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Abstract Review of *One Lord, One Faith: Writings of the Early Christian Fathers as Evidences of the Restoration* (1996), by Michael T. Griffith.

Michael T. Griffith. *One Lord, One Faith: Writings of the Early Christian Fathers as Evidences of the Restoration.* Bountiful, Utah: Horizon, 1996. 250 pp., with appendixes, notes, bibliography, and index. \$17.98.

Reviewed by John A. Tvedtnes

A Much-Needed Book That Needs Much

Although Michael T. Griffith's book is subtitled "Writings of the Early Christian Fathers as Evidences of the Restoration," sixteen of its forty-three chapters—more than a third—contain no quotations from or references to the writings of the fathers.¹ Half the chapters (twenty-two) cite modern non-Latter-day Saint theologians. The paucity of references to the church fathers in most of the book's chapters leads to the anomalous situation in which the author subdivides a subject into two chapters: 6, "The Son's Subordination to the Father in the New Testament," and 7, "The Son's Subordination to the Father in Early Christian Writings." Following the intent of the book's subtitle, these should have formed a single chapter. I suspect that the arbitrary subdivision was intended to keep the chapters in the book more equal in length. It is interesting that chapter 7 has the largest number of citations of the early church fathers (I counted 47) of all the chapters. Indeed, I found that chapters 7, 10, 14, 17, 19, 33, and 34 together had more references than all the others put together. I did not count the totally anonymous "early Christian writers," "ancient Christian writers," "early Christian fathers," "early Christian sources," "other church fathers," "early church fathers," or "church fathers" mentioned on pages 60, 107, 119, 181, 196-7, 200-1, and 208.

¹ I have not counted the few references to these earlier writings by modern theologians or Latter-day Saint writers cited in Griffith's work.

Having said all this, I must be fair to the author and note that the subtitle was added by the publisher. However, it is regrettable that Griffith does not give references to most of the ancient texts he cites. Instead, he usually refers to pages in specific modern translations. Since not everyone uses the same translation (and some prefer to use the Greek), it would have been helpful to give the ancient reference as well. This is particularly true when Griffith merely refers to the text without quoting it. Similar things could be said about nonpatristic literature. For example, when citing Philo in chapter 3, Griffith refers us to a book that contains the relevant quotation, rather than to an actual Philo reference. His source is not even a modern translation of Philo.

Griffith informs me that the original subtitle he gave his book was "Ancient Christian Evidence of the Restoration," which is a bit more accurate, in that the New Testament can certainly be termed "ancient Christian." Indeed, the book is replete with New Testament quotations that, if not complete, are at least useful.

It seems to me that Griffith's latest book is intended to build on his earlier works that attempt to refute anti-Mormon criticisms. In some cases, it does well; in others, it falls short. Here are some of the problems I found:

In chapter 1, Griffith speaks of "the major Christian churches" that "claim to be the one and only true church of Jesus Christ" (p. 12). In this, he includes the Latter-day Saint Church, which can hardly be called "major" when compared to such large denominations as the Lutherans, the Methodists, the Presbyterians, the Episcopalians, and the Baptists, who are not listed because, in Griffith's view, they don't claim to be the true church. After the ecumenical movement of the 1960s, I'm not sure one could say that the Roman Catholic Church continues to exclude Protestants from the true church. And as for the "Eastern Orthodox Church," no such entity exists. There are, however, eastern orthodox "churches," which are national entities (Russian, Armenian, Greek, Syrian, etc.).

In chapter 3, Matthew 28:19, John 14:26, and 2 Corinthians 13:14 are hardly proof of the chapter title's implicit contention that "Father, Son and Holy Ghost Are Three Separate Deities." Prominent by its absence is Acts 7:55-6, in which Stephen sees the Father and the Son as separate beings. Moreover, some of the best

evidences for this proposition, such as the fact that the Father has knowledge not possessed by the Son (Mark 13:32), that the Father is greater than the Son (John 14:28), and that Jesus had to “ascend” after his resurrection to be with his Father (John 20:17), are used in other chapters. In my opinion, they should have been cited in both places to strengthen the argument.

Chapter 4 is entitled, “The Tangible Nature, or Corporeality, of the Father and the Son.” Some of the Bible passages cited, however, do not prove that God has a body, only that he can be seen. Indeed, Exodus 24:9–11 refers to Yahweh or Jehovah, whom Griffith identifies in chapter 9 with Jesus rather than God the Father. Since at the time Moses and the elders saw him, Jesus did not yet have a physical body, they could only have seen his spirit, as did the brother of Jared (Ether 3:6–16). This passage clearly does not prove what Griffith intends. In fairness to the author, however, I should point out that he probably learned to misuse these passages while serving a mission, as did I.

