

# "Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee": Understanding the Christ of the Restoration and the Reformation

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## Introduction

Lutherans pray much like members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints do. When my mother and father taught me how to pray as a child, they clearly championed a Father in Heaven who not only would listen to my prayers, in the name of Jesus, but who was a person not unlike my earthly father—only more divine. Years later, this childhood-ingrained concept was challenged during my theological studies as I learned about the inscrutable theology of the Godhead as set forth by the ecumenical creeds and statements of church councils. But answers to two watershed prayers during these painful years reaffirmed to me that my Heavenly Father had not forsaken me,<sup>1</sup> and they encouraged me to continue my search for truth.

Continue I did, but I began to resent being trained to be an ecclesiastical politician or an esoteric mini-theologian when I simply wanted to be a pastor of my own flock.<sup>2</sup> Far too many of the theologians and professors teaching me were so concerned about examining the details and looking beyond the theological mark that they could not see the big picture. They missed the general message of salvation, even though they were proficient in higher criticism and historical and literary analysis. I found that I could not deal with obscurantism or any -ism like it. And my spiritual sensitivities rebelled at the authority some ministers arrogated to themselves.

My pain was very much like that of Serapion, the fourth-century monk who became a victim of the Anthropomorphite-Origenist controversy<sup>3</sup> (which grappled with the nature of the Godhead without the benefit of revelation).

A certain Serapion, a man so old and accomplished in so many virtues, ... when he realized that the anthropomorphic image of the Godhead which he had always pictured to himself while praying had been banished from his heart ... suddenly broke into the bitterest tears and heavy sobbing and, throwing himself to the ground with a loud groan, cried out: "Woe is me, wretch that I am! They have taken my God from me, and I have no one to lay hold of, nor do I know whom I should adore or address."<sup>4</sup>

As I became increasingly uncomfortable with these nonbiblical interpretations concerning my Heavenly Father, which as a pastor I would later have to preach to congregations as truth, I also began to question the nature and person of Christ. Like many other seekers throughout history, I naively and desperately sought the truth in practice, as well as in belief, when it came to my spiritual life. So I read Martin Luther's works for further wisdom, while getting insights from my favorite "watchdog" theologians like C. S. Lewis and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Ultimately, I lost patience and took the same risk Joseph Smith did: I asked of God.<sup>5</sup>

A few years after my conversion to the Church of Jesus Christ, I had become increasingly intrigued by Joseph Smith's comment that he considered Luther's translation of the Bible to be better than the King James Version in some particulars.<sup>6</sup> I even wondered if Joseph would have found it necessary to inquire about the true church if a Lutheran congregation had been available to him, for even after thirty years in the Church of Jesus Christ, I realize that the most important teaching of all, the atonement of Jesus Christ—to which everything else is an appendage<sup>7</sup>—is nearly identical in the doctrines of the Lutheran Church and the Church of Jesus Christ. I vividly recall the only question a concerned and loving Pastor Heine asked me when he learned that I had joined "the Mormons": "Gary,

do you still believe that Jesus Christ died for your sins and rose again?" When I happily responded in the affirmative, he replied, "That is good enough for me!" Would that all ministers had been so trusting of me.<sup>8</sup>

In any case, Martin Luther and Joseph Smith were my spiritual heroes. I now found myself thinking about them together, wondering what their conversations were like and how they might see us today. Lest it seem too far-fetched and speculative, I have transformed this "spirit-world" conversation into this essay and have attempted to use the facts to show how Martin Luther and Joseph Smith had the same yearnings to discover the nature of God and how both were successful in heightening our understanding of true Christianity and the nature of Jesus Christ. I will reveal much more about Martin Luther than Joseph Smith, simply because the Latter-day Saints already understand much about Joseph Smith. Moreover, I will discuss more similarities than differences, with the hope that we will all become more charitable and tolerant toward our brothers and sisters of different faiths.

