

Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies

Volume 2 | Number 1

Article 2

2010

“A Uniformity So Complete”: Early Mormon Angelology

Benjamin E. Park

University of Edinburgh, School of Divinity

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/imwjournal>

Recommended Citation

Park, Benjamin E. "“A Uniformity So Complete”: Early Mormon Angelology." *Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies* 2, no. 1 (2010). <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/imwjournal/vol2/iss1/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at DigitalCommons@USU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@USU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@usu.edu.





BENJAMIN E. PARK

Benjamin E. Park is a postgraduate student at the University of Edinburgh's School of Divinity where he studies historical theology. He is interested in intellectual history, religious history, and Atlantic history, primarily during the 18th and 19th centuries, and has forthcoming articles on religious boundary

formation in antebellum America and the transatlantic exchange of ideas in 1840s Boston. His master's thesis, tentatively titled "Contesting Reason, Constricting Boundaries: Transatlantic Responses to Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*," examines religious, political, and nationalist boundaries in both America and Britain during the 1790s. He has published previously in the *Journal of Mormon History*, *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal*, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, and several peer-reviewed student journals. Ben, his wife Catherine, and daughter Sara live in the beautiful city of Edinburgh, and enjoy touring Europe every chance they can get. This fall, he will be attending the University of Cambridge, where he will study Political Thought and Intellectual History.

Benjamin E. Park

“A UNIFORMITY SO COMPLETE”: EARLY MORMON ANGELOLOGY

“An angel of God never has wings,” proclaimed Joseph Smith in 1839, just as the LDS Church was establishing itself in what would come to be known as Nauvoo, Illinois. The Mormon prophet then proceeded to explain to the gathered Saints the ability to “discern” between true angelic beings, disembodied spirits, and devilish minions by a simple test of a handshake. He assured them that “the gift of discerning spirits will be given to the presiding Elder, pray for him... that he may have this gift[.]”¹ His statement, esoteric in nature and sandwiched between instructions on the importance of sacred ordinances and a reformulation of speaking in tongues, offers a succinct synopsis of Joseph Smith’s evolved understanding of angels and their relationship to human beings. Teaching that they didn’t have wings rejected the classic stereotypes and caricatures of the mysterious and mystical beings that had long held a significant part in the

This paper was written as part of a Brigham Young University ORCA Project and supervised by J. Spencer Fluhman. The author wishes to thank Fluhman, David J. Whittaker, Samuel M. Brown Robin Jensen, and J. Stewart Brown for insights, suggestions, and critiques.

1. Joseph Smith, Sermon, before August 8, 1839, in Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph*, Religious Studies Monograph Series, no. 6 (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 12–13.

Judeo-Christian tradition.

Indeed, one can say that Joseph Smith made a career out of challenging classic stereotypes, yet each particular challenge represented a larger, undergirding worldview from which his theology sprung. Among the many religious innovations Smith proposed during his prophetic tenure was a radical redefinition of the nature of angelical beings, which in turn closed the gap between humans and angels. Long held to be a “wholly other” species, Smith reconceptualized these metaphysical beings as members of the same human family, taking part in the same salvific work, and even dwelling mortally at some point upon the same planet; when asked whether an angel’s temporal time depended upon the “planet on which they reside,” Smith responded that “there is no angel [that] ministers to this earth[,] only what either does belong or has belonged to this earth,” thereby rejecting the notion of ontologically distinct angelic beings and collapsing the conceptual distance between “mortal” and “immortal.”²

While Smith’s fully developed angelology is significant in itself, Mormonism’s belief in angels is significant for another reason. Like any other religious group, early Mormon thought developed over a period of time, evolving from its beginnings as a mildly diverging form of American Protestantism to eventually a new religious tradition with numerous distinctive beliefs.³ During this period of change, angels served as an important doctrinal touchstone, often appearing at important shifts during the first two decades of the movement and representing the larger developments that were simultaneously occurring. Changing conceptualizations of angels help chart Mormon thinking in important ways that reflect transitions into periods of elaborated ecclesiology and increasingly materialistic

2. Joseph Smith, Sermon, in George D. Smith, ed., *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1995), 96.

3. For a brief—if sometimes simplistic—outline on the evolving nature of Mormon thought, see Thomas G. Alexander, “The Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine: From Joseph Smith to Progressive Theology,” *Sunstone* 5:4 (July–August 1980): 24–33. For Mormonism as a “new religious tradition,” see Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985).

theology. This paper engages Mormonism's evolving views of angels as a window to the evolving views of Mormon thought generally, arguing that angelology provides a useful vantage point from which to interpret early LDS thought.

This study will engage four specific theological and ecclesiastic developments. First, early Mormon thinkers' evolving belief in angels demonstrates their agenda to place supernatural claims on more rationalistic foundations, adapting Romantic impulses with the growing necessity for systematic thought, while at the same time invoking a uniquely literalistic reading of the Bible; though they held onto supernatural beliefs like angelic beings, those beings could be tested through empirical means like a handshake, or, more importantly, by priesthood authority. Second, the use of angels was intimately involved with Mormonism's appeal to authority, and resurrected patriarchs were increasingly invoked as the importance of priesthood increased. Third, connected to the idea of ministering angels was the notion of evil spirits and the accompanied necessity for spiritual discernment—establishing the origin, purpose, and limits of what they recognized as the many false and competing spirits of the day. And finally, Smith's theological reformulation of angelic beings correlated with his larger ideological project to weld all beings—humans, Gods, and angels—into one collaborative group of “intelligences,” the capstone of Mormonism's Nauvoo theology.

Beyond the development of Mormon thought, however, this topic offers an intriguing glimpse into the wider religious milieu of the day, as well as the tensions involved in antebellum religion-making. In a period defined as both a “spiritual hothouse”⁴ and time of theological innovation,⁵ Mormonism often embodied many of the significant themes that confronted contemporary religionists. Indeed, in dealing with issues like rationality, authority, competing

4. Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), title for chapter 8

5. James Bratt has written that the decade between 1835 and 1845—the decade in which Mormonism blossomed—is “less distinguished by the radical extension of evangelicalism's logic than as the launching ground of new departures.” James D. Bratt, “The Reorientation of American Protestantism, 1835–1845,” *Church History* 67 (Mar. 1998): 52–53.

spirits, and even ontology, early Mormons were in indirect conversation with their broader environment, attempting to answer many of the same questions, rebut many of the same accusations, and react to many of the same ideological assumptions. Mormon angelology, then, serves as an important standpoint from which to engage the larger general issues of the day, an efficient micro–history to encounter broader trends.

MODERNITY’S SEARCH FOR A “RATIONAL” ANGEL

In what context did Mormon angelology emerge? It was a period of theological reformulation: Enlightenment thought brought many challenges and innovations to eighteenth and nineteenth century religious movements. It caused believers with religious impulses to defend their respective beliefs about spiritual truths while at the same time reconciling those same beliefs with what they considered “rational.” What had been fundamental beliefs like God’s intervention in human lives, direct communication from heaven, and angelic visitations were now contested as being unreasonable and improbable.⁶ As religious historian Leigh Eric Schmidt wrote, “the very idea of a God who speaks and listens, a proposition integral to Christian devotionism, became a ‘monstrous belief’ to [religious critics of the day], and the voice of reason was offered as a mechanically reliable replacement for these divine attributes.” In response, religious movements were obligated to meet new enlightenment guidelines: “a significant number of American Christians,” Schmidt explained, “continued to absorb the mental habits and disciplines of the Scottish Common–Sense philosophy well into the nineteenth century; and evangelicals, Spiritualists, and Swedenborgians all scrambled to put themselves on respectable scientific footing.”⁷ Early

6. One historian has noted that in most cultures where Enlightenment thought took hold, belief in angels and demons was usually one of the first religious assumptions to be challenged. Andrew Fix, “Angels, Devils, and Evil Spirits in Seventeenth–Century Thought: Balthasar Bekker and the Collegiants,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50 (Oct. – Dec. 1989): 527–547.

7. Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 6, 11.

Mormonism also took part within this rationalization of Christianity as they attempted to present its supernatural claims through reasonable means.

Preaching the reality of angels was one way religious leaders attempted to “put themselves on respectable footing,” and the Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg provided potent examples of doing just that. Swedenborg was a philosopher, pseudo–scientist, and Christian mystic who devoted his later life to theology, garnering numerous converts on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean. He was unique in many of his religious innovations, yet influenced a large number of later thinkers in Europe and America. Among his religious writings, he audaciously claimed to have personal encounters with angelic beings, and this kind of experience was considered a central tenet of his message. Starting in the 1740s, Swedenborg developed the ability to “converse with angels and spirits in the same manner as I speak with men,” and his continual communications with angels was the main foundation for his knowledge and authority.⁸ Many of his followers came to see him as introducing “a more intimate fellowship with saints and angels,” which was meant to lead to a time when “angels shall converse with men as familiarly as they did with Adam before the fall.”⁹

Yet Swedenborg viewed these angelic messengers not as some foreign specimen wholly distinct from humans, but rather as individuals who had once lived on Earth, though at different phases in a post–mortal progression. This was characteristic and foretelling of the coming generations, for the Enlightenment period made it necessary for those who believed in angels to present them in a more “rational” framework. During this time, Schmidt argued, “the voices from the spirit–land that people desired were increasingly materialized and incarnated,” a distant cry from the “wholly other” type of angels traditional Christian-

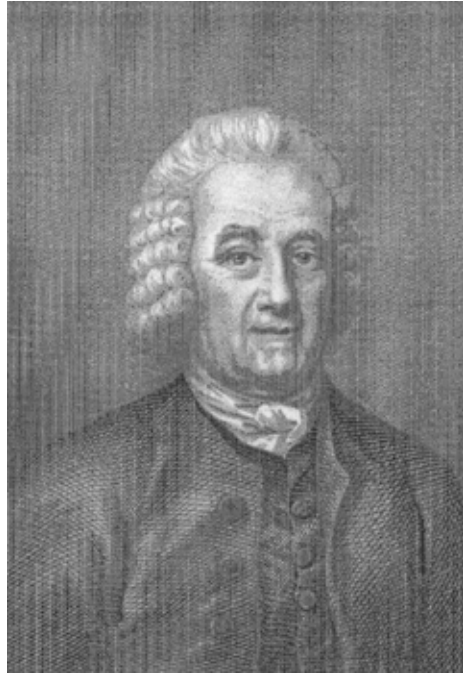
8. *A Brief Account of the Life of Emanuel Swedenborg, a Servant of the Lord and the Messenger of the New–Jerusalem Dispensation* (Cincinnati: Looker and Reynolds, 1827), 15–19.

