

# CELSUS AND MODERN ANTI-MORMONISM

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Consistent with the Preacher's instruction that "the thing that hath been, it is which shall be...and there is no new thing under the sun,"<sup>1</sup> it is no surprise to find stubbornly repetitive approaches from anti-Mormons when criticizing The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, its doctrines, leaders, scriptures, and followers. This paper will not concern itself with rehashing the already copious amount of LDS apologetic literature which seeks to expose these tactics,<sup>2</sup> but rather, to show that these same tactics have not changed since ancient times, and have survived in only slightly modified form from the time that Christians were being fed to the wild beasts in Roman circuses.

Our prime witness to the philosophical and intellectual threads of anti-Christian literature in the earliest centuries C.E. is Celsus, a noted writer whose ideas come to us via the record of Origen, a brilliant apologist who defended the early Church against the pagan writers who sought to destroy the new faith. Our concern here is not Origen's response to the claims, but an analysis of Celsus' claims to show significant parallels between ancient anti-Christianity and modern anti-Mormonism. It is important to bear in mind that the authenticity of Celsus' information is not strictly necessary, because like his modern counterparts, important ingredients in the recipe of maligning the Church include exaggeration, distortion, sensationalism, and casting everything in the worst possible light.

Before proceeding, I wish to clearly and explicitly explain the scope and purpose of this paper. I do not intend to refute the accusations herein, whether leveled against the ancient Christians or the modern Latter-day Saints. To do so would duplicate the fine scholarship of many capable scholars, and if I were to try, I could not give each subject the thorough treatment it deserves. I also do not call into question anyone's personal Christianity. Although a person may use the same tactics as a notorious anti-Christian such as Celsus, that does not give me the ability to see into anyone's heart and judge whether or to what extent he

or she has accepted Christ. My aim is to show that the body of modern anti-Mormon writings, from the time of the Church founding until the present, bears striking parallels to the tactics, accusations, and in some cases even the language, used by Celsus, an avowed enemy to the doctrines of Christ. I hope this might serve as a warning to those who find they use the same arrows as the Adversary, lest they find they are imitating the wrong side in the fight between Good and Evil.

The number of anti-Mormon books available today can easily fill a small library, but most of my personal experience in this area is from encounters on-line, discussing and debating matters of doctrine. There are many places to do this, such as FAIR<sup>3</sup> or CARM.<sup>4</sup>

## FIRST-HAND KNOWLEDGE

It is necessary for the anti-Christian expositor to show why the reading audience ought to take him seriously. In our day, this amounts to the macabre list of Joseph Smith's supposed personal acquaintances who prefaced their own evil reports by solemnly avowing that it all came first-hand, that they knew the Smith family better than anyone else, and that therefore they were to be believed. Celsus' claims, "I have first-hand knowledge" of the deeds of the Christians.<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, he later prefaces a damning anecdote with the words, "I have this first hand, from an Egyptian musician by the name of Dionysus," which makes one wonder exactly what he means by the phrase, which is intended to suggest that Celsus was a personal witness to the event. But the critical step is to show that because the writer is a witness, his own testimony is to be believed.



Modern-day critics will usually add an appendage to this theme, which is that because the Mormons are obviously going around misrepresenting themselves (a theme which we will see copiously in Celsus), they are not to be trusted, while the expositor of their ways is to be believed implicitly.

## FOR THEIR EDIFICATION

The author, of course, will never actually admit this. On the contrary, he claims that he is doing the Church members a favor, that it is only their own well-being he has in mind, and that he is piously looking after the welfare of the horribly fallen. “I have undertaken to compose a treatise for their [the Christians’] edification, so that they can see for themselves the true character of the doctrines they have chosen to embrace and the true sources of their opinions.”<sup>6</sup>

Having thus professed his motive of love and concern for the members of the Church, it is very readily apparent that no vilification or unflattering view of them is too demonic or too horrible to properly characterize them.

