

# Choosing Divinity, Choosing Christ

*Jennifer C. Lane*

Joseph Smith's revelations provide a radically different starting point for thinking about Christ's nature and our relationship to him than the traditional Christian belief in the ontological divide between Creator and creation. After the loss of apostolic authority in the early Christian era, Christians were seeking to understand God and scriptures. This led to many different forms of Christianity and Christian doctrine, much like Joseph Smith encountered as a young man. The efforts of the different councils were usually in response to this variety, and the creedal decisions indicate the councils' efforts to avoid what they saw as heretical options.<sup>1</sup>

The classical Christian teaching of Christ being in two natures, both human and divine—known as the Definition of Chalcedon—emerged to solve a doctrinal problem about how we are saved that arose in the fifth century.<sup>2</sup> This belief of Christ being in two natures addressed the pressing question of how God acts for human salvation

and, while not adopted by all, became the orthodox doctrine of Catholics, Eastern Orthodoxy, and many Protestants.<sup>3</sup> The general Christian understanding in the fifth century affirmed both that Christ was divine and that he had suffered for our sins, but holding both of these beliefs was problematized by the contemporary belief of a radical break between God—seen as the Trinity or the triune God which had always existed—and all other things that were created by God, including humanity. This struggle to define how Christ could be both human and divine, the Creator but also part of the created world, was resolved for many Christians in the Definition of Chalcedon articulated by the Council of Chalcedon.

Even as Joseph's theophany in the Sacred Grove gave a divine voice above the varied interpretations offered by different Christian groups, the subsequent revelations given to Joseph Smith about both Christ and our relationship to God provide a radically different starting point for thinking about Christ's nature and our relationship to him and to the Father. The perspective of modern-day revelation offers a dramatic change from the assumptions of an ontological divide between Creator and creation that is foundational in traditional Christian theology. At the same time, these latter-day revelations also push back at casual perceptions of a low Christology—that humans and Christ are comparable—as critics charge we believe and Church members sometimes unwittingly accept. This low Christology emphasizes our brotherhood to Christ in ways that might diminish our understanding and faith in his role as our Savior, Redeemer, and Lord.<sup>4</sup>

What we find in the revelations given to Joseph Smith is both a rejection of a fundamental ontological difference between God, including Christ, and all humanity and also a reaffirmation of Christ's divinity. As Latter-day Saints we believe that we, along with Christ, are spirit children of the Father, but these revelations also give additional witness to Christ's role and nature as divine, emphasizing that he was the Jehovah of the Old Testament and is our Redeeming Lord. Throughout this paper I will explore this tension between how we are

similar to and different from Christ. I will explore implications from understanding that we were also in the beginning with God and were also spirit children of God, while simultaneously examining ways in which we are not like Christ by considering what it might mean to say that Christ is divine.

## Development of Classical Christology

Greek thought was deeply influential in developing the early Christian ontological framework or worldview. From the assumptions of this worldview, the divine was seen as impassible—meaning that weakness, suffering, and change were not the properties of the divine.<sup>5</sup> Within the world of early Christianity and in the theological traditions that it generated, Christ had to be God in order to be our Savior, but he also had to be human in order to suffer. Since humanity and the divine were seen as so radically different, this created a dilemma. Thus in AD 451 the fourth ecumenical council met at Chalcedon in Asia Minor (the area we know today as Turkey) and articulated a solution known as the Definition of Chalcedon—Jesus Christ was one person “in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation.”<sup>6</sup> This creedal solution was part of a continuing effort by the councils to clarify the way in which God should be understood. The Definition of Chalcedon remains an important part of creedal Christianity for most Christians today, including Catholics, Orthodox, and most Protestants.

Rather than approaching latter-day revelations about Christ’s nature chronologically as the concepts developed, I will approach the insights from a descriptive, comparative theological point of view. With this approach, I seek to explain the implications and differences from historical Christianity that arise from these revelations about the nature of Christ that have a different premise about what it means to be divine and what it means to be human. Some of these insights derive from the scriptures we have through Joseph Smith,

and other insights arise from biblical texts that we understand differently as Latter-day Saints because of Restoration scripture and teachings.

## Starting Premises

To understand the Christology of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as developed from the revelations given to Joseph, it is essential to keep in mind that this Christology is based on a different ontological framework than that of early Christianity. As members of the Church of Jesus Christ, we believe that Christ is divine. We also believe that Christ suffered for the sins of the world. This combination is not, however, a theological problem because there is no doctrine of divine impassibility in the revelations given to Joseph Smith. On the contrary, the revelations he received show us a God who weeps (see Moses 7:28).

Joseph Smith's revelations establish an ontological framework that does not divide Creator and created but lays out instead what might be termed stages of progression between humanity, the Son, and the Father. Unlike the doctrine of traditional Christianity, in the revelations given to Joseph Smith there is not a distinct *ousia* or "essence" or "being" that belongs to divinity and one that belongs to humanity.<sup>7</sup> All, both divine and human, share in the same substance or essence or being. I argue that the essential point to understand is that in the ontological framework of the revelations of Joseph Smith, this essence or being is not deterministic—in other words, God does not act as God simply as a function of his being God. It would be better to describe this *ousia* as agency, or the capacity to choose. God has a godly nature through choice rather than as an inevitable result of what his nature or being/*ousia* requires him to be.

In traditional Christianity, God's nature or being is seen as determining what he is and what he does. God the Father and the Son are good because God is good, rather than saying that because God is good he is God.<sup>8</sup> Understanding this can help us appreciate the

confusion and even astonishment that those from other Christian traditions experience when they learn that Latter-day Saints view both Jesus and Satan as sons of God, as brothers. For those who see one's essence or ousia as deterministic, this kind of relationship is incomprehensible.