## Christology

**Who is Jesus Christ, and what is our proper relationship to him and our Heavenly Father? To more fully understand the true nature of Jesus Christ, it is important to comprehend the true nature of the Godhead, especially of our Heavenly Father. Owing mostly to my background as both a Lutheran and a Latter-day Saint, I believe that few religious leaders in the past have depicted the true nature of the Godhead more accurately than did Martin Luther and Joseph Smith.**

*Christology* is the term commonly used to identify the theological study of the human and divine natures and roles of Jesus Christ. It developed soon after the deaths of the apostles in the first century a.d. when conflicting teachings arose among early church scholars and leaders who felt that they possessed the true understanding of Christ. Christology became both a response to heresies concerning the person and work of the Messiah, as well as a systematic theology that all orthodox Christians could accept as containing true teachings concerning their Redeemer. Eventually these teachings were discussed in councils and set forth in creeds at Nicea (A.D. 325), Constantinople (A.D. 381), and Chalcedon (a.d. 451). These creeds insisted on a full communion of Christ's divine and human natures, as opposed to those teachings that he was either divine or human, or partly the one and partly the other.<sup>9</sup> In the minds of many Christians today, "Christology, the doctrine concerning God's revelation in Christ and the salvation wrought through Christ, constitutes the core of Christian theology and belongs to the centre of the church's proclamation."<sup>10</sup> Others insist that "the christological task is to get Jesus into language."<sup>11</sup> This makes the understanding of Christ a semantic problem. But most of us do not need the words: we *feel* the who and what of Christ.

The Church of Jesus Christ, quite fortunately and miraculously, has a distinctive understanding of God derived from its commitment that Jesus Christ reveals both what God is and what humans can become. Latter-day Saint belief that divinity is fully mature humanity allows the church to avoid the most intractable logical problems confronting Christology.<sup>12</sup> Yet our Christian brothers and sisters ignore thoughts about the deification of human beings. Second Peter 1:4 and Psalm 82:6 speak of deification, and the ante-Nicene fathers also had much to say about it. Most of the following quotations are found in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (hereafter ANF):<sup>13</sup>

- "It must be that thou, at the outset, shouldest hold the rank of a man, and then afterwards partake of the glory of God." Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.39.2 (ca. 180, ANF 1:523).
- "They see that from Him there began the union of the divine with the human nature, in order that the human, by communion with the divine, might rise to be divine, not in Jesus alone, but in all those who not only believe, but enter upon the life which Jesus taught." Origen, *Against Celsus* 3.28 (ca. 248, ANF 4:475).

- “We have learned that those only are deified who have lived near to God in holiness and virtue.” Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 21 (ca. 160, ANF 1:170).
- “How shall man pass into God, unless God has [first] passed into man?” Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.33.4 (ca. 180, ANF 1:507).
- “Our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, so that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself.” Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* preface to book 5 (ca. 180, ANF 1:526).
- “Being baptized, we are illuminated; illuminated, we become sons; being made sons, we are made perfect; being made perfect, we are made immortal. ‘I,’ says He, ‘have said that ye are gods, and all sons of the Highest.’” Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 1.6 (ca. 195, ANF 2:215).
- “The Gnostic [man of God] is consequently divine, and already holy, God-bearing, and God-borne.” Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 7.13 (ca. 192, ANF 2:547).
- “It is He alone who can make gods.” Tertullian, *Against Hermogenes* 5 (ca. 200, ANF 3:480).
- “What man is, Christ was willing to be, that man also may be what Christ is. ... What Christ is, we Christians shall be, if we imitate Christ.” Cyprian, *The Treatises of Cyprian* 6.11, 15 (ca. 250, ANF 5:468, 469).
- Origen: “There is a well of living water in each of us, and it is ‘a kind of heavenly perception and latent image of God.’”<sup>14</sup>

Why do many of our Protestant and Catholic brothers and sisters think contrary to these teachings? To believe in the deification of man would, in their eyes, lessen the inscrutability, majesty, and mystery of God the Father and make obsolete the doctrine of the Trinity as set forth in the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds.<sup>15</sup> In short, mainstream Christianity holds fast to tradition every bit as much as orthodox Jews do as portrayed by Tevye and his friends in *Fiddler on the Roof*.