Celsus criticizes the claims of the Christians to an exclusive or unique position. In modern times, this is often a reaction to passages like D&C 1:30, which describes the Church as “the only true and living church upon the face of the whole earth, with which I, the Lord, am well pleased.” Just as modern opponents see in this verse an astounding arrogance, so did Celsus deride the early Saints. “You say as well that divine grace makes everyone a son of God. This being so, what is the difference between you and anyone else?”<sup>7</sup> “Certainly the Christians are not alone in claiming inspiration for the utterances they ascribe to their god through their prophets.”<sup>8</sup> He declares that there is “nothing new or impressive about their ethical teaching,”<sup>9</sup> that their claim to spiritual gifts is irrelevant because “miracles have indeed occurred everywhere and in all times,”<sup>10</sup> and of Christ he states, “you are not the only one who goes about begging and claiming to be the Son of God.”<sup>11</sup> The lack of originality on the part of the Saints is made worse by the fact that they are so exclusivistic and proud of their chosen status. “[I]f all men desired to become Christians, the cult would immediately shut the door to converts,”<sup>12</sup> and he derides the proud claim “that the Son of God was sent only to the Jews.”<sup>13</sup>

This theme is accented by the direct assault on the character of the Saints in general and the most prominent leaders in particular. It seems ridiculous that the kind of scoundrels described by Celsus could have any claim whatsoever to the grace of God, let alone be the sole dispensers of it. “Though they possess faith, I have seen these Christian priests use books containing magical formulas and the names of various demons.”<sup>14</sup> “Taking root in the lower classes, the religion continues to spread among the vulgar: nay, one can even say that it spreads

because of its vulgarity and the illiteracy of its adherents.”<sup>15</sup> “[Christianity] thrives in its purer form among the ignorant,”<sup>16</sup> and “only a blind faith explains the hold that Jesus has on their imagination.”<sup>17</sup> The leaders “want and are able to convince only the foolish, dishonorable and stupid, and only slaves, women and little children.”<sup>18</sup> This particular barb has the two-pronged effect of denigrating the intelligence of the members and exposing the depravity of the leaders. “Their real talent is in hoodwinking people who are ignorant.”<sup>19</sup>

Examples could be multiplied wherein Celsus decries “their utter stupidity” and the “shady moral characters”<sup>20</sup> of the leaders, but the most vivid claims are made against Mary, the apostles, and Christ himself. Mary was “a woman of no breeding—one unknown and unregarded even by her neighbors.”<sup>21</sup> “According to the Jews, Jesus collected around him ten or eleven unsavory characters.”<sup>22</sup> Jesus himself is a “sorcerer,”<sup>23</sup> “arrogant,”<sup>24</sup> “a liar,”<sup>25</sup> “a magician,”<sup>26</sup> “a profaner,”<sup>27</sup> “deceitful,”<sup>28</sup> “a coward,”<sup>29</sup> a “boaster,”<sup>30</sup> “poor,”<sup>31</sup> and a blasphemer.<sup>32</sup> And once again, Celsus is to be trusted as a reliable source because he gained the trust of the charlatans, and got them to confess all of their dastardy.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the villainous Christians add willful deception to their catalogue of sins, and cackle with glee to confess it all in the ears of one they think is sympathetic. The Christians “babble about God day and night in their impious and sullied way,”<sup>34</sup> and “they are unable to convert anyone truly virtuous or good.”<sup>35</sup> It seems frankly amazing that such a decadent and disgraceful group of believers could move Celsus to sufficient charity that he would “compose a treatise for their edification,” with no malicious intent.

Naturally, all of this wickedness could only end in destruction, but the “sentence of death that looms over [the Christians]”<sup>36</sup> is nothing less than they deserve. “Please do not think I criticize the Christians any more bitterly than they deserve,”<sup>37</sup> he pleads, telling this strange religion that “it is your rejection of true wisdom...that leads you to execution.”<sup>38</sup> “The Christians do not suffer for a principle but because they break the law; they are not martyrs, but robbers.”<sup>39</sup> In like manner, if the early Saints suffered the most horrible depredations at the hands of the mob, if their homes were destroyed, their women raped, their children murdered, and then if they were forced into exile in the dead of winter, this suffering should not evoke our pity, because their vile religion makes the most awful suffering too good for them.

