

# Did Jesus Christ Marry and Father Children?

A Survey of Mormon Teachings on the Marital and Parental Status of the Son of God

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## Introduction

Dan Brown's best-selling novel, *The DaVinci Code*, and the ABC News' Special "Jesus, Mary and DaVinci," which aired November, 2003, are only the most recent examples of speculations about the marital and parental status of Jesus Christ. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has weighed in on this topic in the past, although it is silent at the moment. Some official sources in the Mormon Church publicly taught that Jesus Christ was married and fathered children.<sup>1[1]</sup>

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<sup>1[1]</sup> For stylistic reasons, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is also identified herein as "the Church," "the Mormon Church" or "the LDS Church." This paper is taken, in part, from my Ph.D. dissertation entitled, "An Assessment and Critique of the Distinctive Christology of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), 2000, which may be found online at [http://dev.namb.net/evangelism/iev/PDF/BB\\_Mormon\\_Christology.pdf](http://dev.namb.net/evangelism/iev/PDF/BB_Mormon_Christology.pdf).

Some LDS authorities explicitly taught that the mortal Son of God was married to one or more wives and physically fathered children before his death. Apostle Orson Hyde, one of the original Twelve (1835) and Jedediah M. Grant, who was appointed to the First Presidency of Brigham Young (1854), taught both doctrines.<sup>2[2]</sup> Apostle Orson Pratt, one of the original Twelve (1835) and Apostle Joseph F. Smith (1883), during his term among the Twelve, also taught the plural marriage of the Son on earth, but there are no known records that indicate their views on the physical parental status of the Son. Pratt and Smith did not reject the teaching that the Son physically fathered children. The record is merely silent on the matter.

There is also evidence that Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith (1910), during his term as President of the Quorum of the Twelve, taught that the Son was married and had children of the flesh, but there is no known evidence that he ever publicly taught these doctrines.

Additionally, there is no known record that indicates that any LDS apostle or president has ever repudiated, or rescinded Apostle Orson Hyde's, Jedediah Grant's, Apostle Orson Pratt's or Apostle Joseph F. Smith's teaching on the Son's marriage and, or, fatherhood in the flesh.

### **Category One Statements on the Marital and Parental Status of the Son of God<sup>3[3]</sup>**

Mormon authorities used seven biblical passages as evidence for the marriage or fatherhood of the Son in the flesh, but do not appeal to any other LDS standard work.<sup>4[4]</sup> Apostle Orson Pratt pointed to Psalms 45:9 as evidence for the marriage of the Son.<sup>5[5]</sup> Apostle

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<sup>2[2]</sup> Jedediah Grant was ordained as an Apostle after he affirmed the marriage of the Son in 1853. This is why he is not identified as Apostle Grant in connection with this topic. When a year in parenthesis follows the name of a Mormon general authority, it indicates the beginning of his term of office.

<sup>4[5]</sup> Orson Pratt, *The Seer* (Washington, District of Columbia: Orson Pratt, 1853-1854; facsimile published in Salt Lake City: Eugene Wagner, 1960), 159. "Kings' daughters *were* among thy honorable women; upon they right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir," Psalms 45:9, LDS edition of the AV [italics in the original].

Hyde and Counselor Joseph F. Smith employed the account of the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-12) and they also utilized a portion of the resurrection narrative of the Fourth Gospel (John 20:8-18).<sup>6[6]</sup> Hyde and Smith used the account of the wedding at Cana as an opportunity to teach that this wedding was the wedding of Jesus himself. They used the resurrection narrative to prove that Jesus was both a husband and a father according to the flesh. They asserted that Mary Magdalene used the term "Lord" as a reference to her husband in the flesh.

