

Christology and Theosis in the Revelations and Teachings of Joseph Smith

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In early 1842 Joseph Smith privately taught that righteous Saints would be saviors. The radical teaching appears in a booklet kept by the apostle Wilford Woodruff in Nauvoo, Illinois. On the book's cover, Woodruff scrawled the title "Book of Revelations," and in its pages he included several of Smith's revelations along with notes from some of Smith's sermons. An entry dated 30 January (1842) reads,

Joseph the Seer taught the following principles that the God & father of our Lord Jesus Christ was once the same as the Son or Holy Ghost but having redeemed a world became the eternal God of that world he had a son Jesus Christ who redeemed this earth the same as his father had a world which made them equal & the Holy Ghost would do the same in turn & so would all the Saints who inherited a Celestial glory so their would be Gods many & Lords many.¹

This entry confirms that over two years before Smith publicly revealed the “great secret” of God’s history in the King Follett discourse, he was already teaching that God the Father was once mortal and had served as the savior of a previous world. This singular account suggests that Smith not only taught that humans held the potential to become like the Father and the Son but further that the process of deification demanded that they redeem a world as future saviors.

This final teaching—that exalted humans must literally be saviors of worlds—does not appear in the extant records of Smith’s public discourses, including the famous King Follett discourse, which raises questions about its place in his thought. Was Smith teaching it as a revealed truth, or was he speculating on the possible destinies of exalted humans? While a historical accounting cannot answer that question in full, it can shed light on the sources of this and related teachings and illuminate their possible meanings. In this paper we track how Smith’s revelations seeded concepts that allowed for the development of a robust and radical version of the teaching of theosis—or the process of becoming divine—and trace the flowering of that version in Smith’s later teachings. When viewed in light of this history, Smith’s January 1842 statements appear less as the beginnings of a late theological change of course and more as the beginnings of an intellectual culmination of prior revelations about Christ and humanity.

Historians have sometimes assumed that Smith’s later teachings, particularly those on the nature of God and humans, represent a stark departure from the theology found in his earliest translations and revelations.² While Smith’s teachings on the history and destiny of Gods and humans developed across time, clear christological and anthropological continuities endured from his early 1830s revelations to his 1840s teachings. Indeed, the 1830s revelations shaped the content of the 1840s teachings. In other words, Smith’s Nauvoo pronouncements on the nature of God and his children reflect the maturation of his own views about his earlier revelations. To be sure,

Smith's teachings on theosis upended traditional Christian thought; while the unorthodox Socinians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries taught that Christ was more human than divine, the heterodox Smith taught that humans were eternal beings with divine destinies. However, his teachings were rooted in earlier revelations that upheld Christ as the model for how the faithful could obtain godhood. Smith's revelations simultaneously affirmed Christ's role as savior, exemplar, and prototype of salvation while also advancing the idea that humans, as God's children, have the potential to become like Christ.

The Revelatory Foundation of Theosis

The ideas that Smith developed in the 1840s can be found in the revelations he received a decade earlier. In this first section, we look at five revelatory documents that laid the conceptual foundation for the Latter-day Saint version of theosis that began to emerge in the last years of Smith's life. These revelations included statements that challenged the assumption of an ontological—which refers to the nature of being—difference between God, Christ, and humans and explicitly taught that humans could follow the example of Jesus to obtain a divinity and glory that matches that of the Father.

One of Smith's first revelatory writings to introduce these concepts was his June 1830 expansion of Genesis—a vision of Moses that contextualized the creation account. As other scholars have noted, the Book of Moses Christianized Genesis, but it also rejected a core tenet of creedal Christianity—that an unbridgeable ontological distinction separated the Father from his children.³ In the account, God meets with Moses face to face and reveals that Moses was made in the image of the “only begotten.” After this theophany, Moses endures a vision of a different sort. Satan appears and tempts him and calls him a “Son of man,” which Moses boldly refutes, declaring that he is “a Son of God in the similitude of his only begotten.”⁴ The phrases “son of man,” “Son of man,” and “Son of Man” appear in the Old and New

Testaments, where their referents include a human being, a prophetic and a messianic figure, and Christ himself. While the initial use of the title in the Book of Moses functions as it often does in the Old Testament—to set apart humans from God—subsequent uses, both in the Book of Moses and in Smith’s revelations and teachings, align more closely with the New Testament passages in which the phrase refers to Christ.⁵ Moreover, the account of Moses’s temptation, in its presentation as ancient, *anticipates* Christ’s own temptation; at the same time, in its late introduction to nineteenth-century readers, the account narratively *imitates* Christ’s temptation. At once, then, the passage rejects Satan’s insistence on an ontological distinction between God and man—positing instead an ontological correspondence of the same—while also introducing the idea of a prophetic *Imitatio Christi*, wherein readers discover a familiar prophetic figure who imitates or emulates Christ. In these ways, the account also foreshadows the text’s later distinctive use of the phrase “Son of Man.”

In the second century some Christian commentators used this descriptor to refine the belief in Christ as both human and divine. For example, Irenaeus referred to passages describing Christ as “the Son of Man” to refute claims that Christ did not take on human flesh and suffer in that flesh.⁶ Irenaeus, as well as later Christian commentators such as Saint Augustine, also used the phrase “Son of Man” to make a case for what became known as theosis (that is, deification), insisting that the Son of God became the Son of Man so that believers might partake of his grace. In voicing this belief—which these thinkers asserted rather than fully articulated—they often took care to insist that human participation in the divine came through grace alone and not by nature. In the centuries since Augustine’s formulation, Christian theologians who adopted and advanced versions of a belief in theosis remained committed to the idea that ontological difference separates God from humans and that divinization comes only through grace.⁷

Smith’s Genesis expansion refuted this reading, in part by overturning some of the traditional understandings of “Son of Man.” One

passage in particular revealed that “in the language of Adam, Man of Holiness is [God’s name], and the name of his Only Begotten is the Son of Man, even Jesus Christ, a righteous Judge, who shall come in the meridian of time.”⁸ While conveying messianic content that echoed earlier Christian interpretations, the text also indicated that the “Son of Man” refers to Christ and that “Man” refers to God. In teaching that Christ was the son of an exalted “Man,” this remarkable formulation suggested that humankind shared in the divine nature. In an apparent rejection of the ontological distinction between God and humans, this passage anticipated the emergence of unique teachings about God’s nature and history and a radical version of Christian theosis.

This Book of Moses passage referred to the language of Adam to redefine the terms that described the human and the divine and to reframe the relationship between God and his children. A prior passage had described Adam’s effort to maintain a language “which was pure & undefiled.”⁹ The connection between a pure language and its power to reveal the ontological affinities between Gods and humans continued to intrigue Smith. Sometime around March 1832, he received “A Sample of pure Language” that designated the name of God as “Awmen,” and defined Awmen as “the being which made all things.” It then labeled the name of the Son of God as “Son Awmen,” which it defined as “the greatest of all the parts of Awmen.” It also termed men as “Sons Awmen” and defined it as “the human family the children of men the greatest parts of Awmen Sons.”¹⁰ Whatever else this text meant, the “Sample of pure Language” joined the Book of Moses in positing that humans shared in the same substance as the Son and the Father.

At the beginning and the end of 1832, Smith dictated two other revelatory documents, both of which aligned postmortal glory with becoming like God. The first was the report of a shared vision experienced by Smith and Sidney Rigdon in February 1832. The righteous inheritors of those “whose bodies are celestial” would be “priests and kings, who have received of his [the Father’s] fulness, and of his glory

. . . wherefore," the passage summarized, "as it is written, they are gods, even the sons of god."¹¹ A later section explained that those who "received of his fulness and of his grace" become "equal in power and in might and in dominion."¹² While the vision of Moses and the pure language document had introduced the idea that Gods and humans were the same kinds of beings and shared the same substance, the vision of Smith seemed to suggest that humans could achieve the same power and glory as God.