Again, the suffering and punishment of the believers in general is encapsulated in the person of the leader, whose untimely death was not only a sign of his true wickedness, but also nothing less than what he deserved. “A fine god indeed, this boaster and sorceror [sic] who performed not one godly action, who could not counter even the opposition of men, or the disaster that ended his life in disgrace.”<sup>40</sup> Never mind the fact that Jesus prophesied his own death,<sup>41</sup> as did Joseph Smith.<sup>42</sup> This only makes matters worse, in fact, because Christ “had told his robber band beforehand that he would come to no good end and wind up a dead man.”<sup>43</sup> Jesus is therefore, according to Celsus, “a man who managed to get himself arrested and executed in the most humiliating of circumstances,”<sup>44</sup> who “died a death that can hardly be accounted an example to men.”<sup>45</sup> “I emphasize,” he continues, “that the Christians worship a man who was arrested and died,”<sup>46</sup> just like modern anti-Mormons emphasize what they see as Joseph Smith’s ignominious death, and he charges, “you brazenly worship as God a man whose life was wretched, who is known to have died in disgraceful circumstances,”<sup>47</sup> mocking “the notion that a man who lived a bad life and died a bad death was good.”<sup>48</sup>

In the aftermath of the death of Christ, Celsus then points to the schism and disagreement among the various factions of Christianity, division where there ought to be unity.<sup>49</sup> The modern equivalent to this argument is the observation by critics of the Church that there are, indeed, schisms from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and that although it is the largest body of “Mormons,” it is by no means the only one. This may be true, but if Celsus was using this argument to attack the Christians, then we find ourselves in good company.

## ATTACKING THE BOOK

If the slandering of the members and leaders alike were the only source of commonality, there should have been nothing at all striking about Celsus’ work in relation to modern anti-Mormonism. But our ancient critic, like the modern counterpart, was not content simply to let the matter rest there, because of the obvious danger that someone might one day meet a genuine Christian, and find in him or her a refutation of all the evil that had been spoken concerning the sect. The next step, therefore, is to show how the sacred scriptures, so revered by the Christians, were flawed and untrustworthy.

First, the critic resorts to flat-out disparagement. If the Bible is made to look ridiculous before anyone can seriously investigate the content, then Celsus has already won the battle. He claims that “their books are absolute garbage;”<sup>50</sup> of the Old Testament he writes that “Moses can only have written such things because he was stupid,”<sup>51</sup> while the New Testament is a “newfound superstition”<sup>52</sup> and, “all in all, very stupid fables.”<sup>53</sup> “[T]he writings of the Christians are a lie, and...your fables have not been well enough constructed to conceal this monstrous fiction.”<sup>54</sup> The Jews “trace their genealogy back to the first offspring of sorcerers and deceivers, invoking the witness of vague and ambiguous utterances concealed in dark obscurity.”<sup>55</sup> He derides “stories dealing with the begetting of children long after the parents are of child-bearing age,” “treacheries of mothers...purportedly righteous men having intercourse with various women other than their wives...brothers selling brothers, women being turned into pillars of salt—and so on.”<sup>56</sup> Similar lists can and have been written about the Book of Mormon, usually in complete disregard of LDS scholarship.

Should the simple use of derogatory language prove ineffective at dissuading would-be readers from examining the text, Celsus has provided a much more extensive list of reasons to find the Bible laughable. “[A]nyone can prove anything from so-called prophecy,”<sup>57</sup> so the prophecies which have come to pass, in the eyes of the Christians, are to be ignored, while in reference to other prophecies, he finds it sufficient to smugly say that “a long time has passed since then, and nothing has changed.”<sup>58</sup>

Now there is an odd tendency, when attacking the Book of Mormon, to reject every single idea on the grounds of either originality or unoriginality. That is to say, every concept must be wrong because it is brand new, and has never been heard before, or else it must be wrong because it is blatantly copying some older concept. In modern terms, these two ideas are reduced to contradiction (new ideas) and plagiarism (old ideas).

