

## Introduction

The Christology of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is vastly different from evangelical Christology.<sup>1</sup> Mormon Christology is vastly different on the premortal existence of the Son of God. It is also vastly different on the mortal origin of the Son of God. The LDS Church teaches that Jesus Christ is the twice-begotten Son of Elohim. Elohim begat Jehovah in the first estate. Elohim also begat Jehovah a second time, which resulted in the conception and birth of Jehovah in the mortal realm.<sup>2</sup> When Mormon authorities speak of Jesus Christ as the “Only Begotten” of the Father, they are referring to the second-begetting and mortal birth of Jesus Christ. The mortal birth or origin of the Son of God is the subject of this paper.<sup>3</sup>

### Authoritative Statements on the Date of the Birth of the Son of God in the Mortal Realm

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints believes it knows the exact date of the mortal birth of Jesus Christ. According to LDS authorities, Jesus was born on earth on April 6, 1 B. C. The founding prophet recorded a revelation on this matter in the *D&C*. Joseph Smith wrote, “The rise of the Church of Christ in these last days, being one thousand eight hundred and thirty years since the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the flesh, it being regularly organized and established . . . in the fourth month,

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<sup>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.” The term “Evangelical Christology” is used here to describe the body of christological doctrines held commonly by contemporary American evangelical theologians who have published a systematic theology since 1975, including James M. Boice, Millard J. Erickson, Wayne A. Grudem, Carl F. H. Henry, Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce Demerest, Thomas C. Oden, Charles Ryrie and J. Rodman Williams.

<sup>2</sup> In the LDS program, the “first estate” is the dispensation of the literal family of God that begins with heavenly conception and ends at earthly conception. The “second estate” is the dispensation of the family of God that begins at earthly conception and ends at death. In the LDS system, Elohim is the Heavenly Father and Jehovah is the Son of God.

<sup>3</sup> 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. Printed and electronic copies of the entire dissertation may be ordered online from UMI-Bell & Howell Dissertation Services at <http://wwwlib.umi.com/dissertations>. Search for “Carrigan” in the author field, or 9992698 in the “publication number” field.

and on this sixth day of the month which is called April.”<sup>4</sup> On the basis of Smith’s revelation, Apostle Talmage (1911) wrote,

We believe April 6<sup>th</sup> to be the birthday of Jesus Christ as indicated in a revelation of the present dispensation already cited, in which that day is made without qualification the completion of the one thousand eight hundred and thirtieth year since the coming of the Lord in the flesh. This acceptance is admittedly based on faith in modern revelation, and in no wise is set forth as the result of chronological research or analysis. We believe that Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem of Judea, April 6, B. C. 1 [*sic*].<sup>5</sup>

Two late twentieth century presidents have clarified the above revelation by Joseph Smith and Talmage’s claims during a general conference. Harold B. Lee (11) said, “April 6, 1973, is a particularly significant date because it commemorates not only the anniversary of the organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in this dispensation, but also the anniversary of the birth of the Savior, our Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.”<sup>6</sup> Two years later, Spencer W. Kimball (12) also said, “The name Jesus Christ and what it represents has been plowed deep into the history of the world, never to be uprooted. Christ was born on the sixth of April.”<sup>7</sup>

Apostle Bruce R. McConkie agreed with Joseph Smith and Apostle Talmage. He wrote,

From the first sentence of the revelation given to Joseph Smith on the day the Church was organized in this dispensation, it appears that the latter-day kingdom formally came into being on the eighteen hundred and thirtieth anniversary of our Lord’s birth. In other words, Christ was born April 6, B. C. 1. (D. & C. 20:1.) As pointed out by Elder James E. Talmage, the Book of Mormon accounts that the Messiah would

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<sup>4</sup> D&C 20:1. Smith made a journal entry on April 6, 1833 that corroborates this revelation of 1830. He wrote, “On the 6th of April, in the land of Zion, about eighty officials, together with some unofficial members of the Church, met for instruction and the service of God. . . . The day was spent in a very agreeable manner, in giving and receiving knowledge which appertained to this last kingdom it being just 1800 years since the Savior laid down His life that men might have everlasting life, and only three years since the Church had come out of the wilderness, preparatory for the last dispensation,” in Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, edited by B. H. Roberts, 1:336-337. The D&C is a (C1) and Smith’s journal entry is a (C3) because it was published by the Church in *History of the Church*.

<sup>5</sup> James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 1962, 104 (C3). Talmage is aware of the scholarship of his day that placed the birth of Christ between 7 B. C. and 2 B. C. He was simply unwilling to consider any date that contradicted Joseph’s revelation, see pp. 102-109 including notes.

<sup>6</sup> Harold B. Lee, “General Conference Address,” *Conference Reports* (April 1973): 4 (C3).

<sup>7</sup> Spencer W. Kimball, “General Conference Address,” *CR* (April 1975): 3 (C2). At the general conference in April 1898, Apostle Franklin D. Richards made a remark that corroborates this teaching on the birth of the mortal Son of God. Richards does not affirm the date of April 6, 1 B.C., but he does suggest that December 25 is not the true date. He remarked, “the day *celebrated* as the anniversary of the birth of Christ,” *CR* (April 1898): 80 (C3), [*italics mine*].

come “six hundred years from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem” (3 Ne. 1:1; 1 Ne. 10:4), seem to corroborate this B. C. 1 birth date. (Talmage, pp. 102-104, 109.)<sup>8</sup>

The nature of the mortal origin of the Son of God is one of the most distinctive LDS christological doctrines. The nature of the mortal origin of the Son of God may also be the LDS christological doctrine that is most often reinterpreted or even suppressed by Mormon people. When asked about evangelical claims that Mormons believe the doctrine in question, Raleigh, North Carolina Stake President, John Taggart, replied that the evangelical charges were “absurd.”<sup>9</sup>

#### Category One Statements on the Origin of the Son of God in the Mortal Realm<sup>10</sup>

Mormon authorities use the Bible to support their claim that Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of Elohim in the flesh. There is a range of interpretations of the phrase “only begotten Son of God in the flesh” among Mormon people. On one end of the spectrum is the assertion that Elohim physically engaged in a sacred act of sexual intercourse with Mary so as to produce the material body of the earth-born Son of God. On the other end of the spectrum is the claim that Elohim simply caused the pregnancy of Mary by some undescribed means that may or may not have involved sexual intercourse. Traditionalists and LDS authorities affirm the former while minimalists have generally affirmed the later. Perhaps some Mormon people are reluctant to affirm the former because this teaching may have a negative impact on proselyting new converts with a traditional Christian background.

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<sup>8</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965-1973), 1:91 (C4). This birth day and date of the Son is taught in *Life and Teachings of Jesus: Course of Study for Religion 211 and for College-Age Adults of the Church Educational System* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1974), 29-30 (C3). There is, however, some disagreement with Talmage and McConkie among LDS scholars on the year of the Son’s mortal birth. For an example of this disagreement, see S. Kent Brown, C. Wilfred Griggs and H. Kimball Hansen, “Afterwards,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 2 (Spring 1983): 255.

<sup>9</sup> John Taggart made this remark to a newspaper reporter on the occasion of a Mormon Temple opening in Apex, North Carolina in November of 1999. The article by David Leon may be found in the December 2, 1999 edition of the *Apex Herald*.

<sup>10</sup> 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. 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.

As a rule, LDS authorities do not appeal to the Bible (AV) to support their views on the nature of the origin of the mortal Christ. When they do introduce material from the Bible (AV), they cite Matthew 1:18 and Luke 1:35, and they prefer Luke's account to Matthew's. Matthew 1:18 and Luke 1:35 read,

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with *child of the Holy Ghost* (Mat. 1:18, AV) [italics mine].

And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the *power of the Highest [Elohim] shall overshadow thee*: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35, AV) [brackets and italics mine].

LDS authorities also do not generally appeal to the five passages in the New Testament (AV) that use the term "only begotten" in reference to Christ. Perhaps this is because the characteristic LDS use of the additional term "in the flesh" is absent in the New Testament uses of "only begotten." The particular context of "only begotten" as used in John 3:16-18 and in 1 John 4:9 may explain why LDS authorities generally refrain from citing these passages in defense of the LDS view on the literal parentage of the mortal Son. John 3:16-18 reads,

For God so loved the world, that he gave his *only begotten Son*, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the *only begotten Son of God* (John 3:16-18, AV) [italics mine].

John 3:16-18 uses the phrase "only begotten" in the context of Jesus' plea for people to be "born again," and it emphasizes the role of belief in salvation, not obedience.

1 John 4:9 may present a more serious problem for the LDS position, "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that *God sent his only begotten Son into the world*, that we might live through him."<sup>11</sup> 1 John 4:9 clearly teaches that God sent someone into the world who was already the only begotten Son. The LDS position absolutely cannot tolerate this interpretation because it would severely undermine its entire doctrine of the first estate of humanity and the literal parentage of the Son. The LDS reluctance to cite biblical passages on the literal parentage of the Son of God in the flesh is understandable in light of the above observations.