A December 1832 revelation affirmed this point. The revelation built on Smith's vision in pointing toward a salvation beyond receiving "celestial bodies"; it explained that those bodies would inhabit a celestial glory or kingdom.¹³ Obtaining the Father's fullness appeared to include the inheritance of celestial bodies, powers, and worlds. The revelation reiterated this point in a prophetic passage that described the Saints at Christ's Second Coming. It explained that they would "be filled with his glory and receive their inheritance and be made equal with him."¹⁴ Smith's revelations began to suggest that being made equal with the Son was tantamount to being made equal with the Father. This exalting equation rested in the divine calculus of the Godhead. In a May 1833 revelation Christ declared, "I am in the fathe[r] and the father in me and the fathe[r] and I are one the father because he gave me of his fulness."¹⁵

The May revelation unveiled the origins and progression of Christ, as well as the origins and possibilities of his followers. In other words, it outlined how Christ received the fullness from the Father, and how his followers could do the same. Nicholas J. Frederick suggests that this revelation "stands as Smith's first and greatest statement on the divine potential of humankind, providing a scriptural justification for the Mormon idea that humanity not only shares its origins with God, but that they can become Gods themselves."¹⁶ While not the first statement on the possibility of human deification, the revelation contains the most explicit description of the process by which believers could, in imitation of Christ, become like God.

As Frederick explains, the revelation radically revised the first chapter of the Gospel of John and with it much of traditional Christian thought.¹⁷ The revision began rather innocuously: "I saw his glory that he was in the begining before the world was therefore in the beg[inning] the word was for he was the word even the messenger of salvation the light and the redeemer of the world the spirit of truth, who came into the world."¹⁸ After an unproblematic opening, in which John affirms Christ's magnificent premortal status, he then observes that in mortality Jesus "received not of the fulness at first . . . but continued from grace to grace until he received a fulness and thus he was called the son of God because he received not of the fulness at first."¹⁹ This passage "inverts" the Gospel of John's use of "Son of God," using it not to describe Jesus as God, but rather to show his path toward godhood.²⁰ The Book of Moses's use of the phrase "Son of Man" pointed toward the humanity of both Son and Father, and the revelation's use of the phrase "Son of God" outlined Jesus's movement toward the Father's fullness. Terry Givens suggests that this passage "might be construed as indicating—in contradistinction to the council of Chalcedon's pronouncement that Jesus was fully human and fully divine at birth, and 'perfect in his divinity'—a process of total divinization, or Christ's receipt of the Father's fullness, finally achieved through the experience of mortality."²¹ These passages countered the prevailing Christian view, not by suggesting that Christ had not always been divine but in describing the process by which a divine being progressed from grace to grace until he received a fullness.

Smith's revelation continued where the portion of John's record finished, moving from a description of the progress of Christ to a discussion of the potential of his followers. Taking the narrative lead, the Lord himself spoke directly to his audience: "I give unto you these sayings that you may understand and know how to worship and know what you worship that you may come unto the fathe[r] in my name and in due time receive of his fulness for if you keep my commandments you shall receive of his fulness and be glor[i]fied in me

as I am glor[i]fied in the father, therefore I say <unto> you you shall receive grace for grace.”²² God’s children could achieve full divinity by obeying the commandments of Christ, an apparent act of grace that garnered further grace and allowed individuals to progress toward a fullness. In the May 1833 revelation, the Lord revealed a record about himself—“what you worship”—for the purpose of encouraging believers in the revelations to follow his example—“how to worship.” In this robust *Imitatio Christi*, the Saints could go on to obtain all that Christ and the Father have.

The revelation seemed to anticipate the audience’s question of how they, as mere mortals, could emulate their Savior and become “partakers of the glory of the same.” Divulging another heterodox mystery, the Lord explained that his audience and the rest of humanity “were also in the begining with the fathe[r].”²³ This statement, which exploded traditional Christianity’s core assumption that Creator existed separate and apart from his creation, drew together the human and the divine. The idea that humans had premortally existed with Christ gave credence to the teaching that they could become like him. This teaching aligned with the emphasis placed on mortality’s crucial role in Christ’s progress and on the related teaching that bodies were essential to salvation. The 1832 revelations on salvation had described bodies as a defining characteristic of salvation.²⁴ The May 1833 revelation gave further insight into the importance of bodies in teaching that “the Elements are eternal and spirit and element inseperably connected receiveth a fulness of Joy.”²⁵ In this period, Smith does not appear to have grasped that the exalting connection between spirit and matter had implications for God’s embodiment. Even still, the revelation planted the idea that something about humans and the materials that made up their bodies had existed with Christ in a premortal state, which placed them in a position to fulfill the direction to emulate Christ and obtain the Father’s fullness.

These revelations laid a conceptual foundation for the development of a new kind of Christian theosis, but that development was not

inevitable or automatic. While the ideas, like crude metals, had been made available, they had yet to be forged into useful theological tools. Some forging occurred within months of the May revelation and in the context of Church members' difficulties in Missouri. Whereas most members had little time to consider the exalting power of their bodies while also enduring the effects of mob violence, William W. Phelps managed to do both. Writing to Smith and other Church leaders in Kirtland in December 1833, he asked for guidance "in the midst of [his] solitude" and the Missouri members' "affliction." Those afflictions colored Phelps's reading of Smith's revelations. In his letter to Smith, he wrote that "*the sons of God only* are made equal with Jesus Chrif [Christ] *having overcome*, by righteousness."²⁶ In attempting to reconcile a revealed promise of divine reward and his harsh temporal reality, Phelps conceptualized suffering as a necessary step toward equality with Christ. With a few exceptions, Missouri persecution and Kirtland opposition appear to have hindered Smith, Phelps, and other Church members from producing much else in terms of direct commentary on these revelations.²⁷ In the long term, however, persecution became a powerful forge for the refinement of radical ideas about God and his children.²⁸

Imprisoned *Imitatio Christi*: 1838–1839

While Smith did not fully cultivate the theological seeds of theosis until the Illinois era, his trials in Missouri prepared him for the work. Other sources of opposition in the late 1830s encouraged the articulation of a Latter-day Saint understanding of theosis. In *A Voice of Warning* (1837), Parley P. Pratt included the revealed teaching that the Saints would "be made equal with" Christ, which drew a critical response from an observant and scandalized Protestant. Instead of backing away from the teaching, Pratt proceeded to defend and declare his belief in theosis.²⁹ Smith's own interactions with hostile Missourians proved to be an even more effective, if also more painful and less obvious, incubator for these ideas. His imprisonment in the

winter of 1838–39 placed him in a space wherein he gained greater insight into the process of becoming like Christ and developed a new mode of teaching the Saints about salvation and exaltation. As Smith sought God from the depths of the human condition, he learned important truths about what it meant to be like Christ.

While issuing his lament from an earthly prison, Smith gained new insight into what Phelps had observed in his December 1833 letter: suffering had exalting power. Smith's contemplation of the Saints' suffering, which added to his own, led him to ask, "O God where art thou?" (Doctrine and Covenants 121:1). This recalled the language of the cross, where the Son asked the Father, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). No immediate answer was forthcoming for Jesus; the same was true for Smith. In the 1839 letter to the Saints that contained his plea, the Lord does not immediately reply. Instead, Smith's mundane comments on public perception, personal correspondence, and suffering Saints precede his report of the Lord's response. Only in Orson Pratt's truncated version, which he prepared for inclusion in a later edition of the Doctrine and Covenants, does the Lord instantly respond to Smith's Christlike petition (see Doctrine and Covenants 121:1–7). By removing portions of the text and thereby fusing together question and answer, Pratt's canonized account highlights but also simplifies the dialogue with the divine.³⁰ Smith had to wait for the Lord to speak these comforting words: "My son pease be unto thy soul thine advirsity and thy afflictions shall be but a small moment and then if thou indure it well God shall exalts the[e] on high."³¹ The original letter's quotidian interlude, more than Pratt's canon-making ellipses, underscores the Lord's promise that exaltation would follow endurance. This teaching corresponded with Phelps's earlier equation and with the revealed teaching about receiving "grace for grace."

