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**NOT TO TEACH ANY DIFFERENT DOCTRINE:
EXAMINING THE DOCTRINES OF THE EARLY LATTER-DAY
SAINTS MOVEMENT AND THE CHURCH FATHERS**

by

Jacob D. Hayden

**Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree**

of

University Honors

in

**Religious Studies
in the Department of History**

Approved:

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Abstract:

Explanations of the nature of humanity, God, and the purpose of life have a direct influence on the daily lives of the adherents of a given religious tradition. In the early third century, Origen of Alexandria proposed doctrines of preexistence, subordinationism, and *theosis*, which were dismissed in the early Church to various degrees. Some sixteen hundred years later, members of the upstart Latter-day Saints movement, such as Orson Pratt, would maintain strikingly similar positions about the nature of the soul, the godhead, and the final cause of humanity. These concepts represent essential aspects of the worldviews of these traditions; so why and how do they arise in such different times and contexts?

Both Origen and Pratt expounded the idea that each human soul existed before its physical birth, and that during its preexistent life, it acted with free will; these actions have an influence on the physical life of the incarnate soul. The two men also argued that, within the godhead, the person of the Son derives his authority and power from the Father in such a way that the Son is not coequal with the Father. Finally, both men maintained that the ultimate goal of human existence is to become like God, through a process of learning and purification, in this life and the next.

This essay, however, through examination of the immediate contexts of the two authors, makes the case that the opinions expressed by Origen and Pratt are, in some ways, demonstrably distinct. In studying how these ideas differ, underlying values of ancient Christians and early Mormons can be discussed, allowing the observer to gain a greater understanding of the major concepts which motivate adherents of these traditions. These include the underlying concept of material-naturalism in Mormonism, and the importance of reason and knowledge within some forms of Christianity.

As regards the similarities, the study argues that there is no need for a direct connection between these two thinkers, either natural or supernatural. Rather, these common ideas appear throughout Christian history due to common themes found in Christian scripture and to constant problems of the human condition, with which all religious thinkers must contend. Additionally, these doctrines serve functional purposes, such as the legitimizing concept of the preexistent soul, which are useful for these traditions to maintain.

A Note on the Citation of Sources:

When *De Principiis* is quoted in the original language, it is from John Behr's recent (2017) working edition from Oxford University Press. All other quotations of Origen are from earlier editions published as part of *Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller* (1899 – 1959) or the *Patrologia Graeca*. Quotations of other ancient authors are, for the sake of accessibility, from their respective editions in the Loeb Classical Library published by Harvard University Press. Translations are by the author unless otherwise stated.

Those sources from the Latter-day Saints movement, which were later declared to be canon, are cited both by the page number from their original edition and also by the shorthand used in modern editions of LDS scriptures (e.g. 1 Ne. 1:1). Where the editions differ, quotations are from the earliest edition. Citations of non-canonical writings are from the first published edition, unless otherwise stated.

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Introduction:

Around the turn of the third century of the common era, Origen of Alexandria, the prolific Greek theologian of the pre-Nicene Christian Church, set about writing his great work of speculative theology, *Περὶ Ἀρχῶν* (that is, *On First Principles*, often known by its Latin title, *De Principiis*). In this work, Origen set forth his views of the preexistence of the soul, of the subordination of the Son to the Father, and of the final cause of humankind, which is to become like God.

Nearly sixteen-hundred years later, Orson Pratt, of Hartford, New York, joined Joseph Smith's burgeoning Church of Christ. Taking his cues from the Mormon prophet, Pratt began his own project of speculative theology, which he laid out in a series of pamphlets, tracts, and a short-lived periodical, the *Seer*. In his works, he advanced the position that the lives of human beings were influenced by the faith and actions of a preexistent life, that the Son was inherently separate from and subordinate to the Father, and that human beings could one day become like God the Father, and that this was God's plan for humankind.

Why and how do two authors, separated by centuries of evolution of the Christian tradition, independently come to such similar, heterodox conclusions about the nature of humanity, God, and general existence, ideas which are not simply abstract concepts, unrelated to the everyday lives of the members of these traditions?

This essay argues that no natural or supernatural connection is necessary for these positions to be held by these authors. These common conclusions are natural results of religious persons wrestling with the problems of the human condition, and of Christians wrestling with Christian scripture and tradition. Furthermore, these doctrines have functional purposes, such as

the legitimizing force of the concept of the preexistent soul, and as such, they are useful tools for religious communities, which directly influence the daily lives of followers.¹

These three ideas are controversial answers to central questions in Christianity. The notion of the preexistence is that human beings existed, in some form (usually spiritual), before their current lives. This assertion attempts to explain where life comes from, why humans exist, and why there is suffering and inequality in the world.

The second point addresses the question of the relationship between Jesus Christ and God the Father. Subordinationism is a Christological position which says that Jesus, however he is defined, is not equal to God the Father, that he derives his power and authority from the Father, and that he is second in glory to the Father. This is an essential question for religious groups which often declare that the achievement of the ultimate goal of human existence (humanity's *telos*) is based on proper understanding of God and the world (orthodoxy).

The final concept tries to define the purpose and goal of human life. Both Origen of Alexandria and Orson Pratt espouse a belief which can be labeled variously as “deification,” “exaltation” or “*theosis*.” Broadly speaking, both Pratt and Origen describe a process of sanctification through which human beings become like God.

It must be qualified that these doctrines are not completely identical. There are variances between how Origen and Pratt viewed the world. These differences point to the distinct contexts of the two authors. Origen was deeply embedded in the Greek philosophical tradition, as well as the tradition of the Church as it had evolved in its pre-creedal form. Pratt came from the context

¹ It must also be noted that these are not the only two authors who write on these topics. See, for example, Terryl L. Givens, *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-Mortal Existence in Western Thought*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2010), which details various western views of the preexistence of the soul which developed over time.

of American Restorationism, typified by the Second Great Awakening. These distinctions point to important, underlying values which also influence the lives of members of these traditions.

This essay will proceed by describing and discussing each point of doctrine in turn. It will first introduce the context and content of Origen's version, followed by Pratt's, with comparisons throughout, and a discussion of the function of the concept where fitting. Before discussing the individual points of doctrine, however, an introduction to these authors is necessary.

Origen was born around 185 – 186 C.E. in Alexandria, in what is now Egypt, some sixty years after the last canonical gospel had been composed. Accounts of his life are recorded by Gregory, Pamphilius, and Eusebius, though each record presents problems to the historian. He was given an education in both Greek and Hebrew, and grew up in a Christian household, being raised by a father who would undergo martyrdom when his son was around seventeen. Origen became a grammar teacher, and then a catechistic instructor as well. Origen was expelled from Alexandria around 233 and died in Caesarea around 255.²

The philosophical and theological context of Origen's writings has been contested from the beginning: within a century of his death, other Christians were decrying that he was overly Hellenizing Christianity, profaning the orthodoxy with Greek thought.³ Famously, the Latin theologians Jerome and Rufinius contended over Origen's orthodoxy, with Rufinius defending Origen, declaring that examples from Origen's writings which were clearly heterodox were "... *inserta ea ab aliis et adulterata...*"⁴

² See Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, transl. A. S. Worrall, San Francisco: Harper and Row (1989) for a complete biography and discussion of Origen's life.

³ Mark Julian Edwards, *Origen against Plato*, Aldershot, UK: Ashgate (2002), 2.

⁴ Rufinius, Preface to Book Three, *De Principiis*. "...inserted and altered by others..."

Modern scholars largely defend the position that Origen was influenced by Platonism and other Greek philosophies during his life.⁵ However, this view has been attacked in Mark Julian Edwards' monograph *Origen against Plato*. Edwards argues that Origen, while he shares common vocabulary with the Greek philosophers, he was not a Platonist.⁶ Edwards makes a point to demonstrate the Christian basis for Origen's writings. He also makes a convincing argument that Origen cannot be titled a Platonist simply because he happened to live in Alexandria at the same time as Plotinus. However, Edwards' argument breaks down where he seems to insist that Origen is either a Platonist or a Christian. Many authors have successfully counterargued that Origen could have been both a devout Christian and a developer of Platonic thought.⁷

Origen is not placed in a Platonic context simply because both authors wrote in Greek: Origen is read in the context of Plato because his work rings of Platonic language, imagery, and ideas.⁸ Take, as an example, a passage in the first chapter of *De Principiis*, where Origen compares someone trying to perceive God to someone who cannot bear to look at the light of a small lamp, and thus cannot imagine the brilliance of the light of the sun.⁹ Compare this with Plato's famous Allegory of the Cave found in Book VII of *The Republic*, in which one of the men from the cave is allowed to see first the light of a fire, which pains him, and then the light of the sun, which blinds him at first, until he finally adjusts.¹⁰ Likewise, when Origen addresses the

⁵ See Geza Vermes, *Christian Beginnings*; Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity*; Balthasar, *Origen – Spirit and Fire*.

⁶ Edwards, *Origen against Plato*, 9.

⁷ See Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol.1, Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1971), 48.

⁸ Origen is most often classified as a "Middle Platonist." He is the older contemporary of Plotinus, who is the first Neoplatonist. This is probably not a classification with which Origen himself would have been concerned, and because Origen writes during a period of transition, it is less important to categorize him and more important to understand the categories he stands in relationship to.

⁹ Origen, *De Principiis* 1.1.5.