### Martin Luther

Martin Luther was a product of these councils and creeds and especially of the theology of Augustine, which stressed original sin and total depravity. But Augustine was also the founder of Luther’s order, the Augustinians. Thus, Luther was mostly in harmony with the classical Christology of the ancient church and of the early church fathers, championing what Holsten Fagerberg, in his study of the Lutheran confessions, characterizes as “an assumption Christology.”<sup>16</sup> Like many theologians before him, Luther could not conceive of the possibility that man could be raised to the level of godhood, so ingrained in him were Augustine’s teachings about the utter depravity of man. It was much easier for the Savior to assume humanity and become like us. Accordingly, a simple theology of man and God being in the same image deteriorated into a doctrine wherein God and Christ are entirely different from man.

As Luther matured, he became increasingly confused and nervous about the true nature of God and sought answers through his extensive theological training and from his teachers and mentors. He even began to discount the doctrine of transubstantiation,<sup>17</sup> using words similar to our own Latter-day Saint scholars when they discuss the apostasy: “What is our response,” he said, “when Aristotle, and the doctrines of men, are made the arbiters of these very sublime and divine things?”<sup>18</sup> Gradually, Luther weaned himself from some of the “doctrines of men” and submitted to the words of the New Testament. He began to understand the potential divinity of all human life and the reality of a loving and gracious Father in Heaven, instead of viewing him as a judge ready to consign humanity to hell for their depravity.

If you have a true faith that Christ is your Saviour, then at once you have a gracious God, for faith leads you in and opens up God’s heart and will, that you should see pure grace and overflowing love. This it is to behold God in faith that you should look upon his *fatherly*, friendly heart, in which there is no anger nor

ungraciousness. He who sees God as angry does not see him rightly but looks only on a curtain, as if a dark cloud had been drawn across his face.<sup>19</sup>

Is Luther's God the God of the creeds and councils? I do not think so. *Fatherly* is not an adjective a believer assigns to a philosophical construct who has no body, parts, or passions. Once Luther had come to a more correct understanding of his relationship to his Heavenly Father, it was much easier for him to come closer to a loving association with Jesus Christ. This quotation from his best-known work, *The Freedom of a Christian* (1520), is a prime example: "Christ has made it possible for us, provided we believe in him, to be not only his brethren, co-heirs, and fellow-kings, but also his fellow-priests. Therefore we may boldly come into the presence of God in the spirit of faith (Heb. 10:19, 22)."<sup>20</sup> This statement is very clear, but we can ponder why Luther did not follow his own advice to come into the presence of God in faith. What were his prayers like? Would he have thought it presumptuous to ask God himself about truth? Or were his prayers strictly liturgical, meditative, or worshipful?

Throughout his writings, Luther insists that God comes to us, not we to him. Thus, it seems likely that his answers came passively from his scripture reading, considerable education, meditation, and reason, and actively from pressures from German princes, Roman prelates, and faithful followers who insisted on immediate answers. Luther had looked forward to a "quiet life of scholarship and study." Instead, he was "plunged ... into an ecclesiastical and political whirlpool."<sup>21</sup> Unlike a naive and unlearned Joseph Smith, Luther seemed to pay no attention to James 1:5, possibly because he dismissed the book of James as "an epistle of straw."<sup>22</sup> I am intrigued as I wonder what Luther would have said of Joseph's faith-in-action use of the "epistle of straw" to invoke the restoration.

Although Luther did not believe that God's word could be revealed directly to him (except through the scriptures), he nevertheless received what I am tempted to call a secondary revelation. He characterizes it in slightly different words, however. Compare this thought of Luther to Moroni 10:4-5:

Not through thought, wisdom, and will does the faith of Christ arise in us, but through an incomprehensible and hidden operation of the Spirit, which is given by faith in Christ only at the hearing of the Word and without any other work of ours. ... No one is taught through much reading and thinking. There is a much higher school where one learns God's Word. One must go into the wilderness.<sup>23</sup>

His German translation of the Bible and his many fine sermons and writings, as well as the words he wrote to many hymns, are witness to what I consider to have been the divine inspiration and guidance he received. Here is an example from one of his hymns:

Thus spoke the Son, "Hold thou to me, From now on thou wilt make it. I gave my very life for thee And for thee I will stake it. For I am thine and thou art mine, And where I am our lives entwine, The Old Fiend cannot shake it."<sup>24</sup>

These words speak of a closeness to and a love for Christ that is encouraged among all Christians. As if to continue the conversation from the hymn, Luther also writes:

Now continue and rise beyond Christ's heart to God's heart and you will see that Christ would not have shown this love for you if God in his eternal love had not wanted this, for Christ's love for you is due to his obedience to God. Thus you will find the divine and kind paternal heart, and, as Christ says, you will be

drawn to the Father through him. Then you will understand the words of Christ, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, etc.” (John 3:16). We know God aright when we grasp him not in his might or wisdom ... but in his kindness and love.<sup>25</sup>

Luther not only knew his Savior, but he knew that “those who thus make Christ’s life and name a part of their own lives are true Christians.”<sup>26</sup> In “A Brief Instruction on What to Look For and Expect in the Gospels,” he adds more specific counsel: “Now when you have Christ as the foundation and chief blessing of your salvation, then the other part follows: that you take him as your example, giving yourself in service to your neighbor just as you see that Christ has given himself for you.”<sup>27</sup>

The same sentiment is repeated in other sermons and writings. In “Freedom of a Christian,” he writes: “We conclude, therefore, that a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor.”<sup>28</sup> Luther adds further testimony by reaffirming two truths with which we as Latter-day Saints are familiar: “The inner man, who by faith is created in the image of God, is both joyful and happy because of Christ in whom so many benefits are conferred upon him; and therefore it is his one occupation to serve God joyfully and without thought of gain, in love that is not constrained.”<sup>29</sup> Finally, “Death is swallowed up not only in the victory of Christ but also by *our* victory, because through faith his victory has become ours and in that faith we also are conquerors.”<sup>30</sup>

### What Martin Luther Did Not Reform

Why did Luther not go further? People in the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries were still reticent to call upon Deity for answers to their more important questions. The authority of tradition in the Roman Catholic Church still held sway in people’s minds when it came to matters of the Godhead. Luther would certainly have been burned at the stake for questioning such matters. It is for that reason that his Ninety-five Theses dealt with secondary spiritual matters like indulgences. Had he lived in our own day, his theses would probably have contained more about the nature of the Godhead and of man, of heaven and hell. Luther was not only meek, in the beginning, but cautious. And he was only looking for reform from *within* the Catholic Church. In his own words: “I have sought nothing beyond reforming the Church in conformity with the Holy Scriptures.”<sup>31</sup> A further elaboration reveals Luther’s heart and soul more than anything else he has written. This is Luther’s response to the papal bull of excommunication, *Exsurge Domine*, found in his *Grund und Ursach aller Artickel*, published in Wittenberg by Melchior Lotter in 1521.<sup>32</sup> The Diet of Worms, which resulted in Luther’s excommunication, took place on 6 January 1521.

I have not pushed myself forward at all. If I could follow my own inclinations, I would always prefer to crawl back into my little corner. But my opponents have drawn me out again and again by craft and violence in order to acquire credit and honour by attacking me. Now that their game is falling through, my ambition is supposed to be the cause of everything. But, in the second place, even if they were right and I had really set myself up as a teacher, could God not have called and raised me up for this purpose? Do we not read that he usually raised up only *one* prophet from among his people, and never from the upper classes, but generally humble, despised individuals, even common herdsmen. ... I do not say that I am a prophet. I simply say that they will have to be afraid of this as long as they scorn me and heed themselves. ... If I am not a prophet I am at least sure of this, that the Word of God is with me, and not with them, for I have the Scriptures on my side while they have only their own teachings. ... But do I not preach a new doctrine? No. I simply say that Christianity has ceased to exist among those who should have preserved it – the bishops and scholars. ... I do not repudiate the Church Fathers. But like all men, they, too, have erred at times. Consequently I believe them only in so far as they can prove their teachings from the Scriptures, which have never erred.<sup>33</sup>

What is remarkable about these words is that Joseph Smith could have said the same thing. And today, in a new millennium, some Lutherans continue to call Martin Luther a prophet!

