

Ye Are Gods: Psalm 82 and John 10 as Witnesses to the Divine Nature of Humankind

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Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? (Exodus 15:11)¹

And the Word Himself now speaks to you plainly, putting to shame your unbelief, yes, I say, the Word of God speaks, having become man, in order that such as you may learn from man how it is even possible for man to become a god. (Clement of Alexandria, d. ca. A.D. 215)²

Latter-day Saints are fond of using John 10:34, itself a quotation from Psalm 82:6, to support their doctrine of eternal progression. The passage seems at first glance to be evidence for the concept that men and God are, in some sense at least, of the same species. Yet critics of the restored gospel often contend that such arguments misrepresent the original context—and thus the real meaning—of the two texts. Is their criticism true, or can the typical Latter-day Saint use of these two passages be defended? We shall examine both of them, starting first with John 10:22–39, in an attempt to determine their original meaning. Then we shall consider whether the Latter-day Saint understanding of the passages fits their apparent original sense and whether it does so as well as, or even better than, rival understandings.

John 10

According to the Fourth Gospel, Jesus was at Jerusalem during the Feast of Dedication, which took place in the winter. He was walking in the temple, in the area known as Solomon’s porch. At this point “the Jews” demanded to know “plainly” whether or not Jesus was in fact the Christ, or the Messiah. Responding in a roundabout way, Jesus answered that his good works would tell who he was, at least for those who were receptive to the truth. But he followed that comment with a strong statement that clearly incensed his audience: “I and my Father are one,” he declared.³ At this point, the Jews took up rocks to stone him (see John 10:22–31).

Jesus then asked, in effect, “For which of my good works do you want to stone me?” (John 10:32). His question was obviously ironic, and it is clear that he actually knew the real reason for their anger. The Jews responded that they weren’t stoning him for good works, but “because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God” (John 10:33).

What kind of a claim was Jesus asserting? First, we must keep in mind that the Greek here lacks the definite article. The Jews are, therefore, accusing Jesus of making himself “a god,” but not necessarily of making himself “*the* God.” He is not claiming to be the Father.⁴ This is consistent with the Latter-day Saint view of the Godhead, as well as with the ancient view of the relationship between Yahweh and his Father that will be sketched in this paper. The same view, or something very much like it, also seems to appear in early Christian thought: “Justin,” Oxford’s Henry Chadwick notes of an important second-century Christian thinker, saint, and martyr, “had boldly spoken of the divine Logos as ‘another God’ beside the Father, qualified by the gloss ‘other, I mean, in number, not in will.’”⁵

To understand what Jesus *was* claiming, we need to look closely at John 10:27–29. In those verses, Jesus had spoken of his “sheep” who “hear [his] voice.” Their destiny, the destiny of those who keep the commandments of God and who, consequently, merit his rewards, is glorious, and it is assured by the incomparable and irresistible power of God the Father, for “no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.” “My Father, which gave them to me,” Jesus declared, “is greater than all.” But even in the midst of stressing the unique power and status of the Father, Jesus included himself with the Father. He did so, first, by using almost exactly the same language to describe his own power as he had used to depict that of the Father: “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand” (John 10:28). And then, as if his meaning had not been clear enough, he announced that he and his Father were “one” (Greek *hen*).⁶

Literally *hen* means “one.” But the context suggests that this adjective be translated as “equal to” or “on a par with.” Jesus claims far more than mere moral unity with God, which was the aim of every Israelite; such moral unity would never mean that mortals had become “god,” as Jesus’ remark is understood in 10:31–33. The very argument in John, then, understands *hen* to mean more than moral unity, that is, “equality with God.”⁷

Though confronted by a hostile and potentially violent audience, Jesus did not back away from his claim to divine status. He did, however, implicitly respond to their accusation that he was making *himself* God. (This was a common allegation throughout his ministry.)⁸ But he replied that the designation was not his own. It was God-given and scriptural.

Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? (John 10:34–36)

“Jesus’ reference to ‘Son of God’ in 10:36 does not weaken the argument by reducing the claim from ‘god’ to ‘son of God,’” says Jerome Neyrey, “because if one continues reading Ps 82:6, the two terms are considered equivalent and parallel there (‘I said, “You are *gods*, all of you, *sons of the Most High*”).”⁹ The argument seems to be that the unbelieving Jews were silly to assault Jesus for so petty an offense as claiming to be the Son of God when, as an important Catholic commentary observes, “the scripture itself, God’s own word, sometimes speaks of mere men as ‘gods’ or ‘sons of God.’”¹⁰ “If there is any sense in which men can be spoken of as ‘gods,’” remarks the accompanying note in the evangelical Protestant New International Version of the Bible (or NIV), “how much more may the term be used of him whom the Father set apart and sent!”¹¹ “If scripture was not in error calling mortals ‘gods’ (Ps 82:6), then neither,” writes Father Neyrey, paraphrasing the passage, “is there error in calling the one whom God consecrated and sent into the world ‘the Son of God’ (10:35– 36).”¹²

Having cited the Old Testament as a justification for his claim to divinity, Jesus returned to the testimony of the good works that he had performed and ended with the declaration that “the Father is in me, and I in him” (John 10:38). Thereupon, provoked and angered once again by what they regarded as arrant blasphemy, his audience again assaulted him, but he escaped unharmed.

Psalm 82

Let us now examine the passage from the Hebrew Bible that underlies John 10:34. Jesus identified the passage *Ye are gods* as coming from the “law” (Greek *nomos*) of the Jews. Strictly speaking, of course, this is not entirely accurate, if the term *law* is taken to refer, as it often does, solely to the Pentateuch. For the passage is actually to be found in Psalm 82:6, which would

place it not in the Law or the Prophets, but in the Writings (Hebrew ketûbim). It is to this psalm that we now turn.

1. God [*ʿēlōhîm*] standeth in the congregation of the mighty [*ʿādat ʿēl*]; he judgeth among the gods [*bəqereḅ ʿēlōhîm*].
2. How long will ye judge unjustly, and accept the persons of the wicked? Selah.
3. Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy.
4. Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked.
5. They know not, neither will they understand; they walk on in darkness: all the foundations of the earth are out of course.
6. I have said, Ye are gods [*ʿēlōhîm*]; and all of you are children of the most High [*bānê ʿelyôn*].
7. But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes.
8. Arise, O God [*ʿēlōhîm*], judge the earth: for thou shalt inherit all nations.

To whom is Psalm 82 addressed? This is not the easiest of questions. The poem is apparently very old, and its conceptual world is quite foreign to us.¹³ As one commentator notes, “Though this piece is one of the most perfectly preserved psalms in the Psalter, the contents have given rise to numerous interpretations.”¹⁴ “Although its text is in almost perfect condition,” says another, “and better far than the text of the vast majority of the Psalms, scarcely any psalm seems to have troubled interpreters more or to have experienced a wider range of interpretation and a more disturbing uncertainty and lack of finality therein than Psalm 82.”¹⁵ In any event, it is clear that the interpretation of verses 6–7, the passages most directly relevant to John 10, must depend on the interpretation of the first verse.¹⁶ On the setting of that initial passage, widespread agreement occurs among careful readers of the psalm. “The scene,” says the Catholic *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, “is the heavenly court.”¹⁷ The Hebrew phrase translated in the King James as “the congregation of the mighty,” *ʿādat ʿēl*, would be more accurately rendered as “the council of El” or “the council of God.”¹⁸ And the final verse is, clearly, the Psalmist’s exclamation after witnessing the proceedings of that heavenly court.

But here the consensus ends. Commentators have offered four distinct and apparently conflicting identifications of the members of the divine court who are condemned to death in verse 7: (1) They are Israelite rulers or judges, ordinary men. (2) They are the rulers or judges of the other nations—again, apparently ordinary human beings. (3) They are the people of Israel, gathered at Sinai for the revelation of God. (4) They are the members of the divine council, the gods (in Canaanite religion and, probably, in early Israelite religion) or the angels (in later forms of Hebrew belief).¹⁹ Mitchell Dahood’s interpretation stresses that these are pagan gods.²⁰ The first three interpretive options would appear to be consistent with Jesus’ use of the passage in John 10, since his retort to the Jews can only have any force if the phrase *Ye are gods* refers to ordinary human beings. The fourth option seems, in contrast, to nullify Jesus’ argument as it is recorded in John’s Gospel. It would scarcely have been convincing to the skeptical Jews in his audience if Jesus, a seemingly ordinary and evidently mortal man, had sought to justify his own claim to divinity by alluding to the divinity of some other order of being manifestly (in their eyes) quite unlike himself.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the conservative Protestant New International Version opts decisively for the application of the passage to ordinary human beings, explaining that “The words Jesus quotes from Ps. 82:6 refer to the judges (or other leaders or rulers), whose tasks were divinely appointed.”²¹ “In the language of the OT,” claims the NIV “—and in accordance with the conceptual world of the ancient Near East—rulers and judges, as deputies of the heavenly King, could be given the honorific title ‘god’ . . . or be called ‘son of God.’”²² A common Jewish interpretation, which has been identified by some commentators as that followed in John 10:34, says that God’s standing in the “divine council” is equivalent to his standing “in the midst of the judges.”²³ And, indeed, there would seem to be at least an element of truth in all this. Knowledge of good and evil and the ability to distinguish or discern between them seem to be an essential part of what it means to be divine. We recall in this context Lucifer’s promise to Adam and Eve that if they partook of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, their eyes should be “opened” and they would then “be as the gods, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5). Though this is often dismissed as a Satanic lie, it is manifestly not, since God himself confirms a few verses later that, having eaten of the fruit of the tree, “the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil” (Genesis 3:22, emphasis added). “Accordingly,” write Cyrus Gordon and Gary Rendsburg,

if we examine the story in Genesis objectively, we see that, while many elements go into making up the whole picture, it is not so much an account of the “Fall of Man” but rather of the rise of man halfway to divinity. He obtained one of the two prerogatives or characteristics of the gods: intelligence; but he was checked by God from obtaining immortality, which would have made him quite divine.²⁴

The element of disobedience is present in the story but only circumstantially. To stress the “evil” and overlook the “good” in the text would have no justification.²⁵

With such considerations in mind, and in view of the obvious fact that the use of the passage in John 10 requires that it apply to ordinary human beings, “This interpretation of the psalm enjoyed considerable popularity during a certain period of Johannine scholarship.”²⁶ It was, for example, the position adopted by James E. Talmage in his 1915 treatise *Jesus the Christ*, presumably drawn from the readings in conservative nineteenth-century Protestant biblical scholarship that informed his book generally.²⁷

Yet this interpretation does not seem fully to work. It runs into difficulty, for example, when we read the New International Version’s own explanation that “the congregation of the mighty” is “the assembly in the great Hall of Justice in heaven.”²⁸ Who are these judges or rulers who are in heaven? The New International Version’s editors try to overcome this rather apparent obstacle to their interpretation by explaining that, “As if in a vision, the psalmist sees the rulers and judges gathered before the Great King to give account of their administration of justice.”²⁹ But, as a standard Catholic commentary observes, “obviously, the ‘gods’ cannot be human judges for their punishment is to die ‘like men.’”³⁰ If they were already mortals, this would hardly be a serious penalty. Rev. Derek Kidner, a presumably conservative Protestant at Tyndale House in Cambridge, England, is surely correct in his judgment that “Verse 7, with its simile, *like men*, seems fatal to the view that these are human judges.”³¹

Moreover, those who insist that the *’ēlōhîm* of Psalm 82 are simply mortal humans typically point to Exodus 21:6 and 22:8–9, where the term has frequently (e.g., in the King James Bible) been translated as “judges.” But there seems no particular reason, other than theological squeamishness, to prefer such a translation. What these verses seem to describe is a divinatory practice where a case is brought before “God” or “the gods” for

decision.³² Rendering *’ēlōhîm* literally in these passages makes perfectly good sense. In fact, the ancient Latin Vulgate does exactly that (*deos*), as does the ancient Greek Septuagint (*theos*). These are, by a great distance, the most important and influential translations of the Old Testament in antiquity. Martin Luther’s 1545 translation, so central to the Protestant Reformation, has *Götter* (“gods”), and the standard modern Jewish version has “God.”³³ This should be a sufficient sample to show that Exodus 21:6 and 22:8–9 provide very weak support (if, indeed, they provide any support at all) for the notion that *’ēlōhîm* can ever denote merely human judges.³⁴ That interpretation seems to be a rather late, rabbinic one, and, as Julian Morgenstern notes, “has been approved, so far as I can see, by only one modern scholar, Kittel, and has been definitively rejected by all others on ample grounds.”³⁵ “Nor can it be denied that the fundamental meaning of *’elohim* is ‘gods,’ and that only by a long stretch of the imagination and rather devious and uncertain hermeneutics can the meanings, ‘rulers, kings’ or ‘judges,’ be ascribed to it.”³⁶ Lowell Handy accurately summarizes the dominant view among contemporary scholars when he declares of Psalm 82 that it “refers to ‘gods’ . . . and not ‘angels,’ ‘rulers,’ ‘judges,’ or ‘tenured professors.’ ”³⁷

But there is another and, for Christians, more fundamental problem. It does not seem that Jesus’ citation of a metaphorical use of the term *god*, as applied to human beings, would go very far toward justifying his ascription to himself of literal divinity. So understood, Jesus would seem merely to be playing a word game, practicing a semantic sleight of hand, and, in fact, to be committing the logical fallacy of equivocation, wherein a word surreptitiously changes its meaning from one part of an argument to another. (The point of Jesus’ argument is not that the Jews are unrighteous judges, but that it is not blasphemy for him to call himself divine.) It would be as if someone were declaring himself, madly enough, to be a vast ball of fusion-inflamed gases. We would scarcely be convinced if he were to offer, as evidence for the plausibility of his assertion, the fact that Rudolph Valentino, Lucille Ball, and John Wayne are generally called stars, and to demand that we, in fairness, grant the same title to *him*. The third-century Christian writer Novatian seemed to understand the argument well enough:

If any angel at all subjected to Christ can be called God, and this, if it be said, is also professed without blasphemy, certainly much more can this be fitting for Christ, Himself the Son of God, for Him to be pronounced God. For if an angel who is subjected to Christ is exalted as God, much more, and more consistently, shall Christ, to whom all angels are

subjected, be said to be God. For it is not suitable to nature, that what is conceded to the lesser should be denied to the greater. Thus, if an angel be inferior to Christ, and yet an angel is called god, rather by consequence is Christ said to be God, who is discovered to be both greater and better, not than one, but than all angels.³⁸

Yet certain New Testament scholars have seemed willing to accept the notion that the argument advanced by Jesus rests on precisely that flagrant an equivocation. “One stream of critical opinion,” writes Neyrey,

takes the citation extrinsically, on a literal level as a mere play on words. If mortals, for whatever reason, can truly be called “gods” according to scripture, then the term is not *a priori* preposterously applied to Jesus. This type of explanation does not ask under what circumstances mortals might be called “gods,” and it sees Jesus basically engaging in an evasive maneuver.³⁹

Another interpretation of Psalm 82 that would be consistent with its use in the Fourth Gospel rests on the statement in John 10:35 that they are called “‘gods,’ unto whom the word of God came.” “The Jews understood the term ‘gods’ to be justified as applied to those who were the recipients of God’s word; for this reason, this verse was often understood as having reference to all Israelites.”⁴⁰ Father Neyrey argues that this New Testament formulation refers to the people of Israel as they were encamped at Sinai for the delivery of the word of God to Moses. Considerable evidence, in fact, reveals that such an identification flourished in Jewish circles in the early centuries of the common era.⁴¹ Psalm 82, writes Neyrey, “was historicized in Jewish traditions to refer to Israel at Sinai when God gave it the Torah, making it holy and so deathless.”⁴² This deathlessness, he says, summarizing the data, was thought to have made Israel divine. But that divinity was then lost through sin, and Israel became mortal, merely human, once more.⁴³

This interpretation has the advantage over the first two options in that it allows for the punishment of “immortal” beings by a sentence of death. In fact, claims Father Neyrey, it is the only interpretation of Psalm 82 that “has any bearing on the argument in John 10.”⁴⁴ Nevertheless, at least two problems remain with the theory. First, the midrashic sources on which Father Neyrey draws for his portrayal of Jewish belief are all later than the Gospel of John, as Neyrey himself recognizes. Indeed, Jesus’ use of Psalm 82 in this fashion would, if

Neyrey's argument is valid, be the first instance of such use, with no clear parallel for at least a century or so.⁴⁵ Second, it is far from clear that Psalm 82 was originally intended to refer to the experience of Israel at Sinai. Father Neyrey implicitly acknowledges this when, as we have seen above, he passingly remarks that Psalm 82 "was historicized in Jewish traditions to refer to Israel at Sinai when God gave it the Torah." In other words, it was reapplied.

It must be said in his defense, of course, that Father Neyrey nowhere claims to be explicating the original meaning of Psalm 82. He intends simply to elucidate its meaning in John 10. For this reason, though, his interpretation appears unlikely to have much impact on the scholarly interpretation of Psalm 82 itself. What do contemporary scholars think was the intent of the author of Psalm 82? Who are the "gods" to whom it refers? This, as Morgenstern pointed out years ago in his influential treatment of the text, is the crux of the problem. Are they divine or human beings?⁴⁶ (We seek, for now, to know the original meaning of the passage, quite apart from its use in the New Testament.)

If John 10:34 must refer to ordinary human beings in order to have the force Jesus intended it to have, Psalm 82 seems virtually incapable of being so interpreted. Hans-Joachim Kraus remarks that the notion that Psalm 82's "gods" are human judges has been rendered *indiskutabel* (essentially, "not worth discussing") by modern discoveries.⁴⁷ The consensus of contemporary biblical scholarship, I would judge, is that the action depicted in this psalm occurs in the divine council, or the "council of El," just as the Hebrew text says.⁴⁸ The Septuagint, which normally endeavors to avoid all anthropomorphisms and routinely suppresses hints of polytheism, says this is all taking place "in the meetingplace of the gods."⁴⁹ "It is clear in Psalm 82:6," writes E. Theodore Mullen in his classic treatment, "that the beings condemned to die (v. 7) are gods [*'ēlōhîm; bānê 'elyôn*], the members of Yahweh's [Jehovah's] council, and not human rulers or judges."⁵⁰ It is striking that the same term, *'ēlōhîm*, is used both for God and for the plural members of the audience to whom he addresses his remarks; the shared title seems to imply, strongly, that they share some kind of common identity. "In a courtroom scene," one Catholic commentary explains, "God accuses the *elohim* beings of injustice and lays down the law to them."⁵¹ Another Catholic commentary, obviously troubled by the manifestly polytheistic implications of the psalm, declares it to be "a poet's fanciful picture of Yahweh, the Supreme God, condemning the gods of the nations as non-entities."⁵² But nothing here implies that these "gods," whoever they are, are unreal. They seem very, very real indeed.

Morgenstern argued, on the other hand, that verses 2–4 of Psalm 82 must refer to humans, while Psalm 82:6–7 must refer to divine beings. Accordingly, he concluded that the two portions of the psalm have nothing whatever to do with each other and that one of the two must be an interpolation. (He identified verses 2–4 as the interloper, retaining verses 6–7 as belonging to the original text.)⁵³ If Morgenstern is correct, the only way to save Psalm 82 from a charge of textual corruption (and he himself, as we have seen, commented on the “almost perfect condition” of the text) is to find some way in which the references to human beings in verses 2–4 and to divine beings in verses 6–7 are not mutually exclusive or contradictory.

The Divine Council

We shall return to that issue. In the meantime, it will be helpful to survey the concept of the divine council.⁵⁴ To do so, I will be drawing on discussions of the cuneiform texts recovered from Ras-Shamra, which is the modern Arabic name of the site of the ancient city of Ugarit. It lies on the Mediterranean coast of Syria at roughly the latitude of the northern tip of Cyprus. Ugarit was a thriving seaport city at its height and the administrative center of a small kingdom that traded in olive oil, wines, and grain. The site of Ras-Shamra first attracted the attention of archaeologists in 1928, when a local peasant stumbled upon a nearby tomb dating from the thirteenth century B.C. Since that time, with exceptions during the Second World War and occasionally during the troubles of the 1970s, excavation has proceeded with little or no interruption at Ras-Shamra’s large tell, or mound.

“Cuneiform texts” take their descriptive name from the Latin word for “wedge,” *cuneus*, because they were produced when writers impressed wedge-shaped marks on clay by means of a reed stylus. When these clay texts were baked or otherwise allowed to harden, they became very durable, and they have tended to survive long beyond the time when papyrus and other writing materials have decayed. Many of the documents found at Ras-Shamra were written in the Akkadian language. But another class of texts proved to contain a previously unknown Semitic tongue closely related to biblical Hebrew. This language is now called Ugaritic.

The Ugaritic texts have come primarily from Ugarit’s royal palace. But probably the most interesting documents, for our purposes, have emerged from a “priestly library” located in the vicinity of the Dagon and Ba’l temples. The most important of these texts come from the fourteenth century B.C. and include literary myths and legends related to the religion of ancient

Ugarit. These documents are written in a style and a vocabulary highly reminiscent of the Hebrew Bible, and have, accordingly, shed considerable light on what we now term the Old Testament.⁵⁵ “No student of the Bible today can progress far without a working knowledge of the Ugaritic language and literature. . . . The Ugaritic tablets confront us with so many striking literary parallels to the Hebrew Bible that it is universally recognized that the two literatures are variants of one Canaanite tradition.”⁵⁶ “The relevance of Ugaritic studies for reconstructing ancient Israelite religion is great indeed.”⁵⁷ “It is absurd,” wrote the great W. F. Albright, “to try to isolate any aspect of Hebrew literature from Canaanite-Phoenician influence.”⁵⁸ From 1700 to 1200 B.C., the entire area from Ugarit in the north to the south of Palestine was a cultural unit, and Ugarit was Canaanite culturally, if not politically.⁵⁹

The Ugaritic materials recount the deeds of various gods and goddesses who were important and very visible in the environment of ancient Israel—deities such as ʾĒl, Baʿl, Asherah, and Anat—and even elucidate obscure references in the Bible such as that to the legendary patriarch “Danel,” who shows up in the book of Ezekiel as “Daniel.”⁶⁰ In recent years, the texts recovered from Ras-Shamra have also awakened interest in the idea of “the council of the gods” (Hebrew *ʾadat ʾēl*; Ugaritic *ʾadatu ʾili-ma*), which scholars now recognize as “a primary motif in both the Ugaritic and early Hebrew traditions, as well as throughout the ancient Near East.”⁶¹

The latter phenomenon, that of the council of the gods, goes under various names, and occasionally undergoes various metamorphoses, but one can easily discern it across the spectrum of adjacent cultures beneath its shifting titles. It is particularly evident in the civilizations nearest to the authors of the biblical record. “The concept of the divine council, or the assembly of the gods,” writes Mullen, the leading authority on the subject, “was a common religious motif in the cultures of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Canaan, Phoenicia, and Israel.”⁶² Furthermore, this concept showed an amazing uniformity across considerable distances of time and space. It is a clear feature, for example, of the relatively late Dead Sea Scrolls:

He judges in the council of gods and men. In the heights of the heavens (is) his reproach and in all the foundations of the earth the judgments of his hand. (4Q511, frg. 10, 11–12)⁶³

As Mullen observes, “The parallels between the council motifs in Mesopotamia, Canaan, and Israel clearly show that the concept of the divine council must be taken as one which was common to the ancient Near East.”⁶⁴ In particular, “the concepts of the council in Canaan and Israel are strikingly similar.”⁶⁵ Indeed, “the pre-exilic literature of Israel depicts the council of Yahweh in the same manner as does the description of the assembly of ’Ēl in Ugaritic mythology.”⁶⁶ “Our major evidence for the council motif in the Old Testament is found primarily in Israel’s preexilic literature, especially in the Psalms and other poetic writings where Canaanite influence is most easily seen. But the concept of the council runs throughout the Old Testament as a continuing theme of Yahweh’s power and authority.”⁶⁷ In the postexilic period, the influence of Hellenistic, Persian, and Babylonian religion upon Judaism led to the development of a very elaborate angelology, which is surely related to the concept of the divine council but is probably not to be identified precisely with it.⁶⁸

El in the Ugaritic Texts

The council is known by various names in the Ugaritic materials, including “the assembly of the gods” and “the assembly of the sons of ’Ēl.”⁶⁹ According to Canaanite belief, ’Ēl—or, as we shall most often refer to him in this paper, El—was the creator-god.⁷⁰ (Evidence strongly suggests that he was the original chief god of the Semites generally.)⁷¹ As creator, however, he also stood at the head of the pantheon as the “father of the gods” or the “father of the sons of God” (*’abū banī ’ili*) and was called the “ancient one,” the “patriarch,” and the “eternal one.” Consequently, the gods, as his sons, were designated collectively as “the sons of ’Ēl.”⁷² El was also called “the Father of Man” (*’abū ’adami*).⁷³ A Phoenician incantation from the seventh century B.C., found at Arslan Tash in Upper Syria, depicts the father-god sitting, as it were, with his divine consort and their children:

The Eternal One has made a covenant oath with us, Asherah has made (a pact) with us.
And all the sons of El, And the great council of all the Holy Ones.⁷⁴

The storm-god Ba’l was among the children of El. In Ugaritic literature he is the protagonist of an extremely important cycle of stories according to which he is linked to a sacred place known as Mount Zaphon. (This mountain has been identified as the Jebel al-Aqra’, located near the mouth of the Orontes River in northern Syria.) The story cycle tells of his battle against Lotan, or the Leviathan, and of his struggles against such adversaries as Yamm (“Sea”) and Mot

(“Death”). Biblical depictions of Yahweh’s encounters with watery enemies (as at Isaiah 51:9–10 and Psalm 74:13) may reflect Ugaritic influence. Along the way, Ba‘l perishes and returns to life—a motif that evidently proved very appealing to Canaanite believers.

