

CULTURE AND COSMOS

A Journal of the History of Astrology and Cultural Astronomy

Vol. 19 no 1 and 2, Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter
2015

Published by Culture and Cosmos
and the Sophia Centre Press,
in partnership with the University of Wales Trinity Saint David,
in association with the Sophia Centre for the Study of Cosmology
in Culture,
University of Wales Trinity Saint David,
Faculty of Humanities and the Performing Arts
Lampeter, Ceredigion, Wales, SA48 7ED, UK.
www.cultureandcosmos.org

Cite this paper as: Alison Greig, 'Angelomorphism and Magical Transformation in the Christian and Jewish Traditions', *Celestial Magic*, special issue of *Culture and Cosmos*, Vol. 19, nos. 1 and 2, Autumn/Winter and Spring/Summer 2015, pp. 129-44.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue card for this book is available from the British Library

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ISSN 1368-6534

Printed in Great Britain by Lightning Source

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Angelomorphism and Magical Transformation in the Christian and Jewish Traditions

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Abstract: This paper examines the concept of angelomorphism and magical transformation with reference to canonical and non-canonical Christian and Jewish beliefs. Magic, as loosely defined, is the attempt to engage with the world through the imagination or psyche in order to obtain some form of knowledge, benefit, or advantage, while celestial magic engages with the cosmos through stellar, planetary, or celestial symbolism, influences, or intelligences.¹ Angelification of an individual is linked to the concept of resurrection, where, in the eschaton, the physical body of the righteous is transformed into a glorious new body fit for eternal life in heaven, regaining its divine likeness and becoming androgynous like an angel. The Hebrew Bible and Merkabah traditions support the possibility of the exceptional transformation of a human being into an angelic entity. Qumran liturgical texts also suggest the formation of an angelomorphic identity among the priesthood. The Christian gospels state that the redeemed will become like angels in heaven. Gnostics, however, consider that scriptural references to resurrection refer symbolically to receiving spiritual knowledge (gnosis). The paper examines concepts and practices within the respective traditions that point to a radical magical transformation of the human being that is needed to secure access to the heaven realm and the divine.

The word angel is derived from the Greek *aggelos*, ‘one going’ or ‘one sent’, messenger.² The Latin version distinguishes the divine or spirit-messenger from the human, rendering the original Greek in the one case by *angelus*, and in the other either by *legatus* or by *nuntius*. *Aggelos* is then

¹ From the programme of the Eleventh Annual Sophia Centre Conference on Celestial Magic, 22–23 June 2013: ‘Magic, loosely defined, is the attempt to engage with the world through the imagination or psyche, in order to obtain some form of knowledge, benefit or advantage. Celestial magic engages with the cosmos through stellar, planetary or celestial symbolism, influences or intelligences’.

² Hugh Pope, ‘Angels’, in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 1 (New York, NY: Robert Appleton Company, 1907), at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01476d.htm> [accessed 10 November 2014].

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sometimes used in scriptural translations for the Hebrew *mal'akh* 'messenger'. The distinctive biblical application of the word, both in Hebrew and Greek, is to certain heavenly intelligences whom God employs in the office of messengers. They act as God's messengers to humanity, and as agents who carry out His will, as in the angelic appearances before Hagar in Genesis 16:7, and Joshua at Gilgal (Joshua 5:13, 15). In addition, the angel Gabriel brings revelation, as in Daniel 8:15-16, and Gabriel also announces the coming birth of Jesus the Messiah in Luke 1:26; while in Genesis 19:13, two angels are sent to destroy Sodom.

According to Augustine,

'Angel' is the name of their office, not of their nature. If you seek the name of their nature, it is 'spirit'; if you seek the name of their office, it is 'angel': from what they are, 'spirit', from what they do, 'angel.'" ...the angels are servants and messengers of God.³

It is helpful to consider angelomorphic Christology within the context of pneumatology, the study of spiritual beings, in particular the Holy Spirit in Christian theology.⁴ It has been defined as follows:

Though it has been used in different ways by various scholars, without clear definition, we propose its use wherever there are signs that an individual or community possesses specifically angelic characteristics or status, though for whom identity cannot be reduced to that of an angel.⁵

³ See the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Part One on the Profession of Faith, Section Two, The Profession of the Christian Faith, Chapter One, 'I believe in God the Father', Article I, Paragraph 5. Heaven and Earth, para. 329. Catechism of the Catholic Church (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993), available at <http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/INDEX.HTM> [accessed 10 November 2013], citing Augustine, *En. in Ps.* 103,1,15, J. P. Migne, ed. Patrologia Latina, 37,1348, available at <http://ccs.usccb.org/flipbooks/catechism/index.html#102> [accessed 29 September 2016].

