that Joseph Smith was a prophet called by God to restore ancient teachings and practices that had long been lost to the traditional Christian churches*” (p.180).

He has no doubt that Millet has been honest in presenting his case in the book, but at the same time he admits that “*the question of whether he really does mean what, say, an evangelical means when he uses the same words that we use employ is, of course, a more complicated matter*” (p.180). If this is so, doesn’t that place the entire book under suspicion?

When discussing what Millet calls the ‘*more*’ of Mormonism (baptism for the dead, temple rites, the ancient office of prophet and apostle, golden plates, and new revelations), Mouw says, “*These uniquely Mormon beliefs have to be kept in mind as reminders that the divide between many LDS doctrines and some key beliefs of Christian orthodoxy is still wide indeed*” (p.182).

On the same page, Mouw states that God is “*Wholly other – eternal and self-sufficient – who is in a realm of existence that is radically distinct from the creation that was brought into being out of nothing by God’s sovereign decree. On this view of things, to confuse the Creator’s being with anything in his creation is to commit the sin of idolatry. Mormons, on the other hand, talk about God and humans as belonging to the same ‘species.’ Inevitably, the, the differences are described, not in terms of an unbridgeable gap of being, but in a language of ‘more’ and ‘less.’*” He goes onto say, “*This kind of disagreement has profound implications for our understanding of who Jesus Christ is.*”

The above comments make me question his conclusion on page 183 where he says, “*I think that an open-minded Christian reader of this book will sense that Bob Millet is in fact trusting in the Jesus of the Bible for his salvation. This is certainly my sense.*” If Mouw agrees that the Mormon view of God is idolatrous and that this has profound implications for understanding who Jesus is, how can a

person like Millet be trusting in the “Jesus of the Bible” when he believes in this idolatrous version of God the Father? Based on Mouw’s explanation in the previous paragraph, should we not conclude that Millet is an idolater when he admits that he believes that “*God is an exalted man*” on page 145 of *A Different Jesus*? In 1996 he also wrote, “*Knowing what we know concerning God our Father -- that he is a personal being; that he has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as our own; that he is an exalted and glorified being; that he was once a man and dwelt on an earth...*” (“The Eternal Gospel,” *Ensign* magazine, July 1996, pg. 53).

Are we as Christians going to rearrange our time-proven definitions to now say that an idolater can be a saved individual at the same time? Mouw’s reasoning becomes even more problematic when we take into account that the Jesus of Mormonism is the literal offspring of what must be a non-existent God!

THE BACK COVER

On the back of the book are seven endorsements, four of which are written by evangelical Christians. Christian pastors and apologists alike have expressed their dismay over what appears to be a very confusing message being sent out into the Christian community. Some have even gone so far as to conclude that the four endorsers of the book are somehow working in collusion with the Mormon Church to give it more respectability.

Endorsements can be easily misunderstood, especially when it comes to an apologetic book written by a Mormon who wants very badly for his church to be accepted as Christian. I admit that I have my reservations regarding the wisdom behind such endorsements; rather than run the risk of causing division among brethren, I personally would not have done so. However, I think we must exercise caution before we confuse differences of methodology with what is perceived as an outright sin.

I assume that each of the four Christians are looking for some level of success as scholars dialogue with their LDS counterparts, and I don’t think you can separate the statements on the back of the book from that hope. Whether that is going to be a reality or an unfulfilled pipe-dream remains to be seen. I certainly do not know all that has actually been going on in these discussions, so I admit to being at a disadvantage when trying to make an evaluation of this effort. I will say that I have not been given any indication from those in authority in the LDS Church that these talks have altered any doctrine that has historically placed it outside of Christianity. Quite frankly, with every announcement of a new Mormon temple, I become all the more convinced that the LDS Church has no intention of moving towards orthodoxy.

Trying to look at this controversy objectively has not been easy for me since I have friends on both sides of this thorny issue. As I try to understand the goals of those who are engaged in these private dialogues, I also find myself being sympathetic to those who are left outside to wonder if unbiblical compromises are being made. There is no denying that comments have been made that tend to fuel those fears. With that said, I offer my brief evaluation for each of the four endorsements.

