

expressly affirms absolute monotheism, or that only one true god exists:

Deuteronomy 4:35: "To you it was shown, that you might know that the Lord Himself is God; there is none other besides Him."

Isaiah 40:25: "To whom then will you liken Me, or to whom shall I be equal?" says the Holy One.

Isaiah 43:10: "You are my witnesses," says the Lord, "And My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me."

Isaiah 44:6: "Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts, 'I am the First and I am the Last; Besides Me there is no God.'"

Isaiah 45:21-22: "Tell and bring forth your case; Yes, let them take counsel together, Who has declared this from ancient time? Who has told it from that time? Have not I, the Lord? And there is no other God besides Me, a just God and a Savior; there is none besides Me."

Isaiah 46:9: "Remember the former things of old, for I am God and there is no other, I am God and there is none like Me."

The God described in these passages, the only true God, is qualitatively unique. There can be no other gods at any stage of development who are at all qualitatively like Him. Some of the unique attributes of God are described by the following verses:

Creation: "Thus shall you say to them: 'The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under these heavens'" (Jeremiah 10:11).

Unique Glory: "I am the Lord, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor My praise to graven images" (Isaiah 42:8).

Omnipotent (the Almighty): "I am almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless" (Genesis 17:1).

Alone worthy of worship: "You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve" (Matthew 4:10 cf. Deuteronomy 6:13; 10:20).

The almighty God described in the Bible is uncreated, eternal, not a product of progression and not Himself progressing: "For I am the Lord, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob" (Malachi 3:6). His will, so unlike that of any man (or so-called "god in embryo"), never changes or wavers: "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should repent. Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?" (Numbers 23:19). The true God "inhabits eternity" (Isaiah 57:15), He does not merely keep one step ahead of his created subjects.

On this basis, that there is only one true, unique, and uncreated God, I believe it is impossible to affirm the proposition, "Can man progress to godhood?" This is why we deny this proposition.

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Pamphlet 048

Can Man Progress to Godhood?

Kurt Van Gorden

The Christian panel takes the negative position on the question before us, "Can man progress to godhood?" As with any sound presentation, one needs to define the terms of the resolution.

The term man carries its normal and natural sense. By this I mean human beings, homo sapiens, both male and female.

The verb progress carries the sense of advancement toward a goal.

The word godhood means the state of being God.

There are three ways the Mormon panel could attempt to prove this resolution true. The first is biblical evidence understood by literal historical-grammatical hermeneutics. The opposition must prove the bible teaches the affirmative of this resolution, since this is a theological debate. The second possible way for the opposition to prove its case is logically. If it can be shown that man logically progresses to godhood, as perhaps a child advances logically to adulthood, then my opponents could prove their point. The third possible way for the Mormon panel to win this point is historical evidence. If one can point to any verifiable case where a man has become a god, then we would concede the point.

We take the negative position and intend to prove our position by showing the impossibility of the contrary. We believe it is impossible to establish any one of the tests available—the biblical, the logical, or the historical.

In recent years I have noticed a number of articles in Mormon literature concerning the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of deification, derived from the Greek term theosis. There are two logical linguistic fallacies the Mormon writers have committed concerning their use of Eastern Orthodox citations. First, they commit the fallacy

of equivocation, pretending that the early Church fathers meant the same thing the Mormons do when they use similar terms. Second, they commit the fallacy of vicious abstraction, that is, the removal of a statement from its context and the changing of its argument.

The Mormon doctrine of man reaching godhood is outlined by the Mormon apostle John A. Widtsoe, in his work *A Rational Theology*. He explicitly states, "In short, man is a god in embryo. He comes of a race of gods, and as his eternal growth continues, he will approach more nearly the position which to us is Godhood, and is everlasting in its power over the elements of the universe." He also said, "God and Man are of the same race . . . man is of the order of Gods. . . ."