Smith's isolation gave him a deeper understanding of the expansive nature of salvation that had been introduced in his revelations. There was something poetic about this development; the telestial prison setting encouraged a prophet to develop celestial ideas. In a

portion of the letter that Pratt later edited out, Smith wrote, "Thy mind O Man, if thou wilt lead a soul unto salvation must stretch [stretch] as high as the utmost Heavens, and sink sear[c]h in to and contemplate the loest [lowest] consideatins [considerations] of the darkest abyss, and Expand upon the broad considerations of Eternal Expanxe, he must commune with God."³² Pratt's redactions uncomplicated the processes of salvation and revelation, and it was those very processes that had power to activate the promises in Smith's earlier revelations. In one of those revelations the Lord explained that "he that assended up on high, as also he, decended below all things; in that he comprehended all things, that he might be in all, and through all things; the light of truth."³³ In his moment of need, Christ himself had wondered where God had gone and in that supreme condescension he came to comprehend all things. In prison, Smith learned that growing from grace to grace involved Christlike suffering and learning. In these ways, Smith's prison experience was an *Imitatio Christi* in microcosm.

In another March 1839 letter that he wrote two days after the first, Smith continued to record the Lord's response to his plea, which included this question: "The Son of Man hath descended below them all art thou greater than he?"³⁴ On the surface, the interrogation put Smith in his place, but in light of his prior revelations, including the description of "Son of Man" in Moses, the question might be read as an instance of the Lord instructing Smith on how he could become like him.

Smith emerged from prison with an enhanced prophetic confidence born from a new closeness to God. This was evident in the content of his teachings, which Smith foreshadowed in more than one of his prison letters. In a 15 March letter to Presendia Buell, who had visited the Prophet earlier that day, Smith expressed his desire to "once more lift my voice in the midst of the Saints," noting "I never have had opportunity to give them the plan that God has revealed to me." Smith proceeded to suggest that his understanding of the things of God and his desire to explain them to the Saints had developed in

relationship to his trials. “[Our trouble],” he noted, “will only give us that knowledge to understand the minds of the Ancients for my part I think I never could have felt as I now do if I had not suffered the wrongs that I have suffered.”³⁵ Suffering, Smith had learned, cultivated the knowledge needed to ascend toward God.

In his 20 March letter to the Church, Smith forecast a flood of revelation. He noted that while some Saints had “tasted a little” of the “mistres [mysteries]” of God, many more “of them are to be pored down” upon the faithful. He promised the persecuted Saints that if they endured, they would receive knowledge “that has not been revealed since the world was untill now.” This included an answer to the question of “whither there be one god or many god’s,” and information regarding “all thrones dominions principalities and powers” and the times and revolutions of the planets.³⁶ The statements in Smith’s March 1840 letters highlight the forging power of his imprisonment and anticipated the theological developments in Illinois.³⁷

Smith’s new prophetic confidence was also evident in the method of his teaching, both in terms of how and whom he taught. In Nauvoo he dictated relatively few revelations in the voice of the Lord; he had developed a prophetic voice that no longer depended on the familiar form of his prior revelations. Instead, Smith conveyed core teachings about God, Christ, and humanity in numerous private meetings and, later, in public discourses. The records of those meetings and discourses indicate that Latter-day Saint audiences received these instructions as revealed truth. Smith first shared those instructions among intimate friends. Sharing close quarters with fellow sufferers seems to have conditioned him to reveal new teachings in secluded settings with trusted associates before later gaining the confidence to share those same teachings in public.

So when guards allowed Smith to escape from Missouri in spring 1839, he was liberated in two ways; it gave him freedom over his body, and it also gave him a kind of intellectual freedom to cultivate the theological seeds contained in his earlier revelations. Intellectual freedom followed from bodily freedom, as Smith’s escape provided him

opportunities to develop ideas in both private and public settings. Before his imprisonment, the practicalities of church organization, the logistics of ecclesiastical governance, and the enervating influence of persecution had militated against theological development. Such challenges followed Smith to Illinois, but he had become accustomed to them. In 1842 he wrote that “deep water is what I am wont to swim in, it all has become a second nature to me.”³⁸ The physical lows of Smith’s confinement spurred and shaped the spiritual highs of his postconfinement life.

Saints as Saviors: 1839–1841

Only months after his escape to Illinois, Smith began to privately instruct his most trusted friends and Church leaders. In June and July of 1839 he met with the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles to help them prepare for their imminent mission to Europe. Smith taught them about the “keys of the kingdom of God,” which included the first principles of the gospel, such as faith and repentance, but also the detection of false spirits and making one’s calling and election sure. He revealed that they could use a handshake to distinguish between the devil and a divine messenger, whether a disembodied “just man made perfect” or an embodied angel of God.³⁹ He also explained that the second comforter spoken of in John 14 “is no more or less than the *Lord Jesus Christ* himself” and clarified that those who make their calling and election sure would be taught by him “face to face,” and he would introduce them to the Father.⁴⁰ These instructions built on Smith’s earlier scriptural productions about spirits, salvation, and Moses’s vision.⁴¹ Wilford Woodruff later copied his notes of these and other discourses into his “Book of Revelations,” a title that demonstrates how Woodruff received Smith’s instructions.⁴²

In the same way that early Saints had made copies of Smith’s revelations, they made copies of his later discourses. Willard Richards, who was preaching in England at the time, obtained access to notes of Smith’s sermons and recorded them in his “Pocket Companion.”

In one such discourse, Smith again taught about discerning spirits, as well as the relationship between the priesthood and “the coming of the Son of Man.”⁴³ He described the priesthood as eternal and also asserted that “the Spirit of Man is not a created being; it existed from Eternity. . . . Any thing created cannot be Eternal & earth, water &c—all these had their existence in an elementary state from Eternity.”⁴⁴ This radical rejection of creation *ex nihilo* (out of nothing) and provocative assertion of humankind’s coeternal status with God had been planted in Smith’s May 1833 revelation. Now, six years later and in light of the Saints’ experiences in Missouri and Smith’s time in prison, the ideas began to flower in Smith’s private discourses. While introducing these ideas to Church leaders, he nonetheless urged them “to preach among the first principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ.”⁴⁵ Smith wanted the apostles to teach basic principles for practical proselytizing purposes, but perhaps he also wanted to be allowed to develop the ideas more fully before reading about them in the publications of his followers.

And yet, not long after Smith had revealed the idea of the soul’s eternal existence among his closest followers in private, he was ready to test the idea in public. In February 1840, while pursuing redress for Missouri wrongs in the nation’s capital, he gave a public sermon to correct false reports about the Saints’ beliefs. He affirmed core Christian tenets, including belief in a God with “all the attributes ascribed to him by Christians of all denominations,” and in “nothing but what the Bible teaches,” including the “fall of man” and redemption through Christ.⁴⁶ But Smith also went beyond these widely held views and “entered into some details” about original sin and predestination, which he rejected. While these beliefs were still debated, many American Protestants had also set aside Calvinist creeds for Arminian faith. Smith then moved on to more radical teachings. In discussing the nature of God, he affirmed the traditional belief that “God is Eternal” and then added “that the *Soul* is Eternal.” Smith did not discuss this topic at length, but “entered into some Explanations,” which newspaperman Matthew Davis “could not perfectly comprehend.”⁴⁷ In

the same discourse Smith dismissed rumors that he had pretended to “be a Saviour” and confessed that “he was but a man.”⁴⁸ While Smith described himself as a *man* to dismiss the notion that he was a *savior*, both terms had multiple valences among the Latter-day Saints. In 1840 Smith began to publicize teachings that closed the gap between the human and the divine.