9. “Preface by the Translator,” in Swedenborg, *A Treatise Concerning Heaven and Hell, and of the Wonderful Things Therein, as Heard and Seen by the Honourable and Learned Emanuel Swedenborg* (Baltimore: Miltenberger, 1812), 5–10.

ity was accustomed to.¹⁰ To the Swedish theologian, angelic beings were much more personal, and therefore much more *rational*, setting the stage for similar developments to take place among many contemporary Protestant traditions.

Attempts to rationalize angels were common in the eighteenth century, and speculation about their origin was highly debated. Yet many agreed that they were unique beings designed for angelic work and separately created to further God's purposes, maintaining a separate and distinct realm in the larger Chain of Being.¹¹ Regarding the debate on the genesis of angels, Reverend Charles Buck noted in his highly influential religious dictionary that such debate "is, however, a needless speculation, and we dare not indulge a spirit of conjecture. It is our happiness to know that they are all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them who are heirs

of salvation." As for their makeup, Buck wrote that "the more general opinion is, that they are substances entirely spiritual, though they can at any time assume bodies, and appear in human shape," somewhat connecting angels to humans



Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) was a Swedish inventor, scientist, mystic, philosopher, and theologian. Quite influential in 19th century America, he was important in reshaping western angelology. Specifically, he challenged the traditional idea that humans and angels were ontologically different, arguing instead that they were very much the same species. Picture from Emanuel Swedenborg, The True Christian Religion, Containing the Universal Theology of the New Church (Boston: John Allen, 1833), original in Andover-Harvard Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

10. Schmidt, *Hearing Things*, 201.

11. See Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A History of an Idea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), esp. chapter 4.



*This famous depiction of the Great Chain of Being represents the ontological barriers that were deeply entrenched in western thought through the nineteenth century. Joseph Smith would challenge this idea of the restricted and segregated cosmos through his reformulated ontology, dismissing the distinctions between humans, angels, and God. Didacus Valades, *Rhetorica Christiana* (Perugia, 1579).*

but still maintaining some physiological differences.¹² John Reynolds, the most prolific writer on eighteenth century angelology, summed up the origin and purpose of angels within orthodox boundaries:

Since the great God design'd a Creation for his own Glory, it became him to erect a most splendid House, where he would be most seen and best served: It became him to have a vast Retinue of splendid Domesticks, surrounding his Throne, applauding his Majesty, attending his commands, ready to execute his Pleasure in any Part of his Dominions: These are usually called ANGELS in Scripture; concerning whom the Scripture-Revelation, being but concise and brief, leads us to such Inquiries as these.¹³

Such depictions of angels soon began to be challenged, however. When Swedenborg, for instance, described the angels he was experienced with, he pre-

12. Charles Buck, *A Theological Dictionary: Containing All Religious Terms; A Comprehensive View of Every Article in the System of Divinity; An Impartial Account of All the Principal Denominations Which have Subsisted in the Religious World from the birth of Christ to the Present Day: Together with An Accurate Statement of the most Remarkable Transactions and Events Recorded in Ecclesiastical History* (Philadelphia: Joseph J. Woodward, 1831), 17. On the importance of Buck's *Dictionary* in antebellum America, see Mathew Bowman and Samuel Brown, "The Reverend Buck's Theological Dictionary and the Struggle to Define American Evangelicalism," *Journal of the Early Republic* 29 (Fall 2009): 441–473.

13. John Reynolds, *Inquiries Concerning the State and œconomy of the Angelical Worlds* (London: Printed for John Clark, 1723), 1–2.

sented a vision of celestial beings not too dissimilar from common humanity:

The Angels converse together, as we do on earth, and in like manner on various subjects, whether of a domestic, civil, moral, or spiritual nature... The speech of angels is equally divided into words with our's, and alike sonorous and audible, for they have mouths, tongues and ears, as we have.¹⁴

Similar reconstructions of heavenly beings were being performed on the American continent. What began as the invisible—yet still powerful¹⁵—angels of the early Puritans eventually led to claimed visitations like the one Cotton Mather recorded when he witnessed a beardless angel with traditional wings and a “splendid tiara.”¹⁶ However, by the beginning of the nineteenth century the growing democratized culture gave rise to an increase in angelic manifestations, and a growing number of people were claiming angelic visits from departed loved ones rather than other-worldly specimens.¹⁷ This idea developed even further, and by 1853 New England minister J. Everett could claim that every angel was merely a deceased person from this same planet.¹⁸ While early angelic claims were mostly associated with deathbed experiences and preparation for crossing the veil, these messages took on the role of confirmation and even persuasion for doctrinal and authoritative claims as many antebellum denominations battled for religious legitimacy in an increasingly diverse climate.¹⁹ By the end of the nineteenth century, many among the spiritualist movements were

14. Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, 234–236.

15. The best example for early Puritan views of angles is Increase Mather, *Meditations on the Glory of the Heavenly World* (Boston: Benjamin Eliot, 1711).

16. Quoted in David Levin, “When did Cotton Mather See the Angel,” *Early American Literature* 15 (1980–81): 271.

17. Elizabeth Reis, “Immortal Messengers: Angels, Gender, and Power in Early America,” in *Mortal Remains: Death in Early America*, edited by Nancy Isenberg and Andrew Burstein (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 164.

18. J. Everett, *A Book for Skeptics: Being Communications from Angels, Written with their Own Hands; Also Oral Communications, spoken by Angels through a Trumpet, and Written Down as they were Delivered, in the presence of many Witnesses* (Columbus, Ohio: Osgood & Blake, 1853), 14.

19. Reis, “Immortal Messengers,” 171–172.

attempting to summon angels, hoping to gain more information and knowledge from the realm of the deceased.²⁰

THE “MORMON” ANGEL(S)

Thus, by the time Joseph Smith and the early Mormons entered the scene, belief in angels was a debated topic with considerable baggage, yet still a common issue to address. Indeed, Mormonism from the start began with a direct connection with angelic beings: Joseph Smith claimed a visitation in 1823 by an angel informing him of an ancient record to be translated; however, this messenger was not a faceless, extraterrestrial being created by God solely to deliver divine commands, but rather an actual human remnant of this lost civilization.²¹ The Book of Mormon itself, in a sense, was a means of restoring lost voices with deceased persons “whisper[ing] out of the dust.”²² Within this recovered scripture, angels took an active role in the narrative, including delivering messages, taking chosen prophets on enlightening paths, and even making personal redemptive appearances to wayward children as a way to encourage repentance.²³ Moroni, the same being who visited Joseph Smith in 1823, was the most explicit

20. Catherine Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 258, 280; Bret E. Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997).

21. There is some question as to how explicit Joseph Smith was in public discourse and writing about the exact identity of this visitor. Smith’s first history, written in 1832, does not name the angel. His 1839 history, which eventually became the official history of the Church, originally named the angel as Nephi, one of the early leaders of the indigenous population that makes up the Book of Mormon. However, several contemporary documents identify Moroni, the last author in the same book, as the angel that delivered the message and the plates to the young Joseph Smith. See Joseph Smith, History [1832], in Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989–92), 1:8; Joseph Smith, History, 1839, in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 277; *Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of the Latter-day Saints: From the Revelations of God* (Kirtland, Ohio: F. G. Williams and Co., 1835), 50:2 (current LDS edition: D&C 27:5).

22. See Samuel Brown, *In Heaven as it Is on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Conquest of Death* (forthcoming manuscript), chapter 5. The quotation come from *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon, Upon Plates Taken from the Plates of Nephi*, translated by Joseph Smith (Palmyra: Printed by E. B. Grandin, for the Author, 1830), 108 (current LDS edition: 2 Nephi 26:16).

23. *Book of Mormon*, 24–35, 248, and 323–326 (current LDS edition: 1 Nephi 11, Alma 10:7; 36).

on the necessity of angelic ministrations in the last days, warning that if “the day of miracles ceased,” specifically mentioning visitations of angels, then “it is because of unbelief, and all is vain.”²⁴ Similar passages can be found throughout the revelations that proceeded from Joseph Smith during the following years, emphasizing the interactive role of angels in the work of mankind.²⁵ Indeed, a key component to early Mormon scripture was the restoration of supernatural manifestations—most notably angelic ministration. Further, the Mormon claim on authority came through angelic beings, as discussed below.