Several Mormon writers have attempted to quote early Church fathers to support their doctrine of man progressing to godhood. B. H. Roberts, Hugh Nibley, Keith Norman, Philip Barlow, Steven Robinson, and Van Hale are a few who have popularized this method of association. The whole system crumbles on two accounts: equivocation of terms and taking statements out of context.

Two typical examples are quotes from Tertullian and Origen. Van Hale uses both of these in his note cards (#227 and #348). His introduction states,

Eternal Progression deification (Tertullian, 145-220 A.D.)

Source: *Against Hermogenes*, chap. 5, Ante-Nicene Fathers (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1978) 3:480. The following is one of several statements by Tertullian expressing a view quite widely held by early Christians that man has the potential of becoming gods. This is part of his treatise against Hermogenes whom Tertullian believed to be a heretic. His interpretation of the 2 verses from Psalms was also common. While he and the LDS would disagree on many points, on this point there seems to be considerable agreement.

Then Hale quotes Tertullian,

. . . "We shall be even gods, if we shall deserve to be among those of whom He declared, 'I have said, Ye are gods,'" (Ps. 82:6) and, "God standeth in the congregation of the gods." (Ps. 82:1). But this comes of His own grace, not from any property in us, because it is He who can make gods.

Again, a note card heading reads,

Eternal Progression deification (Origen, 230 A.D.)

Source: Origen, *De Principiis, The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 344-345. This statement of Origen, one of the greatest early Christian writers, is from his discussion of the end of the world written about 230 A.D.

Van's point on deification is, "The highest good, then, after the attainment of which the whole of rational nature is seeking, which is also called the end of all blessings, is defined by many philosophers as follows: The highest good, they say, is to become as like to God as possible."

Then Mr. Hale proceeds to quote Origen on the image and likeness of God in man. The fallacy of vicious abstraction is apparent when we read in both Tertullian and Origen's writings the contextual opposite of Mormon godhood doctrine. Mormonism teaches that humans are of the same species as God and can progress to become a god in the same manner that the Father did, since He is but an exalted man from another planet in their doctrines.

However, the deification doctrine of Tertullian, Origen, and Eastern Orthodoxy teaches that there is but one true eternal God and he imparts communicable attributes only, like immortality, love, and holiness to the redeemed. Never is God an exalted man in any writing of early Church fathers. Never does God impart his incommunicable, unique attributes of eternity, omniscience, omnipresence, or omnipotence to the resurrected believer.

One merely needs to read Tertullian's chapter previous where Van Hal extracted his quote to

discover that Tertullian taught monotheism. He said, "For what other estimate of God is there than eternity? . . . if it can be ascribed to any other being, it will no longer be the property of God." Here, the proper context of Tertullian shows exclusive attributes that will forever separate God from man.

The same is true with Origen. The paragraph following the quote on Mr. Hales note card says, "He who alone is the one good God becomes to him [the believer] all."

Aside from context, the fallacy of equivocation must be avoided. Many of these Mormon writers assume that the Church father meant the same thing with their terms as what Mormons do. One Mormon writer, for example, who was evidently disturbed that this was going on, cautioned Mormons to be careful about using quotes on deification and theosis. Philip Barlow said, "There is obviously a sense in which the various deification allusions here considered have only verbal similarities to Mormon understandings of exaltation. I therefore do not wish to be misunderstood as implying that any or all of the thinkers referred to herein thought of theosis just as the Mormons do."

It is impossible to show that man can progress to godhood on a logical basis if the terms man and God have any real or ontologically distinct meanings.

It is impossible to show that man can progress to godhood on a historical basis, because we have no examples of a man who has done so.

Our final category is that of the biblical teaching. I will demonstrate the impossibility of man progressing to godhood both from verses affirming absolute monotheism and from verses showing the uniqueness of the one true God's attributes.

My conviction that progression to godhood is impossible for man is based partly on the biblical teaching concerning the nature of God. The Bible