

structures of other Christian groups lack divine sanction. Many traditional Christians see this stance as placing Latter-day Saints outside the Christian family as defined by some confessions of faith and accepted ordinances.

Further, Latter-day Saints claim that God spoke and manifested himself not only to persons of biblical times, but also to the people in the Book of Mormon, and that he continues to speak to his people through REVELATION today. Thus, Latter-day Saints are not always viewed as “biblical Christians,” when that term requires the belief that the canon of scripture is complete in the Bible. To the Mormons, God is still a God of continuing revelation, which means that credal and confessional statements are not final. No one confession, or even all of them together, can fully comprehend the dynamism of God. He is to be heard and his words are to be recorded as he gives continuing divine guidance through revelation. Hence, the LDS canon is open; the Doctrine and Covenants becomes an official, open-ended locus for revelations that affect the whole Church; and revelations continue to come to the living prophets, seers, and revelators of the Church, to be communicated to the members.

Latter-day Saints hold that Christians in the broadest sense are those who base their beliefs on the teachings of Jesus and who have a personal relationship with him. Within that definition they recognize Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Protestant, and Latter-day Saint Christians, with the understanding that Latter-day Saint Christianity is the restored fulness of Christ’s gospel. The lives of Latter-day Saints are their affirmations of their Christian faith. As President Brigham YOUNG stated, “If we are not Christlike we are not Christian” (Watson).

Traditional Christianity often defines Christian affiliation as the acceptance of certain beliefs and dogmas. Because Latter-day Saints do not accept certain extrascriptural dogmas—especially those bearing the philosophical overlay of much post–New Testament Christian teaching—some in other churches feel that Latter-day Saints cannot be Christian. They are not “orthodox” in this sense. But for the Mormon, right beliefs (orthodoxy) and right behaviors (orthopraxy) are those congruent with the revealed mind and will of the Lord. Some of the misunderstandings between traditional communities and the Latter-day Saints arise from this issue: whether Christians must first believe traditional, especially credal, dogmas in order to live “correct Christian lives.”

An inclusive definition of Latter-day Saint Christianity is in the Book of Mormon: “And we talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that our children may know to what source they may look for a remission of their sins” (2 Ne. 25:26). Christ and his atoning sacrifice have been the undergirding message of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from its inception. Christ has been the central message of all the latter-day PROPHETS and APOSTLES. They understand that Old Testament prophets anticipated him, New Testament apostles preached and testified of him, Book of Mormon prophets heralded him, and the Doctrine and Covenants presents his word to this generation. Jesus Christ is the living Lord of the Church. Apart from him there is no salvation.

President Spencer W. KIMBALL said, “There can be no real and true Christianity, even with good works, unless we are deeply and personally committed to the reality of Jesus Christ as the Only Begotten Son of the Father who bought us, who purchased us in the great act of atonement” (Kimball, p. 68). He also expressed the hope that all would come to realize that every LDS prayer, hymn, and sermon is centered in the Lord Jesus Christ. “We are true followers of Jesus Christ; and we hope the world will finally come to the conclusion that we are Christians, if there are any in the world” (Kimball, p. 434).

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CHRISTMAS

Christmas is the holiday when Latter-day Saints and other Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. This epochal event, seen in vision by ancient prophets, heralded the entry into mortality of the Son of God, the JEHOVAH of the Old Testa-

ment, and the promised Messiah. Even though Latter-day Saints believe that the birth of Jesus actually occurred in the spring of the year (D&C 20:1; *see* APRIL 6), they observe the December celebration when, more than at any other time of year, the Christian world unites in remembering Christ's birth and practicing his teachings of love, charity, self-sacrifice, and tolerance.

Most Latter-day Saints include some of the traditions, games, decorations, music, and food associated with the Christmas customs of their homelands in their family celebrations. Such items as Christmas trees, stockings, gifts, and greeting cards add to the beauty of the holiday and are not discouraged. But the recommended focus is religious. The Church encourages family closeness, concern for neighbors, thoughtfulness for fellow workers, renewal of friendships, and acts of Christ-like love, giving, and celebration. Appropriate sermons, lessons, songs, and programs are presented in Sabbath services during the Christmas season. Latter-day Saints are cautioned that holiday shopping, decorating, and festivities should not obscure the remembrance of Christ nor hinder the quest for peace on earth.

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CHRISTOLOGY

Christology is the theological study of the human and divine natures and roles of Jesus Christ.

It developed soon after the death of the apostles in the first century, as conflicting teachings arose over the proper understanding of Christ. Christology served both as a response to heresies and as a development of a systematic theology that orthodox Christians could accept. Eventually these teachings were discussed in councils and formulated into CREEDS, for instance, at Nicaea (A.D. 325), Constantinople (A.D. 381), and Chalcedon (A.D. 451). These creeds insisted upon a full communion of Christ's divine and human natures, as opposed to the teaching that he was either divine or human, or part one and part the other. In every sense, the councils concluded, Christ is God and of the same substance (*homoousios*).

Various Christologies competed in the early Christian church. Docetists taught that Jesus Christ only seemed to suffer on the cross, since he only appeared to have a body. Modalists taught that there is only one God in three modes; Arianism, that there are three persons united in purpose. Nestorianism insisted upon two separate wills in a dyadic unity, while Apollonarianism taught that Jesus' human body was inhabited by a divine soul.

Over the years, others have insisted that Jesus Christ is merely the ideal man for humanity, since Jesus often called himself "the Son of man." They have felt that he seldom drew attention to his divinity, as Albert Schweitzer argues in his famous *Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1911).

Some modern Lutheran theologians believe that Jesus was not simultaneously on the earth as a human and in heaven as God. Under this view, Jesus was divine in the PREEXISTENCE but gave up his godly status and divine properties, except moral attributes, and took upon himself flesh and became a man. This is called the "kenotic" theory.

John Hick, a British philosopher-theologian, feels that Christianity should return to the earliest Christology, the "grace" theory, which teaches that Christ was transformed into a being sharing the divine properties by being infused with his Father's grace.

Although the term "Christology" is not frequently used by Latter-day Saints, the doctrine of the Church can be described in the following manner: Jesus Christ descended from his high pre-existent station as a God when he came to earth to die for mankind's sins (*see* JESUS CHRIST: FIRST BORN IN THE SPIRIT; CONDESCENSION OF GOD). He was JEHOVAH come to earth in a physical body as the Only Begotten of the Father in the flesh (*see* JESUS CHRIST: ONLY BEGOTTEN IN THE FLESH). While on earth he was still God, but he received from his Father "grace for grace," as do God's other children (D&C 93:12; *see* JESUS CHRIST: MINISTRY OF). The Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants speak forcefully of the divine sonship of Christ and also of his humanity (Mosiah 15:2–3; Alma 6:8; 11:38; 13:16; 34:2; 3 Ne. 11:7, 28:10; D&C 93; *see* JESUS CHRIST, FATHERHOOD AND SONSHIP).

Like Jesus Christ, all mortals live in a state of humiliation, but through the mediation of the Christ they may progress to a state of EXALTATION (*see* DEIFICATION; GODHOOD). There is no ultimate