

Incarnation, Exaltation, and Christological Tension in Doctrine and Covenants 93:1–20

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It goes without saying that Christianity’s central figure—the person so important to the gospel message that he is literally the namesake for all of global Christianity—is Jesus Christ. Within the Christian tradition, however, there exists a wide variety of perspectives on who Jesus is and how we are to understand the significance of his life, death, and Resurrection. This is a topic that has consumed Christian writers and scholars for nearly two thousand years and given rise to the theological discipline of Christology.¹ Christology, at its core, is a branch of theology devoted to understanding how a given text portrays Jesus Christ, particularly how his *divinity* relates to his *humanity*. For instance, what does it mean that Jesus is the “Son of God”? Did he exist premortally as a divine being who then took on the appearance of a mortal man, or was he a mortal man who was elevated to divinity? Furthermore, if he is somehow both divine and human, how do those two natures interact? Does his divinity succumb

to his humanity, or does his humanity get swallowed up in his divinity? These questions are further complicated by the many different descriptions of Jesus contained in the scriptures. In Matthew 5–7, for instance, Jesus is the new Moses; in John 1:1 he is the immortal Word; in Hebrews 2:17–18 he is the Great High Priest who atones for the sins of Israel.² The Book of Mormon also presents a diverse witness when it comes to the nature of Jesus. Nephi’s Jesus is “the son of the most high God” (1 Nephi 11:6), while Abinadi describes Jesus as being both “Father” and “Son,” titles that Jesus uses in presenting himself to the brother of Jared (Mosiah 15:1–4; Ether 3:14). In the Nephites’ grand Christophany in 3 Nephi, Jesus describes himself as being, among other things, “in” the Father (3 Nephi 19:23).³ While so many different titles could be taken to mean that their various authors lacked a full understanding of who Jesus is, it is more likely that each simply chose to emphasize different elements of Jesus’s nature and mission.

For Latter-day Saints, however, the New Testament and the Book of Mormon are not the only books of scripture containing an impressive witness of Christ. Section 93 of the Doctrine and Covenants is also critical to understanding the Latter-day Saint conception of Jesus and his nature. Section 93, in fact, is one of the most theologically rich and provocative revelations Joseph Smith received. Beginning with a short discussion on the nature of the Savior and his relationship with the Father, the revelation quickly transitions into what seems to be an excerpt of a record written by John that describes several key events relating to Jesus, such as his baptism and his reception of power. The revelation then transitions again, this time into a discussion of the origins of humanity and an elaboration of the principles of truth and intelligence. Then, perhaps most surprisingly of all, beginning in verse 40 the revelation abruptly transitions from these theologically complex topics toward more practical, mundane affairs as the Lord mentions several members of the Church by name and chastens them for, among other things, their lack of attention to their families. Because of the consideration paid in section 93 to

Jesus's relationship with the Father and his own progression through mortality, this revelation is particularly important for understanding the development of christological ideas in Joseph Smith's revelations.⁴

With these introductory thoughts in mind, I explore more fully the Christology presented in Doctrine and Covenants 93 with an eye toward how it fits within the classic theological spectrum between *exaltation* Christology (the notion that Jesus was a man elevated to divinity) and *incarnation* Christology (the notion that Jesus was always God). The thesis of this paper is that Doctrine and Covenants 93:1–20 intentionally introduces a tension between exaltation and incarnation Christologies as a means of highlighting (and perhaps even attempting to solve) the paradox of Jesus Christ's dual nature, which was a topic of much debate in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In this paper I will proceed as follows: I will first attempt to frame the christological controversy that was brewing in New England during the early decades of the nineteenth century. I will then briefly introduce what is meant by exaltation and incarnation models of Christology and quickly discuss the reception of section 93 in its earliest context. I will then turn to the primary focus of this paper, looking specifically at how the section, and the record of John in particular, presents its twofold christological depiction of Jesus.

Christology and the Nineteenth-Century Christological Context of Doctrine and Covenants 93

Exaltation Christology

Exaltation Christology⁵ expresses the belief that “God raised Jesus from the dead—not in order to give him a longer life here on earth, but in order to exalt him as his own Son up to the heavenly realms, where he could sit beside God at his right hand, ruling together with the Lord God Almighty himself.”⁶ A crucial element to this

Christology is the idea that Jesus began life as a regular human being. As scholar Bart Ehrman describes, Jesus “may have been more righteous than others; he may have earned God’s special favor more than others. But he started out as a human and nothing more.”⁷ The key component of exaltation Christology is the belief that at some point in his life, either at the Resurrection or at an earlier point such as his baptism,⁸ Jesus was lifted up or exalted by God the Father, elevating Jesus to a level of divinity such that he eventually shares God’s reign after his ascension. Importantly, exaltation Christology holds that this exaltation is a gift bestowed upon a mortal Jesus, not a reinstatement of a divine position held prior to coming to earth. In Romans, Paul presented what may be the earliest form of this Christology: “Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was 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” (Romans 1:3–4). Paul’s words could be read to suggest that Jesus was “declared” to be something (that is, the Son of God) that he was not already because his origins were in “the flesh.”

Incarnation Christology

While exaltation Christology suggests that Jesus was a man who was lifted up by God to a state of divinity as God’s son, incarnation Christology argues for the opposite: Jesus was always the divine Son of God. He was “a superhuman divine being who existed before his birth and became human for the salvation of the human race.”⁹ According to this view, Jesus’s divinity persisted in some fashion across every stage of his existence: he was divine prior to his incarnation, he retained some element of divinity during his mortal life, and he remains divine following his Resurrection and ascension to the Father’s right hand. Paul seems to have had this idea in mind when he wrote to the Philippians that Jesus, prior to coming to earth, was “in the form of God” (Philippians 2:6). However, as the passage goes on, Paul declares that Jesus enacts the plan of salvation by making himself “of no reputation,” exchanging the explicit form of divinity

for “the form of a servant” instead (Philippians 2:7). The Greek word rendered by King James translators as “of no reputation” is the verb ἐκένωσεν (*ekenosen*), which simply means “to empty.” Jesus, now finding himself “as a man,” humbles himself and demonstrates obedience, finally dying “even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). Although Philippians goes on to mention that following the Crucifixion “God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name” (Philippians 2:9), incarnationist interpreters understand this exaltation to be simply a return to a more explicit form of Jesus’s innate and constant divinity. The Crucifixion and Resurrection may entitle Jesus Christ to exaltation, in their view, but that exaltation was never a question of his nature being changed from that of a human being into a god; rather, Jesus’s divinity was always constant. Readers of John’s Gospel experience a similar sentiment from the very opening verse: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” John’s introduction informs its readers that Jesus Christ is somehow divine from “the beginning.” Jesus is, in some fashion, one with the Father, but he is also a separate entity described by John as “the Word,” a title that perhaps hints at Jesus’s role as mediator between the divine realm and the mortal world. Of Jesus’s birth John said only, “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).

