I have made a ceaseless effort not to ridicule, not to bewail, nor to scorn human actions, but to understand them.

--Spinoza
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CHAPTER I

A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH: THE MILLENNIAL IMPULSE AND
THE CREATION OF ALTERNATIVE FAMILY SYSTEMS

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and
the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And
I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out
of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I
heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle
of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be
his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.
And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall
be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there
be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he
that sat upon the throne said, Behold I make all things new.
---Revelation 21:1-5

In the young, turbulent, rapidly changing United States
between the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, the spirit expressed in this
vision from the Book of Revelation and similar Biblical prophetic
accounts, assumed great potency and power for many Americans.
Particularly in the Jacksonian Era of the 1830s and 1840s and in areas
of New England expansion and settlement, the possibility and, indeed,
the necessity of radical social change came to seem a pressing
concern. During this period of "Freedom's Ferment,"¹ a wide range of
political, social, economic, and religious causes and reforms were
advocated in the attempt to come to terms with the many problems and
possibilities inherent in the development of the new nation.

Among the most thoroughgoing efforts at social and religious
reorganization were those made not by the essentially "secular" reformers

¹This was Alice Felt Tyler's apt characterization of the age in
her Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History from the
Colonial Period to the Outbreak of the Civil War (New York: Harper and
Row, 1962; originally published, 1944).
but by leaders of a proliferation of millennial religious groups that lived in the anxious expectation of great changes that would be associated with the establishment of an imminent, literal, all-inclusive, earthly millennium. This ideal or heavenly order of the kingdom of God on earth would replace what was felt to be a profoundly corrupt and diseased old order that seemed to be tottering inevitably toward destruction. Unable to see any purely rational solution to the complex problems of religious, social, and political fragmentation which surrounded them in the larger society, groups such as the Shakers, Oneida Perfectionists, and Mormons partially separated themselves from the world. They sought to achieve control over their own lives and suercease from great inner and outer tensions by creating a total community environment, essentially an ideal society in microcosm, which would make possible the reintegration of religious and secular life into an harmonious whole. Eventually, the millennialists were convinced, these ideal religious and cultural patterns would spread to encompass the whole world.¹

¹The specific views of the millennium and the means of encouraging its coming that were held by these groups and by individuals within these groups differed greatly. As a provisional definition, this paper will follow Norman Cohn's suggestion that "millenarian" movements are those which look toward a salvation which is to be collective, terrestrial, imminent, total, and accomplished at least in part, by supernatural or extra-human means. Norman Cohn, "Medieval Millenarism: Its Bearing on the Comparative Study of Millenarian Movements," in Millennial Dreams in Action: Studies in Revolutionary Religious Movements, ed. Sylvia L. Thrupp (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), pp. 31-43. The tortured intricacies and frequent inconsistencies in the views of the millennium formally held by such groups have been traced by theologians and intellectual historians. This study will be primarily concerned, however, with the functional significance of the generalized millennial approach. That approach was aptly characterized by John Humphrey Noyes, who founded the Oneida Community, as based on a recognition of "the right of religious inspiration to shape society and dictate the form of family life." Quoted in Tyler, Freedom's Ferment, p. 194, from a longer letter by Noyes printed in William Hepworth Dixon, Spiritual Wives, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1868), 2: 347-353.

The role of the millennial impulse as a key factor underlying much of American history recently has begun to receive increasing attention. From the early Puritans, who attempted to create a "holy commonwealth" in the New World; to later figures such as Jonathan
Perhaps the most striking departure from normative nineteenth-century American social patterns that these millennial communitarians made in attempting to create a total, new, religious and social environment was their reorganization of conventional relations between the sexes. The Shakers, Oneida Perfectionists, and Mormons, as well as many other less long-lived and less well-organized groups in this period, Edwards, who looked to America as the site where the millennium would be inaugurated, to still later, more secular believers in progress, America's unique national mission, and manifest destiny—millennial modes of thought have been of great significance in our history. See David E. Smith, "Millenarian Scholarship in America," American Quarterly 17 (Autumn 1965): 535-549, and Ernest Lee Tuveson, Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America's Millennial Role (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968).

Terms such as "communitarian" and "communitarian socialism" were revived by Arthur Bestor as descriptively and intellectually more adequate than ambiguous and often pejorative words such as "utopian" and "communistic" that have frequently been used to characterize these communal ventures. Arthur Bestor, Backwoods Utopias: The Sectarian and Owenite Phase of Communitarian Socialism in America, 1663-1829, 2d enl. ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970; originally published, 1950). Both the sectarian and the secular communitarians were heavily influenced by millennial concerns. As John F. C. Harrison has shown in his Quest for the New Moral World: Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1969), the most militantly anti-clerical of the secular communitarians thought in a millennial framework. And American Fourierism, the other important secular communitarian excitement of the antebellum period, was even more concerned with religious and millennial issues.

In this study, however, the term "millennial communitarian" is used to designate those groups which operated out of an explicitly Christian millennial framework, sought to restore the faith and practice of the "primitive Christian church," and believed in some form of literal second coming of Christ. These features, more than their communitarianism as such, linked groups such as the Shakers, Oneida Perfectionists, and Mormons. Each of these groups began from an explicitly religious base and eventually moved toward communitarianism to realize their religious ideals in practice. For studies suggesting the linkage between the Mormons and more explicitly communitarian groups such as the Shakers and Oneida Perfectionists, see Leonard J. Arrington, "Early Mormon Communitarianism: The Law of Consecration and Stewardship," Western Humanities Review 7 (Autumn 1953): 341-369; Arrington, Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958); and Mario S. De Pillis, "The Development of Mormon Communitarianism, 1826-1846" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1960).
radically modified standard monogamous marriage patterns within their communities. In breaking down conventional nuclear family arrangements they significantly changed ordinary male and female role relations. And they sharply criticized the inadequacies of sexual and familial patterns in the external society.

The Shakers, earliest of the millennial communitarian groups to be considered in this study, became established in the United States under Ann Lee and her American followers during the turbulence which followed the Revolutionary War. The Shakers reached their greatest numerical strength during the decade before the Civil War, with some 6,000 members in eighteen different centers and some sixty semi-autonomous communities scattered from Maine to Indiana. Developing out of Protestant revivalist roots which looked to a restoration of the faith of the "primitive Christian church" and gaining most of their converts in the aftermath of revivalistic excitements in the larger society, the Shakers established strictly regulated celibate religious communities that were similar in many respects to the dual monastic orders of English Catholicism.

1Shaker membership statistics are extremely unreliable. This figure is based on the estimate of Edward Deming Andrews, The People Called Shakers: A Search for the Perfect Society, new enl. ed. (New York: Dover, 1963).

2A "restorationist" emphasis, involving an attempt to return to the spirit and practices of early Christianity and to do away with the corruptions which were felt to have crept into the Roman Catholic Church (and its successors) was an important concern shared by all of these millennial communitarians. While differing as to specifics, all of these groups shared an historical framework which was an outgrowth of the Protestant Reformation. This framework argued that a severe declension of the Christian Church went back at least as far as Constantine. His reign was followed by more than a thousand years of the "great apostasy" under the Roman Catholic Church. These nineteenth-century millennialists argued that the Protestant reformers had not gone far enough toward returning to the ideals of the "primitive Christian church," and that they themselves in a sense were the true inheritors of early Christianity. Such elaborate historical justifications were important as an underpinning for the radical religious and social innovations introduced by these millennialists.

3The complex origins of Shaker religious and communal organization are discussed in the following chapter. The possibility of some
Men and women in Shaker communities lived under a common roof while strictly separated in almost all of their activities. Shakers bore their "daily cross" against the evils of the flesh, particularly lust, which was identified as the root of all evil, the original sin that led to the fall in the Garden of Eden. The Shakers were convinced that sexual intercourse was inherently exploitative, especially of women. Such relations would be done away with entirely in the afterlife, and, by extension, in their societies, which were an attempt to replicate the heavenly pattern on earth. Women in Shaker communities were given parallel and essentially equal authority at all levels of the Church governmental hierarchy, both temporal and spiritual, although the normal occupational division of labor between the sexes remained largely unchanged. And the foundress of the Society, Ann Lee, was considered to have been coequal with Jesus as an embodiment of the spirit of God in human form.¹

The Oneida Perfectionists, probably the most radical of the millennial community departures from monogamy both in theory and in practice, originated out of the reaction of John Humphrey Noyes to the Finney revival of the early 1830s. Noyes initially was an intense, direct borrowing from earlier groups seems likely, but specific linkages are virtually impossible to establish.

¹With the exception of their commitment to celibacy and their hierarchical church structure, Shaker belief and social practice were anything but monolithic or unchanging. The three major early doctrinal statements were:

[Benjamin Seth Younsg], The Testimony of Christ’s Second Appearing (Lebanon, Ohio: John McClean, 1808).

John Dunlavy, The Manifesto, or A Declaration of the Doctrines and Practice of the Church of Christ (Pleasant Hill, Ky.: P. Bertrand, 1818).

[Calvin Green and Seth.Y. Wells], A Summary View of the Millennial Church, or The United Society of Believers (Commonly Called Shakers) (Albany, N.Y.: Packard & Van Benthuyisen, 1823). Unless the full title has special significance, long nineteenth-century titles have been shortened in these footnotes.

These works, all of which continued to be republished by the Shaker leadership before the Civil War, differed significantly on many theological points. See Robley Edward Whitson, Shaker Theological Sources: An Introductory Selection (Bethlehem, Conn.: United Institute, 1969).
driven young man who sought to convert the entire world to his heretical Perfectionist beliefs. Beginning in the mid 1840s at Putney, Vermont, and then at the main community at Oneida in western New York between 1848 and 1879, Noyes and his followers developed an extraordinary system of "complex marriage." It was described with but little exaggeration as an apparently "unprecedented combination of polygamy and polyandry with certain religious and social restraints."¹

Under a system of strictly regulated informal community control mechanisms, supplemented by elaborate and extremely demanding birth control practices aptly described as "male continence," the Oneida Community allowed frequent exchange of sexual partners among the approximately two hundred adults in the community. Any exclusive attachments were rigorously broken up as "special love," selfish behavior antithetical to community order. Sex roles also were radically revised. Women participated alongside men in almost all of the religious, social, economic, and organizational life of the community, although usually in formally subordinate authority positions. Like Shaker celibacy, Oneida group marriage practices were based on an attempt to return to what they believed had been the faith of the "primitive Christian church" and to replicate an ideal or heavenly pattern on earth.²

The Mormons, or Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, though not so thoroughly a communitarian group as the Shakers and Oneida Perfectionists,³ engaged in what undoubtedly was in scale


³The Mormon law of consecration and stewardship provided considerably larger scope for individual activity than did the more
the most important single experiment in radically revising the relations of the sexes in nineteenth-century America. In effect, the Mormons were attempting to reconstruct an entire society, developing and introducing a revitalized culture with its own cohesively integrated religious and social beliefs and practices. Mormon polygamous marriage practices represented a major departure from the deeply ingrained monogamous traditions of Western Europe that went back to the Roman Empire.¹ Like the Shakers and the Oneida Perfectionists, the initial concern of the Mormon prophet-founder Joseph Smith in the 1820s and 1830s was to overcome the value confusion associated with the competing claims of revivalistic religion in the period. He, too, sought to restore what he conceived to have been the faith of the "primitive Christian church" and institute the "dispensation of the fulness of times" which would be associated with the millennium. Beginning at least as early as 1841 in their headquarters in Nauvoo, Illinois, which grew to become temporarily the largest city in the state, Mormon leadership began to make a concerted effort to establish theocratic control over all aspects of life, and they sought secretly to reinstitute a form of marriage modeled after the polygamous practices of the Hebrew patriarchs of the Old Testament such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.²

explicitly communistic systems adopted by the Shakers and Oneida Perfectionists. The continuing Mormon emphasis on missionary outreach militated against the possibility of a fully communistic organization, as did other Mormon concerns. See Arrington, "Early Mormon Communitarianism."

¹Those areas of the world influenced by the Roman Empire, particularly Western Europe and its extensions, are the only major cultural regions where some form of polygamy or concubinage is strictly prohibited. Even in these areas, the practice of maintaining mistresses or their equivalent has been widely tolerated at the higher levels of society. Of George P. Murdock's world ethnographic sample, 193 out of 234 societies held polygamy as the ideal. William J. Goode, The Family (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 46.

²Major Mormon sources illustrating the development of the early doctrinal and social views propounded by Joseph Smith include: Joseph Smith, Jr. The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon, Upon Plates Taken from the Plates of Nephi (Palmyra, N.Y.:
In initially attempting to establish Mormon polygamous beliefs and practice, the conflicting marriage and divorce standards of ante-bellum society were declared to be invalid for Mormons. In place of the confusing external standards, a strong patriarchal system eventually was established which was buttressed by an elaborate theological rationale of marriage "for time and eternity." From 1852, when the Mormons in Utah officially announced to the world their commitment to "plural marriage" as an integral part of their religious and social practice, until 1890, when the system was officially abandoned due to extreme external pressure, polygamy was advocated as the highest form of marriage among Mormons.

Somewhat paradoxically, this new marriage system in frontier Utah, which had such a heavy ideology of male dominance, and which most non-Mormons denounced in florid terms as a degeneration into "barbarism," allowed for many improvements in woman's status. The Church-supported University of Deseret, founded in 1850, was one of the first coeducational institutions in the country. Women in...

E. B. Grandin for the Author, 1830); A Book of Commandments for the Government of the Church of Christ, Organized According to Law, on the 6th of April, 1830. (Zion [Independence, Mo.]: W. W. Phelps & Co., 1833); Joseph Smith, Jr., et al., comps., Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of the Latter Day Saints: Carefully Selected from the Revelations of God (Kirtland, Ohio: F. G. Williams, 1835); and Joseph Smith, Jr., History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Period I, History of Joseph Smith the Prophet, ed. B. H. Roberts, 6 vols., 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1948).

One of the more accessible of the early reprintings of Joseph Smith's alleged revelation of July 12, 1843, on plural and celestial marriage is found in The Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star 15 (January 1, 1853): 5-8. Hereafter cited as Millennial Star. The revelation is currently most readily available, with added title, introductory explanatory comments, and verse divisions, as Section 132 of Joseph Smith, Jr., The Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints [Utah edition] (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1949), pp. 239-245. Hereafter cited as Doctrine and Covenants. Unless otherwise noted, references to sections of the Doctrine and Covenants will refer to the divisions of this current Utah edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. A smaller body of Mormons that never accepted polygamy--the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints--has denied Joseph Smith's authorship of this revelation, but, as will be shown in detail in Chapter IV, this view is historically unconvincing.
frontier Utah engaged in numerous and varied traditionally "male" occupations and were the first women in any territory or state, including Wyoming, to vote in territorial elections. And a Mormon publication, the Woman's Exponent, was one of the most strongly oriented to feminist issues in the nineteenth century. Today, although the practice of polygamy has been given up, the larger Mormon family ideal remains the basis of social organization throughout a large area of the Intermountain West upon which this hardworking people have placed their indelible cultural imprint.¹

These three religious ventures in communal reorganization thus made drastic changes in the conventional nuclear family patterns that were the norm in antebellum society. As a result, particularly in their early, outgoing, expansive phases, these millennialists were perceived by many people as a threat to family stability and, by extension, to the entire social order. The years from 1820 to 1860 were marked by an extraordinary sentimentalization of home and family life that has been described as part of a larger complex of "Victorian" concerns and repressions. Yet although these millennial groups implicitly and explicitly attacked the validity of conventional monogamous marriage patterns, and partly for that reason suffered considerable persecution, these groups were themselves among the most ardent in using a romanticized family model as the basis not only for their community life but for their whole religious belief system.

Although the Shakers were strictly celibate, they considered themselves part of an enlarged family of God and lived in communal groups called "families" of 30 to 100 men and women under a single roof. Each "family" was semi-autonomous in carrying out its own

¹Many Americans have tended to view polygamy as inherently degrading to women and have assumed that woman's position in a polygamous system is inherently worse than in a monogamous one. This is not necessarily the case. Anthropological studies show that some polygamous societies give women a higher status and more real power and influence than do some monogamous societies, although, of course, a degree of subordination is implicit, at least formally, in such a system. See William N. Stephens, The Family in Cross-Cultural Perspective (New York: Holt, Reinhart & Winston, 1963), pp. 50-51.
religious and economic life. The Shaker foundress was described as "Mother" Ann Lee; especially loved leaders were referred to as "Father" and "Mother"; and ordinary members addressed each other as "Brother" and "Sister." Communities were governed under a highly hierarchical and oligarchic family style paternalism. Only the sexual aspects and the individualistic attachments of normal family life were eliminated.

At Oneida, the family model was even more explicit. All members of the Community lived under a common roof, shared a common table, participated in common economic activities, and attended the daily community religious-and-business meetings. The informal oligarchic control mechanisms used by the Community, including "mutual criticism" and "ascending and descending fellowship," were viewed as an elaboration of the informal means of social control used in ordinary families. John Humphrey Noyes, founder and patriarch of the Oneida Community, described their system as "a Community home in which each is married to all . . . Our Communities are families, as distinctly bounded and separated from promiscuous society as ordinary households." In fact, Noyes felt that the main idea of the great Owenite and Fourierist communitarian excitements was "the enlargement of home--the extension of family union beyond the little man-and-wife circle to large corporations."

The Mormons made possibly the most thoroughgoing elaboration of familial ideology in the antebellum period. For Mormons, marriage and family life provided the basic model for Church and Community life, including a variety of formal and informal mechanisms of social control. In addition, Mormon theology taught that properly sanctioned and practiced earthly marriages provided the basis for eternal progression and the highest development possible in the afterlife. In heaven, men whose marriages had been sealed "for time and eternity"

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1 Handbook of the Oneida Community (Wallingford, Conn.: Office of the Circular, 1867), p. 64.

would be great patriarchs. Eventually, through their "eternal increase" by means of their progeny, they would move on to organize and rule over whole new worlds, achieving full godhood in what could easily be seen as the ultimate in "manifest destiny." In effect, for Mormons such a high value was placed on marriage and family life that it came to provide the model of eternal development and security.

What was the significance of the extraordinary idealization of the home and family life in these millennial community ventures? Clearly in each case "the family" assumed a significance going considerably beyond the meaning usually attached to the term by social scientists. For these millennialists, as for many of their contemporaries, "home" and "family" came to symbolize a complex constellation of values and served as a sort of shorthand to describe the basis of social order and of social relatedness itself. Thus, the intellectual ideas of these millennialists raise interesting perspectives not only on marriage and the family as narrowly defined but also on broader problems of religious and social stress in the period. What were such groups trying to accomplish and how did their marital experimentation fit into their larger concerns?

Few previous writers have addressed themselves to such issues. Instead, most popular and scholarly accounts have emphasized the seemingly bizarre beliefs and practices of such groups. The millennial communitarians are satirized as amusing eccentrics who inevitably "failed" because they were out of touch with the historical currents of their time, however those may be defined. The Marxists have dismissed both the "religious" and "secular" communitarian ventures as examples of "utopian socialism." These groups are said to have failed because they were "unscientific," "backward-looking," and did not deal properly with the economic realities of the emerging capitalist-industrial order. The psychologically and sociologically

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inclined have also dismissed the communitarians. The leadership or membership of such groups are said to have been psychologically and/or sociologically maladjusted and hence were incapable of sustaining their unusual form of community life. Or, in a sort of catchall "consensus" explanation, such communitarian groups are seen as having been too far out of the American "mainstream" to succeed. These sweeping judgments have almost invariably been made on the basis of little or no original research and with little supporting documentation.¹

Rather surprisingly, few writers have deigned to take seriously the assumptions, concerns, and objectives of the millennial communitarians themselves. In the antebellum period, many intelligent and capable people were moved to adopt radically new ways of looking at the world and to organize functioning communities--lasting no less than thirty years in the groups studied here--around forms of marital organization as diverse as celibacy, group marriage, and polygamy. Few people are prepared to commit themselves to beliefs and practices that are seriously at odds with their early training unless they have compelling personal and social reasons. Why should so many groups that were out of the "mainstream" as seen from Marxist, social-psychological, or consensus perspectives have been formed at a particular time and place? What driving dynamic could have led many people to undergo such a painful transition to new standards? And by what means was this remarkable transition achieved?

In these three millennial ventures in communal reorganization--all of which left extensive records of their ideals, concerns, and practices--we have what are in effect almost ideal laboratories through which the process of drastic social change can be viewed as it occurs at both the individual and the group levels. The experience of such groups also highlights contradictory elements of a culture in transition and the

results of carrying certain contemporary social values to their extreme logical conclusion.¹

I

The years from the decade following the War of 1812 to the decade preceding the Civil War—during which these three millennial groups were founded or reached their peak of size and influence—are characteristically described as a time of buoyant optimism and expansiveness. The age was one of "Jacksonian Democracy" when the common man came into his own in politics and public life; of "Manifest Destiny" when the nation surged across the continent to the Pacific; and of "Freedom's Ferment" when Americans, believing that perfection could be achieved on earth, threw themselves into an incredible range of benevolent and reform movements with the confident sense of living in an age of miracles in which all things were possible.

Such an interpretation accurately suggests the surface level of boosterism and drive running through the period, yet it fails to recognize how such often-compulsive optimism could also mask deep anxieties and fears of failure. There was always a dark side underlying expansiveness. The revivalists and home missionary societies could talk in glowing terms of gathering in the sheaves for Christ's kingdom, yet a man such as Lyman Beecher could also be motivated by a desire to save the West from "barbarism" and by a deep fear that, should the churches fail to establish order, the new areas would fall prey to chaos. In a rapidly changing society, there was much moral and intellectual confusion.

¹ These Yankee millennialists deserve the same kind of serious intellectual and social treatment that Perry Miller provided for their forbearers, the New England Puritans. The fascination of the nineteenth-century American millennial communitarians, like Miller's Puritans, is that they provide an almost "ideal laboratory" from which "certain generalizations about the relation of thought or ideas to communal experience" can be extracted. The nineteenth-century groups can be viewed as part of a self-conscious attempt to create a sort of Anglo-American ethnicity. This attempt was analogous in many respects to the efforts of non-WASP immigrant groups to revive their own national roots, to develop or recapture a sense of distinctively Greek, Irish, Polish, or other ethnic identity. See Perry Miller, The New England Mind: From Colony to Province (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961).
Emerson spoke for many when he declared: "Things are in the saddle /
And ride mankind."¹

Adding to the uncertainties facing many people was the proliferation of competing religious sects which has been characterized as "American wars of religion," analogous in a modest way to the destructive European conflicts of the sixteenth century.² As a brilliant essay has suggested,³ the very fluidity of this situation accentuated the sense of the urgency of planting the seeds of future social and religious institutions while society was still malleable, not yet hardened into rigid forms. "Now is the time when the West can be saved; soon it will be too late!" was the cry. Like their Puritan forebearers who had fled religious and social disorder in England and had attempted to establish new commonwealths in the New World, the New Englanders who moved westward across New York and into the Northwest Territory were faced with the need of establishing a new order in the absence of clear guidelines. Theirs was an age both of high promise and of great danger.

Of all the areas in which transplanted New Englanders settled, the one in which religious disorder reached greatest intensity and the greatest variety of social experimentation took place was that part of New York State west of the Catskills and Adirondacks. This was a "burned over district"—so called because of the frequency with which the fires of the revival spirit swept through the region. There the Shakers drew much of their membership, the Oneida Perfectionists settled, and the Mormon prophet Joseph Smith received his first revelations. An outstanding


social-intellectual history of the region describes it as a "storm center," a "psychic highway" upon whose broad belt of land congregated people of solid Yankee inheritance largely from the hill country of New England, a people extraordinarily given to unusual religious beliefs and to crusades aimed at the perfection of mankind and the achievement of millennial happiness. In the minds of many men and women of the region could be found a strange admixture of skepticism and credulity, pragmatism and superstition, optimism and deep fears.

During the period which saw the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825, this "burned over district" was rapidly transformed and began to show its characteristic tendency toward millennial revivalism. "Ultraism," a tendency toward commitment to extreme religious and social ideas, rose to a peak about 1836, and then, with the coming of the Panic of 1837 began to disperse into a variety of new concerns of the early 1840s, including the Fourierist and Millerite excitements. Eventually the Abolitionist crusade would become the focal point for the social concerns of many individuals in the area. Throughout the years before 1850, an atmosphere of intense religious rivalry and competing claims to truth led to great internal tensions in sensitive individuals who desired a secure religious faith and a satisfying basis for social authority.

The socio-religious fluidity and turmoil in the rapidly developing new Republic before the Civil War--particularly in areas of New England settlement--could not but have placed special strains on family life and relations between the sexes. Of course, one may well question whether fundamental structural change was taking place in the family. Recent studies suggest that, at least in Western societies, underlying patterns of family organization have changed but slowly over the centuries.

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2The past decade has witnessed a proliferation of microscopic and macroscopic studies of family patterns, demographic trends, woman's role, and so forth. A provocative point of entry is provided by Philippe Ariès, Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life, trans. Robert Baldick (New York: Vintage Books, 1962; originally published, 1960). Some important essays on these and related topics are found in
period of stress is likely to generate a sense that basic social institutions such as the family are threatened with destruction, even if what actually is occurring is only a painful adjustment of old attitudes and structures to new social realities.

Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that many articulate individuals in the antebellum period were firmly convinced that the family was threatened and that loss of control in many aspects of social life was a pressing danger. Although the historian must refrain from assuming too easily that a one-to-one correlation exists between social reality and a people's perceptions of that reality, the deeply felt concerns of vocal individuals certainly do influence behavior and must be taken into account as a part of the social conditions of any period. Current theories of family change and empirical studies of such changes in the antebellum period still remain in their infancy. Thus, this section will simply suggest a tentative working hypothesis to account for stresses and possible


2See also William E. Bridges, "Family Patterns and Social Values in America, 1825-1875," American Quarterly 17 (Spring 1965): 3-11.
changes in family life in this period as such stresses relate to the experimentation of the millennial communitarians with family life and sexual patterns.

The most important causes of stress in antebellum family life appear to have been related to the increasing economic differentiation, including factors such as the development of commercial agriculture, nascent industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. As older, essentially rural and local farm patterns of economic employment changed, men's occupations increasingly took them away from the home into the highly competitive, individualistic world outside. Concurrently, women began to assume a position of almost sole importance in managing the home, rearing children, and a variety of other domestic concerns. Individual and community ties became more attenuated.

Both sexes presumably found difficulties in adapting to these changes. Men may have felt frustration at their decreased participation in family life and at the difficulties of their position as breadwinners for the family when so many occupational uncertainties existed. And women also appear to have found their new role as sole manager of the home difficult, as is suggested by the extraordinary proliferation of advice manuals in the years between 1820 and 1860.¹ Suggestions on all aspects of managing family and household affairs were provided in a variety of books and magazines. Had women's roles been clear, probably the demand for such publications would not have been so great. It could be argued that corresponding to an increasing "professionalization" of men's occupations, a similar "professionalization" of women's activities in the home took place during those years. Women such as Catherine Beecher came to feel that women needed special training in "domestic science," just as men also required special training for their new occupations which were arising.² Thus, increasing economic

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¹Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," American Quarterly 18 (Summer 1966): 151-174, provides a classic analysis of this literature.

differentiation led to an ever greater gap between the sexes in the period, a gap disturbing to many.

Closely related to increasing economic differentiation as a factor resulting in stress in the family was the great geographic mobility which developed in the antebellum period. Within little more than seventy-five years following the Revolutionary War, New England settlement, which had been narrowly concentrated along the coast and major navigable rivers, expanded into back country New England, spread across New York state, and fanned out into the Northwest Territory. At the same time, from the Middle States, Virginia, and the Tidewater regions, people poured over the Appalachian Mountains to settle and develop much of the Mississippi Valley and the South before the Civil War. Economic and geographic expansion proceeded at a pace unprecedented in previous American experience.¹

This high level of mobility presumably had significant social consequences. If individuals or families could separate with relatively greater ease from parental and community ties, such ties could easily become highly attenuated. Separated or soon to be separated by hundreds of miles, families could hardly maintain as much influence on their children's choice of marriage partners or on the way in which a marriage would be conducted after its consummation. Thus, marriages increasingly came to be established on the basis of what might be described as "romantic love," in which personal emotional attachments between men and women partially replaced earlier predominant considerations such as social status, parental desires, and the like. European visitors in the period almost uniformly were astonished by the great freedom of individual choice which had developed in marriage in America as compared to the much more highly stratified conditions in European society.²


²Especially valuable are accounts by Harriet Martineau, Frances Trollope, and Alexis de Tocqueville. English reactions are
Thus, the individualism of "romantic love" in the antebellum period in many ways paralleled the individualism of the whole society. The breakdown or at least considerable stress placed on marital institutions appears to have been similar to the breakdown or weakening of many other institutions—religious, legal, political, and economic.

Many came to feel that a highly expansive society was running almost out of control.

How accurate were contemporary perceptions of familial dislocation? What specific measures of stress and stability can the historian use to evaluate the validity of such impressionistic observations? One important indicator of marital stress in this period may be found in changes in state marriage policies, particularly divorce laws. Although Americans both of the antebellum period and of the present day have often tended to view the liberalization of divorce laws as a cause of marital disorders, more probably such liberalization is a consequence of increased marital flux and disharmony which the laws eventually are forced to take into account.

If liberalization of divorce laws can, in fact, serve as an accurate indicator of family disharmony, then the antebellum years must have seen considerable marital disorder. Between 1800 and 1870, a significant liberalization of divorce laws and a loosening of the legal strictures against the remarriage of divorced individuals took place in many states. Even in this period, simple desertion may well have summarized in J. L. Mesick, *The English Traveler in America: 1785-1835* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1922). Probably greater freedom of individual initiative had always existed in America than in Europe, but this freedom appears to have become accentuated during the antebellum period.

been the most common way of terminating an unsatisfactory marriage relationship. Nevertheless, in an effort to find formal and less drastic means of dealing with a growing problem, a number of states and territories—including Indiana, Illinois, Connecticut, Maine, Washington, Louisiana, Utah, and Arizona—adopted "omnibus" clauses which in practice permitted the courts and legislatures to grant divorces almost at their discretion. Reacting against such an "omnibus" clause in the Indiana constitution that had been instituted in part through the efforts of Robert Dale Owen—the son of the famous communitarian reformer Robert Owen—Horace Greeley, a prominent New York newspaperman and public figure, criticized the state as a "free love colony."1 Many Americans of this period may well have shared such sentiments.

What were the popular and literary reactions to the sense of uncertainty and disorder in family matters in this period? Not surprisingly, the felt sense of family instability appears to have been countered in large measure by attempts to repress potentially anarchic sexual tendencies and by assigning a position of enormous, sometimes almost cosmic, importance to "the home." This period has characteristically been described as one of "Victorian" repression, "sentimental years"2 marked by prudish and unrealistic attitudes on sexual and familial matters. A recent scholar has written of the "cult of true womanhood,"3 which stressed the pure, innocent, asexual qualities of the ideal woman. She was expected to curb the base animal passions of the lascivious man. By such means the ideal woman would be able to restore order in the family, and, by extension, in the fragmented society itself. Another scholar has written of the idealization of the home in the period as part of a "utopian retreat" from the relentless competition, uncertainty, and general disregard for human values in the new urbanizing and


3Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood."
industrializing order. Certain demographic data—such as the falling off of the birth rate before the Civil War in advance of any widespread popularization of artificial means of contraception—suggest that, far from being dysfunctional, the ideal of a small family and of a more cohesive home life expressed in such sentimentalized literature may well have helped to encourage a more realistic adjustment to changing social conditions.2

Thus, rather than suggesting that the "family" was being weakened in this period, one could plausibly argue that the nuclear family was in fact being strengthened and was gradually moving to take on many of the responsibilities for individual socialization that hitherto had been borne by a more widespread informal network of kinship and community ties.3 At the other end of the spectrum, large impersonal social institutions such as asylums and prisons also began to be developed to take over many of the tasks which previously had been carried on by kinship and community groups but which nuclear family units by themselves


were incapable of handling. In an increasingly mobile industrial order, preparing individuals to function free from conservative constraints was an important task. At the same time, even the most ardent go-getters had to have some human reference point and support for values other than the purely economic, and the family could perhaps provide such a basis for stabilization. One could argue, then, that by strengthening the nuclear family and by correspondingly weakening extended kinship ties in this period, Victorian sexual "repression" and idealization of the "home" may unconsciously have helped to prepare the way for a modern, mobile, highly differentiated, industrializing order.

II

The state of flux and uncertainty in marital and familial relations in the new Republic not surprisingly was also reflected in the various millennial communitarian groups which had such a strong sense of the inadequacies and inconsistencies of their transitional age. In fact, nearly all of both the mainline and fringe revivalistic movements which developed in the "burned over district" and related areas of New England settlement faced such problems and attempted with differing degrees of success to find solutions to them. Any religion which attempts to encompass the whole of life must inevitably come to terms with the problems of the family and regulation of the relations between


2It is possible that certain types of cohesive communal ties may well be incompatible with the functioning of an individualistic, industrial society. On the other hand, some continuing basis of social cohesion clearly is necessary, and the "family" may in some instances have provided such a focus. It seems significant that in taking issue with explosive and largely uncontrolled economic development in his period, a millennial communitarian such as John Humphrey Noyes also sharply criticized the nuclear family which he viewed as simply an extension of such socially disruptive economic individualism from the public into the private sphere.

3See Cross, Burned-over District, passim.
the sexes. And never were such issues more salient than in the period
in which the Shakers, Oneida Perfectionists, and Mormons arose.

In addition to responding to the many pressures of the larger
environment, religious revivalism, as John Humphrey Noyes aptly observed,
contained within itself a tendency to release sexual as well as religious
emotions.\(^1\) And such emotions were even further heightened in groups
which attempted thoroughgoing communal living. Intense and sustained
contact between the sexes under such circumstances could lead to enormous
pressures to relax the arbitrary sexual prohibitions and rules established
by the larger society. It is entirely possible that some form of
communism in sexual relations—whether it be in expression or repression—
may well have been necessary to sustain the sort of total, communistic,
religious and social commitment demanded by the millennial communitarian
ventures in their early phase of development.

The various millennial communitarian groups handled such sexual
tensions in different ways. The Shakers, as well as a number of German
pietist immigrant communities, established extremely rigid separation of
the sexes. In an accentuation of the common revivalistic distrust of
sexual impulses, a thoroughgoing effort was made to eliminate or minimize
sexual expression as much as possible. Celibacy, or highly repressive
systems verging on celibacy, served as a means of keeping "carnal"
impulses in check and encouraging single-minded devotion to religious
and communal goals.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, p. 634. Although the
popular view which associates revivalism with sexual excess may be over-
drawn, an important connection between the two phenomena nonetheless
exists. An historical treatment discussing some of these issues is
Charles A. Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting: Religion's Harvest
Time* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955). For anthropo-
logical and sociological perspectives, see I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion:
An Anthropological Study of Spirit Possession and Shamanism* (Baltimore:

\(^2\) German pietist groups such as the Rappites adopted celibacy,
though at the cost of considerable internal dissension, while the Amana
community discouraged marriage but did not prohibit it. See Karl J. R.
Arndt, *George Rapp's Harmony Society, 1785-1847* (Philadelphia:
University of Pennsylvania Press, 1965) and B. M. H. Shambaugh, *Amana that
Was and Amana that Is* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa,
1932).
Other millennial ventures with a communitarian cast chose a different course. The Oneida Perfectionists and the Mormons, as the most successful representatives of this group, acted to enlarge the range of permissible sexual contacts, while inflicting extraordinarily severe punishments—ranging from temporary exclusion from community life to death itself—on those who overstepped the newly enlarged boundaries. As in the celibate communities, sexuality as well as other aspects of communal life were subordinated to the larger religious and social interests of the group.

Radically variant systems of marriage such as celibacy, group marriage, and polygamy could not have been instituted without an intellectual rationale, rituals, and sanctions. Perhaps prophets or charismatic figures are able to act without external guidelines as "free movers," depending solely on their sense of divine mission and of the correctness of their actions. But the average man or woman would be unlikely to take the extreme risks inherent in jetisoning old ways and moving into a new and in many respects radically opposed condition of being without an overriding conviction that what he or she was doing had ultimate and absolute justification. Thus it is not surprising that in the Shaker, Oneida Perfectionists, and Mormon communities, elaborate religious and social rationales, rituals, and sanctions were created to legitimate the new beliefs and practices.

The extent of the flux in antebellum society and the problems inherent in using the Bible alone as the basis for religious and social order are graphically illustrated by the fact that all three millennial

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Withdrawal of sexual privileges, group criticism, and other forms of temporary exclusion from community life were used to maintain the sexual system at Oneida. The Mormons, who were faced with the necessity of giving order to a larger society which was dealing with a variety of intense internal and external pressures, developed at least the theoretical basis for a form of capital punishment under Church auspices called blood atonement. It was for incorrigible apostates and those guilty of flagrantly adulterous behavior. The origins and nature of this doctrine will be discussed at greater length in Chapter V. All three of these millennial groups were forced to make use of coercive measures in order to establish and maintain their new marital standards.
groups studied here could find support for their unorthodox marital systems in an identical New Testament passage. In the passage in question, Jesus was asked a trick question in an attempt to reduce to absurdity one view of the afterlife: A woman married one of seven brothers, who died without leaving her any children. So, according to the Jewish law of the levirate, she married the next brother to raise up children to the family name. He died just as her first husband had, as did each of the succeeding brothers whom she married in turn. Finally the woman herself died. Which brother would be her husband in the "resurrection," or, very loosely, the afterlife?

Jesus' deft and rather ambiguous response was that the question misunderstood the nature of the "resurrected state."

The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: but they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being children of the resurrection.

The Shakers, following a common Christian interpretation of this passage, argued that no sexual relations would occur in the resurrection. Such carnal distractions would be eliminated there. In imitation of this heavenly model, celibacy should be practiced on earth by truly dedicated Christians. Celibacy thus became the symbol of the triumph over sin, the chief factor separating believers from an impure world and allowing them to realize principles of true Christian unselfishness like that of the angels.

1 The three variants of this story are found in Matthew 22:15-22; Mark 12:18-27; and Luke 20:27-40. This analysis does not intend to suggest that these groups developed their conception of marriage from one Biblical passage. Rather, in each case, there appears to have been a complex interplay between Biblical exegesis and social concerns.


3 The Shaker interpretation of this passage runs throughout almost all of their writings as an underlying theme. The earliest and most authoritative account of Ann Lee's life, activities, and ideas states:

"To the married people, Mother [Ann Lee] said, 'You must forsake the marriage of the flesh, or you cannot be married to the Lamb, nor
John Humphrey Noyes, the Yale-trained academician who founded the Oneida Community, disagreed with this Shaker interpretation. He pointed out that the passage only said that "marriage" would be done away with in the resurrected state, not sexual relations per se. And what was "marriage?" Simply a legal, contractual, earthly relationship between a man and a woman characterized by exclusive sexual privileges and other rights and responsibilities. The narrow private relationship in earthly marriage would be done away with in the afterlife, where love would be universalized and expressed equally among all the saints. And, in Noyes's opinion, for its fullest consummation, total love both in heaven and on earth had to allow for the possibility of its physical expression. Oneida "complex marriage" thus was designed to allow the heavenly pattern to be realized on earth.\(^1\)

The Mormons, in an equally elaborate explanation growing out of their own "modern revelation," developed still a different explanation for this passage. Briefly stated, the Mormon view was that no marriages would be performed in the afterlife. Only marriages that had been properly sealed under the authority of the Mormon Priesthood on earth could endure in heaven. Such marriages would become the basis for social status and eternal progression in the afterlife, for Mormons found it impossible to believe that the finest things of this world--marriage and family life--would be done away with after death. Instead such experiences have any share in the resurrection of Christ: for those who are counted worthy to have part in the resurrection of Christ, neither marry nor are given in marriage; but are like unto the angels.\(^1\)


\(^1\)Noyes comments extensively on the differences between his views and those of the Shakers on sexual relations in this life and in the afterlife. As one example, see his "Bible Argument; Defining the Relations of the Sexes in the Kingdom of Heaven," in First Annual Report of the Oneida Association (Oneida Reserve, N.Y.: Leonard & Co., 1849), pp. 38-39. For a detailed account of Noyes's theories of the resurrection, see the Berean, esp. pp. 334-385.
would be heightened and refined, developing all that was best in earthly social relations.¹

That these three millennial groups could each find sanction for their widely divergent marital beliefs and practices in an identical Biblical passage suggests both the strength and the weakness of the larger Biblical prophetic tradition of which they were a part—a tradition which was associated with Christian millennialism and especially with the Protestant Reformation. By emphasizing the Bible as the sole source of religious authority and by giving "literal" interpretations of highly ambiguous Biblical passages, millennial groups could jetison the whole religious and social order which had developed over more than a thousand years under the Roman Catholic Church, and could innovate radically in belief and practice.

Such innovation was of highly ambiguous potential. By breaking down the old institutions and stressing individual Bible interpretation, further fragmentation might easily result. Yet if reintegration occurred around a new religious and social center, a more satisfying synthesis could also be developed. Although ostensibly looking to the past, in fact prophetic Biblical "literalism" could serve as a powerful vehicle for the expression of deeply felt present-day religious needs and concerns, a sort of divine Rorschach test. As one historian observed, by attempting to reinterpret the faith of the "primitive Christian church" in a new historical context, such groups could unconsciously be "backing into the future."² Since for believers in

¹The Mormons discuss this passage less frequently than the Shakers and Oneida Perfectionists in relation to their marriage views, but such an analysis implicitly underlies their concerns. The Mormon interpretation of this passage was first presented in the revelation on plural and celestial marriage itself. See Doctrine and Covenants, 32:16-17. In a detailed early defense of the theological foundations underlying Mormon polygamy, Orson Pratt, The Seer 1 (March 1853): 43, discusses Mormon beliefs in relation to this New Testament passage. A recent statement by Spencer W. Kimball, current President of the Mormon Church, explains how the Church's "modern revelation" "clarifies" this passage. Spencer W. Kimball, "Temples and Eternal Marriage," The Ensign (August 1974), pp. 2-6.

²Sidney E. Mead, "The Rise of the Evangelical Conception of the Ministry in America (1607-1850)," in The Ministry in Historical
the authority of the Bible and the prophetic traditions that developed out of it, the new beliefs and practices seemingly had ultimate sanction, such Biblical interpretation thus could become an immensely powerful dynamo bringing about social reorganization.

The inherent tendencies toward fragmentation associated with such Biblically based revivalistic religions meant that for a group to be successful it had to develop powerful new institutional forms to interpret and regulate the permissible range of religious and social variation. As both a product of such revivalistic religion and as an attempt to overcome its inherent tendency toward fragmentation, the Shakers, Oneida Perfectionists, and Mormons developed a highly authority-conscious and strongly centralized and hierarchical Church-type structure of government. Community needs were emphasized over those of the individual, although a considerable range of individual variation was allowed as well. Thus, a key to the relative success of these three groups was their eventual development of an authoritative Church structure and a strong, internally coherent social system to overcome the religious and social disorder that their members had found so unacceptable.¹

III

What was the process by which such radical departures from normative religious and marital patterns originated, were elaborated, and became embodied in successfully functioning group life? This will be

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¹Rosabeth Moss Kanter, *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), argues that the key to the success of the religious communal groups was their development of effective "commitment mechanisms." Though Kanter does not stress this point in her fine study, it is clear that such commitment mechanisms were developed because these groups genuinely believed in what they were doing and sought to find the most effective way to inculcate their beliefs. In other words, the successful communities were motivated not so much by abstract social theorizing but by deeply held belief.
the underlying question considered in this dissertation. A large literature analyzes the dynamics of change in millennial groups, primarily from anthropological perspectives. Such groups have been variously described as "nativistic movements," "cargo cults," forms of "messianism," "revitalization movements," "crisis cults," and many other terms. A variety of theoretical perspectives have been utilized in attempting to explain the origin, development, and significance of such movements. In this study, an effort will be made to keep the initial analytical apparatus to a minimum and to develop categories of analysis from the material itself as much as possible.

Three general phases in the development of such millennial movements will be considered in the remainder of this chapter and in the body of the text itself. In the first phase, responding to a high level of internal and external stress, the prophet or formulator of the new set of beliefs and practices undergoes an initial overpowering religious and/or intellectual experience. This results in a radical reorganization of his approach to the world and convinces him of a special mission to convey his new insights to others.

In the second phase, the successful prophet or his successors--unlike most individuals who develop monomanias or special concerns but never

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attract a significant number of followers—is able to generalize an initial idiosyncratic personal experience into a form that attracts a social following. An attempt is made to move from an old world and a way of life that is perceived as dying into a new, and in many ways, radically opposed state of being. Inevitably this transition phase is characterized by considerable confusion.

Finally, in a third phase, a successful millennial movement reaches a partial resolution as the new beliefs and practices become established in what is in essence a new culture or sub-culture for the adherents of the group. Some relaxation from the earlier intensity of commitment and tensions of the transition phase occurs as a generally satisfying new religious and social order begins to function.

Deeply felt personal religious experiences of the prophet-founder marked the origins of the Shaker, Oneida Perfectionist, and Mormon movements. For Ann Lee, this decisive experience came in 1770, following nine years during which she suffered through four extremely unpleasant experiences in childbirth. These experiences had led her to shun her husband's attentions and to spend many sleepless nights. She had devoted herself increasingly to highly emotional, pentecostal-type religious activities, including loud singing, ecstatic dancing, and speaking in tongues.

In 1770 while she was in jail in Manchester, England, for participating in such lively religious activities, Ann Lee had a vision—or what might be described as a waking dream of exceptional power which totally reoriented her life. In the vision, Jesus himself appeared to her and comforted her. A vivid view was also given her of what she

1The study of religious visionary experiences--their origins, character, and significance--still remains in its infancy, although much recent work has appeared. The indispensable starting point for such a study remains William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: New American Library, 1958; originally published, 1902). In the wake of the widespread use of mind-changing drugs in the late 1960s, a number of provocative studies dealing at least tangentially with the psychology of religious experience have appeared. See, for instance, William Braden, *The Private Sea: LSD and the Search for God* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1967); articles in John White, ed., *The Highest State of Consciousness* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1972), esp. pp. 114-174, which includes Kenneth Wapnick,
believed had been the original sin of carnal copulation committed by Adam and Eve that had resulted in their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Ann Lee thus became convinced of her mission to convert the world to a life of total religious commitment and celibacy as the only means by which mankind could be recovered to God.¹

The turning point in John Humphrey Noyes's life came in 1837, following six years during which he had struggled to achieve personal religious perfection, compulsively reading his Bible as much as twelve to sixteen hours a day. Noyes finally had become convinced that God could not expect the impossible of him, that a right attitude could bring perfect holiness on earth. He then began to travel widely throughout New England and New York, attempting with but little success to convert the entire world to his heretical Perfectionist beliefs.²

In 1837, several years after a near-psychotic break in New York City, Noyes underwent yet another great personal crisis. Still inexperienced sexually and having just lost the woman who had been both his first convert and his idealized love object to another man, Noyes wrote an extraordinary letter which declared in part:


¹See Testimonies of Mother Ann Lee.

When the will of God is done on earth as it is in heaven, there will be no marriage. The marriage supper of the Lamb, is a feast at which every dish is free to every guest. . . . I call a certain woman my wife--she is yours, she is Christ's, and in him she is the bride of all the Saints (emphasis in original).

The unauthorized publication of this letter and Noyes's public acknowledgment of his authorship of it, marked a watershed in his career, committing him in a direction that ultimately resulted in the development of "complex marriage." ¹

Although Joseph Smith's initial visions which led him to begin to focus his sense of religious mission, to "translate" the Book of Mormon, and to organize his Church occurred in the early 1820s, the precise date at which he began to develop his polygamous beliefs remains uncertain. In Joseph Smith's initial visions, the primary concern was to overcome the religious fragmentation of the period—to "plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers" and to turn the hearts of the children to their fathers. ² Young Joseph became convinced that he had been uniquely called by God to this task.

Persuasive evidence—which will be fully presented and analyzed in Chapter IV—suggests that Joseph Smith's initial consideration of the possibility of reintroducing polygamy based on Old Testament patriarchal models went back at least as early as 1831. This period was one of almost explosive creativity for Smith, during which he delivered many of the most important revelations that established the basic doctrinal and organizational foundations of his Church. However, not until mid-1843—just one short year before his assassination—did Joseph Smith

¹Noyes's official reprinting of the published portion of this letter with his own additional explanatory comments appeared in the Witness on January 23, 1839. Many other sources, including George Wallingford Noyes, ed., John Humphrey Noyes: The Putney Community (Oneida, N.Y.: The Author, 1931), reprint the famous concluding paragraph of this letter.

²For texts and analyses of the various accounts of Joseph Smith's "first vision" see Dean C. Jesse, "The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision," BYU Studies 9 (Spring 1969): 275-294. Also see Joseph Smith, History of the Church, 1: 2-8, and Doctrine and Covenants, section 2.
apparently commit his belief in polygamy into writing and secretly begin his major effort to introduce polygamy at the upper eschelons of the Mormon Church. Smith recognized the extreme divisiveness of the new doctrines and the probability that their promulgation could result in his death. According to the testimony of close associates of the period, he nevertheless said that he felt emotionally compelled to introduce polygamy: An "angel with a drawn sword" had appeared to him and told him that if he did not go forward and introduce the belief and its practice, his prophetic powers would be taken from him and his Church would be unable to progress.¹

Stated thus baldly without the fuller personal, religious, and social background that preceded these experiences, the prophet-founder's initial formulation of new marital beliefs and practices easily--but I believe inaccurately--could be viewed simply as a form of social psychopathology, a severely disordered response to severely disordered personal and social conditions. At this critical point--symbolically 1770 for the Shakers, 1837 for Noyes and his followers, and 1843 for the Mormons--the social significance of the new beliefs seemed unclear. Would the beliefs be a means of social reintegration or would they lead to further fragmentation?

Thus, a critical second phase in the development of the new religious and social forms was their generalization to an entire body of people. Individual deviants are common in any age, even the most stable. Unlike individual eccentrics, however, Ann Lee, John Humphrey Noyes, and Joseph Smith were able to attract a significant following. As the anthropologist Kenelm Burridge has noted:

¹Accounts of the "angel with a drawn sword" story are widespread, although manuscript accounts of such a story apparently do not exist from the period when Joseph Smith was still alive. The earliest manuscript evidence of this story known to this author dates from 1846 in Joseph Lee Robinson, Autobiography and Journal (original manuscript in Brigham Young University Special Collections), p. 25. Whether or not Joseph Smith ever made this particular statement, his actions in attempting to introduce polygamous belief and practice among his followers in Nauvoo suggest that he, indeed, was operating under a sense of extreme inner compulsion.
It is not appropriate to think of a prophet as reduced in size to a schizophrenic or paranoid, someone mentally sick. In relation to those to whom he speaks a prophet is necessarily corrupted by his wider experience. He is an "outsider," an odd one, extraordinary. Nevertheless, he specifically attempts to initiate, both in himself as well as in others, a process of moral regeneration.¹

It is a somewhat awesome phenomenon that for whatever reason certain individuals seek to find emotional and social reintegration by attempting to establish their deeply felt ideals as a norm for an entire community. Either by themselves or under the guidance of their successors, these prophets were able to set new patterns of behavior and belief that could prove satisfying to other people. What was the social appeal of these millennial groups and how were their transitions to new forms achieved?

Determining the basis of social appeal is a complex problem. Some have assumed that people must have been attracted to such groups because special social factors and distinctive backgrounds. Others have assumed that psychological abnormalities or character disorders could explain the attraction to such new groups. The evidence for such hypotheses will be considered in this dissertation; however, such hypotheses, which are often assumed rather than proven, do not by themselves adequately account for the origins of such groups.²

In any period in which social values and major institutions are undergoing rapid changes, the basis for "normality" and "deviance" is hard to establish. Given such flux, ideas may then assume unusual importance. A scholar such as Lewis Namier might treat eighteenth-century English Parliamentary politics in terms of various pragmatic, interest group considerations. But in the antebellum period, in the absence of clear institutional checks and well-defined values, ideas and moral concerns


²Adequate social analyses of the sources of membership have not yet been made for the Shakers and Mormons. However, the smaller Oneida Perfectionist ventures have been thoroughly studied, and, as will be shown in Chapter III, the results do not support either a simple sociological or psychological reductionist argument as to why members were attracted.
could assume special importance, as the influence of the Abolitionist movement illustrate most graphically.¹

In this study, therefore, I shall suggest a relatively open-ended hypothesis which is not incompatible with social and psychological analyses but which to some extent goes beyond them. One might well argue that not just millennial prophets but also the individuals who joined such groups may often have been people who, for a variety of reasons, were more sensitive than average individuals to the ambiguities, uncertainties, and inconsistencies of their age of transition. Reacting against these sorts of inconsistencies that were reflected both within themselves and in their social environment, certain individuals may well have been attracted to the groups studied here because such groups promised authoritative answers to difficult religious and social problems and also sought to embody a new context of meaning and order in functioning community life.²

That these three millennial groups may have been heavily influenced by their environment is suggested by the striking chronological coincidence of the chief period of sexual and marital stress in each group. The Shakers, of course, had originated earlier, with an initial transition to celibate communal life in the Northeast between 1785 and 1800, which was followed by a second transition-expansion phase in the Ohio Valley between 1807 and 1820. However, the peak period of tension in both the Eastern and Western Shaker communities occurred during the period of "spiritual manifestations" beginning in 1837 and lasting through the early 1850s.


²A major appeal of the Shakers certainly lay in their well-regulated community life, as the testimony of members and visitors clearly indicates. In "The Oneida Community, 1848-1880: A Study in Conservative Christian Utopianism" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Denver, 1968), Robert Fogarty argues that the primary factor in the appeal of Oneida was its creation of a secure religious and social framework for its members. And the thesis of Mario S. De Pillis in "The Quest for Religious Authority and the Rise of Mormonism," Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought 1 (Spring 1966): 68-88, is that this theme was central to the appeal of Mormonism as well.
Both the Oneida Perfectionist and Mormon marital experimentation also peaked during this latter period. John Humphrey Noyes's religious and sexual turmoil had become intense in the early 1830s, but following the watershed represented by his remarkable letter on marriage in 1837 he began to establish his religious, communal, and sexual theories into functioning community life in the 1840s and early 1850s. And, as will be documented in Chapters IV and V, although Joseph Smith's first recorded consideration of the possibility of introducing polygamy apparently occurred in 1831, his first serious attempts to begin to introduce polygamy probably began in the late 1830s, with a concerted effort to introduce such practices in the early 1840s during the years prior to his assassination. By the early 1850s in Utah, under Brigham Young and his associates, the basic intellectual and social formulation of polygamy had been established.

Thus, in all three groups a transition phase to the new practices and/or a peak period of religious and sexual tensions occurred during an approximately fifteen to twenty year period between the mid-1830s and the early 1850s. Probably not coincidentally, this period also was one of considerable tension in antebellum society itself. The year 1837 marked a turning point of "ultraist" excitement in western New York, as well as the beginning of the Panic of 1837, the worst depression known in the new Republic to that date. The 1840s saw the great Fourierist communal excitement, the peak of the Millerite movement, and the absorption of the disparate earlier reform movements into the Abolitionist Crusade. By the early 1850s the phase of intense revivalistic and social reform activities in antebellum society had largely come to an end. Given the close contact of these three millennial groups with their larger environment—which will be thoroughly documented later in this study—the possibility that a complex interrelationship may have existed between the internal tensions in these groups and the strains in antebellum society itself deserves serious scholarly attention.