One of the most difficult and perplexing issues in the study of the religion and mythology of the Canaanites is the relationship between the high god El and Ba‘l, who was the clearly subordinate god of weather and storms. (“Ba‘l,” we might note here, merely means “lord.” It is not, as such, a proper name.) Though Ba‘l was commonly referred to as “the son of Dagnu”—biblical Dagon, chief god of the Philistines (as at Judges 16:23, 1 Samuel 5:2–7, and elsewhere)—El was also called his father and creator.⁷⁵ Both Ba‘l and El were depicted in the Canaanite materials as functioning kings. “While the major emphasis of the Ugaritic texts is upon the rise of Ba‘l to his dominant position among the gods, the myths never lose sight of the position and importance of ’Ēl, the only god given the title *malku*, ‘king.’”⁷⁶ Was there any rivalry between Ba‘l and El? Evidently not.⁷⁷ This was probably because their kingships did not conflict, but were focused upon quite separate spheres. Mullen believes that the kingship of El is to be distinguished from that of Ba‘l in the sense that El was king over the gods within the pantheon—distributing their assignments or stewardships among them—but Ba‘l, although subordinate to El, was king over the cosmos.⁷⁸ “While it is important to recognize that the ‘executive’ functions of the cosmos, the maintenance of order and fertility, belong to Ba‘l as king, the decision as to which god shall possess the position of administrator of these functions belongs solely to ’Ēl, who sits at the head of the pantheon.”⁷⁹ Thus in Canaanite belief, we seem to have a father-god who had delegated administrative authority over the world to his divine son—rather like the Latter-day Saint view of the relationship between Elohim and Jehovah.⁸⁰ While Ba‘l came near to mortal men and revealed himself in the storm cloud, El was transcendent, relatively aloof from the world of humankind. Ba‘l was sometimes described in cosmogonic terms as the creator, but theogony (the origination of deities) was ascribed only to El, in his unique capacity as progenitor of men and gods.⁸¹

Indeed, El himself appears to have been the son of earlier generations of divine beings, who continued to enjoy a shadowy and rather vague existence in Canaanite mythology.

The god ’Ēl stands at the ‘transition point’ between these olden gods, the natural pairs like his father (Heaven) and mother (Earth) and the deities who are active in the cultus. ’Ēl’s role as creator fits into the theogonic scheme: he fathers the gods who take part in

the cultus and the myths associated with the cult. . . . [’Ēl] is the transition figure, standing as the last king in the generations of the olden gods and the first and supreme king in the cosmogonic myths.⁸²

Sons of God in the Old Testament

The Canaanite terminology of “the assembly of the gods” and “the assembly of the sons of El” finds its parallels in the Hebrew Bible. In Psalm 29:1, which has long been recognized by scholars as an Israelite adaptation of an older Canaanite hymn, members of the council are referred to as *bānê ’ēlīm*.⁸³ The King James translation renders this phrase as “the mighty.” The same Hebrew phrase occurs at Psalm 89:6, where the King James Version has “the sons of the mighty.” Neither rendition is adequate. In both passages, the New Jerusalem Bible (or NJB), to choose one of the best of the modern translations, gets things precisely right by translating *bānê ’ēlīm* as “sons of God.” Harvard’s Frank Moore Cross offers his own rendition of the opening verses of the psalm, which he sees as addressed to the divine council:

Ascribe to Yahweh, O sons of ’ēl, Ascribe to Yahweh glory and might; Ascribe to Yahweh the glory due his name. Fall down before Yahweh who appears in holiness.⁸⁴

In Genesis 6:2, 4, and Job 1:6; 2:1, the members of the divine council are designated as *bānê hā-’ēlōhīm* (“the sons of God”). Psalm 97:7 addresses *kōl-’ēlōhīm* (“all [ye] gods”). There may once have been even more such references, since the evidence is rather clear that the Old Testament text has been tampered with in this regard.⁸⁵ Thus, for instance, following the Masoretic text of the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 32:8 KJV tells us that, “When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel [*bānê yiśrā’ēl*].” But the standard Greek Septuagint version of the same verse says, rather, that he set the bounds of the people “according to the number of the angels of God”, and some Septuagint manuscripts even read, instead of “the angels of God,” “the sons of God”.⁸⁶ This is significant, in view of the admitted fact that the Greek translation of the Old Testament has occasionally preserved traces of readings which are manifestly superior to those of the Masoretic text. That text, it should be remembered, was constituted centuries after the Septuagint was already in vogue in the Greek-speaking portion of the Jewish and Christian world.⁸⁷

And, indeed, contemporary scholars contend that it is very likely that the original Hebrew reading of the passage was *bānê ʿĕlōhîm* (“sons of God” or “sons of [the] gods”) or, perhaps better still, in light of new evidence from Qumran, *bānê ʿĕl* (“the sons of El”).⁸⁸ In view of such evidence, Marvin Tate writes of Psalm 82 that “the conceptual horizon of v 8, and of the entire psalm, is that of the assignment of the gods to each nation as patron deities, who would be responsible for the welfare of each nation.”⁸⁹

Wherever it appeared, “The council was headed by the high god of the pantheon: Anu in Mesopotamia, ʿĒl in Canaan, and Yahweh in Israel.”⁹⁰ In other words, the Mesopotamian Anu, Canaanite El, and Israelite Yahweh or Jehovah were functionally equivalent. Indeed, the equivalence of Canaanite El and Yahweh may have been more than merely functional. Various scholars have argued that the original god of Israel was El. (William Dever believes that a twelfth-century open-air hilltop sanctuary located in the territory of Manasseh belonged to El.)⁹¹ In the earliest Israelite conception, according to this view, father El had a divine son named Jehovah or Yahweh.⁹² El, or Elyon (“the Highest” or “the Most High”), and Yahweh were distinct.⁹³ Indeed, the apparent original reading of Deuteronomy 32:8–9, explained immediately above, seems to indicate a *number* of “sons of El,” among whom Yahweh was the most prominent.⁹⁴ “Jewish monotheism, which gave birth to the Christian movement, was not,” reports John J. Collins, “as clear cut and simple as is generally believed.”⁹⁵ According to Larry Hurtado,

Jewish monotheism can be taken as constituting a distinctive version of the commonly-attested belief structure described by Nilsson as involving a “high god” who presides over other deities. The God of Israel presides over a court of heavenly beings who are likened to him (as is reflected in, e.g., the OT term for them “sons of God”). In pagan versions, too, the high god can be described as father and source of the other divine beings, and as utterly superior to them. In this sense, Jewish (and Christian) monotheism, whatever its distinctives, shows its historical links with the larger religious environment of the ancient world. . . .

This commitment to the one God of Israel accommodated a large retinue of heavenly beings distinguished from God more in degree than kind as to their attributes, some of these beings portrayed as in fact sharing quite directly in God’s powers and even his name.⁹⁶

Professor Hurtado is aware that some will find his picture of Judaism difficult or disturbing. “Part of the problem in estimating what Jews made of heavenly beings other than God ‘ontologically,’” he writes, “is that scholars tend to employ distinctions and assumptions formed by Christian theological/philosophical tradition.”⁹⁷ If we are to understand earliest Christian and Hebrew thinking, however, we must seek to understand it on its own terms. Unfortunately, neither post-Nicene trinitarianism nor Hellenistic presuppositions about the metaphysical virtues of oneness provide useful guidance in such matters.

There was a continuum of divine beings in ancient Hebrew belief. “Yahweh belongs to this class of beings,” writes Peter Hayman, “but is distinguished from them by his kingship over the heavenly host. However, he is not different from them in kind.”⁹⁸ Interestingly, as Christopher Stead points out, the original and “basic meaning” of the term *homoousios*, which played so important a role in the formulation of classical trinitarian doctrine at the Council of Nicaea, was something like “made of the same kind of stuff.” It had a “quasi-material” sense to it.⁹⁹ The “gods” of Psalm 82, says one conservative Protestant discussion, are “divine beings . . . who share the divine nature (but who are subject to Yahweh) and who minister in the heavenly realm.”¹⁰⁰

Gradually, it seems, El faded into the background as Yahweh, his preeminent son, came to the fore. A similar process seems already to have occurred among the Canaanites themselves. Rather unexpectedly, the extant Ugaritic mythological literature revolves almost entirely around Ba‘l, or Ba‘l-Haddu as he was often known, despite the fact that El was his father and the chief of the gods and despite the fact that Canaanite liturgical texts clearly show that El was worshiped with sacrifices. Together with his consort, Asherah, El played only a secondary role in the mythology. Furthermore, while temples dedicated to Ba‘l have been discovered, no temple or shrine to El has yet been found, and it would seem that Ba‘l succeeded El as the major deity in the popular worship of Syria-Palestine by sometime shortly after the middle of the second millennium before Christ.¹⁰¹ (It may not come as much of a surprise to learn that, in certain ancient circles, the names *Yahweh* and *Ba‘l* seem to have been regarded as interchangeable.)¹⁰² This fact is probably to be understood in light of the already mentioned fact that, in Canaanite understanding, El had apparently granted Ba‘l administrative responsibility over the world of humankind, and that Ba‘l was, accordingly, the divine being with whom humans had most contact. It would appear that El

had already, in the Ugaritic literature that we now possess, begun the “fade” that would become virtually complete in the Bible. Eventually, for Jews too, the Father was utterly invisible, almost as if he had been absorbed by the Son. With its unembarrassed references to “the Gods,” the Book of Abraham in the Pearl of Great Price belongs to the period prior to Yahweh’s absorption of the functions of El and the divine council. By the tenth century B.C., however, El and Yahweh had come to be identified with one another.¹⁰³ (Professor Cross derives the divine name *Yahweh* from a verbal sentence [yahwe šebā’ ôt, “he [pro]creates the divine hosts”] that occurs commonly in the Hebrew Bible, but which, he contends, is commonly mistranslated as “Yahweh [or Lord] of hosts.” The hosts in question are, of course, the hosts or armies of heaven, the sons of El, and Cross argues that the name Yahweh was originally part of an epithet pertaining to El. Accordingly, the original phrase would have read “El [pro]creates the divine hosts.”)¹⁰⁴

It is obvious from the Bible, in any case, that the name Yahweh or Jehovah was not the name commonly used for God by the patriarchs:

And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am the Lord: And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name Jehovah was I not known to them. (Exodus 6:2–3)

Thus, after roughly the tenth century before Christ, no evidence of any distinct Israelite cult of El is extant, except in his guise as Yahweh.¹⁰⁵ This would seem to explain the otherwise rather puzzling fact, noted by many students of early Israelite religion, that, although El (’Ēl) is the name of the high god of the Canaanite pantheon, the word ’ēl is frequently used as an epithet of Yahweh in the Hebrew scriptures. Moreover, although the Old Testament denounces the worship of the other gods and goddesses of the Canaanites, evidently no trace of any polemic against El is present in it. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that the members of the divine council are never described in the Hebrew Bible as “the sons of Yahweh,” just as the Canaanite myths regard the council as composed of the “sons of El” but never of the “sons of Ba’l.” “Ugaritic literature nowhere presents Ba’l as engendering other gods of the pantheon. This function belonged only to ’Ēl.”¹⁰⁶ Likewise, Mark Smith remarks that, while sexuality was ascribed to El, Yahweh was never described as sexually active.¹⁰⁷ Neither the phrase *sons of Yahweh* nor anything analogous to it appears in the Bible. It is, I think, also significant that Jesus, whom Latter-day Saints identify in his antemortal state with Yahweh or Jehovah, is said several times

in the New Testament to be “the Son of the Highest” but is never himself identified as *being* “the Highest.”¹⁰⁸ Nor is he ever called “son of the Lord.” Designation as “the Highest” seems, thus, to belong uniquely to the Father. But it must surely be Jesus’ identification as “the Son of the Highest” (a phrase whose plural form is equated in Psalm 82:6 with the term *elohim*) and his self-identification as “the Son of God” (John 10:36) that inflamed the Jews against him.

In any event, “The most striking similarity between the council in Ugaritic and in early Hebrew literature is the role played by the high god—’Ēl in the Ugaritic texts and [eventually, at least] Yahweh in the Old Testament. Both are depicted as creator, king, and absolute ruler of the gods.”¹⁰⁹ Both, therefore, preside over the divine council or assembly.

The Council as Corporate Entity

What was the character of the assembly of the gods in Ugaritic and Hebrew materials? “The very *raison d’être* of the council was to pass judgment, in both the heavenly and human spheres.”¹¹⁰ One of El’s primary roles, as a wise patriarch, was to sit in judgment. “We see ’Ēl as the figure of the divine father,” writes Cross.

’Ēl cannot be described as a sky god like Anu, a storm god like Enlil or Zeus, a chthonic god like Nergal, or a grain god like Dagon. The one image of ’Ēl that seems to tie all his myths together is that of the patriarch. Unlike the great gods who represent the powers behind the phenomena of nature, ’Ēl is in the first instance a social god. He is the primordial father of gods and men, sometimes stern, often compassionate, always wise in judgment.

While he has taken on royal prerogatives and epithets, he stands closer to the patriarchal judge over the council of gods. He is at once father and ruler of the family of gods, functions brought together in the human sphere only in those societies which are organized in tribal leagues or in kingdoms where kinship survives as an organizing power in the society. He is a tent-dweller in many of his myths. His tent on the mount of assembly in the far north is the place of cosmic decisions.¹¹¹

In Hebrew, Phoenician, and Canaanite sources, “The council of the gods met to decree the fate of both gods and humans.”¹¹² It was not only a royal court, but a judicial court or quasi-legislative assembly.¹¹³ Thus in 1 Kings 22:17–23, the Lord, speaking before the council, decrees the death

of Ahab. In Isaiah 6, surrounded by angelic hosts, the Lord calls the prophet Isaiah and declares the impending doom of Judah. And Isaiah's experience has a clear parallel in Ugaritic or Canaanite mythology: "Keret seems to have participated in the divine assembly, much as the prophet Isaiah in his inaugural oracle saw the proceedings in Yahweh's cosmic temple and took part in its actions."¹¹⁴ In Judges 5:23, we read the condemnation of Meroz, delivered by an angel, for his failure to send an army to the aid of Israel. In Zechariah 3:1–10, an angel of Yahweh, as messenger of the council, proclaims the high priest Joshua free of iniquity.¹¹⁵ Job 1:6–12 and 2:1–6 record the decision made by Yahweh before the council to allow the testing of Job.

Did the divine council, which Mark Smith terms a "collectivity of deities,"¹¹⁶ exist merely to rubber-stamp the decisions of the high god, or did it possess some authority of its own? "All the gods, even the highest in the pantheon, were subject to the decisions of the council," writes Mullen, speaking of the Canaanite evidence.¹¹⁷ But "the god 'Ēl is equivalent to the entire council. The decree of 'Ēl is the decree of the gods."¹¹⁸ Once the theogonic struggles of the Canaanite mythology were over, with El firmly seated and established on his throne, the military allies who had helped him attain victory disappeared into the background. They seem to have ceased to possess any kind of individual existence or personality.¹¹⁹ "When the high god issues his decree from the chambers of his tent, the action is tantamount to the issuance of a decree from the assembly, for the power of the council of the gods is expressed only through the decree of 'Ēl."¹²⁰ "To address the council was to address 'Ēl, and vice versa."¹²¹ We see, in the surviving Canaanite materials, a kind of corporate deity, in which a number of gods functioned as if they were, in fact, one god: "In the Ugaritic material the assembly appears frequently as the recipient of sacrifices in the liturgical texts. In Phoenician inscriptions they are invoked in blessings and curses. . . . [T]he assembly of the gods continued as an active object of worship. This can be explained by the fact that the assembly, in Canaanite thought, had no true existence apart from the decree of the high god 'Ēl."¹²² "Like 'Ēl, the divine assembly is offered sacrifices, a fact that would seem to indicate that the council was in some sense hypostatized, becoming an entity unto itself"—a situation that continued into post-Ugaritic times.¹²³

Parenthetically, it is noteworthy that the same process of hypostatization, of turning an abstraction into a substantial reality, occurred in the case of the Christian Trinity. And, clearly, although mainstream Christianity has gone seriously off course with its Aristotelian and Neoplatonic metaphysical musings, the move was not entirely illegitimate. Jesus *did* say, during

the exchange reported in John 10, “I and my Father are one” (John 10:30). *Elohim* truly is a plural word. One is strongly tempted to see these notions as shedding light both on Israelite “monotheism” and, even, on the nature of the Godhead itself. Common Latter-day Saint teaching that the oneness of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost consists in their absolute unity of purpose seems to fit quite nicely with the earliest doctrines of the Hebrews and their Semitic cousins, and it accords with both the Bible and the Book of Mormon. The Nicene concept of the Trinity, by contrast, draws on Greek philosophical concepts that have no root whatsoever in the Bible or the biblical world.

P. Kyle McCarter observes that even Israel’s pagan neighbors were capable of viewing their gods as plural from one aspect and, from another, as one, even though they lacked the assistance of Aristotelian ontology.¹²⁴ A similar process occurred, for instance, in the case of the Mesopotamian council. Anu was the head of the pantheon, but when the divine assembly invests Marduk with power, “[his] decree is Anu.” (This may explain, by way of analogy, how, in the theology of ancient Israel, Yahweh could legitimately become El.) “When the gods granted him kingship and the power of decree, he became equivalent to the assembly itself.”¹²⁵

As it was at Ugarit, so it was also in Israel: “The word and decision of the council are the same as the decree of Yahweh. The council only serves to reemphasize and execute his decision. Its members carry out his decree exactly as commissioned.”¹²⁶ Thus Mullen can speak of “the decree of Yahweh, which is the decree of the council.”¹²⁷ In Hebrew writing, just as in the documents from Ras-Shamra, the military retinue of Yahweh continued to be active, although not individuated.¹²⁸ “The heavenly host . . . have little existence apart from Yahweh. They march with him and they worship him. More importantly, they carry out his decisions. Their existence is clearly depicted as being dependent upon the decree, the word of Yahweh.”¹²⁹ “The members of the council are clearly inferior to Yahweh. . . . The ‘Holy Ones’ who constitute the assembly are gods, but they are not Yahweh’s equals.”¹³⁰ “The ‘gods’ are the divine beings who function as his counselors and agents.”¹³¹ As Susan Niditch observes of these celestial beings,

The presence of angels . . . seems to imply an author who imagines Yahweh surrounded and accompanied by a retinue of heavenly beings. . . . God is not alone in heaven but, like any king divine or human, has a large support staff. Such images go back millennia in

ancient Near Eastern portrayals of the deity and are continued in the religion of Yahweh, in which one particular deity dominates.¹³²

Typologically stylized scenes of the realm of heaven are found in 1 Kings 22:19–22, Isaiah 6, Ezekiel 1–3, and Daniel 7. In each case a seer receives a glimpse of the divinity, who is seated on a throne surrounded by his courtiers, angelic or cherubic beings arranged to his right and to his left. The visionary observes, overhears, or participates in the activities of the divine court.¹³³

Thus in the Phoenician, the Canaanite, and the Israelite sources, “the divine council has no authority or power apart from the high god. Though a full hypostatization does not seem to have taken place, the assembly and the decree of the high god are inseparable.”¹³⁴ Nonetheless some differentiation among the members of the heavenly court does seem to be evident, for another aspect of the divine council in Hebrew tradition, obviously related to its juridical function, was the assignment of its members to oversee the various nations as their stewardships—a notion that appears to be fundamental to the interpretation of Psalm 82.¹³⁵ We see this, for example, in Deuteronomy 32:7–9, to which we have already alluded. In the New Jerusalem Bible translation, this passage reads as follows:

Think back on the days of old, think over the years, down the ages. Question your father, let him explain to you, your elders, and let them tell you! When the Most High [*‘elyôn*] gave the nations each their heritage, when he partitioned out the human race, he assigned the boundaries of nations according to the number of the children of God [*bānē ’ēl*], but Yahweh’s portion was his people, Jacob was to be the measure of his inheritance.

As we have seen, the King James Version of the Bible probably does not convey the original intention of the passage. Contemporary scholarship tends to agree that the idea underlying Deuteronomy 32:8 (which the text itself claims to be a very old one) is that “the Most High,” the supreme deity (presumably El), assigned the various peoples of the earth to his sons, reserving the children of Israel to his preeminent son, Yahweh or Jehovah.¹³⁶ But the concept lasted a very long time, even if in somewhat altered form. “For this is the office of the angels,” wrote the second-century Christian apologist Athenagoras of Athens, “to exercise providence for God over the things created and ordered by Him; so that God may have the universal and general

providence of the whole, while the particular parts are provided for by the angels appointed over them.”¹³⁷ This, of course, cannot fail to remind us of the Canaanite understanding that El was king over the gods within the pantheon, distributing their assignments or stewardships among them.

The Host of Heaven

At ancient Ugarit, the Canaanite mother of the gods and wife of the chief god El, Athirat or Asherah, was believed to have seventy divine sons.¹³⁸ These gods, the offspring of El and Asherah, were assigned as guardians to the various nations while El himself, as the creator and father of mankind, had no special relationship with any particular ethnic group.¹³⁹ They are almost certainly to be connected with the seventy angels assigned by ancient Hebrew lore to the nations of the earth.¹⁴⁰ Traditional Jewish belief holds that there are seventy (gentile) nations,¹⁴¹ and also, not surprisingly, that the languages of humankind likewise number seventy.¹⁴² (The Savior’s appointment of the seventy in Luke 10:1 can only be properly understood in this context. Similar conceptions must also explain the seventy elders of Israel mentioned in Exodus 24:1, 9, and Numbers 11:16, who, significantly for this study, stand in much the same relationship to Moses as that of the New Testament seventy to Christ—and, ideally, that of the seventy nations to God.)

For the most part, the transcendent father god delegated direct executive responsibilities to the members of his council. Israelites were, therefore, not to worship the gods of the nations and not to relinquish their uniquely elevated status, for their god was none other than Yahweh, the most important son of El. In this context, it is instructive to recall the warning given in Deuteronomy 4:15, 19 (compare 17:3):

Take . . . heed . . . lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven.

The early second-century B.C. apocryphal book Ecclesiasticus, also known as the Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach, seems to reflect a modified form of the same concept—modified in that, by this period, with El almost completely forgotten as a distinct patriarchal deity, Yahweh himself was the god who had chosen Israel—when it says, “For every nation he appointed a ruler, but

chose Israel to be his own possession.”¹⁴³ Similarly testifying to the notion is the pseudepigraphic book of *Jubilees*, which dates to approximately the same era:

But he chose Israel that they might be a people for himself. And he sanctified them and gathered them from all of the sons of man because (there are) many nations and many people, and they all belong to him, but over all of them he caused spirits to rule so that they might lead them astray from following him. But over Israel he did not cause any angel or spirit to rule because he alone is their ruler and he will protect them.