¹⁰ Plato, *Republic* 515c – 516b.

concept of justice, he does so by arguing against the view that justice is nothing more than doing evil to one's enemies and good to one's friends – the same position which Plato rejects in *The Republic*.¹¹

Platonic idealism, another theme from *The Republic*, deserves discussion here. In Platonic thought, the physical world is an imperfect reflection of those things which are truly real, in immaterial Forms (*ιδεα*). While Rufinius' translation of *De Principiis* denies the existence of the realm of the Forms which Plato discusses, Origen nevertheless must be seen as an idealist and not a materialist. Origen insists that God is both the ground of being and immaterial. The ultimate reality (God) is not made of matter, so matter is not an essential part of reality.¹² In fact, Origen states that, in the context of scripture, spirit is the opposite of body, and so when the Gospel of John says, "God is spirit," it denies the notion that God has a body.¹³ Thus, for Origen, there is both incorporeal existence (i.e. God) and corporeal existence (i.e. creation).¹⁴ As will be shown, this stands in direct contrast to what Orson Pratt will espouse centuries later.

It is important to remember also that Origen was a biblical scholar of high caliber; after all, he might be called the first textual critic of the Bible for his massive accomplishment of textual comparison, the *Hexapla*. Origen does not accept Platonic concepts without consultation of scripture: he bases his discussion on the transmigration of souls in Isaiah 14: 12 – 22,¹⁵ and his doctrine of universal salvation is largely based on 1 Corinthians 15.¹⁶ Origen begins his discussion of the preexistent soul with biblical passages which support the notion, such as

¹¹ Origen, *De Principiis* 2.5.1; Plato, *Republic* 332d.

¹² Origen, *De Principiis* 1.1.1 – 1.1.2.

¹³ Origen, *De Principiis* 1.1.2, quoting John 4:24. See also *De Oratione* XXIII.3, where Origen refers to the notion that God has a body as a "δόγματα ἀσεβέστατα," i.e. "a most unholy dogma."

¹⁴ Origen, *De Oratione* XXVII.9.

¹⁵ Origen, *De Principiis* 1.5.5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.6.1.

Jeremiah 1:5 and Romans 9:11-13¹⁷ His concept of the *theosis* of human beings, for lack of a better word, is likewise based on a (mystic) reading of *Song of Songs*.¹⁸ It may thus be said that Origen is Christianizing Greek thought just as much as he is Hellenizing Christian thought.

Accepting then, that Origen was a thoroughly Christian writer who blended philosophy and theology to create a complete picture of his world, it is worth noting that the issue of Origen's orthodoxy, so important to theologians and past scholars, is of no importance to the religious scholar or to this study. Whether or not Origen's concepts matched what later Christians declared to be "right belief" is irrelevant to this study. It is not necessary to make Origen orthodox in order to make him a valid subject of study; it is precisely because he is so controversial, and at the same time influential, that he continues to be of interest to the historian.

Orson Pratt, on the other hand, came from a much different Christian background. The Latter-day Saints Movement founded by Joseph Smith, Jr., came into existence during that period of American history dominated by the revivals and social changes of the Second Great Awakening (approximately 1790 – 1850). Spiritual "seekers" sought out a denominational identity among the diversity of revivalist denominations.¹⁹ The plentitude of denominations and new religious movement almost certainly resulted in choice fatigue for many individuals, an experience Joseph Smith himself reports having.²⁰

Orson Pratt was born into similar circumstances as Smith. He was born in 1811, in Hartford, New York, to a large family. In 1830, his brother, the more famous Parley Pratt, converted to Smith's church. Orson followed his brother's example, joining the church in its first

¹⁷ Ibid., 1.7.4; 2.9.7

¹⁸ Origen, *First Homily on the Song of Songs* 10.

¹⁹ Leonard J. Arrington, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints*, New York: Vintage (1980), 3 – 4.

²⁰ Joseph Smith, et al., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* 1:3.

year.²¹ Smith's new church styled itself as *the* restoration of the original Christian church, which had been corrupted in the time since Jesus of Nazareth's death.

This "return to origins" narrative, a common tool for religious reformers, casts Smith's innovative ideas as restorations of the original message of Christianity.²² Some Mormon apologists have pointed to doctrines such as the preexistent soul, the subordination of the Son, and the process of deification as proof of this restoration.²³ While this explanation is suitable for the believer, it is not useful to the scholar, due to the fact that these concepts, while similar, are developed in two fundamentally different contexts.

It is important to note also that Pratt himself did not necessarily share this opinion that the records of the early Christian leaders reflect Mormon positions. Pratt states that a "great apostasy," beginning in the first century of the Common Era, was total and complete "after the second century."²⁴ For Pratt, then, Christian writings after the New Testament would not have been of value, because even at the close of the first century, only seven churches (those to whom the Book of Revelations is addressed) were considered worthy to receive divine instruction.²⁵

In 1835, Pratt was selected to become one of the first members of the "Quorum of the Twelve Apostles," and would, upon his death, be the last member of the original Quorum. Pratt would have been made President of the Church after Brigham Young's death, except for the fact that he was excommunicated from the church briefly (from the middle of 1842 to the beginning of 1843), after he denied the practice of polygamy. He later became a staunch supporter and

²¹ See Givens and Grow, *Parley Pratt*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2011).

²² For a brief discussion of the "return to origins" myth, see Craig Martin, *A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religions*, London: Routledge (2014), 121 – 122.

²³ See, for example, Michael T. Griffith, *One Lord, One Faith: Writings of the Early Church Fathers as Evidence of the Resoration*, Bountiful, UT: Horizon Publishers (1996). Griffith specifically mentions Origen when he addresses the preexistence of the soul.

²⁴ Pratt, *Tracts*, 102.

²⁵ *Ibid.* The commonly accepted scholarly dates for the authorship of the New Testament, such as 120 CE for the Gospel of John, would not have been accepted by Pratt.

defender of the practice. After the death of Joseph Smith, Pratt became the first Mormon to enter the Salt Lake Valley (1847). Pratt was then sent to London and later to Washington, D.C., as leader of the English-speaking Mormons outside of Deseret. This period, from 1851 - 1856, was perhaps his most prolific in terms of apologetic writings, during which he published *The Seer*, as well as many of his *Pamphlets* and *Tracts*. Throughout the period after Joseph Smith's death, Pratt found himself constantly at odds ideologically with Brigham Young.²⁶ Pratt died in 1881.²⁷

One important concept from that 1851 - 1856 period which Pratt addresses is that of materialism. In a revelation late in his life, Joseph Smith wrote that there is no such thing as immaterial existence.²⁸ Pratt took this concept and expanded it in two pamphlets, *Absurdities of Immaterialism* and *The Great First Cause*, arguing for an "atomistic materialism," to complement Latter-day Saint doctrine.²⁹ Pratt said that all being is material in nature, including spirit.³⁰ All beings are made of matter, and occupy time and space by necessity.³¹ For Pratt, "Immateriality is representative of nothing... therefore such a substance does not and cannot exist."³² Pratt also argued against the concept of *creatio ex nihilo*, stating that God crafted the world from co-eternal elements.³³ Furthermore, God must necessarily have a body composed of parts, as, "A being without parts must be entirely powerless, and can perform no miracles."³⁴ For

²⁶ Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press (1986), 207.

²⁷ For a complete discussion of Pratt's life, see England, *Life and Thought of Orson Pratt*: Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press (1985).

²⁸ D&C 131:7 - 8.

²⁹ Sterling M. McMurrin, *The Philosophical Foundations of Mormon Theology*, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press (1959), 30.

³⁰ Orson Pratt, *Absurdities of Immaterialism*, 1; 3.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Orson Pratt, *The Great First Cause*, 2 - 3.

³⁴ *Absurdities*, 12.

Pratt, God must have a physical body in order to exercise miraculous power, which are a necessary component of divinity.³⁵

These are important to note, as they are key in understanding Pratt's theology, and they represent essential differences with early Christians. The early (gentile) Christian writers, Origen and Augustine of Hippo being excellent examples, were largely Platonists, adopting wholeheartedly the view that the material world is only a reflection of true reality, that is, of God, who is ultimately immaterial.³⁶ Origen denounced every argument that God has a physical body, or can be thought of in a physical way, for God is "*incomprehensibilem... atque inaestimabilem.*"³⁷ Instead, God is simple (i.e. has no parts), with no need for a body. He is *μονάς*, or even *ένάς*.³⁸ Whereas Pratt argued that God must have a body to function, Origen argued the exact opposite: for God to be God, he cannot have a body or parts, which would limit his power.³⁹

From this, the reader may already observe the dissimilarities between Orson Pratt and Origen, for all their similarities which will be observed later. These distinctions are largely due to a reaction by Pratt and his contemporaries against the predominant views of earlier Christianities, which had been influenced by the worldview which the Church Fathers presented in the early years of church. These distinctions can be traced back to the Enlightenment period, which emphasized rational arguments over the complex theologies which Enlightenment thinkers thought to be irrational. A major sign of this was the abandonment of the traditional creeds by the new denominations which formed at this time.⁴⁰ Smith and Pratt both rejected the concept of

³⁵ See Orson Pratt, "Necessity of Miracles," in *Tracts by Orson Pratt*.

³⁶ See Augustine, *Confessiones* 1.2, 9.10.

³⁷ Origen, *De Principiis* 1.1.5. "[God is] incomprehensible and inestimable."

³⁸ Origen, *De Principiis* 1.1.6. "Unity" and "Oneness." See Behr, *On First Principles*, 31, note 23.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Leonard J. Arrington, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints*, New York: Vintage Books (1980), 24.

the Trinity, maintaining that Jesus and God the Father are two separate beings.⁴¹ The period was characterized by feeling among the uneducated that the “learned” did not have the truth, and that a return to “common sense” ideas was necessary.⁴² Such differences continue to be important points of separation between mainline Christians and Latter-day Saints. Throughout this essay, these points of conflict which are pointed out will be as important, if not more important, than the similarities.

The three concepts which this essay will explore are integrally related to each other in the works of both authors. It is helpful to begin with the doctrine of the preexistent soul, which leads into the discussion of subordinationism and the role of Jesus, which then concludes in the concept of deification. All of these are related to questions which directly influence the practitioners of religion: where human beings think that they come from and where they think that they are going is integral to their understanding of how to live life.

