

“Christ” after the Apostles

The Humanity and Divinity of the
Savior in the Second Century

Jason R. Combs

Late one evening, in the middle of the second century AD, a small group of Christian priests, trained in the philosophy of Plato, met in secret in the back room of a church in Rome. Their goal? To complete the work of transforming the pure doctrine of Christ into a philosophically sound but morally deficient theology. They forged documents and altered scripture to suit their needs.¹ In the end, over the course of that evening, they succeeded in forever altering the true doctrine of the nature of Christ into a fraud that would be propagated throughout the centuries.

The most significant fact about this story is that it never happened. None of it is true; I made it up. Yet Latter-day Saints might be inclined to imagine such a scenario when they read statements from Joseph Smith such as, “all their creeds were an abomination . . . [and] those professors were all corrupt” (Joseph Smith—History 1:19), or “I believe the Bible as it read when it came from the pen of the original

writers. Ignorant translators, careless transcribers, or designing and corrupt priests have committed many errors.”² Notice, however, that neither of these statements implies secret meetings or mass corruption in the ancient Church—in fact, “corrupt priests” is listed as only one out of three possible explanations for “errors” or changes in the biblical texts. And the statement regarding those “professors” of creeds should be understood more specifically as “referring to those ministers . . . with which Joseph Smith was involved,” as Robert Millet, professor emeritus of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University, and Elder William Grant Bangerter (1918–2010), a member of the Seventy from 1976 to 1989, have explained.³

Sometimes LDS authors have suggested that, in the second century or later, Christians’ encounter with Greek language, ideas, and especially philosophy distorted the teachings of Christ found in the New Testament.⁴ Yet the spread of Greek culture—a development known as Hellenization—began centuries before any book of the New Testament was written. The Christian authors whom we meet through the New Testament all wrote in Greek and employed Greek styles, genres, and even philosophical thought.⁵ To assume that the texts of the New Testament were somehow uninfluenced by Greek or Roman thought would be akin to suggesting that the modern-day writings of N. Scott Momaday or Sherman Alexie show no signs of western European influence because those authors are Native American. What’s more, Latter-day Saints should not assume that there is something inherently bad about ancient Greek philosophy.⁶ In fact, through the “Statement of the First Presidency regarding God’s Love for All Mankind,” issued February 15, 1978, the Church affirmed, “Philosophers including Socrates, Plato, and others, received a portion of God’s light. Moral truths were given to them by God to enlighten whole nations and to bring a higher level of understanding to individuals.”

Rather than imagine early Christians as duplicitous in their efforts to write about and understand their faith, it is more accurate to view them as earnest.⁷ The purpose of this essay is to introduce

Latter-day Saints to the origins of the Christian doctrine regarding the nature of Jesus Christ, his humanity and divinity. What we will see are various early Christian authors and groups reading the texts that would one day become the New Testament and laboring to understand their relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior. These second-century Christians were not corrupt. Rather they were earnestly seeking to make sense of sacred texts that could sometimes appear confusing or contradictory. The result of the christological debates of the second century was the shared Christian confession that Jesus Christ is both fully human and fully divine.

Second-Century Christians and Their Christologies

Irenaeus was a Church leader in the late-second century AD in Lugdunum, Gaul—modern-day Lyon, France—part of the Roman Empire where Christians faced persecution.⁸ By this time Christianity had grown from a small Jewish movement in Galilee into an empire-wide religion that spanned across modern Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East.⁹ As more literate elites converted to Christianity, written communication and interaction between geographically diverse Christian communities also increased. Some Christian leaders realized that the theological diversity that so troubled Paul (1 Corinthians 3:3–4 and Galatians 1:6–9; 2:4) and John (1 John 2:18–19; 2 John 7; and 3 John 9–10) in the first century had continued into the second century. In response, Christians such as Irenaeus wrote treatises aimed at cataloging and refuting “heresies”—in Latter-day Saint parlance today, we might prefer the term *false doctrines* over *heresies*.

I place the terms “heresy,” “heretical,” and “heretic” inside quotation marks because the very groups that Irenaeus labeled as “heretical” often returned the favor. For instance, the author of the Coptic Apocalypse of Peter describes Irenaeus’s brand of Christianity as follows:

These people oppress their brothers and say to them, "Through this fellowship our God has mercy, since salvation comes to us alone." . . . And there are others among those outside our number who call themselves bishops and deacons as if they have received authority from God. . . . These people are dry canals.¹⁰

Whereas Irenaeus often rhetorically places "heretical" groups outside of what he deems to be official, authoritative Christianity, the author of the Coptic Apocalypse of Peter claims that Irenaeus's exclusionary rhetoric reveals *him* to be the "heretic." For the author of this apocalypse, Irenaeus and those like him have no authority from God.¹¹

What seems to have most troubled Irenaeus was the fact that these other Christian groups often appealed to the same traditions and scriptural authorities but arrived at dramatically different theological conclusions. Irenaeus insists that the scripture they cite actually refutes their own theological views.

The very heretics themselves . . . starting from these [Gospels], each one of them endeavours to establish his own peculiar doctrine. For the Ebionites, who use Matthew's Gospel only, are confuted out of this very same, making false suppositions with regard to the Lord. But Marcion, mutilating that according to Luke, is proved to be a blasphemer of the only existing God, from those [passages] which he still retains. Those, again, who separate Jesus from Christ, alleging that Christ remained impassible, but that it was Jesus who suffered, preferring the Gospel by Mark, if they read it with a love of truth, may have their errors rectified. Those, moreover, who follow Valentinus, making copious use of that according to John, to illustrate their conjunctions, shall be proved to be totally in error by means of this very Gospel.¹²

Throughout the second century, one particular question seems to have dominated theological discussions: To what extent was Jesus

Christ human or divine? And each of these groups mentioned by Irenaeus—the Ebionites, Marcionites, “those who separate Jesus from Christ,” and the Valentinians—arrived at different conclusions about the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ.

No ancient Christian rejected completely the representations of Jesus Christ’s humanity or divinity found in the earliest Christian texts, such as Paul’s letters or the Gospels. The problem was that those early texts could be interpreted in different ways. When Paul wrote that Jesus was descended from David and “declared to be the Son of God . . . by the resurrection” (Romans 1:4), did he mean that Jesus was primarily human and a “Son of God” in name only? How about when Paul wrote that Jesus “was made in the likeness of men” (Philippians 2:7)? Did he mean that Jesus only seemed to be human but was actually divine? The second-century debate centered on how to interpret such texts and on how one might understand the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ represented within them.