Debates such as these over the relationship between the Father and Son have deep roots, dating back to the fourth century CE. A similar controversy, which became quite heated and for a time divided the Roman Empire, centered around the question of whether Jesus Christ was *homoousia* (of the same substance) or simply *homoiousia* (of a similar substance) with the Father. The latter position was termed Arianism after one of its most prominent proponents, a fourth-century bishop named Arius. Although debates such as these can seem tedious and arcane to many Christians today, it’s important to recognize how high these theological stakes really were. The dispute had to do, in large part, with nothing less than the divinity of Jesus, and by extension his ability to reconcile humanity to God. This

Arian position thus opened up an insurmountable chasm between God and humanity, while leaving Jesus to occupy a middle position in which he is neither God nor human. The Council of Nicaea ruled against Arianism in favor of those who advocated Jesus's *homoousia* with the Father, and thus Trinitarianism, with its emphasis upon the shared essence of substance of the Father, Son, and Spirit, became the accepted theological viewpoint of the emerging Catholic Church. For the next fifteen hundred years, theologians attempting to critique Trinitarianism often resorted to an Arian position. However, many found it hard to balance the Arian theology of the Father's superiority to Christ who is in turn superior to humanity (Father > Christ > Humanity) without eventually asserting a Trinitarian theology that the Father is like Christ who is superior to humanity (Father = Christ > Humanity) or the Socinian Christology that the Father is superior to Christ who is human (Father > Christ = Humanity).¹⁰

This theological positioning of Jesus becomes crucial when we recognize that, as Latter-day Saints, we rely upon him completely for our salvation. The deity of Jesus Christ is, in the words of Roger E. Olson, "the linchpin of the gospel. If it were removed in any way then the hope for eternal participation in God's own life and for forgiveness and restoration to the image of God would fall apart. The gospel itself would be wrecked."¹¹

The early years of the nineteenth century were tense when it came to the subject of Christology. One prominent example of these tensions was the election of the liberal Calvinist Henry Ware as Professor of Divinity at Harvard in 1805, which only widened a developing rift between strict, conservative Calvinists and liberals such as Ware.¹² The debate revolved around whether or not liberal Calvinists were attempting to phase out some of Calvinism's more severe doctrines, such as predestination and total depravity. The thought that Calvinism might be weakened by such liberalizing concessions angered conservative Calvinists, who worried that the election of Ware to such a prominent position might signal a theological changing of the guard. In 1815 Jedidiah Morse, a conservative, published a

harsh critique of what he perceived to be the theological views of his liberal opponents.¹³ Prominent among his criticisms was his feeling that the teachings of American liberal Calvinists aligned with those of English Unitarians. Morse's identification was problematic because English Unitarians advocated a Socinian Christology, meaning they viewed Jesus not as a divine figure but as a human man, born of Mary by purely natural means.¹⁴ According to the Socinian christological position, (1) Jesus had no existence prior to his birth and (2) by way of consequence, what had been understood as "atonement" demanded reevaluation. Though liberal Calvinists denied Morse's claim that their theology bordered on Socinianism, Morse was unconvinced. He vehemently denounced them as hypocrites and further argued that the liberals ought not to be termed Christians since they obviously did not believe in the divinity of Jesus Christ.

It was this christological debate that occupied so much of the attention of Joseph Priestley. Priestley had emerged in the late eighteenth century as the leader of the Unitarians in Britain and had espoused both Trinitarian and Arian views before eventually being swayed by the Socinian position, as had many others.¹⁵ Priestley and the Socinians attempted to answer the question of the relation between God, Christ, and man by bringing Jesus down to man's level. In Priestley's opinion, Christ was a man in whom the Jews found their Messiah: "Jesus Christ . . . [was] a man approved of God, by wonders and signs which God did by him."¹⁶ For Priestley, Jesus was actually just a human being whom history and tradition elevated to a deified state. Jesus's death was not intended in itself to be salvific but to grant hope to humanity that God would look upon them with similar favor and raise them from the dead as well. Priestley reasoned that "the death and resurrection of a man, in all respects like themselves, . . . [was] better calculated to give other men an assurance of their own resurrection, than that of any super-angelic being, the laws of whose nature they might think to be very different from those of their own."¹⁷ Priestley believed that the influence of Oriental or the Greek philosophy led later Christian thinkers "to raise the dignity of

the *person* of Christ, that it might appear less disgraceful to be ranked amongst his disciples."¹⁸ However, while Priestley's view offered a partial solution to the problems of Arianism by asserting that there exists a common nature linking humanity and Christ, it failed to provide a solution to the thorny ontological question of how the nature of humanity relates to the nature of God.

William Ellery Channing advocated a similar christological position but advanced a somewhat different ontological view. Channing was a Harvard graduate who held the pastorate at Boston's Federal Street Church. In 1819 he delivered a sermon in Baltimore entitled "Unitarian Christianity" in which he laid out the framework and theology for American Unitarians while also consolidating the liberal position and answering the critique of conservative Calvinists.¹⁹ One of the primary purposes of this sermon was to better define the Unitarian christological position, one that reflected elements of Arianism in its explanation of Jesus's mediation between God and humanity, although, as with Priestly, Jesus himself is not necessarily seen as divine:²⁰ "If we examine the passages in which Jesus is distinguished from God, we shall see, that they not only speak of him as another being, but seem to labor to express his inferiority. He is continually spoken of as the Son of God, sent of God, receiving all his power from God, working miracles because God was with him, judging justly because God taught him, having claims on our belief, because he was anointed and sealed by God, and was able of himself to do nothing."²¹ The value of Jesus in Channing's mind was that in fully subsuming his will to that of the Father and in living a sinless life, he became the perfect role model to humanity—Jesus communicated the will of God to those around him and as such provided a path of righteous living.