When Oliver Cowdery wrote the first public history of the Church in 1834, angels took a primary role in his narrative. Yet, after reciting Joseph Smith’s 1823 experience, he acknowledged that such an idea might be found primitive in the new enlightened age. “I am aware,” he wrote, “that a rehearsal of visions of angels at this day, is as inconsistent with a portion of mankind as



During the early 19th century, many Americans were embracing a more anthropomorphized understanding of angels. This woodcut, from an 1828 Cooperstown, N.Y., Bible—the same type used by Joseph Smith during his Bible translation—depicts Abraham’s angelic visitors as not only human, but effeminate, echoing the larger artistic trends of the day. Acknowledgments to John Hajicek for sharing this image with the author and allowing for it to be reproduced here. Woodcut, in H & E’s Stereotype Edition. The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments... (Cooperstown, NY: H & E Phinney, 1828), leaf inserted between pages 18-19, copy in the possession of John Hajicek, Mormonism.com, Independence, MO.

24. *Book of Mormon*, 579–580 (current LDS edition: Moroni 7:35–37).

25. See various Joseph Smith Revelations in *Doctrine and Covenants* (1835), 2:2; 4:15; 7:1; *Manuscript History of the Church*, Book A-1, 192–195, 437–441 (current LDS edition: D&C 20:10; 77:8–9; 84:88; 88:2; 103:19–20).

it formerly was, after all the boast of this wise generation in the knowledge of the truth.” However, Cowdery’s faith in the Mormon theology of angelic beings gave him confidence that such a belief could be expected: “but there is a uniformity so complete, that on reflection, one is led to rejoice that it is so.²⁶ To Cowdery, among others, a literal reading of the Bible necessitated ministrations from angels, and these angels provided the young Church an attachment to antiquity and authority²⁷—and, more importantly, the specific angelology of Mormonism was of such theological consistence that it balanced the supernatural with reason.

Belief in angels as symbolizing the restoration of the gospel became such a focal point of the Mormon message that it was a common topic in pamphlet debates between Mormons and their contemporary ministers, especially those involving Parley P. Pratt, the most vocal theologian and apologist. Two examples of these debates—in-print—one in America, one in Britain—represent the standard elements involved in this religious give-and-take. At the heart of these debates were contested issues of biblical interpretation and spiritual gifts—in short, how one related the ancient Bible to the modern world, and what spiritual manifestations were to be expected by religious believers.

When Le Roy Sunderland, at the time a Methodist preacher, printed his eight-part series against Mormonism in 1838, one of his main accusations was that “[the Mormons] profess to have intercourse with the angels of God, and affirm that they frequently see them, and have messages from God through

26. Oliver Cowdery, “Letter V,” in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:55.

27. For early Mormonism’s literal interpretation of the Bible, see Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible: The Place of the Latter-day Saints in American Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 43–73. Although he argues that they were “selective” literalists (33, 38, 65), the Saints presented themselves as the *most* literal among antebellum religionists. For Joseph Smith’s use of physical ordinations from resurrected patriarchs as a commonsensical response to the Protestant view of history and religious enthusiasm, see Samuel Brown and Matthew Bowman, “Joseph Smith and Charles Buck: Heresy and the Living Witness of History,” paper presented at the 2008 Mormon History Association, Sacramento, CA; see also Benjamin E. Park, “‘Build, Therefore, Your Own World’: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Joseph Smith, and American Antebellum Thought,” *Journal of Mormon History* 36 (Winter 2010): 58–59.

them.”²⁸ Sunderland, a Methodist, was part of a tradition that was attempting to become more “rational” and less “enthusiastic,” and thus interpreted Mormonism’s angelic claims as a remnant of a religious fanatical past that Protestantism was trying to move away from.²⁹ In response to this accusation, Pratt countered in his *Mormonism Unveiled* that such a belief should not only be acknowledged, but accepted as a central part to religious claims: “this is what the Saints professed in all ages of the world, in every country, among every nation, and under every dispensation of God to man, whether Patriarchal, Mosaic, or Christian; and one who does not believe in such enjoyments, is an infidel, and not a believer of revelation in any shape.”³⁰ The rejection of these spiritual gifts and rights to angelic ministrations, in other words, would mean the rejection of what it truly meant to be a Christian.

When Pratt’s pamphleteering increased on his mission in England, his defense of spiritual gifts in general and angelic ministrations in particular increased. William Hewitt, a British minister, reacted to the infiltration of Mormon missionaries into his country by attacking the claimed visions of Joseph Smith, particularly the visitations of Moroni.³¹ Arguing that such experiences are technically “possible,” he dismisses them as not “probable” because of the different setting of the 1840s as opposed to Old Testament times. “It is true that God at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers ... by the angels,” he reasoned,

for in those days such a way of communication was necessary,
as the Scriptures were not then written for their instruction;—

28. Le Roy Sunderland, “Mormonism,” *Zion’s Watchman* 3 (January 13, 1838): 6.

29. For Methodism’s transition, see Mark A. Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 362.

30. Parley P. Pratt, *Mormonism Unveiled: Zion’s Watchman Unmasks, and its Editor, Mr. L. R. Sunderland, Exposed: Truth Vindicated: the Devil Mad, and Priestcraft in Danger!* (New York: Printed for the Publisher, 1838), 5.

31. Hewitt was most likely responding to Orson Pratt’s influential *A Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions, and of the Late Discovery of Ancient American Records* (Edinburgh: Ballantyne and Hughes, 1840).

–but after God had once spoken unto men by his own Son, manifested in the flesh, and fully revealed his will by him to the world, and confirmed that revelation by a long succession of unquestionable miracles, there has been no necessity for angelic appearances since the days of the Apostles.

To Hewitt, the ministration of Christ and the spread of the Bible made angelic manifestations unnecessary. While these mystical beings were still present, the government of angels is now “administered in a secret and invisible manner.”³² Echoing the American Cotton Mather, Hewitt not only preached the declining importance of angels, but also the widening gap between the earthly and celestial realms.

In Pratt’s response, the Mormon apostle claimed that the modern spiritualizing of angels does not take precedence over the divine decree for angelic ministration in the New Testament. He dismissed the notion of a “secret and mysterious way” by reasoning that nobody could witness such a manifestation, and it would therefore not fulfill its scriptural prerogative. While Hewitt drew his reasoning of invisible angels from respected contemporary theologians, Pratt countered that unless he heard differently from someone with prophetic authority, the biblical command for angelic ministrations still took precedence.³³ Emblematic of the early Mormon missionary message, Pratt urged that angels not only served as heavenly messengers on divine command, but that their ministration in and of itself was a sign of the religious movement’s legitimacy.

Once the Church settled Nauvoo in the 1840’s, speculation on the nature of angels only grew. Significantly, this speculation was connected to the evolving views of the origin, nature, and possibilities of man, mankind’s relationship with God and the universe. As sacred rites developed in the Nauvoo temple, ange-

32. William Hewitt, *An Exposition of the Errors and Fallacies of the Self-Named “Latter-Day-Saints”* (Lane-End: C. Watts, 1840), 5–6

33. Parley P. Pratt, *An Answer to Mr. William Hewitt’s Tract Against the Latter-Day Saints* (Manchester: W. R. Thomas, 1840), 6–7.

lology became more complex, classified, and, most importantly, anthropomorphized, as these new rites dealt with the discernment of good and bad angels.

Several writers attempted angelic taxonomies, dividing various types of angels into differing categories. Apostle Orson Pratt argued that there were “four grand divisions,” including spirits or angels not yet embodied, spirits or angels currently embodied, spirits or angels disembodied yet waiting to be resurrected, and spirits or angels embodied in an immortal tabernacle.³⁴ An editorial in the Mormon newspaper, likely penned by William Phelps, divided angels into three categories: archangels, resurrected personages, “and the angels which are ministering spirits.”³⁵ This latter editorial goes into the most detail as to the nature and function of angels, making the revealing statement that “it is evident that the angels who minister to men in the flesh, are resurrected beings, so that flesh administers to flesh; and spirits to spirits...”³⁶ This set up an important distinction in the roles between embodied and disembodied spirits, leaving disembodied spirits primarily the role of ministering in the spirit world.³⁷ The only way a disembodied spirit could minister to someone in a mortal tabernacle, the text reasoned, was through “dreams,” so that “spirit” could remain only a minister to “spirit”³⁸—this set of rules regarding materiality was emblematic of the Nauvoo period in general.

34. Orson Pratt, “Angels,” *The New York Messenger* 2 (October 18, 1845): 97.

35. [William Phelps?], “The Angels,” *Times and Seasons* 4 (March 1, 1845): 823. I choose Phelps because the ideas presented in this editorial match the theology present in Phelps’s fictional piece “Paracletes” (especially that of archangels) discussed below. Phelps was the assistant to editor John Taylor for the *Times and Seasons*, and wrote many anonymous pieces. See Samuel Brown, “The Translator and the Ghostwriter: Joseph Smith and W.W. Phelps,” *Journal of Mormon History* 34 (Winter 2008): 26–62. John Taylor is another possible author for this editorial.

36. [Phelps?], “The Angels,” 824.

37. Parley Pratt had been teaching the necessity of preaching the gospel to the spirit world as a disembodied spirit for at least a year previous to this as part of his highly literalistic *Imitatio Christi*. Parley P. Pratt, “The Immortality and Eternal Life of the Material Body,” in Parley P. Pratt, *An Appeal to the Inhabitants of the State of New York, Letter to Queen Victoria, (Reprinted from the tenth European Edition,) the Fountain of Knowledge, Immortality of the Body, and Intelligence and Affection* (Nauvoo, Illinois: John Taylor, Printer, 1844), 35.