While Mormon authorities generally steer clear of biblical passages to support their position on the mortal origin of the Son, they do, however, cite several other passages from the standard works to support the LDS claim that Jesus Christ is literally

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<sup>11</sup> 1 John 4:9, AV [italics mine].

the only begotten Son of God in the flesh.<sup>12</sup> In 1 Nephi of the *Book of Mormon*, Nephi inscribed a revelation of the mortal conception of Christ several centuries before the mortal birth. He wrote that the mother of the Son of God was a mother after the manner of the flesh. Nephi also remarked on the role of the Holy Ghost in the earthly conception of the Son. He said that the Holy Ghost carried the virgin away, and afterwards she appeared with the child who was the Son of the Heavenly Father. Nephi allegedly wrote,

And it came to pass that I saw the heavens open; and an angel came down and stood before me; and he said unto me: Nephi, what beholdest thou? And I said unto him: A virgin, most beautiful and fair above all other virgins. And he said unto me: Knowest thou the condescension of God? And I said unto him: I know that he loveth his children; nevertheless, I do not know the meaning of all things. And he said unto me: Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the *mother of the Son of God*, after the manner of the flesh. And it came to pass that I beheld that she was carried away in the Spirit; and after she had been carried away in the Spirit for the space of a time the angel spake unto me, saying: Look! And I looked and beheld the virgin again, bearing a child in her arms. And the angel said unto me: Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Son of the Eternal Father! Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw? And I answered him, saying: Yea, it is the love of God, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things.<sup>13</sup>

Jacob also allegedly identified Christ as the only begotten Son of the Father. He wrote, “Abraham . . . in offering up his son Isaac . . . is a similitude of God and his Only Begotten Son. . . . Wherefore, beloved brethren, be reconciled unto him through the atonement of Christ, his Only Begotten Son.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *BOM*, 1 Nephi 11:14-22; Jacob 4:5, 11; Alma 5:48; *D&C* 20:21; 76:22-24. The term “only begotten” occurs six times in the New Testament (5t w. ref. to Christ), nine times in the *BOM*, thirteen times in the *D&C* and twenty-five times in the *PGP*.

<sup>13</sup> *BOM*, 1 Nephi 11:14-22 (1981 ed.), [italics mine]. The 1830 edition of the *BOM* has a very different reading of 1 Nephi 11:18, 21, 32. The 1830 edition reads, “Behold, the virgin whom though seest, is the *mother of God* after the manner of the flesh. . . . And the angel said unto me, behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the eternal Father! . . . And I looked and beheld the lamb of God, that was taken by the people; yea, the Everlasting God, was judged by the world; and I saw and bear record,” [italics mine]. The importance of these different readings for this dissertation lies in the charge that early Mormonism was modalistic in its concept of the Godhead. See Royal Skousen, *Book of Mormon Critical Text*, 1:49-50. See chapter two of the dissertation for additional remarks on early Mormon modalism.

<sup>14</sup> *BOM*, Jacob 4:5,11. Perhaps one problem with using this text as support for the LDS teaching that “only begotten” is a distinctive reference for the earthly Son is that this comment by Jacob is made of Christ before his earthly birth.

Alma reportedly used the term “only begotten” in reference to the Son as well. He wrote,

I say unto you, that I know of myself that whatsoever I shall say unto you, concerning that which is to come, is true; and I say unto you, that I know that Jesus Christ shall come, yea, the Son, the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace, and mercy, and truth. And behold, it is he that cometh to take away the sins of the world, yea, the sins of every man who steadfastly believeth on his name.<sup>15</sup>

Alma made another important remark on the earthly birth of the Son. He named Jerusalem as the birthplace of the mortal Son and wrote,

And behold, he shall be born of Mary, *at Jerusalem* which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin, a precious and chosen vessel, who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost, and bring forth a son, yea, even the Son of God.<sup>16</sup>

Joseph Smith used the term “only begotten” to identify the Son of God as well. He recorded the following alleged revelation in the *D&C*, “Wherefore, the Almighty God gave his Only Begotten Son, as it is written in those scriptures which have been given of him.”<sup>17</sup> In another alleged revelation, Smith wrote,

And now, after the many testimonies which have been given of him, this is the testimony, last of all which we give of him: That he lives! For we saw him, even on the right hand of God; and 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.<sup>18</sup>

Like the passages from the standard works used to support the LDS view of the origin of the premortal Son, the standard works do not explicitly affirm LDS teachings on the origin of the mortal Son without the aid of the living prophets. Several presidents have commented on the fact and nature of the paternity of Jehovah in the mortal realm. They include Joseph Smith (1), Brigham Young (2), John Taylor (3), Heber J. Grant (7), Joseph Fielding Smith (10), and Ezra Taft Benson (13).

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<sup>15</sup> *BOM*, Alma 5:48. The assertion that the Only Begotten *shall come* has the same problem as the above Jacob passage. Alma’s identification of Christ as the Only Begotten is prior to his earthly birth.

<sup>16</sup> *BOM*, Alma 7:10. Jerusalem was not the place of the Savior’s birth, but this poses no problem for LDS authorities. Alma’s remark is mitigated by the fact that Bethlehem is only about six miles from Jerusalem.

<sup>17</sup> *D&C* 20:21.

<sup>18</sup> *D&C* 76:22-24.

## Category Two Statements on the Origin of the Son of God in the Mortal Realm

The teaching that Jesus Christ is the Only Begotten Son of the Father according to the flesh is a teaching that may be traced to the founding prophet. The Prophet wrote, “Jesus Christ is the heir of this Kingdom—the only begotten of the Father according to the flesh, and holds the keys over all this world.”<sup>19</sup> Joseph even modified the wording of John 1:13 to support the idea that Jesus was born of God in the flesh. The *Joseph Smith Translation* of John 1:12-14 reads,

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God; *only* to them who believe on his name. *He was born*, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the same 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.<sup>20</sup>

The Prophet has also been identified as the writer of the “Lectures on Faith: Fifth Lecture.” In this document, Smith taught that the Son was the express image of the Father precisely because he was the physical offspring of the Father in the flesh. Smith wrote,

He [the Son] is also the express image and likeness of the personage of the Father, possessing all the fullness of the Father, or the same fullness with the Father; being begotten of Him, and ordained from before the foundation of the world to be a propitiation for the sins of all those who would believe on His name, and is called the Son because of the flesh . . . And he being the Only Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth, and having overcome, received a fullness of the glory of the Father.<sup>21</sup>

Joseph Smith also taught that the Son is called “the Son” on account of his procreation by the Heavenly Father in the flesh. He wrote, “Why was He called the Son? Because of the flesh.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 1902, 5:556.

<sup>20</sup> *Joseph Smith Translation* of John 1:12-14 [emphasis mine]. The AV of the same passage reads, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, [even] to them that believe on his name: *Which were born*, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. 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 [brackets in LDS edition of AV, italics mine].”

<sup>21</sup> Joseph Smith Jr., “Fifth Lecture,” in *Lectures on Faith* (1835), compiled by Nels B. Lundwall (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1991), 48.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

Brigham Young (2) uttered, perhaps, the most controversial teaching on the mortal paternity of Jesus Christ during a sermon in the Tabernacle in Great Salt Lake City on April 9, 1852. Many Mormon people, including some general authorities, have tried to distance LDS doctrine from some remarks in this sermon. The christological features of this sermon, however, remain the undisputed teachings of the living prophets. In this sermon, Young sought to shed light on the mystery of the nature and origin of the mortal Son of God in an attempt to settle some conflict between Church leaders. Young prefaced his main remarks by saying,

My next sermon will be to both Saint and sinner. One thing has remained a mystery in this kingdom up to this day. It is in regard to the character of the well-beloved Son of God, upon which subject the Elders of Israel have conflicting views. Our God and Father in heaven is a being of tabernacle, or, in other words, He has a body, with parts the same as you and I have . . . His son Jesus Christ has become a personage of tabernacle, and has a body like his father.<sup>23</sup>

The second president's purpose was to clarify the exact identity of the father of the mortal Jesus Christ. He said,

The question has been, and is often, asked, who it was that begat the Son of the Virgin Mary. The infidel world have [*sic*] concluded that if what the Apostles wrote about his father and mother be true, and the present marriage discipline acknowledged by Christendom be correct, then Christians must believe that God, is the father of an illegitimate son, in the person of Jesus Christ! The infidel fraternity teach *that* to their disciples. I will tell you how it is.<sup>24</sup>

Young almost certainly surprised many in the congregation when he clearly affirmed that Adam, who was Michael the Archangel in the first estate, begat Jesus Christ in the flesh. This Young teaching puzzles many Mormons and remains a source of extreme embarrassment for the Saints who are aware of it. Young proceeded to tell the congregation whom it was that begat the Son of the Virgin Mary saying,

When our father Adam came into the garden of Eden, he came into it with a celestial *body*, and brought Eve, *one of his wives*, with him. . . . He is MICHAEL, *the Archangel*, the ANCIENT OF DAYS! about whom holy men have written and spoken--HE *is our FATHER and our GOD, and the only God with whom WE have to do*. Every man upon the earth, professing Christians or non-professing, must hear it, *and will know it sooner or later*. . . . When Adam and Eve had eaten of the forbidden fruit, their bodies became mortal from *its effects*, and therefore their offspring were mortal. When the Virgin Mary conceived the child Jesus, the Father had begotten him in his own likeness. He was not begotten by the Holy Ghost.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Brigham Young, "Sermon in the Tabernacle on April 9, 1852," *Journal of Discourses*, 1:50.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, [italics in original].

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, [emphasis in the original text].