A way to think about our understanding of both God's nature and our natures is to say that for Latter-day Saints, our ousia is not deterministic. Our being or nature does not require us to act in a certain way—instead, one could say that our choices and our desires are our being. This way of understanding agency means that at the deepest level, we do what we want. The choices one makes lead to different kinds of beings or different ways of being. The choices of different agents can and will differ and so, as a result, each individual's way of being is different in respect to their degree of godliness, light, life, and love. Latter-day Saints also distinguish between states such as being premortal spirits, having a mortal embodied existence and a post-mortal disembodied state, and finally receiving a resurrected state. The restored doctrine of the resurrection into degrees of glory illustrates the effect of choices on different ways of being (see Doctrine and Covenants 88:27–32). As I will demonstrate throughout this paper, the doctrine of agency allows us to see Christ's nature as God through his use of agency rather than as an ontologically given state.

The ontological framework grounded in the revelations given to Joseph Smith articulates foundational beliefs about human beings and their relationship to God the Father and God the Son. While the classical theological contrast maintains that there is a human kind of ousia that is distinct from the divine ousia, we Latter-day Saints understand both Christ and humanity (all other children of God born into mortality) to be spirit children of God the Father. Just as classical Christology speaks of Christ as being generated rather than created, Latter-day Saints understand human beings' relationship to God the Father as child to parent—he is literally the father of our spirits just as he is the father of Christ's spirit. In addition, we believe that we did not come into being with spiritual creation. Both Christ

and humanity are understood to be coeternal with God the Father as “intelligence” (or the light of truth), which is not created or made (see Doctrine and Covenants 93:29).<sup>9</sup> We understand this intelligence to be foundational to our existence.<sup>10</sup> We do not believe in creation *ex nihilo* and thus maintain that the essence of who we are is “independent” (see Doctrine and Covenants 93:30), even though we do recognize that God places us in a sphere in which we use our agency. This helps us understand how God can create us spiritually and physically without determining how we will use our agency.<sup>11</sup>

These fundamental premises that both Christ and human beings are spiritually begotten by God the Father and that both Christ and human beings are coeternal with God the Father as intelligences set up an ontological framework in which the classical dichotomy of divine and human, Creator and created, does not apply.<sup>12</sup> In addition to confusing those not of our faith, this understanding of both Christ and human beings as offspring of God—while at different places along a continuum of spiritual development—can sometimes cause a problem for Latter-day Saints. What is it that we mean when we say that Christ is God when we do not see him on the other side of the gulf between the Creator and all that is created? We leave behind the idea of a divine *ousia* that is radically different from our own as created beings, but do we simultaneously risk leaving behind the understanding of Christ as divine? One will, in fact, sometimes hear Christ referred to as “our elder brother.” This term is doctrinally true for Latter-day Saints, but it can be emphasized in ways so as to distort the fundamental doctrine of the Church.<sup>13</sup>

Just as for the early Christians, the ontological framework of the doctrine of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has serious implications for soteriology, or the study of salvation. While we do not assert that Christ is different from us as a function of his distinctively divine nature, we do assert that Christ is and was perfect and that he is and was part of the Godhead. Although we are also spirit children of the Father, we are not perfect and are not God. Christ is. We are saved by faith in him that leads to repentance,

baptism, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and enduring to the end.<sup>14</sup> We are saved *through* Christ.

This is where the interesting question arises for Latter-day Saints. If Christ is also a spirit child of the Father, how is he different from humanity in such a way that allows him to be the Savior? The traditional Christian answer is found in the Nicene Creed that defined the Trinity: Christ and the Father are one because they are *homoousios*, “of the same essence or being.” The Restoration answer to this question goes directly to the issue of what it means to be divine for Latter-day Saints. Based on the revelations given to Joseph Smith, Christ’s unity with the Father comes not from their shared ontological essence of being “God” but from unity of will or purpose. This unity that we understand to comprise the relationship of the Godhead can be understood to come from agency, not a divine ousia.

As Latter-day Saints, we can explain that being divine is a choice, not a given. Being divine is a way of being that is chosen, not a way of being that that happens to you without your participation. It is not an unchosen characteristic, something that you are or are not, or something that is a given or compulsory. This perspective not only is key to clarifying the Christology of the Church of Jesus Christ but also has serious implications for its soteriology. The inviolate principle of our doctrine, based on the foundational revelations given to Joseph Smith, is one of agency, that we receive what we are willing to receive (see Doctrine and Covenants 88:32). Christ is God because he chooses light, life, and truth and thus participates in the kind of life that God the Father experiences, not because he is part of an absolute principle or essence of light, life, and truth.<sup>15</sup>

## Christ as Human and Divine

Based on these premises, I will explore what we as Latter-day Saints mean when we say that Christ is God and what we mean when we say that Christ is human. As we have seen, these are not radically distinct categories for Latter-day Saints as they are in the classical

christological formula of the creeds. The problem for us is not how to combine God and man in the person of Christ but how to separate God and man. For traditional Christians, there is such a tremendous gap between Christ as God and humans as God's creation that the Definition of Chalcedon was needed to articulate how Christ could be both God and human. Building from the revelations given to Joseph Smith that some part of us has always existed as intelligence and that we were also premortally existent children of God, as was Christ, we face the challenge of explaining how we as humans are *distinct* from Christ. We need to consider what it means for Christ to be divine in a way that is distinct from other spirit children of Heavenly Parents.

To clarify how it is that Christ is both divine and human, the distinctive Latter-day Saint understanding of God as an actor or agent rather than an absolute principle will be essential. I will now review the scriptural points that inform our teaching of Christ as God and Savior, starting with the issues grappled with in the early creeds, then returning to a discussion of Christ's premortal state to more fully explore what might separate Christ from all other children of Heavenly Parents. With that I will further consider Christ's conception and birth and his mortal condition, along with what we know about his premortal existence. My intention is to explain what it means for him to be God, the only one capable of offering his expiatory suffering, death, and Resurrection to allow us to receive his nature and become as he is.

### *Christ's mortal ministry*

In the Definition of Chalcedon, the biblical account of Christ's perfect life is attributed to his divine nature, just as the biblical account of Christ's weakness is attributed to his human nature.<sup>16</sup> The formula of the two natures is a meaningful solution given the premise that the divine and human have a different ontological status. Within this ontological framework, the doctrine of the two natures explains for many Christians how Christ could be God to save us, but man to suffer for us. The doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ, however,



does not have this dichotomy. Instead, our soteriology insists that Christ had to be mortal rather than immortal so that he could have weakness and the capacity to die. But, while mortal, he had to suffer as God, that is to say, he had to suffer beyond the capacity of mortal suffering: “He shall suffer temptations, and pain of body, hunger, thirst, and fatigue, even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people” (Mosiah 3:7).