This debate was not a purely intellectual pursuit. While early Christians certainly brought all their intellectual resources to bear on these questions, their concern was far from academic. In fact, for them, the salvation of humanity was at stake! Were Jesus Christ not sufficiently *human*, how could he have the ability to rescue *humanity*? Were Jesus Christ not sufficiently *divine*, how could he have *the power* to rescue humanity? The debates about the nature of Jesus Christ were debates about the relationship between humans and God as well as about how humans might be saved and from what they might be saved. The christological debates of the second century represent, in Latter-day Saint terminology, the work of the early Saints to understand the central role of Jesus Christ within the plan of salvation.¹³

Introductory scholarship on the christological debates of the second century typically describes four types of belief about the nature of Jesus Christ: adoptionist, docetist, possessionist/separationist, and incarnation Christologies.¹⁴ An adoptionist Christology emphasizes the humanity of Jesus. He is presented as fully human, conceived through the normal physical union of Joseph and Mary and

born in a typical human manner. In this view, the human Jesus is not by nature divine. Yet, due to his righteousness, God chooses him and adopts him to be a son of God. Most commonly this is believed to occur at Jesus's baptism, although some may understand the adoption to occur at resurrection as a reward for Jesus's life of faithfulness.¹⁵

Docetist Christology could be described as the polar opposite of adoptionism. Whereas adoptionists present Jesus as only human, docetists believe that Jesus is only divine. The term *docetism* comes from the Greek *dokein* which means "to seem" or "to appear." It is an apt description of this Christology because docetists affirm that Jesus Christ only *appears* to be human but is in fact fully divine.¹⁶

Possessionist or separationist Christology describes Jesus Christ as both human and divine but limits that union to a set time during Jesus's mortal life. This Christology affirms Jesus's humanity in a manner similar to the adoptionists—that is, that Jesus is fully human, conceived through normal human sexual processes. Yet this Christology also affirms that at some point in Jesus's life, he is *possessed* by a preexistent divine being, sometimes called the "Christ." In this state of divine possession, Jesus the Christ performs miracles. Then, at some point prior to his death on the cross, the divinity that *possessed* Jesus *separates* from him—for this reason, the belief is called either possessionist Christology or separationist Christology.¹⁷

The incarnation Christology that eventually becomes the orthodox position affirms that Jesus Christ is both fully human and fully divine. This Christology differs from possessionist/separationist Christology in the affirmation that Jesus Christ is human and divine from birth, that his conception and birth are miraculous, and that this union of divinity and humanity continues through death and into the resurrection.¹⁸ Like possessionist/separationist Christology, however, incarnation Christology can be understood as occupying a middle ground on a spectrum with adoptionism and docetism as polar opposites.

Latter-day Saints, like other Christians today, would find most of these Christologies to be absurd if not offensive. Likewise, Latter-day Saints and most Christians today may find it difficult to imagine

that there was ever a time when some Christians questioned Jesus Christ's complete humanity and divinity. Early Latter-day Saints and the scripture that came through Joseph Smith, such as the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants, attest to Jesus Christ's humanity and divinity.¹⁹ This is not to suggest that LDS Christology was completely settled from the foundations of Mormonism.²⁰ For instance, Terryl Givens has noted, "Initially . . . [Joseph] Smith and his colleagues used both titles [Jehovah and Elohim] to refer to God the Father."²¹ It is not until 1844, Givens explains, that we find "hints that Smith was beginning to see Elohim as the more proper title for God the Father."²² Yet, while the understanding of Jesus's identity as Jehovah was only clarified over time for Latter-day Saints, the common Christian affirmation that Jesus Christ is both human and divine was accepted without reservation.²³ And this affirmation has continued to hold sway in the Church. Givens summarizes the LDS view today as follows: "He was truly man and truly God, conceived and born of woman but in some sense progeny of a divine Father."²⁴ This affirmation is not explicit in the texts of the New Testament but was born out of the christological debates of the second century.

Early Christian history is at least as complex as early Latter-day Saint history. Just as certain aspects of LDS Christology became clear only with the passage of time, so too the very affirmation which became orthodox, incarnation Christology, developed over the course of the second century in dialogue with other Christologies. And those other Christologies were more complex than the categories described above. Those categories—adoptionism, docetism, possessionist/separationist, and incarnation—are heuristically useful, but the descriptions of Jesus Christ that we find in ancient Christian writings often appear as hybrids or combinations of categories. For this reason, we cannot proceed by simply collecting evidence for adoptionism, then docetism, and so forth. It is necessary, instead, to review what specific Christian groups affirmed about Jesus Christ and to use our christological categories as a tool to help us analyze their unique beliefs. In what follows, I adopt Irenaeus's summary of "heretical"

groups who preferred one Gospel over another as an organizing principle. I begin therefore with the Christology of the Ebionites, followed by that of Marcion and Valentinus, before concluding with the Christology affirmed by proto-Orthodox Christians.²⁵

Ebionites

Ebionites are often described in ancient Christian texts as “Jewish-Christians.”²⁶ Although only fragments of the Ebionites’ writings survive, and only in quotations from their theological opponents, we are still able to piece together some of the beliefs of this group. The name Ebionite most likely comes from the Hebrew, *’ebyon*, meaning “poor”—as in, “blessed are the poor in spirit” (Matthew 5:3).²⁷ Irenaeus introduces the Ebionite Christians as follows:

Those who are called Ebionites agree that the world was made by God; but their opinions with respect to the Lord are similar to those of Cerinthus. . . . They use the Gospel according to Matthew only, and repudiate the Apostle Paul, maintaining that he was an apostate from the law. As to the prophetic writings, they endeavour to expound them in a somewhat singular manner: they practice circumcision, persevere in the observance of those customs which are enjoined by the law, and are so Judaic in their style of life, that they even adore Jerusalem as if it were the house of God.²⁸

In this description, the Ebionites’ concern for the law of Moses is clear; it is their reason for preferring Matthew over Paul, and it is the reason they continue to practice circumcision as well as other “customs which are enjoined by the law.” Irenaeus also emphasizes that they look to Jerusalem “as if it were the house of God,” even though by this time the Jerusalem temple had been destroyed and replaced by a Roman temple dedicated to the god Jupiter.

Irenaeus believes that this group emphasizes Jewish customs too much, but he is more concerned about their teaching regarding Jesus.

Here he says only that "their opinions with respect to the Lord are similar to those of Cerinthus." Elsewhere, however, he describes their beliefs in greater detail. Cerinthus, he explains, "represented Jesus as having not been born of a virgin, but as being the son of Joseph and Mary according to the ordinary course of human generation, while he nevertheless was more righteous, prudent, and wise than other men."²⁹ According to Irenaeus, this is what the Ebionites believe. A point he reiterates again—"The Ebionites . . . assert that [Jesus] was begotten by Joseph"³⁰—and again—"Vain also are the Ebionites, who do not receive by faith into their soul the union of God and man, but who remain in the old leaven of [the natural] birth, and who do not choose to understand that the Holy Ghost came upon Mary, and the power of the Most High did overshadow her."³¹ According to Irenaeus, Ebionites believe that Jesus was conceived through the normal physical union of Mary and Joseph and was born as naturally as any human being. Jesus was a human being at birth, and nothing more.