In this chapter on the corporeality of the Father and the Son, Griffith does not address the issue of John 4:24, which declares that “God is a spirit.” A good response to those critics who use this against the Latter-day Saint belief in a corporeal deity has been formulated,² but Griffith chooses not to deal with the issue. And while he discusses the meaning of the Hebrew word *tselem* (rendered “image” in Genesis 1:26 and elsewhere), he does not mention its parallel word, *demut* (“likeness” in Genesis 1:26 and

² We believe that man is also spirit (D&C 93:33–4; Numbers 16:22; Romans 8:16) and is, like God, housed in a physical body. We were, after all, created in the “image” of God (Genesis 1:26–7). It is interesting that, in 1 Corinthians 2:11, Paul wrote about “the spirit of man and the Spirit of God.” Elsewhere he spoke of the resurrection of the body and then noted that it is a “spiritual” body (1 Corinthians 15:44–6), though, rising from the grave, it is obviously composed of flesh and bones, as Jesus made clear when he appeared to the apostles after his resurrection (Luke 24:37–9). Paul also told the saints in Rome, “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you” (Romans 8:9). Similarly, in Alma 11:45, Amulek defines resurrected bodies as “spirits uniting with their bodies, never to be divided; thus the whole becoming spiritual and immortal.” The parallel between “God is a Spirit” and worshipping him “in spirit and in truth” in John 4:24 is identical to the parallel in 1 John 4:7–16, in which “God is love” (1 John 4:8) and we must have love in order to worship him properly. It should be obvious that God is not an emotion; similarly, he is not merely a spirit.

elsewhere), which also provides evidence that mankind is in the physical likeness of God.

A few of the references used in chapter 6 do not support its contention about "The Son's Subordination to the Father in the New Testament." For example, I fail to see how the fact that Stephen saw Christ on the right hand of God (Acts 7:55-6) does more than prove that they are separate beings. In one case, Griffith goes too far in his interpretation, claiming that Philippians 2:5-11 refers to Christ's "pre-mortal life" (p. 37). Yet the context of Paul's admonition is that mortal members of the church should have the same attitude he attributes to Christ in this passage. Actually, this scripture is one of the strongest evidences that we can become like God and should have been used in chapter 14.

Chapter 9 is designed to provide evidence that Jesus is the Jehovah of the Old Testament and includes a good list of relevant New Testament quotations of Old Testament passages. But it ignores others that provide evidence for this view. Griffith conveniently omits most of the Old Testament passages in which Jehovah speaks but which New Testament writers interpret as the Father speaking to Christ (e.g., Psalm 2:7, cited in Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5; 5:5). He does, however, refer to Psalm 110:1 (although not its New Testament quotations in Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42-3), but notes that "Latter-day Saints assert that this verse should have Elohim speaking to Jehovah" (p. 60). While this may be true of some Latter-day Saints, the generalization is unfounded. Moreover, if we have to make such changes to a Bible text, the passage loses its evidentiary value.

In this same chapter (p. 57), Griffith postulates a deliberate attempt to blur the distinction between Elohim and Jehovah in ancient times. He could have provided evidence directly from the Bible for this contention, but instead he referred us to modern theological works without citing them (and significantly omitted some of the more important studies, such as those by Margaret Barker).³

³ Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel's Second God* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1992).

Chapter 10 is intended to show "Jesus as the Firstborn of the Father." None of the six Bible passages cited provide evidence for this idea, and only three of them even use the term *firstborn* or *firstbegotten*. (Griffith omits Romans 8:29, which does call Jesus the "firstborn.") In light of Revelation 1:5, in which Christ is "the first begotten of the dead" and 1 Corinthians 15:20, 23, in which he is "the firstfruits" of the resurrection, one could argue that the term *firstborn* in the Bible refers to his resurrection, not his premortal status. We have, of course, evidence of his status as the firstborn spirit child of God from revelations given to Joseph Smith, but the Bible itself is hardly proof of this. From the Bible, one can only conclude that Jesus was the first person resurrected from the dead. As for Hebrews 1:6, Griffith is evidently unaware that the original story, found in a number of early pseudepigraphic works, makes Adam, not Christ, the firstbegotten whom God commanded the angels to worship.⁴ Here as elsewhere, the author of Hebrews, in typical Jewish fashion, borrows a passage unrelated to his current topic as a "proof text."

In the section on "A Heavenly Mother" (p. 67), Griffith cites Latter-day Saint researcher Eugene Seach, but fails to mention some of the principal non-Latter-day Saint sources, such as Raphael Patai and Margaret Barker.⁵ In the next section, "Satan," Griffith indicates the possibility of evidence that "the ancient Hebrews and Christians believed" (p. 68), like the Latter-day Saints, that Satan was a spirit child of God; while he gives several modern references, however, he fails to tell us who these ancient writers were or to cite their works. This seems strange for a book whose stated purpose is to provide *early* Christian evidences for the restoration.