One of the classic examples of this kind of divine suffering is the Lord’s statement to Joseph Smith that is recorded in Doctrine and Covenants 19: “For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I; Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit—and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink—Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men” (19:16–19). Here the Savior emphasizes that he suffered as God. Unlike the traditional understanding from Chalcedon in which only the humanity of Christ could suffer because his divinity was impassible, the direct revelation of the Savior to Joseph Smith emphasizes his integrated suffering on our behalf.

Book of Mormon passages emphasize how Christ’s suffering had to be unique and underscore that it is Jehovah, the premortal Christ, a member of the Godhead, who comes down to suffer in a way that transcends human capacity to suffer in order to redeem us: “For it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice; yea, not a sacrifice of man, neither of beast, neither of any manner of fowl; for it shall not be a human sacrifice; but it must be an infinite and eternal sacrifice,” and “this is the whole meaning of the law, every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice; and that great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal” (Alma 34:10, 14). Christ was mortal in that he could suffer and die, but he was also God so

his suffering could be an infinite and eternal offering on our behalf to ransom us from the consequences of our sin.

The biblical account of Christ's life recounts his limits in ability and knowledge. As the centuries continued and Christianity spread throughout the Greco-Roman world, these biblical texts became difficult for Christians to reconcile with their understanding of God, which had been influenced by Greek philosophical thought. The ideas of Plato were widely accepted in this broader world and, based on these assumptions that undergirded the ontological framework of early Christianity, weakness could not be attributed to an omnipotent divine being.<sup>17</sup> In line with these basic shared assumptions of Platonic dualism in the early Christian world were assumptions that the body was a prison to the spirit, something that was less than divine. The creedal solution was that the human Jesus could be weak or suffer, but not the divine Christ. The solution of the Council of Chalcedon, as we saw in the Definition of Chalcedon, was to describe Jesus Christ as one person in two natures. Weakness is part of his human nature, but not his divine nature, which was understood as impassible, not moved by the passions.<sup>18</sup> Because the ontological position of the restored Church of Jesus Christ does not follow this characterization of the divine and the accompanying dichotomy between the human and the divine, it is not a problem for Latter-day Saints to talk about Jesus Christ, as God, suffering or experiencing pain or temptations. In our understanding, the unified experience of Jesus Christ makes our salvation possible.<sup>19</sup>

From the scriptural record, it would seem as though Jesus Christ was imperfect or weak with regard to his knowledge. Latter-day Saints believe that human beings have what is known as a veil drawn over their understanding that makes it impossible to remember their premortal existence. Even though Jesus Christ's spirit or soul was that of premortal Jehovah, the Creator of the world, there seems to have been a process in which he gained knowledge of his identity. He "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:52) and "learned . . . obedience by the things which

he suffered" (Hebrews 5:8). This process of increasing, learning, and being made perfect is not read by Latter-day Saints to mean that Christ had moral flaws or sinned. In Doctrine and Covenants 93, we learn that "that he received not of the fulness at the first, but received grace for grace, until he received a fulness; he received not of the fullness 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" (93:12–14). This might be described as a progression in perfection.

Even though Latter-day Saints understand the mortal Christ to have been subject to weakness and suffering, we do not believe that he ceased to be God in his character and agency. Because Christ is seen as an agent with genuine choices, Latter-day Saints maintain that Christ could have sinned but did not. In the Book of Mormon we read that he "suffereth temptation, and yieldeth not to the temptation" (Mosiah 15:5). Because of this experience of temptation, Jesus Christ is in a position to intercede and assist all others. As is written in Hebrews, "Ours is not a high priest unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who, because of his likeness to us, has been tested every way, only without sin" (Hebrews 4:15 New English Bible).

Jesus Christ's full participation in the mortal experience, while remaining without sin, is key to understanding the doctrine of salvation in the Church of Jesus Christ. One of the most important restoration passages on the passibility of God and its role in the economy of salvation is found in the Book of Mormon: "And he shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind; and this that the word might be fulfilled which saith that he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people" (Alma 7:11).

Through his mortal choices to obey, Christ continued the unity of purpose that existed with the Father in his premortal existence.<sup>20</sup> This submission to the Father can be seen in Christ's statement in John 6: "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John 6:38). For Latter-day Saints the passage in John 8 expresses the eternal relationship of the Father and

the Son: “I do always those things that please him” (John 8:29). The soteriological framework of this statement is matched by the key passage in the Book of Mormon in which Christ explains his gospel, saying, “I came into the world to do the will of my Father, because my Father sent me” (3 Nephi 27:13). This willingness that “not my will, but thine, be done” is seen by Latter-day Saints as the continuation of an obedience of Son to Father that existed from the beginning.<sup>21</sup>

### *The premortal Christ*

In traditional Christianity, the persons of the Trinity are seen as separate persons, but they are also believed to share a divine nature that, as God, is radically different from all creation, including all created human beings. In addition to the concept of *homoousios* established at the Council of Nicaea, the Council of Chalcedon emphasized that there is a distinction between the human Jesus and the Son of God, the Second Person of the Trinity.

Latter-day Saints understand the Father and the Son as distinct perfect spirits, both part of the Godhead even before Christ’s incarnation. There is a unity within the Godhead, but the nature of God, the Godhead, is not seen as radically different from all creation or as the source of all creation, the existence of everything else. Likewise, these separate persons of the Godhead are also understood as separate personages. In addition, we believe that God the Father has a perfect, glorified body of flesh and bones (see Doctrine and Covenants 130:22). After his Resurrection Christ also received a separate, glorified, and immortal body, but before his incarnation and Resurrection he did not have the same kind of embodied existence as the Father. This is a clear sense in which we understand Christ to be like the Father, but not the same as the Father.