⁴ See for example John McIntyre, *The Shape of Pneumatology: Studies In The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2004).

⁵ Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis, *Luke-Acts: Angels, Christology and Soteriology, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe 94* (Tübingen: Coronet Books, 1997), pp. 14–15.

Hekhalot and Merkabah traditions associated with Apocalyptic and Qumran texts

The texts of the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha provide insights into Jewish ideas on the heavenly realm and later Christian beliefs. Jewish speculations in the *Hekhalot* ('palace') and *Merkabah* ('chariot') literature describe God as enthroned in a celestial palace.⁶ The Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha are Jewish writings from the Second Temple Period (13th–3rd centuries BCE) that are included in the Septuagint and Vulgate but excluded from the Jewish and Protestant canons of the Old Testament. The Apocrypha include the Book of Tobit, 1 Maccabees and 2 Maccabees, which are included in the Roman Catholic Canon; while 3 Maccabees and 4 Maccabees are examples of Apocryphal texts not included in the Roman Catholic Canon. The numerous texts of the Pseudepigrapha include the Apocalypse of Abraham and the Book of Enoch.⁷

These texts include accounts of the journeys of sages through heavenly palaces or utilize the image of God's chariot, examples of which are discussed below. This tradition includes three important elements: the qualities of the ideal mystic, the heavenly journey and a possible transformation at its conclusion.⁸ Its literature is 'apocalyptic' as defined by Collins:

... a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, describing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world.⁹

It should be understood that while that apocalyptic literature is revelatory, it is not necessarily eschatological, even though eschatological literature is

⁶ Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (1946; New York: Schocken Books, 1995), pp. 43–45. The first instances of this description are Isaiah 6.1 and Ezekiel 1.26.

⁷ Michael E. Stone, 'Jewish Holy Scriptures: The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha', available at <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/Judaism/apocrypha.html> [accessed 25 September 2016].

⁸ Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 9–46.

⁹ J. J. Collins, *Apocalypse: Morphology of a Genre* (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), p. 9.

invariably apocalyptic. In the apocryphal texts, heaven is seen as the resting place of the righteous who will ‘have great joy like the angels of heaven’.¹⁰ As Himmelfarb observes, according to Jewish thought, a person can become higher than angels; see, for example, Zechariah 3:7. See also Talmud Bavli, Shabbath 86a – ‘take hold of My Throne and answer them’. In Christian apocalypses, ascent to heaven is the mode of revelation.¹¹ The Hekhalot and Merkabah traditions emphasize personal mystical encounters with God and the heavenly realm initiated by humans.¹² A model of the heavenly journey was provided by the prophet Ezekiel, who was lifted into a divine chariot and transported by the wind and Elijah: ‘...there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire... and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven’.¹³

After the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, some Jews continued Temple worship by mystically visiting a surrogate heavenly Temple.¹⁴ This experience was achieved through methodical meditation and mystical contemplation, as described for example in the manuals of Abulafia such as *The Book of Eternal Life* written in 1280 and *The Light of Intellect* written in 1285.¹⁵ Scholem views this as a variation to second and third century CE Gnosticism and Hermeticism, with the ascent of the soul past hostile angels to its divine home, signifying redemption.¹⁶ In the Hekhalot, the soul that completes the journey sees and hears all in the heavenly realm¹⁷.

Fire was frequently associated with divine glory, purification and transformation. In Exodus, Moses went up to the mountain which was covered by a cloud of glory: ‘The glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai... and He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud. And to the

¹⁰ 1 Enoch 104:2, 4, in George W. E. Nickelsburg and James C. Vander Kam, *1 Enoch: A New Translation; Based on the Hermeneia Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), p. 161.

¹¹ Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven*, p. 3.

¹² Vita Daphna Arbel, *Beholders of Divine Secrets: Mysticism and Myth in the Hekhalot and Merkabah Literature* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2003), p. 144.

¹³ 2 Kings 2:11. See also Ezek. 3:12-13 for a reference to ‘wheels’.