IV

The possible relation of such periods of religious and familial experimentation to their larger social matrix is an extremely interesting
and complex question. However, in this study primary attention will be
given to another, even more interesting, problem: How was the movement
to a new world-view and to new marital practices achieved in functioning
community life? What were the means by which the problems inherent in
such a successful transition were overcome and a new way of life became
established?

Historians have given little serious attention to the problems
of this second, transition phase in these three millennial groups.
Since the new marital forms were either illegal or at least in serious
conflict with conventional monogamous norms, these millennial groups
attempted to maintain strict secrecy during the early development of the
new standards. As a result, knowing exactly what was going on often is
difficult to determine. Loyal believers, either at the time or
subsequently, generally did not talk about the problems of transition
that are of greatest interest to the historian. And even when the
accounts of apostates are accurate factually, those accounts often fail
to convey the spirit underlying such efforts. Nevertheless, a
significant body of information on the early development of each of
these three millennial ventures has been preserved, and the general
outlines of the transition process can be indicated in relation to other
millennial movements of which we have good records.

Individuals during the early transitional phases of the Shaker,
Oneida Perfectionist, and Mormon movements were faced by what must have
appeared to them to be unprecedented problems and challenges, a world
operating according to forces they could not comprehend. Under such
circumstances, dreams, myths, rituals, and symbols could become of
crucial importance in attempting to grasp intuitively the nature of
reality at a level beyond that of the ordinary and mundane.¹ In

¹A recognition that levels of meaning exist beyond that of everyday,
common sense "reality" is essential to all religious life as well as to
serious scholarly and creative activity. A particularly impressive
discussion of the problems of awe, mystery, and transcendence that
underlie religious experience is found in Rudolf Otto's, The Idea of the
and Its Relation to the Rational, trans. John W. Harvey, 2d ed. (New
attempting to move from a world which they saw as corrupt, diseased, and doomed into a new and in many ways radically opposed state of being, individuals were caught in a highly ambiguous position. The old order had to be broken down in each individual and in the group as a whole before a new socialization process could occur. But during this process there was a pivotal point at which the old order was no longer operative and a new way of life also had not yet become established. This was a critical and crucially important period.

A highly suggestive analysis of the dynamics of such intermediary stages is provided in Victor Turner's discussion of the "liminal" phase of "rites of passage" or transition in normal ritual situations, or, by extension, in larger social transitions.¹ In such an intermediary state, a person's position is ambiguous: "he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state." Such persons are caught "betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial." Frequently initiates are represented as possessing nothing, are expected to obey their instructors completely, and accept arbitrary punishment or seemingly irrational demands without complaint. "It is as though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life." In this country, we still see such rites in a mild residual form in fraternity initiations and the like. Millennial movements, however, often go through a more severe process of breaking down the old order before a new one can be reconstructed.²

¹Turner, Ritual Process, pp. 80-83, is the source for the statements cited in these two paragraphs. See ibid., pp. 80-193, for his discussion of liminality and communitas. Turner's work is in part an elaboration and extension of Arnold Van Gennep's, The Rites of Passage, trans. Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960).

²In effect, what is occurring is a temporary de-socialization process which makes possible a re-socialization to new norms. It would be interesting to compare this process in adults who participate in millennial movements to the earlier socialization process and the process of intellectual development in children, as viewed by scholars
Closely associated with the temporary ceremonial breakdown of normal secular distinctions of rank, status, and obligation in the liminal period is an intense sense of comradeship and egalitarianism. There is an overriding feeling of direct personal communion, a blend "of lowliness and sacredness, of homogeneity and comradeship."

It is as though there are here two major 'models' for human inter-relatedness, juxtaposed and alternating. The first is of society as a structured, differentiated, and often hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of 'more' or 'less.' The second, which emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated committatus, community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders.

Turner uses the term "communitas" to distinguish this modality of social relationship from an "area of common living."

Such a state of "communitas" provides direct personal contact replacing the institutional constraints that normally separate individuals. And in no area of life are such direct personal relations freed of all institutional constraints more powerfully expressed than in sexual communion itself. Thus, it is not surprising that in summarizing the transition process in many different millennial movements, Kenelm Burridge finds that a period of sanctioned sexual license and other seemingly bizarre emotional displays frequently precede "a form of entry into a new condition governed by fresh rules and assumptions."

In direct personal communion with each other and with the divine "participants seek that inspiration which will guarantee their activities as right and founded in truth." ¹

such as Piaget. Although children by no means start life with minds that are simply a tabula rosa, they nevertheless have far less cultural baggage to contend with than adults who are inducted into new cultural forms. If one takes Jesus' statement: "Unless ye become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of God" in reference to millennial movements, it suggests the relative lack of preconceptions necessary for individuals to approach new realities in the right spirit.

¹Burridge, New Heaven, New Earth, p. 112.
The degree to which this second, transition stage corresponds to the experience of other millennial movements such as the Shakers, Oneida Perfectionists, and Mormons is open to question. Nevertheless, such frameworks offer the possibility of considerably more convincing analyses than those hitherto used. For instance, in the Shaker communal development of the 1790s a variety of excesses appear to have occurred. These went beyond their characteristic highly emotional religious behavior—which included singing, shouting, and ecstatic dancing—and included flagellant activity and unsanctioned sexual misbehavior. At Oneida the late 1840s and early 1850s were characterized by extremes of emotion, severe psychosomatic disorders, suicidal tendencies, and the like, as complex marriage was introduced, temporarily discontinued, and then reintroduced. And the Mormons experienced a wide range of highly disruptive excesses during the introduction of polygamy in the early and mid 1840s. Some of the most problematic figures in Mormon history such as John C. Bennett and Joseph Smith's brother William, who seemingly lost control over themselves when they learned about polygamy, became more nearly comprehensible when their actions are viewed as a product of the confusion of transition.

Individuals could not long remain poised between two conflicting sets of standards in this second, transitional stage. Such a period—tottering precariously between the extremes of authoritarianism, on the one hand, and antinomianism, on the other—was almost inherently unstable and lasted no more than a few years in any of the groups studied here. In the third and final stage of the early development of each of

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1One can see this polarization between extremes of authoritarianism and antinomianism, with rapid, almost manic-depressive type shifts, in the experience of Joseph Smith during the final years before his assassination. Smith attempted increasingly to centralize all power in his own hands in an effort to deal with the fragmentation in Nauvoo which was threatening to run out of control. At one level, this could be viewed as "authoritarian." Yet from another perspective, this dependence on the desires or whims of one individual also could be viewed as "antinomianism." In effect antinomianism and authoritarianism were two sides of a Janus face. Smith during his last years balanced precariously on a tightrope, trying desperately to avoid falling off into either the abyss of authoritarianism or antinomianism.
these millennial movements, a degree of resolution was achieved as the new practices became embodied in a successfully functioning community order. As individuals came to accept the new norms, the demand for virtually total commitment in the transition phase could be somewhat relaxed and more normal life could resume.

For the Shakers, this resolution first took place in the Eastern communities by about 1800. At this time they were already beginning to appear as the serene, well-ordered, economically successful communities that so impressed many later visitors. A similar resolution took place in the Western Shaker settlements by about 1820, and again to an extent in all the societies by about 1850 in the aftermath of the "spiritualist" excitement.

At Oneida, the resolution of the tensions of transition appears to have occurred by the mid-1850s. Whereas the preceding decade had been a period of unusual religious, social, and economic difficulties that had almost led to the breakup of the venture, by the mid-1850s the optimistic, "secular" tendencies at Oneida appeared to be in the ascendent.

Among the Mormons, too, the first period of resolution of the new order appears to have occurred at least by the early 1850s, following a roughly three to five year "apostolic interregnum" and "period of chaos" in the mid 1840s. By 1852, when the Mormon commitment to plural marriage as an integral part of their religious and social system was announced to the world, diary accounts and accounts of most visitors spoke of the essentially orderly appearance of life in Utah, despite the inevitable hardships of pioneer life.1

Thus, by the early 1850s, and considerably earlier in the case of the Shakers, all three of these millennial groups had in effect moved into a new Promised Land. Their implicit goal had been to reestablish religious and social order by creating what was essentially a new, comprehensive, and more satisfying culture and by converting the entire world to their new beliefs and way of life. Although they failed to

1Documentation for these developments in the three groups will be provided in the course of the appropriate dissertation chapters.
achieve such numerical universality, these millennial communitarians
do appear to have produced a special form of American ethnicity, new
subcultures based on Anglo-American roots. The experience of these
millennialists differs in certain important respects from that of other
ethnic groups which emigrated to America. Rather than bringing an
already-existing culture to be transformed in the New World, these
millennial groups attempted to create new, revitalized forms growing out
of the American Puritan ethos. The millennialists to some extent were
in conflict with their society, but in other respects they helped their
followers adapt to the new society.

In establishing new frameworks for religious and social order,
these millennial communitarians illustrated both the possibilities and
many of the problems inherent in radical social change. Their marital
and familial reorganization, in particular, provides a striking view
of how new cultural patterns can originate and be institutionalized.
This study will attempt to delineate, as clearly as can be reconstructed
from the often-ambiguous evidence available, the process by which these
remarkable ventures in religious and social revitalization achieved at
least temporary success.
CHAPTER II

THEY NEITHER MARRY NOR ARE GIVEN IN MARRIAGE: THE ORIGINS
AND EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF SHAKER CELIBATE COMMUNAL ORGANIZATION

What is there in the universe, within the comprehension of man, that has so sensible, so quick and ravishing an operation, as a corresponding desire of the flesh in the different sexes? . . . As a gushing fountain is more powerful in its operations than an oozing spring; so that desire of carnal enjoyment, that mutually operates between male and female, is far more powerful than any other passion in human nature. . . . Surely then, that must be the fountain head, the governing power, that shuts the eyes, stops the ears, and stupifies the sense to all other objects of time or eternity, and swallows up the whole man in its own peculiar enjoyment. And such is that feeling and affection, which is formed by the near relation and tie between male and female; and which being corrupted by the subversion of the original law of God, converted that which in the beginning was pure and lovely, into the poison of the serpent; and the noblest of affections of man, into the seat of human corruption.

--The Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing, 1808

During the summer of 1770 while she was in jail in Manchester, England, for participating in highly emotional religious activities that the authorities felt had disturbed the peace, a thirty-four year old woman underwent a powerful visionary experience which radically transformed her life. For nine years, Ann Lee, a poor and unlettered

---This statement first appeared in the 1808 edition of Youngs's Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing, pp. 78-79. The version of the statement as quoted here is from the second edition of this work, printed at Albany, New York, by E. and E. Hosford, in 1810, pp. 48-49, which makes one minor spelling and typographic change. All the sentences have been combined into a single paragraph and some minor punctuation changes have been made. Youngs's Testimony, the basic Shaker doctrinal work, also was reprinted in 1823, and, in a heavily revised edition, in 1856. All quotations from the Testimony in this paper are from the 1808 edition, unless otherwise indicated.
but highly capable and dynamic woman, had undergone a series of exceptionally difficult religious and sexual experiences. These had affected all aspects of her life. After suffering four painful deliveries and the loss of all her children in infancy, Ann Lee increasingly had become terrified of all sexual intercourse. She had struggled with her impulses, with the importunity of her good-hearted, but crude husband, and with the pressure of church authorities who tried to convince her of her conjugal duties. She had frequently spent sleepless nights crying out to God for redemption. And through pentecostal religious activities, which included singing, shouting, and ecstatic dancing, as well as through her own lonely individual quest, she had sought to discover the root cause of evil, the foundation of mankind's loss from God.

While undergoing the inner turmoil which was heightened by being jailed for her religious beliefs and activities, Ann Lee had an "open vision" in which she believed she saw the Lord Jesus Christ in all his glory. He comforted her and infused her with a sense of special mission. Ann also had other striking visions, including one of Adam and Eve in carnal intercourse. At last, she knew with absolute inner certainty that this act was, indeed, the very transgression which had resulted in the fall of man in the Garden of Eden. Convinced that lust was the true source of sin, Ann Lee proceeded to take charge of the little splinter group of Shaking Quakers to which she belonged. However, the group remained stagnant

1The most authoritative account of Ann Lee's early struggles is found in the rare 1816 edition of the Testimonies of Mother Ann Lee. Only twenty copies of this work, eight of which are known to be still extant, ever were printed. This book was prepared solely for the use of Shaker leadership, not for reading by the general membership or for external polemical purposes. As such, it furnishes an unusually straightforward and comprehensive account of the early development of Shakerism, based on first-hand testimonies. Sometimes the account was referred to as "the secret book of the Elders." All factual statements about Ann Lee and the early Shakers under her leadership that are not otherwise cited are based on this source. Later printed accounts of Ann Lee's life with a more apologetic tone include: Testimonies Concerning the Character and Ministry of Mother Ann Lee and the First Witnesses of the Gospel of Christ's Second Appearing
in England, and even their removal to America in 1774 at first did little to increase their membership. Between 1780 and 1784 in the troubled aftermath of the American Revolution, Ann Lee and her followers did attract several thousand potential supporters throughout New York and New England. But in 1784 when Ann Lee died, exhausted by her own internal struggles and the intense persecution she had suffered for bearing her blunt and uncompromising testimony against the evils of the flesh, the small group of Shakers appeared to be just another of the many eccentric splinter sects springing up after the Revolution, most of which have been long-forgotten today.\(^1\)

"Only fifteen years after Ann Lee's death and this relatively unpromising beginning, however, a vigorous network of eleven major Shaker community sites with more than 1600 members had been set up under the leadership of Ann Lee's American followers.\(^2\) A thoroughgoing celibate communal system which eliminated private property, espoused pacifism, and

\(^1\)For a discussion of the relation of Shakerism to these splinter revivalistic sects and to main line revivalism after the Revolutionary War, see Stephen A. Marini, "Revivalism in Revolutionary New England, 1775-1780" (unpublished paper presented at the American Academy of Religion meetings, Chicago, Illinois, November 1975).

\(^2\)"Introduction to Records of Sacred Communications, Given by Divine Inspiration in the Church at New Lebanon" (New Lebanon, ca. 1843; MS,WRHS), p. 10. Although primarily an account of the remarkable spiritual manifestations among the Shakers in the late 1830s and early 1840s, this official statement also provides a concise historical summary of early Shaker development.
conducted religious life in self-conscious separation from an evil world was flourishing. As early as 1803, for instance, two Shaker communities could give away thousands of dollars of specie, livestock, and produce to help feed the starving poor who were suffering from cholera in New York City.¹ Both spiritual and temporal success appeared to have come to the Shakers.

This early period was only the beginning of Shaker growth, however. True to their perfectionist and developmental spirit, Shaker religious, theological, and social innovation and dynamism would continue strong until the Civil War. A second wave of Shaker expansion led to a network of new communities in the Midwest, and doubled their membership by 1820. And in yet a final important period of revival and consolidation between 1837 and the mid-1850s, Shaker membership rose to a peak of some 6,000 Believers in approximately sixty semi-autonomous communities scattered from Maine to Indiana.² By that time, the Shakers had become far more than simply a curiosity visited by innumerable tourists. They also had provided an inspiration to a wide variety of social theorists from Robert Owen to Friedrich Engels and others. The success of the Shakers, so these men believed, had proved that a thoroughgoing cooperative and communistic system was not simply an impractical pipe dream but a form of organization that could be established throughout the world.³

¹According to the ex-Shaker Thomas Brown, An Account of the People Called Shakers: Their Faith, Doctrines, and Practice (Troy, N.Y.: Parker & Bliss, 1812), p. 343, in 1803 the New Lebanon, N.Y., and Tyringham, Mass., Shaker communities sent to New York City $300 in specie, 853 pounds of pork, 1951 pounds of beef, 1794 pounds of mutton, 1685 pounds of rye flour, etc. Mayor De Witt Clinton thanked the Shakers for this gift in a letter printed in Andrews, People Called Shakers.

²Andrews, People Called Shakers, p. 224, makes this estimate. Statistics on Shaker membership are unreliable, to say the least, but Andrews's figure appears to be a realistic projection based on available manuscript records.

³Robert Owen's debt to the Shakers was considerable. For instance, his New View of Society: Tracts Relative to this Subject (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme & Brown, 1818) includes a lengthy favorable statement about the Shakers, who had buttressed his own
What accounts for this remarkable development of a successful celibate, pacifist, and communal religious group in the Early National Period and its peaking strength in the midst of the buoyancy, dynamism, and often crass individualism of Jacksonian America? How was the transition from monogamous belief and practice to a celibate system that was essentially a native American form of Protestant monasticism achieved? In what ways were relations between the sexes restructured in Shaker communalism, and what were the advantages and disadvantages of such restructuring? And what could have led a significant minority of highly committed and articulate American men and women, as well as many who left no direct record of their thoughts and feelings, to join such a group and make it work, at least for a time?

These will be the primary questions addressed in this chapter. An effort will be made to understand both at an individual and at a larger social level how the transformation to new values and practices was achieved in functioning community life, how a small but intellectually and socially significant group of Americans could

faith in the possibility of social reconstruction. In February 1845, Friedrich Engels argued that the Shakers, along with other American communal groups, showed that: "Communism, or life and work in a community where all goods are held in common, is not only possible but, as we shall see, is already being practiced successfully in many communities in America. . . . " Most of Engels's material comes from John Finch's travel notes as published in Owen's newspaper, New Moral World, shortly after Engels had sent that paper his own analysis of continental communism. See Henri Desroche, The American Shakers: From Neo-Christianity to Presocialism, trans. and ed. John K. Savacool (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1971), pp. 293-296. In his important history of the American communal movement before the Civil War, John Humphrey Noyes, founder of the Oneida Community and no mean social theorist in his own right, described the success of the Shakers as "the 'specie basis' that has upheld all the paper theories, and counteracted the failures, of the French and English schools." See his History of American Socialisms, p. 670.

have been attracted to this extraordinary religious and communal venture.

I

The English origins of Shakerism are clouded in considerable obscurity. Details of the early development often are hazy, recorded in print well over fifty years after the events described. Shaker accounts, nevertheless, trace their religious lineage to two sources. One was a revivalistic sect of French Protestants, the so-called Camisard Prophets. In the aftermath of the 1689 revocation of the religious tolerance granted by the Edict of Nantes, the persecuted Camisards in the Cevennes Mountains began engaging in extreme revivalistic activities. They shook, shouted, spoke in tongues, and prophesied the imminent destruction of the existing religious and social order. Eventually some of these French Prophets emigrated, settling in London and elsewhere in England.

In Manchester, the French Prophets continued their extreme religious activities and prophesying of the imminent end of the world. They taught that the established Church and State were the Biblical Babylon that would be destroyed by God preparatory to the coming of a millennium of universal peace on earth. Their call to repentance attracted a small following in England and must have come to the attention of a number of individuals who later joined the Shakers, as well as feeding into the larger currents of revivalism represented by John Wesley and Charles Whitefield. In particular, John Partington and John Hocknell--two well-to-do Englishmen who may have served as leaders in the Camisard movement--later joined with the little society that would come to be known as Shakers, infusing

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1 In addition to the accounts of Mother Ann Lee mentioned on p. 44, footnote1, see the following historical treatments of early Shaker development: Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing, pp. 17-32; Millennial Church, pp. 1-50; and Brown, Account of the Shakers, pp. 305-362. A second edition of the Millennial Church with important additions was printed at Albany, N.Y. by C. Van Benthuysen in 1848.
some of the ecstatic, free-form, revivalistic spirit into that group as well.\(^1\)

Probably a more important influence on the early Shakers came through the Quakers. The early Quakers had been given occasionally to highly emotional expressions in their religious meetings. Scoffers declared that they literally "quaked" before God. By the mid-1700s, however, English Quakerism had become more respectable and orderly, tolerated by the civil authorities.\(^2\) In 1747, a Lancashire couple, Jane and James Wardley, feeling that the Quakers had lost their earlier fire, separated themselves from that group to form a small religious society, without any established creed or particular structured manner of worship, but open to the workings of the spirit in the same highly emotional way that the Camisards and early Quakers had been.

Although some later Shakers tended to downplay the importance of the Quaker influence on their development, such influence appears to be a paramount factor at almost all levels of Shaker religious and social beliefs. A similar theological framework, liberal approach to Biblical interpretation, elimination of all sacramental forms including Baptism and the Lord's Supper, emphasis on the free workings of the spirit, thoroughgoing pacifism, refusal to take oaths or participate directly

\(^1\)Any direct genetic connection between the Camisards and the Shakers appears tenuous at best. Brown, *Account of the Shakers*, p. 313, claims that both Partington and Hocknell had formerly been "noted men" among the French Prophets. According to Hocknell's daughter Mary, however, he had belonged to the Church of England until he left to join the Methodists. *Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing*, p. 20. Since revivalist groups were highly fluid in their membership, both the Methodists and Camisards could well have influenced the Shakers. Perhaps because the Shaker revivalist activities were more extreme than even those of the early Methodists, the Shakers felt more akin to the Camisards. Given the relatively vague accounts of English Shaker origins, it is possible that direct connections between the Camisards and the Shakers occurred without being recorded.

in secular government, use of "thee" and "thou," and, above all, the strong encouragement of women to participate at all levels of the group as preachers and active members, place the Shakers squarely in the Quaker tradition. The influence of the Quaker intellectual framework can be seen even in such later Shaker innovations as their belief in a dual godhead in which male and female elements were combined equally, a belief which was by no means incompatible with that of the Quakers.¹

A third influence on early Shaker development was the personality and experience of Ann Lee herself. Ann's personal struggles, both religious and sexual, became transformed into the distinguishing element in the Shaker faith, separating these Believers from those in many similar revivalistic groups. Ann Lee joined the Wardley's little society in 1758. But during the approximately nine years following her marriage to Abraham Standerin in 1762, she gradually developed her testimony against the evils of man's fallen, "carnal" nature and became the most influential member in the open-ended group. In the course of those years, she bore four children, all of whom died in infancy. Ann's last delivery was exceptionally painful, requiring the use of forceps. For hours afterward, she lay with but little sign of life.

In response to these tragic experiences, Ann Lee became increasingly terrified and ambivalent about her impulses. She came to avoid her bed as if it were "made of embers," and when she did go to bed, sometimes she shook with such emotion that her husband was happy to leave her alone. At times she would pace the floor all night, trying to keep quiet to avoid stirring up her husband's concern and affections. At other times, unable to control herself, she would repeatedly cry aloud to God for redemption. And sometimes she feared to close her eyes lest she wake up in hell. Though of a robust natural constitution, she

¹For a summary of the classic statement of Quaker theology, see Eleanor Price Mather, Barclay in Brief: An Abbreviation of Robert Barclay's APOLOGY FOR THE TRUE CHRISTIAN DIVINITY (Pendle Hill, Pa.: Pamphlet Number 28, 1942). To the best of this author's knowledge, an explicit Quaker formulation of the dual godhead idea was not made in the early period, though hints of such beliefs can be found in the works of George Fox, Margaret Fell, and James Naylor.
wasted away, becoming weak and emaciated. The period was one of extra-
ordinary emotional turbulence for her.

In the course of this traumatic period, this strong-willed woman
gradually developed her distinctive faith, and her testimony against
carnal sin before the Wardley's little group became more pointed.
Finally, in mid-1770, a series of overpowering visionary experiences
convinced Ann that "lust"—i.e., inordinate passions or desires of any
sort—was, indeed, the root of all evil and corruption in the world,
not only in religious, but also in economic, social, and political affairs
as well. Only by renouncing all "carnal" desires (using the term in its
broadest sense) and by deciding to live a life of "virgin purity" could
man be restored to God.¹

The attraction of Ann Lee to the Wardley's small religious
society that their neighbors derisively nicknamed jumpers, shiverers,
or Shaking Quakers was by no means accidental. One could argue, of
course, that the highly emotional and unstructured religious activities
that the Shakers engaged in provided an outlet for Ann Lee's own inner
struggles as well as a supportive group in which she could deal with
her problems. But deeper even that her sense of the evil nature of
excessive sexual impulses was her profound sense of the injustice of
the role that sexual relations forced upon women and her overriding
concern to correct the imbalance that she perceived in the relations
between the sexes. Even when only partially articulated, this desire
appears to underlie her sense of mission and her overriding concern to
help both men and women be recovered to God.

Revivalistic religion has always provided both men and women—but
especially women—with greater outlets for self-expression and innovation
than have the established churches. The Wardley's little society was no
exception. The Apostle Paul may have told women to keep silence in the

¹Even in this early period, Ann Lee's attack on the evils of
"lust" went far beyond a simple attack on sexual intercourse per se. As
the Shakers further developed their theology and communal organization,
they increasingly articulated a broader conception of "carnal" desires
as representing all aspects of human rapacity and selfishness that
interfered with the single-minded devotion to God.
churches. But in the early Shaker society, Jane Wardley was given the honorary title "Mother" to indicate her spiritual role, and she became the effective leader of the group, to whom confession of sins was made. As Ann Lee developed her sense of religious mission and her overpowering conviction that lust was the root of human corruption, she gradually took over leadership from Jane Wardley and was in turn addressed by the group as Mother. With Ann Lee's introduction of the belief in the necessity of celibacy for true religious life, a distinctive element was added to this society, separating it from the more common forms of revivalism from which it would otherwise have been largely indistinguishable.

This band of some thirty Believers experienced but little success in England. Some scholars have seen the Shakers as a by-product of nascent industrialism and the hardships of life in the early factory town of Manchester.¹ Available evidence, however, seems to make such an interpretation less than fully convincing. To be sure, the problems of grinding poverty and the evils of early industrialism may well have contributed to the Shakers' sense that the old order was radically corrupt and subject to imminent destruction by God. But in reading the early accounts closely, one is forced to the conclusion that far more salient in Ann Lee's experience was a more inclusive sense of religious malaise and her sensitivity to her tragic sexual experiences. Furthermore, even if early industrialism may have been related in a complex fashion to the origins of Shakerism, England during this stage of industrialism did not provide a promising field for the growth of this

¹This approach is most explicitly formulated in Desroche, *The American Shakers*, although many other books such as Marguerite Fellows Melcher's, *The Shaker Adventure* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), which treat Shaker history largely from an economic perspective, also put forward this argument. Though Desroche's work raises a number of fascinating theoretical perspectives, his analysis sits rather lightly on the facts, seriously overemphasizing Ann Lee's working class background and the role of the later brilliant, but far-from-representative Shaker spokesman, Frederick W. Evans—ex-Owenite, free thinker, and land reformer. See Marius B. Peladeau's review of Desroche in the *Shaker Quarterly* 11 (Fall 1971): 122-125.
group. In England, this small band of Shaking Quakers not only stirred up some harsh persecution, but worse, they were generally ignored and attracted few members.

This fact became obvious to Ann Lee. In 1772, just two years after she effectively assumed control of the Wardley's society, her associate James Whittaker had a powerful vision of the tree of life with ever-burning leaves, representing the Shaker Church that would be established in America.¹ Ann Lee also became convinced that in America, in a land of religious freedom and promise, her Church would grow and thrive. Ann Lee was, indeed, correct. In America her personal convictions could be translated into what was—given its inherent limitations—a highly successful spiritual and temporal organization. Even if one assumes that economic forces were a major causal factor in Shaker development, the American Shakers owed their appeal far more to the strains of pre-industrial commercial agricultural development than directly to problems of the factory system and urbanization. For the most part, Shakers appear to have been small famers, tradesmen, and handicraft workers, hardworking and innovative. The special appeal of the Shaker reordering of male and female roles was related in complex ways to the larger religious and social strains of the young Republic.

II

The America upon whose shores a little band of English Shakers led by Mother Ann Lee disembarked in 1774 was a land whose religious, social, and political climates were in a curious way suited to the needs of this young faith. Religiously, the period came in the aftermath of the Great Awakening of the 1740s which had split the established churches in New England and throughout the colonies, resulting in an unprecedented era of revivals, doctrinal innovations, and divisions. New sects had been spawned, and eventually a new kind of religious spirit would develop. The idea of religious freedom would become a fact in civil life. Economically and socially, the years from the early 1700s had been ones of

¹Testimonies of Mother Ann Lee, p. 66. Accounts of early Shaker history sometimes carelessly attribute this vision to Ann Lee herself.
remarkable growth followed by stagnation and decline, which led to many strains and tensions between the old order and the new. And politically, the period was on the eve of the American Revolution and a disruptive war which would bring to birth a New Republic that would attempt to give voice to new ideals of man and society.¹

When eight Shakers first arrived in New York City on August 6, 1774, however, they were anything but conscious of the many forces which would contribute to their eventual growth. In fact, the very survival of the group itself lay in considerable doubt. Being poor, the Shakers temporarily separated to find individual employment. Ann Lee's husband, who had followed his wife to America, finally forced the issue of whether or not she would live with him in a normal marital relationship. Her adamant refusal, which led to their permanent break, must have been a heart-rending experience for both of them. As Ann Lee said: "The man to whom I was married was very kind, according to his nature; he would have been willing to pass through a flaming fire for my sake, if I would but live in the flesh with him, which I refused to do."² Freed from her husband at last, Ann Lee joined her followers on some land they had purchased near Albany, New York. There for some six


²Testimonies of Mother Ann Lee, p. 45.
years, often discouraged, they tried to eke out a bare living and they continued to hope for the eventual spread of their religious message.

The first major Shaker membership breakthrough came in 1780. As one of the small fires in the aftermath of the Revolutionary War, a small revival broke out in 1779 in New Lebanon, not far from the Shaker settlement at Niskeyuna. The leader of the revival was the Freewill Baptist preacher Joseph Meacham from Enfield, Connecticut, whose father had been converted by Jonathan Edwards, a key figure in the earlier Great Awakening.¹ Feeling discouraged and looking for further light as the 1779 revival waned, Meacham and some of his followers approached the strange group of foreign religionists who were led by a woman, required celibacy, engaged in ecstatic religious services, and professed to be living "sinlessly" in daily obedience to the will of God. Greatly impressed by what he saw, Meacham converted to the Shakers. He brought with him many of his followers, who came to serve as the initial American nucleus for the Shaker Church.

The disorder, confusion, and disillusionment of the post-Revolutionary War period, like the aftermath of most wars in American history, was particularly favorable to revivalism and to the development of new religious movements.² The Shakers had unintentionally settled in an area where the disruption caused by the Revolutionary War was very great, and their early proselytizing ventures took them into similar areas of New England. As foreigners and pacifists, they were persecuted by local American authorities in 1780 for alleged disloyalty. In fact, however, many of the early male members of the Shakers had served in the Revolutionary War, as is indicated by the large number of Shakers who were entitled to receive war pensions.³ The human coarseness brought

¹ Andrews, People Called Shakers, pp. 54-55.

² An interesting study approaching this problem from a slightly different perspective of the relationship between affiliation and power concerns and war in American history is described briefly in David C. McClelland, "Love and Power: The Psychological Signals of War," Psychology Today 8 (January 1975): 44-48.

³ Andrews, People Called Shakers, pp. 215-216, describes how in 1863 when the Shakers were requesting exemption from the draft or the
out by that conflict must have been profoundly disillusioning to many. Even though the Shakers were only beginning their development, they appeared to offer a committed, caring, and ultimately hopeful response to problems that did not seem capable of resolution at the normal political, economic, and social levels.

The appeal of the Shaker movement in this early phase was due to a number of positive factors in the movement itself, as well as to the precondition provided by a disordered social environment. The leadership of Ann Lee and her early associates was the first great attraction of the Shakers. Even Ann Lee's critics agree that she was a capable, articulate; and dynamic woman, warm and loving to her followers, whom she called her "children." Ann's followers loved her so deeply that they came to believe that she had incarnated the spirit of God in female form, just as they believed that Jesus had incarnated the spirit of God in male form. Whether Ann Lee herself ever claimed such quasi-divinity is open to question. Her frequent ecstatic utterances, like those of many other early religious leaders, are open to such an interpretation, particularly when she talked about walking with Jesus as her Lord and Lover, or described herself as his Bride. Such statements were viewed by many people of this earlier age as examples of inappropriate and excessive religious "enthusiasm." Today many people would view such statements as a sign of mental disorder.

But had extreme emotionalism been the primary characteristic of Ann Lee's personality and testimony, her appeal to the other capable and articulate individuals who helped her establish the Society would be hard to explain. Ann Lee also was a straightforward, down-to-earth woman who admonished her followers to put their "hands to work and their hearts to God." She told Believers to do their work as if it would "last a thousand years." When an overawed follower came to her, she told him:

requirement to hire a substitute, they raised the novel argument that there was a sum of money, amounting (with interest) to $439,733, in the national treasury that legally belonged to the Society through those who had served in the wars of the Revolution and 1812 but had not been permitted by Shaker regulations to draw their pensions or bounty lands.
Don't kneel to me. Kneel to God. I am but his servant."¹ And, expressing sentiments that many a religious leader must feel, she once confessed that she was afraid to go in to talk with young Believers because they assumed that whatever she said on any subject came directly from On High. Ann said in frustration that she never claimed to be omniscient in temporal matters. All she knew with certainty was that mankind's recovery to God could only be achieved by giving up all "carnal" desires and practices.²

Given the extremely liberal Shaker theology with its emphasis on the symbolic rather than the literal interpretation of Scriptural passages, a different explanation of Ann Lee's alleged divinity is possible. The Shakers ultimately traced their belief in direct revelation to the Quaker approach which stressed the immediacy of the spirit of God acting within each individual. Sophisticated Shakers in the early theological treatises appear, therefore, to have viewed Ann Lee as a particularly appealing ideal model. She was seen as embodying God's spirit in a greater, but not essentially different, form than the way it was embodied in each human being. In any case, no matter how individual Believers may have viewed Ann Lee theologically, they expressed a deep and unquenchable love for her and they looked to her as a symbol of the mutual love which was expressed within the community of Believers.³

¹Testimonies of Mother Ann Lee, p. 329.

²Recollections of Thankful Goodrich in Alonzo Hollister, ed., "Book of Immortality" (New Lebanon, 1872; MS,WRHS), pp. 78-79.

³For the classic expression of this theological liberalism in approaching Ann Lee, see Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing. Attitudes toward Ann Lee that were popularly held in the early nineteenth century are suggested in Millennial Praises, Containing a Collection of Gospel Hymns in Four Parts; Adapted to the Day of Christ's Second Appearing (Hancock, Mass.: J. Tallcott, 1813). The earliest edition of this first Shaker printed hymnal appeared in 1812. Also see Testimonies of Mother Ann Lee, p. 166, and throughout, for strong evidence that Mother Ann's mystic effusions frequently were taken in a symbolic sense. Ibid., p. 346, further notes: "When any of the Believers expressed their love to her, she would often reply, 'It is not me that you love; but it is God in me.'"
Shaker revivalistic activities were a second factor attracting individuals to the Society. Then as now, such extraordinary actions attracted public curiosity and led to extremes either of awe or of disbelief. Shaker revivalism, though it may appear exceptional to twentieth-century Americans who are unacquainted with such phenomena, was almost indistinguishable from the revivalistic activities of similar groups in hundreds of different cultures throughout history. Among the types of behavior described in basic Shaker sources were shaking and trembling, shouting, leaping, singing, dancing, speaking in tongues, whirling, stamping, rolling on the floor or ground, crying out against sin and against carnal nature, and a wide variety of even more extraordinary ecstatic, trance, and possession phenomena that few would believe possible unless they had seen them with their own eyes.

Many of these activities seemed to be clearly beyond any conscious human agency. Contemporaries of the Shakers thus tended to see such involuntary phenomena as manifestations of the supernatural. Disbelievers often attributed the manifestations to the Devil; Believers, on the other hand, saw the manifestations as a sign of God's continuing workings in human history and of the existence of an authority going beyond the purely man-made. The old order was being shaken, both literally and metaphorically. Human authorities, whether religious or secular, no longer seemed to have any validity, so a return was made to primary and sometimes undifferentiated emotion within a supportive group. Such expression of emotion would lend supernatural sanction to the new order. As a primary Shaker doctrinal source stated, Believers "knew perfectly what those things meant, and felt, therein, the greatest possible order and harmony, it being both the gift and work of God for the time then present; and which bore the strongest evidence that the world was actually come to an end, (at least to those who were the subjects of it,) and the day of judgment commenced."^2

^1 For the worldwide extent of such activities, see the references cited in Chapter I, p. 29, footnote 1.

^2 Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing, p. 31.
If such highly individualistic revivalistic phenomena were, in fact, to result in communal harmony, then institutional order eventually had to be given to the new understandings that had been achieved and validated through group emotional experiences. The propensity of those converted by revivals to "backslide" in the absence of continuing institutional supports is so well-known as to be almost a cliché. Possibly the greatest appeal of the Shakers lay, therefore, in a third factor: their carefully planned group life. Eventually it would come to provide a total framework of religious, economic, and social meaning within which individuals could live their faith on a daily basis, not divorcing it from everyday experience. Such group life was not achieved immediately; rather, it was a gradual and progressive development throughout Shaker history. Even in the earliest phases, however, such total communal life appears to have been held forth as the ideal.¹

This concern for establishing institutional order during the early period of Shaker development can most clearly be seen in the required confession of sins to Elders by new members and, on a continuing basis, by old Believers as well. Such confession was a powerful community control mechanism. It was a major factor contributing to the establishment of an oligarchic and familial structure of community life. Required confession of sins by all new members was a means of acquainting Shaker leaders with the character and abilities of incoming individuals. Such confession also could have a therapeutic effect, much as psychotherapy and similar forms of personal counseling have today. Individuals who felt deeply the inadequacies of their earlier lives often received valuable and pointed personal counseling that helped them to reorient their lives around a new center. As a continuing requirement, confession of all sins to designated Elders provided an important means of allowing leadership to guide and shape the character of individuals and of the whole Society. And should an individual be tempted to apostatize and "tell all," he would be likely to have second

¹Andrews, People Called Shakers, pp. 47-49, cites evidence of Shaker communal interest going back at least as far as 1780. The earliest Shaker manuscript extant, a letter from James Whittaker dated February 1782, concerns communal organization.
thoughts if he knew that his own sins of omission and commission might well be fully aired in response.

III

Although some individuals were strongly attracted to the Shakers, many others were just as strongly repelled by the movement. Much of the hostility, brutality, and mobbing suffered by the Shakers during this early period can be understood as an inevitable response to any vigorous missionary effort that tends to interfere with the status quo. But more specifically, the Shakers stirred up hostility because of the stridency of their testimony, particularly against the flesh. This testimony frequently was blunt, specific, and coarse. "You are a filthy whore," Ann Lee is said to have snapped at a prurient woman, apparently on sight.¹ Early Believers, many of them in their teens or early twenties, felt that they were fighting the Devil with no holds barred. "The devil is a real being," Ann Lee declared, "as real as a bear. I know, for I have seen and fought with him."²

Implicit in the Shaker attack on the evils of the flesh were actions which their critics viewed as a frontal assault on marriage and all close family ties. For instance, in the first Shaker pamphlet, printed in 1790, a letter was included from James Whittaker, one of the original English leaders, to his parents. In the letter he excoriated his parents for their carnal propensities, and he effectively severed any further personal contact.³ Many individuals, both at that time and later,

¹Testimonies of Mother Ann Lee, p. 226. Not surprisingly the woman went off and proceeded to stir up trouble for the Society.

²See the fine essay by Constance Rourke, "The Shakers," in her The Roots of American Culture and Other Essays, ed. Van Wyck Brooks (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1942), pp. 195-237. The intensity of Mother Ann's personal horror of sexual relations is suggested in her vision of souls in hell, where "their torment appears like melted lead, poured through them in the same parts where they have taken their carnal pleasure." Testimonies of Mother Ann Lee, p. 304.

felt that the Shakers contributed to the breaking up of marriages, to the separation of children from their parents, and to similar family disharmony. In the nineteenth century, anti-Shaker individuals would attempt to get laws passed in several states that would declare that joining the Society was tantamount to a legal divorce.1

Shakers vehemently denied any intent to sever marriages, and they fought all attempts to link them with such ideas. Usually Shakers attempted to bring both husbands and wives into their societies. Nevertheless, there can be little doubt that in order to establish the primary loyalty of Believers to the group and to its larger ends, Shakers went to great lengths to sever any close personal relations between husband and wife within their societies. The case of Lucy Wright, after Ann Lee the most dynamic early female leader of the Shakers, illustrates this sort of action most clearly, as we shall see later in this chapter. Then, too, some individuals undoubtedly joined the Shakers as a way out of unsatisfactory marital relationships, since easy divorce was not possible in many states. And definite efforts were made to separate children from their parents and rear them communally so that divided loyalties would not interfere with total community arrangements.

Writing in 1853, some seventy-five years after Shaker origins in America, Hervey Elkins gave a moving personal statement of his reasons for leaving the Shakers after fifteen years in their Senior Order. Elkins spoke with great appreciation of many features of Shaker life, but he criticized with icy incisiveness "the regime which mildly separates man and wife, parent and child . . . and directs them all to seek a less local, and more general bond of union." "The Shakers are a people who rarely speak in passion, and we would think them sympathetic. But no pity, in their acts or measures, was ever shown to social or earthly ties."2 In the no-holds-barred atmosphere of the early Shaker movement,

1Particularly strong anti-Shaker legal challenges were waged in New Hampshire, New York, Ohio, and Kentucky. Many of the cases were concerned with the Shaker custom of receiving children into the Society accompanied by one parent, usually the father, who had "deserted" the other. Andrews, People Called Shakers, pp. 207-212.

such tendencies toward the breaking up of personal relationships must have been even more intense.

In retrospect, such extreme boundary maintenance mechanisms might well seem excessive. Nevertheless, such mechanisms were necessary if the Shakers were to maintain any internal cohesion in their celibate system. The Shakers never retreated to the wasteland or the desert to live in monk-like isolation, far from the world. Rather, most of the societies which were "gathered" in the late 1780s and early 1790s were only a few miles away from adjoining communities. Through their extensive trading activities and through the continued influx of new members and departure of old ones, the Shakers came in continual contact with "the world." Furthermore, within their communities the Shakers opted to maintain the seemingly irreconcilable extremes of separation and association of the sexes. Men and women lived together in "families" of 30 to 150 individuals under the same roof, though strictly separated in their activities. Enormous tensions must inevitably have resulted, tensions that had to be dealt with by breaking down individual loyalties and reinforcing general communal commitment. This was particularly true in this early period when the concrete forms of community life had not yet been established.

A second reason for the hostility generated by the Shakers during this early expansive phase was the fact that they were being led by a woman, a woman whom many Believers almost deified, even in this early period. Writing in 1780, the apostate Valentine Rathbun noted: "Some of them say, that the woman called the mother [Ann Lee], has the fullness of the God Head, bodily dwelling in her, and that she is the queen of


"A human community can be said to maintain boundaries . . . in the sense that its members tend to confine themselves to a particular radius of activity and to regard any conduct which drifts outside that radius as somehow inappropriate or immoral. Thus the group retains a kind of cultural integrity, a voluntary restriction on its own potential for expansion, beyond that which is strictly required for accommodation to the environment."

2Shaker "families" actually ranged in size from a few individuals to even larger groupings, but most fell within these limits.
heaven, Christ's wife: And that all God's elect must be born through
her; yea, that Christ through her is born the second time. 1 By any
standard, this type of statement was "strong meat." Joseph Meacham's
last question in 1780 before joining the Shakers was how a woman could
govern or stand at the head of the Church when St. Paul had so explicitly
forbidden it. Ann Lee's reply to Meacham (significantly it was conveyed
through an intermediary male spokesman) was that "in the natural state,
the man is first in the government of the family; but when the man is
absent the government belongs to the woman." 2

In making this statement, Ann Lee was suggesting, both theologi-
cally and socially, that the balance between the sexes was out of joint
and that she was attempting to rectify the situation. Meacham accepted
her response. But under his later leadership, even many Shakers were
unwilling to accept his appointment of a female associate, Lucy Wright, to
stand at the head of the newly created woman's order and, eventually, at
the head of the whole Church. To many Believers, such a situation was
too radical a departure from existing religious and social practice.
Both tact and coercive pressure would be necessary to re-educate men
and women to the new "gospel" relationship in the Shaker communities. 3

If even loyal Shakers had difficulty accepting active female
participation and leadership, then the extreme hostility of outsiders to
such an "unnatural" state of affairs is not surprising. Not only was a
woman, Ann Lee, leading the early movement, and, according to widespread

1Valentine Rathbun, An Account of the Matter, Form, and Manner
of a New and Strange Religion, Taught and Propagated by a Number
of Europeans, Living in a Place Called Nisqueunia, in the State of New-York
(Providence, R.I.: Bennett Wheeler, 1781), p. 12. This account provides
direct corroboration for later Shaker assertions about Ann Lee. Rathbun
dates his account December 5, 1780.

2This succinct statement is found in the version of the Joseph
Meacham manuscript edited by Theodore E. Johnson, in the Shaker Quarterly
10 (Spring 1969): 26. A longer and more elaborate statement is found in
Testimonies of Mother Ann Lee, p. 21.

3See especially, "Collection of the Writings of Joseph Meacham
Respecting Church Order and Government" (New Lebanon, ca. 1850; MS,WRHS).
reports, making claims tantamount to her own divinity, but she also was attacking the basic female role to "be fruitful and multiply." Thereby she seemed to be attacking the validity of family life itself. This seemed an outrageous and perverted situation to many. Both in England and in America, Ann Lee frequently was accused of being a "witch"; she was seen not simply as misguided or deluded, but as deliberately malevolent.\(^1\) Ann and her followers suffered the most degrading treatment at the hands of anti-Shaker mobs. She frequently was whipped and beaten. And, in one particularly brutal instance, she was worked over by a bunch of toughs, ostensibly to find out if she were a woman.\(^2\) Such treatment contributed much to the excessive zeal sometimes manifested by the early Shakers and also resulted in the premature deaths of all the most capable English leaders of the original movement.\(^3\)

A third factor contributing to the hostility experienced by many early Shakers was the extreme character of many of their revivalistic activities during the period. Although an early convert such as Valentine Rathbun initially could be attracted by such phenomena, eventually he came to have second thoughts about some of the more bizarre involuntary behavior and argued that it was a sign of delusion rather than of the influence of the divine.\(^4\) The first Shaker printed statement that discussed the history of the early period in depth notes that, between

\(^1\)Almost all the early apostate accounts included criticisms of Ann Lee for being a "witch" and engaging in "witchcraft." Although eighteenth-century America was unfavorable to outright prosecution on such a count, residual fears of literal witchcraft may well have contributed to the intensity of the persecutions suffered by the Shakers. Any unorthodox religious group is liable to charges of witchcraft in a culture which believes in the reality of the supernatural, particularly if the group engages in highly emotional religious practices or if it is led by a woman. In our present "enlightened" age, we accomplish the same purposes by freely classing such phenomena as "mental illness."

\(^2\)The brutal mobbing at Petersham, Massachusetts, in December 1781 is described in detail in Testimonies of Mother Ann Lee, pp. 92-98.

\(^3\)William Lee died first at age 44, followed by Ann Lee at 48, and James Whittaker at 37.

\(^4\)Rathbun, New and Strange Religion, pp. 10-12.
1780 and 1787, the peak of Shaker missionary activity, a wide range of extraordinary ecstatic and trance phenomena occurred which "appeared to blind spectators like the most unaccountable confusion."\(^1\) The widespread apostate claims that Ann Lee and her followers sometimes appeared drunk may be due, at least in part, to such behavior.\(^2\) The external appearance of such phenomena and its inner meaning to participants could vary widely.

The extreme Shaker revival phenomena were heightened by the pressures of the missionary trips, persecution, and poverty of many early Believers. But such activities were viewed, both by Shakers and by numerous apostates, primarily as a conscious part of the continuing attempt to mortify and subdue their "fallen carnal natures." Although the phenomena appeared out of the ordinary, one would be wrong to assume automatically that such activities were a sign of individual or group pathology. Anthropological and cross-cultural studies of ecstatic, trance, and possession phenomena show such behaviors to be extremely frequent in all times and cultures and by no means necessarily psychopathological in their effects, even if such phenomena frequently do grow out of disordered individual and social experiences.

According to William Sargent, who has spent the better part of a lifetime studying the physiology of such behaviors in various present-day groups, these activities may often serve an essentially positive personal and social function. Sargent, who worked as a therapist with shell-shocked victims from World War II, found that for normal individuals,

\(^1\) Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing, pp. 30-31.

\(^2\) The critical, though honest, apostate William J. Haskett in his Shakerism Unmasked (Pittsfield, Mass.: The Author, 1828), notes in a special errata introducing his work that he had inadvertently misrepresented a statement by one of his informants. That informant had not asserted that he had seen Ann Lee drunk but rather that he had seen her acting as if she were drunk. Shaker sources pointed out that early pentecostal Christians also had been falsely accused of being "drunk with new wine." It is worthy of note, however, that there can be no question that Ann Lee and the early Shakers did drink wine on occasion, and it is not inconceivable that, faced with extreme stress, they might also have become drunk at some times.
abreactive techniques--i.e., any means of bringing a distraught individual to a peak of tension followed by collapse within a controlled situation--could overcome emotional blockages that prevented the individual from functioning normally and could allow the reconstruction of personality around a new emotional center. Significantly, schizophrenics and other types of severely disturbed individuals were the only class of people unable to respond to such abreactive techniques.¹

In a related analysis, William Samarin, a linguist who has studied glossolalia or "speaking in tongues"--which is not necessarily a trance phenomenon--finds that although glossolalia is "linguistic nonsense," it can convey important emotions and it is not necessarily an indication of psychological maladjustment.² Finally, I. M. Lewis, an anthropologist, argues that similar social factors tend to be connected with spirit possession and shamanism in different cultures. Such dissociational states frequently provide a means of expression for individuals such as women, the poor, and youth, who are outside normal institutional power structures.³ Recently in this country, these activities have been most conspicuously associated with the hippie, drug, and rock music scene.⁴

Shaker and anti-Shaker accounts bear out many of these contemporary theoretical observations. Calvin Green, one of the most important early Shaker leaders and theological writers, spoke of the self-conscious use of ecstatic worship as a means of sublimating sexual impulses:

¹See William Sargent, Battle for the Mind: A Physiology of Conversion and Brain Washing (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Co., 1957), as well as his many other writings developing this thesis.


³See Lewis, Ecstatic Religion, esp. pp. 18-36.

⁴For popular treatments of some of these developments, see Braden, The Private Sea, and Richard King, "The Eros Ethos: Cult in the Counter Culture," in Psychology Today 6 (August 1972): 35-39, 66-70. Many varieties of "sensitivity training" and similar therapeutic approaches make use of various abreactive techniques. For a currently popular therapy which uses such techniques, see Arthur Janov, The Primal Scream: Primal Therapy; The Cure for Neurosis (New York: Dell, 1972).
There is evidently no labor which so fully absorbs all the faculties of soul and body, as real spiritual devotion & energetic exercise in sacred worship. Therefore there is no operation that has so much effect to mortify & weaken the power of the flesh and energize the soul with the life of the heavenly spirit; as to devote all faculties & life powers under the lead of the spirit & controled [sic] by united open order--In the worship of God. And for this purpose was it established by our blessed Mother [Ann Lee] & spiritual parents. And when the soul is baptized into its life it is a spiritual recreation to all the feelings of soul & body; an enjoyment far superior to any natural recreation, or carnal pleasure--In no earthly pursuit whatever have I ever experienced such delightful feelings or such as would bear any real comparison to what I have felt in sacred devotion.1

In their services, Ann Lee is reported to have told brethren and sisters to let themselves go in the spirit: "Be joyful! Joy away! Rejoice in the God of your salvation."2 Though externally the resultant behaviors might have appeared bizarre, to participants the activities felt good and gave psychic release. Many Believers reported the ecstatic oneness with each other that they felt in a lively meeting of worship.

Accounts by apostates, however, provide the most detailed analyses of the way in which the Shakers utilized ecstatic religious activities both to sublimate troublesome sexual impulses and to transform the character of Believers. In a fair and essentially descriptive account printed in 1782, Amos Taylor observed that "the human frame and construction is such that great effects may be produced merely by, as it were, a mechanical operation on the nerves."3 He described some of the Shaker ecstatic dancing in which he had participated, which involved "springing from the house floor about four inches up and down, both in the men's and women's apartment, moving about as thick as they can crowd, with extraordinary transport, singing sometimes one at a time, and sometimes

1Calvin Green, "Autobiography" (New Lebanon, 1861; MS,WRHS), p. 30.


3Amos Tayler, A Narrative of the Strange Principles, Conduct, and Character of the People Known By the Name of Shakers (Worcester, Mass.: The Author, 1782), p. 10.
more than one, making a perfect charm." Taylor believed that when such activities were prolonged, they served as a form of sublimation and could easily account for the numerous strange and seemingly supernatural phenomena experienced in Shaker worship.

More important, Taylor described the moral transformation that the total Shaker program could provide:

However mysterious it may seem, numberless instances can be produced where lyars (sic), swearers, drunkards, extortioners, unclean, unjust, covetous persons, proud, self-willed, heady, high minded, &c. at least many of these characters have all been brought down to confess, and absolutely for a time to leave their ordinary and common vices.

In place of such vices, individuals became devoted to the Shaker faith, which Taylor characterized unfavorably as "one general spirit of downright idolatry" because of their veneration for Ann Lee.

Such character reorientation is one of the most important features of any successful religious movement. Even though the adoption of their distinctive celibacy requirement created many new problems for Believers, the Shakers, like many other revivalistic groups provided many adherents with a new and generally more satisfying center around which to organize their lives.

IV

Although Ann Lee and the English Shakers provided the initial impetus for the new religious movement, the actual organization of the scattered groups of Believers into functioning celibate communities was conducted primarily under the American leaders, particularly Joseph Meacham and Lucy Wright. Exhaustion from the persecutions and pressures they had suffered caused the premature deaths of Mother Ann and her brother William in 1784, and of James Whittaker, the other capable English leader, in 1787. Before his death, Whittaker, a more diplomatic and more organizationally minded individual than Mother Ann or William, had recognized the necessity of gathering the scattered groups of Believers into a united Church order.

1Ibid., pp. 15-16.  
2Ibid., pp. 11-12.
Only under Joseph Meacham's leadership, however, did the move from essentially charismatic to a more routinized organization begin in earnest. To give temporal organizational support to earlier Shaker religious and celibate ideals, Meacham oversaw the establishment of a dual male and female governmental structure which was buttressed by communistic joint economic order. The shift from English to American leadership was illustrated by the decision to make New Lebanon the first "gathered" Shaker community, the model upon which all subsequent communities would be patterned. New Lebanon was chosen in preference either to Niskeyuna (later called Watervliet), the first headquarters of the English Shakers, or to Harvard (Village), Massachusetts, which Mother Ann apparently hoped to make her base of operations. Thus, the basic Shaker communal organization which will be described below is properly seen primarily as an American rather than an imported system.