Human beings also existed as spirit children of God the Father before mortality; this spiritual kinship establishes a sense of potential and capacity to become like God that transcends any sense of theosis or deification found in traditional Christianity. In the traditional understanding of the Trinity, only Christ is understood as spiritually

begotten of the Father.<sup>22</sup> These latter-day revelations about all human beings existing premortally are extraordinary in the potential they suggest is inherent in each child of God while also singling out the premortal Christ as the only one being “like unto God” (Abraham 3:24). It seems that Christ’s choice to obey the Father and thereby live in complete unity with his light and love allowed him to receive the Father’s glory and power in a unique way in the premortal world. This unique premortal status of Christ can be seen in the descriptions of him as the Firstborn, the Word of God, the Creator, Jehovah, and the Savior.

The first of these terms, *the Firstborn*, is at the same time perhaps the most enigmatic and the most significant. Christ revealed in Doctrine and Covenants 93:21 that “I was in the beginning with the Father, and am the Firstborn” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:21). It is not clear exactly what this means. We are told in verse 23 that we “were also in the beginning with the Father,” and so Christ being the Firstborn is usually taken to include temporal precedence as a spirit, following the Latter-day Saint understanding of Hebrews 1:6, describing Christ as “the firstbegotten.” In addition to emphasizing temporal precedence, the title may also suggest his distinctive nature as a Spirit who was so identical to the Father in purpose and will that Christ could say, “he that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9). This similarity is suggested by the passage in Colossians describing Christ as “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature” (Colossians 1:15).

This sense of Christ as the Firstborn might mean that he was the first to fully receive the fullness of the Father. For Latter-day Saints, this is a particularly important title because all those who inherit the celestial kingdom as joint-heirs with Christ are referred to as the Church of the Firstborn.<sup>23</sup> The passage in section 93 verse 21 in which Christ declares, “I was in the beginning with the Father, and am the Firstborn,” directly explains our potential to receive the celestial glory through our receiving him, being born again through faith in him and the covenants and ordinances of the gospel: “And all those who

are begotten through me are partakers of the glory of the same, and are the church of the Firstborn” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:22). A critical part of Joseph Smith’s teachings of Christ’s role in the Father’s plan is that through him we can be born again, begotten sons and daughters unto God in the fullest sense in which he is the Son of God: “we heard the voice bearing record that he is the Only Begotten of the Father—That by him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God” (Doctrine and Covenants 76:23–24).

The description of Christ as the Word of God in John 1 is accepted and used by Latter-day Saints, but it does not have the same resonance or meaning that it would have had in the thought world of Middle Platonism or that it would to other Christians today. Christ is not seen as an emanation of God that is distinct from humanity. Instead, we can see his connection with the Father and his acting as an agent of the Father as a product of his agency, his choice to accept and act upon the Father’s will, rather than his essence. In the Book of Moses, God the Father refers to Christ as his word. “And by the word of my power, have I created them, which is mine Only Begotten Son, who is full of grace and truth” (Moses 1:32). This directly ties in to our doctrine that Christ is the Creator, under the direction of the Father.<sup>24</sup> In the creation accounts found in the Books of Abraham and Moses, Christ as the Creator is portrayed as an agent of the Father and is described as being “like unto God” and the “Only Begotten.”<sup>25</sup>

So, while Latter-day Saints do maintain that all human beings are literally spirit children of God the Father, the premortal Christ had a divine quality giving him the relationship of a God to all of his spirit brothers and sisters. Jesus Christ is understood by Latter-day Saints as the premortal Jehovah. The passage in John 8:58, “Before Abraham was, I am,” is understood by Latter-day Saints as Jesus Christ’s self-identification with Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament. Additionally, Christ identifies himself in a post-Resurrection visit recorded in the Book of Mormon, saying, “I am

he that gave the law, and I am he who covenanted with my people Israel" (3 Nephi 15:5).

Latter-day Saints not only understand the premortal Christ as Creator and Revealer but also describe him as Savior since he was the "Lamb . . . slain from the foundation of the world" (Moses 7:47).<sup>26</sup> Here again it is important to note that Christ was the divine Savior through the exercise of his agency. In the Book of Moses the Father describes his choice of Christ as our Savior: "my Beloved Son, which was my Beloved and Chosen from the beginning, said unto me—Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever" (Moses 4:2). While having Christ be our Savior was the Father's plan, in the council in heaven Christ used his agency to accept the Father's will that he was to make salvation possible for all others, saying, "Here I am, send me" (Abraham 3:27). Christ was willing to be "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8).

To summarize my articulation of our belief regarding the difference between the premortal Jesus Christ and all human beings who also existed premortally, all others did not make the same choices and thereby do not have the same character, glory, and power as Jesus Christ.<sup>27</sup> We learn in Doctrine and Covenants section 93 that "man was also in the beginning with God" (Doctrine and Covenants 93:29). But being premortal offspring of God or even coeternal with God does not make one a God. Agency implies choice, and what scripture we do have about the premortal world indicates that Christ's choices were distinctive. In section 93, after clarifying that intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created, the role of agency is emphasized: "All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence. Behold, here is the agency of man, and here is the condemnation of man; because that which was from the beginning is plainly manifest unto them, and they receive not the light. And every man whose spirit receiveth not the light is under condemnation" (Doctrine and Covenants 93:30–32).

In Doctrine and Covenants 93 we read, “That which was from the beginning was plainly manifest unto them, and they receive not the light.” We usually read this passage in relation to the concepts in the Prologue of the Gospel of John, which refers to how people responded to Christ in his mortal ministry.<sup>28</sup> However, the phrase about those whose spirits “receiveth not the light” being under condemnation is set in a discussion of the premortal world. It might seem that this would just refer to those sons of perdition who rebelled and followed Satan, but I would suggest that we use this passage as a way to think about ourselves in relation to Christ. This interpretation might give us a way to understand what makes us different from Christ in how we used our agency premortally. “Behold, here is the agency of man, and here is the condemnation of man” (93:31). We should not have to see our limited light and truth, our lesser intelligence, in the premortal world as something that was done to us or the way we were made. We had our agency and we chose the light and truth that we wanted to receive. Those who come into mortality did choose to accept the Father’s plan to give his children a chance to repent and grow and receive more light, but that acceptance necessitated a plan of redemption—a plan that enabled us to move from the limited condition of light and truth in which we existed and to overcome through the intercession of Christ and our choice to have faith in and accept him. Herein lies the difference between Christ, who is the light of the world, and those that received not the fullness of the light as did Christ.<sup>29</sup>

Much of this view of Christ and human beings as agents that choose is different than the Christology of historical Christianity. To connect it with traditional christological and soteriological discussion, one could say that, like the Arians, members of the Church of Jesus Christ see the unity of God the Father and the Son as coming from the perfection of Christ’s will rather than from divine essence or substance. While we would use the Arian term *homoiousios*, being *like* God rather than being “of one substance with the Father” (*homoousios*), for us this does not result in Christ being a creature (that



is, not divine) because we do not believe in an ontologically distinct divine substance or essence.<sup>30</sup> This is the core difference between the formulations of classical Christology and the doctrine that follows from the revelations given to Joseph Smith.