¹⁴ Rachel Elijor, *The Three Temples: One the Emergence of Jewish Mysticism*, trans. David Louvish (Portland, OR: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2005), p. 63.

¹⁵ Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 135.

¹⁶ Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 48–49.

¹⁷ Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 55.

eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the mountain top.’¹⁸ Regarding the purification of the speech of the prophet Isaiah: ‘Then flew one of the Seraphim to me, having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs from the altar. And he touched my mouth, and said: “Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven”’.¹⁹

The apocryphal book 3 Enoch records the transformation of the human Enoch into Metatron, the angelic Prince of the Countenance. Enoch sheds his human form, becoming a winged, glowing figure and is granted a place in the celestial hierarchy, along with profound wisdom that enables him to guide other Merkabah seekers.²⁰ 3 Enoch provides an account of Rabbi Ishmael’s ascent to heaven, where he is guided by Metatron.

This Enoch, whose flesh was turned to flame, his veins to fire, his eye-lashes to flashes of lightning, his eye-balls to flaming torches, and whom God placed on a throne next to the throne of glory, received after this heavenly transformation the name Metatron.²¹

Enoch becomes an angel in a kind of priestly investiture, donning special garments and being anointed with oil by the archangel Michael, and being enthroned, suggesting that the transformation stems from an understanding of heaven as a temple, where angels are priests.

The canonical basis for the belief that Enoch was transformed into an angel – since his death is not mentioned – is contained in Genesis: ‘Enoch

¹⁸ Exodus 24:15–17.

¹⁹ Isaiah 6:6–7.

²⁰ Morton Smith, trans., *Hekhalot Rabbati: The Greater Treatise concerning the Palaces of Heaven*, ed. Don Karr, corrected by Gershom Scholem (1943–7; Morton Smith Estate: Digital Brilliance, 2009); see also Hugo Odeberg, ed. and trans., *The Hebrew book of Enoch (Enoch 3) by R. Ishmael Ben Elisha, The High Priest*, in English, revised translation 1928, available at <https://ia902606.us.archive.org/23/items/HebrewBookOfEnoch3/BookOfEnoch3.pdf> [accessed 25 September 2016].

²¹ Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 67, cites *3 Enoch. Third Book of Enoch*, Chapter XLVIII (c), ALT 3 (6), which states in the words of God: ‘I transformed his flesh into torches of fire, and all the bones of his body into fiery coals; and I made the appearance of his eyes as the lightning, and the light of his eyebrows as the imperishable light. I made his face bright as the splendour of the sun, and his eyes as the splendour of the Throne of Glory.’

walked with God after the birth of Methuselah three hundred years... Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him'.²²

Wolfson observes that Jewish sources, beginning with the Apocalyptic and Qumran texts, may provide model of mysticism based on the 'angelification' of the human being who crosses the boundary of space and time and becomes part of the heavenly realm.²³ The mystical experience in this framework involves a two-step closing of the gap separating human and divine by the ascension into the heavens: (a) participation in the angelic liturgy in a standing posture, and (b) enthronement in the celestial realm, which represents the fullest expression of the mystical experience, an eschatological ideal of deification.²⁴ According to Wolfson, the ultimate secret of the prophetic experience is the imaginative representation of the divine as an anthropos. Only one who transforms the physical body into something spiritual – a transformation that is presented as angelification – is capable of imagining the divine form in bodily images.²⁵

The Qumran liturgical texts provide insights into pre-rabbinic Judaism and the cultural background of early Christianity, including the earliest manuscripts of most of the Hebrew Bible books dating from the last centuries BCE or the 1st century CE.²⁶ The *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* (4QShirShab), also known as the *Angelic Liturgy*, describes the Sabbath worship of the angelic priesthood in the heavenly temple.²⁷ Each of the seven firmaments have their own inner sanctuary which is administered by its own high-priestly chief prince. The final inner chamber, the central throne room, is inhabited by God himself.²⁸ The community believed that the righteous would be rewarded by 'eternal blessings and everlasting joy in the life everlasting, and a crown of glory and a robe of honour, amid

²² Genesis 5:22–24.

²³ Elliot R. Wolfson, 'Mysticism and the Poetic-Liturgical Compositions from Qumran: A Response to Bilhah Nitzan', *Jewish Quarterly Review, New Series* 85, No. 1/2, Papers on the Dead Sea Scrolls (1994): p. 186.