It seemed impossible for Celsus to duplicate the ubiquitous anti-Mormon claim that the Book of Mormon contradicts the Bible, but there actually are significant parallels. “This man from Nazareth gives an opposing set of laws”<sup>59</sup> from those found in the Jewish canon, and thus he wonders, “who is to be disbelieved—Moses or Jesus?”<sup>60</sup> There is a very strong tendency in modern anti-Mormonism to set up this kind of false dichotomy,

even down to the subtle use of the word “disbelieved.” The question is much less sinister when we substitute the word “believed,” because it leaves open to the Christian to explain that it can actually work that both are credible, while choosing to disbelieve either Christ or Moses brings the whole system of Christianity down. The words of Christ are to be disbelieved because he “did not hesitate to abandon [the outward forms of observances] for the sake of convenience,”<sup>61</sup> suggesting an inherent disparity between the old text and the new, just as anti-Mormons would convince people that there is an inherent disparity between the Book of Mormon and the Bible.

The other side of this coin, that of plagiarism, is well-used by Celsus. In pre-Christian times, Moses simply stole his ideas from the Greeks, as well as the rite of circumcision,<sup>62</sup> and in his day, the Christians were guilty of “prostituting the noble ideas of Plato.”<sup>63</sup> “This doctrine, however, is not theirs by origin: it is theirs by derivation;”<sup>64</sup> “their system is based on very old teachings;”<sup>65</sup> “They are really very dishonest, borrowing even their incantations from other religions in their magic acts;”<sup>66</sup> and we even have a parallel to the idea that Joseph Smith stole the temple ceremony from Masonic rites: “they excite their hearers to the point of frenzy with flute music like that heard among the priests of Cybele.”<sup>67</sup> Again it is important to remember that it is not significant here whether or not the Christians really did use flute music or excite one another to frenzy, only that Celsus accused them of stealing rites and ideas and then cast those rites in the worst possible light.

Another familiar tactic is to point to changes in the sacred text as proof that it is no good guide for the believers. “I have even heard that some of your interpreters, as if they had just come out of a tavern, are onto the inconsistencies [in the Bible] and, pen in hand, alter the original writings three, four, and several more times over in order to be able to deny the contradictions in the face of criticism.”<sup>68</sup> Anti-Mormons conclude that because there have been changes in the text of the Book of Mormon (even though the vast bulk of those changes are simply grammatical), it cannot pretend to divine origin, ignoring the very obvious fact that no Mormon ever claimed infallibility for the sacred texts. So with Celsus: the Bible is not to be trusted because it has been altered.

Both the sacred text and the words of the leaders are taken to task as corruptions and ideas taken out of context. “[The Christians] expand on their misunderstanding of the ancient traditions,”<sup>69</sup> and “they attempt to explain the fables by means of ideas that really do not

fit into the context of the stories.”<sup>70</sup> So, like the ancient Christians, any time a Mormon uses a scripture to defend a point of doctrine, it is clearly out of context or based on a misunderstanding. Their “perversions of the truth” are either based on incompetence (“It is because these Christians have completely misunderstood the words of Plato that they boast of God as above the heavens and put him higher than the heavens in which the Jews believe.”<sup>71</sup>) or purely malicious intent (“systematic corruption of the truth, their misunderstanding of some fairly simple philosophical principles—which of course they completely botch.”<sup>72</sup>).

And like his modern counterparts, Celsus does not shrink from attacking specific doctrines from the scriptures. LDS doctrines of baptism for the dead, three degrees of glory, and exaltation of the believers are not attacked with much less ferocity than Celsus used against the Christians for their understanding of the afterlife. He sneers upon “their absolutely offensive doctrine of everlasting punishment and rewards, exceeding anything the philosophers...could have imagined.”<sup>73</sup>