One might wonder how the Ebionites, who according to Irenaeus treasured the Gospel of Matthew, could possibly believe that Jesus's birth was normal. What's normal about Mary being "found with child of the Holy Ghost" when she "was espoused to Joseph, before they came together" (Matthew 1:18; see also 1:20)? It may be that the Ebionites' Gospel of Matthew was different from the Gospel that we know today by that name. According to Epiphanius—another chronicler of heresies like Irenaeus, but one who wrote at the end of the fourth century AD—the Ebionites' Gospel was different: "The Gospel of Matthew used by them [was] not in a perfect but in a mutilated and castrated form called the Gospel of the Hebrews."³² Epiphanius's quotations of the Ebionites' Gospel are more similar to the Gospel of Mark than to the Gospel of Matthew. The Gospel of Mark, of course, does not include a narrative of Jesus's birth.³³ In the Gospel of Mark the only explanation provided for Jesus's divine sonship comes at Jesus's baptism when the heavens part and a voice is heard: "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Mark

1:11). To Jewish-Christians like the Ebionites, this would likely remind them of the divine proclamation to King David in Psalm 2:7, “Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee” (see also 2 Samuel 7:14). The Ebionites may have thought that if God could pronounce King David and King Solomon to be his sons without miraculous births, he certainly could do so with Jesus.

In fact, Epiphanius quotes the section of the Ebionites’ Gospel that describes the baptism: “Jesus came also and was baptized by John. And as he came up out of the water, the heavens opened, and he saw the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove and entering into him. And a voice was heard from heaven, ‘You are my beloved son, and in you I am well pleased.’ And again, ‘This day I have begotten you.’”³⁴ Here the declaration, “This day I have begotten you,” takes on additional meaning because the description of the Holy Spirit’s descent includes this statement: “He saw the Holy Spirit . . . *entering* into him” (emphasis added). This supports Irenaeus’s claim that the Ebionites’ understanding of Christ is similar to that of Cerinthus. Irenaeus’s description of Cerinthus’s Christology begins with an explanation of Jesus’s humanity and then continues by describing Jesus’s baptism: “Moreover, after his baptism, Christ descended upon [Jesus] in the form of a dove from the Supreme Ruler, and then he proclaimed the unknown Father, and performed miracles. But at last Christ departed from Jesus, and then Jesus suffered and rose again, while Christ remained impassible, inasmuch as he was a spiritual being.”³⁵ The Gospel quoted by Epiphanius describes the Holy Spirit “entering” Jesus, and here Irenaeus describes the belief that a divine being called “Christ” entered the human Jesus after baptism. The similarity is enough to suggest that one of these views is close to what the Ebionites believed, despite our only sources originating with their theological opponents.³⁶

In summary, the Ebionites appear to have believed that Jesus was conceived and born through the normal physical union of Mary and Joseph. Then Jesus was chosen by God, adopted because of his righteousness, and became the vessel for a divine being, called either

Christ or the Holy Spirit. That divine being empowered the human Jesus to perform miracles and to teach about God. Then, prior to Jesus's death on the cross, the divine being departed. Certain aspects of the Ebionites' Christology sound like an adoptionist view, while others seem closer to a separationist/possessionist Christology.

Marcionites

Marcion was born around AD 100 and was raised in Sinope, a Roman port city in the region of Pontus on the southern shore of Black Sea—modern-day Turkey.³⁷ His father was a Christian bishop, and Marcion became a wealthy shipowner. Around the year AD 139, after Marcion experienced a falling-out with his father, Marcion sailed to Rome. He was, at first, welcomed by Christians there, and he donated 200,000 sesterces to the Church—the purchase price of a nice house in Rome.³⁸ Eventually Marcion began to develop and preach his own unique theology, so the Roman Church returned his money and excommunicated him.³⁹

What did the Church at Rome find so offensive about Marcion's teachings? Marcion taught that the God of the Old Testament, the God worshipped by Jews, was a god of wrath, vengeance, and justice, and was not the God who sent Jesus. For Marcion, the God who sent Jesus was a God of grace, mercy, and love; and Jesus was sent to rescue us from the justice of the Old Testament God.⁴⁰ Certainly it is understandable how a Christian might come to this conclusion by reading the Old Testament—some Christians today continue to interpret the Old Testament in this way. But how could Marcion possibly read something like the Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of John, or the Epistle to the Hebrews and think that Jesus was working against the God of the Old Testament? The answer is that he didn't. That is, in the middle of the second century there was not yet a "New Testament" as we have it today. So Marcion created his own and excluded all of those books. In Marcion's Bible, he included only his own edited version of the Gospel of Luke and a small collection of the

apostle Paul's letters—his Bible was “the Gospel” and “the Apostle,” and that was it! Nothing from the Old Testament was included.⁴¹ For Marcion, Christianity started with Jesus.

Since, for Marcion, Jesus was not the Creator God of the Old Testament and was not sent by the God of the Old Testament, what did Marcion believe about Jesus? It is difficult to say. As with the Ebionites, our knowledge about Marcion comes entirely from the writings of his theological opponents. In the early third century AD, Tertullian wrote an entire treatise against Marcion.⁴² Tertullian was a prolific Latin-writing convert to Christianity from paganism; he lived in the city of Carthage—on the northern shore of Africa in modern-day Tunisia. In his treatise titled *Against Marcion*, he addresses Marcion's Christology as one of the core problems with Marcion's teachings. And Tertullian describes Marcion and his followers as “antichrists” because, he says, “they denied that Christ was come in the flesh.”⁴³ This language about “antichrists” Tertullian borrowed from the Epistles of John; for instance, 2 John 1:7 says, “For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.”⁴⁴ It is not clear whom John was writing about or what precisely they believed, but Tertullian finds in John's words the language to describe Marcion.

Tertullian continues by explaining why Marcion believes that Christ has not come in the flesh. According to Tertullian, Marcion believes that the vengeful god of the Old Testament created this world and that Jesus came to save humanity from that god and from his corrupt material world. “Christ, therefore, in order to avoid . . . the imputation, if possible, of belonging to the Creator, was not what he appeared to be [that is, human].”⁴⁵ This idea that Christ only *appeared* to be human even though he was actually fully divine was introduced above as the defining characteristic of docetism.⁴⁶

Tertullian argues that this belief is absurd because if Christ only appeared to be human, then he only appeared to heal people and

only appeared to suffer and die, but did not in actuality do any of those things.