He continued to teach Church leaders about the eternal nature of things during his trip to the eastern United States. In his autobiography, Parley Pratt wrote that while in Philadelphia Smith introduced him to “the idea of eternal family organization.”⁴⁹ Smith also preached with Parley’s brother Orson in New Jersey and may have taught him newer principles related to the nature of God, his creation, and the salvation of his children.⁵⁰ Regardless, within months of these interactions, both Pratts began to publish pamphlets that expanded on these topics. As noted above, a few years earlier Parley had articulated a version of theosis based on Smith’s December 1832 revelation.⁵¹ For a time Parley and his brother Orson took the initiative in introducing Smith’s teachings on the topic to the world.

In a piece Parley published while in New York, he asserted that “matter and spirit are the two great principles of existence.” Drawing on Smith’s revelations and teachings, which had raised base matter to the level of sacred spirit, Parley emphasized the “physical nature” of Christ’s body “both before and after he arose from the dead.”⁵² While explaining that Christ rose with a glorified body, Parley insisted that it was the same body he had in life. His focus on Christ’s physical body highlighted the similarities between his existence and human existence. Parley extended this discussion to the material earth, which also awaited purification and glorification. The glorified earth, he explained, would become the inhabitation of “Jesus and the saints.”⁵³ In these phrases, Parley flattened out existence and charted a similar destiny for all existing things. In doing so, he relied on Smith’s revelations and teachings, but while Smith focused on the nature of the human and the divine in his public teachings during this period,

Parley continued to publicly consider what those teachings meant for human potential.

Parley continued to write about Christ's body in England. "The Father and Son are in the express *image* of each other," he wrote, "and both have '*hands, feet, eyes, ears, nose, and mouth.*' . . . And man is created in their *image*, or *likeness.*" Parley held "that the Son has flesh and bones, and that the father is a spirit," while adding that "a personage of spirit has its organized formation, its body and parts . . . although not composed of such gross materials as flesh and bones."⁵⁴ Whether taken from Smith's prior revelations, his later private instructions, or both, the ideas in Parley's writings underscored the similarities between Father and Son, and between Son and Saints, in terms of both their essential nature and their ultimate destination.

Orson also published on related ideas while preaching in the British Isles. In the first published account of Smith's early encounters with the divine, Orson outlined the Saints' most definitive beliefs. He first addressed basic teachings, which aligned with traditional Christian tenets, before turning to transgressive ideas. Near the conclusion of his pamphlet, Orson voiced the belief in continuing revelation and described the end result of ongoing instruction. "God will continue to give revelations," he asserted, "until the saints are guided unto all truth," and when they arrive "in their immortal and perfect state" and "are made perfect in one, and become like their Savior, then they will be in possession of all knowledge, wisdom, and intelligence: then all things will be theirs."⁵⁵ Orson's statement echoed a passage in Smith's December 1832 revelation and built on his brother's 1838 defense of the same. In equating learning with godhood, Orson also made explicit what had been implicit in Smith's prison teachings.

While the Pratt brothers began to teach the world that becoming like Christ involved acquiring divine knowledge and earthly inheritance, Smith introduced the Nauvoo Saints to a practice with power to make them "saviours . . . on mount Zion" (Obadiah 1:21).⁵⁶ In August 1840 he taught living members that they could be baptized on behalf of their kindred dead. Smith's willingness to teach baptism

for the dead to the general membership without first explaining it to the Church leadership attests to a deepening confidence in his new revelatory mode. When Smith wrote the Twelve about the subject months later, he warned that he could not “in this letter give you all the information you may desire on the subject.”⁵⁷ Perhaps the introduction of the teaching served to remind the Twelve, including the Pratt brothers, that the Lord revealed his truths through Smith.

The unexpected and exciting new practice had ties to Smith’s teachings on embodiment, matter and spirit, and the nature of God and his creation. The same month in which Smith introduced baptism for the dead, he preached on “the Eternal Duration of matter.”⁵⁸ About six months later, and just a few weeks after writing to the Twelve about the new practice, Smith again discussed the eternal nature of matter at the organization of a “school of instruction.” In doing so, he affirmed that God had formed the earth out of existing materials and stated that “the elements are eternal,” a direct quote from his May 1833 revelation. As indicated in that revelation, teachings on the nature of matter impinged on teachings about the nature of the human soul. Echoing what he had said in Washington, Smith taught that “Spirits are eternal.” While these ideas were present in Smith’s earlier revelations, his later cultivation of them brought into the open the idea that humans were like Gods. It also indicated that Gods were like humans; Smith asserted that “there is no other God in heaven but that who has flesh and bones.”⁵⁹ Though his revelations pointed in this direction, and while Parley had been moving toward the same conclusion, this seems to have been the first time that Smith explicitly taught that God had a body.⁶⁰ In these teachings, Smith developed ideas that had lain mostly dormant in his revelations. In making it clear that human souls are eternal and that Christ and his Son are embodied, he cast aside the Creator/created divide at the center of Christian thought.

Having set aside a core Christian teaching, Smith proceeded to add a heretical corollary. He taught that God the Father, like his Son, had a history. Elucidating John 5:26, Smith stated that “God

the father took life unto himself precisely as Jesus did." Like Father, like Son, Smith taught. In this statement, Smith made an unknowable known; he made shape and temporality essential to, rather than departures from, godliness. According to this theology, embodiment was not the formation of a hapless creature, but a step in an eternal soul's bid to become like God. Continuing his apparent explication of the May 1833 revelation, Smith stated that "we came to this earth that we might have a body," and building on his earlier teachings to the Twelve, explained that "all beings who have bodies have power over those who have not." Following the implications of his earlier revelations, Smith imbued bodily existence with ultimate significance. In pitting embodied beings against a disembodied devil, he was also aligning humans with God. As in Parley's writings, the value Smith placed on matter included both bodies and the earth they inhabited, which, he explained, "will be rolled back into the presence of God and crowned with Celestial Glory."⁶¹ This teaching echoed his December 1832 revelation.⁶² While prior teachings had suggested that humans could become like the Son, these statements implied that to become like the Son was to become like the Father, while also revealing that the Father was a being like the Son, a being that existed in both space and time.

All of this related to Smith's teaching on baptism for the dead, which affirmed the value of the physical body, as well as the spaces those bodies inhabited. On 19 January 1841, in one of the few formal revelations that Smith received in Nauvoo, the Lord urged the Saints to build a temple so they "may be baptized for those who are dead."⁶³ While the body could be imprisoned, as Smith had learned, it also had power to perform sacred acts in sacred spaces to liberate captive spirits. In this way, the Saints could, in imitation of Christ and God, use their bodies to become "saviours . . . on mount Zion."⁶⁴ The teaching suggested that because disembodied spirits were fundamentally unlike embodied Gods, they needed the assistance of embodied Saints to move toward an exalted destination. During an October 1841 conference, while speaking on the topic at the request "of some

of the Twelve,” many of whom had returned from the British Isles, Smith “presented ‘Baptism for the Dead’ as the only way that men can appear as saviors on mount Zion.” He clarified that it was “not men that saved” the dead, but “by actively engaging in rites of salvation substitutionally,” he explained, the living “became instrumental in bring[ing] multitudes of their kin into the kingdom of God.”⁶⁵ Throughout Smith’s ministry, he remained committed to the teaching at the heart of his salvation revelations—that Christ was the singular Savior of the human family—even as he gradually introduced the doctrine that Christ saved beings who had the power to perform feats that would make them like him.