Heavenly Father was aware of the spiritual unpreparedness of the people in Luther's day. He knew they were not ready for the earth-shaking revelations and pronouncements that Joseph Smith would bring forth in the early nineteenth century. According to Roland Bainton, one of Luther's biographers, "Luther for himself had had absolutely no experience of any contemporary revelation, and in times of despondency the advice to rely upon the spirit was for him a counsel of despair, since within he could find only utter blackness."<sup>34</sup> I believe that he would have obeyed a heavenly manifestation had one taken place. As it was, Luther's forays into truth were dangerous enough; witness the wars and politics that accompanied the Reformation and Counter-Reformation.

Fortunately, Luther left the door to the future slightly ajar: "Nor can a Christian believer be forced beyond the sacred Scriptures, ... unless some new and proved revelation should be added; for we are forbidden by divine law to believe except what is proved either through the divine Scriptures or through manifest revelation."<sup>35</sup> Several questions immediately entered my mind as I read this interesting remark: How would this "new" revelation be proven? What would Luther accept as truth? How *else* could such a revelation be made manifest unless through God himself? And, if so, to whom on earth would it be manifested?

Hidden within Luther's writings and sermons are additional evidences that he was thinking of the more important matters and had opened some doors for someone else to enter and explore at a later time. In the words of A. Burt Horsley, "If we regard the Restoration as the fulfillment of a spiritual awakening process, the dawn of which appeared in the hour of the Reformation, then the Reformation becomes even more significant. It was not *disconnected* from the Restoration, but rather the preliminary phase of it."<sup>36</sup>

We also know that Luther's early theology was at odds with the councils and creeds, especially the doctrine of the Trinity. Toward the end of Luther's life, fellow reformer and successor Philip Melanchthon set him straight, as it were, and the changes in Luther's theology at the end of his life were reflected in the Schmalkald Articles. These articles were his theological will and testament and reflected traditional Christianity instead of what other theologians had earlier considered "confused." Luther scholar William R. Russell, building on a discussion by Edmund Schlink, describes what happened:

Luther's theological priorities as expressed in [the Schmalkald Articles] would clearly seem to reveal at the outset a commitment to the classical creedal and theological traditions of the church catholic. However, interpreters of Luther have not always agreed about the genuineness of this commitment. Some scholars have concluded that Luther understood the Trinity in a way that was not really in keeping with the classical Christian tradition. Adolf von Harnack, for example, saw "no bridge" from Luther's interpretation of justification by faith to the Trinity and in the end, Luther's interpretation of the Trinity was an "unspeakable confusion," with modalistic tendencies. Karl Thieme argued with von Harnack but then discovered a "naive Ditheism" and "Tritheism" in Luther's writings—or at least Thieme expressed a concern that the reformer's doctrine inferred such polytheism.<sup>37</sup>

Interestingly, these same arguments have been directed toward the Latter-day Saint theology of the Godhead.

Other researchers have concluded that Luther was not fully convinced of the veracity of the statements of faith in the creeds. Albrecht Ritschl, for instance, asserted that "Luther (and Melanchthon too, for that matter) adhered to the doctrine of the Trinity as a matter of strategic convenience, because it was required by the Justinian Code of

the empire.”<sup>38</sup> This code was promulgated by the Emperor Justinian in A.D. 529<sup>39</sup> and made trinitarian orthodoxy mandatory in the empire. Still in effect in Luther’s time a millennium later, it was therefore a “political” theology that bound Luther to stay away from the higher theological issues. If Joseph Smith were to be known as nothing else, he should be known as the man who broke the bonds of the Justinian Code—thirteen centuries later—by restoring the correct teachings concerning the Godhead and our true relationship to Christ and Heavenly Father.