²⁴ Elliot R. Wolfson, 'Yeridah la-Merkavah: Typology of Ecstasy and Enthronement in Ancient Jewish Mysticism', in *Mystics of the Book: Themes, Topics and Typologies*, ed. R. A. Herrera (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1993): pp. 13–44.

²⁵ Elliot R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2005), pp. 120–121.

²⁶ James R. Davila, *Liturgical Works: Eerdman's Commentaries on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), p. 1.

²⁷ Davila, *Liturgical Works*, pp. 83–167.

²⁸ Davila, *Liturgical Works*, p. 84.

light perpetual'.²⁹ The angelomorphic status may have also implied the possibility of transport to what Corbin termed the imaginal realm.³⁰

Fletcher-Louis argues that the purpose of the mystical participation at Qumran is angelification. 'The priesthood is a primary conceptual category for the formation of an angelomorphic identity'.³¹ Segal observes that the Liturgy seems to map a seven-stage ascent to heaven to view God's throne and glory. Worship in the Heavenly Temple includes an example of angelomorphism in the blessing:

May you be as an angel of the Presence in the Abode of Holiness to the Glory of the God of (Hosts).

May you attend upon the service in the Temple of the kingdom and decree destiny in company with the Angels of the Presence, in common council (with the Holy Ones).³²

For Nitzan, the mystical dimension in the liturgical writings from Qumran involves the harmony of communion of human beings and angels expressed in terms of the participation of individuals or the community in the angelic choir, which praises God in the heavenly temple.³³ This acknowledges that the pure 'may recite praises in company with the angels, and thus attain spiritual experience of communion with the celestial entourage'.³⁴

Wolfson observes that the theoretical model for Nitzan is the description of the mystical experience offered by Scholem, which involves

²⁹ 1QS IV:7–8, see Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English, Revised Edition* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p.189. The scrolls are referred to by cave number and document number. The reference conventions are summarized in Craig Evans, *Holman QuickSource Guide to the Dead Sea Scrolls* (North Nashville, B&H Publishing Group, 2010.)

³⁰ James R. Davila, 'Heavenly Ascents in the Dead Sea Scrolls,' in *The Dead Sea Scrolls After Fifty Years*, Vol. 2, ed. P. W. Flint and J. C. Vander Kam (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 461–85. For the imaginal, see Henri Corbin, 'Mundus Imaginalis: the Imaginary and the Imaginal', *Spring* (1972): pp. 1–19, available at http://www.hermetic.com/bey/mundus_imaginalis.htm [accessed 29 September 2016].

³¹ Crispin Fletcher-Louis, *All the Glory of Adam: Liturgical Anthropology in the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2002), p. 56.

³² 1QSb 4:24–28.

³³ Bilhah Nitzan, 'Harmonic and Mystical Characteristics in Poetic and Liturgical Writings from Qumran', *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 85 (1994): pp. 163–183.

³⁴ Nitzan, 'Harmonic and Mystical Characteristics', p. 166.

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a direct and intimate consciousness of the divine Presence that, in the most extreme cases, eventuates in union with God.³⁵ The mystical aspect of Hekhalot literature, according to Scholem, involves the ‘ascent of the soul to the celestial throne where it obtains an ecstatic view of the majesty of God and the secrets of His realm’.³⁶ However, according to Wolfson, rather than being merely a harmony between heavenly and earthly worshippers, mysticism involves the narrowing of the gap between human and divine and ultimately the ascension to heaven and transformation into an angelic being who occupies a throne alongside the throne of glory.³⁷ The mystical experience expressed in the Hekhalot thus involves a heavenly ascent culminating in the enthronement of the mystic that transforms him into an angelic being, a transformation that facilitates his vision of the glory and the powers of God.³⁸ In the *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice*, one fragment, which, according to the reconstruction of Morton Smith, relates to the ascension and enthronement of an individual of the sect, would meet Wolfson's definition of ‘mystical’.³⁹

Glorification Hymn A (4Q491, fr.11)

... the right(teo)us exult (in the streng)th of His might and the holy ones
rejoice in... in righteousness...

... He has established it in Israel

Since ancient times His truth and the mysteries of His wisdom (have been in
al(l) power

... and the council of the poor into an eternal congregation

... the perfect ... (et)ernity a throne of strength in the congregation of ‘gods’
so that not a single king of old shall sit on it, neither shall their noble men...

My glory is incomparable, and apart from me none is exalted.

None shall come to me for I swell in... in heaven, and there is no...

