

*The POULSEN /  
BRADLEE Letters*

**Victor M. Poulsen**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

A professional colleague of mine once observed, "There are two kinds of people in the world--those who are contemplative and those who are not." *The Poulsen/Bradlee Letters* are really the culmination of much pondering and introspection which inevitably occurs when an inquisitive Mormon finds himself in the midst of evangelical Christians in the Southern Bible Belt.

## **FORWARD**

My comments on Mormon theology and practice are my own and should not necessarily be considered as the official position of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Nor should this be considered an exhaustive treatise on any given subject, but merely some observations I have made concerning the topics in question. Comments concerning Christianity in general represent my understanding of a very diverse community of believers and should be understood in that context.

My thanks to those who contributed in any way to the content herein.

Victor Poulsen

## **The POULSEN / BRADLEE Letters**

### **PART 1** **A QUESTION OF THE TRINITY**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

My association with "Hans Bradlee" began in 1990 when our professions as Engineers brought us together on a project in the aerospace industry. After some brief discussions on the topic of religion, Hans presented me with a hand-written summary of his beliefs which I value and retain to this day. It would be difficult to calculate the effect this courageous gesture has had on my own missionary efforts. In any event, the only major point of disagreement was on the nature of God. "*A Question of the Trinity*" was my response--a document that I would revise eight years later.

There would be no such communication between us for a number of years hence.

#### **SOME TOPICS COVERED**

- Nature of Man
- Nature of God
- Relationship Between Man and God
- Definition of Godhead
- Deity of Jesus
- Grace and Works
- Christian Diversity

From: Poulsen, Victor M  
To: Bradlee, Hans C  
Sent: 1990 (originally) / 1998 (update)  
Subject: [The Trinity](#)

Hans,

For the sake of accuracy and completeness, "Trinity" is defined in The American Heritage Dictionary, "The union of the three divine figures, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, in one Godhead." Nothing is said nor implied here regarding a union of substance. This definition of "Trinity" is at least as suited to the L.D.S. (Latter-day Saint) concept of God as to that of the "orthodox" Christian. However, I recognize that usage of the word "Trinity" has evolved in the direction of "Orthodoxy's" consubstantial (one substance) Trinity and so, for the sake of brevity, I'll conform to trend.

In order to prove a consubstantial Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, you must establish,

El (Elohim) = Jehovah (YHWH)  
Jesus' Father = Jesus

Consider the two figures of speech, 1) "many are one" and 2) "one is many." In our context of defining the nature of God, these are more specifically expressed:

1. Three are one - (L.D.S. concept of Trinity)
2. One is three - (consubstantial Trinity)

Not only is the expression "many are one" a common Biblical literary device but it is well rooted in modern language as well. It is frequently used, for instance, in association with team or group efforts as an expression of unity and oneness. Consider the following Biblical examples:

**John 17:11**

*"Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are."*

**Ezekiel 37:19**

*"I will take the stick of Joseph..[and]..the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand."*

(Incidentally, this is a prophesy of the union of the Book of Mormon (Stick of Joseph) and Bible (Stick of Judah). See 1 Nephi 5:14)

**John 17:22**

*"And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one."*

**Acts 4:32**

*"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul."*

**Romans 12:5**

*"So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another."*

**Galatians 3:28**

*"...for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."*

There are others but I think I have made my point. "Many are one," then, is an expression of unity of purpose, not of substance. Why, then, should I be concerned or even surprised that the three individual members of the Godhead, each of which is appropriately called God, are together referred to as, "one God beside whom there is no other?"

On the other hand, I don't know what "one is many" means. Granted, my ignorance alone does not discredit use of this expression as a description of God, though if true, its use is apparently without precedence in scripture. From a purely logical and linguistic point-of-view, however, this cannot be considered the objective conclusion. In this regard, it is interesting to ask proponents of Trinitarianism the question I asked you.

"Suppose a number of intelligent people could be found who had no preconceived notions of Christianity or the Christian god. Instruct them to read the New Testament, from whence the consubstantial Trinity is derived. Upon their completion, ask them to recount their understanding of the nature of the Christian god. Whose concept of the Trinity will they describe?"

As an illustration, consider some of the statements such a person would read in the Bible concerning the nature of God and man's relationship to him. Add to the list as you will, I think the results will remain largely unchanged.

**LDS Trnty**

F	L	There is one God (Father and Son are one)
L	F	Jesus is the Son of God
L	F	We are all gods (Psalms 82:6, John 10:34)
L	F	We are the sons and daughters of God
L	F	Jesus is the only begotten Son of God
L	F	Man is created in the likeness and image of God

When combined, these Biblical statements can seemingly lead to some fallacious conclusions. So it is not surprising that some interpretation has occurred leading to multiple views of God.

1. There is one God. Jesus is the Son of God. Therefore, Jesus is not God.
2. We are children of God. Jesus is the only begotten Son of God. Therefore, we are Jesus.
3. There is one God. We are all gods. Therefore, collective humanity is God.

So how do the various views of God harmonize these seemingly inconsistent descriptions of Divinity? Trinitarianism reconciles Statement 1 by acknowledging that "Son of God" is a figurative (F) rather than a literal (L) relationship. Mormonism preserves the father/son relationship by teaching that they are both gods making the former part of the statement figurative. However, in the sense that we worship only one God (the Father) in the name of the

Son (Jesus), even "There is one god" can be understood literally. Incidentally, the few verses that explicitly state "there is one god" often refer, separately, to Jesus in the same verse (e.g. 1 Timothy 2:5).

Trinitarianism reconciles Statement 2 by acknowledging that we are the sons and daughters of God only in the sense that He is our creator rather than in a literal sense. Mormonism preserves the parent/child relationship by recognizing that our spirits (that part of us that lives on after the body dies) are literally the offspring of God. In a premortal realm of existence, we lived as a family with our Heavenly Father. Recognizing that "only begotten son" refers to "begotten in the flesh or in mortality," the statements are no longer contradictory and are, in fact, very much literal.

I'm not sure how Trinitarianism reconciles statement 3 except that, again, "we are all gods" must be understood figuratively. The importance of this statement is underscored by the fact that the Savior himself quoted it. Mormonism, again, preserves the literal nature of this statement by recognizing that we are literally offspring of, and thereby the same species, as God - created in his likeness and image. We are, in fact, gods in embryo.

As you can see by the tallied "F's" and "L's" following these Biblical statements, ours are the more literal interpretations.

Additionally, must you not conclude as a proponent of consubstantial Trinity, that during the early part of His life when Jesus did not fully understand who He was, God was not self-aware. Who, therefore, heard the prayers of human-kind and governed the universe while it's maker didn't understand who He was?

Furthermore, the contention that "spiritual matters can only be understood by the spirit" is a valid argument that can be, and is used, to support either point-of-view.

Following is my response to the scriptures you invoked in your effort to prove the consubstantial Trinity.

### **2 Peter 1:17**

Far from establishing the consubstantial trinity doctrine, this is one of innumerable Biblical verses which clearly testifies of the Father/Son relationship of a separate God the Father and Jesus Christ.

### **Revelation 1:8,17-18; 21:6; 22:7,12-16**

"Alpha and Omega" are used figuratively to teach the timelessness of our Lord's existence. It is a title borne by Christ. "Almighty" signifies possession of all power and unlimited might. Both the Father and the Son, being omnipotent Gods, are appropriately designated by the name-title "Almighty." (*McConkie - "Mormon Doctrine"*).

### **Isaiah 44:6**

The pre-mortal Jesus Christ (Jehovah) is declaring himself as the "First and Last." As noted previously, this is a title borne by Christ.

### **John 8:56,59; 10:32 / Exodus 3:14**

Jesus Christ is the great "I Am," meaning that he is the Eternal One. Jesus' declaration to the Jews that He is the "I Am" is simultaneously a declaration that He is Jehovah (Yahweh). On this point, we obviously agree. Your invocation of this declaration indicates that you proceed on the false assumption that Mormons believe Jesus Christ is the son of Jehovah. In fact, Mormons recognize that Jesus Christ IS Jehovah, son of Elohim.

**Colossians 2:9**

That Jesus Christ is deity and thereby endowed with the fullness of His Father, is a central and defining doctrine of Mormon theology. Note verse 10 which indicates that we too have been given a "fullness" (NIV) or "completeness" (KJV).

**Acts 5:3-5; 13:2-4**

As a member of the Godhead, the Holy Ghost (Spirit) is appropriately referred to as God. Jesus (the Word) is also referred to as God (see John 1:1).

**Deuteronomy 6:4 / Isaiah 44:6 / 1 Timothy 2:5**

As described previously, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost together constitute the Godhead. They are united into one God beside whom there is no other. Again, far from teaching the consubstantial Trinity, 1 Timothy 2:5 testifies of their separate nature.

*"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;"*

In fact, the notion of Christ's mediating function between man and God is made vacant and meaningless in the context of a consubstantial Father and Son. In my opinion, this point alone provides a powerful refutation of the consubstantial Trinity doctrine. The theological ramifications of weakening Jesus' role as an arbitrator and intercessor are profound and far reaching.

Your conclusion that "The three persons are the One God" is, at face value, a correct one. However, your intent was to establish these three persons as one substance - a conclusion that is not well drawn from the scriptures you have given. Neither is your conclusion supported by noting that "God is not 1+1+1, he is 1x1x1." This is a clever though unenlightening metaphor.

$$\begin{aligned} 1 \text{ person} + 1 \text{ person} + 1 \text{ person} &= 3 \text{ persons} \\ 1 \text{ person} \times 1 \text{ person} \times 1 \text{ person} &= 1 \text{ person(cubed)} \end{aligned}$$

The notion of three persons composing the Godhead is comprehensible - one person(cubed) is not. This metaphor fits well within the Trinitarian concept of God though it does nothing to make it more comprehensible as is apparently its intention.

Of comprehending God you state, "It is the nature of finitude not to be able to comprehend infinitude. How can we understand an infinite God?" Contrasting this statement is one by the Savior Himself in His great intercessory prayer, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent." John 17:3 (This scripture is itself a refutation of the consubstantial Trinity).

Certainly there is much of God that we cannot comprehend. However, concerning His nature, I must believe that to know Him is, to some degree, to comprehend Him.

The consubstantial Trinity is likely the Catholic church's legacy to the Christian world (see Athanasian creed). This doctrine probably appeared around the end of the 2nd century. In the great documents that come out of Qumran and Nag Hammadi, the nature and character of three gods are spelled out in detail. They re-establish these truths known by the first century Christians that Jesus Christ is the son of Elohim, known in the language of Adam as "Man of Holiness" or more simply "Man." AND SO, IN JESUS' FREQUENT REFERENCES TO HIMSELF AS "SON OF MAN," (Matthew 16:13) WE FIND THAT HE IS LITERALLY DECLARING HIMSELF TO BE THE SON OF GOD! Yet, due to the great apostasy following the death of the apostles, this knowledge was lost to the Christian world. But now, owing to the gospel restoration wrought through the prophet Joseph Smith, these truths have been known to the L.D.S. church for 150 years (see Moses 6:57).

PERHAPS THE REAL FOUNDATION OF TRINITARIANISM LIES NOT IN THE NOTION THAT GOD, AN INCOMPREHENSIBLE BEING, MADE MAN. BUT RATHER, MAN MADE GOD AN INCOMPREHENSIBLE BEING. PERHAPS MEN SIMPLY MUST BELIEVE SO. Nevertheless, ours is a concept of God that most apparently presents itself in the Bible. It is ironic that many Christian denominations teach this doctrine of a God that transcends all characteristics of man who was, in fact, created in the likeness and image of God. This incomprehensible consubstantial Trinity doctrine is not well established in scripture.

What is well established is that God is our father (our Heavenly Father) and we are His children (Romans 8:14-18; Acts 17:28-29). A child is born in the image of his parents. AND HE HAS WITHIN HIM THE CAPACITY OF GROWING AND MATURING INTO SOMETHING LIKE THEM. Earthly parents want no less than this for their children and our heavenly parents want no less than this for us. The earthly family is, after all, patterned after the heavenly family. Our homes should literally be a bit of heaven on earth. One who has seen a good home has already captured a glimpse of eternity.

Following are a few of the many Biblical verses which establish the Godhead as consisting of three separate and distinct individuals. These seem especially inharmonious with the consubstantial Trinity doctrine.

**Genesis 1:26;11:7**

*"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."*

The Son created the world under direction of the Father. Together they created man.

**Luke 3:21,22**

*"...it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased."*

All three members of the Godhead make separate, simultaneous appearances.

**Matthew 12:31-32**

*"And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the*

*world to come."*

One consequence for blaspheming Jesus, another for blaspheming the Holy Ghost.

**Matthew 26:39**

*"O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me! nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."*

Two separate wills are presented. Is Jesus praying to himself?

**Matthew 27:46**

*"And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying...My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"*

Who forsook Jesus and who is His God?

**John 8:42**

*"For I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but He sent me."*

Who sent Jesus?

**John 14:28**

*"...I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I."*

Is Jesus greater than himself?

**John 20:17**

*"Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God."*

Has Jesus not yet ascended to himself and who is His God?

**Acts 7:55,56**

*"And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God."*

Stephen sees BOTH the Father and the Son.

**Hebrews 1:1-3**

*"Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person..."*

Jesus is in the express image of his Father's person.

It seems that many Christians like to think and teach that Mormons don't really believe in the Bible. Yet apparently many of our differences with other Christians are due, in part, to our more literal understanding of the Bible. Our beliefs concerning the nature of God and man's relationship to Him, is one example of just what I mean.

I'll be happy to discuss any of these or other teachings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) in greater detail. You know where to find me.

Your favorite Mormon,  
Victor M. Poulsen

P.S. The rest of your beliefs you expressed are, in general, shared by the L.D.S. faith.

P.S. (1998) Just one more thought on the subject. I've found, in the intervening years since I wrote this, that **THERE ARE MANY PEOPLE FROM MAINSTREAM CHRISTIANITY WHO BELIEVE AS WE DO THAT THE FATHER AND SON ARE SEPARATE AND DISTINCT BEINGS!** Invariably I point out that their belief is inconsistent with the doctrines of their own church (Baptist, Methodist, Catholic, etc.) which seems to be of little concern to them--"Jesus is the SON of God. Right?" I found the same to be true among the Lutherans of Norway while serving a mission there. An objective survey would be very interesting. I think the results would astonish Christian clergy. In any event, I think this point of doctrine is a good illustration of the disparity between what Christians often hear over the pulpit and what they read in their Bibles. (Another example of this is righteousness. I think it's pretty obvious most Christians believe that some degree of goodness is necessary to go to heaven).

## **The POULSEN / BRADLEE Letters**

### **PART 2 JUST JUSTICE / NO JUSTICE-NO PEACE**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

During many religious discussions with associates in the years since my first encounter with Hans, the question of God's justice kept presenting itself to me. The whole Protestant Christian concept of "getting saved" seemed so exclusive and the punishment for ignorance so severe that I could not reconcile the whole idea with a just and merciful God. And so when Billy Graham alluded to the subject in his column, I simply had to write him. As almost an afterthought, I forwarded my letter to Hans. A considerable exchange of e-mail ensued that would continue for nearly a year. For me it was a most stimulating, almost electric time. In Hans, I had found a man who, like myself, was not a professional theologian yet was well read and conversant in Christian theology. But more important, he was a thinker. And, as an engineer, we seemed to think alike. I also believe our discussions benefited from a sense of friendship and mutual respect which exists between us still.

My letters to Hans were titled "*Just Justice*" because all I wanted to find, in Protestant theology, was the JUST God which had thus far eluded me. Hans, sure that I would never rest until I was satisfied, titled his letters to me, "*No Justice-No Peace.*"

#### **SOME TOPICS COVERED**

- Justice
- Christian Diversity
- Deity of Jesus
- Counterfeit Theology
- Original Sin
- Degrees of Sin
- Fall of Adam
- Fate of the Gospel Ignorant
- Nature of Man
- Nature of God
- Salvation
- Grace and Works
- Repentance and Baptism

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**LETTER 1**  
**JUST JUSTICE - 1**

From: Poulsen, Victor M  
To: Bradlee, Hans C  
Sent: Friday, October 3, 1997  
Subject: [Billy Graham's Column](#)

Hans,

I miss you over here. Billy Graham's column in the Oct. 2 paper caught my eye. It reminded me of an issue I have often contemplated - that of "justice and mercy." So I decided to ask him about it. I would also be interested in your thoughts on the subject. I've written a number of letters to other evangelists who have never responded. I have a lot of respect for Dr. Graham. I hope he does respond.

*Dear Dr. Graham: You told P.L that because of His perfection in justice, God will not allow sin to go unpunished. Many Christians believe that without accepting the Savior's offer to suffer in his stead, man must spend eternity in hell to pay the debt himself. Yet, in his short sojourn in mortality, is man capable of committing infinite sin that God judges him worthy of infinite punishment? Is this just?*

V.M.P.

**LETTER 2****No Justice-No Peace - 1**

From: Bradlee, Hans C  
 To: Poulsen, Victor M  
 Sent: Monday, October 6, 1997  
 Subject: [Billy Graham's Column](#)

I miss you too.

- I. Explanation of Dr. Graham's statement and your question, requires the laying of some ground work.
- II. My intention is not to be condescending, but to establish a vocabulary.
- III. I realize that the LDS do not agree with what I am going to say, but that's not pertinent to this discussion.

The Infinite God is by definition, a very complex being to finite man. The Bible teaches that God is one in essence, but three in personality, thus the theological designation of the Trinity. In other words, all three personalities of the Godhead possess exactly the same essence, and are in that sense one. They are all identically equal in their essence.

By essence I mean those essential attributes or characteristics that make God uniquely God. Obviously God is more than nine attributes I will soon list, but this is the best way I've found to describe, in a short time, the Infinite God.

Back to the Trinity. The three personalities of the Godhead, are the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. God is known by many names in the Bible -- Elohim (translated "gods" using the Hebrew plural "-im" form of god (el), Adonai (Lord), YAHWEH (I am, I am, the self-existent one), plus several combinations such as Adonai YAHWEH, El Elyon, Most High God, Lord of Hosts, the Almighty God, etc...

The second person (the Son, the Word, etc) appeared in the OT as the "Angel of the LORD", and came to earth as a man through the Virgin Birth at the First Advent. He is the revealed God. . . the one we can best understand, because we saw him as a human. Jesus is the Unique person of Space-Time History. He is completely man AND completely God (Doctrine of the Hypostatic Union). Jesus Christ is undiminished deity and true humanity combined in one person without confusion forever.

I could go on for some time, but let's get to his essence. As a preface, God is absolute in all his attributes.

**GOD IS (ABSOLUTELY):**

1. Sovereign -- Having absolute Authority; He answers to no one; He does what He wills, and is unchallenged in his Volition.
2. Righteous -- God is perfect and complete righteousness. He does not measure up to a moral standard. He IS the standard. Everything he does and thinks and is completely and absolutely for the right reason

3. Just -- God is Absolutely Fair. He judges evil absolutely because it is the right thing to do. He cannot tolerate evil
4. Love -- I think you know what love is -- I Corinthians 13 explains it well.
5. Eternal -- You know what this means. God has neither beginning or end. He has always existed, he exists, and he always will exist
6. Omniscient -- He has infinite consciousness of all things at all times. It's means more than knowing everything. He is eternally aware and understands everything at once.
7. Omnipotent -- He has all power. He is infinitely powerful.
8. Omnipresent -- God exists in all space at all time. He is eternally present in space and time. You cannot go to a place or time where he is not.
9. Immutable -- God does not change. His attributes have always been what they are, and they always will be.

Now contrast this with man:

1. Volition -- Man has some power to do some of the things he wants, but there are limits.
2. Relatively Righteous -- Man has relative righteousness. Sometimes some men do the right things for the right reasons, not always, and in fact, not usually. Of course, omniscience is required for absolute righteousness, because finite man cannot know what is right at all times, taking ALL circumstances (past, present and future) into account.
3. Relative Justice -- Man is relatively just sometimes. Of course, you have to be omniscient to be absolutely just.
4. Relative Love -- Even the best of men love only at certain times.
5. Temporal -- Man is finite and is limited by space and time.
6. Knowledge -- Man has knowledge, but not infinitely so.
7. Powerful -- Man has some power, but very little compared to all of it.
8. Present -- You can only be at one place at one time.
9. Corruptible -- Man is subject to change, mutation, perversion, etc.

## THE BARRIER

Because of the great chasm between the characters of God and Man, an immovable barrier separates man from God, and no man can do anything to remove the barrier. If a man wants to be with God (to have fellowship with Him) the barrier must be removed. That's what Christianity is all about. God in his grace (unmerited favor) has removed the barrier through Jesus the Christ.

The main problem is the incompatibility of the character of man with the character of God. God is Absolute Righteousness, man is not. God is Absolute Justice, man is a sinner:

*" . . . for ALL have sinned and fallen short of the Glory (Essence) of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus Christ." (Romans 3:23)*

God's character, particularly his Holiness (Righteousness + Justice) must be satisfied, for He cannot deny Himself. In order for man to even be in God's presence requires that man be Holy. Well, since the Fall of Man holiness is not a characteristic that man possesses, nor can any man ever attain it. Man has inherited from Adam, a fallen nature. Man is sinful and corruptible, "and his heart is deceitfully wicked above all things, (who can understand it?)"

Man was created immortal, but death came with the Fall of Man "in Adam all die. . . evenso in Christ shall all be made alive..." As such, man has temporal life, and temporal life cannot have fellowship with Eternal Life. Again a collision in the characters, or natures of man and God. The solution is in the New Birth. "You must be born again." (John 3)

## REMOVAL OF THE BARRIER

God's Righteousness is satisfied, because the Second Person of Trinity came to earth (Doctrine of the Incarnation) as a man (Jesus of Nazareth) and completely fulfilled all aspects of the Mosaic Law, which was given to Israel to show the impossibility of man's achievement of absolute righteousness by his own power. Absolute Righteousness is NOT POSSIBLE BY MAN.

God's Justice was satisfied by the death of Christ on the Cross. The Unique Person of the Universe is the only man qualified to pay the penalty of sin. (The Doctrine of Atonement) The innocent lamb without spot, . . . which takes away the sin of the world.

God's Righteousness and Justice was satisfied by Christ's sacrificial death in our place. (Doctrine of Propitiation)

If there were ANY OTHER WAY for God to provide eternal life for man, other than the way he did it which required the death of His Son, then God cannot be righteous. That's why Jesus said,

*"I am the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:6)*

So how does this work? Man's acceptance of this by faith in the character of God is the ONLY way. That's why it's called the Gospel, the Good News, because it IS GOOD NEWS: The barrier between man and God has been removed. It's not there. God took it away. All you and I have to do is accept it, and we have fellowship with God -- from now on.

Now, to answer your question. . .

"Many Christians believe that without accepting the Savior's offer to suffer in his stead, man must spend eternity in hell to pay the debt himself."

Based on what I've explained, I (as a Christian) do not believe that "man must spend eternity in hell to pay the debt himself ."

If some Christians believe this, then I believe that they do not understand the Gospel clearly.

Man is UNABLE to pay the debt. God requires is Absolute Righteousness. MAN AIN'T GOT IT. He has nothing with which to pay. The debt has been paid by Christ. Man has been purchased by Jesus' life (Righteousness) and death ( Justice).

All man CAN do is accept it.

"Yet, in his short sojourn in mortality, is man capable of committing infinite sin that God judges

him worthy of infinite punishment?"

Your assumption that infinite punishment is required for infinite sin is not Biblically correct.

Infinite sin is not a term used in the Bible. Your reasoning is man's reasoning. It sounds like one of your presuppositions is that man CAN pay for his own sin, and that a little sin can be atoned for with a little punishment, and that greater sin requires greater punishment. But this is not biblical.

Sin is not really the issue, anyway. The Doctrine of Unlimited Atonement says that Christ paid for the sins of the whole world, the just (Christ) for the unjust (man).

One proof of this is the fact that sin is not even mentioned in the Last Judgment. (Rev 20:11-15) The criterion for God's approval is whether or not a person's name is in the Book of Life. To be in the Book of Life at the time of your death requires that you have accepted God's Provision of Salvation. That's all there is to it. The other book opened is the Book of Works. Note that it is not the Book of Sins. Unsaved Man is judged according to his works which, as good as some may be, always can only add up to Relative Righteousness, by definition.

Again, allow me to reiterate, Sin is not the issue. The barrier, which is a combination of many things, including personal sin, is what separates man from God.

The issue is the Character of God and the character of man. Sin has been paid for, once and for all mankind. The barrier has been removed. Man must accept this, or remain separated from God. This is man's choice.

Without taking away man's volition, God has done all he can do to make sure that all members of the Human Race have the opportunity to spend eternity with Him.

"Is this just?"

God is Just, man is not. So it's somewhat of a moot point whether or not you or I think it is just. The Bible is God's Revealed, Inerrant Word, complete with an abundance of historical proof as to its veracity. There is no question about it. Some (many) will balk at that, but that's the way it is.

I'm not sure if I answered your question to your satisfaction. I'm not much of a philosopher, and as such I have given you my thoughts on your question.

If you desire clarification, or more input, I will be glad to accommodate. I'm quite sure Billy Graham would agree with 99% of what I have written.

Your bud, Hans

\*\*\*\*\*

From: Bradlee, Hans C  
To: Poulsen, Victor M  
Sent: Wednesday, October 08, 1997 1:04 PM  
Subject: Billy Graham's Column

how was my explanation?

\*\*\*\*\*

From: Poulsen, Victor M  
Sent: Wednesday, October 8, 1997  
To: Bradlee, Hans C  
Subject: Billy Graham's Column

It was a big pill to swallow. Standby while I get another drink.

\*\*\*\*\*

From: Bradlee, Hans C  
To: Poulsen, Victor M  
Sent: Wednesday, October 8, 1997  
Subject: Billy Graham's Column

take your time . . . standing by . . .