Finally, from the very beginning of the Reformation, Luther claimed in number thirty-seven of his Ninety-five Theses: “Any true Christian whatsoever, living or dead, participates in all the benefits of Christ and the Church.”<sup>40</sup> If any statement is more obviously a harbinger of the restoration of temple work for the dead, I do not know what it is. Reading these words in this seminal work made me wonder what other prerestoration doctrines could be found within the amazing theology of Luther. If anything impresses me about his writings, it is not that Luther was wrong but that he was on the right track and simply did not go far enough. He desperately wanted to, and I am sure that Heavenly Father felt that Luther was a willing servant: it simply was not time yet. It appears that he had chosen and foreordained Luther to be the forerunner of plain and precious truths, not the restorer.<sup>41</sup>

### Joseph Smith

**If Augustine tampered with Paul, and Luther with both Augustine and Paul, then reformers like John Calvin, Huldrych Zwingli, John Wesley, and others who sprouted up after Luther were influenced by Luther, Augustine, and Paul, instead of going directly to the source. Joseph Smith brought an end to the tampering, borrowing, and political theologizing that such men created by the light of their own understanding. Joseph was no educated theologian like the men above. He was a child: naive, meek, teachable, open-minded, uneducated, and curious. He wanted direct and truthful answers no man could give him, so with his childlike faith he took the words of the apostle James at their face value and asked God directly. Like Martin Luther, he was sensitive enough to the Spirit to recognize that there needed to be a change. But, unlike Luther, being among a more tolerant political and cultural climate made it possible for Joseph to receive additional truths—even though he later suffered a martyr’s death, like Jan Hus, for preaching doctrines that seemed heretical and blasphemous to some Americans in the 1830s and 1840s. For theologians to learn from a mere boy that “The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s” (D&C 130:22) was to these learned men the height of falsehood, impertinence, ignorance, and blasphemy.**

Fortunately, Joseph Smith’s teachings were built on a foundation that did not differ from mainstream Christianity. To Joseph, Jesus Christ was still our Savior and Redeemer, our Mediator between God and man, our Advocate with the Father, the Judge of all mankind, and the Life and Light of the world. Thanks to the grace and goodness of God, the marvel of the atonement has always been taught—even throughout the dark centuries of the great apostasy. But Joseph restored the understanding of our *true* relationship to Christ and Heavenly Father by showing that we are divine sons and daughters who are sinners because we have broken the divine law and cannot embrace it fully again without the Savior’s atonement.<sup>42</sup>

As a part of the restoration, Joseph Smith sought to restore additional principles of knowledge about the Savior. Foremost, he taught that the Jehovah of the Old Testament is none other than Jesus Christ. In a letter delivered from Kirtland to the brethren scattered from Zion (22 January 1834), Joseph Smith wrote: “Whenever the Lord revealed Himself to men in ancient days, and commanded them to offer sacrifice to Him, it was done that they might look forward in faith to the time of His coming, and rely upon the power of that atonement for a remission of their sins.”<sup>43</sup>

If Martin Luther had studied the Old Testament and the book of Hebrews more carefully, he might have realized this for himself, but he had as little use for the book of Hebrews as he had for that of James, Jude, and Revelation.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, he would have learned that the term *Elohim* included Jehovah as Creator, who helped God the Father create the world. In the words of Origen, one of the early church fathers: “The *immediate* Creator,

and, as it were, very Maker of the world was the Word, the Son of God; while the Father of the Word, by commanding His own Son—the Word—to create the world, is *primarily* Creator.”<sup>45</sup>

Additionally, Joseph Smith learned that Jesus Christ presides as the God of this world (see D&C 39:1–4) and the father of those who are spiritually reborn (see D&C 25:1; 11:28–30). He is our Father because he “descended in suffering below that which man can suffer; or, in other words, he suffered greater sufferings, and was exposed to more powerful contradictions than any man can be.”<sup>46</sup> “None were ever perfect but Jesus, and why was he perfect? Because he was the Son of God, and had the fulness of the Spirit, and greater power than any man.”<sup>47</sup> These statements and many others show forth the glory and majesty of the truth of the restoration of the gospel. When I studied Martin Luther’s arguments, I felt (and still feel) words of powerful reason and sensitivity. But when I read the inspired words of Joseph Smith, I feel authority and divine empowerment through God. Every Latter-day Saint should become familiar with the sublime teachings of Joseph Smith through his first vision (see Joseph Smith—History 1), his *Lectures on Faith* (especially lecture 5), his King Follett discourse (given on 7 April 1844),<sup>48</sup> and his sermon given at a meeting in the grove east of the Nauvoo Temple on 16 June 1844.<sup>49</sup> These are the most well-known explications of Joseph’s Christology and doctrine of the Godhead.