The precise factors which influenced the organizational planning of the new Shaker communities is unclear. Probably many features of the new system were a pragmatic response to certain

1Testimonies of Mother Ann Lee shows that Harvard served as the primary base of operations for Mother Ann during the 1781-1783 Northeastern missionary trip. For approximately ten years prior to the Shakers' arrival there in 1781, Harvard had been the headquarters of an extraordinary New Light Baptist preacher, Shadrach Ireland, one-time follower of George Whitefield and advocate of Shaker-like doctrines of perfection, celibacy, and the millennium. Ireland appears to have been a rather emotionally disordered individual. He claimed to be the literal Messiah, he proceeded to desert his wife for a new "spiritual" bride, and then, arguing that he had achieved "perfection," he decided that celibacy was to be discarded. As protection from persecution, he and his followers built him a sturdy house with a square roof, a cupola where he could look out and see when strangers approached, and a trap door with a secret staircase leading from the cupola to the cellar. Ireland boasted that if he died he would arise on the third day. When he did die, a year before the Shakers arrived, his followers faithfully awaited his resurrection, only to become disillusioned as the smell of his putrifying body became intolerable. After the Shakers arrived at Harvard they attempted to provide a more realistic religious base for Ireland's disillusioned but still expectant followers. The Shakers converted many of Ireland's associates and set up the Square House as their headquarters. The Shakers purchased the Square House and property for $536, of which Mother Ann herself was credited as supplying $144.73 in cash. Daryl Chase, "The Early Shakers: An Experiment in Religious Communism" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1936), pp. 24-27.
characteristic problems which any celibate group might have to face. The striking similarities between Shaker structures and Catholic dual monastic organization, nevertheless, raises the question whether monastic or other similar communal traditions might have been used as models. Extant literature does not permit any reliable answer to this question, but the fact that Meacham, Wright, and the American leaders of the Shakers were well educated for their time by no means rules out the possibility of some conscious borrowing from earlier traditions. Certainly the Christian communism described in Acts 2:44-45, which speaks of the early Christians holding "all things common," would always be a continuing ideal for the Shakers.

Joseph Meacham's first major action on acceding to the leadership of the scattered bands of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, was to act carefully, but firmly and decisively, to begin to establish a governmental form and community structure that would give women a place equal to men at all levels of the Society. Although Mother Ann had attempted to give women a prominent role in her Society, there was a tendency after her death to drift back toward male dominance in the leadership of the group. Meacham sought to counter this tendency. He realized that "there must be a visible parental order to lead the visible spiritual family of Christ," in short, that women must be encouraged to participate fully in the life of the Church-Community.

To this end, Meacham appointed Lucy Wright as his co-equal to help to establish a women's order of the Shakers that would allow them strict equality in respective sphere and activities with that of the men. This was a revolutionary departure, "contrary to all earlier rules and views of ecclesiastical Government in the so called Christian world,"

1Quotations in this and the following two paragraphs are from Calvin Green, "Biographic Memoir of the Life, Character & Important Events, in the Ministration of Mother Lucy Wright" (New Lebanon, N.Y., 1870; MS,WRHS). Also see "Collection of the Writings of Father Joseph Meacham Respecting Church Order and Government" (New Lebanon, N.Y., 1791-1796; MS,WRHS). Anna White and Leila S. Taylor, Shakerism: Its Meaning and Message (Columbus, Ohio: Fred. J. Heer, 1904), pp. 63-112, discuss Shaker development under Meacham and Wright. This book is the finest later Shaker account of their history and is based on careful use of manuscript sources.
and many Shakers opposed the move. Shakers might have followed and venerated the charismatic leadership of Mother Ann Lee, but they looked upon the institutionalization of a new authority relationship between the sexes as another matter. In fact, so controversial were Joseph Meacham's efforts to increase female participation that he had to present his new ecclesiastical organization and Lucy Wright's appointment, by "revelation." With Meacham's encouragement, Childs Hamlin, a moving singer and an impressively spiritual man, declared that "the Order of Mother in Church relation was revealed to him, & that Lucy Wright was the female" prepared by God to assume that role.

Even with such putative divine sanction, establishment of the new dual order took nearly ten years of strenuous efforts in reeducating Believers. Getting the women to assume a more active role was especially difficult. Mother Lucy worked tirelessly to prepare the sisters to "come forward in their proper sphere, & take their share of the burdens and toils in all needful labors & sufferings, unitedly with their Brethren, as well as to be leaders according to their order in every Department of the Church." Lucy served as a model of the capable, committed woman that the Shakers were laboring to produce. But opposition still remained strong. "In no preceding Dispensation had the Order of spiritual Mother been gained; hence the female portion of humanity never had its due share in the organization & Government of Ecclesiastical Institutions." Quite probably, the so-called "great apostasy" which began in the Shaker orders shortly before Joseph Meacham's death in 1796 was connected in part with opposition to the idea of a woman, Lucy Wright, leading the Church.

Despite the many problems, the basic order of the Shaker Church gradually became fully established during this period.1 This overall structure would remain largely unchanged throughout the history of the group. Supreme authority was vested in the head ministry at New Lebanon, consisting of male and female, usually four in number, two of each sex. The head figure of this Ministry had the authority, tempered by the sentiments of the membership, to appoint or replace the other three members of the Ministry, and with them, all the leadership of the various Shaker communities. This was an hierarchical and oligarchic system that

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1See the summary in Millennial Church, pp. 58-67.
critics frequently attacked as "papist," but it worked with great effectiveness throughout most of Shaker history. In two hundred years in America, the Shakers never experienced a single schism.

As previously indicated, each Shaker settlement was divided into smaller community groups called "families," including both men and women who lived under the same roof but were strictly separated in their activities. Each family was relatively self-sufficient, both spiritually and economically. Just as each larger Shaker settlement site had its own Ministry appointed from New Lebanon, so each family ideally had two elders and eldersresses to take care of spiritual affairs and two deacons and deaconesses to manage the temporal business. Throughout all levels of the Society, this pattern would prevail after the initial period of organization: All authority was hierarchical, but within each level, men and women shared equal responsibility in the work of regeneration.

Making possible this remarkable system which gave women a degree of equality in leadership that even the most militant socialist advocates of women's rights were unable or unwilling to achieve in practice,¹ was Shaker celibacy. Celibacy, when combined with communal childrearing practices for children previously born to members and orphans adopted by the Society, freed Shaker women for an active role in Church leadership at all levels. Theologically, Shakers justified their arrangements by observing that St. Paul's admonitions to wives to be subject to their husbands, keep silence in the Church, etc., no longer held true for women who had given up earthly marriage and were living a life of "virgin purity." In effect, such women were "married to Christ." Their loyalty was directly to God, or, in practice, to the

¹Despite verbal expressions of concern for women's equality, socialists generally have seen the reorganization of the relations between the sexes as subordinate in importance to the reorganization of the economic relations in society. To some extent, the Shakers reversed this order of priority. "In theory and practice, almost all socialists have accorded women more prominence in their organizations than in the contemporary world outside, yet the positions of formal leadership—with the notable exception of the Shakers—have been retained by men." T. D. Seymour Bassett in, Socialism and American Life, ed. Egbert and Persons, 2:391.
larger community "families" in which the divine pattern was being realized on earth. Freed from the entanglements of the world, Believers could devote themselves fully to God, for, as St. Paul had also said, there is "neither male nor female in the Lord."

In addition to establishing a radically new departure from normative ecclesiastical government, the Shakers under Meacham and Wright set up a cooperative, communistic form of economic organization to provide a buttress for their religious ideals. A joint united interest in all things had been an implicit goal under Mother Ann and the English leaders. Consecration of all temporal holdings to the service of the new Church had occurred to some extent, particularly under Whittaker's leadership, as the devotees of the new religion came together in support of the new faith.

Not until Joseph Meacham took charge, however, was the "gathering" of Shaker believers into a temporal as well as a spiritual union really begun in earnest. Meacham acceded to Shaker leadership and began his organizational work in 1787. Appropriately, that was the same year in which the United States Constitution was ratified and order began to be reestablished in the young Republic as well. Between this date and his death in 1796, Meacham set up eleven functioning Shaker centers, composed of numerous smaller "families," in New York and New England. These centers embodied the basic economic forms that would allow the Shaker economic system to function highly successfully throughout the better part of the two succeeding centuries of Shaker life in America. 1

The process by which new economic institutions and new economic ideals were created by the Shakers has been the subject of considerable popular and scholarly curiosity. Several sophisticated scholarly studies have appeared. Of these, an outstanding example is Edward Deming Andrews's The Community Industries of the Shakers, a careful analysis of the central New Lebanon Shaker community. Those desiring a fuller understanding of Shaker economic development can consult such studies. 2 Here,

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1 Two standard Shaker accounts of this development are in Millennial Church, pp. 51-58, and White and Taylor, Shakerism, pp. 63-112.

2 Edward Deming Andrews, The Community Industries of the Shakers (Albany: University of the State of New York, 1933). See also John
therefore, only a summary of some of the most salient aspects of the new communal organization will be provided, particularly as it relates to Shaker sexual and marital reorganization.

Shaker celibacy, with its subordination of individual sexual life to the larger interests of the community, had made possible an equalization of male and female participation in the ecclesiastical system. So, too, celibacy contributed to the success of a communistic system of economic organization in which the good of the individual was subordinated to that of the collectivity. Perhaps because of the grinding poverty from which the English Shakers had come, an emphasis on hard work and economic success had always been an important concern of Believers. They sought to follow Mother Ann's admonition to "put their hands to work and their hearts to God." Believers no longer looked upon productive work as part of the curse pronounced upon Adam. Rather they sought to reintegrate economic and religious life into a harmonious whole, thereby overcoming the exploitative economic individualism that followed the close of the Revolutionary War. By removing the competing demands implicit in separate nuclear family arrangements, the Shakers were able to devote their entire effort to building up their conception of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

Many Shaker communities were gathered around the holdings consecrated to the group by prosperous small farmers who became Believers. Often these communities were called by the names of the original owners, such as Rufus Clark's family, Israel Talcott's family, and so forth. Other farms were purchased by pooling the resources of a number of Believers. Initially oral agreements were made by those who consecrated their property to the "joint united interest." However, because of legal litigation by apostates seeking to reclaim consecrated property, after 1795 written covenants were drawn up, to avoid such disruption of Church
holdings. Even before the formal government of the various Shaker centers had been set up, the economic organization of the Society began to develop.

Far from stifling economic initiative, the "joint united interest" set up by the Shakers appears to have been associated with a high level of economic innovation and commitment. Decentralized economic action was carried out by the various Shaker communities. The basic economic unit was the single Shaker "family" of as many as a hundred or more individuals working cooperatively. Thus the community "family" rather than the nuclear "family" became the productive economic unit. Sometimes several families would unite in an industry or business venture, or maintain a common store or a clearing house for farm or manufactured items. Shaker businessmen developed an extensive network of contacts throughout New York and New England who were attracted by the consistently high quality of their many products. And individual Shakers developed an enormous number of ingenious inventions and improvements that were put to good use in their communities.

Edward Deming Andrews notes that Shaker farm enterprises were reduced to an almost regimental precision, with a clear division of labor in which each member had his or her appointed task at an appointed time. "In these early group activities of the Shakers one recognizes a formative chapter in large scale or 'mass production' enterprise, an anticipation of the corporate businesses which rose later in the machine age in this country." Thus, the Shakers' "amazingly productive economic system" was by no means out of touch with larger American economic developments. Though its response to nascent industrialism was unusual, the Shaker Church contributed in many ways to the successful adjustment of Believers to modern economic realities, while blunting much of the harshness of the individualistic economic competition that was developing.

Significantly, despite their economic progressiveness and their development of equality for women in the government of the Society, the Shakers left almost totally unchanged the basic economic division of labor between the sexes that prevailed in America at that time. Shaker women worked in kitchen and dairy industries, in weaving and manufacture.

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1 Andrews, Community Industries of the Shakers, p. 37.
of cloth, and in a variety of other types of basically indoor activities characteristically pursued by women of the period. And Shaker men typically were involved in outdoor farm labor in heavy agriculture, as well as in blacksmithing, tanning, and the like. The basic American household division of labor in the nuclear family therefore remained in full force in the Shaker communities. Only women's disabilities that were connected with their sexual function in childbearing and childrearing were eliminated.¹

Why did the Shakers maintain this economic division between the sexes while breaking down other important divisions between the sexes in organizational and religious life? So far as this writer knows, in no human society of which we have record have identical productive functions been assigned to men and women, although just what are considered to be men's and women's occupations have varied widely in different times and cultures. The Shakers, not surprisingly, refrained from significantly modifying typical American patterns in the economic area. There is little evidence that Shakers viewed either male or female occupations as inherently "superior." Nevertheless, the testimony of numerous visitors was that in general Shaker women looked less healthy and engaged in more extreme religious activities than Shaker men.² Quite possibly this was related to frustrations arising from the more limiting and constricting occupations pursued by Shaker sisters.

Thus, while eliminating or minimizing differences between the sexes that were explicitly or implicitly connected with sexual intercourse, reproduction, and childrearing, the Shakers firmly maintained that sexual distinctions remained both on earth and in heaven. Such differences could hardly be done away with, for even God was composed of a union of male and female attributes, was sexual in the deepest sense of being a fusion of complimentary opposites. Ironically, groups in

¹Ibid., passim.

²Andrews, People Called Shakers, pp. 143-144, notes the frequent observation of travelers that "the countenances of the sisters often seemed rapt and pallid, their bodies thin, their movements nervous, whereas the brethren looked ruddy, cheerful and healthy."
which men were explicitly dominant such as the Oneida Perfectionists and Mormons did more to break down the typical American occupational division of labor than did the Shakers who stressed to a far greater degree the equality of both men and women in the Church and before God.

V

The introduction of celibacy, the radical modification of traditional authority relations between the sexes, and the development of a communistic economic commitment could hardly have been achieved without resulting in considerable stresses in the newly developing Shaker communities. Shaker sources admit that errors and excesses took place both under the English and the American leadership. Between 1780 and 1785, there were a variety of highly emotional meetings, lasting night and day, the noise of which could occasionally be heard from as far away as two miles.¹ There were thunderings against carnal nature, shaking and trembling, weeping, speaking in tongues, singing, dancing, leaping, shouting, and a variety of seemingly "supernatural" effects.

During the early part of the period from about 1785 to 1797, the revivalistic worship services and attempts to mortify carnal nature became even more intense. Throughout this period, the Shakers almost completely discontinued active proselytizing and shut themselves off from the world in an attempt to establish and regulate their new communal order. Shaker sources admit that the "zeal without knowledge" of some Believers, many of whom were still teenagers, resulted in some actions which the Society would prefer to forget.² Instead, the Shakers tried to stress the generally positive consequences of the activities: "Though men of the world, have been obliged to acknowledge that the visible fruits [of

¹Testimonies of Mother Ann Lee, pp. 113-114.

²The phrase, however, is the summary of those accounts by Brown, Account of the Shakers, p. 362, who observes that "zeal without knowledge, or lack of wisdom and experience, (as they now confess) which caused them to run into many practices which they have now discarded" was common in this period.
Shakerism] were good, yet the real internal work from which those fruits were produced, was wholly hid from their eyes."¹

Although Shaker sources preferred not to talk about the more extreme physical manifestations attendant upon this "internal work," and although little manuscript material bearing on these events survives from the period, an idea of the range of activities engaged in is suggested in the accounts of some individuals who left the Society. By far the best of the accounts of this troubled period is that of the fair, analytical, and meticulously detailed ex-Shaker, Thomas Brown.² Brown had been a Quaker, but joined the Shakers in 1798 after their revivalistic activities had largely subsided. Possessed of sensitivity and a probing curiosity, Brown investigated almost all aspects of Shaker life for nearly a decade, recording his conversations with Shaker leaders in detail soon after they occurred and explaining the bases for his inferences. Brown's account is a participant-observer report of exceptional quality and scope that present-day social scientists would be hard-pressed to surpass.

According to Brown, Shaker revivalistic tensions peaked between the late 1780s and about 1792-93, not coincidentally the period when the Northeastern Shaker communities were becoming established:

The exercises of those who were gathering into a family, united interest and order, were extreme beyond conception. They conceived that by the power of God they could labour completely out of their natural instinct implanted in mankind for the purpose of procreation. . . . Imagination was exhausted by inventing, and nature tortured in executing this arduous work. They often danced with vehemence through the greatest part of the night, and then instead of reposing their weary bodies upon a bed, they would by way of further penance, lie down upon the floor on chains, ropes, sticks, in every humiliating and mortifying posture they could devise!³

As part of such mortifications, according to Brown's careful evaluation of the evidence, some individuals stripped and danced naked to kill their pride. Despite the suppositions of some overly imaginative

¹Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing, p. 31.
²Brown, Account of the Shakers.
³Ibid., p. 334.
outsiders, these actions were totally puritanical in conception and effect. The many accounts of alleged licentious debauchery practiced in this period were wholly without foundation. "A few solitary instances of sexual intercourse might be mentioned; but the parties were shut out of union and not received again without confessions and professions of repentance and contrition similar as in other churches."¹

The more extreme physical manifestations may have been an inevitable concomitant of this troubled transition into new forms, but such extreme behaviors were not desired by the more mature Believers. Joseph Meacham and Lucy Wright, in particular, sought to lead the young Society beyond such extreme activities into a new order. During the transition phase when neither the old order nor the as-yet unborn new state could provide the basis of authority, the extraordinary manifestations had been essential. As the so-called "secret book of the Elders" noted:

Divine miracles have generally attended the ushering in of new and extraordinary dispensations of God to a dark and benighted world; because they carry to the minds of the lost children of men, the strongest evidence of the sacred messenger's divine authority. But when that divine authority is once established in the hearts of honest believers, a continuance of outward miracles, for that purpose, is no longer necessary.²

¹Ibid., p. 336. Mary Hocknell responded to Brown's question about allegations that during early Shaker development men and women had danced naked together, by saying: "Because the brethren pulled off their coats, or outside garments, to labour, or as the world calls it, dancing; and in warm weather the sisters being lightly clothed, they would report we danced naked." Ibid., p. 47. Throughout both his account of his personal investigation of the Shakers and his history of their development, Brown explains why he finds this sort of statement an inadequate explanation for the widespread stories. He provides names of principals and informants, as well as dates and circumstances, which convinced him beyond any reasonable doubt that both naked dancing and naked flagellant activities occurred during peak periods of early Shaker excitement. For a summary of his conclusions, see ibid., pp. 322-323, 334-336.

²Testimonies of Mother Ann Lee, p. 254. Also see ibid., p. 214. Shaker statements of this sort suggest a level of self-consciousness about the techniques of their revivalism that verges on the secular approach of the later revivalist Charles Grandison Finney in his Lectures on Revivals of Religion, 6th ed. (New York: Leavitt, Lord & Co., 1835).
In other words, when the basis for the new religious and social order had become securely established in the minds and lives of Believers, the extreme charismatic gifts and informal leadership could give way to a calmer, more restrained inward faith expressed through the pursuit of fundamental religious goals in daily life under the new system. The overall process of transformation was ably summarized in 1823 by Calvin Green, who compared the Shaker experience to that of Americans of the period generally:

The first leaders of the Society may be compared to people going into a new country, and settling in the wilderness, where the first object is to cut and clear the land, and burn the rubbish, before the ground can be suitably prepared for cultivation. In this operation, the axe and the fire are used with no sparing hand; and the falling of trees and crackling of burning brush and useless rubbish occasion much noise and bustle, and great confusion, especially among the wild beasts and noxious vermin that infest the land. These are now obliged to flee for their lives, into some other part of the wilderness, or the fire will consume them. But when the land is sufficiently cleared, and the rubbish consumed, and the wild vermin have all retreated, and the careful husbandman has securely fenced his field, he can then go on to prepare and cultivate his ground in peace; and if he is faithful to manage his business as he ought, he will continue to improve his premises from year to year; so that in a few years, this once dreary wilderness will be seen to "blossom as the rose." Such has been the progress of the United Society [Shakers], and such is the nature of the changes which it has passed through.

Although ecstatic phenomena became less frequent with the re-establishment of order, throughout Shaker history during times of crisis such phenomena would return with renewed force as individuals sought once again to find ultimate sanction for a religious and social way of life that was being called into question.

VI

By 1800 the Shakers in the Northeastern communities had passed through both an initial charismatic phase and a period of institutional organization. Religious unity, internal tranquility, and economic prosperity appeared to have been achieved. Rather than relaxing at this

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1Millennial Church, p. xii.
point, however, the Shakers inaugurated still a third phase in their development. A major missionary venture into the Ohio Valley was begun to attempt to establish new Shaker communities in the area affected by the Kentucky Revival. Between 1805 and 1820, seven new Shaker community sites were established and began to thrive in Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana. By 1822 there were some 4,000 Shakers in all, nearly half of them in the Midwestern communities.¹

The process of expansion and transformation in this second wave of Shaker settlement was very similar to the first. This development was set forward in stark relief in the first book ever printed by the Shakers.² The book, The Kentucky Revival, published in 1807, was written by Richard McNemar, a prominent revivalist preacher who converted to the Shakers and was instrumental in organizing most of the Midwestern Shaker communities. McNemar was a classical scholar, penetrating intellect, and powerful debater. His brilliant analysis of the course of the Kentucky Revival can be seen as a description from a religious perspective of the phenomena of transition that Victor Turner describes in strikingly similar terms from a secular vantage point in terms of "liminality and communitas."³

In his account, McNemar describes the general sense of religious and social malaise that preceded the revival. He shows the various ways in which revivalism operated to break down existing

¹New Lebanon "Introduction to Records of Sacred Communications," p. 10.

²Richard McNemar, The Kentucky Revival; or, A Short History of the Late Extraordinary Outpouring of the Spirit of God in the Western States of America (Cincinnati: John W. Browne, 1807). This was reprinted in 1808, 1837, and 1846. It was also reproduced in a Shaker periodical, The Manifesto, between January 1891 and July 1892.

³Jerald C. Brauer has suggested the possibility of approaching the Kentucky Revival as an initiation rite. One of Brauer's students, James S. Dalton attempted to develop this concept in "The Kentucky Camp Meeting Revivals of 1797-1805 as Rites of Initiation" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1973). One could, of course, approach any major revival as in some sense both an individual and a social rite of passage. What is remarkable about the Shakers, however, is that their leaders explicitly analyzed their own experience from a framework that is almost totally compatible with that of later secular scholarly theorists.
institutional and intellectual frameworks. And he describes the powerful emotional forces that were let loose as all distinctions of age, sex, and social rank were dissolved in the intense comradeship of the joint worship of God. Yet this sense of the spiritual immediacy, freshness, and awesomeness of direct emotional experience also led to great fragmentation and excess. Different individuals found different and often contradictory messages in the Scriptures. A "hot spiritual war" ensued. Disillusionment was the inevitable result.

Into this field that had been burned over by the fires of revivalism came three of the Shakers' ablest missionaries, Benjamin Seth Youngs, Issachar Bates, and John Meacham. Working typically with individuals or with small, receptive groups, these men emphasized the inadequacy of individual Bible interpretation alone as a basis for religious and social truth. Instead, individuals were told that a new communal order and basis of authority were necessary for a holy life. Believers must submit themselves to the authority of the new dispensation as mediated through the Shaker elders. These elders were representatives of the true Church of Christ "in whom the spirit of truth continually abides." Thus "all who are taught in this manner are strictly and properly taught of God; and obeying what they are taught they yield obedience to Christ."1

In this as in other cases, the Shakers were requiring that their adherents subordinate themselves to a new basis of Church-type authority and a new communal framework of meaning. Celibacy served as their single most distinctive boundary maintenance mechanism, setting the Shakers apart from similar revivalistic groups. Celibacy called for a unique level of commitment and insured that, both in theory and in practice, the Shaker kingdom could not be of this world. The Shakers were attempting to institutionalize a spirit which can never be fully institutionalized, to create what they hoped would be, in effect, a "continuing revolution."

Well aware of the paradoxical nature of their position, the Shakers nevertheless were able, for a time at least, to achieve a balance between the freshness of individual inspiration and the necessary constraints of

1McNemar, The Kentucky Revival, 1846 ed., p. 89.
a functioning social order. For purposes of this analysis, the chief importance of the Kentucky Revival and the development of Midwestern Shakerism lies in the stimulus it provided for the establishment of Shaker printing. In the earliest charismatic and organizational phases of Shaker development, little need was felt for a written literature since fundamental beliefs could be passed on orally and modified as the experience of the group demanded. By the time of the Midwestern expansion, however, the effects of time and of distance made written formulation of beliefs and practices desirable to supplement the still necessary personal contacts and continuing openness to changing realities.

Out of this situation came the first great flowering of Shaker publication, a rich outpouring of histories, doctrinal and polemical works, hymnals, and other writings which constitute the first mature fruits of Shaker writing and provide important information on the attitudes of articulate leadership. McNemar's Kentucky Revival, first published in 1807 in Cincinnati, Ohio, began the procession of accounts. That book was followed in 1808, at Lebanon, Ohio, by Benjamin Seth Youngs's Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing, the first and most important Shaker doctrinal work, sometimes called the Shaker "Bible." Thomas Jefferson is said to have praised the book in a letter to Youngs as the best ecclesiastical history that had ever been written.

In 1812, Millennial Praises, the first of many Shaker printed hymnals, appeared. It provided an indication of the popular concerns of Shaker membership at the time and showed how the emphasis on achieving a greater degree of equality between the sexes was a major theme in popular Shakerism, a theme closely connected with the concern for celibacy. In 1816, a remarkably straightforward and detailed account providing Testimonies of the Life and Character of Our Ever Blessed Mother Ann Lee, sometimes called "the secret book of the Elders," was published in an

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1This development is discussed in detail in John Patterson Maclean, A Bibliography of Shaker Literature, With an Introductory Study of the Writings and Publications Pertaining to Ohio Believers (Columbus, Ohio: F. J. Heer, 1905), pp. 3-20.

2Ibid., p. 6.
extremely limited edition for the sole reference of the leadership. And in 1818, John Dunlavy’s Manifesto, the second great Shaker doctrinal work called forth by the Kentucky Revival, was first printed at Pleasant Hill, Kentucky.

These and other works provide valuable insights into Shaker attitudes and concerns about celibacy and the relations between the sexes. However, possibly the finest summation and defense of Shaker sexual and marital beliefs is found in A Summary View of the Millennial Church by Calvin Green and Seth Y. Wells. First published in 1823, it is the third and most readable of the early Shaker doctrinal works. Throughout the nineteenth century, the Millennial Church served as a primary basis for numerous pamphlet defenses of celibacy, some of which used almost verbatim extracts from the work. The account, therefore, can be used to suggest both the basic rationale behind Shaker celibacy and the relationship of such beliefs to larger nineteenth-century American social currents.¹

Like other Shaker writers, Green and Wells emphasized that in the original Adamic state, human sexuality and the faculty of generation arising from it was a positive force, part of the original creation of God which he had pronounced "very good." It was "as simple and innocent, in itself, as the faculty of eating and drinking." But man’s transgression had corrupted the very fountainhead of life itself, had led the human generative function to become subordinate to the inordinate demands of lust. The Shakers interpreted the story of the Garden of Eden in a symbolic, not a literal sense. They believed that although disobedience to a command of God was the cause of man’s fall, the specific act of disobedience itself was one of carnal intercourse engaged in out of its proper time and season.

In support of this interesting thesis on the origin of human suffering, Green and Wells look at the curse pronounced upon the first woman: "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow

¹Though Shaker celibacy concerns are voiced throughout the Millennial Church, this summary is based on pages 129-143, entitled: "The Cause, Nature and Effects of Man’s Loss From God."
This curse placed by God upon Eve, Green and Wells argue, must have been in response to the nature of the transgression, which therefore must have been a sexual one. This curse of excessive sexual demands upon the woman is seen as a great social problem in antebellum America as well:

This same curse has been more or less felt by the fallen daughters of Eve to this day. . . . Thus the woman is not only subjected to the pains and sorrows of childbirth, but even in her conception, she becomes subject to the libidinous passions of her husband; . . . This slavish subjection is often carried to such a shocking extent, that many females have suffered an unnatural and premature death, in consequence of the unseasonable and excessive indulgence of this passion in the man. Thousands there are, no doubt, who are able to bear sorrowful testimony to the truth of this remark.¹

The marriage ceremony does not alleviate this severe problem, for lust corrupts even the marriage bond. Man, unlike other animals, has no specific period of the year during which he engages in sexual intercourse. Rather, he indulges this passion at his whim, inside or outside marriage, irrespective of the law of nature and his desire for progeny. As a result, "the lawless passion of lust knows no bounds, is confined to no limits, and subject to no laws." Green and Wells bitterly ask why, if sexual intercourse is such a good thing, those pious divines who try to sanctify the act by a marriage ceremony should refuse to ask their parishioners to do it in public before their very eyes! Shame, they say, is an inseparable part of the act, proof that it is a work of darkness. The inability to establish order in the process of generation is both a symbol and a cause of all other types of social disorder. If sexual behavior could be properly regulated, all other social problems could be brought under control as well.

This analysis, only briefly indicated here, raises interesting perspectives on the tensions between the sexes facing many antebellum Americans. Recent research suggests that, contrary to the general view of optimism and expansiveness, a number of special sexual problems may have existed during the period before the Civil War, especially for women.

¹Millennial Church, pp. 132-133.
For whatever reasons, it seems indisputable that the desire for smaller families had begun well before the Civil War. In the absence of effective artificial means of birth control in this period (other than abortion), self-control or repression was widely advocated as a means of avoiding the evils of excessive procreation. The Shakers, doubting that such a half-way approach could ever really handle the problem, merely went one step further than their contemporaries by eliminating physical connection between the sexes altogether, a novel and rather drastic form of birth control.

But in their practice of celibacy, the Shakers were engaged in considerably more than simply an early faltering attempt at birth control. Had their program been only of this character, it could justly be forgotten as an eccentric attempt to counteract the still-prevalent emphasis on having large families. From the Shaker viewpoint, mankind's recovery to God was a positive process involving a total commitment to an ideal and a way of life. They felt that such a religious commitment at the level at which they sought it was impossible unless men and women could be freed from the inevitable distractions involved in sexual relations and the nuclear family. Thus, except perhaps in the earliest period, the Shakers never seriously expected that everyone would ever become a Shaker. They recognized the validity of the normal procreative life, insofar as it was well-lived, but they felt that they were living according to a higher standard.¹

¹Shakers frequently were frustrated by the inability of most outsiders to understand—much less agree with—their celibate system. Richard Pelham expressed such feelings in a pamphlet appropriately entitled A Shaker's Answer to the Oft-Repeated Question, "What Would Become of the World If All Should Become Shakers" (Boston: Rand, Avery, & Co., 1878). But perhaps the most vigorous defense of Shaker celibate distinctiveness was put forward in the Testimony of Christ's Second Appearing, 1810 ed., p. 618:

"... it is not a question of so much concern to the people of God, what will become of the world, as it is to know their Lord's will, and to do it, and thereby to flee from the wrath to come.

"Thousands and millions may be butchered, nation be destroyed by nation, and the earth be involved in blood and calamity, and nothing be said about the danger or wickedness of such an example, nor any
VII

What kinds of people become attracted to the Shakers? What types of concerns and social backgrounds were associated with joining such an unusual communal society? Some of the reasons for interest in the Shakers have already been suggested in the preceding account of the early historical development of the group. To highlight the complex motivation and the wide range of personal experiences of those who joined the Shakers, two primary sources of information will be used in this section.

The first of these is the numerous biographical and autobiographical statements of articulate men and women who became Believers. In view of their limited numbers, the Shakers were an extraordinarily self-conscious group. They evidently felt that what they were doing was of ultimate, of cosmic, importance. Thus, like the earlier highly introspective Puritans and Quakers with whom they shared much, the Shakers attempted to record in detail their inner feelings, motives and aspirations. William James has suggested that to understand the full scope of religious experience, one must look at it through its finest

concern expressed about the world's coming to an end. But no sooner do souls confess and forsake their sins, and set out to follow the example of Christ Jesus, but the hue and cry is raised, The world will come to an end! As if man were a mere lump of flesh and blood, created for no higher end than to live after the flesh, in the gratification of their lusts, and destroy one another."

White and Taylor, Shakerism, provides a point of entry into the wide range of printed and manuscript Shaker biographical and autobiographical statements. Important printed autobiographical accounts include those of Frederick W. Evans, Mary Antoinette Doolittle, Giles Avery, Henry B. Bear, Jane D. Knight, Henry C. Blinn, and George M. Wickersham. These are primarily late Shaker figures and Shaker "liberals." A better cross section of people are represented in the manuscripts at the Western Reserve Historical Society. See Pike, Guide to Shaker Manuscripts, esp. pp. 48-52. Alonzo Hollister's two-volume compilation "Book of Immortality. Autobiography of the Saints, or Stray Leaves from the Book of Life" provides a good entrée into this material. Also see accounts of Issachar Bates, William Leonard, Rebecca Jackson, Proctor Sampson, Calvin Green, Abigail Crossman, Orren N. Haskins, Henry Clough, Rhoda Blake, Richard W. Pelham, and Freegift Wells. Some of these accounts have been reproduced with introductions in the Shaker Quarterly.
representatives—just as one looks at great art, literature, or science through its best, not its worst, exemplars. Autobiographical statements provide such examples for the Shakers.

An analysis based on the outstanding and articulate alone, however, would almost certainly distort the total picture of any group. Thus, to supplement the qualitative membership information and to develop the demographic characteristics of the larger number of Shakers who remained inarticulate, a second, quantitative source will be used. An analysis will be made of the membership roster of the Second Family of the New Lebanon community. That roster provides the date and place of birth, date and place of entry into the Shakers, and death or departure date for everyone in this family between 1830 and 1896. The somewhat less complete records of the Sodus Bay, New York, community between 1826 and 1838 also will be considered. Although these two documents probably do not represent the full range of Shaker membership, they at least suggest the types of people attracted to Shaker communities that were in close contact with the Burned-over District of upstate New York and related areas of New England. By combining qualitative and quantitative measures a more nearly accurate picture of Shaker membership can be developed.

The complex motives which could lead an individual to join the Shakers are vividly illustrated by the experience of Issachar Bates. Born in 1758 in Hingham, Massachusetts, Bates was married in 1778 to Lovina Maynard from Gary, Massachusetts, where he was then living. By the time he joined the Shakers in 1801, he and his wife had had eleven children, nine of whom were still alive. Following Bates’s marriage, he

1William James, Varieties of Religious Experience, esp. pp. 21-38.

2"Names, Ages, Places of Birth, Date of Reception and Departure of Those Residing in the Second Order" (New Lebanon, 1830-1896; MS,WRHS); and "A Record of the Commencement, and Progress of Believers at Sodus and Portbay" (Sodus Bay, 1826-1838; MS,WRHS). New Lebanon, Watervliet, and Sodus Bay (later Groveland) composed what was known as the Central Bishopric, a bishopric being a group of societies operating under the supervision of a single ministry.

had bought a small farm, but, unable to support his rapidly increasing family on it, he turned to mercantile speculation in a variety of farm products. Eventually his trading ventures failed, in part because of the corruption of his agent, and Bates lost most of his goods. Such economic reverses were a not unusual experience for many individuals during the rapidly expanding and fluctuating American economy between the Revolutionary and Civil Wars.

In 1795 when he was thirty-seven and had had seven children, Bates began to have an awful fear of what would happen to his children, both spiritually and materially. Out of these concerns, he joined the Baptists and became a lay preacher. Nevertheless, during the succeeding six years, he continued to suffer deep swings of emotion and he remained profoundly dissatisfied with his life. Distraught over his spiritual and material condition, Bates sought to confess his "secret sins" and feelings about the "works of the flesh" to a Baptist elder. The elder, however, refused to hear him for fear that it would lead to the breakup of Bates's family. Instead, he admonished Bates to continue to follow the command of God to "be fruitful and multiply." Bates's wife Lovina, likewise refused to listen to his doubts. She ran out of the room when he tried to bring up his anxieties about having more children.

Under these circumstances, Bates began to cast around for help, but he found little response from his friends when he tried to talk with them about his disillusionment with the works of the flesh, bearing arms, taking oaths, and becoming enmeshed in superficial worldly concerns. Finally, after having four additional children, Bates turned to the Shakers, whom he had found increasingly appealing, to see if they would give his concerns and problems a serious hearing. After sharing a moving discussion of their mutual concerns with a Shaker elder, Bates finally was moved to join the Society. Not surprisingly, Bates's whole family initially was militantly opposed to this action. Eventually, however, all but his two eldest sons joined the Watervliet Shaker society with Bates. He, in turn, went on to distinguish himself in a missionary career in which he covered some 38,000 miles, largely on foot, and played an important role in helping to start the Midwestern Shaker communities.

Bates's concerns were characteristic of those of many other individuals who joined the Shakers, although he was exceptional in the
degree to which he consciously articulated his motives. As the New Lebanon and Sodus Bay membership records show, many people entered the Shaker societies (and many left as well) in family units, sometimes quite large ones. Rearing a numerous family could be spiritually and physically taxing for both men and women, particularly given the uncertainties of religious and social life in the period. The Shakers offered their adherents a total context of functioning spiritual and temporal community life, and they were willing to deal frankly and honestly with personal problems that many of their contemporaries simply tried to ignore.

Although Issachar Bates was middle-aged and had a considerable family when he joined the Shakers, biographical sketches and membership records in the collection at the Western Reserve Historical Society show that a majority of individuals either joined the Shakers as children or during the turbulent years of adolescence or young adulthood. A generalized identity crisis concerning the direction and significance of their lives, rather than simply sexual confusions or dissatisfactions, appears to have been the conscious concern of most of these people. The Shakers were one of a number of groups to which such individuals might turn to find solutions to their inner uncertainties. Lucy Brown, who joined the Shakers when she was eighteen, suggests some of the characteristics of many of these people. Lucy had experienced a relatively satisfying family life, but felt a certain emptiness and uncertainty about her life's direction, as well as a hunger for something more than what her parents and immediate environment could offer her. She was deeply impressed when she visited a nearby Shaker community. In joining the Shakers she was, in effect, stepping out on her own and asserting her own individuality and freedom from her parents, ironically, much the same reason that many people get married. Although Lucy Brown does not mention any particular family problems, economic difficulties, or sexual anxieties, such factors are also frequently described in other

accounts as a part of the reason that individuals became attracted to the Shakers.

Young married couples also frequently joined the Shakers. The experience of Lucy Wright and Elizur Goodrich is one such case. Wright, who came from a well-to-do and socially prominent family in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, was married at nineteen to Elizur Goodrich, nine years her senior. They both had a very lofty and idealized conception of marriage and lived together "uncommonly continent" for several months before being converted in the small New Lebanon revival of 1779. Elizur went further and joined the Shakers. After very considerable resistance, Lucy also joined the Society, but a wide range of rather harsh methods had to be used to wean her affections away from those of her husband. Elizur finally was sent out preaching, while Lucy, who like Mother Ann reverted to her maiden name, remained at Watervliet. There she had free scope to develop her considerable talents and her religious career that eventually made her a leader and model for the women in the Society.

The experience of John Lyon of the Shaker community at Enfield, New Hampshire, shows how an individual who was reared by the Shakers might undergo powerful inner experiences which would convince him to stay. Lyon was exceptional, for the majority of young Shakers who grew up in the Society eventually left the group, and few recorded conversion experiences as vivid as John Lyon's. In 1795 when he was about fourteen, Lyon was becoming disturbed by his emerging sexual impulses which he viewed as deeply sinful. He confessed repeatedly to the elders, and generally he tried to follow their advice, but inwardly he was deeply divided and he doubted what they told him. In 1802, when he was twenty-one, Lyon underwent a powerful visionary-conversion experience which he describes with remarkable insight. In profound inner turmoil, he was alone at work, when "suddenly I was taken from all sense of the things of time ... apparently the whole heavens were filled, seeming to roll

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1See Green, "Biographic Memoir of Lucy Wright." Also see White and Taylor, *Shakerism*, pp. 105-109.

2"Incidents in the Early Life of Elder John Lyon" (Enfield, N.H., 1861, MS, WRHS).
backward and forward, and in every direction." He saw a thin vertical streak of light which he walked toward at the command of a voice, but suddenly he stood next to a great gulf and became "enveloped in a horrible darkness." He had nothing on which to rest his feet, was unable to move in any direction, and felt in great distress, utterly lost and terrified.

Eventually Lyon discovered that by keeping his eyes firmly fixed on the thin ray of light, he was able to move forward safely through the unknown. But every time he lost his concentration on the light, he was overwhelmed in blackness and terror again. Finally he decided to ask for help. He was instructed in obedience and he vowed in his heart that if he pulled through the experience, he would never disobey his elders again. Then at last he was able to move through the darkness into a bright, lovely vision. After an unknown interval of time, "I heard the same sound which I heard at the commencement of the vision, it came rolling through the heavens, and seemed to fill all things. . . . and I found myself upon my knees, having wet with my tears, a place some ten or twelve inches in diameter." Approximately four hours had elapsed. From that time forth, despite occasional inner conflicts, Lyon was firmly dedicated to the Shakers. He went on to become one of their great leaders.

Any qualitative account of Shaker membership would be incomplete without consideration of accounts of apostates and those who left the Shakers. The New Lebanon and Sodus Bay membership records suggest that far more of the individuals who entered the Society during the nineteenth century may have "turned off," or left the Shakers, than remained. Some seceders felt strongly enough about their experiences to write accounts which they printed at their own expense.¹ The majority of seceders,

¹Among the most important accounts of seceders and apostates are Rathbun, An Account of a New and Strange Religion (1781); Tyler, Narrative of the Shakers (1782); Brown, Account of the Shakers (1812); Mary Marshall Dyer, A Portraiture of Shakerism (Concord, N.H.: For the Author, 1822); Mary Marshall, The Rise and Progress of the Serpent from the Garden of Eden, to the Present Day (Concord, N.H.: For the Author, 1847); Eunice Chapman, Account of the Conduct of the People Called Shakers in the Case of Eunice Chapman and Her Children (Albany, N.Y.: n.p., 1817); Eunice Chapman, No. 2d, Being An Additional Account of the Conduct of the Shakers in the Case of Eunice Chapman and Her Children (Albany, N.Y.: I. W. Clark, 1818); Haskett, Shakerism Unmasked (1828); David Rich Lamson, Two Years' Experience Among the Shakers: Being A Description of
including Valentine Rathbun, Mary Dyer, Eunice Chapman, and William J. Hackett, wrote with a pronounced polemical bias. Others such as Thomas Brown, David Lamson, and Hervey Elkins wrote accounts as skeptical but basically sympathetic participant-observers. The motives which led these people to join the Shakers and later to leave and "expose" them are almost as complex as those of individuals who remained in the Society. Apostate accounts provide a fascinating and often quite graphic discussion of certain important problems largely ignored in other Shaker texts.

The experiences of Mary Dyer, one of the most vociferous anti-Shaker writers, illustrates the complexity of apostate motivation, as well as some problems the Shakers faced in trying to deal with those who did not find celibate life to their liking. Mary joined the Enfield, New Hampshire, community with her husband Joseph and their five children about 1812. Three years later, she left the Society, and, to recover her children, she instituted several suits, accompanied over the course of thirty years by books and pamphlets attacking the alleged misdeeds of the group.

Mary Dyer's most damaging exposé, *A Portraiture of Shakerism*, appeared in 1822. Much of the book was devoted to grossly exaggerated affidavits detailing the alleged misdeeds of the early Shakers. These statements, which referred to events some forty to fifty years previous, showed little except the intense hostility that early Shaker missionary activities in New England had generated. However, the core of the book

the Manners and Customs of That People (West Booleston, Mass.: The Author, 1848); and Elkins, Fifteen Years in the Shakers (1853).

consisted of reprints of statements by a galaxy of the most important Shaker seceders and apostates, including Amos Rathbun, Thomas Brown, and Bunice Chapman. Climaxing these statements was Mary Dyer's account of her own sufferings and trials among the Shakers, a lengthy and apparently relatively factual account, despite its self-pitying tone and polemical intent.

Faced with the implacable hostility and the numerous verbal and printed attacks by this capable but contentious woman, the Shakers departed from their normal policy of publicly ignoring apostates. Instead, the Shakers responded at length to Mary Dyer's charges, implicitly recognizing that many of her underlying criticisms identified real points of vulnerability and stress in their societies. Included in the resultant lively exchange, pro and con, was a statement by Mary's husband Joseph attacking her character and veracity. The exchange of barbed criticisms provided what the Shakers aptly characterized as an account of the Dyers's "domestic broils."

Raking through the numerous allegations and counter-allegations about the character of Mary Dyer or the Shakers will not be our concern here. Mary Dyer's allegations about hidden Shaker licentiousness connected with "spiritual wives and husbands"—which appears to be a deliberate misrepresentation of the chaste and straight-laced Shaker "union meetings"—are as unconvincing factually as the equally extreme Shaker retort which accused Mary of making passes at Shaker leaders and making lesbian advances to one of her roommates. Such statements appear to be of purely polemical significance, with no factual basis. Of far greater importance is why the Shaker celibate system proved so completely unacceptable to Mary Dyer, as it did also for some other initially enthusiastic converts. Related to this as a larger question of why a person like Mary Dyer should become what might be described as a "career apostate," a person whose whole life would become devoted to trying to destroy a faith that he or she had once espoused.

From the perspective of hindsight, Mary Dyer's personal charges against the Shakers tell us little that we did not already know. However, at the time of the printing of her public description of the elaborate Shaker control mechanisms, against which she clashed, the account posed a
serious deterrent to potential converts. Mary's primary complaint was that the Shakers had tried to separate her from her husband and her children so that they could all be given a new group loyalty. Her relations with her husband (which had already been severely strained before she joined the Shakers) were further undercut. Three of her children were sent to a different "family." And she was forbidden to talk to or care for the two children remaining in her own "family," who were reared communally. When Mary finally broke with the Shakers, she had endless conflicts in her unsuccessful effort to recover her children.

Underlying much of Mary Dyer's anger was her dislike of the general loss of privacy and independence that she experienced in Shaker life. For instance, she could not send or receive a letter without first having it approved. And when she felt dissatisfied about something, she was supposed to express those feelings and to seek redress only from the Elders. She was expected to subordinate her own will to that of the Elders, who, in her opinion acted as though they stood in the place of God. Remaining intransigent, Mary became increasingly isolated and unhappy. Thus, unlike many individuals who joined the Shakers and became docile and obedient members, or others who were able to subordinate themselves initially while gradually working their way into responsible positions, Mary Dyer simply was unable to adjust and was invariably at odds with the leadership. Unwilling to let herself be reshaped into the Shaker mold, she would always remain a round peg in a square hole.

The severe restrictions on personal life and independent action which so disturbed Mary Dyer were a necessary part of making the Shaker system function. In order to sustain their unusual commitment, Shaker leaders deliberately tried to keep the average Believer isolated from the world, physically, socially, economically, and intellectually. Attempts were made to insure that those who went out into the world on business stayed apart, and free from worldly contamination as much as possible. Within the Society, Shaker government had an almost military regimentation, with every aspect of life minutely regulated. Close personal contact of any kind between those of the same or opposite sex were forbidden in favor of a more generalized "spiritual" love for their co-religionists. Children
were raised communally, not by parents. Occupations were frequently shifted, and privacy was almost non-existent. Required confession of all sins to the Elders further increased the degree of control. Those who accepted such limitations could find many rewards in the well-ordered Shaker system. But those who were unwilling to accept such constraints, could find the arrangements oppressive.

Although many people did not find the highly restrictive Shaker system to their liking, few devoted their lives to exposing the sect. Why did Mary Dyer choose to become a "career apostate"? Undoubtedly, her motives were extremely complex. At the most obvious level, she appears to have been bound to the Shakers because of her problems in retrieving her children and because of her continuing ambivalence about her husband who remained happily in the group. But probably at least as important, Mary Dyer, like other apostates such as Valentine Rathbun and Eunice Chapman, appears to have been a frustrated leader. She had a genuine talent along with a strong sense of personal destiny and self importance. When she found her expectations unfulfilled and was unable to put her talents to constructive use, she bitterly turned all her talents against the group she felt had frustrated her efforts to create a satisfying life. No hatred is more deadly than that of a person who genuinely believed or wanted to believe, only to find his or her high hopes blasted.

Whatever Mary Dyer's personal motives, her experience does suggest many characteristic issues raised by other apostates. Like the abrasive Mary Dyer, the more sensitive and appealing Shakers who "turned off" often had trouble submitting themselves to the oligarchic Shaker leadership and renouncing their individual life and interests in favor of those of the group. Almost invariably seceders found the renunciation of normal marital and sexual life particularly unappealing. As Hervey Elkins wrote, many were unhappy among the Shakers because of "an aspiration for something not found in confinement" and a desire to express "the strong affinities of nature."¹ Finally, when individuals did leave the Shakers, many were upset by their loss of consecrated property and

¹Elkins, Fifteen Years in the Shakers, p. 128.
were bitter at the difficulties they had in getting their children out of the Society if one of the parents remained a Believer. Throughout the pre-Civil War period, conflicts and litigations over children that the Shakers were reluctant to give up to departing parents generated much of the hostility to the Society.\(^1\) Clearly Shaker communal life was not for everyone.

Just as the individuals who joined the Shakers varied greatly in their backgrounds and motives, so, too, individual Shaker communities were diverse in their size, sex ratios, and degree of cohesiveness. Important differences existed between the Northeastern and Midwestern Shaker communities, for example. Although the following information about the Second Family of the central New Lebanon Shaker community thus may not be entirely representative of all other Shaker communities, it does provide some understanding of the sources of Shaker membership and of the changes that occurred in one important Shaker group during a period of over sixty years from 1830 to 1896.\(^2\)

The life of the New Lebanon Second Family spanned more than a century from the founding of the community in 1790 to its dissolution in 1896. The membership record covers all individuals who entered from 1830 to 1896--the period of the decline of this Family--as well as some

\(^1\) Andrews, People Called Shakers, pp. 207-212.

\(^2\) In the programming and statistical aspects of this membership study, Raymond E. Pifer has provided invaluable counsel and assistance. The findings presented here represent only a preliminary foray into the rich Shaker membership materials. This author is currently working on a more intensive analysis of the New Lebanon data, an analysis which will utilize census data, qualitative accounts of the members of the Second Family, and other membership information on the New York Shakers. By building on Andrews's work in Community Industries of the Shakers, which reconstructs the economic life of the New Lebanon community, and on other available manuscript materials, a comprehensive picture of this complex celibate community could be developed. The possibilities of this type of social analysis are suggested in D'Ann Mae Campbell's "Women's Life in Utopia: Roles, Rights, and Responsibilities of Women in Shaker Settlements, 1820-1860" (unpublished paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association in Atlanta, Georgia, on December 28, 1975). That paper includes a provocative analysis of the demographic composition of the Shaker community in Logan County, Kentucky, and of Shaker women's autobiographical statements in the collection at the Western Reserve Historical Society. Some of the unusual membership characteristics of the New Lebanon Second Family could be explained if that family served as a "gathering order" for the larger New Lebanon community complex.
individuals who entered earlier. Here information will be analyzed on
284 people for whom at least two of three vital dates—birth, entrance,
and departure or death—have been recorded. Of this aggregate group, 149
were men and 135 were women. However, at any given point in time, women
slightly outnumbered the men, since they tended to remain in the community
longer than men did. In the Central Bishopric, which included all
members of both the New Lebanon and Watervliet societies, there were 312
males to 421 females in 1819. The male/female ratio varied greatly in
different Shaker societies and at different periods of time, but apparently
in the Northeastern Societies it was not until after the Civil War that
the heavy preponderance of women would develop.

A total of 171 out of the 284 individuals who entered the Second
Family shared a common surname and clear kinship ties to at least one other
person who also entered the community. Of these 171 people, 98 were
males and 75 were females. These individuals belonged to 61 distinct
surname groups (including 2 sets of Joneses). Another 11 individuals
shared common surnames but could not be positively related by common
birth place, entrance date or location from which they entered. The
most common kinship pattern was for two children of 15 years of age or
under to enter together. This occurred in 26 cases (8 involved two males,
7 involved two females, and 11 involved a male and a female). Of the
284 individuals entering the Second Family throughout this period, 222
were under 16 years of age. In contrast to the Sodus Bay records in
which husband and wife groups with up to 10 children were not uncommon,
the Second Family attracted few husband-and-wife or other adult kinship
units. Particularly during the period of decline in the 1850s and 1860s,
large numbers of children were taken in for relatively short periods of
time. This information gives credence to the argument that this community
from 1830 to 1896 depended heavily for its membership on acting as
custodians of children who for various reasons could not or did not wish
to live with their parents.

That the ethnic composition of the Second Family was overwhelmingly
of English derivation is suggested by the heavy preponderance of surnames
such as Baker, Carpenter, Cook, Free, Grey, Hull, Jones, Long, Smith,
Taylor, Weed, White, and others. The few insignificant exceptions included
names such as Brazie, Dubois, Portrus, Van Houten, Apolinaire, and Meixsal. This English derivation is also suggested by the fact that of the only 26 foreign-born individuals who entered the group, 20 were from England, 3 from Scotland, 1 from Ireland, and 2 from Canada.

Geographically, nearly half of the members were born in New York state (123), followed by Massachusetts (45), Connecticut (20), Vermont (8), Rhode Island (6), a scattering from 13 other states, and the foreign countries mentioned above. Somewhat startling, in view of the stereotype of supposed Shaker rural origins, was the fact that 52 individuals were born in New York City proper, and 15 in Brooklyn! Other large cities in the Northeast and in England also furnished many members. This Shaker community appears to have drawn members chiefly from the Hudson Valley, from areas of New York state that would touch by their extensive trading routes, and from other areas of New England where strong Shaker communities existed or where missionary ventures had occurred. Forty-seven individuals who entered the Second Family were from other Shaker communities, including other families at New Lebanon.

The membership record of the New Lebanon Second Family highlights the internal decay of the Shakers. While the mean age at entry fluctuated between seven and fifteen years for both men and women throughout most of this period, the length of time that individuals who entered in each decade stayed in the community dropped precipitously for both men and women, as Table 1 shows.

If one assumes that the length of time that a person stayed with the Shakers was related to the appeal that the group had for him at the time he or she entered, then the decade 1830-39 marks a critical transition period between a relatively strong Second Family and a community that was increasingly losing its appeal. Before 1830, individuals stayed more than thirty years on the average after they entered, and they often remained until they died. People who entered during the 1830s stayed approximately half that length of time on the average. After 1840, individuals who entered the community stayed less than ten years on the average, and by the 1850s and 1860s, in many cases individuals were staying only a few years or even months before leaving. After 1870, the length of stay was so short that the person who kept the record evidently
TABLE 1
LENGTH OF STAY FOR INDIVIDUALS ENTERING THE NEW LEBANON SECOND FAMILY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade of Entry</th>
<th>Before 1820</th>
<th>1820-29</th>
<th>1830-39</th>
<th>1840-49</th>
<th>1850-59</th>
<th>1860-69</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total men entering</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean length of stay for men</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total women entering</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean length of stay for women</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

became frustrated and seldom bothered to note personal information on incoming individuals.

The extraordinary membership turnover in the New Lebanon Second Family can be seen by looking at the aggregate figures in Table 2 showing the reasons that individuals left the community.