Channing, who had been grappling with the relationship between God and humanity for some time, made another major theological move in 1828 with a sermon entitled "Likeness to God." For Channing, humanity's potential to become like God was a primary crux of the Christian faith: "In truth, the very essence of Christian

faith is, that we trust in God's mercy, as revealed in Jesus Christ, for a state of celestial purity, in which we shall grow forever in the likeness, and knowledge, and enjoyment of the Infinite Father."²² Channing saw this "likeness" as a teleological goal that symbolized the ultimate accomplishment of humanity: "I affirm, and would maintain, that true religion consists in proposing, as our great end, a growing likeness to the Supreme Being. Its noblest influence consists in making us more and more partakers of the Divinity."²³ Statements such as these represented an explicit disavowal of total depravity (the idea that men and women are, by their very nature, inclined to indulge their own desires) and suggested that rather than equip humanity with the overwhelming urge to sin, God had instead prepared them to be partakers of the Divine: "Likeness to God is the supreme gift. He can communicate nothing so precious, glorious, blessed, as himself. To hold intellectual and moral affinity with the Supreme Being, to partake of his spirit, to be his children by derivations of kindred excellence, to bear a growing conformity to the perfection which we adore, this is a felicity which obscures and annihilates all other good."²⁴ E. Brooks Holifield has written that Channing's concept of humanity's likeness to God referred "not to its inherent or achieved goodness but to its capacity for transcendence, its ability to yield to the new, to push in thought, imagination, and moral harmony beyond its current limits."²⁵ Without resorting to messy theological language such as "uncreated" or "ex nihilo," Channing constructed a paradigm in which God, Jesus Christ, and humanity all share *something* in common, and there is clearly an affinity between God and humanity throughout Channing's writings. As Holifield notes, "If a growing likeness to God was the goal, it was unwise to posit a God whose perfection could have nothing in common with human perfection."²⁶

The preceding paragraphs have presented only a small portion of the many debates that occupied Western Europe and North America during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries, where reason, revelation, and religion found an uneasy coexistence. Due to the emerging confidence in humanity's ability to discern the

will of God through reason, the need for a divine, atoning Jesus gave way to a Jesus who provided the model of a perfect Christian life. Likewise, humanity's capacity to grasp and understand the revealed will of God through their own intellect suggested that a Calvinist theology centered upon the fall of Adam and subsequent original sin was flawed. Men like Priestly and Channing mined the Bible for evidence that the Trinitarian position, with its triune God, was unsustainable, and by the early 1830s the question of Jesus's relationship to God and the need for a divine atonement had been called into serious question. Most agreed that Jesus provided a crucial bridge between humanity and the Father. However, the nature and purpose of that bridge was in doubt.

Against this theological backdrop, Doctrine and Covenants 93, in my opinion, can best be understood. Currents of christological controversies had been sweeping through the eastern states during the early decades of the nineteenth century, and this revelation provided the Lord's response to the debate—one that proved particularly timely due to subsequent trends in biblical scholarship.²⁷ Section 93 directly addresses the relationship between God and humanity, identifies when that relationship originated, and relates how Jesus Christ figures in that relationship. The revelation carefully and concisely traces Jesus's trajectory as both divine and human, directly linked to both God the Father and humanity, and in the process settles from a Latter-day Saint perspective the christological controversies to which Priestly, Channing, and others had contributed.

Christology and Doctrine and Covenants 93:1–20

With this framework in mind, attention can now be directed specifically toward Doctrine and Covenants 93, a revelation with opaque origins. Our earliest historical sources for the reception of Doctrine and Covenants 93 amount to just two short statements. The first, written in Joseph Smith's history, states only that "on the 6th I received the following."²⁸ The second, written by Newel K. Whitney, gives some

additional details: “Revelation to Joseph, Sidney Frederick & Newell by chastisement & also relative to the Father & Son 6 May 1833.”²⁹ Whitney’s statement raises an intriguing question about the catalyst for the May 1833 revelation. By placing the primary emphasis upon *chastisement*, Whitney introduced the possibility that the more theologically oriented content (things “relative to the Father & Son”) found in the first two-thirds of the revelation needs to be read in light of the final third of the revelation in which individuals are called out by name and encouraged to be more effective parents. Just as the revelation begins with a discussion of the relationship between Heavenly Father and his Son, it concludes with a reflection on human parental relationships. And since the revelation reminds readers that human beings can, like Christ, receive “grace for grace” and be “partakers of the glory” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:20, 22), parents are encouraged to reflect on the eternal nature of their children’s spirits.

Reminding the recipients of the trajectory of Jesus Christ’s own development and growth places attention both on the relationship between him and his Father as well as on the lengthy measures Jesus went through to ensure that salvation would be made available for all of God’s spirit children. Parents in mortality have an important charge that they must not forget as they raise their children—all children are ultimately God’s children, and Jesus has demonstrated, through his own journey, the model for how all of God’s children can return safely to him as they learn to properly exercise their God-given agency. As Steven Harper has noted, “Section 93 is a masterpiece of parenting from a most concerned Father and a commandment to go and do likewise.”³⁰

Seen in this light, readers can better appreciate why a revelation on parenthood might open with a christological discussion. Note, for instance, how the revelation begins:³¹

Verily, thus saith the Lord: . . . I am the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world; . . . I am in the Father,

and the Father in me, and the Father and I are one—the Father because he gave me of his fulness, and the Son because I was in the world and made flesh my tabernacle, and dwelt among the sons of men. I was in the world and received of my Father, and the works of him were plainly manifest. (Doctrine and Covenants 93:1–5)

The first two verses strongly hint at an incarnation Christology. Verse 1 repeats the “I Am” formula found so prominently in the Gospel of John, reinforcing that the speaker of this revelation, the divine Lord, is simultaneously Jesus and Jehovah.³² The “I Am” carries over into verse 2, in which the Lord declares, “I am the true light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” The reference to “true light” again returns readers to John 1, in which the “word” is also described as “the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” (John 1:9). Verse 3 introduces another element of incarnation Christology, namely the extremely close connection between Jesus and the Father. They are, in fact, so closely linked that Jesus can say that he is “in the Father, and the Father in me” (compare John 14:10). This connection between the Father and Jesus is made even more explicit through the phrase “the Father and I are one” (compare John 10:30). Whether this sameness in the Johannine text amounts to something ontological (a shared nature) or something teleological (a shared purpose) is not made clear at this point. What is clear, however, is that these two figures are so closely linked that they are practically indistinguishable. What Doctrine and Covenants 93 has presented thus far is not so much a picture of Jesus *and* God but Jesus *as* God.

However, in light of the christological questions summarized above, readers might well wonder *when* in time this divine unity occurs. Because the revelation was received in May 1833, we can safely assert that the postresurrected Jesus is God, but we might still wonder whether that divinity was assumed prior to mortality, during mortality, or after mortality.