The second president continued,

And who is the Father? He is the first of the human family; and when he took a tabernacle, it was begotten by *his Father* in heaven, after the same manner as the tabernacles of Cain, Abel, and the rest of the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve.<sup>26</sup>

Young anticipated the objections of many Mormons and non-Mormons alike, and he repudiated these objections in the remainder of this sermon. He remarked, I could tell you much more about this; but were I to tell you the whole truth, blasphemy would be nothing to it, in the estimation of the superstitious and over-righteous of mankind. However, I have told you the truth as far as I have gone. I have heard men preach upon the divinity of Christ, and exhaust all the wisdom they possessed. All Scripturalists, and approved theologians who were considered exemplary for piety and education, have undertaken to expound on this subject, in every age of the Christian era; and after they have done all, they are obliged to conclude by exclaiming “great is the mystery of godliness,” and tell nothing.<sup>27</sup>

A third time, perhaps for emphasis, Young stated what he believed was a revelation and an authoritative teaching. Michael-Adam was the father of the mortal Son of God. He also made it clear that a true believer must embrace this teaching to enjoy all the benefits of salvation. Again, he said,

Jesus, our elder brother, was begotten in the flesh by the same character that was in the garden of Eden, and who is our Father in Heaven. Now, let all who may hear these doctrines, pause before they make light of them, or treat them with indifference, for they will prove their salvation or damnation.<sup>28</sup>

Young’s closing remarks included a strong assertion that the Son of God was not conceived of or begotten by the Holy Ghost as the Bible and the *Book of Mormon* seem to indicate. He remarked,

Now remember from this time forth, and forever, that Jesus Christ was not begotten by the Holy Ghost. I will repeat a little anecdote. I was in conversation with a certain learned professor upon this subject, when I replied, to this idea--”if the Son was begotten by the Holy Ghost, it would be very dangerous to baptize and confirm females, and give the Holy Ghost to them, lest he should beget children, to be palmed upon the Elders by the people, bringing the Elders into great difficulties.” Treasure up these things in your hearts. In the Bible, you have read the things I have told you to-night; but you have not known what you did read. I have told you no

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

more than you are conversant with; but what do the people in Christendom, with the Bible in their hands, know about this subject? Comparatively nothing.<sup>29</sup>

Later repudiations notwithstanding, Brigham Young, the second president of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints clearly taught that Adam, who was Michael the Archangel in the first estate, fathered Jesus Christ. The negative side of his assertion was that the Holy Ghost did not father the mortal Jesus, because he could not have. Young taught that the Holy Ghost could not have fathered the mortal Jesus because the Holy Ghost does not possess the physical reproductive organs necessary to father a child. If the Holy Ghost did have reproductive organs, according to Young, it would not be proper to endow women with the Holy Ghost, lest they should become pregnant by him.

Brigham Young made several other official remarks on the origin of the Son of God in the flesh. During an address delivered in the Tabernacle in 1853, Young's remarks clearly teach that the Father, whomever he may be, physically impregnated Mary by means of sexual union. He reasoned that the Son could not possibly be the only begotten Son unless the Father was physically present to beget him. He said,

I believe the Father came down from heaven, as the Apostles said he did, and begat the Saviour of the world; for he is the ONLY-begotten of the Father, which could not be if the Father did not actually beget him in person.<sup>30</sup>

Four years later, the second president delivered another sermon that claimed that the Son was literally begotten by the Father in the same manner that all mortals are sired by their earthly fathers, by sexual union with their mothers. Young said,

When the time came that His first-born, the Saviour, should come into the world and take a tabernacle, the Father came Himself and favoured that spirit with a tabernacle instead of letting any other man do it. The Saviour was begotten [in the flesh] by the Father of His spirit, by the same Being who is the Father of our spirits, and that is all the organic difference between Jesus Christ and you and me.<sup>31</sup>

There are at least three other statements by Young that comment directly on or inform his teaching on the nature of the origin of the mortal Son of God. In one of them he affirmed that the conception of the Son of God was the result of the same natural

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid. For an analysis of Orson Pratt's rejection of Brigham Young's Adam-God doctrine, see Gary J. Bergera, "The Orson Pratt-Brigham Young Controversies: Conflict within the Quorums, 1853-1868," *Dialogue* 13:2 (Summer 1980): 7-49. Orson Pratt, however, did not enjoy the same rank as Young. President Spencer W. Kimball (12), however, officially and publicly denounced the Adam-God doctrine in 1976, in "Our Own Liahona," *Ensign* (November 1976): 77. See also, David J. Buerger, "The Adam-God Doctrine," *Dialogue* 15:1 (Spring 1982): 14-58.

<sup>30</sup> Brigham Young, "Discourse in the Tabernacle, July 24, 1853," *JD*, 1:238.

<sup>31</sup> Brigham Young, "Discourse in the Tabernacle, February 8, 1857," *JD*, 4:218 [brackets mine].

reproductive process experienced by all couples that conceive children. In another he asserted that the natural process of procreation he called “creation” is absolutely the only way anyone can ever be born in any universe. Young also taught that Mary, the earthly mother of Jesus, had God for a husband.

In 1860, Young said, “The birth of the Saviour was as natural as are the births of our children; it was the result of natural action. He partook of flesh and blood--was begotten of his Father, as we were of our fathers.”<sup>32</sup> Five years later, he said, “He [God] created man, as we create our children; for there is no other process of creation in heaven, on the earth, in the earth, or under the earth, or in all the eternities, that is, that were, or that ever will be.”<sup>33</sup> One year later, Young made some important remarks on this subject during a defense of polygamy. Young said,

This matter [multiple wives] was a little changed in the case of the Savior of the world, the Son of the living God. The man Joseph, the husband of Mary, did not, that we know of, have more than one wife, but Mary the wife of Joseph had another husband. . . . That very babe that was cradled in the manger, was begotten, not by Joseph, the husband of Mary, but by another Being. Do you inquire by whom? He was begotten by God our heavenly Father. This answer may suffice you--you need never inquire more upon that point. Jesus Christ is the only begotten of the Father.<sup>34</sup>

According to the LDS program, Brigham Young was a living prophet. In keeping with Mormon traditionalism, the official remarks above that have not been rescinded or “clarified” by one of the thirteen succeeding prophets must stand as authoritative doctrine. Even if Young’s remarks about the identity of the Father as Adam-Michael have been rejected, or clarified, by later prophets, his remarks about the nature of the origin of the Son of the Father still stand. In other words, even if the Father of Jesus in the flesh was not Adam-Michael, Young’s revelation on the manner of the Son’s conception remains intact.

Brigham Young taught that the mortal Jesus Christ was fathered in the same manner--the only manner possible--that all mortals are fathered. Young taught that Jesus Christ was not conceived by the Holy Ghost, but by a literal union between the Father and his wife Mary. The phrase, “sexual union” is not used, but Young insisted that the Father had to be physically present in order to cause Mary’s pregnancy. The Father’s physical presence would not be required if the nature of providing the premortal Son of

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<sup>32</sup> Brigham Young, “Remarks of July 8, 1860,” *JD*, 8:115.

<sup>33</sup> Brigham Young, “Remarks of June 18, 1865,” *JD*, 11:122 [brackets mine].

<sup>34</sup> Brigham Young, “Remarks of August 19, 1866,” *JD*, 11:268 [brackets mine].

God with a body of flesh was an act of *creatio ex nihilo*.<sup>35</sup> Reason dictates that the physical presence of the Father is only necessary if the nature of providing the premortal Son of God with a body of flesh was a procreative act, or sexual act, that requires male sperm and female ovum to produce a body of flesh.

John Taylor, the third president and prophet of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, also claimed that Jesus Christ was the Son of the Father by means of an act of the flesh. He wrote, “He [the Son], in the nearness of His relationship to the Father, seems to occupy a position that no other person occupies. He is spoken of as His well beloved Son, as the Only Begotten of the Father—does not this mean the only begotten after the flesh?”<sup>36</sup>

Joseph F. Smith (6) was also in the stream of presidents of the Church who taught that the Father begat the Son in the same manner that fathers universally beget their children. According to the sixth president, the Father begat the Son by Mary, “who had never known mortal man.” The adjective “mortal” appended to “man” implies that the president meant to specify that Mary had not known a mortal man, but had known an immortal one, the Father. During a stake conference in December of 1914, Joseph F. Smith directed his remarks about the mortal origin of the Son to children. He said,

I want the little folks to hear what I am going to tell you. I am going to tell you a simple truth, yet it is one of the greatest truths and one of the most simple facts ever revealed to the children of men. . . . Now, we are told in scriptures that Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of God in the flesh. Well, now for the benefit of the older ones, how are children begotten? I answer just as Jesus Christ was begotten of his father. The difference between Jesus Christ and other men is this: Our fathers in the flesh are mortal men, who are subject unto death: but the Father of Jesus Christ in the flesh is the God of Heaven. We must come down to the simple fact that God Almighty was the father of His Son Jesus Christ, and he was born into the world with power and intelligence like that of His Father. . . . Now, my little friends, I will repeat again in words as simple as I can, and you talk to your parents about it, that God, the Eternal Father, is literally the father of Jesus Christ.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> The prospect of creation from nothing is absolutely out of the question for anything that comes to be in Mormonism (see chapter 3). It seems that Elohim, in the LDS program, had two possible choices: either artificially inseminate Mary, or naturally inseminate her. It seems that Elohim’s physical presence would only be required if he intended to naturally inseminate her.

<sup>36</sup> John Taylor, *The Mediation and Atonement*, 136 [brackets mine].

<sup>37</sup> Joseph F. Smith, “Address at Box Elder Stake Conference (December 20, 1914), *Brigham City Box Elder News* (January 28, 1915): 1-2. This citation is also found in “Whom Say Ye That I Am?” *Family Home Evenings* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1972), 125-126. *Family Home Evenings* is an official publication of the Church.