Since however, Christ's being flesh is now discovered to be a lie, it follows that all things which were done by the flesh of Christ were done untruly. . . . If with a touch, or by being touched, He freed any one of a disease, whatever was done by any corporeal act cannot be believed to have been truly done in the absence of all reality in His body itself. . . . On this principle, too, the sufferings of Christ will be found not to warrant faith in Him. For . . . a phantom could not truly suffer. God's entire work, therefore, is subverted. Christ's death, wherein lies the whole weight and fruit of the Christian name, is denied.⁴⁷

For Tertullian, it is absurd that anyone would believe in Marcion's Christ. And it might be tempting to agree with Tertullian, but it's worth remembering that Tertullian is Marcion's theological opponent and as such might not do justice to Marcion's theology. That is, Marcion may not have held a docetic Christology.

Before further analyzing Marcion's Christology, it is worth noting that passages in the writings of Paul—Marcion's favorite apostle—lend themselves to docetic interpretation. For instance, when Paul discusses the challenges of both sin and flesh in this life, he describes Christ's incarnation in a way that could lead someone to believe that Christ was not *incarnated* (literally "in-fleshed") but only appeared to be so: "God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3). Similarly, in a poetic passage from Paul's letter to the Philippians, Christ is described as only being similar to humans: "But [Christ] made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men" (Philippians 2:7). Marcion could have read either of these passages and concluded that Jesus's flesh was similar to that of human beings, but not precisely the same. That said, it is not clear that Tertullian's description of Marcion as a docetist accurately captures Marcion's Christology.

We catch a glimpse of the problem with Tertullian's caricature of Marcion's Christology at the very end of his four-volume treatise against Marcion. There he quotes from Marcion's edition of the Gospel of Luke. In the King James Version, the passage reads:

But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. (Luke 24:37–39)

According to Tertullian, Marcion cut many passages out of his version of the Gospel of Luke. Yet, when it comes to this passage, which would seem to contradict a docetic Christology, Tertullian quotes Marcion's Gospel as saying, "Why are ye troubled, and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; for a spirit hath not bones, as ye see me have." Although this passage does not appear precisely the same as that found in the KJV translation of Luke today—for instance, it omits the command to "handle" Jesus and leaves out the word *flesh*—it, nevertheless, rejects the idea that Jesus was a mere "spirit" after his resurrection and insists that he has "bones."⁴⁸ Tertullian is clearly confused by this passage and struggles to make sense of why it appears in Marcion's Gospel. He concludes that "Marcion was unwilling to expunge from his Gospel some statements which [were] even made against him," and he suggests that Marcion only included this passage so that he could "deny that he had expunged anything."⁴⁹ Of course, the other possibility is that Marcion did in fact believe that Christ had some form of a tangible body.⁵⁰ In fact, Tertullian admits that Marcion's later followers believed that Jesus's body was tangible: "They allow that Christ really had a body. Whence was the material of it, if not from the same sort of thing as that in which He appeared? . . . He borrowed, they say, His flesh from the stars, and from the substances of the higher world."⁵¹ In other words, Marcion seems to have argued

that Christ's body looked human but was in reality more divine or was made of more heavenly than earthly material.

How might Marcion have developed the idea that Christ's body was not of this earth but was instead a heavenly body? Once again, Paul uses similar language in his first letter to the Corinthians. In the context of explaining the resurrection, Paul contrasts Adam with Jesus Christ, and thus human beings with the Lord. Referring to Christ as the "last Adam," Paul writes: "There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. . . . The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven" (1 Corinthians 15:44–45, 47). It is easy to understand how Marcion might have developed from Paul's language in 1 Corinthians 15 the idea that Christ's body was not fully human.

Despite Tertullian's insistence that Marcion was a docetist, Marcion's Christology seems to have been more complex. Rather than insisting that Jesus Christ was a phantasmal being who only appeared to have a tangible body, Marcion actually affirmed that Jesus's body was real and tangible. Yet, for Marcion, this body of Jesus was not made of the evil material that comes from this world. Instead, Jesus's body was comprised of heavenly substance—a concept Marcion likely derived from his reading of Paul.

Valentinians

The story of Valentinus (no relation to the century-later St. Valentine) is similar to that of Marcion. It seems that Valentinus was born in Egypt in the early second century AD and was educated in Alexandria.⁵² At some point, Valentinus moves to Rome and begins preaching (c. AD 130–160). Unlike Marcion, Valentinus then becomes so popular that he is almost elected Bishop of Rome.⁵³ Irenaeus and Tertullian, however, do not think highly of him, and they associate him with other "heretics" such as Marcion. Unlike Marcion, however, Valentinus was not trying to change the beliefs of

all Christians in Rome. Instead, Valentinus offered his teaching as an expansion or deeper understanding of the Christian message already taught to the masses—he formed a church within the Church. Irenaeus criticizes, in particular, Valentinus’s beliefs about Christ, arguing that he does not place sufficient emphasis on Jesus’s humanity.

And I have proved already, that it is the same thing to say that He appeared merely to outward seeming, and [to affirm] that He received nothing from Mary. For He would not have been one truly possessing flesh and blood, by which He redeemed us, unless He had summed up in Himself the ancient formation of Adam. Vain therefore are the disciples of Valentinus who put forth this opinion, in order that they may exclude the flesh from salvation, and cast aside what God has fashioned.⁵⁴

Irenaeus asserts that Valentinus’s Christology is no different than affirming a Jesus who “appeared merely outward seeming,” and in this way Irenaeus equates the Christology of Valentinus with docetism. To support this criticism, Irenaeus points to the Valentinian belief that Jesus “received nothing from Mary,” and he argues that Christ could not have truly saved humanity (those of “flesh and blood” like “Adam”) unless he was also flesh and blood.

Tertullian offers a similar criticism of Valentinus. Likewise focusing on Christ’s relationship to his mother, Mary, Tertullian argues that the Valentinians play irresponsibly with the prepositions *through* and *of*: Christ was born *through* Mary, they say, not *of* her. The implication is that Christ did not inherit any particular humanness from Mary.

[Valentinus’s] position being one which must be decided by prepositions; in other words, [Christ] was produced *by means of* a virgin, rather than *of* a virgin! On the ground that, having descended into the virgin rather in the manner of a passage through her than of a birth by her, He came into existence *through* her, not *of* her—not experiencing a mother in her, but nothing more than a way. Upon this same Christ, therefore

(so they say), Jesus descended in the sacrament of baptism, in the likeness of a dove.⁵⁵

Tertullian also mocks the idea of a Christ made of multiple parts (beyond a spirit and a body) by describing the Valentinians as stuffing Christ's body first with "spirit-seed" and "a soul-breath" and later at baptism with this divine being (Jesus), as if the divinity were "seasoning" intended to prevent the other "stuffing" from spoiling.