As Smith introduced this teaching and related practices to the general Church audience, his critics took note of what they viewed as mounting heresies. In an 1841 publication, “anti-Mormon” editor Thomas C. Sharp cited Parley Pratt’s earlier defense of the revealed statement that “the saints shall be made equal with Christ.” Perhaps knowing of Parley’s and Orson’s other writings on the topic, along with something of the content of Smith’s recent sermons, Sharp asserted that the Saints “believe that they will have power to create worlds, and that those worlds will transgress the law given, consequently they will become saviors to those worlds, and redeem them; never, until this is accomplished,” Sharp reported, “will their glory be complete; and then there will be ‘Lords many, and Gods many.’”⁶⁶ Despite Sharp’s stinging bias, records indicate that he actually had a pulse on radical developments in Latter-day Saint thought.

Making Gods: 1842–1844

In late January 1842, Smith met with a small group inside his home in Nauvoo and instructed them on the histories of Gods and the future of humankind. Just over a month before, in mid-December, he had held a similar meeting. According to Woodruff’s record of that gathering, Smith instructed them that if “we kept the commandments of God we Should bring forth fruit & be the friends of God &

know what our lord did & he would reveal his secrets unto us.”⁶⁷ A few weeks later, Smith made good on his promise. On that occasion, he taught that what the “lord did” on this earth was what God the Father had done on another earth. In teaching this, Smith put flesh on the theological bones he had unveiled a year before, but he did not end with the histories of Gods. He proceeded to trace the destinies of their righteous believers: “The Holy Ghost would do the same in his turn & so would all the Saints who inherited a Celestial glory so their would be Gods many & Lords many.”⁶⁸ According to Woodruff’s account, Smith appears to have taught that exalted Saints had similar destinies as the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. It seems that Sharp had not been far off in his account of “heretical” Latter-day Saint beliefs.

While Smith was anxious to teach these mysteries, and although related ideas about eternal existence, the plurality of Gods, and human potential appeared the next month in published selections of the Book of Abraham, Smith became frustrated when some of his secret instructions were made public before he thought prudent.⁶⁹ In an April 1842 discourse given to the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo, he chastised some Church leaders, including Parley and Orson Pratt. Smith described them, along with Orson Hyde and John E. Page, as “great big elders” and charged them with repeating certain principles taught in “private counsel . . . as their own revelations.”⁷⁰ In light of the fact that Smith often taught about theosis and corresponding concepts in private, he appears to have had those teachings in mind in these statements to the Relief Society. While Smith seemed most concerned about the source of these teachings, he also might have been just as concerned about when and in what setting they were taught.

Despite this frustration, or perhaps even because of it, Smith continued to unveil teachings on becoming like God and proceeded to introduce new practices meant to actualize the deification process.⁷¹ Within days of chastising the Pratts and others, he spoke to the Saints about the elders being “endued with power,” and then, a

few days later, he introduced nine men to the endowment, the purpose of which was to bring initiates into “the prese[n]ce of Eloheim in the eternal worlds.”⁷² In a Sunday sermon given in 1843, the same year in which he introduced the ritual of the endowment to women, Smith described the similar histories of Father and Son and noted that some of God’s children “are resurrected to become gods by such revelations as god gives in the most holy place.”⁷³ Smith’s statement seemed to indicate that the endowment was essential to the process of becoming like God.

While introducing new practices, Smith continued to elucidate teachings about the natures and destinies of God and humans. In an April 1843 meeting in Macedonia, Illinois, he corrected Orson Hyde’s interpretation of a passage in 1 John that reads, “When he shall appear, we shall be like him” (1 John 3:2). In a prior meeting, Hyde had taught that Christ “will appear on a white horse.—as a warrior” and proposed, “May be we shall have some of the same spirit.” Smith clarified that the passage referred more to Christ’s nature than how he would appear at that moment, explaining that “we shall see that he is a man like ourselves.” In the same meeting, Smith also corrected Hyde’s reading of the scripture in John 14 regarding the appearance of the Father and the Son. Hyde had taught that “it is our privilege to have the father & son dwelling in our hearts,” but Smith dismissed the idea as “an old Sectarian notion,” explaining that the appearance written of “is a personal. appearance.”⁷⁴ Before the day was over, Smith again referred to Hyde’s mistake and explained that “the Father has a body of flesh & bones as tangible as mans the Son also.”⁷⁵ Smith may have relished the opportunity to correct one of the “great big elders,” but in any case he used the occasion to reiterate divine embodiment and human potential.

While Smith had begun to include veiled references to these teachings in sermons, he continued to follow the pattern of explaining deifying practices and principles to his most trusted friends before preaching them in public. This was particularly the case with related revelations on the new and everlasting covenant of marriage.

For instance, in May 1843 Smith met with Benjamin F. Johnson and explained the concept of marital sealings. According to his scribe William Clayton, who was present at the time of the teaching, “He said that except a man and his wife enter into an everlasting covenant and be married for eternity while in this probation by the power and authority of the Holy priesthood they will cease to increase when they die (i e) they will not have any children in the resurrection.”⁷⁶ This suggested that exaltation involved not just glorified bodies, but also the ability to propagate children in eternity.

Smith’s revelation on plural marriage, which he revealed two months later, confirmed that godhood involved eternal families and eternal increase. It declared that the righteous who did not enter the new and everlasting covenant of marriage would “remain separately and Singly without exaltation in their Saved Condition to all eternity and from henceforth are not Gods, but are angels of God forever and ever.” In contrast, those who abided the covenant, would receive “a fullness and Continuation of the Seeds for ever and ever. Then Shall they be Gods, because they have no End.”⁷⁷ These statements added to the prior teachings on becoming like God. God’s children had eternal souls that would inhabit and create eternal bodies on eternal worlds.

All of Smith’s teachings on the topic came together in a sermon he gave on 7 April 1844 at the funeral of King Follett. Follett had spent time imprisoned with Smith in Missouri, an experience that contributed to the development of teachings Smith now shared at his friend’s funeral. The concepts contained in this sermon had been introduced in revelations given fourteen years earlier and developed in meetings and discourses preached during the prior half decade. While Smith had introduced these teachings and related practices first in private, he now distilled all that he had learned about the nature of God, Christ, and man, before a large body of Saints.

Smith grounded his sermon in New Testament passages to show that these teachings had been sown long before his early 1830s revelations. “What did Jesus say,” Smith asked, “as the father hath power in

himself even so hath the son power. to do what why what the father did To lay down his body and took it up again." After teaching that Christ had died as his Father had, Smith went on to tell his audience, "You have got to learn how to be a god yourself."⁷⁸ Such statements, like the passages in Smith's revelations, might have raised the question of how mere mortals could become like God. Anticipating the queries, Smith followed his revelations in providing an answer that placed humans on the same ontological plane as God. "The mind of man—the intelligent part is coequal with God himself," he stated, "their spirit exists coequal with God." Smith concluded that because "intelligence exists—upon a self existent principle" and there is "no creation about it . . . all the spirits that God ever sent into the world are susceptible of enlargement."⁷⁹ The exalted ontological status of humans made eternal progression and eventual perfection possible. Smith followed these statements with a call for the Saints to save their dead, again linking the practice of baptism for the dead to the process of theosis. These teachings represented Smith's latest reflections on the revealed teaching that, in emulation of Christ, the righteous could grow from grace to grace until they obtained a fullness.