Some clarification is received in the next two verses. Rather abruptly, verse 4 moves readers from two personages (Lord and Father) to two titles (“Father” and “Son”), both of which apply to Jesus. In a statement that echoes Abinadi’s language in Mosiah 15:1–4, Jesus explains that he can be called “Father” because Heavenly Father “gave [him] of his fulness.” The nature of this fullness remains unspecified at this point in the revelation, but the implication is that the moment when Jesus was granted or given fullness was when he became fully divine.³³ Related passages in the Gospel of John and Doctrine and Covenants 76 add further complications to the question. In the Gospel of John, the “fulness” (Greek *pleroma*) is something that “we all have received,” but here it is applied specifically to Jesus. Based on Doctrine and Covenants 76:56 and 76, fullness must be different from grace or glory, but it is difficult to know what else to call it. A few verses later in 93:6, fullness will specifically become the fullness “of my glory,” but that does not line up very closely with the use of the word in Doctrine and Covenants 76, in which fullness and glory are two separate things.³⁴ Does the fullness somehow emanate from the Father, and those who are permanently brought into his presence are able to absorb or receive it? Further complicating matters is that Joseph Smith in section 76 says that he and Sidney Rigdon “beheld the glory of the Son, on the right hand of the Father, and *received of his fulness*” (76:20; emphasis added). But perhaps the difference here is the Son’s fullness as opposed to that of the Father.

The remainder of verse 4 and verse 5 clarify why Jesus is called the Son. First, Jesus is the Son because he was “in the world” and because he “made flesh [his] tabernacle.” In other words, he willingly condescended to a telestial world and lived in an incarnate form. It is unclear, however, from a christological perspective how to position this statement. Is Jesus saying that he was divine but then came to earth and became flesh, a course that allowed him to live “among the sons of men”? Or is he speaking of his experience as a mortal—he lived on earth in a physical body and lived among other men and women? Because Doctrine and Covenants 93:4 alludes to John 1

(in particular 1:12, 14) with its explicit incarnation Christology and because 1 Nephi 11 discusses God's condescension, it is natural for Latter-day Saints to read this as a statement supporting incarnation Christology; but actually the verse can be read either way. This ambiguity is especially pronounced when we keep in mind the reference to Jesus having "received [the fulness] of my Father" (Doctrine and Covenants 93:5), while "in the world." This phrase could be taken to mean that his status was elevated during his mortality, placing this within the spectrum of exaltation Christology. The statement that "the works of [the Father] were plainly manifest" seems to return the reader to verse 3 and the idea that "the Father and I are one." But again, there is ambiguity. Does Doctrine and Covenants 93:5 mean that what Jesus did in mortality (his healings, his miracles, and his sacrifice) mirrors the will and desire of the Father? Or does it mean that the works of the Father prepared Jesus (through elevating him and bestowing power upon him during his mortal ministry) to be able to reflect the Father's will? In short, these first five verses leave readers with a clear sense of tension between Jesus's mortality and divinity. He is simultaneously divine and is one with the Father, but how he arrived at that state remains, at least to this point in the revelation, unclear.

The next section of Doctrine and Covenants 93 introduces what readers are meant to assume is an excerpt from an ancient text, the "record of John" (Doctrine and Covenants 93:18). According to verse 6, an individual named John both witnessed the fullness of Jesus's glory and, more importantly, wrote that account down in a text that has not yet been revealed. The identity of this John is never stated outright, but several overlapping words and phrases show a clear connection between the record of John that appears in section 93 and the Gospel of John, particularly John 1.³⁵ However, the prominence of John the Baptist in John 1 leaves open the possibility that the referenced record was written by John the Baptist and was subsequently redacted in the Gospel of John.³⁶ These questions only illustrate yet again the complexity of section 93's christological message.

The record of John in Doctrine and Covenants 93 begins, “I saw his glory, that he was in the beginning, before the world was; therefore, in the beginning the Word was, for he was the Word, even the messenger of salvation” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:7–8). There is much here that suggests an incarnation Christology, primarily the application of the title “Word” to Jesus. In the Gospel of John, the Word was “in the beginning” and also “with God,” and the “Word” was, notably, also “God.”³⁷ One senses a similar portrayal of Jesus in the record of John mentioned in section 93. Here the revelation relays that Jesus was “in the beginning,” probably meaning that Jesus existed prior to the creation of the world since John goes on to clarify that “beginning” has reference to a time “before the world was.” The implication of verses 7 and 8 is not simply that Jesus *existed* prior to the creation of the earth but that he existed as the *Word*. In other words, “In the beginning *he* was the Word.” The revelation also goes on to clarify what Jesus’s status as Word amounted to: specifically, Jesus functioned as the “messenger of salvation” (93:8). This could simply mean that Jesus spoke for the Father, vocalizing the Father’s will and commands. Or more likely, the verse implies a sense of Jesus as God’s divine agent—he is the one who will bring to pass salvation through creating the earth and participating in the Atonement. It is Jesus, the Word, who will bring to pass the Father’s will.

Unlike the ambiguous Christology of verses 1–5, the information about Jesus presented in verses 7 and 8 fully suggests an incarnation Christology. Jesus is divine not because he was resurrected or because the fullness of the Father came upon him at his baptism or at his birth but because of his nearness with God and the divine status he held long before the creation of the world. This information was apparently relayed to John the Baptist in some way through witnessing Jesus’s glory (Doctrine and Covenants 93:7)—and this too, it should be noted, is again suggestive of an incarnation Christology. The real oddity of verses 7 and 8, though, is not what is present in these verses but what is conspicuously absent. Although these verses share much in common with John 1:1 (the use of the title “Word,” the phrase “in

the beginning”), they also omit the crucial phrase in John 1:1 that the Word “was God.”³⁸ Section 93 elevates Jesus to a divine, premortal status but stops just short of referring to him directly as “God.”

The same pattern holds true in the next two verses: Jesus is “the light and the Redeemer of the world; the Spirit of truth, who came into the world, because the world was made by him, and in him was the life of men and the light of men. The worlds were made by him; men were made by him; all things were made by him, and through him, and of him” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:9–10). Here Jesus is again (but now explicitly) attributed the role of creator of the world, but the scope has been expanded to include many worlds. Jesus’s relationship with humanity is made more explicit since he is described as both the *creator* of humanity and the *sustainer* of individuals. It is in Jesus that the life and the light of humanity find their origin or source. In a rather striking statement, we learn that Jesus’s creative power extends to all things that owe their existence to having been brought into existence “by,” “through,” and even “of” Jesus. The last phrase (“of [Jesus]”) teases an ontological connection between Jesus and humanity that challenges a hard and fast division between creator and created.