I now adduce (what they say) concerning Christ, upon whom some of them engraft Jesus with so much license, that they foist into Him a spirit-seed together with a soul-breath. Indeed, I will not undertake to describe these incongruous crammings, which they have contrived in relation both to their men and their gods. . . . Moreover, there was even in Christ accruing . . . the condiment of a spirit-seed, in order of course to prevent the corruption of all the other stuffing⁵⁶

Tertullian's mockery, like that of Irenaeus, was intended to disparage the Valentinians' beliefs and portray them as ridiculous. Tertullian concludes by describing the Valentinians as "reducing all things to mere images—Christians themselves being indeed nothing but imaginary beings!" in the thought of Valentinus.⁵⁷

Valentinus's understanding of the world and of Christ's role in it was more logical than his theological opponents allow. And most of his ideas concerning the nature of Christ came from close readings of texts now found in the Bible. For instance, Valentinus's understanding of the nature of Jesus's body seems to have developed in part from his reading of the Gospel of John. Valentinus argued that Jesus's body was special: "He was continent, enduring all things. Jesus digested divinity: he ate and drank in a special way, without excreting his solids. He had such a great capacity for continence that the nourishment within him was not corrupted, for he did not experience corruption."⁵⁸ As strange as it may seem that Valentinus would have speculated about the bowel movements of the Savior, it is worth

noting that this theory likely originated from his reading of John 6:27. As Bentley Layton explains:

His exaggerated statement about Jesus' digestion may be based on a New Testament story of Jesus' command to the people of Tiberias in Jn 6:27, playing upon the double meaning of the Greek verb "to labor for," which also means "to digest": "Jesus answered them . . . 'Do not *labor for* (or *digest*) the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the son of man will give you.'"⁵⁹

As with the other Christian authors we have considered so far, Valentinus is deriving his understanding of Jesus Christ from scripture. In this case, Valentinus is focusing on texts that suggest Jesus's body was unique.

For Valentinus, Jesus's body was different from an average human being's body. In the Gospel of Philip, likely written by one of the disciples of Valentinus, the author explains that Jesus's flesh is the only true flesh.⁶⁰

[The master] was conceived from what [is imperishable], through God. The [master rose] from the dead, but [he did not come into being as he] was. Rather, his [body] was [completely] perfect. [It was] of flesh, and this [flesh] was true flesh. [Our flesh] is not true flesh, but only an image of the true.⁶¹

Jesus's flesh is better and more perfect than the flesh of human beings, both because of the way in which he was incarnated and because of the way in which he was resurrected.

For Valentinians, it was necessary that Jesus's flesh be better than that of humanity in order that he might save humanity from a kind of flesh that can get sick and die. In the Gospel of Truth, a work possibly written by Valentinus himself, the flesh of Jesus nailed to the cross becomes the salvific fruit of the tree of life: "He was nailed to a tree and became fruit of the Father's acquaintance. Yet it did not cause ruin because it was eaten. Rather, to those who ate of it, it gave

the possibility that whoever he discovered within himself might be joyful in the discovery of him."⁶² This tree of the cross becomes for Valentinus "the climactic moment of divine self-revelation," as David Brakke explains.⁶³ It is through Christ crucified that the Father is revealed and Christians can become acquainted both with God and with their own divine destiny. This tree of the cross of Christ stands in opposition to a tree that would "cause ruin." As Brakke notes, it points back to the forbidden fruit of Eden and forward to the Eucharist—in LDS terminology, the sacrament.⁶⁴ Again, Valentinus's love for the Gospel of John shines through as his theology of the cross echoes Jesus's sermon in John about partaking of his life-giving flesh as bread (see John 6:51).

It is not clear whether Valentinus believed that Jesus's material body was comprised of celestial substance, as Marcion taught, or whether Valentinus affirmed that Jesus's body was made of the substance of this world (inherited from his mother, Mary) and redeemed by his own spiritual body that inhabited it.⁶⁵ It is clear, however, that the Christology of Valentinus and later Valentinians was more complicated than Tertullian's classification of it as mere docetism. For Valentinus, Jesus Christ was divine and had a body that was crucified and resurrected.

Proto-Orthodox

The Christology that eventually became the orthodox position and continues to be preached by Christians today, including Latter-day Saints, affirms that Jesus Christ is fully human and fully divine. This understanding of Jesus Christ is no more explicit in the New Testament texts from the first century than are the views later promoted by the Ebionites, Marcion, or Valentinus. Rather, during the second century, proto-Orthodox Christians developed and refined their understanding of the nature of Jesus Christ in dialogue with the Christologies of these other groups and authors.⁶⁶ As Aloys Grillmeier explains, "The struggle against the Docetists and the Adoptionists gives rise to stronger stress on the Godhead [the divinity] and the manhood in

Christ.”⁶⁷ We can see the development of this dual emphasis on the full divinity and humanity of Christ in the writings of Irenaeus and Tertullian at the end of the second century.⁶⁸

Irenaeus’s arguments against docetism helped him to refine his belief in Jesus Christ’s humanity. For instance, Irenaeus argues for Jesus’s humanity when he says, “Those, therefore, who allege that He took nothing from the Virgin do greatly err. . . . In that case is His descent into Mary [superfluous]; for why did He come down into her if He were to take nothing of her?”⁶⁹ Then, alluding to one of the most common titles Jesus uses for himself in the Gospels, Son of Man, Irenaeus writes, “For if He did not receive the substance of flesh from a human being, He neither was made man nor the Son of man; and if He was not made what we were, He did no great thing in what He suffered and endured.” Irenaeus then quotes Galatians 4:4 and Romans 1:3–4 to prove that Christ was “made of woman” and “made of the seed of David according to the flesh.”

Irenaeus’s arguments against adoptionism helped him to refine his belief in Jesus Christ’s divinity. For instance, Irenaeus also quotes the rest of Romans 1:3–4, which continues, “made of the seed of David according to the flesh; And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” Since Paul says that it was by his resurrection that he was “declared to be the Son of God,” this passage could be read to imply that Jesus became divine by “adoption” through his resurrection but was actually only human. Yet Irenaeus elsewhere argues against those who emphasize Jesus’s humanity over his divinity when he writes, “Those who assert that He was simply a mere man, begotten by Joseph . . . are in a state of death having been not as yet joined to the Word of God the Father.”⁷⁰ With his mention of the “Word of God,” Irenaeus alludes to the prologue of the Gospel of John, in which the divine Word is made flesh so that all who receive him might become children of God (John 1:1, 12, 14). The critique, that they have not yet “joined to the Word,” has a double meaning. First, they have not accepted the belief that Jesus is fully divine, and second,

they have not, Irenaeus suggests, received Christ in such a way that they might be saved. Here, Irenaeus makes an argument similar to Valentinus, that humankind could only be saved by a divine Christ acting to transform humanity's corruptible, mortal nature: "But how could we be joined to incorruptibility and immortality, unless, first, incorruptibility and immortality had become that which we also are, so that the corruptible might be swallowed up by incorruptibility, and the mortal by immortality, that we might receive the adoption of sons?"⁷¹ Of course, Irenaeus argues against Valentinus's view that Christ was more divine than human by insisting that the humanity of Jesus was just as important as his divinity.⁷²