The First Presidency of Joseph F. Smith issued a statement on the doctrine of Christ as the Father and the Son. The statement included remarks about the physical and spiritual paternity of the Son of God or the first and second siring of the Son. This statement clearly affirmed the literal paternity of the Son in the flesh. They wrote,

Jesus Christ is the Son of Elohim both as spiritual and bodily offspring; that is to say, Elohim is literally the Father of the spirit of Jesus Christ and also of the body in which Jesus Christ performed His mission in the flesh, and which body died on the cross and was afterward taken up by the process of resurrection, and is now the immortalized tabernacle of the eternal spirit of our Lord and Savior.<sup>38</sup>

Mormon authorities have always approached the topic of the siring of the mortal Son with great care and propriety so as not to speak disrespectfully or irreverently about the Father, the Son or Mary. They do not always speak explicitly but they do speak clearly on the manner of the Son's mortal conception. LDS authorities have spoken so clearly that even children can understand. In a guidebook designed for LDS parents to use in their weekly family home evening sessions, the First Presidency of Joseph Fielding Smith (10) quoted President Joseph F. Smith's (6) remarks of December 1920. Then, the teaching guide advised parents to draw a diagram depicting how a father plus a mother produces a child to illustrate how the Heavenly Father plus Mary produced Jesus. The family teaching guide included a recommended script to rehearse with the children. It reads,

All boys and girls have a mother and father on earth. Your mother and father, of course, are mother and I. Jesus is the only person ever born on this earth that is different. Jesus had a mother on earth. What was her name? (Mary.) But who was his *real* father? (Heavenly Father.) So you see, Jesus is the only person who had our Heavenly Father as the father of his body.<sup>39</sup>

Consistent with Smith, Young and Taylor, Heber J. Grant (7) issued a statement on the mortal parentage of the Son of God in 1922. According to Grant, the Son of God was begotten in the flesh in the same way or just as all males are the sons of their fathers. It is, of course, widely known that all men are the sons of their fathers by means of sexual union between their parents. Grant said, "We believe absolutely that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, begotten of God, the first-born in the spirit and the only begotten in the flesh; that He is the Son of God just as much as you and I are sons of our fathers."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Joseph F. Smith with the First Presidency and the Twelve, "The Father and the Son," *Messages of the First Presidency*, 5:27.

<sup>39</sup> The First Presidency, "Whom Say Ye That I Am?" *Family Home Evenings*, 1972, 125-126.

<sup>40</sup> Heber J. Grant, "Analysis of the Articles of Faith," a discourse delivered in the Tabernacle on November 20, 1921, in *Millennial Star* 84 (January 5, 1922): 2; also in *Latter-day Prophets Speak (LDPS)*, 280 and *Doctrines of the Gospel Student Manual (DGSM)*, 9. Grant also said, "We believe that Jesus Christ was actually the Son of His Father, as I am the son of my father, and as you are of your father," in "Tabernacle Address, August 21, 1938," *Deseret News: Church Section* (September 3, 1938): 1.

President Ezra Taft Benson (13) made a statement that some may use to mitigate the record of evidence that points very strongly to an LDS doctrine of sexual union between the Father and Mary. Benson asserted that Mary was a virgin, in some sense, both before and after the physical birth of Christ. He wrote,

He was the Only Begotten Son of our Heavenly Father in the flesh—the only child whose mortal body was begotten by our Heavenly Father. His mortal mother, Mary, was called a virgin, both before and after she gave birth (See 1 Ne. 11:20).<sup>41</sup>

The record shows that there are several authoritative LDS statements on the fact and nature of the mortal origin of the Son of God. The Bible (AV) is not strongly employed by LDS authorities to support the LDS position on this topic. Passages from the *BOM*, *D&C* and *PGP* reveal more than the Bible does to describe the LDS teaching on the mortal origin of the Son, but statements by LDS presidents are needed to describe more fully the LDS view on this topic.

Joseph Smith (1) declared that the Son was born of the Father in the flesh. Brigham Young (2) taught that God physically fathered the mortal Jesus by physically being present to impregnate his wife, Mary, and this is absolutely the only way any spirit child can inherit a body of flesh.<sup>42</sup> John Taylor (3) did not repudiate, or materially reinterpret, Young's view and added his own endorsement of the teaching that the mortal Son is the only begotten Son *in the flesh*. There is no evidence that Wilford Woodruff (4), Lorenzo Snow (5), Joseph F. Smith (6), or Heber J. Grant (7) repudiated or materially reinterpreted Young's view either. In fact, Joseph F. Smith and Grant strengthened Young's view by adding that Elohim begat the Son in the flesh by the same way that all sons are begotten in the flesh by their earthly fathers--presumably by sexual union.

There is also no evidence that George Albert Smith (8), David O. McKay (9), or Joseph Fielding Smith (10) repudiated or materially reinterpreted Young, Taylor, Joseph Fielding Smith, and Grant on the matter of the physical parentage of the mortal Son of God. Joseph Fielding Smith agreed with the teachings of the presidents before him and even promoted the teaching of this concept of the physical parentage of the Son to children.<sup>43</sup>

Evidence has not come to light that President Lee (11) officially repudiated or materially reinterpreted Young, Taylor, Grant, Joseph F. Smith, or Joseph Fielding Smith on the matter of the physical parentage of the mortal Son. Harold B. Lee did, however, make a statement in an unpublished talk three years before his presidency that

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<sup>41</sup> Ezra Taft Benson, "Joy in Christ," *Ensign* 16 (March 1986): 3-4. See McConkie's remark on the virginity of Mary below.

<sup>42</sup> Young identified Michael-Adam as the begetting God.

<sup>43</sup> See evidence of this in the section on (C2) authorities below.

discouraged Mormons from speaking about sexual intercourse between the Father and Mary.<sup>44</sup>

There is also no evidence that Kimball (12) or Benson (13) repudiated or materially reinterpreted the teachings of Young to Joseph Fielding Smith on the paternity of the mortal Son.<sup>45</sup> Agreeing with the presidents before him, Benson taught that the Heavenly Father sired the physical body of Christ. But, Benson interjected a new teaching as well. He taught that Mary was called a virgin after the conception of Christ.<sup>46</sup>

Finally, there is no evidence that the two most recent prophets, Howard W. Hunter (14) or Gordon B. Hinckley (15) repudiated, added to, or materially reinterpreted the teachings of the living prophets that preceded them on the matter of the Son's mortal origin. Therefore, the standing doctrine on the mortal origin of the Son of God, which is based on the standard works and the official statements of the presidents, should agree with the teachings of the presidents from Joseph Smith (1) to Joseph Fielding Smith (10). Their teachings are only mitigated by Kimball's (12) repudiation of the Adam-God doctrine and Benson's (13) teaching that Mary was called a virgin after the conception of Christ. Consider now, the category three statements on the origin of the Son of God in the mortal realm. Perhaps they can shed some light on the above presidential statements and the evidence in the standard works.

#### Category Three Statements on the Origin of the Son of God in the Mortal Realm

Apostle Orson Pratt (1835) testified to the fact of the physical sonship of the earthly Christ. He wrote, "Like man, he had a Father; and he was *'the express image of the person of the Father.'*"<sup>47</sup>

In the LDS publication, *Jesus the Christ* (1915), Apostle James Talmage (1911) made some remarks about the nature of the origin of the Son of God in the mortal realm. His remarks were perhaps the most sophisticated description of the physical conception

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<sup>44</sup> This statement will be presented below.

<sup>45</sup> Spencer W. Kimball did, however, officially reject the Adam-God doctrine ascribed to Young, but he did not repudiate, or materially reinterpret Young's teaching on the physical parentage of the mortal Son. Kimball only rejected the identity of Adam-Michael as the father of the mortal Son, not the mechanism or manner of the Son's conception.

<sup>46</sup> See Bruce R. McConkie's remarks about the post-conception virginity of Mary below.

<sup>47</sup> Orson Pratt, *The Kingdom of God* (Liverpool: R. James, 1848), Part I, p. 4; also in *Teachings of the Latter-day Prophets (TLDP)*, 1:308.

of the Son. He stopped short of saying explicitly that Elohim had sexual intercourse with Mary in the same way that all fathers sire their children, but he came very close. The Apostle called Jesus the “Son of the Highest” referring to Luke 1:35. He claimed that the conception of the mortal Son was in accordance with a higher manifestation of natural law. He also asserted that the conception of the mortal Son involved an “association of supreme sanctity, celestial Sireship, and pure though mortal maternity.”

That Child to be born of Mary was begotten of Elohim, the Eternal Father, not in violation of natural law but in accordance with a higher manifestation thereof; and, the offspring from that association of supreme sanctity, celestial Sireship, and pure though mortal maternity, was of right to be called the “Son of the Highest.”<sup>48</sup>

Talmage taught that Elohim propagated the Son after his own kind. He also taught that the Son inherited the traits of both his parents in the same way that all children inherit traits from both parents. He wrote,

In His nature would be combined the powers of Godhood with the capacity and possibilities of mortality; and this through the ordinary operation of the fundamental law of heredity, declared of God, demonstrated by science, and admitted by philosophy, that living beings shall propagate--after their kind. The Child Jesus was to inherit the physical, mental, and Spiritual traits, tendencies, and powers that characterized His parents--one immortal and glorified--God, the other human--woman.<sup>49</sup>

Talmage also taught that the earthly Son was able to live without end because his second siring was an act of the Father. He wrote, “Born of a mortal mother He inherited the capacity to die; begotten by an immortal Sire He possessed as a heritage the power to withstand death indefinitely.”<sup>50</sup> In agreement with the preceding statement, Apostle Talmage wrote, “A natural effect of His immortal origin, as the earth-born Son of an immortal Sire, was that He was immune to death except as He surrendered thereto.”<sup>51</sup>

The Son’s absolute separateness from the Father is a doctrine that informs the doctrine of the mortal origin of the Son. In Mormonism, it is possible for the Son to have been sired, because the Son is a separate being from the Father. Milton R. Hunter, member of the First Council of the Seventy (1945), delivered an address on the Holy Trinity during the general conference of October 1948. Hunter referred to the three members of the Godhead as three personal beings. He remarked,

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<sup>48</sup> James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 1962, 81. See pp. 103-104, fn. 143 herein for comments about the use of the term “sire” or “sired” in relation to the person and work of the Heavenly Father.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 418.