In these verses as well, the revelation continues to disclose titles for Jesus. In addition to “Word” and “messenger of salvation,” readers encounter “redeemer of the world” and “Spirit of truth,” titles that continue to reinforce the salvific nature of Jesus’s mission: he will redeem humanity, and through him humanity will find truth. However, verses 9 and 10 also continue to develop the christological tension introduced in verses 7 and 8. Jesus is, on the one hand, so important that the creation and sustaining of life not only on this world but on many worlds are attributed to him, yet on the other hand John’s record stops short of referring to him the way John 1:1 does, as “God.” This omission could simply be attributed to John believing that Jesus’s divinity is already implied in his description of Jesus in these first four verses and so does not require explicit statement. However, for the record of John to so closely align with the text

of John 1:1–18 but then omit the most theologically striking phrase feels measured, as if section 93 is intended to deconstruct, in the minds of its readers, Jesus’s true christological nature. The revelation seems to say, “You thought you knew where this revelation was going based upon your familiarity with John’s Gospel, but now watch this,” as it tells its readers to look one way and then, in verses 11–14, takes them in the exact opposite direction.

Indeed, from this point on in the revelation, readers encounter a key christological shift.

And I, John, bear record that I beheld his glory, as the glory of the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, even the Spirit of truth, which came and dwelt in the flesh, and dwelt among us. And I, John, saw that he received not of the fulness at the first, but received grace for grace; and he received not of the fulness at first, but continued from grace to grace, until he received a fulness; and thus he was called the Son of God, because he received not of the fulness at the first.
(Doctrine and Covenants 93:11–14)

Here in these crucial verses the incarnation Christology of section 93 confronts its most explicit exaltation Christology. The shift is subtle, as verse 11 continues to expand on the incarnation Christology of verses 7–10. The scene shifts from premortality to mortality as Jesus’s incarnation becomes a reality—the divine Word “dwelt in the flesh, and dwelt among us.” John again mentions Jesus’s glory, as he did in verse 7, but the source of glory appears to have shifted as well—now Jesus’s glory is linked not to his premortal status, “before the world was,” but to his being “the Only Begotten of the Father.” This title, which in the Bible is distinctly Johannine (Greek *monogenes*), is perhaps better rendered God’s “one and only” or “most precious” Son.³⁹ Jesus is unique in the Father’s eyes, and in this sense the phrase “Only Begotten of the Father” echoes the Father’s words to Jesus at the baptism: “This is my beloved son” (Matthew 3:17). This title becomes critical in section 93 as the focus shifts to Jesus’s subordinate role as

Son as opposed to his codivinity with the Father. Jesus retains all his titles and descriptors from verses 7–10, but at this point in John’s story, he is distinctly a son.

The nature of this sonship becomes clear in the next three verses. First, readers learn that Jesus has not always possessed fullness. According to verse 12, Jesus didn’t have the fullness “at the first,” and this lack of fullness is mentioned again in verse 13. It is unclear if “first” refers to the premortal Jesus, the creator and sustainer of the universe, or the mortal Jesus, who “came and dwelt in the flesh.” Based upon the placement of these verses, it seems more likely that John intends the latter: When Jesus came into mortality, he lacked fullness.⁴⁰ It seems likely, based upon the duplication of “at [the] first,” that John wants to emphasize that this ante-fullness was merely temporary—only at the beginning of his time on earth did Jesus lack fullness.

The process between Jesus lacking and securing fullness can be seen in two key phrases from verses 12 and 13: “*grace for grace*” and “*grace to grace*.” The first, “*grace for grace*,” is also present in the Gospel of John, where its meaning is debated. Is John saying that (some) grace is given in addition to (other) grace—that is, blessings follow one after the other—or is he saying that grace is given (by God) as a reward for the grace shown (by his children)?⁴¹ Some modern translations (NIV, NRSV) follow the former, interpreting the expression as a demonstration of how God compounds his blessings. But this makes little sense in the context of Doctrine and Covenants 93, which is about the process by which Jesus receives fullness. If we look at how the Book of Mormon uses this particular phrase—and others like it—we see that the latter interpretation has precedent for restored scripture: “And may God grant, in his great fulness, that men might be brought unto repentance and good works, that they might be restored unto grace for grace, according to their works” (Helaman 12:24).

This language suggests something of an exchange of grace. As we repent and perform good works, we receive grace in exchange for our

acts of grace. The use of *restored* links this verse with Alma's discourse to Corianton, in which he teaches a similar idea: "O, my son, this is not the case; but the meaning of the word restoration is to bring back again evil for evil, or carnal for carnal, or devilish for devilish—good for that which is good; righteous for that which is righteous; just for that which is just; merciful for that which is merciful" (Alma 41:13).

If this idea of restoration is used as a lens, Doctrine and Covenants 93:12 seems to state that Jesus attained a fullness by receiving blessings from the Father as he himself did what the Father asked—grace was granted to him in exchange for his grace. While this notion of exchange is foreign to the Gospel of John, it fits nicely with the overall trajectory of Doctrine and Covenants 93.⁴²

The second phrase, "grace *to* grace," is a little more complicated. This phrase appears nowhere in the Bible or in Restoration scripture outside of Doctrine and Covenants 93:13.⁴³ The similarity between "grace *for* grace" and "grace *to* grace" suggests that John views them both as acting somehow in tandem, with the shift in prepositions from *for* to *to* being the key in how they act differently. Rather than an exchange, as suggested by *for*, *to* may suggest a progression of sorts—that is, the idea that Jesus advanced from one stage to another while in mortality. This is the view taken by Stephen E. Robinson, who argues that "the key to this verse is the word *to*, indicating that there are levels of grace, or degrees to which one may enjoy the grace of God and act graciously toward others. Thus, from birth on, we move forward in a process of learning and responding to God's grace."⁴⁴ Both verse 12 and verse 13 thus portray Jesus as progressing. In verse 12, this progress is shown by way of individual moments of exchange between Jesus's righteous actions and the Father's subsequent blessings. In verse 13, however, this progress is narrated with wider scope, emphasizing the resulting movement as each divine exchange advanced Jesus to a new level of grace. Thus, taken together, verses 12 and 13 narrate Jesus's development to the point where he was ready to receive the fullness of the Father. Indeed, according to the revelation, Jesus's sonship is a direct result of this developmental

process: “*and thus he was called the Son of God, because he received not of the fulness at first*” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:14; emphasis added). In the process, section 93 has shifted subtly from an incarnation Christology to an exaltation Christology.⁴⁵

From here, the revelation (and with it, the record of John from which the revelation takes its account) now turns to focus specifically on one point in Jesus’s life: his baptism.