I am reckoned with the ‘gods’ and my dwelling-place is in the congregation of
holiness.⁴⁰

³⁵ Wolfson, ‘Mysticism and the Poetic-Liturgical Compositions from Qumran’, pp. 185–202, pp. 191–192.

³⁶ Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 5.

³⁷ Wolfson, ‘Mysticism and the Poetic-Liturgical Compositions from Qumran’, p. 193.

³⁸ Wolfson, ‘Yeridah la-Merkavah’, p. 26.

³⁹ 1 of 4Q491; and see Wolfson, ‘Mysticism and the Poetic-Liturgical Compositions from Qumran’, p. 200.

⁴⁰ Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, pp. 341–342.

Furthermore, Wolfson states that in order to envision the 'glory', a term that signifies in Qumran fragments the heavenly world, 'one must become glorious, aglow with the glimmer of the divine image, the angelic splendor in whose likeness Adam was created'.⁴¹ He refers to two epistemological principles, one traceable in the Greek philosophical tradition to Anaxagoras, 'like sees like', and the other to the occult wisdom of hermetic alchemy, 'like mirrors like', expressed in the Emerald Tablet attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, 'What is below is like that which is above, and what is above is like that which is below, to accomplish the miracles of one thing'.⁴² A priest can behold the glorious light without only when he has become that light within, a transformation facilitated by faithful adherence to ascetic practices, especially sexual renunciation, intended to realize the ideal of ritual purity.⁴³

Fletcher-Louis maintains that the purpose of entry into the sacred temple – with access to the heavenly world through the inner sanctuary – is transformation. The worshipper becomes closer to conformity to God's nature and modes of action. The liturgical anthropology of the temple tradition is essentially a matter of deification.⁴⁴ Furthermore, a ritual connection between the celibacy of some Essenes and their angelomorphic identity is possible.⁴⁵

Angelification in the New Testament

The idea of angelification also finds support in the New Testament: St Paul described his ascension to the third Heaven, a revelation rooted in the Jewish apocalyptic traditions, as discussed above:⁴⁶

⁴¹ Elliot R. Wolfson, 'Seven Mysteries of Knowledge: Qumran Esotericism Reconsidered', in *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel*, ed. H. Najman (Leiden: Brill, 2003), p. 192.

⁴² Jabir ibn Hayyan, 'The Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus', in E. J. Holmyard, *Alchemy* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1957), line 2, available at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/alc/emerald.htm>. See also Wolfson, 'Seven Mysteries of Knowledge', p. 192.

⁴³ Leviticus 15.17. See also Wolfson, 'Seven Mysteries of Knowledge', p. 193.

⁴⁴ Fletcher-Louis, *All the Glory of Adam*, p. 203.

⁴⁵ Alan F. Segal, *Life after death: A history of the Afterlife in the Religions of the West* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), p. 306.

⁴⁶ Also see the resurrected 'are like angels in heaven', Matt 22:30; Mark 12:25;

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I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. And I know that this man was caught up into Paradise – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know... and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.⁴⁷

Paul's ascension parallels the mystical experiences of apocalyptic Jews and is linked with the newly resurrected body, which resembles or is an angelic body, through a process of angelification. A master narrative of salvation is marked by the meta-schematization (change in the structure) of the body into a glorious body shared with Christ. For example, 'Lord Jesus Christ... will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body'.⁴⁸ And again,

Jesus said to them, 'Those who belong to this age marry and are given in marriage; but those who are considered worthy of a place in that age and in the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage. Indeed they cannot die anymore, because they are like angels and are children of God, being children of the resurrection.'⁴⁹

Such themes were developed by the Apostle Paul, who stated that the body of glory or pneumatic body becomes androgynous, regains its divine likeness, its angelic completeness. In addition, he describes the primal combination of male and female that is lost in the Garden of Eden: 'There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus'.⁵⁰ The message in the Gospels and in the writings of Paul with respect to believers being transformed into either angelic beings or beings analogous to angels implies that a believer will undergo a radical transformation, which is a prerequisite to becoming a full citizen of heaven.⁵¹

In Gnostic theologies, heavenly ascents are considered as a means to redemption. According to non-canonical Gnostic Christianity, exemplified

Luke 20:36. The version of the Bible used is the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1989).

⁴⁷ 2 Corinthians 12.

⁴⁸ Philippians 3:20–21.