In chapter 13, Griffith makes a number of declarations regarding "The Grand Council in the Pre-Earth Life" (p. 78). While Latter-day Saints would accept his assertions, he does not support them with any references, either in Latter-day Saint

⁴ The story is told in *Life of Adam and Eve* 14-5; 2 *Enoch* 31:3-6; *Gospel of Bartholomew* 4:25, 52-6; *Apocalypse of Sedrach* 5; Koran 2:34; 7:11-8; 15:28-50; 17:61-3; 18:50-3; 20:116-7; *Book of the Rolls* f.93a-94a (cf. 92a-b); *Discourse on Abbatôn* 13a-14a.

⁵ Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* (New York: Ktav, 1968), and Barker, *The Great Angel*, 48-69.

scriptures or in the Bible or early Christian works, though such evidence is available.

Chapter 14 discusses "Godhood: Man's Divine Potential." Following earlier Latter-day Saint writers, Griffith cites Jesus' statement from the Sermon on the Mount, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). This is, however, a weak argument, since the context of Jesus' statement is not becoming like God, but loving our fellowman as God loves us. In fact, other Bible statements better support the idea that we should strive to be like God. For example, the Lord declared, "Ye shall be holy; for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:44-5; cf. 19:2; 20:7, 26; 1 Peter 1:15-6). Yet Griffith includes none of these passages. Nevertheless, this is one of his best chapters and one that includes a number of references to the church fathers.

Of the seven Bible passages listed at the beginning of chapter 15, "'Except There Come a Falling Away First': The Apostasy of the Ancient Church," only one (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3) clearly prophesies concerning an apostasy of the early church. Most of the others merely indicate that some people would fall away, not that the church would be lost. Matthew 21:43 could readily be interpreted—and is by most Christians—as meaning that the church would be taken from the Jews and given to the gentiles, not that there would be an apostasy. As for Revelation 13:7, it refers to the last days, not to an apostasy that took place nearly two millennia ago. The list of scriptures cited at the bottom of page 89 merely shows that some people were falling away and, again, does not provide evidence that the church itself would be lost.

The best evidence for the apostasy is the necessity of a restoration. In chapter 16, Griffith provides evidence that this restoration was prophesied anciently. He cites Acts 3:19-21, regarding the restitution or restoration of "all things," but fails to note 1 Peter 4:7, in which Peter used the same phrase when he declared that "the end of all things is at hand." Griffith's use of Isaiah 2:2 and Ephesians 1:10 as evidence for the restoration is not justified, however. The former refers to the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem (see Isaiah 1:1), not to the restoration of the church. The latter can be understood as a restoration passage only by reference to the Latter-day Saint use of the phrase *dispensation of*

the fulness of times. To most Christians, this would refer to the time of Christ, not to the latter days, and the passage contains no internal evidence that a restoration is intended.

But what disappoints me most in chapter 16 (and, perhaps, in the entire book) is Griffith's treatment of Acts 3:22-4 (see also Acts 7:37), which he misinterprets as meaning that Peter was referring to "a prophet who would be similar to himself" (p. 94). This leads him to identify the expected prophet with Joseph Smith. Actually, the passage is a quotation from Moses (as Peter clearly qualifies), found in Deuteronomy 18:15, and the prophet is hence to be like Moses, not Peter. Moreover, during his visit to the Nephites, the risen Christ cited Deuteronomy 18:15 and declared, "Behold, *I am he of whom Moses spake*" (3 Nephi 20:23). Indeed, the context of Peter's quotation of the passage is his discussion of Christ, not of the restoration, as Griffith claims. The restoration is mentioned only peripherally in Acts 3:21, the real subject of which is Christ's second coming.

Having laid the foundation that Peter referred to Joseph Smith rather than Jesus, Griffith then goes on to speak of the prophet of the restoration as the messiah of Joseph of the Jews and the restorer of the Samaritans. The discussion is a worthy one, but the foundation that led to it is based on an incorrect interpretation of scripture. Griffith also fails to cite much of the evidence for the tradition and relies entirely on secondary sources.

Griffith's contention that the church should be named after Jesus Christ has merit (p. 99), but nowhere in the New Testament can that be shown to be the case.

In chapter 21, Griffith includes a brief section entitled "Bishop and Elder: Two Different Offices" (p. 119). His justification for this is that "some churches believe the offices of bishop and elder are the same position." Perhaps he has information that has not come to my attention. More likely, he has confused the issue, for the argument is that priests and elders are the same, because the Greek term *presbyteros*, which means "elder," later came to denote priests in the early churches.

