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Book Reviews
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“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[.]” 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

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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.”

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. 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

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” and time of theological innovation, Mormonism often embodied many of the significant themes that confronted contemporary religionists. Indeed, in dealing with issues like rationality, authority, competing


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 devotionalism, 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

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.

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. 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.”

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–


ity was accustomed to. 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.” 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

but still maintaining some physiological differences.\textsuperscript{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 Dome-sticks, 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.\textsuperscript{13}

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


\textsuperscript{13} John Reynolds, \textit{Inquiries Concerning the State and \oeconomy of the Angelical Worlds} (London: Printed for John Clark, 1723), 1–2.
presented 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

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


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).

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.”

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. 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 her. 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.

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 be-
ings 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 ministra-
tion 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 supernatu-
ral 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 exam-
pies 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

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 his-
tory 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 See Benjamin E. Park, “‘Build, Therefore, Your Own World’: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Joseph Smith, and American Antebellum Thought,” Journal of Mormon History
them.”  

Sunderland, a Methodist, was part of a tradition that was attempting to become more “rational” and less “enthusiastic,” and thus interpreted Mormon-ism’s angelic claims as a remnant of a religious fanatical past that Protestantism was trying to move away from. 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.” 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. 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,

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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.”

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.

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-

ology 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”—this set of rules regarding materiality was emblematic of the Nauvoo period in general.

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.
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. 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.

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 Sperit [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. 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

40. Ibid., 121.
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.
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

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\(^{44}\) 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.


\(^{46}\) 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 ministering [sic] of Angels to administer the letter of the Gospel – <--the Law and commandments as they were given unto him--> and the ordinences [sic]”
4. “a confirmation and reception of the high Priesthood after the holy order of the son of the living God power and ordinece [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”


revelatory words, texts, and gifts, and did not highlight priesthood ordination. 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.” 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.” While it is impossible to determine the extent this information was known during this early period, the

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.
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. 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. 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. 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. 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

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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.


Benjamin E. Park: Early Mormon Angelology

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. 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.” 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 manifestations—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.
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 Melchezedek 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 antebellum 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 restorationalist 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

This link was crucial; for in Smith’s mind, salvific rituals had passed un-
changed 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. During Smith’s implementation and expan-
sion 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.” 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 author-
ity 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 Genera-
tion…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 when-
ever the Gospel is sent…He, [Adam] is the Father of the hu-
man 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.”

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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
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


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].” 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.” 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.

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. 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


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 unforeseen 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


\(^{75}\) Reynolds, *Inquiries*, 14.

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

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.”

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 discerner must be in possession of priesthood keys and have “a knowledge of the laws by which spirits are governed.”

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,

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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.” 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.

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.” 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.”

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.
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.” 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.” 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.

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. 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. 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-

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85. Joseph Smith, Sermon, May 14, 1843, in ibid., 201.
86. Joseph Smith, Sermon, May 21, 1843, in ibid., 208.
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 Mormon-
ism’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 oppos-
ing 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 min-
istrations 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 Jour-
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.
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

over us,” was the climax of antebellum America’s yearning for a consanguineous cosmology.\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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 ressurection [sic] for their bodies…”\textsuperscript{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.\textsuperscript{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

\textsuperscript{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.

\textsuperscript{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, 

\textit{Words of Joseph Smith}, 10.

\textsuperscript{99} Joseph Smith, Sermon, October 5, 1840, in ibid., 41–42.

\textsuperscript{100} Parley P. Pratt, “Intelligence and Affection,” in Pratt, \textit{An Appeal}, 39.
an eternal spectrum. 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.” 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. In Commerce, Smith taught that “the innumerable company of Angels” was only that group that had been “resurrected from the dead.” 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.” 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.


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).


angels, and men are all of one species, one race, one great family, widely diffused among the planetary systems, as colonies; kingdoms, nations, etc. In 1843, Joseph Smith elaborated on his eternal familial chain and the differences between this hierarchical structure, noting that “Gods have an ascendency over angels” because of their fuller progression along the spectrum. 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.

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. 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.” 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.
“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.”

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”—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 death). 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. 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 they 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.
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TJ McDonald

Ameriyan: The Western Vehicle of the Buddha Dharma

America is firmly steeped in the Christian and European-centered traditions of the past, leaving little room for any outside traditions that do not fit into that mold. However with the 19th century introduction of Buddhist culture, America began to welcome different traditions and saw its European-centric culture change. The changes were not one sided, however, as Buddhism also began to adapt to a Christian society with ideals different than those of its nativity. With the insertion of Buddhist tradition into American culture, there has been a vast change both in the host culture, as well as among the Buddhist immigrant community.

History of Buddhism, a Brief Sketch

To understand the evolution of Buddhism in America, we must first understand the history of the tradition in Asia. Buddhism began with the awakening of Siddhartha Gautama in sixth century B.C.E. India. The Pali canon, the earliest Buddhist texts, comprises the teachings of Siddhartha, early reports of his life, as well as accounts of how he achieved enlightenment. The Pali Sutras describe Siddhartha as a young prince who was to become either a great king or
a great sage, depending on the path he took in life. His father sought to keep him from anything that would frustrate his royal life or lead him into the life of a mendicant. This endeavor was successful until the young prince took a chariot ride through the royal park and encountered various forms of suffering, namely old age, sickness, and death. As he pondered the way all humans suffer these things, he developed a compassion for others that led him to leave home and become an ascetic wanderer on a quest to find “unaging, unailing, deathless, sorrowless, undefiled, unexcelled security from bondage – nirvana.”

The Buddha’s awakening to Dharma, the ultimate truth of life, came after several disappointments in monastic schools. He received ascetic training and practiced such self-depravations as suppression of breath and extended fasting. It was only when he practiced meditation while sitting under the Bodhi Tree that he reached enlightenment and decided to teach. Using Upaya, or skillful means, Siddhartha formulated the Four Noble Truths that teach the Dharma in a simple and clear form. His method was effective for five wandering ascetics who immediately converted to Buddhism and set out to teach the Dharma to others. When the Buddha had amassed a group of approximately 60 devout monks, he sent them out as missionaries. These missionaries quickly gained converts who desired to

3. Strong, Experience of Buddhism, 22.
be ordained to the monastic life. This led to the development of the Sangha, or the order of ordained monks or nuns.

Over time different Sanghas assembled and were scattered throughout India. As they grew, they gradually began administering various practices and teachings. The different schools shared the Pali Sutras, which contained teachings on the Dharma, and teachings of discipline, or vinaya. As these communities grew apart, they developed differing views on the vinaya. Traditionally, it is said that there were eighteen schools, though only the Theravada school survives today.4 A new form of Buddhist school began to develop and emerge in the sixth century C.E. Mahayana Buddhism came to be seen as a separate and distinct school of thought from the early schools. The break between Mahayana and the early schools happened over a long period of time, and as a result of many innovations. Buddhists began to study the bodhisattva path. During this time of study, some decided to abandon the striving to become an arhat, or an enlightened one, in favor of the goal to reach the status of Buddha instead. In the late sixth century, a group of Buddhists began to claim they had a faster, more direct path to achieving enlightenment. These were the Vajrayana Buddhists. Vajrayanists believed that by using ritual means taught by an enlightened guru, one could escape suffering and reach enlightenment faster than with Mahayana or the early schools. With missionary zeal, Buddhists shared their

beliefs and Buddhism spread beyond its Indian roots.

Buddhism quickly began to grow and adapt to the changing Eastern world. It found wide acceptance in Sri Lanka, Burma, and Thailand. These cultures were then searching for answers to the same questions that caused the rapid growth of Buddhism in India. The introduction of iron and writing into cultures often resulted in rapid, and even severe, social change; and these cultures entered a period of transformation, from tribalism to unification. The elevated civilization of Buddhist India entranced these areas. But, when Buddhism entered China, these changes had already occurred. China already had an advanced civilization, so it seemed less susceptible to the spell of Buddhism. Gradually, the tradition began to gain acceptance as it blended with indigenous Daoism and Confucianism. Buddhism also started to gain power as rulers began to request monks perform rituals on behalf of their countries. As these rituals were deemed effective, the tradition would gain traction on a larger scale.

Eventually, two forms of Buddhism became popular, which catered to the casual and illiterate practitioner. These two are known as Pure Land Buddhism and Ch’ān Buddhism. Pure Land Buddhism focuses on Amitabha Buddha and his “pure land” in the West. According to this tradition, calling upon the name of Amitabha Buddha would ensure reincarnation of the reciter in this land. Ch’ān Buddhism focuses on meditation. It asserts that truth is not found in the study of the scriptures. The texts are said to be like a finger pointing at the moon: If you fixate upon the finger you will never see the moon; you will never see the truth. In order to find the truth, you must meditate on that to which the scriptures are pointing. These traditions both employed missionaries who helped carry the beliefs to other lands, but it was largely through the immigration of the Chinese to America in the late 19th century that Buddhism found its roots in America.

The first Chinese ship arrived in America in 1849, and five years later,

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there were an estimated 13,000 Chinese men in the new world.\[^6\] By the 1880’s, the American census bureau recorded slightly over 100,000 Chinese living in the United States.\[^7\] In 1852, the Tin Hou and Kong Chow temples were constructed in San Francisco.\[^8\] It was from these immigrants that America was first introduced to Buddhism on a large scale, but it should be noted that this Chinese flavor of Buddhism had little effect on the future “White Buddhism” in America. It was simply America’s first encounter with the tradition. Two events following Chinese immigration can be credited with the establishment of Buddhism in America. First was the founding of the Theosophical Society in New York City followed by the World’s Parliament of Religions.

In 1875, in New York City, Helena Petrova Blavatsky, Henry Steel Olcott, and William Quan Judge were among those who founded the Theosophical Society, a group initially organized to investigate, study, and explain Spiritualism, a monotheistic religion with heavy emphasis on mediums and contacting the spirits of the dead. In 1879, Olcott and Blavatsky left New York to establish the

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organization’s international headquarters in India. While there, the two became Buddhists by taking the traditional five vows of the laity.\(^9\) While Olcott spent time in Sri Lanka, he sought out “pure” Buddhism in hopes of sharing it with America, which he felt had “Westernized” the original tradition. It was during his time of searching that Olcott was introduced to the Bodh–Gaya Maha Bodhi society, whose purpose was to revive the Indian study, practice, and observation of Buddhism. Henry Steel Olcott, referred to as the White Buddhist,\(^{10}\) was appointed as first director of the Bodh–Gaya Maha Bodhi society in 1891 while he was spending time in Ceylon. Olcott is responsible for making Ceylon the center for the Theravada missionary movement as well as writing the “Buddhist

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Catechism,” a summary statement on the practices and teachings of Buddhism. 11 The Theosophical Society became a well–known group headed by two “White Buddhists,” thrusting the religion further into the public sphere.

The second major event in the development of Buddhism in America is the World’s Parliament of Religions held in conjunction with the 1893 World’s Fair in Chicago. The occasion was a symposium in which representatives from different religions lectured on their traditions to overflowing audiences. Anagarika Dharmapala and Soyen Shaku were two of the most influential speakers for Asian Buddhism. Dharmapala delivered the closing address for the Parliament and asserted that the event “was simply the re–echo of a great consummation which the Indian Buddhists accomplished twenty four centuries ago.” 12 To Dharmapala, Buddhism’s entrance into America was the fulfillment of the work started when the Buddha first sent out missionaries. On his return to America in 1897, Dharmapala founded an American branch of the Maha Bodhi society further solidifying the place of Buddhism in America. Soyen, while not making a significant impact on the Western tradition himself, was active in sending Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki to America. Suzuki later became a chief proponent of Buddhism in the West. 13

The World’s Parliament of Religions helped Buddhism gain notoriety in the New World and opened discourse on the legitimacy of the tradition. Two English–language magazines on Buddhism began publication. The Buddhist Ray combined Buddhist themes with popular occult ideas of the day, reminiscent of the Theosophical Society after the conversion of Olcott and Blavatsky. The second periodical was The Light of Dharma, which was published by Pure Land Buddhist missionaries. As publications like these began to sprout, Buddhism secured its

footing and began to grow, soon becoming an accepted tradition in America.