⁴¹ *History of the Church* 6:474.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 26.

The Preexistent Soul:

Origen's concept of the preexistence of the soul before the current life is one of his most difficult ideas to work out. One reason for this is because Rufinius is at odds with all other testimonies of *De Principiis* regarding the role of the body: Rufinius' version describes how souls will always have a body in some form, while the text presented by Jerome and Justinian argues that bodily nature will one day be "dissolved," and that the soul does not have need for the body.⁴³ Modern scholars, such as Behr, have begun to side with Rufinius, though some still follow a more critical reading of Rufinius' translation.⁴⁴ Behr's persuasive reading is that Origen separates the "properties and qualities" of the body from the matter itself – thus, while the matter of a body without a doubt dissolves upon death, the properties which are embodied by the material body are transformed into a spiritual body.⁴⁵

Regardless, whatever his belief about the connection between the body and the soul, Origen clearly expressed the view that the soul had an existence prior to the current one, in which it acted in good and bad ways, and earned merit for its next life.

Plato's discussions of the immortality of the soul are a starting place for discussion. *Republic* Book X includes such a discussion, the "Myth of Er," which describes the journey which Er takes in the world of the dead. Er sees the souls (*ψυχαι*) of men being judged for their deeds, and the souls of men of prior generations being reborn into new lives of their own choosing.⁴⁶ Human souls experience a cycle of lives, with the actions and decisions of the past life influencing the next life. Er reports that the soul of the Greek hero Odysseus, for example,

⁴³ Compare Rufinius' translation of *De Principiis* 2.3.3 to Jerome *Ep.* 124.5.5 and the portion of Justinian *Ep. ad Menam*, which Koetschau included in his critical text as Fragment 19.

⁴⁴ Pelikan (1971), following a passage from the *Contra Celsum*, thinks that Origen's discussion of the body which exists forever along with the soul should be taken as an analogy for an essential principle held by the body which always exists with the soul. Pelikan, *Christian Tradition*, vol. 1, 48.

⁴⁵ See Behr's introduction to his edition to *On First Principles*: Behr, *On First Principles*, liv.

⁴⁶ Plato, *Republic* 614c – 617e.

having experienced such turmoil in his last life due to hubris, chose a life of no renown for his next incarnation.⁴⁷ In the *Phaedo*, Plato's Socrates highlights the fact that the soul may be separated from the body.⁴⁸ This is not even a tragedy, but an escape from the "prison" (*φορορά*) of the body.⁴⁹ This release is a blessing to humans, who may, in death, see and understand the true form of things, while in life it is possible "...to know nothing perfectly."⁵⁰

Plato and Origen both began their discussions of the existence of the soul with a discussion of what happens to the soul after death. Plato did this by describing what happens to the mythic character of Er after his pseudo-death. Origen argued that the beginning must be like the end, and since he understood the Bible to describe the end, he thought that he might use the description of the end to understand the beginning.⁵¹

In the beginning, then, "*omnes animae atque omnes rationabiles naturae factae sunt vel creatae...*"⁵² They were created by God, through the Word, and were "*incorporeae*" by nature.⁵³ Because God is just and fair, all souls and beings were created absolutely equal: the diversity of the universe that human beings now observe is the result of those beings falling "*...ab illa initii unitate atque concordia, in qua a deo primitus procreati sunt...*"⁵⁴ The souls are given reason by the action of the Word (see below) and are thus able to make choices, for which they are accountable.⁵⁵ The souls then descended away from God, due to their own desires and movements.⁵⁶ The souls constantly have bodies in some form, but that form changes depending

⁴⁷ Ibid., 620c – 620d.

⁴⁸ Plato, *Phaedo* 64c.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 62b.

⁵⁰ "...μηδὲν καθαρῶς γινῶναι..." Ibid., 66e.

⁵¹ Origen, *De Principiis* 1.6.2.

⁵² Origen, *De Principiis* 1.7.1 "...all souls and rational natures were made or created..."

⁵³ Ibid. Behr, in his note on this passage, says "Although souls and rational beings are 'bodiless' in themselves, Origen is emphatic that they never exist without a body." See Behr, *On First Principles*, 121, note 3.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 2.1.1 "[falling] ... from that initial unity and concord in which they were first created forth by God..."

⁵⁵ Ibid., 3.1.3

⁵⁶ Ibid., 2.1.2

on their position relative to others: those souls which fell away from God less have more glorious bodies than others.⁵⁷

These souls then go about living life in the way that they desire. Those who live well store up merit for themselves, which God, being the God of justice, rewards in later lives. Origen derives this view from the story of Jacob and Esau. Jacob is chosen before his birth to one day supplant his elder brother. For Origen, this is not just of God, unless Jacob, in a previous life, earned God's love from his merits.⁵⁸ By doing good things and exercising faith, souls may receive more glorious births in the next life, up until the consummation of the world.⁵⁹

Joseph Smith lays out a very similar view of preexistence in his *Book of Abraham*, which presents a vision of the foundation of the world given to the biblical patriarch Abraham:

Now the Lord had shewn unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was; and among all these there were many of the noble and great ones; and God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said These I will make my rulers... and he said unto me, Abraham, thou art one of them, thou wast chosen before thou wast born.⁶⁰

In both cases, the starting point of the argument is from the biblical "calling" of great patriarchs, and in both cases, it is the prior actions of a soul which make them worthy of the station which they find themselves in when they are born into the current world.

Orson Pratt developed his view of the soul from Joseph Smith's teachings, which he defended through his interpretation of the Bible. Pratt did not see Smith's revelations as a new invention, but as complementary and continuous with the Bible. One may observe this in the

⁵⁷ Ibid., 2.2.2; 2.3.2

⁵⁸ Ibid., 2.9.7; see also 1.7.4

⁵⁹ Ibid., 1.6.3

⁶⁰ Joseph Smith, *Pearl of Great Price*, 41 (Abr. 3:22 – 23).

layout of Pratt's first explanation of the "Preexistence of Man" in Volume 1 of *The Seer*. Pratt quoted copiously from the King James Bible, making use of Smith only once, in a quotation of Smith's "inspired translation" of the Bible.⁶¹ Pratt used a close, literal reading of the Bible to render an interpretation supporting his conclusion.

His argument begins, for example, with a quotation of Ecclesiastes, "...the spirit shall RETURN unto God who gave it. [*sic*]"⁶² Pratt states that "to return" to a place means that one must have come from that place: "Could the spirit *return* to God if it were never in his presence?"⁶³ From here, without appeal to Joseph Smith, Pratt provides a logical line of reasoning which results in the conclusion that human souls existed before physical birth, that they were "educated and instructed... in the laws and order of government..." and that they experienced justice for actions which they had taken.⁶⁴

These souls are the sons and daughters of God, a position which Pratt declares on the basis of Hebrews 12:9.⁶⁵ They have a father and a mother, by whom they were "begotten... long anterior to the creation of this world."⁶⁶ The realm in which they existed, before their current, mortal life, contained the "spiritual bodies" of all things which would one day exist on earth.⁶⁷ Pratt derives this notion from his reading of the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis: according to Pratt, the first chapter records the spiritual creation of all things, and the second

⁶¹ Pratt, *The Seer*, 23.

⁶² Eccles. 12:7, qtd. in Pratt, *The Seer*, 17.

⁶³ Pratt, *The Seer*, 17.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

records the “temporal” creation.⁶⁸ The pre-existent world is not one of unification and perfection, as Origen maintains, but of diversity and variety:

Heaven is the world where all the spirits, destined for this creation, had their origin: It is a world consisting of a great variety of materials of a similar nature to those which enter into the constitution of our world. The difference between our world and a Heavenly one, consists, not in the diversity of elements, for they are the same, but in the difference of the organization of these elements.⁶⁹

This is an important distinction in worldview. The standard, traditional Christian worldview is monistic, understanding all existence to come from one source. The Mormon worldview is, however, pluralistic.⁷⁰ All existence does not come from one source (i.e. God). The human soul, for example, comes from at least three sources: God the Father, one of his wives, and the preexistent, intelligent matter of which they are composed. The implications of this will be explored later.

In this time of preexistence, souls were given instruction on “self-evident truths,” in order to help them advance towards their ultimate goal.⁷¹ However, there are, Pratt continued, certain truths that must be experienced in order to be learned; for this reason, the souls were destined to one day take on mortal bodies, in order to experience those things which are necessary in the accomplishing of their final cause.⁷² Further, Pratt maintained that the souls were in a consistent state of neutral emotion, “...having no knowledge of happiness or misery...”⁷³ Echoing John

⁶⁸ Ibid., 22.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 23.

⁷⁰ Sterling M. McMurrin, *The Philosophical Foundations of Mormon Theology*, Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press (1959), 7 – 8.

⁷¹ Pratt, *The Seer*, 49.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 81.

Milton, Pratt argued that a knowledge of and appreciation for happiness could not exist without the experience of evil. Thus, the souls had to live a mortal life open to pain in order to experience happiness.⁷⁴

When the time came for mortal existence to commence, the souls met in a council, as God presented a plan for the advancement of the begotten souls. This plan was “eternal,” and “had no origin.”⁷⁵ It was not simply invented by God for his children, but represents the process by which he himself became a god.⁷⁶ Working from Joseph Smith’s “inspired version,” Pratt stated that one-third of the souls rejected the Father’s plan, not trusting that human “agency” would be enough to return souls to God.⁷⁷ These souls rebelled, and a “war in Heaven” began. It was during this time that the temporal earth was organized.⁷⁸

This war had an enormous influence over mortal life. The third of souls who rebelled would never receive a mortal body. The remaining souls would receive a body, but the circumstances of their birth would not be equal. Some souls were “valient [*sic*]” in the war, and would receive positions of honor in this life.⁷⁹ “Our condition when we enter the next world will depend on our conduct here, By analogy, then, does, not our condition when we enter this world depend upon our conduct before we were born? [*sic*]”⁸⁰

The greatest example of this is Michael, the Judeo-Christian archangel, whom Joseph Smith had reinterpreted as the preexistent soul of Adam, the first physical man, whose position of honor in the “second estate” was derived from the fact that he led the army of God against the

⁷⁴ Ibid. See Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 222: “Knowledge of Good brought dear by knowing ill.”