In chapter 26, Griffith lists Acts 15 as evidence that "the apostles overrule an important provision of the Law of Moses" (p. 129). The question was whether non-Jewish converts to the church should be required to undergo circumcision, and the

council of apostles and elders ruled that this would not be necessary, but that they would be required to refrain from sexual sin and from consumption of blood. Actually, the law revealed to Moses in Sinai does not provide for circumcision, which was instituted at the time of Abraham. But the Jews came to believe that converts, too, should undergo circumcision. Consequently, the Christian council held in Jerusalem did not overrule a revelation given to Moses, but a ruling made by the rabbis. However, it upheld the rabbinic teaching that certain laws had been given to Noah and were therefore incumbent on Jew and non-Jew alike. This included the two provisions mentioned in Acts 15, abstention from sexual sin and consumption of blood. The leading elders made a decision regarding what parts of Jewish tradition they would impose on converts, not about the law of Moses.

In some cases, Griffith cites only one or two ancient texts to prove his point, when, in fact, many others would better support his argument. A case in point is his citation of Justin Martyr in chapter 30 on the mixing of wine and water for the sacrament. A fair number of passages actually do support this, so Justin is not the sole witness.

Griffith's comments about the cross in chapter 32 are generally correct, but he fails to address the obvious symbolism of the cross in 1 Corinthians 1:17-8 and Galatians 5:11; 6:12, 14, which are the real basis for Christian veneration of that symbol. How should one respond to those who quote Paul's statement in Galatians 6:14, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world"? Many Christians would classify Latter-day Saints among "the enemies of the cross of Christ" to whom Paul referred (Philippians 3:18). Griffith has obviously not adequately addressed this issue.

In chapter 35, Griffith dogmatically declares that "according to the Protestant doctrine of infant baptism, if an infant dies without baptism he is condemned" (p. 178). Most Protestant churches have no such belief, and it is even an overstatement of the Catholic doctrine.

Griffith's discussion of secret teachings in ancient Christianity is woefully inadequate. He could have given more references to support his case.

Chapter 39 is also inadequate. For example, Griffith could have cited many more ancient texts in the section he entitles "Apocryphal and Rabbinic Evidence," in which he is content to cite Eugene Seach. In his discussion of Matthew 22:23–30, Griffith seems unaware of the story (perhaps "fictional") in the Apocrypha in which we read of a young woman, Sara, who had been married to seven husbands (all brothers), each of whom was killed on the wedding night by a demon. But in the story (*Tobit* 6:10–8:9), Sara ultimately marries an eighth husband, Tobias, son of Tobit, who, following instructions from the archangel Raphael, manages to chase the demon away and is therefore not slain. Of special interest is the fact that the archangel (who, according to *Tobit* 3:17, had been sent to arrange the marriage) tells the young man that his wife had been appointed to him "from the beginning" (*Tobit* 6:17). This implies that she had not been sealed to any of her earlier husbands, which would explain why none of them would claim her in the resurrection, as Jesus explained. But if she were sealed to Tobias, the situation changes. Assuming that the Sadducees (whose real issue was one of resurrection, not of eternal marriage) were alluding to this story but left off part of it, this would explain why Jesus told them, "Ye do err, *not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God*" (Matthew 22:29).

Chapter 42 was also a disappointment. Many ancient documents talk about baptism for the dead, and one would expect that Griffith might have cited at least some of them.

The book has some more general problems, such as the failure to give adequate biblical references. For example, Griffith asks, "But how, then, could Jesus say in John 14:9 that to see him was to see the Father? Very easily," he concludes, "the Savior is 'the express image of his Father'" (p. 30). While the statement is certainly accurate, Griffith's point fails because he neglects to give us the scriptural reference for the statement that Jesus is "the express image" of his Father (Hebrews 1:3). Consequently, he doesn't really respond to the question.

Another problem is that Griffith's evidences are sometimes much too superficial. For example, he notes that "Trinitarians also cite such verses as Matthew 1:23 (Jesus is Emmanuel, which means 'God with us')" (p. 32). He summarily dismisses this as evidence that Jesus was God the Father. It would have been better

to point out that a number of Old Testament personalities bore theophoric names but were also not God. For example, Isaiah's name means "Yahweh (Jehovah) saves," while Jonathan means "Jehovah gives." No one would argue that these names imply that the men were God (either Elohim or Jehovah), so why would the term Emmanuel (which is best translated "God is with us") prove that Jesus was God?

What this book really needed was prepublication peer review, which would have helped weed out Bible passages unrelated to the topic at hand and provided additional materials to support the propositions in the various chapters. It also could have used a good editor—a perennial problem with Horizon Books.⁶ In my opinion, we really need a book like this. Michael Griffith has made a decent start, but his book falls far short of what it could be.

⁶ I refer to the hyphenated words in the middle of the line, misspellings, and the like. A really serious editor would also have checked sources and noted that the passage ascribed to Ephesians 2:14–6 is really in Philippians. This and a few other errors were noted by Robert Durocher, who brought this one to my attention.