



Type: Magazine Article

Confirmatory Evidences of "Mormonism": Traditions of the Virgin Birth in America

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Source: *The Latter-Day Saints' Millennial Star*, Vol. 95, No. 50
(21 December 1933)

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Page(s): 826–827

Abstract: Lord Kingbrough (1830—1848), H. H. Bancroft, D. G. Brinton, Torquemada, and Angus W. McKay found traditions of the virgin birth in the traditions of Mexico, the Otomies, and Navajo Indians. Other ancient peoples such as the Aztecs and the Indians of Paraguay believed in the virgin birth of their gods. This same belief was taught to ancient Americans in the Book of Mormon.

CONFIRMATORY EVIDENCES OF "MORMONISM"

TRADITIONS OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH IN AMERICA

THROUGHOUT Christendom, Christmas Day holds special significance. To believers it either commemorates, or it is observed as the day of the birth of Jesus Christ. Acceptance of and belief in the circumstances surrounding this great event are generally regarded as distinctly Christian in nature. But it is interesting and enlightening to know that there are similar traditions of circumstances surrounding the birth of the Son of God among peoples that are not commonly classified as Christians, nor considered to have any knowledge whatsoever of Christ.

Centuries ago, when Columbus discovered America, he found a land already occupied by a people whom he called the Indians—a people, who in various tribes and nations, covered both of the American continents. They ranged in customs and civilizations from the most primitive of tribes in Paraguay to the highly developed and cultured nations of the Incas, in Peru, and the Aztecs in Mexico.

Soon after the discovery of America, Catholic Fathers went among the native peoples to tell them of the Mission of Christ and to convert them to Christianity. But to their surprise, the black-robed priests found already extant among the various tribes, parallel traditions telling of the visit of a great being who had wrought wondrous changes in their way of living, and instituted a new order of things—traditions that were striking in their portrayal of a Christ-like person. In Mexico this being was called Quetzalcoatl (kate sal qua tl), in Peru, Viracocha (vee ra co cha), among the Mayas in Central America, Kukulcan (koo kool cau). Although they bore different names among the different tribes and nations, the different representations of this tradition-figure all had similar general characteristics.* Though centuries of time undoubtedly altered and distorted these traditions, yet running through all of them can be seen an attempt to portray certain beliefs and ideas that were common to all of the people. Of outstanding interest concerning the personage in question, in that it parallels so closely the Christian conception of Christ's advent on earth, is the tradition of his virgin birth.

Lord Kingsborough, who between 1830 and 1848 published the results of his researches on Ancient America, says :

From Mexican mythology, speaking of no other son of Tonacatecutle [a god and the people] except Quetzalcoatl, who was born of Chimalman, the virgin of Tula, without connection with man, and by his breath alone (by which may be signified his word or his will, announced to Chimalman by word of mouth of the celestial messenger, whom he dispatched to inform her that she would conceive a son), it must be presumed that Quetzalcoatl was his only son. Other arguments might be adduced to show that the Mexicans believed that Quetzalcoatl was both god and man. . . . Quetzalcoatl was born of a virgin of the daughters of men. (Vol. 6, p. 507.)

*Bancroft, *Native Races*, vol. 5, pp. 23, 24 ; Brinton, *Myths of the New World*, p. 192.

Many other writers,* telling of Quetzalcoatl, give similar accounts. H. H. Bancroft, the author of many works of history dealing with America, said :

He was born of a virgin of miraculous birth. . . . He had a human body like other men, yet was a God, the son of a God, of mysterious birth.

D. G. Brinton, scholar on the subject, said :

Quetzalcoatl was "born of a virgin in the land of Tula or Tlapallan, in the distant Orient, and was high priest of that happy realm."

Torquemada, an early Spanish writer, relates :

The Otomies Indians, a wild and warlike race, originally spread over the table-land north of the Mexican valley, "were also acquainted with the embassy of the angel of Our Lady, under a figure, relating that something very white, like the feather of a bird, fell from heaven, and that a virgin stooped down and took it up and put it into her bosom and became pregnant."†

Elder Angus W. McKay relates the following tradition of the Navajo Indians :

A baby boy was found near the Pacific Ocean by a most beautiful Virgin, who had never seen man. They claim that Heavens and Earth came together and that this boy was dropped from Heaven, pure and holy.‡

The tradition of a virgin giving birth to a god is found among many ancient American peoples. Brinton says :

Many of the goddesses were virgin deities, as the Aztec Coatlicue, Xochiauetzal, and Chimalman; and many of the great gods of the race, as Quetzalcoatl, Manibozho, Viracocha, and Ioskeha, were said to have been born of a virgin. Even among the low Indians of Paraguay the early missionaries were startled to find this tradition of the maiden mother of the god, so similar to that which they had come to tell.§

To Latter-day Saints, these traditions are not surprising. We recognize in them remnants of the truths once taught to the early American peoples, as recorded in the Book of Mormon. According to the Book of Mormon, the people were not only told of the visit of Christ to come (Helaman 14), but also to the Prophet Nephi was shown, in a vision, "the Virgin, exceedingly fair and white . . . the mother of the Son of God after the manner of the flesh . . . bearing a child in her arms" (1 Nephi 11 : 18). The vision of Christ, after His crucifixion, is also described in an account of singular beauty (3 Nephi 11 : 28). The signs of His birth that were given to the American people are mentioned elsewhere in this issue of the *Star*.

That a knowledge of the Virgin Birth is to be found in the traditions of the American Indians is a powerful evidence of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, and a confirmatory evidence of "Mormonism."—FRANKLIN S. HARRIS, JR.

*Bancroft, *Native Races*, vol. 3, p. 372; Brinton, *Myths of the New World*, page 214; Nadaillac, *Prehistoric America*, p. 274.

†Kingsborough, *Mexican Antiquities*, vol. 11, p. 409. (Quoted by Roberts in *New Witness For God*, vol. 2, p. 473.)

‡*Utah Genealogical Magazine*, vol. 24, p. 60.

§Brinton, *Myths of the New World*, p. 172.