If it should prove insufficient to disprove the ancient record, attacking the modern one will naturally follow suit. In our day, this means that the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and any historical record written by a Latter-day Saint is to be rejected as propaganda at best. But Celsus has beaten the anti-Mormons to the punch once again. He asks, concerning the resurrection, “what witnesses saw this wondrous event...For I have so far only heard your voice, and have but your word for it.”<sup>74</sup> And again, “Who really saw [the resurrection]? A hysterical woman, as you admit and perhaps one other person—both deluded by his sorcery, or else so wrenched with grief at his failure that they hallucinated him rising from the dead by some sort of wishful thinking.”<sup>75</sup> “The writings of the disciples contain only those facts about Jesus that put a flattering face on the events of his life,”<sup>76</sup> and are therefore not to be trusted. “Indeed,” he concludes, “what I know to be the case and what your disciples tell are two very different stories.”<sup>77</sup> By way of modern parallel, the testimonies of the eleven witnesses to the reality of the gold plates are discarded, Joseph Smith’s testimony of the First Vision is scoffed at, and the character witnesses who do not denounce the Prophet as a scoundrel and a cheat are nothing but modern “wishful thinking.” Even the full-time missionaries are by this logic discredited, because while they are busy preaching repentance and faith in Christ, their omission of what anti-Mormon writers consider the sordid history of the Church makes them parties in the deception.<sup>78</sup>



## ATTACKING THE THEOLOGY

The book of scriptures is really only offensive to Celsus and the modern anti-Mormons inasmuch as it propagates what they see as a faulty theology. In Celsus' day, as in our own, criticism is based on the idea that the writer understands the proper nature of God, and any deviation from the writer's personal theology is a deviation from the truth. The Christians claim they worship "not only as the son of God but as the very Logos—not the pure and holy Logos known to the philosophers, mind you, but a new kind of Logos."<sup>79</sup> The crux of modern anti-Mormonism is the claim that Mormons are not Christians, and that despite the fact that the very name of Christ is in the real title of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, it is a different Jesus from the historical Jesus. "You undertake to find another God, one different from the Father,"<sup>80</sup> "another God,"<sup>81</sup> and clearly not "the God of the philosophers."<sup>82</sup>

Arguments to prove that there is a disparity between the two conceptions of God begin with the implied assertion that the critic knows how God ought to behave. In other words, if God does not act like he is supposed to, then he must not be God. This is a very subjective standard, as its foundational premise must be theological infallibility in the critic, but this is by no means clear to either Celsus or his modern counterparts. Celsus asks, "Why—though a son of God—do you go about begging for food, cowering before the threats of the people, and wandering about homeless?"<sup>83</sup> "It is petulance and the ambition for power that seems to determine the actions of the Christian God."<sup>84</sup> The game is very simple when played this way. All Celsus has to do is define the actions of Christ as "petulance" and "ambition" and then laugh at the ridiculous idea that a God could ever be such negative things. And of course, the more scandalous, the better. "A beautiful woman must his mother have been, that this Most High God should want to have intercourse with her!"<sup>85</sup> The frequent reference to polygamy in the early Church stems from the same desire to shock the hearer with sexual scandal.

The catalogue of "ungodly" traits is a long one. Christ "deceives [his followers], and tells lies—which it is not the nature of a God to do."<sup>86</sup> He is clearly not omnipresent if he came down from heaven,<sup>87</sup> as the Christians teach. The Christian stories show that Christ is not really omnipotent.<sup>88</sup> According to the Bible, Celsus charges, "God is vindictive and repentant,"<sup>89</sup> but the real God obviously "is not able to do anything that violates or contradicts his own character."<sup>90</sup> No ancient Christian—or modern Mormon—would contest this last state-

ment; the point of dispute is whether or not Christ's behavior can be genuinely characterized as the critic would like.

Celsus' take on the matter of Christ's death is the most illuminating portion of his criticism. "And would it not seem reasonable that if you are, as you say, God's son, God would have helped you out of your calamity?"<sup>91</sup> He mocks, "a fine God indeed who fears what he is supposed to conquer."<sup>92</sup> "When thirsty, he drinks greedily from a sponge full of vinegar and gall, not bearing his thirst with godly patience."<sup>93</sup> Celsus tells the Christians what "[their] God should have"<sup>94</sup> done, and rails against them when he does not.