And I, John, bear record, and lo, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Ghost descended upon him in the form of a dove, and sat upon him, and there came a voice out of heaven saying: This is my beloved Son. And I, John, bear record that he received a fulness of the glory of the Father; and he received all power, both in heaven and on earth, and the glory of the Father was with him, for he dwelt in him. (Doctrine and Covenants 93:15–17)

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that readers learn that Jesus finally received of the fullness at the baptism.⁴⁶ This, too, is in perfect keeping with the revelation’s shift to an exaltation Christology. As I mentioned earlier, exaltation Christology attempts to locate a point within the ministry of Jesus at which he is raised up or exalted by the Father and endued with some measure of divinity. In some texts, such as the book of Romans, this exaltation takes place at the Resurrection. For others, such as the Gospel of Mark, this exaltation happens at the baptism (see Mark 1:10–11). Doctrine and Covenants 93 presents a scene very much in this latter vein. Jesus, having spent the first three decades of his life learning how to exchange grace for grace and to progress from grace to grace, now finds himself ready to receive the “fulness of the glory of the Father.” While the text of section 93 does not explicitly link verses 15 and 16 as contemporaneous, their quick succession is suggestive. It is hard not to hear an implication that Jesus’s reception of fullness in verses 16 and 17 follows directly on the heels of the events of verse 15. Although Jesus’s baptism seems to root this portion of the revelation firmly in exaltation

Christology, the concepts and phrases return to themes of incarnation Christology from earlier in section 93, reminding readers that the two Christologies continue to exist in tension with one another.

The reason for this sudden summary becomes clear in the next three verses: the Lord hopes to turn now from the content of the record of John to its primary lesson for readers:

And it shall come to pass, that if you are faithful you shall receive the fulness of the record of John. I give unto you these sayings that you may understand and know how to worship, and know what you worship, that you may come unto the Father in my name, and in due time receive of his fulness. For if you keep my commandments you shall receive of his fulness, and be glorified in me as I am in the Father; therefore, I say unto you, you shall receive grace for grace. (Doctrine and Covenants 93:18–20)

In quite an amazing statement, readers are informed that Jesus's trajectory is not unique but is in fact the model for all of God's children. The Father desires that we *all* receive his fullness. We do this, we are told, by keeping the commandments, and in the process we, like Jesus, will "receive grace for grace." Presumably, all of us must also progress grace to grace, with the promise that those who complete this journey will "be glorified in me as I am in the Father." The importance of these verses is summarized by Latter-day Saint scholar Terryl L. Givens, who writes that "[Doctrine and Covenants 93] promises to the obedient the same inheritance of the Father's 'fulness' that Christ obtained, and an eventual 'glorifi[cation] in' Christ, as he is glorified 'in the Father.' It draws a linguistic parallel, in other words, between Christ receiving a fullness, but not 'at the first,' and humans receiving an eventual fullness."⁴⁷

It is here in these three verses that *praxis* intersects with *Christology* and that we begin to understand the tension that exists between the section's two seemingly disparate christological paths. Because Jesus is our ultimate exemplar for how to progress and

receive a fullness, section 93 portrays Jesus as an amalgamation of mortality and immortality, humanity and divinity, Son and Father. By combining incarnation Christology with exaltation Christology, the revelation allows us to find commonalities with Christ's mortal sonship while at the same time aspiring to Jesus's divinity and glory. In the tension between the two Christologies, Doctrine and Covenants 93 helps us locate ourselves at the crux between mortality and godhood. As Blake Ostler has written, "Christ became what we are that we might become what Christ is."⁴⁸ Deification is, in actuality, Christification.⁴⁹

Conclusion

The nineteenth century was a time when the divine nature of Jesus Christ was called into question. Was he divine or was he human? Was he ontologically nearest to God or to humanity? The brilliance of the Christology in Doctrine and Covenants 93 is evident in how carefully it combines two different Christologies.⁵⁰ Through the elements of exaltation Christology that emerge in section 93, readers see how Jesus's path can be their own. Jesus, like each of us, came to mortality without the fullness of the Father's glory. Each of us, like Jesus, progresses grace for grace and from grace to grace. Yet, lest readers get too carried away by the human element of Jesus's nature, the verses on exaltation Christology also include reminders that Jesus held creative power and authority prior to coming to earth. Likewise, section 93 uses elements of incarnation Christology to help readers understand how Jesus possesses the capacity to bring us to the Father. He must be able to perform an atonement, die on the cross, and be raised again—experiences that are far removed from our capacity. Readers of Doctrine and Covenants 93 come away with the understanding that Jesus's divinity is just as real as his humanity—and just as important. But again, lest readers begin to tilt too heavily toward incarnation Christology, the record of John reminds us that Jesus's acquisition of the fullness happened not at birth but at baptism.

Over the last two thousand years, hundreds of writers have written thousands of pages in an attempt to define just who Jesus is.⁵¹ However, because of both the importance and complexity of the topic, confusion naturally remains. In many ways, Doctrine and Covenants 93 represents what Joseph Smith accomplished with the Restoration. It is not only that Joseph created new ideas or brought back old ideas that had been lost; rather, as in section 93, he often took confusing, opaque, and misconstrued concepts and applied a practical, commonsense approach, providing meaning to what had been mystifying. The tension created by this revelation's skillful weaving of two Christologies is a healthy one because it forces readers to abandon a false binary and instead to embrace the Jesus who is, in some fashion, fully God and, in another fashion, fully human, one who can successfully lift us up to the Father both because he has been where we are now and because he fully understands what is waiting for us when we get to where he is.

Notes

1. For a good introduction to the study of Christology, see Thomas P. Rauch, *Who Is Jesus? An Introduction to Christology* (Collegetown, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003); for a more academic approach that surveys more recent issues, see Francesca Aran Murphy, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Christology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
2. For more on how the different ways the New Testament authors present Jesus, see Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003); and Eric D. Huntsman, Lincoln H. Blumell, and Tyler J. Griffin, eds., *Thou Art the Christ: The Person and Work of Jesus in the New Testament* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2018).
3. For more on how Book of Mormon Christology is developed in 3 Nephi, see David L. Paulsen and Ari D. Bruening, "The Social Model of the Trinity in 3 Nephi," in *Third Nephi: An Incomparable Scripture*, ed. Andrew C.