In response to these opposing views—that Jesus Christ was more divine than human or that he was more human than divine—Irenaeus insists that both positions are equally true. Grillmeier summarizes Irenaeus's Christology as describing the divine Word, or Logos, "in a living relationship to the flesh he has assumed."⁷³ In Irenaeus's own words, he affirms:

For as [Jesus Christ] became man in order to undergo temptation, so also was He the Word that He might be glorified; the Word remaining quiescent, that He might be capable of being tempted, dishonoured, crucified, and of suffering death, but the human nature being swallowed up in it (the divine), when it conquered, and endured [without yielding], and performed acts of kindness, and rose again, and was received up [into heaven]. He therefore, the Son of God, our Lord, being the Word of the Father, and the Son of man, since He had a generation as to His human nature from Mary—who was descended from mankind, and who was herself a human being—was made the Son of man.⁷⁴

For Irenaeus, it was necessary that Jesus Christ be both human and divine in order to save humankind.

Tertullian also refined his Christology in dialogue with alternative views and alternative interpretations of scripture. For instance,

the same scriptural passage that docetists might have used to authorize their interpretation of Jesus's difference from humans is used by Tertullian to affirm Jesus's humanity: "God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Romans 8:3). Tertullian explains:

For in another place also he says that Christ was in the likeness of the flesh of sin: not that he took upon him the likeness of flesh, as it were a phantasm of a body and not its reality: but the apostle will have us understand by "the likeness of sinful flesh" that the flesh of Christ, itself not sinful, was the like of that to which sin did belong, and is to be equated with Adam in species but not in defect.⁷⁵

In other words, for Tertullian, Paul did not claim that Jesus's body was only in appearance like that of other humans. For Tertullian, Jesus's body was comprised of the same flesh as any other human. The only difference in Tertullian's interpretation of Paul is that Jesus's flesh was not sinful because Jesus was sinless—therefore, it was in the "likeness of sinful flesh," but it was nonetheless human flesh.⁷⁶

Tertullian, in response to the Christologies of Marcion and Valentinus, emphasizes the humanness of Jesus's body. When he affirms that Jesus was crucified, died, was buried, and was resurrected, he emphasizes that Jesus's flesh is human: "*I mean* this flesh suffused with blood, built up with bones, interwoven with nerves, entwined with veins, *a flesh* which knew how to be born, and how to die, human without doubt, as born of a human being."⁷⁷ For Tertullian, it is important that Jesus's flesh be exactly the same as human flesh because it is in part through Jesus's incarnation that he is able to save human beings: "By clothing himself with our flesh he made it his own, and by making it his own he made it non-sinful."⁷⁸ Notice how this contrasts with Valentinus's understanding of Christ's flesh. For Valentinus, Christ's flesh had to be superior to that of humanity so that through it humans might escape their own sinful flesh. For Tertullian, however, it is by Christ taking upon himself human flesh that he is able to redeem that very flesh. Rather than escape from

sinful flesh, in Tertullian's understanding of incarnation, Christ saves flesh from its potential for sinfulness.

For Tertullian, it was necessary that Jesus Christ be both human and divine. In a statement that echoes Irenaeus's affirmation concerning the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ, Tertullian summarizes his own view:

Thus the nature of the two substances displayed Him as man and God,—in one respect born, in the other unborn; in one respect fleshly, in the other spiritual; in one sense weak, in the other exceeding strong; in one sense dying, in the other living. This property of the two states—the divine and the human—is distinctly asserted with equal truth of both natures alike, with the same belief both in respect of the Spirit and of the flesh. The powers of the Spirit proved Him to be God, His sufferings attested the flesh of man.⁷⁹

For Tertullian, Jesus Christ was both fully human and fully divine.

This is not the end of the story. While this may have been the first time that the belief in Jesus Christ's two natures was so clearly elucidated, it was not the last. Discussions about the relationship between Jesus Christ's humanity and divinity continued into the middle of the fifth century, with the Council at Chalcedon, and beyond.⁸⁰ Although Latter-day Saints may now quibble with some of the nuances of the later creeds, we owe a debt of gratitude to the early proto-Orthodox Christians whose Christology we have inherited. Likewise, all Christians owe gratitude to the Ebionites, Marcionites, Valentinians, and others who labored alongside the proto-Orthodox to grow in their understanding of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

The story of the christological developments of the second century has been told in different ways. Latter-day Saint authors have sometimes conveyed this story as though it were a disaster narrative, in

which all that is good collapses and is lost or scattered.⁸¹ The orthodox Christian telling of this story is one of heroes and villains, in which authors such as Irenaeus and Tertullian triumph over their heretical rivals.⁸² The story that I have related is less dramatic and less triumphalist. It is not the story of a fight for survival and not a story of good versus evil. Rather it is the story of various ancient Christians who worked to understand their relationship with Jesus Christ.

Whereas Latter-day Saints often disagree with Christians of other denominations on the nature of the Trinity, or Godhead in LDS parlance, we find general agreement on the affirmation that Jesus Christ is both fully human and fully divine. Yet this doctrine is not explicitly affirmed by Christians until the end of the second century AD. Latter-day Saints have sometimes ignored or worse disparaged the writings of Christians that came after the texts now compiled in the New Testament. It is sometimes assumed that anything written in the second century AD and beyond must be evidence only of rebellion against God, what we commonly call the Great Apostasy. Yet, as we have seen here, one of the fundamental Christian doctrines—belief in Christ’s full humanity and divinity—came into focus over the course of the second century as various Christians worked to understand holy scripture. This is not to deny the LDS doctrine of a Great Apostasy or the concomitant doctrine of the Restoration, but only to suggest that we may not yet fully understand the extent and ramifications of each. For that reason, we should take extra caution when setting limits on whom God might guide and how God might work for the benefit and understanding of humankind. And as Latter-day Saints, we should graciously acknowledge our debt to second-century Christians and be grateful for the understanding of Jesus Christ we have inherited from them.