Throughout the pages of the New Testament we find a very definite doctrine proclaimed of the actuality and existence of three members in the Godhead—three personal beings, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost—constituting the Holy Trinity.<sup>52</sup>

John A. Widtsoe wrote a pamphlet published by the Church in which he taught that the doctrine of the trinity of the Godhead was perverted by the early church. He affirmed that the original apostolic doctrine posed that the Godhead was composed of three entirely separate beings, or three Gods, unified in purpose and action. Widtsoe wrote,

The doctrine of the unity, or the trinity, of the Godhead also became perverted in the early church. It had been taught that there were three beings in the Godhead—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; separate and distinct in person, but one—that is united—in purpose and action. After the passing of the apostles it was taught that these three were only one: --“the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, and yet they are not three Gods but one God.”<sup>53</sup>

Counselor David O. McKay (1944), like many general authorities that served before and after him, explicitly denied any figurative understanding about the meaning of “son,” with reference to the Son of God. He favored a plain literal understanding of the term “son” over a figurative one. McKay said, “The Man of Galilee is, not *figuratively*, but *literally*, the Son of the living God.”<sup>54</sup>

Henry D. Taylor, Assistant to the Twelve (1958-76), delivered an address at a general conference in 1967. Demonstrating a dependence upon some of the above comments by Talmage, Taylor declared that the Son of God was begotten of an immortal sire. The Son was able to live indefinitely because of the nature of his sire. Taylor remarked,

Having been begotten of an immortal sire, Jesus possessed as a heritage the power to withstand death indefinitely. He literally and really gave up his life. It was not taken from him.<sup>55</sup>

The Church published *Messages for Exaltation: Eternal Insights from the Book of Mormon* in 1967. It used very descriptive terms in its explanation of the meaning

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<sup>52</sup> Milton R. Hunter, “General Conference Address,” *CR* (October 1948): 16.

<sup>53</sup> John A. Widtsoe, “Centennial Series,” in *Handbook of the Restoration: A Selection of Gospel Themes Discussed by Various Authors; Also Other Items of Interest to Gospel Students* (Independence, Missouri: Zion’s Printing and Publishing Co., 1944), 228.

<sup>54</sup> David O. McKay, “General Conference Address,” *CR* (April 1944): 123; also in *Gospel Ideals* (Salt Lake City: The Improvement Era, 1953), 46 [italics in original].

<sup>55</sup> Henry D. Taylor, “General Conference Address,” *CR* (October 1967): 142.

of “Son of God in the flesh.” *Messages* used three adverbs to teach that the Son of God was the Son in the flesh. *Messages* asserted that the mortal Jesus Christ was “actually, literally, and biologically the Son of God in the flesh.”<sup>56</sup> Jesus Christ was able to make payment because of the unique way he became the Son of God in the flesh. *Messages* reads,

He [Jesus Christ] was *willing* to make payment because of his great love for mankind, and he was *able* to make payment because he lived a sinless life and because he was actually, literally, biologically the Son of God in the flesh.<sup>57</sup>

This is the first known use of the term “biological” to describe how the Son of God is the Son in the flesh. It is a term that certainly connotes sexual activity.<sup>58</sup>

Counselor Marion G. Romney (1951) made a christological statement at a 1975 general conference. He taught that the physical body of Christ was begotten of God, so that he might inherit the Father’s ability to live indefinitely. He said,

Now who is Jesus Christ, and how could he bring about the resurrection when no other man nor all men put together could do so? The Scriptures respond to these questions. They make it clear that the spirit person Jesus Christ—as are the spirits of all men—is the Son of God, our Eternal Father. In this respect he is like all other men. He differs from all other men, however, by reason of the fact that men’s bodies are begotten of mortal men and are, therefore, subject to death, being descendants and inheritors from Adam, while Christ’s physical body was begotten of God, our Heavenly Father—an immortal being not subject to death. Christ, therefore, inherited from his Father the faculty to live on indefinitely.<sup>59</sup>

Apostle Melvin J. Ballard (1919) offered some very important clarifying statements about the nature of the conception of the mortal Son of God. Attempting to settle some worldly confusion on the matter, Ballard asserted the fact of the divine conception saying that Christ’s birth was a birth “wherein divine power interceded.” Ballard called Jesus the “very Son of God” and he called God the “real Father.” This may be interpreted as another way of expressing some measure of physicality to the conception process. The Apostle also employed the characteristic LDS designation for the mortal Son, calling him the “Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh.” Ballard wrote,

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<sup>56</sup> *Messages For Exaltation: Eternal Insights from the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Sunday School Union, 1967), 378-379 [italics in original].

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid* [brackets mine].

<sup>58</sup> The exact quote above is used verbatim without notation in Daniel H. Ludlow, *A Companion to Your Study of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Desert Book Co., 1976), 177. The term “biological” is used with reference to the sonship of Christ two times in Robert J. Matthews, *Behold the Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1994), 74, 101; and once by Andrew C. Skinner, “The Birth of Christ,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 2:729-730.

<sup>59</sup> Marion G. Romney, “General Conference Address,” *CR* (April 1975): 123-124.

One of the great questions that I have referred to that the world is concerned about, and is in confusion over, is as to whether or not his was a virgin birth, a birth wherein divine power interceded. Joseph Smith made it perfectly clear that Jesus Christ told the absolute truth, as did those who testify concerning him, the Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ, wherein he is declared to be the very Son of God. And if God the Eternal Father is not the real Father of Jesus Christ, then are we in confusion; then is he not in reality the Son of God. But we declare that he *is* the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh.<sup>60</sup>

Ballard retold the story of the conception from the perspective of Mary and called her the “virgin mother of the Redeemer of the world.” He also clarified the identity of the “Highest” as the Father and explained the reason for the Holy Ghost’s overshadowing. Ballard stated that Mary could not have survived the physical presence of the Father had the Holy Ghost not sustained her. He wrote,

Mary told the story most beautifully when she said that an angel of the Lord came to her and told her that she had found favor in the sight of God, and had come to be worthy of the fulfilment of the promises heretofore made, to become the virgin mother of the Redeemer of the world. She afterwards, referring to the event, said: “God hath done wonderful things unto me.” “And the Holy Ghost came upon her,” is the story, “and she came into the presence of the highest.” No man or woman can live in mortality and survive the presence of the Highest except by the sustaining power of the Holy Ghost. So it came upon her to prepare her for admittance into the divine presence, and the power of the Highest, who is the Father, was present, and overshadowed her, and the holy Child that was born of her was called the Son of God.<sup>61</sup>

Apostle Ballard concluded his remarks by anticipating the objections of some who might think it inappropriate to ascribe sexual activity to the Heavenly Father. He called the act of sexual union “creation” and insisted that this creative power of sexual reproduction was a sacred ability. Ballard referred to the sexual ability of God as a “pleasure,” “holy” and a “divine function.” He also said that the “power of creation,” or sexual reproduction, is “retained by the Father.” But, with the sensitivity of Benson (13), Ballard insisted that the Father exercised his sexual power in an honorable manner so as not to “debase himself, degrade himself, nor debauch his daughter.” He wrote,

Men who deny this, or who think that it degrades our Father, have no true conception of the sacredness of the most marvelous power with which God has endowed mortal men—the power of creation. Even though that power may be abused and may become a mere harp of pleasure to the wicked, nevertheless it is the most sacred and holy and divine function with which God has endowed man. Made holy, it is

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<sup>60</sup> Melvin J. Ballard, *Sermons and Missionary Services of Melvin J. Ballard*, compiled by Bryant S. Hinckley (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1949), 167 [italics in original]; also in *TLDP*, 1:301.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

retained by the Father of us all, and in his exercise of that great and marvelous creative power and function, he did not debase himself, degrade himself, nor debauch his daughter. Thus Christ became the literal Son of a divine Father, and no one else was worthy to be his father.<sup>62</sup>

The above quotation leaves no room for anyone to claim that Apostle Ballard did not teach the sexual origin of the Son in the flesh.

*Gospel Principles* is another official Church publication that makes statements on the origin of the Son of God in the mortal realm. *Gospel Principles* rehearses the LDS interpretation of Luke 1:34-35. It reads,

The story of the birth and life of the Savior is found in the New Testament in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. From their accounts we learn that Jesus was born of a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to marry Joseph when an angel of the Lord appeared to her. The angel told her that she was to be the mother of the Son of God. She asked him how this was possible (see Luke 1:34). He told her, “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). Thus, God the Father became the literal father of Jesus Christ.<sup>63</sup>

*Gospel Principles* also affirms the uniqueness of the divine parentage of the earthly Son of God. It affirms that Christ’s father in the flesh was an immortal father and that the Son inherited his divine abilities from the Father. It reads,

Jesus is the only person on earth to be born of a mortal mother and an immortal father. That is why he is called the Only Begotten Son. From his mother he inherited mortality and was subject to hunger, thirst, fatigue, pain, and death. He inherited divine powers from his Father. No one could take the Savior’s life from him unless He willed it. He had power to lay it down and power to take up his body again after dying. (See John 10:17-18.)<sup>64</sup>

*Gospel Principles* does not comment on the nature of the paternity of the Son in the flesh. It only states the fact of it.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid. Perhaps the most important comment by Ballard above is that “Christ *became* the literal Son of a divine Father,” [italics mine]. This statement crystallizes one of the fundamental differences between Evangelical and Mormon Christology. If Jesus Christ *became* the literal Son of a divine Father, then there was a moment in time when he was not a son at all. Evangelicals assert the eternal sonship of the Son of God, whereas “eternal” means that there was never a moment when the Son of God was not related to the Father as the Son. This evangelical understanding demands, of course, a metaphysical understanding of the eternal relationship of the Father to the Son, whereas the LDS understanding of this relationship is a physical one.