Dr. Craig Blomberg (Denver Seminary) has been engaged in personal dialogue with LDS academics for several years and co-authored the book *How Wide the Divide* with BYU professor Stephen E. Robinson. Blomberg does seem to want to make it clear in his brief statement that what the reader is about to experience in Millet’s book is comprised of the opinions of Robert Millet. As I mentioned above, this becomes cloudy when you read Paulsen’s comments.

Blomberg does not view the LDS Church as a Christian organization. He made this clear in his contribution to the book *The New Mormon Challenge*. On page 331 he wrote, “*The real problem from an evangelical perspective – or any orthodox Christian perspective – is to find a meaningful way to include Mormonism within Christianity. I cannot, as of this writing, therefore, affirm with integrity that either Mormonism as a whole or any individual, based solely on his or her affirmation of the totality of LDS doctrine, deserves the label ‘Christian’ in any standard or helpful sense of the word.*”

David Neff (editor of *Christianity Today*) offers what I consider to be the most disturbing endorsement when he states that Millet has “*given us a gift of clarity*” that “*lays out a thoroughly Mormon understanding of Jesus-centered salvation.*” In reading this, I can’t help but ask, “If this ‘Mormon understanding’ is really ‘Jesus-centered,’ why does the LDS Church continue to disfellowship and excommunicate those who insist they are trusting totally in Jesus Christ for their salvation, but have come to reject Joseph Smith?” These are not people who engage in immoral acts. Their major “sin” is that they have come to the conclusion that Joseph Smith was not a prophet of God. To my knowledge the LDS Church has never renounced the warning given by tenth President Joseph Fielding Smith who said there is “*no salvation without accepting Joseph Smith.*” Does this really sound “Jesus-centered”?

Neff goes on to say that Millet “*does not at all hide or diminish the fundamental differences in our understandings.*” I most strongly disagree. There are many topics discussed in the book where Millet fails to elaborate clearly what his leaders have taught.

Craig Hazen (Biola University) has always expressed to me his passion for the Mormon people as well as a love for God’s Word. For this reason I am puzzled when some Christians portray him as a liberal who has gone to the dark side. Craig has more than once publicly stated that he does not consider the LDS Church to be a Christian church. In fact, in a radio interview with Greg Koukl (Stand to Reason), he went so far as to say, “*I actually believe that Mormonism is a tremendous achievement of the devil!*” (<http://www.strradio.org/current/121904.mp3>).

Craig firmly sees Mormonism as outside the pale of Christianity, but he is very optimistic that some day the LDS Church may very well shed its heretical teachings. At this point I don't personally share that enthusiasm, but I will not fault Craig's optimism. Quite candidly, I hope he proves me wrong. Craig is part of the ongoing dialogue with Mormon scholars; though he wants to keep an ongoing dialogue, he does not see this as something that is open-ended.

Craig states, "*Robert L. Millet has done us all a great service with this book. He communicates contemporary Latter-day Saints thinking on Christology with remarkable clarity and charity.*" While I may understand what Craig is trying to say, unfortunately many Christians reading this may not be aware that there even is a difference between contemporary Mormonism (unofficial ideas expressed by some of the laity) and the more traditional Mormonism (teachings espoused by LDS leaders). However, because Millet insists that what he espouses in his book has been a part of Mormonism all along, Craig's distinction tends to have little meaning for most people.

Because I have personally spoken to Craig about his views, when he says "*This work sets the stage for a whole new level of robust dialogue between the LDS and evangelical Christian communities,*" I don't at all get the impression that he is looking forward to an ecumenical standoff. Craig has more than once expressed to me that he truly wants to see Mormons come to an orthodox consensus.