TABLE 2
REASONS FOR DEPARTURE OF INDIVIDUALS FROM THE NEW LEBANON SECOND FAMILY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remained in Community until death</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left Community on own volition</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taken away by parents or relatives</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moved to another Shaker Community</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No information</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It is somewhat striking that only slightly more than 10 per cent of the individuals who entered the New Lebanon Second Family in this period remained in the community for their entire lives. Both men and women show essentially similar patterns of movement, except that more men than women left the community. This pattern of behavior, if repeated in other Shaker communities, would help explain the increasing disproportion of women in the communities as the nineteenth century progressed.

The fluidity of Shaker membership is even more graphically suggested by the membership records of the short-lived and quite possibly atypical Sodus Bay community. It lasted from 1826 until 1838, when the community relocated itself at Groveland, New York, where it continued until shortly before the end of the century.

TABLE 3
SODUS BAY MEMBERSHIP RECORD
(Errors of original are retained)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population at End of Year</th>
<th>Number who Entered</th>
<th>Number who Left</th>
<th>Number who Died</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1826</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1827</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1828</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1829</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>29</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>1830</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>1831</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>1832</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>1835</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>1836</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1837</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If this brief look at two relatively complete Shaker membership records is supported by research on other communities and by further investigation of the development of these two communities, then a number of common assumptions about the Shakers and their development may need to be revised. Most obvious, the fluidity of Shaker membership calls into question any view of the Shakers as an essentially static, isolated, "utopian" community. The nature of Shaker membership also may have been incorrectly understood. If many nineteenth-century Shakers were born in urban areas, then the assumption that the Shakers came from a sort of rural proletariat seems increasingly dubious. And quite possibly, Shaker membership may also reflect a higher average level of wealth and education than has commonly been assumed.

VIII

The high point of Shaker spiritual and social tensions before the Civil War and the last major Shaker effort to revitalize their Society occurred during about a decade of "spiritual manifestations" lasting between 1837 and 1847 or slightly later. The manifestations began on August 16, 1837, when a group of ten- to twelve-year-old girls meeting for worship in the Gathering Order of the Watervliet Shaker community near Albany, New York, began to exhibit extraordinary behavior. Some shook and whirled, becoming completely oblivious to their external surroundings. A few fell to the ground and broke out into beautiful unknown songs. They told of being led by angels through heavenly places and of seeing Mother Ann Lee, foundress of the Society, who had died more than fifty years earlier.

News of these strange and seemingly inexplicable manifestations which continued to occur caused a current of intense excitement to run throughout the Shaker societies. Within a year most of the closely linked Northeastern Shaker communities and a few of the Midwestern ones were beginning to experience similar and sometimes bizarre and frightening physical occurrences. In an extreme example of a group of young Watervliet boys meeting for worship:

Some were thrown violently on the floor and all efforts of strong men were unavailing to raise their stiffened bodies. . . . Sometimes they were with those in suffering and torment; they seemed suffocated, as
by sulphur fumes; their bodies were distorted and bore every mark of intense agony, while their screeches were terrible to hear.¹

Thus in a variety of forms of highly emotional activity began a complex and tension-ridden decade of "spiritualist manifestations," sometimes described as the "spiritualist period" or a "spiritualist" revival.² The period brought severe challenges to community order, yet also attempts to revive inner Shaker spiritual life and commitment to their ideals. A rich outpouring of creativity in new forms of worship and ecstatic dance resulted, including hundreds of new songs, of which "The Gift to Be Simple" is perhaps best-known. During the transition period, literally thousands of messages of exhortation and verbal gifts from departed spirits were received which the Shakers considered "words of comfort, gifts of love."

¹White and Taylor, Shakerism, p. 223.

²This phase of Shaker history has been described variously as "the new era," "Mother Ann's Second Appearing," "Mother Ann's Work," a period of "spiritual manifestations," the "spiritualist period," or the "wave of mystic symbolism." The phenomena were "spiritualist" in the sense that many of them involved messages allegedly coming from the dead. The messages expressed a sense of the interconnectedness of the temporal and spiritual worlds, both of which were believed to have a literal existence. Shaker "spiritualist" phenomena occurred prior to the larger nineteenth-century American Spiritualist Movement and were largely over by the time such Spiritualism first achieved general popularity following the table rapping of the Fox Sisters in Hydesville, New York, in 1848. Since the Shaker spiritualist period was primarily a religious revival, I coined the term "spiritualist revival" in an earlier paper to differentiate the period from other revivals in Shaker history in which alleged communications with the dead were not such a prominent feature. A version of this section was presented as a paper at the Shaker Bicentennial Conference in Cleveland, Ohio, on October 10, 1974, entitled: "Shaker Trance and Spirit Possession, 1837-1845: New Perspectives on the Psychology of the Shaker Spiritualist Revival:"


³Eric Rohman's "Words of Comfort, Gifts of Love: Spirit Manifestations Among the Shakers, 1837-1845" (B.A. thesis, Antioch College,
Many historians have found this period of Shaker spiritual manifestations baffling or incomprehensible, just as they have been unable to understand other aspects of Shaker life. Some have viewed the phenomena as a product of quaint eccentrics; others have postulated fraud and deliberate manipulation; while still others have suggested mental disorder. Rather surprisingly, few historians have taken seriously the Shakers' own attempts to explain the ecstatic, trance, and possession phenomena which occurred between 1837 and 1847. That the spiritualist period was critically important to the Shakers is clear from the extensive Shaker manuscript collection at the Western Reserve Historical Society. Out of a 325 page typescript bibliography of titles in the collection, 80 pages, or more than one fourth of the total, deal directly with this period, while a number of others are peripherally related to it. Many of these manuscripts are beautiful leather bound

Yellow Springs, Ohio, 1971) provides one of the few convincing interpretations of this difficult and troubled period, despite his heavy reliance on secondary sources. Also see the sociological treatment of Shaker development in John McElvie Whitworth, God's Blueprints: A Sociological Study of Three Utopian Sects (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975). Whitworth shows how the spiritualist period was pivotal in Shaker development.

A patronizing approach is evident throughout many accounts of those fascinated by the externals of Shaker life such as their crafts and architecture, but unsympathetic to the inner meaning of Shaker religious views and concerns. Even Edward Deming Andrews's great work contains such elements. For the fraud thesis, see John P. Maclean, "Spiritualism Among the Shakers of Union Village, Ohio," in his Shakers of Ohio, as well as his A Sketch of the Life and Labors of Richard McNemar (Franklin, Ohio: Printed for the Author by the Franklin Chronicle, 1905), and Melcher, Shaker Adventure, pp. 248-250. The psychopathology thesis has few supporters among serious scholars of Shakerism, but it appears as an undercurrent in some of the less sophisticated work on the group. Misunderstandings are almost inevitable in attempting to understand other cultures or sub-cultures. Since even experienced anthropologists find achieving such sensitivity difficult, it is not surprising that few Shaker scholars have really penetrated to the inner spirit of the movement.

John Large's preliminary draft bibliography of the Shaker holdings of the Western Reserve Historical Society has been superseded by Pike, Guide to Shaker Manuscripts, which, because of the way it groups the materials, does not suggest the full extensiveness of the holdings from the spiritualist period.
books filled with revelations copied with all the meticulous care of a medieval scribe. Since the spiritualist period was of such great importance to the Shakers, it is not surprising that this articulate and sensitive people also provided some sophisticated analyses of its underlying dynamics.\(^1\) In analyzing the earlier periods of Shaker development, limitations of material have made our generalizations about the tensions and process of change perforce highly conjectural. However, the massive documentation of the spiritualist period allows a somewhat more reliable view of the course of the manifestations.

The context within which the spiritualist phenomena occurred is of central importance. In essence, the period was a religious revival, the last of the three or four great revivals in Shaker history. Like the earlier revivals, it was attended by violent shaking, speaking in tongues, and other forms of ecstatic dance and trance phenomena which provided direct experiential support for a new order. Mother Ann Lee herself frequently had been overcome by passion against the evils of man's fallen carnal nature and had gone into trance, distracted from the scenes of time for days at a stretch; she had reported seeing the heavens open and talking with angels and with Jesus himself. Thus for the Shakers strong positive expectations were connected with revivalist phenomena such as those that started again in 1837.

\(^1\)The most important Shaker manuscript analyses of the period that are available at the Western Reserve Historical Society include: New Lebanon "Introduction to Records of Sacred Communications," an invaluable overview of the spiritualist period from the perspective of the leadership at New Lebanon, keyed to the eleven volume official compilation of revelations made there; Alonzo Hollister, "Shakers and Spiritualism" (New Lebanon, n.d.), as well as numerous other collections of spiritualist experiences recorded by his hand; and "A Record of Heavenly Gifts, Messages and Communications" (Watervliet, 1839-1841) a collection of revelations making clear the various social problems and tensions associated with the spiritualist phenomena at Watervliet. Valuable printed Shaker accounts are found in the anonymous, A Return of Departed Spirits of the Highest Characters of Distinction (Philadelphia: J. R. Colon, 1843); Frederick W. Evans, Autobiography of a Shaker, and Revelation of the Apocalypse (Mt. Lebanon, N.Y.: F. W. Evans, 1869); Giles B. Avery, Autobiography (East Canterbury, N.H.: n.p., 1891); Henry C. Blinn, The Manifestation of Spiritualism Among the Shakers, 1837-1847 (East Canterbury, N.H.: n.p., 1899); and White and Taylor, Shakerism. Indispensable accounts by those who left the Shakers are given in Lamson, Among the Shakers, and Elkins, Fifteen Years in the Shakers.
The spiritualist period differed from earlier Shaker revivals in being primarily an internal development within the societies, rather than an outgrowth of external missionary expansion or a direct response to tensions in the outer society. The trajectory of the spiritualist as of earlier revivals, began in a sense of declension, in this case a sense of a falling away from earlier Shaker ideals. The revival rose to a climax of excitement and commitment. And then it fell back to a more stable level of commitment.

By the beginning of the spiritual manifestations in 1837, exactly fifty years after the gathering of the first Shaker community in 1787, most of the Believers who had known Mother Ann and the other early leaders personally had died or grown old and feeble. In many communities, a serious gap existed between the very old members and the very young. Discipline was becoming lax. Curious visitors from the outside world would come in and stare with uncomprehending amusement at the strange worship services. The leadership was gradually losing control over the societies and there was a pervasive sense of malaise that led to a longing for some supernatural or unconscious intervention as in the past to provide revitalization. If the young were to be successfully induced into the Shaker way of life, they would have to undergo a powerful direct personal experience of the truth of the Shaker message.¹

When the spiritual phenomena began in 1837, they thus attracted enormous interest. Not only were the Shaker societies experiencing a declension, but the outer world also was a scene of great tensions as a period of runaway economic expansion collapsed into the Panic of 1837. The spiritual manifestations spread rapidly and, with the encouragement

¹See the New Lebanon "Introduction to Records of Sacred Communications," pp. 11-13, for a summary of the declension which immediately preceded the 1837 revival. "Remarks on the Necessity of Reforming the Morals and Improving the Religious Condition of Our Children" (New Lebanon, 1830; MS,WRHS), written in the same hand as the "Introduction," gives a detailed account of the problems the Shakers were having in keeping children who reached puberty in the Society. Throughout the spiritualist period itself, numerous revelations and writings were directed to youth, possibly the most famous of which was The Youth’s Guide in Zion. Given by Inspiration at New Lebanon, N.Y., January 5, 1842. Printed at Canterbury, N.H., 1842.
and some direction of the leadership, eventually reached a crescendo between 1841 and 1843—the time differed in different societies—roughly when revivalistic excitements were peaking in the outer world. For the Shakers the most important of these outer excitements were the Millerite expectations of Christ's second coming in 1843 or 1844. Disappointment of these expectations eventually brought many new members into Shaker communities.¹

By this time Shaker spiritual manifestations were becoming so widespread, with wild behavior and numerous contradictory revelations, that anarchy threatened to result. As early as 1842, most Shaker societies decided that the emotionalism of their meetings could not be understood by outsiders, so they closed off their communities to visitors and began to try to get their own house in order. Refusing to allow visitors was an extraordinary step in a group dependent upon converts for its very existence. Finally, in 1845 a set of Millennial Laws was promulgated.² They restored extremely tight discipline, effectively choking off significant further group spiritualist activity. Later

¹The major Millerite accessions to the Shakers appear to have occurred between 1844 and 1846. Andrews, People Called Shakers, p. 223, notes that in 1846 about two hundred Millerites joined the Midwestern Shaker communities, Whitewater in particular. In the East, Harvard, Canterbury, and Enfield (New Hampshire) were the chief beneficiaries. At the invitation of the Millerite society in Philadelphia, New Lebanon sent missionaries who organized a Shaker family there, including a Negro contingent led by Mother Rebecca Jackson. This group moved to Watervliet but later returned to Philadelphia, where it existed for several years. Enoch Jacobs, who edited the Adventist Western Midnight Cry which became the Day-Star, briefly joined the Shakers, publishing several issues of the Day-Star from Union Village, Ohio, between 1846 and 1847. See "On the Second Coming of Christ: Not Personal, But Spiritual and Gradual; Progressive, Like the Rising of the Sun (n.p.: The Compiler, c. 1843?); Anon., "Brief Sketches of the Visitations of the Judgments of God to Earth Since 1840. Showing the Fulfillment of Many Prophecies Given in These, Our Days" (New Lebanon?, c. 1848?; MS, WRHS); Henry B. Bear's Advent Experience (Whitewater, Ohio: n.p., n.d.); "Diary of Rebecca Jackson" (Watervliet, N.Y., 1849-1861; MS,WRHS); "Autobiography and Testimony of Rebecca Jackson" (New Lebanon, 1877; MS, WRHS); Anon., "Sketches of a Conference Meeting Between the Shakers & Adventists held at, Enfield, Conn. Faby. 18th 1847" (Enfield, Conn., 1847; MS,WRHS).

²Andrews, People Called Shakers, pp. 249-289, reprints these Laws.
Shaker writers looked back on the period with considerable ambivalence. They remembered its positive contributions to the societies, but they also were painfully aware of its excesses.

The spiritualist manifestations had both an internal and an external aspect. Externally, as described in the official New Lebanon Shaker account, the operations ranged from those which were "so irresistibly violent that it would seem life was in great danger to that which is gentle and scarcely perceptible to the beholder." Most activities took this milder, non-trance, form in which the emotions were quickened and faith and fellowship were strengthened. The more extreme actions, however, included violent gyrations--turning rapidly upon the toes, bowing, bending, or reeling as though drunk. After these activities, individuals would sometimes fall to the floor and lie helpless, stiff and cold as a corpse, sometimes for days. Suddenly they might resuscitate and resume their dance, still abstracted from the world, perhaps speaking with a voice or personality not their own, singing strange, unearthly new songs, or babbling in a euphonious sort of pseudo-language, known popularly as "speaking in tongues." When unwilling to let themselves move freely in these "exercises," individuals might become temporarily blinded, physically contorted, or possessed of seemingly preternatural strength. Understandably, the Shakers concluded that such actions could not be feigned and must be due to supernatural agency. ¹

Although these phenomena appeared astonishing and not a little frightening to their participants, such types of involuntary behavior are strikingly similar to related phenomena in other cultures as described by Sargent, Samarin, Lewis, and others. In the Shaker communities, as among other groups, the most severely affected individuals appear to have been girls and boys entering puberty, as well as older women. Characteristically, individuals in such categories are in some sense frustrated outsiders, unconsciously prone to turn to extra-institutional means of expressing themselves and seeking power, or, alternatively,

¹The New Lebanon, "Introduction to Records of Sacred Communications," pp. 41-44, summarizes the wide range of phenomena observed, as does Elkins, *Fifteen Years in the Shakers*, p. 35.
concerned to find means of accepting or adjusting to a novel and difficult state of being and social reality.\textsuperscript{1}

Shaker celibacy and their tightly regulated group life made some such emotional phenomena almost essential in validating a social order that was very far from the norm in outer society, far from self-evidently true. In effect, whether individuals were adolescents, converts, or people whose commitment was growing slack, they had to be initiated (or re-initiated) into a new way of life. Only in conjunction with larger tensions in their communities and in external society, however, did individual tensions in the loosely structured Shaker worship services lead to widespread spiritualist behavior. For the Shakers, the spiritualist phenomena contained both a promise and a threat. Spiritual manifestations could contribute to a more vital faith and to revitalization of the group, but if too extreme, those same manifestations could seriously undercut that same authority and lead to excessive fragmentation.

Since the external aspects of Shaker spiritualism were strikingly similar to ecstatic and trance phenomena throughout the world, to understand the distinctively Shaker features of the period we must turn to the content of the messages themselves. The Shakers realized that these messages were of primary importance. In fact, so frequently did the Shakers record only the spirit communications that some writers have seemed largely unaware that such messages generally were received through ecstatic worship and trances. The messages reveal a rich and vivid inner life, by no means simply reducible to body chemistry and sexual frustration, but expressive of the high ideals, hopes, and fears of this committed, gentle people: Parenthetically, it should be noted that almost no examples of extra-sensory perception or evidences of personal survival of death were associated with Shaker spiritualism. Like most spiritualists, the Shakers simply assumed but did not try to prove survival after death.\textsuperscript{2}

\textsuperscript{1}See Lewis, Ecstatic Religion.

\textsuperscript{2}The number of cases of spiritualist phenomena described by the Shakers that would be considered as evidence of extrasensory perception by today's standards is miniscule. Walter F. Prince, "The Shakers and Psychical Research: A Notable Example of Cooperation," Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research 12 (1918): 61-69, catalogues books on the spiritualist period sent him by Shakers, but barely discusses
Two basic types of communications were received: first, personal messages of encouragement, comfort, and evidence of spirit concern for individual members, and second, messages of moral exhortation urging renewed commitment to key Shaker ideals and a strengthening of group life and solidarity. Average members most frequently received personal messages, while the leadership tended to receive messages of general moral exhortation. Both individual and group concerns found expression through elaborate special activities. These included the "Midnight Cry," intricate "Mountain Meetings," and other forms of communal worship which developed primarily after 1842 and led back toward the more patterned worship activities which followed the end of the influx from the "spirit world."¹

Personal messages of encouragement and comfort were both the earliest and, throughout the period, the most common form of spirit communication. Typically there were accounts of travel to the spirit world and visits with Mother Ann and the early beloved leaders. Various presents, seen in the mind's eye, would be brought back from these "heavenly parents" to show their continuing concern for their "children" in the temporal world. These presents had no corporeal existence, but were obviously highly symbolic, even in the accounts of many of the less sophisticated Shakers. "Spectacles of discernment"; "sparkling balls of love"; lamps "to be kept well trimmed and burning so that the enemy may not impede our progress"; celestial wine; silver sacks filled with the bread of life; priceless gems; "six clusters of white plums from the Angel of Peace, with his love and peace written on the leaves that hang to the stems of the clusters"—these and innumerable other "spiritual" gifts were verbally brought back to strengthen the faith of Believers.

¹Rohmann, "Words of Comfort," suggests the basic typology that I have used here.
Many of the visions were of exquisite loveliness, as was this
description a medium of Tyringham, Massachusetts, gave of her guides to
the spirit world:

... some had what seemed like filmy gold; others were clad in
garments of rich changeable colors, glossy, like silk, while some
were enveloped in soft, fleece-like drapery, as white as snow,
around their heads were crownlike halos of golden light; some were
decorated with diamonds, stars, pearls and other precious gems.1

Paradoxically, this vivid visual imagery was occurring among a people
who eschewed all private ownership of property and dressed in drab
clothing without jewelry, at a time when increasingly stringent regulations
against any worldly possessions were being enforced. Eric Rohmann was
led to speculate that a sort of "spiritual materialism" may have been
operating in many cases, with the Shakers unconsciously compensating for
their repressed worldly longings in exquisite visions of the spiritual
world to come, where surcease from all their strivings could occur.2

While messages of personal encouragement and comfort were commonly
received by average members struggling to overcome the desires of "carnal
nature," the larger group concerns of the Shakers were most clearly
reflected in exhortations delivered primarily by leadership. The first
direct participation of the leaders as a spiritualist "instrument"
ocurred on April 22, 1838, about a year after the beginning of the
manifestations, when Philemon Stewart, a New Lebanon elder, became
entranced. Through him a personality purporting to be Mother Ann spoke
at length to an assembled Shaker meeting, exhorting Believers to cast off
worldly "superfluities," return to the "true order" of the initial
Shakerism, and obey the leadership.3

1Blinn, Manifestation of Spiritualism, p. 24.

2Rohmann, "Words of Comfort," pp. 9-11. Paradoxically, though the
manifestations were ostensibly "spiritual," these phenomena, insofar as
they represented the repressed desires of average Shakers, could contribute
to the move toward an increasingly secular outlook that was already
occurring among the Shakers. The manifestations could, therefore, give
a sort of supernatural aura to secular ideals. For a discussion of how
the larger Spiritualist Movement also was associated with further seculari-
zation, see Judah, Metaphysical Movements.

3"Messages of Mother Ann to the Church at New Lebanon, April
22, 1838, Through Philemon Stuart [sic], Sabbath, P. M." (New Lebanon, 1838;
Brother Philemon's statement provided a focus for earlier, more inchoate messages, suggesting that the leadership may have seen the general spiritual awakening in the societies as a heaven-sent means of helping to restore earlier discipline and commitment. While some have seen such leadership involvement as cynical manipulation, this is an inadequate explanation. Since individuals in trance are highly suggestible and have a tendency to objectify their deepest desires, it is not surprising that Shaker leaders, as well as members distraught at the loss of faith in the societies, might also express their concerns in trance communications. Even when messages were more obviously of a sermonic than an involuntary character, no obvious cynicism need be postulated, for Shakers felt that the connection between the spiritual and temporal worlds was so close as to be almost inseparable, and ordinary sermons could progress almost imperceptibly into trance communications in the surcharged atmosphere of a lively meeting.¹

Although a few trance phenomena occurred to isolated individuals such as men working in the fields, the vast majority took place in meetings for worship where emotions could be aroused and channeled within a supportive setting. With the mounting collective excitement, new

¹Even when deliberately planned or sought, Shaker spiritualist revelations were not seen by the leadership as cynical manipulation, but rather as a part of the normal hierarchical control that they exercised in the Shaker communities. Avery, Autobiography, p. 12, illustrates the Shaker attitude. In this book published by the Shakers, he unself-consciously describes how he was commissioned to write a book-length revelation. He was unable to work himself into the proper state of mind. Eventually the Ministry gave the assignment to Philemon Stewart—who wanted it. He wrote A Holy, Sacred and Divine Roll and Book: Sent Forth by the Lord God of Heaven, to the Inhabitants of Earth (Canterbury, N.H.: United Society, 1843). See Robert F. W. Meader, "The Vision of Brother Philemon," Shaker Quarterly 10 (Spring 1970): 8-17, for an account of this strange episode. Giles Avery's account suggests a very different mind-set from our present one. Surely if he had viewed his efforts as cynically manipulative, he would not have reported them straightforwardly as he did. And had the Shakers viewed the information in his autobiography as damaging, they presumably would have deleted it.
forms of group worship were developed to give freshness and vitality to spiritual life. As in earlier communications, these new forms of worship had a high symbolic content and often did not distinguish clearly between the temporal world and that of aspirations and dreams.

One of the most colorful of the new forms of group worship was the "Midnight Cry," in which a platoon of mediums—six male and six female, with two elders in the lead carrying lighted lamps in their right hands—marched through all the community buildings each night for a period of two weeks. "Every medium wore upon the right wrist, a scrap of scarlet flannel, some two and one half inches wide, and attached to this a written inscription as follows:—'War hath been declared by the God of heaven, against all sin, and with the help of the Saints on earth, it shall be slain.'" ¹ These activities were interpreted as the actualization of the "searching as with candles" foretold at the beginning of the manifestations. At midnight on one of the nights, the brothers and sisters were awakened with singing:

Awake from your slumbers, for the Lord of Hosts is going through the land, He will sweep he will clean his holy sanctuary.
Search ye your Camps, yea read and understand
For the Lord of Hosts holds the Lamps in his hand.²

All the Believers dressed quickly and hurried out to join in the marching and singing, before repairing to the meeting house for an hour of active worship. "This strange alarm had a wonderful effect on the minds of those thus suddenly aroused."³

Even more dramatic were the elaborate "Mountain Meetings." Mystic names were assigned to the various communities and "Holy Hills of Zion" or "Sacred Squares" were set aside, consisting of an acre of land on or near the highest point in the community, to be specially prepared for twice-yearly meetings in the spring and fall. In the center of the carefully cleared area was a white picket fence encircling a Fountain of Life, which could be seen only by those with spiritual insight. Prior

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¹Blinn, Manifestation of Spiritualism, p. 49.
³White and Taylor, Shakerism, p. 235.
to the meetings, the Shakers purified themselves with fasting and silent
prayer, hard work and confession of sins, and dressed themselves in
imaginary spiritual garments so they would be clothed symbolically
in the virtues of "holiness, innocence, meekness, freedom & peace."
Carrying spiritual instruments and spiritual food on which to feast,
they marched to the meeting grounds, heard exhortations from the spirits,
sang, danced, and finished by sharing a great pantomime feast of spiritual
delicacies. It was a joyful and significant occasion, rejuvenating body
and spirit.¹

Although the spiritual manifestations helped in many ways to
revitalize Shaker spiritual commitment, the phenomena also contained
highly disruptive possibilities. As early as 1839, three leading Shakers,
including the venerable Richard McNemar, who had been a key figure in
the founding of the Midwestern Shaker societies, were expelled from the
Union Village, Ohio, Shaker community at the behest of a young medium.
This medium apparently was at least unconsciously acting in support of
the leadership of Freegift Wells, recently appointed by the Northeastern
Shakers, who was involved in a power play with McNemar and the old guard
Midwestern leaders. Only belatedly were McNemar and his associates
reinstated by a directive from the central office at New Lebanon.² This

¹A detailed account of the Mountain Meetings in which he participated
is found in Lamson, Among the Shakers, pp. 56-74. Composite accounts are
given in Andrews, People Called Shakers, pp. 161-167, and Rohmann,

²J. P. Maclean discusses this complex episode in his Richard
McNemar, pp. 61-62. Maclean suggests that some collusion between the
medium and Freegift Wells may have been present, at least unconsciously.
Compare this interpretation to Freegift Wells's later disillusioned state-
ments about spiritualist phenomena in his "Testimonies, Predictions, and
Remarks" (Watervliet, n.d.; MS, WRHS), p. 19. The McNemar papers at the
Library of Congress probably would shed light on this heated conflict.
Whatever the conscious intent of the participants in this unfortunate
conflict, there would seem to be little doubt that the intense division
within the Union Village community had a negative effect on its membership.
About 1823, that community had reached its peak membership of some 600,
rivaling that of New Lebanon. By 1830, its membership had declined to
500. Thereafter it declined slowly to something less than 400 in 1852,
and extremely rapidly in the next decade to a mere 100 members in 1862.
See Whitworth, God's Blueprints, p. 78.
unfortunate incident led to the promulgation of rules for testing the validity of spirit communications. They must not be in conflict with basic Shaker beliefs and those affecting policy must be cleared with the New Lebanon ministry.¹

Nevertheless, the problem continued. As tensions increased between 1841 and 1843, potentially anarchic tendencies developed. Whereas earlier revelations had been primarily from deceased Shaker leaders such as Mother Ann, later revelations began coming from an extraordinary range of historical figures, including Biblical ones such as Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and St. Paul; popular culture heroes such as Christopher Columbus, George Washington, and Napoleon; outstanding women such as Queen Isabella, Queen Elizabeth, martyred saints of the Middle Ages, and others.² Following this period was the "gathering of all nations," in which the Shakers were visited by a motley crew of American Indians, Chinese, Arabs, etc. all of whom acted out popular American clichés of those cultures. Possessed of the spirits of Indians, for instance, Shakers whooped and hollered, war danced, passed the peace pipe, or powwowed.

Such activities began to reduce the spiritual communications to absurdity. Furthermore, the content of the messages themselves appears to have become more idiosyncratic and representative of the repressed desires of Shaker membership. A tendency toward cynicism about all spiritual truth and a pervasive spirit of infidelity developed. Attacks were made by mediums on many of the prominent Shaker leaders, many visionists experienced the terrors of hell, and only with great difficulty were some of the manifestations contained within the Shaker communal structure.

¹Andrews, People Called Shakers, p. 174.

²The figures from whom the Shakers received revelations were strikingly similar to the heroes and heroines of the school textbooks of the period as described in Ruth Miller Elson, Guardians of Tradition: American Schoolbooks of the Nineteenth Century (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964). This would suggest that the Shakers may have shared much of the common cultural background of their contemporaries.
Although much of the material dealing with the conflicts of this period appears to have been destroyed, there is strong evidence that sexual tensions of disaffected individuals threatened to break out into overt expression at this time. For instance, a young woman told Frederick Evans that she had had a revelation from Ann Lee that celibacy should be given up and they should all move into the higher, married state. Evans, sharp as ever, retorted that they were not followers of Ann Lee! Rather, they followed her principles. If she had fallen from grace, even in the afterlife, her faithful followers would nevertheless continue to follow the truth she had taught on earth. ¹

Faced with challenges such as this to their leadership and to celibacy, the only unalterable Shaker tenet, Shaker leaders appear to have recoiled. Rather than channeling the vitality of young Believers into renewed external missionary activity or attempting to take advantage of the religious and social ferment of the Burned-over District by setting up new communities, Shaker leaders turned their attention inward and sought to tighten their control over existing communities. They promulgated the Millennial Laws of 1845, the strictest and most rigid in Shaker history. Unlike the earlier Millennial Laws of 1821 or the later ones of 1860, the 1845 Laws were so extreme as to be almost a parody of the Shaker spirit of progressive change and perfectionism. One item went so far as to declare: "Sisters must not mend, nor set buttons on brethren's clothes while they have them on." ² Such regulations suggest that laxness in obeying the spirit and the letter of the regulations separating the sexes was becoming a serious problem that had to be corrected at any cost.

What was the significance of this remarkable period of spiritual excitement? For the Shakers, it was a bittersweet time in retrospect. The faith of many of the Believers who were already in the communities apparently was deepened and strengthened. Yet the

¹White and Taylor, Shakerism, p. 246.

appeal of the Society to new members dropped off sharply. The Society would continue to take in many new individuals, but few of them would stay for more than three or four years. The Shakers were freed from many of their most disruptive members, since almost all of the most severely affected mediums, particularly the young girls, left the Society. Yet other capable individuals such as Hervey Elkins, who could have contributed much as leaders, also left. The failure of the Shakers to regain their lost momentum in the aftermath of the spiritualist period led to deep-seated disillusionment.¹

Looking back, Giles Avery, a leader who had been severely criticized by the mediums himself, described spiritualism as a "revolutionary element, both in religious and secular society," a two-edged sword with both positive and negative possibilities.² Alonzo Hollister urged that each spirit communication be judged separately to see if it were really of God, for many false spirits also had sent messages.³ For Henry C. Blinn, spiritual manifestations were "not a foundation pillar; but rather a helping hand. . . . The better guide is love, 'Love never faileth.'"⁴ Freegift Wells, disillusioned by the dissention in his large Union Village community, a dissention which was associated with its drastic decline, expressed similar sentiments.⁵ Perhaps Catherine Allen, eldress at New Lebanon, expressed the ambivalence of leadership most succinctly when she said that while not in the least doubting the mediums' sincerity, "we agree with the Indian who said: 'Blow breath thro [sic] onion stalk and it smell of onion.'"⁶

¹For a discussion of the complex factors leading to Shaker decline, particularly as related to the spiritualist period, see Whitworth, God's Blueprints, pp. 48-88.

²Avery, Aubobiography, p. 15.

³"Diary of Rebecca Jackson," page not indicated. The statement appeared in appended comments by Alonzo Hollister.

⁴Blinn, Manifestation of Spiritualism, pp. 38-39.

⁵Freegift Wells, "A Series of Remarks Showing the Power of the Adversary in Leading Honest Souls Astray Through the Influence of Inspired Messages" (Watervliet, N.Y., 1850; MS,WRHS).

The spiritualist period thus may have represented something of a pyrrhic victory for the Shakers. Believers made a significant effort at revitalization which helped to sustain the group through more than a hundred years of ensuing membership decline. But the root problems were not overcome. In response to the disruptive manifestations, the already-faltering Shaker leaders appear to have become somewhat traumatized. They were unable or unwilling to engage in vigorous proselyting activity or undergo extreme revivalistic stresses again. By the 1870s and 1880s, the lively Shaker dancing, which had contributed so much to the vitality of the group had been largely discontinued. These changes may well have been due to forces beyond the control of the Shakers themselves, including the decline of the revivalistic enthusiasms upon which the group depended so heavily for members.\(^1\) The changing environment of the nineteenth century--combined with the loss of the fervent commitment of Believers who had known Mother Ann and the early leaders personally--led the once-vital Shaker societies into a gradual decline that even the spiritual revival of the 1830s and 1840s could not reverse.

In summary, Shaker spiritual manifestations during the years between the Revolutionary and Civil Wars were always associated with important periods of growth and transition within the societies. Such spiritual phenomena suggest many of the most important problems in the study of religion and social change, as well as the way in which sexuality in its most comprehensive sense is related to such problems. Early Shaker spiritual activities starkly highlight how fine is the line dividing insanity and social disorganization from ecstasy and the highest visionary reorganization of the individual and society: "Mental disorganization results in psychosis; a creative reorganization underlies the visionary state."\(^2\) Before the Civil War, the Shakers for a time succeeded in achieving a remarkably effective balance between individual creativity and self-expression, and the necessary constraints of their functioning social order.

\(^1\)Whitworth, *God's Blueprints*, pp. 74-79.

CHAPTER III

THAT ALL MIGHT BE ONE: JOHN HUMPHREY NOYES AND THE ORIGINS OF ONEIDA COMMUNITY COMPLEX MARRIAGE

Free love with us does not mean freedom to love to-day and leave tomorrow... Our Communities are families, as distinctly bounded and separated from promiscuous society as ordinary households. The tie that binds us together is as permanent and sacred, to say the least, as that of marriage, for it is our religion. We receive no members (except by deception or mistake), who do not give their heart and hand to the family interest for life and forever. Community of property extends just as far as freedom of love.

The thing we have done for which we are called "Free Lovers," is simply this: We have left the simple form of marriage and advanced to the complex stage of it. We have no quarrel with those who believe in exclusive dual marriage and faithfully observe it, but we have concluded that for us there is a better way. The honor and faithfulness that constitutes an ideal marriage, may exist between two hundred as well as two; while the guarantees for women and children are much greater in the Community than they can be in any private family.

--Oneida Community Handbooks, 1867 & 1871

The unauthorized publication in August 1837 of a remarkable private letter on marriage written by an intense, driven young man of twenty-five marked a turning point in his life. For some six years prior to that date, John Humphrey Noyes had experienced extreme intellectual and emotional turmoil. He had struggled to achieve absolute religious and

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1Handbook of the Oneida Community, 1867 ed., p. 64; Handbook of the Oneida Community, no. 2 (Oneida, New York: Oneida Community, 1871), p. 56. Italics have been removed from these quotations and from all other quotations in this chapter, except when otherwise indicated. Noyes's frequent use of italics throughout his writing suggests his intensity and his polemical style, but distracts from the scholarly assessment of his ideas.
social perfection, sometimes compulsively reading his Bible twelve to sixteen hours a day. When he finally realized in 1834 that God could not expect the impossible of him, Noyes began to develop new religious and sexual theories stressing the importance of inward attitude rather than outward forms. For three years he wandered quixotically throughout New York and New England, trying with frustrating lack of success to convert the entire world to his highly idiosyncratic and heretical Perfectionist religious beliefs. He seemed driven to try to justify his existence by spreading his ideas, but his great efforts led to repeated failures and correspondingly wide swings of emotion. During one particularly trying three week period in New York City, Noyes reached the verge of total mental and emotional collapse.

Perhaps the most devastating blow to Noyes came when he learned in January 1837 that Abigail Merwin, his first convert, idealized love object, and close associate and supporter, had deserted him to marry another man. The shock was terrific. Shy, lacking in any sexual experience, and intensely wrapped up in himself, Noyes poured out his feelings in a letter to a friend. Noyes could not accept the fact that Abigail was gone. Instead, expressing ideas that had been germinating in his mind at least since 1834, he declared that in the resurrected state, which he would have an important part in helping to inaugurate on earth as in heaven, there would be no marriage. The legal partitions between the sexes would be broken down and every dish would be free to every guest. "In a holy community there is no more reason why sexual intercourse should be restrained by law than why eating and drinking should be and there is as little occasion for shame in the one case as in the other."1

Extracts from this remarkable letter were published anonymously without Noyes's knowledge in August 1837 in a sensational

1Quoted from Noyes's reprint of the letter and various responses to it that he printed in the Witness on January 23, 1839. Noyes first publicly acknowledged his authorship of the letter in print in the Witness on September 23, 1837. Numerous reprints and discussions of the letter have appeared, of which the most comprehensive is in G. W. Noyes, Putney Community, pp. 1-10.
free love and anti-establishment newspaper, the *Battle-Axe and Weapons of War*, edited by Theophilous Gates. Not surprisingly, the result was a great scandal in Perfectionist circles. Perfectionists in New York and New England already were plagued by serious sexual and emotional irregularities. Noyes himself had been closely associated with many of the individuals who had been most extreme in their experimentation. Although he had avoided any participation in such activities and had inveighed against the licentious excesses which occurred, his reputation had suffered because of his associations. When Noyes courageously acknowledged that he had written the "Battle-Axe Letter," that it emphatically was not a call to licentiousness, and that he would stand firmly behind the sentiments in the letter, he thus succeeded in achieving little but alienating his few remaining followers. They concluded that he was unstable and unbalanced. Noyes appeared totally discredited and alone.

Only twenty years after this unpromising beginning, Noyes and a group of more than two hundred loyal followers were living in a successfully functioning community at Oneida, New York, which embodied many of the religious and social ideas that had been first publicly broached in the Battle-Axe Letter. During approximately a decade of experimentation and of transition to communal life in Noyes's home town of Putney, Vermont, between 1837 and 1847, the new theories gradually were elaborated and tried out in practice. Expelled from Putney by the pressures of townspeople who were irate at the Perfectionists' religious and sexual deviation from accepted patterns, Noyes and his followers started over on a permanent and larger basis at Oneida, New York, in 1848. The early years of religious, social, and economic transition were intensely troubled, but by the mid-1850s relative tranquility had been restored and almost all the theories and practices that would make Oneida one of the most distinctive of all American ventures in religious and social reorganization had been at least provisionally established.

Central to these distinctive Oneida communal arrangements was the practice of "complex marriage." This form of group marriage
which lasted at Oneida for nearly thirty-two years from 1848 until 1879, when it was abandoned due to internal tensions and external pressure, served as the basic social focus around which the Community was organized. This remarkable system allowed for the frequent exchange of sexual partners among Community members, under a number of restrictive provisions which included the breaking up of any long-term attachments as "special love," selfish behavior antithetical to Community order. Also underlying the system were a difficult voluntary method of birth control through "male continence"; informal oligarchic community government and control mechanisms through "mutual criticism," "ascending and descending fellowship," and daily religious-business meetings; and a communistic form of economic organization in which the good of the community was given primacy over individual self-interest. At Oneida, sexual roles were perhaps more radically revised than in any similar American group for which extensive documentation exists. In all, the Community member Abel Easton was exaggerating but little when he described Oneida as "a home the like of which has not been seen since the world began."¹

What accounts for the development and relative success of such a remarkable "free love" community practicing "Bible Communism" in the midst of the sexually restrictive Victorian ethos and economically expansive America of the Jacksonian Era? How did such a system originate, attract capable members, and restructure their religious, social, and economic lives so that the resulting community could prosper over more than a quarter of a century? And what implicit or explicit critique of the marital, familial, and sexual patterns of the larger society did the Oneida Perfectionists make?

These will be the primary questions addressed in this chapter. Although a thorough sociological analysis of how the Oneida Community functioned once it had become established as a going concern undoubtedly would be of much interest, the primary focus

¹Alan Estlake [Abel Easton], The Oneida Community (London: George Redway, 1900), p. 56.
here will be on the historical development of the distinctive beliefs and practices pioneered at Oneida. This historical development of Oneida was closely related to the larger stresses and strains of antebellum society. John Humphrey Noyes's writings provide a brilliant and highly original perspective on the problems and prospects of his larger environment. Whitney Cross, the foremost historian of the evangelical religious enthusiasms that spread over Western New York before the Civil War, has described Noyes's work as "verbatim the keystone in the arch of Burned-over District history, demonstrating the connection between the enthusiasms of the right and those of the left."¹ This chapter will suggest how the larger social critique underlying Noyes's thinking was related to the elaboration of his ideas in functioning communal life.

I

John Humphrey Noyes, founder and undisputed leader of the Oneida Community during virtually its entire existence, was born on September 11, 1811, in Brattleboro, Vermont. Like many of the individuals who later would join his communities, Noyes grew up in a family of considerably higher than average intellectual and social attainments. His father John, who had great intellectual and practical versatility, taught school for a number of years, amassed a considerable private fortune through various mercantile ventures, and served as a member of the United States House of Representatives. The Noyes family estate eventually would provide much of the necessary capital base that would underwrite the difficult early years of communal experimentation at Putney and Oneida. Noyes's mother, Polly Hayes, was a strong willed and deeply religious woman from a prosperous merchant family and was a second cousin to Rutherford B. Hayes, who later became the nineteenth President of the United States. Polly Hayes had a major influence on the development of young John's sense of religious vocation and mission. She

¹Cross, Burned-over District, p. 333.
complemented her husband's influence on their son's intellectual
development with a strong vein of practical idealism. ¹

The rather unusual family environment in which young John
Humphrey Noyes grew up would be later reflected in many features of
the organizational life of the Putney and Oneida Communities. The
family was a very emotionally ingrown one, yet strongly aware of its
distinctive talents and capabilities. Because of shyness, all four
of Noyes's father's brothers had married close cousins. The elder
John Noyes himself had only married Polly Hayes at long last when he
was forty. This was the conclusion of an extended and rather
desultory courtship which finally came to a close when Polly forced
the issue of whether he ever would make up his mind to marry her.
Young John also shared his father's intense shyness around women as
well as the resulting tendency to intellectualize relationships with
the opposite sex.

In initially establishing communal life at Putney in the late
1830s and early 1840s, John Humphrey Noyes not only would build upon
the base provided by the family property, but, perhaps even more
important, he would begin to set up his organization by establishing
control over his own family base and enlarging it. Even before his
father's death in 1841, Noyes would begin to break down his mother's
resistance to his full leadership of the religious and business
affairs of the family. He also proceeded, over his mother's
objections, to arrange marriages between two of his sisters and his
two closest followers. This family unit, with additions that
included Noyes's wife Harriet Holton and brother George, would serve
as the nucleus of the initial communal group. The extreme family
model so fully elaborated later at Oneida was in many ways an

¹For discussions of Noyes's early life and family
relationships see: G. W. Noyes, Religious Experience, pp. 1-41 and
passim; Robert Allerton Parker, A Yankee Saint: John Humphrey Noyes
3-20; and Thomas, "Psychoanalytic Study," pp. 57-75.
extension of the combination of unusual family closeness and distance
that Noyes experienced in his early life.¹

John Humphrey Noyes first began to develop his own special
sense of religious mission after he was converted in 1831 in Putney,
Vermont, in one of a number of religious revivals inspired by the prominent
antebellum evangelist Charles Grandison Finney.² The initial result
of Noyes's 1831 conversion was his decision to go to Andover Theological
Seminary to study to become a minister. A year of the sterile profes-
sionalism of the Seminary proved disappointing to the zealous Noyes,
who was determined to remain "a young convert forever" and to live
with his heart fervently fixed on the Millennium. Nevertheless, the
experience did provide Noyes with exposure to many new ideas which
influenced his later theological departures. And contact with a group
of young missionary brethren at Andover exposed him to self-improvement
practices that provided the basis for "mutual criticism," which later
became the primary means of informal government at Putney and Oneida.

Moving from Andover to the more liberal and innovative atmosphere
of Yale Theological Seminary in 1832, Noyes gained greater flexibility
to develop his religious and social ideas. Perhaps the most striking
of these ideas grew out of Noyes's elaboration of the teaching of Moses
Stuart, one of his teachers at Andover, who had argued that Christ had
predicted that his Second Coming would occur within the lifetime of
his then-living followers. Convinced that Stuart's reading of the Bible
account was correct, and equally convinced that Jesus could not have
been wrong in making such a prediction, Noyes concluded that the Second
Coming must have taken place in 70 A.D. when the Temple in Jerusalem

¹The closely-knit and somewhat ingrown characteristics of Noyes
and his communities have been discussed from the perspectives of Freudian
theory and recent ego-psychology in Ernest R. Sandeen, "John Humphrey
Noyes as the New Adam," Church History 40 (March 1971): 82-90, and in
Thomas, "Psychoanalytic Study."

²The indispensable source for Noyes's early religious development
is Part I of his Confessions. Part II, which was to have described
the development of Noyes's social theory, unfortunately never was
printed. Excerpts from the Confessions, as well as letters and diary
entries, are found in G. W. Noyes, Religious Experience. Noyes's
periodicals also provide insight into many facets of the development
of his religious concerns that are not so clearly indicated in other
printed sources.
was destroyed and the Diaspora began. At that time, there was a primary resurrection and judgment in the spiritual world, that marked the beginning of the establishment of the Kingdom of God in the heavens. A second and final resurrection judgment was now approaching: "the church on earth is now rising to meet the approaching kingdom in the heavens, and to become its duplicate and representative on earth."¹

This seemingly bizarre theory, Noyes's first advance into "positive heresy," had important practical consequences. It convinced Noyes that he could not rely on established orthodoxies, and it gave him the first glimmering of the idea that the development of Christianity was a progressive process, that the age of miracles and of God's active involvement in human affairs was not past. In short, though Noyes's theology of the Millennium appeared very different from that of the Shakers, Mormons, or many other contemporary groups, its functional significance was the same: to provide an unshakeable conviction that the Kingdom of God could and would soon literally be realized on earth.

The Millennium might, indeed, be imminent. But the nature of the millennial society and the means by which it would be inaugurated did not immediately become evident to Noyes. Rather, these ideas were gradually developed as his beliefs and sense of personal mission became clarified. At Yale, Noyes compulsively drove himself on, isolating himself and endlessly reading and re-reading the Bible on different topics to determine God's will. He seemed to expect almost superhuman perfection of himself. Finally, by typically following his literalistic bent to its extreme logical conclusion, Noyes became convinced that the extreme demands for legalistic perfection that he was making of himself were wrong. God could not expect the impossible. The total perfection that God demanded of all true Christians was a right attitude and inner sense of assurance of salvation from sin, not any outward works per se.

¹First Annual Report of the Oneida Association (Oneida Reserve, New York: Leonard & Co., 1849), pp. 11-12. A more detailed presentation of Noyes's elaborate theological beliefs is found in his Berean. Somewhat misleadingly described as the "Bible" of the Oneida Community, the Berean reprints the core of Noyes's theology as presented in seventy-five articles written and published between 1834 and 1846 in various periodicals with which he was associated.
"Perfection" did not mean that one was not capable of improvement, but simply that so long as one's attitude and motivation were right, one's acts would follow a pattern acceptable to God. Like Luther and many other great religious reformers, Noyes was inspired by the implicit radicalism of St. Paul, who believed that the spirit not the letter of the law, faith not works, was required for salvation.

Once having achieved this intellectual breakthrough on February 1, 1834, Noyes characteristically felt compelled to share his new insights with the world. Not surprisingly, his public declaration that he was "perfect" in the sense indicated above, was misconstrued. Some thought Noyes was crazy. Others were convinced that his beliefs would lead to antinomian excess, turning people loose to do anything they wanted to do. Unable to convince Noyes to back off from his more extreme assertions, his mentor Nathaniel W. Taylor disowned his precocious former pupil. Noyes's license to preach was revoked, and he was left to depend wholly on his own inner resources, without any external institutional supports to validate his sense of mission.

Noyes might intellectually have cast away his legalistic attitudes. But not until three emotionally devastating weeks in New York City in May 1834, during which he plumbed the depths of suffering and came to the very brink of total mental collapse, did he cut loose emotionally from his earlier legalistic upbringing and begin to clear his heart to rebuild his life on a new and more durable foundation. The immediate precipitant of the crisis was the tension of being almost totally alone, cast adrift by his old associates. At first he had felt a certain sense of exhilaration and bravado at being freed from old shackles. This soon gave way, however, to a feeling of being near physical death, with labored breathing and internal constrictive pressure, which eventually dissipated. During the day, Noyes went around the city engaging in fruitless disputations with various unsympathetic religious leaders. At night, fear of sleep and intense mental anguish led him compulsively to walk the streets, including the notorious Five Points area, where he preached to down-and-outers and prostitutes, and sometimes

1 The only comprehensive account of this episode is found in Noyes's Confessions, pp. 33-47.
fell asleep in the streets wherever exhaustion overtook him. To break free from "the petty tyranny of fashionable morality" he "drank ardent spirits," though, he later declared, he was never intoxicated. Instinctively he ate and drank whatever he craved, particularly the strongest stimulants such as cayenne pepper.

During this period, his mental anguish became almost unbearable. This anguish peaked as Noyes came to doubt everything. The Bible, Jesus Christ, even God Himself, seemed to fall away as the basis for truth. "Nothing but my own experience was left me," he wrote, and even that appeared to be a deception. Yet an instinctive consciousness of inner strength and an unquenchable hope remained. He said within himself: "If the universe is a blind chaos without God, and the destinies of all beings are to be worked out by their own strength, I have as good right to try what I can do for existence and happiness as any body." With this realization, Noyes asserted his will to achieve victory over evil. "The net gave way, and immediately I found myself again in an atmosphere of confidence and peace." ¹

Noyes had passed through the fires of the most intense suffering and had come through to a new inner resolution and sense of himself, in effect, to a new conversion. "The effect of this mental overturn was permanent. It completely emptied me, for the time being, of all the theories which I had previously stored up. I could hardly tell afterward what I believed on any subject, till I had investigated it anew; and from this time forward I have had a deep sense of the necessity of laying the foundations of my belief below the frost of spiritual delusion." ² Although these experiences at first caused Noyes's reputation to suffer still further, since many of his associates felt he had been deranged, the overall effect was positive. Throughout his life, Noyes's sensitivity to his own inner conflicts and to the confusion in external society would cause him to continue to undergo much emotional turmoil, but the outcome was never in doubt later. He had laid the foundations for a personal reconciliation with God and a sense of security from sin, which later would be conveyed to his followers who joined him in establishing communal living.

¹Ibid., pp. 40-41. ²Ibid., p. 41.
During this period when the basis of his personal life and all religious and social truth seemed tenuous, Noyes also began to question and to rethink the basis of relations between the sexes. Shyness around women had always bothered Noyes. In consequence he thought perhaps more deeply about the nature of sexuality and its proper expression than the average person would have. Following his expulsion from the ministry in 1834 for preaching the necessity of "perfect holiness," Noyes became deeply attached to Abigail Merwin, his first convert, and, for a time, his loyal supporter and defender in the New Haven Free Church, where he first attempted to establish his authority. Though Noyes at the time viewed their relationship as purely "spiritual," it is clear that the distinction between religious and sexual love remained tenuous, and that much of Noyes's extraordinary intensity in this period may be seen as part of the sublimation of his sexual impulses.

The conclusions which Noyes reached at this time about the proper relations between the sexes paralleled his conclusions about the proper approach to religious and social truth generally. He thought long and deeply about the arguments for celibacy, but gradually came to reject them intellectually as incapable of handling the full range of human experience. If one had the right attitude, he came to believe, sexual relations, just as other activities in life, would be expressed in an outward manner that would be pleasing to God. Summarizing these early understandings, Noyes declared:

I then came to the conclusions in which I have since stood, viz., that the outward act of sexual connection is as innocent and comely as any other act, or rather if there is any difference in the character of outward acts, that this is the most noble and comely of all. This sentiment covered with any covering but that of the Spirit, is licentiousness.... God tells me that he does not care so much what I do as how I do it.... every day sinks me deeper and deeper in the certainty that these are the principles of God, and of his heavenly hosts.¹

¹Witness I (September 25, 1839): 78. The original has copious italics scattered throughout. This statement was part of a reply by Noyes to letters of the Shaker Loren Hollister of New Lebanon, New York.
Such statements easily could be misconstrued and misused. The excesses of militant Perfectionists forced Noyes to give more serious consideration to how his beliefs in sexual "anti-legality" could be constructively organized in practice. It was all too easy to equate legitimate freedom from external law or outmoded older standards with the irresponsible, antinomian freedom to do whatever one chose. To break down external restrictions on behavior without developing new inner standards to replace them would be fatal to the movement. This was shown by the scandals in central New York associated with Lucina Umphreville, and by similar scandals among Perfectionists of Brimfield, Massachusetts.

At Brimfield in 1835, Mary Lincoln and Maria Brown decided to demonstrate that their piety could overcome carnal desires, by proving that they could sleep chastely with their minister. Noyes, who had been at Brimfield, had a strong inkling of the developing irregularities. Feeling personally threatened by the pull of his own sexual impulses in the environment at Brimfield, and foreseeing the likely course of events connected with Mary Lincoln and Maria Brown, he left Brimfield precipitously, making his way some sixty miles through bitter cold and snow to his home in Putney, Vermont, in less than twenty-four hours. The aftermath of the "Brimfield Bundling" and related events which led to much less innocent activities, resulted in scandals which continued to plague Noyes.

During the four years between 1834 and 1838, Noyes drifted about, both geographically and doctrinally, trying to complete his theology, argue down opposers, and escape the irregularities which in others snared and destroyed the urge to holiness. Though he rigorously separated himself from the sanctified bundling at Brimfield, he recognized his own affiliation "with its testimony, and its desolation came upon me like a flood." Having his own words "tried by fire," "instead of convicting me of sin, purged and healed my conscience; but it deepened my sense of responsibility, and impressed upon my spirit a sobriety and a resolution to resist corruption among professed Perfectionists."^1

^1Noyes, Confessions, p. 63. Also see Spiritual Moralist 1 (June 13, 1842): 7-8.
As Noyes began to clarify his own position, he moved out to assert his authority and the validity of his views by attempting to clear Perfectionism of "the disreputable mysticisms and barbarisms which had begun to discredit it."

He met most of the important Eastern Perfectionist leaders, cast off the friendships of his more erratic associates, and gradually hammered out the further beliefs which helped him capture the entire Eastern wing of Perfectionism.

The first clear printed presentation of John Humphrey Noyes's marriage and sexual beliefs, and the turning point in his career, came as a result of the unintended publication of a letter that he wrote in January 1837 after discovering that he had lost Abigail Merwin to another man. As late as December 28, 1835, Noyes had tried to minimize their estrangement by writing her of his conviction of their spiritual affinity and that she was destined to be his wife. He further declared that his experiences at New York and at Prospect had brought him to an understanding of "the place which the marriage relation will hold in the coming dispensation."