- Skinner and Gaye Strathearn (Provo, UT: The Neal A Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2012), 191–234.
4. For how Doctrine and Covenants 93 fits into Joseph Smith’s larger christological project beyond the Doctrine and Covenants, see John G. Turner, *The Mormon Jesus: A Biography* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 157–58.
 5. It is important to note that christological categories can be very fluid, and the limits of a given category are often left up to the author’s interpretation. For ease of interpretation and to avoid getting bogged down in minute theological debates, I’m adopting the two categories Bart D. Ehrman focuses on in his study of early Christian theology, *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (New York: HarperOne, 2014), 211–82. I do recognize that other authors may present these categories differently and even adopt further categories. I highly recommend one such study, James L. Papandrea, *The Earliest Christologies: Five Images of Christ in the Postapostolic Age* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016). For a response and critique of Ehrman’s book, see Michael F. Bird et al., eds., *How God Became Jesus: The Real Origins of Belief in Jesus’ Divine Nature—A Response to Bart D. Ehrman* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014).
 6. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God*, 230.
 7. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God*, 230.
 8. One variation of this idea, termed spirit adoptionism, argues that “after Jesus was baptized, the Christ spirit descended on him in the form of a dove and entered into him. . . . After his baptism Jesus was given power from God through the Holy Spirit and was therefore able to perform miracles.” Papandrea, *Earliest Christologies*, 34–35.
 9. Ehrman, *How Jesus Became God*, 251.
 10. For more on the intricacies of the Arian debate, see Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001). For a Latter-day Saint perspective, see Lincoln H. Blumell, “Rereading the Council of Nicaea and Its Creed,” in *Standing Apart: Mormon Historical Consciousness and the Concept of Apostasy*, ed. Miranda Wilcox and John D. Young (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 196–217.

11. Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 150.
12. For more detail on this pivotal moment in both Harvard and Unitarian history, see Conrad Wright, *The Unitarian Controversy: Essays on American Unitarian History* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 2016), 1–16.
13. See Jedidiah Morse, *Review of American Unitarianism* (Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1815).
14. Priestley's use of the label *Socinian* to impugn the liberals was not an uncommon move, as "the sling of Socinian was a common one in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries." Lydia Willsky-Ciollo, *American Unitarianism and the Protestant Dilemma: The Conundrum of Biblical Authority* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015), 13. Willsky-Ciollo further explains that "Socinians, so named for their founder Faustus Socinus, employed a rational exegesis of scripture grounded in a belief in the literal sense of the Bible, one that led to a radically Unitarian understanding of God. Socinian theology disputes the pre-existence of Christ and views him not as a 'reconciler' of humanity to God, but as the revealer of a particular and perfect morality, which if emulated, could lead to eternal life."
15. Priestley described his conversion process as moving "from Trinitarianism to high Arianism; from high Arianism to low Arianism; and from this to Socinianism even of the lowest sort." Maurice Wiles, *Archetypal Heresy: Arianism through the Centuries* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 148.
16. Joseph Priestley, *A History of the Corruption of Christianity* (London: The British and Foreign Unitarian Association, 1871), 1.
17. Priestley, *History*, 8.
18. Priestley, *History*, 8.
19. Mark A. Noll describes the impact and import of Channing's 1819 sermon: "[It], which provided an unambiguous answer to questions about what the Boston liberals actually believed, was a masterpiece of rhetorical adaptation as well as religious exposition. In it Channing did set forth clearly what the Unitarians believed. . . . But he did so through a masterful deployment of the intellectual warrants that virtually all the more orthodox religious thinkers of his day were also scrambling to enlist for their

- versions of Christian faith.” Mark A. Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 235.
20. Channing’s biographer and nephew, William Henry Channing, would later write of Channing that “in a word, he was then an Arian.” William Henry Channing, *William Ellery Channing, with Extracts from His Correspondence and Manuscripts* (London: George Routledge, Soho Square, 1850), 397.
 21. Channing, *Works*, 373.
 22. Channing, *Works*, 293.
 23. Channing, *Works*, 291.
 24. Channing, *Works*, 291. It is important to note that Channing is not advocating for the deification of humanity in the sense that men and women become gods and goddesses themselves. Rather, “To Channing, it was appropriate to speak of life-giving, love-inspiring spiritual experience as revelatory, but not as the realization of supernatural empowerment. He affirmed that human beings possess the God-given capacity to experience divinity, and he insisted that revelation is knowable only as personal experience, but he pointedly admonished that human beings do not become gods or infallible interpreters of Divinity by virtue of the experience of revelatory feeling.” Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion 1805–1900* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 57.
 25. E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 204.
 26. Holifield, *Theology*, 206. It is not hard to see why transcendentalists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson saw Channing as a predecessor, although they would differ on the very important point of how to understand the nature of Jesus Christ.
 27. In 1835, two years after the reception of the revelation now contained in Doctrine and Covenants 93, David Strauss published his highly influential *Life of Jesus Critically Examined*, which argued that many of the divine events and circumstances surrounding the life and death of Jesus were simply the product of the social imagination of the ancient world. Subsequent trends in biblical scholarship throughout the nineteenth and

into the twentieth century would only widen this divide. Viewed from the perspective of faith, it is hard not to see section 93 as given specifically to address these growing concerns.

28. Joseph Smith, *History*, 1838–1856, vol. A-1, p. 291, Church History Library.
29. Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, Brent M. Rogers, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, eds., *Documents, Volume 3: February 1833–March 1834*, vol. 3 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Ronald K. Esplin and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2014), 83.
30. Steven C. Harper, *Making Sense of the Doctrine and Covenants: A Guided Tour through Modern Revelation* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2008), 347.
31. For a deeper analysis of Doctrine and Covenants 93, including its intertextual connections with the Bible and possible theological implications, see Nicholas J. Frederick, *The Bible, Mormon Scripture, and the Rhetoric of Allusivity* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2016), 95–129.
32. One of the elements of John's Gospel is that Jesus consistently speaks in an "I Am" (*ego eimi*) formula (compare 4:26; 6:35; 8:58). This alludes back to Exodus 3:14, where Jehovah identifies himself to Moses as "I Am that I Am" (*ego eimi ho on*). The idea is that Jesus is using this language to intentionally allude to his position as Jehovah. See the discussion in Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John I–XII* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 533–38. For more on how the Gospel of John interacts with the Doctrine and Covenants, including Doctrine and Covenants 93, see Nicholas J. Frederick, "Using the Gospel of John to Understand the Text of the Revelations," in *You Shall Have My Word: Exploring the Text of the Doctrine and Covenants*, ed. Scott C. Esplin, Richard O. Cowan, and Rachel Cope (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2012), 205–19; and Nicholas J. Frederick, "Of Life Eternal and Eternal Lives: Joseph Smith's Engagement with the Gospel of John," in *Approaching Antiquity: Joseph Smith and the Ancient World*, ed. Lincoln H. Blumell, Matthew J. Grey, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 194–228.