### Conclusion

Like Martin Luther, Joseph Smith, and Serapion, we all have the right to “lay hold of” our Heavenly Father and to receive revelation from the original source. Many of us are grateful that we have had searching prayers like Luther’s, for the words of his Small Catechism show that he relied on the Spirit: “I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in true faith.”<sup>50</sup> But we are even more thankful that our answers were like Joseph’s: “When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—*This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!*” (Joseph Smith—History 1:17, emphasis in original). This clear and irrevocable response demonstrates that the Lord himself will not only change humanity’s understanding of the Godhead but restore a correct understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Luther may have preached the “priesthood of all believers” and Christian liberty, but Joseph Smith taught that revelation through the Holy Ghost was possible for all believers. History shows that neither Joseph Smith nor Martin Luther sought to begin a new church. In the beginning, all either wanted was enough truth to make him free, salvation from his sins, and knowledge of the real God.

### Notes

1. Winfield, Kansas, at St. John’s College, October 1962, and Kendallville, Indiana, at St. John Lutheran Church, July 1968. The former preceded my January 1963 auto accident and near-death experience. The latter led to my conversion to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

2. For example, John, a fellow college classmate, was forced to cease his studies for the ministry because he could not master New Testament Greek, but he would have made a very fine minister. Four years later, a professor told my parents that, while I was not very bright, I would nevertheless make a good minister. Where were the priorities?

3. Anthropomorphites believe that God the Father has a physical body like a man. Origen was an Alexandrian theologian who lived from a.d. 185 to 254. His most controversial beliefs were his concepts of the premortal existence of humans and the temporary character of the body. See Henry R. Saften, “Origenism,” in *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. James D. Douglas (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1978), 734.

4. Tim Vivian, trans., “Coptic Palladinana I: The Life of Pambo,” *Coptic Church Review* 20/3 (1999): 78.



5. My conversion story is recounted in volume 2 of Hartman Rector Jr. and Connie Rector, eds., *No More Strangers* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1973), 145–58.
6. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1950), 6:307, 364.
7. See *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, comp. Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 121.
8. Other ministers have roundly and intolerantly condemned me, threatened me with excommunication, or literally knocked the breath out of me with a well-placed fist in my stomach.
9. See Raymond E. Brown, “Christology,” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1990), and John Hick, “An Inspiration Christology for a Religiously Plural World,” in *Encountering Jesus: A Debate on Christology*, ed. Stephen T. Davis (Atlanta: Knox, 1988), 5–22, cited in Gary P. Gillum, “Christology,” in *The Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:272.
10. Martin Hengel, *Studies in Early Christology* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1995), vii.
11. William P. Loewe, *The College Student’s Introduction to Christology* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1996), 202.
12. Blake T. Ostler, “A Mormon Christology,” 1; manuscript in my possession.
13. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (1885; reprint, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994); see David W. Bercot, ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1998), 199–201.
14. *Homélies sur la Genèse*, trans. Louis Doutreleau, in *Sources chrétiennes* 7 (Paris: ditions du Cerf, 1976), 287–91, quoted in Patricia C. Miller, “Dreams in Patristic Literature: Divine Sense or Pagan Nonsense?” *Studia Patristica* 18/2 (1989): 187.
15. Latter-day Saints, after all, believe in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and hence in a trinity in that sense. The mainstream Christian Trinity, however, is defined as the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost being one substance in three persons.
16. Holsten Fagerberg, *A New Look at the Lutheran Confessions (1529– 1537)*, trans. Gene J. Lund (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972), 117.
17. Transubstantiation is the doctrine that the bread and wine of the Eucharist are changed into the body and blood of Christ.
18. Martin Luther, “Against Transubstantiation,” in *Readings in Christian Thought*, ed. Hugh T. Kerr (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), 149.
19. Quoted in Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Abingdon, 1950), 65, emphasis added.