Those views were starkly exhibited in a private letter Noyes wrote to his close friend David Harrison on January 15, 1837, after discovering that Abigail had married another man. The first part of the letter was a reassertion of Noyes's continued faith in his mission despite the emotional blows he had suffered. Noyes realized that the transition to new social forms which he foresaw would be a painful process:

Between this present time and the establishment of God's kingdom over the earth, lies a chaos of confusion, tribulation, woe, &c. such as must attend the destruction of the fashion of this world, and the introduction of the will of God as it is done in heaven.

The core of the letter, however, was in the final paragraph. Because of the central importance of this statement in indicating the direction of Noyes's later marriage and sexual thought, it will be reproduced in full here. In words of startling bluntness, Noyes declared:

1 Noyes, Confessions, p. 30.

I will write all that is in my heart on one delicate subject, and you may judge for yourself whether it is expedient to show this letter to others. When the will of God is done on earth, as it is in heaven, there will be no marriage. The marriage supper of the Lamb, is a feast at which every dish is free to every guest. Exclusiveness, jealousy, quarrelling, have no place there, for the same reason as that which forbids the guests at a thanksgiving dinner to claim each his separate dish, and quarrel with the rest for his rights. In a holy community, there is no more reason why sexual intercourse should be restricted by law, than why eating and drinking should be—and there is as little occasion for shame in the one case as in the other. God has placed a wall of partition between the male and female during the apostacy, for a good reason, which will be broken down in the resurrection, for equally good reasons. But woe to him who abolishes the law of the apostacy before he stands in the holiness of the resurrection. The guests of the marriage supper may have each his favourite dish, each a dish of his own procuring, and that without the jealousy of exclusiveness. I call a certain woman my wife—she is yours, she is Christ's, and in him she is the bride of all the saints. She is dear in the hand of a stranger, and according to my promise to her, I rejoice. My claim upon her cuts directly across the marriage covenant of this world, and God knows the end. Write if you wish to hear from me. Yours in the Lord.  

Not surprisingly, when extracts from this letter were printed anonymously in Theophilous Gates's newspaper, the Battle-Axe and Weapons of War, a storm of controversy broke loose. Within a month, Noyes had acknowledged that he was, indeed, the author of the letter, but that he had not intentionally obtruded those sentiments before the public. Trying to clarify his meaning, he emphatically denied that he had engaged in any improper behavior himself, or that he proposed the platform of his letter for immediate adoption. Properly followed, his approach would not result in licentiousness: "Liberty never metamorphoses the children of God into swine. If any become swine in consequence of learning the law of liberty, they are only hypocrites made manifest."  

Not until nearly nine years after the Battle-Axe letter was published, would Noyes begin the practical introduction of the system

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1Quoted in full in the Witness 1 (January 23, 1839): 49. The original emphasis has been restored to this important paragraph.

2See the Witness on September 23, 1837.
among his closest followers. The immediate effect of the publication of the letter, however, was devastating to Noyes's activities. His newspaper, the Witness, collapsed as subscribers fell away. His reputation seemed ruined, and his career, such as it had been, seemed finished. Once again, Noyes appeared totally isolated and alone.

III

Although the appearance of the Battle-Axe Letter and the repercussions which ensued might appear the nadir of Noyes's career, in retrospect those events marked the turning point which presaged his ultimate success. During the six years between Noyes's first conversion in 1831 at age twenty and the appearance of his Battle-Axe letter in 1837 at age twenty-five, he had undergone great religious, social, and sexual turmoil. By that latter date, he had formed the basic religious and social beliefs which he would continue to develop and to commit himself to throughout the remainder of his life.

Noyes retrospectively saw the publication of the Battle-Axe Letter as providential. From that time, he felt that he "was called, even under the heaviest penalties, to defend and ultimately carry out the doctrine of communism in love."1 In attempting to justify himself and to rehabilitate his reputation, Noyes began to settle down and to establish the organizational forms which eventually would allow his principles to be realized in functioning community life. Rather than attempting quixotically to convert the whole world to his religious ideas, Noyes partially reoriented his sights to the more practical options of seeking to realize his social ideas among tested followers in small scale pilot projects and of continuing to propagate his ideas through the periodical press.

In the wake of the Battle-Axe controversy, the first important to begin more effective organization to embody his beliefs, was to return home and arrange his marriage to Harriet Holton in 1838. The reasons for this sudden marriage to a woman he barely knew were complex and varied. The basic precondition appears to have been Harriet's

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1G. W. Noyes, Putney Community, p. 10.
demonstrated and unswerving loyalty to him and to his ideas. Additionally, she must have seemed "safe" sexually, and unlikely to make special demands on him. And, while she was capable and hard-working, she appeared to be totally willing to be shaped however he might desire. Only such a woman would have been likely to accept the unusual proposal of marriage which John Humphrey Noyes offered.

The substance of that proposal was a redefinition of the beliefs that Noyes had expressed in the Battle-Axe Letter. Earthly marriage, with its legal and emotional exclusiveness, would eventually be done away with in the resurrected state which was to be realized on earth. Such selfish relationships would be sublimated to the larger and more inclusive concerns of the holy community. Noyes was proposing to Harriet Holton "a partnership which I will not call marriage, till I have defined it."

... we can enter into no engagements with each other, which shall limit the range of our affections, as they are limited in matrimonial engagements by the fashion of this world. I desire and expect my yoke-fellow, will love all who love God, whether they be male or female, with a warmth and strength of affection unknown to earthly lovers, and as freely as if she stood in no particular connexion with me. In fact, the object of my connexion with her will be, not to monopolize and enslave her heart or my own, but to enlarge and establish both, in the free fellowship of God's universal family. If the external union and companionship of a man and a woman in accordance with these principles, is properly called marriage, I know that marriage exists in heaven, and I have no scruple in offering you my heart and hand, with an engagement to be married in due form, as soon as God shall permit.

I know that the immortal union of hearts, the everlasting honeymoon, which alone is worthy to be called marriage, can never be made by a ceremony, and I know equally well that such a marriage, can never be marred by a ceremony.¹

¹Witness 1 (January 23, 1839): 56. In his "Psychoanalytic Study," p. 193, Thomas suggests that this marriage proposal, like the Battle-Axe Letter, was an effort by Noyes to "desexualize marriage." Evidently Noyes also felt compelled to clarify his intent in the letter, for he further wrote Harriet:

"... I know not how far you may have imbibed the spirit of Shakerism, but I will say frankly, that there may be no mistake between us, that so far from regarding the act of sexual enjoyment as in itself unholy, I am sure that there is no sacrifice except that of the heart, that is more acceptable to God."

Parker, Yankee Saint, pp. 63-64.
Whatever one might think personally about this extraordinary marriage proposal, it does suggest an acute awareness on Noyes's part of the arbitrary, human character of American marriage practices of his day. Perhaps only in times of extreme social flux, would individuals explicitly articulate the relative character of the social forms around which existing marriage arrangements were organized. For most people in most periods of history, the relationship between emotional expression and the particular social forms within which such expression occurs, is largely taken for granted. Noyes and many contemporary millennialists, on the other hand, were sharply aware of the inadequacy of existing marriage arrangements. Rather than assume that all marriage standards were relative, however, they sought to realize new "divine" standards of their own. For John Humphrey Noyes, the development of such "divine" standards to restructure marriage was a gradual process which was only expressed in clear written form by the late 1840s.

After setting up the premises upon which their marriage would be based, Noyes's marriage proposal to Harriet Holton proceeded to enumerate the specific reasons why he wanted to marry her. These were given in a remarkably flat and unemotional tone, written as a "witness" not an "advocate." Underlying all the other reasons was the idea that the marriage would advance God's work, the work in which Noyes felt he was engaged. Further: "It will set us free, at least myself, from much reproach, and many evil surmisings, which are occasioned by celibacy in the present circumstances." Subsequently, Noyes was to observe ingenuously: "By this marriage, besides herself, and a good social position, which she held as belonging to the first families of Vermont, I obtained money enough to buy a house and printing-office, and to buy a press and type."¹ With that press, which Noyes bought within three weeks of their marriage, he resumed publication of his newspaper, the Witness, which for several years appeared to be devoted as much to bearing witness to Noyes's good character as to his views of the will of God.

The Noyes-Holton marriage was thus apparently one of convenience, at least at first. Faced with the flux around him, Noyes was unwilling fully to commit himself emotionally to any individual, even in marriage. Nevertheless, the suggestion that Harriet Holton was the only one of the three women important in Noyes's adult life whom he "never loved,"\(^1\) appears overdrawn. Certainly, Noyes does not seem to have loved Harriet in a romantic sense, but he did not really love his followers in such a sense either. The deep respect and abiding affection which John and Harriet had for each other, combined with their mutual and lifelong loyalty in pursuit of larger religious and communal goals, made their relationship considerably more than simply a pragmatic one. In his own marriage, as well as in all aspects of the community life which he would develop, Noyes subordinated individual wills and self interest to the larger communal goals.

Following his marriage, John Humphrey Noyes's next major organizational move was to begin to assert his undisputed authority over his own family in Putney, Vermont, as well as to establish his leadership over the small group of followers who joined his family at the Putney Bible School which they had started in 1836. Noyes began by securing the loyalty of his younger brother George, as well as two of his sisters, Harriet and Charlotte, whose marriages he eventually arranged in the early 1840s to two of his closest followers, John L. Skinner and John R. Miller. The Noyes brothers, Skinner, and Miller, with the later addition of George Cragin, would form the informal governing group of "central members," who charted the development of the Putney and Oneida Communities. Given the physical and mental incapacity of his aging, alcoholic father, Noyes also tried to assert his authority over his strong-willed mother, who was upset by the way he was using up the family estate to support his religious projects. Despite the intense psychological pressure applied to her, not until 1839 did she finally fully capitulate to her son as "being to me a teacher and father in spiritual things."\(^2\)

\(^1\) Fogarty, "Conservative Christian Utopianism," p. 66.

\(^2\) G. W. Noyes, Putney Community, p. 33.
In these instances, as well as in his subsequent community ventures, Noyes demanded total authority and control. As early as 1837, Noyes had declared that "I would never connect myself with any individual or association in religion unless I were acknowledged leader."\(^1\) In later describing his ideal model for the government of his communities at Putney and Oneida, he declared that the Kingdom of God is an "absolute monarchy," with authority coming from the top, yet decisions tempered by the concerns of the membership below.\(^2\) Noyes, of course, would be the supreme leader who benevolently delegated authority to loyal subordinates who would do the concrete work of implementing his ideals. As George Wallingford Noyes summarized the underlying approach: "The dogma of Noyes's divine commission became a touchstone in the Putney and Oneida Communities. Those who rejected it were turned away; those who accepted it were bound together in a brotherhood of self-sacrificing quest for the Kingdom of God."\(^3\)

What accounts for this extreme emphasis on control which runs throughout the life of John Humphrey Noyes? One's initial response might be to suspect individual psychopathology, but this would be too simple an explanation, particularly in view of the generally humane and emotionally satisfying communities that Noyes eventually established. From a larger social perspective, Noyes's own concerns, and the appeal of his essentially oligarchic system of government to the articulate individuals who joined his communities, were related to their sense of the extreme disorganization of their larger social environment. Faced with a sense of religious and social collapse, individuals would seek to establish some basis for order as the first necessity. Cohesive, unified, and self-contained community life, separated as much as possible from the disorders of the outer world, would allow individuals who felt at loose ends to find a new and more secure basis for their lives.

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 25.

\(^2\)Noyes's underlying theory of organization and government for his communities was presented in *First Annual Report of the Oneida Association*, pp. 12-14. For the original statement, see *Spiritual Magazine* 2 (July 1, 1847): 57-59.

\(^3\)G. W. Noyes, *Putney Community*, p. 33.
This interpretation is supported by much of the leading scholarship on Oneida. In his study of the social sources of Oneida membership, Robert Fogarty has argued that, although the religious and social ideas of Oneida might appear radical at first sight, the Community grew and prospered, paradoxically, because of its "conservatism." It was able to provide a sense of security and a new set of satisfying absolutes to replace the vagaries of revivalistic religion and other expressions of the social disorder in the period. Noyes himself gave support to such an interpretation when he argued that a true "conservative," which he felt that he was, must be prepared to radically change existing belief and practice in order to reestablish a satisfying basis for social life. And a psychoanalytic study of John Humphrey Noyes by Robert Thomas echoes these themes by recalling the provocative insight of Frank Manuel, who suggested that "the utopia may well be a sensitive indicator of where the sharpest anguish of an age lies." Noyes's underlying ego strengths allowed him not only to reestablish his own emotional stability but also to create supports for the lives of his followers as well. Thus, the ability to achieve what Noyes described as "salvation from sin," in both religious and secular terms, accounts for much of his appeal, as well as the appeal of other ante-bellum millennialists such as the Shakers and Mormons.

The period from 1841 to 1846, when the little community at Putney was in its most plastic state, was also a time of unusual tensions and communal interest in American society at large. Between 1841 and 1844, the depths of the depression generated by the Panic of 1837, Brook Farm emerged out of New England Unitarianism, Hopedale grew out of New England Universalism, and some forty to fifty or more lesser-known and

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2"Who are the Conservatives?" Circular 1 (May 30, 1852): 115. See also Parker, Yankee Saint, p. 113.

more shortlived "secular" Associations were formed under the inspiration of the ideas of the French social thinker Charles Fourier, as reinterpreted by his American disciple Albert Brisbane. The group of Perfectionists which coalesced at Putney eventually described itself as an Association, as did Oneida in the early days. This terminology suggests the Fourierist influence upon what was more fundamentally John Humphrey Noyes's breakaway from the orthodoxy of New England Congregationalism.¹

In forming his communities, Noyes typically tried to synthesize and to integrate the best elements of the great popular excitements of his day into a new, cohesive unity. Looking back, he saw the two great efforts at reconstruction in the antebellum period as coming from the Revivalists, whose great idea was "the regeneration of the soul," and the Socialists, whose great complimentary ideal was "the regeneration of society, which is the soul's environment."² But Noyes's primary starting point was the religious one, as he indicated in an early critique of the Fourierists:

... we have no hope of perfecting human nature by improving its external conditions. We think the Fourierists have begun at the wrong end. They are trying to build a chimney by beginning at the top; and we think they will fail not because we do not believe that chimneys can and should be built, but because we do not believe that such heavy structures can be durably built on anything but a firm foundation and by beginning at the bottom. The great problems of our relation to God and of the relation of the sexes, which the Fourierists postpone as of no pressing importance, we consider the first to be solved.³

To summarize, common value premises and commitments had to be internalized before durable new social forms for life could be erected.

¹For discussions of the communitarian interest in the antebellum period, see as starting points: Noyes, History of American Socialisms; G. W. Noyes, Putney Community, pp. 151-169; Bestor, Backwoods Utopias; Bestor, "Patent-Office Models"; and Stow Persons, "Christian Communitarianism in America," in Socialism and American Life, ed. Egbert and Persons, 1:125-152. John Humphrey Noyes's American Socialisms made extensive use of manuscript materials on the Owenite and Fourierist groups collected by A. J. Macdonald, the originals of which are now held by the Yale University Library.


³G. W. Noyes, Putney Community, p. 168.
In retrospect, Noyes concluded that the "Revivalists failed for want of regeneration of society, and the Socialists failed for want of regeneration of the heart." Only by achieving an enlarged unitary family such as the one at Oneida, could all aspects of religious and social life be reintegrated into a cohesive whole.

Following Noyes's order of priorities, the small group of Perfectionists at Putney gradually developed new and more complex forms of social organization in support of their religious ideals. As we have seen, the original nucleus of the later community had gathered around John Humphrey Noyes's family and a few close associates who had begun to establish the Putney Bible School in 1836. By the time of the formal division of the estate of Noyes's father on February 5, 1841, which provided nearly $20,000 to support community life, a clear economic side to the organization developed as well. On February 22, 1841, a Society of Inquiry was officially established. By the end of March 1843, despite the defections of approximately one-third of the members, there were thirty-five persons at Putney—twenty-six adults and nine children—being supported by the common purse and living primarily in three dwellings owned by the Noyes family. Until the commencement of the practice of complex marriage in 1846, no further membership additions occurred.

Between 1842 and 1846, a move toward community of property to provide support for the original primarily religious goals also occurred. A Contract of Partnership signed February 26, 1844, introduced a joint stock principle of property ownership into the Corporation. And on March 8, 1845, this arrangement was superceded by a more elaborate Constitution which moved toward explicit communism of property. Nevertheless, even as late as the Oneida period, full communistic amalgamation of property holdings had not yet occurred. All these arrangements were made on an ad hoc basis in attempting to find the best way of expressing their religious life. As Noyes noted on January 10, 1843:

A spirit of love naturally led us into a sort of community of goods. . . . Our community has no constitution nor written laws. Our object in coming together was not to form a community after the

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1Noyes, American Socialisms, p. 27.
fashion of the Shakers or Fourierites, but simply to publish the
gospel and help one another in spiritual things. We found it
necessary to investigate many new problems in social economy, but
it is difficult as yet to tell what form of social life we shall
ultimately take.¹

IV

John Humphrey Noyes's first moves to establish order within
himself, and as a necessary corollary, in the lives of his followers,
had been to begin to create a communal religious loyalty, that is, common
value premises within which life would be conducted. For success,
this effort also presupposed certain steps to restructure social and
economic life of the community, particularly the relations between the
sexes. Total commitment in religious and communal life helped prepare
the way for the eventual institution of communism in sexual relations
as well. In fact, in a certain sense total communal commitment could
lead naturally to the end of the exclusive social and sexual attachments
of the world.

The theoretical aspects of Noyes's plans for marital reorganiza-
tion typically were developed prior to practice. During the twelve
years between his conversion to Perfectionism in 1834 and his first
actual practice of complex marriage on a limited scale in 1846, Noyes
stated that he had strictly adhered to the normative marriage ideals
of the world, remaining celibate before marriage, and strictly monogamous
thereafter.² Only when he had set up an adequate value foundation
and organizational backing so that he was relatively confident of the
prospect of success, did he make the break from conventional marriage
patterns to what he considered to be those of the heavenly state.

As we have seen, sexual problems had plagued both Noyes and
many other Perfectionists in the free-floating, unstructured atmosphere

¹Parker, Yankee Saint, p. 89. G. W. Noyes, Putney Community,
pp. 55-56, quotes the same passage, changing Noyes's original term
"Fourierites" to "Fourierists." This is a minor example of the problems
of editing in G. W. Noyes's two compilations. Sometimes he engages in
more serious editing, as when he changes a term such as "anti-Mason"
into "lover of light."

²Handbook of the Oneida Community, 1867 ed., p. 9.
of the 1830s in New York and the Northeastern States. Looking back in 1840, Noyes described the extremes which had resulted. He declared that in dealing with sexual morality,

... the church and the world have swung far beyond the center to the right. Perfectionism took away the restraining force, and some swung far beyond the center to the left. In this case, the church and the world are the cause, for they placed men in a position of unnatural restraint; Perfectionism was the occasion, though innocent occasion; for the abolition of law is an essential feature of the gospel and must not be kept back let the consequences be what they may.¹

Eschewing extremes of both the right and the left, Noyes would devote his efforts to attempting to restore a proper balance in the relations between the sexes.

In wrestling with these problems, Noyes was heavily influenced by the writings and approach of the Shakers. This celibate group, which swung even farther to the right than conventional society had in seeking to control human sexuality, provided the most thorough and intellectually impressive contemporary Perfectionist arguments as to how the proper relations between the sexes should be restored. Paradoxically as it might seem, both Noyes's sexual theories and even much of his basic theological structure itself may perhaps most convincingly be viewed, formally at least, as a Shaker heresy.² The system which Noyes developed at Putney and Oneida was, in effect, a form of self-denying "Victorian sensuality," which stood the Shaker system on its head.

¹Parker, Yankee Saint, pp. 115-116.

²Benjamin B. Warfield, "John Humphrey Noyes and His 'Bible Communists,'" Bibliotheca Sacra 78 (1921): 346-347, argues that Noyes "... has been most influenced by the Shakers; or it would be more correct to say that the whole formal nature of his system was borrowed from them. ... To every one of these items of Shaker teaching Noyes presents a clear counterpart. Sometimes he simply takes the Shaker doctrine over just as he found it. More frequently he tries to fit it into his own personal lines of thinking. But even when he most alters it—as in his transformation of their celibacy into his promiscuity—his genetic connection is not wholly obscured."

In my "Women and Utopia: The Shaker and Oneida Perfectionist Attempts to Achieve Heaven on Earth by Enlarging the Family to Do Away With Human Selfishness" (B.A. thesis, Antioch College, 1970), I suggested that Noyes's system, including complex marriage, might in many respects best be viewed as a Shaker heresy.
Although Noyes developed his theories without any wholesale borrowing from other groups, including the Shakers, his affinity for their approach is suggested in his repeated respectful, if often rather critical, use of them as a foil for his own views. Writing in 1848, Noyes observed:

Forbid sexual intercourse altogether and you attain the same results, so far as shutting off the jealousies and strifes of exclusiveness is concerned, as we attain by making sexual intercourse free. In this matter the Shakers show their shrewdness. But they sacrifice the vitality of society, in securing its peace.¹

Elsewhere Noyes declared that his approach and that of the Shakers were the only two ones possible in the resurrected state.² And he further said: "If I believed in a Shaker heaven I would be a Shaker now."³

But Noyes did not believe in a Shaker heaven. He felt that the Shaker emphasis on sexual shame was morbid and irrational. He declared that both

... the Shaker and the licentious spiritualist are alike in their fundamental error, which is an over-estimate of the importance of the outward act of sexual union. The Shaker, with a prurient swollen imagination of the importance of that act, pronounces it a damnable abomination prohibited to all the saints. The licentious spiritualist, with the same morbid imagination, thinks it right and necessary in the face of all human regulations, to perform it at the bidding of impulse.

In Noyes's view, neither the act of sexual union, nor the abstinence from that act, had any importance in itself. The goal, rather, was "a healthy development and faithful subordination of the sexual


² Handbook of the Oneida Community, 1867 ed., p. 60. Also see "Marriage--Its Bible Limitatio," Circular 3 (September 14, 1854): 487.

³ Quoted in "Was Mr. Noyes Ever a Shaker?" Oneida Circular 12, n.s. (June 28, 1875): 211. The article, in three installments on June 28, July 5, and July 12, 1875, summarizes Noyes's attitudes toward the Shakers by reprinting a number of his earlier responses to them and their ideas. Robert Thomas kindly called this article to my attention.
susceptibility." That could be achieved without either "the monkery of the Shakers" or "the extravagances of the licentious spiritualist."¹

John Humphrey Noyes's contact with the Shakers was more than simply an abstract, intellectual one. Recognizing that celibacy, or "practical Shakerism," was antithetical to his program and could lead to a falling away of his followers, Noyes inveighed against the group and their ideas in his newspaper, the *Witness*, in the late 1830s.² In the summer of 1839, Noyes and his new bride, visited the Shaker society at Harvard, Massachusetts, where he carried on a lively, if inconclusive, exchange with them.³ On March 16, 1849, during the difficult organizational phase at Oneida, Noyes visited the New Lebanon society for the express purpose of informing the Elders there "that I was laying the foundations of a society and a system that would sooner or later subvert Shakerism."⁴ Later, becoming more mellow, Noyes observed that if only the Shakers had known his method of birth control and scientific propagation, they probably would have adopted his system.⁵ Noyes's son Pierrepont remembered frequent visits of the Massachusetts Shakers to the Oneida Community in the 1870s, where they performed their dances in front of the group. And he was struck by Noyes's long, serious conversations with the Shaker leader Frederick W. Evans, during which Noyes, to his son's surprise, "treated him as an equal and seemed to recognize some spiritual value in an outsider."⁶ Throughout

¹"A Word of Warning," *Perfectionist and Theocratic Watchman* 5 (July 12, 1845): 34.

²Possibly the most interesting debate was the one that Noyes carried on in response to letters of the New Lebanon Shaker Loren Hollister. See *Witness* 1 (September 26, 1839): 80.

³The substance of this conversation is reported in Parker, *Yankee Saint*, pp. 155-158.

⁴"Was Mr. Noyes Ever a Shaker?" *Oneida Circular* 12, n.s. (July 12, 1875): 219.


this analysis, the influence of the Shaker approach on Noyes's theory and practice will reoccur as a unifying thread.

Rather more mundane emotional and sexual problems of his followers initially occupied Noyes's attention, however. In the early 1840s, the most pressing sexual difficulty with which Noyes had to deal was the triangle between his followers George and Mary Cragin and Abram C. Smith, leader of a faction of the Perfectionists at Newark, New Jersey, loyal to Noyes's theories. Smith was locked into a desperately unhappy marriage to a woman whom Noyes described as a "perfect devil." On the other side were Mary Cragin, a coquette and woman who seemingly "couldn't say no," and her husband George, a competent, hard-working, and self-effacing man who apparently only functioned well when working under the guidance of another, stronger personality. When the Cragins visited the Smiths's summer home in Rondout, the results were predictable--a secret liaison between Abram Smith and Mary Cragin. Getting wind of the Smith-Cragin affair, Noyes visited them and severely reproved the guilty parties for their behavior.

Eventually, all three individuals moved to Putney, where they could be under Noyes's immediate supervision. He worked with them, trying to help them overcome the "lusts and affections of the flesh," and work out their emotional difficulties. The Smith-Cragin affair convinced Noyes that his Eden, no less than the original one, must have a wall and a "flaming sword that turned every way" to keep the Devil out. These protections were developed gradually in several new forms of organizational control that were closely associated with preparing the way for the coming of complex marriage.

The first of these new forms of social control which made possible the introduction of complex marriage at Putney and Oneida was "male continence"; the second was "mutual criticism." The intellectual roots of male continence, Noyes's unusual form of birth control, went back to 1837, when he had read Robert Dale Owen's Moral Physiology, an

1G. W. Noyes, Putney Community, pp. 37-45.

2Ibid., p. 46.
early birth control pamphlet, as well as works of the Shakers. The practical impetus for Noyes's development of his new technique came as he grappled with the problems of his wife Harriet. During their first six years of married life, she suffered through five painful deliveries, four of which were premature and resulted in the death of the child. After the last failure, Noyes vowed to her never again to expose her to such fruitless suffering. He decided that he would live apart from her, if necessary, rather than break this vow.

This was hardly a satisfactory solution to the problem. In the summer of 1844, Noyes elaborated the idea that the sexual organs had a social function which could be separated in practice from the propagative one. He drew the same basic distinction that Robert Dale Owen had made in Moral Physiology between the use of sexual intercourse for "amative" and "propagative" purposes. The first concern of sexual intercourse should be social: to allow the two sexes to communicate and to express affection for each other. God created Eve primarily as a "helpmeet" and a companion for man, and only secondarily for propagative purposes. Noyes thought that it was extremely important to "establish intelligent, voluntary control over the propagative function."1

With this end in view, Noyes was thus highly critical both of unplanned procreation and of the various then-current means to avoid procreation. In his view, sexual intercourse when no progeny was desired was like masturbation, less common only because "a woman is less convenient than the ordinary means of masturbation."2 "... after marriage it is as foolish and cruel to expend one's seed on a wife merely

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1The first detailed printed presentation of Noyes's theory and practice of male continence appears in his "Bible Argument," pp. 27-35. This was written early in 1848. About 1866, a four page letter by John Humphrey Noyes describing the practice to an inquier was published under the title: Male Continence, or Self-Control in Sexual Intercourse. That letter was reprinted a number of times and finally was included, along with the major summation of Noyes's views on the subject, in his pamphlet on Male Continence in 1872. Noyes's statement of the historical roots of his development of the idea first appeared in his Dixon and His Copyists (Wallingford, Conn.: Oneida Community, 1872).


for the sake of getting rid of it, as it would be to fire a gun at one's best friend merely for the sake of unloading it." The various current means of birth control—abstinence, artificial aids, and abortion—all appeared unappealing to Noyes. And coitus interruptus, the method proposed by Robert Dale Owen, was wasteful of a man's seed and vital powers. In Noyes's opinion: "it is the glory of man to control himself, and the Kingdom of Heaven summons him to self-control in ALL THINGS." 2

Whatever one might think of "male continence," Noyes's term for what is technically described as coitus reservatus, the practice certainly did require male self-control. In male continence, a couple would engage in sexual congress without the man ever reaching orgasm and ejaculating, either during intercourse or after withdrawal. Typically, Noyes developed male continence as a logical outgrowth of his principles. In his view, regular intercourse is wasteful, sowing the seed where one does not want or expect it to grow.

Yet it is equally manifest that the natural instinct of our nature demands frequent congress of the sexes, not for propagative, but for social and spiritual purposes. It results from this that simple congress of the sexes, without the propagative crisis, is the order of nature, for the gratification of ordinary amative instincts. 3

In defending his unorthodox birth control practice, Noyes used several intriguing analogies. He denied that male continence was "unnatural." If it was, then "cooking, wearing clothes, living in houses, and almost everything else done by civilized man, is unnatural in the same sense. . . ." " . . . every instance of self-denial is an interruption of some natural act. The man who virtuously contents himself with a look at a beautiful woman is conscious of such an interruption. The lover who stops at a kiss denies himself a natural progression." Noyes was merely drawing the line further along than a group such as the Shakers, which had only resorted to "the most imposing of human contrivances for avoiding the woes of undesired

1 Noyes, Male Continence, p. 16.  
2 Ibid., pp. 9-10.  
3 Noyes, "Bible Argument," p. 32.
propagation."\(^1\) Indeed, male continence might be described paradoxically by the scholarly analyst as a form of "celibate intercourse."\(^2\)

Certainly the Victorian preoccupations implicit in male continence are clear. Noyes's basic analogy for the process of male continence has a very Victorian flavor:

The situation may be compared to a stream in three conditions, viz., 1, a fall; 2, a course of rapids above the fall; and 3, still water above the rapids. The skillful boatman may choose whether he will remain in the still water, or venture more or less down the rapids, or run his boat over the fall. But there is a point on the verge of the fall where he has no control over his course; and just above that there is a point where he will have to struggle with the current in a way which will give his nerves a severe trial, even though he may escape the fall. If he is willing to learn, experience will teach him the wisdom of confining his excursions to the region of easy rowing, unless he has an object in view that is worth the cost of going over the falls.\(^3\)

"Our method simply proposes the subordination of the flesh to the spirit, teaching men to seek principally the elevated spiritual pleasures of sexual intercourse, and to be content with them in their general intercourse with women, restricting the more sensual part to its proper occasions."\(^4\)

How well did such an unusual system work? Initial experimentation by Noyes and his followers suggested that the procedure definitely was effective in curtailing pregnancies. And after complex marriage began to be introduced in 1846, the technique further proved its effectiveness. During the twenty-one years between 1848 and 1869, when male continence was almost the sole sanctioned means of sexual intercourse at Oneida, at most thirty-one accidental births took place in a Community numbering approximately two hundred adults and having frequent sexual congress with a variety of partners during that time.\(^5\)

\(^1\)Noyes, *Male Continence*, pp. 7, 9.

\(^2\)I coined this term in an attempt to capture the paradoxical quality of sexual intercourse without any seminal emission.

\(^3\)Noyes, *Male Continence*, p. 8.  

\(^4\)Noyes, "Bible Argument," p. 32.

\(^5\)This is the conclusion reached by Carden, *Oneida*, p. 51. She bases her figures on Hilda Herrick Noyes and George Wallingford Noyes,
Undoubtedly, that low birth rate was related to the practice of inducting young men into male continence by women past the menopause, and inducting young women by older, more experienced men. But the effectiveness of male continence as a means of birth control in a regulated community setting is incontestable. Less pregnancies occurred with male continence than would have with the pill.

The psychological effects of the system are somewhat more ambiguous. Unfortunately, approximately twenty-five years ago, an extensive body of diaries, journals, and other personal papers of Community members which might shed light on this question were deliberately burned. And those items which were fortuitously saved, are not currently available to outside scholarship, nor likely to become so in the foreseeable future. As a result, evaluation of the psychological effects of male continence must be based primarily on the printed sources put out by the Community—the books, pamphlets, and especially the newspapers. These are often remarkably frank in discussing ideals and problems of all sorts.

From the printed sources, it appears that there were indeed, serious problems connected with the introduction and dissolution of Community life, including male continence and complex marriage, which male continence helped to make possible. But if these difficult transition periods are excepted, male continence and other forms of Community control do not appear to have been unusually burdensome. Even in the troubled late stages of Oneida life, a careful medical study of the health of the Community by Noyes's son Theodore showed less incidence of "nervous disorders" than in the society at large, although the precise relationship of such disorders to male continence is not wholly clear. Noyes himself felt that a slightly higher-than-average level

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1 Constance Noyes Robertson, The Oneida Community: The Breakup, 1876-1881 (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1972), pp. xi-xiv. Garden, Oneida, p. xviii, states that "half a room full" of paper was burned.

2 Theodore E. Noyes, M.D., "Report on Nervous Diseases in the Oneida Community" as printed in Noyes, Scientific Propagation, pp. 25-32. The
of sexual tension was not necessarily harmful.\(^1\) His son Pierrepont dimly recalled a quality of restrained romantic excitement pervading and invigorating Community life, what Abel Easton described as a sort of "continuous courtship."\(^2\) Finally, the practice of male continence for many years evidently did not lead to impotence. When Noyes instituted his experiment in "scientific propagation" in 1868, many men who had practiced male continence for the longest time deliberately sired children.\(^3\)

Despite such disclaimers, it is difficult to believe that there were no special problems connected with male continence. Probably even with unusually strong religious commitment, proper training, and stringent enforcement procedures, few men could have found the technique "easy," as Noyes declared it was for "spiritual men." Hints in Noyes's writings and exhortations, for instance, suggest that masturbation, and associated anti-social withdrawal from Community life, may have been a minor problem at times, but the record is inconclusive. According to Maren Lockwood Carden's figures, the rate of secession from Oneida for men was approximately twice that of the women, though it was only two to three per year on the average.\(^4\) Although this could have been due to dissatisfactions with male continence or a variety of other factors of Community life, probably the higher figure for men simply reflected the

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\(^{1}\)Noyes, Male Continence, p. 20.


\(^{3}\)For Noyes's defense of the good practical effects of the system, see his Male Continence, pp. 18-21.

\(^{4}\)Carden, Oneida, pp. 77-80.
greater ease that they found in reestablishing their independence in the outside world as compared to women. Whatever the difficulties associated with male continence, most Oneida men evidently preferred it to complete celibate abstinence, the other alternative possibility, which apparently was practiced by a few men of the Community. ¹

Ironically, although male continence was described almost wholly from a male perspective and concerns, leading Robert Thomas to conjecture that Noyes developed the technique more to satisfy his own psychic needs than to alleviate his wife's problems, ² the practice apparently had the unintended side effect of improving women's pleasure in sexual intercourse. In describing his early experimentation with male continence, Noyes stated: "my wife's experience was very satisfactory, as it had never been before." ³ Norman Himes, author of the authoritative Medical History of Contraception, opined "that the Oneida Community stands out historically as perhaps the only group experiment, at least in the Western World, placing great emphasis upon the full satisfaction of the woman, and this in a culture dominated by male attitudes." ⁴ And the sex researcher, Havelock Ellis, concluded that women did reach orgasm under male continence. ⁵

¹Robert Fogarty has called my attention to evidence in T. E. Noyes's "Report" that some members of the Oneida Community remained celibate. P. B. Noyes implies that at least one of the men who took care of the rearing of the Community's children in the Children's House was celibate. See My Father's House, p. 150, and elsewhere. There can be no question that celibacy was considered a theoretical alternative to complex marriage at Oneida, although, like worldly marriage, it was considered less desirable. When the Oneida Community announced its final abandonment of complex marriage in August 1879, it stated that the group was advocating "Paul's platform, which allows marriage but prefers celibacy." Robertson, The Breakup, p. 160.

²Thomas, "Psychoanalytic Study," pp. 227n.

³Noyes, Male Continence, p. 11.


⁵Havelock Ellis, Sex in Relation to Society, vol. 6: Studies in the Psychology of Sex (Philadelphia: F. A. Davis Co., 1911), p. 553. This conclusion was based on Ellis's correspondence with an ex-Community member, George Noyes Miller.
If obvious negative side effects of this unusual birth control practice are at best conjectural, could individuals who accepted it and engaged in its practice have done so, nevertheless, because they were psychologically abnormal? Maren Lockwood Carden makes the acute, but only partially accurate, observation that John Humphrey Noyes never was able "to commit himself fully to any idea, action, or person." Further, she also suggests that Community members must have had an unusual "psychological makeup" which allowed them to be attracted to and to function under such a demanding and controlled system. Unfortunately, Carden fails to produce convincing evidence, either in her dissertation or book, to support this latter thesis. Oneida Community publications also fail to suggest that Community members had any special character structure. The detailed psychological critiques of Oneida members that were given in mutual criticism sessions and reported in the Community newspaper, reveal the full gamut of human types, as well as almost every conceivable character strength and weakness.

To be sure, Noyes's followers did constitute a highly selected group of people. As Robert Fogarty has shown in his analysis of the

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1 Carden, Oneida, p. 30. Noyes expressed the basis of his commitment in his Confessions, p. 41. After his New York Experience in 1834, he realized that he would have to reorganize his life around a small number of truths which he "absolutely knew" and could use as the "speciebasis" for all his other beliefs. Everything but those core principles was subject to modification. Noyes's commitment to his basic religious and sexual beliefs and to his own sense of personal mission, shows exceptional consistency throughout his life, but the way in which those beliefs were expressed in practice varied considerably in the face of altered external circumstances. A similarly intense commitment to basic principles and to his sense of religious mission, but a willingness to innovate radically in specific external forms, also characterized Joseph Smith.

2 Carden, Oneida, p. 107.

3 See Mutual Criticism (Oneida, N.Y.: Office of the American Socialist, 1876), esp. pp. 44-69. The major source for personal data of this nature on Community members was the column inaugurated officially in the Spiritual Magazine on December 22, 1849, entitled "Criticism," p. 346. Like all examples of successfully functioning societies, Oneida operated according to certain underlying shared principles which all members of the group accepted to a large degree, but it also allowed for the expression and interaction of a wide range of character types within that basic framework.
social sources of Oneida membership, individuals attracted to the Community frequently were initially in an emotionally unsettled state, seeking surcease from inner turmoil and external uncertainties, particularly those associated with the vagaries of revivalistic religion. Oneidans found Noyes's beliefs and communal program appealing because it helped them reestablish order and become resocialized to a more secure and satisfying way of life.\textsuperscript{1} But this is true of the converts to almost any religious or secular cause which seeks to radically restructure the beliefs and lives of its followers. The burden of proof for any argument that these Perfectionists had a special "character structure"—whether ideal or psychopathological—rests on the person who makes it. Had the Oneida Community been unbalanced, either in character types or in occupational backgrounds and abilities, it probably could not have functioned successfully for more than thirty years.

Male continence cannot simply be dismissed as aberrant, therefore. Rather, the practice should be investigated as a serious, if admittedly highly unusual, form of sexual organization, just as an anthropologist would investigate and attempt to understand the functions of any form of social organization, however seemingly bizarre it might appear. Viewed within its cultural context, male continence may perhaps best be seen as an accentuation of certain characteristic Victorian attitudes, a sort of "Victorian sensuality," expressing an exaggerated concern for control. The image one has of the later Oneida Community is of a group of perfect Victorian gentlemen and ladies playing croquet on the lawn in front of the great Community Mansion House, the whole scene constituting simply an accentuation of the Victorian home idea.\textsuperscript{2} Pierrepont Noyes remembered that the children at Oneida, who were reared communally

\textsuperscript{1}Fogarty, "Conservative Christian Utopianism," esp. pp. 105-129. Three appendices to this study, comprising pp. 259-344, print the Oneida Family Register, a manuscript giving the names and personal data on the first 111 people who joined the Community; U.S. census data on Oneida Community members from 1850 through 1880; and maps showing the birthplaces of members. The characteristics of members also are suggested by the first three Annual Reports of the Oneida Association.

\textsuperscript{2}In his "Psychoanalytic Study," pp. 288-289, Thomas looks at this popular Community past-time from such a perspective.
in the Children's House, became conscious of their sexual drives at a later age than most children in external society.\(^1\) And, except during its foundation and breakup, Oneida's public relations with the external society remained very good. Noyes's practice might appear bizarre, but his ideals represented a fusion of characteristic elements from the larger American culture into an harmonious new synthesis.

Male continence may have represented an accentuation and synthesis of certain characteristic Victorian attitudes that sought internalized control of sexual expression. The primary importance of the technique was a practical one, however. Noyes declared that the "Oneida Community in an important sense owed its existence to the discovery of Male Continence" and that the principle underlying that practice "has been the very soul of its working constitution."\(^2\) Male continence undercut emotional and physical exclusiveness between couples and prevented the complications which having children would have posed to establishing the primary loyalty to the Community in all things. It allowed a degree of sexual pleasure, yet necessarily coupled this with stringent self-control and self-denial not found in artificial methods of birth control. Few would be tempted simply to make a "hobby" of the practice and withdraw from the normal round of Community life into exclusive emotional and sexual attachments. In short, male continence was a necessary precondition for the practical establishment of complex marriage as Noyes envisioned it.

The second form of social control which helped to prepare the way for complex marriage and the close community life associated with it was the practice of "mutual criticism," sometimes also called "free criticism" or simply "criticism."\(^3\) Mutual criticism served the same

\(^1\)P. B. Noyes, My Father's House, p. 148.
\(^2\)Noyes, Male Continence, p. 21.
\(^3\)The term "criticism" covered more than the relatively formalized procedures described here. Community members were supposed to openly criticize each other's faults and to encourage each other to improve their character, not only in such institutionalized sessions, but throughout their daily lives as well.
function for the late Putney Community and for the Oneida Community that confession of sins to the elders did for the Shakers. It provided the basic means of encouraging the desired character development and the commitment to the Community and its principles. The idea of mutual criticism went back to Noyes's experiences at Andover, where he had participated with a group of students preparing to be missionaries, in frank criticisms of each other's character, for the purpose of improvement. The individual to be criticized remained silent, except to correct obvious errors of fact, while the other members of the group, one by one, plainly and honestly hold him his faults.¹

During the difficult transition to complex marriage and more intense communal life at Putney in the winter of 1846-47, when new ideas and practices were being developed and emotional tensions were high, Noyes introduced a form of group criticism similar to that which he had found so valuable at Andover. This mutual criticism provided a many-sided mirror, reflecting an individual's strengths and weaknesses so that he could see how others responded to him and could improve his personal relations within the developing limitations of Community life and values. Mutual criticism brought faults and irritating personality characteristics into the open rather than letting the problems fester in secret.

Looking back, the Community newspaper noted the cathartic effects of this process during the winter of 1846-47 when the Perfectionists at Putney felt that they were "in the day of judgment."

Criticism had free course and it was like a fire on the tender life. . . . It was painful in its first application, but agreeable in its results. One brother who has a vivid memory of his sensations, says, that while he was undergoing the process he felt like death, as though he was dissected with a knife; but when it was over, he felt as if he had been washed. He said to himself, 'these things are all true, but they are gone, they are washed away.'²

¹Noyes, Confessions, p. 4. Also see Mutual Criticism, pp. 4-13.
²"Criticism," Circular 1 (March 21, 1852): 74. This was written by Noyes's sister Harriet.
In like manner, at the group level the old order was passing away, and the Community was being prepared for social integration around new beliefs to be internalized by each individual.

At Oneida, the increased size of the group and the lack of acquaintance of many members, led to several modifications of the practice. Initially:

Instead of subjecting volunteers for criticism to the scrutiny of the assembly, the Association appointed four of its most spiritual and discerning judges, to criticize all the members. The critics themselves were first criticized by Mr. Noyes, and then gave themselves to their work, from day to day for three weeks, till they had passed judgment on every character in the Association. Their method was first to ascertain as much as possible about the character of the individual about to be criticized, by inquiring among his associates, and then after discussing his character among themselves, to invite him to an interview, plainly tell him his faults, converse with him freely about his whole character, and give him their best advice.¹

Later on, members formed classes of ten or fifteen persons, and each separate group carried through a course of mutual criticism of all its members. Various other approaches also were tested, although the general tendency was to public criticism of individuals by the whole family, at their evening meetings.

As mutual criticism developed, it became the chief means of Community government. The Oneida Community, which considered itself an enlarged family, was also like a family in having no formal government, statutory regulations, or fixed forms. Rather, its arrangements were informal. Noyes quoted with approval Charles Nordhoff's opinion that mutual criticism would be an excellent means of discipline in most families.² Recognizing the close connection between mental and physical health, Noyes also encouraged the use of criticism to cure physical ailments. To Noyes, mutual criticism sometimes seemed to be a panacea, combining the best aspects of many different possible forms

¹First Annual Report of the Oneida Association, p. 11.

²Mutual Criticism, pp. 3, 88. Nordhoff's quotation was from his Communistic Societies, p. 413.
of government—monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. When mutual criticism was coupled with the removal or restriction of the sexual privileges of members, it provided an extremely powerful means of encouraging loyalty to the Community.

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Not only did Noyes have to establish new means of social control, but he also had to develop new marriage ideals and introduce them to his followers, if he intended to start the practice of a new marriage system. Without such overarching ideals, developed and modified in relation to experience, there is little likelihood that Noyes could successfully have carried his program through to completion. As we have seen, Noyes's basic critique of existing marriage practices and his proposed solution to the resultant problems, had originated between 1834 and 1837, and the arguments were further expressed publicly and elaborated in his newspapers between 1837 and 1847. The general thrust of Noyes's argument shows remarkable consistency over the years. The most succinct summary of the views which were published in his newspapers and internalized by his followers in the mid-1840s is found in Noyes's "Bible Argument; Defining the Relations of the Sexes in the Kingdom of Heaven." Although it was written in the early spring of

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1"It is Th[e]ocratic for in recognizing Truth as King, it recognizes God who is the source of all truth, and whose Spirit alone can give power of genuine criticism. It is Aristocratic, in as much as the best critics have the most power. It is Democratic, inasmuch as the privilege of criticism is distributed to all classes, and the highest attainments and skill are open to every one." Mutual Criticism, p. 94. This statement also appeared in slightly different form in Bible Communism, pp. 9-10.

2This "Bible Argument" may have been first printed in the First Annual Report of the Oneida Association, pp. 18-42. All quotations in this chapter are taken from this version. Apostate editions giving all or part of the "Bible Argument" were printed in 1850 and 1852. Noyes revised and enlarged his statement in his Bible Communism, pp. 24-64. An edition of the "Bible Argument" also may have been printed by the Oneida Association in 1848, prior to its publication in the Association's First Annual Report. A convenient summary of the main points in the "Bible Argument" is found in Noyes's, American Socialisms, pp. 623-637. For the history of the early publication of the "Argument" see the Circular 2 (April 18, 1852): 90.
1848, immediately after he had gone to Oneida, the "Bible Argument" basically is a reformulation of Noyes's earlier views, and it almost certainly expresses the ideals which underlay the initial efforts at Putney to introduce the practice of complex marriage in 1846.

The "Bible Argument" not only was a recapitulation of Noyes's earlier beliefs. In addition, the statement looked to the future. It contained almost all the important ideas for revising the relations between the sexes that Noyes would implement during the subsequent thirty years at Oneida, including complex marriage, male continence, and scientific propagation. The statement was adopted by the Oneida Association as its declaration of principles, was printed in its First Annual Report in 1849, and was boldly sent out to various public officials, including the Governor of New York State. The "Bible Argument" thus provided the pivotal formulation of Noyes's marriage beliefs. It will be further supplemented in the analysis which follows by reference to Noyes's more detailed articles in his newspapers and other writings.

As outlined in the "Bible Argument," the underlying problems with which Noyes sought to deal during his life were fourfold and integrally interconnected:

The chain of evils which holds humanity in ruin has four links, viz.—1st, a breach with God; (Gen. 3:8;) 2d, a disruption of the sexes, involving a special curse on woman, (Gen. 3:16;) 3d, the curse of oppressive labor, bearing specially on man; (Gen. 3:17-19;) 4th, Death. (Gen. 3:22-24.) These are all inextricably complicated [sic] with each other. The true scheme of redemption begins with reconciliation with God, proceeds first to a restoration of true relations between the sexes, then to reform of the industrial system, and ends with victory over death. . . . Holiness, free love, association in labor, and immortality, constitute the chain of redemption, and must come together in their true order.

From what precedes, it is evident that any attempt to revoluitionize sexual morality before settlement with God, is out of order. Holiness must go before free love. Perfectionists are not responsible for the proceedings of those who meddle with the sexual question, before they have laid the foundation of true faith and union with God. 1

Since Noyes had already securely established his religious foundations by this time, the "Bible Argument" primarily addresses the second problem—how true relations between the sexes are to be restored. To do this, the earthly institution of marriage, "which assigns the exclusive possession of one woman to one man," must be eliminated. Such marriage treats women in effect as a form of property, and thus has the same harmful effects that other types of selfish ownership of property have. The existing marriage regulations of the world are purely arbitrary, not founded in man's real nature. Hence, they lack divine sanction.

All experience testifies . . . that sexual love is not naturally restricted to pairs. . . . the secret history of the human heart will bear out the assertion that it is capable of loving any number of times and any number of persons, and that the more it loves the more it can love.¹

Noyes describes how the legal marriage restrictions that he and his followers experienced were inadequate:

The law of marriage "worketh wrath." It provokes to secret adultery, actual or of the heart. It ties together unmatched natures. It sunders matched natures. It gives to sexual appetite only a scanty and monotonous allowance, and so produces the natural vices of poverty, contraction of taste and stinginess or jealousy. It makes no provision for the sexual appetite at the very time when that appetite is strongest. By the custom of the world, marriage, in the average of cases, takes place at about the age of twenty-four; whereas puberty commences at the age of fourteen. For ten years, therefore, and that in the very flush of life, the sexual appetite is starved. This law of society bears heaviest on females, because they have less opportunity of choosing their time of marriage than men. This discrepancy between the marriage system and nature, is one of the principal sources of the peculiar diseases of women, of prostitution, masturbation, and licentiousness in general.²

In later articles in his newspapers, Noyes describes the larger social inadequacies of conventional antebellum marriage practices even more explicitly.³ Briefly, he argues that "marriage," in its present

¹Ibid., p. 24.

²Ibid., p. 25. The internal numbering of the original has been removed.

sense, was antagonistic to the "family." By this rather startling statement, he meant that existing patterns of "marriage" which grew out of romantic love, frequently separated a couple geographically, emotionally, and socially from their "family"—that is their parents and larger kinship and community ties—thereby further fragmenting social relations. As Noyes saw it, love attachments limited to individual couples were a sort of "egotism for two," part of the same disruptive and anti-social individualism that was represented by the rampant economically acquisitive spirit of the antebellum scene.

How were the diverse aspects of such romantic love to be dealt with constructively? Further individualistic fragmentation—for instance, free love outside a community context—was no solution. Instead of being a factor leading to community disruption, powerful sexual forces should be given natural channels and harnessed to provide a vital bond within a society. Noyes wanted all believers to be unified and to share a perfect community of interests, to replace the "I-spirit" with the "we-spirit." If believers were fully to love each other, while living in close communal association, they must be allowed to love each other fervently and physically, "not by pairs, as in the world, but en masse."

The necessary restrictions of the earthly period, governed by arbitrary human law, would eventually have to give way to the final heavenly free state, governed by the spirit in which "hostile surroundings and powers of bondage cease" and "all restrictions also will cease." A perfect unity in all respects would be the result. Each should be married to all—heart, mind, and body—in a complex marriage.

1"Bible Argument," pp. 21-22; Noyes, American Socialisms, pp. 626-627. The Freudian implications of this sort of statement are discussed by both Sandeen and Thomas from contrasting perspectives. In this regard, Noyes's reaction to Mormon polygamy is illuminating. Noyes recognized that both his and the Mormon systems for reorganizing the relations between the sexes were "masculine products of the Great Revivals." But complex marriage was fundamentally different both from monogamy and from polygamy, which Noyes felt only extended the worst features of monogamy.

"It is plain that the fundamental principle of monogamy and polygamy is the same; to wit, the ownership of woman by man. The monogamist claims one woman as his wife—the polygamist, two or a dozen: but
Such mutuality would be achieved by enlarging the home from the selfish individual level to that of an entire community. Noyes inveighed against the harmful effects of growing economic differentiation, which split the family, with the mother held in a sort of slave-like bondage in the home, while the father toiled in a hectic and uncertain world outside the home. The family must be reunified. The father must be reintegrated into the spiritual and economic leadership of the home and home economy, and both sexes must work side by side in vital and rewarding labor.\(^1\) One has a sense that Noyes looked almost toward a restoration of a manorial ideal in economic life. At Oneida, such a reintegration of all aspects of life into a Gemeinschaft-type unitary whole was to a large extent successfully achieved. Religious, economic, social and even sexual loyalties were raised from the individual to the group level. With a tight organization and a definite separation from surrounding society, Noyes's Perfectionist followers would be able to create one of the few successful examples of sustained group marriage ever recorded in history.

\(^{1}\text{Noyes's concerns for creating an enlarged, unitary family to overcome the sort of fragmentation which he found in the existing American family run throughout his writings as a prominent theme. Noyes felt that such concerns were not only the major preoccupation of his own movement, but also of both the Owenite and Fourierist waves of communal excitement, which had for their main idea "the enlargement of home--the extension of family union beyond the little man-and-wife circle to large corporations." Noyes, American Socialisms, p. 23. Some especially revealing articles on this topic include: "The Utility of Combination," Spiritual Magazine 2 (October 1, 1847): 131; "Practical Communism," Circular 1 (June 13, 1852): 121; "Industrial Marriage," Circular 3 (March 18, 1854): 179; "What Communism Offers," Circular 3 (October 5, 1854): 522; and "Our Home," Circular 3 (October 21, 1854): 550. Excellent analyses of Noyes's concerns for reorganizing the relation of the family and the industrial order are presented in Fogarty, "Oneida" and in Thomas, "Psychoanalytic Study," pp. 256-268.}
Having thought through his goals, established his authority, and set up the organizational mechanisms to inculcate his religious, economic, and social views in communal life, John Humphrey Noyes finally was in a position to initiate a move out of traditional monogamous marriage into a complex, group form. The impetus for the realization in practice of what still remained essentially a disembodied ideal was the increased intimacy of ever-closer association and the resulting mutual attachment networks that were proceeding to grow up. The trigger for the first actual departure from monogamous marriage was Noyes's attraction to Mary Cragin. On an evening in May 1846, the two had gone for a long walk together and Noyes had taken some liberties in personal intimacy. Rather than give way to his impulses, which were strong, Noyes managed to maintain self-control. True to form, he sought sanction for his beliefs, before putting them into practice. When the two of them returned home, Noyes called a meeting between them and his wife and George Cragin. After a searching talk, and strong opposition from George Cragin who felt that he was being taken advantage of again, the four of them agreed to give each other "full liberty" within the group.¹

From this beginning, the circle of attachments gradually was enlarged. In early November 1846, the Noyes, Cragin, Skinner, and Miller families signed a declaration of principles which declared: "All individual proprietorship either of persons or things is surrendered, and absolute community of interests takes the place of the laws and fashions which preside over property and family relations in the world." Noyes was to guide and direct "the family thus constituted."² A consolidation of households followed this declaration. The Noyeses and Cragins moved to the Campbell house, and the Skinners and Millers joined the Leonards at the Noyes homestead. The new arrangements would be elaborated and extended slowly, although not until the mid-1850s, approximately a half dozen years after the removal of the group to Oneida, would the system fully be established in an entire community.