38. [Phelps?], “The Angels,” 825.

Orson Pratt's exposition followed the same rules concerning angelic stewardships and rules, going so far as to claim that the angels that administered to Adam must have been "fleshy beings of some former world" in order to minister to the fleshy mortal.³⁹ He reasoned on the difference in appearance between the two different types of angels, offering his view on the nature and characteristics of a spirit when not possessing a tangible body.

There is a difference in appearance of the spirits of just men, and those immortal beings raised from the dead or translated. If the first become visible, they must appear in brightness with exceeding great splendor and glory. They have no tabernacle in which to hide the brightness of their glory, when visible to mortal eyes; the second can display their glory, or veil it from mortal gaze, by the interposition of the fleshy tabernacle. Hence the second in this respect, hold a preeminence above the first, being possessed of the superior power of administering in brightness and glory, or appearing like common mortal men according to their own will and pleasure.⁴⁰

Several early Mormons, most notably Orson Hyde, took a special interest in guardian angels. Zina Diantha Huntington Jacobs recorded a discourse by Hyde "concerning our guardian Angels that attended each Saint, and would until the Spirit [sic] became grieved." Jacobs took comfort from this teaching and immediately began praying for her own guardian spirit to help her in her current infirmities.⁴¹ Elsewhere, Hyde discoursed that "while the angel that administers to man is still in attendance, his life is protected, for the guardian angel is stronger than death," even identifying Christ's plea of being forsaken in Gethsemane as a result of the departure of "the protecting angel whom the Lord had called

39. Orson Pratt, "Angels. No. 2," 121.

40. *Ibid.*, 121.

41. Zina Diantha Huntington Jacobs, Journal, November 17, 1843, "All Things Move in Order in the City": The Nauvoo Diary of Zina Diantha Huntington Jacobs," ed. Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Brigham Young University Studies* 19 (Spring 1979): 298.

away, leaving Jesus in the arms of death.”⁴² In William Phelps’s 1845 speculative fictional piece “Paracletes,” he presented a divine plan designed so “that none of the work of the hands of the ‘Son’ might be lost or any soul which his father had given him, might be left in prison” by commissioning angels “to watch over Idumia [the earth], and act as spiritual guides to every soul...”⁴³ Indeed, the first two decades of Mormonism provided many different formulations of angels and an evolving notion of their relationship to mankind and God’s Kingdom. However, moving beyond a mere description of this developing angelology and engaging what it reveals about early Mormon thought offers an important glimpse into the mental world of the early Church.

MORMON ANGELS AND THE APPEAL TO AUTHORITY

Even as early as the translation process of the Book of Mormon, angelic ministration served a larger role in Joseph Smith’s evolving conception of ecclesiastical authority. Scribe Oliver Cowdery recalled that while they were translating the portion of the record containing the ministry of Christ, he and Smith came to conclude that “none had authority from God to administer the ordinances of the gospel.” As a result, they retired outdoors and an “angel of God came down clothed with glory, and delivered the anxiously looked for message, and the keys of the gospel of repentance.” Writing half a decade after the event, Cowdery attempted to recall the words of the angelic being, placing emphasis on the power they felt the ministration conferred: “upon <you> my fellow servants, in the name of Messiah I confer this priesthood, and this authority, which shall remain upon the earth, that the sons of Levi may yet offer an offering unto

42. Orson Hyde, Sermon, December 26, 1844, in “Dedication of the Seventies Hall,” *Times and Seasons* 6 (February 1, 1845): 796.

43. Joseph’s Speckled Bird [William Phelps], “Paracletes,” *Times and Seasons* 6 (May 1, 1845): 892. For an excellent introduction an annotated version of this text, see Samuel Brown, “William Phelps’s Paracletes, an Early Witness to Joseph Smith’s Divine Anthropology,” *International Journal of Mormon Studies* vol. 2 (Spring 2009): 62–82.

the Lord in righteousness!”⁴⁴ Combined with the reception of the “high Priesthood after the holy order of the son” some time later under the hands of New Testament apostles,⁴⁵ angelic ministrations served as three of Joseph Smith’s four primary claims to the “Kees [sic] of the kingdom of God” in his 1832 history.⁴⁶

Angelic ordination, however, was not a rhetorical focus of Mormon authority in the first few years of the Church. From 1829, when Joseph Smith began baptizing converts, through the organizational years of 1834–35, the “Church of Christ”—the official name of the Church until 1834—was very simple in organization and quite democratic as opposed to its later hierarchical structure.⁴⁷ The early Saints based their authority on a spiritual, egalitarian power rooted in

44. Oliver Cowdery, “Letter I,” in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:30–31. It is important to note that the priesthood conferred by this angel held “the key of the ministering of angels,” implying that future manifestations were to be expected.

45. The timing of the second angelic ordination is debated, yet is tangential and relatively unimportant to this paper’s purposes. For various interpretations of possible dates, see D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Powers* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1994), 14–26; Marvin S. Hill, *Quest for Refuge: The Mormon Flight from American Pluralism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 25–26; Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 118, 588 n. 35; Brian Q. Cannon and *BYU Studies* staff, “Priesthood Restoration Documents,” *Brigham Young University Studies* 35 (1995–96): 162–207; Larry C. Porter, “The Restoration of the Aaronic and Melchizedek Priesthoods,” *Ensign* 26 (Dec. 1996): 30–47.

46. When Joseph Smith began his first attempt at writing a history of the early Church in 1832, he gave four key events that he felt was crucial to “the rise of the church of Christ”:

1. “the receiving the testamony [sic] from on high”
2. “the ministering of Angels”
3. “the reception of the holy Priesthood by the ministring [sic] of Angels to administer the letter of the Gospel – <-the Law and commandments as they were given unto him-> and the ordinances [sic]”
4. “a confirmation and reception of the high Priesthood after the holy order of the son of the living God power and ordinance [sic] from on high to preach the Gospel in the administration and demonstration of the spirit the Kees of the Kingdom of God conferred upon him and the continuation of the blessings of God to him &c”

Joseph Smith, 1832 History, in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:3.

47. For a discussion on the evolving nature of Mormon authority, see Gregory A. Prince, *Power from on High: The Development of Mormon Priesthood* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), esp. 1–46; Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy*, 1–47.

revelatory words, texts, and gifts, and did not highlight priesthood ordination.⁴⁸ Joseph Knight's history, possibly written in the early 1830s, did not mention any angelic ordinations.⁴⁹ Many members of early Mormonism's circles, especially those who left the Church during a time of temporal tumult and theological transition, recalled not hearing about angelic ordinations. David Whitmer later wrote, "neither did I ever hear of such a thing as an angel ordaining [Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery] until I got into Ohio about the year 1834—or later."⁵⁰ William McLellin, one of the original apostles, claimed that while in 1831 he "heard Joseph tell his experience about angel visits many times," he "never heard one word of John the Baptist, or of Peter, James, and John's visit and ordination till I was told some year or two afterward in Ohio."⁵¹ While it is impossible to determine the extent this information was known during this early period, the

48. See Dan Vogel, *Religious Seekers and the Advent of Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988), 104.

49. Dean C. Jessee, ed., "Joseph Knight's Recollection of Early Mormon History," *Brigham Young University Studies* 17 (Spring 1976): 29–39. It is also possible that this account was written as much as a decade later.

50. David Whitmer interview by Zenos H. Gurley, January 14, 1885, in Lyndon W. Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1991), 154. It should be noted that David Whitmer in his later life was trying to distance himself from certain elements of Mormonism—most notably priesthood organization—while at the same time holding on the bare minimum of what he believed of the early Church. See H. Michael Marquardt, "David Whitmer: His Evolving Beliefs and Recollections," in *Scattering of the Saints: Schism within Mormonism*, ed. Newell G. Bringhurst and John C. Hamer (Independence, Missouri: John Whitmer Books, 2007), esp. 64–74.

51. William McLellin, qtd in Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy*, 19. In 1860, McLellin wrote a letter claiming "I never heard of Moroni, John, or Peter, James, and John. It was after [Joseph Smith] fell from God that these things were put in, in order to sustain the falsehood of these two priesthoods. I do not say but angels conversed with him, and gave him much instruction how to proceed. But that they ever ordained him I deny." William McLellin to Davis H. Bays, May 24, 1870, transcribed in *The William E. McLellin Papers, 1854–1880*, edited by Stan Larson and Samuel J. Passey (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2007), 462. For discussions on McLellin's "selective" memory, especially concerning his later interpretation of the priesthood, see Thomas G. Alexander, "The Past as Decline from a Golden Age: Early Mormonism's Restorationist Tendency," and D. Michael Quinn, "My Eyes were Holden in Those Days': A Study of Selective Memory." For an argument for the validity of McLellin's memory, see William D. Russell, "Portrait of a 'True Believer' in Original Mormonism." All these articles are found in Larson and Passey, *The William E. McLellin Papers*.

lack of public commentary on angelic ordination is readily apparent.⁵² Rather, though angels were sometimes mentioned, they were often invoked to confirm Mormonism's appeal to the restoration of spiritual gifts and manifestations—their presence confirmed the opening of the heavens more than a connection to ancient patriarchs.

However, 1834–1835 brought many changes for the young Church. Based on what he believed to be the “order of heaven in ancient councils,” Joseph Smith began implementing multiple layers of hierarchical organization.⁵³ He organized High Councils in both Kirtland, Ohio, and Clay County, Missouri, in 1834; in 1835, he expanded the ecclesiastical structure even further by establishing a Quorum of Twelve Apostles and a Council of Seventy.⁵⁴ Smith received a revelation that established the different roles and authorities of the higher and lower priesthoods as well as the many new priesthood offices.⁵⁵ But with this new emphasis on ordination came a need to validate their ordaining authority, and that is when angelic connections to antiquity became a central argument.