(*Jubilees* 15:30–32)

Despite the rather cynical twist that *Jubilees* puts on the celestial rulers of the other nations when it declares that God intended them to mislead the gentiles, the general view of the divine council in ancient literature is far more positive. These angels, gods, or sons of God seem to be the “watchers” who are the guardians of the earth according to such pseudepigraphic texts as *1 Enoch*.¹⁴⁴ They had been assigned the task of ruling, and of ruling well. “The crux of the interpretation of [Psalm 82] revolves about vv. 2–4,” remarks Mullen, “which concern the problem of the dispensation of justice. As we have seen, this task was specifically given to the members of the divine council. In Deut 33:3, the ‘Holy Ones’ are called specifically the ‘guardians of the peoples.’ It was their task to administer justice rightly.”¹⁴⁵ Still, as Moritz Steinschneider observes, among the Israelites the notion of being turned over to the stewardship of another angel or prince was regarded as a punishment.¹⁴⁶ According to *1 Enoch* 89:59–90:22, 25, the seventy angels of the council were appointed (instead of God, who had rejected his people) to rule over Israel until the day of judgment. At that time, according to *1 Enoch*, the angels themselves will be judged as having been too harsh on the Israelites. The relevance of this notion to Psalm 82 should be immediately apparent.

The primary function of the members of the divine council in Canaanite tradition was to serve as heralds, as the messengers who delivered or even executed the decrees of El, which (as we have seen) were the decrees of the council. “After the commissioning of the messenger, the message was delivered in precisely the same words that had been given to the divine couriers. The form of the message, as repeated, leaves no doubt as to the concept of the authority of the messenger—the envoy had the same authority as the deity who dispatched him.”¹⁴⁷ Likewise, the primary function of the members of the divine council in the Hebrew Bible was to serve as heralds, as the

messengers who delivered or even executed the decrees of Yahweh.¹⁴⁸ Our word *angel*, of course, reflects this: The Greek *angelos* simply means “messenger.”

Prophets as Messengers

Canaanite deities who served as envoys of the council could be described as “messengers” or “angels,” using the Ugaritic equivalent of the virtually identical Hebrew word. But the same word could be applied, in Hebrew, to human prophets as messengers.¹⁴⁹ One inescapably thinks of the biblical prophet known to us as “Malachi.” This may or may not be a personal name; it means, in Hebrew, “my messenger.” The “angels” of the seven churches of Asia (in Revelation 1–3) may similarly be simply the human representatives of those churches. In both Revelation 19:10 and 22:7–9, an obviously supernatural or superhuman angel describes himself as a “brother” to John the Revelator and even identifies himself as one of the prophets.

“God dwells in a parallel realm,” writes Niditch regarding the Israelite tradition, “a king surrounded by courtiers, but lucky mortals may at times join the council’s meetings.”¹⁵⁰ “Thus the prophet becomes in effect the *mal’āk* or herald of Yahweh’s council, and like a supernatural ambassador mediates the divine pronouncement.”¹⁵¹ Significantly for our present purpose, Hebrew tradition could make human beings serving in the role of prophets the equivalent, at least temporarily, of Canaanite gods.¹⁵² “The Israelite traditions of the council,” Mullen notes, while paralleling those of Canaan and Phoenicia, introduce a new element—the prophet as herald/courier of the council. In the Ugaritic myths, the messages of the council (’Ēl) were carried by divine beings; in Hebrew prophecy, the decree of Yahweh was delivered by the human prophet. The similarity between the divine messenger and the human prophet is remarkable. Both carried the absolute authority of the deity who dispatched them. They, in effect, represented the presence of the deity in the decree.¹⁵³

Commenting on the dramatic scene depicted in Isaiah 6, Morgenstern observes that

In its basic features the situation here is quite similar to that of 1 Ki. 22.19–23. Yahweh needs a messenger to fulfill His purpose with the object of His judgment and His sentence of destruction. But whereas there one of the “host of heaven” offers himself for the service and is accepted, here apparently none of the *sērafim* seems qualified for this particular task, and the Deity must therefore have recourse to a mortal being who has providentially appeared upon the scene at just the right moment and who, after due

preparation, through a process of purification which, impliedly, strips from him some of the disqualifying conditions of human nature and endows him with certain qualities of divinity, such as ability to understand divine speech, offers himself spontaneously for this service.¹⁵⁴

“The very designation *nābī*’, ‘one who is called’ (cf. Akkadian *nabī’um*) implies the background of the council, for the prophet was called to proclaim the will of the deity which was issued from the assembly.”¹⁵⁵ (Cross interprets Isaiah 35:3–4 and 40:1–8, with their plural imperatives, as samples of the instructions given to members of the heavenly assembly.)¹⁵⁶ “The prophet’s role is clear—he is the herald/courier of the council, whose task it is to deliver the judgment of the assembly.”¹⁵⁷

Form-critical analysis of the prophetic forms of speech has yielded the information that the prophet’s office is that of messenger and that the fundamental message he brings is the judgment, Gerichtswort. The oracle of judgment properly carries overtones of a judicial decree or verdict, and rests upon a basic legal metaphor. More concretely, the prophet is the messenger of the divine court or council, and his authority rests upon the absolute authority of the council, its great Judge or great King who pronounces the judgment which the prophetic messenger is to transmit. The prophet himself receives the word of the Judge and court normally in vision or audition, most frequently the latter.¹⁵⁸

***Sôd*/Council/Counsel**

It is apparent from a study of the relevant Old Testament passages that Hebrew prophets conceived themselves as standing in Yahweh’s assembly.¹⁵⁹ A few examples should make this clear. First, however, an understanding of the Hebrew term *sôd* is crucial for appreciating these passages. In the Old Testament, that word denotes confidential discussions or secrets (as at Proverbs 3:32 and 11:13). It also refers to the council setting in which such confidential discussions are conducted, or to a circle of intimate friends.¹⁶⁰ In fact, the two meanings must always be kept in mind together, for, as a recent discussion of the term notes, “*sod* never in Biblical Hebrew came to express a simple ‘secret,’ but only a ‘counsel’ or ‘decision’ taken in secret ‘council,’ that the wise man does not bruit about.” Thus *sôd* has “the dual meaning ‘council/counsel’ (Ratsversammlung/ Rat), i.e., the body and the decision of the body.”¹⁶¹

“Which of them,” Jeremiah asked rhetorically of the false prophets who opposed him, “has stood in the council [*sôd*] of the Lord, seen him and heard his word? Which of them has listened to his word and obeyed?” (Jeremiah 23:18 New English Bible, or NEB).¹⁶² Clearly, Jeremiah was implying that, while the pseudoprophets had never been admitted to the divine council and so could claim no valid authority for their declarations, he, Jeremiah, had been and therefore could assert such authority. Access to the decrees of the council was the unique qualification of true prophets. “Surely the Lord God will do nothing,” declared the prophet Amos, “but he revealeth his secret [*sôd*] unto his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7).¹⁶³ Of false messengers, the Lord said to Jeremiah: “I did not send these prophets, yet they went in haste; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. If they have stood in my council [*sôd*], let them proclaim my words to my people and turn them from their evil course and their evil doings” (Jeremiah 23:21–22 NEB). Attacking Job as a pretentious but ordinary man, a man who had no corroborating authority for what he was saying, the uncharitable Eliphaz asked him, “Do you listen in God’s secret council [*sôd*] or usurp all wisdom for yourself alone?” (Job 15:8 NEB). Mullen’s summary of the biblical data is succinct:

The prophet is the herald of the divine council. He delivers the decree of Yahweh, which is the decree of the council. The authority of the prophet as the herald/messenger of the assembly is that of the power which sent him. He is the vocal manifestation of the deity who dispatched him. The parallel position of the prophet and the messenger-deity in Canaanite literature makes this fact undeniable. . . . The Hebrew prophets, like the messenger-deities described in the Ugaritic myths, are clearly envoys who carry both the message and authority of the divinity who dispatched them. In the case of the prophets, this was Yahweh, and ultimately the council that surrounded him.¹⁶⁴

Such concepts underlie the accounts of Yahweh’s interactions with the members of his court, as they are recorded in Isaiah 6:1–8 and 1 Kings 22:19–23. In the latter passage, the prophet Micaiah informs Ahab of Israel and Jehoshaphat of Judah of his vision of a heavenly council: “I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left. And the Lord said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the Lord, and said, I will persuade him” (1 Kings 22:19–21).¹⁶⁵ (Note the strongly anthropomorphic character of this and other passages relating to the

heavenly council.)¹⁶⁶ Isaiah, on the other hand, in his account of his own call to prophethood, “heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me” (Isaiah 6:8).¹⁶⁷

Deified Dead

We thus see, in biblical and other ancient references to the council of El, a blurring of the distinction between mortal human beings and angels, between mortal human beings and gods. This blurring is further evident in the fact, noted by contemporary scholars, that both Canaanite and Hebrew texts seem to suggest that the term *gods* could have been used, very anciently, for deceased human beings.¹⁶⁸ Thus, for instance, when Saul, who went to the witch of Endor to attempt a seance with the deceased prophet Samuel, asks her what she saw as the process began, she replies, “I saw gods [’*ēlōhîm*] ascending out of the earth” (1 Samuel 28:13).¹⁶⁹ “The ‘gods’ (’*ēlōhîm* or, more frequently, ’*ēlîm*) are the souls of the dead, deified in Sheol,” says Niditch. “Concepts of the dead as ‘gods’ . . . were probably popular among Israelites throughout their history.”¹⁷⁰ In the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon, which likely dates to the latter half of the first century B.C., the wicked, summoned for divine judgment, are astonished to see a righteous man (whom they had mocked and oppressed while in mortality) exalted in the presence of God:

How has he come to be counted as one of the children of God and to have his lot among the holy ones?¹⁷¹

Their surprise is understandable. He has indeed risen high. As we have seen above, the terms *holy ones* and *children of God* (or *sons of God*, as the New English Bible renders the Greek) commonly refer to the members of the divine council, the assembly of the gods. “The ‘heavenly court’ that played a large role in Hebrew thought . . . now is seen,” observes the noted Catholic scholar Roland Murphy of this text, which was probably written just a few decades before the birth of Christ, “as a goal, a group to whose ranks one might aspire.”¹⁷²

And such views were perhaps not as isolated as one might at first assume.¹⁷³ The covenant community at Qumran worshiped El alone as God, but recognized a large court of heavenly beings subordinate to him (archangels, angels, the ’*ēlîm*, the Holy Ones). It is often impossible to distinguish, with any certainty, whether heavenly angels or earthly Qumranites are intended in a given text, and “the concept that the Qumran male could evolve into angelic status indicates that

the categorical distinction between angels and humans had broken down.”¹⁷⁴ Consider the following texts, for example:

He has given them an inheritance in the lot of the holy ones, and with the sons of heaven has He associated their company to be a council of unity and a foundation for a holy building, to be an eternal plantation for all coming time. (1QS xi.7 f.)¹⁷⁵

The perverted spirit didst Thou cleanse from much transgression, that he may take his place in the host of the holy ones and enter into community with the congregation of the sons of heaven, and Thou hast cast for man an eternal lot with spirits of knowledge. (1QH iii.21 f.)¹⁷⁶

. . . who came together for Thy covenant . . . and arrange themselves before Thee in the fellowship of the holy ones. (1QH iv.24–25)¹⁷⁷

To them whom God elects He gives this as an eternal possession and gives them a share in the lot of the holy ones, and to the sons of heaven does He join their circle [*sôd*] (1QS xi.7–8)¹⁷⁸

“It is . . . expressly said,” remarks Helmer Ringgren, “that the members ‘stand in one and the same lot as the angels of the presence’ (1QH vi.13), and it is apparently thought that the elect as the result of their entrance into the community become in some way citizens of the kingdom of heaven.”¹⁷⁹

Several texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls indicate that a human being could hope to be enthroned among the gods.¹⁸⁰ “Even in a conservative Jewish community like Qumran, such an idea was not taboo.”¹⁸¹ Thus, for instance, the anonymous speaker in column 1 of fragment 11 of 4Q491 declares that

El Elyon gave me a seat among] those perfect forever, a mighty throne in the congregation of the gods. None of the kings of the east shall sit in it and their nobles shall not [come near it]. No Edomite shall be like me in glory, and none shall be exalted save me, nor shall come against me. For I have taken my seat in the [congregation] in the

heavens And none [find fault with me]. I shall be reckoned with gods and established in the holy congregation. . . . In my legal judgment [none will stand against] me. I shall be reckoned with gods, and my glory with [that of] the king's sons.¹⁸²

Similarly, several hymns from the Qumran community praise God for the grace that he bestows upon sinful humanity, demonstrating beyond cavil that belief in an exalted potential for humankind is not incompatible with a profound sense of human unworthiness and a reliance upon divine mercy.

I thank you, Lord, because you saved my life from the pit, and from Sheol and Abaddon you have lifted me up to an everlasting height, so that I can walk on a boundless plain. And I know that there is hope for someone you fashioned out of clay to be an everlasting community. The corrupt spirit you have purified from the great sin so that he can take his place with the host of the holy ones, and can enter in communion with the congregation of the sons of heaven.¹⁸³

For your glory, you have purified man from sin, so that he can make himself holy for you from every impure abomination and blameworthy iniquity, to become united with the sons of your truth and in the lot of your holy ones, to raise the worms of the dead from the dust, to an [everlasting] community and from a depraved spirit, to your knowledge, so that he can take his place in your presence with the perpetual host and the [everlasting] spirits.¹⁸⁴

And he will not be able to compare with my glory. As for me, my place is with the divinities, [and glory or splend]our for myself I do not [buy them] with gold or with refined gold or precious metals. . . . Sing, favoured ones, sing to the king of [glory, be happy in the assem]bly of God, exult in the tents of salvation, praise in the [holy] residence, exalt together with the eternal hosts. . . . Proclaim and say: [Great is the God who works wonders,] for he brings down the arrogant spirit without even a remnant; and he raises the poor from the dust [to an eternal height,] and extols his stature up to the clouds and cures him together with the divinities in the congregation of the community.¹⁸⁵

Likewise, the fragmentary Melchizedek scroll recovered from Cave 11 at Qumran seems to identify Melchizedek with the god who rises to judgment in Psalm 82;¹⁸⁶ elsewhere in the Dead Sea Scrolls, Melchizedek is identified as the archangel Michael. In a play about the exodus from Egypt written by Ezekiel of Alexandria in the second century B.C., God, who is depicted in the form of a “noble man,” gives Moses his scepter and his royal crown and allows the prophet to sit upon his throne; a host of stars fall to their knees before Moses in an attitude that can only be described as worship.¹⁸⁷ The angels Uriel and (Ye)remiel, who appear frequently in Jewish texts after the close of the Old Testament, may be “heavenly personifications” of the human biblical prophets Urijah or Uriyahu (see Jeremiah 26:20) and Jeremiah.¹⁸⁸

Slavonic or 2 *Enoch*—a text of very uncertain date and provenance, but one without any clear Christian features—offers a first-person account of a mortal human’s purported entry into the divine council:

And I fell down flat and did obeisance to the Lord. And the Lord, with his own mouth, called to me, “Be brave, Enoch! Don’t be frightened! Stand up, and stand in front of my face forever.” And Michael, the Lord’s greatest archangel, lifted me up and brought me in front of the face of the Lord. And the Lord sounded out his servants. The Lord said, “Let Enoch come up and stand in front of my face forever!” And the glorious ones did obeisance and said, “Let him come up!” The Lord said to Michael, “Take Enoch, and extract (him) from the earthly clothing. And anoint him with the delightful oil, and put (him) into the clothes of glory.” And Michael extracted me from my clothes. He anointed me with the delightful oil; and the appearance of that oil is greater than the greatest light, its ointment is like sweet dew, and its fragrance like myrrh; and its shining is like the sun. And I gazed at all of myself, and I had become like one of the glorious ones, and there was no observable difference.¹⁸⁹

The very important first-century Rabbi Johanan is reported to have declared, citing Isaiah 43:7, that “The righteous are destined to be called by the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, for it is said, ‘Everyone who is called by my name, him have I created, formed and made that he should also share my glory.’ ” Rabbi Elazar, in the second century, explained that “The trishagion [i.e., ‘Holy, Holy, Holy’] will be said before the righteous as it is said before the Holy One, blessed be He.” “In a later passage in the Tanhuma and in the condensation in Bereshit Rabbati,” remarks

Morton Smith, commenting on these statements, “this potential divinity and predicted worship are presented as the direct consequences of man’s being the image of God.”¹⁹⁰

“Jews were quite willing,” writes Hurtado,

to imagine beings who bear the divine name within them and can be referred to by one or more of God’s titles (e.g., Yahoel or Melchizedek as *elohim* or, later, Metatron [Enoch] *asyahweh ha-katon* [“the lesser Yahweh”]), beings so endowed with divine attributes as to be difficult to distinguish them descriptively from God, beings who are very direct personal extensions of God’s powers and sovereignty. About this, there is clear evidence. This clothing of servants of God with God’s attributes and even his name will seem “theologically very confusing” if we go looking for a “strict monotheism” of relatively modern distinctions of “ontological status” between God and these figures, and expect such distinctions to be expressed in terms of “attributes and functions.” By such definitions of the term, Greco-Roman Jews seem to have been quite ready to accommodate various divine beings.¹⁹¹

In Daniel 12:3, we read that, in the future resurrection, “they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.” This concept is echoed by the Savior himself, at Matthew 13:43: “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” “Be hopeful,” the author of *I Enoch* advises the faithful,

because formerly you have pined away through evil and toil. But now you shall shine like the lights of heaven, and you shall be seen, and the windows of heaven shall be opened for you. . . . [Y]ou are about to be making a great rejoicing like the angels of heaven. . . . [F]or you are to be partners with the good-hearted people of heaven. (*I Enoch* 104:2, 4, 6)

Second Baruch, a Syriac text whose Hebrew original probably dates to the period between A.D. 100 and 120, says of “those who are saved” that

they shall see that world which is now invisible to them, and they will see a time which is now hidden to them. And time will no longer make them older. For they will live in the

heights of that world and they will be like the angels and be equal to the stars. . . . And the excellence of the righteous will then be greater than that of the angels.¹⁹²

“In the idiom of apocalyptic literature,” John Collins observes of such passages, “the stars are the angelic host. When the righteous dead become like the stars, they become like the angels; in the Hellenistic world, to become a star was to become a god.”¹⁹³ But the notion that we can become stars when we die long predates the Hellenistic era. The famous Greek comic poet Aristophanes refers to it as a well-known idea in his play *Peace*, written around 421 B.C.¹⁹⁴

The great third-century Christian theologian Origen of Alexandria believed that faithful humans could take the place of fallen angels.¹⁹⁵ “The life of the soul,” writes one scholar in summary of Origen’s views,

is a journey in which it learns about God, and a completion in which it knows God. . . . If the soul was virtuous enough in this life, it had nothing to fear from the heavens, where indeed it would receive new opportunities to become like God. In this journey too there were different levels of achievement and so different levels of glory among those who ascended to heaven. As the stars differed in their shining according to their merits, so too there was not one fixed destiny for the soul after death but many different ways in which it might travel.¹⁹⁶

Deification in Early Christianity

It is important to note that, in the familiar manner of Hebrew literary parallelism, Psalm 82:6 equates “gods” with “children/sons of the Most High.” Jesus Christ, as we have seen, is identified several times in the New Testament as “the Son of the Most High,” and this seems to have infuriated his Jewish audience. Thus, it is remarkable that Luke 6:35 promises faithful disciples that, if they love their enemies and do good and lend without expectation of return, their reward shall be great: “Ye shall be the children of the Highest.” Since, biblically, the “children of the Highest” or of the “Most High” are “gods,” *’ēlōhîm*, this seems in itself to be a promise of deification.¹⁹⁷ As St. Augustine points out, “If we have been made sons of God, we have also been made gods.”¹⁹⁸ It is scarcely surprising, then, that faithful disciples will, at the end of time, participate in rendering divine judgment as do the *elohim* of Psalm 82 (see, for example, Matthew 19:28; Luke 22:29–30).

St. Justin Martyr, a very important early Christian writer (d. A.D. 165), was expressly discussing Psalm 82 when he wrote to Trypho that

the Holy Ghost reproaches men because they were made like God, free from suffering and death, provided that they kept His commandments, and were deemed deserving of the name of His sons, and yet they, becoming like Adam and Eve, work out death for themselves; let the interpretation of the Psalm be held just as you wish, yet thereby it is demonstrated that all men are deemed worthy of becoming “gods,” and of having power to become sons of the Highest; and shall be each by himself judged and condemned like Adam and Eve.¹⁹⁹

“We have learned,” Justin wrote elsewhere, “that those only are deified who have lived near to God in holiness and virtue.”²⁰⁰ (Of course, it is only such persons who would be qualified, even potentially, to be divinely designated as judges.) Expressly discussing Psalm 82, Origen wrote of the angels and the gods, mentioning in this connection the “thrones,” “dominions,” “powers,” and “principalities” alluded to in several places by the apostle Paul. On the basis of the biblical passages, he declared, “we see that we men, who are far inferior to these, may entertain the hope that by a virtuous life, and by acting in all things agreeably to reason, we may rise to a likeness with all these.” Concluding, he cited 1 John 3:2, varying slightly from the text as we have received it: “It doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like God, and shall see Him as He is.”²⁰¹ “Christians,” Origen said,

are benefactors of their country more than others. For they train up citizens, and inculcate piety to the Supreme Being; and they promote those whose lives in the smallest cities have been good and worthy, to a divine and heavenly city, to whom it may be said, “Thou hast been faithful in the smallest city, come into a great one,” where “God standeth in the assembly of the gods, and judgeth the gods in the midst;” and He reckons thee among them, if thou no more “die as a man, or fall as one of the princes.”²⁰²

Other church fathers took similar positions. They do not seem to have entertained the notion that the psalm was condemning sinful mortal judges.²⁰³ St. Irenaeus (d. ca. 200) and Clement of Alexandria identified the “gods” of Psalm 82 as virtuous or saved human beings who had received adoption.²⁰⁴ “Each of them,” observes Annewies van den Hoek, “firmly integrated

human divinization, as viewed through the Psalm text, into the larger scheme of their theologies of salvation.”²⁰⁵ Clement writes of “the future life that we shall lead, according to God, and with gods.”²⁰⁶ “God stood in the congregation of the gods,” Clement quotes from the Psalm.

“He judgeth in the midst of the gods.” Who are they? Those that are superior to Pleasure, who rise above the passions, who know what they do—the Gnostics [i.e., those who know], who are greater than the world. “I said, Ye are Gods; and all sons of the Highest.” To whom speaks the Lord? To those who reject as far as possible all that is of man.²⁰⁷

On this wise it is possible for the Gnostic already to have become God. “I have said, Ye are gods and sons of the highest.” And Empedocles says that the souls of the wise become gods, writing as follows: — “At last prophets, minstrels, and physicians, And the foremost among mortal men, approach; Whence spring gods supreme in honours.”²⁰⁸

Tertullian (d. ca. A.D. 225) taught that it is impossible for humans to become gods—unless they receive godhood from God himself. “For we shall be even gods, if we shall deserve to be among those of whom He declared, ‘I have said, Ye are gods,’ and, ‘God standeth in the congregation of the gods.’ But this comes of His own grace, not from any property in us, because it is He alone who can make gods.”²⁰⁹

Clement of Alexandria, too, acknowledged the Redeemer’s essential role in *theosis*, the common Christian Greek term for human deification. Of those saved in heaven, he explained that “they are called by the appellation of gods, being destined to sit on thrones with the other gods that have been first put in their places by the Saviour.”²¹⁰ “If one knows himself,” wrote Clement, “he will know God; and knowing God, he will be made like God. . . . [H]is is beauty, the true beauty, for it is God; and that man becomes God, since God so wills.”²¹¹ St. Irenaeus exhorted Christians to follow “the only true and stedfast Teacher, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is himself.”²¹² Likewise, St. Athanasius, the great Alexandrian father of the Nicene creed, recognized that deification came through the incarnation and atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and not solely because of human nature. (Like Irenaeus and Clement, Athanasius saw the “gods” of Psalm 82 as evidence for divine adoption.)²¹³ In fact, it was his insistence upon salvation as

deification that led Athanasius to oppose Arianism. He felt that an only partially or metaphorically divine Savior, a redeemer who was not fully God, would be unable to deify us.