²Ibid., pp. 205-207.
During the early stages of this move into the practice of complex marriage, strict secrecy, or what Noyes called "Bible Secretiveness," was maintained as much as possible. The new practices were revealed only to those deemed able to understand and support them. Only by maintaining such a cover could the difficult internal problems and conflicts generated by the new arrangements satisfactorily be worked out. Some of Noyes's followers, such as George Miller, initially found difficulty accepting the idea that the move was at root a principled one. Despite the effort to maintain secrecy, a surprising number of indications of the new departures found their way into the Community's newspaper. During the winter of 1846-1847, Noyes could not refrain from directly revealing the facts of the new system to a small number of Perfectionists outside Putney as well. Only a year later, he would write his "Bible Argument" at Oneida, a statement far more open than any of those ever put out by the early Shakers or Mormons as they attempted to institutionalize new marriage practices. During the five years between 1846 and 1851, Noyes dropped his editorship of the Community newspaper, so that he could devote his full efforts to organizing his new system of complex marriage.

The explicit communal affirmation of the new marriage system was made in a meeting of the Putney Perfectionists on June 1, 1847. As reported in the *Spiritual Magazine*, the Community newspaper, Noyes asked if it was not now "the time for us to commence the testimony that the Kingdom of God has come?" He declared: "Separate households, property exclusiveness have come to an end with us." In the discussion which followed, it was concluded that, although the existing arrangements fell short of the heavenly ideal (no marriage), the Community nevertheless represented an outpost of that Kingdom. The Putney believers therefore unanimously affirmed that "The Kingdom of God Has Come."

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1 This was the title of an article in the *Spiritual Magazine* (September 1, 1847): 120.
3 "Business for the Convention," *Circular* 1 (February 8, 1852): 54.
Not surprisingly, the transition to what was perceived as a heavenly model radically at variance with that of existing society resulted both in internal tensions for the Putney Perfectionists and in external tensions with their neighbors. The extent of the internal tensions connected with the new arrangements are suggested by numerous exhortations in the Spiritual Magazine to unity, obedience, self-control, and the like. Equally telling was the development of a variety of emotionally based illnesses of Community members, which Noyes attempted to treat, with varying success, through mutual criticism and faith cures. In their excitement at the idea that the Kingdom of God actually had arrived, unsuccessful attempts also were made to treat organic illnesses as well.¹

The greatest threat to the establishment of the new marriage arrangements, however, came when external hostility was fueled by information that leaked out through dissension within the group. That rumors of the new practices should circulate in distorted form and eventually receive direct confirmation from some of the Putney Perfectionists themselves was almost certain. Before this happened, the Perfectionists complicated their situation by making the mistake of attempting to draw into their circle two girls, Emma and Helen Campbell, as well as Helen's fifteen year old friend Lucinda Lamb. The anxieties of the parents and relatives of these girls about what their daughters might be getting involved with if they joined the Putney believers added explosive new hostilities to the ones the Perfectionists already faced. Closer scrutiny of the group was the natural result.

Matters came to a head when two less-than-fully-loyal Perfectionists, one of whom correctly surmised what was happening and the other of whom was told by Noyes directly about what he was doing, reported their information to anti-Perfectionist leaders in Putney and to the State's Attorney in Brattleboro. Noyes was indicted by a Grand Jury on two specific counts of adultery. Rather than stand trial for the charges or remain in Putney to face the mounting clamor of the townspeople, Noyes left the state, forfeiting his $2,000 bond. He finally went to

¹G. W. Noyes, Putney Community, pp. 276-280.
New York City, where he and his followers, several of whom soon joined him there, remained unrepentant. Noyes wrote to George Miller that he would continue to advocate his ideas, even should he eventually suffer the loss of all his personal property, imprisonment, or death. Yet he would not brave public opinion unnecessarily. Exactly what he or his followers would do remained an open question.

VII

The departure of the leadership of the Putney Perfectionists late in 1847 might easily have marked the end of this unusual effort at reorganizing marriage and community life. Instead, after a brief period of confusion, the chief loyalists from Putney began regrouping around Perfectionist holdings in the Oneida Reserve in central New York, early in March 1848. At Oneida, the unorthodox religious and social forms first pioneered in the Putney Community were further refined and organized. A third concern for the establishment of a form of economic organization which would allow for communal self-sufficiency, also received increasing attention. By 1857, when the Community for the first time showed a profit financially, the religious, social, and economic forms distinctive to Oneida had largely become set. Only Noyes's experiment in "scientific propagation" remained to be tried out in practice in the late 1860s.

The initial problem after the departure of Noyes and his closest followers from Putney in 1847, was to find a new base for communal operations. Several locations were considered, but Noyes wisely decided to settle his followers on the holdings of Jonathan Burt, a Perfectionist living in the Oneida Reserve. Not only was this location in the geographic center of New York State, a few miles from the Erie Canal, but more important, it was the strongest Perfectionist center in the state and thus could provide a valuable source of members and supporters. By January 1849, the original nucleus of Putney Perfectionists had expanded to 87; by February 1850, the number had risen to 172; and by February 1851, the total reached 205.1 The group at Oneida would rise to a

1These membership figures are based on the first three Annual Reports of the Oneida Association.
stable level of approximately 250—or some 300 in all—at Oneida and its sister community at Wallingford, Connecticut, after the consolidation of the various peripheral communities that were founded in the late 1840s and early 1850s. Although a few accessions to the group and a few defections from it would continue to occur, 84 of the 109 adults who joined in the first two years either died in the Community or lived there until the breakup.¹

This impressive degree of membership stability was connected with the carefully selected character of the group. Members were deliberately chosen so that they were fully loyal to Noyes's leadership and dedicated to his Perfectionist ideals. Members represented a wide and diversified range of occupational skills, emotional types, and personal interests necessary for the Community. Geographically, they came from most of the areas of New York and New England where sizable pockets of Noyes's Perfectionist followers lived. Furthermore, many of those attracted to Oneida were relatively affluent.² By 1857, the members had invested almost $108,000 in the Oneida Community and its branches. Only with such a large capital backing could the Community have continued to function despite a loss of $40,000 during the ten lean years before it finally got on its financial feet at Oneida.³ Many other intentional communities of the antebellum period failed because, unlike Oneida, they lacked adequate organizing principles, capable leadership, a diversified and dedicated membership, and sound financial backing.

¹Carden, Oneida, p. 77.

²This analyst finds difficulty in determining how simple social characteristics of the geographical, occupational, or economic status of Community members could alone account for the attraction of individuals to the group. Bible Communism, p. 22, accurately states that "the main body of those who have joined the Association at Oneida, are sober, substantial men and women, of good previous character, and position in society." Problems with the status anxiety and frustration-aggression models in explaining reform in general and Noyes's efforts in particular are discussed in Thomas, "Psychoanalytic Study," pp. 1-10.

³Handbook of the Oneida Community (Oneida, N.Y.: Office of the Oneida Circular, 1875), p. 15.
Even with so many factors in its favor, the Oneida Community's early years were very difficult, both physically and emotionally. The innovative spirit and dedication which contributed to the success of the Community during those early years is suggested by the rather drastic reorganization of male and female roles that took place at this time. Many of the modifications in activities, such as women working alongside the men in the labor of constructing buildings and in other outdoor work, were primarily a pragmatic response to the requirements of establishing a functioning community. Certain other modifications were largely of this character. Women cut their hair short for greater practicality and, partially for the same reasons, wore an unusual outfit composed of a mid-length shirt over pants, similar to the attire later populatized by Amelia Bloomer.¹

Changes in occupational activities normally assigned to one sex were made not simply for pragmatic reasons, but because of an explicit intellectual rationale as well. Noyes sought to do away with artificial distinctions between the sexes and to reintegrate both men and women into a cohesive community-home in vital labor together. Men and women therefore worked alongside each other in most Community departments, although in only two of the thirty-odd committees which eventually developed were they actually in charge, and those were exclusively women's departments.² Men also engaged in work traditionally considered to belong to women, including cooking, washing dishes, rearing children, knitting, and even the onerous task of sewing carpet rags. And because women were freed from the burdens of procreation by male continence, and from the difficulties of childrearing because the Community took on such responsibilities on a communal basis, they were able to participate more fully in almost all levels of Community life, including the daily religious-and-business meetings. Few societies in history have broken down the arbitrary occupational distinctions between the sexes as fully as did the Oneida Community.

Paradoxically, this drastic revision of sexual roles was accomplished in the face of John Humphrey Noyes's explicit belief in male superiority over women. Although Noyes emphasized the reciprocal relationship and mutual respect between the sexes, he made clear that man's primacy over woman was part of the very nature of the universe. The male-female relationship was even said to mirror that of the Father and the Son in the Godhead. St. Paul had said: "The head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God." Noyes concluded: "The female capacity is in its very nature negative. Weakness makes way for strength. Deficiency embraces fullness. Hence the Father takes precedence of the Son. 'My Father,' says Christ, 'is greater than I.'" Sexual role distinctions were not eliminated at Oneida, therefore, and women were encouraged to express their distinctively "feminine" skills and talents.

Despite the formal theoretical superiority of men over women at Oneida, the practical application of Noyes's religious beliefs within the structure of Community life, resulted, as we have seen, in a significant rise in woman's status. Partly this was due to Noyes's flexibility and to his continuing concern for the underlying spirit rather than any external forms. No external form was sacrosanct. Noyes thus was prepared to make major changes as he sought the best possible accommodation, in the interests of both sexes. Furthermore, both men and women shared a common religious commitment at Oneida which radically undercut normal social restrictions. Woman's primary responsibility was not to her husband or to her children, but to God, an article in the Community's newspaper declared. This meant that the common juxtaposition of male superiority and female inferiority no longer had much significance within the Community. As St. Paul had said, there is "neither male nor female in the Lord." If some women were, in fact, spiritually superior to

1"Condensation of Life," Spiritual Magazine 2 (March 15, 1846): 2. This important article was reprinted in the Berean, pp. 487-493. Also see Carden, Oneida, pp. 66-67.

some men—as they recognizably were—they could and should exercise more authority at Oneida than those men. Thus, the line of division of authority was not simply between men and women.

Instead, life at Oneida gradually came to be governed by a philosophy of "ascending and descending fellowship," in which those of higher "spirituality" exercised more authority than those of lesser attainments.¹ At the top of the oligarchic governing pyramid were a group of the most spiritual men, who oversaw most major decisions. They cooperated closely with the most spiritual women, who in turn were above the less spiritual men, who were above the less spiritual women, and so forth. Since those of greater spirituality generally were older than the less spiritual, there was an implicit age factor operating in determining community status. Because it was considered desirable to associate with those higher in the ascending fellowship, higher status individuals had access to a larger range of sexual contacts than did lower status members. Just how children entered into this hierarchy of ascending and descending fellowship is unclear, but the primary point of entry probably came with puberty and sexual initiation. Significantly, since spirituality was the basis of authority at Oneida, Noyes was forced to reverse the popular argument of the world that women were more spiritual than men.² Thus, Noyes's radical religious views were associated with a radical revision of sexual roles as well at Oneida. This revision eventually led to a new "conservative" synthesis.

VIII

The primary factor leading to the revision of the relations between the sexes at Oneida undoubtedly was the institutionalization of the complex marriage system within the entire Community. This was a difficult and often an extremely painful process. Lack of access to first-hand records describing this transition phase openly from an

¹This approach is developed in "Condensation of Life," Spiritual Magazine 1 (March 15, 1846): 3-4. Also see "Socialism in Two Directions," Circular 3 (April 29, 1854): 250.

²"Woman's Character," Circular 3 (January 14, 1854): 72.
internal perspective necessarily makes any analysis somewhat conjectural, but the Community newspapers give enough information that at least some of the general lines of development can be partially reconstructed. Even at Putney, with a small and carefully tested group of followers, the introduction of complex marriage had been difficult and only partially achieved. But at Oneida, under trying living conditions and with many new Community members who were only minimally acquainted with each other and with the new practices, the difficulties must have been enormous. Internal and external tensions inevitably resulted.

The essence of the complex marriage system which Noyes was seeking to institute among his followers was the elimination of "selfishness"—the subordination of individual self-interest to the larger and more inclusive interests of the community, which in turn was dedicated to achieving God's will. Even individual sexual loyalties, usually formalized through "marriage" in the external society, had to be given up. Sexual loyalties instead were raised to the Community level, to what was in Noyes's opinion an "enlarged family." The resulting ties were at least as binding and demanding as those of ordinary worldly marriage. "Special love," or any exclusive romantic attachments were rigorously discouraged, as were any special individual attachments to offspring, or even any close friendships between members of the same sex. Because of the fragmentation that Noyes and his followers had experienced, they placed a great emphasis on the achievement of unity and community cohesion.

In most instances, the "green-eyed demon jealousy" was exorcized through Community pressure and free criticism. More difficult cases frequently involved the suspension or limitation of sexual privileges for a time until the ostracized individual began to shape up to Community standards. In some cases, individuals who became overly attached to each other were separated by sending one person off to the Wallingford, Connecticut, sister community for a time. In at least one instance, a couple which could not be separated in their "special love" for each other, were instructed by Noyes to find other individuals and have children by them—and they obeyed.¹ Abel Easton, a Community leader, expressed

¹Estlake, Oneida Community, pp. 74-77.
the core sentiment at Oneida when he declared: "No matter what his other qualifications may be, if a man cannot love a woman and be happy in seeing her loved by others, he is a selfish man, and his place is with the potsherds of the earth. There is no place for such in the 'Kingdom of Heaven.'"¹

To institutionalize such a system was understandably difficult. The image that Noyes used to describe the transition process over which he and his trusted associates presided was that of an army sent into a foreign territory. When sent for military purposes alone, it is "placed under the rules of martial discipline, which have reference to hostile surroundings and are very restrictive." "But an army sent for the purpose of introducing civil institutions and settling a foreign territory, ought to pass, as soon as it can do so safely, from the restrictions of martial law, to the conditions of permanent civilized life."² This latter state was Noyes's goal in attempting to introduce the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, and that objective was largely achieved by the mid-1850s at Oneida.

With this martial image in mind, one can more easily understand the significance of many of the articles of moral exhortation which appeared in the newspapers of the Putney and Oneida Communities between 1846 and 1853. During this period, endless articles inveighed in favor of total and unquestioning obedience, unity, love, harmony, right devotion, and the like. Others exhorted Community members to overcome jealousy, backbiting, shame, bashfulness, and similar problems. The tone was, indeed, a martial one, and one article even was entitled "The Soldier Spirit." Psychosomatic illnesses and faith cures were frequently discussed, several problems of temporary insanity and suicidal tendencies cam up, and there were some slight problems with "spiritualist" communications which could have become a threat to Noyes's authority had they become more organized. Shortly before the expulsion from Putney, John Miller, Noyes's trusted associate, wrote that he felt like Moses

¹Ibid., p. 35.

²"Bible Argument," p. 18. Compare this with the Shaker analysis of the process of transition.
before the Red Sea parted: He knew that God would find a way to lead them through, but he had no idea how. Throughout the period before 1853, the atmosphere often seemed tense, and the direction of the Community sometimes appeared unclear. As the Oneida Circular recalled:

The years 1850, '51, '52 were years of external trial to the community. First came the conflict with internal 'evils,' such as insubordination, disloyalty, and pleasure-seeking, culminating in the withdrawal of several families which seemed at times to jeopardize the very existence of the community.

In 1849, about a year from the foundation of the Oneida Community, Noyes—who typically tried to absent himself from conflict situations which he couldn't handle—moved with a nucleus of some of his most loyal Putney followers to a small community outpost at Willow Place in Brooklyn, New York. He lived there during most of the time between 1849 and 1854, when John Miller who had been the primary leader at Oneida died. During those years, and particularly after he once again formally took over the editorship of his newspaper in 1851, Noyes wrote with a sense of surprising distance from his community ventures. His column "Ideas from the Communes," for instance, referred not to other communal experiments, but to his own Associated Communities at Oneida, New York; Wallingford, Connecticut; Newark, New Jersey; and Cambridge and Putney, Vermont. Noyes wrote that the Brooklyn community where he was living, and not Oneida, was really the center of his efforts.

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1 Letter of August 1847, printed in the *Spiritual Magazine* (September 1, 1847): 126. In this same issue, page 124, Miller writes an article entitled "The Soldier Spirit," which suggests the same line of argument in Noyes's later statement in the "Bible Argument," p. 18.


3 See the *Circular* 3 (January 17, 1854): 75. This was an irregular column.

4 "Brooklyn and Oneida," *Circular* 1 (November 16, 1851): 6. Noyes wrote:

"The Brooklyn company which is engaged in the business of this paper, has heretofore been called sometimes a branch of the Oneida Association—strictly speaking however it is an independent company; and so far as there is any affiliation between the two, the Oneida Association is the Branch" (italics in original).
One has the sense that in this period, Noyes, deeply afraid of failure or loss of control, was hedging his bets. Faced with uncertainty in his communal ventures, he seemed to be returning to his first concern—to get his ideas before the public through his newspaper. He left to his capable subordinates who had internalized his values, the difficult task of translating those values into community life. This pattern would continue throughout the life of the Oneida Community. During the years between 1842 and 1880, Noyes spent only about half of his time at Putney and at Oneida, and he typically left the Community at times of major stress.\(^1\) In retrospect, this appears to have been the wisest thing he could have done. Few prophets have sufficient wisdom to know when to step partially aside after they have set up the value foundations of their communities, and leave the pragmatic problems of implementing their ideals to capable subordinates. By being a distant figure above the battle, so to speak, Noyes and his ideas could serve as a unifying force in times of conflict.

External pressures also contributed to Community tensions in this period. In 1850 and 1851, Grand Juries of both Oneida and Madison Counties, on whose boundary the Community was located, heard complaints about the Perfectionists from enemies, probably including seceders. The Madison County Grand Jury adopted a "wait and see" attitude. The Oneida County Grand Jury at Utica, however, called Community men and women to testify early in 1851, grilling them with obscene and insulting questions about their most personal experiences. The deportment of Community members, who answered the questions freely and honestly, maintaining dignity and perfect manners, helped to diffuse the hostility. Nevertheless, based on this intense pressure and harassment, the leaders at Oneida actually commenced considering other possible areas where they could relocate their Community. But a petition supporting the

\(^1\)Fogarty, "Conservative Christian Utopianism," p. 162. Noyes characteristically went to New York City, or, later, to the Wallingford, Connecticut, branch community. Robert Thomas commented wryly to me that instead of retreating from the bustle of the city to a rural idyl in times of stress, Noyes instead went from a rural base to the City.
Perfectionists remaining in the area gained overwhelming public support, and influential local power figures interceded on their behalf.\(^1\)

The success of the Oneida Community in resisting such pressures undoubtedly was due in part to what they had learned from their problems with the residents at Putney. At Putney, hostility had come to the breaking point when a local girl, Lucinda Lamb, had been encouraged to join the Perfectionists against her parents' wishes. When the Oneida venture was begun, on the other hand, greater circumspectness was observed. Direct efforts to convert local residents were scrupulously avoided and the Perfectionists made it plain that they simply were trying to mind their own business. As early as 1850, the Oneida Community publicly stated that it was not actively seeking new members, although it continued to attract new people who were familiar with Noyes's writings. After 1856, the Perfectionists stopped considering applicants for admission except in rare cases.\(^2\)

The exigencies of successfully establishing complex marriage thus necessitated a move away from Noyes's universalistic efforts to convert the entire world, to a more restricted goal of establishing a tightly-knit, internally unified community. At Putney, as George W. Noyes noted, the primary problem had been to break free from the bonds of conventional morality and attitudes; at Oneida, having broken through that initial barrier, the goal was to reestablish order and avoid the potentially disintegrative effects of the subtle spirit of pleasure-seeking.\(^3\) Such order could not easily be established if there were many new people joining the Community or leaving it all the time.\(^4\)

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1Parker, Yankee Saint, pp. 187-189.


3"Editorial Correspondence," Free Church Circular 3 (October 21, 1850): 281.

4In his Home-Talk "Disasters and Successes of Perfectionism," Spiritual Magazine 2 (January 10, 1850): 353-357, Noyes discusses at great length the various betrayals through "bad partnerships" and "false fellowships" which had continually undercut his efforts and had resulted in negative publicity for his cause. He concluded: "The consequence, or
Internal tensions over the new complex marriage practices continued to pose severe problems. On October 3, 1850, a rare public airing of internal Perfectionist disharmony over the new marriage system appeared in a letter by a believer from Wisconsin, a letter that was prominently featured in the Community newspaper.¹ The man bitterly asked "from the depths of my soul" why the Oneida Community insisted in maintaining unorthodox sexual practices which did nothing but alienate many potential converts to holiness who otherwise were in agreement with the group. In response to this eloquent and deeply felt outburst, John Miller simply replied that their sexual theory was a necessary part of the demands of God, and could not be accepted or rejected on opportunistic grounds. Another Community member also noted that a certain recklessness in following the truth in spite of possible consequences was necessary to overcome individual selfishness and achieve the Kingdom of God on earth.

These responses by no means adequately dealt with the entire critique raised, and they did not show the thoroughness that Noyes himself typically used in refuting the opinions of his adversaries. Furthermore, to allow and indeed even to highlight in an open public presentation the explicit discussion of such highly divisive issues was virtually unprecedented in Noyes's newspapers. The feeling of opposition to complex marriage, as well as the less than wholehearted support that Noyes was receiving even from his loyal subordinates on this issue, are suggested in this exchange. Very probably, John Humphrey Noyes's decision to resume formal editorship of his newspaper in 1851, may have been in part an effort to avoid losing control over both his newspaper and his communities, in the wake of the deep-seated opposition that was developing to his policies.²

¹"A Complaint Answered," Free Church Circular 3 (October 3, 1850): 270. The letter was from a Charles Degroff of Wisconsin.

²The immediate occasion for the move was the accidental burning of the printing office at Oneida in November 1851. The decision to relocate in Brooklyn rather than to rebuild at Oneida, may well have
The climax of the early difficulties over the institutionalization of complex marriage, and the beginning of the resolution of those problems, apparently came during the six months between March and August 1852, when compelling evidence suggests that complex marriage was temporarily discontinued at Oneida. The obvious external reason for this abrupt change in the Community's course, was a virulent newspaper crusade launched by a New York religious paper, the Observer. It and a number of other newspapers took up the hue and cry, and in a sustained and well-organized campaign, they attacked Oneida as a moral eyesore.

On March 7, 1852, evidently in response to such pressure, the Circular made an unexpected announcement. Although the Perfectionists felt that their course had received "vindication in reason and conscience," they nevertheless recognized that their "liberty on this subject is looked upon with jealousy and offense by the surrounding society."

And in view of the fact, we have decided to forego it and withdraw from the position we have held. It may be understood that the Oneida Association, and all Associations connected with it, have receded from the practical assertion of their views, and formally resumed the marriage morality of the world, submitting themselves to all ordinances and restrictions of society and law on this subject. This definite concession to public opinion, made in good faith, we trust will be satisfactory and give peace.

The statement went on to say that this step was intended only as a temporary retreat that would last until there would be a "change of public feeling" which would gradually extend the "area of freedom" tolerated. By its action, the Community was graphically demonstrating that it was "not attached to forms," even to its own. "To be able to conform to any circumstances, and any institutions, and still preserve spiritual freedom" was the goal of the Perfectionists. There was also a certain sense of looking back at a chapter of a story that

been due to a number of factors, including the insecure position of the Community at Oneida, and Noyes's desire to have his press located closer to the centers of public opinion.

1 "The Past, Present and Future," Circular 1 (March 7, 1852): 66. The Observer's campaign contributed to severe local problems for the Community, as well as larger public relations difficulties.
was already completed: In some important sense, the Community had let its "previous activities pass into history." The Community's new efforts would be devoted to the establishment of a free press and, to what must appear a most puzzling objective, indeed—the "abolition of death."

What is one to make of this remarkable statement? To begin with, there is every reason to believe that the practice of complex marriage was, in fact, discontinued during this period. Although "Bible Secretiveness" might sanction speaking in a sort of code language or not telling a hostile public the whole truth, the honesty of Noyes and his followers could always be relied upon when they made direct factual assertions. Their word was their bond. Furthermore, numerous articles over the next six months either directly or indirectly support the contention that complex marriage was temporarily discontinued at this time.1 Had it continued to be secretly practiced, Community dissidents probably would have passed on that information to a hostile press. And it seems significant that when the Oneida Community finally gave up complex marriage forever in 1879, the language and constructions used were in several instances almost verbatim repetitions of those used in the 1852 statements.2

Looking back at that last discontinuance of complex marriage in 1879, which was said at the time to be only a temporary move, Abel Easton noted that:

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"The Oneida Community has in a certain sense, discharged its mission, and may be looked upon as in the past. By its change of position last winter, it surrendered the distinctive and peculiar characteristic which constituted its individuality and fell back within the lines of worldly toleration, and under the forms of selfish law. Of course it is no longer, as to outward force and feature, the original Oneida Association."

In a conclusion suggesting a sort of forced cheerfulness, the article asserts that at least the past accomplishments of the Community are a part of history and can "never be touched, or blotted out, or forgotten." These accomplishments prove that this kind of unselfish association is possible.

On more than one occasion previously, in the presence of sickness in the family or of persecution or other causes, John H. Noyes proposed that the Community as a body consider itself under criticism, and proclaim a fast from conjugal freedom; making a time of earnest self-examination and spiritual improvement, and proving their power of self-control in refraining from, as well as using, their freedom. Such seasons of fasting sometimes lasted a few days or six months, and they were strictly observed by all. Their right to exercise freedom as a principle was no more abandoned in the public suspension of complex marriage than it was in their former more private experiences of temporary suspension. It was rather an assertion of their right, either to use their freedom or to yield to expediency; they elected to yield until such time as they deemed it expedient to do otherwise. At the same time, they had pledged themselves to the public, and having assumed that pledge, of course considered themselves bound to observe their promise until they were prepared to renounce it as publicly as they had professed it (emphasis added).  

The period from the beginning of March to the end of August 1852 is the only time in the history of the Oneida Community when there is any indication of such a six month suspension of complex marriage. And if such a suspension in fact took place in 1852, it would appear to have been both a response to external pressure, as well as more fundamentally a reaction to an internal sense of malaise for which communal penance needed to be done. 

A further key to understanding the motivation behind this apparent retreat from complex marriage is Noyes's enigmatic observation that for a time the primary efforts of the Community would be devoted to the "abolition of death," rather than to marriage reform. A later article reasserts this primary concern, clearly indicating that "death" was being used in a special sense: If this attack on "death" be madness, yet there is a method to it. 2 In fact, when Noyes speaks of trying to "abolish death," he usually is referring to his efforts to overcome sickness and ill-health, especially mental and emotional disorders. Such psychologically related ailments are the first ones which must be eliminated if the "King of Terrors" is eventually to lose his hold over the mind and spirit of man. 3  

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1 Estlake, Oneida Community, pp. 40-41.

2 "The Second Course," Circular 1 (April 4, 1852): 82.

3 It is significant that many of these articles coupled the terms "disease and death." For Noyes's basic statement on the topic, see "Abolition of Death" in the Berean, pp. 476-486.
Thus what Noyes may be saying here, in his own special code language to be understood by his followers but not by the outside world, is that for a time, the severe mental and emotional problems (many of them associated with the introduction of complex marriage) are to be the primary concern of the Community. This interpretation also is supported by the prevalence of articles in this period on topics such as nervousness, faith and unbelief, insanity, spiritualist excesses, inattention, the uselessness of self-condemnation, problems of insubordination, and the like. The Oneida Community apparently was engaging in a policy of deliberate retrenchment, an internal and external penance which would prepare a solid foundation for a second and successful effort to reintroduce the practice of complex marriage later.

The threat of internal insubordination and even of apostasy also was facing Noyes in this period. The problems of "bridling sensuality" and placing such drives at the service of the larger purposes of the Community are discussed in numerous articles. Noyes himself did not always appear to be contributing to the solution of such problems, when he wrote in enthusiastic terms of God being "married to matter" and the like.\(^1\) An even more concrete threat of outright apostasy also existed. In late March and early April, two articles appeared on Judas Iscariot,\(^2\) who "was not merely an unprincipled traitor, but a positive rival of Christ." The articles make clear that a high Community member was seen as playing the role of Judas.

In these articles, the Community Judas is portrayed as one whose sin was that of "covetousness"—of affections. His character is contrasted to that of the Mary who impulsively anointed Christ with expensive ointment. This Mary, and her Community counterpart, "had little worldly prudence. Her love exceeded her discretion. She was found at Jesus' feet, absorbed in his discoursing," abandoned

\[\ldots\] to the attractions of her heart—a dangerous susceptibility in the case of misplaced affections, but her glory as a follower of

\(^1\)Circular 1 (February 1, 1852): 51.

\(^2\)"The Rival of Christ," Circular 1 (April 4, 1852): 82; "A Bible Contest," Circular 1 (April 11, 1852): 87. These articles were written by Noyes's sister Harriet.
Christ. This led her, at the loss of dignity, into that wonderful
gratitude and love, which Christ promised should be recorded of her
as a memorial of praise to all generations.

But Judas, with his base, uncomprehending heart, could not appreciate
Mary's "tribute of affection," and so betrayed Christ for a paltry
thirty pieces of silver to the public authorities.

There can be little doubt as to the identity of the principle
Community members whose relationship was being obliquely discussed in
these articles. Almost certainly, George Cragin, a member of the central
committee and one of Noyes's earliest followers, stood in the position
of Judas; his wife, Mary Cragin, was represented by the wayward Mary
whose devotion to Christ brought her everlasting glory; and, of course,
John Humphrey Noyes, as God's special representative, served symbolically
in Christ's position. Full documentation of this complex triangular
relationship of Noyes and the Cragins, which apparently led to George
Cragin's temporary estrangement from Noyes, will not be provided here.¹

Some of the probable general outlines can be indicated, however.

John Humphrey Noyes's relationship with Mary Cragin always had
exhibited strong overtones of idolatry, the sort of "special love" which
he so strongly discouraged in his followers. Being for all intents and
purposes supplanted by Noyes in his wife's affections could not but
have proved galling to George Cragin, especially when both the Noyeses and
Cragins were living together in Brooklyn between 1849 and 1851. After
Mary Cragin's tragic death in a boat accident in July 1851, Noyes's grief
proved almost inconsolable. For over a year afterward, nearly every
issue of his newspaper contained fulsome tributes to her character,
examples of her writing, and the like. In 1853, Noyes's *Bible Communism*,

¹If one can "break the code" used during this tense period of Noyes's
communal experimentation, all the parts fit together like pieces in a
jigsaw puzzle. By writing about the Oneida Community in terms of
Biblical characters, the paper could operate simultaneously on two
levels. On the simple, public level, a person would see articles of
moral exhortation. On a more private level, those who knew more about
the inner details of the Community could find out what was going on at
Oneida. I hope eventually to write a book length study showing more
clearly than is possible in this short compass, the complex inter-
relationships between Noyes's theories and his personal life.
which provided his final important summation of his sexual and marriage
theories, was dedicated obliquely to her memory:

To Mary of Nazareth, the blessed of all generations, who so beauti-
fully yielded to the will of heaven, though it contravened the
fashion of this world, and, at the hazard of her good name, and
of all earthly affections and interests, became the mother of
Christ, and so the mother of Christianity, this work is respectfully
and loyally dedicated.¹

The recognition of Noyes's continuing involvement with his wife,
Mary Cragin, and with her memory even after she had died, could easily
have disturbed George Cragin. Furthermore, conflicts evidently also
existed between the small, relatively comfortable Brooklyn elite group
which printed the newspaper, and the larger group of struggling Per-
fectionists at Oneida which provided their financial support. Noyes's
own apparent loss of his emotional moorings after Mary Cragin's death
did little to help in maintaining Community confidence in him or in his
ideas. It should be noted, however, that because of Noyes's own extreme
sensitivity to external conditions and his need to validate the truth
of his own ideas by having them accepted by his followers, his emotional
instability at this time could well be seen primarily as a reflection
of the disorder then present in his communities, rather than simply as
his individual problem.

To overcome these personal and communal conflicts, Noyes launched
into a wholehearted effort to reestablish common values among his

¹Bible Communism, p. [4]. The reprint of this book by Porcupine
Press prints this dedication, but the AMS Press reprint inexcusably omits
it. Note that Noyes could use any of the various Mary's in the New
Testament in referring symbolically to Mary Cragin, as he wrote for his
followers at Oneida. No literal identity is being established here
between a particular Biblical character and a particular follower of
Noyes, any more than Noyes's own self-identification with Christ in
many of the articles is intended in a literal sense. The Bible stories
are freely adapted to say important things about the present.

The intense veneration for Mary Cragin at Oneida is suggested in
"Community Journal," Circular 5 (October 19, 1868): 245, as quoted in
Carden, Oneida, p. 70. In 1868, practical considerations made it
appropriate to rebury Mary Cragin's remains. Looking at her skull,
"all who knew her, recognized the contour--so beautifully feminine.
[Her son George] expressed a wish that the skull might be retained.
The wish was unanimous. It is to be varnished and preserved."
following, values which could provide a rationale for their existence. Not only did his newspaper make repeated exhortations to unity, but it also systematically reprinted articles from the mid-1840s which he had originally used to prepare the minds of his supporters for closer communal living and complex marriage at Putney. Individual and communal purification was stressed as part of a larger effort to achieve God's objectives on earth.

These and other measures apparently proved effective. On August 1, 1852, an article by George Cragin reaffirmed his total submission to God's will (as mediated through Noyes). In the next issue, an article on "The Character of Peter" noted that although Peter's denial of Christ might appear culpable, Peter nevertheless had come back to become Christ's "devoted follower." Throughout August a new optimism was present in the newspaper. The tone rose to a radiant crescendo in the August 29 issue, with articles such as "The Resurrection King," "The Light Shineth in Darkness," and "The Heart Satisfied." Most important, that same issue contained Noyes's "Theocratic Platform" which apparently served to announce to the world the reestablishment of complex marriage and close communal life at Oneida. Among the planks of the platform were: "Abandonment of the entire fashion of this world--especially marriage and involuntary propagation," "Cultivation of free love," and "Dwelling together in association or complex families."

Although tensions within the group continued to be present, by the end of 1852 the worst was over emotionally both for Noyes and for Oneida. With the basic value premises and marital forms established, the primary effort of the Community increasingly was turned toward developing successful and satisfying economic arrangements. After the death of the overworked and exhausted John Miller in June 1854, Noyes returned to Oneida to take over personal charge. Recognizing that he

3 Circular 1 (August 29, 1852): 170. The capitalization of the original has been eliminated in this quotation from the "Theocratic Platform."
had overextended himself in starting so many different communal ventures, Noyes consolidated the six associated groups into two communities at Oneida and Wallingford.

This action, and the development of a popular line of animal traps for sale, succeeded in putting Oneida on its financial feet by 1857 for the first time in its history. An increasingly secular tone and relaxed atmosphere was suggested in the Community newspaper. Instead of the endless abstruse theological presentations of earlier years, the newspaper broadened its coverage, giving numerous chatty articles on community affairs; discussions of economic matters, including articles such as "Christ: A Business Character";¹ and an extraordinary range of accounts of Noyes's diversified interests from botany to world politics and social life. The transition process at Oneida was largely completed. Noyes and his followers had passed "from the restrictions of martial law, to the conditions of permanent civilized life." For more than twenty additional years, the Oneida Community would successfully embody the new religious, marital, and economic ideals inspired by John Humphrey Noyes.

X

The story of Oneida would not be complete, however, without a final postscript on Noyes venture in "scientific propagation," or, to use the term that he coined for his eugenics experiment, "stirpiculture." By 1868, the Community had securely established itself and Noyes was prepared to take one further step in his efforts to institutionalize what was in effect his "continuing revolution." The ideal of scientific propagation had first been proposed in print by Noyes as early as 1848.² In 1868, Noyes decided that certain Community members would be allowed to have children, subject to the approval of a stirpiculture committee, which he initially headed. During the next decade, forty-five live

¹Circular 3 (April 15, 1854): 226.

²Parker, Yankee Saint, pp. 253-254. Presumably Bible Communism as printed in 1848 is the same text as the "Bible Argument" printed in First Annual Report of the Oneida Association.
children were born under these regulated arrangements. Most participants selected their own mates and applied as couples, but probably one-fourth of all unions actually were suggested by the committee.¹

Just as Noyes's maintenance of a press to disseminate his ideas to the world had been part of his effort to avoid an excessively inward-looking community, the stirpiculture experiment served as part of an attempt to avoid a situation of complacency and communal stagnation, and to expand the practice of the Community beyond the narrow limits of the effectively celibate system which had hitherto existed. Unfortunately, however, this very effort to strengthen and revitalize the Community and its ideals, eventually became a major factor contributing to the destruction of that Community. As first practiced, stirpiculture still demanded the total subordination of individual attachments to the good of the whole. Inevitably, nonetheless, the stirpiculture unions tended to introduce divisive special affections into the Community and thus they led almost imperceptibly back toward the selfish forms of this-worldly marriage.²

Despite the good intentions which underlay the stirpiculture experiment, that program and the other sexual practices of the Oneida Community eventually became a major focus of the complex organizational and emotional conflicts which led to the breakup of the group. Setting the stage for the breakup was the decline in the ability of the aging and increasingly deaf John Humphrey Noyes to lead the Community, and the inability of other leadership successfully to fill the place he was vacating. Connected with this and underlying it was a decline in the commitment of the group to their original religious ideals. A younger generation lacking direct experience of the early struggles of the

¹See Carden, Oneida, p. 63. She bases her figures on H. H. Noyes and G. W. Noyes, Eugenics, Genetics and the Family, 1: 378.

²An indispensable presentation of the conflicts associated with the dissolution of complex marriage is Robertson, The Breakup. This could serve as a model for a similar scholarly study of the dissolution of Mormon polygamy. Among the other important discussions of stirpiculture and the breakup, see Parker, Yankee Saint, pp. 254-291, Fogarty, "Conservative Christian Utopianism," pp. 200-240, and Carden, Oneida, pp. 61-65, 89-111.
Perfectionists developed an ever more skeptical and secular bent. Without a strong common value commitment, justifying the intense self-sacrifice necessary to make the Community's distinctive organization work was more and more difficult. Actions by the governing central committee members came to be viewed as simply arbitrary and lacking in any deeper rationale than self-interest.

With the breakdown of common values, a number of specific sexual tensions which had always been at least potentially present became very divisive. Perhaps the most serious problem was the chafing of youth and lower status community members under the system of ascending and descending fellowship, which limited the sexual contacts of those of lower status. The stirpiculture experiment also made clear that only those deemed fit would be allowed to have children, thus further increasing resentments within the group. Had a high degree of commitment to basic ideals existed, such frustrations could have been minimized, but in the absence of such a level of commitment, an internal power struggle and factionalization developed. When an external campaign against the Community was launched by Professor John W. Mears at Syracuse in the mid-1870s, an internally weakened community no longer was confident of its mission and of the loyalty of its members.

Rather than prolong an increasingly uncertain internal and external situation, the Community leaders therefore acted gracefully to terminate their distinctive sexual arrangements in August 1879, while their venture could still be counted a success. In discontinuing thirty-three years of unorthodox Perfectionist marital practice, the Community announced that they were placing themselves "not on the platform of the Shakers, on the one hand, nor of the world, on the other, but on Paul's platform which allows marriage but prefers celibacy." The Community also stated, in what may well prove a fitting epitaph:

"The past history of the Oneida Community is at least secure. Its present social position and its future course, whatever they may be, have no power to change the facts of the past; and the more these are studied, the more remarkable they will appear. These

1Robertson, The Breakup, p. 160.
things prove, as does also their present course in giving up that phase of their communal life which has caused offense, that the Communists have not been the reckless bacchanalians a few have represented them. The truth is, as all the world will one day see and acknowledge, that they have not been pleasure-seekers and sensualists but social architects, with high religious and moral aims, whose experiments and discoveries they have sincerely believed would prove of value to mankind.¹

XI

What is the underlying significance of John Humphrey Noyes's life and of the distinctive communal ventures which he helped to found? Looking back, the scholar is struck initially by Noyes's remarkable self-conscious awareness of the arbitrary human basis for social order. When he asked himself for the record in 1853 what the "principles" that he and his followers held were, Noyes responded: "Our fundamental principle is religion."² Note that in making this statement, Noyes is not saying anything about what the specific content of their principles was—whether about God, Christ, or whatever—but he is talking only about the form of those beliefs. In effect, he is saying that his followers believed in "having a religion," that is, in having a common basis of belief. This spirit of solidarity and unity might be an absolute—or to put it differently, some accepted basis of social order had to be accepted as a given—but the content of religious and social practice could be altered drastically, depending on circumstances. In like manner, Noyes could clearly see that none of the varied ways of assigning the sexes to each other sexually in a possessive marriage relationship had any ultimate validity. The ideal state, he felt, must be something more.

Realizing at both a basic emotional and intellectual level that existing social patterns were inadequate and subject to change, Noyes did not go on to make the mistake of lesser minds and hearts of simply assuming that "anything goes." Instead, he almost compulsively sought a new basis of common assumptions and unity to restore the possibility of normal human relationships. With his strong sense of personal destiny

¹Ibid., p. 161. ²Bible Communism, p. 6.
and his unwillingness to try to conform to the shifting and unreliable patterns that he perceived around him (one does not try to join a sinking ship), Noyes felt a strong need to create a form of unified community life which would sanction the validity of his views. As he put it in 1837: "God has set me to cast up a highway across this chaos, and I am gathering out the stones and grading the track as fast as possible."¹

Unlike many lesser reformers and religious leaders, Noyes insisted that the intellectual or creative person must accept responsibility for the social consequences of his beliefs. Noyes would not break down existing social patterns until he felt that he had something better to offer and was convinced that he stood a reasonable chance of introducing the new ways successfully. For twelve years from 1834 until 1846, he worked to set up the basis for new ideals and practices within himself and among his followers. Only after he and his followers had internalized a new basis for morality, did Noyes lead the way out of the marriage customs of the "apostasy" and into those of the "resurrected state." Throughout this effort, Noyes always sought to maintain a harmonious balance between "the two great principles of human existence," "solidarity" and "liberty," which, though they appeared antagonistic, "like the centripetal and centrifugal forces of nature," were in fact "designed to act upon human life in equilibrium."²

Although the idiosyncratic forms of social life at Oneida—particularly complex marriage—have chiefly attracted the attention of popular and scholarly writers, Noyes's greatest importance is as a brilliantly original social thinker and synthesizer. For more than forty years, Noyes and his followers struggled with problems of social order and disorder, not just in theory but also in practice. They went through a transition to a radically new state of being and they succeeded in making that new way of life work in practice for more than twenty

¹G. W. Noyes, Religious Experience, p. 306. This is a part of the larger portion of Noyes's letter to George Harrison which was not printed by Theophilous Gates as part of the Battle-Axe Letter.

years. Noyes's observations from his own experience on the problems and prospects of transitional periods of human life, ranks with the analyses of the best of present-day social theorists, if only one is able to penetrate his unusual religious and intellectual framework—to have "eyes to see" and "ears to hear."

Noyes's views as to what constitutes a true "conservative" may fittingly summarize his whole career. He wrote:

The truth is, all present institutions are growths from an imperfect society and are adapted only to a transition state. This is true of religious as well as political institutions, marriage as well as slavery. The spirit of heaven in order to fulfill its full development in this world requires that we be ready to forsake all institutions adapted to the selfish state of society, and to expect something new and better. A truly conservative man therefore will be ready for change. He will not violently or unwisely attack any present institutions, but he will be ready and on the lookout for change.¹

John Humphrey Noyes and his communities deserve the kind of serious scholarly attention that they are only now beginning to receive.

¹ "Liberty to Change," Circular 3 (August 8, 1854): 422.
CHAPTER IV

A NEW AND EVERLASTING COVENANT OF MARRIAGE: JOSEPH SMITH
AND THE ORIGINS OF MORMON POLYGAMY, 1831-1844

The whole subject of the marriage relationship is not within my reach or in any other man's reach on this earth. It is without the beginning of days or the end of years; it is a hard matter to reach. We can feel some things with regard to it: it lays the foundation for worlds, for angels, and for Gods; for intelligent beings to be crowned with glory, immortality, and eternal lives. In fact, it is the thread which runs from the beginning to the end of the holy Gospel of the Son of God; it is from eternity to eternity.

--Brigham Young

On July 12, 1843, one of the most remarkable nineteenth-century American experiments in the reorganization of marriage and family life appears to have received formal written sanction. According to accounts of the main body of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, better known as Mormons, on that day Joseph Smith, the Church's dynamic thirty-seven year old prophet-founder, privately dictated a revelation in the Church's headquarters in Nauvoo, Illinois. The revelation called for a restoration among the Mormons of polygamous marriage practices similar to those of the Biblical patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These new standards were placed within a larger context of a conception of marriage, growth, and development lasting throughout all eternity. The "new and everlasting covenant" thus revealed to a small group of

1Speech of October 6, 1854. Reported in Journal of Discourses, 26 vols. (Liverpool, Eng.: F. D. Richards and others, 1854-1886), 2: 90. Hereafter cited as JD. These volumes, based on stenographic reports of the speeches of early Mormon leaders, are an invaluable source for the understanding of many early developments in the Mormon Church.
Smith's closest followers was conceived as a key element in his new religion.¹

Not surprisingly, many Mormons found acceptance of the new standards difficult. Since the founding of the Mormon Church in 1830, it had provided many Americans coming from deep roots in the Puritan past of English and American dissenting religion with a compelling new faith. That faith had satisfied their intense quest for true religious authority and seemed to restore the ancient gospel spirit of Christianity in all its fulness and purity. The early Mormons were strong believers in the conventional monogamous standards of their day. Thus, the initial promulgation of polygamous marriage beliefs even within the restricted circle of Joseph Smith's closest followers led to misunderstandings and a severe internal crisis within the Church. Little more than a year later, the beloved prophet of the Church and his brother Hyrum were

¹Numerous printed versions of the revelation on plural and celestial marriage exist. The minutes of the conference of the Church in Salt Lake City at which the revelation was first read publicly appeared as a Deseret News Extra for September 14, 1852, and were reprinted as a supplement to vol. 15 of the Millennial Star in 1853. Another early reprinting of this revelation is found in the Millennial Star 15 (January 1, 1853): 5-8. The earliest printed versions of this revelation are untitled. This is also true of the two manuscript versions of the revelation, xerox copies of which this author has carefully examined in the Archives of the Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Salt Lake City, Utah. Hereafter cited as Church Archives. The strong contemporary evidence for the existence of this revelation in Nauvoo, and for its dictation by Joseph Smith, will be presented in the course of this chapter. The handwriting of the two manuscript versions of the revelation in the Church Archives has been established by Danel W. Bachman in "A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage Before the Death of Joseph Smith" (M.A. thesis, Purdue University, 1975), pp. 208-211. Bachman's fine study was not available to this author in time to be utilized in this dissertation, but his account is essentially complimentary to the analysis presented here. The full text of the first printed version of the revelation on plural and celestial marriage will be found in the Appendix to this dissertation. Note that technically the term "polygamy" refers either to "polygyny," a man having more than one wife, or to "polyandry," a woman having more than one husband. The Utah Mormons practiced a form of polygyny, never polyandry; however, in deference to the almost-universal usage of both Mormons and non-Mormons, the term polygamy will be used in this study.
murdered in a jail in Carthage, Illinois, while awaiting trial on charges arising in part from dissatisfactions connected with the new marriage beliefs and practices.

This tragic denouement might have been expected to cripple the new Church and to result in the abandonment of its as-yet-only-nascent form of family organization. Quite the reverse occurred. By 1852, less than a decade later, the main body of Mormons under the leadership and organizational genius of Brigham Young had made a heroic trek to the Intermountain West to escape persecution and were beginning to establish themselves securely in their mountain Zion. There, in Salt Lake City, on August 29, 1852, they announced to the world their commitment to plural marriage as an integral part of their religious and social organization. By that time acceptance of polygamy was in large measure a fait accompli among the Mormons. For nearly forty years until intense Federal pressure and internal Mormon dissatisfactions with polygamy combined to force its official abandonment in 1890, plural marriage was the ideal form of family organization in the Utah Territory and adjacent areas of Mormon settlement. Even though plural marriage was often only reluctantly espoused, it formed an important component of life within a large area of the Intermountain West upon which the hardworking Mormons placed their indelible cultural imprint.

The origin and early development of polygamous beliefs and practices among the Mormons suggest many complex questions. What factors could have led the prophet Joseph Smith to conceive of such a form of family organization? Equally important, why did he apparently come to feel, as his closest followers repeatedly asserted, that the acceptance of plural marriage was essential to the continuing development of his Church? How did Smith's followers—most of them reared in a strict monogamous tradition and highly critical of any sexual irregularities—

1The sermon by Orson Pratt which presented the initial Mormon defense of their marriage system to the world appeared in the Deseret News Extra of September 14, 1852, and the supplement to vol. 15 of the Millennial Star. It was also reprinted under the title "Celestial Marriage" in JD, 1: 53-66.
react to the beliefs, and why did many of his most committed followers come to support the belief and practice? In short, what pressures could have been intense enough to have led a whole body of men and women to adopt cultural patterns seemingly so greatly at variance with those with which they had grown up? Finally, and perhaps most important, how did plural marriage work in Utah in the period before external persecution interfered significantly with its natural development? What were the positive values as well as the problems associated with this new form of social organization? And what, if any explicit or implicit critique of the contemporary American family did Mormon plural marriage offer?

Despite a voluminous literature both of exposure and of defense, these questions, and the larger questions of the significance of plural marriage in the total Mormon religious and social world view, have barely been touched. In this chapter, I shall try to suggest the social, intellectual, and political matrix within which plural marriage was put forward before the death of Joseph Smith in 1844, as well as some of the unresolved questions connected with the attempt to introduce such new cultural patterns in nineteenth-century America. A second chapter will consider the complex relationship between problems of succession to Joseph Smith and the introduction of polygamy between 1844 and 1847 under Brigham Young and his associates. A final chapter will suggest an ideal model of that never-fully-regularized system in early Utah before external pressures led to significant modifications in its operation.

I

Numerous partially inadequate hypotheses have been advanced to explain the origin of plural marriage. Indicative of the complexity of the problem facing the scholar is the fact that one whole branch of the Mormon Church generally has denied that Joseph Smith had anything to do with the introduction of plural marriage. This group, the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS), has argued that the introduction of plural marriage was a corruption of the Church by Brigham Young. Smith himself is said to have been innocent of the evil ideas and practices attributed to him by the Utah Mormons.
While one may sympathize with the intense hatred of polygamy shown by the Reorganized Mormon Church, the popular RLDS position on this issue is historically untenable. Overwhelming evidence exists that Joseph Smith introduced polygamous beliefs into the Mormon Church and almost certainly engaged in polygamous practice himself. This evidence includes contemporary letters, diary accounts, and circumstantial evidence from Mormon believers, including a handwritten letter by Joseph Smith; contemporary manuscript and published accounts of Mormon apostates and anti-Mormons who were in a position to know what was happening in Nauvoo; and a large body of retrospective testimonies and affidavits of Joseph Smith's plural wives and closest associates. These accounts are supported by statements made by most of the early leaders of the Reorganization and by the official RLDS paper, the True Latter Day Saints' Herald. In its first issue of January 1860, the Saints' Herald repeatedly criticized Joseph Smith for introducing polygamy into the Church, but claimed that he had repented of his errors before his martyrdom.

Despite the widely divergent biases of these various sources, their degree of agreement on the basic details of early polygamy is impressive. Available evidence simply will not support the allegation that the testimonies and affidavits that the Utah Church later released to show Joseph Smith's responsibility for polygamy could have been fraudulent. In spite of the inadequacies of the RLDS position, it does contain one important element of truth. The RLDS position is correct in implicitly recognizing the limited extent of polygamous belief and practice in Nauvoo and in giving major credit (or blame) to Brigham Young for overseeing the introduction of plural marriage into the whole Church and making it work in Utah.  

1Charles A. Shook, The True Origin of Mormon Polygamy (Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Co., 1914), reproduces and skillfully analyzes most of the early evidence—including statements by almost every early leader of the RLDS Church—which links Joseph Smith beyond any reasonable doubt to the intellectual genesis and practice of polygamy. The first issue of the True Latter Day Saints' Herald in January 1860 included statements of Isaac Sheen, William Marks, and others, admitting that Joseph Smith had been actively involved in introducing polygamy, but claiming that he had repented of his errors prior to his death. As individuals who had a personal knowledge of Joseph Smith's polygamy activities died, the RLDS Church increasingly tended to react to the wholly polygamy
A second partially inadequate explanation for the origins of Mormon polygamy is the one adopted by most non-Mormons and anti-Mormons. They have tended to assume that Joseph Smith simply was an oversexed individual who was trying to rationalize his own amorous propensities. Smith certainly was a handsome, dynamic leader, unafraid to break with convention. He could enjoy shocking a sanctimonious visitor who expected to encounter the dour prophetic stereotype, by challenging him to arm wrestle, for instance. But the hypothesis of conscious fraud or rationalization founders on the complexity of Smith's character and fails to take into account the larger social context in which he operated.

issue as a bad dream; the official stance was to deny that the whole affair had ever taken place—but always with the significant proviso that even if Smith had taught or practiced polygamy, it still was wrong. For instance, see Joseph Smith III and the Restoration, ed. Mary Audentia Anderson and cond. Bertha Audentia Anderson Holmes (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1952), pp. 152-154; and Maurice L. Draper, Marriage in the Restoration: A Brief Historical Doctrinal Review (Independence, Mo.: Herald Publishing House, 1968).

The primary LDS arguments for the thesis that Joseph Smith was responsible for introducing the theory and practice of polygamy into the Mormon Church are summarized in John A. Widtsoe, "Evidences and Reconciliations: CX. Did Joseph Smith Introduce Plural Marriage?" Improvement Era 49 (November 1949): 721, 766-767; and Joseph F. Smith, Jr. [Joseph Fielding Smith], Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage: A Discussion (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1905). Also see the article by Andrew Jenson, LDS Church Historian, giving affidavits and a list of twenty-seven women who allegedly were sealed to Joseph Smith, primarily during the last three years of his life. "Plural Marriage," Historical Record 6 (May 1887): 219-234. Note that such "sealings" did not necessarily involve full conjugal relations. This author has carefully examined the many published and unpublished affidavits and other personal statements in the Church Archives in Salt Lake City. The hypothesis of fraud can not possibly account for this entire body of material which represents so many different perspectives and biases. If one removes the polemical overlay, the only significant difference between statements of Mormons, non-Mormons, ex-Mormons, and early RLDS leaders lies in a few trivial matters such as the question of the exact date at which polygamy began to be introduced. Since different individuals learned about polygamy at different times and since many of these statements were written long years after the events that they describe, some fuzziness in dating events is not surprising. There is now sufficient information that the scholar can move beyond the question of whether or not Joseph Smith tried to introduce polygamy to the more significant problem of explaining how and why Smith attempted to introduce polygamy.
Few would deny that sexual impulses played a part in the introduction of polygamy. If one views such impulses as the primary causal element, however, one fails to see the larger picture. Smith showed an underlying seriousness of purpose and a sense of prophetic mission which were recognized even by knowledgeable apostates. He apparently had begun formulating polygamous beliefs at least as early as 1831, some ten years before any significant attempts to introduce the practice can be clearly identified. Had Smith simply wanted sexual outlets, he could have found them through easier and more conventional means.