### **LETTER 3** **JUST JUSTICE - 2**

From: Poulsen, Victor M.  
Sent: Thursday, October 9, 1997  
To: Bradlee, Hans C  
Subject: [Just Justice](#)

That was quite the response you sent! But I appreciate your thoroughness. There is some good stuff in there that I need to study further before commenting on. But I think I need to provide you with a little context to my question. To that end, here is the complete article entitled, "What is God about, exactly?" as it appeared in the Star Telegram last week:

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*Dear Dr. Graham:*

*My friend and I are having an argument about God. I think God is like a judge, and is angry at the human race because of our misbehavior. But my friend says God is love, and would never do anything to harm people. Which one of us is right? P.L.*

*Dear P.L.:*

*In reality, you are each partly right - and partly wrong - in what you say. Let me explain. The Bible tells us that God is both just and loving. On one hand God is angry at the Human race because of our rebellion against him. The reason is because he is holy and absolutely pure, without any hint of injustice. Because he is holy and perfect, he is also perfect in his justice. In other words, sin does not go unpunished, because if it did, God would not be just. Sometimes we see God's punishment in this life; sometimes it must wait until eternity. You can be certain of this: "You may be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23) God also loves us - and that makes all the difference. Yes, we have sinned against him. But does that mean there is no way out for us? No - and the reason is because Christ came to take the punishment for our sins by his death on the cross. You and I deserve to die for our sins - but Christ (who was without sin) dies in our place, by God's design. I invite you to discover God's forgiveness and love for yourself. Open your heart to Christ and commit yourself to following him, for he alone is "... the way and the truth and the life ..." (John 14:6).*

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It is very difficult to make general statements about what Christians believe because of the diversity of beliefs that exist even among members of like denominations and because of a curious ignorance of that diversity. When making such statements I generally find that I must modify "Christian" with denomination identity or even philosophical labels such as "Fundamentalist" or "Moderate." In short, I try to be aware of my audience and what "Christian" means to him or her.

Your discussion concerning the nature of god is a very good illustration of this diversity. Probably as many as 50% or more of the individuals I have spoken to on the subject, in my twelve years here at the plant, believe the Father and the Son to be separate and distinct beings. These Christians represent a wide range of denominations and they are often unaware that such a belief is contrary to the professions of their own church. I found the same to be true in Norway among Lutherans. Other Christian tenets which engender diverse beliefs are (to name a few): 1)

the role of faith and works in salvation, 2) the nature of the soul after death, 3) so-called "once-saved, always-saved," 4) degrees and nature of sin, punishment, and reward, 5) age and origin of earth and man, and 6) inerrancy of the Bible.

In any event, my question was directed to Dr. Graham and so it has to be understood within the context of his beliefs (or at least my perception of them). You say that "sin is not the issue", yet Dr. Graham seems to see otherwise. He clearly states that justice requires punishment for sin and that such punishment may be seen in this life or in the life to come. He also teaches that Christ is the "way out for our sins" having taken the punishment upon himself. A declaration like "You and I deserve to die for our sins" certainly suggests that, without Christ, death is OUR punishment for sin - a philosophy you seemed to take issue with.

I conclude from your discussion that since sin is only a part of the "barrier" that separates man from god, even a hypothetical sinless man would remain unworthy of god's presence. I think many of your Christian peers would disagree. Let me suggest some implications of this. The balance of this "barrier" (e.g. temporal, present, relative) would, then, comprise man's created nature. Why would god's greatest creation - created in His own image - begin as an unworthy creature? If man was created unworthy, what was accomplished by the Fall? Was not the Redemption to counter the affects of the Fall? Does this mean the Redemption was inadequate? Yet, if the entire "barrier" came as a result of the Fall, does that mean man was created as a god? If so, how could he sin against god's law initiating the fall?

One of the greatest messages of Mormonism is that we are the "Children of God." (This is such a common Biblical expression that its numerous references need not be cited). I don't understand why Christians refuse to believe it - but would rather believe, that for some unfathomable reason, He created this unworthy, disgusting creature called man. But because He loved us, He saved us from our created state. Why didn't he create us already saved? It's a curious thing to me. No, there was no "barrier" between Adam and god. Adam walked and talked with god. The Fall brought sin into the world and it is sin that keeps us separated from god. Sin IS the problem.

In asking him my question, I think the only assumption I make that is not supported in Dr. Graham's article is that there are different degrees or levels of sin. However, this is not so much an assumption as it is a part of the question. I think you would allow it is not difficult to find practicing Christians who agree that, even in an eternal perspective, there is a huge difference between stealing a pencil and cold-blooded murder. The dilemma for nay-sayers then becomes - What is the meaning of "degrees of sin" without associated "degrees of punishment."

Of Course, you (and I emphasize "you") reject the basic premise of degrees of sin calling such a notion non-Biblical without further reference. On the contrary, I think the Bible provides significant support. The Law of Moses is rich with symbolism intended to prepare the Children of Israel for the coming of Christ. Everything associated with it foreshadowed the life and mission of a Savior that should come. They sacrificed their best because god would sacrifice His best. Paul said "the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ." (KJV Galatians 3:24) Jesus of Nazareth, then, "fulfilled" the prophesy that was the Mosaic Law. (Incidentally, your assertion that the intent of the Mosaic Law was to "show the impossibility of man's achievement of absolute righteousness by his own power" is curious to me. Can you support this conclusion? Does god ask us to do things which cannot be done? Is that just?). Each commandment in the Law of Moses had, associated with it, a different punishment. Some penalties were mild while

others were severe even requiring execution.

I recently asked a Methodist (formerly Baptist) friend what a "saved person" expected to gain by righteous living. (I know that sounds a bit cynical but none was intended. It's actually a fascinating question). He explained that even though there is only one heaven, we can expect different rewards there depending on our righteousness. Do you concur? (Again I struggle with the diversity problem). If so, is it reasonable to accept the notion of graded reward for righteousness while rejecting graded punishment for unrighteousness?

My question to Dr. Graham is really a question about justice. There are actually two aspects to secular justice: 1) transgression of law effects a consequence, and 2) the consequence is known and commensurate with the transgression. It is not just to let a man get away with burglary. Nor is it just to put him to death for it. When god tells me that he is "just" (and I'm reasoning as a man because that's the only way I can reason), I have to understand his declaration within that context. If, as a man, I cannot possibly comprehend what god means when he says he is just, or merciful, what is the point of the declaration? No, we cannot understand all the ways of god, but when he speaks to us, he does so in our language and according to our ability to comprehend. If his word becomes obfuscated, it is because of our inability to transmit it.

It is, in fact, this second aspect of justice that prompted my question.

I didn't address all the issues you raised (any one of which is a worthy discussion) but this is already too long. It's all very stimulating, don't you agree? (1 Peter 3:15,16).

RULDS2,

Victor

P.S. You say, "Infinite sin is not a term used in the Bible." I don't recall seeing these terms either: "Omniscient" (etc), "Doctrine of the Hypostatic Union", "Doctrine of the Incarnation", "Doctrine of Propitiation," and even "Trinity." (I'm sure you'll agree I could go on). We all have our own vocabularies to codify our particular interpretations of scripture. (KJV 2 Peter 1:20)

**LETTER 4**  
**NO JUSTICE-NO PEACE - 2**

From: Bradlee, Hans C  
 To: Poulsen, Victor M  
 Sent: Tuesday, October 14, 1997  
 Subject: [No Justice-No Peace](#)

I think the best way to answer your response is to do it embedded in the actual text. I also think that no matter what I say, and no matter what the Bible says, we are approaching this from diametrically opposing viewpoints. Many, if not most, of your presuppositions are completely different from mine. We must recognize that from the beginning. If I start at point A, and add 2 + 3 + 5 to it, we will arrive at a different location, even though we agree that 2+3+5 is 10. You will always arrive at B+10, and I, A+10. No matter what we discuss, we will always differ at least by A and B.

I assume you purposefully did not capitalize "God", which is helpful, because I don't think we are discussing the same God. I will endeavor to retain this convention for clarity.

By the way, I do not intend any insult or injury to you as a person, so please do not take anything I say in that manner.

(After all, your my bud.)

My remarks will be underlined and in red. . .\*

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\*Note: To facilitate plain text viewing, I have enclosed Hans's remarks in double brackets [[...]] - vmp

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From: Poulsen, Victor M  
 Sent: Thursday, October 9, 1997  
 To: Bradlee, Hans C  
 Subject: Just Justice

That was quite the response you sent! But I appreciate your thoroughness. There is some good stuff in there that I need to study further before commenting on. But I think I need to provide you with a little context to my question. To that end, here is the complete article entitled, "What is God about, exactly?" as it appeared in the Star Telegram last week:

\_\_\_\_\_

*Dear Dr. Graham:*

*My friend and I are having an argument about God. I think God is like a judge, and is angry at the human race because of our misbehavior. But my friend says God is love, and would never do anything to harm people. Which one of us is right? P.L.*

*Dear P.L.:*

*In reality, you are each partly right - and partly wrong - in what you say. Let me explain. The Bible tells us that God is both just and loving.*

[[Agree. God is Just, God is Love.]]

*On one hand God is angry at the Human race because of our rebellion against him. The reason is because he is holy and absolutely pure, without any hint of injustice. Because he is holy and perfect, he is also perfect in his justice. In other words, sin does not go unpunished, because if it did, God would not be just.*

[[Agree.]]

*Sometimes we see God's punishment in this life; sometimes it must wait until eternity. You can be certain of this: "You may be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23)*

[[Agree. You must realize that Dr. Graham is an Evangelist, and is interested PRIMARILY with the Salvation of the souls of men. I think he is greatly simplifying the issue for the sake of ease of communication -- P.L. is obviously not a theologian. If you want to discuss the issue in terms of First Cause, I agree that Sin, or Rebellion against God is the FIRST CAUSE of the unbeliever's residence in Hell for eternity, as well all the turmoil this world is in now. But as I said, technically, Christ paid for all of that, and technically it no longer remains the issue. The issue is what man does with God's Free Gift of Salvation in Christ. If he accepts it, then that's good for him. If he rejects it in this life, then he rejects it for all eternity. . ." for it is appointed for man once to die, and after that the judgment."]]

*God also loves us - and that makes all the difference. Yes, we have sinned against him. But does that mean there is no way out for us? No - and the reason is because Christ came to take the punishment for our sins by his death on the cross. You and I deserve to die for our sins - but Christ (who was without sin) dies in our place, by God's design*

[[I Agree.]]

*I invite you to discover God's forgiveness and love for yourself. Open your heart to Christ and commit yourself to following him, for he alone is "... the way and the truth and the life ..." (John 14:6).*

---

It is very difficult to make general statements about what Christians believe because of the diversity of beliefs that exist even among members of like denominations and because of a curious ignorance of that diversity.

[[I Agree, and I think the problem lies in the individual Christian's lack of understanding of Christian Doctrines, I'm sure you find varying degrees of comprehension and acceptance of Mormon Beliefs among Mormons. I know marginal Christians, and have met marginal Mormons. (By marginal I mean that their faith does not really influence their lives.)]]

When making such statements I generally find that I must modify "Christian" with denomination

identity or even philosophical labels such as "Fundamentalist" or "Moderate." In short, I try to be aware of my audience and what "Christian" means to him or her.

[[I am classified as a Bible-believing Christian. I have no denominational affiliation. You seem to be weaving a web. . .]]

Your discussion concerning the nature of god is a very good illustration of this diversity. Probably as many as 50% or more of the individuals I have spoken to on the subject, in my twelve years here at the plant, believe the Father and the Son to be separate and distinct beings. These Christians represent a wide range of denominations and they are often unaware that such a belief is contrary to the professions of their own church. I found the same to be true in Norway among Lutherans. Other Christian tenets which engender diverse beliefs are (to name a few):

- 1) the role of faith and works in salvation,
- 2) the nature of the soul after death,
- 3) so-called "once-saved, always-saved,"
- 4) degrees and nature of sin, punishment, and reward,
- 5) age and origin of earth and man, and
- 6) inerrancy of the Bible.

[[Agree. I believe the Bible is clear on these issues, but I realize that there are many opinions about these. I also do not think we mean the same when we say separate and distinct beings in our references to God (god). I still say that God is One, undivided and indivisible, yet Three in Personality.]]

In any event, my question was directed to Dr. Graham and so it has to be understood within the context of his beliefs (or at least my perception of them). You say that "sin is not the issue", yet Dr. Graham seems to see otherwise. He clearly states that justice requires punishment for sin and that such punishment may be seen in this life or in the life to come. He also teaches that Christ is the "way out for our sins" having taken the punishment upon himself. A declaration like "You and I deserve to die for our sins" certainly suggests that, without Christ, death is OUR punishment for sin - a philosophy you seemed to take issue with.

[[I Agree that God's Justice requires that sin be punished, but this is not the same as saying the sinner must be punished. "The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life." I also Agree that man **DESERVES DEATH** for his sin, but Christ bore our sins, when He hung on the tree. Remember that Dr. Graham is an Evangelist, and is interested **PRIMARILY** with the Salvation of the souls of men, and may be simplifying the issue for clarity.]]

I conclude from your discussion that since sin is only a part of the "barrier" that separates man from god, even a hypothetical sinless man would remain unworthy of god's presence.

[[If we must speak in hypotheticals, I agree, assuming that this man was born after the Fall. Aside from personal sin, which the hypothetical sinless man would lack, man still has the problems of Inherited Sin (Old Sin Nature, the Flesh), Imputed Sin ("In Adam all die, but in Christ shall all be made alive.", Temporal Life (God is Eternal), and Lack of Righteousness (God is Righteous, and "there are none righteous, NOT EVEN ONE."))]]

I think many of your Christian peers would disagree. Let me suggest some implications of this. The balance of this "barrier" (e.g. temporal, present, relative) would, then, comprise man's created nature.

[[I DISAGREE. Your presupposition is different than mine. Man was created once - the first man, Adam, was different than any other human. He was created perfect, and in the image of God. (I suspect your "image of god" means something different than my "image of God.") I believe it means primarily that man was given a Conscience, in contrast to the animals, which do not have Consciences.) When Adam was created, He was in a Sinless and Perfect state. He was potentially immortal, and was potentially righteous. He was NOT created righteous. Righteousness consists in doing something, and in the beginning, Adam had not done anything. This is illustrated by Adam's lack of clothing which is symbolic for righteousness throughout the Bible -- He and Eve were naked, and were not ashamed. Adam could have "theoretically" attained righteousness, which would have included complete obedience to God, but he disobeyed, and consequently, from that point on could only attain Relative Righteousness, at best. Remember that God is Absolutely Righteous, and even if Adam had never sinned after that, the best he could have done is relative righteousness. This is so, even without the consequences of the Fall, which I have not discussed.]]

[[Another point of interest, why did God make Adam and Eve clothes of skin after the Fall, and from where did He get the skins? I assert that they did not need the clothes before the Fall, because they were either covered by something else, or they did not need to be covered. But after the Fall, man required clothes (righteousness) because he had lost the possibility of attaining it. The clothes were provided by God by grace. Man didn't deserve it, man didn't work for it, man could not attain it, but God chose to provide it for him, free of charge. Actually someone paid for the clothes. The animal(s) that God killed to provide Adam and Eve their first suits paid the ultimate price. It's kind of like bacon and eggs. Eggs show interest, but bacon proves commitment.]]

[[The fig leaves didn't suffice because man provided them for himself, and because plants are not considered to be living in the Bible. A soul had to die - something that had blood and breath an animal in this case, but ultimately a man (The God-Man) "Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. . ." Salvation in Christ is the same. It's free for us, but Jesus paid the ultimate Price for it. "He gave His Life as a ransom for many."]]

Why would god's greatest creation - created in His own image - begin as an unworthy creature?

[[See discussion above. Man was not unworthy, he was created perfect and sinless, but not righteous.]]

If man was created unworthy, what was accomplished by the Fall? Was not the Redemption to counter the affects of the Fall?

[[The Redemption in Christ DOES counter the effects of the Fall. There are several issues here. The Fall caused all mankind to be brought into the world with fallen natures. As long as we live on this earth, we are going to be hindered and affected by it. We inherit Adam's Fallen Nature. As I said, Adam is unique to the human race. He was the only man created sinless, except of

course Christ, who is unique because He is God, in addition to man. The Creation is also affected by the Fall, and remains affected to this day. Engineers can have a special understanding of this. It's called Entropy -- The Second Law of Thermodynamics. (Romans 8) . The Redemption which Christ secured by dying on the Cross and rising again after three days, redeems both man and the Creation, but The Day of Redemption, when the creation and man will be transformed, has not yet come, it is yet future.]]

Does this mean the Redemption was inadequate? Yet, if the entire "barrier came as a result of the Fall, does that mean man was created as a god?

[[Man does not have to be a god to be approved by God.]]

If so, how could he sin against god's law initiating the fall?

[[I assert that your previous proposition is false, and therefore the point is meaningless.]]

One of the greatest messages of Mormonism is that we are the "Children of God." (This is such a common Biblical expression that its numerous references need not be cited). I don't understand why Christians refuse to believe it - but would rather believe, that for some unfathomable reason, He created this unworthy, disgusting creature called man.

[[If you actually believe that statement, and I assume you do, you really don't understand Christianity as well as you think you do. I believe with all my being that if you DID understand the message of Christ, you would be a Christian, because I sense that you are truly interested in the Truth, and what God has planned for you. . . . The Bible teaches that Believers are adopted into the Family of God (Romans 8), but I doubt that you and I agree on what that means. Mormonism has its own vocabulary, and so does Christianity, and they are vastly different. I DO NOT believe that the Bible teaches that man has ever been a god, nor is he a god, nor will he ever be a god. There is only one God, and He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I have already discussed the Fall and some of its ramifications. Man was not created, nor is he now an unworthy disgusting creature. He is a fallen being, and as such requires redemption, but he is still made in the image of God.]]

But because He loved us, He saved us from our created state.

[[Your starting from point B again; we did not need salvation from our created state.]]

Why didn't he create us already saved?

[[Still starting from point B.]]

It's a curious thing to me. No, there was no "barrier" between Adam and god.

[[There was no sin barrier in the sense that I described before. Absence of a barrier, however, does not imply equality or sameness. Illustration -- You are able to communicate and love and walk with your wife, but she is not a male human. She will always be a female human. Obviously this is not an exact analogy, but you should be able to see my point. Just because Adam was able to walk and talk with God, does not imply that Adam was a god. God and man

have some things in common, and this is by design, because man was created in the image of God. Language is one thing shared by man and God; conscience is another. There may be others.]]

Adam walked and talked with god. The Fall brought sin into the world and it is sin that keeps us separated from god. Sin IS the problem.

[[Back to the First Cause -- I agree, but I also disagree. The Problem of Sin has been removed, so far as the Barrier is concerned. We are still hindered by sin, and always will be, until the Resurrection, and God is still grieved by our sin. But sin is not what ultimately keeps us away from God. Our rejection of God's Salvation in Jesus Christ is what separates us from God in eternity. I'm trying to tell you it's already been taken care of ! There is only one sin that is not forgivable, The Unpardonable Sin = The Rejection of Christ as Savior, which blasphemes God the Holy Spirit because He is testifying to mankind that Salvation is by Faith in Jesus Christ alone, apart from any works of merit. "All our righteous acts are like filthy rags to God," according to Isaiah.) If you will look at Revelation 20, and read about the last Judgment, which is the Judgment of the Unbelievers - those who reject Christ as the ONLY means of Salvation, you will see that God does not mention anyone's sins. There are two kinds of books opened. The Book of Life, and the Book of Works, or the Book of Good Deeds. Originally all members of the human race were in the Book of Life, but if one dies without accepting God's Salvation in Christ, his/her name will be blotted out, and he/she will stand before God at this Judgment. He will add up all their good deeds, and they will add up to Relative Righteousness, and God requires Absolute Righteousness. The Book of Life will show that they refused God's gift of Righteousness, because their names will have been blotted out, and to the Lake of Fire they go.]]

In asking him my question, I think the only assumption I make that is not supported in Dr. Graham's article is that there are different degrees or levels of sin. However, this is not so much an assumption as it is a part of the question. I think you would allow it is not difficult to find practicing Christians who agree that, even in an eternal perspective, there is a huge difference between stealing a pencil and cold-blooded murder.

[[I will allow that.))]]

The dilemma for nay-sayers then becomes - What is the meaning of "degrees of sin" without associated "degrees of punishment."

[[I think most people would be surprised to see God's list of Terrible Sins. There are a couple of lists; one is in Proverbs 6. I agree that there are degrees of sin. In one sense, some sins are worse than others. But in another sense, (hypothetical of course, notwithstanding the issue of Inherited Sin) the smallest of sins wrecks man's Absolute Righteousness. Actually what I took issue with was your assumption based on the concept of Infinite Sin, which I still think has no meaning in the context of the Bible. It's not actually so much that it is not mentioned in the Bible, as it is that the concept is meaningless, when starting from point A. I'm sure it has meaning when starting at some other point, such as B or C, but definitely not A.]]

Of Course, you (and I emphasize "you") reject the basic premise of degrees of sin calling such a notion non-Biblical without further reference. On the contrary, I think the Bible provides significant support. The Law of Moses is rich with symbolism intended to prepare the Children

of Israel for the coming of Christ. Everything associated with it foreshadowed the life and mission of a Savior that should come. They sacrificed their best because God would sacrifice His best. Paul said "the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ." (KJV Galatians 3:24) Jesus of Nazareth, then, "fulfilled" the prophesy that was the Mosaic Law. (Incidentally, your assertion that the intent of the Mosaic Law was to "show the impossibility of man's achievement of absolute righteousness by his own power" is curious to me. Can you support this conclusion? Does God ask us to do things which cannot be done? Is that just?

[[GOD IS JUST. Regardless of whether you believe it or understand it. That is exactly what Paul is saying. No one has ever been able to keep the Mosaic Law, except Christ. It was not given so man would keep it, and thereby find favor in God's eyes, try as man might. It was given to drive man to the realization that he needed a Savior. If we are honest with ourselves, I think we all realize that it is impossible for any man to keep the Law. That was whole point of Christ saying that 'if you looked upon a woman to lust after her, that you had committed adultery in your heart.' It was to emphasize the impossibility of keeping the Law. That is the point of Romans 7.]]

Each commandment in the Law of Moses had, associated with it, a different punishment. Some penalties were mild while others were severe even requiring execution.

[[Fairly recent archeological evidence indicates that the Mosaic Law is structured precisely in the format of an ancient Near Eastern legal contract or treaty. (You may already know all this) The NIV Study Bible has some good notes on this subject (in Deuteronomy), There are also several books out about this. "The Treaty of the Great King" is an example. The point being that, in one sense, the laws contained in The Law, were the requirements God had for continual blessing on Israel. If they kept the commandments, they would prosper, if not they would not prosper. This went on until their rebellion became so great that they were ejected from the land. This is a fascinating topic, and reveals much about God and the way He works, but I'll not get into it.]]

I recently asked a Methodist (formerly Baptist) friend what a "saved person" expected to gain by righteous living. (I know that sounds a bit cynical but none was intended. It's actually a fascinating question). He explained that even though there is only one heaven, we can expect different rewards there depending on our righteousness. Do you concur? (Again I struggle with the diversity problem). If so, is it reasonable to accept the notion of graded reward for righteousness while rejecting graded punishment for unrighteousness?

[[Starting from point B, you still have the problem of Sin. If you were to start from Point A, it would disappear for you. I believe I have previously and repeatedly addressed this issue. The Bible teaches that there are Rewards in Heaven, although it does not elaborate much. I can't readily recall a passage that teaches one way or the other about degrees of punishment. I have spent a significant amount of time studying Europe, but have done little if any study about Bangkok. I enjoy visiting Europe, and plan to go back one day. I have no interest or desire to go to Bangkok. Hell is much the same for me. I am not going to live there, nor would I even want to visit. As far as I am concerned, Separation from my God is separation from my God, and Hell is Hell. It doesn't make any difference to me whether or not there are degrees of punishment or not, and from my perspective, it really shouldn't matter to you. Maybe there are and maybe there are not, but what difference does it make? GOD IS JUST.]]

My question to Dr. Graham is really a question about justice. There are actually two aspects to secular justice: 1) transgression of law affects a consequence, and 2) the consequence is known and commensurate with the transgression. It is not just to let a man get away with burglary. Nor is it just to put him to death for it. When god tells me that he is "just" (and I'm reasoning as a man because that's the only way I can reason), I have to understand his declaration within that context. If, as a man, I cannot possibly comprehend what god means when he says he is just, or merciful, what is the point of the declaration?

[[I really don't understand your issue with God's Justice. Are you worried about my God's justice, or your god's justice?. I believe we can know a great deal about God. He has told us much about Himself in the Bible. The point of this revelation is for us to know Him, believe Him, and Love Him. He desires a relationship with us, but not on just any terms. His Righteousness and Justice will not allow Him to wink at our condition.]]

No, we cannot understand all the ways of god, but when he speaks to us, he does so in our language and according to our ability to comprehend. If his word becomes obfuscated, it is because of our inability to transmit it.

It is, in fact, this second aspect of justice that prompted my question. I didn't address all the issues you raised (any one of which is a worthy discussion) but this is already too long. It's all very stimulating, don't you agree? (1 Peter 3:15,16).

RULDS2, [[NO.]]

Victor

P.S. You say "Infinite sin is not a term used in the Bible." I don't recall seeing these terms either: "Omniscient" (etc), "Doctrine of the Hypostatic Union", "Doctrine of the Incarnation", "Doctrine of Propitiation," and even "Trinity." (I'm sure you'll agree I could go on). We all have our own vocabularies to codify our particular interpretations of scripture. (KJV 2 Peter 1:20)

[[I concede that these words are not in the Bible, but they are biblical concepts. These are terms that Christians use to explain Biblical Concepts. My point was that Infinite Sin is not a biblical concept. The Bible does not require the philosophical concept of Infinite Sin, because after the first sin, the whole issue is moot. All hypothetical sinless men aside, Adam's sin is all that is required to erect a barrier between God and man. We've discussed the Trinity before, and I am well aware that A and B would collide on this point. Suffice it to say : "He that hath the Son, hath life, and he that hath not the Son hath not life." (Is that John or 1 John?)]]

[[Food for Thought. . .If God is Eternal, then God pre-existed the Creation, And if God is Love, and we assert that love requires an object, then whom did God love before the Creation?]]

## **LETTER 5**

### **JUST JUSTICE - 3**

From: Poulsen, Victor M  
To: Bradlee, Hans C  
Sent: Tuesday, October 21, 1997  
Subject: [Just Justice](#)

I wouldn't be too worried about offending me Hans. No one, who is secure in his beliefs, should be afraid to engage in thoughtful and educated argument in support of his position. I have become convinced that the most effective learning comes when ones most basic assumptions are challenged in reasoned debate.

We, as Mormons, are so often bombarded with mindless, superficial propaganda from our detractors, that it is actually refreshing to encounter a contemplative challenge. I'm sure, as a Christian, you have similar experiences. It is ignorance and closed-mindedness that offend me. And I don't perceive that you are in possession of either.

My reason for not capitalizing "god" is probably less complicated than you presume. If I use the word in a generic sense, I tend not to capitalize it. I mean nothing else by it. Actually, the charge that we worship, a "different Jesus" (or, in your words, "a different god") has always puzzled me. There is only one Jesus - Jesus of Nazareth born in Bethlehem 2000 years ago. If we disagree about who He was and what He taught, then let that be the basis of our debate. There is no "other Jesus."