For therefore did he assume the body originate and human, that having renewed it as its Framer, He might deify it in Himself, and thus might introduce us all into the kingdom of heaven after His likeness. For man had not been deified if joined to a creature, or unless the Son were very God; nor had man been brought into the Father's presence, unless He had been His natural and true Word who had put on the body. And as we had not been delivered from sin and the curse, unless it had been by nature human flesh, which the Word put on (for we should have had nothing common with what was foreign), so also the man had not been deified, unless the Word who became flesh had been by nature from the Father and true and proper to Him. For therefore the union was of this kind, that He might unite what is man by nature to Him who is in the nature of the Godhead, and his salvation and deification might be sure.²¹⁴

“For,” insisted Athanasius, “as the Lord, putting on the body, became man, so we men are deified by the Word as being taken to Him through His flesh, and henceforward inherit life everlasting.”²¹⁵ “He was made man that we might be made God [or gods].”²¹⁶ “For He has become Man, that He might deify us in Himself . . . and that we may become henceforth a holy race, and ‘partakers of the Divine Nature,’ as blessed Peter wrote.”²¹⁷

In another text, Tertullian again draws upon Psalm 82 as biblical justification for terming Jesus Christ the Son of God:

If, indeed, you follow those who did not at the time endure the Lord when showing Himself to be the Son of God, because they would not believe him to be the Lord, then (I ask you) call to mind along with them the passage where it is written, “I have said, Ye are gods, and ye are children of the Most High;” and again, “God standeth in the congregation of the gods;” in order that, if the Scripture has not been afraid to designate as gods human beings, who have become sons of God by faith, you may be sure that the same Scripture has with greater propriety conferred the name of the Lord on the true and one-only Son of God.²¹⁸

Again, there is nothing here to hint or suggest that an early Christian writer saw the “gods” of Psalm 82 as evil. Quite the contrary. Mark D. Nispel makes the underlying reasoning of the passage explicit for modern readers as it relates to John 10. “The scripture calls righteous men ‘gods’, the argument goes, therefore how much more so should the Son of God receive the title ‘God.’ The requirement, as it were, of this argument, as also in the Gospel, is the minor premise that righteous men or believers are called ‘gods.’”²¹⁹ St. Cyprian (d. A.D. 258), the bishop of Carthage, understood the argument in precisely the same way. “But,” he wrote, “if they who have been righteous, and have obeyed the divine precepts, may be called gods, how much more is Christ, the Son of God, God!”²²⁰

“We cast blame upon Him,” said St. Irenaeus concerning God,

because we have not been made gods from the beginning, but at first merely men, then at length gods; although God has adopted this course out of His pure benevolence, that no one may impute to Him invidiousness or grudgingness. He declares, “I have said, Ye are gods; and ye are all sons of the Highest.” But since we could not sustain the power of divinity, He adds, “But ye shall die like men,” setting forth both truths—the kindness of His free gift, and our weakness, and also that we were possessed of power over ourselves. For after His great kindness He graciously conferred good [upon us], and made men like to Himself, [that is] in their own power; while at the same time by His prescience He knew the infirmity of human beings, and the consequences which would flow from it; but through [His] love and [His] power, He shall overcome the substance of created nature. For it was necessary, at first, that nature should be exhibited; then, after that, that what was mortal should be conquered and swallowed up by immortality, and the corruptible by incorruptibility, and that man should be made after the image and likeness of God, having received the knowledge of good and evil.²²¹

“It is a curiosity,” writes Nispel, “to note the large place occupied by the concept of salvation as deification in the theology of the Greek fathers and at the same time how little attention western scholarship has given to this idea.”²²² It is perhaps especially puzzling since the doctrine is not utterly absent even from the fathers of the West. For instance, St. Augustine of Hippo (d. A.D. 430), perhaps the greatest of all the early Christian fathers, wrote of Christ that “He that justifieth doth Himself deify, in that by justifying He doth make sons of God. ‘For he has given them

power to become the sons of God.’ If then we have been made sons of god, we have also been made gods.”²²³

Modern Western scholars who have given thought to the subject often presume that the doctrine of deification arose under Greek influence after Christianity had spread among the pagans of late antiquity.²²⁴ But, as the examples cited in this essay should make abundantly obvious, the doctrine has its roots in Jewish sources and originated well before Hellenism had taken hold of Christian theology. Even A. N. Williams, who appears to be unaware of the early origin of deification teaching, offers a useful caveat for those who would dismiss it as a pagan-inspired aberration. “Early in the Christian tradition,” he writes,

from the third century onwards, theosis became the dominant model of the concept of salvation. The Fathers writing on deification drew on two sources: the Bible and the Platonic tradition. . . . The early tradition can be viewed as too indebted to the pagan tradition. . . . This view, however, vastly underestimates the importance of biblical warrants in early Christian writing on deification. Chief among the biblical sources was 2 Peter 1:4: “Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion and may become participants in divine nature.” Other texts of importance include Psalm 82:6, John 10:34 (quoting Psalm 82), Romans 8:11, 1 Corinthians 15:49 and 2 Corinthians 8:9.²²⁵

Nispel goes yet further, contending that

the origin of this concept among the early fathers is largely to be found in the church’s Christological use of Psalm 82 in the east and west as early as the late first century. This can be demonstrated by observing that Psalm 82:1, 6–7 were regularly used as Christological proof texts in the early collections of *testimonia* against the Jews, and further, that the use of these texts required that all believers in some way be considered “gods.” . . . The use of Psalm 82 as a proof text for deification in the later fathers of the East is well known.²²⁶

And there is, of course, an abundance of language in the New Testament that would suggest something like a doctrine of exaltation for the righteous saints. “To him that overcometh,” says

Christ in Revelation 3:21, “will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.” “And I saw thrones,” says John the Revelator himself in Revelation 20:4, 6, “and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them. . . . Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.” Images of royalty and reign recur. “And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold” (Revelation 4:4; compare Revelation 4:10).

John J. Collins, in his Hermeneia commentary on the book of Daniel, helps to elucidate such passages, pointing out that

The background of this notion lies in ancient traditions about the council of ‘El, where the gods sit on their “princely thrones.” In the later period, compare Matt 19:28, where the apostles are promised that they will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel, and Rev. 20:4 (“and then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom judgement had been committed”).²²⁷

“And when the chief shepherd shall appear,” says 1 Peter 5:4, 6, “ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away. . . . Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.” At 1 Corinthians 6:2–3, the apostle Paul, irritated with the Corinthian Saints for their propensity to take one another to court, demands of them, “Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? . . . Know ye not that we shall judge angels?” Presumably he is reminding them of things they already know. “Paul’s understanding of salvation,” says James Tabor, “involves a rather astounding (at least to modern ears) scheme of ‘mass apotheosis.’”²²⁸ Indeed, Paul speaks of the exaltation of faithful Christians as an event so certain that, in a sense, it has already occurred: God, he says, “hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:6).

The Spirit himself joins with our spirit to bear witness that we are children of God. And if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, provided that we share his suffering, so as to share his glory. In my estimation, all that we suffer in the present time is nothing in comparison with the glory which is destined to be disclosed for us, for the whole creation is waiting with eagerness for the children of God to be

revealed. . . . We are well aware that the whole creation, until this time, has been groaning in labour pains. (Romans 8:16– 19, 22 NJB)

One is forcibly reminded of the French philosopher Henri Bergson’s declaration that “the universe . . . is a machine for the making of gods.”²²⁹ Such a phrase might not have seemed altogether inappropriate to Paul as a description of his own view:

And all of us, with our unveiled faces like mirrors reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the image that we reflect in brighter and brighter glory; this is the working of the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18 NJB)

We are well aware that God works with those who love him, those who have been called in accordance with his purpose, and turns everything to their good. He decided beforehand who were the ones destined to be moulded to the pattern of his Son, so that he should be the eldest of many brothers; it was those so destined that he called; those that he called, he justified, and those that he has justified he has brought into glory. (Romans 8:28–30 NJB)

Commenting on this passage, Tabor explains that

Jesus’ transformation or glorification foreshadows that of the many “in Christ” who follow. “First-born” [=New Jerusalem “eldest”] as used here is therefore anticipatory, pointing toward recapitulation. It means more than preeminence; it implies there are those who will be “later-born.” The equation of Jesus the Son of God, with the *many* glorified sons of God to follow is God’s means of bringing into existence a *family* (i.e., “many brothers”) of cosmic beings, the *Sons of God*, who share his heavenly *doxa* [“glory”]. Or, to put it another way, Jesus already stands at the head of a new *genus* of cosmic “brothers” who await their full transformation at his arrival from heaven.²³⁰

Nearing his own death, Paul reflected that

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge,

shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. (2 Timothy 4:7–8)

This is a familiar passage, quoted often among Christians. But its familiarity should not be permitted to obscure its implications nor to dull its force. Professor Tabor draws out the full and stunning meaning of the apostle's language:

One must not miss the radical implications of Paul's understanding of the destiny of the elect group. Paul develops his exegesis from Gen. 1:27 and Psa. 8:6 as well. These texts speak of man in the "image" (*eikōn*) of God, having "all things placed under his feet." Paul interprets this in the light of Christ, who is the "image of God" (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18) and has been given all rule and authority (1 Cor. 15:24; Phil. 2:10) with "all things" subject to him. So it takes on the vastly expanded meaning of *cosmic* rule, power, and exaltation. What is said of Jesus as glorified Son of God, is also said of those "many brothers" who follow. In the wider context of Hellenistic religions, it makes little sense to speak of an exalted, heavenly, group of immortals, who are designated "Sons of God," as *human beings*. The old rubric, "Gods are immortal, humans are mortal" is apt here. Paul's understanding of salvation involves a particularly Jewish notion of *apotheosis* [deification], and would have been understood as such by his converts. . . . I would argue that this idea of heavenly *glorification* is the core of Paul's message. . . . Paul is consumed with *two great insights*—the vision he has had of the exalted and glorified Christ whom he knows to be the crucified man Jesus, whose followers he had once opposed; and his conviction that by grace through faith this same heavenly glorification is the destiny of the elect group.²³¹

"He that overcometh," says the voice of "the Alpha and Omega" in Revelation 21:7, "shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son." This language of our potential to be adopted as the children or sons of God is highly significant, and particularly so in view of our earlier discussion about the Savior's argument in John 10. "Jesus' reference to 'Son of God' in 10:36 does not weaken the argument by reducing the claim from 'god' to 'son of God,'" wrote Father Neyrey, "because if one continues reading Ps 82:6, the two terms are considered equivalent and parallel there ('I said, "You are *gods*, all of you, *sons of the Most High*" ')." ²³² It seems clear that, in adopting us as his children, God makes us like his Son Jesus Christ. He

appoints us his heirs and exalts us to the position of, precisely, gods. Such, at least, is the teaching of the New Testament.

You must see what great love the Father has lavished on us by letting us be called God's children— which is what we are! The reason why the world does not acknowledge us is that it did not acknowledge him. My dear friends, we are already God's children, but what we shall be in the future has not yet been revealed. We are well aware that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he really is (1 John 3:1–2 NJB).²³³

Praise

But we cannot leave the ancient Semitic council of the gods behind just yet. There is more to be learned about it that will help us to understand its function in the Bible and its relevance to the issue of human deification more clearly. Just as it was the duty of every individual Israelite, of the priests, and of the nations to praise the Lord, the members of the divine council were also there to praise God.²³⁴ Thus, again, we read in Psalm 29:

Ascribe to the Lord, you gods [*bānē 'ēlīm*], ascribe to the Lord glory and might.
Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name; bow down to the Lord in the splendour of holiness. (Psalm 29:1–2 NEB)²³⁵

In Psalm 89, the divine assembly is summoned to hymn the incomparable greatness of the Lord, Yahweh or Jehovah:

Let heaven confess your wonders, Yahweh, Your faithful deeds in the council of holy ones. For who in the heavens compares with Yahweh? Who may be likened to Yahweh among the gods [*bānē 'ēlīm*]? The god terrible in the council [*sôd*] of the holy ones, Great and dreadful above all around him. Yahweh, god of hosts, who is like you? (Psalm 89:6–9)²³⁶

Psalm 148 likewise calls upon the heavenly host to praise God:

Praise ye the Lord. Praise ye the Lord from the heavens: praise him in the heights. Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts. Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light. (Psalm 148:1–3)

Another interesting text on the praise offered God in the divine assembly is the Septuagint Greek version of Deuteronomy 32:43. The first two lines of that verse are omitted in the Masoretic Hebrew text and therefore also in the King James Version, which is based on that Hebrew tradition. They read:

Rejoice with him, O heavens! And prostrate yourselves to him, all you sons of God!

Such passages can hardly fail to remind us of the question posed to Job, which is often used by Latter-day Saints as a text illustrative of premortal existence:

Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. . . . When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy? (Job 38:4, 7)

Note the parallelism of this passage, which seems to make “the sons of God” equivalent to “the morning stars.” It comes as little surprise, therefore, to learn from Mullen that “the stars are seen in both Ugaritic and Hebrew literature as members of the council.”²³⁷ Stars and gods (in some cases, the deified dead) were commonly linked in early Semitic thinking.²³⁸ (In classical pagan thought, too, as well as in early Christian belief and in Hellenistic and late antique Judaism, stars were often regarded as divine or angelic and, significantly, as akin to human souls. Indeed, the souls of human beings were sometimes thought to have originated in the stars, and human salvation consisted in a return to the stars.)²³⁹ As an example of early Semitic thinking, consider the following fragmentary passage from an ancient Canaanite text:

[And tell,] that the sons of 'Ēl may know, [And that] the assembly of the stars [may understand] [—] the council of the heavens [may ?]²⁴⁰

In this light, Lehi’s prophetic call, as it is described at the very beginning of the Book of Mormon, takes on yet another dimension. An eighth–seventh-century B.C. surge in piety directed toward the heavenly bodies is detectable not only in the biblical text but in visual symbolism recovered from the western portions of the Neo-Assyrian empire. Such symbolism is notably present in seventh-century B.C. Judah, out of which Lehi emerged.²⁴¹ There is evidence that Yahweh was regarded as a sun god,²⁴² and some scholars believe that the Jerusalem temple

was, from its beginning, a solar shrine.²⁴³ Certain recently recovered materials also seem to fit the Egypto-Hebraic cultural background that 1 Nephi claims for Lehi: A 649 B.C. tablet recording a land transaction includes stellar and lunar symbolism accompanied by the name of the property's Judahite owner; of the witnesses to the transaction, one was apparently Egyptian. A seventh-century B.C. tablet from Haran, which may have been the homeland of astral symbolism, shows not only stars but the name *Laban* and an Egyptian *ankh* sign (the symbol of life).²⁴⁴ Characters bearing the name *Laban* appear, of course, both in Genesis 24–31 (where it is associated with Haran) and in 1 Nephi 3–4. Thus, Lehi's prophetic call appears, in these regards as in others, to fit precisely the time and place claimed for it:

[Lehi] was carried away in a vision, even that he saw the heavens open, and he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God. And it came to pass that he saw One descending out of the midst of heaven, and he beheld that his luster was above that of the sun at noon-day. And he also saw twelve others following him, and their brightness did exceed that of the stars in the firmament. (1 Nephi 1:8–10)²⁴⁵

Here, not only the Son of God (the “One”) but his twelve apostles—who are not generally regarded as divine—are evidently premortal beings who have been sent as representatives of the heavenly council.²⁴⁶ And Lehi's prophetic authority is seen, furthermore, to rest at least in part on his having had access to the council.

In both Canaanite and Hebrew traditions, the stellar members of the divine assembly were sometimes also viewed as warriors.²⁴⁷ Thus the song of Deborah exults that “They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera” (Judges 5:20).²⁴⁸ Ugaritic legends recall the attempt by the god Sea, or Yamm, to seize control of the divine council, and his defeat at the hands of El's son, Ba'1.²⁴⁹ In the Bible, too, Yahweh is surrounded by divine soldiers who fight on his behalf:

Yahweh from Sinai came, He beamed forth from Seir upon us, He shone from Mount Paran. With him were myriads of holy ones At his right hand marched the divine ones, Yea, the purified of the peoples. (Deuteronomy 33:1–3)²⁵⁰

Who are these divine soldiers? Although the passage is difficult and ambiguous, it should be noted that the “holy ones,” the “divine ones,” seem in the passage just quoted to be identified with “the purified of the peoples.” Is there a possible reference here to postmortal human beings? We have already mentioned evidence that suggests that, in very early Israelite and Canaanite belief, the dead could be referred to as “gods.” However that question may be answered, though, it would seem that Psalm 68:18 speaks of the same moment in history when it reads:

The chariots of God are two myriads Two thousand the bowmen of Yahweh When he came from Sinai with the Holy Ones.²⁵¹

Rebellious Gods

But this was not the only conflict possibly involving members of the assembly. Eliphaz, addressing Job, implied that things have not always been altogether right even within the divine council itself:

Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his maker? Behold, he put no trust in his servants; and his angels he charged with folly. (Job 4:17–18)²⁵²

“It is a noteworthy fact,” writes Kurt Marti of Psalm 82, “that Yahweh does not, as a matter of course, dispute the godhood of the gods in this ancient psalm. On the contrary, he calls upon them to finally take their godhood seriously or, in other words, to act among human beings in a divine way.”²⁵³ The psalm, says Handy, “assumes the existence of deities who rule aspects of the cosmos independent of, but under the jurisdiction of, the head deity. They have become corrupt and now are condemned to oblivion for their misbehavior.”²⁵⁴ In the third Christian century, Origen of Alexandria and others believed that an angel stands watch over every nation and that each angel would be held accountable for the handling of his stewardship. Moreover, Origen, who equated stars with angels, taught that they were capable of sin and, citing 1 Corinthians 15:41, thought that the varying degrees of glory in the heavens reflected or foreshadowed God’s judgment of them.²⁵⁵

Similarly, Isaiah 24 seems to speak of judgment for misdeeds in the heavens, as well as for those committed here below: “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall punish the host of the high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth” (Isaiah 24:21).²⁵⁶ We

recall here too the rhetorical question posed at Isaiah 14: “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!” (Isaiah 14:12). (Especially intriguing is the fact that the Hebrew words rendered in the King James Bible as “Lucifer, son of the morning” could just as easily be translated as “morning star, son of dawn”—which draws us again into the astronomical imagery often connected with the divine assembly.) Incidentally, Mullen and Cross locate El’s legendary dwelling place, Mount Zaphon, in the Amanus mountain range, to the north of Ugarit.²⁵⁷ This seems clearly related to the allusion to the fall of Lucifer in Isaiah 14:13–14, where we read his boast, “I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God [*kawkabī ’ēl*]: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation [Hebrew: the mount of the council (of El?)], in the sides of the north [Hebrew: *Zaphon*, i.e., the sacred mountain]: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High [‘*elyōn*].”²⁵⁸ Yet, although Satan or Lucifer is named among the sons of God at Job 1:6 and 2:1, Christ saw him “as lightning fall from heaven” (Luke 10:18).²⁵⁹

Thus war in heaven took place at least once.²⁶⁰ And Lucifer, as we all know, did not fall alone. The pseudepigraphic text *I Enoch* 86:1–6 has *many* stars falling from heaven to earth. Accordingly, there was a danger that such rebellious members (or former members) of the assembly would lead people on earth astray. We have already noted, in another context, that the book of Deuteronomy warns against being misled in such a manner. But that passage bears repeating here:

Take . . . heed . . . lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven. (Deuteronomy 4:15, 19; compare Deuteronomy 17:3)

To worship the heavenly bodies was to worship “other gods.” “These olden gods, completely demythologized in Israel’s liturgical life, were not viewed as active members of the cultus. The Israelite cultus could recognize the worship of Yahweh alone.”²⁶¹ Deuteronomy 17:2–7 stipulates capital punishment for anyone who “hath gone and served other gods, and worshipped them, either the sun, or moon, or any of the host of heaven, which I have not commanded” (Deuteronomy 17:3; compare Jeremiah 19:13). But the warnings were not always heeded:

And he [Manasseh, king of Judah] did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, after the abominations of the heathen, whom the Lord cast out before the children of Israel. For he built up again the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed; and he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove [*'āshērāh*], as did Ahab king of Israel; and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. And he built altars in the house of the Lord. . . . And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the Lord. (2 Kings 21:2–5)²⁶²

Jeremiah prophesied of a future period when such sins would be done away with and their perpetrators would be punished, if only posthumously:

At that time, saith the Lord, they shall bring out the bones of the kings of Judah, and the bones of his princes, and the bones of the priests, and the bones of the prophets, and the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, out of their graves: And they shall spread them before the sun, and the moon, and all the host of heaven, whom they have loved, and whom they have served, and after whom they have walked, and whom they have sought, and whom they have worshipped: they shall not be gathered, nor be buried; they shall be for dung upon the face of the earth. (Jeremiah 8:1–2)

Psalm 82, Again

Let us return, now, to a consideration of Psalm 82 itself. Perhaps it will be wise to repeat the text of the psalm, this time in one of the newer translations—one that is informed by recent scholarship (especially in the wake of the discoveries at Ras-Shamra):

God [*'ēlōhîm*] takes his stand in the court of heaven [or “assembly of God”; *'ādat 'ēl*] to deliver judgement among the gods themselves [*bəqereb 'ēlōhîm*].

How long will you judge unjustly and show favour to the wicked? You ought to give judgement for the weak and the orphan, and see right done to the destitute and downtrodden, you ought to rescue the weak and the poor, and save them from the clutches of wicked men. But you know nothing, you understand nothing, you walk in the dark while earth's foundations are giving way. This is my sentence: Gods [*'ēlōhîm*] you may be, sons all of you of a high god [or “of the Most High”; *bənê 'elyôn*],²⁶³ yet you shall die as men die; princes fall, every one of them, and so shall you.

Arise, O God [*’ēlōhîm*], and judge the earth; for thou dost pass all nations through thy sieve. (Psalm 82 NEB)

We need not take Psalm 82’s portrayal of judgment and condemnation within the divine council as literally accurate, as representing an actual historical event (although, obviously, it might), any more than we are obliged to take as literally true the depiction of Satan in Job 1–2, freely coming and going within the heavenly court and even placing wagers with God. The psalms are, after all, poetry. Much as the *Thousand and One Nights*—though the events narrated in them are fictional—convey a wealth of background information about the details and assumptions of the culture that produced them and that they claim to depict, Psalm 82 and related texts tell us a great deal about the theological presuppositions of the writers of scripture. And we have seen that the concept that underlies both Psalm 82 and Job 1–2—that of a council of divine beings surrounding the supreme God—is surprisingly widespread in and out of the Bible and surprisingly consistent wherever it appears. The author of Psalm 82 seems to be expressing, in poetic and perhaps even fictional form, something like the idea that we have already met in the book of *Jubilees*, according to which the obvious evil and disorder of the world is to be blamed on the gods who were assigned to the other nations of the earth. The psalm thereby exalts Israel’s God, Yahweh, as alone reliable and competent to govern not merely Israel, but the whole planet. Thus, in what might be described as an outburst of inspired local patriotism nicely caught in Mitchell Dahood’s rendition of the psalm’s final verse, the poet calls upon his deity to assume universal command:

Arise, O God, govern the earth, rule over all the nations yourself!²⁶⁴

“Yahweh’s position,” writes Mullen of this poem, “. . . is in the midst of the gods [*bəqereḇ ’ēlōhîm*]. This corresponds exactly to the other Israelite conceptions of the position of Yahweh in his council—he is enthroned, surrounded by the other deities. . . . Yahweh is clearly the central god in the assembly, the deity about whom the other council members gather.”²⁶⁵ Still, he is simply “the preeminent member of the divine assembly.”²⁶⁶ “Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord,” says Psalm 86:8.²⁶⁷ This is, as we have seen, a common motif—and a rather odd one for those who wish to insist on the supposed strict monotheism of Hebrew religion: “While the monotheistic tendencies of Israelite religion

prohibited the worship of other gods,” Mullen remarks, “divine beings surrounded Yahweh in his council.”²⁶⁸ “Despite the tendency of interpreters to view the Hebrew materials from a monotheistic viewpoint,” Mullen observes elsewhere, “it is apparent that the biblical materials themselves envisioned Yahweh surrounded by his heavenly court, the lesser deities who made up the divine entourage.”²⁶⁹ Professor Cross agrees:

In both Ugaritic and biblical literature, the use of the first person plural is characteristic of address in the divine council. The familiar “we” of Gen. 1:26, “Let us make man in our image . . .,” Gen. 3:22, “Behold the man is become as one of us . . .,” and Gen. 11:7, “Come, let us go down and let us confound their language . . .,” has long been recognized as the plural address used by Yahweh in his council.²⁷⁰

The situation was the same in Canaanite lore. The Phoenician account of Sanchuniathon, which is recorded by Philo Byblius, indicates that El was surrounded by allies who were named after him: “And the allies of Elous, who is Kronos, were surnamed Eloim”.²⁷¹ This attempted etymology leaves little doubt that these warrior allies were the Ugaritic *'ilm* or *bn 'ilm*, the “gods” or “sons of God.” “They were no doubt the minor deities who surrounded 'Ēl,” writes Mullen, who proceeds to observe that “'Ēl’s retinue was composed of gods who were named and fashioned after him.”²⁷²

How, then, was ancient Israelite religion different from the faith of those who surrounded the Hebrews? We must avoid imposing later notions and anachronistic judgments, particularly those derived from Hellenistic philosophy rather than from the biblical data, upon the early Israelites.