⁷⁵ Pratt, *The Seer*, 152. See also 134, where Pratt discusses the “science of world-making, world-governing, and world-redemption.”

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 52.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 51.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 55.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 56.

army of Lucifer during the war in Heaven.⁸¹ Among those who were honorable in the war, the greatest were predestined to be prophets, apostles, and leaders.⁸² The further circumstances of one's birth were also contingent upon faith during the war; when one would be born, among what peoples, and in what class were determined in this way.⁸³

As has been observed, for both Pratt and Origen, the concept of free will is essential. Both assume that human beings are capable of free choices, and their system of preexistence depends on this being true. Origen maintains that human beings must have free will if God is to be a just judge of them – in other words, human beings must have the ability to determine wrong from right.⁸⁴ Pratt goes so far as to state that free-will is essential for human happiness, which may be based on the American context in which Pratt develops his thought.⁸⁵

And yet, there is an important difference in how they construct their systems with regards to fairness. For Origen, souls were created by God as equal beings to each other, a testament to God's fairness and justice.⁸⁶ Pratt, however, declares that the souls of human beings are the literal children of God, born via birth from one of God the Father's many celestial wives.⁸⁷ These children are born at different times, and then receive instruction in this preexistence, meaning that some (the older souls) have more knowledge and experience than others.⁸⁸ What is more, Pratt argued that "intelligent... and eternal particles of substance" make up all living beings, which are not created by God, but are independent of deity.⁸⁹ So, while the souls of humans are

⁸¹ Joseph Smith, *Doctrine and Covenants*, 180 (D&C 27:11); Pratt, *The Seer*, 50.

⁸² Pratt, *The Seer*, 55.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁸⁴ *De Principiis* 3.1.3

⁸⁵ Pratt, *The Seer*, 52.

⁸⁶ *De Principiis* 2.1.1.

⁸⁷ Pratt, *The Seer*, 37 – 39.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁸⁹ Pratt, *The Great First Cause*, 16.

the spiritual children of deities, they are also made up of preexistent, intelligent matter which existed eternally with the Gods. In this way, humans are coeternal with God.⁹⁰ Joseph Smith expounded this doctrine in his famous “King Follett Discourse.”⁹¹ This is distinct from Origen’s view, which unequivocally presents God as the creator and source of humanity.

Even in spite of the already noted differences, the similarities are intriguing enough to warrant an attempt to understand how they can independently develop. Because they are looking at the same core texts (i.e. the books of the Hebrew Bible and the traditional “New Testament” writings), Origen and Pratt are able to come to analogous conclusions without any direct connection, be it natural or supernatural. One important proof-text directly quoted by both Pratt and Origen is from the *Book of Jeremiah*, which reads, in the King James Version familiar to Pratt, “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.”⁹²

Another important text, already cited when discussing Pratt, in Ecclesiastes 12:7.⁹³ Job 38:4 is important to Pratt’s argument, which Origen does not cite. It is worth noting that Pratt takes “Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?” as an honest question and not a rhetorical question, as the context of the passage suggests. Other texts, such as Isaiah 14: 12 – 22, Romans 9:11 – 13, and Ephesians 1:3 – 4 complement these passages, all of which suggest that the human soul exists in some way before the birth of the body.

Moreover, the doctrine of the preexistence is not simply a logical conclusion from biblical passages, it is also a *useful* idea because it performs a function of describing why

⁹⁰ Terryl L. Givens, *Feeding the Flock*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2017), 32.

⁹¹ *History of the Church* 6:310.

⁹² Jeremiah 1:5. The translation in the Greek Septuagint is: “Πρὸ τοῦ με πλάσαι σε ἐν κοιλίᾳ ἐπίσταμαί σε καὶ πρὸ τοῦ σε ἐξελεῖν ἐκ μήτρας ἡγίακά σε, προφήτην εἰς ἔθνη τέθεικά σε.”

⁹³ In the Greek, it reads “...καὶ ἐπιστρέψῃ ὁ χοῦς ἐπὶ τὴν γῆν, ὡς ἦν, καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα ἐπιστρέψῃ πρὸς τὸν θεόν, ὃς ἔδωκεν αὐτό.”

inequality and unfairness exists in a world supposedly created by a just and fair God. Origen was clearly concerned with this, and sought to describe the diversity of existence as the result of the choices and actions of rational beings.⁹⁴ Pratt seems similarly concerned, and said that a soul's involvement and valor in the "war in heaven" has a large influence on the state of their birth.⁹⁵

This doctrine is also useful in terms of social legitimation. By arguing that the status of one's birth is dependent upon the actions of oneself in a premortal time, the theologian can state that oppression and injustice are just expressions of the judgement of God. Pratt tacitly does this when he uses the "war in heaven" as a reason for the inequality of black Africans in American society and the LDS Church in particular, which denied Africans and those of African descent the rights to full participation in the church. One could also argue from this logic that some souls are born as women, inferior to men, and so women should not be leaders in the church. While brave souls in the war are born into a life in which they could become members of Smith's church and hold the priesthood, those souls who did not rebel but were not valiant are born "...among the African negroes or in the lineage of Canaan whose descendants were cursed..." and as such be ineligible to be a member of the priesthood of the church.⁹⁶

Origen made nearly this exact point in his *Sixteenth Homily on Genesis*. Origen explained that the Egyptian people are the slaves of the Pharaoh, and that they deserved this slavery because they were descended from Ham and Canaan.⁹⁷ He goes on to say that the spiritual meaning of this is that, though the carelessness of the soul, a person becomes a slave of vices and

⁹⁴ Origen, *De Principiis* 2.1.1.

⁹⁵ Pratt, *The Seer*, 49.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* Pratt was not alone among early Mormons to state that Africans were of an inferior race, which was marked by their skin color. The Book of Mormon (1 Ne. 12:23) and the Book of Abraham (Abr. 1:21-25) suggest as much. Orson Hyde suggested that the souls of Africans were nearly neutral in the war (see Orson Hyde, "Speech of Elder Orson Pratt Delivered Before the High Priests' Quorum, in Nauvoo, April 27, 1845," Liverpool: James and Woodburn (1845), 30. Brigham Young agreed that Africans were inferior, cursed to be the "servant of servants" (JD 2:184). For discussion of this, see Brodie 173 – 174.

⁹⁷ Origen, *Genesis Homily XVI* 1. "Non ergo immerito ignobilitatem generis decolor posteritas imitatur."

sins.⁹⁸ He continues by stating “*Non ergo ad dispensatam culpa reflectitur ubi digna dispensatorum meritis providentur.*”⁹⁹ While Origen does not explicitly link the current state of the Egyptians to their actions in a prior world, the conclusion is not difficult to draw from Origen’s logic, and the function of oppression remains either way.

Having observed what the preexistence means for both Origen and Pratt, and having described how it functions in their religious systems, it is now possible to move on to the next controversial concept: the notion that Jesus, God the Son, is not equal to God the Father, but is subordinate to him. This is an essential part of understanding Christianity, and is, in both works, described in terms of the preexistent world.

⁹⁸ Origen, *Genesis Homily XVI* 2. “*In quod utique unumquemque non extrinsecus illata necessitas cogit, sed segnitie animi, et libido ac voluptas corporis subigit, cui se animus per socordiam subdit.*”

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* “Blame is not, therefore, reflected on the dispenser, when things worthy of the merits of the recipients are being provided.”

Subordinationism:

Like the doctrine of the preexistent soul, Origen developed a notion of subordination out of a larger context, both Hellenic (largely Platonic) and Hebraic. An excellent source which may be examined in order to understand the Platonism of Origen's day is Plotinus, Origen's younger contemporary, who develops comparable concepts in his own works. His *Fifth Ennead* discusses the "three hypostases," a Neoplatonic concept similar to the Christian Trinity. Plotinus described an initial One (τὸ ἓν) from which all being is derived and generated. The One is perfect, and "...τὸ ὑπερπλήρες αὐτοῦ πεποίηκεν ἄλλο."¹⁰⁰ This being is the Intellect (ὁ νοῦς), the result of the perfection of the One, who in turn produces the Soul (ἡ ψυχή).¹⁰¹ Each of the *hypostases* is less perfect than the one before, and takes a lower rank than the being which generated it.¹⁰² The Intellect is still honorable (τίμιος), however, and more honorable than all other things in existence (other than, of course, the One).¹⁰³ All beings in creation stand in a chain of relations reaching down from the One, and nothing is separated from that from which it came.¹⁰⁴ In this way, all created beings are connected to the One, which is the ground of all being.

Geza Vermes, in *Christian Beginnings* (2012), accurately describes the historical evolution of Christian theology up to the time of Origen as a process of the gradual elevation of the person of Jesus, accompanied by the influence of Greek thought on a movement which began as part of charismatic Judaism.¹⁰⁵ Vermes awards Origen the title of the "greatest mind... of early Christianity,"¹⁰⁶ presenting him as a sort of culmination of the evolution of Christian

¹⁰⁰ "...the superabundance of that One made another." Plotinus, *Ennead V.2.1*

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Plotinus, *Ennead V.2.2; Ennead V.4.1*

¹⁰³ Plotinus, *Ennead V.4.1*.

¹⁰⁴ Plotinus, *Ennead V.2.1*

¹⁰⁵ Geza Vermes, *Christian Beginnings: From Nazareth to Nicaea*, New Haven: Yale University Press (2012), xiii.