I really have no idea what you meant when you suggested that I was "weaving a web." The difficulty of referring to diverse Christian philosophies is very real and something I constantly struggle with in discussing religion with anyone. You classify yourself as a "Bible-believing Christian," and so you should. But what Christian on the face of the earth would not - or should not? In fact, you embrace a theology which, in many respects, is peculiar in Christendom. (I mean no criticism here as God's people have always been peculiar). Remember that the largest Protestant denominations are measured in the low tens of millions while Catholicism is measured in the hundreds of millions. Like Catholicism, Mormon theology is very well defined and documented and readily available to anyone.

You are correct in noting that we have fundamental differences. But there is also much in common. For our differences, we must often agree to disagree. The nature of god certainly falls into this category. Another of these, more pertinent to my original question to Dr. Graham, is so-called "original sin." This doctrine represents to me, the very antithesis of justice. Mormon Theology teaches that, although he lives with the effects of Adam's transgression, man bears no responsibility for it. We do not believe that Adam's actions will determine man's place in the eternities. This doctrine has led to the erroneous practice of infant baptism which was intended to save children who would otherwise be damned in early death because of Adam's "original sin." It also gave rise to the persistent belief, that those who die in ignorance of the gospel suffer a similar fate. It is no exaggeration to suggest that billions of such souls live or have lived. (I have no reason to believe that you accept either of these doctrines).

In support of "original sin," you have twice quoted 1 Cor. 15:22. Let me suggest a different

meaning - but first the scripture (KJV).

*21 For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead.*

*22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.*

*23 But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christs at his coming.*

I think we agree that the Fall of Adam affected his posterity both physically and spiritually. Spiritually, man became subject to sin and thus unworthy of God's presence. (Adam was cast out of the Garden of Eden). Physically, man became mortal. (We will die). The Savior's atonement countered both of these effects. First, He paid the price for our sins providing us with the opportunity to return to God's presence. (How we take advantage of that opportunity remains in dispute but is here, beside the point). Second, he rose from the dead providing us with the gift of resurrection. Don't you agree that Paul is discussing physical death rather than spiritual separation. ALL men, good and evil, will rise from the grave to be judged of God (Acts 24:15). Your interpretation requires that Paul's twice use of the word "all" in verse 22 has two different meanings confusing the structure and poetry of his statement. I.e., "For as in Adam all (inclusive) die, even so in Christ shall all (exclusive) be made alive.

I think I just discovered something significant that may help explain our differences on this issue. You say, "MAN WAS CREATED ONCE - the first man, Adam, was different than any other human." And later add, "Adam is unique to the human race. HE WAS THE ONLY MAN CREATED SINLESS, except of course Christ, who is unique because He is God, in addition to man." At the risk of yanking these statements out of context and over-analyzing them, may I deduce the following?

Actually, I'm having a little difficulty reconciling these two quotes. On the one hand, the first statement seems to suggest that Adam's posterity is not directly a creation of God but rather a product of His "once" created man - Adam. This allows one to conclude that God didn't really create sinful beings (an uncomfortable position I perceive) because, in fact, He didn't really create us. On the other hand, your second statement implies that, although Adam was created sinless, his posterity was created sinful (because of original sin). So which is right? Did God create us sinful or did He not create us at all? I suspect that the latter is correct but I'll try to cover both bases.

#### 1. God Created Us Sinful

I think the ramifications here for justice are obvious. I realize that your definition of justice is something like, "whatever God says it is." Yet I think that Christians, in general, would be very leery of such a conclusion. It suggests a sort of pre-destination to hell.

#### 2. God Did Not Create Us

I suspect that this is the more correct conclusion albeit worded in a manner you might consider misleading. In short, God created Adam sinless. Adam fell and then sinful man resulted not (directly) as a creation of God but rather through the normal biological process of reproduction.

I think the Christian world (excluding Jehovah's Witnesses) generally agree that the soul of man consists of both physical and spiritual elements (Job 32:8, Eccles. 12:7, Acts 7:59). The spiritual element, often called "man's spirit" is that which animates the physical body and lives on after

death. Certainly, I can agree that the physical body is the result of biological reproduction and, in that sense, not a direct creation of God. But what of the spirit? Can we bypass God here? (Heb. 12:9) Is it not the spirit that really makes us who we are? But if God created our "spirits," then the original question remains - did He create us sinful? Or does the "fallen" mass of organic compounds that is our physical body make us unworthy of God's presence. If so, then we should be better-off without it.

By the way, was Mary created sinless? In other words, do you accept the doctrine of the "immaculate conception?"

Don't get too hung up on my use of the phrase "infinite sin." It's really my own terminology. You have to understand that when one rejects the notion of "original sin" in favor of personal responsibility, it becomes very difficult to comprehend a just and loving god who would eternally punish man for anything he could possibly do in this blink of time we call mortality. And, in fact, "original sin" makes Him seem even less so. Nevertheless, I think you can see why his "oversimplification" lead me to ask Dr. Graham my question.

A few closing notes:

1. I have also been told, by others of your religious persuasion, that I'm not a Christian. It's all rather silly to me so I don't tend to make an issue of it. I know who my Savior is.
2. Do you really feel comfortable concluding that "in our image, and after our likeness" (KJV Gen 1:26 compare 5:3) means little more than that God gave us a conscience?
3. You agreed that there are "degrees of sin" and then you proceed to say that the "concept is meaningless." I guess I don't get it.
4. You don't believe the Bible teaches that man is, has been, or ever will be a god. "I have said, Ye are gods;" the Old Testament Psalmist declares. And why are we gods? - he gives a simple and beautiful answer - because we are the children of a god. (KJV Psalms 82:6, John 10:34, Heb. 12:9)
5. Your ideas about Adam's clothing of righteousness was interesting. I guess I thought of Adam's lack of clothing as a sign of his innocence.

I enjoyed your "Food for Thought." It's an intriguing question. At the risk of answering a rhetorical question, let me offer this: Jer. 1:4,5; Eph. 1:4,5.

**LETTER 6**  
**NO JUSTICE-NO PEACE - 3**

From: Bradlee, Hans C  
 To: Poulsen, Victor M  
 Sent: Thursday, November 6, 1997  
 Subject: [No Justice-No Peace](#)

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 Note: To facilitate plain text viewing, I have enclosed my remarks (quoted by Hans) in double braces {{...}} - vmp  
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Sorry it's taken so long to get back to you. I've been a little busy and ill. Perhaps I should not have referred to this response as a "thesis," for I fear you may now be disappointed. . .

I'm glad you do not perceive me to be closed-minded or ignorant. I'm probably more closed-minded about some things than you think.

I agree that there is only one Jesus, son of Mary. As the unique person of space-time history, the perception of the person of Christ must be central to our faiths. The way in which a person sees Christ has eternal ramifications. I believe (as you must know) the Bible teaches that one must believe and personally accept that he is Almighty God incarnate, who came into the world to reconcile homo sapiens to himself. One can also deny his claims of such deity, and reject his offer of salvation. (Psalm 24:7-10) As I perceive it, you disagree with his claims, or perhaps more accurately, you disagree that this is his claim. It is at this point that we diverge theologically. As this is THE central issue, and the foundation of biblical theology, all the rest is based on this, and as such, no matter how close your views and mine may appear to be, they are a universe apart. I wish there was something I could say to cause you to come to a realization of this truth, but I know that it is not my place nor my responsibility to do so. I can only bear witness to the truth of God's Word, and encourage you to seek the truth for yourself. (John 7:17; Hebrews 4:12)

Are you suggesting that my views of Christianity are peculiar relative to most other Christian viewpoints, or just peculiar in general? I would tend to agree that they are peculiar relative to the viewpoints of many. On the other hand, my viewpoints are not unusual. There are many who hold to very, very similar ideas, although you may not have come across them before. Having grown up Baptist, I once held to a significantly different theology, which was probably more along the lines to what you are accustomed. Although I still embrace most (95%) of their beliefs (according to their Statement of Faith in "The Baptist Faith and Message") my understanding of Christianity relative to theirs varies in some areas. Even so, most Baptists don't know where their Statement of Faith can be found, much less tell you what it is. I suspect it's much the same with many Mormons, JW's, Catholics, Methodists, Islamics, etc. Here are two examples of others who believe the way I do:

<http://www.bearcreekbiblechurch.org/bylaws.htm>

<http://www.dts.edu/dts/catalog/general/doctrinal/doctr-st.htm>

Even though you say our Faiths have much in common, as you can tell, I completely disagree. Rather than a benefit, I see this as a hindrance, because it tends to confuse the issue, and cause many to think that they are closer to the truth than they really are. The most effective counterfeit is that which best mimics the genuine.

How's that for open-mindedness . . . on to your questions.

I really don't understand how you conclude that Adam's sin has no repercussions for the human race. I believe the Bible clearly teaches that as humans, we suffer as a result of Adam's Transgression. I believe there are at least three aspects to sin that cause problems for us. For lack of a Biblical synoptic term, Orthodox Christendom refers to them as Inherited Sin, Imputed Sin, and Personal Sin. Explanation:

**INHERITED SIN** is that aspect of sin that we physically inherit from our parents (specifically our biological fathers) (Romans 5:12). This is what Paul repeatedly refers to in Romans as "the old man" and "the flesh." I believe that it is an actual physical problem in our genes. We can't help ourselves. Regardless of our best efforts, we are unable to live a life free of personal sin. At this point in my understanding, I think this is what causes our spirits to die at physical birth, and this is why Jesus said in John 3 to Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again." We must be reborn spiritually, and that is nothing that we can do for ourselves. We must rely on God for this.

**IMPUTED SIN** is that aspect of sin whereby we are co-guilty with Adam. I see it as "guilty by association." If a motorist is stopped by the police, and the passengers are not wearing their seat belts, the passenger and the driver can both be cited for the offense. Even though the driver was wearing his seat belt, his passenger was not, and he is responsible. This is not a perfect illustration, but perhaps you see the point. I'm sure this aspect of sin gives you the greatest deal of trouble with your "is this just" question. Nevertheless, we are guilty, and atonement must be accomplished for this. For whatever reason, and however the mechanics operate, Adam's sin is imputed to us, and we are incapable of making atonement. Christ is our sacrifice of Atonement that removes our guilt, and we are imputed (credited) with His Righteousness by faith in his work on the Cross.

**PERSONAL SIN** are the sins we commit because we are a fallen race, and because of our inherited sin nature. We sin because we are sinners, by birth. We are not sinners because we sin.

Considering these three aspects, I think I can clarify the distinction between Adam and the humanity of Christ, with which you say you have difficulty. Adam was created (formed, or whatever you want to call it) in a sinless state. He was also created mortal, i.e. he was capable of dying. If he were immortal, he would not have been able to die. He was not created righteous, rather he was given a clean slate, upon which he was given a free will to write. He theoretically could have chosen obedience, and attained righteousness, but he freely, willingly and knowingly chose disobedience, which resulted in the consequences God had explained to him beforehand, specifically death, and generally the curse occasioned by the Fall. Other effects notwithstanding, I believe that a physiological change took place, and this change he (not Eve) passed on to his children. (Romans 5:12) Adam is a unique case in human history. Eve is also unique, but for a different reason.

At the Incarnation, the Second Person of the Godhead, the Lord Jesus Christ, came to earth as a man. He was also unique, but also for a different reason. (I maintain the convention that the number of entities which can possess uniqueness in a particular area is one (1).) Jesus Christ had no human father, and therefore did not inherit the damaged genes passed on by human fathers, like all other post-Adam-and-Eve humans. For this reason he was not credited with Adam's sin, nor did he have a sin nature. Without this physical relationship to mankind, he was not born a sinner (like we are) and since he never committed personal sin, he never became a sinner, like Adam did. Mary on the other hand, was a sinner, and she was born with a sin nature passed on to her from her daddy. Mary needed redemption just like any other normal person, and therefore Negative on the Immaculate Conception. I think this incorrect teaching comes from a realization that Jesus could not be born with a sin nature, and the failure to recognize that the effects of sin are passed on by the biological father. This is the whole point of the Virgin Birth. As far as I can reason, I don't see how it could have happened any other way. There is also an interesting legal aspect to the Virgin Birth, pertaining to who could and who could not sit on the Davidic Throne. If I recall correctly, Messiah had to be physically related to David, but not through Solomon, yet he had to be legally related to David through Solomon. You probably know to what I am referring, but if not and you are interested, I can find the details. It has to do with one of the Kings of Judah (Josiah?) whose children were eternally excluded from sitting on the Throne of David.

As far as the heathen are concerned, I believe the Bible teaches that those who die in ignorance of the Good News of Christ, indeed are damned. (Romans 1) That's the reason for Christ gave the Great Commission - "Go ye therefore unto all the world, and preach the Gospel . . ." The Bible teaches that Christ died for the sins of the world, and that any who will receive him will not be condemned, but that those who reject him, stand condemned already. (John 3:14-18)

Relative to God's justice, I see it as a travesty of justice that God would send his son to die in our stead, were there any other possible way of salvation. This would not seem to be just to me. But, there apparently was no other way in which God could reconcile us to Himself, so he came into the world to accomplish redemption himself.

I think you are confused with my use of "created", and I think it's merely a hang-up with semantics. Genesis CLEARLY says that "God created man in his own image." It also says that God formed man out of the dust of the earth. I don't know what words are used in the original language (which by the way I believe the Bible is inerrant only in the original languages), but I don't have a semantic or philosophical problem with "made" or "created" or "formed." I believe the creation of man is different than the creation of the heavens and the earth. God created the latter out of nothing (ex nihilo), while He created (formed) man out of something he had already created. I don't see a problem with this. As far as our human spirits go, of course, God created, made, caused to exist, or whatever, them as well.

You seem to be suggesting that the material part of man (the body) is inherently evil, while his immaterial (the spirit) is good. This is reminiscent of Platonic Dualism, and I reject it. Man was given a physical body for a reason. To have dominion, to subdue the earth, and to be fruitful and multiply, are some of the more obvious reasons. I believe every aspect of man is affected by the Fall (the Doctrine of Total Depravity). Not meaning that man is as bad as he can be, but that the effects of the fall permeate his entire being - body and spirit. I don't have a problem with my viewpoint, but apparently you think I should.

I don't see the problem with my use of 1 Corinthians 15:22; it makes perfect sense. I agree that in Acts 24:15 Paul is speaking of physical death. I also believe, as Paul does, that all men will be resurrected and given immortal bodies - bodies that cannot die. But I also believe that there will be two different resurrections -- the First Resurrection, and the Second Resurrection. The first is the resurrection of those who accepted God's free gift of salvation in Christ (OT and NT believers), while the second is the resurrection of those who rejected that same salvation. The first resurrection is a resurrection to eternal life, and where we all will want to be. We don't want any part of the Second Resurrection, which is a resurrection to eternal damnation and separation from God. (Revelation 20).

In Adam, ALL die, but for all who are in Christ, they shall all be made alive. We are all "in Adam" by virtue of our physical birth, but only those who have been reborn spiritually are "in Christ." Consequently, those who are in Christ, and them alone, shall be made alive. This can be the only interpretation. It cannot mean that all homo sapiens will be saved, otherwise, all the other passages that talk about some being saved and some rejecting that salvation are meaningless. You don't have enough "inclusives" in verse 22, and you put your "(exclusive)" in the wrong place -- it should be placed after "in Christ." The second "all" is a subset of those who are "in Christ." I.e., "For as in Adam all (inclusive) die, even so in Christ (exclusive) shall all (inclusive) be made alive.

[You have to understand that when one rejects the notion of "original sin" in favor of personal responsibility, it becomes very difficult to comprehend a just and loving god who would eternally punish man for anything he could possibly do in this blink of time we call mortality. And, in fact, "original sin" makes Him seem even less so. Nevertheless, I think you can see why his "oversimplification" lead me to ask Dr. Graham my question.}}

I don't even know what you are trying to say here. Perhaps I don't know how you are defining "original sin." The way I understand "original sin" and "personal responsibility" they are completely compatible. If you have a problem comprehending the just and loving God, it's probably because you are an unjust and unloving man, just like me. ("There is not a just man upon the earth that doeth good and sinneth not.") I recommend not rejecting the notion of "original sin", and continuing to be in favor of "personal responsibility." If your notions of these are incompatible, I suggest you modify one or both to make them compatible.

{{1. I have also been told, by others of your religious persuasion, that I'm not a Christian. It's all rather silly to me so I don't tend to make an issue of it. I know who my Savior is.}}

I'm sure this is because I don't know Mormon Dogma, but it doesn't sound to me like you think you need a Savior. What is it that you think you need to be saved from?

{{2. Do you really feel comfortable concluding that "in our image, and after our likeness" (KJV Gen 1:26 compare 5:3) means little more than that God gave us a conscience?}}

I'm sure there is much more to it than that. I can't say that I know the totality of what it means. I guess I'm guilty of oversimplification. Oh well, I'm in good company. God and man also share mentality, emotions, language and the possession of spirits (God is spirit, and unregenerate man has a dead one.)

{{3. You agreed that there are "degrees of sin" and then you proceed to say that the "concept is meaningless." I guess I don't get it.}}

I still maintain this view. In the final analysis, what difference does it make? Christ paid for the sins of the world. No one will be judged for their sin in eternity, so it's meaningless to discuss degrees of sin. Murder is worse than stealing a pencil, black lies are worse than white lies, dark gray sins are worse than light gray sins, and so on. It all leads to a human discussion of relative righteousness, and is ultimately meaningless, and therefore not profitable. If we are not judged for our sins in eternity, what's the point of discussing judgment on sin at all? I don't think I can express it much more plainly. Perhaps what you mean is that you don't agree? What difference should it make to me that there are degrees of sin?

{{4. You don't believe the Bible teaches that man is, has been, or ever will be a god. "I have said, Ye are gods;" the Old Testament Psalmist declares. And why are we gods? - he gives a simple and beautiful answer - because we are the children of a god. (KJV Psalms 82:6, John 10:34, Heb. 12:9)}}

I knew you'd eventually get around to that. This is not an overly difficult passage, except when trying to defend it before a LDS or a JW.

I'll tell you what I think it means. In Psalm 82, the people referred to as gods were vehicles of the Word of God - those who were given authority by God to study his Word, and sit in judgment over the people, in light of their understanding of that Word. I believe Jesus was arguing from the lesser to the greater. In other words, he was saying to the Pharisees, that if Psalm 82 referred to men as gods, (and the scripture can't be broken) then they should not get all bent out of shape if he claims to be a god in that sense, because he was not only a vehicle of God's Word, but he was God's Word Incarnate. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him nothing was made that has been made." (John 1:1-3). (Cf. Colossians 1:15-20 & Genesis 1:1) I think the Pharisees understood the claims of Christ, they simply refused to put their faith in him. So, if it is permissible to refer to vehicles of God's Word as gods, then how much more is it apt to refer to the Incarnate Word of God as God?

Anyone who does not understand that Jesus claimed Deity to the extent of equality with his Father, does not understand the message and ministry of Christ. The Pharisee understood it completely, which is one reason they sought to stone him, because he, being a mere man, claims to be God, which is either blasphemy, or it is the truth. (I maintain the latter.) Actually the Pharisees had it completely backwards. Jesus, being merely God Almighty, made himself a man.

I think you understand where I am coming from. I challenge you to try to read the scriptures from this viewpoint, and see if it makes sense. I dare you. I double dog dare you. There it is the dreaded "double dog dare!" As the saying goes, "Try it you'll like it."

Many theologies have been erected by yanking passages out of context, and not purifying them using the whole counsel of God (the Bible). The Churches of Christ are a neutral example. Historically, they are an offshoot of the Baptist church, who broke off because of their wrong belief that Water Baptism is essential for salvation. They get this from Acts 2:38, where Peter

said, 'Repent and be baptized . . . for ("for" should be translated "because of") the remission of sins. . . '. This is contrary to the ENTIRE Bible. The Bible teaches that salvation is by grace through faith, from Genesis to Revelation. "Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. . . " Salvation is through Jesus Christ PLUS NOTHING ELSE . . . (JESUS + 0). Baptism cannot be required for salvation, because it is something WE do. All we are permitted to do is believe. The only part we play in our justification is our acceptance of it.

{{5. Your ideas about Adam's clothing of righteousness were interesting. I guess I thought of Adam's lack of clothing as a sign of his innocence.}}

Not my own of course. I'm not smart enough to come up with that on my own, although it makes sense to me. I suppose innocence also plays a part in his clothing. Up to the point of his transgression, he had done nothing unrighteous, and could be said to be innocent.

In closing,

Seek the truth while it may be sought. Don't be afraid to question the very foundations of your being, just because you might find that you are mistaken about something very important.

Your bud,  
Hans

## **LETTER 7** **JUST JUSTICE - 4**

From: Poulsen, Victor M  
To: Bradlee, Hans C  
Sent: Monday, November 17, 1997  
Subject: [Just Justice](#)

Hans,

Forgive the length of this epistle. I spent some time in New Bedford since receiving your most recent comments. The flight to and from Massachusetts together with lonely evenings in a hotel room, afforded considerable time for contemplation. As I had a laptop computer with me, I took full advantage of the opportunity to write.

### DEITY OF JESUS

We have, of course, dealt with the issue of the godhead on a previous occasion. I think you are aware that Mormonism does not deny the deity of Jesus and so, unless you require further clarification, I won't pursue the matter except to say this. Jesus is Jehovah - God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is LORD; the great I AM; the creator of this world; the God of our fathers. Nor do we diminish His role as Savior and Redeemer of mankind. It is apparent, however, that you question, or at least, misunderstand this so I'll address the issue a little later.

### COUNTERFEIT THEOLOGY

I agree with your statement that the "most effective counterfeit is that which best mimics the genuine." In fact it reminded me of what C.S. Lewis said through his fictional devil, Screwtape.

"The fine flower of unholiness can grow only in the close neighborhood of the Holy. Nowhere do we tempt so successfully as on the very steps of the altar."

I recognize that we have great differences and that truth cannot be compromised. But effective teaching is difficult unless built upon a foundation of common knowledge. As a teacher, I need to understand what my student understands. Too many would-be evangelists (and we agree this is our charge), refuse to recognize this and subsequently fail in their efforts. Mormons are encouraged to seek all kinds of learning which, I feel, greatly contributes to our missionary efforts. (Curiously, we are frequently labeled as a subversive cult, a defining attribute of which is the CONTROL of information).

You say that as a Baptist, you "once held to a significantly different theology." Which is the counterfeit? (I apologize for asking a loaded question but I'm trying to make a point). If you carefully consider it, I think you'll find that even among Protestantism, relatively few Christians believe and teach that salvation comes merely by calling upon the name of Jesus (Matt. 7:21). After all, most of the Christian world ultimately believes that good people go to heaven and bad people go to hell. Is then, sacrament-laden Catholicism counterfeit? How about the Greek Orthodox Church, Lutheranism, or even moderate Baptists? Does such a belief in the necessity of works (e.g. baptism and repentance) constitute a rejection of salvation? As for the deity of

Jesus, I've already pointed out that Mormons are not alone in our view of the godhead. My point is this. If Mormonism is counterfeit, then true Christians should boldly declare it to anyone who will listen. But what is a true Christian? I think we've already agreed that the "house" of Christianity is deeply "divided" over some very significant points of doctrine. Indeed, your definition of Christianity makes for a very small Christian community.

#### ORIGINAL SIN

"I really don't understand how you conclude that Adam's sin has no repercussions for the human race."

I believe I was quite clear when I stated, "...although he LIVES WITH THE EFFECTS OF Adam's transgression, man bears no responsibility for it." Your conclusion that I stated otherwise baffles me. A victim of DWI may be crippled for life, but certainly shares no blame with his drunken assailant. But perhaps you disagree?

I appreciated the definitions of sin you provided. My comments...

#### -INHERITED SIN

1. Given your definition, I think the terminology "inherited sin" is misleading. What you really seem to be talking about is an inherited propensity for sin. The difference is, of course, more than subtle. I agree that we inherit a tendency for sin but will quickly argue that this makes us guilty of nothing. One who genetically carries a propensity for alcoholism will never be an alcoholic unless he first takes a drink.
2. You quoted Romans 5:12 in support of "inherited sin." I'm sure you are keying off the phrase "death passed upon all men," but Paul goes on to qualify the statement by pointing out that "all have sinned." That's the real stuff.
3. What did you mean when you said our spirits, "die at physical birth?" I define "spiritual death" as separation from our spiritual home - God, just as physical death is separation from our temporal home - mortality. Resurrection and salvation, then, nullify physical and spiritual death respectively.
4. There is beautiful symbolism in Jesus' declaration to Nicodemus that we must be "born of water" (i.e. baptized - see Closing Notes), "and of the spirit" (i.e. Holy Ghost). Baptism is symbolic of death and resurrection where the dead man is buried only to be raised, in the name of Christ, to immortality. And then the Holy Spirit descends upon him, as it did the disciples on the day of Pentecost, symbolizing reconciliation with God. (Romans 6:3,4)

#### -IMPUTED SIN

Do you have scriptural support for this concept? I realize that examples are imperfect, but "guilt by association" at least requires one to be SOMEHOW associated with the crime. One who argues that I did not exist at the time, would have difficulty associating me with Adam's transgression. You are correct in predicting that I would be troubled by this. And no - it is not just.

## -PERSONAL SIN

This is the only sin.

"Original Sin" then, as I understand the term, includes "Inherited Sin" and "Imputed Sin" and I stand by my rejection of the idea. Remember that "hypothetical sinless man" we discussed earlier? There are millions of such persons living today - we call them "babies." Sin is more than mere transgression of law. It requires choice and accountability.

Now that you understand my definition of "original sin," perhaps you can see why I used it as an antonym for "personal responsibility." Personal responsibility requires that I be responsible for my sins and Adam for his, leaving no room for so-called original sin. I stand by my assertion that they are mutually exclusive and I apologize if I was unclear in my previous discussion of the matter. It was merely an attempt to restate that "original sin" is not just and that ones (quite needless) acceptance of it, suggests that God is unjust.

## MORTALITY

One of the reasons I enjoy discussions such as this is that I am constantly reminded that no belief can be taken for granted. You stated that Adam was "created mortal." What, then, did God mean when He warned Adam that death would be a consequence of his disobedience? Was not mortality one consequence of the Fall? Is this not part of his "physiological change" you spoke of? Again, I'll quote 1 Cor. 15:21, "For since by man CAME death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead." Furthermore, if Adam were created mortal, must we not conclude that Jesus' empty tomb redeemed us not from Adam's Fall but, indeed, from his created state? A redeemer, then, should be needed regardless of whether a Fall had taken place.

## DAMNED HEATHENS

"As far as the heathen are concerned, I believe the Bible teaches that those who die in ignorance of the Good News of Christ, indeed are damned."

I respect your courage in making such a clear statement concerning the fate of those who die in ignorance of Christ. Most, who share your view, tend to be artificially non-committal about the issue. It is an unfortunate if necessary consequence, again, of "original sin" and a perfect example of how one prevarication begets another. Ironically, your use of this issue as a reason to urge missionary work furthers its injustice by putting the salvation of these people squarely into the hands of "saved Christians" who may, but largely do not, heed the call.