In many “monotheistic” traditions the gap between God and human beings is filled by the intermediary forces of angels, constellations, and demons. The world of divinity becomes a kind of complex bureaucratic system, or an emanated chain of being according to the neo-Platonist conceptions of emanation, from the one to the many. . . . Hierarchical . . . conceptions of the world of divinity stand in opposition to the picture of simple unity of the philosophers, and as a result the conception of idolatry is conceived differently. The metaphysical gap between those who reject paganism and the pagans becomes smaller, since pagan conceptions also involve a pantheon with one god at the head. What distinguishes them is not the answer to the question of what forces there are in the world, but rather the answer to the question of who one is permitted to worship, of whether

worship must be exclusive to the figure at the head of the hierarchy. The exclusivity of God, as the only metaphysical power who constitutes unity within himself, is undermined, and the argument turns upon the exclusivity of the worship of one power. . . . [I]ntermediate forces exist and have influence, but their worship is nevertheless forbidden.²⁷³

Such, it seems, was the view of “the world of divinity” among the early Israelites. Thus, Psalm 89:6–9 reads,

The heavens praise Thy wondrousness, O Yahweh, Likewise Thy trustworthiness in the assembly of the gods.

For who in the skies can be compared with Yahweh; Who among the gods is like unto Yahweh?

A god who inspires awe in the council of the gods, Who is great and fearful beyond all those who surround Him.²⁷⁴

This is also the worldview presupposed in Psalm 82. “That other gods exist alongside Yahweh, the psalm does not deny. It is, rather, concerned with the question, To which god do precedence and predominance belong? Naturally, another question stands behind that one: To which people do precedence and predominance belong?”²⁷⁵ In the Dead Sea Scrolls, we read of the “God of the gods” (*’ēl ’ēlîm*)²⁷⁶ and of the “prince of the gods” (*śār ’ēlîm*): “Behold, Thou art prince of the gods and king of the honored ones, Lord of every spirit.”²⁷⁷ Biblically, God is commonly referred to as the “Lord of hosts,” but he is also “Prince of princes,” “God of gods, and Lord of lords.”²⁷⁸

Who were these other divine beings? Specifically, who were they in the Hebrew biblical context? It will be useful here to recall the four major interpretations that have been offered of the “gods” condemned to death at Psalm 82:7: (1) They were Israelite rulers or judges, ordinary men. (2) They were the rulers or judges of the other nations—again, apparently ordinary human beings. (3) They were the people of Israel, gathered at Sinai for the revelation of God. (4) They were the members of the divine council, the gods or the angels.

Mullen (whose widely recognized and highly esteemed scholarship on the divine council we have been following, to a great degree, in this paper) recognizes only three leading interpretations for the gods of Psalm 82. They were, he writes, either (1) Israelite rulers or judges, (2) rulers or judges of the other nations, or (3) members of the divine council, the angels or the gods. He argues that “the latter two must be combined in order for us to interpret the text correctly,”²⁷⁹ and it seems clear that he is correct. But an interpretation of Psalm 82 that makes its “gods” angelic or divine superterrestrial rulers of other nations seems to leave Jesus liable to a charge of proof texting in John 10, vulnerable to the accusation that he misapplied the passage in his dispute with the Jews. If Psalm 82 applies to the divine council, and if the Jews to whom Jesus addressed his comments were—because they were Israelites and because they were mortal—completely distinct from the members of the divine council, it seems clear that Jesus’ statement to them is inaccurate in its use of the Old Testament and, essentially, beside the point. This is, nonetheless, the option accepted by quite a number of commentators. The Catholic *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, for instance, seems to damn with faint praise when it says forthrightly of Jesus’ response to the Jews that “this was good rabbinic exegesis, which disregarded the original sense and context of scriptural words.”²⁸⁰

I suspect that I am not alone in feeling uncomfortable with such a solution. Is there any way of maintaining the interpretation of Psalm 82 that modern scholarship has largely and (I think) convincingly settled on, without accusing the Savior of misuse of the passage? It seems to me that there may well be such a possibility. We should, I am convinced, think in this regard of the remarkable vision of premortal humanity granted to the patriarch Abraham and recorded in Abraham 3:22–23:

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

Here we have God standing in the midst of premortal spirits who are appointed to be rulers, in a scene that is really a textbook instance of the motif of the divine assembly. These are premortal human beings. Can they truly be called “gods” in any sense?

Humans as Sons of God

Yes, they can. We should first note Psalm 8:3–6, in which the Psalmist addresses an important question to God. The passage reads as follows in the King James Version of the English Bible:

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and with honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet.

Our concern here is specifically with verse 5, which, in the King James translation, places human beings “a little lower than the angels.” This is a strong statement and one that is often quoted in order to illustrate the majesty and dignity of humankind. Yet, even so, it is too weak. The Hebrew word underlying KJV “angels” is actually *elohim*. The “angels” of Psalm 8:5 KJV are, literally, “‘elohim’ beings, the members of the heavenly court.”²⁸¹ The passage should therefore almost certainly be translated, rather, as “thou hast made him a little lower than God” or, even, as “thou hast made him a little lower than the gods.”²⁸²

But biblical thought on the subject goes even further than that. Writing to the saints at Ephesus, the apostle Paul spoke of “one God and Father of us all” (Ephesians 4:6).²⁸³ How literally did he mean it? Preaching on Mars Hill in Athens, to a pagan audience, Paul approvingly cited one of their own pagan poets—the third-century B.C. Aratus of Cilicia—to make his case that human beings are God’s “offspring” (Acts 17:28–29).²⁸⁴ The word rendered “offspring” by the King James translators is the Greek *genos*, which is cognate with the Latin *genus* and means “family” or “race,” or “kind,” or, even, and most especially interesting for our present purpose, “descendants of a common ancestor.”²⁸⁵ Paul was saying that human beings are akin to God—the word *kin* is itself related to *genos*—or, to put it differently, that he and they are of the same genus. (The Latin Vulgate rendering of the same passage uses exactly that word, *genus*.) What does this mean? The great third-century philosopher Porphyry of Tyre explained in his *Isagoge*, one of the most important and widely read treatises on logic from the ancient world, that the primary meaning of the term *genos* or *genus* refers to

a collection of things related to one another because each is related to some one thing in a particular way. In this sense, the Heraclids are said to be a family [*genos*] because of the

relationship of descent from one man, Heracles. The many people related to each other because of this kinship deriving from Heracles are called the family of the Heraclids since they as a family are separate from other families.²⁸⁶

Porphyry's explanation that the nature of a *genus* consists at least partly in its separation from other *genera* seems to accord very well with the argument at Acts 17:29, where Paul contends that, because we and God are of the same *genus*, "we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device." Such things, such *genera*, he says, are separate from our *genus*, and, hence, are not appropriately worshiped by human beings. They are beneath us.

"The basic language of the Bible and of the Christian religion," wrote G. Ernest Wright, albeit in another context,

is an anthropomorphic language, drawn from the categories of personality and community. Confusion with metaphors drawn from other realms should be avoided because there is a basic relatedness and kinship between God and human life which does not exist in the same sense between God and nature.²⁸⁷

Aratus's declaration, which Paul endorsed, may perhaps represent a quite venerable position among Greek thinkers. "One is the race of men with the gods," wrote the great fifth-century B.C. lyric poet Pindar, using the same word, *genos*, that appears in Acts 17.²⁸⁸ The so-called *lamellai*, or "Golden Plates," found in tombs in Thessaly, Crete, and Italy are among the most intriguing documents from antiquity and provide still further evidence. These *lamellai* were apparently placed in the hands of the dead to remind the soul of powerful phrases that it was to use when confronting the powers of the underworld; they would thus help the soul to attain salvation. Among them is a plate from Petelia, dating to the mid-fourth century before Christ, that seems to make a point rather similar to Paul's own. Describing the terrain and the guards that the deceased soul will encounter in the spirit world, the text advises him to declare, "I am a child of Earth and starry Heaven; but my race [*genos*] is of Heaven alone."²⁸⁹ In other words, the deceased person belongs there, in heaven; he is akin to heavenly things and not to the mundane objects of earth.

That Paul intended to call his audience's attention to the familial resemblance and relationship that exists between God and humanity receives support from a survey of translations of Acts

17:28–29: The King James rendering of *genos* as “offspring” is followed by the New American Standard Bible, the New International Version, the Amplified Bible, the Rheims New Testament, the New American Bible, the New English Bible, and the New Revised Standard Version, as well as by Hugh Schonfield’s so-called *Authentic New Testament*.²⁹⁰ The New Jerusalem Bible says that “We are all his children.” The modern translation by J. B. Phillips concurs.²⁹¹ Likewise, the 1990 Arabic New Testament says of God that we are his *abnā’* (“children”).²⁹² The modern Hebrew New Testament, using a word derived from the root meaning “to beget,” also says that we are God’s “children” (*yəladīm*). The paraphrastic *Living Bible* explains that we are the “sons” of God. The modern French version called *Bonnes Nouvelles Aujourd’hui* agrees, reporting that we are his “enfants.”

William Tyndale’s 1525 New Testament has “generacion,” and identifies humanity as “the generacion of God.” The Calvinist Geneva Bible of 1560 follows Tyndale, using precisely the same terms. The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites Tyndale’s use of the word as an illustration for the meaning of *generation* as “offspring, progeny.”

The 1950 Arabic Catholic New Testament, published in Beirut, says that we are God’s *dhurriyya*, which means that we are his “progeny,” “descendants,” “children,” or “offspring.”²⁹³ The 1972 Turkish Bible uses precisely the same word (in its Turkicized form [*zürriyet*]), with precisely the same meaning.²⁹⁴ Western versions have used analogous language. Deploying a word obviously cognate with the term *genos*, the 1556 Latin translation prepared by the Calvinist Theodore Beza says that we are the *progenies* of God. We are also *progenie di Dio*, or “God’s progeny,” according to the 1914 Italian Bible.²⁹⁵ This is the same word that the University of Chicago’s Constantine Trypanis chooses to translate *genos* in the original passage of Aratus’s astronomical poem *Phaenomena*, from which Paul was quoting.²⁹⁶

The 1991 Hebrew translation of the Bible Society in Israel says that we are God’s *še’šā’īm*, using the common modern Hebrew word for “descendants.” The popular-language German translation of the New Testament entitled *Die Gute Nachricht* says, “Von ihm stammen auch wir ab” (“We also descend from him”).²⁹⁷ The roughly equivalent modern-language Spanish New Testament entitled *Dios Llega al Hombre*, straightforwardly indicates that “Somos familia de Dios” (“We are the family of God”).²⁹⁸ The 1904 translation of the Bible into Farsī or Persian says that we are of the *nasl-i Khudā*, “the lineage of God.”²⁹⁹

Martin Luther's historic German Bible renders Acts 17:28 as "Wir sind seines Geschlechts" ("We are of his race") and expands on this, in the next verse, by saying that we are "göttlich Geschlechts" ("of divine race").³⁰⁰ This is a very strong claim. One of the standard manuals of German etymology explains that the word *Geschlecht* means, essentially, "what strikes out in the same direction"³⁰¹ or "things of similar kind." "It was chiefly used in the sense of 'descent [*Abstammung*], [noble] extraction,' and in the sense of 'people of the same descent [*Abstammung*].'"³⁰² Konstantin Rösch's early twentieth-century Catholic New Testament concurs with Luther, explaining that "Wir sind von seinem Geschlecht" (i.e., again, "We are of his race"), "von Gottes Geschlecht" ("of God's race"), as does the 1958 translation by Rupert Storr ("Sind wir doch seines Geschlechtes"), which proceeds, like Luther's, to speak of our "divine race" ("Sind wir nun so göttlichen Geschlechtes").³⁰³ Ulrich Wilckens's 1972 translation uses precisely the same terminology.³⁰⁴ The relatively recent *Einheitsübersetzung*, which takes its name from the fact that it represents a collaborative effort on the part of the Roman Catholics and the major Protestant denominations of Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, renders the passage even more strikingly: "Wir sind von seiner Art," it says, which means "We are of his type," or "We are of his kind."³⁰⁵ James Moffatt's early twentieth-century translation declares that "We too belong to his race."³⁰⁶ "Car nous sommes aussi de sa race," says the original Jerusalem Bible, as produced by the Ecole Biblique, which reads in the following verse that we are "de la race de Dieu": "We are of his race . . . of the race of God."

Thus for Paul, humans are the offspring or the children of God. They are, as in the words of the Hebrew Bible, *bānê 'ēlōhîm*. Accordingly, it seems reasonable to conclude that, for Paul, just as in ancient Semitic belief, God is the father of man (*'abū 'adami*)—or, as the epistle to the Hebrews (12:9) puts it, "the Father of spirits."³⁰⁷ "Wherefore David blessed the Lord before all the congregation: and David said, Blessed be thou, Lord God of Israel our father, for ever and ever" (1 Chronicles 29:10; compare Psalm 89:26). The Jewish opponents of Christ described in John 8:41 merely reflected traditional Hebrew belief when they claimed God as their father.³⁰⁸ "Ye are the children [*bānîm*] of the Lord your God," declares Deuteronomy 14:1.³⁰⁹ This is also the doctrine that appears to undergird Hebrews 2:11, where that epistle says of Christ, the divine Son, and of those whom he saves, that "both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one [*ex henos*]: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren."³¹⁰ And again, those whom Christ calls "my brethren" in Matthew 25:40 are not limited

to believing Christians, as if Jesus were summoning us only to treat with kindness the poor and afflicted whom we find theologically acceptable.³¹¹

The Latter-day Saint understanding that humans are of the same genus or species as God is thus clearly biblical. “The line separating the divine from the human in ancient Judaism was not as absolute as is sometimes supposed.”³¹² As the distinguished Anglican church historian Alan Richardson contends, the theologians who produced such classical creeds as the famous Definition of Faith of the fifth-century Council of Chalcedon, unduly dominated by the philosophy of their day, exaggerated the gulf between divine and human. And they have been enormously influential in subsequent Christian thought. Still, centuries of creedal Christianity notwithstanding, says Richardson, “God and man are fundamentally akin.”³¹³

But can human beings be called “gods” *now*? In an obvious sense, no. Yet just as an acorn is much more to be called an oak than it can be termed a soup or a submarine or even a palm tree, there is another sense in which they clearly *can* be termed “gods” even now. And at least some early Christians were apparently quite willing to do so. The illustrious third-century church father Clement of Alexandria, for example, wrote that Heraclitus, the equally illustrious pre-Socratic philosopher, correctly declared that “Men are gods, and gods are men.”³¹⁴ And, once again, we must note that Clement does not limit application of this dictum to Christian believers. (Heraclitus obviously cannot have had any such limitation in mind since he lived, a pagan, several centuries before Christ.) The first-century A.D. *Life of Adam and Eve*, a Jewish text, has the angels worshiping the newly created Adam, at God’s command.³¹⁵

Even sources reluctant to come right out and say it acknowledged that the term *god* could be used in various ways, some of which were applicable to human beings: “Learn this also,” says Peter in a passage from the third-century *Clementine Homilies* that bears obvious relevance to the controversy recorded in John 10:

The bodies of men have immortal souls, which have been clothed with the breath of God; and having come forth from God, they are of the same substance, but they are not gods. But if they are gods, then in this way the souls of all men, both those who have died, and those who are alive, and those who shall come into being, are gods. But if in a spirit of

controversy you maintain that these also are gods, what great matter is it, then, for Christ to be called God? for He has only what all have.³¹⁶

Note, incidentally, that humans are said here to be of the same “substance” as God.³¹⁷

Some will object, of course, that the thesis advanced by this paper violates monotheism. But ancient Jews and Christians would, it seems, have disagreed, and we must be careful neither to impose our own assumptions on the Bible and other early texts nor to presume that our presuppositions are necessarily correct. While some might suppose that the other “gods” were so in name only, Origen of Alexandria insisted that “Scripture distinguishes between those gods which are such only in name and those which are truly gods.”³¹⁸ “And by this name ‘gods,’ ” said Origen, “we are not to understand the objects of heathen worship (for we know that ‘all the gods of the heathen are demons’), but the gods mentioned by the prophets as forming an assembly, whom God ‘judges,’ and to each of whom He assigns his proper work.”³¹⁹ In fact, Origen was scornful of those who refused to take language of “gods” and deification as literally true. “Whilst there are thus many gods and lords,” he wrote,

whereof some are such in reality, and others are such only in name, we strive to rise not only above those whom the nations of the earth worship as gods, but also beyond those spoken of as gods in Scripture, of whom they are wholly ignorant who are strangers to the covenants of God given by Moses and by our Saviour Jesus, and who have no part in the promises which He has made to us through them.³²⁰

The eminent evangelical scholar Larry Hurtado warns against

a tendency to proceed deductively from *a priori* presumptions of what monotheism must mean, instead of building up a view inductively from the evidence of how monotheism actually operated in the thought and practice of ancient Jews. There seems to be an implicit agreement . . . that more than one transcendent being of any significance complicates or constitutes a weakening of or threat to monotheism.

“It is clear,” he continues, “that ancient Jews were not characteristically monists or unitarians, but does this mean that they were not monotheists?” He decries

a tendency to proceed as if we can know in advance what “monotheism” must mean, which turns out to be a very modern, monistic form of monotheism, and can accordingly evaluate ancient Jewish texts and beliefs as to whether or how closely they meet an *a priori* standard of “pure monotheism.”³²¹

Whether or not a community is monotheistic, according to Hurtado, is not to be deduced from “this rather Aristotelian approach,” and not by judging the implications of its doctrines, as we see them, against the standard of our own theology. Instead, the crucial indicator is to be found in the community’s worship practices, in its liturgy, and in its self-understanding. He urges scholars

to work more inductively, gathering what “monotheism” is on the ground, so to speak, from the evidence of what self-professed monotheists believe and practice. In fact, I suggest that for historical investigation our policy should be to take people as monotheistic if that is how they describe themselves, in spite of what we might be inclined to regard at first as anomalies in their beliefs.³²²

We should take as “monotheism” the religious beliefs and practices of people who describe themselves as monotheistic. Otherwise, we implicitly import a definition from the sphere of theological polemics in an attempt to do historical analysis. . . . If we are to avoid *a priori* definitions and the imposition of our own theological judgments, we have no choice but to accept as monotheism the religion of those who profess to be monotheists, however much their religion varies and may seem “complicated” with other beings in addition to the one God.³²³

The monotheism of the early Hebrews and, indeed, of the early Christians need not look exactly like the monotheism that normative Christianity expects today, centuries after the great ecumenical councils synthesized the doctrine of the Trinity. When Trypho the Jew demanded that the second-century St. Justin Martyr “show us that the Spirit of prophecy [i.e., the Bible] admits another God [i.e., Jesus] besides the Maker of all things,” Justin didn’t instruct him in the mystery of one God in three persons. Trinitarianism hadn’t yet been formulated. Rather, he set about, quite cheerfully and at considerable length, to do exactly what Trypho had requested—concluding with a discussion of Psalm 82.³²⁴ Similarly, albeit no doubt surprisingly to some, early Christian monotheism did not rule out the teaching of human deification:

The description of salvation as deification is at first glance an unlikely development in early Christian theology. In the case of worshiping the pagan gods or honoring deified rulers, the earliest Christian authors explicitly and vehemently reject the idea of any creature being considered a god as this was contrary to the church's monotheistic confession. Pagan deification is roundly decried as deriving from the serpent's temptation of Adam and Eve in Paradise that "you will be like gods", which event is even pinpointed as the original source of pagan polytheism. In addition to disobedience, it was the belief in other gods and the desire that Adam and Eve "themselves could become gods" which burdened "the soul of man like a disease." This activity of the early fathers reflects their conflict with the surrounding culture. On account of this refusal to venerate the gods and worship the emperor, the church in places suffered persecution. And the rejection of such pagan ideas of deification earned the early Christians the label "atheists". Clement of Alexandria simply follows the tradition before him when he completely rejects the pagan deification of the heavens, of people, of passions, and of bodily shapes and calls it all "the manufacturing of gods." The idea and language of deification, therefore, would seem unlikely to find a positive use in Christian doctrine. Nevertheless, a well-known and deeply traditional description of salvation as deification in the early fourth century is explainable as a natural development of the church's theological use of Psalm 82 in the late first and early second centuries.³²⁵

However unlikely it may appear, a doctrine of human deification was present across the early Christian church, very much including Clement of Alexandria himself. Nispel is at pains to distinguish pagan *theosis* from a Hellenized Christian version of human deification, and to separate both from a very early Christian doctrine of divinization that arose on entirely biblical soil.³²⁶ And it must frankly be admitted that the later mutation of the doctrine of human deification, as it appears in the church fathers, tends to move further and further away from the very literally conceived doctrine of the early Christians and their biblical forebears. For one thing, the doctrine of divine anthropomorphism, of a corporeal deity, gradually disappeared from official Christian teaching,³²⁷ and any concept of *theosis* divorced from belief in an anthropomorphic God must inevitably differ sharply from the earlier doctrine that presupposed such a deity. A related development saw the emergence, in Christian thought, of a chasm between God and humankind, with the Greek fathers, particularly, insisting on the unapproachable superessential *ousia*— the ontological uniqueness—of God.³²⁸ Such concepts

and such language are, of course, utterly foreign to the Bible, as to the first Christians. But even the later Hellenized doctrine of *theosis* recalls the richer teaching of the early church—of which it is, albeit distorted, a conspicuous fossil remnant—and foreshadows the full concept as revealed in the restoration.

Conclusion

Once we have divested ourselves of certain theological prejudices that are, apparently, foreign to ancient Hebrew and early Christian thought, the Latter-day Saint claim that God and humankind are akin seems a promising basis upon which to resolve the apparent disagreement between the reference of Psalm 82:6 to heavenly gods and the reference of John 10:34 to mortal human beings. For John 10 must apply to human beings, or its narrative makes no sense, yet it must also involve genuinely divine beings or Christ's argument comes down to little more than sophistic equivocation. The Latter-day Saint position also seems to suggest a way to deal with Morgenstern's charge of textual corruption against Psalm 82, by showing that, even if verses 2–4 are taken as referring to human beings, this is not necessarily incompatible with the clear reference to divine beings in verses 6–7. Finally, the Latter-day Saint conception of humanity and divinity seems to allow a reconciliation of the broad contemporary consensus that Psalm 82 is speaking of celestial beings with the necessity, in order to see Jesus' argument as logically respectable, that it also refer to human beings.

The precise details of the psalm remain somewhat difficult, and perhaps there is no real point in trying to pin them down with theological precision in any event. Psalm 82 is poetry, not a treatise on systematic theology. But its broad underlying conception of man and God, interpreted from a Latter-day Saint perspective, makes sense. “The theme of human divinization” is indeed, as Annewies van den Hoek has written, “implicit in the Psalm. . . . The Psalm text and its Johannine interpretation . . . provide the legitimatization for followers of Christ to identify themselves as ‘gods’ or ‘angels,’ just as Rabbinic traditions do for the Israelites.”³²⁹ Again, as St. Justin Martyr said, “let the interpretation of the Psalm be held just as you wish, yet thereby it is demonstrated that all men are deemed worthy of becoming ‘gods,’ and of having power to become sons of the Highest.”³³⁰ Moreover, it seems to accord with what we are now learning about very early Hebraic and pan-Semitic ideas.