¹⁰⁶ Vermes, *Christian Beginnings*, 222.

thought in the pre-Nicene period.¹⁰⁷ Origen's subordinationism, which concept Vermes spends the majority of his work discussing, is not based on Platonic notions alone: subordinationism was the view of Origen's Christian "...forerunners, contemporaries and successors..."¹⁰⁸ This is clear from a close study of the Pre-Nicene Fathers. Tertullian, often cited for inventing the word "*trinitas*," wrote explicitly that the Father was greater than the Son.¹⁰⁹ So too did Justin Martyr.¹¹⁰ The New Testament authors frequently describe Jesus as unequal to the Father.¹¹¹ By his own admission, Rufinius, Origen's Latin translator, actively changed parts of Origen's *Περὶ Ἀρχῶν* which he deemed to be inaccurate, especially in passages dealing with the nature of the Trinity.¹¹² Because of these changes, it is difficult to make clear Origen's position on the relationship of Jesus to the Father.

To further complicate matters, as Vermes rightly remarks, Origen's vision of Jesus seems to change over the course of his life; the Jesus of *Contra Celsum* and that of *De Principiis*, at times, appear different.¹¹³ This essay will focus on the Jesus image presented in *De Principiis*, though other sources will be discussed where they are relevant.

Taking into account the development of Christian theology in the pre-Nicene period, and examining the fragments of Origen exterior to Rufinius' translation, it is possible to describe with reasonable accuracy Origen's position. Origen was the product of the Church's evolving view of Jesus. "... Origen, like all his precursors, ended up with a subordinationist understanding of the relation between the Father and the Son."¹¹⁴ The Son, for Origen, is the "image of the

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 240.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 220.

¹⁰⁹ Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 9.

¹¹⁰ Justin Martyr, *1 Apology* 13.

¹¹¹ John 14:28, etc.

¹¹² Rufinius, Preface to *De Principiis*, 3.

¹¹³ Vermes, *Christian Beginnings*, 219.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 221.

invisible God,” through whose mediation human beings come to a knowledge of God.¹¹⁵ Jerome reports that Origen had written “... *quod filius nobis comparatus est veritas et patri conlatus mendacium.*”¹¹⁶ If Jerome is accepted, this is a clear statement of the Son’s subordination and inferiority to the Father. Jesus is the link between humans and a God whom they cannot fathom: for this reason, Jesus is not the full truth of God, but an image of the truth which may be understood by men.¹¹⁷ Plotinus likewise describes the *νοῦς* as a link between the One and creation.¹¹⁸

If Jerome’s transmission is *not* accepted, then a closer examination of *De Principiis*, together with a study of *De Oratione*, may still serve the purpose of clarifying Origen’s position. In Rufinius’ translation, the Son is referred to as “... *manatio purissima gloriae omnipotentis.*”¹¹⁹ The Son is omnipotent as the Father is, but he derives his power from the Father.¹²⁰ He is not, therefore, equal to the Father, but has only a share of the Father’s power and glory.

Origen’s short work on the nature of prayer, *De Oratione*, agrees with these views. Proper prayer, for Origen, is addressed only to God the Father, “...to whom even our Savior himself prayer.”¹²¹ God the Father is above God the Son, who functions as the link between God and humans; for this reason, prayer is addressed to the Father “through Christ Jesus.”¹²² Origen is clearly describing a hierarchy within the Godhead, with the Father at the top. This hierarchy, present in its function in *De Oratione*, is described at length in *De Principiis*:

¹¹⁵ Origen, *De Principiis*, 1.2.6.

¹¹⁶ “...because the Son having been compared to us is truth, and having been compared with the Father, he is falsehood...” Jerome, *Ep.* 92.2.1.

¹¹⁷ Jerome, *Ep.* 124.2.3; Origen, *De Principiis*, 1.2.8.

¹¹⁸ Plotinus, *Ennead V.2.1*

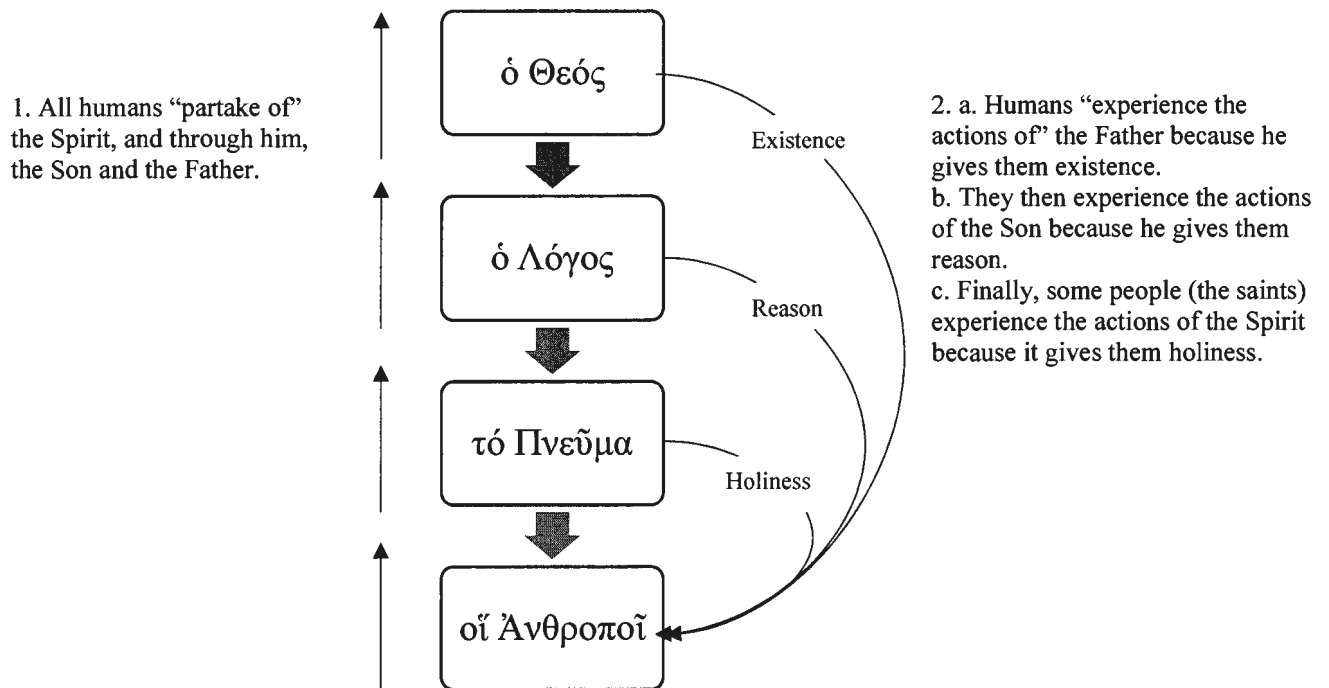
¹¹⁹ “...the purest emanation of the glory of the omnipotent one...” Origen, *De Principiis*, 1.2.10.

¹²⁰ Origen, *De Principiis*, 1.2.2

¹²¹ Origen, *De Oratione*, 15.1 – “...ὅτι καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ σωτὴρ ἡμῶν προσήχετο...”

¹²² *Ibid.*, 15.2.

Fig. 1 – Hierarchy of the Trinity in *De Principiis*



Human beings have access to God the Father via the Son and the Spirit in downward sequence; this is a clear demonstration of the higher place which God holds, as he is the ultimate source to which humans are indebted.¹²³ While the Son is incredibly important, and is credited as the source of reason, he is not equal to the Father.¹²⁴ Elsewhere, Origen refers to the Son as “some small drop” of the Father’s glory, which descends down to humanity.¹²⁵

The Son thus represents a crucial step between creation and creator. Through their own actions, souls had fallen away from their initial unity with God, and born into grosser bodies. Through a process of education and then sanctification, they may come again to their unity with

¹²³ Origen, *De Principiis*, 2.9.2.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.9.4.

¹²⁵ Origen, *Canticles Homily II.3* – “*Si ergo videris Salvatorem meum terrena aut humilia descendantem, videbis quomodo virtute magna et maiestate divina ad nos modica quaedam stilla defluxerit.*”

God, so that their end may be like their beginning, an essential point for Origen.¹²⁶ All of this is made possible only through the divine love made known and accessible by God the Son.¹²⁷

Origen argued further that the soul of Jesus was one of the souls which existed with God in the beginning. While all other souls fell from God, that of Jesus did not. The soul became one with the divine Word, like iron in a fire.¹²⁸

Pratt similarly described Jesus as one of the souls which were born to God in the preexistence. Jesus was the greatest of the souls, the First Born of God, who, by virtue of his birth, was the most experienced and educated of all the souls.¹²⁹ The soul of Jesus was chosen by God during the “Grand Council” to act as “...an acceptable offering and sacrifice before the Father to atone for the sins of His brethren, committed, not only in the second, but also in the first estate.”¹³⁰

Jesus is, thus, of an identical nature to humans.¹³¹ While he is exalted in his predestined role, he is not essentially different than human souls. Moreover, though he is exalted above other humans, he is not equal to God the Father. Jesus had, in the preexistence, only a spiritual body, and during his physical life, he had a body capable of death and decay.¹³² In contrast, God the Father has a redeemed, glorified, physical body, unchanging and undying.¹³³ Whereas Jesus required instruction, as mentioned above, God the Father “...possesses a fulness of truth, of knowledge, of wisdom...”¹³⁴

¹²⁶ Origen, *De Principiis* 1.6.2.

¹²⁷ Origen, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Prologue.

¹²⁸ Origen, *De Principiis* 2.6.6.

¹²⁹ Pratt, *The Seer*, 40.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹³¹ He, like all humans, is of the same essential nature as God the Father, even though he is not currently equal to him. See “Deification” below.