Conclusion

Smith's last public reflections on the teaching came a few months later in his Sermon at the Grove, given just over a week before he was killed. Prior to speaking, Smith sang "Mortals, awake!" with the Saints, perhaps in anticipation of his message about Gods and men. Once again, opposition encouraged the articulation of mature theological concepts. In this case, the publication of the *Nauvoo Expositor* drew Smith's radical rejoinder. Rather than refute the newspaper's claim, Smith dug in his heels, insisting that he had preached on "the plurality of Gods" for fifteen years. Backing the teaching from the Bible, he declared that he had "always" preached that God, Christ, and the Holy Ghost were "distinct" personages, a necessary qualification to his assertion. In what was perhaps an acknowledgement of

a newer teaching, Smith then indicated his intention to preach “the doctrine [of] there being a God above the” Father of Christ. Smith might have had in mind the King Follett discourse when he insisted that he had taught “all the strong doctrines publicly—& always stronger than what I preach in private,” or maybe he was signaling to the audience that the present occasion would evidence the truth of his assertion.⁸⁰

Smith proceeded to preach the plurality of Gods from both the Old and New Testaments. He explained that a proper reading of the Hebrew Bible showed that Gods organized the heavens and the earth and made man in their own image, and that “the heads of the Gods appointed one God for us.”⁸¹ Setting aside the Trinitarian formulation as an absurdity, Smith reasoned that if Christ had a Father, then the Father “had a [Father] also.” Smith made this point from the Bible, but he also directly drew on a passage from the Book of Abraham. In the passage, wherein the Lord described a hierarchy of intelligent spirits to Abraham, he noted, “I am the Lord thy God, I am more intelligent than they all.”⁸² Smith understood the scripture to mean that “intelligences exist one above ano[ther and] that there is not [an] end to it.” Refusing to be “scared to death” of these teachings, he proceeded to explain that as the Father “wrought precisely in the same way as his [Father] had done,” so Christ “laid down his life & took it up.”⁸³ Another account of the discourse indicates that Smith taught that “the holy ghost is yet a spiritual Body. and waiting to take to himself a body as the savior did or as god did or the gods before them took bodies.”⁸⁴ As in the revelations and Smith’s prior sermons, when he thought and taught about the nature of Gods, he also thought and taught about the destinies of God’s children.

Smith’s radical views of the Father and the Son, whom he described as beings with bodies and histories, directly related to his radical teachings about humans, whom he described as beings with premortal pasts and immortal futures. Citing a passage from Romans that had begun to appear with more regularity in his discourses, Smith explained that to become joint heirs with Christ, “we

then also took Bodies to Lay them down and take them up again." As the passage in Romans taught, this required suffering "with him in the flesh that we may be also glorified together."⁸⁵ These statements suggest that perhaps Smith had reconsidered the unique teaching that exalted saints needed to become saviors; perhaps it was enough that they suffered with Christ in this life, a lesson that harkened back to his experience in prison. Such suffering meant that "we shall see as we are seen & be as God—& be as the God of his Fa[ther]."⁸⁶ Smith had once taught that when Christ appears the righteous would see that he was a man, like unto them; now he chose to emphasize that the Saints would be seen as Gods. While Smith grounded these teachings in biblical passages, he had also cited the Book of Abraham and even made mention of the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants. Indeed, he spoke specifically of "the vision" of 1832, wherein he had learned of differing glories and multiple gods, to emphasize that "every man who reigns is a God."⁸⁷

Smith's last formulations on theosis might be interpreted as a threat to the Christology that had been at the heart of Latter-day Saint theology, but this interpretation fails to recognize the christological continuities between Smith's 1830s revelations and his 1840s teachings. The close reading of early revelations yields a contextual understanding that should limit and constrain how we understand Smith's late teachings. While those teachings spurned much of traditional Christian theology, they rested on revelations that simultaneously emphasized salvation through Christ and the potential to achieve exaltation in imitation of Christ. In other words, from beginning to end, the articulation of a Latter-day Saint theosis depended on a robust Christology.

This had been made clear in the 1832 vision, which taught that through Jesus, who "came in to the world . . . to be crucified for the world and to bear the sins of the world," the righteous Saints could become "Gods even the sons of God." The vision indicated that these, who "the father hath given all things . . . are priests and kings."⁸⁸ Over fourteen years later, in one of his last public statements on the topic,

Smith again taught that Jesus Christ “hath by his own blood made us [Kings and Priests] to God.”⁸⁹

Notes

1. Wilford Woodruff, 30 January 1842, “Book of Revelations,” Church History Library (hereafter cited as CHL).
2. For instance, John Turner notes that while Christology “was not one of the points of contention between early Mormons and their many antagonists,” during the next quarter century Latter-day Saints “embraced a different metaphysics and a new way of interpreting God’s ‘plan of salvation.’” John G. Turner, *The Mormon Jesus: A Biography* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2016), 154–55.
3. See, for example, Richard Lyman Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 134.
4. Visions of Moses, June 1830 [Moses 1], in Michael Hubbard MacKay, Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, eds., *Documents, Volume 1: July 1828–June 1831*, vol. 1 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, Richard Lyman Bushman, and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2013), 154.
5. See, for example, Old Testament Revision 2, pp. 21, 23–25, 40 [Moses 7:24, 47, 54–56, 59, 65]; Revelation ca. 7 March 1831 [D&C 45:39], in *JSP*, D1:278; Revelation, 7 May 1831 [D&C 49:6, 22], in *JSP*, D1:301–2; Revelation, 1 August 1831 [D&C 58:65], in Matthew C. Godfrey, Mark Ashurst-McGee, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, eds., *Documents, Volume 2: July 1831–January 1833*, vol. 2 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2013), 21; Revelation, 12 August 1831 [D&C 61:38], in *JSP*, D2:44; Revelation, 30 August 1831 [D&C 63:53], in *JSP*, D2:54; Revelation, 30 October 1831 [D&C 65:5], in *JSP*, D2:93; Vision, 16 February 1832 [D&C 76:16], in *JSP*, D2:184; Revelation, ca. June 1835 [D&C 68:11], in Matthew C. Godfrey, Brenden W. Rensink, Alex D.

- Smith, Max H Parkin, and Alexander L. Baugh, eds., *Documents, Volume 4: April 1834–September 1835*, vol. 4 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Ronald K. Esplin and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2016), 357; Letter to the Elders of the Church 30 November–1 December 1835, in Brent M. Rogers, Elizabeth A. Kuehn, Christian K. Heimburger, Max H Parkin, Alexander L. Baugh, and Steven C. Harper, eds., *Documents, Volume 5: October 1835–January 1838*, vol. 5 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Ronald K. Esplin, Matthew J. Grow, and Matthew C. Godfrey (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2017), 98–99; Blessing to Alvin Winegar, 7 February 1836, in *JSP*, D5:167; Minutes and Prayer of Dedication, 27 March 1836 [D&C 109:5], in *JSP*, D5:195, 199.
6. Jason R. Combs, “‘Christ’ after the Apostles: The Humanity and Divinity of the Savior in the Second Century,” in *Thou Art the Christ, the Son of the Living God: The Person and Work of Jesus in the New Testament*, ed. Eric D. Huntsman, Lincoln H. Blumell, and Tyler J. Griffin (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2018), 321–25.
 7. See Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov, eds., *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2006). On the history of this belief among the Church Fathers and in Christian thought, see Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung, *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007). For comparative studies on early Christian and Latter-day Saint theosis, see Jordan Vajda, “Partakers of the Divine Nature”: A Comparative Analysis of Patristic and Mormon Doctrines of Divinization (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002); Grant Underwood, “Justification, Theosis, and Grace in Early Christian, Lutheran, and Mormon Discourse,” *International Journal of Mormon Studies* 2 (Spring 2009): 206–23, and Adam J. Powell, *Irenaeus, Joseph Smith, and God-Making Heresy* (Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2015).