We have seen that little or no distinction is made in the biblical texts between mortal human prophets as heralds of the divine council, on the one hand, and, on the other, gods as heralds of the divine council. We have noted that ancient biblical and Semitic documents appear to use the term gods for deceased human beings. We have learned that, according to at least two Jewish texts from the period just before the birth of Jesus, the righteous dead can be exalted to participation in the heavenly council. (Indeed, it may be worth noting that, in the epigraph to this paper from the Dead Sea Scrolls, the reference is to a *singular* “council of gods and men.”)³³¹ Moreover, we have seen abundant Jewish and early Christian evidence for a doctrine of *theosis* or human deification. We have seen that, from a Latter-day Saint perspective, the premortal spirits of humankind seem to be included in the membership of the divine assembly.³³² We have also noted that biblical and other relevant ancient documents appear to describe both gods and humans as the children of God.

Once again, we recall the four standard interpretations of the “gods” in Psalm 82: They were either (1) ordinary mortal Israelite rulers or judges, (2) ordinary mortal rulers or judges of the other nations, (3) the ordinary mortal people of Israel gathered at Sinai for the revelation of the law, or (4) angelic or divine members of the council of El. Any of the first three would be compatible with Jesus’ use of the passage in John 10. Unfortunately, though, none of the three seems, on its own, to be compatible with the best recent scholarship on the original intent of the psalm itself. Only combined acceptance of the fourth interpretive option and one or more of the first three can make consistent sense of both Psalm 82 and John 10 without accusing Jesus, in the New Testament, of misrepresenting the real meaning of the former passage. More basically, only if the genus “gods” and the genus “humans” overlap can the Savior’s application of Psalm 82 to mortal human beings be a legitimate one. We have seen that, according to both the apostle Paul and a plausible reading of the Hebrew Bible, they do overlap. Yet, to my knowledge, in all Christendom it is only the Latter-day Saints, to whom a doctrine of the antemortal existence of human beings and of their literal kinship with God has been revealed, who recognize that gods and men form a single class, differentiated along a spectrum of holiness, wisdom, and power. Consequently, it would seem that the Latter-day Saints are in a uniquely strong position to reconcile the original sense of Psalm 82 with the Savior’s use of it in John 10.

Notes

It is a very great pleasure to offer this article in tribute, however inadequate, to Professor Richard Lloyd Anderson. If his life’s work consisted only of the two books *Understanding Paul* and *Investigating the*

Book of Mormon Witnesses, he would still rank among the most significant scholars of the restored church. But, of course, he has given us much more still.

I wish to thank my friends and colleagues Professors William J. Hamblin and Stephen D. Ricks for helpful comments on various drafts of this paper. Roger D. Cook, Daniel McKinlay, Stephen D. Ricks, Royal Skousen, John Tvedtnes, and Bryan J. Thomas assisted with important references. While making final adjustments to the essay, I profited from the lengthy and revealing e-mail exchange between Professor Hamblin and a professional anti-Mormon named James White on the interpretation of Psalm 82 that has been posted, complete and unedited, at http://www.shields-research.org/Critics/A-O_01b.html. (Mr. White has also placed a cropped and vigorously “spin-doctored” version of that exchange at his own web site.) Of course, the argument and the conclusions (and any attendant errors of fact or judgment) are mine alone.

1. Unless otherwise specified, biblical quotations in this paper are taken from the King James Version.
2. Clement of Alexandria, *The Exhortation to the Greeks* 1; English rendering from G. W. Butterworth, trans., *Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 23.
3. John 10:30.
4. Compare the distinction made by Philo, *On Dreams* 1:229, between the being who is “truly God” and who is, accordingly, uniquely identified by use of the Greek article with the word for *God*, and he who is divine by extension or analogy, for whom the article is omitted. Philo Judaeus, or Philo of Alexandria, was a contemporary of Jesus and John. “Philo does not seem to regard the use of ‘God’ as a designation for the Logos as improper,” writes John J. Collins, “although he clearly distinguishes between the supreme God and the intermediary deity.” See John J. Collins, “Jewish Monotheism and Christian Theology,” in *Aspects of Monotheism: How God Is One*, ed. Hershel Shanks and Jack Meinhardt (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1997), 93; compare 96. *Logos*, of course, is the term used for Jesus in John 1.
5. Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1967), 85–86.
6. My analysis here is indebted to that of Jerome H. Neyrey, “‘I Said: You Are Gods’: Psalm 82:6 and John 10,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108/4 (1989): 651–53.
7. *Ibid.*, 651–52. The relevance of this to passages in the Bible (e.g., John 17:11, where the same Greek word, *hen*, is used) and in the Book of Mormon where the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost are said to be “one” should be obvious. Such terminology does not, though, commit us to seeing Jesus and the Father as somehow ontologically “one,” in the fashion of traditional trinitarian metaphysics. Larry W. Hurtado, “What Do We Mean by ‘First-Century Jewish Monotheism’?” *Society of Biblical Literature 1993 Seminar Papers*, ed. Eugene H. Lovering Jr. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 351, is right to recognize

“the rather flexible ability of ancient Jewish monotheism to incorporate a plurality in the operation of the sovereignty of the one God.” *Hen* is the neuter form of the Greek “one”; *heis* is the masculine form. “I note in passing,” Hurtado continues (on pp. 356–57), “that monotheistic rhetoric, e.g., the use of *heis* and *monos* formulae in references to the divine, can be found in non-Jewish sources of the Greco-Roman period as well. . . . But in religious practice, this pagan ‘monotheism’ amounted to the recognition of all gods as expressions of one common divine essence or as valid second-order gods under a (often unknowable) high god, and, as such, as worthy of worship. This was categorically different from the exclusivist monotheism of Jews who rejected the worship of beings other than the one God of the Bible.” Is it altogether different, though, from early Christianity, which encouraged worship both of God the Father and of Jesus Christ?

8. See, for example, John 5:18; 10:33; and 19:7, 12. An analogous accusation is frequently made against the Latter-day Saints. We are, our critics charge, “the God Makers.” Our response should be analogous, as well. For a brief survey of some of the voluminous evidence for early Christian teaching of a doctrine of human deification, see Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks, *Offenders for a Word: How Anti-Mormons Play Word Games to Attack the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Aspen Books, 1992), 75–92, which gives numerous references for further reading.

9. Neyrey, “I Said: You are Gods,” 653, emphasis in the original source.

10. Raymond E. Brown, John A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, eds., *The Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1968), 2:446 [63:120]; hereinafter referred to as *JBC*.

11. Kenneth Barker et al., eds., *The NIV Study Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 1617n; hereinafter referred to as *NIV*.

12. Neyrey, “I Said: You Are Gods,” 53.

13. Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms II: 51–100* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1968), 269, dates the psalm to the period before the Israelite monarchy. So, too, do Kurt Marti, *Die Psalmen 73–106:*

Annäherungen (Stuttgart: Radius, 1992), 59; Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalmen: 2. Teilband* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1966), 570. On the other hand, Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 20 (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 333–34, sees it as relatively late.

14. E. Theodore Mullen Jr., *The Assembly of the Gods: The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1980), 228.

15. Julian Morgenstern, “The Mythological Background of Psalm 82,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 14 (1939): 29–30. Kraus, *Psalmen*, 569, also affirms the excellent state of the text.

16. See Reginald C. Fuller, Leonard Johnston, and Conleth Kearns, eds., *A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* (Nashville: Nelson, 1975), 472; hereinafter referred to as *NCCHS*.

17. *JBC*, 1:591 [35:98]; compare *NCCHS*, 472.
18. Helmer Ringgren, *The Faith of Qumran: Theology of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, expanded ed., trans. Emilie T. Sander, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 202, says that among the common terms the people of the Dead Sea Scrolls used for their own community was *‘ēdāh*, or “congregation,” “an ancient term for Israel’s cult-community.” The term also appears in such passages as Numbers 26:9; 31:16; Joshua 22:17; and Psalm 1:5. Clearly, though, its use to indicate earthly councils of mortal humans no more implies the humanity of Psalm 82’s *‘ēlōhīm* than the existence of earthly thrones implies the mere humanity of God because he is described biblically as sitting upon a throne.
19. See Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 228 n. 195; compare Neyrey, “I Said: You Are Gods,” 647. One minority strand of interpretation that we can safely ignore even takes Psalm 82:6 as ironic: When the psalmist, speaking for Yahweh, says, “You are gods,” this interpretation maintains that he is really saying something along the lines of “You call yourselves gods!” (*NCCHS*, 472.) But there seems nothing in the text to suggest this, and it is not at all obvious that Jesus would have strengthened his position by quoting to the Jews an ironic description of mortal human beings as gods which really intended precisely the opposite. Dahood, *Psalms II*, 268, 270, takes a more sophisticated but related view, with some actual grounding in Hebrew usage, but his interpretation, too, seems to make impossible any unified understanding of Psalm 82 and John 10. Nor does it appear to have found much acceptance among other scholars.
20. See Dahood, *Psalms II*, 268.
21. NIV, 1617n.
22. NIV, 873n.
23. *NCCHS*, 472. And, in fact, Psalm 82:2–4 could be seen as supporting something like this interpretation. According to this view, Psalm 82:5, then, would simply affirm “you are divinely appointed judges.”
24. Cyrus H. Gordon and Gary A. Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 4th ed. (New York: Norton, 1997), 37.
25. *Ibid.*, 37 n. 9.
26. Neyrey, “I Said: You Are Gods,” 648.
27. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1962), 489, 501. Malcolm R. Thorp, “James E. Talmage and the Tradition of Victorian Lives of Jesus,” *Sunstone* 12 (January 1988): 8–13, discusses the bibliographical resources that Elder Talmage drew upon for *Jesus the Christ*. Of course, Elder Talmage’s deservedly revered work, while surely correct in the broad picture, has never been held to be either canonical or inerrant in all its details.

28. NIV, 873n. For the heavenly assembly, see such biblical passages as Psalm 89:5–7 (where the King James translation rather obscures the proper meaning); 1 Kings 22:19; Job 1:6; 2:1; and Isaiah 6:1–4.
29. NIV, 873n.
30. *JBC*, 1:591 [35:98].
31. Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150: A Commentary on Books III, IV, and V of the Psalms* (London: Inter-Varsity, 1975), 299. Rev. Kidner’s example and the examples of others cited in these notes indicate that it is misguided to suggest that rejection of the interpretation of Psalm 82’s *’ēlōhîm* as human judges simply reflects lack of faith. (This is the accusation leveled by Mr. White in his exchange with Dr. Hamblin.)
32. See Numbers 5:11–31 for a possible parallel.
33. Martin Luther, *Die gantze Heilige Schrifft Deudsch* [1545], ed. Hans Volz (Munich: Rogner & Bernhard, 1972); *Tanakh—The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1988).
34. It is true that both the Septuagint and the Vulgate render *’ēlōhîm* as “angels” at Psalm 8:5. But that fact is entirely consistent with the theological evolution presupposed in this paper.
35. Morgenstern, “The Mythological Background of Psalm 82,” 30. And, as Morgenstern points out in n. 3 on the same page, even Kittel eventually abandoned it.
36. *Ibid.*, 38; compare 75.
37. Lowell K. Handy, “The Appearance of Pantheon in Judah,” in *The Triumph of Elohim: From Yahwisms to Judaisms*, ed. Diana V. Edelman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 40. The interpretive ancient Aramaic Jewish Targum to Psalm 82:6 didn’t hesitate to flatly change the text from “gods” and “sons of the Most High” to “angels,” in order to lessen the passage’s impact.
38. Novatian, *Treatise concerning the Trinity 20*, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (hereinafter *ANF*), ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (1885; reprint, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995), 5:631.
39. Neyrey, “I Said: You Are Gods,” 654.
40. *JBC*, 2:446 [63:120].
41. See Neyrey, “I Said: You Are Gods,” 654, 655–59, 662. See also Morton Smith, “The Image of God: Notes on the Hellenization of Judaism, with Especial Reference to Goodenough’s Work on Jewish Symbols,” in Morton Smith, *Studies in the Cult of Yahweh*, ed. Shaye J. D. Cohen (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 1:121.
42. *Ibid.*, 648.
43. See *ibid.*, 656.
44. *Ibid.*, 649.
45. See *ibid.*, 647, 663.

46. See Morgenstern, "The Mythological Background of Psalm 82," 30–31.
47. Kraus, *Psalmen*, 570–71. The conservative Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 340–41, likewise dismisses the "human judge" interpretation.
48. *NCCHS*, 472; Kraus, *Psalmen*, 569–74. In his e-mail exchange with Mr. White, Dr. Hamblin summarizes a search of twenty-two commentaries on Psalm 82. Twelve had been published in 1970 or before (going back to Calvin in the sixteenth century). Of these, eight hold that the psalm's "gods" are actually human judges, while three allow that they might be either earthly judges or celestial beings, and one (which appeared in 1968) insists that they are heavenly persons. Ten of the commentaries had been published in 1971 or later. All of these, not excepting even conservative Protestant writers, declare the "gods" of Psalm 82 to be celestial beings. My impression is that Dr. Hamblin's sample is representative. The discovery of the Ugaritic materials has affected biblical studies dramatically, here as elsewhere (on which, see below). Earlier interpretations of Psalm 82 were offered on the basis of less information and knowledge.
49. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 329 n. 1.d, points out that "It is probable that the Greek versions represent a variant Heb[rew] textual tradition. . . . It is unlikely that the [Septuagint] translators would have gone to the plural . . . 'gods,' without finding it in the Heb[rew] texts." Manfred Dietrich and Oswald Loretz, "*Jahwe und seine Aschera*": *Anthropomorphes Kultbild in Mesopotamien, Ugarit und Israel: Das biblische Bilderverbot* (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1992), 147–48, contend that the original phrase was "council of the gods," rather than "council of God," the text having, they say, been altered in the direction of monotheism by later editors. For other examples of such possible editing to suppress an earlier polytheism, see Morgenstern, "The Mythological Background of Psalm 82," 39 n. 22, 118 n. 167.
50. Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 236.
51. *JBC*, 1:590 [35:98].
52. *NCCHS*, 472. From conservative Protestants, compare Alton H. McEachern, *Layman's Bible Book Commentary: Psalms* (Nashville: Broadman, 1981), 104–5; G. C. D. Howley, F. F. Bruce, and H. L. Ellison, *A Bible Commentary for Today* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1979), 659. Kidner, *Psalms 73–150*, 297, says the beings involved are angels.
53. See Morgenstern, "The Mythological Background of Psalm 82," 31–35, 38, 71–73, 114.
54. Usefully concise accounts are G. Ernest Wright, "The Faith of Israel," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick et al. (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, 1952), 1:360; E. Theodore Mullen Jr., "Divine Assembly," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman et al. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:214–17.

55. Interpreters should, however, bear in mind the important caveats offered by Othmar Keel and Christoph Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 11–12, 395–96, and by Gordon and Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 89. Morton Smith, “The Common Theology of the Ancient Near East,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 71 (1952): 135–47, had offered a similar caution many years before, but then proceeded, as the title of his article indicates, to sketch numerous parallels between the varied theologies of the Israelites and their neighbors.
56. Gordon and Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 88–89; compare 20, 88, 138 n. 11. Some readers will recognize Cyrus H. Gordon, the eminent author of *Ugaritic Textbook* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965).
57. Theodore J. Lewis, review of *The Ugaritic Baal Cycle*, vol. 1, by Mark S. Smith, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 118/1 (1999): 170.
58. William F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan: A Historical Analysis of Two Contrasting Faiths* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1968), 255.
59. See *ibid.*, 114–16.
60. Ezekiel 14:14, 20; 28:3; see Gordon and Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 289. He is not to be confused with the Daniel of the Babylonian captivity, who has a biblical book named after him.
61. Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 3; compare 284; see also Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), 44–45, 183, 186; Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, 191–93.
62. Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 113; compare Morgenstern, “The Mythological Background of Psalm 82,” 39 n. 22, 40. At pages 113–14, Mullen contends that the Egyptian “synod of the gods” is of less relevance to the Bible than the concepts of other Near Eastern cultures. Dahood, *Psalms II*, 269, identifies Psalm 29:1–2; 77:14; 89:6–9; 95:3; 96:4; and 148:2 as alluding to the divine council.
63. As rendered in Florentino García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 373–74.
64. Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 115. I would contend that the notion survives even into the sacred text of Islam, dictated in the seventh century A.D. Both Qur’ān 37:8 and 38:69 speak of *al-malā’ al-a’lā*, the “exalted assembly” or “high council,” which is clearly placed in heaven and associated with the angels of God’s presence.
65. Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 120, 147, 278–79, 283–84.
66. *Ibid.*, 5; compare 181, 208–9.
67. *Ibid.*, 116.

68. See *ibid.*, 113 n. 1. Mullen sees the beginnings of “individualization of the members of the council” in Job 1–2, Zechariah 3, and Daniel 7, which he evidently dates to a relatively late period. On the terminology for angels in the Dead Sea Scrolls, which includes “sons of heaven” (1QS iv.22; xi.8; 1QH iii.22), see Ringgren, *Faith of Qumran*, 83–84. “Sons of heaven” may have been a reverential euphemism for the older “sons of El” or “sons of the Most High.” Morgenstern, “The Mythological Background of Psalm 82,” 58–59, 65–66, offers some interesting insights into the shift from a council of gods to an angelic hierarchy, which is already occurring within the Bible itself. Compare Wright, “The Faith of Israel,” 360. It is instructive to note that the third-century B.C. Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint (“LXX”), routinely rewrites the Hebrew *godsto* read *angels*. Examples include Psalms 8:6 and 97:7 (=LXX 96:7). The fifth-century A.D. Syriac Peshitta does the same at Psalm 82:1.
69. Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 117–19.
70. See *ibid.*, 13–15. Mullen notes that some of the epithets applied to El as creator-god are applied, in the Hebrew Bible, to Yahweh.
71. See Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 13–15.
72. *Ibid.*, 15, 42–43; Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 15; Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 21; see also Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 113–16, where El’s position as father of the gods is compared to that of Amun in the Egyptian pantheon. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, 234, alludes to legendary accounts of El sacrificing his “only” son for the sake of humankind; the Greek word translated by “only,” *monogenēs*, is rendered as “only begotten” in the King James Version of the New Testament.
73. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 15–19, 42–43, 180; Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 24–25, 32, 250 n. 225; Gordon and Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 97.
74. The translation is from Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 17.
75. Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 16, 19, 21–22.
76. *Ibid.*, 84.
77. *Ibid.*, 92–109, takes issue with the commonly held idea that Ba’l actually deposed El.
78. See *ibid.*, 9 n. 3, 84–85, 92, 109–10, 119–20.
79. *Ibid.*, 41.
80. Compare Conrad E. L’Heureux, *Rank among the Canaanite Gods: El, Ba’al, and the Repha’im* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979), 3–28.
81. On this point, see Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 43.

82. Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 44–45; compare 109–10, 146; see also Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 40–41; and L’Heureux, *Rank among the Canaanite Gods*, 69.
83. See Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 151–52, 152 n. 23.
84. *Ibid.*, 155; compare 152 (in Hebrew). Professor Cross discusses the proper interpretation of the phrase *bānē ’ēlīm* at pp. 45–46.
85. On the notion that the Old Testament as we now have it suppresses important facts about ancient Israelite religion, see William G. Dever, “Folk Religion in Early Israel: Did Yahweh Have a Consort?” in Shanks and Meinhardt, *Aspects of Monotheism*, 27–56; Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 11–12, 390–91, 396; Othmar Keel, *Goddesses and Trees, New Moon and Yahweh: Ancient Near Eastern Art and the Hebrew Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 49–50; Susan Niditch, *Ancient Israelite Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 23, 27, 31.
86. Compare Psalm 82:6; possibly also Genesis 6:2–4 and Job 38:7. Wright, “The Faith of Israel,” 360, flatly pronounces the Septuagint variant “the correct text.” (Writing at the very beginning of the 1950s, he may not have known about the Dead Sea Scrolls version mentioned immediately below.) Perhaps significantly, the ancient Arabs, a Semitic people who were akin to the Hebrews, seem to have identified at least certain angels as the sons or daughters of God, and to have spoken of them, also, as gods and goddesses. See the critique of this idea offered by the rigorously monotheistic Qur’ān in the early seventh century (e.g., at 16:57–59; 17:40; 21:26–29; 23:91–92; 37:149–53; 43:16–19; 52:39; and 53:19–28).
87. F. C. Conybeare and St. George Stock, *Grammar of Septuagint Greek* (1905; reprint, n.p.: Hendrickson, 1995), iii.
88. See Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 269, 365; also Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 119 n. 19; 202–3 n. 153; compare Smith, *Early History of God*, 7, and 114 n. 138, where it is suggested that the Masoretic text was tampered with in order to suppress anthropomorphism.
89. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 340.
90. Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 209.
91. See Dever, “Folk Religion in Early Israel,” 29; Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 118, also suggest the possibility. Ringgren, *Faith of Qumran*, 48, writes that “The usual designation for God [in the Dead Sea Scrolls] is the archaic *’ēl*.” They also use the term “the Most High” (*’elyôn*), e.g., at 1QS iv.22.
92. See Smith, *Early History of God*, 7, also 18; compare Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel’s Second God* (Louisville: Westminster, 1992). See also Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1998), and

Collins, “Jewish Monotheism and Christian Theology,” 81–105, for rather different but, I think, relevant and intriguing approaches. Smith, *Early History of God*, 22, proposes, in the development of Hebrew religion, “an early stage when Israel knew three deities, El, Asherah, and Yahweh.” I discuss this subject in my article “Nephi and His Asherah: A Note on 1 Nephi 11:8–23,” in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 191–243. On Asherah, see now also Dever, “Folk Religion in Early Israel,” 27–56; P. Kyle McCarter, “The Religious Reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah,” in Shanks and Meinhardt, *Aspects of Monotheism*, 74–80. Yahweh seems also to have been worshiped among ancient pagan polytheists in Syria in the first and second millennia before Christ. See Gordon and Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 38 n. 11, 113, 250–51; also Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 314 n. 35. Gordon and Rendsburg believe that Yahwism was originally non-Hebraic.

93. See Morgenstern, “The Mythological Background of Psalm 82,” 120, 120 n. 175.

94. See, for example, Smith, *Early History of God*, 7, 21; Baruch Halpern, “‘Brisker Pipes Than Poetry’: The Development of Israelite Monotheism,” in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Baruch A. Levine, and Ernest S. Frerichs (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 85; John Day, “Asherah in the Hebrew Bible and Northwest Semitic Literature,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105/3 (1986): 387, 387 n. 9; Peter Hayman, “Monotheism—A Misused Word in Jewish Studies?” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 42/1 (1991): 1–15; Dietrich and Loretz, “Jahwe und seine Aschera,” 155–57. In our Bible as it currently reads, see Job 1:6 and 2:1, as well as Psalm 29 (in its original Hebrew), Psalm 82, and Micah 4:5.

95. Collins, “Jewish Monotheism and Christian Theology,” 82. For a somewhat different approach, arguing for a pre-Christian Jewish “ditheism,” see Ioan P. Culianu, “The Angels of the Nations and the Origins of Gnostic Dualism,” in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions, Presented to Gilles Quispel on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. R. van den Broek and M. J. Vermaseren (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 78–91. Culianu seems to have been unaware of the original reading of Deuteronomy 32, just presented.

96. Hurtado, “First-Century Jewish Monotheism,” 365, 367; compare Smith, “Common Theology,” 135–47.

97. *Ibid.*, 364 n. 69.

98. Peter Hayman, “Monotheism—A Misused Word in Jewish Studies?” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 42/1 (1991): 5.