Apostle Hyde also used Isaiah 53:10 to defend his teaching of the parental status of the Son, "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put *him* to grief; when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see *his* seed."<sup>7[7]</sup>

In addition to John 2 and 20 above, according to Apostle Wilford Woodruff (1839), Counselor Joseph F. Smith used three additional biblical passages to help him prove that Jesus was both a husband and a father in the flesh.<sup>8[8]</sup> Smith used Luke 10:38-42 to show that Jesus was the husband of both Mary and Martha. Jesus allegedly went into the home of Mary and Martha in the same way a husband enters the home of his wife, or wives. Smith used John 11:2-5 to show that Jesus loved Mary and Martha as a husband loves his wives. Smith also used the anointing of Jesus by Mary, sister of Martha, in John 12:3 to show that Mary showed marital devotion to her husband, Jesus.

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<sup>6[6]</sup> Orson Hyde, "The Marriage Relations, October 6, 1854," a lecture at general conference, in *Journal of Discourses, by Brigham Young, President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, His Two Counsellors [sic], the Twelve Apostles, and Others*, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saint Book Depot, 1854-1886), 2:81-82; Joseph F. Smith, in "Wilford Woodruff's Journal Entry for July 22, 1883," *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 9 vols. (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1985), 8:187.

<sup>7[7]</sup> Isaiah 53:10, AV [italics in LDS edition]. Orson Hyde, *JD*, 2:80.

<sup>8[8]</sup> "Wilford Woodruff's Journal Entry for July 22, 1883," in *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 8:187. The entry reads, "22 Sunday . . . Evening Meeting. Prayer By E Stephenson. Joseph F Smith spoke One hour & 25 M. He spoke upon the Marriage in Cana at Galilee. He thought Jesus was the Bridegroom and Mary & Martha the brides. He also referred to Luke 10 ch. 38 to 42 vers, Also John 11 ch. 2 & 5 vers John 12 Ch 3d vers, John 20 8 to 18. Joseph Smith spoke on these passages to show that Mary & Martha manifested much Closer relationship than Merely A Believer which looks Consistet. He did not think Jesus who descended through Poligamous families from Abraham down & who fulfilled all the Law even baptism by immersion would have lived and died without being married? [sic]."

The above biblical passages do not appear to teach explicitly, or implicitly, that the Son married and fathered children. Therefore, the category one evidence for the marital and parental status of the Son is inconclusive at best.

### **Category Two Statements on the Marital and Parental Status of the Son of God**

No President or First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has delivered a public address or issued an official statement on this doctrine. Therefore, there are no category two statements on the marital and parental status of the Son.

### **Category Three Statements on the Marital and Parental Status of the Son of God**

Apostle Orson Hyde (1835) delivered an address at the October general conference of the Church in 1854 during his term as President of the Quorum of the Twelve. Taking Luke 16:15 for his text, Apostle Hyde set out to speak on the topic of marriage relations. In doing so, he also affirmed the superiority of modern revelation to the Bible in this context. Hyde said,

The words contained in this Bible are merely a history of what is gone by; it was never given to guide the servant of God in the course he should pursue, any more than the words and commandments of God, given to a generation under one set of circumstances, would serve for another generation under another set of circumstances. . . . The Bible is not a sufficient guide; it is only the history of the people who lived 1800 years ago.<sup>9[9]</sup>

Apostle Hyde was a polygamist who taught that Jesus was married to Mary on the basis of the evidence of John 20:8-18.<sup>10[10]</sup> The conversation between the resurrected Son and Mary outside the tomb, according to Hyde, was a conversation like that between a husband

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<sup>9[9]</sup> Orson Hyde, "The Marriage Relations, October 6, 1854," *Journal of Discourses*, 2:75.

<sup>9[10]</sup> Apostle Hyde did not explicitly identify the Mary in question as Mary Magdalene or Mary the sister of Lazarus and Martha, but the context of the passage points to Mary Magdalene.

and a wife. Hyde pointed to Mary's use of the term "Lord" as evidence of their marriage--a common title for husbands. Apostle Hyde said,

When Mary of old came to the sepulchre on the first day of the week, instead of finding Jesus she saw two angels in white, "And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She said unto them, Because they have taken away my Lord," or husband, "and I know not where they have laid him. And when she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master." Is there not here manifested the affections of a wife. These words speak the kindred ties and sympathies that are common to that relation of husband and wife. Where will you find a family so nearly allied by the ties of common religion? "Well," you say, "that appears rather plausible, but I want a little more evidence, I want you to find where it says the Savior was actually married."<sup>11</sup>[11]