Greg Johnson (Standing Together Ministries) is a close friend of Millet and has been personally responsible for much of the limelight that has been given to him in recent years. He and Millet often speak together in churches and schools. I concede that I have a lot of concerns about this arrangement; at this point in time, I have not seen any substantial benefit to the Christian church as a result of this relationship (though I have seen an incredible amount of benefit given to the LDS Church). I have never heard Greg say that Mormonism was compatible with Christianity although he does believe that Millet expresses a faith that appears to be much closer to the truth. That, of course, is what much of this debate is about.

Greg begins by saying "*Without hesitation, I recommend this book to evangelical Christians and Latter-day Saints alike.*" I can't see myself saying this since I personally feel the book is fraught with theological landmines that most Christians could readily step on. Millet has been hanging around evangelicals for so long that he has become fluent in "Christianese." He is very "church-wise" and knows how to make a clever argument. For that reason alone, I would never recommend this book to a new Christian, and I would have strong reservations recommending it to any Christian who has only a minimal understanding of Mormonism.

OFFICIAL DOCTRINE

Millet wants his readers to know that "*not everything that was stated or written since 1830, even by prominent Church leaders, is considered to be a part of the doctrine of the Church*" (p.xiii). He chides LDS critics who quote the teachings of past LDS leaders who, he concedes, "*are not perfect*" and have "*some time in the past*" made statements "*that would not be a part of the doctrine of the Church today.*" This last statement is telling because Mormons are told over and over that God will not allow church leaders to lead them astray. In their manuals they are told to trust what the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve tell them. Are we to assume this is not true of men who held these offices in the past? If so, how far "in the past" does this apply?

He then explains that "*doctrine*" for the LDS Church can "*be found in official Church pronouncements, within current Church manuals and handbooks, and would be a topic discussed regularly in general conferences or other official church gatherings.*" Why is it necessary to use words like "*current*" if LDS leaders are in fact getting their information from the same unchanging God? After all, Alma 41:8 states the "*decrees of God are unalterable.*" Shouldn't there be a long-term consistency if something is a decree from God?

Millet's definition is certainly not shared by all Mormons. For instance, the late Sterling McMurrin, a respected Mormon philosopher, noted, "*In the beginnings of the LDS church, its philosophy and theology were quite fluid and in some respects transitory, a condition entirely normal for a movement in its infancy. In the early years, the theology was not basically different from typical Protestantism, but there were radical changes before the death of Joseph Smith. In the first decades of this century, the philosophy and theology achieved a considerable measure of stability and consistency. But things changed after the death in 1933 of the Church's leading theologians, Brigham H. Roberts and James E. Talmage; now for several decades there has been considerable confusion in Mormon thought, with the result that it is often difficult if not impossible to determine just what are and what are not the officially accepted doctrines*" ("*Some Distinguishing Characteristics of Mormon Philosophy,*" *Sunstone* 16:4/35, March 1993).

A CHURCH IN A DOCTRINAL STATE OF FLUX?

I have heard from several of my Christian acquaintances that Mormonism is crumbling and that it won't be long before we can, with confidence, accept it into the Christian fold. Is this really happening? After all, President Gordon B. Hinckley outright denied such a notion when, in a 2001 conference message, he said, "*Those who observe us say that we are moving into the mainstream of religion. We are not changing. The world's perception of us is changing. We teach the same doctrine*" (*Ensign*, November 2001, p.5). It is interesting to note that Millet inserts this quote on page 141 of *A Different Jesus?*

If the LDS Church is really changing, why do I not see this in the writings of Robert Millet? For example, in his June 2003 review of Jon Krakauer's controversial book, *Under the Banner of Heaven*, Millet states emphatically, "*The fact is, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has no inclination whatsoever toward ecumenism and no desire to compromise one ounce of its doctrine or*

history in order to court favor among other religionists” (“Church Response to Jon Krakauer’s Under the Banner of Heaven,” <http://www.lds.org/newsroom/mistakes/0,15331,3885-1-17125,00.html>)

Much of what we find in *A Different Jesus?* concurs with the above insistence that Mormonism is not changing. Throughout the book we find samples of Mormon teaching that have been expounded on by LDS leaders for years. For example:

- Page 2: All the “sects” were wrong and that God had no church on earth.
- Page 3: The necessity of the Aaronic Priesthood that gives power to preach, teach and baptize.
- Page 9,15: The necessity of latter-day revelation and an open canon.
- Page 19: Men and women are spirit sons and daughters of God, and that we lived in a pre-mortal existence. God is “literally our spirit father.”
- Page 20: Jesus was the “firstborn spirit child of God.”
- Page 21: Lucifer and “one third of the spirit children of God” are cast out of heaven.
- Page 45: “Plain and precious truths” removed from the Bible.
- Page 64: The LDS Church is “the only true and living Church” and “the only one with which He is well-pleased.”
- Page 70: Support for a tri-theistic godhead.
- Page 73: Jesus *became* like unto God.
- Page 74: Jesus “is literally the Son of God.”
- Page 76: Post mortal opportunity for salvation.
- Page 83: Man is an eternal being who existed from eternity.
- Page 84: A denial of the “doctrine of human depravity.”
- Page 92: Jesus’ “suffering in Gethsemane was not just a prelude to the Atonement but a vital and important part of it.”
- Page 94: Bodily resurrection is “universal salvation.”
- Page 95: “Certain things must be done in order for divine grace and mercy to be activated in the lives of individual followers of the Christ.”
- Page 99: Justification removes the punishment for past sin.
- Page 100: A combination of faith, repentance, *and baptism* bring remission of sins.
- Page 117: Men can become Gods.
- Page 144: Man is of the same species as God. God is an exalted man.

Admittedly, Millet often fails to give a lot of details regarding these teachings. For instance, while he mentions the “noble and great ones” who helped God “create” the earth, he doesn’t mention that Joseph Smith was allegedly one of them (p.21).

On pages 22 and 23 he writes that the plan of salvation is “*always and everlastingly the same*” and “*gospel laws have not changed.*” How does this square with the fact that Blacks were banned from temple ordinances necessary for their exaltation until 1978? Or how about the doctrine of polygamy that was required for godhood until 1890? If Millet’s conclusion is true, why did tithing only become mandatory for exaltation after the United Order experiment was suspended?

On page 63 he states that the God of Mormonism “*is the only true God and thus the only deity who can hear and respond to the earnest petitions of his children.*” Yet on page 141 he concedes that there are “*three separate Gods*” within the Mormon godhead. If that is so, which two of the three are not true and cannot respond to the earnest petitions of his children?

On page 114 he says there is no power his God “*does not possess.*” Yet the God of Mormonism cannot create physical matter ex nihilo nor can he cause it to cease to exist.

On page 117 he states, “*Even though we believe in the ultimate deification of man, I am unaware of any authoritative statement in LDS literature that suggests that men and women will ever worship any being other than the ones within the Godhead.*” The key phrase here is “*authoritative statement.*” Granted, you won’t find such a statement in the standard works, but it is a subject that has been discussed. For instance, Mormon Apostle Orson Pratt (ironically the same Pratt he mentions following this statement) taught on page 37 of his book *The Seer* that the offspring of those who become Gods, “*are required to reverence, adore, and worship their own personal father who dwells in the Heaven which they formerly inhabited.*” If Mormons believe this eternal progression to godhood is something that has been going since eternity past, consistency would demand that they will eventually accept worship. If not, why do they worship Elohim? An even bigger question for me is, who is Elohim worshipping?

On the same page (117), he says Mormons “*believe in ‘one God’ in the sense that we love and serve one godhead.*” This sounds like a definition used by Bruce McConkie. McConkie also liked to define monotheism as the belief in one godhead (see *Mormon Doctrine*, p.511). Millet goes on to insist that all three Gods “*possess all of the attributes of Godhood.*” Since omnipotence is one of the attributes commonly associated with God, is it really possible to have more than one omnipotent being at a given time?

On page 145 Millet states, “*That which is without body, parts, and passions is nothing. There is no God in heaven but that God who has flesh and bones.*” Where does that leave the bodiless “Holy Ghost” of Mormonism?