When preparing to organize the Kirtland High Council, Smith gave significant instructions to those in attendance: “I shall now endeavour to set forth before the council, the dignity of the office which has been conferred upon me by the ministering of the Angel of God, by his own voice and by the voice of

52. It does appear that there was some discussion concerning angelic authority in Kirtland in 1830, while Oliver Cowdery and others were preaching the gospel on the way to their mission to the Lamanites. See Mark Lyman Staker, *Hearken, O Ye People: The Historical Setting for Joseph Smith's Ohio Revelations* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2009), 55. However, it is still important to note that most discussion concerning the priesthood for the following four years do not emphasize ordinations by angels.

53. Joseph Smith, Sermon, February 17, 1834, in Fred C. Collier and William S. Harwell, eds., *Kirtland Council Minute Book* (Salt Lake City: Collier's Publishing Co., 1996); hereafter cited *KCMB*.

54. Bushman, *Rough Stone Rolling*, 251–69; Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy*, 39–77; Prince, *Power from On High*, 24–35. Dean C. Jessee, Mark Ashurst-McGee, and Richard L. Jensen, eds., *Journals, Volume 1: 1832–1839*, vol. 1 of the journals series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2008), 252–260.

55. Joseph Smith, Revelation, February 17, 1834, in *Doctrine and Covenants* (1835), section 3 (current LDS edition: D&C 107).

this Church.”⁵⁶ Indeed, Smith’s idea of recovering the “ancient councils” was by hearkening to the ancient patriarchs who took part in those councils. Around the same time, Joseph Smith gave Oliver Cowdery a blessing in which he explained it was a fulfillment “of prophecy of Joseph, in ancient days,” that Smith and Cowdery should “be ordained... by the hand of the angel in the bush, unto the lesser priesthood, and after receive the holy priesthood under the hands of those who had been held in reserve for a long season even those who received it under the hands of the Messiah” in order to establish the governing councils of the Church in the latter days.⁵⁷ Smith again emphasized the angelic authority when instructing the newly formed Quorum of the Twelve, explaining, “You have been ordained to the Holy Priesthood. You have received it from those who had their power and Authority from an Angel.”⁵⁸ In this period of increasing attention to authority and ordination, the Mormon Prophet began to emphasize authority through angelic ordinations—a theme that expanded in the following years.

Once the Kirtland Temple was completed and dedicated—an event that involved a spiritual “Pentecost” including many angelic manifestations⁵⁹—Smith claimed further angelic visitations and ordinations, which in turn signaled deeper theological developments. On 3 April 1836, a week after the dedication, Joseph Smith recorded in his journal a visitation from Moses, Elias, and Elijah, all

56. Joseph Smith, Sermon, February 12, 1834, in *KCMB*.

57. Joseph Smith, Jr., Blessing on Oliver Cowdery, December 18, 1833, revised and recorded 2 October, 1835, Patriarchal Blessing Book 1:12, transcribed in H. Michael Marquardt, comp., *Early Patriarchal Blessings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Smith-Pettit Foundation, 2007), 8–9. There is some debate about whether this blessing was delivered in December 1833 or December 1834. See Quinn, *Mormon Hierarchy*, 46–51. Either date, however, works within the framework of this paper, since the former date takes place two month previous to the organization of Kirtland High Council, and the latter is two months previous to the organization of the Quorum of the Twelve.

58. Joseph Smith, Sermon, February 21, 1835, in *KCMB*.

59. See Steven C. Harper, “A Pentecost and Endowment Indeed’: Six Eyewitness Accounts of the Kirtland Temple Experience,” in *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844*, edited by John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press; Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 2005), 327–372.

conferring advanced keys and priesthoods upon the Mormon prophet.⁶⁰ These keys, and the principles Smith would associate with them, would come to dominate Nauvoo theology and discourse as he hearkened repeatedly to “the fulness of the Melchizedek Priesthood,” the “sealing” ceremonies, ordinances for the dead, and temple rituals—all of which he would associate with Elijah.⁶¹

That Smith relied on angels for his authority claims reveals an important glimpse into early Mormon thought, not to mention the tensions of the larger intellectual environment. Ecclesiastical authority was an important issue in ante-bellum Protestant culture, with many competing claims on how an authoritative bridge could be built between modernity and the ancient, New Testament past. Martin Luther’s “priesthood of all believers” was a popular position for many evangelical-minded denominations, especially among those who emphasized an untrained and unprofessional clergy during the democratized early republic, because it placed significant importance on spiritual experience and charismatic manifestation rather than a tangible, traditional lineage. Among restorationist movements, with which Mormonism has often been associated, authority was gained through close examination of the Bible and the legitimate interpretation of scripture.⁶² Joseph Smith’s appeal to restore the true Christianity, however, was to receive it from those who were a part of it before it was lost. By claiming priesthood reception from resurrected ancient prophets and patriarchs authorized to bestow authoritative keys, knowledge, and priesthood, Smith provided a connecting link between Saints of the latter days and Saints of a former day.⁶³

60. Joseph Smith, Journal, 1835–1836, in Jessee, Ashurst–McGee, and Jensen, *Journals*, 222 (3 April 1836).

61. Prince, *Power from On High*, 35–44. See also Samuel M Brown, “The Prophet Elias Puzzle,” *Dialogue: a Journal of Mormon Thought* 39 (Fall 2006): 1–17.

62. For an overview of Mormonism’s connection to Restorationists, see Jan Shipps, “The Reality of the Restoration and the Restoration Ideal in the Mormon Tradition,” in *The American Quest for the Primitive Church*, edited by Richard T. Hughes (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 181–195.

63. Brown and Bowman, “Heresy”; John W. Welch, “Joseph Smith and the Past,” in *The Worlds of Joseph Smith: A Bicentennial Conference at the Library of Congress*, edited by John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2006), 112.

This link was crucial; for in Smith's mind, salvific rituals had passed unchanged from the time of Adam to the second coming of Christ, establishing an authoritative continuum that necessitated both constant ritual performances and authority to administer them.⁶⁴ During Smith's implementation and expansion of the Nauvoo temple ordinances, the importance of this continuity only increased: "Ordinances were instituted in heaven before the foundation of the world in the priesthood for the salvation of men," he taught in Nauvoo, and were "not [to] be altered, not to be changed. All must be saved upon the same principle."⁶⁵ Thus, his intent was not only to recover the presence of past figures, but to also recover their authority. In 1839, when the idea of priesthood authority was further solidified, he delivered a discourse that outlined his views of keys and authority exercised by a long network of priesthood officiators:

The Priesthood was first given to Adam: he obtained the first Presidency & held the Keys of it, from generation to Generation... These men held keys, first on earth, & then in Heaven.— The Priesthood is an everlasting principle & Existed with God from Eternity & will to Eternity, without beginning of days or end of years. the Keys have to be brought from heaven whenever the Gospel is sent... He, [Adam] is the Father of the human family & presides over the Spirits of all men, & all that have had the keys must stand before him in this great council... The Keys were given to [Adam], and by him to others he will have to give an account of his Stewardship, & they to him... The Savior, Moses, & Elias—gave the Keys to Peter, James & John on the Mount when they were transfigured before him... How have we come at the priesthood in the last days?... it came down, down in regular succession. Peter James & John had it given to them & they gave it up."⁶⁶

64. See Park, "Build, Therefore, Your Own World," 54–59.

65. Joseph Smith, Sermon, June 11, 1843, in Scott H. Faulring, ed., *An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1989), 383–384.

66. Joseph Smith, Sermon, August 8, 1839, in Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 8–9.

Indeed, Smith exulted in his angelic tutelage and ordination. In a letter written to the Church in 1842, Smith jubilantly proclaimed the many angelic visitors who had taught and ordained him in his prophetic experience, making possible what he believed was the restoration of the ancient gospel:

Now, what do we hear in the gospel which we have received? ... Moroni, an angel from heaven, declaring the fulfilment of the prophets—the book to be reveal'd... The voice of peter, James & John, in the wilderness, between Harmony, Susquehanna County, and Colesvill, Broom County... And the voice of Michael the archangel—the voice of Gabriel, and of Raphael, and of divers angels, from Michael or Adam, down to the present time; all declaring each one their dispensation, their rights, their keys, their honors, their majesty & glory.⁶⁷

In an age where many Protestants and spiritualists were attempting to recover angelic *voices* as a way to gain comfort or information,⁶⁸ Joseph Smith sought to recover physical angelic *personages* with their accompanying *priesthoods* as a more solidified claim to ancient authority.

DISCERNING FALSE SPIRITS FROM TRUE SPIRITS

In early Mormonism, angels who held priesthood authority were not the only type of spirits to be reckoned with. As early as 1831, circumstances required Joseph Smith to dictate two revelations that were explicitly designed to direct the Saints in discernment between good and evil spirits.⁶⁹ Having arrived on a scene of charismatic excess among the recent Kirtland converts, the young

67. Joseph Smith, Letter to the Church, September 6, 1842 in Jessee, *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2:473–474.