The classical Christian theological premise that God's nature is infinite and human nature is finite means that explaining how Christ became human is the great mystery and wonder that the creeds try to articulate. As Latter-day Saints, we can affirm, with the Council of Nicaea, both that Christ eternally coexisted with the Father and that he was generated but not created and did not have a beginning; however, this alone cannot make Christ God for members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints because it does not distinguish Christ from the rest of Heavenly Father's children who likewise are understood to have been "also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be" (Doctrine and Covenants 93:29). I believe that for us divinity lies in agency, not essence. Our potential as the children of God is to become even as he is, but that potential in itself does not make us divine. Understanding Christ as the premortal Jehovah, the one "like unto God," while we are all children of God, points us to unique choices on his part.

### *The incarnation*

Much as they do regarding the premortal existence of Christ, the revelations of Joseph Smith present a view of the incarnation that is different from that of traditional Christianity. We do not say that the divine assumed humanity because this implies a dichotomy between the human and the divine. We do, however, maintain that the spirit (or soul, in traditional terminology) that entered into Christ's body was the premortal Word of God (see Moses 1:32).<sup>31</sup>

Based on the revelations given to Joseph Smith, the framework in which Latter-day Saints talk about the incarnation, as with the premortal existence of Christ, parallels the experience of other children of God. Thus, again, the challenge is to articulate in what way

Christ is distinctive and divine for Latter-day Saints. Christ's spirit was joined with a physical body just as Latter-day Saints believe all spirit offspring of God are in their earth life. The difference between the incarnation and the experience of all other spirit children of God entering mortality is that Latter-day Saints believe that Christ was literally the Son of God. When Latter-day Saints talk about Jesus Christ being the Only Begotten Son of God, they are not speaking metaphorically; he is understood as having the properties and powers of both a mortal mother and an immortal, perfect, and embodied Father. He was conceived by the Virgin Mary and begotten by God the Father in a process that the Bible and the Book of Mormon describe as being overshadowed by the Holy Ghost.<sup>32</sup> The language of *The Living Christ* emphasizes that Christ was "the Only Begotten Son in the flesh."<sup>33</sup>

Having a divine, immortal father and a mortal mother, Jesus Christ had a distinctive mortal existence. For Latter-day Saints this distinctiveness is not a soteriological problem as it would be in a traditional model. "That which is not assumed is not healed" is the classic statement of this need for Christ to be fully human as well as fully divine—thus the Council of Chalcedon's formula of one person in two natures. Because God was not understood to have any physical quality, the physical dimension of Christ's incarnation was understood to have come from Mary. This doctrine that Christ's body, his humanity and physical nature, is entirely from Mary is more fully developed later in the Middle Ages.<sup>34</sup>

Instead, in the doctrine of the Church of Jesus Christ, the blending of Mary's mortality and Heavenly Father's immortality is understood to provide Christ's capacity to accomplish the Atonement and the Resurrection. He needed to have a capacity to suffer and die for others and then to live again, but other than these extraordinary and essential capacities, we do not consider his mortal condition to have been different from other mortals. He knew the experience of pain, sickness, weakness, and temptation. Our understanding of what it means for Christ to have been divine preserves his ability to choose

how to respond to choices and temptation rather than believing that he had to be good by definition because of his divinity, his divine being, or *ousia*. Christ's being the offspring of Deity is not understood to have required him to have made perfect choices or to have prevented him from physical weakness and suffering.

### *Christology and atonement*

For Latter-day Saints, Christ, being sinless and the Son of God, literally suffered for the sins of all humanity. Since for us there is no distinction between the divine and human in him, we say that *he* suffered, not that his human nature suffered. He took upon himself, with a capacity that no one else had, "the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6).<sup>35</sup>

Latter-day Saints believe that Christ at some level knew all human sin, pain, and sorrow as a premortal God, but at the same time assert that only as the incarnate Son of God could he experience it fully. An important passage in the Book of Mormon notes that "the Spirit knoweth all things; nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh that he might take upon him the sins of his people" (Alma 7:13). While Christ as a premortal God knew all things, there seems to have been an abstraction to this knowledge. His embodiment completed his knowledge. His experiential acquaintance with mortal weakness, suffering, and sin became part of the intercession of redemption.<sup>36</sup>

No other being could suffer for the sins of another. As God incarnate, infinite and eternal, the perfect Son of God, Christ could take upon himself the sins of all of Heavenly Father's spirit children.<sup>37</sup> He took our place. In the Book of Mormon we are told that "God himself should come down among the children of men (Mosiah 13:34) "and shall redeem his people" (Mosiah 15:1). This identification of the one who suffered with God is consistent with the revelation in the Doctrine and Covenants in which Christ reveals that "I, God, have suffered these things for all. . . . Which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and

to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit" (Doctrine and Covenants 19:16, 18).<sup>38</sup> For Latter-day Saints, this Christological understanding of God made flesh does not imply a separation of divine and human natures because *in* Christ's unity lies the means of salvation.