The Apostle pointed to the marriage ceremony at Cana (John 2:1-12) as evidence that "the Savior was actually married." He implied that the marriage of the Savior was a fact partially concealed by translators and councils. He said,

Gentlemen, that is as plain as the translators, or different councils over this Scripture, dare allow it to go to t e [*sic*] world, but the thing is there; it is told; Jesus was the bridegroom at the marriage of Cana of Galilee, and he told them what to do.<sup>12</sup>[12]

Apostle Hyde explicitly asserted that the bridegroom at the wedding of Cana was Jesus Himself in no uncertain terms. According to Hyde, it was necessary for Jesus to marry so he could father children and see them before his death. He remarked,

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<sup>11</sup>[11] Orson Hyde, *Journal of Discourses*, 2:81.

<sup>12</sup>[12] *Ibid.*, 2:82.

Now there was actually a marriage; and if Jesus was not the bridegroom on that occasion, please tell who was. If any man can show this, and prove that it was not the Savior of the world, then I will acknowledge I am in error. We say it was Jesus Christ who was married, to be brought into the relation whereby he could see his seed, before he was crucified.<sup>13</sup>[13]

Hyde also argued that the Son had children in the flesh on the basis of Isaiah 53:10, which reads, "he shall see his seed." According to the Apostle, the Son could only see his seed if he had children, which he did. Apostle Hyde remarked, "I shall say here, that before the Savior died, he looked upon his own natural children, as we look upon ours; he saw his seed, and immediately afterwards he was cut off from the earth; but who shall declare his generation?" But, what became of the natural offspring of the Son of God? Hyde claimed,

They had no father to hold them in honorable remembrance; they passed into the shades of obscurity, never to be exposed to mortal eye as the seed of the blessed one. For no doubt had they been exposed to the eye of the world, those infants might have shared the same fate as the children of Jerusalem in the days of Herod, when all the children were ordered to be slain under such an age, with the hopes of slaying the infant Savior. They might have suffered by the hand of the assassin, as the sons of many kings have done who were heirs apparent to the thrones of their fathers.<sup>14</sup>[14]

#### **Category Four Statements on the Marital and Parental Status of the Son of God**

Apostle Orson Hyde's address during a general conference is the highest authoritative teaching on the marriage and fatherhood of Jesus Christ, but it is not the earliest statement on this doctrine. The earliest known official remark by an LDS authority on the marital status of the Son of God was by Jedediah M. Grant (appointed to the Seventy in 1845). On August 7, 1853, Grant addressed the Saints in the Tabernacle in Great Salt Lake City. Grant, a polygamist himself, taught that the chief reason for the persecution of Christ was his

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<sup>13</sup>[13] Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>[14] Ibid, 2:82-83.

polygamy. He asserted this on the basis, in part, of Celsus' remarks about the many wives of Jesus Christ. Grant lectured,

The grand reason of the burst of public sentiment in anathemas upon Christ and his disciples, causing his crucifixion, was evidently based upon polygamy, according to the testimony of the philosophers who rose in that age. A belief in the doctrine of a plurality of wives caused the persecution of Jesus and his followers. We might almost think they were 'Mormons.'<sup>15</sup>[15]

Apostle Orson Hyde repeated his propositions about the marital and parental status of the Son of God in a sermon in the Tabernacle on March 18, 1855. Hyde reasserted that Jesus Christ was the husband of the wedding at Cana, that Mary and Martha, among others, were his wives, and that the Son of God sired children in the flesh. He said,

I discover that some of the Eastern papers represent me as a great blasphemer, because I said, in my lecture on Marriage, at our last Conference, that Jesus Christ was married at Cana of Galilee, that Mary, Martha, and others were his wives, and that he begat children.<sup>16</sup>[16]