Another theological sticking point is the existence and nature of the Devil. He argues that the Christian God is inherently contingent if a devil exists.<sup>95</sup> Yet far more interesting is the following claim. "These same Christians," he warns, "speak of *two divine sons*, locked in combat with one another."<sup>96</sup> Modern anti-Mormon sensationalists love to inform their audiences, with a note of horrified shock in their tone, that according to Mormon theology, Jesus and Satan are brothers. Yet here we find Celsus, the exact same chord of pious revulsion in his writings, reviling against the Christians for the exact same shocking doctrine.

Rather than continuing along this theme of theological monstrosity at length, it will suffice to quickly highlight some of the more obvious themes. Celsus charges the Jews and Christians alike with polytheism.<sup>97</sup> "Now, if the Christians worshipped only one God they might have reason on their side," and the same might go for the Mormons, according to anti-Mormon literature. The early Christians "are attempting to exalt Jesus to the heights,"<sup>98</sup> as the Mormons are accused of exalting Joseph Smith. "And was [Jesus] not even betrayed by those whom he was silly enough to call disciples?"<sup>99</sup> One has to wonder, if Celsus is right, what kind of God would call such men disciples, and why he did not have the foreknowledge to avert it. Finally, the ancient Christians were fools enough to teach that God has a body,<sup>100</sup> which supposed heresy the Mormons preach (and are condemned for) today.

Celsus then and anti-Mormon writers now both take the identical approach of teaching that their misguided foes have a faulty theology, as taught in an unreliable book. Therefore, they conclude, their full system of worship is false, and the adherents are either too uneducated to know or too depraved and dishonest to let on.

## WIDENING THE DIVIDE

As anti-Mormon writers do today, Celsus sought to exploit differences between the old and the new. He wanted to make Christianity seem alien from the Judaism from which it sprung. “[They] have deserted Israel for another name”<sup>101</sup> in choosing Christ, and while teaching that “outsiders are not to be trusted...they themselves must remain perpetual apostates from the approved religions.”<sup>102</sup> He capitalized on the break with Judaism that Christianity was undergoing, and asked, “how can you despise the origins in which you yourselves claim to be rooted?”<sup>103</sup> Modern anti-Mormons exploit the differences between Mormonism and “mainstream” Christianity, and then conclude that if we have rejected their form of Christianity, we have rejected Christ.

The LDS doctrine of dispensations comes into play here. “The Christians are silly to say, therefore, that God turns the world back to himself after a period of neglect.”<sup>104</sup> As the early Christians taught that God had restored His truth after a period of apostasy (from approximately 400 B.C.E. until the time of Christ), so do the Latter-day Saints teach that God has again restored His priesthood authority again in this dispensation. And just as the early Christians were mocked for this teaching, so are the Latter-day Saints today.

Today, we read anti-Mormon writers complaining of the “secret” rites which take place in the temple, and point to verses such as Matthew 10:27 or Luke 12:3 to claim that Christians have no secret teachings, but rather, everything is preached from the housetops. They may as well be quoting Celsus’ accusation against the Christian “secret society,”<sup>105</sup> the “secrecy and obscurity of their little club.”<sup>106</sup> He wondered why “he was not eager to make public anything he professed to do?”<sup>107</sup> The secret anointings of the Christians are called into question,<sup>108</sup> and again the old theme of willful misrepresentation pops up when he describes their “false descriptions of the punishments awaiting those who have sinned”<sup>109</sup> and revealed inner-circle secrets to outsiders.

Should all else fail, Celsus will not hesitate to use inflammatory language when referring to the Christian “cult.”<sup>110</sup>

The remainder of Celsus’ challenge to Christianity is a little harder to pin down, as he resorts to simply waving off certain ideas as “silly and contradictory,”<sup>111</sup> and unworthy of refutation. When he writes that “I bring these accusations against the Christians, and could bring many more,” he only threatens, nothing more. “I

shall not go into their crazy displays of pretended power,”<sup>112</sup> but he has already shown us quite convincingly that he is not at all squeamish about laying bare anything crazy or bizarre, and so his hesitation at this point leaves his supporters leering and the Christian apologists unable to mount a real defense against a threat that will not materialize. Some aspects of Christianity are, in fact, “so absurd that [they do] not merit my ridicule but rather my pity and contempt. I think it is unnecessary to refute this sort of stuff, as its silliness will be apparent to anyone who has the patience to read through it.”<sup>113</sup> In this fashion, modern anti-Mormon writers tend to make tongue-in-cheek references to certain ideas which the Latter-day Saints hold in earnest, hoping that their lack of an actual attack will go unnoticed behind words such as “silly,” “crazy,” or “shameful.”