**AMERICAN BUDDHIST TRADITIONS**

As seems to be the case with Buddhism wherever it travels, the Dharma became the basis for many different traditions. As Buddhist missionaries with disparate views came from numerous countries to proselytize, countless forms of Buddhism developed on Western soil. The traditions that will be investigated in this paper include Chinese, Zen, Tibetan and Theravada, as well as a new and indigenous American tradition known as Engaged Buddhism.

Zen is a branch of Mahayana Buddhism that seeks access to truth through the practice of meditation. The origins of Zen Buddhism vary depending upon the person telling the story. Adherents claim that Zen came from Siddhartha himself. This story begins with the Buddha’s announcement of a sermon in which he would preach the true Dharma. Thousands gathered around him to hear. The Buddha stood silent while the crowd began to worry he was ill. Eventually, he picked up a flower, held it in his hand and stared at it silently. His disciples tried to interpret what they saw, and one of them, Mahakasyapa, smiled. The Buddha acknowledged Mahakasyapa’s reception of the truth of the Dharma by saying “I possess the true dharma eye, the marvelous mind of Nirvana, the true form of the formless, the subtle dharma gate that does not rest on words or letters but is a special transmission outside of the scriptures. This I entrust to Mahakasyapa.”  

This account, though not historically verifiable, stands as an example of the teachings of Zen Buddhism. No scripture, god, ritual, or recitation can reveal knowledge; it can only be found through direct transmission from teacher to student. G. Victor Sogen Hori compares Zen Buddhism in America to Valentine’s Day in Japan; their environment significantly changes both.

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the traditional Zen Buddhism of Japan entered America, it was viewed through the American lens of teaching, learning, social organization and enlightenment. Less than one hundred years after Soyen Shaku came to America, the Zen Buddhism he brought with him became thoroughly Americanized and adapted to its new culture.

A typical Buddhist teaching on the Four Noble Truths is that they are like a canoe used to reach a distant shore; they are a great way to achieve enlightenment, but once you reach the shore, you have to get out of the boat. The imported Zen Buddhism of America is much like this parable: many of the canoes employed in traditional Japanese Buddhism are cast away as hindrances to reaching enlightenment. One such example is the act of meditation and the way it is practiced. Traditionally, meditation is performed in the lotus, a cross-legged sitting position in which the feet are placed on top of the opposite thighs. In American Zen Buddhism, however, it has become accepted to sit in chairs if the lotus position is uncomfortable for the person meditating. Bernard Glassman is also an example of the change in Zen Buddhism as it has come to America. Glassman, who is number 81 in the line of Dharma Transmission as traced back to the Sakyamuni, runs his monastery in a bakery in upstate New York. In Greystone Bakery, Zen Buddhists get all of the “components of Zen training – samu, or work practice, zazen and face-to-face study with the teacher.”¹⁶ For Glassman, traditional Zen practice had become an obstruction, but in the bakery, a for-profit enterprise, he found a way to help his students achieve enlightenment in a modern capitalist setting. At Greyston, tasks like washing dishes are supposed to lead to enlightenment as much as the guided meditation of monks in Tibet. But even the end-goal of Buddhism as enlightenment has come into question with American Zen. Buddhist scholar and practitioner Helen Tworkov tells of an encounter with a Zen teacher who said, “I don’t give a shit about enlightenment.” She then commented “The quest for enlightenment has been derided of late as the romantic and mythic aspiration

¹⁶ Helen Tworkov, Zen In America (New York: Kodansha, 1994), 116.
of antiquated patriarchal monasticism.”

Instead of looking for this outdated religious notion, these Buddhists are searching for ways to be attentive and mindful in everyday life; Buddhism has become basically, a set of ethics. In some ways, this development within Zen Buddhism does not at all resemble its original tradition, but it still claims to be that tradition, only sprinkled with capitalist and American ideas to appeal to a Western audience.

A second major form of American Buddhism is the Tibetan import of Vajrayana. In the early 1970’s, Tibetan lamas brought theocratic Tibetan Buddhism to the West, where its authority was challenged in favor of an individual, self–reliant, more democratic tradition. The American practitioners were quick to adjust the organization so that the senior Buddhist would be placed at the head, becoming responsible for the maintenance, upkeep and general administration of the Sangha. As with Theravada Buddhism, the monastic institution of Vajrayana Buddhism has yet to come into its own in America, but it is beginning to take shape. Its Western audience also challenges traditional Tibetan metaphysical notions. An example given by Amy Lavine in her essay on Tibetan Buddhism in America is that of the lamas and their reincarnations as young boys. The notion of incarnation as a young boy is just beginning to come into focus as the early lamas who brought Vajrayana to the West are beginning to die.

The Dalai Lama, the traditional religious official of Tibetan Buddhism, has even begun to forego the traditional metaphysical notions in an attempt to garner further support for the movement. In Ethics for the New Millenium, the Dalai Lama questions the necessity of religion in life, focusing instead on the presence of needs and ethics of life. He asserts that those who wish to solve society’s problems do not have to be Buddhists, but simply humanists.

American Buddhism includes many Mahayana traditions, as demonstrated,

but there are also a small number of Theravada monks. Paul Numrich estimates this number to be between 450 and 600.\textsuperscript{20} American Buddhism has traditionally been a lay oriented tradition, leaving the monastic lifestyle of Theravada Buddhism all but forgotten. American Theravada Buddhism abandons the traditional monastic aspects in favor of a non–hierarchal, non–authoritarian vehicle for simple Buddhist teaching. Instead of the classical denunciatory lifestyle of Theravada monks, the focus has been primarily on the tradition of insight meditation, \textit{vipassana}. This form of meditation has become a very popular part of American culture, often practiced by the wealthy. This trend receives treatment in the section on American Buddhism and pop culture.

The meditation and recitation found in traditional forms of Pure Land and Ch’an Buddhism are not mutually exclusive. For this reason, Chinese Buddhism can be discussed as one tradition instead of discussing the former divisions that have all but disappeared in Pure Land and Ch’an. Despite the early appearance of Chinese Buddhism in America, its practice today is relatively limited. Practitioners are generally immigrants who tend to stay in their own communities, isolated from the outside.\textsuperscript{21} These communities focus on meditation and recitation as well as Sutra study. Further, they express devotion to the figures Amitabha Buddha and Avalokitesvara, two highly revered \textit{bodhisattvas} in mainstream Mahayana Buddhism. The focus of Chinese Buddhism is the transfer of good deeds so that all people might attain enlightenment in Amitabha’s Pure Land. Master Hsin Yun, the founder of Fo Kuang Buddhism, considers the goal not to reach the Pure Land, but rather to transform this world into a Pure Land.\textsuperscript{22} Thus, this tradition has special relevance in the modern world, which approaches this goal through environmentalism, in that sense creating a Pure Land.

There is also a unique form of American Buddhism that has taken the

\textsuperscript{20} Paul David Numrich, “Theravāda Buddhism in America: Prospects for the \textit{Sangha},” in \textit{Faces of Buddhism}, 150.

\textsuperscript{21} Chandler, “Chinese Buddhism in America,” 16.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 22.
forefront. This new tradition seeks to perfect the world by changing it. Some call this “Liberation Buddhism” as opposed to “Extinction Buddhism” since it seeks to free the world from greed and hatred instead of allowing that greed and hatred to destroy the world. American Buddhism has more recently come to be known as Engaged Buddhism, and manifests a radical departure from the Buddhism first seen in India. Engaged Buddhism has taken practices of Asian Buddhism that do not fit in the Western context and adapted them to American culture. Engaged Buddhists openly welcome Western Christian ideals, allowing for an amalgamation of thought. There is a complete dismissal of the many traditional forms of Buddhism, referring to them as the cause of “2,500 years [of] male–centered interpretation.”

This tradition has moved toward agnosticism regarding beliefs including reincarnation and karma while upholding instead that liberation is not to be found in distant epochs of time but in this world, leading to social activism. Engaged Buddhists are typically white professionals reminiscent of the “White Buddhists” that founded the Theosophical Foundation, bringing the evolution of Buddhism in America full circle.

EFFECTS OF BUDDHISM IN AMERICA

As different Buddhist traditions entered America, they adapted to the culture and lifestyles already present. It was through this Americanization that Buddhism became a recognized tradition in the United States. In the confluence of Buddhism and American culture we see an effect that spreads far beyond the lives of individual practitioners. Monks such as Thich Nhat Hanh brought Engaged Buddhism to the forefront, affecting the views of the American populace towards war and influencing political figures such as Martin Luther King. The introduction of Buddhism also led to changes in mainstream Christian beliefs and psychiatry, as well the political and popular lives of Americans.

“Since Buddhist practice is to be awake and to be at one with ourselves, to
be whole and not to be caught in opposites, automatically then the practice is peace. *Is being peace... So outer peace and social peace is a manifestation of inner peace.*

24 These are the words of Ruth Klein, president of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, and they serve as an introduction to the philosophy of Engaged Buddhism. In socially Engaged Buddhism, there is no distinction between the outer world and the world of the mind; they belong to the same reality. It is for this reason that groups like the Buddhist Peace Fellowship strive to provide an arena for understanding how to fight oppression and injustice. Engaged Buddhism opens up its adherents to political activism. By acknowledging the need to make the world a better place, the active Buddhist must leave behind the monastery and pick up their picket signs to rally for political change.

Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen monk, is one of these socially engaged Buddhists, and in fact coined the term “engaged Buddhism.” His activism for peace ultimately led to his exile and expatriation. Nhat Hanh was living in Vietnam as war with America broke out. In 1965, he spoke out at Van Hanh Buddhist University declaring that the North and South needed to find a way to end the war in favor of peace and mutual respect. Shortly thereafter, he retreated to the United States. After arriving in America he corresponded with Martin Luther King, Jr. and asked him to publicly denounce the war in Vietnam. He said “You cannot be silent since you have already been in action and you are in action because, in you, God is in action, too... Nobody here wants the war. What is the war for, then? And whose is the war?”

25 Hanh met with King in 1966, and in 1967 Dr. King spoke out at Riverside Church in New York City against the U.S. involvement in Vietnam. Later that year, Dr. King nominated Hanh for the 1967 Nobel Peace Prize and said “I do not personally know of anyone more worthy

of the Nobel Peace Prize than this gentle Buddhist monk from Vietnam.”26 The Buddhist peace ethic of Thich Nhat Hanh influenced Dr. King, and in turn aided the burgeoning anti-war movement in the United States.

Buddhism has also served as a catalyst in the development of modern Christian meditation. As Buddhism’s influence in Western society has grown, many Christian traditions responded by reviving and adapting meditative and devotional practice to their model of religious life. For example, the Jesuit father H. M. Enomiya Lassalle has written multiple books and delivered many lectures on Zen meditation for Christians and Westerners.27 The spread of Buddhism has also opened a new dialogue between Christianity and other religious traditions, especially those in the East. This has not only led to exchange in ideas and beliefs, but a questioning of the limits of the ever-present European culture.28

Meditation as found in Buddhism has also unlocked certain facets of Western psychology, psychiatry, and psychotherapy previously unexplored. At the end of the 19th century, Sigmund Freud explored the importance and inner workings of the unconscious mind. It was through his study of the unconscious that he derived methods for understanding human behavior and mental illness. In Buddhism, researchers in these fields have found adherents who have discovered ways to control their subconsciouses and certain intuitions. This has led to an attempt for Western psychotherapy to incorporate Buddhist meditation practices.

In 1969, Buddhist poet Gary Snyder composed what is now known as the Smokey The Bear Sutra, a poem that presents the American eco-conscious bear as a reincarnation of Vairocana Buddha. Snyder explained that “it might take this sort of Buddha to quell the fires of greed and war and to help us head off the bio-

28. Ibid., 320.
logical holocaust that the twenty first century may prove to be.” Snyder’s focus on the environment and community was the product of the Buddhist elements of Sangha and samadhi, that is, community and mindful concentration. In Snyder we see an example of the effect Buddhism can have on the practitioner and their worldview. By focusing on the environment, envisioning the planet becoming a Pure Land, and adapting the views from the ancient Buddhist teachings into modernity, Snyder has been able to become actively engaged in the political goal of improving and maintaining the environment.