The view of the incarnation found in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints might be compared with the *Logos-sarx* (Word-flesh) Christology of Apollinarianism, a fourth-century form of one-nature Christology in which the Logos took the place of the soul of the man Jesus. It was problematic from a soteriological standpoint because there was no assumption of a human mind and in the classical christological model that which is not assumed is not healed or saved.<sup>39</sup> The model of soteriology based on the revelations of Joseph Smith, however, is different because we do not see redemption coming from the assumption of something "human" that is radically other, but rather from *all* of Christ "taking upon himself" the sins, weaknesses, and sicknesses of humanity.

Parallel to the process of his taking upon himself our sins, the Book of Mormon describes Christ as taking "upon him death, that he may loose the bands of death which bind his people" (Alma 7:12). To do this he needed to be able to suffer and die, but he also needed to be able to suffer vicariously beyond mortal ability and to give up his life, not have it taken from him.<sup>40</sup> This required a being who was both mortal and divine, without having to separate these paradoxes as is done in traditional Christianity. Jesus Christ was a mortal, the son of Mary, and therefore he was able to suffer and die. Simultaneously, we understand him to have a physical inheritance from a glorified, immortal, and embodied Father that allowed him, as a God, to suffer and die so as to take the suffering and death of all others upon himself.<sup>41</sup> Latter-day Saints believe that only the Son of God in the flesh could suffer and die in this way. Likewise only the Son of God could rise again as a resurrected, glorified, immortal being with power to lift others from the grave. Only he could redeem humanity.

## Conclusion

Christ is distinct from humanity because of his agency and because he is the “Only Begotten Son in the flesh,” but we do not need to believe that he was radically different in terms of his ontological makeup as a premortal being. All human beings are spirit offspring of God, and while all have not used their agency as well as Christ, our belief is that all can receive the fullness of the Father, even as Christ as received the fullness. As Paul stated, our hope is that we may become “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17).

When we see being divine as a choice, we then realize why this inheritance must be chosen rather than given as an irresistible grace. This is where the focus on salvation through faith and obedience becomes operative. In the Doctrine and Covenants we are told by Christ that “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 93:20). Out of context, this focus on salvation through obedience sounds like we are asked merely to imitate Christ and thus save ourselves. It is, however, essential to note that in the scripture of the Church of Jesus Christ that came through the revelations of Joseph Smith, “my commandments” consistently refers to believing in Christ and coming unto him.<sup>42</sup> We believe that we are saved by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel, the first of which is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (see Articles of Faith 1:4).<sup>43</sup>

Christology and soteriology are inseparable. We do believe in obedience because this implies agency, but we do not believe that our obedience alone will save us. Christ’s perfect obedience was constant; ours will develop through our faith in him and choosing to receive his power and grace through making and keeping covenants. His perfection and obedience was a choice and a gift to us. Christ is “the resurrection, and the life” (John 11:25); others are resurrected through him. Christ is the way, the truth, and the life, the light and life of the world; others are saved through faith in his name. Christ is the

Firstborn, but he declares that we can be born again: “All those who are begotten through me are partakers of the glory of the same, and are the church of the Firstborn” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:22).<sup>44</sup>

As we choose the path of faith in Jesus Christ, repentance, and making and keeping covenants, our unity with God will also become a unity of purpose and will. Seeing divinity as a matter of choice rather than of essence, we recognize that we can also choose to be submissive to the will of the Father, choosing to trust in Christ and follow him. Our hope is articulated in the intercessory prayer offered in John 17: “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us. . . . And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one” (John 17:21–23). Our hope as Latter-day Saints is in Christ’s oneness with the Father, not because of a distinctive divine essence, but because of divine choices, a divine way of being. Because he was always one with the Father, we believe that he has prepared the way for all to be “perfect in one” through him if we desire.

## Notes

1. See Jennifer C. Lane, “The Creeds and Councils,” in *The Life and Teachings of the New Testament Apostles: From the Day of Pentecost through the Apocalypse*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), 299–329.
2. Surveys of the early christological debates can also be found in John McIntyre’s *The Shape of Christology: Studies in the Doctrine of the Person of Christ*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998); Roch A. Kereszty’s *Jesus Christ: Fundamentals of Christology*, ed. J. Stephen Maddux (New York: Alba House, 1991); and Gerald O’Collins’s *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995). A classic treatment of some aspects of this period is J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed. (New York: David McKay, 1972).

3. The Oriental Orthodox Churches did not accept the Definition of Chalcedon; these include many Christians in Egypt and Syria and other Eastern Christians. As Robert C. Gregg and Dennis E. Groh have noted, a focus on soteriology was not unique to Chalcedon but had also been central to the concerns of the early Arians in the Trinitarian debates of the fourth century. See Gregg and Groh, *Early Arianism: A View of Salvation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981).
4. While it is doctrinally correct, it is significant that the term *Elder Brother* is not found among all the titles given for Christ in "The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles," *Ensign*, April 2000, 2. The title page of the Book of Mormon emphasizes its role in "convincing Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God."
5. In many post-Enlightenment Christologies these premises have been reevaluated, but so has the belief that Jesus Christ was divine and that he suffered vicariously for the sins of the world. For a broad overview of this issue, see John Macquarrie, *Jesus Christ in Modern Thought* (London: SCM Press, 1990). A survey of recent theological approaches to Christology can be found in McIntyre's *Shape of Christology*.
6. From the "Definition of Chalcedon," in *Documents of the Christian Church*, ed. Henry Bettenson, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1963), 51. As mentioned earlier, the Oriental Orthodox Churches did not accept the Definition of Chalcedon. For clarity of explanation I will focus on this traditional and widely influential formula.
7. I am using the term *ousia* in its philosophical sense as the essence or ground of being from which everything else will result.
8. The question of how God's creation can then be evil becomes a philosophical problem, but the initial assumption about God's nature being good is determined by the assumption of a particular nature or being that is uniquely godly and good and radically different from human beings. Richard J. Mouw, an evangelical theologian very friendly toward the Church, commented that Latter-day Saints "singing Christ-adoring hymns" is internally inconsistent with a belief "that God is on the same ontological level as the human beings he has created." To his mind as an orthodox theologian, there is a "vast ontological gap between Creator and