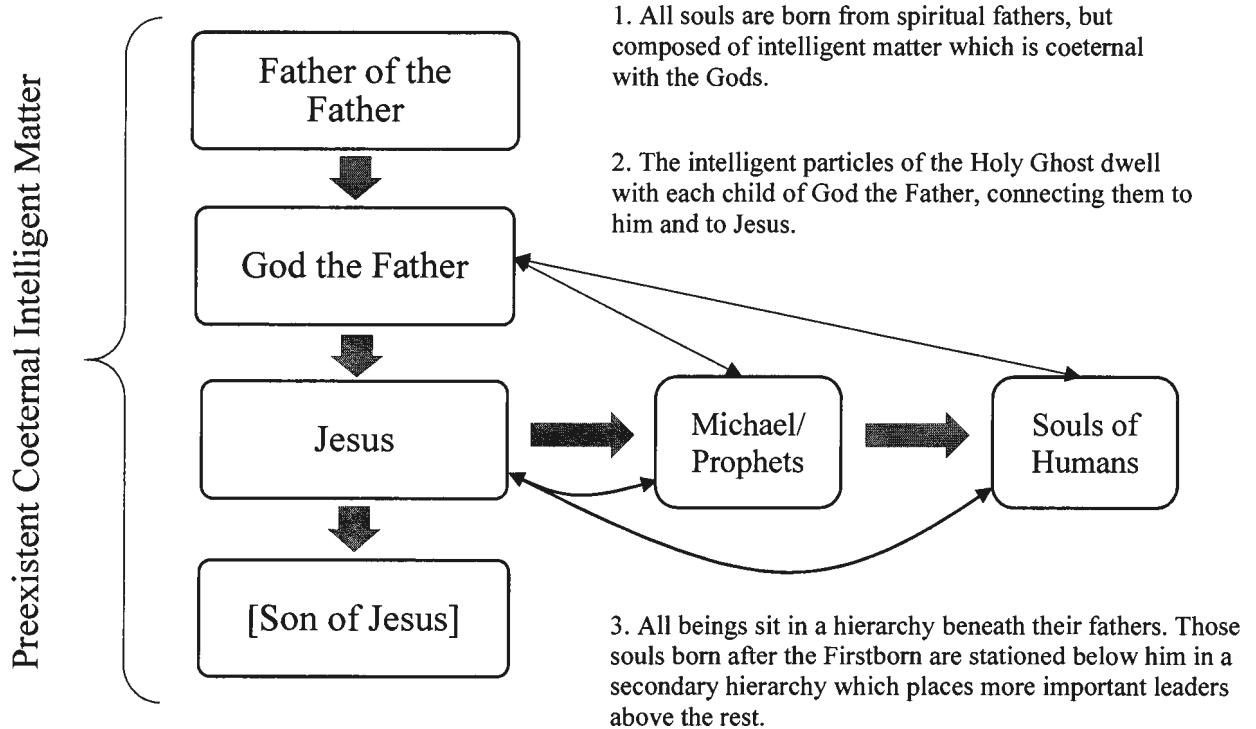
¹³² Pratt, *The Seer*, 35.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

By virtue of his life and resurrection, however, Jesus became exalted like his Father, and thus became equal "...in power, in glory, in dominion, and in the possession of all things..."¹³⁵ This is due to the fact that God has given Jesus "[a]ll the powers of the Priesthood which the Father possessed..."¹³⁶ These include the power to organize matter and create worlds, the power to perform saving "ordinances" and "sealings" which result in exaltation, and the power to rule over creation and institute laws.¹³⁷ However, this does not change his unequal relationship to the Father. For Pratt, because Jesus is the Son, he will always be under the "authority and dominion" of his Father.¹³⁸ By virtue of father-ship alone, God will always be the "Grand Patriarch" of those worlds over which his children will later rule.¹³⁹

Fig. 2 – Hierarchy of the Godhead in Pratt



¹³⁵ Pratt, *The Seer*, 24.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 145.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

These statements approach contradiction: Jesus is always the Son of the Father, and for this reason must always give honor and worship to the Father. Jesus began life as lesser to the Father, but, because he goes through the same process of exaltation through which the Father went, the two are equal with regards to power, knowledge, etc. God the Son is able to create his own worlds over which he is the almighty Father, but the glory which the Son earns for himself is also added to that of his Father. Pratt's brother, the well-known Parley Pratt, summarized this point by stating that Jesus does nothing independently of the Father, a similar position to that which Origen holds.¹⁴⁰

Nevertheless, as has already been mentioned, the general worldview of Origen and Orson Pratt, representative of the worldviews of their traditions more generally, were fundamentally different. This is especially clear in their understanding of the relationship between God the Father and his Son. For Pratt, God the Father and Jesus Christ must both have separate bodies, and so they must be separate beings with a hierarchical relationship. But for Origen, neither God nor the Word have a body inherently (though the Word is, of course, made incarnate in the life of Jesus of Nazareth).¹⁴¹

For Pratt, Jesus is the Son of God because he was literally begotten by God via sexual congress, first with a spiritual wife, who gave birth to the soul of Jesus,¹⁴² and then via intercourse with Mary of Nazareth, the mother of Jesus' body.¹⁴³ But the notion that God the Father had ever engaged in sexual intercourse, much less with the mother of Jesus, would have been regarded as the highest form of heresy by Origen, the early Fathers, and the Jewish community at large in the Second Temple period. Important biblical proof texts clearly reject the

¹⁴⁰ Parley Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology*, Liverpool: F. D. Richards (1855), 32.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 1.2.1.

¹⁴² Pratt, *The Seer*, 37.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 158.

concept that the Jewish God had a wife of any kind.¹⁴⁴ Origen, in contrast, insisted that the “begetting” of the Word was an eternal, metaphorical event, and that God the Father had never been without God the Son.¹⁴⁵ This, for Origen, echoes the sentiment from the Prologue of the Gospel of John, which proposes that, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God...”¹⁴⁶

Still, in either understanding, a subordinationist view of creation describes a world in which everything has a proper place within a hierarchy. The understanding of the world presented by Origen says that God is above Christ, who is above the Spirit, who is above the angels, who are above men, who are above women, who are above animals, who are above demons. The example of Jesus as a willing subordinate of God provides a model for religious leaders to use when they insist that all people stay in the place which God has ordained for them. This argument has often been used in Christian history, notably during the early modern period, when the rise of central monarchies was tied to an explanation that God had ordained a king to stand between God and humanity with respect to law and governing. A hierarchical model of creation reinforces the concepts which the preexistent soul does: those souls which were good are born in more glorious positions in the natural hierarchy, while those souls who sinned or erred are born lower, in need of those in higher positions to guide them back to God.

Jesus stands at a crucial place in this system. He mediates between God and creation, and all people come to God through him.¹⁴⁷ Origen and Pratt both argue that the purpose of human life is to become close to God so that a person may become like God. This is only possible

¹⁴⁴ See Jer. 14.

¹⁴⁵ Origen, *De Principiis*, 1.2.2.

¹⁴⁶ John 1:1.

¹⁴⁷ 1 Tim. 2:5

through the mediation of the subordinate Son. This process by which souls become like God is the final doctrine to be discussed, and is closely related to the preceding concepts.

Deification:

The idea of deification, in the broadest sense, is not limited to a Christian worldview. Union with the One (*ἔνωσις*) is the goal of spiritual life, according to the last treatise in Plotinus' *Sixth Ennead*. Plotinus explained that the soul loves the One and longs to be with it, "...ὥσπερ παρθένος καλοῦ πατρὸς καλὸν ἔρωτα."¹⁴⁸ The soul's life in the current world is a life of deception and shame, and so seeks purification and unity with the one.¹⁴⁹ The soul lets go of all other things and becomes united with the One: it is glorified and made a god.¹⁵⁰ Comparable to what Origen writes, the Soul becomes fiery and brilliant, but might become heavy if she falls from union with the One.

Origen's version runs in this way: From God the Father, all beings acquire their being. From the Son, rational creatures acquire their reason. It is from the Holy Spirit that the holy receive their holiness.¹⁵¹ Origen's understanding is that the world will, in the end, be as it was in the beginning, that is, united and in harmony with God.¹⁵² "*Semper enim similis est finis initiis...*"¹⁵³ Here, the early strands of the Eastern doctrine of *theosis* are present, though Origen does not use this term.

For Origen, this *telos* of human life is to be made perfect by God and to be with God forever.¹⁵⁴ A person becomes sanctified by the Holy Spirit and is cleansed of imperfections and ignorance, until she is made pure enough to "abide" with God, "...*indesinenter atque inseparabiliter...*"¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁸ Plotinus, *Ennead VI.9.9*. "...just as the noble young maiden longs for her noble father."

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., "...θεὸν γενόμενον..."

¹⁵¹ Origen, *De Principiis* 1.8.3.

¹⁵² Ibid., 1.6.1 – 1.6.2

¹⁵³ Ibid., 1.6.2 "For indeed the end is always similar to the beginning..."

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 1.3.8.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. "...without ceasing and without separation."

This view of human destiny is the basis of Origen's mysticism, which casts human life as an upward journey to be with God, typified by the striving of the Bride and the Bridegroom of the *Song of Songs*. Origen writes in his *First Homily on the Song of Songs*, "*Cum enim ille surrexerit, ipse tibi aurum, ipse faciet argentum, ipse tuam mentem sensumque decorabit, et eris vere dives in sponsi domo sponsa formosa, cui est gloria in saecula saeculorum.*"¹⁵⁶ The purpose of human life, then, is to prepare oneself to become unified with God, to become one with God.¹⁵⁷

The end, then, is exactly like the beginning, which Origen states must be true.¹⁵⁸ Just as all things were created by God in unity with him, the *telos* of humanity is to become united with God. At the consummation of history, all creation will become united with God, body and matter being united with heavenly being.¹⁵⁹ This is made possible through the actions of God the Son, the Logos, who provides the essential link between God and creation, through whom creation occurred, and through whom humans gain the knowledge necessary to reunite with God. All souls, capable of good and evil, have become separated from God.¹⁶⁰ But through redemptive actions of the Logos, they are united with God again. Thus, souls come to the state in which they were created and originally existed.