Buddhism has also had a significant effect on American popular culture, in lifestyle, music, movies, and other media. The Vipassana meditation retreats are an example of the Buddhist lifestyle influencing the culture. The practice of Vipassana meditation is generally taught at ten–day courses where participants are taught the basics as well as how to interpret its results. This style of meditation has become famous among the wealthy, from business executives to rock stars. In his readmissions letter to Harvard University, Rivers Cuomo, of the music group, Weezer, explained that since attending seven ten–day courses, “I have found that the areas of tension in my mind – the fear, the anger, the sadness, the craving – are slowly melting away. I am left with a more pristine mind, more sharp and sensitive than I previously imagined possible. I am more calm and stable.” This form of meditation has not just limited itself to the upper class, however. It is offered free of charge at all retreats and has been brought by its founder, S. N. Goenka, to correctional facilities.

Donaldson Correctional Facility in Bessemer, Alabama is a high security prison which houses prisoners serving sentences ranging from six months to life in prison. Prison Psychologist Dr. Ron Cavanaugh had heard of the benefits of medi-

tation in prisons in India, so he introduced the Houses of Healing program to the prison, which had a heavy emphasis on meditation. After seeing improvement, it was suggested by Jenny Philips, director of the documentary film *The Dhamma Brothers*, that an intensive ten–day Vipassana meditation course be offered.\(^{32}\) The course was first offered for twenty prisoners who sat through ten full day sessions in which there was no talking or actions done outside of a strict schedule of meditation, rest periods, meal times and breaks. The majority of prisoners involved in the program were sentenced to life in prison, though the possibility of parole was available, leading many to be skeptical of the prisoners’ intentions. One of Donaldson’s Corrections Officers, Sergeant Joel Gilbert notes, “evidently something was working somewhere. They’re more relaxed, they’re easier to get along with, and they don’t cause as many problems.”\(^{33}\) The prisoners ended the course accepting responsibility for their actions and realizing they had to make peace with society for their crimes.

The Dharma has also found a strong footing in Hollywood. Actor Richard Gere is often considered the Dalai Lama’s most high–profile disciple.\(^{34}\) In 1978, Gere traveled to Nepal, where he first became acquainted with Buddhism. He became a disciple of the Dalai Lama in 1982, and has since been a strong advocate for human rights and the Tibetan Independence Movement. His high profile career and acceptance of Buddhism has not been an exception in Hollywood. Other famous Buddhists include Harrison Ford, Orlando Bloom, Uma Thurman, and Oliver Stone. Recent films have included strong Buddhist overtones. One well–known example is the 1999 film, *The Matrix*. The film takes place in a universe that is understood to be an illusion, and features many parallels with Buddhist be-


\(^{33}\) Andrew Kukura and Jenny Philips, *The Dhamma Brothers*, DVD, directed by Jenny Philips, Andrew Kukura, and Anne Marie Stein (Boston: Northern Lights Productions, 2008).

liefs. The main character is considered a chosen one who is in charge of recruiting others and releasing the world from this illusionary state, obvious mirrors of The Buddha, Upaya, and escaping samsara.

Parallels are even found in children’s media. In one production, five monks stand in front of a young boy and present him with four toys. He replies, “I know these. They are my toys.” This story may sound similar to the way the fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, was chosen, and it is. The reference, however, is not to that of a religious occurrence which led monks to believe the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama had been found, but rather to the episode of the children’s television show Avatar: The Last Airbender, in which Aang is told that he is the reincarnation of the Avatar, a human manifestation of deity that is destined to save the world. Interestingly enough, Aang’s master in the show is named Gyatso. This is just one of many examples of Buddhist influences that have crept into children’s entertainment. There are many examples: Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Power Rangers, Pokemon, Dragonball Z, Avatar, Digimon, Spirited Away, Kung Fu Panda, The Karate Kid, etc. It is through these media that pre–teens and adolescents begin to shape their worldviews and religious faiths. For example, from Avatar, one might learn of meditation and the protection offered by the avatar. From shows like The Karate Kid and Teenage Mutant Turtles, another might learn reverence and respect for a teacher or monk and the importance of mutual non–aggression. While there is no proof that these Asian influences are being perpetuated in media as a way to indoctrinate youth, evidence does seem to point to an effect on their spirituality. Thus the presence of these Buddhist–influenced films, television programs, and actors might be considered effective missionary tools for converting a rising generation plugged in to popular culture.

Just as there are many different forms of Buddhism in America, there are also

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35. The author’s current research is focused on the effect of Buddhist–themed media regarding the spirituality of young Americans. He hopes to publish his findings in the near future. For a study of Buddhist–themed media and its effect on the spirituality of religious seeking adults, see Jin Kyu Park, “Creating My Own Cultural and Spiritual Bubble: Case of Cultural Consumption by Spiritual Seeker Anime Fans,” Culture and Religion: An Interdisciplinary Journal 6, no. 3 (2005): 393–413.
a variety of Buddhist practitioners. In his book *The Dharma Bums*, Jack Kerouac gives insight into two prominent types of Buddhist lifestyles lived in the mid-20th century. Kerouac himself typifies the first of these lifestyles. When questioned by Gary Snyder using Zen Buddhism word questions, Kerouac replies, “I’d say that was a lot of silly Zen Buddhism… I’m not a Zen Buddhist, I’m a serious Buddhist, I’m an old fashioned dreamy Hinayana coward of later Mahayanism.”

For Buddhists like Kerouac, holding the title of a Buddhist is not a matter of brooding over the texts or metaphysical questions, but about living life and growing out of the experiences had while living. Like the Engaged Buddhists that would come forth in the 90s, Kerouac practices little “b” Buddhism, focusing on the betterment of himself and society instead of the traditions. The second type of Buddhist presented in *The Dharma Bums* as a direct contrast to Kerouac is illustrated in the life of Gary Snyder. Snyder was raised as a backwoods boy and eventually found his Buddhist faith in the university:

> When he finally got to college by hook or crook he was already well equipped for his early studies in anthropology and later in Indian myth and in the actual texts of Indian mythology. Finally he learned Chinese and Japanese and became an Oriental scholar and discovered the greatest Dharma Bums of them all, the Zen Lunatics of China and Japan.

Snyder was an active searcher for Bodhisattvas, declaring Kerouac and friends, Bodhisattvas and reincarnations of Mahayana scholars. He exemplifies the Buddhist scholar in America; one who rejects the Americanization of the tradition by maintaining the importance of belief in karma, samsara, reincarnation, and the Bodhisattva path. But, as previously mentioned, Gary Snyder became a prominent shaper of the Engaged Buddhism tradition, which has cast aside these beliefs. Kerouac, in writing *The Dharma Bums*, prophetically presented the future of Buddhism: a time when the “liberation buddhists” would cause a dwindling in

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the number of “extinction Buddhists.”

Buddhism entered America as an ancient practice that did not fit within a society firmly grounded in Western Christianity. Its beliefs and practices were adapted to fit the American lifestyle while still maintaining its unique Eastern sensibilities. Over time, this Eastern uniqueness has, in turn, altered aspects of American culture. While these two institutions have formed a symbiotic relationship, they have gradually meshed into one another. America has made its mark on Buddhism by adapting its beliefs to the American west. Traditions that do not appeal to a capitalistic culture, such as monasticism, have been abandoned in favor of the practical aspects of meditation and devotion. Buddhism has placed itself in the forefront of American politics and pop culture, influencing important figures from political activists to teen idols. With this mutual transformation has come a melding together, as American Buddhism has become a separate entity from its Asian counterparts and has become an institution of its own.
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Jonathan L. Friedmann

The Victory of Confession: Ashamnu, the Shirah, and Musical Symbolism in Jewish Worship

In one of the first modern studies of the relationship between music, religion, and emotions, E. Janes argued that musical sounds produce essentially universal human responses. “When we assemble in the house of God,” he wrote, “the calming, solemnizing strains of music may serve to turn our minds away from the everyday pursuits by soothing our weary brains with sweetness.”¹ According to Janes, this collective experience of music is possible because “all who are susceptible to music at all are affected in the same way, allowance being made for whatever is the result of the association. All are here on the same level; no difference exists, save in degree.”² A musical passage that evokes grief for one individual will not inspire joy for another, nor will a piece that elicits hope for one cause despair in someone else.

While this conclusion seems naïve in light of the diversity of the world’s music cultures, the idea of musical universality, at least within a given tradition or community, still holds true. This “contextual universality” of music–inspired emotions was treated extensively in the work of composer and philosopher

Leonard B. Meyer, who found that cultural and experiential influences within a group contribute to the formation of shared musical expectations. For individuals participating in a religious service or another communal musical experience, certain melodies, modes, and motifs can inspire specific and shared emotional and intellectual associations. A song sung at the same time and place every year, or one that is bound closely to a certain concept or theme, acts as a “powerful retrieval tool” for collective sentiments and memories.

This study explores the emotional function of musical symbolism in the synagogue. It examines in particular how the Ashkenazi Shirah, a melody derived from the chanting of the biblical “Song of the Sea,” is used as a musical quotation in various parts of the Bible and liturgy, and how this melody inspires within worshipers shared feelings tied to victory and deliverance. This powerful association extends even to the use of the Shirah melody in singing the confessional prayer Ashamnu on Yom Kippur—a practice that suggests the victorious nature of confession. As a case study in music-generated meaning, this study will give support to Janes’ argument for the collective and affective impact of ritual music.

SACRED TIME, SACRED SOUND

One of the primary functions of ritual music is to facilitate collective experiences. Music closely tied to specific occasions, texts, or concepts has the unique ability to convert a plurality of individuals into a community imbued with a “shared mythic consciousness.” In virtually all of the world’s religious traditions, the sounds of song and chant demarcate sacred from secular time and space, and substantially comprise the emotional underpinnings of worship.

Through the direct pathway of human emotions, ritual music can stimulate a deep sense of unity among worshipers, and foster or enhance communication between humanity and the Divine. Taken together, these relationships—horizontal between individuals and vertical between the community and God—form the foundation of religious life itself, and validate the prominent role of music within it.

In the synagogue, communal emotions are often stimulated by changes in the musical presentation of the liturgy. Modal and melodic variations serve to distinguish morning from evening services, weekdays from Shabbat, festivals from holy days, and so on. “In the context of ritual,” writes Cantor Andrew Bernard, “music triggers emotional associations that bind worshipers to the significance of the moment and, simultaneously, to each other.”7 Much more than plain reading, the singing of liturgy works to fuse group focus, fastens the worshipers’ attention on a particular occasion or section of liturgy, and evokes common associations through the shared experience of familiar sounds. For an individual aware of the musical nuances of the liturgical year, and in communities where musical choices are determined by the sacred calendar, music serves as an emotionally charged symbol of the sacred moment.

Musical symbolism in the synagogue comes in three major forms: nusach ha–tefillah, contrafact, and musical quotations. Nusach ha–tefillah refers to melodic patterns or prayer modes that traditionally govern the chanting of the liturgy. Nusach is chanted freely without fixed rhythm or meter, and may be improvised within the prescribed modal and motivic framework. Specific melodic patterns vary depending on the section of liturgy, time of day, day of the week, or date on the calendar; and the proper use and understanding of nusach “guarantees that a Jewish ‘Rip van Winkle’ could sleep for 20 years and identify the

6. For the concept of horizontal and vertical relationships in religious life, I am indebted to Rabbi Mordecai Finley, professor of Jewish thought at the Academy for Jewish Religion, California. This insight was gleaned from an informal discussion.

service to which he had awakened just by the musical motifs.” As one scholar notes, nusach is the “record of musical syntax” in Jewish worship: it elicits among liturgically literate congregants an array of shared emotions, both specific to the themes of the particular prayer or day (such as tranquility or lament) and related to broader concepts (such as Jewish continuity or nostalgia).

Melodic contrafact can also function as a mnemonic device, storing and prompting emotions and memories. Contrafact is the process of creating a new composition on an already existing one. Within the synagogue, this device is frequently employed to stir up sentiments linked to a certain time or place. According to musician and research scientist Daniel J. Levitin, this process of retrieval is an essential part of the ritual experience: “Rituals tie us to the event itself, and to a cycle of history in which similar events have previously occurred and will continue to occur. They are a form of externalized, social memory, and when marked by music, they become even more firmly instantiated in both our personal and collective memories.” Certain melodies are linked indelibly with specific sacred times, and bring to mind immediately the personal and communal significance of the day.