"The Bible teaches that Christ died for the sins of the world, and that they who receive Him will not be condemned, but those who reject him, stand condemned already. (John 3:14-18)"

Your paraphrase of verse 18, refutes your own argument. It is, of course, impossible to reject a message you've never heard. This is consistent with Paul's statement to the Romans you twice referred me to in Romans 5. But let me draw your attention to verse 13 which says, "...but sin is not imputed when there is no law." This sheds considerable light on the subject as the heathen, being without the gospel, is also without the law.

As God is just, all of Adam's posterity will have the opportunity to hear and accept the saving message of Jesus Christ - if not in mortality, then in the life to come. In fact, it was the Savior Himself who ushered in this great missionary work to the dead - described in 1 Peter 3:18-20; 4:6.

## JUSTICE FOR JESUS

"I see it a travesty of justice that God would send His son to die in our stead..."

I lament with you here. But realize that justice must be measured from an eternal perspective. Otherwise, the injustice of our world would know no conclusion. Jesus is with His Father partaking in eternal joy. His place in the eternities is just. Do your beliefs allow the same for all men?

## SCRIPTURAL INERRANCY

"...I believe that the Bible is inerrant only in the original languages."

Again you surprise me. Most conservative Christians literally bristle at any suggestion that translation and transmission problems played a role in bringing us our modern Bible. It suggests that you understand and are not threatened by the Bible's history. One of our thirteen "Articles of Faith" makes a similar declaration which brings us no end of grief from our detractors.

## NATURE OF MAN

I'm afraid you mistake my investigative questioning of your beliefs as a statement of mine. I'm prone to play "devil's advocate" (no pun intended) in order to stimulate the thought process. I assure you that I do the same with any Mormon unlucky enough to have me as their instructor. It's too easy to take for granted that which remains unopposed.

My original line of questioning was intended to uncover the inconsistency of denying that God ever created (and I don't care what word you use here) anything evil, while maintaining that man begins life tainted with "original sin."

As for the nature of man, I believe that we begin life in much the same way I began my course in Thermodynamics. The professor walked into class and immediately announced, "Today, you all have 'A's.'" But as we continue in a life that will include sin, only those who take advantage of Jesus' atoning sacrifice, will finish with one. It is a view consistent with our belief in man's divine origin and potential and a dramatic departure from the fatalistic view of traditional Christianity which teaches that man is essentially evil.

## SAVED FROM WHAT?

This is an interesting question, not so much because of what it asks of my beliefs, but because of what it implies of yours. In other words, without "original sin," why do we need a Savior? The short answer is, of course, to redeem us from mortality through the gift of resurrection and to atone for "personal sin" that we might not stand guilty before the judgment of God. We seem to agree on the former, so I'll expound on the latter. To this end, I've attached a sort of parable, if

you will, called "The Mediator" by Boyd K. Packer. Please take the opportunity to read it and then continue with my comments.

...

As you say, no example is perfect, and I think the chief weakness of this one is the implication that eventually we will completely repay Jesus for what he did in our behalf. Yet it is a beautiful illustration of the roles of justice and mercy in our lives and why (in answer to you own question) Jesus was sent to accomplish our redemption.

A few points relating to the story.

1. The godly principles of justice and mercy are analogous to those of works and grace. They don't have to be contradictory.
2. The mediator had to be in a position to take upon him the debtor's debt. In other words, he had to be free from debt. Only Jesus could be our Mediator and Advocate with the Father.
3. The concept of a Mediator is left vacant with a "one essence" view of the godhead.

## REPENT AND BE BAPTIZED

Concerning Peter's admonition to repent and be baptized in Acts 2:38, my KJV and NIV translations both use the word "for" (the remission of sins). What translation are you looking at? (See Closing Notes). Nor is this contrary to the rest of the Bible. For example:

(Mark 16:16) "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved;..."

(John 3:5) "Except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

(1 Peter 3:21) "Even baptism doth also now save us,..."

Why do you think this is contrary to grace? Why do you believe that grace and works are, somehow, mutually exclusive? That our proverbial mediator required something of the debtor does not diminish the fact the latter was saved from his debt by the grace of the former. And this because of his love and compassion. You warn not to take a few verses out of the context of the Bible, yet you would brush off as unnecessary, every commandment from God given within its pages. As the Bible teaches BOTH principles, it is equally wrong to ignore works in favor of grace as is the reverse.

## DEGREES OF SIN

"If we are not judged for our sins in eternity, what's the point of discussing judgment on sin at all?"

I assume your pronoun refers to saved Christians since the damned are indeed, being judged for their sins. Or do you disagree? This is a return to my original question - what can a man possibly do to warrant eternal punishment? Although it may seem only academic to you, it reaches into the heart of any religious philosophy like few others. Reaching the sensible conclusion that there are indeed degrees of sin and that men are judged accordingly (Rev. 20:13) begs consideration that punishment may not be eternal. Indeed, in my opinion, the notions of

eternal punishment and degrees of sin are fundamentally incompatible. It is a sense of this incompatibility that leads most Christians of your like mind to reject the idea that any one sin is worse than another. Again, an example of one mistake leading to another.

### "YE ARE GODS"

In reading Psalm 82, I don't see any support for your suggestion that "gods" are "vehicles of the Word of God." I partially agree with your interpretation of John 10:34. Reprimanding those who would stone Him for blasphemy, Jesus submitted that His claim was consistent with their own scripture. They, of course, were blinded as to its deeper meaning that Jesus' physical body was the offspring of deity. Concerning your resignation, "I knew you'd eventually get around to that," let me point out that it was you who raised the topic (rather abruptly I might add). Surely you expected me to respond. Probably, you wanted me to.

### CLOSING NOTES

1. My definition of "open-minded" does not preclude resolve but, rather, suggests a willingness to entertain and consider other points of view. The fact that you are even willing to engage in this discussion meets such a definition.

2. 1 Cor. 15:21-23. I think our disagreement on this scripture centers around the phrase "made alive" in verse 22. I argue it is synonymous with "resurrection" while you maintain it means "salvation." Obviously, verse 21 is speaking of resurrection - even using the word. And you accurately described the teaching of verse 23 when you wrote of the first and second resurrections - the "First" being the resurrection of the just and the "Second" being the resurrection of the unjust. Indeed, the entire fifteenth chapter is dedicated to convincing doubters of the reality of the physical resurrection. Read it. The message is simple. We die because of Adam, and we resurrect because of Christ. Clearly, context is on my side. Nevertheless, I agree that it is in Christ that we receive salvation. I just wouldn't use this scripture to support it.

3. (1 Peter 3:18-20;4:6). Having referenced them, let me address an interpretation of these verses you may embrace (forgive my presumption if I'm wrong). Peter does NOT say here that Jesus is declaring victory over the damned. Rather, he says that Jesus "...PREACHED also to them that are dead, THAT THEY MIGHT BE JUDGED according to men in the flesh..." And that's exactly what we do here in mortality. We preach the gospel to all within our reach, so that they might receive a righteous judgment, each according to his acceptance of it. This plain and righteous truth demonstrates that God is truly just and merciful and the reach of Jesus' redemption, truly universal.

4. (John 3:5). Again, forgive my presumption but let me address an interpretation of this verse I have frequently heard from those who reject it as a commandment for baptism. I refer to the suggestion that "born of water" means physical birth from the water-filled womb of a mother. In the first place, why would the Savior make such self-evident statement? In other words, "born" as opposed to what? Secondly, if you argue that Adam and Eve are the only human beings not to be born (of a mother), were they then predestined to hell? Such irrationalness ought to suggest the need for a different view.

5. According to "Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible," the word "for" (the remission

of sins) in Acts 2:38 was translated from the same word used to render "for" in Acts 7:5,16, and 21.

6. I'm afraid I'm not up on "Platonic Dualism." I do know, however, that "dualism" is the concept that man's nature includes both physical and spiritual aspects - a philosophy which pervades all of Christianity. I suspect it has something to do with an inherently good aspect battling an inherent evil one. I've already rejected the notion that man is inherently evil. I do believe, however, (and I think most Christians would agree) that man's conscience is associated with his spirit and is continually trying to overcome the temptations of the flesh. My conscience, for instance, reminds me, "thou shalt not steal" but my starving body may beg me to do otherwise. Who would argue that a young man's conscience is not constantly battling with his raging hormones. If this is "Platonic Dualism," then count me in because it's also reality.

7. If they truly believed that grace was sufficient for salvation, "saved Christians" would embrace the philosophy of "universalism" which declares that God's grace is sufficient to save all men regardless of what they do. But, crossing the line of universalism into the world of works, they really believe that men must first accept Christ's atoning sacrifice before salvation is extended. And regardless of arguments to the contrary, this action is not fundamentally different from repentance, baptism, or keeping the Ten Commandments. One might, in the same breath, accept Jesus' sacrifice and ask His forgiveness. How, then, is the latter "works" but not the former?

8. Jesus' right to the Davidic throne was apparently established through both of his legal parents as Joseph and Mary were evidently first cousins.

Your Contemplative Friend,  
Victor

### *THE MEDIATOR*

*There once was a man who wanted something very much. It seemed more important than anything else in his life. In order for him to have his desire, he incurred a great debt.*

*He had been warned about going into that much debt, and particularly about his creditor. But it seemed so important for him to do what he wanted to do and to have what he wanted right now, and that was what seemed important.*

*The creditor was always somewhere in the back of his mind, and he made token payments now and again, thinking somehow that the day of reckoning really would never come.*

*But as it always does, the day came, and the contract fell due. The debt had not been fully paid. His creditor appeared and demanded payment in full.*

*Only then did he realize that his creditor not only had the power to repossess all that he owned, but the power to cast him into prison as well.*

*"I cannot pay you, for I have not the power to do so," he confessed.*

*"Then," said the creditor, "we will exercise the contract, take your possessions, and you shall go to prison. You agreed to that. It was your choice. You signed the contract, and now it must be enforced."*

*"Can you not extend the time or forgive the debt?" the debtor begged. "Arrange some way for me to keep what I have and not go to prison. Surely you believe in mercy? Will you not show mercy?"*

*The creditor replied, "Mercy is always so one-sided. It would serve only you. If I show mercy to you, it will leave me unpaid. It is justice I demand. Do you believe in justice?"*

*"I believed in justice when I signed the contract," the debtor said. "It was on my side then, for I thought it would protect me. I did not need mercy then, nor think I should need it ever. Justice, I thought, would serve both of us equally as well."*

*"It is justice that demands that you pay the contract or suffer the penalty," the creditor replied. "That is the law. You have agreed to it and that is the way it must be. Mercy cannot rob justice."*

*There they were: One meting out justice, the other pleading for mercy. Neither could prevail except at the expense of the other.*

*"If you do not forgive the debt there will be no mercy," the debtor pleaded.*

*"If I do, there will be no justice," was the reply.*

*"Both laws, it seemed, could not be served. They are two eternal ideals that appear to contradict one another. Is there no way for justice to be fully served, and mercy also?"*

*There is a way! The law of justice can be fully satisfied and mercy can be fully extended - but it takes someone else. And so it happened this time.*

*The debtor had a friend. He came to help. He knew the debtor well. He knew him to be shortsighted. He thought him foolish to have gotten himself into such a predicament. Nevertheless, he wanted to help because he loved him. He stepped between them, faced the creditor, and made this offer.*

*"I will pay the debt if you will free the debtor from his contract so that he may keep his possessions and not go to prison."*

*As the creditor was pondering the offer, the mediator added, "You demanded justice. Though he cannot pay you, I will do so. You will have been justly dealt with and can ask no more. It would not be just."*

*And so the creditor agreed.*

*The mediator turned then to the debtor. "If I pay your debt, will you accept me as your creditor?"*

*"Oh yes, yes," cried the debtor, "You save me from prison and show mercy to me."*

*"Then," said the benefactor, "you will pay the debt to me and I will set the terms. It will not be easy, but it will be possible. I will provide a way. You need not go to prison."*

*And so it was that the creditor was paid in full. He had been justly dealt with. No contract had been broken.*

*"The debtor, in turn, had been extended mercy. Both laws stood fulfilled. Because there was a mediator, justice had claimed its full share, and mercy was fully satisfied.*

*Each of us lives on a kind of spiritual credit. One day the account will be closed, a settlement demanded. However casually we may view it now, when that day comes and the foreclosure is imminent, we will look around in restless agony for someone, anyone to help us.*

*And, by eternal law, mercy cannot be extended save there be one who is both willing and able to assume our debt and pay the price and arrange the terms for our redemption.*

*Boyd K. Packer "Ensign," May 1977, pp.54-55*

**LETTER 8**  
**JUST JUSTICE - 4 (MORE)**

From: Bradlee, Hans C  
 To: Poulsen, Victor M  
 Date: Tue, 18 Nov 1997 09:06:24  
 Subject: [No Justice-No Peace](#)

Hey man.

This is like banging my head against a brick wall. . . I'll get back to you. With what, I'm not yet sure.

H

\*\*\*\*\*

From: Poulsen, Victor M  
 To: Bradlee, Hans C  
 Sent: Wednesday, November 19, 1997 12:32 PM  
 Subject: Just Justice

Hans,

Your note has an air of disgust. Maybe it's time to agree to disagree and call it quits or, perhaps, move on to a different topic. I'm not trying to declare a victor here. (Pardon the pun). The fun for me is in the journey. But it doesn't sound like you're having fun. I really had no idea that my little question to Dr. Graham (which he hasn't answered) would generate such a discussion. But I've learned a lot and that's an end in itself.

Isn't it amazing that we can read these messages and shake our respective heads in disbelief asking, "Where in the world does he get this stuff?!" - and yet we read and quote from the same Bible. And we are but a small sample of sectarian Christianity. What's wrong with this picture?

Victor

P.S. Your replacement is retiring leaving a big hole in our mechanical group. You still have a chance to return.

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From: Bradlee, Hans C  
 To: Poulsen, Victor M  
 Sent: Wednesday, November 19, 1997 1:17 PM  
 Subject: No Justice-No Peace

Not disgust, just frustration. You, my friend, express my same sentiments on how in the world two people reading the same words can come out with such enormously fundamental differences. We cannot both be correct, for our views mutually exclusive. . . at least my view will not allow yours. I submit to you that either you are right and I am wrong, or I am right and you are wrong,

or neither of us is right. I also submit to you that the words of the Bible means SOMETHING, and there is only ONE interpretation that is correct. I am guessing that you disagree with that, but . . . . My read on the book is that there is one interpretation, but many applications. I intend to at least respond to your assumptions about my beliefs which are incorrect.

Thanks for the challenge, and don't worry about me counting you the victor. To me you're just Victor.

Hans

p.s. I didn't realize I had a replacement. Who would that be? Nonetheless, I do not intend to return to that organization. Thanks for your thoughts, though.

H

\*\*\*\*\*

From: Poulsen, Victor M  
To: Bradlee, Hans C  
Sent: Wednesday, November 19, 1997  
Subject: Just Justice

Hans,

There is only one truth. Where many interpretations of that truth persist, one must consider the possible inadequacy of its definition.

Victor

P.S. I don't know what "Victor? Mais non" means but why do I get the feeling a suitable translation might be something like "Winner? Hell no"?

\*\*\*\*\*

From: Bradlee, Hans C  
To: Poulsen, Victor M  
Date: Thu, 20 Nov 1997  
Subject: Articles of Faith

I forgot to ask you . . . you mentioned your articles of faith. What are they?

h

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From: Poulsen, Victor M  
To: Bradlee, Hans C  
Date: Fri, 21 Nov 1997  
Subject: LDS Articles of Faith

*THE ARTICLES OF FAITH*  
*of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*

- 1. We believe in God, the Eternal Father, and in His Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost.*
- 2. We Believe that men will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's transgression.*
- 3. We believe that through the Atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Gospel.*
- 4. We believe that the first principles and ordinances of the Gospel are: first, Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ; second, Repentance; third, Baptism by immersion for the remission of sins; fourth, Laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost.*
- 5. We believe that a man must be called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hands by those who are in authority, to preach the Gospel and administer in the ordinances thereof.*
- 6. We Believe in the same organization that existed in the Primitive Church, namely, apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, evangelists, and so forth.*
- 7. We believe in the gift of tongues, prophecy, revelation, visions, healing, interpretation of tongues and so forth.*
- 8. We believe the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly; we also believe the Book for Mormon to be the word of God.*
- 9. We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that He will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.*
- 10. We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion (the New Jerusalem) will be built upon the American continent; that Christ will reign personally upon the earth and, that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory.*
- 11. We claim the privilege of worshipping Almighty God according to the dictates of own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may.*
- 12. We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law.*
- 13. We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul - We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is*

*anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things.*

*Joseph Smith*

Probably the greatest message to come from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is expressed in article nine. It stands as a challenge to students of the gospel, almost without compare--what do you believe, and why do you believe it? Ironically, it is this message that most alienates us from the rest of Christianity.

Victor

**LETTER 9**  
**NO JUSTICE-NO PEACE - 4**

From: Bradlee, Hans C  
 To: Poulsen, Victor M  
 Date: Mon, 9 Feb 1998 12:13:13  
 Subject: [No Justice-No Peace](#)

As a preface, my wife and mother (not the same people) do not like to be around my father and I when we start discussing religion and politics. We both enjoy the verbal bantering. We agree in "religion" and disagree in politics. We often raise our voices and pound on tables, etc. and the women in my family react negatively to this behavior. They sense that we are angry at each other, and that disharmony will result from the encounter. We try to explain to them that we are passionate about our beliefs, and cannot speak about them in a Stoic manner, and that the passion is not directed at each other. It's even sometimes difficult for me to distinguish passion about an idea, and passion toward someone else for not agreeing with something so central to the core of my being. How can they hear the same facts and come to opposite conclusions? It's sometimes mind boggling to me, especially in the heat of debate and discourse. (e.g. -- How can you POSSIBLY say that  $2+2=5$ , when the whole world obviously can see that  $2+2=4$ ????!!) But then I remember that there are thousands of people that come up with  $2+2=5$ , or actually, in the case of my dad and me,  $2+2+A=4+A$ , versus  $2+2+B=4+B$ . You and I, on the other hand are more like  $2+2=5$  versus  $2+2=4$ .

I must remind you that my arguments are directed to your arguments, and not to you the person. I know you know that, but I still feel I must reiterate. . . .

I think our discussion is suffering from Orwellian Double Speak. In many cases, you explain your theology using Bible words, and I use the same words to explain a completely different theology. We are using the same letter symbols, but the meanings are NOT the same.

For ease of response my responses are imbedded in the text below.\*

Hans

p.s. I have been holding on to this for some time, intending to do some research, but I never got around to it, and probably won't for some time. I'm getting behind, so I'll just send it.

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 \*Note: To facilitate plain text viewing, I have enclosed Hans's remarks in double brackets [[...]] -  
 vmp  
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From: Poulsen, Victor M  
To: Bradlee, Hans C  
Sent: Monday, November 17, 1997  
Subject: Just Justice

Hans,

Forgive the length of this epistle. I spent some time in New Bedford since receiving your most recent comments. The flight to and from Massachusetts together with lonely evenings in a hotel room, afforded considerable time for contemplation. As I had a laptop computer with me, I took full advantage of the opportunity to write.

### DEITY OF JESUS

We have, of course, dealt with the issue of the godhead on a previous occasion. I think you are aware that Mormonism does not deny the deity of Jesus and so, unless you require further clarification, I won't pursue the matter except to say this. Jesus is Jehovah - God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is LORD; the great I AM; the creator of this world; the God of our fathers. Nor do we diminish His role as Savior and Redeemer of mankind. It is apparent, however, that you question, or at least, misunderstand this so I'll address the issue a little later.

[[But do you not also say that Elohim is someone else, or is this another one of those misconceptions?]]

### COUNTERFEIT THEOLOGY

I agree with your statement that the "most effective counterfeit is that which best mimics the genuine." In fact it reminded me of what C.S. Lewis said through his fictional devil, Screwtape. "The fine flower of unholiness can grow only in the close neighborhood of the Holy. Nowhere do we tempt so successfully as on the very steps of the altar."

I recognize that we have great differences and that truth cannot be compromised. But effective teaching is difficult unless built upon a foundation of common knowledge. As a teacher, I need to understand what my student understands. Too many would-be evangelists (and we agree this is our charge), refuse to recognize this and subsequently fail in their efforts. Mormons are encouraged to seek all kinds of learning which, I feel, greatly contributes to our missionary efforts. (Curiously, we are frequently labeled as a subversive cult, a defining attribute of which is the CONTROL of information).

You say that as a Baptist, you "once held to a significantly different theology." Which is the counterfeit? (I apologize for asking a loaded question but I'm trying to make a point).

[[From the age of seven, I knew that Jesus Christ was the savior of the world, and that he would save me if I asked him to. I did, and He did, and that has never changed. As a Baptist I believed most of the tenets of the Baptist Faith. I stopped going to the Baptist church about 9 years ago, and have since learned many things that are slightly different than the typical Baptist's belief. However, I can Guarantee you that there are MANY Baptists who believe the same things I do, although many have left the church like myself. That's one of the characteristics of the Baptist

church, they have complete freedom to believe whatever they want. My beliefs are a hint more Calvinistic than before. The Doctrine of Election is one that is not taught often in the Baptist church. I won't say that it is never taught, because I know of instances where it has been. (I currently teach a Bible Class in a Baptist Church, and I teach the Doctrine of Election.) Now many Baptists may believe in Universal Election, but it's not a stated Doctrine of the Church, nor should it be. It's one of those doctrines with many proponents on both sides, and really has no bearing on the Basic Gospel which is "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." In the final analysis, does it really matter to us what mechanism god uses to save us? Many doctrines are not essential to the main issue. I've heard this maxim repeated many times by preachers - "Let's keep the main thing the main thing."]]

[[Counterfeits change the main thing. They may call it the same thing, but it means another thing. When one starts messing with the Person and Work of the Lord Jesus Christ, denying his deity, denying his equality with the Father, adding things to his message, and adding things that are required for salvation other than faith (such as baptism), then you start getting into a dangerous area. One of the things I've always heard is that a cult will always deny or diminish the deity of Christ, because that is the central issue. I don't know Mormon Theology. I've heard on many occasions from many different sources that they deny the deity of Christ. By this I'm not saying that they deny he is A god, but that He is THE ONLY GOD, period. You know what you believe, I don't. That's all I have to say on the matter.]]

If you carefully consider it, I think you'll find that even among Protestantism, relatively few Christians believe and teach that salvation comes merely by calling upon the name of Jesus (Matt. 7:21). After all, most of the Christian world ultimately believes that good people go to heaven and bad people go to hell. [[(I don't care if the entire human race believes that good people go to heaven, and bad people go to hell -- they would all be wrong. We know that some DO go to heaven, yet the Bible says that there are no good men, no, not even one.)]] Is then, sacrament-laden Catholicism counterfeit? How about the Greek Orthodox Church, Lutheranism, or even moderate Baptists? Does such a belief in the necessity of works (e.g. baptism and repentance) constitute a rejection of salvation? As for the deity of Jesus, I've already pointed out that Mormons are not alone in our view of the godhead. My point is this. If Mormonism is counterfeit, then true Christians should boldly declare it to anyone who will listen.

[[Is this not what I do?]]

But what is a true Christian? I think we've already agreed that the "house" of Christianity is deeply "divided" over some very significant points of doctrine. Indeed, your definition of Christianity makes for a very small Christian community.

[[The road is narrow...]]

## ORIGINAL SIN

"I really don't understand how you conclude that Adam's sin has no repercussions for the human race."

I believe I was quite clear when I stated, "...although he LIVES WITH THE EFFECTS of Adam's transgression, man bears no responsibility for it." Your conclusion that I stated

otherwise baffles me. A victim of DWI may be crippled for life, but certainly shares no blame with his drunken assailant. But perhaps you disagree?

I appreciated the definitions of sin you provided. My comments...

#### -INHERITED SIN

1. Given your definition, I think the terminology "inherited sin" is misleading. What you really seem to be talking about is an inherited propensity for sin. The difference is, of course, more than subtle. I agree that we inherit a tendency for sin but will quickly argue that this makes us guilty of nothing. One who genetically carries a propensity for alcoholism will never be an alcoholic unless he first takes a drink.

[[Perhaps, but the genetically ill are still ill. The fallen race is still fallen, whether they have practiced it or not.]]

2. You quoted Romans 5:12 in support of "inherited sin." I'm sure you are keying off the phrase "death passed upon all men," but Paul goes on to qualify the statement by pointing out that "all have sinned." That's the real stuff.

[[No comment. I can't express it any differently than I already have. The Word speaks for itself.]]

3. What did you mean when you said our spirits, "die at physical birth?" I define "spiritual death" as separation from our spiritual home - God, just as physical death is separation from our temporal home - mortality. Resurrection and salvation, then, nullify physical and spiritual death respectively.

[[I mean simply that. Whether they are actually dead, or just deactivated, I do not know the mechanics of it. Allow me to restate my understanding of the soul of man. BODY + SPIRIT = LIVING SOUL. The Bible does not speak of plants or angels as being living, or having souls. Plants have no spirits, Angels are spirits without bodies. Man is dichotomous, having spirit and body, resulting in a living soul. Because of the Essence of God, and the sinfulness of man, God cannot have fellowship with man, and so, once the spirit enters the fallen body at birth, the spirit "dies" and is separated from God. If the point of God-consciousness occurs, and the separation continues, the separation perpetuates into eternity. In eternity, one's status is unchangeable, and so, eternal separation results. The body is also made immortal at the resurrection, and then the body gets to spend eternity with the spirit. The location being decided on earth by each individual soul during time. I agree that God is eternal life. Separation from God is spiritual death, which leads to eternal spiritual death, or eternal separation from God. The most important aspect of this is that it is up to the individual's own volition. We get to choose where and how we want to spend eternity.]]

4. There is beautiful symbolism in Jesus' declaration to Nicodemus that we must be "born of water" (i.e. baptized - see Closing Notes), "and of the spirit" (i.e. Holy Ghost). Baptism is symbolic of death and resurrection where the dead man is buried only to be raised, in the name of Christ, to immortality. And then the Holy Spirit descends upon him, as it did the disciples on

the day of Pentecost, symbolizing reconciliation with God. (Romans 6:3,4)

[[As I said, I do not think that John 3 is talking about baptism. Baptism is like circumcision. It has nothing to do with anything. It's not magical or mystical - it's only a symbolic ritual with a deeply spiritual meaning. Circumcision did not save Abraham, in fact he was saved before circumcision, just as I was saved before I was baptized. I was baptized because of my decision for Christ, after I was saved. Our pastor preached a sermon on John 3 this past Sunday. He thinks "being born of water" is physical birth, which I do not. I think he is wrong. My wife and I were discussing it after church, and I told her what I thought. She commented that if physical birth was a prerequisite for salvation, then all unborn babies must not go to heaven. Now if you believe that life begins at conception, then this is a logical conclusion, and physical birth cannot be a requirement for salvation. It certainly doesn't mean baptism, so it must mean something else. I think the answer is found in Ezekiel 36:25 -ff? As I have said numerous times, man is separated from God because of his sin and the resulting spiritual death. In order to be saved and back into fellowship with God, one must be cleansed of this sin. Before regeneration occurs, or perhaps simultaneously, the Holy Spirit also does an act of cleansing on us. We are cleansed of our sins. What is the symbol for cleansing? Clean Water. I think this is what it is talking about. To see heaven we must be cleansed of our sin by God, and born from above, or again. This is the only way, and all that is required. Over and out.]]