In the Latter-day Saints view, however, the process of deification is not a reunion or a restoration of a lost state: it is a progression to a previously *not* held state. Joseph Smith described how, through the practice of plural marriage and other ordinances, men would be able

¹⁵⁶ Origen, *Canticles Homily I.10*. "For when he rises, he himself will make for you silver and gold, he himself will decorate your mind and senses, and you will be truly rich, a beautiful bride in the bridegroom's home, to whom is glory into the ages of ages."

¹⁵⁷ Origen, *Canticles Homily II. 13*.

¹⁵⁸ *De Principiis* 1.6.2.

¹⁵⁹ *De Principiis* 1.6.4

¹⁶⁰ *De Principiis* 1.8.3; 1.5.5

progress and become Gods.¹⁶¹ However, deification made possible by plural marriage was not widely discussed until after Joseph Smith had died, at which time Pratt became the great expounder of the concept. It should be noted that, in general, Joseph Smith is, at least in those writings which were later canonized, relatively vague on his points of doctrine.¹⁶² It is Pratt who explores the meaning and implications of these new ideas more broadly.

The particulars of the Mormon concept of “exaltation,” that is, a process of deification by which human beings are made into literal gods, *separate* from the god who created them, is unique among Christians.¹⁶³ Pratt defends this concept throughout his works, clearly seeing this to be the final cause of humanity, the purpose of existence.¹⁶⁴

As mentioned above, deification, for Pratt, is a process, the instrument of which is the Priesthood, which has no beginning.¹⁶⁵ He summarizes at the end of his essay on the “Preexistence of Man:”

The Father of our spirits has only been doing that which His Progenitors did before Him. Each succeeding generation of Gods follow the example of the preceding ones: each generation have their wives, who raise up from the fruit of their loins immortal spirits... they organize new worlds for them, after the former patterns set before them... they are redeemed after the pattern by which more ancient worlds have been redeemed.¹⁶⁶

This process includes several important stages, including preexistent education, experience of a righteous mortal life, redemption via the atonement of the Son, reception of the Priesthood and

¹⁶¹ Joseph Smith, *Pearl of Great Price*, 83 - 84 (D&C 132:15 - 21).

¹⁶² Smith does state that God was once a man, saying that “God himself was once as we are now, and is an exalted man, and sits enthroned in yonder heavens!” *History of the Church* 6:305.

¹⁶³ Joseph Smith, *Pearl of Great Price*, 84 (D&C 132:20).

¹⁶⁴ Pratt, *The Seer*, 133 - 134.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 150 - 151. Pratt cites the Book of Mormon (Morm. 9:6) as justification.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 134.

associated ordinances, and marriage to multiple wives. Jesus, for example, fulfills all of these in order to be deified: he experiences millions of years of education in premortal life, and he then lives a mortal life, and during that time he is baptized, is granted the Priesthood, and is even married to multiple women, according to Pratt.¹⁶⁷

Unlike many Protestant thinkers, Pratt argued explicitly that “faith alone” is not sufficient for salvation; in order to be saved and exalted, “true faith and righteous works” are necessary.¹⁶⁸ “It is not the person who merely believes in the sayings of Christ, that is justified, but it is he who shows his faith by obeying them.”¹⁶⁹ In order to be deified, a man may not rely on his faith alone, but rather, faith is only the first step in a journey through many requirements.

The result of deification is that a righteous soul, which earned the right to be born by their actions in pre-mortal life and lived a good life in a fallen world, becomes an immortal and glorified divinity. These divinities have “Heavenly bodies,” which are composed of matter in such a way that they cannot die, cannot decay, and need not change.¹⁷⁰ They live on redeemed worlds, where they delight in “conjugal love” with many wives, and go about raising their own generations of children, and forming worlds for them.¹⁷¹

It should be noted that only men may become gods in Pratt’s theology. The wives of these gods are immortal and unchanging, but they are not to be worshipped, and are not equal to their husbands.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 40 and 159.

¹⁶⁸ Orson Pratt, *Tracts*, 3.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 4.

¹⁷⁰ Pratt, *The Seer*, 23.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid., 159. Pratt does not use the word “goddess” in many of the important passages where he discusses the wives of the gods.

Each god, for Pratt, is a “tabernacle or temple,” in which divine truth resides.¹⁷³ Worship of the Father of one’s world is also worship of the universal truth.¹⁷⁴ Truth is, for Pratt, “...one God, dwelling in all of His fulness [*sic*] in the personages who are the Fathers of each.”¹⁷⁵ Deification, then, is a process through which the individual becomes a god through the infusion of Truth, and is given the power and authority to act as a God in organizing and redeeming worlds of his own children. The deified individual is separate from the god who fathered him, and is equal to him in power and knowledge, though the glory of the son is given also to the father, and so the son is still, in this way, subordinate to his father. This is the same relationship which the Father and the Son have in this world.

These concepts of deification, as has no doubt been observed, are quite distinct. For Pratt, the goal is to become like God, a literal divine being, separate from God the Father. This god will have many divine wives, and will give birth to his own children, who will worship him as God.¹⁷⁶ For Origen, the *telos* of mankind is not to become a god worshiped by others, but to become holy so as to live forever, united with God. The difference here is important. The idea that human beings would become united with God is antithetical to the position held by the Latter-day Saints that God is a physical being, eternally embodied separately from his creation. Pratt argued, furthermore, that human beings are essentially the same as God, that they are beings of the same nature as God. They are rulers of creation because they are the literal children of the divine and are the same of him in their essence.

Origen, on the other hand, maintained that human beings are essentially different from God, unlike him and always unequal to him. They are his creations, and they are constantly

¹⁷³ Ibid., 24.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 134 - 135.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 23.

inferior. They have been separated from him because of sin. They may only be *accidentally* holy, only righteous and good in their accidental qualities, while God is righteous, holy, and good in his essence.¹⁷⁷ This derives from Aristotle's notion of essence and accident: the essential characteristics of a being are those things which are inherent for that being, while the accidental characteristics are changeable qualities which a being happens to possess at a given moment. For Origen, goodness is essential to God, but only accidental to his creations.¹⁷⁸

Deification is described as a process by both authors, which requires that members of the religious community remain devoted to that community if they wish to continue along the road to exaltation. For Latter-day Saints, this means maintaining a proper standing in the Church, and completion of several ordinances (sacraments/rites) by which glory and grace are conferred. Origen explained that souls must gain knowledge in order to progress, knowledge which is made available by teachers such as himself. In either case, one function of this doctrine is to reinforce devotion and commitment to the community of believers, who aid the individual in her quest for the ultimate goal. Pratt's system, and also Origen's to an extent, is a high-demand religion. Because members of the tradition are required to do so much in order to maintain good standing in their religious community, and in order to experience future rewards they become more devoted to the tradition and less likely to abandon it.

¹⁷⁷ *De Principiis* 1.5.5

¹⁷⁸ Aristotle, *Categories* 1b25 – 2a4.

Conclusion:

Origen and Orson Pratt both taught the controversial doctrine that human souls were created by God before their mortal birth and that these souls dwelt with God before their birth. They also maintained that Jesus, the second person of the godhead, is subordinate to the Father, the first person in the godhead. Finally, both described a process of deification in their writings.

Origen narrated how God created all souls as equals, and that they lived in unity with him until their desires and passions moved them away from him. Only one created soul did not fall away, the soul of Jesus of Nazareth, which dwelt with God and became united with the divine Word. The Word took its place in a hierarchy connecting God with his creation, and in the life of Jesus, the Word made it possible for humans to be reunited with God. By following the way of Jesus, human beings can return to that original state in which they were created, and be reunited with God as it was in the beginning.

Pratt tells a slightly different narrative, but with many similarities. The souls of humankind are the literal children of God the Father, born to his many wives as spiritual bodies. The first born of these souls was Jesus, who was the most educated and faithful by virtue of his birth. God had previously been a soul like his children, and went through a process of deification himself. As a divinity, he sets his children down on the same path towards godhood. The First-Born soul, in his earthly life, gives his life to redeem his brothers and sisters, who then have the opportunity to follow the path of God the Father and Jesus in order to become deities themselves, unique and physically separate from God, but always subordinate to their Father.

At least at first glance, Origen of Alexandria and Orson Pratt seem to hold identical heterodox opinions on the existence of the soul, the status of Jesus, and the purpose of human life. One possibility for these similarities would be that the earlier author, Origen, directly

influenced the latter, Pratt. However, direct influence is not necessary for these ideas to develop independently, and indeed, since Origen was anathematized and his teachings were not accepted by the Church, it is likely that Pratt and other Mormon thinkers were not aware of Origen. The fact that the two widely accepted English translations of *De Principiis* were not published until 1869 (Frederick Crombie translation) and 1936 (G. W. Butterworth translation) lends support to this. Another position, held perhaps by a religious individual, that divine connection is the cause of these concepts, does not provide a foundation for useful study. However, other, non-supernatural, explanations serve as starting points for more intriguing discussions of Christianity.