Examples of contrafact in Jewish worship include the adaptation of holiday melodies to Mi Chamocha (“Who is like You”), a prayer found in evening and morning services throughout the year. This custom developed in Ashkenazi communities of Western Europe as a way of delineating sonically one holiday

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10. In contemporary synagogue practice, Orthodox congregations adhere strictly to the use of a-cappella nusach, while liberal denominations (Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, etc.) utilize nusach in varying degrees, but also “balance” the service with cantorial art songs, congregational folk tunes, choral pieces, and other musical forms accompanied by instruments. For more on the differing musical preferences of Jewish denominations, see Jeffrey A. Summit, The Lord’s Song in a Strange Land: Music and Identity in Contemporary Jewish Worship (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).
from another. On Hanukkah the representative theme for Mi Chamocha is taken from Moaz Tzur, which commemorates the triumph of the Maccabees. On Pass-over, the melody is derived from Addir Hu, which longs for the re-establishment of the Jerusalem temple “speedily and in our day.” Shavuot finds Mi Chamocha sung to Akdamut, an Aramaic poem sung prior to that festival’s Torah reading; and during Sukkot, it adopts the melody used for the shaking of the lulav. These variations demonstrate the power of a familiar melody, even when detached from its original text, to forge instantaneously musical associations. Upon hearing these time-specific tunes, the listener is not only reminded of what day it is, but also of the various personal and communal memories, relationships, sentiments, and sensual experiences associated with that day: a childhood synagogue, a grandparent, the taste of holiday foods, etc.

Musical quotation is the practice of incorporating recognizable phrases or short melodic lines into a piece of music. Unlike contrafact, which adapts entire texts to pre-existing melodies, quotations are musical snippets that call to mind the larger tune from which they are derived. And in contrast to the examples above, musical quotations in synagogue services typically evoke emotions linked to a different context, not the occasion being observed. For example, in many American congregations it is customary to quote from the melody of Hatikvah, the Israeli national anthem, when chanting the words praising devotion to the land of Israel in the blessing for the congregation (Mi Shebeirach). This practice not only marks a stark departure from the modal nusach, but also inspires within worshipers sentiments attached to the Holy Land. Just as the sound of Hatikvah stirs emotions and arouses a sense of unity among Jews wherever they are, this brief musical passage can, to a smaller extent, bring worshipers into solidarity. Through these familiar and meaningful sounds, the community is transported temporarily from liturgical time to the emotional context of Jewish nationalism.

12. This prayer is found in the Shabbat Torah service in the section following the chanting of Haftarah.
Perhaps the most frequently quoted melody in Ashkenazi custom is the \textit{Shirah}, derived from the biblical cantillation of the “Song of the Sea.” A spontaneous proclamation sung by the Israelites after crossing the Red Sea (or Sea of Reeds), the \textit{Shirah} is the first recorded devotional song in the Hebrew Bible: A distinctive melody developed for chanting this portion of the Torah Scroll, which in Jewish tradition has come to be the signature sound of glory and triumph. Whenever and wherever a portion of this melody is applied to different texts, and no matter how varied these texts may seem, the knowledgeable listener is stirred to a sense of victory or elation, perhaps even feeling as though he or she is experiencing the mythic moment when the Israelites crossed the Red Sea.

\textbf{THE SHIRAH MELODY}

“In every epoch of Jewish history,” writes Cantor Macy Nulman, “song and chant became a significant mode of expression. When the Jewish people were victorious over their enemies and when God saved them from disaster, their thankfulness and joy were expressed through the medium of song.”\textsuperscript{13} There are numerous examples of post-victory songs of gratitude in the Hebrew Bible, including the \textit{Shirah}, Deborah’s Song (Judg. 5), David’s hymn of thanksgiving (2 Sam. 22), and in a variety of Psalms. When individuals or groups were compelled to express intense feelings tied up with moments of profound release, the Bible tells us, they instinctively turned to music, the “tonal analogue of emotive life.”\textsuperscript{14} But their singing did not stem from gratitude alone. Rather, as one scholar noted, “man sings when the gulf between God and man is at its greatest, either because of His manifest greatness or our own manifest weakness.”\textsuperscript{15} In the case


\textsuperscript{14} Susanne K. Langer, \textit{Feeling and Form} (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1953), 27.

of the Shirah, it was precisely at the moment when the Israelites felt the tremendous chasm between their own fragility and the mighty hand of God that song poured forth from their lips. Their victory was dependent on Divine intervention, and their gratitude conveyed a mixture of fear and awe.

Rich in imagery, hyperbole, and poetic flare, the Shirah text expresses “the unrestrained enthusiasm of the Israelites over their miraculous rescue from disaster.”16 It spans Exodus 15:1–18 and can be divided into four sections: (1) an introduction beginning with the words “Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord…” (vv. 1–3); (2) an account of the defeat of Pharaoh’s chariots and army (vv. 4–12); (3) God’s redemption and guidance of Israel to the prom-

ised land (vv. 13–17); and a short coda: “The Lord will reign for ever and ever!” (v. 18).17

The literary structure of the text and the indication that it was simultaneously spontaneous and communal suggest that it was a call–and–response. Nineteenth–century musicologist William C. Stafford wrote that in performing this ode, “the Israelites were divided into two great choirs—Moses and Aaron being at the head of the men, and Miriam at the head of the women. Whilst the former sung the canticle, the latter would appear to have answered them by repeating the first stanza, accompanying their singing with the sound of tabrets, or timbrels, and with dancing.”18 But it is impossible to know for sure the exact manner in which the Shirah was first intoned; while the text of this famous song has been transmitted from generation to generation, its original tune is irretrievably lost to history. Nevertheless, both the layout of text in the Torah Scroll and the music to which it is chanted mark a dramatic break from the norm. Its verses are arranged metrically like “bricks in a wall,”19 rather than in the standard parallel columns, recalling perhaps Israel’s experience as brick–laying slaves.20 Musically, the Shirah is not bound to the usual system of biblical chant, which utilizes prescribed musical patterns indicated by a system of textual accents called te’amim (“tastes”). It exists instead as an independent tune that in both sound and structure establishes a perceptible departure from the cantillation, and resembles “the martial notes of a trumpet–call” signaling a moment of victory.21

The Ashkenazi Shirah melody is among the oldest in the synagogue.22 Because it was utilized infrequently during the liturgical year, it did not experience

19. BT Megillah 16b.
the same degree of variation and melismatic development as Torah chant, which was used every week. Its strong pentatonic character also points to its antiquity, as the pentatonic is among the earliest established scales.\textsuperscript{23} Moreover, there is a close similarity between the Ashkenazi and Sephardic Shirah melodies, suggesting that the tune—or at least its fundamental properties—predate the development of these rites.\textsuperscript{24} The features unique to either tune can be attributed to rhythmic rather than tonal differences. While in Ashkenazi synagogues the Shirah is chanted freely by a single reader, it is customary among Sephardim for the congregation to sing the melody together—a practice that necessitated its conversion from chant to a metrical tune. And, importantly, the Shirah melodies—Ashkenazi and Sephardic—are essentially “universal,” displaying little denominational or regional variations within these rites.

**QUOTING THE SHIRAH**

The Ashkenazi Shirah melody, with its trumpet calls and festive cadences, is intimately associated in the Jewish psyche with divine deliverance and the accompanying feelings of triumph and joy. Precisely because this melody is so indelibly linked with the biblical episode, it has the potential—even when set to different words—to stimulate a sense of victory and gratitude. The Shirah imbues a text with added and instantly discernable interpretive meaning, often unlocking emotional content hidden beneath the surface of the words.

The Shirah melody is comprised of two parts: an opening and closing line. In liturgical practice, these short melodic sections appear either as a pair or separately at various times and in various passages thematically linked to the Exodus event. Because of the brevity of this melodic material, and because it is generally adapted to small portions of a larger text, such instances are classified as musical quotations rather than contrafact. But while concise, this specific combination


of pitches and durations has the remarkable ability to recall immediately both collective and affective memories: it evokes the shared experience of a paramount moment in Jewish mythology, and stirs within individual listeners the emotions associated with it.25

For example, in congregations across denominational lines, after the reader completes a book of the Torah, the congregation sings the words “Be strong! Be strong! And may we be strengthened” to the second part of the melody. “In this case,” writes Cantor Elihu Feldman, “it is no doubt used to mark a moment of triumph and jubilation at the completion of a book of the Torah.”26 The second part of the Shirah tune is also used when reading from the Torah Scroll on Simchat Torah, when it is applied to the conclusion of each of the six days of creation: “And it was evening and it was morning…” (Gen. 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). Here, too, the melody draws the listeners’ attention to moments of tremendous achievement.

The entire Shirah melody is used to add “a majestic tone” to the portion of the Book of Numbers that recounts the Israelites’ journey from Egypt to their final encampment in Transjordan (Num. 33:10–46).27 These verses are sung in pairs (33:10–11, 12–13, 15–16, etc.), each of which marks a successful stage in Israel’s wilderness itinerary. And on Shabbat, the opening words of Psalm 95 may be sung to the Shirah: “Come, let us sing unto God, raise a shout to our rock and deliverer.” This custom highlights the text’s reference to God as deliverer—a concept central to Exodus 15—and establishes Shabbat as a day of victory. As Feldman relates, “We use this tune to emphasize that we were able to live through the past week successfully and will be recharged for the week to come.”28

In each of these instances, the Shirah melody marks the completion of one stage and the arrival at another, a progression analogous to the transformative journey across the Red Sea. In Nulman’s words, “The worshiper is stimulated to a mood of victory and a sense of hopeful living in the face of an unknown and unpredictable future...the easily recognizable melody recalls this sentiment of victory.”

ASHAMNU

Less explicit is the connection between the Shirah and the confessional prayer Ashamnu. In Ashkenazi synagogues during Yom Kippur, Ashamnu begins with a quotation from the first part of the Shirah melody. On its surface, this practice seems to contradict the text’s plaintive tone:

We have become guilty, we have betrayed, we have robbed, we have spoken slander. We have caused perversion, we have caused wickedness, we have sinned willfully, we have extortion, we have accused falsely. We have given evil counsel, we have been deceitful, we have scorned, we have rebelled, we have provoked, we have turned away, we have been perverse, we have acted wantonly, we have persecuted, we have been obstinate. We have been wicked, we have corrupted, we have been abominable, we have strayed, You have let us go astray.

Ashamnu travels through the Hebrew alphabet, each letter beginning a different moral transgression. This alphabetical form conveys that all sins have their source in the neglect of the Torah, which is scribed with these twenty-two sacred letters. It is phrased in the plural form to emphasize the common

30. Ashamnu is sung to the Shirah melody during the Yom Kippur evening, Selichot, and Minchah services. This practice is also prevalent in the Selichot service prior to Rosh Hashanah.
responsibility that underlies every sin. Rabbi Isaac Luria asked, “Why was the confession arranged in the plural number so that we say ‘We are guilt–laden’ instead of ‘I am guilt–laden’? Because all Israel is one body, and every individual Israeli a member of that body.” Thus, while the acrostic suggests the endless ways individuals may fall short of holy ideals, its plural form frames individual failures as a communal responsibility. As the Talmud declares, “all Jews are answerable for one another.”

The grave words of Ashamnu seem antithetical to the triumphant strains of the Shirah. Ashamnu spells out in detail “how we tend to sin, to negate the promise of life, in our own existence,” which is a far cry from the celebratory and life–affirming words sung following the Red Sea crossing. Moreover, worshipers stand slightly bent and beat their chests at each mention of sin, indicating that evil stems from the heart. In fact, the only obvious link between these texts is that Ashmanu is sung as a call–and–response between cantor and congregation, a method that recalls the responsorial singing of Moses and the Israelites in the Exodus account. Yet while this manner of singing in Exodus emphasizes the collective nature of redemption, its use in singing Ashamnu suggests collective sinfulness.

Ashamnu’s connection with the Shirah melody, then, appears an example of what Barbara Babcock termed “symbolic inversion”: “any act of expressive behavior which inverts, contradicts, abrogates, or in any fashion presents an alternative to commonly–held social codes, values, and norms, be they linguistic, literary or artistic, religious or social, and political.” When attached to the Shirah tune, this relentless list of transgressions, epitomizing human fallibility and

34. BT Shevu’ot 39a.
36. Midrash Rabbah on Kohelet 7:2
our apparent helplessness in the face of our darkest impulses, is overlaid with a sense of exaltation. The music symbolically inverts the prayer from darkness to light.