33. Blake T. Ostler offers this definition of *fulness*: “The concept of ‘a fulness’ is intimately connected with the divine glory that characterizes the divine life. ‘A fulness’ in Joseph Smith’s revelations refers to the fulness of life and glory that is given by the Father to the Son and which is received by grace from one glory to another in a process of growth and progression.” Blake T. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: Of God and Gods* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2008), 366.
34. “These are they who receive of his glory, but not of his fulness” (Doctrine and Covenants 76:76).
35. I deal with the rhetorical and theological implications of the presence of the record of John in Doctrine and Covenants 93 in “Translation, Revelation, and the Hermeneutics of Theological Innovation: Joseph Smith and the Record of John,” in *Producing Ancient Scripture: Joseph Smith’s Translation Projects in the Development of Mormon Christianity*, ed. Michael Hubbard MacKay, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Brian M. Hauglid (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2020), 304–27.
36. That Doctrine and Covenants 93 preserves a record originating with John the Baptist has been argued by some Latter-day Saint writers. In his *Mediation and Atonement*, John Taylor quotes Doctrine and Covenants 93 and lists it under the title “Record of John the Baptist.” Taylor, *Mediation and Atonement* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), 55. Orson Pratt described the record of John as being penned by “him who baptized the Lamb of God.” Orson Pratt, in *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter Day Saints’ Book Depot, 1854–86), 16:58. Writing much later, Bruce R. McConkie wrote that “there is little doubt but that the Beloved Disciple had before him the Baptist’s account when he wrote his gospel. The latter John either copied or paraphrased what the earlier prophet of the same name had written.” Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1966), 1:70–71. However, the issue is not necessarily without a counterargument. Historian Steven C. Harper noted that “all editions of the Doctrine and Covenants since 1921 imply that these were the writings of John the Apostle.” Harper, *Making Sense of the Doctrine and Covenants*, 560. Perhaps the safest approach has been that of historian John G. Turner, who wrote simply that the record

of John was attributed to “either John the Baptist or John the Evangelist.” Turner, *Mormon Jesus*, 158.

37. The Gospel of John’s usage of the title “Word” (Greek *logos*) was probably intended to communicate a mediating figure between the transcendent, divine realm and the immanent, mortal realm. God the Father, being fully divine, does not come to the corrupt mortal world but instead sends a messenger, the Word, to act as his spokesman or divine agent. In some fashion, the Word was associated with God the Father but was also himself God—“While the Word is God, God is more than just the Word.” See discussion in Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 298–320; and J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 47.
38. The theological significance of these four words is hinted at by D. A. Carson, who wrote, “Here then are some of the crucial constituents of a full-blown doctrine of the Trinity.” Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 117. As such, its omission from Doctrine and Covenants 93 is striking.
39. As Raymond Brown points out, “Although *genos* is distantly related to *gennan*, ‘to beget,’ there is little Greek justification for the translation of *monogenēs* as ‘only begotten.’” It was the influence of Jerome’s Latin Vulgate on the translators of the King James Bible that led to *only begotten* becoming the standard reading. Isaac is likewise called Abraham’s *monogenēs* son in Hebrews 11:17, but that was to signify Isaac’s status as Abraham’s favorite son, as Isaac was not Abraham’s only son. See Brown, *Gospel according to John*, 13.
40. It is unclear why verse 12 of Doctrine and Covenants 93 would not just repeat the phrase “in the world” from verse 4 if John meant to refer to Jesus’s mortal sojourn.
41. See discussion in Carson, *Gospel according to John*, 131–34.
42. “The idea of grace being given ‘in return for’ something else, a kind of *quid pro quo*, is alien to the New Testament in general and to John in particular.” Carson, *Gospel according to John*, 131.
43. *Grace to grace* does appear in the writings of Methodist founder John Wesley in the context of sanctification: “From the time of our being *born*

again, the gradual work of sanctification takes place. . . . We go on from grace to grace.” *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley* (London: John Mason, 1829), 6:46.

44. Stephen E. Robinson and H. Dean Garrett, *A Commentary on the Doctrine and Covenants* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2004), 3:183.
45. Some have seen in these verses in Doctrine and Covenants 93 evidence that Latter-day Saints embrace Arian ideas when it comes to the person and nature of Jesus Christ. For a response, see Brian D. Birch, “Mormonism and the Heresies,” in *Let Us Reason Together: Essays in Honor of the Life’s Work of Robert L. Millet*, ed. J. Spencer Fluhman and Brent L. Top (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2016), 249–63.
46. What is surprising from a biblical perspective is that the record of John includes the baptism scene at all. The Gospel of John, which apparently relied upon this lost record of John, contains John’s testimony of Jesus’s divinity but completely omits the baptism scene itself. The recounting of the baptism in Doctrine and Covenants 93:15 seems to draw upon the description of the baptism preserved in Matthew 3:16–17.
47. Terryl L. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought; Cosmos, God, Humanity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 120. Speaking to the tension present in the Christology of Doctrine and Covenants 93, Givens continues, “The phrasing, therefore, might be construed as indicating—in contradistinction to the council of Chalcedon’s pronouncement that Jesus was fully human and fully divine at birth, and ‘perfect in his divinity’—a process of total divinization, or Christ’s receipt of the Father’s fullness, finally achieved through the experience of mortality. . . . At the same time, Mormons believe there is no diminishment to Christ’s divinity in asserting the precedence of God the Father. Mormons worship the Father, in the name of the Son, while holding both to be God.” Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 121.
48. Ostler, *Of God and Gods*, 369.
49. As Ostler writes, “We are Christified to the extent we receive the glory of God or light and truth. We are deified to the extent that we keep the commandments of God because, to the same extent, we express the love

that is definitive of participating in the divine nature.” Ostler, *Of God and Gods*, 369.

50. The fact that this new christological and anthropological vision of Jesus Christ and his relationship with humanity originated from an ancient text, the record of John, is a perfect encapsulation of how Joseph Smith pushed back against the canonical restraints of his day by turning back, in a fashion, to the Bible, an irony David Holland highlights in his *Sacred Borders: Continuing Revelation and Canonical Restraint in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 143–57.
51. See, for example, R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy*, 318–381, 2nd ed. (Ada, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), which comes in at a hefty 954 pages.