99. Christopher Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 167. Latter-day Saints, of course, can easily affirm *that* of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

100. Willem A. VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 376.
101. See Frank Moore Cross, “Yahweh and the God of the Patriarchs,” *Harvard Theological Review* 55 (1962): 234; compare 241–42; Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 48; Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 9, 10, 88, 93; Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, 119–20.
102. See Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 205, 260–61, 279; Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, 199–200.
103. Smith, *Early History of God*, xxiii, xxvii, 8–12, 15, 19, 21, 22, 23, 89, 146, 161, 163; Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess*, 3rd ed. (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1990), 133; Cross, “Yahweh and the God of the Patriarchs,” 253–57; Otto Eissfeldt, “El and Yahweh,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 1 (1956): 25–37; J. A. Emerton, “The Origin of the Son of Man Imagery,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 9 (1958): 225–42; Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 113–14, 207 n. 31, 232, 280, 311–12; Gordon and Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 144–45. Herbert Niehr, “The Rise of YHWH in Judahite and Israelite Religion,” in *The Triumph of Elohim*, 45, summarizes the majority view but appears vaguely to disapprove of it. Frank Moore Cross certainly believes that Yahweh inherited (at least) the epithets of Canaanite El, but insists that Yahweh was equated with El at a very, very early period. See Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 52, 71, 72, 186. Patai, *Hebrew Goddess*, 128, and Halpern, ““Brisker Pipes Than Poetry,”” 80, discuss the common motif of the withdrawal of the elder gods.
104. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 65, 70–71, 105.
105. See Smith, *Early History of God*, 9. Which is not to say that there is no evidence of worship of El by Israelite *individuals* in later times. Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 310–11, cite inscriptional evidence for such veneration during the Iron Age IIB–C period (900–586 B.C.); compare the materials discussed at 208–10, where the context, though geographically near, appears to be non-Israelite. I use the term *cult*, of course, in its primary and original religious sense, without pejorative intent. See Peterson and Ricks, *Offenders for a Word*, 193–212, for a discussion of the term and its frequent abuse by critics of the church.
106. Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 108.
107. See Smith, *Early History of God*, 164, 165. See also Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 23, 23 n. 56, 24, 43.
108. Mark 5:7; Luke 1:32, 35; 8:28. For other occurrences of “the Highest” or “the most High,” see Luke 1:76; 6:35; Acts 7:48; 16:17; and Hebrews 7:1.
109. Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 4.

110. Ibid., 226; compare 232.
111. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 42–43; compare 17, 39, 177, 189–90.
112. Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 279.
113. See Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 105. On pp. 188–89, Cross discusses the biblical motif of the divine *rîḫ*, or lawsuit, as it pertains to the council of the gods.
114. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 179–80.
115. Ibid., 187, says that, “In Zechariah 3:1–10, the prophet is shown the proceedings of the council in the matter of Joshua the priest. Both the advocate, the *mal’āk*, ‘herald’ of Yahweh and the adversary stand in the council.”
116. Smith, *Early History of God*, 25.
117. Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 115.
118. Ibid., 142; compare 227, 281, 282; compare Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 177.
119. See Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 185.
120. Ibid., 147; compare 209.
121. Ibid., 282.
122. Ibid., 185.
123. Ibid., 268–74, 279. The quotation is from p. 268.
124. See McCarter, “Religious Reforms,” 67–69.
125. Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 177–78.
126. Ibid., 207.
127. Ibid., 226, 282.
128. See *ibid.*, 187; compare Morgenstern, “The Mythological Background of Psalm 82,” 56, which suggests an earlier, more individuated phase. See also Deuteronomy 33:2–3.
129. Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 190.
130. Ibid., 192; see also Morgenstern, “The Mythological Background of Psalm 82,” 40, 43, 59.
131. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 335. Tate, writing in a distinctly conservative Protestant commentary series, lists Genesis 6:2; Exodus 15:11; Job 1:6; 2:1; Psalms 8:6; 29:1; 82:6; 89:6–7; 95:3; and 96:4 in support of his view.
132. Niditch, *Ancient Israelite Religion*, 42 (referring specifically to the story of Jacob’s ladder, in Genesis 28).
133. Ibid., 44.
134. Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 279.

135. Dietrich and Loretz, “*Jahwe und seine Aschera*,” 139. For manifestations of this belief in the Judaism of the centuries immediately before and after the time of Christ, see Culianu, “The Angels of the Nations,” 78–91.
136. Compare Deuteronomy 14:1–2. Recall, again, Luke 1:32, 35, and the designation of Jesus as “the Son of the Highest.”
137. Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians* 24, in *ANF*, 2:142.
138. See Steve A. Wiggins, *A Reassessment of ‘Asherah’: A Study according to the Textual Sources of the First Two Millennia B.C.E.* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1993), 62–63 (drawing on the standard published version of the Ugaritic materials, *Die Keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit*, 1.4.VI.46, ed. Manfred Dietrich, Oswald Loretz, and Joaquin Samartín, 70); Dietrich and Loretz, “*Jahwe und seine Aschera*,” 134, 149, 154–57; Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 74 and 74 nn. 13–14; Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, 121.
139. See Dietrich and Loretz, “*Jahwe und seine Aschera*,” 146, 148, 155.
140. *Ibid.*, 149, makes the connection. For the seventy angels, see Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, trans. Henrietta Szold (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1969), 2:214; Moritz Steinschneider, “Die kanonische Zahl der muhammedanischen Secten und die Symbolik der Zahl 70–73,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 4 (1850): 145–46; Samuel Krauss, “Die Zahl der biblischen Völkerschaften,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 19 (1899): 3; Moritz Steinschneider, “Die kanonischen Zahlen 70–73,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 57 (1903): 481; Culianu, “The Angels of the Nations,” 78–91. The notion of the seventy shepherds in *1 Enoch* 89:59 may also be relevant here. The two articles by Steinschneider offer useful surveys of the general significance of the number seventy in ancient Semitic conceptions and beyond. Stephen D. Ricks was of great assistance in tracking down most of the rabbinic and secondary references in this and the immediately succeeding footnotes.
141. See, for instance, Israel Slotki, trans., *Sukkah*, in *The Babylonian Talmud: Seder Mo‘ed*, ed. I. Epstein (London: Soncino, 1938), 3:269 n. 9; *Midrash Psalm 9:7*; *Numbers Rabbah* 14:10; *Yalqut Shimoni*; TB *Sukkah* 55b; also S. Kent Brown, “The Seventy in Scripture,” in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 25–45; Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 2:214; Steinschneider, “Die kanonische Zahl,” 150–51, 169; Krauss, “Die Zahl der biblischen Völkerschaften,” 1–14; Steinschneider, “Die kanonischen Zahlen 70–73,” 481, 486; Samuel Krauss, “Zur Zahl der biblischen Völkerschaften,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 20 (1900): 38–43. The seventy nations also appear in early Arabic folklore. See Steinschneider, “Die kanonischen Zahlen 70–73,” 491.

142. See Henry Freedman, *Shabbath*, in *The Babylonian Talmud: Seder Mo'ed*, 1:420 n. 2; Targum Jonathan on Genesis 11:7; Deuteronomy 32:8; Mishnah *Sota* 7:5; Mishnah *Sheqalim* 5:1; TB *Shabbat*88b; also Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, 2:214; Steinschneider, "Die kanonische Zahl," 153–55, 169.
143. Sirach 17:17 (New English Bible; hereinafter NEB); compare Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 236; Krauss, "Zur Zahl der biblischen Völkerschaften," 40–41.
144. See, for example, *I Enoch* 10:9; 12:2, 4; 14:3; and 15:2–3.
145. Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 236.
146. See Steinschneider, "Die kanonische Zahl," 156.
147. *Ibid.*, 209–10; compare 140, 143, 144. Some Latter-day Saint readers may find it significant that the message is delivered by the divine messengers in "precisely the same words" as those in which they received it.
148. See *ibid.*, 199, 205, 282; Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 177.
149. Mullen, *The Assembly of the Gods*, 212, 215.
150. Niditch, *Ancient Israelite Religion*, 48.
151. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 187.
152. The situation sketched in Exodus 7:1 may be relevant in this context: "And the Lord said unto Moses, See, I have made thee a god to Pharaoh: and Aaron thy brother shall be thy prophet." See also Exodus 4:16.
153. Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 279; compare 283–84. Modern scripture clearly teaches the same idea. See, for example, Doctrine and Covenants 1:38; 68:4; and 84:36–37, 89. Compare Exodus 7:1; Matthew 10:40; Luke 9:48; 10:16; and 1 John 4:6. Revelation 19:10 and 22:7–9 supply a case where an angel speaks as if he were himself Jesus Christ; understandably but mistakenly, John twice falls down in worship and is rebuked.
154. Morgenstern, "The Mythological Background of Psalm 82," 55–56.
155. Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 216.
156. See the discussions at Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 171 n. 105, 173, 187–88.
157. Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 225.
158. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 189.
159. On this, see Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 218–20.
160. See the references in Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, n.d.), s.v. "sôd"; also W. J. Harrelson, "Council, the Council, Council House, Counsel," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George A. Buttrick et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 1:710.

161. Dennis Pardee, review of Gottes himmlischer *Thronrat: Hintergrund und Bedeutung von sod JHWH im Alten Testament*, by Heinz-Dieter Neef, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116/1 (1997): 117, 118.

162. I use the New English Bible here because the King James Version has clearly missed the implication of the word *sôd*.

163. In this context, note the humble disclaimer that Qur'ân 38:69–70 puts in the mouth of Muḥammad: “I have no knowledge of the exalted assembly when they argue. All that has been revealed to me is that I am to be a clear warner.” Yet, in fact, Muḥammad does know such things as that which the Lord said to the angels about his imminent creation of Adam (38:71–85). Since Muḥammad cannot possibly have been present for the event as an ordinary mortal human, this story, according to which Iblīs rebels against the divine decree to bow before Adam, can only have come to him, in the view of believers, as revealed information about the divine council.

164. Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 226. Again, one can scarcely avoid thinking of such passages as Doctrine and Covenants 1:38; 68:4; and 84:36–37, 89.

165. On this passage, see Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 205–7.

166. Smith, *Early History of God*, 101–2, 114 n. 138, comments on the notably anthropomorphic language that generally appears in such accounts. Roger D. Cook, “How Deep the Platonism? A Review of Owen and Mosser’s Appendix: Hellenism, Greek Philosophy, and the Creedal ‘Straightjacket’ of Christian Orthodoxy,” *FARMS Review of Books* 11/2 (1999): 294–95 n. 64, supplies a good representative sample of modern biblical scholars who recognize the anthropomorphic character of the Old Testament portrayal of God. Morton Smith, in his articles “The Image of God,” 116–59, and “On the Shape of God and the Humanity of Gentiles,” in Morton Smith, *Studies in the Cult of Yahweh*, 1:150–60, offers excellent examples of anthropomorphic views among the ancient rabbis. Analogous references could be furnished virtually at will but are properly the subject of another paper.

167. Compare Abraham 3:27, which fits perfectly into this ancient pattern. One Ugaritic text, recounting the story of the ailing prince Kirta or Keret, depicts the supreme god El posing the following formulaic question four times to the members of the divine assembly: “Who among the gods will cast out the illness, will drive out the sickness?” No one among the gods answered him.” See Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 181.

168. See Smith, *Early History of God*, 128 (referring also to Akkadian and Phoenician materials); Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 261–64, 261 n. 241; Dietrich and Loretz, “*Jahwe und seine Aschera*,” 48–49, 52 n. 27, 63–65, 66 n. 54, 68, 69 n. 66, 73 n. 73, 73–74; Keel, *Goddesses and Trees*, 120; Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 43, 45, 51, 53. See also Gordon and Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 92, 115; Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, 168 n. 43, 203–6.

Brian B. Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead: Ancestor Cult and Necromancy in Ancient Israelite Religion and Tradition* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1996), denies that a cult of the dead existed in early Canaan and Palestine, while conceding that, in doing so, he is going against “a virtual consensus” (p. 267) among modern scholars. “In recent years,” writes Wayne T. Pitard in *AAR/SBL Abstracts 1998* (Annual Meeting 1998, Orlando, Fla.), 394, “a consensus seems to have developed concerning the identity of the beings called *rpum* in the Ugaritic tablets. Most scholars today understand them to be spirits of deceased kings and perhaps other members of the nobility.” (His paper, “The Identity of the Rapi’uma, Again,” dissents from that consensus.) For evidence of a cult of the dead among the ancient Arabs (one that lingered even into Islamic times), see Ignaz Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, ed. S. M. Stern (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1966), 1:209–38. The New Testament image of “Abraham’s bosom” as the destination of the righteous dead and Abraham’s role in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (as arbiter and receiver of petitions) seem to imply a deified Abraham. See Luke 16:19–31; compare Doctrine and Covenants 132:29.

169. 1 Samuel 28:13. See, too, the discussion of Deuteronomy 33:1–3 on p. 532, above. Schmidt, *Israel's Beneficent Dead*, 201–20, considers 1 Samuel 28 fiction and redates it to postexilic times, as part of his argument that there was no necromancy in preexilic Israel. This is a move that presumably few conservative Protestant critics of Mormonism would be willing to make.

170. Niditch, *Ancient Israelite Religion*, 47, 48; compare 65–66, 84.

171. Wisdom of Solomon 5:5 NJB. The New Jerusalem Bible note on the passage points to the ambiguity of the phrases *children of God* and *holy ones*, showing, with several references (including one to Psalm 82), that the terms can refer either to angels or to the elect among postmortal humanity. To Latter-day Saints, of course, these categories are not mutually exclusive.

172. Roland E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 94. For the dating of the Wisdom of Solomon, I rely on Father Murphy’s brief discussion at pp. 83 and 95 n. 2.

173. Again, see Peterson and Ricks, *Offenders for a Word*, 75–92, for further references on this subject.

174. Charlesworth, introduction to Ringgren, *Faith of Qumran*, xx.

175. As rendered at Ringgren, *Faith of Qumran*, 85.

176. As rendered at *ibid.*, 85–86.

177. As rendered at *ibid.*, 127. Ringgren, *Faith of Qumran*, 217, 228, says that, among those who produced the Dead Sea Scrolls, the liturgy of the temple or of Qumran itself was thought to have its precise counterpart in a heavenly temple, and the angels, who led the worship in heaven, were also expected to participate in the ceremonies of their earthly community.

178. As rendered at Ringgren, *Faith of Qumran*, 127–28.
179. *Ibid.*, 127.
180. See the discussion by John J. Collins, “A Throne in the Heavens: Apotheosis in Pre-Christian Judaism,” in *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys*, ed. John J. Collins and Michael Fishbane (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 43–58. Thus, although Ringgren, *Faith of Qumran*, 47, is largely correct in saying that “There is a general tendency within postexilic Judaism strongly to emphasize that God is exalted and transcendent,” some of his statements now require qualification: It is apparently untrue, for instance, that “Qumran teaches salvation but not the deification which is found in Gnosticism.” See Ringgren, *Faith of Qumran*, 119–20; compare 250.
181. Collins, “Jewish Monotheism and Christian Theology,” 91.
182. As translated by Morton Smith, in *Studies in the Cult of Yahweh*, ed. Shaye J. D. Cohen (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 2:74–75.
183. 1QH XI 19–22, as rendered by García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*, 332.
184. 1QH XIX 10–13, as rendered in *ibid.*, 353.
185. 4Q427 frg. 7, col. I, 11–15, and col. II, 7–9, as rendered in Hurtado, “First-Century Jewish Monotheism,” 364–65.
186. See 11QMelchizedek (11Q13 [11QMelch]), in García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*, 139–40. Compare Culianu, “The Angels of the Nations,” 89.
187. See the discussion of these two documents at Collins, “Jewish Monotheism and Christian Theology,” 85–86, 89.
188. See Culianu, “The Angels of the Nations,” 89–91.
189. 2 Enoch [A] 22:4–10, in James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (hereinafter *OTP*) (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 1:137, 139; compare 2 Enoch [J] 22:4–10, in Charlesworth, *OTP*, 1:136, 138. See also Culianu, “The Angels of the Nations,” 87–89, where Enoch is seen to have been granted a title that is elsewhere given to the archangel Michael, who himself plays the role in the “council” in certain documents that other texts reserve for God.
190. Smith, “The Image of God,” 121. Compare pp. 140 and 146, where Smith notes the interesting equation, in ancient Jewish sources, of the image of a tree, representing a Jewish saint, with the menorah, representing God. The quotations from R. Johanan and R. Elazar are found, with their references in the primary sources, on pp. 120–21.
191. Hurtado, “First-Century Jewish Monotheism,” 364. For discussion of a truly rigorous monotheism, see Daniel C. Peterson, “Al-Kirmani on the Divine *Tawḥīd*,” in *Proceedings of the Third European Conference of Iranian Studies, Part 2, Mediaeval and Modern Persian Studies*, ed. Charles Melville

(Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 1999), 179–93. There is nothing remotely approaching such a view among the biblical writers.

192. *2 Baruch* 51:7–10, 12, in Charlesworth, *OTP*, 1:638.

193. Collins, “Jewish Monotheism and Christian Theology,” 88.

194. See Aristophanes, *Peace* 832–41.

195. See Alan Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars: A History of an Idea* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 156.

196. *Ibid.*, 158–59.

197. This point is made in Dr. Hamblin’s messages to Mr. White.

198. Augustine, *On the Psalms* 50.2, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (hereinafter *NPNF*), ed. Philip Schaff (1888; reprint, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 8:178.

199. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 124, in *ANF*, 1:262.

200. Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 21, in *ANF*, 1:170.

201. Origen, *Against Celsus* 4.29, in *ANF*, 4:509.

202. *Ibid.*, 8.74, in *ANF*, 4:668. Origen seems to have viewed himself and his fellow Christians as “God Makers”—to use the anti-Mormon epithet hurled against the Latter-day Saints in recent years—and to have regarded the fact as worthy of honor.

203. Perhaps Novatian (d. ca. A.D. 258), the rigorist schismatic who led the movement named after him, did, but the text is not entirely clear. He links the “gods” with “the men of the synagogue,” but also with angels. See Novatian, *Treatise concerning the Trinity* 20, in *ANF*, 5:631. The fourth-century *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles or Apostolic Constitutions* 2.26, in *ANF*, 7:410, identify the gods of Psalm 82 as the Christian bishop sitting in council with his congregation.

204. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.6.1, in *ANF*, 1:419; Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 1.6, in *ANF*, 2:215. See also Mark D. Nispel, “Christian Deification and the Early *Testimonia*,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 53/3 (August 1999): 297.

205. Annewies van den Hoek, “‘I Said, You Are Gods . . .’: The Significance of Psalm 82 for Some Early Christian Authors,” in *The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World*, ed. L. V. Rutgers et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 219. I thank Paul Owen for kindly bringing this article to my attention. He is, of course, not responsible for my use of it.

206. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 7.10, in *ANF*, 2:539.

207. *Ibid.*, 2.20, in *ANF*, 2:374.

208. *Ibid.*, 4.23, in *ANF*, 2:437.

209. Tertullian, *Against Hermogenes* 5, in *ANF*, 3:480. Latter-day Saints agree, of course. We cannot save ourselves. We require the grace made available by the atonement of Christ. But, by the same token, while humans can receive deification, there is no biblical or patristic warrant for imagining that, say, dogs or canaries can. The innate capacity to receive it must be present.
210. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 7.10, in *ANF*, 2:539.
211. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 3.1, in *ANF*, 2:271.
212. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5 (preface), in *ANF*, 1:526.
213. Athanasius, *Against the Arians* 1.39, in *NPNF*, 4:329.
214. *Ibid.*, 2.70, in *NPNF*, 4:386. Compare Athanasius, *On the Councils of Ariminum and Seleucia* (=De Synodis) 51, *NPNF*, 4:477.
215. Athanasius, *Against the Arians* 3.34, in *NPNF*, 4:413; compare *ibid.*, 1.39, in *NPNF*, 4:329.
216. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word* 54, in *NPNF*, 4:65.
217. Athanasius, *Letters* 60.4 (“To Adelphius”), in *NPNF*, 4:576; the reference is to 2 Peter 1:4. Compare Athanasius, *Letters* 61.2, in *NPNF*, 4:578–79.
218. Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 13, in *ANF*, 3:608.
219. Nispel, “Christian Deification and the Early *Testimonia*,” 295.
220. Cyprian, *Treatise* 12; *Three Books of Testimonies against the Jews* 12.2.6, in *ANF*, 5:518. Nispel, “Christian Deification and the Early *Testimonia*,” 296, argues persuasively that Tertullian and Cyprian are mutually independent sources on this question.
221. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.38.4, in *ANF*, 1:522.
222. Nispel, “Christian Deification and the Early *Testimonia*,” 289.
223. Augustine, *On the Psalms* 50.2, in *NPNF*, 8:178. The reference is to John 1:12.
224. This is the position advocated, for example, by evangelical scholars Paul Owen and Carl Mosser in their review of *How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation*, by Craig L. Blomberg and Stephen E. Robinson, *FARMS Review of Books* 11/2 (1999): 90.
225. A. N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 27.
226. Nispel, “Christian Deification and the Early *Testimonia*,” 290–91; compare 292, 304. Van den Hoek, “‘I Said, You Are Gods . . . ,’” 203–19, also emphasizes the role of Psalm 82 in the development of the Christian idea of human deification, although she concentrates on the later, more Platonized version of the doctrine.

227. John J. Collins, *Daniel: A Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ed. Frank Moore Cross (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 301. Note 212, on the same page, supplies useful references for further reading on ancient belief in the heavenly enthronement of human beings.
228. James D. Tabor, *Things Unutterable: Paul's Ascent to Paradise in Its Greco-Roman, Judaic, and Early Christian Contexts* (New York: University Press of America, 1986), 9.
229. Henri Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, trans. R. Ashley Audra and Cloudesley Brereton (New York: Holt, 1935), 306.
230. Tabor, *Things Unutterable*, 12, emphasis in the original.
231. *Ibid.*, 18–19, emphasis in the original.
232. Neyrey, “I Said: You Are Gods,” 653, emphasis in the original.
233. John knows that we will be like God but does not fully know what that will involve. So it is, too, with the Latter-day Saints: We know that we will be like God, but what that likeness precisely entails “has not yet been revealed.” Notions such as creating and ruling over our own planets and ideas about how spiritual offspring are created typically rest more on speculation than on revelation.
234. For the duty of mortals to praise God, see, as a sample of the many references that could be cited, 2 Samuel 22:50; Ezra 3:10; and Psalm 117:1. On the praises of the divine council, see Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 205.
235. The KJV’s “O ye mighty” fails, again, to represent the real significance of the Hebrew *bānê `ēlīm*. As we have seen at p. 502 above, the New Jerusalem Bible renders that phrase as “sons of God.”
236. As translated by Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 160.
237. Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 149 n. 65, 195–96. This may also be the case in 1 Enoch 104:2, 6. See also Keel, *Goddesses and Trees*, 104; Morgenstern, “The Mythological Background of Psalm 82,” 93 n. 112, 96.
238. See Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 347; Dietrich and Loretz, “*Jahwe und seine Aschera*,” 14, 48, 50–51, 63–65, 66 n. 54, 74, with the accompanying references. For references to the deified dead as stars, see especially pp. 63–65, 66 n. 54, and 73–74. It may be significant that, at p. 141 n. 13, Dietrich and Loretz suggest that the Hebrew *śār*, which the King James Bible renders as “prince[s],” might be translated as “shining one[s].” Morgenstern, “The Mythological Background of Psalm 82,” 98 n. 120, sees in *śār* a title for an angel or some “exalted, divine being.”
239. See Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars*, for a fascinating treatment of the subject.
240. Cited in Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 195.

241. See Keel, *Goddesses and Trees*, 59–120; also Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 53, 290, 294, 314–16, 318, 345, 351, 358, 367, 369, 402; Gordon and Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 266–67, 271, 273.

242. See Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 277, 279, 354, 389, 401.

243. See, e.g., Keel, *Goddesses and Trees*, 103–4; Morgenstern, “The Mythological Background of Psalm 82,” 60–63.

244. On these two tablets, see Keel, *Goddesses and Trees*, 79, 100, 100 n. 19.

245. Compare *1 Enoch* 86–88 for a very negative use of astral imagery.

246. Alert Latter-day Saints will recognize the temple echo here.

247. In addition to what follows, see Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 345, 347.

248. Joshua 10:12–13 should perhaps also be read with this motif in mind. And Qur’ān 37:6–8 may reflect a related notion: “Truly, we have beautified the lower heaven with the adornment of the stars, and as a protection against every rebellious demon. They [i.e., the demons] do not listen to the exalted assembly and they are bombarded from every side.” (All Qur’ānic translations, unless otherwise identified, are mine.) Rudi Paret’s interpretive German translation *Der Koran* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1983), 312, proposes that the rebellious demons of 37:6–8 are bombarded with stars. This suggestion accords well with other passages. Thus, for instance, Qur’ān 21:32 represents God as saying, “We have made the heaven a canopy well guarded.” In Qur’ān 41:12, we are told that God created seven heavens, of which he “beautified the lower heaven with lamps and as a protection.” According to another passage, these “lamps” were made in order to stone the demons [*rujūman lil-shayāṭīn*] (67:5). Paret’s rendition of 67:5 says that this was done “in order to chase them away . . . when curiosity led them to draw too close to that lowest heaven.” Qur’ān 15:16–18 tells us that God guards the zodiacal signs in the heavens “against every accursed demon” [*min kulli shayṭān rajīm*], adding that any demon that manages to gain a hearing is pursued by “a manifest flaming meteor.” It might be noted here that the terms *rujūm* and *rajīm* both derive from a verb whose primary meaning is “to stone (someone),” and only secondarily “to curse (someone).” In Qur’ān 72:8–9, we are allowed to listen to reminiscences of some of the outcasts themselves: “We touched the heaven, and we found it filled with terrible guards and with meteors. We used to sit in various places to listen. But now, whoever listens finds a blazing meteor lying in ambush for him.”