68. For an analysis of the antebellum quest to restore supernatural voices, see Schmidt, *Hearing Things*, esp. 199–211.

69. For a preliminary analysis of Smith's teachings concerning discernment, see Andrew F. Ehat, "Joseph Smith's Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the 1844 Succession Question" (Brigham Young University: Master's Thesis, 1981), 33–35. While Ehat depicts a continuity in Smith's discernment teachings, I argue that they correspondingly evolved with Smith's developing theology.

prophet corrected what he understood to be “some strange notions and false spirits” that had “crept in among [the Church].”⁷⁰ As recorded in May 1831, one of the revelations the Mormon Prophet received in response warned his followers, “there are many spirits which are false spirits, which have gone forth in the earth, deceiving the world.”⁷¹ The topic of discernment was still on Smith’s mind a few months later in October when he counseled the Church to beware of “false Christs”—a New Testament allusion, yet one especially potent in early Mormon thought.⁷²

The idea of false spirits—or more specifically, fallen angels—was an important issue in antebellum America. Indeed, many contemporary religionists were left to determine, as one historian put it, “distinction[s] between the efficacy of demonic and divine intervention,” especially as it related to their own assemblies.⁷³ Beyond merely labeling these evil influences as mystical forces of a vague satanic power, more and more began describing them as fallen angels—personages with human-like characteristics who only lacked physical bodies. Most explained them as angelic beings that, often because of pride, fell from

70. Smith, 1839 History, in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:347. For other contemporary accounts of this outbreak of enthusiasm, see Parley P. Pratt, ed., *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 61; Bruce N. Westergren, ed., *From Historian to Dissident: The Book of John Whitmer* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 57; John Corroll, *A Brief History of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints (Commonly Called Mormons)* (St. Louis: printed for the author, 1839), 16; Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled: Or, A Faithful Account of that Singular Imposition and Delusion* (Painesville, Ohio: By the Author, 1834), 116. For an analysis of this spiritual crisis, see J. Spencer Fluhman, “The Joseph Smith Revelations and the Crisis of Early American Spirituality,” in *The Doctrine and Covenants: Revelations in Context*, ed. Andrew H. Hedges, J. Spencer Fluhman, and Alonzo L. Gaskill (Provo and Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2008), 68; Staker, *Hearken, O Ye People*, 147–168.

71. Joseph Smith, Revelation, May 1831, in *Book of Commandments, for the Government of the Church of Christ, Organized According to the Law, on the 6th of April, 1830* (Zion: W.W. Phelps & Co., 1833), 2 (current LDS edition: D&C 50:2).

72. Joseph Smith, Sermon, October 25, 1831, in Donald Q. Cannon and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *Far West Record: Minutes of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1830–1844* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1983), 23.

73. Susan Juster, *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 35.

their divine positions. Buck's *Theological Dictionary*, the widely used theological reference for antebellum America, said, "although the angels were originally created perfect, yet they were mutable: some of them sinned, and kept not their first estate; and so, of the most blessed and glorious, became the most vile and miserable of all God's creatures." Kicked out of heaven and organized under a quasi-demonic rule, these angels, Buck explained, were set out to tempt, try, and even destroy humanity.⁷⁴ Theologian John Reynolds also noted that there were numerous heavenly creatures that had fallen because of "pride" and were left to disturb the children of God.⁷⁵

Early Mormon teachings and revelations echoed these sentiments. An 1832 revelation labeled the devil as "an angel of God who was in authority in the presence of God, who rebelled against the Only Begotten Son" only to be "thrust down from the presence of God and the Son..."⁷⁶ As mentioned above, the early Church was thought to have suffered from many "false spirits" even before the boundaries and limitations of spiritual enthusiasm were clearly marked. Smith later explained these manifestations were a result of inexperience on the part of the Saints in discerning true and false spirits.⁷⁷ As the Church developed, these false spirits continued to evolve to signify disembodied personages that sought after the tabernacles of mankind. Phelps's "Paracletes" depicted the guardian angels determined to "preserve [mankind] from the secret of unfor[e]seen snares of those angels who kept not their first estates, but were left in their sins, to roam from region to region, and in chains of darkness, until the great day of

74. Buck, *Theological Dictionary*, 17. By "first estate," Buck was likely referencing some existence before mortality—an increasingly popular, if never officially endorsed, idea during antebellum America. See Terry L. Givens, *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-Mortal Existence in Western Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), chapters 9–10.

75. Reynolds, *Inquiries*, 14.

76. Joseph Smith, Revelation, February 16, 1832, in *Doctrine and Covenants* (1835), 91:3 (current LDS edition: D&C 76:25).

77. Joseph Smith, "Try the Spirits," *Times and Seasons* 3 (April 1, 1842): 743–747; Joseph Smith, 1839 History, in Jesse, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:347.

judgment.”⁷⁸

In Nauvoo, spiritual discernment continued to be discussed, yet these fallen angels were now closely connected with temple rituals. Indeed, the detection of false angels was a specific focus for Joseph Smith during this period. George A. Smith, cousin of the Mormon prophet and member of the Quorum of the Twelve, recalled that “there was no point upon which the Prophet Joseph dwelt more than the discerning of Spirits.”⁷⁹ In 1842, Joseph Smith echoed and built upon the 1831 episode by writing that “it is evident from the apostle’s writings that many false spirits existed in their day, and had ‘gone forth into the world,’ and that it needed intelligence which God alone could impart to detect false spirits, and to prove what spirits were of God.” Only now, Smith added a new element: the discernor must be in possession of priesthood keys and have “a knowledge of the laws by which spirits are governed.”⁸⁰

Smith further explained a test by which this knowledge could be obtained. “If an Angel or spirit appears offer him your hand,” he explained sometime around 1840; “if he is a spirit from God he will stand still and not offer you his hand. If from the Devil he will either shrink back from you or offer his hand,

78. [Phelps], “Paracletes,” 892.

79. George A. Smith, Sermon, November 28, 1869, in “Minutes of Meetings Held in Provo City,” microfilm of holograph, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University. It should be noted that at the time of this statement of George A. Smith, the Mormons were in a debate with a growing number of Spiritualists in Utah, and hence had a reason to emphasize the importance of discernment. For spiritualism in Utah, see Ronald W. Walker, *Wayward Saints: The Godbeites and Brigham Young* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998); Edward Leo Lyman, *Amasa Lyman, Mormon Apostle and Apostate: A Study in Dedication* (Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 2009).

80. Smith, “Try the Spirits,” *Times and Seasons*, 743–747. This editorial, though signed by Joseph Smith, was most likely a collaboration with William Phelps or John Taylor. Many of Smith’s documents, especially in Nauvoo, were penned under the supervision of Smith but were authored by his scribes. As one recent scholar noted, “[Smith’s] name on any document from his last years is not an answer but a question.” Michael Hicks, “Joseph Smith, W. W. Phelps, and the Poetic Paraphrase of ‘The Vision,’” *Journal of Mormon History* 20 (Fall 1994): 68. “Try the Spirits” is engaged in depth in Brown and Bowman, “Heresy.”

which if he does you will feel nothing, but be deceived.”⁸¹ Such a test implied that the appearance of a false spirit could be similar to the appearance of angel, and that the only way to detect them was a physical touch that would differentiate them from resurrected angels, as well as the recognition of priesthood authority. Indeed, just like Joseph Smith’s anthropomorphized angels, false spirits were also in human form and were to be dealt with through the reliance on a primary belief that all beings were forced to follow the same irrevocable rules.⁸²

The belief that all spirits, even disembodied spirits who failed to keep their “first estate,” were subject to the same infinite laws and authority is also highlighted by the teaching in early Mormonism regarding the discernment of spirits by virtue of the priesthood. In 1845, Orson Pratt asked the hypothetical question, “how [can] the saints can distinguish between angels of authority, and such as have no authority, seeing there are so many different classes?” By reasoning, he answered “that no one can distinguish correctly, without the keys of the priesthood, obtained through the ordinances of endowment.”⁸³ The priesthood in early LDS thought was not merely a means to perform salvific ordinances or sacraments; it was an eternal power present outside of the human race that governed the entire cosmos.

Developing conceptions of embodiment also influenced Mormon beliefs in evil spirits. By equating the possession of a corporeal body with power, the Saints had an advantage over fallen angels who did not possess physical tabernacles. “All men have power to resist the devil,” Joseph Smith explained in 1841, because “they who have tabernacles have power over those who have not.”⁸⁴

81. Joseph Smith, Sermon, December 1840, in Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 44. There is some question as to when this account was written. See Smith, *An Intimate Chronicle*, 514.

82. One of Joseph Smith’s early revelations also taught of infinite laws: “And unto every kingdom is given a law; and unto every law there are certain bounds and conditions.” *Doctrine and Covenants* (1835), 7:9–10 (current LDS edition: D&C 88:38).

83. Pratt, “Angels. No. 2,” 121. The “endowment” was the term that came to describe Nauvoo temple ordinances.

84. Joseph Smith, Sermon, May 16, 1841, in Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 74.

That human beings kept their first estate gave them authority over those who rebelled and followed the devil. “The greatness of [the devil’s] punishment,” Smith taught two years later, “is that he shall not have a tabernacle[,] this is his punishment.”⁸⁵ Franklin D. Richards remembered Smith calling this punishment the “mortification of satan,” and that he and his demons often make it a goal to take possession of bodies, but are forced to leave “when the proven authorities turn him out of Doors.”⁸⁶ Thus, while Smith confirmed that evil spirits sought to take control of human tabernacles, he assured the Saints that they had the innate power to resist them by virtue of their bodies as well as the endowed power to resist by virtue of the priesthood.⁸⁷

This humanization of fallen angels added new elements to spiritual discernment. Beyond empirical handshakes, other tests very common in human experience were also employed. Joseph Smith gave an off-hand remark that one way to detect an evil messenger was by the color of his hair.⁸⁸ Parley Pratt wrote that someone possessed of a “bad spirit” has several tangible signs, including “a disagreeable smell” and the use of obscene words; Pratt even asserted that deafness and dumbness might be signs of possession.⁸⁹ Indeed, the discerning characteristics became less mystical and more humanistic.