#### -IMPUTED SIN

Do you have scriptural support for this concept? I realize that examples are imperfect, but "guilt by association" at least requires one to be SOMEHOW associated with the crime. One who argues that I did not exist at the time, would have difficulty associating me with Adam's transgression. You are correct in predicting that I would be troubled by this. And no - it is not just.

[[Nothing to add...]]

#### -PERSONAL SIN

This is the only sin. [[(I'm sorry, you err.)]]

"Original Sin" then, as I understand the term, includes "Inherited Sin" and "Imputed Sin" and I stand by my rejection of the idea. Remember that "hypothetical sinless man" we discussed earlier? There are millions of such persons living today - we call them "babies." Sin is more than mere transgression of law. It requires choice and accountability.

Now that you understand my definition of "original sin," perhaps you can see why I used it as an antonym for "personal responsibility." Personal responsibility requires that I be responsible for my sins and Adam for his, leaving no room for so-called original sin. I stand by my assertion that they are mutually exclusive and I apologize if I was unclear in my previous discussion of the matter. It was merely an attempt to restate that "original sin" is not just and that ones (quite needless) acceptance of it, suggests that God is unjust.

[[Original sin has nothing to do with justice. It was a choice made by your father Adam. God didn't make him sinful, and he didn't cause, force, encourage him to sin. He chose to, and for

that, we all suffer.]]

## MORTALITY

One of the reasons I enjoy discussions such as this is that I am constantly reminded that no belief can be taken for granted. You stated that Adam was "created mortal." What, then, did God mean when He warned Adam that death would be a consequence of his disobedience? Was not mortality one consequence of the Fall? Is this not part of his "physiological change" you spoke of? Again, I'll quote 1 Cor. 15:21, "For since by man CAME death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead." Furthermore, if Adam were created mortal, must we not conclude that Jesus' empty tomb redeemed us not from Adam's Fall but, indeed, from his created state? A redeemer, then, should be needed regardless of whether a Fall had taken place.

[[This is not really that difficult to understand. One is either mortal or immortal. If a person is immortal, he CANNOT die. If a person is mortal, he CAN die. Adam and Eve died, and they therefore could not have been immortal. The only conclusion is that they were created mortal. -- Which does NOT mean that it was not possible for them to live forever, for indeed they could have, but you know the story.]]

## DAMNED HEATHENS

"As far as the heathen are concerned, I believe the Bible teaches that those who die in ignorance of the Good News of Christ, indeed are damned."

I respect your courage in making such a clear statement concerning the fate of those who die in ignorance of Christ. Most, who share your view, tend to be artificially non-committal about the issue. It is an unfortunate if necessary consequence, again, of "original sin" and a perfect example of how one prevarication begets another. Ironically, your use of this issue as a reason to urge missionary work furthers its injustice by putting the salvation of these people squarely into the hands of "saved Christians" who may, but largely do not, heed the call.

"The Bible teaches that Christ died for the sins of the world, and that they who receive Him will not be condemned, but those who reject him, stand condemned already. (John 3:14-18)"

Your paraphrase of verse 18, refutes your own argument. It is, of course, impossible to reject a message you've never heard. This is consistent with Paul's statement to the Romans you twice referred me to in Romans 5. But let me draw your attention to verse 13 which says, "...but sin is not imputed when there is no law." This sheds considerable light on the subject as the heathen, being without the gospel, is also without the law.

As God is just, all of Adam's posterity will have the opportunity to hear and accept the saving message of Jesus Christ - if not in mortality, then in the life to come. In fact, it was the Savior Himself who ushered in this great missionary work to the dead - described in 1 Peter 3:18-20; 4:6.

[[Romans 1 is clear. I can't express it more plainly. It all goes back to the concept of God-consciousness. At the point of god-consciousness, a person can respond positively or negatively to what can be known about God. At this point, God is either obligated to get them

more information, i.e. the Gospel Message, or God is no longer obligated. It all depends on the Heathen. If he wants to know God, he will be provided the information. If he doesn't want to know God, he doesn't need the information, nor would it benefit him, for it would only serve to harden his heart even more. The longer one rejects the Truth, the more difficult it becomes to accept it. 'And how shall they hear without a preacher?' It's not the message bearers fault if the recipient does not want to hear the information, and the message bearer is not held responsible for the hearer's rejection of the message. It's on their own heads.]]

## JUSTICE FOR JESUS

"I see it a travesty of justice that God would send His son to die in our stead... [[IF THERE WERE ANY OTHER WAY WE COULD BE SAVED."]]

[[You left out a part of what I said. That's how heresies are started -- by leaving out a part of what God said.]]

I lament with you here. But realize that justice must be measured from an eternal perspective. Otherwise, the injustice of our world would know no conclusion. Jesus is with His Father partaking in eternal joy. His place in the eternities is just. Do your beliefs allow the same for all men?

[[The Doctrine of Unlimited Atonement allows the provision for all to be saved, but that does not ensure that all men will be saved. What about those who don't want to be saved? What about those who don't want to spend eternity with God? Are you going to force them to do it and like it? You know what they say about leading a horse to water...]]

## SCRIPTURAL INERRANCY

"...I believe that the Bible is inerrant only in the original languages."

Again you surprise me. Most conservative Christians literally bristle at any suggestion that translation and transmission problems played a role in bringing us our modern Bible. It suggests that you understand and are not threatened by the Bible's history. One of our thirteen "Articles of Faith" makes a similar declaration which brings us no end of grief from our detractors.

[[Again, your surprise at my remarks indicate that you don't know as much about Orthodox Christianity as you think you do. I don't know of any "conservative Christians" who bristle at the suggestion of translation and transmission problems. You've been talking to the wrong people. If you want to understand something, you've got to talk to people who know what they are talking about. I don't know very many -- maybe 20 or 30. Understanding usually requires education and the ability and inclination to think. Most people don't think -- at least not in terms of absolutes and absolute truth. An example of this is the recent Capitol Punishment and the circus of dialogue that went on with that. The idiotic arguments against the death penalty and even some of the ones FOR the death penalty illustrate the inability of people to think in absolute terms. Everyone wants to be a relativist. But that's only because most of them don't recognize a source of absolute truth, and those who do, don't know what the source of truth says.]]

[[Something that puzzles me is your apparent lack of comprehension of what I said above. The

original languages are Hebrew, Greek and some Aramaic in Daniel. The NAS, NIV, NKJV, or KJV are NOT original languages, but a translations. The LXX and the Vulgate are also not original texts, but translations. If you want to know what the Bible REALLY Says, you can only find it in the Greek or Hebrew. Anything else is a translation of the original. Now some translations are better than others. For many, many years the KJV was the best thing going. It's still a pretty fair translation, but it still has problems. The NIV also has problems, but I think it's easier to understand. From all of my cross-studying I have found that the NAS is by far the best English translation. But it's still a translation.]]

## NATURE OF MAN

I'm afraid you mistake my investigative questioning of your beliefs as a statement of mine. I'm prone to play "devil's advocate" (no pun intended) in order to stimulate the thought process. I assure you that I do the same with any Mormon unlucky enough to have me as their instructor. It's too easy to take for granted that which remains unopposed.

My original line of questioning was intended to uncover the inconsistency of denying that God ever created (and I don't care what word you use here) anything evil, while maintaining that man begins life tainted with "original sin."

As for the nature of man, I believe that we begin life in much the same way I began my course in Thermodynamics. The professor walked into class and immediately announced, "Today, you all have 'A's.'" But as we continue in a life that will include sin, only those who take advantage of Jesus' atoning sacrifice, will finish with one. It is a view consistent with our belief in man's divine origin and potential and a dramatic departure from the fatalistic view of traditional Christianity which teaches that man is essentially evil.

[[But no, you really didn't start out the class with an "A", unless the professor actually imputed an "A" to you. You started out with a blank slate. Your performance was what produced the grades, not the will of the professor, nor was it your sincerity.]]

## SAVED FROM WHAT?

This is an interesting question, not so much because of what it asks of my beliefs, but because of what it implies of yours. In other words, without "original sin," why do we need a Savior? The short answer is, of course, to redeem us from mortality through the gift of resurrection and to atone for "personal sin" that we might not stand guilty before the judgment of God. We seem to agree on the former, so I'll expound on the latter. To this end, I've attached a sort of parable, if you will, called "The Mediator" by Boyd K. Packer. Please take the opportunity to read it and then continue with my comments.

[[I don't think we agree on anything theological. You start at A, I start at 1.]]

...

As you say, no example is perfect, and I think the chief weakness of this one is the implication that eventually we will completely repay Jesus for what he did in our behalf. Yet it is a beautiful illustration of the roles of justice and mercy in our lives and why (in answer to you own

question) Jesus was sent to accomplish our redemption.

A few points relating to the story.

1. The godly principles of justice and mercy are analogous to those of works and grace. They don't have to be contradictory. 2. The mediator had to be in a position to take upon him the debtor's debt. In other words, he had to be free from debt. Only Jesus could be our Mediator and Advocate with the Father. 3. The concept of a Mediator is left vacant with a "one essence" view of the godhead.

## REPENT AND BE BAPTIZED

Concerning Peter's admonition to repent and be baptized in Acts 2:38, my KJV and NIV translations both use the word "for" (the remission of sins). What translation are you looking at? (See Closing Notes). Nor is this contrary to the rest of the Bible. For example:

(Mark 16:16) "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved;..." (John 3:5) "Except a man be born of water and of the spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." (1 Peter 3:21) "Even baptism doth also now save us,..."

Why do you think this is contrary to grace? Why do you believe that grace and works are, somehow, mutually exclusive? That our proverbial mediator required something of the debtor does not diminish the fact the latter was saved from his debt by the grace of the former. And this because of his love and compassion. You warn not to take a few verses out of the context of the Bible, yet you would brush off as unnecessary, every commandment from God given within its pages. As the Bible teaches BOTH principles, it is equally wrong to ignore works in favor of grace as is the reverse.

["You warn not to take a few verses out of the context of the Bible, yet you would brush off as unnecessary, every commandment from God given within its pages."]

[[I think you are extrapolating to the fantastic. That's a ridiculous statement, and I would not do such a thing. Nor do I understand how you come to the conclusion. If you say works are required for salvation, and then you find one instance where works could NOT have played a part in the salvation of an individual, then would you not agree that logically, works could not be a requirement? We have been give that instance, and you know what it is. God does not have to make exceptions for his word. Think about this -- if salvation required faith PLUS one work, don't you think you could find a case in all of history where at least one person would have not been able to do the work that was required. Let's say it was batting your eyes twice. You say that's really simple, but what if you had no eyes? You would be unsavable. It is not necessary for God to require us to do anything for salvation. And what can we do that would impress God anyway? As Isaiah wrote, "All your righteous acts are like filthy rags."]]

## DEGREES OF SIN

"If we are not judged for our sins in eternity, what's the point of discussing judgment on sin at all?"

I assume your pronoun refers to saved Christians since the damned are indeed, being judged for their sins. Or do you disagree?

[[Of course I disagree. Have you not been reading my comments. Christ atoned for the sins of the world, once for all. Even the sins of those who deny him. 1 John 2:2, + ....]]

This is a return to my original question - what can a man possibly do to warrant eternal punishment? Although it may seem only academic to you, it reaches into the heart of any religious philosophy like few others. Reaching the sensible conclusion that there are indeed degrees of sin and that men are judged accordingly (Rev. 20:13) begs consideration that punishment may not be eternal. Indeed, in my opinion, the notions of eternal punishment and degrees of sin are fundamentally incompatible. It is a sense of this incompatibility that leads most Christians of your like mind to reject the idea that any one sin is worse than another. Again, an example of one mistake leading to another.

"YE ARE GODS"

In reading Psalm 82, I don't see any support for your suggestion that "gods" are "vehicles of the Word of God." I partially agree with your interpretation of John 10:34. Reprimanding those who would stone Him for blasphemy, Jesus submitted that His claim was consistent with their own scripture. They, of course, were blinded as to its deeper meaning that Jesus' physical body was the offspring of deity. Concerning your resignation, "I knew you'd eventually get around to that," let me point out that it was you who raised the topic (rather abruptly I might add). Surely you expected me to respond. Probably, you wanted me to.

## CLOSING NOTES

1. My definition of "open-minded" does not preclude resolve but, rather, suggests a willingness to entertain and consider other points of view. The fact that you are even willing to engage in this discussion meets such a definition.

2. 1 Cor. 15:21-23. I think our disagreement on this scripture centers around the phrase "made alive" in verse 22. I argue it is synonymous with "resurrection" while you maintain it means "salvation." Obviously, verse 21 is speaking of resurrection - even using the word. And you accurately described the teaching of verse 23 when you wrote of the first and second resurrections - the "First" being the resurrection of the just and the "Second" being the resurrection of the unjust. Indeed, the entire fifteenth chapter is dedicated to convincing doubters of the reality of the physical resurrection. Read it. The message is simple. We die because of Adam, and we resurrect because of Christ. Clearly, context is on my side. Nevertheless, I agree that it is in Christ that we receive salvation. I just wouldn't use this scripture to support it.

3. (1 Peter 3:18-20;4:6). Having referenced them, let me address an interpretation of these verses you may embrace (forgive my presumption if I'm wrong). Peter does NOT say here that Jesus is declaring victory over the damned. Rather, he says that Jesus "...PREACHED also to them that are dead, THAT THEY MIGHT BE JUDGED according to men in the flesh..." And that's exactly what we do here in mortality. We preach the gospel to all within our reach, so that they might receive a righteous judgment, each according to his acceptance of it. This plain and righteous truth demonstrates that God is truly just and merciful and the reach of Jesus' redemption, truly universal.

4. (John 3:5). Again, forgive my presumption but let me address an interpretation of this verse I have frequently heard from those who reject it as a commandment for baptism. I refer to the suggestion that "born of water" means physical birth from the water-filled womb of a mother. In the first place, why would the Savior make such self-evident statement? In other words, "born" as opposed to what? Secondly, if you argue that Adam and Eve are the only human beings not to be born (of a mother), were they then predestined to hell? Such irrationalness ought to suggest the need for a different view.

5. According to "Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible," the word "for" (the remission of sins) in Acts 2:38 was translated from the same word used to render "for" in Acts 7:5,16, and 21.

[[I would say that the "for" in 7:5 might just as easily be rendered "as." -- God gave it to him as/for a possession. It would be meaningless to translate this "for" as "in order to" as many hold the "for" in Acts 2:38 to mean. Same for Acts 7:21 -- "Pharaoh's daughter raised him AS her own son, not "FOR" her own son. Why would Pharaoh's daughter raise a son FOR her own son?]]

[[Acts 7:16 is more what you are looking for, BUT. . . You can't just take a Greek word out of it's surrounding sentence structure. You have to consider the tense, voice and mood of the verbs around it, not to mention the etymologies. I don't know Greek, but I can assure you there's more to it than just the word. I think we should both go to Dallas Theological Seminary and get a couple of four years of Greek under our belts, and continue this discussion. I think it would be a whole lot different, and perhaps a lot more agreement.]]

6. I'm afraid I'm not up on "Platonic Dualism." I do know, however, that "dualism" is the concept that man's nature includes both physical and spiritual aspects - a philosophy which pervades all of Christianity. I suspect it has something to do with an inherently good aspect battling an inherent evil one. I've already rejected the notion that man is inherently evil. I do believe, however, (and I think most Christians would agree) that man's conscience is associated with his spirit and is continually trying to overcome the temptations of the flesh. My conscience, for instance, reminds me, "thou shalt not steal" but my starving body may beg me to do otherwise. Who would argue that a young man's conscience is not constantly battling with his raging hormones. If this is "Platonic Dualism," then count me in because it's also reality.

7. If they truly believed that grace was sufficient for salvation, "saved Christians" would embrace the philosophy of "universalism" which declares that God's grace is sufficient to save all men regardless of what they do. But, crossing the line of universalism into the world of works, they really believe that men must first accept Christ's atoning sacrifice before salvation is extended. And regardless of arguments to the contrary, this action is not fundamentally different from repentance, baptism, or keeping the Ten Commandments. One might, in the same breath, accept Jesus' sacrifice and ask His forgiveness. How, then, is the latter "works" but not the former?

8. Jesus' right to the Davidic throne was apparently established through both of his legal parents as Joseph and Mary were evidently first cousins.

Your Contemplative Friend,  
Victor

## THE MEDIATOR

*There once was a man who wanted something very much. It seemed more important than anything else in his life. In order for him to have his desire, he incurred a great debt.*

*He had been warned about going into that much debt, and particularly about his creditor. But it seemed so important for him to do what he wanted to do and to have what he wanted right now, and that was what seemed important.*

*The creditor was always somewhere in the back of his mind, and he made token payments now and again, thinking somehow that the day of reckoning really would never come.*

*But as it always does, the day came, and the contract fell due. The debt had not been fully paid. His creditor appeared and demanded payment in full.*

*Only then did he realize that his creditor not only had the power to repossess all that he owned, but the power to cast him into prison as well.*

*"I cannot pay you, for I have not the power to do so," he confessed.*

*"Then," said the creditor, "we will exercise the contract, take your possessions, and you shall go to prison. You agreed to that. It was your choice. You signed the contract, and now it must be enforced."*

*"Can you not extend the time or forgive the debt?" the debtor begged. "Arrange some way for me to keep what I have and not go to prison. Surely you believe in mercy? Will you not show mercy?"*

*The creditor replied, "Mercy is always so one-sided. It would serve only you. If I show mercy to you, it will leave me unpaid. It is justice I demand. Do you believe in justice?"*

*"I believed in justice when I signed the contract," the debtor said. "It was on my side then, for I thought it would protect me. I did not need mercy then, nor think I should need it ever. Justice, I thought, would serve both of us equally as well."*

*"It is justice that demands that you pay the contract or suffer the penalty," the creditor replied. "That is the law. You have agreed to it and that is the way it must be. Mercy cannot rob justice."*

*There they were: One meting out justice, the other pleading for mercy. Neither could prevail except at the expense of the other.*

*"If you do not forgive the debt there will be no mercy," the debtor pleaded.*

*"If I do, there will be no justice," was the reply.*

*"Both laws, it seemed, could not be served. They are two eternal ideals that appear to contradict one another. Is there no way for justice to be fully served, and mercy also?"*

*There is a way! The law of justice can be fully satisfied and mercy can be fully extended - but it takes someone else. And so it happened this time.*

*The debtor had a friend. He came to help. He knew the debtor well. He knew him to be shortsighted. He thought him foolish to have gotten himself into such a predicament. Nevertheless, he wanted to help because he loved him. He stepped between them, faced the creditor, and made this offer.*

*"I will pay the debt if you will free the debtor from his contract so that he may keep his possessions and not go to prison."*

*As the creditor was pondering the offer, the mediator added, "You demanded justice. Though he cannot pay you, I will do so. You will have been justly dealt with and can ask no more. It would not be just."*

*And so the creditor agreed.*

*The mediator turned then to the debtor. "If I pay your debt, will you accept me as your creditor?"*

*"Oh yes, yes," cried the debtor, "You save me from prison and show mercy to me."*

*"Then," said the benefactor, "you will pay the debt to me and I will set the terms. It will not be easy, but it will be possible. I will provide a way. You need not go to prison."*

*And so it was that the creditor was paid in full. He had been justly dealt with. No contract had been broken.*

*"The debtor, in turn, had been extended mercy. Both laws stood fulfilled. Because there was a mediator, justice had claimed its full share, and mercy was fully satisfied.*

*Each of us lives on a kind of spiritual credit. One day the account will be closed, a settlement demanded. However casually we may view it now, when that day comes and the foreclosure is imminent, we will look around in restless agony for someone, anyone to help us.*

*And, by eternal law, mercy cannot be extended save there be one who is both willing and able to assume our debt and pay the price and arrange the terms for our redemption.*

*Boyd K. Packer "Ensign," May 1977, pp.54-55*

## **The POULSEN / BRADLEE Letters**

### **PART 3** **JIMMY CARTER ON THE MORMONS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Shortly after my initial exchange of letters with Hans Bradlee, I read a November, 1997 article in the paper where Jimmy Carter was critical of Southern Baptists for their indictment of Mormonism as a non-Christian cult. Once again I forwarded it to Hans and a new series of letters ensued that I've titled "*Jimmy Carter on the Mormons.*" This would be our longest running exchange which finally lead to the conclusion of our considerable theological debate.

#### **SOME TOPICS COVERED**

- Extrabiblical Scripture
- Temples
- Polygamy
- Judgment
- Creation Periods
- Apostles
- Oracles
- Israelis and Jews
- Bible Canonization
- Transition from Christianity to Judaism

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**LETTER 1**

From: Poulsen, Victor M  
To: Bradlee, Hans C  
Sent: Friday, December 05, 1997 8:15 AM  
Subject: [Jimmy Carter on the Mormons](#)

Hans,

I thought you might enjoy reading this if you haven't already done so. Of course, Mr. Carter is entitled to his own opinions, but I do think he makes a valid point. It has always struck me as ironic that many of the things we are constantly criticized for are, in fact, part of Christian history. These include the practice of polygamy, temple worship, and - perhaps the most contentious issue of all - additions to canonized scripture. Jewish traditionalists were, of course, furious that the followers of Christ were adding to historical Jewish scripture. God's word had already been revealed, and God himself, couldn't give them more. In reality, adherents of Judaism viewed (and still view) the books of the New Testament in exactly the same way that Christian traditionalists view The Book of Mormon.

Your Non-traditionalist Friend  
Victor

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Fort Worth Star-Telegram  
Saturday, November 22, 1997  
Section F, Page 6

*Mormons Should be Accepted, Carter Says.*

*Jimmy Carter, in opposition to Southern Baptist leaders, says Mormons should be considered part of the Christian community. The Deseret News reported that the former president, speaking at a teleconference with religion writers, said leaders were wrong to imply that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a non-Christian cult. He said they "are trying to act as the Pharisees did, who were condemned by Christ, in trying to define who can and who cannot be considered an acceptable person in the eyes of God. In other words, they're making judgments on behalf of God. I think that's wrong." Some fundamentalist Protestant denominations criticize Mormon acceptance of additional Scriptures - the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price - and their temple worship as departures from traditional Christianity.*

**LETTER 2**

From: Bradlee, Hans C  
To: Poulsen, Victor M  
Sent: Friday, December 05, 1997 11:28 AM  
Subject: [Jimmy Carter on the Mormons](#)

There are reasons why Orthodox Christendom rejects additions to the Scriptures. They believe that Israel has been "entrusted with the oracles of God." (I don't remember where that is, but I think it's in Romans.) In other words, God revealed His word through Prophets in the OT, and prophets and/or Apostles in the NT. Without the existence of Israel, and without the existence of Apostles, they hold that God has not spoken since then. The Apostles included the 12 chosen by Christ during his earthly ministry, and Paul, whom God chose to replace Iscariot, who was an unbeliever. The 11 Apostles chose a new one to round out the 12, after Iscariot was taken out of the picture by suicide. I do not know if this one was accepted or not. The only book I know of that may not have been written by one of the Apostles was Hebrews, and that author was probably a Jew, anyway.

The Temple was in Jerusalem, and was the only one authorized in the OT. God's Presence dwelt there until the Babylonian captivity (586BC?)

I don't know much about the topic of polygamy, except that as far as I know, God made only one wife for Adam. I don't know of any specific prohibitions against it in the Mosaic Law, or the NT, although I could be mistaken. I do know that Jesus spoke about this to the Pharisees, when they questioned him about the divorce issue. I believe he said something like 'the two shall become one flesh.'

Although I can think of no prohibitions against it, I believe there is ample evidence to indicate that it is not the best matrimonial arrangement. Is Polygamy legal in this country?

I do not think man is in a position to judge who will and who will not be allowed into heaven. I also think that many Christians will be surprised at some of the people who will be in Heaven. I think a lot of Baptists will be surprised at the number of Church of Christ people there.

I'm not sure where the line is. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." is the only requirement I know about. I know that is absolutely required. Every believer in Christ has his own baggage to carry. Everyone's understanding of the mechanics of this is different, and only God is Omniscient. He alone knows where the line is. He alone is judge. I submit to you that there are only two people that can know that they are redeemed -- God and the redeemed person, and sometimes I think the redeemed person is questionable. I think there are people who have been redeemed, who don't know it. I also think there are those who think they are and are not. I think there will probably be many Mormons in Heaven. I also think there will be many Baptists who are not.

This is really a different issue than the veracity of a particular theology. I believe there is only one theology that is absolutely true, and that it is revealed in the Bible. The degree to which we approach the true theology is the degree to which our theology is true. I don't believe any human has an understanding equal to the true theology. Some of us have the main points down exactly.

Some of us have some of the details down exactly. The main points are those that we must be correct on. The details are not as important to salvation. I believe in a literal six-day creation. Many do not, and I fervently believe they are wrong. But I do not think a wrong understanding of Creation has anything to do with their salvation. Their attitude toward Christ is what determines their fate. (I won't delve into the Doctrine of Election, here, although I think this a crucial doctrine.) I think a rejection of the six-day Creation poses other problems having to do with Inerrancy, the Faithfulness of God, the Truthfulness of God, Sovereignty, Omnipotence, intellectual honesty, etc. . . .

Methinks I begin to ramble.

I don't think Ecumenicalism is all it's cracked up to be, anyway. I steer clear of ecumenical-new-world-order-united-nations-let's-all-be-one-big-happy-family types. I think they are in left field, and don't understand what's going on. They are ignorant of the Flood and the Tower of Babel, and all the rest of it. I never was impressed with Jimmy Carter's politics, and I don't know much about his theology. I think he is a good man from a human standpoint, however. I'm such an accommodating soul.

I'll get around to your last epistle when I feel like it.

Hans

**LETTER 3**

From: Poulsen, Victor M  
 To: Bradlee, Hans C  
 Sent: Sun, 11 Jan 1998 19:09:09  
 Subject: [Jimmy Carter on the Mormons](#)

Thank you for your comments. I can't tell you how much I enjoy them. Occasionally I have the opportunity to teach our youth in Sunday School and Seminary. (As we have a lay clergy, our seminary program is for all of our High School aged youth). I like to challenge them in some of the same ways that you challenge me. It's great to see them digging into God's word searching for answers to questions they had never before even thought to ask.

**ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURE**

Your statement that "Israel has been entrusted with the oracles of God" is a little different angle than I've heard before. I would be very interested in seeing scriptural support. Taken literally, the statement can't be true. "Israel" is, of course, a designation given to the descendants of Jacob whose name was changed to "Israel" by divine decree. All of the prophets preceding Jacob - including Adam, Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek, Abraham, and Isaac - cannot meet this strict definition of "God's Oracle" as they were not Israelites. Perhaps, however, you intended a broader definition of "Israel" which also includes Jacob's ancestors. But the scriptures also use "Israel" to describe believers in the True and Living God (Gal. 6:16; Eph. 2:12). Indeed we, as a gentile nation, are adopted into the House of Israel by virtue of our acceptance of the gospel of Jesus Christ. But while this allows for the inclusion of ante-Jacobean (is that a great word or what?!) believers into Israel, it includes modern believers as well.

I think Christians spend a lot of time looking for reasons why God does not speak to us today rather than recognizing His divine pattern of doing so and allowing Him to continue. I've often wondered how Moses or Abraham would be accepted in the Christian world today and I have to conclude, "probably not well." But such has always been the case. Even Jesus lamented, "A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin..." (Mark 6:4). Nevertheless, God spoke to men via prophets for four-thousand years and His word became scripture. This pattern of divine communication did not end with Jesus Christ but continued long after His death resulting in the New Testament. Why did He stop? I submit that there are few questions you could pursue in your lifetime, more significant than this.

*"Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets."  
 (Amos 3:7)*

**TEMPLES**

Your conclusion, "The Temple was in Jerusalem, and was the only one authorized in the OT" requires some clarification. I assume you are referring to Solomon's Temple, the Temple of Zerubbabel, and Harod's temple as a single temple. The Tabernacle was, of course, in many places other than Jerusalem. And what do you mean by "authorized?" In fact, temple worship has always had place among God's people including the New Testament Christians. I think it is safe to conclude that modern Christians don't build temples because they really have no idea

what to do with one. Yet, the temple foreseen Ezekiel, is yet to be built. A little more about Biblical temples...

Tabernacle of the Congregation (Exodus 33:7-11)

1. A temple of the Lord. (1 Samuel 1:9)
2. Center place of Israel's worship activities until Solomon's Temple was built.
3. Pattern, consisting of a Holy of Holies, and an inner and outer court, was delivered to Moses by God.
4. Completed in the first year after the exodus.

Solomon's Temple (2 Samuel 7:5, 6)

1. Built after the pattern of the Tabernacle.
2. Materials were gathered by David but constructed by Solomon.
3. Destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar late in the 5th century B.C.

Temple of Zerubbabel (Ezra 1:1-4)

1. A reproduction of the Temple of Solomon.
2. Completed about 500 B.C.
3. Partially destroyed when Harod took Jerusalem in 37 B.C.

Temple of Herod

1. To win popularity with the Jews, Harod proposed to rebuild the Temple of Zerubbabel.
2. Completed about 64 A.D.
3. Destroyed 6 years after its completion by the armies of Titus.

Temple foreseen by Ezekiel (Ezekiel 40-47)

1. Detailed description given by Ezekiel suggests a design similar to the Tabernacle.
2. Dimensions do not match any known historical temple.
3. Yet to be built.

## POLYGAMY

Polygamy was, of course, widely practiced in the Kingdom of God in Biblical times. Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, and others had more than one wife. It is inconceivable that these men of God lived in continuous adulterous relationships during the duration of their prophetic callings as is often argued. God even told David, "I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom..." (2 Sam 12:8). Little is said of polygamy in the New Testament. Paul taught that a Bishop should be the "husband of one wife." This statement is as interesting for what it doesn't say as for what it does. Why would Paul even make such a statement to a people among whom polygamy was not already an accepted practice?

Polygamy is not an acceptable practice in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints today. Nevertheless, given its Biblical heritage, I think it is difficult to conclude that polygamy does not, betimes, have a place among God's people. Though its purpose is not clearly expressed in the Bible, it does allow a meager and vulnerable people, especially one whose male population has been ravaged by war or conflict, to rapidly increase their numbers and viability. While Judeo-Christian history suggests that God's people have often faced such circumstances (which also well describes early Mormonism), the church doesn't face such a problem today.

## JUDGMENT OF MEN

I applaud your conclusion that man is in no position to determine who will be allowed into heaven. Unfortunately, fundamentalist Christians often do so anyway. Not only is man not in possession of the information required to make judgments concerning the eternities, it takes from God what rightly belongs to Him. Such must be considered the height of irreverence.

## ON "DAYS"

I wouldn't dispute that the creative periods spoken of in Genesis may well be 24 hours. However, I see no compelling evidence from scripture that they have to be. Indeed, the Bible frequently uses the word "day" to mean periods of indeterminate length. For example...

Genesis 2:4

*"These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the DAY that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens,"*

Genesis 2:17

*"But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the DAY that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."*

Zechariah 14:9

*"And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that DAY shall there be one LORD, and his name one."*

John 8:56

*"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my DAY: and he saw it, and was glad."*

2 Peter 3:8

*"But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one DAY is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one DAY."*

"CLOSING NOTES:

1. Upon his death, Judas Iscariot was replaced by Matthias (Acts 1:21-26), not Paul as you indicated. In fact, there were a number of Apostles called in addition to the original Twelve. Paul applied the title to himself (e.g. Rom. 1:1), and to the Lord's brother James (Gal. 1:19). Barnabas was also an Apostle (Acts 14:14). Although initially attempted, the perpetuation of this body of Twelve was practically impossible as its members became separated and subsequently killed. It is often argued that only one who was His disciple and acquaintance, could be called as a special witness of the Lord Jesus Christ. Although it is quickly added that Paul, who met neither requirement, became such a witness through his vision of the resurrected Christ. Paul's Apostleship shows that the calling can be both timeless in its occurrence and boundless in its reach.

2. Josephus gives the account of a temple built by the father-in-law of Manasseh on Mount Gerizim. Manasseh became its first High Priest. This site continues to be the chief sacred place of the Samaritan community.

3. I don't believe there were any laws prohibiting polygamy until the Mormons began practicing it in the mid 1800's. If such laws still exist, they are probably not enforced. Polygamy is only one of many alternative relationships that, if not sanctioned by law, for all practical purposes, are not prohibited by it.

Reflectively Yours,  
Victor

P.S.

While returning from Dinosaur State Park with some Boy Scouts, I noticed an exit from I-35 in south Fort Worth for "Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary." I expect it was Seminary Drive. I guess I wasn't imagining it after all.

Incidentally, I received a response to my inquiry of Billy Graham that started all of this. I'll try to get that to you later in the week when I return from a much anticipated "flight" in the altitude chamber.

**LETTER 4**

From: Bradlee, Hans C  
 To: Poulsen, Victor M  
 Sent: Tue, 20 Jan 1998  
 Subject: [Jimmy Carter on the Mormons](#)

Rather than cite scriptural support for my statement, just read Romans 3:2. It IS scripture. The point is, that god promised Abraham that he would be the channel of all spiritual blessing. Messiah, the savior of the world came through Abraham, as did the scriptures that point us to Messiah. Note that blessing did not go through Ishmael, but through Isaac and Jacob (Israel). This is why it is important for me to define MY God as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, so as to leave others with no question about my God. No, Abraham, Melchizedek, Adam, Enoch and Noah are not descendants of Jacob, but which book of the Bible did they write? We're talking about Genesis -Deuteronomy (Moses) Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Songs (David and Solomon), the Prophets, Daniel, etc. Israelites, Also Paul, John, Matthew, James, Peter, etc. Now that's not to say that every word in the Bible was written by a Jew, but the point is that Israel has been directly associated with all books written that are now canonized, and as such, Israel is no longer in existence, except by Gentile Decree (UN). See also Hebrews 1:1-3. Israel has been and will be the Guardian of the Scriptures. This is only a cursory discussion of Romans 3:2.

One of the many things designed to unify the nation of Israel on earth was temple worship in the Capital of the Nation. (The Tabernacle was not in Jerusalem, because Israel was wandering around out in the Wilderness, but they were still a nation at the time, and still had centralized worship through the Tabernacle. God's Glory was present in both the Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple, but Ezekiel saw it leave just before the Babylonian captivity, and it has not returned. Israel has not existed of it's own will since that time, but only by Gentile Decree (Cyrus?, Rome, etc.) Note that the Glory did not move to Samaria at the time of the Israelite Rebellion, and Judah always held that worship of God was to be at Jerusalem. Thus the dialogue with the Woman at the Well. Jesus did not correct her by saying that in the past, worship of God was not conducted at the temple in Jerusalem, only. He did say that a time was coming (a new dispensation) and is now here, where those that worship God will worship him in spirit and in truth (obviously a paraphrase -- See John).

In the next dispensation, Israel will be regathered and will reinstate Temple Worship in JERUSALEM, (followed by antichrist, return of Christ, Millennium, eternity. . . )

Polygamy? Who cares. I think God has instituted an ideal arrangement in Adam and Eve: One man, one woman. Many types of sin were also practiced in the "Kingdom of God during biblical times." Lying, cheating, stealing, murder, slander, gossip, etc. The Prophets were men just like you and me. They had sin in their lives, and to say that God used them and they were polygamous is not really saying much. I do find it interesting, that it is not plainly condoned or forbidden, and as such, we must leave it at that, and after all, what does it matter anyway?

Days - When used in the ordinal fashion, days always mean days. Jesus used them as days - evening and morning - resting on the seventh, etc. The Day of the LORD does not necessarily refer to a specific day, although it may. Nor is it ordinal (or cardinal) in Nature. Not really a big

deal to most unless you get nit-picky and say that "since Jesus believed in a literal six-day creation, and it took more than six days, as the evolutionists tell us, then Jesus is wrong and obviously cannot be God." Actually I believed it is of UTMOST importance, because of His obvious belief that it was a six-day creation. If he was mixed up on that, then maybe he was mixed up on the part about him being Almighty God Incarnate.?

Paul - Actually, I guess I was applying a little Hans-theology here. This came about by my own reasoning process, which goes as such: The disciples got together to choose another disciple because they thought there should be twelve. I also went on the assumption that this was their own idea, and not sanctioned by God, because God did not tell them to pick another one. God, in his own timing picked the man of his own choosing - Paul. That was my reasoning, and it may be flawed - I haven't done a study on this, and doubt that it really matters much.

I still owe you an answer to No Justice-No Peace (part 4). Again, when I feel like it.

Hans

**LETTER 5**

From: Poulsen, Victor M  
 To: Bradlee, Hans C  
 Sent: Sun, 8 Feb 1998 21:18:03  
 Subject: [Jimmy Carter on the Mormons](#)

You're sending some great stuff Hans. It's really making me dig into the scriptures.

**ORACLES**

Romans 3 (KJV)

1. *What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?*
2. *Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.*

Your Interpretation (I think)

- "Israel" has been entrusted with the oracles of God.
- Excludes anyone preceding Jacob.
- Excludes anyone following Israel's destruction late in 1st Century A.D. (Gentile U.N. established Israel is not true Israel).

Romans 3:2 is, of course, speaking of the "Jew" - which excludes Jacob, rather than "Israel" - which includes him. So we're really talking about "Judah" being "entrusted with the Oracles of God" rather than "Israel" as you suggest. This is an important distinction to make because "Israelites" include all twelve tribes of Israel whereas "Jews" comprise a single tribe. This error facilitates your questionable assumption that Paul is speaking of a nation rather than a people. Yes, you might argue that the true NATION of Israel is gone, but Israelites in general, and descendants of Judah in particular, are indeed with us still.

This error notwithstanding, you make an interesting point. Although I guess I'm a little surprised that you don't see Abraham and Isaac as Oracles of God. Indeed, you repeat the promise given to Abraham that he "would be the channel of all spiritual blessing" but exclude him, and his son from that promise. When Noah warned of the pending flood, was he not acting as a spokesman or Oracle of God?

Nevertheless, your interpretation of Romans 3:2 is not without merit so I'll treat it as such. But it's my opinion that Paul did not intend to exclude Judah's ancestors as "Oracles of God." Indeed, I think he was reminding his compatriots to take pride in the fact that God's Spokesmen CONTINUE through them. I don't believe he was suggesting that such men ORIGINATED with Judah.

But I think it's quite clear that your definition of "Oracle," in the context of this discussion, is not really "Spokesman for God" so much as "Originator of eventual Scripture" - the difference being that the divine communications of the former are unwritten or (more likely) uncanonized. If this is the case, I think it's a difficult distinction to justify. After all, whether written or spoken (or uncanonized for that matter), God's word is God's word. We really require a discussion of the canonization process which is as misunderstood as it is significant. Indeed, Bible-based Christian theology is inextricably connected to the assumption that the canonization PROCESS

of the Bible is at least as inspired as its content - a subject of considerable debate to be sure.

However, before you reject Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek, and Abraham as "Oracles of God," consider who else authored no canonized scripture. The list includes most of the Twelve Apostles, John the Baptist, and the Savior Himself.

#### TEMPLES

I think the key statement in your discussion came when you wrote, "God's Glory was present in both the Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple, but Ezekiel saw it leave just before the Babylonian captivity, and it has not returned." Are you prepared to conclude, then, that neither the Temple of Zerubbabel nor the Temple of Harod were God-sanctioned temples? When Jesus found merchants and money changers in Harod's Temple, he drove them out exclaiming, "Take these things hence; make not MY FATHER'S HOUSE an house of merchandise." (John 2:16)

#### POLYGAMY

Perhaps neither you nor I care, but this topic continues to be used, by the fundamentalist Christian community, to incite opinion against us. Your suggestion that this was just one of many sins committed by the O.T. Patriarchs, didn't address the very compelling evidence in 2 Samuel 12:8 to the contrary. Did you know the Law of Moses required polygamy under certain circumstances? Study up on "Levirate Marriage" in your Bible Dictionary/Concordance. It should refer you to Deut. 25:5-10.

#### DAYS

You say that, "Jesus believed in a literal six-day creation." How do you know that? After all, since Jesus Himself is the Creator, I must believe as He did.

Reflectively Yours,  
Victor

**LETTER 6**

From: Bradlee, Hans C  
 To: Poulsen, Victor M  
 Sent: Friday, February 13, 1998 8:52 AM  
 Subject: [Jimmy Carter on the Mormons](#)

again.

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Note: To facilitate plain text viewing, I have enclosed Hans's remarks in double brackets [[...]]. My remarks, highlighted in red by Hans, are enclosed by double braces {{...}} - vmp

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From: Poulsen, Victor M  
 To: Bradlee, Hans C  
 Sent: Sunday, February 08, 1998 9:18 PM  
 Subject: Jimmy Carter on the Mormons

You're sending some great stuff Hans. It's really making me dig into the scriptures.

**ORACLES**

Romans 3 (KJV)

1. *What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?*
2. *Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.*

Your Interpretation (I think)

- "Israel" has been entrusted with the oracles of God.
  - Excludes anyone preceding Jacob. [[(no part of the Bible was written before Jacob)]]
  - Excludes anyone following Israel's destruction late in 1st Century A.D.
- (Gentile U.N. established Israel is not true Israel).

[[The Bible says that Israel will be regathered in their land, and that Messiah will reign physically from Jerusalem for 1000 years. I do not think Israel has yet been regathered. I think they are beginning to come back, but God has not YET stopped working through the Church and restarted working through Israel. Remember, Israel rejected their Messiah, and as such remain out of fellowship until such time that they accept him nationally. (Which they will.) Up to the point of Messiah, God worked exclusively through Israel -- the prophets were Israeli, the books of the Bible were written by Israelis, they were the custodians of God's word, and ultimately Messiah came from them. At their rejection of their King, God set them aside, and began to work exclusively through the church. This is spoken of in Daniel. 70 sevens (490 years) were decreed for Israel in a vision to Daniel. After the 69th seven, Messiah would be cut off (killed). Then nothing happens with Israel for a long, unspecified time period. This is the mystery which Paul talks about - the mystery of the church age between the 69th and 70th seven-year periods. The 70th seven has still not yet been accomplished. This will be the Tribulation period just before the Second Coming of Christ. Before this Tribulation period, those who belong to Christ (Christians) will be taken out of the world (translated - raptured - whatever you want to call it)

and God will resume working through Israel upon their acceptance of him as their Messiah ("they will look upon him whom they have pierced. . . "). I digress.]]

[[Israel can be a confusing entity to me. When the Bible speaks of Israelites or Israel, it is speaking of a nation, a family, or those who follow the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Most often, the Bible uses men's names when talking about nations anyway, Ammon, Moab, Edom, Gog, Magog, Meshech, Tubal, etc. Nations originally descended from clans, families and ultimately, individuals, Israel being a case in point. Because of this, the term Israel can mean any one of those three things.]]

{{Romans 3:2 is, of course, speaking of the "Jew" - which excludes Jacob, rather than "Israel" - which includes him. So we're really talking about "Judah" being "entrusted with the Oracles of God" rather than "Israel" as you suggest.}}

[[I have always understood Israelis and Jews to be the same people. I have never heard anyone make a distinction between the two. However, you have raised an interesting point that merits some research. A cursory look at an Exhaustive Concordance shows that Israel is used many, many more times, and that "Jew" does not appear in the OT until Jeremiah, Daniel, Esther, and Ezra-Nehemiah. Both are used in the NT, and both are used by the same people, i.e. Paul and Jesus both use both terms. I will study this to see if there is any importance in the distinction. I rather believe it will turn out that they are essentially synonyms, but I have been wrong before.]]

[[I don't have a problem with Proto-Israeli messengers of God--Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek, etc. (I don't understand the fixation with Melchizedek, as it seems that for a person with so little written about him, you seem to think he is highly important.) My point still remains - that none of these guys wrote anything down in the Bible, and that most writers of the Bible were descendants of Abraham. The primary point in the entire discussion of "the oracles of God being entrusted to Israel" is that God sovereignly chose Abraham and his descendants from among the nations to be a chosen people, through which God would reveal himself to the world. All spiritual blessing come through Israel - ultimately the Messiah, "the Lion from the tribe of Judah."]]

{{This is an important distinction to make because "Israelites" include all twelve tribes of Israel whereas "Jews" comprise a single tribe.}}

[[In your theology, is Benjamin classified as a Jew or as an Israeli, or both?]]

This error facilitates your questionable assumption that Paul is speaking of a nation rather than a people. Yes, you might argue that the true NATION of Israel is gone, but Israelites in general, and {{descendants of Judah in particular}}, are indeed with us still.

[[I agree with the obvious -- Abraham still has descendants on this earth, Simeonites, Reubenites, Gadites, Levites, etc. Paul was from Benjamin. I don't understand why you say "Judah in particular." Many of these Israelites live in Israel, while many live in New York, Texas, and all over the world. They are still the same people. Again I say, there is no error as you assert.]]

This error notwithstanding, you make an interesting point. Although I guess I'm a little surprised that you don't see Abraham and Isaac as Oracles of God. Indeed, you repeat the promise given

to Abraham that he "would be the channel of all spiritual blessing" but exclude him, and his son from that promise. When Noah warned of the pending flood, was he not acting as a spokesman or Oracle of God?

[[I wonder if part of the difficulty lies in the word "oracle"? Would it help to translate the word as "the words of God"? since the word translated as oracle in the KJV is actually *logios*. *Logios* should be translated "words". Romans 3:2 is not talking about people, it's talking about words, and more specifically, The Word of God ~ The Bible ~ Genesis through Revelation minus the Apocrypha.]]

Nevertheless, your interpretation of Romans 3:2 is not without merit so I'll treat it as such. But it's my opinion that Paul did not intend to exclude Judah's ancestors as "Oracles of God." Indeed, I think he was reminding his compatriots to take pride in the fact that God's Spokesmen CONTINUE through them. I don't believe he was suggesting that such men ORIGINATED with Judah.

But I think it's quite clear that your definition of "Oracle," in the context of this discussion, is not really "Spokesman for God" so much as "Originator of eventual Scripture" - the difference being that the divine communications of the former are unwritten or (more likely) uncanonized. If this is the case, I think it's a difficult distinction to justify.

After all, whether written or spoken (or uncanonized for that matter), God's word is God's word. We really require a discussion of the canonization process which is as misunderstood as it is significant. Indeed, Bible-based Christian theology is inextricably connected to the assumption that the canonization PROCESS of the Bible is at least as inspired as its content - a subject of considerable debate to be sure.

However, before you reject Enoch, Noah, Melchizedek, and Abraham as "Oracles of God," consider who else authored no canonized scripture. The list includes most of the Twelve Apostles, John the Baptist, and the Savior Himself.

[[I don't really see a point in this statement. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says that "every scripture is God-breathed". The Bible is God's written Word, Christ is God's Word Incarnate. Also cf 2 Peter 1:20-21.]]

## TEMPLES

I think the key statement in your discussion came when you wrote, "God's Glory was present in both the Tabernacle and Solomon's Temple, but Ezekiel saw it leave just before the Babylonian captivity, and it has not returned." Are you prepared to conclude, then, that neither the Temple of Zerubbabel nor the Temple of Harod were God-sanctioned temples? When Jesus found merchants and money changers in Harod's Temple, he drove them out exclaiming, "Take these things hence; make not MY FATHER'S HOUSE an house of merchandise." (John 2:16)

[[I guess what I am saying is that Israel was on it's way out of the picture by the time of Zerubbabel, and especially by the time of Herod. To me, this is a confusing era, because I think Israel begins to fade, and the church takes over after Pentecost. There is some apparent overlap of the two, because Israel was not "officially" scattered until Titus destroyed Jerusalem in 70

AD. I don't really know what to think about a temple built by a gentile heathen such as Herod. At least it was in the right place - on the Temple Mount, and I think in this sense, it was probably acknowledged to be God's Temple. The important point is that it was in Jerusalem. Check the Law on this - it should be discussed in Deuteronomy.]]

[[Be that as it may, if you recall Jesus' discussion with the woman at the well, 'a time is coming.. when people will not worship God in Samaria or Jerusalem - they will worship in Spirit and truth.' Jesus was speaking of the coming church age in which the good news of God's salvation would be disseminated to the gentiles, and not specifically for the Jews. Since God's Presence would not be in any one place, and since all believers would be indwelt by God himself (Holy Spirit) there would be no need for a Temple of any sort, because the body of the Believer is the Temple of God. I guess this discussion depends on one's definition of temple. I do not think Webster defines the word as it is used in Scripture. If the term "temple" is defined as "the place where God meets with man, or the place where God's Presence dwells," then there are no earthly temples, as in the days of Israel. The only temples of this sort are those made of flesh.]]

## POLYGAMY

Perhaps neither you nor I care, but this topic continues to be used, by the fundamentalist Christian community, to incite opinion against us. Your suggestion that this was just one of many sins committed by the O.T. Patriarchs, didn't address the very compelling evidence in 2 Samuel 12:8 to the contrary. Did you know the Law of Moses required polygamy under certain circumstances? Study up on "Levirate Marriage" in your Bible Dictionary/Concordance. It should refer you to Deut. 25:5-10.

[[As I may have indicated, I don't know that much about polygamy. I am familiar with Levirate Marriage as instituted by the Mosaic Law. See also Ruth, and Genesis 38. I believe LM was instituted to provide male offspring to a widow without a son from her dead husband. The child born would be called a child of the deceased husband, and would inherit his personal property. This would ensure a perpetuation of that man's name in Israel, and also provide assets available to the mother, who would otherwise not possess any property. I believe it is also a cultural thing, and a special circumstances provision. You don't hear much about it as time goes on. Most if not all of Solomon's extra wives were undoubtedly marriages having political importance. When kings entered into treaties with other kings, they would often provide a daughter to the other in order to ensure the keeping of the treaty. She was somewhat of a bargaining chip, or an insurance policy. 'Solomon knew many strange women. . . ' they were foreigners -- Gentiles -- and God did not approve because they turned his heart away from the God of Israel, and because Solomon was becoming engaged in "entangling alliances." (George Washington, not Bible)]]

## DAYS

You say that, "Jesus believed in a literal six-day creation." How do you know that? After all, since Jesus Himself is the Creator, I must believe as He did.

[[I guess since He created the world, and he was there, and knows how long it took him. I seem to recall a passage where this is inferred, but I can't remember it or find it. I'm pretty sure the guy on the "Evolution" tapes I will lend you talks about that passage.]]

Reflectively Yours,  
Victor

## LETTER 7

From: Poulsen, Victor M  
To: Bradlee, Hans C  
Sent: Sunday, August 02, 1998 9:52 PM  
Subject: [Jimmy Carter on the Mormons](#)

Hans,

I started this some time ago but have been preoccupied with a number of different things including building a new home and a braving a high adventure trip to Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico that just about killed me.

### ORACLES

After a little research, I've learned that there is more than one definition of "oracle" which probably explains the confusion between us.

1. REVELATIONS given by God through His prophets are "oracles." (e.g. Hebrews 5:12)
2. MEN WHO RECEIVE REVELATIONS are themselves called "oracles." (e.g. 1 Peter 4:11)
3. Any SACRED PLACE, where revelations are received, is called an "oracle." (e.g. 1 Kings 8:6)

Your reference to Romans 3:2 brought to my mind the second definition while you were undoubtedly thinking of the first. Although I think you were correct in that regard, my ensuing argument remains largely valid since a people who is "entrusted with" the revelations (oracles) of God is also entrusted with the prophets (oracles) who receive them.

You seem to want to draw an important distinction between the prophets whose revelations were eventually included in the collection of scripture known as the "Bible" and prophets whose revelations were not. And part of your justification for doing so is Romans 3:2. When placed in their proper context, I think it is difficult to use Paul's words to make such a distinction. When Paul wrote of the "oracles" (scripture) of God, there was no Bible nor would there be for THREE CENTURIES! The Christian canon at that time was fluid and growing (see Note 1) making it naive and presumptuous to substitute Biblical references to scripture (e.g. Romans 3:2), with the word "Bible." This is the same mistake made by many Christians in suggesting that John's ominous warning concerning "THIS book" and "THIS prophecy" in Revelation 22:18-19 actually refers to a non-extant Bible rather than his OWN book of revelation (see Note 2).

I reiterate what I said previously that, "Bible-based Christian theology is inextricably connected to the assumption that the canonization PROCESS of the Bible is at least as inspired as its content - a subject of considerable debate to be sure." In fact, I would argue that the Bible's table of contents must be given the same scriptural veracity by the Christian community as the rest of the Bible. Although, at its compilation, there was much agreement concerning what should be included in the Christian canon, the contents of today's Bible were NOT universally accepted as "scripture, the whole scripture, and nothing but scripture." Therefore, the importance and influence of documents such as Athanasius' Easter Letter cannot be minimized. Indeed, the ability to determine the content of a collection of scripture rivals the ability to author it.