- creature.” Richard J. Mouw, “Mormons Approaching Orthodoxy,” *First Things* (May 2016): 48. He articulates the traditional belief that “God and human beings are of different orders of ‘being’” (44).
9. Givens discusses the term *co-equal* in the King Follett discourse as having the original sense of being “of equal age.” Terryl Givens, *When Souls Had Wings: Premortal Existence in Western Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 219.
  10. See Doctrine and Covenants 93:30 and Abraham, chapter 3. There are differences of interpretation concerning the few points that we know about our existence before our spiritual birth. Many Latter-day Saints will see this intelligence as differing in degree from one individual to another. Others suggest that differentiation began as we were born as spirits. In either case, this intelligence that seems to be the essence of who we are as beings was “not created or made” (93:29).
  11. The full passage reads, “Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be. All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also; otherwise there is no existence” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:29–30). This is central to our position on agency.
  12. While the understanding that all human beings have a component of their being as uncreated intelligence is a standard interpretation of the passages in Abraham 3 and Doctrine and Covenants section 93, other explanations question the degree to which there was individual consciousness within this uncreated intelligence or explore the question of how to distinguish intelligences from spirits. See Paul Nolan Hyde, “Intelligences,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 692–93. See also Givens, *When Souls Had Wings*, 217.
  13. Misunderstandings of both the Christology and soteriology of the Church of Jesus Christ from within and without have frequently occurred. For members of the Church, there has long been a folk Christology and soteriology not taught by Church leaders that presents ways of thinking about one’s own life and the need to be perfect to be saved. This way of thinking emphasizes that in his earthly existence Christ was just like us, having



the same tripartite being of intelligence, spirit, and physical body, and it reasons that Christ obeyed the Father and was saved and, since human beings are just like him—meaning the same kinds of beings—complete and perfect obedience is our only hope as well.

Doctrinally, it is true that we don't believe in total depravity or the bondage of the will, and so theoretically we could obey God the Father just as Christ did. The Book of Mormon gives an important insight into how Christ's Atonement delivers all from the effects of Adam's transgression and allows us to be agents with genuine choices (see 2 Nephi 2:26–29). Practically, however, as we often come to learn through great personal disappointment, it is true that we don't always obey, and so being saved through our works isn't a viable option.

A clarified understanding of doctrinal Christology can help in arriving at a more doctrinal soteriology. In other words, Latter-day Saints believe that salvation comes through the intervention of a God. The more we are grounded in the doctrine of Christ as taught in the Book of Mormon, the more we realize how much we do need Christ and that we can have faith and hope based on his redeeming power that leads us to want to repent and be humble disciples, “relying wholly upon the merits of him who is mighty to save” (2 Nephi 31:19).

14. On the relationship between faith and repentance, the clearest statement is found in Helaman 14:13: “And if ye believe on his name ye will repent of all your sins, that thereby ye may have remission of them through his merits.” Another expression of the organic relationship of faith, repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost in Church teaching is found in Moroni 8:25–26: “And the first fruits of repentance is baptism.” This passage continues on with a discussion of how this brings the reception of the Holy Ghost and enduring to the end.
15. My reading of the Christology of the Church of Jesus Christ is finally a nonessentialist position. Or, one might say, the essence is choice. As Latter-day Saints we say that God lives, not that God is.
16. In the *Tome of Flavian* that influenced this Definition, Leo describes it thus: “Each nature performs its proper functions in communion with the other; the Word performs what pertains to the Word, flesh what pertains

to the flesh.” Bishop Leo of Rome, “The Tome of Leo,” in *Documents of the Christian Church*, 51.

17. The docetic position that would have denied these attributes to the person of Jesus Christ was, however, ruled out because of soteriological and scriptural considerations.
18. For an introduction to the doctrine of the impassibility of God in early Christianity, see Joseph M. Hallman, “Impassibility,” in *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, ed. Everett Ferguson, 2nd ed. (New York: Garland, 1997), 566–67.
19. We take literally Paul’s assertion that the premortal Christ, “being in the form of God, . . . took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:6–8). We learn in the Book of Mormon that “the Lord Omnipotent who reigneth, who was, and is from all eternity to all eternity, shall come down from heaven among the children of men, and shall dwell in a tabernacle of clay” (Mosiah 3:5). This condescension to “dwell in a tabernacle of clay” is, from a soteriological point of view, an important part of our Christology. The incarnation is referred to in the Book of Mormon as “the condescension of God.” The angel asks Nephi, “Knowest thou the condescension of God?” (1 Nephi 11:16). He later explains, telling Nephi, “Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the mother of the Son of God, after the manner of flesh” (1 Nephi 11:18). The earliest manuscript records this passage as “the mother of God after the manner of the flesh.” Royal Skousen, *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 28.
20. This is the sense in which Book of Mormon prophets describe him as the same yesterday, today, and forever (see Mormon 9:7–11; Moroni 10:18–19). In the Book of Mormon this unity of will is seen in Christ’s statement that he came into the world “to do the will, both of the Father and of the Son—of the Father because of me, and of the Son because of my flesh” (3 Nephi 1:14). The same theme of bringing his flesh into obedience with his spirit, just as his spirit is in obedience to God the Father can be found in this extremely intricate passage in the Book of Mormon: “because he dwelleth in flesh he shall be called the Son of God, and having subjected the flesh to

the will of the Father, being the Father and the Son—The Father, because he was conceived by the power of God; and the Son, because of the flesh; thus becoming the Father and the Son—And they are one God, yea, the very Eternal Father of heaven and of earth. And thus the flesh becoming subject to the Spirit, or the Son to the Father, being one God, suffereth temptation, and yieldeth not to the temptation” (Mosiah 15:2–5).