## SCIENCE PREVAILS OVER FAITH

Where, then, is truth to be found for the wayward followers? In ancient times as well as today, the answer is surprisingly the same. Celsus and the corpus of anti-Mormon literature enshrine nothing less than reason as the God of Knowledge. Criticism of the Book of Mormon does not hinge on a comparison with the Bible, ultimately, because the Mormons are just as good at finding proof in the Bible as are their attackers. It is therefore a perceived lack of archaeological evidence that makes belief in it as a genuine record so laughable. In other words, science and religion are going toe to toe. “One ought to first follow reason as a guide before accepting any belief, since anyone who believes without testing a doctrine is certain to be deceived.”<sup>114</sup> That is why Moroni’s promise<sup>115</sup> is seen as such a weak test, according to skeptics, because it is not based on science. “Those who have had anything to do with philosophy, on the other hand, are above such trickery, since they are interested in examining actions and looking at their consequences.”<sup>116</sup> To the question “Canst thou by searching find out God?”<sup>117</sup> Celsus and the anti-Mormons agree the answer is a resounding “Yes!” In fact, it is the only way to find Him out: “any conception of the Nameless First Being is dependent on proper reasoning.”<sup>118</sup>

## CONCLUSION

As previously stated, I do not intend through this paper to disparage anyone’s personal testimony or relationship with Christ. God alone is judge, and I do not covet that position. For those who have had their beliefs come under fire, “Blessed are ye, when men shall

revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”<sup>119</sup> As it was in the time of Celsus, so it is now, and so shall it be as long as Satan rages in the hearts of men.

## FURTHER READING

Brown, Robert L., *They Lie in Wait to Deceive: A Study of Anti-Mormon Deception*. Mesa, Arizona: Brownsworth Publishing, 1982.

Nibley, Hugh. *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass: The Art of Telling Tales about Joseph Smith and Brigham Young*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991.

Peterson, Daniel C. and Ricks, Stephen D. *Offenders for a Word*. Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998.

Robinson, Stephen E. *Are Mormons Christians?* Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991.

## NOTES

1. Ecclesiastes 1:9.

2. See for example Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks, *Offenders for a Word* (Provo, Utah: FARMS), 1998; Hugh Nibley, *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass: The Art of Telling Tales about Joseph Smith and Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book), 1991; Stephen E. Robinson, *Are Mormons Christians?* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft), 1991; Robert L. Brown, *They Lie in Wait to Deceive: A Study of Anti-Mormon Deception*, (Mesa, Arizona: Brownsworth Publishing), 1982.

3. The Foundation for Apologetic Information & Research, at [www.fairlds.org](http://www.fairlds.org). This site is run by Latter-day Saints.

4. Christian Apologetics Research Ministry, at [www.carm.org](http://www.carm.org). This site is run by Matt Slick, who is very hostile to LDS doctrines and beliefs.

5. Celsus, *On the True Doctrine*, translated by R. Joseph Hoffmann (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 106.

6. *Ibid.*, 54.

7. *Ibid.*, 58.

8. *Ibid.*, 120.

9. *Ibid.*, 53.

10. *Ibid.*, 69.

11. *Ibid.*, 58.

12. *Ibid.*, 70.

13. *Ibid.*, 105.

14. *Ibid.*, 98.

15. *Ibid.*, 57.

16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*, 72.

18. *Ibid.*, 73.

19. *Ibid.*, 98.

20. *Ibid.*, 98.

21. *Ibid.*, 58.

22. *Ibid.*, 59.

23. *Ibid.*, 60, 64, 66, 89, 99.

24. *Ibid.*, 61.