⁴⁹ Luke 20:34–36.

⁵⁰ Galatians 3:28; also see Col. 3:11.

⁵¹ 'But our citizenship is in heaven', Philippians 3:20.

by the texts discovered at Nag Hammadi and the *Pistis Sophia*, Jesus Christ undertook a journey to heaven and defeated the planetary archons, thereby enabling his followers to undertake similar journeys.⁵²

The *Pistis Sophia*, provides an account of Jesus Christ's journey to heaven, where he defeats the planetary spirits (archons) thus enabling his followers to undertake similar journeys, free from confines of earthly life and malevolent astrological influences. In the *(First) Apocalypse of James* from Nag Hammadi,⁵³ Jesus tells disciples that after his death he will return and 'appear for a reproof to the archons. And I shall reveal to them that he can not be seized. If they seize him, then he will overpower each of them'. The Gnostic is rescued from the dark powers and can depart from this world through the planetary spheres towards the pleroma. Similarly, the Gnostic text *Pistis Sophia* quotes Christ as saying:

I flew to the height... And the gates of the firmament... all opened at the same time. And all the archons and all the powers and all the angels therein... looked upon the shining garment of light which I wore, they saw the mystery of their name within it... saying: "How has the Lord of the All passed through without our knowing?" And all their bonds were loosened, and their places and their ranks.⁵⁴

In *The Gnostic Paul*, Pagels examines the way in which Paul's letters can be interpreted either antignostically or gnostically.⁵⁵ The Naasenes and Valentinians revered Paul as a Gnostic initiate, claiming that his receiving of the gnosis was a symbolic one, as set out in the *Treatise on the Resurrection*, which was discovered at Nag Hammadi:⁵⁶

⁵² G. R. S. Meade, trans., *Pistis Sophia*, 1921, available at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/ps/index.htm> [accessed 15 September 2016].

⁵³ J. M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, Fourth revised edition (Leiden: Brill, 1996), p. 264.

⁵⁴ Meade, *Pistis Sophia*.

⁵⁵ Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Paul – Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters* (New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1992), p. 152.

⁵⁶ Pagels, *The Gnostic Paul*, p. 29, with reference to the *Treatise on the Resurrection*, a Gnostic text found at Nag Hammadi sometimes referred to as 'The Letter to Rheginos'. See Willis Barnstone and Marvin Meyer, eds., *The Gnostic Bible* (London and Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, 2003); *The Treatise on the Resurrection (Nag Hammadi Codex I, 4)*, trans. Willis Barnstone, available at <http://gnosis.org/naghamm/resurrection-barnstone.html> (accessed 25 September 2016.)

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The saviour has swallowed up death, so that you should not remain in ignorance [i.e., 'death']... and he has offered us the way of our immortality. Therefore, as the Apostle says, we suffered with him, and we arose with him, and we went to heaven with him.

According to Harrison, Paul's revelation is a paradigm for the Gnostic believer's ascent.⁵⁷ Furthermore, the motif of the heavenly journey can be seen in John 3:1–21. 'Jesus replied, " ...unless a person is born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God".' The phrase 'born again' in the King James Version can be translated as 'born from heaven', indicating a heavenly journey and the transformation of the mystic.⁵⁸

Paul describes Jesus Christ as 'a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek', which could be connected to angelomorphism and the priesthood at Qumran.⁵⁹ Melchizedek is a mysterious figure in the Book of Genesis, who as 'a priest of God Most High', presents bread and wine to Abraham and blesses him.⁶⁰ Melchizedek does not belong to the traditional Levitical priestly caste of the Israelites. Early Church Fathers understood this as representing a pre-figuration of the priesthood of Christ and that of the Catholic Church.⁶¹ Paul describes Christ as a high priest in the sanctuary and a true tabernacle, which was set up by God, i.e., in heaven.⁶² The theme has been further amplified by Peter, who says: 'But you are... a royal priesthood... God's own people'.⁶³ While in Revelation, John writes ' ...you have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God'.⁶⁴ This is the notion that angelomorphism is linked to heaven as a temple with angels serving as heavenly priests.

Fletcher-Louis further discusses angelomorphism in Luke's Gospel and the Book of Acts. In Acts 6:15 the face of the martyr Stephen is explicitly likened to that of an angel; and in Acts 12:13–15 it is assumed that a person's guardian angel closely resembles them. He considers that those texts were constructed in conscious interaction with Jewish traditions of

⁵⁷ J. R. Harrison, 'In Quest of the Third Heaven: Paul & His Apocalyptic Imitators', *Vigiliae Christianae* 58, no. 1 (2004): pp. 24–55, p. 29.