<sup>63</sup> *Gospel Principles*, 1997, 63-64.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

### Category Four Statements on the Origin of the Son of God in the Mortal Realm

Several high-ranking general authorities have commented on the origin of the Son of God in the flesh outside of official LDS publications and general conferences. These authorities include Apostle Orson Hyde, Apostle Orson Pratt, Counselor Heber C. Kimball, Apostle Harold B. Lee and Apostle Bruce R. McConkie. Hyde, Pratt and Kimball were original members of the Twelve ordained in 1835, and Kimball was elevated to the First Presidency in 1849. Lee was ordained in 1941 and McConkie was appointed to the First Council of the Seventy in 1946 and ordained as an Apostle in 1972.

On March 18, 1855, Apostle Orson Hyde (1835) delivered a sermon in the Tabernacle in Great Salt Lake City while he was the President of the Quorum of the Twelve. This contemporary of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young taught that the Father came down to Mary, honored the righteous and important law to multiply and replenish the earth, and begat a Son in the same manner as Jesus Christ himself begat his own children. Apostle Hyde 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.

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 [*sic*] 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, 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.”<sup>65</sup>

Apostle Hyde made a very provocative statement here. He clearly ascribed sexual activity to both the Father and the Son and described that sexual activity as a righteous and important law of the universe.<sup>66</sup>

Apostle Orson Pratt (1835) was also a contemporary of the founding prophet and Brigham Young. Pratt denied that the Holy Ghost begat the Son. He wrote, “If He [Jesus] were begotten by the Holy Ghost, then He would have called him [The Holy

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<sup>65</sup> Orson Hyde, “Sermon in the Tabernacle, March 18, 1855,” *JD*, 2:210. The spelling of “fulfil” in this citation is a characteristic spelling in LDS literature.

<sup>66</sup> Hyde’s teaching on the marital status of the Son will be more fully discussed later in chapter two under the section entitled, “The LDS Doctrine of the Marital and Parental Status of the Son of God.”

Ghost] His Father.”<sup>67</sup> More importantly, though, Pratt affirmed the marital union of the Father and Mary, which resulted in the conception of the Son. Pratt asserted that Mary was the temporary, lawful wife of the Father and he used the term “overshadowed” to describe the sexual intercourse between them. Apostle Pratt wrote,

God, the Father of our spirits, became the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the flesh . . . The fleshly body of Jesus required a Mother as well as a Father. Therefore, the Father and Mother of Jesus, according to the flesh, must have been associated together in the capacity of Husband and Wife; hence the Virgin Mary must have, for the time being, the lawful wife of God the Father . . . He had a lawful right to overshadow the Virgin Mary in the capacity of a husband, and beget a Son, although she was espoused to another; for the law which He gave to govern men and women, was not intended to govern Himself, or to prescribe rules for his own conduct.<sup>68</sup>

Counselor Heber C. Kimball (1847) was the grandfather of President Spencer W. Kimball (12) and ordained as one of the original Twelve. Counselor Heber Kimball explicitly taught that Jesus Christ was begotten on earth by the same natural means as the Counselor himself was begotten. Since Kimball was presumably begotten by a sexual union between his earthly parents, it seems reasonable to assume that Kimball meant to teach that the Son was begotten by sexual union as well. Counselor Kimball made the following remarks at the Bowery in Great Salt Lake City on September 2, 1860:

In relation to the way in which I look upon the works of God and his creatures, I will say that I was naturally begotten; so was my father, and also my Saviour Jesus Christ. According to the Scriptures, he is the first begotten of his father in the flesh, and there was nothing unnatural about it.<sup>69</sup>

Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith (1910) also made several remarks on the origin of the Son of God in the mortal realm. These remarks are collected in a work compiled by Bruce R. McConkie entitled *Doctrines of Salvation*. He repeated the characteristic addition of the phrase “in the flesh” when he employed the term “only begotten.”<sup>70</sup> He wrote, “Our Father in heaven is the Father of Jesus Christ, both in the spirit and in the

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<sup>67</sup> Orson Pratt, “Celestial Marriage (October, 1853),” in *The Seer* (Washington, District of Columbia: Orson Pratt, 1853-1854), 159; facsimile republished in (Salt Lake City: Eugene Wagner, 1960), [brackets mine].

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>69</sup> Heber C. Kimball, “Remarks at the Bowery, September 2, 1860,” *JD*, 8:211.

<sup>70</sup> The reason for the addition of this prepositional phrase is, presumably, to account for the difference between all the other children of the Father begotten in the spirit in the first estate. The entire LDS program fails if Jesus Christ is absolutely the only begotten Son of the Father since the Church teaches that all humans in this universe of many worlds are begotten sons and daughters of the Father.

flesh. Our Savior is the Firstborn in the spirit, the Only Begotten in the flesh.”<sup>71</sup> Like Brigham Young, Smith also categorically denied that the Son was begotten of the Holy Ghost and Smith asserted that Christ was born with the aid of a man who was God. Joseph Fielding Smith said,

I believe firmly that Jesus Christ is the Only Begotten Son of God in the flesh. He taught this doctrine to his disciples. He did not teach them that he was the Son of the Holy Ghost, but the Son of the Father. Truly, all things are done by the *power* of the Holy Ghost. It was through this power that Jesus was brought into this world, but not as the Son of the Holy Ghost, but the Son of God. Jesus is greater than the Holy Spirit, which is subject unto him, but his Father is greater than he! He has said it. Christ was begotten of God. He was not born without the aid of Man, and *that Man was God!*<sup>72</sup>

While he denied that the Holy Ghost begat the Son, Joseph Fielding Smith asserted that Christ was conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost on the testimony of the *Book of Mormon*, and Luke 1:35. He also cited Matthew 1:18, but reinterpreted it in light of the *Book of Mormon* and Luke.<sup>73</sup> The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints based in Independence, Missouri rejects the LDS doctrine of the literal paternity of the Son of God. Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith (1910) affirmed Brigham Young and argued openly with the “Reorganites” on this front. He wrote,

“Reorganites” claim that Brigham Young went astray and apostatized because he declared that Jesus Christ was not begotten of the Holy Ghost. “Reorganites” claim that he was begotten of the Holy Ghost, and they make the statement that the scriptures so teach. But they do err not understanding the scriptures. They tell us the *Book of Mormon* states that Jesus was begotten of the Holy Ghost. I challenge the statement. The *Book of Mormon* teaches no such thing! Neither does the *Bible*. It is true there is one passage that states so, but we must consider it in the light of other passages with which it is in conflict.<sup>74</sup>

In this same way, Smith wrote,

If “Reorganites” are correct, then Jesus is not the Only Begotten Son of the Father, but the Son of the Holy Ghost. This will not do, for it conflicts with the scriptures. The Prophet taught that the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost were three separate personages, and that Jesus was the Only Begotten of the Father. In the Book of Genesis (*Inspired Version*), Jesus is spoken of throughout as *the Only Begotten of the Father* not less than 12 times, and in the *Book of Mormon* at least five times, and a great number of times in the *Doctrine and Covenants*; and in these scriptures he is

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<sup>71</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:18.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, [italics in original].

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:19.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

spoken of as the Son of God innumerable times. Now, if he is the *Only Begotten* of the Father in flesh, he must be the Son of the Father and not the Son of the Holy Ghost. Yet, to be consistent, “Reorganites” must claim that Jesus is the Son of the Holy Ghost and not the Son of God the Father. Their alternative—if it can be called such—must be, then, the stand of Mr. William H. Kelley, “president” of their “apostles.”<sup>75</sup>

Like Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith before him, Apostle Ezra Taft Benson (1943) appealed to the testimony of Matthew and Luke, preferring Luke’s account. He also appealed to 1 Nephi 11:15, 19-21.<sup>76</sup> On the basis of these passages Apostle Benson wrote,

Thus the testimonies of appointed witnesses leave no question as to the paternity of Jesus Christ. God was the Father of Jesus’ mortal tabernacle, and Mary, a mortal woman, was His mother. He is therefore the only person born who rightfully deserved the title “the *Only Begotten Son of God*.”<sup>77</sup>

Benson too, affirmed that Jesus Christ is the literal Son of God. He affirmed that the Father physically sired the body of Jesus. Benson also rejected the teaching that the Holy Ghost begat the Son. He claimed,

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints proclaims that Jesus Christ is the Son of God in the most literal sense. The body in which He performed His mission in the flesh was sired by that same Holy Being we worship as God, our Eternal Father. Jesus was not the son of Joseph, nor was He begotten by the Holy Ghost. He is the Son of the Eternal Father!<sup>78</sup>

Apostle Ezra Taft Benson (1943) suggested that the literal paternity of the mortal Son was a fundamental doctrine of genuine Christianity. It was his position that naturally minded persons could not comprehend the mystery of the birth of Christ in the mortal realm. He said,

The most fundamental doctrine of true Christianity is the divine birth of the child Jesus. This doctrine is not generally comprehended by the world. The paternity of Jesus Christ is one of the “mysteries of godliness” comprehended only by the spiritually-minded.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 1:19-20 [italics in original].

<sup>76</sup> See the text of these passages above.

<sup>77</sup> Ezra Taft Benson, *Come Unto Christ*, 3 [italics in original]; also in *Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson (TETB)*, 7.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 2; also in *TETB*, 6 [with inconsequential alterations].