JASON R. COMBS *is an assistant professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University.*

Notes

1. Even though this imagined scenario is not true, some early Christian authors did accuse each other of forgery and of altering scripture; for instance, see Tertullian’s criticism of Marcion in Tertullian, *Prescription against Heretics* 38.9. Of course, already in the first century AD, Paul warns that there are forgeries in his name (see 2 Thessalonians 2:2).
2. *History of the Church*, 6:57.
3. Robert Millet quoting Elder William Grant Bangerter, “It’s a Two-Way Street,” address delivered on 4 August 1985, in *1984–85 BYU Speeches of the Year* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Publications, 1985), 161. See Robert L. Millet, “Joseph Smith and “The Only True and Living Church,”” in *A Witness for the Restoration: Essays in Honor of Robert J. Matthews*, ed. Kent P. Jackson and Andrew C. Skinner (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2007), 201–31.
4. For instance, see Richard R. Hopkins, *How Greek Philosophy Corrupted the Christian Concept of God*, 2nd ed. (1988; repr., Springville, UT: Horizon Publishers, 2009). Recently, Noel B. Reynolds wrote, “Though the incorporation of Greek philosophy into Christianity was not an original cause of the apostasy, the apostate Christian churches generally reached out to embrace philosophy as a means of bringing common standards and rationality to Christian belief. . . . The Christian tradition that resulted was far different than the one established by Jesus Christ and his apostles in the first century.” Reynolds, “What Went Wrong for the Early Christians?,” in *Early Christians in Disarray: Contemporary LDS Perspectives on the Christian Apostasy*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2005), 14.
5. For instance, see David E. Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment*, Library of Early Christianity (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987); or Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000). These studies seem to contradict the claim of Daniel W. Graham and James L. Siebach: “It is only in the mid-second century that Christians began to use Greek forums and genres to communicate publicly with the pagan world. They did so at first only to make their case to the secular world and to refute heresies which had

- some philosophical inspiration.” Graham and Siebach, “The Introduction of Philosophy into Early Christianity,” in *Early Christians in Disarray*, 234.
6. In Colossians 2:8 we read, “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit.” This is not a critique of philosophy in general. If the word *philosophy* was replaced with *religion* one would not assume that it was a critique of all religion. Rather it would be a critique of anyone who would use religion to lead someone away captive (to “spoil,” or better, “despoil” them). Of note, Judaism and Christianity were both understood to be philosophies in the ancient world; see Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.1.2–6; and Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 8.
 7. While it is possible that there were some Christians who were corrupt or who wrote with ulterior motives, the idea of mass corruption and a unified effort, intentional or unintentional, to reshape the earliest teachings of Christianity into something foreign and false is not supported by the extant ancient records—heresiological discourse notwithstanding.
 8. See *The Letter of the Churches of Vienne and Lyons*. On the life of Irenaeus, see Denis Minns, *Irenaeus: An Introduction* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010).
 9. On the growth and spread of Christianity, see Keith Hopkins, “Christian Number and Its Implications,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6, no. 2 (1998): 185–226.
 10. The Revelation of Peter 78.31–79.31, in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures: The Revised and Updated Translation of Sacred Gnostic Texts*, ed. and trans. Marvin Meyer (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 295; ellipses added.
 11. Bart D. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 185–88.
 12. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.11.7 (ANF). Irenaeus here seems to distinguish the Ebionites’ Christology from “those who separate Jesus from Christ.” Often the Ebionites have been classified as adoptionists because they believe that Jesus was born of the normal sexual union of Mary and Joseph, then on account of his righteousness was “adopted” by God as son. Yet a close reading of the extant fragments of writing from the Ebionites seem to suggest that they should be grouped with the otherwise anonymous collective of “those who separate Jesus from Christ”—what I call a possessionist/separationist Christology.

13. Although I use the term *debate*, one should not imagine that these various Christian groups ever sat down for a meeting to discuss their opposing views. The earliest theological councils did not take place until the fourth century. Rather I use the term *debate* simply to describe the broad disagreement, the awareness of that disagreement, and the various attempts in writing to affirm one's own view while refuting the alternatives.
14. For instance, Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*. For more detailed treatments of early Christologies, see the foundational work, Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in the Christian Tradition: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. J. Bowden (1965; repr., Atlanta: John Knox, 1975); see also Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003); and James L. Papan-drea, *The Earliest Christologies: Five Images of Christ in the Postapostolic Age* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016).
15. For more on adoptionism, see Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 99–103; Papan-drea, *Earliest Christologies*, 23–43.
16. For more on docetism, see Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 103–6; Papan-drea, *Earliest Christologies*, 45–65; Michael Slusser, "Docetism: A Historical Definition," *Second Century* 1 (1981): 163–72.
17. For more on possessionist/separationist Christology, see Papan-drea, *Earliest Christologies*, 23–43, 67–84; Matti Myllykoski, "Cerinthus," in *Companion to Second-Century Christian "Heretics,"* ed. Antti Marjanen and Petri Luomanen (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 224–36.
18. For more on proto-Orthodox Christology, see Papan-drea, *Earliest Christologies*, 85–104; Grillmeier, *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, 102–57.
19. For instance, see Mosiah 15:2–4 and D&C 93:4.
20. For the history of LDS Christology, see Terryl Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Cosmos, God, Humanity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 117–23; and Charles R. Harrell, "*This Is My Doctrine*": *The Development of Mormon Theology* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2011), 149–84.
21. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 119. See Boyd Kirkland, "Elohim and Jehov-ah in Mormonism and the Bible," *Dialogue* 19 (1986): 77–93, and Ryan

Conrad Davis and Paul Y. Hoskisson, "Usage of the Title *Elohim*," *Religious Educator* 14, no. 1 (2013): 109–27.

22. Inconsistent and irregular use of the titles Jehovah and Elohim continued throughout the presidencies of both Brigham Young and John Taylor; see Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 119.
23. I am not suggesting that early Mormons would have agreed with all the nuances of dyophysitism, for instance, as established in the Chalcedonian Creed; on dyophysitism and Mormonism, see Harrell, "This Is My Doctrine," 160.
24. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 123. Regarding what sense Jesus should be understood as progeny of a divine Father, some LDS leaders have speculated that God the Father impregnated Mary through normal human sexual processes and other LDS leaders have insisted that such speculation should be avoided. For instance, Brigham Young said, "The Father came down and begat him, the same as we do now, and Jesus was the only one"; see *The Complete Discourses of Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2009), 1:321. Harold B. Lee, on the other hand, wrote, "Teachers should not speculate on the manner of Christ's birth. We are very much concerned that some of our church teachers seem to be obsessed of the idea of teaching doctrine which cannot be substantiated and making comments beyond what the Lord has actually said. You asked about . . . the birth of the Savior. Never have I talked about sexual intercourse between Deity and the mother of the Savior. If teachers were wise in speaking of this matter about which the Lord has said but very little, they would rest their discussion on this subject with merely the words which are recorded on this subject in Luke 1:34–35. . . . Remember that the being who was brought about by [Mary's] conception was a divine personage. We need not question His method to accomplish His purposes. Perhaps we would do well to remember the words of Isaiah 55:8–9: 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord'; see Harold B. Lee, *Teachings of Harold B. Lee* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996), 14.