25. *Ibid.*, 61. See also pp. 57, 65, 90.

26. *Ibid.*, 99. See also pp. 57, 123.

27. *Ibid.*, 61.

28. *Ibid.*, 61, 64, 66.

29. *Ibid.*, 65. See also page 61.

30. *Ibid.*, 64.

31. *Ibid.*, 65.

32. *Ibid.*, 99.

33. *Ibid.*, 107.

34. *Ibid.*, 77.

35. *Ibid.*, 75.

36. *Ibid.*, 53.

37. *Ibid.*, 74.

38. *Ibid.*, 111.

39. *Ibid.*, 122.

40. *Ibid.*, 64.

41. Matthew 16:21.

42. A week before he was killed, the Prophet said, “I told Stephen Markham that if I and Hyrum were ever taken again we should be massacred, or I was not a prophet of God.” Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, edited by Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City; Deseret Book Company, 1976), 376-377.

43. Celsus, *On the True Doctrine*, 66.

44. *Ibid.*, 64.

45. *Ibid.*, 65.

46. *Ibid.*, 72.

47. *Ibid.*, 110.

48. *Ibid.*, 113.

49. *Ibid.*, 70.

50. *Ibid.*, 101.

51. Ibid.
52. Ibid., 94.
53. Ibid., 81.
54. Ibid., 64.
55. Ibid., 79.
56. Ibid., 80.
57. Ibid., 106.
58. Ibid., 119. One modern version of this notion concerns the building of a temple in Jackson County, Missouri. See D&C 84:4. The logic of the criticism essentially runs thus: "Because the prophecy has not yet been fulfilled, it can never be fulfilled."
59. Ibid., 108–109.
60. Ibid., 109.
61. Ibid., 61.
62. Ibid., 56.
63. Ibid., 94.
64. Ibid., 121.
65. Ibid., 95.
66. Ibid., 98.
67. Ibid., 71.
68. Ibid., 64.
69. Ibid., 70.
70. Ibid., 81.
71. Ibid., 95.
72. Ibid., 91.
73. Ibid., 70.
74. Ibid., 58.
75. Ibid., 67.
76. Ibid., 62.
77. Ibid., 62.
78. This is akin to condemning Christianity because modern Christian missionaries don't begin their preaching by going into lengthy discussions of the Inquisition, the Crusades, or the Catholic versus Protestant violence in Ireland. Although I have raised this comparison many times in conversations with non-LDS Christians, I have yet to read a satisfying response, and neither have I seen an end to the use of this particular critique against the Latter-day Saints.
79. Ibid., 64.
80. Ibid., 97.
81. Ibid., 106.
82. Ibid., 104.
83. Ibid., 58.
84. Ibid., 76.
85. Ibid., 57.
86. Ibid., 78.
87. Ibid., 77.
88. Ibid., 99, 101, 103.
89. Ibid., 78.
90. Ibid., 87.
91. Ibid., 58.
92. Ibid., 64. See also page 59.
93. Ibid., 65. This is a manifest contradiction of Celsus' claim that Christ should not even have been on the cross in the first place, if he were the Son of God. Note the pernicious insertion of the colorful words "greedily," despite the fact that according to scripture, Jesus originally denied relief until his work of atonement was complete (see Mark 15:23).
94. Ibid., 112.
95. Ibid., 115.
96. Ibid., 105, emphasis added.
97. Ibid., 56, 85.
98. Ibid., 116.
99. Ibid., 61.
100. Ibid., 103, 109.
101. Ibid., 60.
102. Ibid., 70.
103. Ibid., 60.
104. Ibid., 85.
105. Ibid., 53.
106. Ibid., 117.
107. Ibid., 61.
108. Ibid., 96.
109. Ibid., 77.
110. Ibid., 76, 116, 117.
111. Ibid., 90.
112. Ibid., 98.
113. Ibid., 81.
114. Ibid., p. 54.
115. Moroni 10:3–5.
116. Celsus, *On the True Doctrine*, 98.
117. Job 11:7.
118. Celsus, *On the True Doctrine*, 111.
119. Matthew 5:11–12.



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