The few scholars who have attempted to explain the link between Ashamnu and the Shirah see the melody as providing a sense of hope to worshipers seeking exoneration from sin. But in both the Exodus account and the other texts to which the melody is applied, the Shirah marks a victorious moment after the completion of a journey or task, not a longing for future release. It can thus be argued that the connection between Ashamnu and the Shirah melody is based on the notion that confession itself is a triumphant act.

THE VICTORY OF CONFESSION

The linking of Ashamnu with the Shirah melody originated within Hasidic Judaism, a revivalist movement founded in eighteenth–century Poldolia and Volynia (regions now part of Poland and Ukraine). Using earlier traditions of Kabbalah and medieval pietism as a foundation, Hasidism emerged as a populist religious praxis centered upon joy and ecstatic devotion. This approach challenged both the asceticism of earlier piety movements and the hierarchical academic rabbinic culture of Eastern Europe, and provided the masses a way of bringing a palpable sense of God into their daily lives.

From its inception, musical expression has held a prominent place in Hasidic ritual. Music is integral to the movement’s goals of attaining joy in God’s service, and forging a “complete merger” of the human soul with the Divine. The Baal Shem Tov, founder of Hasidism, taught that the soul could not soar


40. Hanoch Avenary, Encounters of East and West in Music (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1979), 158.
Another Hasidic master claimed, “There are castles in the upper spheres which open only to song.”

This high appraisal of music is in some ways a continuation of medieval mystical ideas. Yehudah the Pious, for example, taught: “Whoever is unable to arrange his words well, should express his supplication, praise or penitence by means of melodies…” Like these earlier mystics, Hasidim are not concerned with musical aesthetics; their music is intended solely to cultivate an elevated devotional experience. “[T]he tunes of this secluded microcosm,” wrote musicologist Hanoch Avenary, “are not aimed at any audience, do not strive for external beauty, and cannot be measured by purely artistic standards. Only by means of participation can their ravishing, moving, exalting power be realized.”

The most significant Hasidic musical innovation is the niggun: a wordless melody sung to inspire emotional states. A niggun is endless, not limited by verses of text, allowing the singer’s emotions to pour forth without concern for language. As one scholar put it, these tunes “give voice to that which is too intimate to be uttered in words.” Historically, Hasidic communities would gather during holidays and other special occasions to sing their own niggunim, usually composed by their Rebbe or leader. Wordless singing eventually made its way into the synagogue, where it typically introduces or concludes liturgical prayers.

It was through this migration of niggunim into the synagogue that the Shirah melody came to be connected with Ashamnu. This custom, first introduced by the Hasidim, was later adopted throughout the Ashkenazi world. To this day, synagogues ranging from Orthodox to Reform use the wordless singing of the Shirah to introduce Ashamnu on Yom Kippur. Yet few are able to reconcile

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42. Avenary, Encounters of East and West in Music, 158.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid., 160.
45. Ibid., 159.
the apparently contradictory choice of this joyous melody for the confession-
al prayer. Indeed, to understand this selection as more than simply random
or ironic, one must have an appreciation of the role of confession in Hasidic
thought.

Hasidic ethics teach that human beings are constantly pulled between
good or godly impulses and the yetzer ha-ra, the evil inclination. In this frame-
work, sin results from allowing the yetzer ha-ra to direct one’s thoughts or ac-
tions. But through repentance, the return to God and goodness, these sins can
be atoned. In the words of Rabbi Louis Jacobs, “Repentance has the power of
erasing the sin as if it had not been committed.” It is this philosophy of sin
that gives confession a victorious quality: confessing one’s transgressions and
embracing goodness marks the defeat of the evil within. This is why Hasidic
master Elimelech of Lizansk called confession “a marvelous antidote to the evil
inclination”:

A man should tell his mentor who teaches him God’s way, or
even to a trustworthy friend, all the evil thoughts he has which
are the opposition to Holy Torah, which the evil inclination
brings into his head and heart, whether while he is studying To-
rah or offering his prayers or when he lies on his bed or at any
time during the day. He should conceal nothing out of shame.
The result of speaking of these matters, thus actualizing the po-
tential, will be to break the hold over him of the evil inclination
so that it will possess less power to entice him on future occa-
sions, quite apart from the sound spiritual guidance, which is
the way of the Lord, he will receive from his friend.

The victory of confession is also described in a saying of the Baal Shem
Tov: “The charlady who cleanses the dirt floors of the king’s palace, sings sweetly

46. Heller, What to Listen for In Jewish Music, 234.
as she works.”

Confession is an act of inner cleansing: through self-assessment and disclosure, one eliminates spiritual refuse from one’s soul. The individual is reinvigorated and God, “the king,” is pleased. According to the Baal Shem Tov, this process should be scored with “sweet” tones—a notion that justifies further the relationship between the Shirah melody and Ashamnu.

**SUMMARY**

If it is true that the sound of the Shirah is always and indelibly connected with triumph, its use in singing Ashamnu must be intended to illustrate the victorious nature of confession. The Hasidim did not develop this custom arbitrarily: they understood confession to be an act of triumph over the evil inclination and an embrace of one’s inner-godliness. Utilizing the symbolic power of this melody, they infused the confessional Ashamnu prayer with an overwhelming sense of elation, gratitude, and the awesome presence of the redemptive hand of God.

Viewed as an example of emotionally potent musical symbolism, the Shirah melody gives justification for the broader and pervasive relationship of music, emotions, and religion. In the poetic words of E. Janes: “Delightful music, companion of solitude, alleviation of sorrow, which gives expression to our joys, accompanies and assists our worship, shall [ever] be our recreation and a worthy attendant upon our festivities and religious services.”

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Benjamin Clarke: Theodicy Literature

Benjamin Clarke

Benjamin Clarke is a graduate student in Biblical Studies at Graduate Theological Union. He received his bachelor’s degree at Utah State University with a major in Literary Studies. His scholarly interests cluster around the cross-mappings between the Hebrew Bible and other ancient and modern literary texts, including the intersections of sacred and secular literature.
Misery Loves Company: A Comparative Analysis of Theodicy Literature in Ancient Mesopotamia and Israel

Over the past century of research in Ancient Near Eastern religions, a number of scholars have utilized a comparative approach to note affinities between the Book of Job and Mesopotamian theodicy literature. The disparate results have shown both the advantages and flaws of the comparative method, uncovering useful contextual information, but appraisals have often been plagued by ideological bias and interpretive difficulties. As commonly noted, the Book of Job, the Akkadian poem *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi*, and the poetic dialogue known as the Babylonian Theodicy contain shared thematic and literary features that can increase the understanding of each composition within its religious environment. Although each text contains idiosyncratic traits, their structural, stylistic, and ideological similarities suggest that these texts can be categorized as a distinct genre within Ancient Near Eastern religious literature, offering insights to the religious thought of the Mesopotamian and Israelite intellectual elite.

**The Texts and Method of Analysis**

The composition known as *Ludlul Bēl Nēmeqi* (hereafter *Ludlul*) is a monologue given by a suffering man, lamenting his punishment by the wrathful gods.
After his deliverance is promised in a set of dreams, the sufferer recounts his restoration at the hands of Marduk. The text dates to the Kassite period (circa 600–1150 BCE).¹

The text commonly called the Babylonian Theodicy (hereafter BT) can be tentatively dated later than Ludlul, at approximately 1000 BCE.² In a poetic dialogue, the sufferer laments his afflictions and the injustice in the world, while the sufferer’s friend tries to convince him that the world fits traditional conceptions of divine justice. Ultimately, the sufferer wins the debate, convincing his friend that the gods unfairly inflict suffering upon mankind. However, the sufferer’s concluding speech leaves the discussion on an ambiguous tone, avowing his righteousness while expressing hope of divine redemption.

In dealing with the Book of Job, the majority of scholars have concluded that the text has undergone multiple stages of redaction and expansion. The most agreed–upon division is that the poetic dialogue and the prose narrative which frames it were composed separately. A majority of scholars conclude that the poetic portion is older than the prose frame story.³ The following analysis will assume that the poetic dialogue is independent, while occasionally noting any parallels between the Mesopotamian literature and the later canonical edition of Job.

The question of whether the texts share a genre may seem like a literary

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2. Lambert, Wisdom, 67; Sara Denning–Bolle, Wisdom in Akkadian Literature (Leiden, Ex Oriente Lux, 1992), 136. Foster’s Before the Muses translation will be cited in this paper (II:806–814). Hereafter, the Ludlul and BT will be cited by tablet and line number (i.e. II:2).

rather than a religious question. However, in its more traditional definition, genre presupposes a pattern of influence: each text works within a paradigm created by its predecessors, with which the author is acquainted either directly or indirectly. The term ‘genre’ denotes influence not in the sense of rigid criteria, but rather as discursive frameworks allowing for a flexibility built on certain convention.\(^4\) Determining if the texts conform to a definable genre is relevant for discussing the religious and historical affinities, since it provides evidence for one culture influencing another if this influence can be corroborated by historical circumstance. From this perspective, the Mesopotamian theodicy literature and the book of Job can be compared and contrasted in relation to several key categories: literary features, religious ideology, and the texts’ respective social settings.\(^5\)

**LITERARY FEATURES**

There are significant similarities in the content of the three texts. All three describe a sufferer upon whom, it appears, the god(s) have chosen to inflict undeserved calamity. They lose their prominent economic standing,\(^6\) are socially rejected,\(^7\) are afflicted with physical maladies,\(^8\) and weep and mourn their state. The three respective sufferers express their ignorance regarding any sin that

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\(^6\) Ludlul I: 99–101; BT XXII: 242; Job 29:6–7, 30:12–19 (and, if the prose prologue is included, 1:1–20).


would have merited such affliction:

*Ludlul:* “I for my part, was mindful of supplication and prayer...
I instructed my land to observe the god’s rites.”

*BT:* “Indeed, in my youth I tried to find out the will of (my god),
With prayer and supplication I besought my goddess.
I bore a yoke of profitless servitude.”

*Job:* “Let Him weigh me on the scale of righteousness;
Let God ascertain my integrity.

If my feet strayed from their course...
May the growth of my field be uprooted!”

In their laments, the three sufferers describe the malice that their respective gods have directed toward them:

Ludlul: “After the Lord (changed) day (into night),
And the warrior Marduk (became furious with me)…”

BT: “God does not block the progress of a demon...
What has it profited me that I knelt before my God!”

Job: “For he crushes me for a hair,
He wounds me much for no cause.”

While the texts share these features, they also display notable differences. Unlike Ludlul and Job’s dialogue, BT does not include a divine response. The dialogue runs its course with only human participants. In addition, Ludlul has its own unique features. One of the most obvious distinctions is form; Ludlul is a monologue, while the other two texts are dialogues involving the sufferer and his friend(s). Unlike the other texts, Ludlul both begins and ends with the

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praise of a deity, Marduk, who has delivered the sufferer from his suffering.¹⁷

_Ludlul_ also has the distinction of being the only text to reach a conclusion about the theodicy problem; the sufferer is restored, and the relationship is repaired. In contrast, _BT_ and poetic portion of _Job_ have decidedly ambiguous endings,¹⁸ although interpreters have often tried to impose clarity on them. The sufferer in _BT_ eventually convinces his friend that the gods brutalize human beings. His friend declares:

“They lavish mischief upon (man), they conspire to kill him.
They make him suffer every evil...
They bring him to a horrible end,
They snuff him out like an ember.”¹⁹

Yet, despite this admission from his detractor, the sufferer ends his complaint by begging for the deities’ mercy.²⁰ The ending of the Joban dialogues is similarly ambiguous. After Yahweh lambasts Job for his impudence, Job appears to retract his complaint, but his motivations, and Yahweh’s assessment of his complaint’s validity, remain unclear.²¹ The dialogic forms of both texts foster

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¹⁷. While some scholars see Job’s recant (_Job_ 42:1–6) to include praise of the deity, the ‘praise’ comes only at the end of the long dispute, and it is much less elaborate than that of Ludlul’s protagonist. In _BT_, the sufferer does not offer any praise to the god(s).