Bruce R. McConkie apparently agreed with the above teachings made by Hyde, Orson Pratt and Heber Kimball more than one hundred years prior. McConkie, during his term on the First Council of the Seventy, taught that the Son of God was begotten in exactly the same way that all mortal men are begotten. He wrote,

Christ is the Only Begotten (Moses 1:6, 17, 21, 33; 2:1, 26-27; 3:18; 4:1), the Only Begotten Son (Jac. 4:5, 11; Alma 12:33-34; 13:5; D. & C. 20:21; 29:42; 49:5; 76:13, 25; John 1:18; 3:16), the Only Begotten of the Father. (Moses 5:9.) These name-titles all signify that our Lord is the only Son of the Father in the flesh. Each of the words is to be understood literally. Only means only; Begotten means begotten; and Son means son. Christ was begotten by an Immortal Father in the same way that mortal men are begotten by mortal fathers.<sup>80</sup>

McConkie repeated the affirmation of the physical parentage of the Son in the mortal realm. He claimed that the Son was conceived according to the “normal and natural course of events.” If McConkie did not intend to teach that the Son was conceived by means of a sexual union between the Father and Mary, it seems he would have made his objections explicitly clear, which he did not. He wrote,

God the Father is a perfected, glorified, holy Man, an immortal Personage. And Christ was born into the world as the literal Son of this Holy Being; he was born in the same personal, real, and literal sense that any mortal son is born to a mortal father. There is nothing figurative about his paternity; he was begotten, conceived and born in the normal and natural course of events, for he is the Son of God, and that designation means what it says. (1 Ne. 11.)<sup>81</sup>

Some LDS people are reluctant to accept this teaching of McConkie because *Mormon Doctrine*, his most popular work, was written before McConkie’s ordination as an Apostle of the Church. This objection is unwarranted, however, because McConkie made similar comments in works published after he was ordained as an Apostle in 1972. Apostle McConkie (1972) repeated his teaching on the sexual origin of the mortal Son in his 1973 volume of *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*. Concerning Hebrews 1:5, he wrote, “Begotten means begotten; it means Christ’s mortal body was procreated by an Eternal Sire; it means God is the Father of Christ, ‘after the manner of the flesh.’ (1 Ne. 11:18.)”<sup>82</sup> The above remark by Apostle McConkie is the only known use of the term “procreated” in reference to the earthly Son of God, although the sense of the term widely expressed by other LDS authorities.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 1966, 546-547.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 742.

<sup>82</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 3:141.

<sup>83</sup> A search for the term “procreated” in *Infobases CD-ROM* yielded no other results.

Apostle McConkie's teachings on the sexual origin of the mortal Son that are found in *Mormon Doctrine* (1966) are also repeated in *The Promised Messiah* (1978) and *The Mortal Messiah* (1979-1981). McConkie reaffirmed the sexual conception of the mortal Son in *The Promised Messiah*. He wrote, "The Father had a Son, a natural Son, his own literal Seed, the Offspring of his body."<sup>84</sup> He wrote,

And so it is with the Eternal Father and the mortal birth of the Eternal Son. The Father is a Father is a Father; he is not a spirit essence or nothingness to which the name Father is figuratively applied. And the Son is a Son is a Son; he is not some transient emanation from a divine essence, but a literal, living offspring of an actual Father. God is the Father; Christ is the Son. The one begat the other. Mary provided the womb from which the Spirit Jehovah came forth, tabernacled in clay, as all men are, to dwell among his fellow spirits whose births were brought to pass in like manner. There is no need to spiritualize away the plain meaning of the scriptures. There is nothing figurative or hidden or beyond comprehension in our Lord's coming into mortality. He is the Son of God in the same sense and way that we are the sons of mortal fathers. It is just that simple. Christ was born of Mary. He is the Son of God—the Only Begotten of the Father.<sup>85</sup>

The Apostle also wrote,

As far as this life is concerned, he [Jesus] was born of Mary and of Elohim; he came here as an offspring of that Holy Man who is literally our Father in heaven. He was born in mortality in the literal and full sense as the Son of God. He is the Son of his Father in the same sense that all mortals are the sons and daughters of their fathers.<sup>86</sup>

But if the Heavenly Father physically begat the earthly Son of God by sexual union with Mary, then what of Mary's virginity after the union? McConkie asserted that Mary's virginity after the conception of the mortal Son could still be properly affirmed because the father of the Son was an immortal Being. In other words, McConkie seemed to say, with Ezra Taft Benson, that Mary's virginity was not compromised in this unique case because of the special divine circumstances of the sexual union with Elohim. He wrote, "For our present purposes, suffice it to say that our Lord was born of a virgin, which is fitting and proper, and also natural, since the Father of the Child was an Immortal Being."<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah: The First Coming of Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1978), 355.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 468-469.

<sup>86</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, *Mortal Messiah*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1979), 1:330 [brackets mine].

<sup>87</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah*, 466.

In 1985, Apostle McConkie published *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith*. He reaffirmed here much of what he had already written about the sexual origin of the mortal Son of God in the second edition of *Mormon Doctrine*. He wrote,

All men (Christ included) were born as the sons of God in the spirit; one man (Christ only) was born as the Son of God in this mortal world. He is the Only Begotten in the flesh. God was his Father; Mary was his mother. His Father was an immortal man; his mother was a mortal woman. He is the Son of God in the same literal, full, and complete sense in which he is the son of Mary. There is nothing symbolic or figurative about it. He is God's Almighty Son and as such is distinguished from the Father in the same way any son is a separate person from his father.<sup>88</sup>

Apostle Harold B. Lee (1941) became the President of the Church in 1972. But, three years before taking up the mantle of the president of the Church, and before his assignment in the First Presidency, Lee made some unofficial remarks in an unpublished talk that discouraged teachers from explicitly asserting the sexual origin of the earthly Son. On January 2, 1969, Apostle Harold B. Lee said,

We are very much concerned that some of our Church teachers seem to be obsessed of the idea of teaching doctrine which cannot be substantiated and making comments beyond what the Lord has actually said.

You asked about . . . the birth of the Savior. Never have I talked about sexual intercourse between Deity and the mother of the Savior. If teachers were wise in speaking of this matter about which the Lord has said but very little, they would rest their discussion on this subject with merely the words which are recorded on this subject in Luke 1:34-35: "Then said Mary unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."

Remember that the being who was brought about by [Mary's] conception was a divine personage. We need not question His method to accomplish His purposes. Perhaps we would do well to remember the words of Isaiah 55:8-9: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

Let the Lord rest His case with this declaration and wait until He sees fit to tell us more.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, *A New Witness for the Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1985), 67-68 [parenthesis in original].

<sup>89</sup> Harold B. Lee, "Unpublished Talk, January 2, 1969," *The Teachings of Harold B. Lee*, edited by Clyde J. Williams (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996), 13-14 [ellipsis and brackets in Williams' edition].

Apostle Lee's unofficial statement above is evidence for the prominence of the doctrine that there was sexual intercourse between the Heavenly Father and the mother of the earthly Son of God. It seems appropriate to wonder why President Lee never made his position the official position of the Church after becoming president.

Non-Authoritative LDS Statements  
on the Origin of the Son of God  
in the Mortal Realm

In addition to the above remarks from the standard works and general authorities on the mortal origin of the Son of God, several non-authoritative LDS writers have also written on this topic. Carlfred B. Broderick asserted that God is a sexual being with sexual organs that he employed for the purpose of sexually procreating the mortal Son. He wrote, "Sexuality, far from being an antithesis of spirituality, is actually an attribute of God . . . [and] God is a procreating personage of flesh and bone, Latter-day prophets have made it clear that despite what it says in Matthew 1:20, the Holy Ghost was not the father of Jesus."<sup>90</sup>

All non-authoritative LDS writers, however, do not affirm the sexual origin of the Son of God. Two scholars from Brigham Young University strongly deny that the sexual origin of the Son of God is an official doctrine of the Church. They do so on the basis that official doctrines of the Church are only those that are explicitly taught in the standard works, or are officially sustained by the Church in general conference. This claim itself is a doctrine that does not meet its own test, however. Peterson and Ricks are defenders of the proposition that the Mormon Church can rightly claim Christian identity precisely because it *does not* officially teach, as charged, that the mortal Son of God was procreated physically by the Heavenly Father in sexual union with Mary. Peterson and Ricks wrote,

We will ignore the fact that these scattered nineteenth-century speculations were never canonized by the Mormon Church, and that no comparable statements occur in Latter-day Saint scripture. . . . While certain early Mormon leaders may occasionally have interpreted the concept of "virgin birth," they never for a moment suggested that Jesus was begotten by a mortal man, nor that his father was any other personage than God. . . . And for a denial, it cannot be repeated too often, that the Latter-day Saints have never accepted as official doctrine.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Carlfred B. Broderick, "Three Philosophies of Sex, Plus One," *Dialogue* 2:3 (Autumn 1967): 100-101. Lowell L. Bennion's objects to Broderick's unqualified attribution of sexuality to God. He wrote, "It may be true, but again it may not be," in "This—Worldly and Other—Worldly Sex: A Response," *Dialogue* 2:3 (Autumn 1967): 106.

<sup>91</sup> Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks, *Offenders for a Word*, 129-131.

All of the above assertions by Peterson and Ricks do not seem to be well founded in light of the evidence presented in the preceding pages of this chapter. It is correct that the standard works do not explicitly teach the sexual origin of the Son in the flesh, and it is also correct that the Church has never sustained the doctrine of the sexual origin of the Son in the flesh in a general conference. It does not appear correct, however, to say that this teaching was limited only to “scattered nineteenth century speculations.” Presidents Joseph F. Smith (6), Joseph Fielding Smith (10) and Ezra Taft Benson (13) were all twentieth century presidents. Additionally, Apostles Talmage, Romney, Ballard and McConkie were also twentieth century Apostles. Each of them seemed to affirm the sexual origin of the Son on earth, though arguably, some of them affirmed the teaching more strongly than others.

There is another troubling feature of the Peterson-Ricks defense for Mormon Christianity on the basis of its rejection of the sexual origin of the Son of God in the flesh. Why would the relative age of this doctrine impact its truthfulness? In other words, Peterson and Ricks seem to be saying that these teachings are not official or authoritative because they originated from nineteenth century prophets, which is a strange claim for devotees of a religion restored and crystallized in the nineteenth century.