Far more than individual idiosyncracy was involved in the Mormon attempt to "restore" a patriarchal family system based on Old Testament models. Pressing problems of social disorganization which will be considered in this paper also made the new marriage practices seem compelling to many people. The essentially self-denying, repressive, or "puritanical" tendencies inherent in plural marriage eventually became strongly accentuated in Utah. One writer described the system there as "Puritan Polygamy."¹

¹The term "Puritan Polygamy" was used by M. R. Werner, Brigham Young (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1925). Although accounts of knowledgeable apostates generally fail to present the spirit which underlay Smith's efforts, such accounts are indispensable if one is to reconstruct many of the complex problems associated with the early development of polygamy. Later Mormon accounts often prefer to forget some of those early difficulties. Among the accounts which must be seriously considered to make an historical reconstruction of the early development of polygamy, see: John C. Bennett, The History of the Saints; or, An Exposé of Joe Smith and Mormonism (Boston: Leland & Whiting, 1842); Oliver H. Olney, The Absurdities of Mormonism Portrayed (Hancock County, Ill.: n.p., 1843); The Nauvoo Expositor (June 7, 1844); John Hyde, Jr., Mormonism: Its Leaders and Designs (New York: W. P. Petridge & Co., 1857); T. B. H. Stenhouse, The Rocky Mountain Saints: A Full and Complete History of the Mormons (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1873); John D. Lee, Mormonism Unveiled; or The Life and Confessions of the Late Mormon Bishop, ed. John D. Lee and W. W. Bishop (St. Louis: Bryan, Brand & Co., 1877); and Wilhelm Wyl, Joseph Smith, The Prophet: His Family and Friends; A Study Based on Facts and Documents (Salt Lake City: Tribune Printing & Publishing Co., 1886). Such accounts based on first-hand documentation should not be confused with the vast body of late nineteenth-century anti-Mormon treatments which are semi-novelistic in character and which are usually historically valueless in understanding the early development of polygamy. Analyses of this latter genre are provided in Leonard Arrington and Jon Haupt, "Intolerable
A third partially inadequate hypothesis to explain the origin of plural marriage is the standard position of the now-monogamous Utah branch of the Mormon Church. This group usually has argued that Joseph Smith was commanded by God to introduce plural marriage. He simply was mechanistically doing his best to carry out the inscrutable demand of the Almighty which he may well have felt to be an onerous obligation. After this has been said, the question is seen as closed.

Unfortunately, although this approach may well represent the way many Mormons reacted to the command, it does not do justice to the complex process by which Smith himself received and interpreted revelation. Even should one accept the validity of an explicitly revelatory framework, one would still be faced with the question why the Lord should have given such a command to Smith at that particular time and place. Typically, Joseph Smith received revelation only in answer to concrete intellectual or social problems that he or his followers faced. He would lay such a problem before the Lord, or, from a secular perspective, he would place the problem in his unconscious mind. When his heart "burned within him" with a definite sense of the answer to the problem, he would proceed to deliver it as a revelation, though not necessarily in written form or at the precise time that he received the revelation. Thus, a sophisticated view of Joseph Smith's revelatory process still would have to ask what the intellectual and social roots were for the revelation on plural and celestial marriage.¹

¹The complex process by which Joseph Smith received and interpreted revelation has not yet received adequate scholarly analysis. Some starting points for such an analysis are found in the Doctrine and Covenants, especially sections 6, 7, and 10; History of the Church, 5: xxxiv-xlvi; Eduard Meyer, "The Nature and Mechanisms of Smith's Revelations," in his The Origin and History of the Mormons, trans. Heinz F. Rahde and Eugene Seach (Salt Lake City: [University of Utah], 1961),
A final partially inadequate explanation for the origin of plural marriage might be described as the "psychological reductionist view." This approach would see Joseph Smith as a deeply disturbed individual, perhaps possessed of paranoid obsessions. Plural marriage thus could be dismissed as the product of a diseased mind. Unfortunately, none of the numerous possible psychological reductionist arguments has ever been systematically and convincingly formulated for Joseph Smith by a competent psychiatrist or psychologically sophisticated historian. Even if such an approach were to be fully developed, it still would be based on the implicit value judgment that no sane person could possibly want to introduce polygamy as a norm for society.

Can we arbitrarily assume, however, that deviance from certain cultural norms is automatically a sign of pathology, particularly during a period of rapid change when the norms themselves are uncertain? Smith and his followers identified so strongly with the cultural patterns of the Biblical Hebrews that they self-consciously thought of themselves as a modern Israel and tried to recapitulate many of the values and practices of an earlier way of life in their own. The appeal that a Biblical restorationist approach had for Mormons may be due primarily to the turbulence of nineteenth-century American life, rather than to any special Mormon psychological abnormalities.

Unless one is prepared to assume a priori that the social life and customs of the Biblical Hebrews were invalid or that any thoroughgoing attempt to translate different cultural values into one's own experience is inherently psychopathological, one must reserve judgment on Joseph Smith until all the evidence is in. Geniuses frequently deviate from the everyday assumptions of their contemporaries and they are thus often misunderstood. Much of the conflict, disorder, and misunderstandings associated with the introduction of plural marriage was not necessarily due to flaws in the practices themselves, but

rather to the inevitable problems of transition from one way of life to another.¹

II

All the preceding approaches to the origin of plural marriage contain elements of truth. As in the story of the blind man and the elephant, however, all fail to grasp the total picture. The historian Jan Shipps has suggested that to understand Joseph Smith we must attempt to see him as a whole person, to comprehend the total context within which he was operating, with all its complexities and ambiguities.² Based on a careful study of original sources, an attempt will be made in this chapter to reconstruct what Joseph Smith himself was trying to accomplish, the problems he faced, and the degree of consistency he showed in terms of his own objectives.

There can be little doubt that Joseph Smith was a religious genius. Like geniuses in all fields, he attempted to fuse the raw materials of his experience into a new synthesis that would have meaning both for himself and for his contemporaries. Joseph Smith began as a barely literate farm boy in a socially marginal family in western New York. During the less than fifteen years between the founding of his religion and his death, he elaborated a complex system of religious belief and organization purporting to be a restoration of the original gospel faith of "primitive Christianity." He attracted tens of thousands of followers, as well as a group of able leaders. And he founded a series of new communities including Nauvoo, Illinois, which


²"The Prophet Puzzle."
grew within five years to become the largest city in the state and provided a social and religious blueprint for what was later to be achieved in Utah. The introduction of polygamous belief and practice must be viewed within this larger total context of Joseph Smith's attempt to re integrate religious and social values into an harmonious whole. What was the driving dynamic that lay behind the intense and sustained effort at culture building?

Central to Joseph Smith's sense of prophetic mission was his millennial vision of a corrupt, diseased, and doomed old order inevitably tottering toward destruction. It would be followed by a glorious restoration of the true religious and social practices of the "kingdom of God" on earth, ushering in a veritable "new heaven and new earth" purged of the evils of the old order. Every existing account of the genesis of young Joseph's religious concerns stresses his profound dissatisfaction with the cacaphony of religious claims surrounding him. This cacaphony accompanied the almost explosive growth, expansion, and development of the United States in the antebellum period.

As we have seen, western New York where Joseph Smith grew up and received his first revelations was a particularly troubled region which was repeatedly "burned over" by the fires of religious enthusiasm. In this area that was undergoing rapid economic growth, settled many displaced New Englanders who became attracted to an extraordinary range of crusades aimed at the perfection of mankind and the achievement of millennial happiness. An atmosphere of intense religious rivalry and competing claims to truth led to great internal tensions in sensitive individuals who desired a secure religious faith.

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1 Millennial themes run throughout Joseph Smith's life, becoming especially important during times of crisis, such as the late Nauvoo period. Tuveson, Redeemer Nation, pp. 175-186, notes that Mormon millennialism can not easily be fitted into the pessemistic pre-millennial or the optimistic post-millennial categories. For instance, the Millennial Star, official organ of the British mission, carefully detailed various natural disasters which presumably presaged the end of the world when God would miraculously intervene to set things straight. Yet the Mormons also showed a strong sense that they could mold a glorious future themselves, and could take fate into their own hands. Like most millennialists, the Mormons combined both optimism and pessemism. Sometimes these attitudes fluctuated in an almost manic depressive manner.
Joseph Smith's family was deeply influenced by this religious and social disorder. The Smith family had always manifested a strain of visionary discontent. They had moved frequently, had never achieved economic security, and possessed an intense religious concern and sense of family destiny while not finding any of the available institutional frameworks satisfying. Young Joseph was described as a generally pleasant and outgoing ne'er-do-well who spent much time hunting for hidden treasure—a pastime, incidentally, which was common to other young men in the area as well. Yet underneath the seemingly nonchalant and outgoing exterior, conflicts seethed. Joseph declared: "So great were the confusion and strife among the different denominations, that it was impossible for a person young as I was and so unacquainted with men and things to come to any certain conclusion who was right and who was wrong."2

This inner tension demanded some sort of resolution. At least as early as 1823, young Joseph began experiencing a series of visions—or what might be described as waking dreams of unusual force and vigor which totally reoriented his life.3 He became convinced that all

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1 For references to the texts of the various accounts of Joseph Smith's first vision, see Chapter I, p. 32, footnote 2.

2 History of the Church, 1: 3.

3 As a starting point in analyzing the larger context of prophetic visionary experiences, see Wallace, "Revitalization Movements." Numerous articles in Dialogue and BYU Studies during the past decade have addressed issues connected with the first vision. See especially James B. Allen, "The Significance of Joseph Smith's First Vision in Mormon Thought," Dialogue 1 (Autumn 1966): 28-45; Rev. Wesley P. Walters, "New Light on Mormon Origins from the Palmyra Revival," Dialogue 4 (Spring 1969): 60-81, with Richard L. Bushman's reply and Walters's response in ibid., pp. 82-100. Because of certain polemical considerations, Mormon historiography has placed excessive emphasis on the precise date of Joseph Smith's first visions, instead of analyzing the more important values and concerns underlying those visions. Smith's visions were neither culturally aberrant, as non-Mormon historians tend to assume, nor were they unique, as some Mormon historians have implied. Visionary phenomena of all sorts were a common part of the revivalistic religion of the period. Smith's visions were significant because, unlike the visions of many of his contemporaries, his visions led to socially significant actions—specifically, his decision to "translate" the Book of Mormon, and his larger, long-range concern to found his own church.

From this perspective, a neglected account of Joseph Smith's early visionary experiences deserves serious reconsideration. It is the
existing religions were wrong and that he had been especially called by God to restore the primitive gospel faith of early Christianity in all its immediacy and purity.

The means through which this sense of mission expressed itself initially was through what Smith described as his "translation" by religious inspiration of plates found in an Indian mound. This "translation" purported to be an ancient religious history of two peoples of Jewish extraction who had migrated to the American continent about 600 B.C. It detailed their many conflicts and apostasies which culminated about 400 A.D. in the destruction of the lighter-skinned Nephites by the darker-skinned Lamanites, ancestors of the American Indians. Although

first official printed account of Joseph Smith's life and mission, written by Oliver Cowdery, with Smith's assistance, in letters to W. W. Phelps. These letters were printed in the Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate between October 1834 and October 1835, and reprinted as Letters by Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps, on the Origin of the Book of Mormon and the Rise of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Liverpool: Thomas Ward & John Cairns, 1844). This account places Joseph Smith's first vision in his seventeenth year (1823) and identifies it as the same one in which he realized that he eventually would "translate" the Book of Mormon. Thereby this account restores the Book of Mormon to its place as the primary tangible expression of Smith's initial sense of mission. It also avoids the 1820-1821 date for Smith’s early formative visionary experiences, a date that this writer believes is historically questionable. It would seem desirable to move beyond sterile attempts to shore up the orthodox (and quite possibly inaccurate) official version of the first vision to the more interesting question of what actually happened in Joseph Smith’s early visionary experiences. For some suggestions of this larger context, see my unpublished paper: "'Puritan Polygamy': The Development of Distinctive Marriage Ideals and Practices Among the Mormons" (unpublished seminar paper, University of Chicago, 1972), pp. 11-15.

1 The initial edition of the Book of Mormon printed in 1830 has undergone considerable subsequent modification, largely of a stylistic nature. As only one example, the first edition of the Book of Mormon identifies Joseph Smith, Jr. as the "Author and Proprietor" of the work, while subsequent editions state that he was the "Translator." See Howard, Restoration Scriptures, pp. 24-69. For reader convenience, quotations from the Book of Mormon will be taken from the first edition but citation will be given based on Orson Pratt's division of the text into chapter and verse in 1879: Joseph Smith, Jr., Translator, The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon Upon Plates Taken from the Plates of Nephi (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1963).
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non-Mormon archaeologists have not found this account historically persuasive, this epic story of two great cultures in conflict and of a direct Biblical linkage between Old World and New had immense appeal in an early nineteenth-century America seeking a sense of its historical roots and a uniquely American identity.\(^1\)

Joseph Smith's intense identification with the ancient Hebrew culture which he allegedly described was perhaps the most striking feature of the Book of Mormon. As a contemporary observer in a New York magazine noted:

> The author lives with the whole strength of his imagination in the age he portrays. It is difficult to imagine a more difficult literary task than to write what may be termed a continuation of the Scriptures that should not only [avoid] all collision with the authentic sacred work, but even fill many chasms that now seem to exist. . . . \(^2\)

Equally impressive was the way this earlier culture was related to nineteenth-century America. Alexander Campbell, minister of a religious group for whom the Mormons were proving a major rival, paid the young prophet a backhanded compliment in 1831 when he declared that in the Book of Mormon, Smith reproduced

> . . . every error and almost every truth discussed in New York for the last ten years. He decides all the great controversies—infant baptism, ordination, the trinity, regeneration, the fall of man, the atonement, transubstantiation, fasting, penance, church

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government, religious experience, the call of the ministry, the
general resurrection, eternal punishment, who may be baptized, and
even the question of free masonry, republican government, and the
rights of man.¹

Although later Church doctrine and organization were by no means
fully formulated in the Book of Mormon, but were gradually
unfolded through Joseph Smith's continuing revelations in the 1830s
and 1840s, the book did set the framework within which much of later
Mormon development would occur.²

III

The early development of plural marriage was closely related to
three major periods of religious and social creativity in the Mormon
Church. The first of these periods came in the late 1820s and early
1830s when the intellectual and organizational foundations of the new
religion were established. In the early 1840s a second period of
significant doctrinal and social departures took place. The final period
included the time following Smith's death, the exodus from Nauvoo, and
the establishment of the main body of Mormons in Utah in the late 1840s and
early 1850s which set the foundations for the "Great Basin Kingdom."

¹"The Book of Mormon Reviewed and Its Divine Pretensions Exposed,"
Painesville Telegraph, March 15, 1831. Reprinted in Alexander Campbell,
Delusions: An Analysis of the Book of Mormon: With An Examination of Its
Internal Evidences, and a Refutation of Its Pretences to Divine Authority
(Boston: Benjamin H. Greene, 1832), p. 13.

²For studies emphasizing the early formulation of basic Mormon
beliefs and practices, see Marvin Hill, "The Shaping of the Mormon Mind
his larger study, "The Role of Christian Primitivism in the Origin and
Development of the Mormon Kingdom, 1830-1844" (Ph.D. dissertation,
University of Chicago, 1968). Other writers have placed greater stress
on the developmental aspects of Mormon religion. See especially Mario
S. De Pillis, "The Quest for Religious Authority and the Rise of Mormonism,"
Dialogue 1 (March 1966): 68-88, and "Social Sources of Mormonism,"
Church History 37 (March 1968): 50-79. The distinctive Mormon form
of Biblical "literalism" underlying the early Mormon world view is ably
delineated in Gordon Irving, "The Mormons and the Bible in the 1830s,"
BYU Studies 13 (Summer 1973): 471-488, based on his more detailed study,
"Mormonism and the Bible, 1832-1838" (Honors B.A. thesis, University of
Utah, 1972).
The early development of plural marriage paralleled these larger developments in the Mormon Church. The first phase in the development of plural marriage appears to have begun at least as early as 1831 and to have run through 1838-39 in Kirtland, Ohio, and several locations in Missouri where the Mormons settled. This marked the intellectual genesis of the new beliefs and possibly some early faltering attempts at practice. In the second phase, in Nauvoo between 1840-41 and 1844, Smith began an effort to introduce polygamous beliefs in the whole Church, and he initiated the practice of polygamy among some of his closest followers. A third phase, to be considered in the following chapters, led to the introduction of plural marriage as the highest ideal of family organization for the entire Church, although only a minority of the membership ever engaged in polygamous marriage.

Joseph Smith's driving concern to overcome the religious confusion within himself and surrounding him must almost certainly have included reflections on the familial and sexual disharmony prevalent in the socially troubled region of western New York in which he grew up in the 1820s. Problems associated with rapid economic expansion, mobility, and competing value systems were already making the area a hotbed of marital experimentation. Nearly all the new religious groups in the area were involved in some manner with unorthodox marriage ideals and practices. The already-mentioned Shakers and Oneida Perfectionists represented only the most conspicuous tip of the iceberg of dissatisfaction with prevailing marriage, family and sex roles. Much of the even less-structured marital experimentation in the area was referred to generically by the perjorative term "spiritual wifery," a catchall suggesting rationalized infidelity. Joseph Smith, with his wide-ranging interests and travel throughout the region, could not have been unfamiliar with such problems and experimentation, and he must have given serious thought as to how personal relationships between men and women should be handled.

Recognition of the personal tragedies involved in sexual disorder and family disorganization was one of the earliest themes in the Mormon faith. The Book of Mormon declared that "fornication and lasciviousness and every kind of sin" were running rampant and that "a hundredth part" of these evil proceedings could not be described in its account.
For behold, I, the Lord, have seen the sorrow, and heard the mourning of the daughters of my people, in the lands of my people, because of the wickedness and abominations of your husbands. . . . You have broken the hearts of your tender wives, and lost the confidence of your children because of your bad examples before them; and the sobbings of their hearts ascended up to God against you.\(^1\)

This concern for the evils of sexual sins and family disorganization recurs in the Book of Mormon. Indeed, an implicit part of the commission Joseph Smith felt he had been given in his vision of September 21, 1823—when he believed the angel Moroni had told him that he would bring forth the Book of Mormon—concerned the restoration of family ties. It was said that Elijah would restore to Joseph Smith the Priesthood powers of the true church before the Second Coming. "And he shall plant in the hearts of the children the promises made to the fathers, and the hearts of the children shall turn to their fathers. If it were not so, the whole earth would be utterly wasted at his coming."\(^2\) This statement suggests the problem of restoring ties of religious and social continuity that was central to Joseph Smith's concerns and claims to authority throughout his life, including the development of the rationale for marriage sealing ceremonies for "time and eternity" and earthly polygamy.

Given Joseph Smith's intense identification with the Old Testament patriarchs as a cultural model, his intellectual problems with their practice of polygamy is not surprising. Americans of Smith's day were not inclined to look kindly on polygamy, even in the Bible. Interestingly, the Book of Mormon contains five separate denunciations of polygamy, linking it with the "fornication," "whoredoms," and various problems of family disorganization which appear to have so disturbed Joseph Smith. David and Solomon were attacked for having many wives and concubines, "which thing was abominable before me, saith the Lord." The people were commanded not to do "like unto them of old."\(^3\)

These harsh attacks on polygamy might appear ironical, since the Mormons later adopted the practice. The apparent paradox partially

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\(^1\)Jacob 2:31.

\(^2\)Doctrine and Covenants, 2: 2-3.

\(^3\)Jacob 2:24, 26. For the denunciations of polygamy, see O'Dea, The Mormons, p. 269, footnote 30.
disappears, however, when one considers the passages closely and places them within the dispensational framework of the Church. The most important of the anti-polygamy passages declares: "Wherefore, my brethren, hear me, and hearken to the word of the Lord: For there shall not be any man among you have it be one wife: and concubines shall he have none: For I, the Lord God, delighteth in the chastity of women. And whoredoms are an abomination before me. . . . " This apparently clear-cut prohibition is followed by a significant proviso: "For if I will, saith the Lord of Hosts, raise up seed unto me, I will command my people; otherwise, they shall hearken unto these things" (my emphasis).\(^1\) This passage would clearly appear to leave open the possibility that God through Joseph Smith might eventually issue a new command if it would contribute to having a numerous progeny in righteous families. That polygamy was a means of a man's acquiring a numerous progeny would become one of the key arguments for plural marriage used in Utah.

The standard Mormon interpretation of this passage in the Book of Mormon sees it simply as referring to a specific time when polygamy was interdicted for practical reasons, and not as a blanket condemnation of the practice. Any blanket condemnation would necessarily have

\(^1\)Jacob 2:27-30. Compare that statement with the one that Smith is said to have written on October 5, 1843:

"Gave instructions to try those persons who were preaching, teaching, or practicing the doctrine of plurality of wives; for, according to the law, I hold the keys of this power in the last days; for there is never but one on earth at a time on whom the power and its keys are conferred, and I have constantly said no man shall have but one wife at a time, unless the Lord directs otherwise" (emphasis in original).

*History of the Church* 6: 46.

Only one source that this author has discovered suggests that Smith explicitly anticipated the eventual reintroduction of polygamy as early as the time that he was "translating" the Book of Mormon. That statement was made by Brigham Young at a ward meeting on July 26, 1872, as reported in the Charles L. Walker Journal in the Church Archives for that date. Other statements made by Brigham Young on that occasion also appear partially misleading, so it is possible that Young was getting confused with the standard Mormon account which dates the intellectual genesis of the idea of polygamy in Smith's mind to the time when he was making his inspired "translation" of the Bible. It also is possible that Walker himself reported Brigham Young's speech inaccurately.
included the great patriarchs of the Bible such as Abraham, whose conduct God presumably approved. As such it would have been self-contradictory. The key to understanding this Mormon interpretation lies in their concept of progressive revelation and of different dispensations. Behavior permitted in one dispensation might not be permitted in another, and vice versa. Mormon writings declared: "The Mosaic dispensation was one of practices; the Christian Church was one of principles; while the Latter-day work differs from either yet includes both."

In pragmatic American fashion, the Mormon religion thus combined Biblical literalism with a dispensational interpretation of history to free itself for continuing religious and social innovation, what Jason Briggs described as "walking backward towards the future." As Orson Pratt noted in 1869: "Domestic relations were governed according to the mind and will of God, and were varied according to circumstance, as he thought proper." The problem in this as in other cases was that the distinction between the mind of God and the mind of Joseph Smith often remained tenuous at best.

As the references to polygamy in the Book of Mormon suggest, the problem of interpreting ambiguous passages with doubles entendres runs throughout the early history of the Mormon Church. Knowing whether a statement about polygamy means what it appears to mean is particularly difficult. Almost all early public statements relating to the topic were couched in a special language, the significance of which could be grasped only by those who knew its inner meaning. So controversial were the new beliefs that they could not at first be revealed even to

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2 *Saints' Herald* 21 (October 1, 1874): 584. Briggs was an early leader of the RLDS Church. This same concept was later developed independently by the historian Sidney Mead. See Chapter I, p. 27, footnote 2.

rank-and-file members of the Church, let alone to the outside world. Although polygamous marriage appears to have been practiced before the recording of the revelation in 1843 and although a fairly extensive polygamous system was set up following the exodus to Utah, until 1852 the leaders of the Saints always officially denied that they sanctioned any such belief or practice. These denials involved elaborate casuistry, for Mormon leaders felt that the perversions ascribed to them by rumor bore no resemblance to the regulated practices that they were trying to introduce.¹

Whatever the ethics of such secrecy, it was a practical necessity. Persecution of the Saints already was enough of a problem without public knowledge of polygamy to add fuel to the fire. The Shakers earlier had closed themselves off from the world while they were organizing their initial celibate orders. John Humphrey Noyes at first maintained "gospel secrecy" about his system of "complex marriage" at Putney and Oneida. So, too, Joseph Smith and his followers realized that their plural marriage ideas were too controversial to be introduced except under cover of secrecy. Probably our knowledge of the development of polygamy before Nauvoo will always remain rather conjectural. From Nauvoo on, however, a more nearly reliable picture can be provided.

¹Denials of polygamy belief and practice took a wide range of forms. These are fully detailed in Shook, Origin of Mormon Polygamy. Frequently, Mormons denied that they believed in or practiced a "spiritual wife system," this being taken to denote John C. Bennett's corruption of the proper Mormon form of plural marriage. Sometimes individuals denied that the (whole) Church believed in or sanctioned polygamy. Strictly speaking, this was true, since belief in polygamy was not known by or enjoined upon the majority of the membership of the Church while Joseph Smith was alive. Smith himself most characteristically made indirect denials of polygamy in which he said simply that such statements were too ridiculous to be believed. But he always carefully refrained from saying that such statements weren't true. Although many individuals were cut off from the Church for teaching polygamy publicly, their error lay not in what they taught but in the premature disclosure of the principle without prior Church sanction. Such cases continued to occur throughout the late 1840s and early 1850s when there can be no doubt that polygamy was being taught and practiced at the highest levels of the Church.
Although the intellectual and practical development of Mormon polygamy before Nauvoo cannot be reconstructed with any degree of certainty, Joseph Smith's first serious consideration of the possibility of introducing plural marriage appears to have occurred at least as early as 1831. According to the retrospective Mormon view—which may be partially an extrapolation based on internal evidence from the 1843 revelation—Smith first became convinced that polygamy should be reintroduced while he was making his inspired "translation" of the Old Testament, particularly Genesis. While engaged in this work, he became impressed by the "evident approval of God to the plural marriage of the ancient patriarchs." In answer to one of his pleas for information concerning God's view of marriage, he then received the sanction for a plurality of wives "under certain limitations and special conditions," although full details were not then revealed to him. This view is supported by a number of statements of close associates from the period.¹

That Joseph Smith was considering the possibility of plural marriage as early as this period is also suggested in a recently published revelation dated July 17, 1831, that he allegedly gave to seven elders over the boundary west of Jackson County, Missouri. This revelation obliquely implies that plural marriage eventually would be reintroduced in some form. The present copy of the revelation in the handwriting of W. W. Phelps who was present on the occasion, dates from the 1850s or 1860s; however, references to the revelation by a knowledgeable contemporary apostate, Ezra Booth, only five months after its alleged delivery, tends to confirm its authenticity.²


²Ezra Booth, one of the first apostates from the Mormon Church to make extensive public disclosure of its alleged misdeeds, wrote in a letter to the Ohio Star of December 8, 1831: "In addition to this, and to cooperate with it, it has been made known by revelation, that
The relevant portion of the revelation states:

Verily, I say unto you, that the wisdom of man, in his fallen state, knoweth not the purposes and privileges of my holy priesthood, but ye shall know when ye receive a fulness by reason of the anointing; For it is my will, that in time, ye should take unto you wives of the Lamanites and Nephites that their posterity may become white delightful and just, for even now their females are more virtuous than the gentiles.

In a note appended to the revelation, W. W. Phelps adds:

About three years after this was given, I asked brother Joseph, privately, how "we," that were mentioned in the revelation could take wives of the "natives" as we were all married men? He replied instantly "I in the same manner that Abraham took Hagar and Keturah; that Jacob took Rachel, Bilhah and Zilpah; by revelation the saints of the Lord are always directed by revelation."

This document suggests that within two years of the founding of his Church, Joseph Smith had at least considered the possibility of introducing a form of polygamous practice. Like many of Smith's other

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1 The text of this revelation as quoted in this paper is based on a typescript prepared by Andrew Jenson, LDS Church Historian, from the earlier of the two manuscript copies in the handwriting of W. W. Phelps which are held in the Church Archives. The most readily available source for copies of the two manuscript versions of this revelation is Jerald and Sandra Tanner, Mormonism Like Watergate? (Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm Co., 1974), p. 9.
revelations, this one is not important doctrinally. It was not considered of enough significance to be formally brought to the attention of Brigham Young until 1861. Yet the revelation typifies many of Smith's concerns in this early period. It attempts to relate two different cultures, Biblical Hebrew and native American in a new synthesis within a larger American restorationist framework. The statement appears to foreshadow, at least in part, temple ceremonies later to be adopted in Kirtland and Nauvoo, some of which were connected with plural marriage. Although this statement suggests that Smith contemplated the eventual reintroduction of a form of Biblical polygamy in nineteenth-century America, this account clearly indicates that in 1831 he did not yet believe that the time to begin the practice of the principle had arrived.

The critical description of this revelation by Ezra Booth in the Ohio Star of December 8, 1831, further suggests some of the social factors associated with Mormon marital changes in this period. Booth did not grasp the implications that the revelation might have for polygamy. Rather, he emphasized the difficulties the Mormons were having when one individual converted to the faith, yet his or her spouse did not join, and remained adamantly opposed to the Church or to coming to the Mormon place of gathering. How were unsatisfactory marital alliances to be terminated when Mormons lived or traveled in many different states and encountered a plethora of state marriage and divorce laws?

Faced with this problem, the Mormon Church in the 1830s began to assume responsibility for the marriage and divorce of its own members. Sometimes the Mormon arrangements were not fully in harmony with local marriage regulations or mores. For instance, the question of whether Joseph Smith, who was not a formally ordained minister, could solemnize marriages, evidently provoked some controversy in the

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mid-1830s. Sidney Rigdon, another prominent early leader, was actually indicted (and acquitted) for "solemnizing marriages without a license" in 1835.¹ In November 1835, at a marriage ceremony for Newell Knight and Lydia Goldthwaite, Smith reportedly "remarked that marriage was an institution of heaven, instituted in the garden of Eden; that it was necessary it should be solemnized by the authority of the everlasting Priesthood."²

If the Mormon Church were to gain the independent control of its own destiny that it sought, it thus had to be able to control the marriage and divorce practices of its members. Such control also would be a necessary precondition for the establishment of polygamy, since that form of marital practice was illegal in the states in which the Mormons settled. Only the Church could regulate such alternative family forms. Innovation in other areas of marriage and family life may also have been encouraged by the increasing Mormon independence of civil regulations.

Whatever the causes may have been, fundamental changes in the attitudes of Mormon leaders toward marriage appear to have begun occurring in the early and mid-1830s. As early as March 1831, in Kirtland, Ohio, Joseph Smith gave a revelation commanding three followers to proselytize the nearby Shaker village at North Union (the present Shaker Heights). Although the venture itself proved inconclusive, the revelation suggested many characteristic Mormon marriage beliefs, including the idea that marriage was a sacred ordinance of God.³ Explicit steps to link religion and civil relations marked a major departure from the tradition out of which the Mormons had come. The Mormons thus were moving away from the New England Puritan view of

¹Chardon Spectator and Geuga Gazette, October 30, 1835, as cited in Parkin, "Internal and External Conflict," p. 176.

²History of the Church, 2: 320.

³The revelation is printed ibid., 1: 167-169, and as section 49 of the current Doctrine and Covenants. For a detailed account of the negative Shaker reaction to the Mormon proselytizing at North Union, see Robert F. W. Meader, "The Shakers and Mormons," Shaker Quarterly 2 (Fall 1962): 83-96.
marriage as a strictly civil contract and back toward the pre-Reformation Roman Catholic approach which treated marriage as a sacrament.

The innovative Mormon re-sacralization of marriage was vividly expressed in W. W. Phelps's statement in 1835, which alluded to the idea that marriage relations existed in heaven:

_We shall by and by learn that we were with God in another world, and had our agency: that we came into this world and have our agency in order that we may prepare a kingdom of glory; become archangels, even the sons of God where the man is not without the woman, nor the woman without the man in the Lord._... 1

More than five years later in Nauvoo, Joseph Smith would begin to teach that the divine form of marriage "sealed" couples together for eternity, forging a key link to weld the faithful together in a family relation. When translated into temporal practice, this belief would make possible the development of earthly polygamy among the Mormons.

If Smith began considering the possibility of introducing polygamy as early as 1831, one would not be surprised if some early attempts at practice should have occurred. Whether pilot efforts took place in Kirtland, Ohio, and in Missouri remains a moot point. 2 Many


2Evidence of the premature practice of polygamy before Nauvoo is slight, although this author has not worked extensively with manuscript material from the period. Such evidence is suggested in the detailed retrospective comments recorded by Smith's close associate Benjamin F. Johnson, Letter to George F. Gibbs, 1903. The original manuscript and various typescript copies with slightly differing pagination are in the Church Archives. Some subsequent allegations were made that Jared Carter, Warren Parish, and Oliver Cowdery practiced polygamy in the period, but these are unconvincing. See Parkin, "Internal and External Conflict," pp. 167-171.

Later Mormon writers frequently charged that Cowdery had made early attempts to practice polygamy without Joseph Smith's sanction. For an exhaustive detailing of this argument and the sources for it, see Robert Glen Mouritsen, "The Office of Associate President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1972), pp. 78-111. No contemporary evidence that Cowdery practiced polygamy appears to exist. In fact, contemporary sources show
of the allegations of polygamy in this period may well represent nothing more than the confusion of individuals who heard rumors that new practices were to be introduced. Others may represent individuals who "ran before being sent," entering polygamous relationships prematurely on their own initiative. Possibly some of the early adultery cases in the Church may have been of this character.

Smith was well aware of the necessity for extreme caution in such a touchy area. He had a canny sense of how fast he could move. Speaking to Brigham Young in Kirtland, Smith once commented that "if I were to reveal to this people what the Lord has revealed to me, there is not a man or a woman that would stay with me." The Bible did not provide detailed guidelines as to how polygamy was to be practiced. Thus, it is not surprising that the development of Smith's thought in this and in many other areas of revelation appears to have been a gradual process, building "precept by precept, and line upon line."

By the time plural marriage was announced publicly in 1852, many of the problems in its early development had been overcome. The retrospective views of key participants, writing as much as fifty years after the events they described, may well attribute greater order to its development than existed at the time.

that Cowdery strongly opposed Joseph Smith's polygamous practice and was cynical about Smith's motives. For Cowdery, and several close friends in Missouri, polygamy appears to have been one of the factors contributing to their apostasy from the Church. See the Oliver Cowdery Letterbook held at the Huntington Library, San Marino, California, especially his letter to Warren Cowdery from Far West, Missouri, on January 21, 1838; and the "Far West Record," a record book containing minutes of meetings in Kirtland and in Far West, Missouri, p. 117. Significantly, in Cowdery's excommunication trial on April 11, 1838, in Far West, Missouri, no charges of any personal sexual indiscretions on his part were made. Instead, one of the chief charges against him was "For seeking to destroy the character of Joseph Smith, Jun., by falsely insinuating that he was guilty of adultery." Elders' Journal 1 (July 1838): 45. If Cowdery's character in this regard had been anything by spotless, there can be little doubt that he would have been thoroughly vilified for his indiscretions. Probably later Mormon writers may have confused Cowdery's and Smith's actions in this period.

1JD, 9: 294.
Although solid contemporary evidence for the practice of polygamy before Nauvoo is extremely rare, rumors of polygamous beliefs and practice were quite common in the 1830s. The Mormon historian Stanley Snow Ivins has collected more than one hundred thirty allegations concerning Mormon polygamy before 1841. Many of these admittedly are unreliable, speculative, or second-hand, but others seemingly are based on more substantial evidence. An RLDS source implies that problems with polygamy may have existed in the Church as early as 1833. And a Mormon writer, Mosiah Hancock, speaking of the Kirtland period, said:

"My father made some things known to me concerning those days, and the

1See the card index entries for "Polygamy Before 1841" in Stanley Snow Ivins, Notebooks and Transcripts. The original manuscripts are held by the Utah State Historical Society Library, Salt Lake City, Utah. An example of the statements that appear to be based on solid knowledge is this letter entitled "The Nauvoo Block and Tackle" which appeared anonymously in the *Warsaw Signal*, April 26, 1844:

"I have frequently noticed in the columns of your paper, articles concerning the doctrine of spiritual wives, a part of the Mormon creed. Nothing as yet has come to my view which gave entire satisfaction; and as it is my turn now, just command silence for a few moments that I may have a hearing.

In the year 1834, at Kirtland, Ohio, the aforementioned step in the heavenly stairway was located. Much excitement grew out of this measure; many of the Saints demurred, and the more knowing ones readily perceived that it was entirely too liberal in its provision— even to be constitutional. In a word, the Saints rejected it; only a few of the more licentious delighting in it. The doctrine was hushed up, as being sent before its time—for be it known that Mormonism is a system of progression. The next glimpse I obtained of this hellish spiritual wife doctrine, was in the year 1836, just on the eve of hostilities in Missouri. The presence of the enemy furnished subjects of reflections, to the exclusion of the old eye-sore for the second time. But iniquity never lies dormant. No sooner did prosperity smile upon the fraternity in Nauvoo than the secret workings of the same faction were set in motion. Success attends perseverance and emboldens the culprit. Such seems to be the results in the present discontent made glorious—sudden appearance of the spirit of compromise and which serves two purposes, viz., is a cloak to the spiritual wife system."

part he took with the Prophet in trying to assist him to start the principle. . . . "1

By 1835 enough rumors were circulating that a resolution explicitly denying that the Mormons sanctioned "polygamy" was introduced under the auspices of W. W. Phelps and Oliver Cowdery into the 1835 edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. It declared:

Inasmuch as this church of Christ has been reproached with the crime of fornication, and polygamy, we declare that we believe that one man should have one wife, and one woman but one husband, except in case of death, when either is at liberty to marry again.2

Whether Joseph Smith was in favor of this resolution, which was presented while he was unaccountably away on a brief trip, is unclear. Although the primary object of the resolution appears to have been to staunch damaging rumors of polygamy, it may also represent opposition to polygamy by several of those closest to Joseph Smith.3

Following the dedication of the Kirtland Temple in March 1836 rumors of polygamy appear to have become more widespread.4 Such rumors


2Doctrine and Covenants, 1835 ed., p. 251.

3Note the possibly ambiguous wording of the statement itself, which does not actually prohibit a man from having more than one wife. The statement "one man should have one wife" is not parallel to "and one woman but one husband." Stenhouse, Rocky Mountain Saints, p. 193, states that he heard Brigham Young say in a public meeting that the appendix on marriage "was written by Oliver Cowdery against Joseph's wishes, and was permitted to be published only after Cowdery's incessant teasing and Joseph's warning to him of the trouble which his course would create."

4Hostility resulting from attempts to introduce polygamy may have been a contributing factor in the anti-Mormon sentiment which led the Mormons to leave Kirtland in 1837. A number of apostate sources refer to problems with polygamy in this period. Furthermore, Mormon theology identifies the dedication of the Kirtland Temple in April 1836 as the first time when Joseph Smith had full divine authority given him to introduce polygamy. For instance, in introducing polygamy belief to the world in 1852, the apostle Orson Pratt declared that Joseph Smith held
were only a minor factor in the complex causes of dissension in the late Kirland and Missouri periods, however. With Missouri governor Lilburn W. Boggs calling for either the expulsion or the literal "extermination" of the Mormons, the group had little time for minor worries. Nevertheless, rumors of polygamy did add to Mormon problems.

A resolution adopted by the presidents of the Seventies Quorum of the Church on April 29, 1837, declared that fellowship would be withheld from any elder "who is guilty of polygamy or any offense of the kind." In editorial comment in November 1837 in Kirtland, Ohio, and in July 1838 in Far West, Missouri, the Elder's Journal responded to "questions which are daily and hourly asked by all classes of people" concerning the Mormons, including "Do the Mormons believe in having more wives than one?" The answer was an unequivocal "No." And, in a letter of Joseph Smith's from Liberty Jail in Missouri in which he defended himself against charges the gentiles had made against his people, he wrote at length denying that Mormon communitarian efforts were connected in any way with a "community of wives."

"... the sealing keys of power, or in other words, of Elijah, the Prophet, who held many keys, among which were the keys of sealing, to bind the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers; together with all other sealing keys and powers, pertaining to the last dispensation. They were committed by that Angel who administered in the Kirtland Temple and spoke unto Joseph the Prophet, at the time of the endowments in that house."

JD 1 (1854): 64. In 1842 in the first explicit defense of polygamy ever printed by the Mormon press, the goal of the author of the polygamy defense was said to be to teach the spirit of Elijah and to "turn the heart of the fathers to the children; and the heart of the children to their fathers." This remarkable pamphlet is discussed later in this chapter.

1Latter-Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate 3 (June 1837): 510-511.


3History of the Church, 3: 230-233. This letter of December 16, 1838, was in part a response to "foul and libelous reports" that Joseph Smith had allegedly committed adultery. Communitarian and cooperative ventures frequently received criticism, both real and imaginary, for introducing unorthodox marital practices. Smith was almost certainly aware of some of those ventures. For instance, between November 9 and 11, 1835, a self-styled prophet Robert Matthias stayed at Joseph Smith's
The most serious criticism of Joseph Smith connected with polygamy in this period appears to have been based on his alleged liaison with Fanny Alger, an attractive young girl working as a servant in his household in the mid-1830s. Later Mormon writers believed that she was "without doubt the first" or "one of the first" of his plural wives. A major charge in Oliver Cowdery's excommunication trial in Far West on April 12, 1838, was for defaming Joseph Smith's character by falsely alleging he had committed adultery, and Cowdery's letters show that "the girl" in question was Fanny Alger.

Cowdery's anger appears primarily to have been not at the relationship itself but at Joseph Smith's allegation that Cowdery's inopportune talk about Smith's activities constituted a deliberate untruth. The ethical problems arising when two distinct standards of truth had to be maintained during the early development of plural marriage would continue to create bitterness and misunderstandings in Nauvoo as well. Given Cowdery's network of friendships in the Church, it is not surprising that a part of the dissatisfaction of other

house. At that time, Matthias was achieving notoriety for a variety of reasons, including his efforts at establishing a community of property and of wives. Matthias's marriage system allowed each of his male followers one wife, but made him alone a husband to all the women. See Memoirs of Matthias the Prophet, cited in Ivins, Notebook 7: 157-160. Since Joseph Smith took the rare step of telling Matthias about his first vision on this occasion, it is reasonable to assume that considerable rapport and personal openness existed between the two men. A slightly altered account of their exchange is published in History of the Church, 2: 304-307.

1Johnson, Letter to George Gibbs, p. 12; Jenson, "Plural Marriage," p. 233. Exactly what constituted a "marriage" is unclear in this as in many other early instances in which Smith is said to have taken plural wives. A number of early Mormon writers evidently viewed a sexual connection as tantamount to a "marriage," particularly in the cases of Joseph Smith's plural wives. There is no evidence that any plural marriage ceremony was ever performed by or for Joseph Smith prior to April 5, 1841.

2Cowdery Letterbook, especially the letters for February 24, 1838, and January 21, 1838. Johnson, Letter to George Gibbs, p. 10, states that "I was afterwards told by Warren Parrish, that he himself and Oliver Cowdery did know that Joseph had Fannie Alger as wife, for they were spied upon and found together."
prominent Mormons who left the Church in Far West, Missouri, may well have been with nascent polygamy belief and practice.\(^1\)

Initial efforts to introduce plural marriage—if such there were—thus got off to a slow start. Summarizing his detailed analysis of the development of polygamy in this period, the Mormon historian Max Parkin writes:

> It appears that polygamy was a secret practice in Kirtland in the 1830s and the Church, or rather the Church's Prophet, neither had the intention of making it a public matter nor at that early date making it a principle of the Mormon faith . . . within the Church, the conflict of the period was accentuated by the few who understood the new principle, and by others who mispracticed it.\(^2\)

Whatever the early development of plural marriage may have been, not until Nauvoo would the latent tendencies lead to the formal introduction of polygamous beliefs and practices at the highest level of the Church as part of a radical effort to introduce a total way of life.

V

The period between 1839 and 1844 that the Mormons spent in Nauvoo, Illinois, under Joseph Smith's leadership was pivotal in their

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\(^1\)Among those who disaffection may have been connected in part with opposition to polygamy were Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, Lyman E. Johnson, Warren Parrish, Jared Carter, and W. W. Phelps. Utah Mormon accounts suggest that an important factor in the apostasy of Thomas Marsh, head of the quorum of the Twelve, may have been his opposition to polygamy. When Marsh returned to the Church in 1857 following his wife's death, he was ridiculed in public speeches: as a broken down man, he wouldn't have to worry about polygamy any more. See JD, 5: 28-29, 115, 206-209, for references relating to Marsh's return. In a public sermon of July 12, 1857, Heber C. Kimball said that Marsh's problem was sustaining his wife in preference to Joseph, and that Emma had been involved in the same sort of opposition to Joseph over polygamy. See Journal History, July 12, 1857, pp. 1-2. The Journal History contains excerpts from diaries, journals, letters, and newspapers, which give a day-by-day account from the founding of the Church of 1830 to the present. At least four of Joseph Smith's closest associates—Oliver Cowdery, Thomas Marsh, John C. Bennett, and William Law—apparently apostatized at least in part over polygamy.

history. Nauvoo marked the climax of an earlier phase of Mormon development and set the pattern of new doctrinal, social, and political approaches which would be further developed and tested in Utah. In Nauvoo, Smith made his most concerted effort to realize his conception of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth. No aspect of life was left untouched.

The period abounds in paradoxes. From one perspective, Nauvoo was a typical Jacksonian boom town, representative of the raw potentiality, enthusiasm, crassness, and tensions that characterized the era. Yet at a more fundamental level, the Mormons in Nauvoo were attacking and attempting to overcome that rampant, exploitative Jacksonian individualism which surrounded them. They were seeking a total solution, more akin to earlier medieval ideals in which religious and social life were inextricably intertwined and the good of the community would become paramount over individual "self-interest." Mundane "secular" life would be re-sacralized and integrated into a new organic unity within a cosmic perspective of meaning.¹

The introduction of new marriage and family patterns was an important part of this total effort. Plural marriage was in some ways an accentuation of characteristic American values, in particular, an attempt to restore earlier patriarchal patterns in marriage that were under attack in the period. At its deepest level, it was a fundamental protest against the careless individualism of romantic love which seemed to threaten the very roots of family life and social solidarity. Plural marriage was conceived as a means of strengthening kinship relations and social solidarity. Yet, paradoxically, the introduction of plural marriage exacerbated already severe internal and external tensions in

¹The best, and possibly the definitive, treatment of Mormon Nauvoo as a Jacksonian boom town is found in Robert Bruce Flanders, Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965). Useful overview analyses of the period also appear in a special issue of Dialogue 5 (Spring 1970): 7-79, on "The Mormons in Early Illinois," ed. Stanley B. Kimball. Recently, Mormon scholars have been placing greater stress on the religious than on the economic motivations for social life in Nauvoo. As an example, see Marvin Hill, "Religion in Nauvoo: Some Reflections" (unpublished paper read at the Mormon History Association Meetings, Nauvoo, Illinois, April 1974).
the Mormon Church, resulting in the death of Joseph Smith and the temporary disorganization of his religion.

A variety of social, intellectual, and political factors made possible the introduction of plural marriage on a limited scale in Nauvoo. The key emotional thread running throughout the period, without which events cannot be understood, was a sense of increasing tension and imminent crisis. This encouraged self-sacrifice, increasing intellectual and practical isolation conducive to excess, and an almost compulsive emphasis on unquestioning loyalty to the Priesthood as the cardinal virtue.

The Mormons started over again in 1838-39 in Illinois after fleeing from attacks in Missouri that surpassed in brutality any of the outrages that would later be perpetrated by border ruffians on "Bleeding Kansas." This and previous persecution had established a mind-set for crisis. Although the Mormons at Nauvoo were initially well-received by their neighbors, the tight-knit Mormon group loyalty soon began to result in tensions with the surrounding areas. Determined not to be pushed around any more, the Mormons secured a city charter that, if freely interpreted, made Nauvoo almost autonomous from the state. An all-Mormon militia of more than 2,000 men called the Nauvoo Legion was established, provoking fears in nearby non-Mormon regions. And a tightly-organized Church, presiding over what became temporarily the largest city in Illinois and appearing to hold the balance of power in the state, managed to alienate both political parties. Within this context of spiraling tension and experienced separateness the inhibitions which normally discourage radical innovation in the larger society became less significant and major doctrinal and social changes could occur. As

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1 In "The Nauvoo Charter: A Reinterpretation," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 64 (Spring 1971): 66-78, James L. Kimball, Jr., shows that the city charter granted to the Nauvoo Mormons actually was very similar to those granted other Illinois cities of the period. The only uniqueness of the Nauvoo Charter lay in the way it was used by the Mormons. Kimball's article is based on his more detailed analysis, "Study of the Nauvoo Charter, 1840-1845" (M.A. thesis, University of Iowa, 1966).
separateness encouraged innovation, so innovation in turn encouraged separateness by providing doctrinal and practical bases for evolving peculiarity.¹

Closely connected with the tensions between Mormons and outsiders as a factor making possible the introduction of new doctrinal and social patterns were social tensions within the Mormon community itself. Nauvoo was a boom town, growing within five years from a few hundred people to become a city with over 11,000 inhabitants. Like many such boom towns, it was plagued by a host of problems attendant upon rapid growth. Visitors commented on the extremes of wealth and poverty in the city, as well as on the Mormon efforts to overcome those problems.² With thousands of immigrants from England and the eastern states entering the city each year, inducting new members into the distinctive Mormon beliefs and cultural patterns posed a major challenge.³ Since the city adjoined the marshy malarial bottoms along the Mississippi River, numerous deaths occurred. According to one historian, perhaps as many as 1,500 to 2,000 people may have died during the six years that the Mormons lived in Nauvoo. This estimate is undoubtedly too high. Nevertheless, there were few families in Nauvoo that were not intimately acquainted with disease and death.³

¹See O'Dea, The Mormons, pp. 53-54, for an analysis of this cumulative process by which the inner dynamic of Mormon development, when faced by ever-increasing external pressures, spiraled toward major doctrinal and social innovation.


³This informal estimate was made by Kenneth W. Godfrey, "Some Thoughts Regarding an Unwritten History of Nauvoo" (unpublished paper presented at the Mormon History Association Meetings, Nauvoo, Illinois, April 1974), p. 2, footnote. This figure apparently is based on an extrapolation from the total number of obituaries in the popular Nauvoo newspaper, the Wasp, during part of 1842. As T. Edgar Lyon suggested to this author, there are several reasons why this is probably a high estimate. In 1842, a large influx of British immigrants who were highly susceptible to malaria-caused disease and death came to Nauvoo. Furthermore, deaths varied on a seasonal basis in Nauvoo, so one cannot extrapolate
Probably the most important internal dislocations were the unintended side effect of the Mormon missionary effort itself. While this program brought in vitally needed convert-settlers and capital, it also placed severe strains on marital relationships. On the one hand, men were frequently called with little notice to go "without purse or scrip" on extended missionary trips which amounted to long periods of voluntary celibacy. Experiences in the 1830s had convinced Mormon leaders that the alternative effort to take families along on such trips was impractical. Parley P. Pratt articulated the emotions felt by many Mormon missionary husbands when he wrote from England in 1840 to his wife Mary Ann: "Why must we live separate? Why must I be forever deprived of your Society and my dear little Children? I cannot endure it, and yet I must." Only an intense personal commitment to the larger objectives of the Mormon group enterprise could have induced so many men like Parley P. Pratt to sacrifice their hopes of normal family life.

Although the position of Mormon missionary husbands certainly was demanding, the pressures on their wives were even greater. Of necessity, they were left behind, often either pregnant or with young children to care for, as they faced the problem of trying to support themselves somehow. Typical of such cases was Eunice B. Shurtliff. Her husband Luman recorded her letter to him in 1842 in his journal to give "a small understanding of the trials, labors, sufferings and hardships of the sisters, and especially the wives of traveling elders." Eunice wrote that she was four months pregnant, had been severely sick for three months, and could not get credit to purchase food at the store.

"... I have no husband to talk with or comfort me these long nights

a total figure on only part of a year. Finally, the Wasp printed obituaries for Mormons anywhere in the United States who were known to the residents of Nauvoo. Although Godfrey's estimate is thus undoubtedly high, he has correctly identified a major factor contributing to social dislocation in Nauvoo.

1Letter of Parley P. Pratt to Mary Ann Frost Pratt, dated July 6, 1840, Parley P. Pratt Papers, Church Archives, box 1, folder 6.
... You know when Jane was born and you were gone from home ... I had to get along the best I could. Luman, I do not think it is your duty to stay there and leave me in such circumstances. Come without fail."¹ The circumstances of yet another woman, whose husband was gone for an exceptionally long five year period, was graphically described as one of "widowhood."² Under such circumstances, marital dissatisfactions of both men and women were almost certain to press for solution.

Thus it may not be accidental that the significant expansion of the Mormon missionary program, represented by the founding of the English mission in 1837, was closely followed by a major effort under Joseph Smith's leadership to introduce new marriage and family beliefs and practices. Neither does it appear surprising that the major leadership faction which supported Smith in these efforts and eventually oversaw the introduction of polygamy into the Mormon Church, were the twelve apostles, who actively ran the missionary program. Faced with long separation from their wives and families, such leaders might understandably have found the possibility of eventually formalizing and consummating other emotional attachments they had made to young women they had encountered in their work, an appealing prospect. Likewise, the dissatisfied wives of missionaries must also have at least felt a desire for a husband who was not always away for long periods of time and who could provide economic security.

In short, even without any larger intellectual rationale, an idealization of family and married life, a longing for stable eternal relationships, and the practice of variant forms of marital arrangements

¹ Letter of Eunice B. Shurtliff, dated December 24, 1842, as recorded in Luman Andros Shurtliff, Biographical Sketch. A typescript copied from the original by the Federal Writers Project of Ogden, Utah. Copy in the Huntington Library, San Marino, California, pp. 58-59.

² S. George Ellsworth, ed., Dear Ellen: Two Mormon Women and Their Letters (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Library, 1974), p. 42, records a letter from Ellen Pratt McGary to Ellen Spencer Clawson on April 12, 1857. It refers to her mother's independent management of their family affairs while her husband Addison Pratt was away on a mission from June 1, 1843, to September 28, 1848, as "her five year widowhood." During that period, Mrs. Pratt successfully organized her family's move from Illinois to Utah.
would seem almost certain to occur. What is surprising is that despite all these strains Nauvoo was by general agreement a basically well-kept and "virtuous" town. Significant marital variation apparently occurred only in the upper hierarchy of the Church.

VI

All the contradictory tensions and potential of Nauvoo eventually seemed to become fused within Joseph Smith himself. Especially after the devastating apostasy of John C. Bennett in 1842 which led Smith to become increasingly paranoid about the loyalty of even some of his close associates, he attempted to concentrate all positions of power in his own hands. He served simultaneously as Prophet and President of his Church, Mayor of the city, Major-General of the Nauvoo Legion, chief economic planner for the city and the Church, and in many other capacities--enough to tax the talents of many a lesser man. As tensions rose to a climax in 1844, Joseph Smith also began a seemingly quixotic campaign for President of the United States and simultaneously he apparently had himself secretly crowned King of his evolving political kingdom.¹ Faced with an enormously complex series of interlocking problems, Smith acted increasingly as though he were only willing to trust his own resources; he sought through his own powers alone to find solutions to all the difficult problems facing him.