(Incidentally, I believe that Athanasius was Greek). And, of course, the great cementing process of any resolution is the passage of time where suggestion becomes a truth and ponderings ripen to irrefutable fact.

I think the question Christians (especially those who preach an "inerrant Bible") MUST not take for granted concerns God's involvement in the Bible canonization process. It's easy to conclude that the Bible is exactly as God intended it to be just as it's easy to conclude that every Bible translation is exactly as it should be. "How could God let it be otherwise?" Of course it is much more complicated than that since man and his God-given agency are involved in the equation. My fear is that the question is too often ignored. It seems so futile to argue the minutia of Biblical verse when the bigger picture of Bible compilation remains unresolved. Those who have truly come to grips with this issue (and you may well be one of them) are worthy of great respect and they certainly have mine.

#### NOTE 1:

At the time of Old Testament canonization, there was controversy over the inclusion of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon (surprise), and Esther. While at the time of New Testament canonization, James, II Peter, II and III John, Jude, Hebrews, and (ironically) Revelation were not universally used or accepted in the Christian community. Additionally, Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermas, the Didache, and the Gospel according to the Hebrews were widely used and accepted by Christians as scripture.

#### NOTE 2:

Of course, one cannot forward the notion of an incomplete or imperfect canon without being accused of Biblical heresy. It is, at once, a frustrating and curious thing that is well compared to Judaism's declaration at Jamnia in A.D. 70 that the canon of scripture was complete with the 39 books that would become the Old Testament and that adding to that canon was an act of heresy. Interestingly, there is a markedly similar mentality among many Christians with respect to the Bible where a willingness to accept continuing divine guidance is interpreted as contempt for past guidance. Yet it is both a tragic and arrogant attitude that allows one to proclaim the heavens closed and that God has nothing more to say to men. It may be tempting to counter that it is really any incongruity between modern and ancient scripture that Christians object to. Yet although critically important, congruity is nevertheless a separate issue. No, it is the very IDEA of modern scripture that horrifies many Christians just as it horrified the ancient Jews. And given the turbulent introduction of New Testament revelation, there can be no end to the irony of that fact.

#### ISRAELIS AND JEWS

The story goes something like this. Jacob was, of course, given the name of "Israel" by God. His twelve sons became the patriarchs of each of twelve tribes collectively known as the "House of Israel." About 925 B.C. the House of Israel was divided into two kingdoms. Ten tribes formed the Northern Kingdom known as "Israel" while the remaining two tribes of Benjamin and Judah formed the Southern Kingdom of "Judah." The Northern Kingdom fell into apostasy adopting many of the practices of Baalism despite the ministries of Elijah and others. They were eventually carried away captive into Assyria. Prophecies speak of these "Lost Ten Tribes" returning to their homelands from the "north countries" when, at last, they are ready to accept the gospel.

Some definitions:

**JEW** - First of all, this is a designation given to the tribe of Judah and secondly, to those who allied themselves with Judah - primarily the tribe of Benjamin. (In the latter sense, Paul was certainly a Jew). But in a broader fallacious sense, all twelve tribes of Israel are sometimes called by this name.

**ISRAEL** - First of all, it is the man Jacob. Secondly, it refers to his descendants. And finally, in a Christian context, it is a designation given to true believers in Christ.

I don't think it would normally be appropriate to refer to Abraham or Noah as either Israeli or Jewish (except, perhaps, in a broad sense of religious brotherhood) and that's where I have a problem with your interpretation of Paul's statement in Romans 3:1-2 and your subsequent assertion:

"Up to the point of Messiah, **GOD WORKED EXCLUSIVELY THROUGH ISRAEL -- THE PROPHETS WERE ISRAELI**, the books of the Bible were written by Israelis, they were the custodians of God's word, and ultimately Messiah came from them." (upper-case added)

Perhaps you think it splitting hairs, but the point does become significant when you use it (as you have done above) to argue that the canon of scripture **MUST** be complete and that its authors must be of a particular nationality and can exist only in the past. In fact, Abraham and Noah are best described as Hebrew. It is true that these pre-Israeli prophets authored no Biblical scripture (though some of Abraham's writings are part of the LDS canon). But even if you reject as scripture all but Biblical texts, some of Bible authorship is still uncertain (as you have acknowledged). It may be safe to assume that even if some of its traditional authorship is erroneous, the true Bible authors are likely Israeli. But what if they were not? Would such a discovery be grounds to purge these writings from the traditional Christian canon? It is really a question that needn't be asked as there is no reason to put an ancestral requirement on scriptural authorship (consider Matt. 3:9). If the prophet Abraham wrote God's word under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, those writings are scripture regardless of Abraham's lineage or its eventual canonization.

## TEMPLES

You make an interesting point by arguing that our bodies have replaced wooden and stone structures as the "temples" of God. And I guess, if the only purpose of a temple was to provide a meeting place between deity and man, your conclusion would be tempting. I believe there is much more to it than that. Unfortunately, Biblical details concerning how temples were used are little understood and often overlooked by the Christian community making it no surprise that they are largely absent from modern Christianity. Yet modern revelation, essential in a living church, provides much elucidation to those who will hear it.

Certainly the "transition period," from Judaism to Christianity, you speak of was very real and it is obvious, from apostolic writings, that it took many years for Jesus' teachings to be absorbed by His disciples. Nevertheless, Jesus remains the example of Christianity and, for many decades, the temple was a sanctuary of great religious import to Him and His followers. And even

Biblical scripture teaches that temples are not relegated to history. In a previous letter, I referred to a detailed description of a future temple seen by the prophet Ezekiel. In any event, it is certainly an issue worthy of significant investigation.

NOTE:

Would it be more accurate to say that temples were historically located AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE rather than IN JERUSALEM? The former certainly includes the latter and also allows for the tabernacle which followed the Children of Israel during their 40-year journey in the wilderness. It's a cause and effect issue. Temples were not built for Jerusalem but for the people of God who lived there.

Additionally Yours,  
Victor

*"We believe all that God has revealed, all that He does now reveal, and we believe that he will yet reveal many great and important things pertaining to the Kingdom of God." (Joseph Smith, Jr.)*

*"...What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?..."These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. "Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple..." (Rev 7:13-15)*

**LETTER 8**

From: Bradlee, Hans C  
To: Poulsen, Victor M  
Sent: Mon, 03 Aug 1998 13:05:38  
Subject: [Ho Dpodmvtjpo](#)

I had comments for most of your points, but I realized that further debate would not be profitable. I respect your viewpoints inasmuch as I believe you are sincere.

We have a communication difficulty that often arises when other religions use Biblical terminology to describe their beliefs. When you say priest, and temple, and oracle, Jesus Christ, son of God, and all the rest of it, I have been approaching it as if we were discussing the same things, but ultimately we are not. It would be like me using the names of your children to describe an event in which your children were not involved. You are using biblical words to describe unbiblical concepts and theologies, which is okay, but it makes cross-religious debate difficult at best. I don't think we can communicate using this type of approach.

You've fought like a tiger, but I prefer fishing. Besides, it's not even tiger season.

Respectfully,  
Abspo

**LETTER 9**

From: Poulsen, Victor M  
To: Bradlee, Hans C  
Sent: Sat, 8 Aug 1998 19:23:36  
Subject: [Jimmy Carter on the Mormons](#)

Hans,

Your note reminded me of a letter I wrote to the Fort Worth Star-Telegram recently. (I may have written something similar to you). The letter was never published.

"With their Convention in Salt Lake City this year, Southern Baptists are taking the opportunity to accentuate their long-standing contention that Mormons are not Christian because we believe in a 'different Jesus' - an argument often repeated by Mormon detractors. It's a curious assertion, really, and I've often wondered at its meaning. There is, after all, only one Christ - Jesus of Nazareth born 2000 years ago in Bethlehem. If we disagree on who he was and what he taught, then let that be the basis of our debate. There is no other Jesus."

So now you are suggesting that we not only believe in a "different Jesus," but also different oracles, different priests, different temples, and so on. It seems to me that such an assertion attempts to disparage my arguments by suggesting that I am talking about "apples" when the conversation is really about "oranges." In fact, I have made logical, reasonable, and contemplative arguments in support of my positions and I have used the Bible to do it. If you are unwilling or unable to respond in kind (and up to this point you have done so magnificently) then just say so but don't tell me that I'm on the wrong subject!

There are at least three reasons why you and I (or any two individuals) understand the same Bible passage differently - 1) my erroneous interpretation, 2) your erroneous interpretation, and 3) the Bible's lack of clarity on the subject in question. Most are willing to acknowledge the dangers of interpretation but the very idea that the Bible is somehow inadequate in a given area seems to frighten people to death - yet it is often the real problem. I sense a danger among such Christians that the Bible has replaced God as their real object of reverence. They can no more believe in an imperfect Bible than an imperfect god.

I'm sure you meant no offense and so you'll have to forgive my abruptness here, but I find this whole "different Jesus" argument a cop out. It suggests fear and resignation from a lack of meaningful retort. It is also insulting to me because it implies that, ultimately, I don't know what we're talking about. It's alright to end our debate but let's recognize the merits of each others arguments and agree to disagree.

I've never felt that a declaration of victory was ever a goal for either of us. This, along with our mutual respect and similar way of thinking has made this debate possible. I have benefited enormously from it and that's the only end I've ever sought. I hope you have had a similar experience.

I just returned from the most physically challenging and rewarding thing I've ever done in Philmont Scout Ranch, to which the Poulsen/Bradlee letters are well compared. Together, they

made me a better person. My muscles, my mind, and my soul have rarely been so stimulated.

Sincerely,  
Tiger

P.S. I intended to respond to No Justice-No Peace (part 4). I won't do that now except to say this:

I really appreciated your wife's insightful comment regarding John 3:5 and how it relates to abortion. Her wisdom further accentuates the inanity of concluding that "born of the water" means "physical birth." It's only fitting that a women would think of it. You expressed some ignorance concerning our doctrine of the Trinity. I deliberately avoided it in favor of other topics because of the letter I wrote you a number of years ago on the subject. Perhaps you have lost or forgotten that letter so I'll send you an e-mail version. It will be a little changed from the original as I have added insight on the subject.

So what do "Abspo" and "Ho Dpodmvtjpo" mean?

**LETTER 10**

From: Bradlee, Hans C  
To: Poulsen, Victor M  
Sent: Tue, 11 Aug 1998 12:31:49  
Subject: [Jimmy Carter on the Mormons](#)

VP,

I don't mean to be offensive toward you or your beliefs. You certainly have the right to believe whatever you want to believe. We have been discussing issues and concepts that are very dear to me, as they are core to my psyche. My beliefs about God and my responsibility to Him are what define me, as I am sure is the case with you. This being the case, I am able to tolerate viewpoints that differ with my fundamental beliefs about God, and His Word, but only to the extent that I agree that other viewpoints exist.

Some things I am open-minded about, others, not. I am open to discussions of the differences in Jews and Israelites, but this is not central to Christianity. When we begin discussing the Person and Work of Christ, certain aspects of this subject are non-negotiable. I am able and willing to listen to differing viewpoints, but when they differ fundamentally from what I believe to be true, I am not at liberty to acknowledge their merit. Actually it's not that I am unable, but that which I believe does not grant other viewpoints true merit. It's along the same lines as John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Christianity by its very nature is exclusive of other viewpoints.

I hope you can forgive me in my assertion that you were discussing the wrong subject. I tend to see discussions from my viewpoint. If we were discussing what I believe to be Biblical Christianity, then you have been explaining and developing ideas and theologies that are utterly foreign to the subject. If we have been discussing Mormon Theology, as perhaps you had assumed, then I have been talking the merits of oranges, when the topic has indeed been apples. If on yet another hand, you assumed we were comparing and contrasting Mormon and Christian ideas, the case is the same -- I was discussing apples, when the whole time the topic was oranges. It doesn't really matter who was on the wrong subject, the point is, the subjects are different.

I still believe that Mormonism and Christianity cannot be discussed rationally using the same vocabulary. I will restate my point -- even though Mormonism and Christianity use words that look the same, and are spelled the same, the words have different meaning. That's why many of the points we make sound so confusing to one another. As you know, words are simply tools or symbols that convey ideas. If we don't agree on the meaning of the symbol, how can we have rational or meaningful discourse using those symbols which, as a result, have a double meaning? The only possible way would be if I knew Mormon doctrine as well as you (which I don't), and if you knew Christian doctrine as well as I (which I doubt). But then even if that were the case, why engage in confusing double-speak? ("War is Peace. Freedom is Slavery.")

Then you get into the even larger area of faith. Even if I knew Mormonism intellectually, I would still be approaching the topic differently, because I would not believe it. I guess that's actually speculation on my part, based on the fact that what I do know of Mormonism, I don't believe. The case would naturally be the same with you. If you do know Christian doctrine

(maybe you do, and maybe you don't) you don't believe it, at least not the Christian doctrine that I believe. Otherwise you would be a Christian and not a Mormon. Perhaps this is inflammatory to you, but I assure you it is not motivated by malice, but an attempt to explain our differing views. This perhaps presents the greatest case for discontinuing our dialogue, as we have reached a critical impasse -- our fundamental core beliefs are different. Yours beliefs may tolerate my errors, but mine will not tolerate yours. So why continue?

Yes, the Jesus you and I have been discussing is largely the same individual. Our disagreement begins at the point of what we believe about him. I don't think that's difficult to understand, and surely you must agree. I believe Jesus is "A", you believe that he is "B". Where can we go from here? "B" may allow "A", but "A" excludes "B" by definition. You believe the Bible is "C", I believe it is "D". "C" and "D" are irreconcilable. How can we discuss ideas in "D" (or is it "C"?) that have any meaning? Perhaps it has been educational for both of us, but this has been my point from the beginning -- ultimately our discussions are meaningless.

I hope you can understand why I find it difficult to respond to your responses. I don't believe it's for the reasons you suggest, but I guess you do. We will have to agree to disagree about that too. I must admit that your assertion that "I am . . . unable to respond." and that my position results from "fear and resignation from a lack of meaningful retort." almost inspired me to resume our "debate", but only for a minute.

You are welcome to respond to No Justice-No Peace (part 4) if you like. I might find it enlightening, and you seem to enjoy the discussion.

We may be wrong, but we are certain.

Hans

p.s. Abspo and Ho Dpodmvtjpo were intended to mean what HAL meant to IBM in "2001: A Space Odyssey", but as you will now see, I am fallible. Abspo (Hans) Ho Dpodmvtjpo (In Conclusion) It was just a cute way to say we're using a different alphabet.

Later

**LETTER 11**

From: Poulsen, Victor M  
To: Bradlee, Hans C  
Sent: Sun, 16 Aug 1998 20:52:00  
Subject: [Jimmy Carter on the Mormons](#)

Hans,

I guess I've duped myself. Let me explain.

A cherished belief among Mormons is that God can communicate truth to us by the Holy Spirit (James 1:5-6). The beauty of James' message here is in its simplicity - if you're uncertain about the truth of something, ask God. "Ask and ye shall receive." Yet, despite its clarity, I hear this belief criticized over and over again in the Christian media and even over the pulpit. It seems that we can't trust ourselves to properly interpret such personal revelation - it could, after all, be our own personal feelings or even Satan speaking to our hearts.

"THE ONLY WAY GOD SPEAKS THE TRUTH TO YOU IS THROUGH THE BIBLE!" they warn. "If two Bible-believers differ on a point of doctrine, it is because one of them is not reading his Bible correctly." "Though God may be willing to do so, we fallible humans cannot trust ourselves with His help."

I don't mean to sound cynical but that really is the message I hear. (I don't pretend to know if you are of a similar mind). I'm left to believe if you can't establish religious truth spiritually, you must have to do it intellectually.

I like to teach and am a firm believer that you have to speak to your audience using the tools that THEY (not you) possess. In that context, I approached our debate as an exercise in Bible interpretation believing that to be the evangelical Christian way. But, as it turns out, you're really no different than I am. You have a core set of beliefs that have, somehow, been confirmed to you and no amount of (seemingly) contrary Bible evidence will compel you to compromise those beliefs.

I've never really understood the relevance of your recurring "A+B=C or D" argument. It was easy to ignore in past letters because you always proceeded to address tangible issues. It's a contradiction, really. One of the primary objectives of debate is to use logic and evidence to ESTABLISH vocabulary. Indeed, if all terminology is agreed upon, there IS NO debate! Think about it! Differing on the sum of "A" and "B" is, by definition, a debate since the value of "A" or "B" is obviously misunderstood by one or both parties. So how am I, or any other theologically misguided person, to come to know the truth? I can't trust myself with personal revelation. And debate is futile because my vocabulary, with respect to such things, is all messed up. So what am I to do?

Of course I don't really believe that I am "theologically misguided." But, from your point of view, there must be a way for me to come to a knowledge of the truth. And perhaps you are not a nay-sayer of personal revelation after all. But I think by throwing your hands in the air (metaphorically speaking) over reasoned debate you have rejected the only other possibility.

And so you can see, I've duped myself. I thought that by engaging in such a debate, I was speaking the language of evangelical Christianity which seems to be to establish truth intellectually, through a fastidious study of the Bible. But now, I guess, I really don't know what that language is after all.

(But I've still had a great time!)

Foolishly Yours,  
Victor

I appreciate your invitation to respond to No Justice-No Peace (part 4), but a one-sided debate is an oxymoron. It takes two to Tango.

## **The POULSEN / BRADLEE Letters**

### **PART 4** **BILLY GRAHAM RESPONDS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

While Hans and I were engaged in this two-dimensional debate spawned from newspaper columns, I received a response from Billy Graham in November of 1997. It was actually a response from his ministry written by Alison Barker. Once again I forwarded the letter, along with my own comments, to Hans. A third series of letters, I've called "*Billy Graham Responds*," ensued.

#### **SOME TOPICS COVERED**

- Reality of Hell
- Who's Heard the Gospel Message
- Judgment and Works
- Original Sin
- Christian Orthodoxy
- Bible Versions
- God Consciousness

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**LETTER 1**

From: Poulsen, Victor M  
 To: Bradlee, Hans C  
 Sent: Sun, 18 Jan 1998  
 Subject: [Billy Graham Responds](#)

Hans,

I apologize for waiting so long to get this to you--things have been hectic. There were four separate items in the envelope: a letter addressed to me from Alison Barker; a reprint of Dr. Graham's Jan. 14, 1995 edition of "My Answer," a pamphlet entitled "There is a Real Hell" by Billy Graham; and a pamphlet entitled "The Great White Throne Judgment" by Roy Gustafson.

I have included the letter in its entirety and summaries of Dr. Graham's writings. Because the second pamphlet was not written by Dr. Graham and because I didn't find anything remarkable in it, I chose to exclude it. However, I'll be happy to send you a copy if you desire.

Victor

---

*Billy Graham Evangelistic Association  
 1300 Harmon Place  
 Minneapolis, MN 55403-1988  
 (612) 338-0500*

*November 24, 1997*

*Mr. Victor Poulsen  
 Fort Worth, TX*

*Dear Mr. Poulsen:*

*Your letter to Dr. Graham by way of the media services has come to us for a reply. We are happy to answer in his behalf.*

*You asked us a question which has been pondered down through the ages: Is man so capable of committing infinite sin that God judges him worthy of infinite punishment? It is important to consider what the Bible tells us about judgment and hell. Most of what we know about hell comes from Jesus' own words. He mentions no intermediate place where one might pass from one condition to the other. Final judgment simply settles what has already begun according to the person's response to God while on earth.*

*Those in hell are there because they refused or ignored God's love; they are solely responsible for their own condition. It does not matter whether there are lesser or fewer sins, although it is thought that there may be degrees of punishment in hell; the wicked will be judged, every man according to his works (Revelation 20:13). God does not want anyone to be lost but wants all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).*

*God gives many warnings to mankind. The Bible says: "Now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation"; "Seek the Lord while he may be found"; "How shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?" (2 Corinthians 6:2, Isaiah 55:6, Hebrews 2:3). One of the most pertinent warnings is found in Proverbs 29:1: "He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." The most important thing we have to settle in this life is our eternal salvation, for there is no further opportunity after death. The Bible says: "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (see Hebrews 9:27, Mark 8:36).*

*We do not need to reconcile the love of God and the wrath of God. God Himself has done that already; see 2 Corinthians 5:19. In Christ's death on the cross of Calvary, the love and mercy of God were combined with His holiness, righteousness, and justice. At Calvary was the greatest demonstration of all time of both the love and hatred of God - love for lost sinners, but a holy hatred poured out in judgment on sin and all unrighteousness. His justice demanded that sin be punished; His love has provided a way to escape that punishment. If God had overlooked sin, He would have been putting His stamp of approval on it. Each person who accepts Christ as his Savior has been judged for his sin already because Jesus bore our sins in His own body on the cross as our substitute; read 1 Peter 2:24 and 2 Corinthians 5:21. Therefore, the future judgment for the Christian will not involve any condemnation but only reward for faithful service while still on earth.*

*We are sending literature which we trust will be helpful to you. May God bless you abundantly.*

*Sincerely,*

*Alison Barker  
Christian Guidance Department*

---

### **My Comments...**

1. Although she makes some good points and provides some interesting scripture references, unfortunately, Ms. Barker's comments mirror those of so many other "Orthodox Christian" apologists in assuming that all have had the opportunity to "respond to God while on earth." That's a really bad assumption. It's a bad assumption not only because it isn't true, but because it allows an oversimplification of the matter. Ironically, she quotes Rev. 20:13 which not only points out that men will be judged "according to their works," (a largely non-Orthodox doctrine) but the context of which clearly shows that this final judgment occurs AFTER the Millennium. Where are the souls of the dead in the meantime? But I addressed that issue previously. However, I agree with Ms. Barker that once this final judgment has occurred, the judged will not have opportunity to "pass from one condition to the other."

2. I was most drawn to Ms. Barker's comments in the third paragraph. "Those in hell are there because they refused or ignored God's love; they are solely responsible for their own condition." Although I completely agree with this statement (and I know you do not), its significance is somewhat diminished by her unfortunate assumption noted above. But it was her next statement that really caught my eye, "...although it is thought that there may be degrees of punishment in

hell..." Again, this is a topic we have already discussed. Obviously I agree. I've just never heard such teaching from "Orthodox" Christianity.

3. I suspect that Ms. Barker, like others who have "pondered [it] down through the ages," doesn't really know the answer to my question. It's all right to admit as much. But no matter, I think I found an answer from the man to whom my question was addressed.

---

## MY ANSWER

(by Billy Graham)

Wednesday, November 15, 1995

*Q: Does God punish every sin we ever commit, or does He allow us to get by with some things, as long as they are not too bad? -- J.R.Y.*

*A: The Bible is clear: Every sin has consequences. The Bible says, "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction." (Gal. 6:7-8)*

*Does that mean God always gives us exactly what we deserve, so that when we sin we will be punished immediately and completely for that sin: No, God is gracious and merciful and patient with us...*

*The greatest news, however is this: We do not need to bear the eternal penalty for our sin -- and the reason is because Christ has taken our sins and paid the penalty for us by His death on the cross...*

---

## My Comments...

This is similar teaching to that which prompted me to write Dr. Graham. What does it mean to warn that *"Every sin has consequences"* if the consequence for a single sin is no different from the consequence of a lifetime of sin?

---

## THERE IS A REAL HELL

(by Billy Graham)

In this pamphlet, Dr. Graham suggests that the Bible teaches of *"at least three kinds of hell."* He defines them as follows:

*"First, there is hell in the heart. Thousands of people have hell in their heart. Much of the world assumes that human nature is good, but the Bible teaches that it is basically evil..."*

*"Second, the Bible teaches that hell is around us. There is hell in the home and hell in society..."*

*"Third, there is hell in the future, and it goes on and on..."*

He continues,

*"There are many mysteries surrounding the nature of hell. Hell is separation from God. We are separated from God by sin, and that continues into eternity..."*

Under the heading "*Hell is Terrible*," Dr. Graham ponders,

*"Jesus used the word 'fire.' I have often wondered if hell is a terrible burning within our hearts for God, to fellowship with God, a fire that we can never quench. If we have turned our back on God, we are banished from all that is joyous, good and righteous..."*

And finally, under the heading "*You Can Go to Heaven*," he concludes,

*"Repent of your sins. To repent means to change--change your mind, change your way of living. Let Christ come and help you change. Then by faith receive Christ who died for you and rose again..."*

---

### **My comments...**

1. Obviously Dr. Graham's pronouncement on the nature of man is consistent with yours and apparently contrary to mine. It depends on how you define "nature." Though I suspect he would disagree, I don't believe there is any evil in a child. This changes, however, as the child matures and becomes accountable for his actions.
2. I think most would agree with Dr. Graham's three types of hell. It is his ponderings on the final hell that I found, at once, intriguing and surprising and WHERE I THINK I FOUND HIS PERSONAL ANSWER TO MY ORIGINAL QUESTION! So is hell really eternal punishment for a short life of sin wherein the sinner is physically tortured with "fire and brimstone." Or is it but a denial of the reward of heaven wherein the sinner is banished from the presence of God? The difference between "punishment" and "lack of reward" is, of course, more than subtle. So the sinner receives a punishment commensurate with his sins and then is denied a place with the God whom he rejected--the former, a punishment and the latter, a denial of reward. His judgment is just. Obviously, Dr. Graham's ponderings are contrary to what many would regard as Orthodox Christianity.
3. Also contrary to Orthodoxy, Dr. Graham stays true to scripture that repeatedly admonishes us to repent. Only then do we receive Christ by our faith in Him. Faith AND works bring salvation. Indeed, faith without works is merely a belief. And even the heathen believes in something. (James 2:14-19)

**LETTER 2**

From: Bradlee, Hans C  
To: Poulsen, Victor M  
Sent: Tue, 20 Jan 1998  
Subject: [Billy Graham Responds](#)

I guess one day we will see if there is a real Hell, and if it's as hellish as they say. Until then, all we have to go on is the Word of God.

I noticed a bit of misplaced confidence on your part regarding the assertion that not all have had the opportunity to respond to God. I think Romans 1:18-20 is crystal clear on this topic. All men are without excuse. They HAVE had the chance to respond to God. If they respond with negative volition to 'that which may be known about God from the things that are made,' is God held responsible to provide them with the Gospel Message a la Acts 4:12? Would they not simply scoff or spit in His face? They don't want the information if they respond negatively at the point of God-consciousness, and in these cases, I don't think they get it. I believe you would be partially correct if you had said "not all have heard." But this is not the same as "not all have had the opportunity to hear." Romans 1 says they have, and usually the response is negative.

I agree with Alison's answer. I do not think she went far enough, however, because the Bible teaches that Christ died for the sins of the whole world, not only for the sins of the elect. (Unlimited vs. Limited Atonement) I also think her understanding of Revelation 20 is typical, but it is not one that I hold. If Christ paid for the sins of the whole world, how could anyone be judged for sin again? The sin has already been paid for once, for all, by Christ on the cross. The only works left to be judged for are the "good" works, which I think Revelation 20 is addressing.