8. "Old Testament Revision 2," p. 18 [Moses 6:57], The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/old-testament-revision-2/22>. See also, "Old Testament Revision 1," p. 14 [Moses 6:57], The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/old-testament-revision-1/16>.
9. "Old Testament Revision 1," p. 11 [Moses 6:5–6], The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/old-testament-revision-1/13>.
10. Sample of Pure Language, between ca. 4 and ca. 20 March 1832, in *JSP*, D2:215.
11. Vision, 16 February 1832, in *JSP*, D2:188–89 [D&C 76:58].
12. Vision, 16 February 1832, in *JSP*, D2:190 [D&C 76:91].
13. Revelation, 27–28 December 1832, in *JSP*, D2:337–38 [D&C 88].
14. Revelation, 27–28 December 1832, in *JSP*, D2:344 [D&C 88:107].
15. Revelation, 6 May 1833 [D&C 93:3–4], in Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, Brent M. Rogers, Grant Underwood, Robert J. Woodford, and William G. Hartley, eds., *Documents, Volume 3: February 1833–March 1834*, vol. 3 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Ronald K. Esplin and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2014), 86.
16. Nicholas J. Frederick, *The Bible, Mormon Scripture, and the Rhetoric of Allusivity* (Teaneck, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2016), 97.
17. Frederick, *Bible, Mormon Scripture, and the Rhetoric of Allusivity*, 95–130.
18. Revelation, 6 May 1833, in *JSP*, D3:86 [D&C 93:7–8].
19. Revelation, 6 May 1833, in *JSP*, D3:88 [D&C 93:12–14].
20. Frederick, *Bible, Mormon Scripture, and the Rhetoric of Allusivity*, 112–13.
21. Terryl L. Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought; Cosmos, God, Humanity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 120–21.
22. Revelation, 6 May 1833, in *JSP*, D3:88 [D&C 93:19–20].
23. Revelation, 6 May 1833, in *JSP*, D3:88–89 [D&C 93:22–23].
24. See Vision, 16 February 1832, in *JSP*, D1:189–90 [D&C 76:70, 95]; Revelation, 22–23 September 1832, in *JSP*, D2:297 [D&C 84:33]; and Revelation, 27–28 December 1832, in *JSP*, D2:338 [D&C 88:20, 28].
25. Revelation, 6 May 1833, in *JSP*, D3:89 [D&C 93:33].
26. Letter from William W. Phelps, 15 December 1833, in *JSP*, D3:383.

27. In a series of theological discussions in Kirtland, Ohio, held in the winter of 1834–35, Joseph Smith and other Church leaders discussed matters relating to the nature of God and salvation. While their scriptural references pointed toward the Bible rather than Smith’s revelations, the fifth, sixth, and seventh lectures emphasize that Christ obtained a fullness of the Father and further insist that righteous Saints could also obtain a fullness of perfection through Christ. *Doctrine and Covenants*, 1835 ed., 52–74, in Robin Scott Jensen, Richard E. Turley Jr., and Riley M. Lorimer, eds., *Revelations and Translations, Volume 2: Published Revelations*, vol. 2 of the Revelations and Translations series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Dean C. Jessee, Ronald K. Esplin, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2011), 362–84.
28. Adam Powell posits a relationship between persecution and a belief in deification among early Christians and Latter-day Saints. See Powell, *Irenaeus, Joseph Smith, and God-Making Heresy*.
29. See Jordan Watkins, “All of One Species’: Parley P. Pratt and the Dialectical Development of Early Mormon Conceptions of the Theosis,” in *Parley P. Pratt and the Making of Mormonism*, ed. Gregory K. Armstrong, Matthew J. Grow, and Dennis J. Siler (Norman, OK: Arthur H. Clark, 2011), 201–18.
30. See Kathleen Flake, “Joseph Smith’s Letter from Liberty Jail: A Study in Canonization,” *Journal of Religion* 92, no. 4 (October 2012): 515–26.
31. Joseph Smith to the Church and Edward Partridge, 20 March 1839, in Mark Ashurst-McGee, David W. Grua, Elizabeth Kuehn, Alexander L. Baugh, and Brenden W. Rensink, eds., *Documents, Volume 6: February 1838–August 1839*, vol. 6 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Ronald K. Esplin, Matthew J. Grow, and Matthew C. Godfrey (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2017), 312–16.
32. Joseph Smith to the Church and Edward Partridge, 20 March 1839, in *JSP*, D6:319.
33. Revelation, 27–28 December 1832, in *JSP*, D2:337.
34. Joseph Smith to Edward Partridge and the Church, ca. 22 March 1839, in *JSP*, D6:342.
35. Letter to Presendia Huntington Buell, 15 March 1839, in *JSP*, D6:355.

36. Joseph Smith to the Church and Edward Partridge, 20 March 1839, in *JSP*, D6:369.
37. For an illuminating contextual analysis of Smith's prison letters, including a discussion of the relationship between suffering and revelation, see David W. Grua, "Joseph Smith's Missouri Prison Letter and the Mormon Textual Community," in *Foundational Texts of Mormonism: Examining Major Early Sources*, ed. Mark Ashurst-McGee, Robin Scott Jensen, and Sharalyn D. Howcroft (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 124–53.
38. Letter to "All the Saints in Nauvoo," 1 September 1842 [D&C 127], The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/letter-to-all-the-saints-in-nauvoo-1-september-1842-dc-127/1>.
39. Discourse, 27 June 1839, in *JSP*, D6:510.
40. Discourse, between ca. 26 June and ca. 2 July 1839, in *JSP*, D6:525.
41. Revelation, ca. 8 March 1831-A, in *JSP*, D1:282 [D&C 46:7]; and Revelation, 9 May 1831, in *JSP*, D1:306 [D&C 50:2]; Revelation, 27–28 December 1832, in *JSP*, D2:336–337 [D&C 88:1–5].
42. Historical Introduction to Discourse, 27 June 1839, in *JSP*, D6:509.
43. Discourse, between ca. 26 June and ca. 4 August 1839-A, in *JSP*, D6:542–48.
44. Discourse, between ca. 26 June and ca. 4 August 1839-A, in *JSP*, D6:543.
45. Discourse, between ca. 26 June and ca. 2 July 1839, in *JSP*, D6:521. See Letter to Heber C. Kimball and Brigham Young, 16 January 1839, in *JSP*, D6:315.
46. Discourse, 5 February 1840, in Matthew C. Godfrey, Spencer W. McBride, Alex D. Smith, and Christopher James Blythe, eds., *Documents, Volume 7: September 1839–January 1841*, vol. 7 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Ronald K. Esplin, Matthew J. Grow, and Matthew C. Godfrey (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2018), 177.
47. Discourse, 5 February 1840, in *JSP*, D7:178.
48. Discourse, 5 February 1840, in *JSP*, D7:179. Parley P. Pratt wrote that while in custody in Missouri the prior year, a woman had asked "which of the prisoners was the Lord whom the Mormons worshipped?" and that Smith, after being singled out by a guard, "professed to be nothing but a man, and a minister of salvation sent by Jesus Christ." P[arley] P. Pratt,