There is also one other problem with the statement of Peterson and Ricks above. There are no known official statements by even one president that refute the teaching of the sexual origin of the Son in the flesh. Given the evidence, as established above, that this teaching was common among presidents and apostles from Joseph Smith to Bruce R. McConkie, why have there been no official declarations repudiating this teaching if it is so foreign to Mormon doctrine?

Peterson and Ricks are not alone on their position about the sexual origin of the Son in the flesh. Stephen E. Robinson, another prolific minimalist author, attempts to distance the Mormon Church from the doctrine in question. He wrote,

While it is true that certain LDS leaders (mostly in the nineteenth century) have offered their opinions on the conception of Jesus, those opinions were never included among the official doctrines of the church and have, during my lifetime at least, not appeared in official church publications—lest they be taken as the view of the church.<sup>92</sup>

Like the previous remark by Peterson and Ricks, the present statement is correct in some respects but not in others. Robinson, unlike Peterson and Ricks, acknowledges this teaching among twentieth century Mormon leaders, but he describes the remarks about the conception of the Son in the flesh as merely “opinions” of those leaders. The presidents and apostles who uttered them would not likely share the opinion that their

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<sup>92</sup> Stephen E. Robinson, *How Wide The Divide*, 135. To see the doctrine of the sexual origin of the mortal Son in an official church publication published during Robinson’s lifetime, see Apostle Melvin J. Ballard’s remarks in *TLDP*, 1986, 1:301 [see citations pp. 85-86 herein].

remarks were merely “opinions” with no force of authority. While some of them may have been more cautious than others, each of them taught these doctrines authoritatively.

Robinson not only rejects the claim that the Mormon Church teaches the sexual origin of the Son in the flesh, he states his own opinion on the matter and insists that his beliefs are representative of Mormons in general. Robinson opines that the Father is the source of half of the mortal Son’s chromosomes and he concedes that the Father caused Mary to become pregnant. He teaches that the Father was the cause of the Son’s “coming into biological existence.” He is unwilling, however, to concede that what took place was a sexual event. He wrote,

If Jesus was truly a *human* being, then he had forty-six chromosomes, a double strand of twenty-three. If he was truly human, he got one strand of twenty-three chromosomes from his mother. Where did the other strand come from, if not from his Father? I am not talking about a sexual conception . . . only a *divine* conception and a *divine* sonship. . . . There can be no doubt that Mary was pregnant and that God caused her pregnancy. . . . Exactly how God caused Mary to become pregnant is unknown . . . but *that* God did indeed cause her to become pregnant is in my view a fundamental belief of historic Christianity. If Evangelicals do not believe that God was the Father of the mortal Jesus, the cause of his coming into biological existence, then Latter-day Saints would have misgivings about Evangelicals being truly Christian!<sup>93</sup>

Robinson says that Latter-day Saints believe everything the Bible says on the virgin birth. He admits that some past LDS statements about the conception of the Son in the flesh have been “tasteless and indelicate,” but he does not identify to which LDS presidents or apostles, if any, he refers. He also likens those tasteless and indelicate statements to similar ones made by undisclosed persons of the medieval Roman Catholic Church in an apparent effort to win some sympathy. In other words, Robinson seems to suggest that evangelicals should overlook past LDS doctrinal errors on this topic on the grounds that some medieval Christians erred as well. Evangelicals are not, however, encumbered by the same LDS doctrine of living prophets and continuing revelation, a distinction that seems to be lost on Robinson. He wrote,

In regard to the virgin birth, Latter-day Saints believe everything that the Bible has to say on the subject. However, the Bible has less to say on this subject than many seem to wish it did. Certainly the gynecological expositions of the medieval church are as extrabiblical as they are tasteless and indelicate. Unfortunately, popular speculations on the LDS side have sometimes also been tasteless and indelicate.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 139. Robinson repeats this claim that twenty-three of Jesus’ chromosomes came from the Father in a videotape interview, *The Mormon Puzzle* (Alpharetta, Georgia: North American Mission Board, Southern Baptist Convention, 1977).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 135.

Robinson also claims that the following four statements are “official” Mormon doctrines. He makes this claim even though he has no official basis for doing so. All of these statements cannot be found, as stated, in the standard works. It also cannot be established that the Church has sustained all of these statements, as stated, in a general conference.

1. Mary was a pure virgin (Alma 7:10; 1 Nephi 11:13-20).
2. Mary was in some unspecified manner made pregnant by God the Father, through the power of the Holy Ghost (Lk. 1:32-25), “not in violation of natural law but in accordance with the higher manifestation thereof” [Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 1915, p. 81]. Hence Jesus is not a metaphorical Son, but a *begotten* Son.
3. Jesus of Nazareth, the offspring of the divine conception, is in his biological being the son of a mortal mother, Mary, and a divine father, God. Jesus is not the son of the Holy Ghost, but of the Father through the Holy Ghost. Jesus’ divine paternity was necessary in order for him to have power over death and therefore to accomplish his saving mission (Jn. :26; 10:17-18) and perform his atoning sacrifice. Only one with the power to live could truly die voluntarily.
4. The exact details of how Jesus’ conception was accomplished have not been revealed, either in the Bible or in modern revelation.<sup>95</sup>

One non-authoritative LDS source even posed that the Son of God was not human, because of Elohim’s direct role in the Son’s mortal conception. Richard D. Draper, assistant professor of ancient Scriptures at Brigham Young University, posed that the Father sired the mortal Son in the same manner as all babies are sired. Draper also affirmed that the mortal Son was not a member of the human family—the family of Adam. He wrote,

While in mortality the Savior was not man, not human. . . . He was not man (as distinct from male) because he did not receive his physical life, as all others do, through Adam. . . . The point is that although Jesus was born after “the manner of the flesh,” the way all babies are born, his father was not a son of Adam, but the Father of Adam, God.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Richard D. Draper, “The Mortal Ministry of the Saviour as Understood by the Book of Mormon Prophets,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2:1 (Spring 1993); available at [http://www.farmsresearch.com/member/library/archives/jbms/2\\_1/draper.html](http://www.farmsresearch.com/member/library/archives/jbms/2_1/draper.html); accessed September 25, 2000.

This view lends some internal consistency to LDS Christology, but it has some serious consequences for the evangelical doctrine of substitutionary atonement. For, what is not assumed by the Son cannot be saved.<sup>97</sup>

### Summary of Distinctive LDS Doctrines on the Origin of the Son of God in the Mortal Realm

The following propositions are derived from statements by LDS authorities on the origin of the Son of God in the mortal realm. These propositions are my own attempt to state succinctly and systematically what the above descriptive research seems to indicate about distinctive authoritative LDS teachings on this topic. These propositions are stated in this fashion in order to place these LDS doctrines in the context of evangelical christological propositions.

#### Derived LDS Propositions of the Incarnate Mortal Origin of the Son

- 1:23. All incarnate mortals, including the Son of God, are *sired* in the same manner as all offspring are sired in every context--by the *sexual union* of a male and a female.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> See Gregory of Nazianzen on Apollinarianism in "Letter 101," *Patrologia Graeca*, compiled by J. P. Migne, 37.177B-180A; 181C-184A; translated into English and compiled by Alister E. McGrath, *The Christian Theology Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 141-142.

<sup>98</sup> The use of the term "sired" in these derived propositions and elsewhere in this study is consistent with both authoritative and non-authoritative LDS usages. Counselor Harold B. Lee said, "He was our Heavenly Father; we were sired by Him," in "Utah State University Fireside Address (October 10, 1971)," *The Teachings of Harold B. Lee*, 23 (C3). BYU professor, Rodney Turner, wrote, "God's first creative act as a Father was to sire his Firstborn and Only Begotten Son," in "The Doctrine of the Firstborn and Only Begotten," *Pearl of Great Price: A History and Commentary*, edited by H. Donl Peterson (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1987), 94 [italics in original]. The terms "Sire," "eternal Sire," "exalted Sire" or "immortal Sire" are used to identify the Heavenly Father by Apostle James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 22, 81, 418 (C3); Apostle Bruce R. McConkie, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, 1:487, 3:138, 141 (C4); *The Promised Messiah*, 9 (C4); *The Mortal Messiah*, 1:319; Robert L. Millet, "The Natural Man: An Enemy to God," *Book of Mormon Symposium Series: Mosiah, Salvation Only Through Christ*, edited by Paul R. Cheesman, Monte S. Nyman, and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1988-1995), 151; "Adam in Eden: The Creation," *The Man Adam*, edited by Joseph Fielding McConkie and Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990), 12; and Joseph Fielding McConkie, Robert L. Millet, and Brent L. Top, *Doctrinal Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987-1992), 2:230, 3:66, 89. The verb "sired" is also used to describe the action of the Heavenly Father which resulted in the premortal birth of all the premortal offspring of God, or the mortal birth of the Son of God by Apostle Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah*, 229 (C4); *The Mortal Messiah*, 1:282, 313, 330 (C4); Apostle Ezra Taft Benson, *Come Unto*



- 1:24. The Son of God was sired in such a manner that a corporeal God (Elohim) caused the pregnancy of Mary so that the incarnate mortal Son of God possessed the *biological substance of both Elohim and Mary*.
- 1:25. The Son of God was sired in the same manner as all offspring are sired in every context--by the *sexual union* of a male (Elohim) and a female (Mary).
- 1:26. The Son of God is the *only incarnate mortal offspring of God*. Therefore, the Son God enjoys a unique status as the only incarnate mortal offspring of God.
- 1:27. The Son of God was *born on April 6, 1 B.C.*