Though she did not come right out and say it, I think she meant that people go to hell because they want to. I would also concur with this. Every member of the human race who has ever walked the face of this earth, after reaching the point of God-consciousness, has had the opportunity to respond to God. Whether they heard the Gospel Message or not, they have had the chance to respond. Some don't need the Gospel Message, because of their lack of interest. All the others, who have responded positively to their God-consciousness, have been given the opportunity to hear the Gospel. You hold that young children (babies) are sinless, but I disagree because of Inherited Sin, and Imputed Sin, the concepts of which you reject. "I was shapen in iniquity. . . ." I do believe that babies go to heaven, however. Not because they are sinless, but because they are not culpable, until they reach God-consciousness.

You don't understand orthodox Christianity as well as you think you do, nor do you understand my beliefs.

*"Those in hell are there because they refused or ignored God's love; they are solely responsible for their own condition."* Although I completely agree with this statement (and I know you do not), its significance is somewhat diminished by her unfortunate assumption noted above.

That is exactly what I believe. People go to Hell because that's where they want to go.

Do not be too diligent in attaching Orthodox Theology to the statements of men, such as Dr.

Graham and myself. We are responding to questions raised by others, and are not attempting to formulate an entire theology. For a more comprehensive theological perspective, you would do well to study a book on theology. May I suggest "Basic Theology" by Charles Ryrie. He provides a very understandable treatment of Orthodox Christian Theology, that even the Lay Person can understand.

Until we meet again. . . I need to try to get those tapes on Evolution to you at some point in the future.

Your Disagreeable Friend,  
Hans

**LETTER 3**

From: Poulsen, Victor M  
To: Bradlee, Hans C  
Sent: Thu, 29 Jan 1998  
Subject: [Billy Graham Responds](#)

Thanks again for your comments. I'll try to be brief this time.

**WHO'S HEARD?**

I guess we'll have to disagree on this one. Though I must admit, I was taken aback at your conclusion that all men "HAVE had the chance to respond to God" given your previous statement that "those who die in ignorance of the Good News of Christ, indeed are damned." Perhaps my "misplaced confidence" on the matter resulted from my perception that we agreed many had NOT heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ while only disagreeing on their destiny. But then you introduced the idea of "responding positively to God." I think I understand your reasoning as follows:

1. The individual "responds positively to God." (In the form of works?)
2. This results in an opportunity to hear the saving gospel message.
3. And finally, he accepts or rejects this message.

Of course the flaw here is that, in the real world and for real people, Step 2 often cannot happen. You simply cannot conclude that every person who has ever lived, has had access to Christian missionaries or scripture. In fact, I would argue that most of humanity, past and present, has not. Will you then argue that no such individual has ever responded positively to God? Not even ONE!? This sounds an awful lot like the erroneous and unjust doctrine of predestination," where persons who live without access to His word, are predestined to "respond negatively to God" because no mechanism exists to teach them the truth. This, of course, also predestines them to Hell. What of the millions of Americas' inhabitants prior to the arrival of Columbus and the missionaries that would follow? There are the Pygmies of Africa, Australia's Aborigines, and the pagan Norsemen. What about Communist China, Buddhist Tibet, and Hindu India? Yes, God's word eventually reached many of these peoples but even if ONE was missed, your argument breaks down and my questions are legitimized.

No. I stand by my overconfident assertion that Ms. Barker's remarks were based on a "really bad assumption." Call it "opportunity to respond to God" or "opportunity to hear the Message," the conclusion of the matter is unchanged--without possibility of the latter, there is no justice.

In this regard, I think you misrepresent the teaching of Romans 1:18-20. Paul is warning the Roman Saints "WHO HOLD THE TRUTH in unrighteousness" of God's wrath for their ungodliness. Simply, he was teaching them that where much is given, much is expected.

Nevertheless, I agree that man's eternal reward is to his own satisfaction. We can only feel content with those of own kind.

**JUDGED ACCORDING TO THEIR WORKS**

Again, I think you misunderstand the scriptures when you conclude, "The only works left to be judged for are the 'good' works, which I think Revelation 20 is addressing." Verse 13...

"And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and HELL delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works."

Will you argue that the dead from Hell are being judged for their good works?

#### SIX OR HALF DOZEN

Your acknowledgment that babies do go to heaven, "not because they are sinless, but because they are not culpable, until they reach God-consciousness" was intriguing. But now I'm all the more puzzled as to what theological purpose is served by the concepts of "inherited" and "imputed" sin. Apparently they are of no consequence until the age of culpability, but by then, our own sins are sufficient to damn us. We need the Savior even without being responsible for what Adam did!

Doesn't it make more sense to say that we are born with the potential and the tendency to commit sin, but do not sin until we have reached a point where we can understand right and wrong?

#### ORTHODOXY

Of course "orthodoxy" is really just another name for "traditionalism." And, although tradition has its merits, it has historically been a poor basis for faith mostly because it has a tendency to change with time. And so in using it or any adjective to describe a group of Christians, I continue to struggle with Christian diversity.

Unorthodoxically Yours,  
Victor

**LETTER 4**

From: Bradlee, Hans C  
 To: Poulsen, Victor M  
 Sent: Monday, February 9, 1998 1:19 PM  
 Subject: [Billy Graham Responds](#)

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 Note: To facilitate plain text viewing, I have enclosed Hans's remarks in double brackets [[...]]. My remarks, highlighted in red by Hans, are enclosed by double braces {{...}} - vmp  
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From: Poulsen, Victor M  
 To: Bradlee, Hans C  
 Sent: Thursday, January 29, 1998 9:44 PM  
 Subject: Billy Graham Responds

Thanks again for your comments. I'll try to be brief this time.

**WHO'S HEARD?**

I guess we'll have to disagree on this one. Though I must admit, I was taken aback at your conclusion that all men "HAVE had the chance to respond to God" [[(Your assertion that all men have NOT had the opportunity is naive. Again Romans 1:18.)]] given your previous statement that "those who die in ignorance of the Good News of Christ, indeed are damned." Perhaps my "misplaced confidence" on the matter resulted from my perception that we agreed many had NOT heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ while only disagreeing on their destiny. But then you introduced the idea of "responding positively to God." I think I understand your reasoning as follows:

1. The individual "responds positively to God." (In the form of works?)

[[You don't seem to acknowledge that God is capable of doing something you can't see, touch, hear or feel. No not works. Volition, Mental Attitude. Do you not think God knows all? Every thought that ever existed in anyone's mind? God knows who will respond positively, and who will respond negatively. Those who respond positively to what may be known of God, will receive more opportunities. Works has nothing to do with it.]]

2. This results in an opportunity to hear the saving gospel message.

[[Yes]] .

3. And finally, he accepts or rejects this message.

[[Yes]] .

Of course the flaw here is that, in the real world and for real people, Step 2 often cannot happen .

[[There is no "flaw". Step 2 is not needed most of the time, because in step 1, they failed the test. Is that so difficult to understand?]]

You simply cannot conclude that every person who has ever lived, has had access to Christian missionaries or scripture.

[[That is NOT what I am saying. Those who reject what may be known of God from the Creation, have no use for the Gospel. They don't need it because they have rejected God already. Why did Moses not witness to Pharaoh and invite him to ask God for Forgiveness and accept Christ as his Savior? Because He had been provided proof of God's existence from the creation, and in the form of the plagues. Each additional revelation of God's existence and power only served to harden Pharaoh's heart even more.]]

[[What purpose would it serve to provide a pagan Norse tribe with the Gospel if every member of the tribe had rejected "what may be known about God" from the Creation? Would they say, "Well, if you put it like that, then yes, I would like to accept Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior?" No they would not. They would respond in essentially the same way that Ted Turner responded to the good news, 'I don't want anyone to have to die for me. I've had a few drinks and I've had a few girl friends, and if that's going to send me to Hell, then so be it.']]

[[Now is that unclear? Is that unreasonable? Where is the flaw?]]

[[Now what I am NOT saying is that Christians should not go to the ends of the earth with the good news. Christians are not omniscient, and we don't know who has rejected God and who will accept God. So all men are fair game as far as needing the Gospel. Christians are told to GO. God will take care of the rest.]]

In fact, I would argue that most of humanity, past and present, has not. Will you then argue that no such individual has ever responded positively to God? Not even ONE!?

[[My God is able to ensure that all men who have responded positively to their God-consciousness will be provided the information needed to make a decision for Christ.]]

This sounds an awful lot like the erroneous and unjust doctrine of predestination, " {{where persons who live without access to His word, are predestined to "respond negatively to God" because no mechanism exists to teach them the truth.}}

[[Just because you do not understand a biblical doctrine does not mean that it is erroneous or unjust. Your explanation highlighted in red proves that you don't understand it.]]

This, of course, also predestines them to Hell. What of the millions of Americas' inhabitants prior to the arrival of Columbus and the missionaries that would follow? There are the Pygmies of Africa, Australia's Aborigines, and the pagan Norsemen. What about Communist China, Buddhist Tibet, and Hindu India? Yes, God's word eventually reached many of these peoples but even if ONE was missed, your argument breaks down and my questions are legitimized.

[[What about them? I see no problem or disharmony. What about Rahab the Harlot? What about the Israelites who destroyed entire cities: men, women, children, infants, cows, goats,

sheep, puppies and kitties? What about the God who instructed them to do so? Based on my understanding of your viewpoints, I would guess that you have a problem reconciling this with your justice. But does Almighty God? I think not.]]

[[Your questions are indeed legitimate, but your conclusions are not.]]

No. I stand by my overconfident assertion that Ms. Barker's remarks were based on a "really bad assumption." Call it "opportunity to respond to God" or "opportunity to hear the Message," the conclusion of the matter is unchanged--without possibility of the latter, there is no justice.

[[Still wrong.]]

In this regard, I think you misrepresent the teaching of Romans 1:18-20. Paul is warning the Roman Saints "WHO HOLD THE TRUTH in unrighteousness" of God's wrath for their ungodliness. Simply--he was teaching them that where much is given, much is expected.

[[This is an instance where you should be brave and throw out what the KJV says and go with the original language.]]

[[Humanity is further indicted as TEN ALETHEIAN EN ADIKIA KATECHONTON. TEN ALETHEIAN is not the gospel specifically but general truth about God which is explained further in the following verses. Truth in the NT is to be both believed and obeyed. KATECHONTON suggests that men have refused to do either. The AV translates "hold," giving the KATA a perfective force. Linked as it is with EN ADIKIA the criticism is that of hypocrisy: "practice unrighteousness while knowing truth." In this case their sin is described only in EN ADIKIA and not in KATECHONTON. It would be difficult to show that the idea of hypocrisy is not somewhat involved, but from here it is but a small step to understand KATA as simply "down" or "against." It is, then, the "suppressing" of truth that is condemned. The indictment which follows seems to confirm this meaning. EN ADIKIA then, is instrumental: they "suppress the truth by means of their unrighteousness." The problem is more than hypocrisy; it is rebellion. Truth understood was refused. Cranfield gives a conative force to the participle, pointing out that men do not actually succeed in suppressing the truth but only "attempt to suppress the truth." Again, it is difficult to deny the point, but Cranfield only addresses a part of the picture. Granted, the truth is not successfully suppressed in men's minds, but the suppression of truth is very much accomplished in their actions. The point is not merely that men have tried to avoid the truth intellectually but that by their ADIKIA they have actually refused it. Consistent with Paul's other references to man's inherent knowledge of God in this context (1:28, 32; 2:14-15, etc.), their knowledge involves a sense of moral duty, a moral duty which he here says all have spurned.]]

[[<http://www.pot.infi.net/~tulip/romans1.html>]]

[[I have Italicized (capitalized) the Greek words, but they are shown in the proper font at the URL above. This is another reason why it is so important to hold that the very words of scripture are inspired, inerrant and accurate. But remember that God did not write the NT (or OT) in 1611 English, but in Koine Greek of the First Century.]]

Nevertheless, I agree that man's eternal reward is to his own satisfaction. We can only feel

content with those of own kind.

### JUDGED ACCORDING TO THEIR WORKS

Again, I think you misunderstand the scriptures when you conclude, "The only works left to be judged for are the 'good' works, which I think Revelation 20 is addressing." Verse 13...

*"And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and HELL delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works."*

Will you argue that the dead from Hell are being judged for their good works?

[[That is exactly what I have been saying from the very beginning. Go back and look at what I wrote. This is why I keep wondering if you are hearing what I say, and thus the banging of the head against a wall. They can't be judged for their sins because their sin was poured out on Christ on the Cross in a moment of time. It was so horrible it made him scream "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" At that moment God the Father and God the Holy Spirit turned their backs on God the Son. Why? "Thou art holy." God as a Holy God cannot tolerate or condone sin of any kind. This is the whole point behind the First Advent of Christ--To die for and pay for "the sins of the whole world." This is Unlimited Atonement vs. Limited Atonement. Christ died for the sins of all vs. Christ died for the sins of the elect only.]]

### SIX OR HALF DOZEN

Your acknowledgment that babies do go to heaven, "not because they are sinless, but because they are not culpable, until they reach God-consciousness" was intriguing. But now I'm all the more puzzled as to what theological purpose is served by the concepts of "inherited" and "imputed" sin.

[[This is not "theology" to me. I do not engage in this discussion because I enjoy theological dialogue. I do so because it is the Truth, and as such it is important. Imputed and Inherited Sin do not exist to serve a theological purpose. They are merely expressions of reality. If you don't accept the reality, then you have to change your theology to match your perception of reality. I'm not a theologian, but if you want to ask one about it, I'm sure they could give you a better explanation. If you don't know any, I can find you one. Billy Graham is not a theologian, however. I do know of one--Charles Ryrie--"Basic Theology."]]

Apparently {{they are of no consequence until the age of culpability, but by then, our own sins are sufficient to damn us. We need the Savior even without being responsible for what Adam did!}}

[[Now THAT is TRUE, and I agree 100%,]]

Doesn't it make more sense to say that we are born with the potential and the tendency to commit sin, but do not sin until we have reached a point where we can understand right and wrong?

[[It makes sense to say that, and would be wise to do so, because, once again it is true. But if you stop there, you do not accurately express reality. I assure you it is more important than I

have been able to explain.]]

## ORTHODOXY

Of course "orthodoxy" is really just another name for "traditionalism." And, although tradition has its merits, it has historically been a poor basis for faith mostly because it has a tendency to change with time. And so in using it or any adjective to describe a group of Christians, I continue to struggle with Christian diversity.

[[Actually, ortho = straight, right or true + doxa = opinion.]]

[[I put those together to mean one whose teaching is correct, but that may seem a bit self-serving. Webster says they mean "conforming to an established doctrine," and I have no problem with that either. Mormonism is relatively new to the scene, as far as I can tell. And in that sense, and in the sense that it contradicts the long-established Judeo-Christian Scriptures, it cannot be considered orthodox. Actually "unorthodox" is not the term that comes to mind when I think of Mormonism, but I use it to be gracious.]]

Unorthodoxically Yours,  
Victor

[[Believe it or not. . . . I love you man.]]

[[Hans]]

**LETTER 5**

From: Poulsen, Victor M  
To: Bradlee, Hans C  
Sent: Mon, 13 Apr 1998 20:29:5  
Subject: [Billy Graham Responds](#)

Hans,

I hope you had a nice Easter. The Choir program I was working on turned out well. I hope, now, I can devote a little more time to this most stimulating pursuit.

**WHO'S HEARD**

This discussion has almost become surreal to me.

You counter my argument that the gospel message has not been within the reach of all men (in their lifetimes) by contending, "My God is able to ensure that all men who have responded positively to their God-consciousness will be provided the information needed to make a decision for Christ." And how am I to refute what God CAN do? Yet I will argue that God is able to ensure that all men have an opportunity to HEAR the gospel of Jesus Christ before the day of judgment. And how will YOU argue with what God CAN do? In fact, anyone, of any faith, will argue that God can do all kinds of things defined within the context of their particular theology. And how are we to argue with what God CAN do? Of course, in advancing such an argument, you err by making God a pawn of your theology. We agree that God is omnipotent. The point of this discussion is to uncover what God DOES do, not what He is CAPABLE of doing.

You also invoke issues of temporal injustice to temper my argument against eternal injustice. Yes, God requires men to do things which, by any earthly measure, are completely unjust. But "earthly measures" are myopic. I'm really not interested in whether it was lawful for the Israelites to kill women and children under God's command. My question of justice (that spawned this considerable exchange) concerns the ETERNAL status of all who leave mortality. Eons from now, what difference will it make how or when one died? All that will matter is where you are and where you will remain.

I pointed this out in a previous letter when I stated "...realize that justice must be measured from an eternal perspective. Otherwise, the injustice of our world would know no conclusion."

Now, let's see if we can find some common ground.

1. I think we agree that, within the context of the atonement, ultimately a man's eternal destiny is in his own hands. In other words, any man who WOULD be saved, CAN be saved. And that to argue otherwise would be an affront to the just nature of God.
2. I think you will agree that, in the history of mankind, large groups--even civilizations arose and passed away without any KNOWLEDGE of the gospel of Jesus Christ. (I say this understanding your argument that no one of them deserved more).

3. The truth of how Point 2 is reconciled with Point 1 can only be found within the revealed Word of God.

You reconcile points 1 and 2 by arguing that anyone who "responds positively" to the knowledge he or she has of God, will receive further knowledge. This process concludes with a disclosure of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and an opportunity to accept or reject it.

I've considered this again and again but I can't seem to wrench the idea away from the doctrine of "predestination" which contends that a man's destiny is established before his birth. Perhaps you can help me. Let's consider a very specific group of people--the native inhabitants of the Americas prior to its introduction to the Old World. If you argue that Gospel truths did NOT exist among them, you must then conclude that NONE among them (and we're talking about millions of individuals) ever "responded positively" to what they did know of God. I don't think you can reasonably argue that of all people who would respond positively to God, coincidentally, none of them were born among these people. Meanwhile, those who would eventually accept the gospel just happen to (typically) be born among those of like destiny. This segregation of those who would "respond positively" from those who would not, suggests that their response was predetermined (i.e. established before their birth). Of course, such a predestination of the soul to fail or to succeed is, by definition, unjust. The only alternative is to argue that being born into favorable (or unfavorable) circumstances is a destiny that is somehow deserved. But then you must grapple with the question of a premortal existence wherein the soul's fortune is established. Although such an existence was accepted among early Jews and Christians and remains, to some degree, a Catholic doctrine, it has been largely rejected by the Protestant Christian world (Jeremiah 1:5, John 9:2).

The reasonable conclusion to your argument would be the existence of pockets of God's disciples among all groups and civilizations of mankind past and present. It is, of course, only with great difficulty that you could make such a case. (Don't get hung up on the particular group of people I chose as an example. I might just as easily have selected the ancient Chinese or a tribe of African Pygmies).

I guess my difficulty with your argument is also communicated by asking this--what if YOU had been born in a heathen family, among a heathen people, and in a heathen nation? As you responded positively to your God-consciousness, would the gospel of Jesus Christ have been made available to you, if not by unavailable conventional means (e.g. missionaries and scripture) then by extraordinary ones? You may respond with a resounding "yes," but for the reasons stated above, I have significant doubt. There's just no evidence to show that it really happens that way. And thus my conclusion that your argument is unrealistic.

ROMANS 1:18-20

I was brave and put down my King James Bible but your suggestion that I go with the "original language" is easily misunderstood. Of course, we have no original Bible text so it's difficult to say how original the "original" language is. The earliest Old Testament texts belong to the collection of documents widely known as the "Dead Sea Scrolls" which date from 200 B.C. into the first century A.D. New Testament texts date no earlier than around the third century A.D. Nor is it correct to assume that the King James Version is no better than the ninth century

documents from which it was translated. It has, in fact, been revised several times since its publication in the 1600's. I believe the latest of those revisions was to the Codex Sinaiticus (the earliest of complete Bible texts) upon its discovery in the late 1800's.

One of the hallmarks of the King James Bible is that it is more of a translation and less of an interpretation than other versions. As a very simple (if crude) example; an expression of gratitude in Norwegian is, "takk skal du ha." The simple TRANSLATION, "thanks shall you have" would normally be further INTERPRETED as, "thank you." Although this, in addition to its archaic English, is responsible for its characteristic recondite vernacular, it does allow the student to be closer to the originating language and thus serve as his own interpreter.

Additionally, a scholar of ancient scripture named Theodore Gastor, responded to criticism that he used archaic English in his important translation of the Dead Sea Scrolls ("The Dead Sea Scriptures") by noting that much scripture, especially psalms and poetry, were originally WRITTEN in archaic language. To translate such verse into modern language, he argues, destroys its intended poetic effect.

For these and other reasons, the King James Version is quite deserving of its distinction as the most popular English translation in the world. Nevertheless, I'm neither an expert in New Testament Greek nor familiar with yours (expert). So I read his Greek and my NIV (yes, I have something besides the KJV after all) to broaden my perspective.

I think it's fairly obvious from the KJV, NIV, and Greek alike, that Paul is speaking of men collectively rather than individually. I might fittingly lament, for instance, that America has become an unrighteous nation but you would be presumptuous to ascribe that unrighteousness to every American individual. This fact, of course, changes the dynamics of the question. Paul describes, for instance, some very specific evils being practiced among "men" such as idolatry and homosexuality. Again, I think it erroneous to conclude that because a given individual died without the truth, he must have been guilty of such evils.

The disagreement is really over whether Paul's indictment applies to mankind in general (NIV) or believers in particular (KJV). But even if the former were true, you are faced with an engaging question. Your Greek expert instructs that men suppress the truth by means of their unrighteousness and rebellion. So the very idea of a righteous non-Christian (or "possessor of truth" if you will) represents an oxymoron to your "God Consciousness" theory since his righteousness should have precipitated the receipt of truth. But does such a person really exist? This is a potentially contentious question of semantics which is easily argued either way. Yet Paul gives a rather concise definition of "righteousness" in the second chapter of Romans. (I'll quote the NIV this time).

*13. For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous.*

But does this only apply to the Christian? Paul continues...

*14. (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law.*

*15. since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their*

*consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.)*  
 16. *This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ, as my gospel declares.*

Should not such a man whose actions show that the law is written in his heart, receive the gospel prior to the day of judgment?

(I noted with interest your Greek expert's statement, "Truth in the NT is to be both believed and obeyed. KATECHONTON suggests that men have refused to do either." This is, of course, consistent with verse 13 above. Though perhaps beside the point, how ironic it is that such a strong argument for the NECESSITY of obedience to law--"works"--comes from a Christian community that ultimately rejects the idea. Don't pull out any more hair here Hans. "Works" are either IN the equation for salvation or they're NOT. Many Christians try to "have their cake and eat it too" on this issue.)

In summary, I'm skeptical of your "God Consciousness" argument for the following reasons:

1. The historical inhomogeneity of true believers among the civilizations of the world.
2. Its apparent kinship with the doctrine of predestination of the soul (to succeed or fail).
3. The resulting contradiction of a righteous man who is also without the gospel.

Perhaps it's the engineer in me, but I think that point number 1 alone powerfully discredits your theory.

#### JUDGED ACCORDING TO THEIR WORKS

You're not the only one banging your head against the wall Hans (and I have the bald spot to prove it). You completely missed my point here! You had previously argued, "The only works left to be judged for are the 'good' works, which I think Revelation 20 [verse 12] is addressing." After quoting verse 13 which obviously contradicts your conclusion, I emphasized this contradiction by rhetorically asking the question, "Will you argue that the dead from Hell are being judged for their good works?"--the point being that if only GOOD works are to be judged, then what works are Hell's inhabitants being judged for?

Simply--and contrary to what you "have been arguing all along,"--Revelation 20:12,13 (as well as numerous other scriptures) clearly points out that ALL men will be judged according to their works whether they be good OR evil. Obviously such a notion is problematic to your theology.

#### SIX OR HALF DOZEN

Your point that truth exists independently of perceived purpose was well expressed and is well taken. Nevertheless, if your standard of truth is the Bible, then the VERY significant doctrines of "imputed sin" and "inherited sin" ought to be well defined within its pages. In my opinion, you have failed to demonstrate this.

#### ORTHODOXY

Perhaps my point is best illustrated this way. In the meridian of time, "Orthodoxy" was

perverted Judaism and Jesus' new gospel was the latest "cult" to threaten that tradition. Protestantism suffered a similar birth. Thus my assertion that orthodoxy has historically been a poor basis for faith. But if you differ, then perhaps you should embrace Catholicism whose Christian orthodoxy is surpassed by none.

(Thank you for being gracious).

Unorthodoxically Thine,  
Victor

**The POULSEN / BRADLEE Letters****PART 5**  
**SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH****INTRODUCTION**

This exchange took place in April 1998 after Hans sent me some articles from the "Institute for Creation Research."

**LETTERS**

From: Poulsen, Victor M  
To: Bradlee, Hans C  
Subject: Scientific Research

Thanks for the interesting reading Hans. I guess one of the problems we face as believers in scripture, is that we approach our research with a desired conclusion. That makes it very difficult to achieve objective results.

Victor

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From: Bradlee, Hans C  
To: Poulsen, Victor M  
Subject: Scientific Research

Victor,

I don't guess I can make much sense out of your note. You imply that you are a believer in Scripture. If you believe it is true, then it should be a standard of truth. If you are attempting to discover truth in the creation, and you believe the Bible is Truth, what's wrong with attempting to reconcile the evidence with the frame-work you know (believe) to be true. You've lost me, once again.

Here's more articles for your scoffing enjoyment.

Hans

P.S. If we believe scripture, do we not begin with it as truth? We should have already been through the objective consideration of its veracity. Once you've been there, should you not take scripture as a GIVEN?

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From: Poulsen, Victor M  
To: Bradlee, Hans C  
Subject: Scientific Research

Hans,

I think you're reading too much into my little note. I was not critical of using science to verify truths taught in scripture. Indeed, I anticipate such discoveries with eagerness. I merely acknowledged the difficulty of conducting objective research when starting with a conclusion. Acknowledging that fact doesn't diminish the truth of the conclusion, it just makes that conclusion unacceptable to anyone but a believer. (It's that "preaching to the choir" thing). So what do we accomplish with such research? It won't convince the unbeliever and the believer already believes. But if you love science, it's hard to resist. And I'll be the first one to be involved in it.

The real problem comes when the "Biblical Truth" we're trying to scientifically verify, isn't really Biblical truth. A good example is your 24-hour creation days. That may, or may not, be fact but it certainly is a disputed point even among theologians. So how are we to interpret a scientific explanation that resulted from using a questionable Biblical doctrine as a given? Someone else may well conclude the Bible teaches that the creative days were 1000 years each and proceed to conduct scientific "research" to verify that "fact."

I'm just saying we have to be careful.

Victor