MILLET’S JESUS

Is the Jesus of Robert Millet any different than the Jesus embraced by Latter-day Saints of the past? Millet doesn’t seem to think so. While speaking at the “Worlds of Joseph Smith Conference” in Washington, D.C. on May 7, 2005, he stated, “*Strictly speaking, nothing in the LDS doctrine of Christ has changed in the last 175 years.*” He makes the same statement on page 139.

On page 73 he says, “*Modern revelation attests that Jesus was the firstborn spirit-child of God the Father.*” The reason he must preface this sentence with the words “*modern revelation*” is because this is not a biblical doctrine. He also states on page 73 that Jesus, as “*Jehovah,*” “*grew in knowledge and power to the point where he became ‘like unto God.’*” Shouldn’t such a comment alarm Christians who hold the Bible dear?

Though he concedes that “*Jesus was born of a virgin*” on page 67, Millet writes on page 74 that “*Jesus of Nazareth is literally the Son of God, the only Begotten of the Father in the flesh. He is not the Son of the Holy Ghost, nor is he the Son of the father in some mystical, metaphorical sense; he is the Son of Almighty God.*” In what can only be an attempt at damage control, we find a footnote that reads, “*While Latter-day Saints clearly believe that Jesus is the Son of God the Father, there is no authoritative doctrinal statement within Mormonism that explains how the conception of Jesus was accomplished.*” Again, he is compelled to hide behind words that hopefully will somehow neuter the teachings of past leaders that he knows full well expose Mormonism’s heretical view of the incarnation of Christ.

Why must Millet play this game of semantics? A number of LDS prophets have explained how the conception of Jesus was accomplished. For instance, Ezra Taft Benson, a very *authoritative* LDS prophet, stated, “*The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints proclaims that Jesus Christ is the Son of God in the most literal sense. The body in which He performed His mission in the flesh was sired by that same Holy Being we worship as God, our Eternal Father. Jesus was not the son of Joseph, nor was He begotten by the Holy Ghost*” (*The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, pg.7). Jesus is the son of God in the *most literal* sense? His body was *sired* by the same being we worship as God? Do words not have any meaning among LDS apologists? When Millet himself says Jesus is not *the Son of the Father in some mystical metaphorical sense*, what are we left to believe?

Three manuals that I am readily aware of address the incarnation of Jesus Christ in such a way that I am compelled to question Millet’s premise.

Gospel Principles, probably one of the most popular of all the manuals published by the LDS Church, stated in its 1985 edition, “*Thus, God the Father became the literal father of Jesus Christ. Jesus was born of a mortal mother and an immortal father*” (pg.57).

In the 1967 edition of *Messages for Exaltation*, Mormon readers were told, “[*Jesus Christ*] *was willing to make payment because of his great love for mankind, and he was able to make payment because he lived a sinless life and because he was actually, literally, biologically the Son of God in the flesh*” (pp.378-379).

Consider also that in 1972 a family home evening manual was published by the “*Corporation of the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*” that tackles this issue. The information on pages 125-126 were meant to “*help you and your children understand that Jesus is God’s Only Begotten Son.*” Under the heading of “*A MODERN PROPHET’S ANSWER,*” Sixth LDS president Joseph F. Smith is quoted as saying, “*Now we are told in Scriptures that Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God in the flesh. Well, now for the benefit of the older ones, how are children begotten? I answer just as Jesus Christ was begotten of his father.*” On the next page his thought continued, “*We must come down to the simple fact that God Almighty was the Father of His Son Jesus Christ. Mary, the virgin girl, who had never known mortal man, was his mother. God by her begot His son Jesus Christ. And he was born into the world with power and intelligence like that of his Father.*”

Accompanying this quotation is an illustration depicting a man and a woman labeled “*Daddy*” plus “*Mommy*” with lines connecting to a drawing of a girl labeled, “*You.*” (Daddy plus Mommy equals You). Directly below it is another illustration that reads “*Our Heavenly Father*” plus “*Mary*” with lines connected to the word “*Jesus*” (Heavenly Father plus Mary equals Jesus).