While the Prophet was hesitant in giving physicality to angels, several of the early Saints wrote about experiences in which they physically battled demonic forces. Wilford Woodruff, for instance, recorded in his journal in 1840 an instance where the devil “made war” with him, and this literal battle was any-

85. Joseph Smith, Sermon, May 14, 1843, in *ibid.*, 201.

86. Joseph Smith, Sermon, May 21, 1843, in *ibid.*, 208.

87. For a more in-depth treatment of embodiment in early Mormon thought, see Benjamin E. Park, “Salvation Through a Tabernacle: Joseph Smith, Parley Pratt, and Early Mormon Theologies of Embodiment,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 43 (Summer 2010): 1–44.

88. Smith, “Try the Spirits,” 747.

89. Parley P. Pratt, *The Key to the Science of Theology: Designed as an Introduction to the First Principles of Spiritual Philosophy; Religion; Law and Government; As Delivered by the Ancients, and as Restored in This Age, For the Final Development of Universal Peace, Truth and Knowledge* (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855), 116.

thing but figurative: “[the devil] caught me by the throat & choked me nearly to death. He wounded me in my forehead. I also wounded him in a number of places in the head.”⁹⁰ These details were later struck out by a pencil, however, possibly as a result of learning from Smith that angels could not physically harm an individual, which, if correct, represents an important shift from Mormonism’s early exorcism experiences. Woodruff’s literal view of demonic “war” did not fully mesh with the Prophet’s understanding of unembodied spirits; while Mormon theology rejected the idea of “immaterial spirit,” and thus held that demons were composed of some form of matter, Smith taught that an evil spirit could never gain possession of a human body unless granted access.

This did not mean that Smith did not believe in literal battles with opposing spirits. On the contrary, his assertion that evil spirits’ desires were to take control of human bodies implies a form of struggle. However, these struggles seem to have been considered internal rather than external, “spirit” to “spirit,” as most notably displayed in his later “First Vision” accounts.⁹¹ Smith’s exorcism was based on priesthood authority—implying more of an internal, supernatural struggle—rather than a physical brawl with a satanic figure. Representative of the Mormon Prophet’s experiences with demonic possession was a June 1831 meeting where one follower, Harvey Whitlock, was possessed by the devil—“bound by the power of Satan,” as observer Philo Dibble put it⁹²—as if being internally attacked. To counter, Joseph Smith laid his hands on the afflicted Whitlock and invoked his priesthood power to dispel the demon.⁹³

Indeed, discerning false spirits was as important to the early Saints as ministrations from true angels, though the methods of discernment progressed over

90. Wilford Woodruff, Journal, October 18, 1840, in Scott G. Kenney, ed., *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal: 1833 Typescript*, 9 volumes (Midvale, Utah: Signature Books, 1983), 1:532.

91. Joseph Smith, 1839 History, in Jessee, *Papers of Joseph Smith*, 1:272.

92. Philo Dibble, “Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith,” in *Juvenile Instructor* 26 (May 15, 1892), 303.

93. Levi Hancock, Autobiography, 33–34, in L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

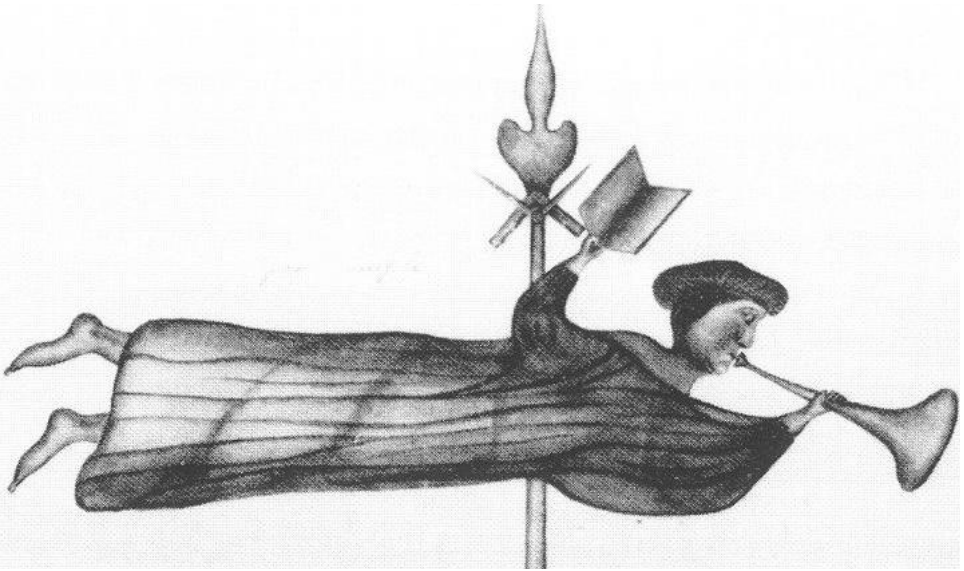
time in correspondence with their overall theology. They believed in a world where numerous spirits abounded, but only some could be trusted. While accounts of early manifestations vacillated between mystical forces and embodied beings, the face of these evil spirits became more and more human-like—mirroring the development of similar beliefs in anthropomorphic angels. Belief in the mythical destroying angel of Zion's Camp eventually evolved into the corporality-starved fallen dominions of Nauvoo.⁹⁴ This particular aspect of the developing angelology not only reveals elements of early Mormon thought, but also sheds extra light on Smith's growing conception of a supernatural sociality.

THE FAMILIAL ORDER OF HEAVEN

Nowhere was this growing idea of sociality more readily apparent than in Joseph Smith's humanization of angelic beings. That Smith depicted the empirical test of shaking hands as a way to discern angels reveals more than just a perceived way to identify spirits, or even a rational attempt to give credence to a supernatural experience, but it also hints to a deeper underlying theme beneath his reconceptualization of the order of heaven. In nineteenth century America, the practice of shaking hands tangibly symbolized the rural fraternity that the young nation embraced. This practiced irked British observer Frances Trollope, who bemoaned the "eternal shaking hands" among the vulgar American men who saw themselves as "gentlemen"—one of the many aspects of "republican equality" that Trollope found so repulsive.⁹⁵ By suggesting that angels—traditionally understood to be celestial beings from another sphere of glory—were willing to shake hands with humanity suggests the close relationship Smith en-

94. For the "destroying angel" of Zion's camp, see Benjamin E. Park, "'Thou Wast Willing to Lay Down Thy Life for Thy Brethren': Zion's Blessings in the Early Church," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 29 (2009): 33. Though disposed of by Joseph Smith and other Church leaders in Nauvoo, the image of a destroying angel or the otherwise traditional physicality of demonic aggression continued into the Utah period on a folk level.

95. Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1901), 141. I appreciate Samuel Brown for bringing this reference to my attention.



William Weeks's drawing of the angel weathervane to top the Nauvoo Temple succinctly captures that period's emphasis on humans and angels working together, performing the same salvific temple work as part of one larger family. Detail of William Weeks Nauvoo Temple Angel, in Nauvoo Architectural Drawings, circa 1841-1846, MS 11500, LDS Church Archives, in Selected Collections from the Archives of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2 volume DVD (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2002), 1:18.

visioned for the two groups.⁹⁶

In a sermon given sometime during the summer of 1839, Joseph Smith presented an interconnected, working relationship between mortals and angels. “Those men [to] whom these Keys have been given” will all work together in reporting stewardship, he taught regarding past prophets and patriarchs, “and they without us cannot be made perfect.” Smith explained to his audience that these angelic beings were not otherworldly creatures or completely different specimens, but rather “men [who] are in heaven” and still have “their children... on Earth.” This familial connection, strong enough that the angels’ “bowels yearn

96. Joseph Smith's teachings concerning “handshakes” should also be seen in the context of his involvement with masonry and the development of Nauvoo temple rites during this period. See Michael W. Homer, “Similarity of Priesthood in Masonry’: The Relationship between Freemasonry and Mormonism,” *Dialogue* 27 (Winter 1994): 1–116.

over us,” was the climax of antebellum America’s yearning for a consanguineous cosmology.⁹⁷ But this familiarization of angels was as sacerdotal as it was totemic: “both mortal and immortal servants,” Smith claimed, “were working together & join hand in hand in bringing about” the Kingdom of God.⁹⁸ That this insight about angels came in the middle of one of his most important discourses on priesthood authority lends itself to the importance of these angelic beings in Smith’s long chain of priesthood holders all working together to provide salvation for the entire earth.

A year later, in 1840, Smith expanded his teachings concerning the continuation of priesthood work after death. Using the biblical figure Abel as an example, Smith explained that the world’s first martyr could still “speak” in modern times because he “magnified the Priesthood which was confired [sic] upon him and died a righteous man,” and afterward “became... an angel of God by receiving his body from the dead” to confer his keys upon the next dispensation. While the dead may “rest from their labors” for a period, “yet their work is held in reserve for them, that they are permitted to do the same works after they receive a resurrection [sic] for their bodies...”⁹⁹ During the same period, Parley Pratt taught similar sentiments, arguing that even after death “we are more fully than ever qualified to teach, to judge, to rule and govern; and to go and come on foreign missions” as angels continuing to fulfill divine purposes.¹⁰⁰

However, the angels of Mormonism were not only taking part in the same *work*, but they were also the same type of *being*, each at varying points along

97. Elizabeth Reis noted that this “transformation of deceased family members into angels allowed believers to reconstruct families beyond the grave.” Reis, “Immortal Messengers,” 164.