Hyde rebutted the objections of non-Mormons by claiming that the plural marriage of Jesus Christ to several women and his sexual function in natural fatherhood did not undermine his holiness, or purity. He taught that Jesus Christ was merely fulfilling all righteousness by obeying the fundamental commandment to be fruitful and multiply. The Son, according to Hyde, was merely following the practice of his own Father who physically sired him with Mary. The Apostle said,

All that I have to say in reply to that charge is this--they worship a Savior that is too pure and holy to fulfil the commands of his Father. I worship one that is just pure and holy enough 'to fulfil all righteousness;?' not only the righteous law of baptism,

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<sup>15</sup>[15] Jedediah M. Grant, 'Discourse in the Tabernacle, August 7, 1853,' *Journal of Discourses*, 1:346.

<sup>16</sup>[16] Orson Hyde, 'Sermon in the Tabernacle, March 18, 1855,' *Journal of Discourses*, 2:210. Hyde's reference to 'the last conference' was his October 6, 1854 address during the general conference of the same year.

but the still more righteous and important law ?to multiply and replenish the earth.? Startle not at this! for even the Father himself honored that law by coming down to Mary, without a natural body, and begetting a son; and if Jesus begat children, he only ?did that which he had seen his Father do.?17[17]

Apostle Hyde addressed the Saints in Great Salt Lake City on December 21, 1856 on a variety of subjects including polygamy, and the marriage and fatherhood of Christ. During his defense of polygamy he affirmed his consistent teaching that the Son was married to Mary and Martha and fathered children in the flesh. He defended this teaching by posing the inappropriate nature of Christ?s relationship with Mary and Martha if they had not been married. He argued,

It will be borne in mind that once on a time, there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and on a careful reading of that transaction, it will be discovered that no less a person than Jesus Christ was married on that occasion. If he was never married, his intimacy with Mary and Martha, and the other Mary also whom Jesus loved, must have been highly unbecoming and improper to say the best of it.18[18]

According to Hyde, to reject the marriage and fatherhood of Christ would be to charge the Son with sin or neglect of the Father?s command to multiply. He said,

Was it God?s commandment to man, in the beginning, to multiply and replenish the earth? None can deny this, neither that it was a righteous command; for upon an obedience to this, depended the perpetuity of our race. Did Christ come to destroy the law or the Prophets, or to fulfil them? He came to fulfil. Did he multiply, and did he see his seed? Did he honour his Father?s law by complying with it, or did he not?

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17[17] Ibid. A non-authoritative LDS source, Carlfred Broderick, posed that sexuality is ?an attribute of God? and ?the central, distinguishing characteristic differentiating the exalted from the merely saved? in ?Three Philosophies of Sex, Plus One,? *Dialogue* 3 (Autumn 1967): 100-101.

18[18] Orson Hyde, ?Address in Great Salt Lake City, December 21, 1856,? *Journal of Discourses*, 4:259.



Others may do as they like, but I will not charge our Saviour with neglect or transgression in this or any other duty.19[19]

Another founding member of the Twelve and polygamist, Apostle Orson Pratt, taught the plural marriage of the Son of God. In his work entitled, *The Seer*, Pratt argued along the same lines as Hyde for the plural marriage of the Son on the basis of the resurrection appearance of the Son to one of his wives, Mary Magdalene. Pratt wrote,

Next let us inquire whether there are any intimations in the Scriptures concerning the wives of Jesus. . . . In order to become the Father of Spirits, or, as Isaiah says, 'The Everlasting Father,' it is necessary that He should have one or more wives by whom He could multiply His seed, not for any limited period of time, but forever and ever. . . . One thing is certain: that there were several holy women who greatly loved Jesus--such as Mary, and Martha her sister, and Mary Magdalene; and Jesus greatly loved them and associated with them much; and when He arose from the dead, instead of first showing Himself to His chosen witnesses, the Apostles, He appeared first to these women, or at least to one of them--namely, Mary Magdalene. Now, it would be very natural for a husband in the resurrection to appear first to his own dear wives, and afterwards show himself to his other friends.20[20]

Apostle Pratt also offered a unique argument for the marriage of the Son from the Psalms. He taught that Jesus must have been married in order to fulfill the Messianic Psalm 45: 8-10.21[21] The Apostle wrote,

If all the acts of Jesus were written, we no doubt should learn that these beloved women were his wives. Indeed, the Psalmist David prophesies in particular

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19[19] Ibid., 4:260.