⁵⁸ William C. Grese, "'Unless One Is Born Again": The Use of a Heavenly Journey in John 3', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107, no. 4 (1988), pp. 677–693.

⁵⁹ Heb. 5:6, with reference to Psalm 110:4.

⁶⁰ Gen. 14:18–20.

⁶¹ *The Catechism*, p. 1333.

⁶² Heb. 8:1–2.

⁶³ 1 Peter 2:9.

⁶⁴ Rev. 5:10.

human angelomorphism.⁶⁵ According to Fletcher-Louis, ‘the Lukan angelomorphic Christ brings an angelic identity and status to his followers’.⁶⁶ The relation between Jesus-followers and angels is one of ‘substantive continuity of identity’ and ‘ontological affinity’.⁶⁷ However, for a contrary view, Sullivan stated that despite the similarity in appearance and the closeness of interaction, there does not seem to be any reason to suppose that there was any blurring of categories between angels and humans.⁶⁸ Sullivan considered that the transformation of Enoch into the Angel Metatron was a one-off event beyond the earthly sphere. In any case, according to Bucur, the depiction of eschatological humanity as angelic or angelomorphic should be understood as corresponding to the depiction of protological humanity. Thus, 2 Enoch 30.11 states that Adam was created as ‘a second angel, honored and great and glorious’, and so angelification signals a return to Paradise.⁶⁹

Tertullian (ca. 160–225 CE) explained that, in the eschaton, the heavenly kingdom can be enjoyed when the righteous are changed into angelic bodies:

This is the manner of the heavenly kingdom: within the space of its thousand years is comprised the resurrection of the saints, who arise either earlier or later according to their deserts: after which, when the destruction of the world and the fire of judgement have been set in motion, we shall be changed in a moment into angelic substance, by virtue of that supervesture of incorruption, and be translated into that heavenly kingdom...⁷⁰

Bucur considered that Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–ca. 215 CE), another Christian theologian, saw the spiritual universe as hierarchical: the Logos is at the pinnacle, below which are the seven *protocists* (the first

⁶⁵ Fletcher-Louis, *Luke-Acts*, p. 105; see also Fletcher-Louis, *All the Glory of Adam*.

⁶⁶ Fletcher-Louis, *Luke-Acts*, p. 254.

⁶⁷ Bogdan Gabriel Bucur, *Angelomorphic Pneumatology; Clement of Alexandria and other early Christian witnesses* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), p. 46.

⁶⁸ Kevin P. Sullivan, ‘Wrestling with Angels: A study of the Relationship between Angels and Humans in Ancient Jewish Literature and the New Testament’, (*Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums* 55) (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

⁶⁹ Bucur, *Angelomorphic Pneumatology*, p. 46.

⁷⁰ Tertullian. *Tertullian: Adversus Marcionem*, ed. and trans. Ernest Evans (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), III. 24, p. 249.

created angels), the archangels and the angels.⁷¹ Advancement on the cosmic ladder leads to the progressive transformation of one level into the next at the end of the millennial cycle.⁷² But Clement indicates that the time period indicated that the Gnostic ought to rise out of the sphere of creation and of sin. So the cosmic-ladder becomes an image of interior transformation. Bucur concludes that these texts present an ancient biblical and extra-biblical tradition – the transformation from human to angelic – that was eliminated, or de-emphasized, in mainstream Christianity.⁷³ According to McGrath, in a view that seems close to that in the *Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice*, whenever the Divine Liturgy is celebrated on earth, the boundaries between heaven and earth are removed with earthly worshippers joining in the eternal heavenly liturgy chanted by angels and ‘...worshippers have the opportunity of being mystically transported to the threshold of heaven’.⁷⁴

Barker endeavours to reconstruct the worldview of the first Christians as including elements of Temple theology, arguing that these elements include: the Temple/Tabernacle as a microcosm of the creation; priests as angels and angels as priests, and where humans could become angels through resurrection or *theosis*.⁷⁵ Thus the fallen angels of scripture could be attributed to a corrupt priesthood.⁷⁶ According to 1 Enoch, the rebel angels brought their heavenly knowledge to earth and they made a covenant.⁷⁷ Since the temple priests had seen themselves as angels, according to Barker, the fallen angels were corrupted priests.⁷⁸ However, returning to angelification proper, in Psalm 110:

⁷¹ Bucur, *Angelomorphic Pneumatology*, p. 42.