20. Martin Luther, "Freedom and Service," in Kerr, *Readings in Christian Thought*, 151.
21. Kerr, *Readings in Christian Thought*, 140.
22. Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 331.
23. *Ibid.*, 224.
24. *Ibid.*, 66. This hymn verse may be sung to the melody of Luther's "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." However, the original German words lend themselves more easily to the meter of the tune.
25. Martin Luther, "A Meditation on Christ's Passion," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 171.
26. *Ibid.*, 172.
27. Martin Luther, "A Brief Instruction on What to Look For and Expect in the Gospels," in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, 107.
28. Martin Luther, "Freedom of a Christian," in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, ed. John Dillenberger (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961), 80; also in Luther, "Freedom and Service," 154.
29. Luther, "Freedom and Service," 152–53.
30. Luther, "Freedom of a Christian," 66, emphasis added.
31. Quoted in Ernest G. Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times: The Reformation from a New Perspective* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1950), 509.
32. Original manuscripts of these forty-one articles written against the Roman Catholic Church are found in the vault of the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University.
33. Quoted in John M. Todd, *Martin Luther* (Westminster, Md.: Newman, 1965), 188.
34. Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 261.
35. Rheinhold Seeberg, *Text-Book of the History of Doctrines*, trans. Charles E. Hay (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1952), 2:290. Latin text from *D. Martin Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Weimar: Böhlau, 1966), 2:279: "Nec potest fidelis Christianus cogi ultra sacram scripturam, que est proprie ius divinum, nisi accesserit nova et probata revelatio: immo ex iure divino prohibemur credere nisi quod sit probatum vel per scripturam divinam vel per manifestam revelationem" (Hora secunda continuata est disputatio eadem 5. die Iulii [in Leipzig], 1519).
36. A. Burt Horsley, "Martin Luther," in *Martin Luther: Two Essays by De Lamar Jensen and A. Burt Horsley* (Provo, Utah: BYU Department of History, 1984), 26–27, emphasis added.

37. William R. Russell, *Luther's Theological Testament: The Schmalkald Articles* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 61. Russell refers to the discussion by Edmund Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1961), 62 n. 16.
38. Russell, *Luther's Theological Testament*, 61; see Schlink, *Theology of the Lutheran Confessions*, 62 n. 16.
39. Robert G. Clouse, "Justinian Code," in *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 558.
40. Quoted in *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings*, 494.
41. One of the greatest evidences of Luther's closeness to the truth is the inspiration he provided for Johann Sebastian Bach and his eternal music of the celestial spheres, always composed "to the Glory of God."
42. "Through the atonement of Christ and the resurrection and obedience in the Gospel, we shall again be conformed to the image of [God's] Son, Jesus Christ. Then we shall have attained to the image, glory, and character of God." *The Words of Joseph Smith*, comp. and ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980), 231, punctuation altered for readability. Joseph Smith even recognizes the difference between *anthropomorphism* and *theomorphism* in the following thought from his *Lectures on Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), lecture 5:2 (p. 59): "The Son, who was in the bosom of the Father, [is] a personage of tabernacle, made or fashioned like unto man, or being in the form and likeness of man, or *rather man was formed after his likeness and in his image*" (emphasis added). Obviously, this modern revelation confirms that the Anthropomorphist-Originist controversy was misdirected; see note 4, above.
43. *History of the Church*, 2:17.
44. Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 332.
45. Origen, *Against Celsus* 6.60 (ANF 4:601, emphasis added).
46. Smith, *Lectures on Faith*, 59.
47. *Words of Joseph Smith*, 72.
48. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 342–62; see Joseph Smith, "Sermon Delivered April 7, 1844," in *American Sermons: The Pilgrims to Martin Luther King Jr.*, selected by Michael Warner (New York: Library of America, 1999), 584–99.
49. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 369–76.
50. Third Article on Sanctification, in *Dr. Martin Luther's Small Catechism* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1943), 11.