20[20] Orson Pratt, *The Seer*, 159.

21[21] Ibid.

21[22] Ibid.

concerning the Wives of the Son of God. . . . ?Kings? daughters were among thine honorable WIVES: upon thy right hand did stand the QUEEN in a vesture of gold of Ophir.?22[22]

After an extensive argument in *The Seer*, Apostle Orson Pratt concluded that both the Father and the Son had multiple wives. He wrote,

We have now clearly shown that God the Father had a plurality of wives, one or more being in eternity, by whom He begat our spirits, as well as the spirit of Jesus His First Born, and another being upon the earth by whom He begat the tabernacle of Jesus, as His Only Begotten in this world. We have also proved most clearly that the Son followed the example of his Father, and became the great Bridegroom to whom kings? daughters and many honorable Wives were to be married.23[23]

### **LDS Non-Authoritative Statements on the Marital and Parental Status of the Son of God**

There is also some evidence that Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith (1910) also taught that the Son of God was married, but there is no known evidence that he ever taught this doctrine in a public setting. In a reply to a letter from J. Ricks Smith dated March 17, 1963, Apostle Smith affirmed that Jesus was married, but instructed the addressee not to preach this doctrine. J. Ricks Smith consulted the Apostle, who was serving as President of the Quorum of the Twelve, to ask if Jesus was married and had children. J. Ricks Smith wrote, ?In a discussion recently, the question arose, ?Was Christ Married?? The quote of Isaiah 53:10 was given . . . What is meant by ?he shall see his seed?? [sic].24[24] To this question, the Apostle replied, ?Mosiah 15:10-12 Please Read your Book of Mormon!?! [sic].25[25] Ricks also asked,

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23[23] Ibid., ?Celestial Marriage, Continued? (November 1853), *The Seer*, 172.

24[24] J. Ricks Smith, ?Letter to Joseph Fielding Smith, March 17, 1963, with Reply.? A copy of this letter with Smith?s handwritten reply and signature is in my possession.

24[25] Ibid. Mosiah 15:10-12 is evidence for the figurative fatherhood of the Son.

In the Temple ceremony we are told that only through Temple marriage can we receive the highest degree of exaltation and dwell in the presence of our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ. Christ came here to set us the example and, therefore, we believe that he must have been married. Are we right?<sup>26</sup>[26]

In response to this query, Apostle Smith wrote, "Yes! But do not preach it! The Lord advised us not to cast pearls before swine!"<sup>27</sup>[27]

Though Joseph Fielding Smith was the President of the Quorum of the Twelve at the time of this letter and would become the President of the Church in 1970, a high level of authority may not be ascribed to this letter because it was not published. This letter does, however, stand as important evidence of two features of the LDS doctrine of the marital and parental status of the Son. First, this letter is evidence that a high ranking, highly respected, late twentieth century LDS authority taught that the Son was both a husband, and by reasonable extension, a father in the flesh. Second, this letter is evidence of a deliberate suppression of this doctrine by a high ranking, highly respected, late twentieth century LDS authority. One can only speculate about the extent to which this kind of private authoritative affirmation mixed with public suppression is presently at work.

Peterson and Ricks take a mixed position on the marital and parental status of the Son. On the one hand, they characterize Apostle Hyde's teaching as speculation. But on the other hand, they seem to offer a possible defense for this doctrine. They suggest that those who reject the marriage and fatherhood of Christ do so from a Gnostic, Neoplatonic, or Docetic platform. Peterson and Ricks write, "Some denunciations of Mormonism seem to betray a

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<sup>24</sup>[26] Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>[27] Ibid.