²¹. _Job_ 42:5–6. The Hebrew is notoriously difficult in this verse; the normal reading of the verb is ‘despise,’ but there is no direct object. In light of the textual witnesses, the idea of Job retracting his statement seems best (thus, the JPS _Tanakh_ “recant”). Yahweh seems to imply that Job’s complaints were valid and accurate in 42:7.
inconclusiveness.\textsuperscript{22} As a structure committed to the clash of opposing perspectives, the dialogue style seems to allow for more ambiguity than \textit{Ludlul}, which functions as a didactic monologue.\textsuperscript{23}

In addition to these large-scale similarities and differences, the texts also share more specific literary features. All three texts include explicit avowals that the sufferer is ignorant of any offense that elicited divine wrath.\textsuperscript{24} All three texts display the thematic similarities and literary conventions proposed by Karel van der Toorn’s “emblematic sufferer” paradigm:\textsuperscript{25} by employing a character who suffers from an array of physical and emotional afflictions, the texts create a figure with which various readers can identify. This ‘Everyman’ trope heightens the philosophical problem. Each of the texts displays an intellectual vocabulary of rare words.\textsuperscript{26} The texts also draw from a set of common

\textsuperscript{23} For this characterization, see Denning–Bolle, \textit{Wisdom}, 129–130.
\textsuperscript{24} Ludlul II:12–32; BT XXVII: 289–294; Job 29:7–17;
\textsuperscript{25} Karel van der Toorn, \textit{Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia} (Assen–Maastricht, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1985), 59–66. While van der Toorn describes the ‘emblematic sufferer’ from an exclusively social perspective, the effect that this trope has on heightening the dramatic tensions and pathos should not be ignored.
metaphors. These conventional tropes include images of imprisonment, crossing the infernal river, and descent into the netherworld. While not attested in all three texts, one could also add images of the pit, day and night imagery, and dream revelations as shared components of Job and Ludlul. While each text uses these metaphors in unique and innovative ways, they do so within a shared poetic and discursive framework.

**RELIGIOUS IDEOLOGY AND SOCIAL CONTEXT**

These literary characteristics provide the proper data set to discuss the religious beliefs expressed in the texts. There is some difficulty in extrapolating worldviews from the texts; three isolated compositions cannot provide enough information to assess a complete worldview. To reach a conclusion, contextual information must be supplied, and this juxtaposition can allow presuppositions to become bias. This danger is evident in many previous comparisons between these theodicy texts. Even a cursory comparison of scholarly conclusions illustrates how widely interpreters have disagreed about the religious implications of the texts. Some claim that the Mesopotamian theodicies are revolutionary, while others have concluded that they are a sycophantic reinforcement of an inflexible theology of retribution. In a similar vein, some scholars have elevated the poetic innovation and theological reflection of Job over the ‘simplistic’ Mesopotamian texts.

There are multiple reasons for this interpretational disparity. Some portions of the texts—particularly the BT and Job—are notoriously ambiguous,

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and thus susceptible to over-reading. To complicate matters, scholars have long disagreed on the nature of Mesopotamian and Israelite religion. However, an analysis of the argumentation shows that many of these conclusions may have been reached because of a scholar’s specialty in one culture or the other. Mesopotamian scholars tend to see *Ludlul* and *BT* as intellectually innovative, “revolutionary,”31 and “couched in powerful poetry.”32 Conversely, biblical scholars often denigrate the Mesopotamian literature as intellectually unintelligible, “facile,”33 or “rudimentary,”34 while assessing Job as “higher level wisdom.”35 This trend does not negate the insights of the respective scholars, but it does serve as a warning about allowing one’s own scholarly interests to interfere with the comparative process.

*Ludlul*, *BT*, and Job do suggest some key ideological similarities between Mesopotamian and Israelite religion. Both religious worldviews emphasized the transcendence of their deities. Although deities could be described anthropomorphically, their designs and thoughts were believed to be beyond the comprehension of humans. Divine transcendence was not only a presumed aspect of the divine, but it also could explain why the ideal and real did not always correspond. More specifically, notions of divine transcendence could be used to explain why the pious appeared to suffer, why an individual’s fortunes could turn without any apparent reason, and why the moral order of the cosmos could appear to fall apart, yet actually remain intact.

In conjunction with this theological principle, the Mesopotamian and Israelite religious worldviews had a general cause–and–effect system of rewards and retributions. Those who served their god(s) and lived ethically could expect the favor of the god(s) and reap benefits from their piety, while those who

failed in their responsibilities toward the god(s) and transgressed the divinely approved ethical code could expect to be punished by the god(s). Even when theodicy was considered problematic in events which disagreed with the causational system, the evidence of the symmetry of piety/reward and impiety/punishment was the normal expectation. In counterbalance to this expectation, the idea of divine transcendence was a needed, if not always satisfactory, reconciliation.

In comparing the religious components of the texts, a clear distinction between *Ludlul* and the other texts appears. The protests of innocence in *Ludlul* center on cultic sins, while BT and Job include other, moral dimensions of the sufferer’s behavior. However, the distinction between ‘moral’ and ‘cultic’ should not be unduly emphasized, since the lines between the two were blurry or nonexistent in Israelite and Mesopotamian cultures. However, the protagonists’ additional claims of humility and beneficence are significant distinctions in BT and Job. In addition, the author of *Ludlul* avoids fully confronting the theodicy problem. While dealing with the same dilemma as the other texts, it ultimately returns to a traditional view in Mesopotamian religion: in the words of the poet, while the gods may be cruel in punishment, once appeased, Marduk “rescued me [from the pit] / summoned me [from destruction].” Since *Ludlul* resolves its theodicy, it does not challenge divine justice to the same degree as BT and Job’s dialogue. The gods can be expected to deal justly with humans. Despite suffering being incomprehensible at times, larger questions about why

36. Cf. Weinfeld, “Mesopotamian Parallels,” 224. Ludlul’s sufferer speaks of his dutiful observance of libations, observing religious festivals, and making food offerings, while Job and BT’s sufferer protest on basis of their generosity and moral integrity.
37. Van Der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction*, 72.
such suffering occurs dissolve once the protagonist experiences redemption.\textsuperscript{40} In this conclusion, \textit{Ludlul} finds the idea of divine transcendence to be a sufficient counterbalance to the incongruity between the religious ideal of the causational system and the mortal experience.

In contrast to the reinforcement of traditional views found in \textit{Ludlul}, \textit{BT} and \textit{Job} disclose a radical questioning of the notion of the gods’ justice and a causational system in which the righteous are rewarded and the transgressors are punished.\textsuperscript{41} In their intense arguments, the sufferers in \textit{BT} and \textit{Job} cross the traditional boundary between lament and blasphemy. This is clearly indicated in \textit{BT}, where the sufferer’s friend comments that the sufferer has “spurned propriety,”\textsuperscript{42} “besmirched [every] code,”\textsuperscript{43} and “blaspheme[d] in the anguish of [his] thoughts.”\textsuperscript{44} After being convinced of the sufferer’s position, the friend invokes this blasphemy, giving the gods derogatory eponyms “Liar” and “Slanderer.”\textsuperscript{45}

Both \textit{BT} and \textit{Job} also explore the problem of theodicy beyond the solipsistic view of the text’s sufferer, exploring the issues of injustice and suffering on a more general scale.\textsuperscript{46} In their radical questioning, these texts wrestle with the inadequacy of divine transcendence as a sufficient answer to a non-causational reality. The inability of humans to discern the deities’ thoughts is at least temporarily found to be an unsatisfactory answer to the unmerited suffering and the


\textsuperscript{42} BT XX: 214.

\textsuperscript{43} BT XX: 214; Lambert renders “you profane ordinances.” (\textit{Wisdom}, 85).

\textsuperscript{44} BT XXIV: 245; cf. Job 15:1–6.


inequity in the mortal world.

Despite these similarities in ideology, there are significant differences between BT and the Joban dialogue. Job’s dialogue presents a more extensive examination of theodicy, both from the sufferer and from the counter-ideology of Job’s friends. However, some of this thoroughness can be attributed to its length; the text is much longer, allowing the problem to be discussed more extensively. Moreover, in a significant way, the dialogue in Job is less of an examination than BT, since both sides of the argument appear to largely ignore the other side’s arguments, leading to theses and counter-theses that rarely break new ground. Although the two debaters in BT display this same trait of ‘talking past each other,’ the friend is eventually persuaded by the sufferer. Thus, there is some consideration of the opposite view, since there is an ultimate agreement.

As for the Joban dialogue, regardless of Job’s reasons for recanting after Yahweh’s speech, he reaches this point not from the counterarguments or his friends or, for that matter, from any counter argument by Yahweh. The recant is the result of a speech from Yahweh, which, although emphasizing the deity’s power, does not address Job’s argument about injustice and suffering. In short, the arguments in Job have more static positions that are less inquisitive, less

47. Contra. Albertson, who seems to argue that more dialogue shows deeper thought (“Job,” 226).
responsive to counterargument, and recalcitrant to the point that only a *non sequitur* from the deity can bring the argument to a conclusion, albeit an artificial one.

These contrasts suggest a more general difference between Mesopotamian polytheism and the burgeoning Israelite monotheism. The real nature of this difference is difficult to discern, especially since neither culture produced any systematic theological statements. One difference that can be detected, at least tentatively, is that Mesopotamian polytheism had more flexibility than Israelite monotheism due to a multi-causational worldview. While deities were expected to act according to the causational system, other deities or malevolent entities could also influence an individual’s fate and disrupt the effects of righteousness or sin. In this way, calamity could be explained in multiple ways. This belief, although it is not explicitly mentioned in BT, may have allowed a greater flexibility in speculation. One could decry the injustice of the gods, since multiple causes allowed for a way of thinking about right and wrong outside of the will of a particular god. This multiple causation system could not exist within the ideals of the developing Israelite monotheism; thus, questioning the deity’s justice was more unsettling and opaque in the Israelite worldview.

While the theodicy texts attest to philosophical speculation and counter-cultural inquiry in Mesopotamia and Israel, one should be cautious in extrapolating from these texts to general trends in their respective cultures. Given the very low literacy rates in ancient Israel and Mesopotamia, few people would have been able to read these texts, particularly with their challenging vocabulary. In addition, the scribal cultures responsible for these texts were a relatively

50. Van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture*, 10–11. While Israel might have had a slightly higher rate than Mesopotamia, less than ten percent of either culture would have been able to read a literary text, much less the challenging style of the three theodicies under examination.
While the theodicy texts show a speculative and revolutionary aspect of religious thought, they likely do not reflect commonly held beliefs, and few would have been exposed to their speculation. The texts are products of the intellectual elite who had the time, means, and education to compose them; as such, they reflect the thought and interest of only miniscule parts of Mesopotamian and Israelite societies.

Finally, this assessment of the shared features of BT and Job’s poetry raises questions about the possible influence of BT on Job. While there is no reason to posit Job’s ‘dependency’ on BT, it is likely that the author(s) of the poetic dialogue in Job had some acquaintance with BT and other Mesopotamian literature. As members of the social and scholarly elite, the Israelite author(s) were likely in a position to be influenced by the literature and thought of other cultures, as evidenced by other texts produced by their social circle. The literary features and metaphors employed by the authors of Job’s dialogue indicate shared conventions with the Mesopotamian literature, and particularly with BT; this also indicates that the author had some acquaintance with BT and its Mesopotamian literary context.

CONCLUSION

After a consideration of the literary and theological features of Ludlul Bêl Nêmeqi, the Babylonian Theodicy, and the poetic portions of the Book of Job, there is a clear distinction between Ludlul and the other two texts. In both literary and ideological aspects, Ludlul represents a different expression of the problem of theodicy. In contrast, BT and the dialogue in Job merit a different genre
within Ancient Near Eastern literature and religious expression.\textsuperscript{54} Both texts question the adequacy of a theological causation system, and express their views in a dialogic style that accentuates the philosophical nature of their discussion and ultimately results in ambiguous conclusions. In assessing these texts, generalizations about their respective cultures should be avoided, since these texts are products of a small intellectual elite whose speculations and counter-cultural thoughts are representative of their idiosyncratic worldviews. In this way, BT’s and Job’s dialogic form, revolutionary questioning of the traditional religious paradigm, and constellation of shared stylistic features constitute unique expressions in their religious worlds.

\textsuperscript{54} In agreement with Van Der Toorn, “Literary Dialogue,” (65), who suggests that the Egyptian “Dialogue Between a Man and His Ba” also belongs to this genre.
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“Unholy Ghost”: Jane Kenyon and the Religious Binaries of Depression

When asked about the religious element in her poetry, award–winning American poet and devout Christian Jane Kenyon said in an interview with Mike Pride, “My spiritual life is so much a part of my intellectual life and my feeling life that it’s really become impossible for me to keep it out of my work.”