- History of the Late Persecution Inflicted by the State of Missouri upon the Mormons* (Detroit: Dawson & Bates, 1839), 45.
49. *The Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt, One of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (New York: Russell Brothers, 1874), 329.
 50. Orson Pratt to Sarah Marinda Bates Pratt, 6 January 1840, in *Times and Seasons*, February 1840, 1:61.
 51. See Watkins, "All of One Species," 205–9.
 52. P[arley] P. Pratt, *The Millennium, and Other Poems: To Which Is Annexed, A Treatise on the Regeneration and Eternal Duration of Matter* (New York: W. Molineux, printer, 1840), 128.
 53. Pratt, *Millennium, and Other Poems*, 147–48.
 54. Parley P. Pratt, *An Answer to Mr. William Hewitt's Tract against the Latter-Day Saints* (Manchester: W. R. Thomas, printer, 1840), 5, 9. See Parley P. Pratt, *A Reply to Mr. Thomas Taylor's "Complete Failure," &c., and Mr. Richard Livesey's "Mormonism Exposed"* (Manchester: W. R. Thomas, printer, 1840), 9–10.
 55. O[rson] Pratt, *A[n] Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions, and of the Late Discovery of Ancient American Records* (Edinburgh: Ballantyne and Hughes, 1840), 30.
 56. On this practice, and its development, see Ryan G. Tobler, "Saviors on Mount Zion: Mormon Sacramentalism, Mortality, and the Baptism for the Dead," *Journal of Mormon History* 39, no. 4 (2013): 182–238.
 57. Letter to Quorum of the Twelve, 15 December 1840, in *JSP*, D7:470.
 58. John Smith, Journal, 1840 July–1841 March, 30 August 1840, in John Smith Papers, CHL.
 59. Accounts of Meeting and Discourse, 5 January 1841, in *JSP*, D7:494.
 60. On the development of embodiment in Latter-day Saint thought, see Benjamin E. Park, "Salvation through a Tabernacle: Joseph Smith, Parley Pratt, and Early Mormon Theologies of Embodiment," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 43, no. 2 (Summer 2010): 1–44.
 61. Accounts of Meeting and Discourse, 5 January 1841, in *JSP*, D7:494, 95.
 62. Revelation, 27–28 December 1832, in *JSP*, D2:338–39 [D&C 88:17–20].
 63. Revelation, 19 January 1841, in *JSP*, D7:517 [D&C 124:29].

64. In an 1834 revelation, the Lord described “his people” as “saviours of men,” and in subsequent statements Smith and other Church leaders applied the terms “saviour” and “savior” to those who participated in preaching the gospel and the work of Zion. (See, for example, Revelation, 24 February 1834, in *JSP*, D3:460 [D&C 103:9]; Minutes, Discourse, and Blessings, 1 March 1835, in *JSP*, D4:275; Joseph Smith Sr. to Rebecca Swain Williams, Blessing, 14 September 1835, in Patriarchal Blessings, 1:30–31; and Discourse, ca. 19 July 1840, in *JSP*, D7:337, 341). After Smith introduced baptism for the dead in 1840, the phrase most often appeared in references to that practice and the connected passage in Obadiah 1:21. See, for example, Discourse, 16 May 1841, in Brent M. Rogers, Mason K. Allred, Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, and Brett D. Dowdle, eds., *Documents, Volume 8: February–November 1841*, vol. 8 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Ronald K. Esplin, Matthew J. Grow, Matthew C. Godfrey, and R. Eric Smith (Salt Lake City: Church Historian’s Press, 2019), 152; “The High Council of the Church of Jesus Christ, to the Saints of Nauvoo, Greeting,” *Times and Seasons*, 15 February 1842, 3:699; “Discourse, 21 January 1844, as Reported by Wilford Woodruff,” p. [182], *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-21-january-1844-as-reported-by-wilford-woodruff/2>; “Conference Minutes,” *Times and Seasons*, 15 August 1844, 5:616; and “Discourse, 12 May 1844, as Reported by George Laub,” p. 21, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-12-may-1844-as-reported-by-george-laub/3>.
65. Minutes and Discourse, 1–5 October 1841, in *JSP*, D7:287. See Discourse, 3 October 1841, in *JSP*, D7:300–302.
66. William Harris, *Mormonism Portrayed: Its Errors and Absurdities Exposed, and the Spirit and Designs of Its Authors Made Manifest* (Warsaw: Sharp & Gamble, 1841), 22–23. Sharp’s paper later indicated that he, the paper’s editor, had written *Mormonism Portrayed* “from materials furnished by Mr. Harris.” “Monsieur Violet and the Mormons,” *Warsaw Signal*, 11 September 1844, [1].
67. Woodruff, 19 December 1841, “Book of Revelations,” CHL.

68. Woodruff, 30 January 1842, "Book of Revelations," CHL.
69. Book of Abraham Excerpt and Facsimile 2, 15 March 1842, in Alex D. Smith, Christian Heimburger, and Christopher James Blythe, eds., *Documents, Volume 9: December 1841–April 1842*, vol. 9 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Ronald K. Esplin, Matthew J. Grow, and Matthew C. Godfrey (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2019), 225–26.
70. Minutes, 28 April 1842, in *The First Fifty Years of the Relief Society*, ed. Jill Mulvay Derr, Carol Cornwall Madsen, Kate Holbrook, and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2016), 55.
71. Samuel Morris Brown, *In Heaven as It Is on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 268.
72. Discourse, 1 May 1842, in Elizabeth A. Kuehn, Jordan T. Watkins, Matthew C. Godfrey, and Mason K. Allred, eds., *Documents, Volume 10: May–August 1842*, vol. 10 of the Documents series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Matthew C. Godfrey, R. Eric Smith, Matthew J. Grow, and Ronald K. Esplin (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2020), 7; Historian's Office, Joseph Smith History, draft notes, 4 May 1842, CHL.
73. "Discourse, 11 June 1843–A, as Reported by Willard Richards," p. [250], The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-11-june-1843-a-as-reported-by-willard-richards/11>.
74. JS, Journal, 2 April 1843, in *JSP*, J2:324.
75. JS, Journal, 2 April 1843, in *JSP*, J2:326.
76. "Instruction, 16 May 1843, as Reported by William Clayton," p. [14], The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/instruction-16-may-1843-as-reported-by-william-clayton/2>.
77. "Revelation, 12 July 1843 [D&C 132]," p. 3, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/revelation-12-july-1843-dc-132/3>.
78. "Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Reported by William Clayton [26]," p. 14 [26], The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-7-april-1844-as-reported-by-william-clayton/4>.
79. "Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Reported by William Clayton [28]," p. 16 [28].

80. "Discourse, 16 June 1844–A, as Reported by Thomas Bullock," p. [1], The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-16-june-1844-a-as-reported-by-thomas-bullock/1>.
81. "Discourse, 16 June 1844–A, as Reported by Thomas Bullock," p. [2].
82. Book of Abraham Excerpt and Facsimile 2, 15 March 1842, in *JSP*, D9:225.
83. "Discourse, 16 June 1844–A, as Reported by Thomas Bullock," p. [3].
84. "Discourse, 16 June 1844–A, as Reported by George Laub," p. 30, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-16-june-1844-a-as-reported-by-george-laub/2>.
85. "Discourse, 16 June 1844–A, as Reported by George Laub," p. 31. For examples of references to Romans 8:16–17 in Smith's discourse, see "Discourse, 14 May 1843, as Reported by Wilford Woodruff," p. [32], The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-14-may-1843-as-reported-by-wilford-woodruff/3>; "Discourse, 27 August 1843, as Reported by James Burgess," p. [13], The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-27-august-1843-as-reported-by-james-burgess/4>; "Discourse, 7 April 1844, as Reported by Wilford Woodruff," p. [135], The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-7-april-1844-as-reported-by-wilford-woodruff/3>; and "Discourse, 12 May 1844, as Reported by Thomas Bullock," p. [2], The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-12-may-1844-as-reported-by-thomas-bullock/2>.
86. "Discourse, 16 June 1844–A, as Reported by Thomas Bullock," p. [3].
87. "Discourse, 16 June 1844–A, as Reported by Thomas Bullock," p. [4].
88. Vision, 16 Feb. 1832, in *JSP*, D2:188 [D&C 76:56].
89. "Discourse, 16 June 1844–A, as Reported by Thomas Bullock," p. [5].