Neoplatonic and gnosticizing disdain for the material cosmos, a discomfort with the body and with sexuality that is utterly foreign to the Bible.<sup>28</sup>[28] In a related footnote, they add,

Orson Hyde speculated that Jesus was married. Robertson (1983): 17, finds the suggestion "horrifying." Gnosticism would respond so, as would a Christianized Neoplatonism. But where in Judeo-Christian scripture is such a horror of sex and materiality to be found? If Mr. Robertson takes the Incarnation seriously, he must allow for some pretty gritty physiological attributes—at least as much so as sexuality—to be predicated of Jesus. If he does not, he is a Docetist. And Docetism, as we have seen, is the one heresy that our ancient sources might justify us in expelling from Christianity.<sup>29</sup>[29]

### **Summary of LDS Comments on the Marital and Parental Status of the Son of God**

In sum, five high-ranking LDS authorities affirmed the plural marriage of the Son. The five include Orson Hyde, Orson Pratt, Jedediah M. Grant, Joseph F. Smith and Joseph Fielding Smith. Four of the five were apostles at the time of their remarks and two of the five ascended to the presidency of the Church. Jedediah M. Grant was not an apostle at the time of his remarks but was ordained as an apostle and appointed to the First Presidency soon afterward.

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<sup>28</sup>[28] Peterson and Ricks, *Offenders for a Word*, 129.

<sup>29</sup>[29] *Ibid.*, 129-30, fn. 439. The work to which they refer here is Irvine Robertson, *What Cults Believe* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983). For an atypical non-Mormon defense of the monogamous marriage of the Son, see William E. Phipps, *Was Jesus Married* (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1970); and "The Case for a Married Jesus," *Dialogue* 7 (Winter 1972): 44-49. For a defense of the plural marriage of the Son, see a book by Ogden Kraut, a Fundamentalist Mormon who is not formally associated with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, entitled, *Jesus Was Married* (Salt Lake City: Ogden Kraut, 1969). For a Mormon review of Kraut and Phipps, see Keith Norman, "Book Reviews of *Jesus was Married* by Ogden Kraut and *Was Jesus Married?* by William E. Phipps," *Sunstone* 1/2 (Spring 1976): 87-92. Non-Mormons, Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln, posed that a Roman Catholic priest discovered some ancient documents in Southern France that prove Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene at Cana and that he fathered at least one son with her. According to this hypothesis, Jesus and Mary stole away to Europe and the bloodline of Jesus continued in the Merovingian dynasty. See, *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1982). For an evangelical rebuttal of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* and its theories, see Paige Patterson, "Holy Blood, Holy Grail?" Holy Mackerel, in *Christianity Today* 26 (September 3, 1982): 28-29.

Three of the five authorities also affirmed that the Son sired children in the flesh while the other two were silent on the Son's fatherhood. The three include Orson Hyde, Jedediah M. Grant and Joseph F. Smith. All but one of these five high-ranking LDS authorities publicly taught these doctrines in official contexts. Only Joseph Fielding Smith refrained from teaching these doctrines publicly, presumably to minimize the ridicule from non-Mormons. Additionally, there is no evidence that any LDS authority has ever officially repudiated or rejected the teachings of Hyde, Pratt, Grant, Joseph F. Smith, and Joseph Fielding Smith on the marital and parental status of the Son.

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1[3] Authoritative Mormon christological statements are divided here into four categories in a manner similar to, but not exactly like, the method of James R. White, *Is the Mormon My Brother* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1997). Category one statements include the LDS standard works (Bible, *Book of Mormon*, *Doctrine and Covenants* and *Pearl of Great Price*). Category two statements are official remarks by individual president-prophets and corporate statements by the First Presidency. Category three statements come from documents published under the authority of the First Presidency or some agency under their supervision, and statements by individual general authorities made at general conferences. Sources for category four statements include remarks by individual general authorities in books, talks, and other publications.

30[4] Psalms 45:9; Isaiah 53:10; Luke 10:38-42; John 2:1-12; 11:2-5; 12:3; 20:8-18.

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