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Are Mormon Chaplains Christian?

By Tal Davis

Recently the Pentagon faced a controversy when it decided to revise and simplify its classifications of military Chaplains. Everything was fine except that they decided to list the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints separately from the generic classification of "Christian." That Utah based church is historically known as the Mormons, though they prefer not to be called by that name anymore. When the new chaplaincy designations were released, an outcry of complaints came from the LDS church itself and from LDS members of Congress who felt it was discriminatory to separate the LDS from the other Christian denominations. They argued that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is in every way a Christian church and even pointed to the name of church itself. The church has a good argument. Other groups that are unorthodox in their theology were included as "Christian." The Jehovah's Witnesses, who I doubt even sponsor military chaplains, and the Christian Science Church were listed as Christian.

They now completely exclude a number minority faith groups including Atheists, Asatru, Deists, Druids, Eckankar, Heathens, Humanists, Magick, New Age churches, Pagan, Rosicrucianism, Shaman, Spiritualists, Troth, Unitarian Universalists and various Wiccans. We are glad to see those groups excluded. However, we are a little surprised to see Unitarian-Universalists among them, especially in light of some of those that are included (see below).

The full list of credited chaplains is as follows: Agnostic; Baha'i faith (BH); Buddhism (BU); Christian - Assemblies of God (AG); Christian - Baptist (BA); Christian - Brethren (BR); Christian - Catholic (CA); Christian - Church of Christ (CC); Christian - Church of God (CG); Christian - Church of the Nazarene (CN); Christian - Episcopal/Anglican (EA); Christian - Evangelical (EV); Christian - Jehovah's Witnesses (JW); Christian - Lutheran (LU); Christian - Methodist (ME); Christian - Non Denominational (ND); Christian - Orthodox (OX); Christian - Other (CO); Christian - Pentecostal (PE); Christian - Presbyterian (PR); Christian - Quaker (QU); Christian - Reformed (RE); Christian - Scientist (SC); Christian - Seventh Day Adventist (SA); Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (CJ);

Hindu (HI); Islam (Muslim) (IS); Judaism (Jewish) (JU); No Religion (NR); Other Religions (OR); Sikh (SI).

Frankly, we have to ask who made this list of religions. In many ways it makes no sense. Why do they include Agnostic chaplains or No Religion Chaplains, And why is Jehovah's Witnesses and Christian Scientist called Christian and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is not? In our view none of those are truly Christian. So, you might ask, what makes a church truly Christian? It boils down to several essential points, and if a group deviates on any key elements it cannot be regarded as an orthodox Christian faith group.

The first point is that there exists only One and Infinite and Eternal God who is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, immutable, etc. In the Old Testament He was Yahweh, the I AM. The New Testament and Historic Christianity absolutely affirm that fact. (Exodus 3:14; 6:2-3; 15:11ff.; 20:1ff.; Leviticus 22:2; Deuteronomy 6:4; 32:6; 1 Chronicles 29:10; Psalm 19:1-3; Isaiah 43:3, 15; 64:8; Jeremiah 10:10; 17:13; Matthew 6:9ff.; 7:11; 23:9; 28:19; Mark 1:9-11; John 4:24; 5:26; 14:6-13; 17:1-8; Acts 1:7; Romans 8:14-15; 1 Corinthians 8:6; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 4:6; Colossians 1:15; 1 Timothy 1:17; Hebrews 11:6; 12:9; 1 Peter 1:17; 1 John 5:7)

Any church or movement that denies or redefines this doctrine cannot be regarded as authentically Christian. For example, the Church of Jesus Christ of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches that the material universe is eternal and that God the Father is not. They say he was once man like us who became a god. He then made the earth from pre-existent matter. For them, God did not create the universe, the universe created God.

The second essential concept of true Christianity is that Jesus was the only Son of God. He is the Second Person of the Trinity. He existed with the Father and the Holy Spirit infinitely and eternally. (John 1:1-14; 5:17-18; 8:56-59; 10:30-33; Col. 1:15-20; 2:9)

All true Christians believe in the incarnation of God in Christ. This key doctrine distinguishes it from all other religions. God, the eternal Son Himself, the Second Person of

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the Trinity, left Heaven, was conceived by the Holy Spirit, took on human flesh, and was born on earth to the Virgin Mary. That is to say, Jesus' conception and birth were totally miraculous. (Matt. 1:18-25; Luke 2:1-20; John 1:1-18; 8:58; Col. 1:15-20; Phil. 2:6-11; Titus 2:13; Heb. 1:3; 13:8; Rev. 3:14)

This is perhaps the most blatant deviation we see among non-Christian religions and cults. For instance the Jehovah's Witnesses absolutely deny the full deity of Christ saying He was not eternally pre-existent in the past. He was only Jehovah God's first created being. The LDS teaches that Jesus was not conceived by the Holy Spirit. They say he was the first procreated spirit son of the heavenly Father and his "only begotten son in the flesh." That means he was literally the only physical offspring of God (an exalted man) and Mary.

The next essential doctrine is that Jesus lived a sinless life on earth and by His death on the cross He gave His life as a once and for all sacrifice for the sins of mankind. He provided salvation for all those who believe in Him. (Matt. 27-28; Mark 15-16; Luke 23-24; John 18-21; Rom. 3:25; 1 Cor. 1:17-24; 2:2; 15:3-4; 1 John 2:2; 4:10)

The next point is where history and faith converge. Genuine Christianity asserts that not only was Jesus crucified, but three days later He rose physically from the dead. This historical fact is the linchpin that establishes the veracity of who Jesus was and the truth claims of the church. Any person or movement that denies or redefines the physical resurrection of Christ cannot be regarded Christian in any way. (Luke 24:14-39; John 2:19-21; 20:26-29; 1 Cor. 15:1-8)

As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:13-14:13 *But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; 14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain.* (NASB)

Even most heretical cults affirm the resurrection in one sense or another. However, some deny it was a physical event. The Jehovah's Witnesses say His resurrection was only spiritual. Christian Science and other Mind Cults interpret the resurrection in totally metaphysical terms since matter does not exist anyway.

One other essential doctrine of the Christian faith that is often overlooked is the Ascension of Christ. Forty days after His resurrection and, after His many appearances, Jesus was physically taken up into Heaven. This event was witnessed by a large number of His disciples (Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9-11). The statement says He went up to Heaven where He now "is seated at the right hand of the Father."

Now we understand that the Pentagon does not have the same kind of theological standards that we do in categorizing their chaplains. We realize they are in a bit of a quandary assigning chaplains of different religious perspectives to minister to soldiers and sailors of such diverse faith backgrounds. It also limits the chaplains themselves as to what they can say or do while serving so as not to offend adherents of other religions.

It would be to the Pentagons advantage to have experts help them understand the differences in these faiths and what they actually believe. In any case, they should probably just remove the designation of "Christian" from all the denominational groups, since obviously they cannot discern the differences between what is or is not truly Christian.

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