25. I do not treat independently "those who separate Jesus from Christ" (possessionist/separationist Christology) because that view is represented by the Ebionites and Cerinthus (see below).
26. For an introduction to the Ebionites, see Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 99–103; and Sakari Häkkinen, "Ebionites," in *Companion to Second-Century Christian "Heretics,"* 247–78.
27. Häkkinen, "Ebionites," 247.
28. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.26.2 (ANF).
29. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.26.1 (ANF).
30. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.21.1 (ANF).
31. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.1.3 (ANF); alluding to Luke 1:35.
32. Epiphanius, *Refutation of All Heresies* 30.13; trans. J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), adapted.
33. On the Ebionites' Gospel missing an infancy narrative, see Grillmeier, *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, 79.
34. Epiphanius, *Refutation of All Heresies* 30.13; Ebionites frag. 5, trans. Elliott.
35. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.26.1 (ANF, adapted).
36. For comparable Christologies, see Grillmeier, *Christ in the Christian Tradition*, 92–93.
37. For an introduction to Marcion, see Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 99–103; and Heikki Räisänen, "Marcion," in *Companion to Second-Century Christian "Heretics,"* 100–124.
38. Martial, 5.35; Pliny, *Epistulae* 6.1; see Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries*, trans. M. D. Johnson (1989; repr., Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 245.
39. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 108–9; Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus*, 245.
40. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 104–5; and Räisänen, "Marcion," 105–7.
41. On Marcion's canon and its influence, see Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987), 90–99.

42. For more on Tertullian's construction of Marcion, see Judith M. Lieu, *Marcion and the Making of a Heretic: God and Scripture in the Second Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 50–85.
43. Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 3.8.1 (ANF).
44. See also 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3.
45. Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 3.8.2 (ANF). "Only those souls that had learned his doctrine would attain salvation. The body, on the contrary, since it was taken from the earth, is incapable of sharing in salvation"; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*. 1.27.3; trans. Dominic J. Unger and John J. Dillon, *St Irenaeus of Lyons: Against the Heresies Book 1*, Ancient Christian Writers 55 (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1992).
46. For an overview of docetic Christologies, see Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 93–101.
47. Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 3.8.4–5 (ANF).
48. Absence of the word *flesh* may be due to Paul's affirmation that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (see 1 Corinthians 15:50).
49. Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 4.43.6–7 (ANF).
50. This seems likely, see Lieu, *Marcion and the Making of a Heretic*, 219–21; and David E. Wilhite, "Was Marcion a Docetist? The Body of Evidence vs. Tertullian's Argument," *Vigiliae Christianae* 71, no. 1 (2017): 1–36.
51. Tertullian, *The Flesh of Christ* 6.3 (ANF).
52. Based on Epiphanius's comments in the early fourth century, which should be treated with a healthy dose of skepticism; see David Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 100.
53. Brakke, *Gnostics*, 100.
54. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.1.2 (ANF).
55. Tertullian, *Against the Valentinians* 27 (ANF).
56. Tertullian, *Against the Valentinians* 27 (ANF, adapted).
57. Tertullian, *Against the Valentinians* 27 (ANF).
58. Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* 3.59.3; trans. Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 239.
59. Layton, *Gnostic Scriptures*, 238.

60. For Valentinus, the material world is not real—only God is real; see Brakke, *Gnostics*, 101.
61. Gospel of Philip 68.29–37; trans. Marvin Meyer.
62. Gospel of Truth 17.18–31, in Layton, trans., *Gnostic Scriptures*, 254.
63. Brakke, *Gnostics*, 102.
64. Brakke, *Gnostics*, 102.
65. For a more detailed analysis of Valentinian Christology, see Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed: The Church of the “Valentinians”* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).
66. In theological terms, Latter-day Saints might describe this as a revelation received line upon line; see 2 Nephi 28:30; D&C 98:12; 128:21. On the relationship of these passages to Isaiah 28:10, 13, see Terry B. Ball, “‘Precept upon Precept, Line upon Line’: An Approach to Understanding Isaiah 28:7–13,” in *Prophets and Prophecies of the Old Testament: The 46th Annual Brigham Young University Sidney B. Sperry Symposium*, ed. Aaron Schade, Brian Hauglid, and Kerry Muhlestein (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, 2017), 79–94.
67. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 123. Judith Lieu echoes this statement from Grillmeier when she writes, “At every point Tertullian’s own convictions and his construction of Marcion play off against each other like a light and the shadows it throws, the sound and its echo.” Lieu, *Marcion and the Making of a Heretic*, 84.
68. Prior to Irenaeus and Tertullian, other proto-Orthodox Christians had begun to develop similar ideas regarding Jesus Christ’s humanity and divinity: for instance, Ignatius, Justin Martyr, Melito of Sardis, and others. See Papandrea, *The Earliest Christologies*, 91–96; and Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 102–14. Yet it is in the writings of Irenaeus and Tertullian that we first find the idea of Jesus Christ’s dual natures clearly affirmed.
69. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.22.1–2 (ANF).
70. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.19.1 (ANF).
71. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.19.1 (ANF). Irenaeus goes on to write, “For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man, and He who

- was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God” (*Against Heresies* 3.19.1 [ANF]).
72. Both Valentinus and Irenaeus developed this idea from their reading of Paul’s letters and the Gospels.
 73. Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 122.
 74. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.19.3. Irenaeus continues by citing Isaiah 7:13–14 as evidence for Jesus’s birth from the virgin, Mary. For more on the meaning of Isaiah 7:13–14 in its historical context and in Matthew 1, see Jason R. Combs, “From King Ahaz’s Sign to Christ Jesus: The ‘Fulfillment’ of Isaiah 7:14,” in *Prophets and Prophecies of the Old Testament*, 95–122.
 75. Tertullian, *The Flesh of Christ* 16.3–5; trans. Ernest Evans, ed., *Tertullian’s Treatise on the Incarnation* (London: SPCK, 1956).
 76. Tertullian does not here consider the implications of Philipians 2:7.
 77. Tertullian, *The Flesh of Christ* 5.5 (ANF).
 78. Tertullian, *The Flesh of Christ* 16.5; trans. Evans.
 79. Tertullian, *The Flesh of Christ* 5.7 (ANF); cf. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.19.3.
 80. In October AD 451, a council was held at Chalcedon, a city on a small peninsula near the southern mouth of the Bosphorus strait—on the coast opposite Istanbul in modern-day Turkey. There a group of bishops, theologians, and other church leaders crafted a statement to deal with questions regarding whether Christ’s divinity absorbed his humanity, whether Christ remained of two natures or whether the two became one, etc.
 81. See above, note 4.
 82. See Tertullian, *Prescription against Heretics* 29. For a narrative of early Christian history that follows this model, see Eusebius, *Church History*.