98. The Mormon Prophet then expounded on the parable of the mustard seed, claiming that the fruition of the lesson was that the full-grown mustard tree would eventually become big enough to host “fowls” (angels). Joseph Smith, sermon, before August 8, 1839, in Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 10.

99. Joseph Smith, Sermon, October 5, 1840, in *ibid.*, 41–42.

100. Parley P. Pratt, “Intelligence and Affection,” in Pratt, *An Appeal*, 39.

an eternal spectrum.¹⁰¹ As a result of Mormonism's growing materialism, there was a corresponding collapse of the ontological distinctions between humans, angels, and gods. As early as the end of 1833, Joseph Smith began placing familiar names on mythical and supernatural beings. "Since I came down I have been informed from a proper source," wrote Oliver Cowdery to John Whitmer on New Year's Day, 1834, "that the angel Michael is no less than our father Adam and Gabriel is Noah."¹⁰² Identifying two Old Testament figures (Adam and Noah) as the two archangels mentioned in the Protestant Bible (Michael and Gabriel) removed the traditionally sacred distance between the earthly and the celestial.¹⁰³ In Commerce, Smith taught that "the innumerable company of Angels" was only that group that had been "resurrected from the dead."¹⁰⁴ Orson Pratt explained that angels are labeled differently than men "merely to designate and distinguish between different classes of the same order of beings, according to their advancement in the different stages of their existence."¹⁰⁵ Orson's brother Parley echoed the same theme a decade later when he famously quipped, "Gods,

101. Samuel Brown (*In Heaven*, chapter 9) explores in detail the collapse of Mormon ontology. However, while Brown argues that this ontological shift occurred earlier in the Mormon movement and led to the many other doctrinal innovations, I have argued elsewhere that it was a later development that came as a result of Mormonism's growing materialism. Benjamin E. Park and Jordan T. Watkins, "The Riches of Mormon Materialism: Parley Pratt's 'Materiality' and Early Mormon Theology," paper under review.

102. Oliver Cowdery to John Whitmer, January 1, 1834, Huntington Library, transcribed in the *Book of Abraham Project*, <http://www.boap.org/LDS/Early-Saints/Letters-cowdery.html> accessed June 9, 2009). A revelation revised and printed the next year (current LDS edition: D&C 27:11) also identified Adam as Michael, though this addition probably wasn't made until late 1834. See *Doctrine and Covenants* (1835), 50:2 (current LDS edition: D&C 107:54).

103. While Michael and Gabriel are the only two mentioned in the Bible, traditional Christianity recognizes five more: Raphael, Uriel, Raguel, Zerachiel, and Remiel. Raphael is listed as one of the voices of the restoration in the letter excerpt above. Barachiel, an archangel in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, resembles the sometime code name for Joseph Smith, Baurach Ale. Further, in Kirtland, one "young man" even "foretold" that Joseph Smith would be "the Sixth Angel." Charles Ora Card, *The Diaries of Charles Ora Card: The Utah Years, 1871-1886*, ed. Donald G. Godfrey and Kenneth W. Godfrey (Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, 2006), 386 (entry for October 8, 1882).

104. Joseph Smith, Sermon, before August 8, 1839, in Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 14.

105. Orson Pratt, "Angels," 98.

angels, and men are all of one species, one race, one great family, widely diffused among the planetary systems, as colonies; kingdoms, nations, etc.”¹⁰⁶ In 1843, Joseph Smith elaborated on his eternal familial chain and the differences between this hierarchical structure, noting that “Gods have an ascendancy over angels” because of their fuller progression along the spectrum.¹⁰⁷ In his dictated revelation on polygamy written that same year, he claimed that those who rejected the principle of eternal marriage, and therefore lacking the necessary link to the larger eternal chain, would be relegated to the station of ministering angels in the next life, while those who embraced it would be exalted as Gods.¹⁰⁸

Indeed, this familializing of angels and gods is part of Mormonism’s unique *scala naturae* (ladder of nature), connecting a chain of hierarchical links along a graduated ladder that covers every conceivable point of human growth and potential.¹⁰⁹ Speaking at the dedication of the Seventy’s Hall in Nauvoo, apostle Heber C. Kimball “used a chain as a figure to illustrate the principle of graduation, while in pursuit of celestial enjoyment in worlds to come.”¹¹⁰ Mormon ontology presented a unification of species with numerous grades and advancements, similar to—and likely influenced by—the spiritual chain depicted in Joseph Smith’s Abrahamic scripture. “These two facts exist,” the text read,

106. Parley P. Pratt, *The Key to the Science of Theology*, 33. Pratt similarly wrote an editorial a decade earlier where he also wrote that Gods, angels, and men “are one great family, all of the same species, all related to each other, all bound together by kindred ties, interests sympathies, and affections.” Parley P. Pratt, “Materiality,” *The Prophet* 1 (May 24, 1845), no pagination.

107. Joseph Smith, Sermon, June 11, 1843, in Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 212.

108. Joseph Smith, Revelation, July 12, 1843, reprinted in “Revelation Given to Joseph Smith, Nauvoo, July 12th, 1843,” *Deseret News Extra* (September 14, 1852), 26 (current LDS edition: D&C 132:16).

109. The best work on this topic in western thought is still Lovejoy, *Chain of Being*. Samuel Brown has done the most comprehensive work on the Mormon chain, though he places the origins of the chain much earlier than I do. While Brown finds roots of it during developments in Kirtland, I see it making its appearance late in Nauvoo. Samuel Brown, “Joseph Smith’s Conquest of Death: Sacerdotal Genealogy and the Chain of Being,” paper presented at American Academy of Religion, 2006; Brown, “In Heaven as it Is on Earth,” chapter 9.

110. Summary of sermon by Heber C. Kimball, December 26, 1844, in “Dedication of the Seventies Hall,” 79S.

“that there are two spirits, one being more intelligent than the other; there shall be another more intelligent than they; I am the Lord thy God, I am more intelligent than they all.”¹¹¹ This eternal chain in early LDS thought entailed vast possibilities including a pre-mortal existence, mortal probation, angelic servitude, and eventual godhood.

Mormonism’s radical ontology continued to be expanded and clarified after Joseph Smith’s death. Perhaps the most expansive collapse of these differing races into one divine species is expressed through William Phelps’s speculative work of theological fiction, “Paracletes,” that appeared almost a year after the prophet’s murder. In this 1845 text, Phelps presented a universe full of “paracletes”—what historian Samuel Brown described as “humanized angels or divinized humans”¹¹²—widely situated along an eternal Chain of Being; some already gods ruling over their own planets, some beings not yet embodied and waiting to be called down to their own earth, some beings assigned to serve as ministering angels to varying planets, and one individual chosen to serve as a spiritual “Adam” for his own world (and also to serve as an “arch angel” after his death¹¹³). All these “paracletes,” though at different stages along this graduated path, are all a part of the same race and represent each other at different points.¹¹⁴ Such is the fulfillment of the disintegration of terrestrial and celestial spheres, making the difference one of progress and status rather than of species. Indeed,

111. “The Book of Abraham,” *Times and Seasons* 3 (March 15, 1842): 720 (current LDS edition: Abraham 3:10). There is some debate as to when this passage first appeared. The Church has three extant Kirtland-era copies of the Book of Abraham, and none of them go beyond what is currently chapter 2 verse 18. The verses engaged here come later in the text, and while it is possible that they were written in Kirtland, I posit that have a better fit theologically amongst the Nauvoo doctrinal developments.

112. Brown, “William Phelps’s Paracletes,” 65. I largely follow Brown’s interpretation of this text, though I do not agree with his assessment that this “divine anthropology” was fleshed out in Joseph Smith’s thought; rather, I see it as Phelps’s interpretation and expansion of Smith’s Nauvoo teachings.

113. [Phelps], “Paracletes,” 892.

114. There is still, however, a reference to a “head-god” who appears to be from a different race than all others, but whether this difference is from development or is inherent is unclear.

the angelic presence in Mormonism's fully developed Nauvoo theology is both fitting and ironic when considering that the movement's origin also featured a resurrected angel, that is, the visitation of Moroni in upstate New York eventually led to a revision of the doctrine in the Nauvoo period only two decades later.

CONCLUSION

Mormon angelology, more than just the result of early LDS literalistic reading of the bible and emphasis on spiritual gifts, reminds the reader of the developing formulations of early Mormon thought as well as several important theological tensions of the period. Serving as a touchstone from which to gauge the evolving nature of LDS theology, Mormon perceptions of angels presented in a microcosm the larger ideological shifts taking place, being both a product of and reaction to the larger culture. It played a role in balancing the supernatural and the rational, even to the point that it blurred the distinction between the two; it took center stage when it came to authoritative claims and connection to antiquity; it helped resolve and explain competing spiritual claims, demonic possessions, and evil spirits; but most of all, it helped orient Mormon ontology: man's relationship with spirits, the universe, and even God. Early Mormon theology was as boundless as it was bold, offering a revised understanding of the ontological construct of the world, audaciously challenging traditional perspectives of the day. Indeed, Mormon angelology was not only influenced by and representative of the broader environment from which it was born, but it stands as a testament to the innovative state of early Mormonism as well as American antebellum culture.