21. See Moses 4:2; Matthew 26:42; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42.
22. In traditional Christianity this idea of Christ being begotten of the Father does not mean that there was ever a time in which he was not—he is seen as eternally spiritually begotten of the Father, always existing as part of the Trinity, but existing in a relationship of being the Son of God.
23. Hebrews 12:23; Doctrine and Covenants 76:92–94. On being joint-heirs with Christ, see Romans 8:14–17. While many Latter-day Saints read this passage as referring to our status as spirit children of God, I believe that it is more accurate to read the text as describing the adoption of covenant and being born again through Christ, becoming his sons and daughters. On this see Mosiah 5:6–8.
24. This role as Creator is elaborated on in some length in Doctrine and Covenants section 93 and John, chapter 1.
25. “There stood one among them that was like unto God, and he said unto those who were with him: We will go down, for there is space there” (Abraham 3:24); “by the Son I created them, which is mine Only Begotten” (Moses 1:33).
26. Here the connection between Christology and soteriology becomes very clear. We believe that salvation comes “with the precious blood of Christ,” a being who “was foreordained before the foundation of the world” (1 Peter 1:19–20).
27. Since choices varied in the premortal existence, the degree of light and truth, or intelligence, of spirits also varied (see Abraham 3:18–19). Among these different agents with different degrees of intelligence there stood only “one among them that was like unto God” (Abraham 3:24). It might be argued that these different degrees are products of a different kind of essence. From this perspective, Christ’s being the Firstborn and the one that “was like unto God” might suggest a unique generation. While this

would be an understandable way to account for the difference between his character and ours, we do not have any data to support this. In fact, I believe that the idea of a special kind of generation of the Son may be fundamentally problematic. The principle of agency is paramount for Latter-day Saints, and thus we do not agree with Augustine's position in the Pelagian debates. Augustine does, however, make it clear that to the extent that creation is seen as being *ex nihilo*, the disposition of individuals will ultimately point back to their Creator. The Latter-day Saint understanding of our essence (if you will) being intelligence or light and truth, which is not created or made, means that at our core, we are not the product of a Creator. If our choices and the degree of light that we receive are our own, we must assume the same to be true of Christ.

28. "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:10–11).
29. The Gospel of John testifies that Christ is the source of our life and light and that "as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12; see 1:4–14).
30. We clearly do not believe, as the Arians did, that "there was when He was not." See Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 233. Arius wrote that "before he was begotten or created or appointed or established, he did not exist; for he was not unbegotten." "The Letter of Arius to Eusebius, Bishop of Nicomedia," in *Documents of the Christian Church*, 39. Given the ontological framework of fourth-century Christianity, the Arians were seen as making Christ into a creation and not the Creator. Arius wrote: "We are persecuted because we say that the Son has a beginning, but God is without beginning. For that reason we are persecuted, and because we say that he is from what is not. And this we say because he is neither part of God nor derived from any substance." *Documents of the Christian Church*, 39. The Arians took their position of distinguishing the Father and the Son because they were concerned that if Christ were God there would be a change in God or there would be a "plurality of divine beings." Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 232. We do not have these concerns.

31. "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).
32. See Luke 1:31–35; Alma 7:10; 1 Nephi 11:18–21. Because of the literal sense in which we understand the Sonship of Jesus Christ, some nineteenth-century Church leaders spoke of the conception of Christ in terms that were analogous to all other human conceptions. This has been a favorite point of those seeking to marginalize the Church's position. To hold these statements as binding and true Church doctrine is to refuse to allow insiders to define their own beliefs. A recent Church prophet has, in fact, asked that these nonscriptural speculations not be taught. *The Teachings of Harold B. Lee*, ed. Clyde Williams (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996), 13–14. In an age of in vitro fertilization it is much easier to understand a conception that follows the scriptural description of a virgin birth. For an additional discussion of this issue, see Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen Robinson, *How Wide the Divide?: A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 135–36; Robert L. Millet, "What Is Our Doctrine?," *Religious Educator* 4, no. 3 (2003): 15–33.
33. "The Living Christ: The Testimony of the Apostles, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints," *Ensign*, April 2000, 2.
34. See, for example, the discussion of Mary as the source of Christ's body in Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).
35. Isaiah's evocation of the Man of Sorrows is a central passion text for Latter-day Saints. This belief that all of Christ, spirit and body, bore "our griefs, and carried our sorrows" rests on a belief in his capacity and willingness to be "wounded for our transgressions" and "bruised for our iniquities." Isaiah 53:4–5. The Book of Mormon explicitly states that "he shall suffer . . . even more than man can suffer, except it be unto death; for behold, blood cometh from every pore, so great shall be his anguish for the wickedness and the abominations of his people" (Mosiah 3:7).

36. Elder Neal A. Maxwell commented on this: “Imagine, Jehovah, the Creator of this and other worlds, ‘astonished’! Jesus knew cognitively what He must do, but not experientially. He had never personally known the exquisite and exacting process of an atonement before. Thus, when the agony came in its fulness, it was so much, much worse than even He with his unique intellect had ever imagined! No wonder an angel appeared to strengthen him!” Maxwell, “Willing to Submit,” *Ensign*, May 1985, 72–73.
37. The Book of Mormon refers to this intercession, saying that “there can be nothing which is short of an infinite atonement which will suffice for the sins of the world”; therefore the “great and last sacrifice will be the Son of God, yea, infinite and eternal” (Alma 34:12, 14).
38. It continues, “and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink— Nevertheless, glory be to the Father, and I partook and finished my preparations unto the children of men” (Doctrine and Covenants 19:18–19).
39. This opposition to Apollinarianism was articulated by Gregory of Nazianus who said that “what he has not assumed he has not healed; it is what is united to his Deity that is saved.” *Documents of the Christian Church*, 45. It became a basic principle to connect soteriology and Christology. See, for example, Kereszty, *Fundamentals of Christology*, 192.
40. “No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again” (John 10:18).
41. The purpose for this divine suffering is described in the Doctrine and Covenants: “For, behold, the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh; wherefore he suffered the pain of all men, that all men might repent and come unto him” (Doctrine and Covenants 18:11).
42. See, for example, 3 Nephi 12:19. Even the context of the preceding verse illustrates this focus on Christ: “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” (Doctrine and Covenants 93:19).
43. Choosing faith in Christ will lead to repentance, a change of heart and nature that will bring obedience.
44. “By him, and through him, and of him, the worlds are and were created, and the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God”

(Doctrine and Covenants 76:24); “because of the covenant which ye have made ye shall be called the children of Christ, his sons, and his daughters; for behold, this day he hath spiritually begotten you; for ye say that your hearts are changed through faith on his name; therefore, ye are born of him and have become his sons and his daughters” (Mosiah 5:7).