The fact that religion plays an integral role in Kenyon’s intellectual life is evident in an examination of her poetry, which is filled with the images and language of her faith. The ways in which her faith affects her “feeling life,” however, are inevitably and complexly connected with her lifelong struggle with depression. Her husband, former poet laureate Donald Hall, relates an episode of coming home and finding Kenyon in an “exalted and shining mood,” having felt an enlightening, comforting presence she “associated with the holy Spirit.”

These blissful moods, however, were very rare; her depression, as she told Bill Moyers, was “more like a unipolar depression,” in which she experienced long relentless attacks of profound melancholy.

While Kenyon understood her depression as a biochemically determined illness, she chose to represent it as the exact opposite

of this exalting presence—an evil spirit she terms the “unholy ghost.”

These binaries in Kenyon’s descriptions of her depression are most clearly evident in “Now Where?” and “Having it Out with Melancholy.” While the opposition in the poems reveals her sense that, at times, the promises of Christianity do not apply to her, it also represents her effort to keep her disorder in perspective while maintaining her faith.

Both poems portray her depression as the antithesis of the Holy Ghost—an evil spirit that is always with her and possesses her body. Perhaps Kenyon’s characterization of her depression as an “unholy ghost” can be traced back to her childhood fear regarding the concept of the Holy Spirit. Laban Hill provides insight regarding Kenyon’s Methodist grandmother, who had a “dark obsession with Christ’s second coming and the end of the world;” her rhetoric of hellfire and brimstone gave her young granddaughter an early conception of Christianity as a religion of fear. So when her grandmother told her as a young girl that “the body is the temple of the Holy Ghost,” she was frightened at the prospect of a ghost possessing her body. “Now Where?” personifies her depression as a dark spirit which constantly follows the speaker:

It wakes when I wake, walks
when I walk, turns back when I
turn back, beating me to the door.

Like the Holy Spirit, which Christ promises to His followers as a constant companion, this unholy ghost is always with her. However, unlike the promised Comforter, it is a dark, tormenting spirit from which she physically cannot escape. John H. Timmerman quotes an earlier draft of “Having It Out with Melancholy” that reveals Kenyon’s emphasis on this binary. As her depression

occupies the role of the Holy Ghost, she addresses her melancholy, saying,

You and I are finished, companion
of years and days, so familiar
I thought you were my friend.  

The final version of the poem reveals that Kenyon has struggled with this unwanted companionship from her birth. The poem’s opening section reveals the evil spirit’s possession and control over the speaker’s body.

When I was born...
...you lay down
on top of me, pressing
the bile of desolation into every pore.  

The thought of depression as an ever-present companion is troubling indeed. If, as Paul teaches, “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, [and] longsuffering,”
then the unholy ghost brings the fruit of self-loathing, misery, and, as Kenyon’s earlier draft states, “hatred of the world.”
While the Holy Ghost sanctifies and brings one closer to the divine, the evil spirit of depression is a “mutilator of souls” and “ruin[s her] manners toward God.”

The speaker’s despair makes her feel that she is abandoned by God, and prevents her from enjoying His promised joy and peace. Her despondency in “Now Where?” is reflected in the lines: “It spoils my food and steals my sleep” and “If I lie down or sit up it’s all the same.”
In her suffering, she is bereft of any spiritual consolation as the unholy ghost mockingly asks her, “Where’s your

10. Galations 5:22
11. Timmerman, 195.
God now?”14 This line is placed at the end of the second stanza, suggesting that the speaker has no answer to the evil spirit’s jesting question. Her response is only to lie down “like a widow.”15 While this simile certainly conveys a sense of loneliness and sorrow, it specifically suggests that she has been abandoned by God. Her description of herself as a widow recalls Christ’s parable in which He presents Himself as the bridegroom to His followers, who enter into a spiritual covenant relationship with Him. As a widow she feels that either Christ has forsaken her as though He were dead, or that His death is final, denying His promised resurrection. This reading is consistent with the poem’s concluding lines:

To strangers I must seem
alive. Spring comes, summer;
cool, clear weather; heat, rain....16

Uncharacteristically for Kenyon, the arrival of spring with its natural manifestations of new life does not bring her comfort. She portrays herself as being dead, and does not feel that the Christian promise of rebirth applies to her. Her sense that God has abandoned her seems a confirmation of the childhood fear she describes in her poem “Staying at Grandma’s.”17 In the poem she questions why, if her grandmother loved her, she would tell her about Christ coming unexpectedly to two women—taking one to be with Him and leaving the other alone. Feeling abandoned by the promised bridegroom, she has only the unholy ghost who brings a misery like spiritual death.

“Melancholy” conveys the same sense of God–forsaken misery as the unholy ghost prevents the speaker from partaking of Christianity’s promised blessings. In 1980 Kenyon had a spiritual vision and saw “a great stream of light,” in which “every human life was suspended;” this had a significant impact on her

14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Kenyon, 145.
conversion to Christianity.\textsuperscript{18} She relates the vision in the fifth section of “Melancholy,” but she is prevented from partaking of the life-giving light of the stream by the unholy ghost. Kenyon describes herself in the poem as “a speck of light” floating in the river of light “with the whole / human family. We were all colors.”\textsuperscript{9} Kenyon’s use of the plural pronoun and the word family emphasize communal belonging. Timmerman notes that this instance represents a release from the isolation of depression in which the speaker is at one with “normal” society.\textsuperscript{20} This is a blissful moment of joy and community in contrast to the despair and isolation of depression, that prompts the speaker’s words, “For a few moments . . . I no longer hated having to exist.”\textsuperscript{21} This relief from suffering, however, is indeed momentary, as it is interrupted by the arrival of the unholy ghost:

Like a crow who smells hot blood  
you came flying to pull me out  
of the glowing stream.  
“I’ll hold you up. I never let my dear  
one’s drown!”\textsuperscript{22}

This scene emphasizes the binary of the evil spirit and the Holy Ghost. The speaker’s depression, the unholy ghost, is personified as a crow. This black bird of death represents the opposite of the Holy Sprit, who descends in the form of the dove at the baptism of Jesus. While the evil spirit holds itself up as a rescuer, it keeps her from the source of life and light she desires. Once the speaker shows signs of life and vibrancy, this bird of death and despondency smells her “hot blood” and drags her away from the water. Although the unholy ghost gives the appearance of uplifting her, by taking her from the living waters, he brings her down into darkness, isolation, and spiritual death. “After that [she]

\begin{itemize}
\item 18. Qtd. in Hill, 127.
\item 19. Kenyon, 190.
\item 20. Timmerman, 200.
\item 22. Ibid.
\end{itemize}
wept for days” as the prior feelings of self-loathing and despair returned with increased intensity.\(^{23}\)

Amidst these feelings of abandonment and anguish, Kenyon recognizes her depression as an illness for which she is not responsible. In the poem’s third section Kenyon relates the insensitive advice from a friend: “You wouldn’t be so depressed if you really believed in God.”\(^{24}\) This represents what Paul Breslin describes as an older, more traditional way of viewing mental illness, “as primarily a disease of soul rather than body.”\(^{25}\) This is also highlighted in the poet’s use of the older word “melancholy” in the poem, rather than the more modern term “depression.” Kenyon also represents depression from a modern medical perspective, emphasizing the chemical nature of her sickness in the poem’s second section, in which she lists an arsenal of medications to combat her depression. The following two, earlier variations of the poem highlight the absurdity of the friend’s advice, emphasizing the nature of the disease as medical rather than spiritual:

If you really believed
in God, your pancreas would
produce enough insulin.\(^{26}\)

Your bones aren’t really broken!
Take off that body cast and change
your tune.\(^{27}\)

Timmerman comments, “The depressive cannot suddenly cease being depressed any more than the diabetic can stop being diabetic, or the person in

\(^{23}\) Ibid.

\(^{24}\) Kenyon, 190.

\(^{25}\) Paul Breslin, “Jane Kenyon’s ‘Manners Toward God’: Gratitude and the Anti-Urge,” Simply, 205.

\(^{26}\) Qtd. in Timmerman, 197.

\(^{27}\) Ibid.
the body cast can get up. All three are states that one learns to live with.”  

The assumption of the friend’s perspective is that depression is induced by a certain behavior or mindset, and therefore can be cured by a change of behavior or a better attitude. Kenyon keeps the fallacy of this view in perspective, maintaining in the poem that she is not to blame for the disorder. As a new medication stops her depressive pain, the speaker returns to her normal life “with the wonder and bitterness of someone pardoned for a crime she did not commit,” emphasizing her innocence and confessing to her depression, “There is nothing I can do against your coming.”  

The poem’s beginning at the baby’s nursery reinforces the idea that the speaker is born with, and therefore not responsible for, her depressed condition.

This perspective, strengthened by Kenyon’s faith, brings some degree of comfort in the belief that although she cannot now see the fulfillment of Christianity’s promises, God will not ultimately abandon her. A depressive is tormented by the self-perception that he or she is not good enough, and cannot do anything right. It is important, therefore, that the speaker maintains the knowledge that she suffers from an illness for which she is not to be blamed. Her belief in a just God gives her a hope that He will not abandon her in the end for something that is not her fault. Even during the speaker’s suffering, there is a moment of comfort in her dog’s companionship. In the sixth section

The dog searches until he finds me
upstairs, lies down with a clatter
of elbows, puts his head on my foot.

Sometimes the sound of his breathing
saves my life—in and out, in
and out; a pause, a long sigh....

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28. Timmerman, 197.
While the dog’s presence brings a physical comfort as a living presence other than her relentless depression, these lines convey a deeper, more spiritual meaning. Timmerman states, “Essentially, the dog breathes for her. As such the act suggests the breath of the Holy Spirit and an act of grace.”

Even in her deep suffering, the spirit brings some comfort. While her illness diminishes her ability to feel the presence of the divine, she feels that the Holy Ghost is still with her and helps her to keep on living. While hope is much more difficult to find in “Now Where,” the closing lines describing the onset of spring can be read as a reassurance. Even though she cannot presently feel the new life of Christianity or the presence of the promised bridegroom, it is still there, and Christ, according to His promise, will not forsake her. This conviction and her knowledge that she has not done anything to deserve her suffering, or to estrange herself from God, give her something to cling to in her despair.

Considering her depression in religious terms is certainly not a cure for Kenyon, nor does it bring comfort sufficient to outweigh her intense suffering. However, her faith in a future relief from sorrow helps her to keep going and make the moments of peace more meaningful. The final two sections of “Melancholy” portray the speaker’s relief from her anguish.

Pharmaceutical wonders are at work
but I believe in this moment
of well-being.32

Kenyon’s language suggests an intersection between the religious and the medical discourse. While she acknowledges the chemical element of her happiness, the word “wonder” has more of a divine connotation; she chooses to believe that her well-being is due to spiritual as well as medical forces, making it more meaningful to her. In the life-affirming final stanza, Kenyon notes that she is “high” on June light as well as Nardil, emphasizing the duality of her

31. Timmerman, 201.
32. Kenyon, 192.
temporary relief, as both spiritual and chemical. 33 She is “overcome by ordinary contentment” and wonders, “What hurt me so terribly all my life until this moment?”34 She is delighted by the song of a “wood thrush” and its “bright, unequivocal eye.”35 At the same time, she recognizes that this happiness is precarious, as the “unholy ghost” is “certain to come again” and that after rising at four, her emotions will eventually sink back down.36 However, she enjoys the moment of peace and realizes that there will be future solace as well as suffering. Kenyon said, “My belief in God has kept me from harming myself,” and that “searching for God is the first thing and the last thing, but in between such trouble and such pain.”37 This suggests that these “moment[s] of well–being,” which she associates with religion as well as medicine, keep her alive during the difficult times, like the reassuring breathing of her dog, or the presence of the Holy Spirit. While the unholy ghost of depression will come back, so, too, will the wood thrush and the morning light, bringing solace as well as suffering. This knowledge enables Kenyon to “let evening come,” knowing that it will eventually give way to the morning and that her suffering will eventually be alleviated with a healing, albeit a temporary relief.38

33. Kenyon, 193.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
37. Qtd. in Hill, 135.
38. Kenyon, 176.
Now Where?

Jane Kenyon

It wakes when I wake, walks
when I walk, turns back when I
turn back, beating me to the door.