249. On this, see Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 93, 97–99. Cross sees echoes of this story in Psalm 24, explaining the otherwise rather strange image of the “gates” being summoned to “lift up” their

“heads” as an allusion to the members of the divine council, waiting nervously by the gates of their heavenly residence for the return of the warrior-god.

250. Translated by Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 101.

251. *Ibid.*, 102.

252. Furthermore, the council is not immune to fear, at least according to one poetic text: Leviathan is described in Job 41:25 as stirring up or frightening the *’ēlīm*, the divine beings or gods. The notion of conflict within the divine council is very old, and it survives for a very long time. A recent and quite extensive treatment of the theme is Neil Forsyth, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987). Seldom if ever noticed in this context is the seventh-century Qur’ān (38:69–70), where, it will be recalled, Muḥammad is told to declare that he has “no knowledge of the exalted assembly when they argue [*ḡyakhtaṣimūna*].” A. Y. Ali’s harmonizing, apologetic translation tries to eliminate the negative connotations of the verb *ḡyakhtaṣimūna* by rendering the passage containing it as “when they discuss (matters) among themselves.” A. Yusuf Ali, trans., *The Holy Qur’an*, 2nd ed. (n.p.: American Trust Publications, 1977), 1231. But Paret’s “als sie miteinander stritten” (*Der Koran*, 321) and Arthur J. Arberry’s “when they disputed” (A. J. Arberry, trans., *The Koran Interpreted* [New York: Macmillan, 1969], 163) certainly capture much more fully the implication of the Arabic root *kh-ṣ-m*, which gives us such common words as *khuṣūm* (“enemies”) and *khuṣūma* (“argument,” “lawsuit”). Medieval commentators generally recognized the note of strife contained in the verb and connected it with the famous refusal by Iblīs, the *diabolos* or Satan, to prostrate himself before Adam, which is recorded in the verses immediately following (38:71–85). See, for example, al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashf ‘an Ḥaqā’iq al-Tanzīl wa ‘Uyūn al-Aqāwīl fī Wujūh al-Ta’wīl* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma’rifa, n.d.), 3:381–82; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān al-‘Azīm* (Aleppo: Maktabat al-Irshād, 1980), 4:42–43; al-Qurṭubī, *Tafsīr al-Qur’ān: Al-Jāmi‘ li-Aḥkām al-Qur’ān* (Cairo: Dār al-Sha‘b, n.d.), 7:5670.

253. Marti, *Die Psalmen 73–106*, 62 (my translation). Discussing an ancient Babylonian myth, Gordon and Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 43 n. 20, remark, “Note that a god can die. Nor is Kingu a god who was resurrected. We must avoid generalizing on the nature of divinity. Thus, far from being omniscient, the gods of Mesopotamia are often ignorant and error-prone. In the Egyptian pantheon, all the gods except Thoth are illiterate.” We need not admit the Mesopotamian and Egyptian materials as accurate depictions of deity, of course, but it is also important that we not impose upon biblical texts concepts of the divine that really derive from Greek philosophical notions of perfection instead of from the Bible itself. On this issue, see Daniel C. Peterson, “Editor’s Introduction: Fictionary,” *FARMS Review of Books* 10/2 (1998): v–xx. Thus it is insufficient, as a refutation of the proposition that Psalm 82 means

“gods” when it uses the Hebrew term that means “gods,” to point out that these *elohim* don’t accord with the concept of God in Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Anselm, or Thomas Aquinas.

254. Handy, “The Appearance of Pantheon in Judah,” 40–41.

255. See the discussion at Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars*, 123, 135–43, 156. Compare Athenagoras of Athens, *A Plea for the Christians* 24, in *ANF*, 2:141–42.

256. The imagery of Ezekiel 28 may be drawn from a similar story.

257. See Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 26–28; Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 147–54.

258. The divine mountain, discussed in fascinating detail by Richard J. Clifford, *The Cosmic Mountain in Canaan and the Old Testament* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), was associated in common Semitic belief with the waters of life, which emerged from its base, and was thought to be the place where both the gates of heaven and the passage into hell could be found. It was the place of the test or river ordeal at the entrance to Sheol, the world of departed spirits. See also Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 38, 39, 113, for its link with Isaiah 14. The connections of the cosmic mountain to the temple should be obvious, but are, in any event, worthy of another paper.

259. The Dead Sea Scroll fragment 11QMelchizedek (11Q13 [11QMelch]) interprets Psalm 82 in terms of the trial of Satan and the gods/angels who followed him.

260. See Revelation 12:7. Compare Moses 4:1–4; Abraham 3:22–28; and Doctrine and Covenants 29:36. Also *Book of Adam and Eve* 13:1–6; Andreas Caesariensis, “Commentarius in Apocalypsin,” in *Patrologiae Graecae* (hereinafter *PG*), ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris: Migne, 1845), 106:325C; Arethra Caesareae Cappodociae Episcopus, “Commentarius in Apocalypsin,” in *PG*, 106:665A; Cassiodorus, “Complexiones in Apocalypsin,” in *Patrologiae Latinae*, ed. J.P. Migne (Paris: Migne, 1845), 70:1411C; C. Detlef G. Müller, *Die Engellehre der koptischen Kirche* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1959), 9. Stephen D. Ricks and Daniel C. Peterson, “The War in Heaven: A Comparison of Interpretations,” *Tangents III* (Spring 1975): 99–105, summarily sketches the widespread ancient motif of strife within the heavenly council, showing how post-Augustinian commentators tried to explain it away, as well as how the restoration of a true account of it through Joseph Smith has received support from modern scholarship.

261. Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 197.

262. For Josiah’s attempts to eradicate such things, see 2 Kings 23:4–5.

263. The New English Bible, which I am using here, suggests “of the Most High” as an alternate translation. I consider it the preferable rendition.

264. Dahood, *Psalms II*, 268. On p. 271, Father Dahood explains that he takes the Hebrew *kī ‘attāh* (“yourself”) as emphatic.

265. Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 231.

266. Smith, *Early History of God*, 101. Smith's brief discussion here is very useful.
267. Marti, *Die Psalmen 73–106*, 59, argues that this passage is preexilic and that Psalm 96:5 ("all the gods of the nations are idols") represents the purer monotheism of the period following the Jews' Babylonian exile.
268. Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 279. On apparent polytheism in primitive, preexilic, or pre-Deuteronomistic Hebrew faith (despite its tendency toward monolatry), see Smith, *Early History of God*, xix, xxiii, xxvii, 25, 145, 146, 152, 154, 156; Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 2–5, 134, 140, 280, 385; Dever, "Folk Religion in Early Israel," 56; McCarter, "Religious Reforms," 67; Niditch, *Ancient Israelite Religion*, 95–96 (for a useful discussion of the Deuteronomic reform, see pp. 82–88); Gordon and Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 85, 148–49, 180–81, 187–88, 232–33, 291–92. Smith, *Early History of God*, contends (on pp. xxii, xxiii, xxxi, 1, 3, 4, 146, and 156) that the Israelite religion was a subspecies of Canaanite religion and not something utterly different; compare Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God*, 280; also Gordon and Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 51, 82, 87 (cf. the rather arbitrary methods used by biblical law to differentiate Israelites from Canaanites, alluded to at p. 161). I would judge that this view represents the current consensus among scholars. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 143, agrees, in any event. On pp. 190–91, Professor Cross explains why, at a certain point in history, Canaanite religion (to which Hebrew religion is manifestly very closely related) became a threat and had to be opposed by the biblical prophets. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, 153, remarks that, "Though the Patriarchs were unmistakably immigrants from Mesopotamia, with historical traditions as well as religious lore and customary law derived from the northeast, the Hebrew language and poetic style were quite certainly Canaanite in origin."
269. Mullen, "Divine Assembly," 2:215.
270. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, 187 n. 176; compare Morgenstern, "The Mythological Background of Psalm 82," 58 n. 46. See also Isaiah 6:8. Compare the plurals that are so characteristic of the creation narrative in Abraham 3:22–5:21. The Qur'ān invariably uses the first-person plural for the speech of God, which is typically, though not altogether convincingly, dismissed as a "royal we." If El was the original high god, of course, he rather than Yahweh would be the speaker addressing the council.
271. In Greek mythology, of course, Kronos was the father of Zeus. He seems to have been a pre-Hellenic deity, with origins in Asia Minor. Zeus overthrew him and replaced him as the head of the gods. See N. G. L. Hammond and H. H. Scullard, *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 573–74. The analogy between this episode and Yahweh's or Ba'1's displacement of El is difficult to miss. Gordon and Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 19 (compare also 95, 97,

and 107), point out the usefulness of even relatively late Greek materials for the study of the ancient Near East.

272. Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 184, 185.

273. Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit, *Idolatry*, trans. Naomi Goldblum (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 4.

274. As translated in Morgenstern, “The Mythological Background of Psalm 82,” 66–67.

275. Marti, *Die Psalmen 73–106*, 59 (my translation; emphasis in the original). In Jewish tradition, it was the Sadducees who, along with denying the resurrection, denied the existence of angels or other divine beings; see Morgenstern, “The Mythological Background of Psalm 82,” 40 n. 25, 124.

276. In 1QM xiv.16; perhaps also in 1QM xviii.7.

277. 1QH x. 8–9.

278. At, respectively, Daniel 8:25 and Deuteronomy 10:17; compare 1 Timothy 6:15 and Revelation 17:14. See Morgenstern, “The Mythological Background of Psalm 82,” 40–41 n. 25.

279. Mullen, *Assembly of the Gods*, 228 n. 195.

280. *JBC*, 2:446 [63:120].

281. *JBC*, 1:577 [35:26].

282. The latter is the option preferred by Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms I: 1–50* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), 48.

283. See also Numbers 16:22; Malachi 2:10; Romans 8:16; and Hebrews 12:9.

284. It is crucially important to note that Paul was addressing Athenian pagans. Some critics of Latter-day Saint doctrine have claimed that humans are not naturally children of God, but become such only through being born again in Christ. There is, of course, an important sense in which this is true. (See, for example, John 1:12 and Doctrine and Covenants 76:24.) Clement of Alexandria, in his *Instructor* 1:6, in *ANF* 2:215, seems to suggest that it is in baptism that we are adopted and become the children of God, and he connects this explicitly with an exegesis of Psalm 82 (compare his *Exhortation to the Heathen* 12, in *ANF*, 2:205–6). But it is clear from Paul’s comments, as well as from the passages from the Old Testament cited below, that non-Christians are also children of God in some sense. (Clement, again, in his *Exhortation to the Heathen* 11, in *ANF*, 2:202–3, speaks of Adam, the ancestor of all men, as a child of God who disobeyed his Father. Yet few if any Christians other than the Latter-day Saints believe that Adam was baptized, so, even from their point of view, he must have been a child of God in some other sense than the one Clement allowed for in the passage to which we alluded immediately above. The genealogy of Jesus that culminates in Luke 3:38 relates Adam to God in the same way that it relates Jacob to Isaac and Isaac to Abraham—that is, as son to father.) Furthermore, the idea of kinship with God

through covenant is fundamental to the earliest layers of the Old Testament and long antedates the coming of Christ. See Frank Moore Cross, “Kinship and Covenant in Ancient Israel,” in Frank Moore Cross, *From Epic to Canon: History and Literature in Ancient Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1998), 3–21. Professor Cross’s thesis is neatly summarized in Hershel Shanks, “God as Divine Kinsman: What Covenant Meant in Ancient Israel,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* (July/August 1999): 32–33, 60.

285. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 4th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 155; see Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 1:684–85. For the meaning of the term in classical or pagan Greek (which is identical), see any of the numerous editions of the standard Liddell and Scott lexicon. The same term, *genos*, is used in the modern Greek translation of the Bible (Athens: Biblike Hetairia, 1971).

286. Porphyry the Phoenician, *Isagoge*, trans. Edward W. Warren (Toronto: The Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1975), 28–29. Compare Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.1.3.

287. Wright, “The Faith of Israel,” 359.

288. Pindar, *Nemean Odes* 6.1. The phrase is admittedly ambiguous. It could also mean “one is the race of men, another the race of the gods,” and is frequently, if not generally, so rendered. However, I follow the interpretation of the passage advanced by John C. Lawson, *Modern Greek Folklore and Ancient Greek Religion: A Study in Survivals* (New Hyde Park, N.Y.: University Books, 1964), 65 and 65 n. 1, and endorsed by Stylianos V. Spyridakis, “Reflections on Hellenic Theanthropism,” in *TO EAAHNIKON: Studies in Honor of Speros Vryonis Jr.*, ed. John S. Langdon et al. (New Rochelle, N.Y.: Coratzas, 1993), 1:9, 16 n. 2. Dawson W. Turner, *The Odes of Pindar Literally Translated into English Prose* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1852), 371, gives the passage as “Men and the Gods above one race compose.”

289. The Greek text of the plate, in both transcription and reconstruction, is published at Günther Zuntz, *Persephone: Three Essays on Religion and Thought in Magna Graecia* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 358–59.

290. See Hugh J. Schonfield, *The Authentic New Testament* (London: Dobson, 1955), 234. The survey of translations that follows is not meant to be exhaustive or systematic, but I believe it is sufficiently comprehensive to be “statistically significant.” It rests almost entirely on versions of the Bible in my home library.

291. J. B. Phillips, *The New Testament in Modern English* (n.p.: Macmillan, 1958).

292. *Al-Kitāb al-Muqaddas: Al-‘Ahd al-Jadīd* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Muqddis fī al-Sharq al-Awsaṭ, 1990). I have found only one translation obscuring the genetic link between God and humankind that is so clearly the point of this passage, and, perhaps not surprisingly, it is an Arabic version. The contemporary

New Testament called *Kitāb al-Ḥayāt*, which bears the significant subtitle *Tarjama Tafsiṛiyya* (i.e., “An Interpretative Translation”), says that we are God’s *khalīqa*, his “creation” or “creatures.” (*Kitāb al-Ḥayāt: Tarjama Tafsiṛiyya* [Cairo: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1982].) One can certainly understand that translators into Arabic would seek the least disturbing possible interpretation of this passage, since the overwhelmingly dominant religious tradition of the Arabic cultural region affirms, as a central article of its faith, that God “does not beget, nor is he begotten [*lam yalid wa lam yūlad*]” (Qur’ān 112:3)—a proposition that has obvious implications not only for the thesis of this paper but for the central doctrine of Christianity. The fact that even most Arabic Bibles seem, so far as I have been able to determine, to support a genetic relationship between God and humankind is impressive.

293. *Al-Kitāb al-Muqaddas: Al-‘Ahd al-Jadīd li-Rabbīnā Yasū‘ al-Masīḥ* (Beirut: Al-Maṭba‘a al-Kathūlūkiyya, 1950).
294. See *Kitabi Mukaddes: Eski ve Yeni Ahit* (Istanbul: Kitabi Mukaddes Sirketi, 1972).
295. *La Sacra Bibbia* (Rome: Deposito di Sacre Scritture, 1914).
296. See Constantine A. Trypanis, ed., *The Penguin Book of Greek Verse* (London: Penguin, 1971), 308.
297. *Die Gute Nachricht: Das Neue Testament in heutigem Deutsch* (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1971).
298. *Dios Llega al Hombre: El Nuevo Testamento de Nuestro Señor Jesucristo*, 2nd ed. (Asunci—n: Sociedades Bíblicas Unidas, 1970).
299. *Kitāb-i Muqaddas* [1904] (n.p., 1982). The relevant meanings for *nasl* given by F. Steingass, *A Comprehensive Persian-English Dictionary* [1892] (Beirut: Librarie du Liban, 1975), are “offspring, progeny, lineage, pedigree; relationship; stock, race, breed, caste, family.” The term is a borrowing from Arabic, cognate with the Arabic verb *nasala/yansulu* (“to beget”).
300. Luther, *Die gantze Heilige Schrifft Deudsch* [1545]. More recent revisions of the Luther Bible have retained his rendering of this passage. See, for example, *Das Neue Testament und die Psalmen* (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1956).
301. As close inspection might suggest, *Geschlecht* derives from the same Germanic root as the verb *schlagen*, “to strike.” German-English dictionaries typically give, as equivalents of *Geschlecht*, “genus,” “kind,” “species,” “race,” “family,” “stock,” and “generation”—as well as “sex” and “gender,” which are obviously less likely here.
302. Günther Drosdowski, Paul Grebe, et al., *Duden Etymologie: Herkunftswörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* (Mannheim: Bibliographisches Institut, 1963), 215.

303. Konstantin Rösch, trans., *Das Neue Testament* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1946); Paul Riessler and Rupert Storr, trans., *Die Heilige Schrift des alten und des neuen Bundes* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1958).
304. Ulrich Wilckens, *Das Neue Testament* (Hamburg and Zürich: Furche, Benziger, and Theologischer Verlag, 1972).
305. *Die Bibel: Altes und Neues Testament: Einheitsübersetzung* (Freiburg: Herder, 1980).
306. James Moffatt, *The Parallel New Testament* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1935).
307. Certain Hebrew biblical names may reflect such an understanding: Consider, for instance, *Abiel*, the eleventh century B.C. Benjaminite grandfather of King Saul and of Abner, his military commander. *Abiel* means “God is my father,” or “El is my father.” See 1 Samuel 9:1; 14:51. (Another *Abiel*, this one from the tenth century B.C., is mentioned in 1 Chronicles 11:32.) The personal name *Eliab* (“My God is father,” or “El is father”) is also worthy of note. It is attached in the Hebrew Bible to at least six distinct individuals, including the leader of the tribe of Zebulun in the time of Moses (Numbers 1:9; 2:7; 7:24–29; 10:16) and the eldest brother of David the king (1 Samuel 16:6). The common personal name *Abijah*, of course, may represent Yahweh’s assumption of the role of El—as, for that matter, may Deuteronomy 14:1 (where the Hebrew word translated in the KJV as “Lord” is Yahweh). The name *Ahijah* (“My brother is Yahweh” or “Yahweh’s brother”) belongs to eight different characters in the Hebrew Bible, one of them a prophet. (Compare, too, the *Ahiah* or *Ahijah* of Nehemiah 10:26.) It has long been argued in certain scholarly circles that the earliest Semites—i.e., the proto-Hebrews and their relatives—saw themselves as literally akin to their God or gods. See, for example, W. Robertson Smith, *The Religion of the Semites* (1889; reprint, New York: Meridian Library, 1956), 39–61; George A. Barton, “The Kinship of Gods and Men among the Early Semites,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 15 (1896): 168–82.
308. The Qur’ān, which appeared in Arabia in the early seventh century A.D., describes both Christians and Jews as believing themselves to be the “sons” or “children” of God (*abnā’ Allāh*). See Qur’ān 5:18. By contrast, in John 8:42–44, Jesus uses a clearly distinct understanding of covenant kinship (related, it seems likely, to the usage referred to in John 1:12 and Doctrine and Covenants 76:24) to deny their relationship to God because of their sinfulness.
309. Compare Job 21:19; Hosea 1:10; Malachi 2:10; perhaps also Genesis 6:2–4 and Job 38:7. Psalm 68:5 likewise speaks of God as a father to human beings, but probably only in a metaphorical sense.
310. It is worth noting, incidentally, that the word *henos*, in the phrase *ex henos* (“of one”), is simply the grammatically genitive form of the word *hen* (“one”) that, as mentioned at the beginning of this essay, is used to characterize the relationship between the Father and the Son in John 10:30.
311. See Matthew 25:31–46 for the context of the statement.

312. Collins, “Jewish Monotheism and Christian Theology,” 88.
313. See Alan Richardson, *Creeds in the Making: A Short Introduction to the History of Christian Doctrine* (London: SCM, 1990), 86; see also 85–88. Perhaps there is significance in the fact that there are two very widespread legends concerning the reason for Satan’s fall: According to one, he fell because he rebelled against God; according to the other (which is common in Jewish and Islamic lore), he fell because he refused to do homage to Adam. Of course, in the latter case, he was also rebelling against the express will of God.
314. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor* 3.1, in *ANF*, 2:271. For a survey of the semantic range and complexity of the term *theos* among pagan Greeks of the Roman period, see S. R. F. Price, “Gods and Emperors: The Greek Language of the Roman Imperial Cult,” *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 104 (1984): 79–95. Price cautions his readers against imposing on antiquity modern “Christianizing assumptions,” lest they fail to understand the evidence on its own terms. Such a survey needs to be done for ancient Jews and Christians, as well, and with the same caution in mind.
315. See *Life of Adam and Eve* 13, in Charlesworth, *OTP*, 2:262. The same notion appears in the Qur’ān, where Satan refuses to worship. See Qur’ān 2:30–34; 7:11–22; 15:26–35; 17:61–62; 18:51; 20:120; and 38:75–86.
316. Peter, *Clementine Homilies* 16:16, in *ANF*, 8:316. The term god is not univocal even in the scriptures. For a particularly striking example of this, where it is applied to a mortal man, see Exodus 4:16 and 7:1. See also the note on Psalm 45:6 at NIV, 831. *The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* 2.26 (as translated in *ANF*, 7:410) says of the fourth-century Christian bishop that “he is, next after God, your earthly god, who has a right to be honored by you.”
317. I thank Barry Bickmore for reminding me of this passage. It is discussed in his very interesting book, *The Restoration of the Ancient Church: Joseph Smith and Early Christianity* (Ben Lomond, Calif.: The Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research, 1999).
318. Origen, *Against Celsus* 8.4, in *ANF*, 4:641.
319. *Ibid.*, 8.3, in *ANF*, 4:640.
320. *Ibid.*, 8.5, in *ANF*, 4:641.
321. Hurtado, “First-Century Jewish Monotheism,” 354. Compare Wright, “The Faith of Israel,” 361–62.
322. Hurtado, “First-Century Jewish Monotheism,” 354–55.
323. *Ibid.*, 356. (I cannot resist remarking the structural similarity of Professor Hurtado’s argument to that advanced in Peterson and Ricks, *Offenders for a Word*.) Hurtado cites Orthodox and Catholic veneration of Mary as an example of a practice that might trouble Protestants like himself, but declares

that Protestant historians, as historians, must nonetheless accept such veneration as a genuine manifestation of monotheism. His suggestion of a more inductive approach may actually bring those who accept it to a more biblical way of thinking: "I have repeatedly pointed out," wrote W. F. Albright, "that the Hebrew Bible is the greatest existing monument of empirical logic and that this logic is more exact than formal logic in some important respects. After all, it is based on the cumulative experience of men, and not on postulates or presuppositions which may or may not be correct, as is inevitably true of most postulational reasoning outside of mathematics and the exact sciences." Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, 177.

324. See Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 55–124, in *ANF*, 1:222.

325. Nispel, "Christian Deification and the Early *Testimonia*," 290–91.

326. As at *ibid.*, 292, 301–3.

327. For a good discussion of this subject, see David L. Paulsen, "Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity: Origen and Augustine as Reluctant Witnesses," *Harvard Theological Review* 83/2 (1990): 105–16; David L. Paulsen, "The Doctrine of Divine Embodiment: Restoration, Judeo-Christian, and Philosophical Perspectives," *BYU Studies* 35/4 (1995–96): 6–94.

328. See, for example, the discussion of Van den Hoek, " 'I said, You Are Gods . . . ,' " 203–19, which focuses mostly on the later, Platonized version of the doctrine of human deification and notes the gulf that the Platonized Fathers insisted on retaining between God and humankind.

329. *Ibid.*, 208, 209.

330. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 124, in *ANF*, 1:262.

331. 4Q511 frg. 10, line 11, as given in García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated*, 373.

332. Perhaps Novatian, *Treatise concerning the Trinity* 20, in *ANF*, 5:631, had something analogous in mind.