Any person with minimal amount of biological knowledge regarding how children are born can easily grasp this concept. If Millet wants to continue insisting that a manual published by his church (that quotes its prophets) is somehow not *authoritative* he only gives credence to the suspicion that he is acting in an intellectually dishonest fashion.

Now I know Millet may argue that two of the three manuals I listed are not currently being used. The oldest one I mentioned was printed in 1967, and it certainly doesn’t disagree with the example I provide that was printed in 1985. Is it logical to believe that an event as ancient as the incarnation of Christ somehow changed within the last few decades? Remember, these manuals were “*current*” back in 1967, 1972, and 1985.

Also on page 74, Millet's speaks of how "*Jesus of Nazareth was and is the only mortal to traverse earth's paths without committing sin.*" Yet Brigham Young gave this startling description of Jesus when he said, "*But while he was tabernacling in the flesh, he was more or less contaminated with fallen nature. While he was here, in a body that his mother Mary bore him, he was more or less connected with and influenced by this nature that we have received. According to the flesh, he was the seed of Adam and Eve, and suffered the weaknesses and temptations of his fellow mortals*" (*Journal of Discourses* 6:95-96). More or less contaminated with fallen nature? Influenced by this nature?

On page 171 Millet states, "*if an acceptance of the doctrine of the Trinity makes one a Christian, then of course Latter-day Saints are not Christians.*" That's enough for me. A denial of the Trinity compels a person to either accept the heresies of modalism, henotheism, or polytheism. None of these can be supported biblically. The doctrine of the Trinity is one of the fundamentals of the faith and it cannot be compromised.

On the same page he quotes President Gordon Hinckley who, in a 1998 conference message, said, "*there are some of other faiths who do not regard us as Christians. This is not important. How we regard ourselves is what is important.*" Actually, how the Mormons view themselves is not nearly as important as how their doctrines conform to God's standard, the Bible. In the end it all boils down to how all of God's creation handled His Word.

CONCLUSION

I have no idea how much error God will allow when it comes to man's final judgment. What the maximum amount of heresy God will allow before a person is plunged into despair and damnation is unknown to me. However, this one thing I do know: the leaders of Mormonism have certainly pushed the doctrinal envelope to a very uncomfortable level. It is a level so extreme that I can't help but feel compelled to warn both my Christian brethren and my Mormon friends about the pitfalls that, according to Scripture, appear to lie ahead. I can only do my best to point out these extremes and pray that God will open their eyes to the fact that only His Word is worthy of our trust.

I am fully aware that the above criticisms are anything but an exhaustive examination of *A Different Jesus?* No doubt some will wonder why I mentioned some things at the expense of leaving out other things. Like many of my colleagues, I too would like to see a dramatic change take place in the LDS Church. However, if this tome was to be a landmark beginning of a new direction towards orthodoxy, I can only say that I am sadly disappointed. To put it bluntly, I can't see why any Christian can be excited about this book. If Dr. Millet really represents a general understanding of the LDS faith then it seems clear that it has a long way to go before we can confidently claim the LDS Church is a Christian church.

At times I really don't know how to categorize Dr. Millet. There are moments when I'd like to think of him as a young Martin Luther who is still in the infant stages of a new scriptural understanding, struggling to make it all work to some level of consistency. If such was the case, I could probably be more patient towards his views that are clearly outside the biblical norm. Then again there are times when I see him staunchly defend Mormonism with a conviction so firm that I can't help but feel that he is purposely using his cunning to appease the concerns of skeptical Christians so that people like myself will leave his church alone and allow the Mormon people to bask in the pool of good feelings.

At the beginning of the book, he laments over the fact that Christians have questioned his faith in "Christ." He asks, "*Do we worship the same Jesus worshipped by our friends of other Christian faiths? This question is not answered quickly or easily.*" As long as he finds that question difficult to answer, I see no reason why Christians should abandon their skepticism.

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