It spoils my food and steals
my sleep, and mocks me, saying,
“Where is your God now?”

And so, like a widow, I lie down
after supper. If I lie down
or sit up it’s all the same:

the days and nights bear me along.
To strangers I must seem
alive. Spring comes, summer;

cool clear weather; heat, rain....

Having It Out with Melancholy

Jane Kenyon

1 From the Nursery

When I was born, you waited
behind a pile of linen in the nursery,
and when we were alone, you lay down
on top of me, pressing
the bile of desolation into every pore.

And from that day on
everything under the sun and moon
made me sad—even the yellow
wooden beads that slid and spun
along a spindle on my crib.

You taught me to exist without gratitude.
You ruined my manners toward God:
“We’re here simply to wait for death;
the pleasures of earth are overrated.”

I only appeared to belong to my mother,
to live among blocks and cotton undershirts
with snaps; among red tin lunch boxes
and report cards in ugly brown slipcases.
I was already yours—the anti-urge,
the mutilator of souls.

2 Bottles
Elavil, Ludiomil, Doxepin,
Norpramin, Prozac, Lithium, Xanax,
Wellbutrin, Parnate, Nardil, Zoloft.
The coated ones smell sweet or have no smell; the powdery ones smell like the chemistry lab at school that made me hold my breath.

3 Suggestion from a Friend
You wouldn’t be so depressed if you really believed in God.

4 Often
Often I go to bed as soon after dinner as seems adult
(I mean I try to wait for dark) in order to push away from the massive pain in sleep’s frail wicker coracle.

5 Once There was Light
Once, in my early thirties, I saw that I was a speck of light in the great river of light that undulates through time.
I was floating with the whole
human family. We were all colors—those
who are living now, those who have died,
those who are not yet born. For a few
moments I floated, completely calm,
and I no longer hated having to exist.

Like a crow who smells hot blood
you came flying to pull me out
of the glowing stream.
“I’ll hold you up. I never let my dear
ones drown!” After that, I wept for days.

6 In and Out
The dog searches until he finds me
upstairs, lies down with a clatter
of elbows, puts his head on my foot.

Sometimes the sound of his breathing
saves my life—in and out, in
and out; a pause, a long sigh....

7 Pardon
A piece of burned meat
wears my clothes, speaks
in my voice, dispatches obligations
haltingly, or not at all.
It is tired of trying
to be stouthearted, tired
beyond measure

We move on to the monoamine oxidase inhibitors. Day and night
I feel as if I had drunk six cups of coffee, but the pain stops abruptly. With the wonder
and bitterness of someone pardoned for a crime she did not commit
I come back to marriage and friends,
to pink-fringed hollyhocks; come back
to my desk, books, and chair.

8 Credo
Pharmaceutical wonders are at work
but I believe only in this moment of well-being. Unholy ghost,
you are certain to come again.

Coarse, mean, you’ll put your feet
on the coffee table, lean back,
and turn me into someone who can’t take the trouble to speak; someone who can’t sleep, or who does nothing but sleep; can’t read, or call for an appointment for help.
There is nothing I can do
against your coming.
When I awake, I am still with thee.

9 Wood Thrush
High on Nardil and June light
I wake at four,
waiting greedily for the first
notes of the wood thrush. Easeful air
presses through the screen
with the wild, complex song
of the bird, and I am overcome

by ordinary contentment.
What hurt me so terribly
all my life until this moment?
How I love the small, swiftly
beating heart of the bird
singing in the great maples;
its bright, unequivocal eye.

In *Mormon Convert, Mormon Defector*, Polly Aird offers us a unique glance at the life of Peter McAuslan and the events that encircled his life that should not only be enjoyable to students of Mormon History, but any student of religion seeking to understand individual reactions to societal demands of a larger church organization. Aird paints a beautiful picture of Peter’s surroundings that allows the reader to see the social pressures that influenced both Peter’s conversion to and disillusionment with Mormonism.

Aird details how Peter, a calico printer in 1840s Scotland encountered Mormonism. Then, through the experience of a vision, the promises of Zion, and the works of Mormon theologian, Orson Pratt, Peter left the harsh Scottish industrial revolution for America. Peter and his family and friends traveled to the States and then to the Utah territory. Along the way, they witnessed tragedies both on the sea and across the plains while experiencing firsthand disease and discomfort.

In Utah, Peter had to adjust to a different type of Mormonism than what he had expected when converting in Scotland. Aird gives accounts of how some Mormons enforced doctrine with violence and coercion along with citations of leaders expecting the strictest of obedience. With locusts, drought, famine, hard
winters, tragedies of the handcart companies, Aird shows the individual and community struggles of the early Saints in Utah. And with the Utah War and the Mormon Reformation completing the picture, the reader begins to grasp the feel of what it must have been like to be a Mormon pioneer in the era.

Aird details the motivation behind Peter McAuslan’s decision to leave Mormonism and the Utah territory. These pressures include his losing confidence in Brigham Young as a divine leader, distaste for the blind obedience expected of him, a fear for his personal safety in the face of the threatening rhetoric of Mormon leaders. Aird throughout her book seeks to elucidate Peter’s choice to abandon his faith in a fair manner leaving an admirable impression.

Peter’s adventure ends with a journey to California escorted by federal troops. There he becomes involved with the practice of spiritualism and reconciles his Mormon past with new experiences. Aird’s final portrayal of McAuslan through letters written to his Mormon family members shows a man deeply thoughtful, courteous, and profoundly affected by his past. Aird’s account of Peter McAuslan’s life will be of interest to anyone who is curious about the social pressures of religion and the inner pressures of conscience.

ERIC BOTTELBERGHE, Utah State University

Eric Bottelberghe is a senior at Utah State University working toward a BA in philosophy with a concentration in ethics and minors in sociology, political science and religious studies. He was Vice President of USU Religious Studies Club from Fall 2009–Spring 2010 and will be the President of the club for Fall 2010– Spring 2011.

In *Inventing America’s Worst Family*, historian Nathaniel Deutsch traces the development of the “Tribe of Ishmael” from the emergence of the eugenics movement in the nineteenth century to the literature of family and genetics studies in the 1970s. Of particular interest to Deutsch is the contradiction between the actual history of the Ishmael family and scholarly construction of America’s worst family. As he tracks the rise and fall of scholarship about the family of Ishmael, Deutsch demonstrates the complicated relationship between race, religion, and science within American politics and popular culture.

Deutsch argues that the so-called Tribe of Ishmael was “made not born” (18). With great attention to detail, Deutsch uses the research notes of pivotal eugenics, family studies, and genetics scholars to expose the construction and reconstruction of a stereotype. Specifically, Deutsch speculates that eugenicist Oscar McCullough relied upon American assumptions and fears about Islam in order to insinuate the potential threat of cultural deviants. Deutsch further asserts that the eugenics movement successfully shifted the meaning of “undeserving poor” from a moral calculus to a biological one under the guise of scholarship. As the primary source of evidence, the Ishmaelites were unfit to receive aid because of their “inferior genes” (15). Deutsch’s thorough contextualization, however, reveals that the Tribe of Ishmael was never an easily definable community let alone a distinct genetic disposition.

Deutsch readily admits that the actual story of the Ishmael family is unknown. Misguided genealogies, politicized ideologies, and archival lacunae combine to create a contestable history of the Ishmaelites. The strength of Deutsch’s work lies in its exposure of spurious genealogical records, political motivations, and popular assumptions that led three successive family studies scholars to misinterpret the place of the Ishmaels in American history. Deutsch successfully
outlines an alternative history of the Ishmaelites in which the ostensibly “unfit” and “Asiatic” family reflected white, Upland Southern cultural roots. Moreover, Deutsch discovers that the Ishmaels did not rely on charity; instead, eugenicists’ records reveal that those considered a part of the Ishmael “tribe” belonged to the working poor, middle, and landowning classes.

Inventing America’s Worst Family provides a noteworthy example of scholarship that penetrates several historiographical conversations, including ethnic studies, history of science, and American religious history. For religionists, Deutsch pays attention to the racialization of Islam within American history. Like Native Americans and Mormons, the Ishmael family was symbolically Muslim. Deutsch in particular notes the inverted mirroring of white eugenicists who viewed the “Islamic sounding” surname as an opportunity to otherize the Ishmaels and of African-American Muslims who found pride in Islamic oriented racial identities. Both groups relied upon claims to Middle East origins yet did so for antithetical reasons. Further complicating this genealogy, Deutsch locates appeals to the supposed triracial identity of the Ishmaels in the 1970s. With each turn in the Ishmael tale, Deutsch points to a complex fashioning and re-fashioning of race, religion, and science within identity politics in America.

For Deutsch, America’s alleged “worst family” is “a profoundly unsettling counterhistory of the United States” (5). Remarkably, their changes in race and religion over time only marginalize Ishmaelites. As whites with a “Muslim-sounding name,” as a triracial community, and as African-American Muslims, the Ishmaelites remain on the outer edges of mainstream society even when the stereotypes of them permeate popular culture. Ultimately, Deutsch seeks to discredit late nineteenth and early twentieth century Protestant reformers. While
Religious Experience Reconsidered builds on Ann Taves’ previous work in Fits, Trances and Visions by again taking up the comparison of “involuntary,” or religious, experiences—this time from a theoretical perspective. She provides a new framework for thinking about religious experiences and sets up potential avenues of inquiry into four issues related to her task: religion, experience, explanation, and comparison. In exploring each of these issues, Taves promotes collaboration among scholars in the humanities and sciences by suggesting ways that scholars from each side could approach a set of questions.

Taves argues that scholars must move away from the term “religious experience,” because it limits the range of comparison, and it confuses scholarly purposes with those of religious believers. She suggests that scholars employ the “second-order” term, “things deemed special” in order to preserve the integrity of the their subject’s explanations, while keeping scholars from using the language of their subjects. Moving away from William James’ definition of religious experience as something individuals experience in private, Taves suggests that “religion” is constituted by group processes of ascription whereby individual experiences, objects, etc. are identified as “special” (“simple ascriptions”) and then
organized into “pathways” to achieve spiritual goals (“composite formations”).

In her discussion of “experience,” Tavies contends that special experiences are closely related to alterations in consciousness. Drawing upon recent studies of consciousness, she suggests that special experiences might be studied in comparison to the unconscious processing of dreams. Thus the “explanation” of these experiences must account for both cultural processes of ascribing meaning to them, and the role of embodied, unconscious processing in generating the experience itself. Finally, regarding “comparison,” Tavies argues that scholars should compare religious subjects with non-religious subjects by stipulating a point of comparison that creates a set of things to compare, such as cross-cultural studies of sleep paralysis.

Despite Tavies’ emphasis on multi-disciplinary studies, some of the questions that Tavies offers might feel foreign to scholars in the humanities. In her chapter on “Experience,” Tavies emphasizes her inquiry into how experiences occur. She suggests only in passing that historians and ethnographers could take up the question of the cultural meaning of these experiences. In addition, where Tavies’ methodology seems most applicable to scholars of the humanities, it comes across as something that these scholars have already been doing implicitly. For example, in chapter three, Tavies employs “attribution theory” to compare the special experiences of Stephen Bradley and David Brainerd. Attribution theory entails a comparison of the two people’s personalities and historical contexts and the historical context of their experiences. Even without the rubric of attribution theory, scholars in the humanities already do this kind of comparative work. Controversially, Tavies concludes that “religious studies” should be refocused to a broader study of “specialness.” Scholars of religious studies must consider her suggestion carefully, asking whether such a change in focus might not undermine the discipline itself.

However, scholars in the humanities may find Tavies’ general model for “religion” useful, because it situates religious experiences within the process of
building a religious tradition, which directs scholars to consider the significance of religious experiences beyond the individual level. In addition, by employing “special things” as a descriptor, Taves calls scholars to a more careful consideration of their terminology. Finally in bringing together the sciences and the humanities, Taves demonstrates the value of collaborative work for generating questions, and she reveals the potential for scholars across disciplines to contribute meaningfully to related issues.

RACHEL OZANNE, University of Texas at Austin

Rachel Ozanne received her BA in Plan II from the University of Texas at Austin in 2006 and her MA in U.S. History from the same institution in 2009. In her dissertation project for the University of Texas, Ozanne will compare the reception of religious experiences in three Antebellum communities—Hickite Quakers, Mormons, and Seventh-day Adventists—and will consider the impact of religious experiences on community ethics.