⁷² Bucur, *Angelomorphic Pneumatology*, p. 42.

⁷³ Bucur, *Angelomorphic Pneumatology*, p. 46.

⁷⁴ Alister E. McGrath, ed., *A Brief History of Heaven* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003), p. 167.

⁷⁵ Margaret Barker, *Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2003), p. 105; see also

<http://www.margaretbarker.com/Temple/default.htm> [accessed 26 September 2013].

⁷⁶ Genesis 6:1–4.

⁷⁷ 1 En.6.4.

⁷⁸ Margaret Barker, *Wisdom and the other Tree: A Temple Theology reading of the Genesis Eden Story* (Amsterdam: Society for Biblical Literature, 2012), p. 5, at <http://www.margaretbarker.com/Papers/WisdomOtherTree.pdf> [accessed 10 November 2013].

The Lord says to my lord:
 “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies
 a footstool for your feet.”
² The Lord will extend your mighty scepter from Zion, saying,
 “Rule in the midst of your enemies!”
³ Your troops will be willing
 on your day of battle.
 Arrayed in holy splendor,
 your young men will come to you
 like dew from the morning’s womb.
⁴ The Lord has sworn
 and will not change his mind:
 “You are a priest forever,
 in the order of Melchizedek.”

The investiture and symbolic birth of a Melchizedek-like figure – i.e., ‘a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek’ – in the holy of holies is described.⁷⁹ He is invited to sit on the throne: i.e., ‘The Lord says to my lord: “Sit at my right hand”’, which is the moment he takes his place as the divine son.⁸⁰ Margaret Barker, considering alternative translations of the text, considers that in this Psalm ‘the heavenly birth and anointing of the king and birth into the life of heaven was what is meant by resurrection’.⁸¹ Those who sit on the throne are reborn and live in heaven, equal to angels, sons of god, uniting the divine and human. The heavenly liturgy and the angel priesthood replicate the most ancient traditions of the Jerusalem Temple, and perpetuate them as a tradition in the Christian Church.⁸²

Conclusions

Angelomorphism can be understood in various ways from literal to figurative, and has links to early liturgical practices, although the concept has been de-emphasized in current Christian teachings. The nature of the angelification can be understood in different ways: whether human beings join the angels' worship in heaven and thereby become more angelic by association; change into an angelic class of being through a process of

⁷⁹ Melchizedek is the king of Salem and priest of *El Elyon* (‘God most high’) mentioned in Genesis 14: 18–20. See footnote 61 above, regarding Paul’s reference to Jesus Christ as a priest in the order of Melchizedek in Heb. 5:6.

⁸⁰ Barker, *Great High Priest*, p. 82.

⁸¹ Margaret Barker, *Temple Mysticism, An introduction*, (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2011), p. 100.

⁸² Barker, *Great High Priest*, p. 105.

transformation with divine fire; begin to function as messengers (*aggelou*) of the divine due to their faith; or become ontologically identified with Jesus Christ in the resurrection, the radical and magical transition from an earthly level to a heavenly one, aided by ritual, ascetic, prayer, or other religious practices, which has been equated with angelification in both Jewish and Christian earliest traditions. Being 'born from above' by mystical enthronement in sacred space is seen as another key to both the contemplation of the divine and the empowerment of the individual seer.

One result of the transference of the worshiper from the 'lower' to the 'higher' part of the continuum of life would be for individuals and communities to experience life more as the denizens of the heavenly realms would be imagined to experience it, i.e., to become more 'angelic', in resonance with the Hermetic dictum 'as above, so below'.⁸³ In this way, heaven becomes less a physical location in the sky, but rather an orientation towards the sacred in life. The dichotomy between heaven and earth, 'above' and 'below,' depends on the perspective and orientation of the person perceiving them. Life on earth includes experiences corresponding to periods of elevated awareness which therefore, by analogy, are closer to the perceived heavenly powers. Similarly, life on earth may be perceived of as not completely disconnected from the heavenly realms, but rather as shaped by the thoughts and actions of individuals, which influence conditions while alive as well as those that are desired or imagined in the hereafter.

⁸³ Hayyan, 'The Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus'.