Christians are very much a “people of the book,” to borrow a phrase from Islam. The Christian life is, for many Christians, based upon the study of the Bible. Origen wrote to Gregory “Σὺ οὖν, κύριε υἱέ, προηγουμένως πρόσεχε τῇ τῶν θείων γραφῶν ἀναγνώσει· ἀλλὰ πρόσεχε.”¹⁷⁹ For Origen, the reading of the biblical texts was essential, because it revealed divine inspiration and allowed belief to grow.¹⁸⁰ Pratt also shows respect for the Bible in his copious citations from it, even though he declares that the Bible must be supplemented with Mormon writings.¹⁸¹ It is interesting to note that both writers are working in a time when the notion of canon was not fixed: Origen cites sayings and whole books which were not later accepted by the Church as scripture, while Pratt rejected the notion of the closed canon of his day.¹⁸² Nevertheless, both found it necessary to seek answers in the scriptural collections; both argued that written texts embody divine truths, and attempt to describe existence in the context of these texts.

¹⁷⁹ Origen, *Philokalia* 13.4. “Devote yourself principally, dear son, to the reading of the divine writings: indeed, devote yourself.”

¹⁸⁰ Origen, *De Principiis* 4.1.6.

¹⁸¹ Orson Pratt, *Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon*, 33.

¹⁸² See Pratt, *Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon*, 3; and Origen, *De Principiis*, 1.2.3, 1.3.3,

In reality, then, the presence of these ideas in different times and contexts points to the variety of possible opinions which can be drawn from Christian scripture, as well as functional purposes such as the legitimation of social order and the maintenance of devotion to the religious community.

Furthermore, where the concepts differ between the two authors, one can observe important underlying positions held by different people. Pratt and Origen do not agree about the nature of reality, with Pratt arguing that all existence must be material while Origen argues that to assign a material nature to God is folly. This points to an essential difference between these forms of Christianity. Early Christianity evolved from a Judaism which opposed the notion of a physical God, and adopted a Greek philosophical framework that was idealistic and not materialistic.

In contrast, early Mormonism, founded in the period after the Enlightenment, had a strong leaning towards materialistic thought. After all, Joseph Smith insisted on a material aspect of many of his revelations, from the gold plates of the Book of Mormon to the papyrus scrolls of the Book of Abraham. For early Mormons, it was the physical world that had meaning, not some immaterial world ruled by an immaterial God. After all, Joseph Smith insisted on a material aspect of many of his revelations, from the gold plates of the Book of Mormon to the papyrus scrolls of the Book of Abraham. For early Mormons, it was the physical world that had meaning, not some immaterial world ruled by an immaterial God.

Furthermore, an emphasis on materiality led to an endorsement of naturalism, as opposed to supernaturalism. For the early Latter-day Saints, miraculous events were not supernatural, immaterial events butting into the natural world – instead, all things are natural, if

only unexplained.¹⁸³ This is indicative of the radical changes in western attitudes about reality since the time of Origen. Newtonian physics and material views of reality within science were popular in America at that time, and other American religious thinkers had already begun to blend this view with their religious views.¹⁸⁴ Newton had long replaced Plato and Aristotle, as it is Newton, not Plato, whom Pratt quotes in support of his argument for materialism.¹⁸⁵

The result is that the underlying theology of Mormonism looks radically different from traditional Christianity. At the basic level, the Latter-day Saints espouse the same general concepts as Christianity: “belief” in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; the redemptive role of Christ; and, use of the Bible.¹⁸⁶ However, the understandings of existence at a deeper level could hardly be further apart. Traditional Christianity holds that there is a single God who is the source of being and the creator of all things, whereas Mormonism endorses a view of multiple (if not countless) divinities, none of whom created the universe, but merely organize matter around them.¹⁸⁷ The traditional Christian view, as has been explored, describes an immaterial divinity who exists outside of time and space, which he created, but the view of the Latter-day Saints is that the divinities are, by necessity, material products of the world in which they live.

“Orthodox” Christian interpretations of Plato have led Christians to argue that universals, such as truth and beauty, are universal because they are held in the mind of God. Mormonism turns this view on its head, especially Pratt, who maintained that a god is a God because they *embody* universals, such as truth, which exist independently forever.¹⁸⁸ This reflects a basic

¹⁸³ Sterling M. McMurrin, *The Philosophical Foundations of Mormon Theology*, 19.

¹⁸⁴ See Mark A. Noll, *In the Beginning Was the Word: The Bible in American Public Life, 1492 – 1783*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2016), 257 – 259.

¹⁸⁵ Pratt, *Absurdities of Immaterialism*, 28. Newton is so influential that, where Pratt disagrees with him, he feels the need to address Newton’s error directly. See, for example, *Absurdities*, 9.

¹⁸⁶ Terry L. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel – Volume 1, The Foundations of Mormon Thought: Cosmos, Humanity, God*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (2015), 6.

¹⁸⁷ Sterling M. McMurrin, *The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion*, 4; 19.

¹⁸⁸ McMurrin, *Theological Foundations*, 14 – 16.

difference between these two traditions: one is monistic while the other is incredibly pluralistic, in terms of how they view the ultimate nature of reality.

In summary, the ideas explored in this work point both to how various forms of Christianity can be largely alike, and at the same time, how they may be vastly different. Two different thinkers may independently come to similar conclusions with nearly identical functions, not because of direct connections, but because of common sources and necessary functions. But, there will always be important variations in their approaches, due to different historical and social contexts in which the authors find themselves. Using the comparative method, these similarities and differences can come to light, explaining the meaning and role of religion in the lives of those who practice it, and giving the scholar a closer look at the ways in which practitioners of these traditions have and continue to understand reality.

Reflective Writing for Honors Program:

Religion is, in many ways, a reflection on humanity. Karl Marx argued that human beings take what is best about themselves and put those traits into religion, and Emile Durkheim maintained that religion is a typification of society. Whenever we study religion, then, we are studying the people who identify with that religion, and when we seek to understand doctrine, what we are really seeking is to understand how human beings have viewed the world and their place in it. Religion is never *only* about the sacred and the otherworldly, but always tied to aspects of mundane and profane life. Even the most convoluted and theoretical concepts of religion are connected to actual human life. For this reason, religion is the object of intense respect and admiration as well as vehement denial and disgust. Religion is a reflection on humanity – the good parts as well as the bad and the neutral.

This project has sought to bring such an argument to light, and to highlight essential differences and similarities between two distinct forms of Christianity. The methods used were simple. First, through broad reading of secondary sources and close readings of primary sources, I attempted to create a phenomenology of three controversial teachings in two forms which they have appeared across Christian history. As suggested by the title, which is drawn from 1 Tim 1:3, I have based this discussion largely in terms of interpretations of the Bible, which is of particular interest to me. Then, using the comparative method, I sought to use the differences between the two versions of the doctrines to explain important differences in how historical Christianity and early Mormonism viewed their world and reacted to it. This was largely in attempt to see how modern practitioners, influenced by the history of their tradition, continue to conceptualize reality in specific ways. Finally, I wanted to briefly connect these ideas to the

societal functions which they perform in their different contexts, in order to highlight how religion is often used in similar ways to maintain and reinforce society.

The result is a project which truly stands as a capstone for my undergraduate education. This project blends history, religious studies, classics, sociology, and philosophy together to create a cohesive picture. I found myself being guided by the different classes that I have taken while at Utah State: *Philosophy of Religion* helped me to see the important differences between Mormonism and early Christianity, while *History of Christianity in the West* taught me how to recognize when Christians are reinterpreting Christianity within a new framework and what that means. My Latin and Greek courses were essential in preparing me to read the works of Origen and the other Church Fathers in their original languages, and *Theory and Method of Religious Studies* gave me the tools to describe religion in terms of social function. While at USU, I have focused on studying Judaism, Christianity, and Mormonism. This capstone was an excellent way for me to blend together my research on Christianity and on Mormonism (which is not to say that Mormonism cannot be defined as a type of Christianity) and produce new and interesting research.

Religious Studies, as a discipline, is about asking “why.” In Religious Studies, we do not take for granted what a religious person says or does, or simply accept that an idea “it is just what they believe.” Instead, we think critically, and look for meaningful answers to the question “why,” which then provide us with a better and more nuanced understanding of human-beings. In many ways, the value of the study of religion for the outside world is simply that studying religion helps the average person understand her fellow human-beings more. When I am not in class, I serve as Vice President of the Interfaith Student Association, which has a similar goal: promote religious literacy so that people understand each other better, so that there can be less

conflict and more cooperation in society. So too, then, this project was a capstone for my extra-curricular activities as well.

To step back from the grand-scale vision which I find myself writing, this project also helped me to simply become a better student. I was able to organize my own research and complete a project of my own choosing. I found that I sincerely enjoy the research process, and I learned that I am able to craft a large-scale argument and express my findings. I was also able to read more Latin and Greek outside of the classroom, and I had the honor of working with Dr. Norm Jones, who has helped me to understand how to produce persuasive discussion in this field. It is my goal to become a university professor one day – this project assured me that I enjoy the type of research which scholars perform. And, now I am able to use this project as a writing sample for applications to graduate school, which is an excellent benefit to me.

By going through the process of selecting a research topic, performing independent study, and working with a mentor to draft a finished product, I now have experience in the ways that research is done in Religious Studies. I know more about the subject than I did when I started, which will be very useful when I go on to do other research projects, since I now have a better understanding of the periods of history which interest me. Overall, my capstone experience has been a resounding success in so far as I have learned the skills that I will need to succeed in this field, and I have developed a stronger working relationship with my mentor. The project was an excellent capstone for my undergraduate career, because it brought together threads from my education while also preparing me to go on to graduate school.

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As President of the Interfaith Student Association, he serves as an advocate for religious literacy and religious minorities at USU. In Spring 2017, Hayden was named Religious Studies Student of the Year. He has consistently been placed on the Dean's List, and has earned the A-Pin award, one of Utah State's oldest distinctions. One of his early essays has been published in *Voices of USU*, an anthology of exceptional student research.

Following graduation with University Honors from USU, Hayden plans to seek a Ph.D. in Ancient Mediterranean Religions.