Within this context of rapidly increasing tension, one can understand how Smith could have chosen Nauvoo as the place to present doctrines that had long been germinating in his mind. Apparently foreseeing the possibility of his eventual martyrdom, Smith became obsessed with teaching even his most controversial ideas to his close associates,

¹Klaus J. Hansen, *Quest for Empire: The Political Kingdom of God and the Council of Fifty in Mormon History* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1967), pp. 155-158, provides evidence that Joseph Smith may have had himself crowned King, at least symbolically, of his evolving Political Kingdom of God. Some information on the possible origins and significance of Smith's political kingdom concerns is suggested in Reed C. Durham's 1974 Mormon History Association Presidential Address, "'Is There No Help for the Widow's Son': Mormonism and Masonry," printed as pp. 6-8 of the unauthorized typescript transcription of the talk circulated by Mervin B. Hogan, Salt Lake City, Utah.
lest those ideas die with him. In a mood of aggressive fatalism on January 22, 1843, he reportedly declared: "God Almighty is my shield; and what can man do if God is my friend? I shall not be sacrificed until my time comes; then I shall be offered freely." Given such an attitude, a strong-willed man may be capable of the most remarkable actions.

Joseph Smith appears to have possessed such a strong sense of his prophetic mission that he could interpret his own deepest perceptions as having divine origin and he could consider himself responsible only to God for his actions. Other Mormons, however, would not have been willing to take the enormous risks of leaving behind familiar moral standards and committing themselves to an unknown and untested new way of life without clear guarantees or sanctions.

Some writers have suggested that Smith's personal "charisma" was sufficient to induce his followers to adopt new marriage and family practices. This is an inadequate explanation. Certainly Smith did possess unusual personal magnetism, but his appeal was at least as much in his prophetic role as in his person. In addition, an intellectual-doctrinal framework of great power and appeal as well as a variety of impressive new temple ceremonies had to be created to introduce Smith's followers into the new beliefs and practices.

Anthropologists are familiar with rites of passage in various cultures; these occur in certain socially prescribed circumstances and forms. What Joseph Smith did was more complex; he created a whole new framework of meaning for his followers—including elaborate new beliefs and rituals which would lead his followers out of their present state and initiate them into a largely unknown new condition of being. In effect, Smith was attempting to demolish an old way of life and to build a new social order from the ground up.

Not surprisingly, Smith encountered difficulties with this venture. Only following his martyrdom, when his personal motivations were no longer in such hot dispute among most Mormons, could Joseph

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Smith's new beliefs and practices be introduced into the whole Church. 1

The antebellum period in America when this remarkable development took place was one in which the absence of adequate institutional means to deal with pressing problems allowed various reform ideas to assume unusual practical influence. 2 In turbulent Nauvoo, which served in many ways as a microcosm of contemporary America, ideas came to play a significant role in events. Joseph Smith's ideas thus will be given serious treatment in this account.

A quest for true religious authority had been a key factor underlying initial Mormon development. 3 In Nauvoo, where the Saints had sufficient time and the concentrated power to put their ideals into practice, the effort to integrate religious and social life reached an early peak. Five revelations—and four additional statements now accepted as revelation by the Utah Church—were given between January 19, 1841 and July 12, 1843. These provided the doctrinal basis for a new world view making possible the introduction of plural marriage. 4

Basic to these revelations was the further elaboration of Church authority through new ceremonies linking the living and the dead. Strong emphasis was placed on the idea that the head of the Mormon Church possessed the powers of Saint Peter to bind and to loose, thereby determining possible relationships in heaven. This was the basis for a doctrine of baptism for the dead making possible the salvation of

1Mary Rollings Lightner, one of Smith's plural wives, stated that he recognized that his death might be a necessary precondition for the successful establishment of his religion, including plural marriage. Smith is said to have declared that "this work will never progress until I am gone for the testimony is of no force until the testator is dead." Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, Speech Given at Brigham Young University, April 14, 1905, p. 5. Copy in Brigham Young University Special Collections.

2Elkins, Slavery, brilliantly argues this case.

3De Pillis, "Quest for Religious Authority," pp. 68-88, is the classic statement of this argument.

4The statements are printed as sections 124 through 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants.
those who had died without knowledge of the truth. Special endowment and sealing ceremonies, apparently a revision and elaboration of Masonic ritual, were also seen as necessary to give permanence to earthly marriage after death.

Ideally these ceremonies were to be performed within a special temple. Great efforts thus were made to create such a temple which would provide tangible sanction for the new doctrinal and social departures. These new beliefs and rituals helped solidity Church authority over its members, providing individuals whose own lives often were uncertain with a sense of eternal continuity and stability.

Underlying this elaboration of Church authority was a new view of the relationship between the material and spiritual worlds. The central premise of this belief was the close connection between matter and spirit: "All spirit is matter, but it is more fine and pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes." Smith asserted that "spirit is a substance that is material but that is more pure, elastic and refined matter than the body. . . . It existed before the body, can exist in the body, and will exist separate from the body, when the body will be moulder- ing in the dust. . . . "

The distance between God and man also was sharply reduced, for God was seen as possessing a physical body and as limited by time. Revelation declared that: "The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as a man's. . . . " and Smith made clear that he did not mean this statement metaphorically: "God himself, who sits enthroned in yonder heavens, is a man like unto yourselves, that is the great secret. . . . Adam received instruction, walked, talked, and conversed with him, as one man talks and communes with another."

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1 The relationship between Mormon and Masonic ritual will be discussed at greater length in Chapter V.

2 History of the Church, 5: 393.

3 Ibid., 6: 573. From an editorial in the Times and Seasons on April 1, 1842. Punctuation modified for purposes of clarity.

4 Doctrine and Covenants, 130: 22. Given on April 2, 1843.

5 Millennial Star 5 (November 1844): 88-89.
This anthropomorphic view, reminiscent of the popular stereotype of God as the great bearded patriarch on the throne, suggests the extraordinary degree to which Joseph Smith personalized his relationship to God. Implied in this new view of God was the awesome and intoxicating possibility that men could progress toward full godhood. "As man is, God once was; as God is, man may become" was Lorenzo Snow's succinct summary of this belief.

The key to entering this highest celestial glory was open to men through the Priesthood and through a "new and everlasting covenant of marriage," which would be most fully described in Smith's last recorded revelation. All these revelations implied that heaven was simply an accentuation and heightening of the present life. "The same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there, only it will be coupled with eternal glory, which glory we do not now enjoy." The afterlife was thus not merely an academic matter; the ideal or heavenly pattern could be realized on earth.

That marriage relationships would be eternal when properly sealed by the Church was the key idea in Joseph Smith's last and perhaps most important revelation on plural and celestial marriage. Marriage was raised to a position of supreme importance as the only means by which highest status and glory could be achieved in heaven. Neither a man nor a woman could be saved apart from each other in a marriage relationship. Two main types of marriage were indicated. The first, ordinary secular marriage or marriage without the proper sealing ceremonies by the Priesthood, would last only "for time." It was thus of an inferior character, for it would be dissolved by the death of either party. In heaven, people who had participated in such marriages would be of the lowest order, solitary "ministering angels," a sort of perpetual servant class, unable to progress further toward godhood.

1Although it is unclear whether Lorenzo Snow actually was the first to coin this striking phrase, his name has become firmly linked to it.

2History of the Church, 5: 323.

3The possible appeal of this concept to many lower-class female Mormon converts from England and Scandinavia is an interesting problem. Many of the women who migrated to Utah had been severely exploited as
The second "celestial" form of marriage "for time and eternity" was possible when properly sealed by the Priesthood. It would endure in heaven as well as on earth. In heaven, men participating in such marriages would be great patriarchs having "all power," surrounded by their own family as well as by those unfortunate ministering angels who lacked wives or progeny. Through the "eternal increase" of such godlike patriarchs by means of their children, grandchildren, and so forth, they eventually would move on to rule over whole new worlds, achieving full godhood in conjunction with their wives in what could easily be seen as the ultimate in "manifest destiny."¹

Polygamy or plural marriage was introduced as a particularly exalted form of eternal or celestial marriage. The possibility of polygamy was based on Smith's belief that God had commanded or at least sanctioned the taking of plural wives and concubines by the Hebrew patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as well as by David and Solomon, and many others. The logic behind the Latter-day Saint version of plural marriage was that if marriage with one wife, sealed under the authority of the Priesthood, could bring eternal progression and ultimate godhood for men, then having more than one wife in this life and the next merely accelerated the process, in line with God's promise to Abraham that his seed eventually would be as numerous as the sand on the sea shore.

Since the idea of polygamy obviously would be repugnant to many individuals, the bulk of this, as of many previous revelations, was devoted to reminding Mormons that strict obedience to God's commands was required, even when those commands appeared humanly unreasonable. Thus, when Abraham was prepared, if necessary, to obey God's command domestic servants. Their degradation was comparable to if not worse than that of early factory workers. Any marriage, no matter how inadequate, would signal a rise in status for such women.

¹With the end of the expansiveness associated with the nineteenth-century development of Mormonism, this concept has been considerably modified. Ironically, some present-day Mormons attribute this concept to a non-Mormon misunderstanding of their faith rather than realizing that these beliefs were those of their forebears.
to kill his son Isaac as a sacrifice--even though it is written, "Thou shalt not kill"--he was justified. And likewise, when Abraham, at God's command according to Mormon scripture, took Hagar to wife in addition to Sarah,\(^1\) he was acting under law and was justified. "Go ye, therefore, and do the work of Abraham; enter ye into my law, and ye shall be saved."

Almost no details were given in the revelation as to how polygamy was to be practiced; however, the revelation did declare that under the authority of the Priesthood,

If any man espouse a virgin, and desire to espouse another, and the first give her consent, and if he espouse the second, and if they are virgins, and have vowed to no other man, then he is justified; he cannot commit adultery with that that belongeth unto him and to no one else; and if he have ten virgins given unto him by this law, he cannot commit adultery, for they belong to him, therefore he is justified.\(^2\)

Should either party who was sealed under the new and everlasting covenant have sexual relations outside the bounds of churchly supervised law, however, that would be a heinous sin, especially for the woman, who would be destroyed by God.

The extreme arbitrariness running throughout this revelation and the constant emphasis on male prerogatives are characteristic of Joseph Smith's attitudes during this increasingly tense period in Nauvoo. A contemporary scholar, probing to the root of this extraordinary new system, declares: "Mormonism was true to its heritage. It would transgress conventional morality only by claiming the sanction of a higher command. Moral authority must not be questioned in the process."\(^3\)

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\(^1\) Doctrine and Covenants, 132: 65. The cosmological framework which helped to prepare the minds of Mormon believers for the acceptance of polygamy is suggested in the Book of Abraham, which was "translated" by Joseph Smith in 1842. It was first printed in Joseph Smith, Jr., The Pearl of Great Price: Being a Choice Selection from the Revelations, Translations, and Narratives of Joseph Smith, First Prophet, Seer, and Revelator to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1851). The Pearl of Great Price is now printed together with the Doctrine and Covenants by the Utah branch of the Mormon Church.

\(^2\) Doctrine and Covenants, 132: 61. This is possibly the most frequently cited passage from the revelation in both contemporary Nauvoo Mormon apostate attacks on Joseph Smith and in later accounts critical of polygamy.

\(^3\) O'Dea, The Mormons, p. 61.
VII

The idea of plural marriage may have taken internally consistent form in Joseph Smith's remarkable mind. The practical development and workings of a new polygamous marriage system were much more problematical, however. Even under ideal circumstances, polygamous practices could hardly have been introduced into nineteenth-century Illinois without provoking the most intense misunderstandings and conflicts. Most people already considered individual immorality or deviance to be dangerous. But to claim that an abomination such as polygamy was authorized—indeed commanded—by God, and that it should be the ideal standard for an entire community, was to pose an intolerable threat to social stability. To those committed to monogamous standards, such new beliefs would seem to undercut the very basis of moral authority itself.

Perhaps the most vehement opposition to the new beliefs and practices came from highly placed Mormons, many of whom were appalled at what they considered Joseph Smith's falling away from virtue and the earlier high standards of the Church. The number of Mormons who had first-hand knowledge of the new beliefs before Smith's death was miniscule. Even rarer were those who engaged in the practice of polygamy with Joseph Smith's approval. Nevertheless, rumors that strange and perhaps officially sanctioned practices were being introduced into the Church circulated widely in Nauvoo and trickled out to nearby newspapers such as the Warsaw Signal, which gleefully pounced on such stories as yet another proof of Mormon perfidy. So seemingly exaggerated were many of those accounts that few decent non-Mormons gave them much credence. But within Nauvoo itself, tensions over the introduction of plural marriage became explosive.

Since Joseph Smith assumed ultimate authority and responsibility for everything in the Church and whatever he supported became more or less official policy, he inevitably became the storm center around which dissention swirled. During the last three years of his life, Smith made a number of moves to prepare the minds of his followers for the introduction of plural marriage; he explicitly began advocating polygamous belief and practice to his closest followers; and he took a large number of plural wives himself. Thus, he became increasingly vulnerable to discovery and criticism.
For analytical purposes, five main circles of conflict may be seen radiating outward from Joseph Smith. Tensions were present within Smith's own psyche; between Smith and his first wife Emma; and between Smith and his closest disciples, including the women he espoused. With the possible partial exception of Emma, these people composed an inner core group which knew a good deal about what Smith was trying to do and which supported him, albeit often reluctantly.

A much larger outer group of followers sensed that something strange was happening in the Church and were disturbed by the direction of events. Opposition ranged from Mormons who engaged in variant polygamous or licentious practices such as the highly opportunistic John C. Bennett, who distorted a developing religious principle to serve his own personal ends, to sincere believers such as William Law and Austin Cowles, who became convinced that Joseph Smith had become a "fallen prophet" and must be replaced if the Church were to be preserved. In conjunction with external pressures, the varied dissension within Nauvoo eventually would lead with almost tragic determinism to the martyrdom of the Mormon prophet and the departure of the Mormon community from Illinois.

Joseph Smith himself appears to have been torn by many conflicting impulses. He repeatedly declared to his closest associates that he had decided to introduce plural marriage only with the greatest reluctance because "an angel of God stood by him with a drawn sword, and told him that, unless he moved forward and established plural marriage, his Priesthood would be taken away from him and he should be destroyed!"1 Certainly he was aware of the political explosiveness of the new doctrines, as his numerous carefully veiled remarks and many apparent "feelers" to test Church opinion suggest.2

1Eliza R. Snow, Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Co., 1884), pp. 69-70. See Chapter I, p. 33, footnote 1.

2Attempts to prepare the minds of his followers for plural marriage were numerous and varied. As early as November 21, 1841, prior to the return of the Twelve from England, Smith gave a public speech before a large assemblage of Saints in Nauvoo. He asked what the Mormons should do if they converted polygamous men in Turkey or India, where polygamy
Smith's detractors have not adequately appreciated the extent to which he was aware of his own motives and how close he may have come to the realization that the introduction of plural marriage might in part represent a high level rationalization for his own impulses and behavior. In a public speech in April 1840 he declared:

I have my failings and passions to contend with the same as has the greatest stranger to God. I am tempted the same as you are, my brethren. I am not infallible. All men are subject to temptation, but they are not justified in yielding to their passions and sinful natures. There is a constant warfare between the two natures of man.1

Surely it is no accident that Joseph Smith distinguished between his actions as a fallible man and his role as a prophet or mouthpiece of God,2 or that revelations frequently rebuked him for his own shortcomings or errors in judgment. Several ambiguous statements, including two in the revelation on plural marriage may even suggest an indirect apology to his wife Emma for possible sexual misconduct.3 A devoted was legal. Would the Mormons force such converts to break up their families if they came to America? The answer was No. And the implication was clear: that polygamy might eventually be practiced by American Mormons also. Mormon women responded so negatively to this sermon that in the afternoon Smith got up and retracted the remarks that he had made in the morning. Robinson, Journal, pp. 24-27. Smith's many sermonic references to the "mysteries" yet to be revealed also led to a mood of expectancy conducive to the introduction of plural marriage. These "Mysteries" were associated with new doctrines and sealing ceremonies. If one becomes sensitized to the possible meaning of such references, many of the standard accounts of the Nauvoo period can be seen in a new light. It is no accident that the RLDS Church later rejected the new Nauvoo doctrines and sealing ceremonies in toto, for they provide an intellectual and emotional framework within which polygamy is a logical if not an inevitable development.

1Lee, Mormonism Unveiled, p. 111.

2On February 8, 1843, he made clear that "a prophet was a prophet only when he was acting as such." History of the Church, 5: 265.

3Following a series of statements saying that Emma must accept Joseph's plural wives or "be destroyed," the revelation reads: "And again, verily I say, let my handmaid forgive my servant Joseph his trespasses...." Doctrine and Covenants, 132: 56. And Doctrine and Covenants, 132: 60 further declares: "Let no one, therefore, set on my servant Joseph; for I will justify him; for he shall do the sacrifice which I require at his hands for his transgressions, saith the Lord your God."
follower, Joseph Lee Robinson, remembered that Smith once expressed anxiety that he might have committed adultery. Such a concern would suggest either that even Joseph Smith may not have been wholly able to leave old monogamous ways of thinking behind, or else that he himself did not always live up to the standards that he was introducing.¹

Smith certainly never fitted the stereotype of the hard-nosed Puritan divine; he had a dynamism, sense of humor, and love of life that were contagious. He was proud both of his intellectual and physical prowess. The allegation that Smith once told a follower, "Whenever I see a pretty girl, I have to pray for grace" is probably apocryphal,² but by his own record a perceptive phrenologist once gave him an extremely high rating for "amativeness."³ Smith was an immensely popular leader who was idolized by his followers, including many capable and attractive women. He had to handle an extraordinary range of personal problems of his followers, including economic difficulties of women whose husbands were absent on missions and a variety of marital problems and dissatisfactions.

Under such circumstances, Smith was subject to far greater than average pressures and temptations. If he had not been the man of

¹"I Joseph Lee Robinson do verily know it [the LDS gospel] is true, so help me God. my love for the Prophet Joseph was truly Stronger than death it was greater than for any man that Ever lived Except Jesus the first Begotten of the Father. . . . we all also [sic] heard him [Joseph Smith] say that God had revealed unto him that any Man that Ever Committed Adultery in Either of his Probations that that man could never be raised to the highest Exaltation in the Celestial Glory, and that he felt anxious with regard to himself that he enquired of the Lord, that the Lord told him that he Joseph had never committed [sic] Adultery. . . . "

Robinson, Journal, p. 22. Similar allegations were made by William Law and others shortly before Smith's death, and drew his usual indirect denial: such allegations were too absurd to be believed. The revelation on plural and celestial marriage itself shows great concern for distinguishing between sanctioned sexual behavior and behavior defined as adulterous.

²Coming from Wyl, Mormon Portraits, p. 55, this statement is understandably suspect.

³History of the Church, 5: 53.
extraordinary energy and need for self-consistency that he was, he could not have struggled so intensely with his and his followers' impulses as he did, and very probably he never would have conceived, much less introduced, either a new religion or a new marriage system.

The bitterness with which Joseph Smith's strong-willed wife Emma reacted to his taking additional wives also suggests the difficulties facing the prophet. Emma never became reconciled to plural marriage. The introduction of polygamy was complicated by the deep affection that Emma and Joseph had for each other, a bond which is unmistakably revealed in their personal letters. Emma was jealously devoted to Joseph. He, in turn, showed great love for her. The attachment between the two of them must have made the introduction of plural marriage especially painful. Contemporary accounts from both Mormon and anti-Mormon sources suggest that on at least two or three occasions Emma was on the verge of leaving Joseph altogether because of his polygamous practice. Internal evidence in the 1843 revelation on plural and celestial marriage, as well as affidavits from both the man who recorded

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1 Even in the Nauvoo period, these letters continue to show great personal warmth.

2 A summary of contemporary accounts is provided in Raymond T. Bailey, "Emma Hale: Wife of the Prophet Joseph Smith" (M.S. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1952), p. 104. Bailey's account of Emma's reaction to polygamy, pp. 50-111, is probably the most complete assessment of the evidence on the subject available. Typical of the gossip accounts of Smith's marital difficulties which circulated in the Illinois press was a note in the Warsaw Signal for April 24, 1844, which alleged that Emma Smith had gone down the river on a boat trip and that before she left she "became reconciled to Joe, who last week turned her out of his house."

Joseph Lee Robinson, a brother of Ebenezer Robinson who was writing on July 14, 1846, in Nauvoo as a loyal member of the Church, indicated that the involvement of Ebenezer's wife Angeline in watching Joseph Smith's movements for Emma infuriated him and precipitated a family crisis that almost led Emma to go home to her parents. Apparently Ebenezer's support of his wife's stand in the matter was a contributing factor in his precipitous removal from the editorship of the Times and Seasons, the official Church newspaper, in February 1842. Robinson, Journal, p. 49. Writing many years later in The Return, a retrospective newspaper that he published, Ebenezer Robinson skirted the whole issue, which apparently still was painful to him.
it for Smith and the man who allegedly made the copy of the original from which the present version is reproduced, support the hypothesis that the immediate occasion for writing the revelation was an attempt to overcome the hatred of Smith's wife for the practice. According to these accounts, she eventually badgered Smith into giving her the original statement and then proceeded to destroy it, believing there was no other copy.¹

There is a genuine pathos in this strong-willed woman's effort to eliminate the humiliating evidence of her husband's most striking social innovation, and in her lifelong attack on the system. Eventually she and her sons by Joseph Smith would become pillars of the schismatic Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, which included among its primary doctrines, opposition to polygamy based on statements from the Book of Mormon and from the 1835 Kirtland edition of the Doctrine and Covenants. According to Utah Mormon accounts, Emma's knowledge extended to only a fraction of Joseph Smith's plural marriages.² After his death, in effect she attempted to blot out that whole aspect of her life, saying next to nothing about her personal knowledge of polygamy. Finally, in a posthumously published and highly edited "Last Will and Testament" she admitted that Joseph had talked with her about the possibility of polygamy being introduced, but she said that he had never practiced it and had never had "improper" relations with any other woman.³

¹A convenient summary of the relevant affidavits on the subject is found in Roberts, Comprehensive History, 2: 105-107. The original affidavit by William Clayton, Joseph Smith's secretary who swore that he wrote down the revelation, is in the Church Archives in a slightly longer version than that commonly printed.

²According to Utah Mormon accounts, Emma had personally approved Joseph Smith's marriages to four women—Eliza M. and Emily Dow Partridge, and Maria and Sarah Lawrence. In all probability, such approval was given with extreme reluctance. Emma may also have known of her husband's relations with a few of his other plural wives as well. Even most of Joseph Smith's close associates only knew a small number of his plural wives by name, and, depending on their range of contacts, the wives whom they knew as such varied. Evidently the extent of Joseph Smith's plural marriages was kept a secret from most of even his trusted followers.

³The statement was printed as "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," Saints' Herald 36 (October 1, 1879): 289-290. Apparently the questions
If Joseph Smith faced internal psychic turmoil and a near rebellion from his wife due to the introduction of plural marriage, he also encountered great difficulties with his close male followers to whom he gradually revealed the system. Brigham Young, leader of the Twelve Apostles who oversaw the introduction of plural marriage after Smith's death in Nauvoo and in Utah, declared that when he first heard the revelation and thought of all the troubles that would ensue, "it was the first time in my life that I desired the grave." Heber C. Kimball, another of Smith's closest followers, was so distraught after receiving the command to secretly take another wife that he begged Smith to remove the requirement lest he apostatize and thereby forfeit his had been carefully prepared in advance and may have been seen by Emma prior to her being asked them for the record. The questions were asked her at an unspecified time or times during a seven day period. Frequently they were asked her in the presence of her second husband Major Lewis C. Bidamon, who was in and out of the sitting room where the conversation took place. It is unclear how much of the original conversation is printed in this account or what qualifying or linking statements may have been edited out. The hostility of the questioners toward polygamy was palpable; Joseph Smith III prefaced the account by saying that they were fearful what Emma might have to say on the subject, but that they swallowed their fears and decided "whatever the worst might be, we would hear it." Before asking Emma the questions, they apologized to her for asking about polygamy. The questions about polygamy show an ambiguity in wording that is probably not accidental. Despite her apparent flat denial that Joseph Smith had taught or practiced polygamy, Emma did admit that he had discussed the possibility of plural wives in a "chat" with some of his followers, and that he had supposedly said: "Well such a system might possibly be, if everybody was agreed to it and would behave as they should..." Emma's statement was taken informally, not under oath, and it was not published until after her death. This author doubts that any of Emma's statements contained therein were deliberately fabricated, but the nature of the editing process that was used is unclear. Even less convincing than Emma's "Last Testimony" is her reported statement to Jason Briggs in an interview of April 1867, which denies, simply, that her husband ever taught her the "principles of polygamy" or that she knowingly burned the original revelation. The Messenger 1 (April 1875): 23. Knowing Emma's passionate hatred of polygamy, it is difficult to imagine why she refused throughout her entire life to personally issue any public denials or affidavits refuting Joseph Smith's involvement with polygamy, unless, as the evidence overwhelmingly shows, she knew that he had in fact taught and practiced polygamy during his life time.

¹JD 3: 266. Speech of July 14, 1855.
salvation. Only after being commanded three times by Smith in the name of the Lord did he obey.¹

Even more complex was the case of Orson Pratt, who later was chosen to give the first public defense of plural marriage in 1852, and who became its most articulate intellectual spokesman in the Church. In 1842, he initially balanced precariously on the verge of apostasy or madness because of what he felt had been Smith's improprieties toward his wife.² And Benjamin F. Johnson, later patriarch of an extensive plural family in Utah, said he had been horrified when Smith explained plural marriage to him and told him to ask his sister Almera to become Smith's plural wife. Recovering from the shock, Johnson remembered telling Smith that he would try to do as he had asked but that "if ever I know you do this to degrade my sister I will kill you, as the Lord lives."³

Introducing plural marriage and beginning its institutionalization was a risky venture, to say the least. To be sure, a few leaders apparently accepted the new system fairly easily. And perhaps a few of the retrospective accounts may have portrayed their personal reluctance to support Joseph Smith on the issue as having been greater than it actually was. Nevertheless, most of Smith's loyal followers appear to have been genuinely distraught when told of the new departure. Joseph Smith's personal magnetism, the appeal of his prophetic role, and the attractiveness of the doctrines and rituals he introduced into his Church must have been frighteningly intense. Even when his followers found the new marriage beliefs and practices personally repugnant, they were even more anxious that if they did not accept them, they might forfeit their eternal salvation.


²For a consideration of this problem, see Thomas Edgar Lyon, "Orson Pratt--Early Mormon Leader" (M.A. thesis, University of Chicago, 1932), pp. 34-44.

The acceptance and practice of plural marriage thus came to serve as one of the chief tests of the total loyalty which Smith was coming to demand of his closest followers. Such participation meant there was no turning back. If men or women had once engaged in polygamous practice, they were in no position to apostatize, or the air would be made blue with stories of their licentious behavior. Likewise, if a man's daughter had been sealed as a plural wife to Joseph Smith or other leaders of the Church, effective opposition to the practice became exceedingly difficult. To do so would be tantamount to disowning one's own children as well as everything to which one had previously committed one's whole life.

In addition, by accepting polygamy, the network of personal loyalties and the range of possible relationships were vastly expanded. As one Mormon scholar has noted, in Utah the varieties of interrelationships in some families became so complex as virtually to defy analysis.¹ For instance, by his death at age eighty-eight, Benjamin F. Johnson was related by blood or marriage to over eight hundred people.² For a heavily persecuted group which thought of itself in tribal terms as a "New Israel," such personal linkages thus can be seen as a critical factor contributing to social cohesion. There is every reason to believe that an awareness of these factors was an important part of the practical calculations underlying Joseph Smith's introduction of polygamy and his personal choice of plural wives.

VIII

The women whom Joseph Smith took as plural wives were faced with exceptional emotional and practical difficulties. The nature of their reactions to the new beliefs and practices and their relationships with Smith has never been studied systematically. Most writers have contented themselves with making head counts of Smith's alleged plural wives. The Mormon historian Andrew Jenson listed 27, Fawn Brodie claimed 48, while

¹Quinn, "The Mormon Hierarchy," p. 159.
²Johnson, My Life's Review, p. 388.
Stanley S. Ivins found 84. These lists fail to differentiate between various categories of wives, particularly between those who may

Exactly what relationship was sustained to Joseph Smith by the twenty-seven women listed as his plural wives in Jenson, "Plural Marriage," pp. 233-234, is unclear. Of this list, full marriage dates are given in ten cases; the year only is given in five cases; no date is given in the cases of two women who presumably were married to Smith before Nauvoo; and no dates are given for the marriages of ten women who presumably were sealed to him in some fashion in Nauvoo. Of the list of forty-eight plural wives of Joseph Smith presented in Brodie, No Man Knows My History, pp. 335-336, 457-488, approximately one-third appear to have been sealed to him for "time and eternity"; another one-third may or may not have been sealed to him for "time and eternity"; and approximately one-third were presumably sealed to him only "for eternity," or else are of such dubious and unsubstantiated a character that little can be said about them. Brodie makes use of a number of apostate accounts in drawing up her list. Some of these may contain important information, while others such as William Hall's account, are of extremely dubious accuracy and must be evaluated with the caution used in evaluating any malicious gossip. Stanley Snow Ivins's list of eighty-four alleged plural wives is found in a Miscellaneous Folder in his collection at the Utah State Historical Society and is most readily available in Jerald and Sandra Tanner, Joseph Smith and Polygamy (Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm Co., n.d.), pp. 41-47. Again, the precise nature of the relationship, if any, that Joseph Smith sustained to these women is unclear. Ivins includes eleven women in his list who were sealed by proxy to Joseph Smith long after his death, but who, he says, might have been married to Smith during his life.

The major primary and secondary accounts on which this analysis of Joseph Smith's plural wives is based include Jenson, "Plural Marriage," pp. 219-234; Joseph F. Smith, Jr., Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage; Temple Lot Case [U.S. Circuit Court (8th Circuit)] in Church Archives, printed in abbreviated form as Complainant's Abstract of Pleading and Evidence. . . . The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Complainant, vs. The Church of Christ at Independence, Missouri. . . (Lamoni, Iowa: Herald Publishing House, 1893), hereafter cited as Abstract of the Temple Lot Case; Shook, Origin of Mormon Polygamy; Brodie, No Man Knows My History, esp. pp. 297-322, 334-347, and 457-488; Jerald and Sandra Tanner, Joseph Smith and Polygamy; and Vesta P. Crawford Papers, University of Utah Special Collections. Since the closing of the records on Joseph Smith's marriage sealings in the Geneological Archives in Salt Lake City to researchers, that data is available for the use of serious historians and geneologists in Thomas Milton Tinney, The Royal Family of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Junior: First President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (typescript, 1973; a copy is held in the Utah State Historical Society Library, Salt Lake City, Utah). A number of important primary anti-Mormon sources exist, including those cited on p. 195, footnote 1 of this chapter, but their use has been de-emphasized in this section. Insofar as most of these sources, whether Mormon or non-Mormon, tend to focus on Smith's
actually have lived with Joseph Smith and those who probably were only sealed to him for "eternity." These lists also largely avoid the important qualitative questions about Smith's relationships.

What were the reactions of women who were asked to become Smith's plural wives? Why and how did they accept the new status, if they did? Did the relationship involve full conjugal rights? If so, why are there no clear cases of children born to such unions? Finally, what accounts for the apparent discrepancies between theory and practice in the early development of polygamy, particularly the evidence that Joseph Smith took a number of plural wives who already had living husbands? In an attempt to recover internal Mormon reactions to these controversial developments, primary reliance in this section will be placed on Mormon accounts rather than anti-Mormon sources which often fail to capture the underlying spirit of events. Anthropological perspectives from other millennial groups will also help in providing a larger context into which to place the problems the Mormons experienced in the process of transition to a new marriage system.

The frank and detailed personal statement of Lucy Walker, who became a plural wife of Joseph Smith and later of Heber C. Kimball, suggests many of the characteristic features of Smith's relationships for which we have extensive information. Lucy was born on April 30, 1826, in Peacham, Caledonia County, Vermont. Her family joined the Church shortly after it was founded, moved frequently with it, underwent intense personal behavior, they tend to ignore the important social issues that are of primary interest to historians. As Brigham Young stated rather emphatically in JD, 4: 78, a prophet's personal conduct is not necessarily a measure of the validity of his general program.

The primary source used here for Lucy Walker's experience is a typescript copy of her account made by the Federal Writer's Project in 1940. This version is almost identical to that held in manuscript in the Church Archives, except that the latter contains a fuller account of Lucy Walker's experiences following Joseph Smith's death. A version omitting almost all references to plural marriage was printed in the Women's Exponent 39 (1910): 31, passim. The testimony in the Temple Lot Case also should be consulted.

Some of Joseph Smith's other plural wives for whom extensive documentation exists include Eliza R. Snow, Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner, Sarah Ann Whitney, Emily and Eliza Partridge, Helen Mar Kimball, and Melissa Lott.
persecution in Missouri, and eventually settled in Nauvoo. The family had developed a close personal relationship to Joseph Smith. When Lucy's mother died in Nauvoo in 1842, leaving ten motherless children, the health of Lucy's father seemed to give way under the strain. Joseph Smith stepped in, suggesting the father seek a change of environment, and Smith temporarily adopted the four oldest children as a part of his own family and household, going out of his way to help them in all ways.

Early in 1843, when Lucy was a lively and attractive sixteen, Joseph Smith had a private interview with her and told her God had commanded him to take her as a plural wife. Her "astonishment knew no bounds." She felt he was insulting her. Smith asked her if she believed him to be a Prophet of God. She said Yes. He then explained "the principle of plural or celestial marriage" to her, saying that it was being restored for the good of the human family and that it would "prove an everlasting blessing to my father's house, and form a chain that could never be broken, worlds without end." Lucy was told to pray and that she would receive a personal testimony of the correctness of the principle, but her mind was filled with darkness. She had no father or mother to give her counsel and she felt deeply distraught.

Joseph Smith could see her unhappiness. He said that although under the circumstances he couldn't publicly acknowledge her as his wife, she would eventually be "acknowledged and honored as my wife." He also told her that if she rejected this message "the gate will be closed forever against you." This threat made her angry. Lucy felt that she was being asked "to place myself upon the altar a living sacrifice--perhaps to brook the world in disgrace and incur the displeasure and contempt of my youthful companions." Unless she knew that God approved her course, she would rather die. Smith said she would get a personal testimony of the truth of the principle. Lucy earnestly desired such a testimony. Shortly before dawn after a sleepless night of fervent prayer, she felt as though her room were "lighted up by a heavenly influence": "Supreme happiness took possession of me, and I received a powerful and irresistible testimony of the truth of plural marriage."
Lucy Walker's background and experience typifies that of many of Joseph Smith's other plural wives. Women who were approached by Smith or his close associates to become plural wives normally were of proven personal and family loyalty to the Church, were frequently dependent upon the Church for economic support, and generally had a variety of strong personal ties to Smith and the other leadership. In an analysis of various relationships among Smith's wives, Vesta Crawford indicates that at least eleven of the women were related to prominent Church leaders, five were orphans or otherwise dependent, and seven lived at some time in Smith's home--categories which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Direct or indirect coercive pressure was placed on the women to accept the marriage overtures, or, if they adamantly refused, to keep quiet about them. In the few cases of such apparent refusals that became publicly known--such as the tangled cases of Nancy Rigdon, Martha Brotherton, and Sarah Pratt--the characters of the resisting women were thoroughly blackened.

In almost all recorded cases, initial presentation of the belief in plural marriage either to men or women resulted in shock, horror, disbelief, or general emotional confusion. Those who eventually accepted the principle almost invariably went through a period of inner turmoil lasting from several days to several months on occasion. During this period, they generally would go without adequate sleep, food, or normal social contacts, fervently praying that God would reveal the truth of the new beliefs to them. Those who eventually accepted plural marriage almost invariably had a compelling personal experience of the truth of

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1 Since Lucy Walker's accounts were written many years after the events she describes, her lack of clarity in giving dates is understandable. According to Joseph F. Smith, Jr., Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage, p. 55, William Clayton's Private Journal for May 1, 1843, states: "At the Temple. At 10 married Joseph to Lucy Walker." The whereabouts of Clayton's Journal is not currently known.

2 Typescript analysis of various characteristics of Joseph Smith's plural wives as indicated in Vesta P. Crawford Papers.
the new standards. Taking such a drastic step away from established
norms demanded more than a purely intellectual assent to the new beliefs.¹

Few contemporary documents have survived which show reactions
within the Mormon community of supporters of plural marriage before
Joseph Smith's death. One of these is found in a letter of Vilate
Kimball to her husband Heber C. Kimball, dated "Nauvoo June 24th 1843."
She wrote:

June 27th Since writing the above, I have had a visit from brother
Parley [Pratt] and his wife, they are truly converted it appears
that J....h has taught him some principles and told him his privilege,
even appointed one for him, I dare not tell you who it is, you
would be astonished and I guess some tried. She has ben to me for
council, I told her I did not wish to advise in such matters. Sister
Pratt has ben rageing against these things, she told me her self that
the devel had been in her until within a few days past, she said the
Lord had shown her it was all right. She wants Parley to go ahead,
says she will do all in her power to help him; they are so ingagued
I fear they will run to fast. they asked me many questions on
principle I told them I did not know much and I rather they would
go to those that had authority to teach. Parley said he and J were
interrupted before he got what instruction he wanted, and now he
did not know when he should have an oppurtunity. he seamed unwilling
to wate, I told him these were sacred things and he better not make
a move until he got more instruction.--I have a secret to tell you,
but I am almost afrade, it was committed to Sarah and she was
requested not to tell me, but she said she concidered me a part
of her self and she would tell me, and I might tell you for it was
just what you had prophecied would come to pass. now if you know
what you have said about Sarah Ally then you have got the secret,
for it is even so, and she is tickled about it. and they all appear
in better spirits than they did before. how they will carry it out,
is more than I know, I hope they have got more faith than I have.
Brother nobles folks all send love to you.

In her concluding remarks, Vilate writes:

I think you had better burn this, as soon as you can after reading
it. I should not dare to send it by mail, but I trust it will go
safe. if Brigham. should go I will write by him. I am as ever
your affectionate wife Vilate Kimball.²

¹Compare this type of experience to formal ritual rites of passage
as described in Van Gennep, Rites of Passage, and Turner, Ritual Process.

²Vilate Kimball, Letter dated June 24th 1843 to Heber C. Kimball.
In Winslow Whitney Smith Papers, box 5, folder 2, Church Archives. Called
to this author's attention courtesy of Jan Shipps. This letter was also
This letter clarifies a number of important points suggested by other sources. It shows that polygamy was taught and practiced prior to the formal recording of the revelation itself, as the revelation on plural and celestial marriage also indicates. As late as 1843, however, practice of polygamy was occurring on a very restricted scale even in the top echelons of the Church, with the exception of Joseph Smith. Recent research by Michael Quinn on wives of leaders of the Church bears out the contention that, prior to Smith's death, most Mormon leaders had taken at most two or three additional wives. The large number of wives taken by a few of the early Mormon leaders would occur largely between Smith's death and the exodus to Utah, a complex period when the transition to plural marriage was taking place in the Church as a whole.

As this letter indicates, a tendency to go to extremes could easily develop once earlier patterns of behavior were broken down. Furthermore, the impossibility of finding time and privacy to give detailed instructions even to the twelve apostles, Smith's closest associates, suggests how difficult translating such beliefs into practice for the general membership must have been. Excesses and confusion were almost a certainty. Interestingly, the letter correctly implies that one of the plural wives, Sarah Alley, was pregnant. Her child, George Omer Noble, born on February 2, 1844, is generally credited as the first child born into Mormon polygamy. Finally, there is the concluding suggestion that the letter should be burned. Probably most actually were.

One other important document which was not burned was a holograph letter of Joseph Smith's dated "Nauvoo, August 18th 1842" to Newel K. printed in part, with slight modifications, in Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, "Scenes and Incidents in Nauvoo," Woman's Exponent 11 (September 15, 1882): 58.


2See Historical Record 6 (May 1887): 237, which states:

"Brother Noble also obeyed this higher law on Apr. 5, 1843, when Sarah B. Alley was sealed to him for time and all eternity, the Prophet himself officiating. The first issue of this marriage was George Omer Noble (now Elder in the Church) who was born in Nauvoo Feb. 2, 1844. He is supposed to have been the first polygamous child born in this dispensation."
Whitney, his wife, "and &c."—presumably their daughter Sarah Ann, who had been married to Smith twenty-two days earlier on July 27, 1842, according to LDS accounts. Sarah Ann was said to have been the first plural wife he had taken with the approval of both parents. At the time the letter was written, Smith was hiding in the home of Carlos Granger, attempting to avoid extradition to Missouri.

The letter communicates "Some of my feelings . . . which I want you three Eternally to keep in your own bosoms; for my feelings are so Strong for you Since what has passed lately between us"—presumably referring to his recent marriage to Sarah Ann. Smith speaks of his great loneliness and need of succor from them. He gives instructions for their coming to see him secretly:

... let Brother Whitney come a little a head, and nock at the south East corner of the house at the window; it is next to the cornfield; I have a room intirely by myself, the whole matter can be attended to with most perfect Safety, I know it is the will of God that you should comfort me now in this time of affliction, or not at all.

Smith continues by saying that the only thing to be careful of is "to find out when Emma comes then you cannot be Safe, but when she is not here, there is the most perfect Safety." He asks them to

... burn this letter as soon as you read it; keep all locked within your breasts, my life depends upon it. one thing I want to see you for is to git the fulness of my blessing Sealed upon our heads, &c. you will pardon me for my earnestness on this subject when you consider how lonesome I must be, your good feelings know how to make every allowance for me, I close my letter. I think Emma wont come tonight if she dont dont fail to come to night, I subscribe myself your most obedient, and affectionate, Companion, and friend.

Joseph Smith

While one cannot be positive what the precise nature of the relationship portrayed in this letter was, it certainly was far more

1Letter of Joseph Smith's dated August 18, 1842, in Joseph Smith Collection, Church Archives. This letter has been photographically reproduced along with a line by line transcription in H. Michael Marquart, The Strange Marriages of Sarah Ann Whitney to Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet, Joseph C. Kingsbury and Heber C. Kimball (Salt Lake City, n.p., n.d.), pp. 6-9. Marquart's accompanying text provides background information and a suggestion of the flexibility of marital relationships during the early development of polygamy in Nauvoo.
than casual friendship. If the possibility of a sexual relationship with his plural wife Sarah Ann is not implied, it is hard to see why the references to Emma were made. According to Mormon and non-Mormon accounts, Emma attempted to keep track of and head off possible liaisons of Joseph Smith and his plural wives. Why a simple visit from close family friends should have had to be kept secret from her is unclear if the sexual element did not enter into the picture. The circumstances and tone of this letter also suggest the enormous pressures under which Smith was operating, pressures which apparently made him desire more than purely intellectual companionship.

Whether Smith's involvement with his plural wives included full sexual relations has been hotly contested. Certainly some cases did not. Women who were sealed to Smith only for "eternity" presumably had no physical relationship to him while he was alive, although some of the women whose names appear in the 1846 Nauvoo Temple Record as sealed to him for "eternity" may be exceptions to this generalization. Following Smith's death a total of some 335 women were sealed to him, many of whom he had not even known when alive.\(^1\) If these two types of cases are excluded, however, the almost unanimous testimony of Smith's followers, informed ex-Mormons and anti-Mormons, and his plural wives themselves was that his wives were, indeed, wives in every sense of the word except public acknowledgment. How Smith's followers could have been induced to adopt the new practices if he had not led the way himself is difficult to understand.

Although admissions of engaging in unorthodox marital relations are obviously a highly personal matter, many of Joseph Smith's plural wives explicitly testified that they had had full sexual relations with him. Emily D. P. Partridge said she "roomed" with Smith the night following her marriage to him and she also admitted that she had had

\(^1\)See Tinney, "Royal Family," for a full reproduction of the revelant temple sealing records. This list includes all known women who were sealed to Joseph Smith, either during his life, or after his death. Unfortunately, it is little more than a listing of evidence and fails to ask most of the historically interesting questions.
"carnal intercourse" with him. Melissa Lott testified that she was Joseph Smith's wife "in very deed." When Lucy Walker was asked "Did you live with Joseph Smith as his wife?" she replied in irritation, "He was my husband, sir." Joseph Bates Noble went so far as to claim that he actually saw Joseph Smith and Louisa Beaman, whom he sealed to Smith, in bed together. When pressed, Noble admitted that he hadn't actually seen them in bed together; Smith had told him the next day that they had slept together. Probably Benjamin F. Johnson's statement that he had seen his sister Almera in bed with Smith was a supposition similar to that of Joseph Bates Noble.

More convincing than the direct testimony of Smith's wives is the indirect assumption underlying almost all major existing accounts—that contemporary sealings to him normally implied full marital relations. Eliza R. Snow's statement clearly shows this assumption and it also suggests the intellectual process by which the new practice could be accepted. When Eliza first heard that plural marriage was to be introduced into the Church, she found the idea "repugnant." She reflected, however, that "I was living in the Dispensation of the fulness of times, embracing all other Dispensations. surely Plural Marriage must necessarily be included, and I consoled myself with the idea that it was far in the distance, and beyond the period of my mortal existence." Shortly thereafter, however, she heard that the time had come. She was sealed to Joseph Smith for "time and eternity." Eliza's sense of


2. Affidavit of Melissa Willes, August 4, 1893, as reproduced in Bailey, "Emma Hale," pp. 98-100. In the Temple Lot Case (complete transcript), p. 98, 105, Melissa Willes emphatically stated that she was married to Joseph Smith for time and eternity, even if it was not officially so recorded, and she gives the room number in Smith's home where she allegedly spent the night with him.


4. Ibid., p. 427.


6. The original "Sketch of My Life" by Eliza R. Snow is held by the Bancroft Library, Berkeley, California. The portions dealing with
repugnance and her statement as a whole does not make sense unless one sees something more than ethereal relationships being discussed here. One also would have to assume that marriage sealings for "time and eternity" were different in the later Mormon Church than in Smith's day, if one were to "spiritualize" this account.

If Smith's relations with many of his plural wives did involve full conjugal relations, why is there no solid evidence of any children born by his plural wives? Impotence is not a possible explanation, since Emma bore children to Joseph Smith regularly throughout their marriage, even during times of considerable stress. Infrequency of sexual relations with any given plural wife might provide a partial but not a complete explanation for the lack of children by the wives. And abortion does not appear to be a possible explanation, since not only was it in total opposition to Smith's emphasis on polygamy as a means of "raising up righteous branch," but it also is not supported by documentary evidence.

It is significant that despite their strong testimony to being wives of Joseph Smith in the fullest sense of the term, most women who claimed to have been married to him consistently refused, in spite of repeated questioning, to affirm or deny that they or other women had had children by him.\textsuperscript{1} Such reticence was entirely understandable. If personal details of Smith's children by plural wives were once brought into the open, the line of questioning adopted by often-hostile interrogators would have been even more insulting, and other individuals' names would have dragged unwillingly into the discussion. Even if children by Smith's plural wives existed in Utah—as oral and written

\textsuperscript{1}Typical of such statements in the Temple Lot Case (complete transcript), pp. 96-97, 99, Melissa Willes denies that she had any children by Joseph Smith but she refuses to say anything about other children that he may have had because "I told you that I couldn't swear to any body else's children but my own. . . ."
traditions there suggest— they probably would have borne the names of the family who reared them. Detailed demographic work in progress on the Nauvoo period and early Utah does suggest the possibility of children who appear to have become part of families in which they were not born, under puzzling circumstances.

Evidence for children Smith may have had by plural wives is based largely on oral and family traditions. Mary Rollins Lightner, one of the most articulate and knowledgeable of Smith's plural wives, said: "I know he had six wives and I have known some of them from childhood up. I know he had three children. They told me. I think two are living today but they are not known as his children as they go by other names." Lucy Meserve Smith recalled that her husband George A. Smith told her of going to see Joseph Smith and finding him washing his hands after he had helped Emma—who had served as a midwife—deliver a child by one of his plural wives. Persistent and apparently well-founded family tradition suggests that Eliza R. Snow conceived a child by Joseph Smith and suffered

1 Even Joseph Smith's acknowledged plural wives went by the names of the men whom they remarried, or, as in the atypical case of Eliza R. Snow, who was remarried to Brigham Young but had no children by him, retained their maiden names. Children born to wives of Joseph Smith who had been sealed to him for eternity bore the names of their natural father even though Mormon theology taught that the children would belong to Joseph Smith's family after they died. Thus, it may be assumed that if Smith had any children by any of his plural wives, they would have borne the surnames of the families which reared them.

2 James L. Kimball, Jr., who is making a detailed demographic reconstruction of Nauvoo based on census records and other information, expressed his personal puzzlement to this author at a number of cases of children who appear in early Utah census records but not in those from Nauvoo. Their age in Utah would have suggested that they should have been counted in the Nauvoo census also. This discrepancy in the record could be due to errors by the census takers, to various forms of "adoption" by the Mormons, or to factors connected with the early development of polygamy.

3 Mary E. Rollins Lightner, Remarks at Brigham Young University, April 14, 1905, p. 5.

4 Handwritten statement by Lucy Meserve Smith, dated May 18, 1892, in the George A. Smith Papers, University of Utah Special Collections. Called to this author's attention courtesy of Robert Flanders.
a miscarriage.¹ The Nauvoo Expositor of June 7, 1844, published by a schismatic faction in the Church which was attempting to oust Smith from power, alleged that "in order to avoid public exposition from the common course of things," pregnant plural wives "are sent away for a time until all is well; after which they return, as from a long visit."²

T. Edgar Lyon, a leading contemporary authority on the Nauvoo period, has related another account of how children by Smith's plural wives may have been handled. When Dr. Lyon was working in Nauvoo in 1968-69, a man introduced himself by saying: "How would you like to meet a descendant of Joseph Smith who has never been out of the Church!" Since none of Smith's children by Emma remained affiliated with the Utah Church, the man's statement showed that he considered himself descended from one of Smith's polygamous unions. The man told Dr. Lyon of three families—Farnsworth, Dibble, and Allred—in each of which lived one of Smith's plural wives. When each of the plural wives became pregnant, they as well as the recognized wife in the household both went into seclusion, as was the practice for visibly pregnant women at the time. After the plural wife's child was born, the recognized wife in the household reappeared and presented the child as belonging to her. At least one of the children was born from these polygamous unions before Smith's death. After his death, these plural wives went to Utah, were married to other men, and had children by them.³ These and similar

¹See Brodie, No Man Knows My History, pp. 345-346, 470-471. Part of Brodie's unidentified documentation for her assertion in this case is found in a handwritten letter of John R. Young to Vesta P. Crawford in April 1931. Vesta Crawford Papers. Called to this author's attention courtesy of Robert Flanders.

²This is part of a low-keyed description of the typical manner in which plural wives were said to be taken by Mormon leaders in Nauvoo. This statement in the Expositor is compatible with other Mormon and apostate accounts. In fact, if anything it is understated.

³Personal conversation with T. Edgar Lyon, June 27, 1974. This account could easily be reconciled with that of the Expositor, above, which indicated that pregnant plural wives disappeared from public view. Although there are a number of family traditions in Utah of children by plural wives of Joseph Smith, this author has not been able to investigate them closely enough to determine their possible validity. If Smith
traditions could be adduced to suggest that children by Joseph Smith's polygamous unions are by no means improbable, although of course actual proof of any such descendants is probably impossible.

Explaining the apparent lack of children born to plural wives of Joseph Smith's other followers prior to his death is less difficult since most of them were married for a shorter time and to fewer women in this period. Kimball Young, the late sociologist of Mormon polygamy and a descendant of Oscar Young, the first acknowledged child by any of Brigham Young's plural wives, explained how that and similar cases of pregnant plural wives of high Church officials were handled. According to Kimball Young, plural wives who were pregnant, including Oscar Young's mother, Harriet Cook, went into seclusion in the second floor of the Erastus Snow home in Nauvoo. The second floor had an entrance that was separate from the remainder of the house. The Snow family was small enough to live entirely on the first floor. Food and other necessities were discretely brought to the wives who lived on the second floor.¹

The original construction of the Erastus Snow house does correspond with this account of Kimball Young's. In addition, an unusual holograph letter from Brigham Young to "Mrs. Hariot Cook" in 1846 was sent in care of the Erastus Snow home, suggesting that she may have been living there at the time as well.² Quite possibly other arrangements were made in cases of other plural wives, but these examples at least suggest some of the possibilities.


²This letter, dated June 23, 1846, was sent by Brigham Young to his plural wife "Mrs. Hariot [sic] Cook." On the cover of the letter, its destination is indicated as "Snow House." Reproduced in full in Fawn M. Brodie, "A Letter from the Camp of Israel, 1846," Princeton University Library Chronicle 33 (Autumn 1971): 67-70.
Apparent discrepancies between belief and practice were numerous during the chaotic early days of the development of polygamous practice. Perhaps the most severe conceptual difficulties are raised by the strong evidence that Joseph Smith took as plural wives a number of women who already had living husbands and that he asked some of his closest followers to give him their wives as well. Some of the marriages may have been only for "eternity," as was apparently true in two cases in which wives of Smith's closest associates were sealed to him after his death. As the numerous posthumous sealings attest, being married to Joseph Smith "for eternity" obviously had considerable appeal.

Other allegations that Smith asked married women to become his wives may be instances of what might be called the "Potiphar's wife syndrome," in which women to whom Smith refused his attentions alleged that he had attempted to seduce them. A variant on this theme was the charge leveled by Smith's followers against Orson Pratt's wife Sarah after John C. Bennett's exposé alleged that Smith had commissioned Bennett to ask Mrs. Pratt to become Smith's plural wife. This account was said by Smith's supporters to be a cover for Bennett's own alleged improper relations with Mrs. Pratt. In this and in almost all other cases, the tangle of allegation and counter-allegation is so complex that one cannot reliably determine exactly what did happen. Certainly, no matter what their truth, such character defamations by both sides did much to disrupt the social atmosphere in Nauvoo. Probably any attempt secretly to introduce and to regulate unorthodox marriage practices that were not sanctioned by law would have led to similar problems, no matter how well the process was handled.

When all the contradictory and unreliable evidence about Joseph Smith's plural wives is sifted out, a hard core of puzzling data remains

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1 Mary Ann Frost Pratt, first wife of Parley P. Pratt, was sealed to Joseph Smith "for eternity" in February 1846, and Nancy Marinda Johnson Hyde, first wife of Orson Hyde, was sealed to Joseph Smith "for eternity" on July 31, 1857. It cannot be positively determined whether or not early cases of sealings "for eternity" were for eternity only.
which demands an explanation if we are to understand the dynamics of the early development of plural marriage. If one accepts LDS sources, it seems clear that Smith was married in a full earthly sense with some women who were at the same time in a technical legal sense the wives of other men.\(^1\) Based on such evidence, it is also clear that Smith did ask some of his followers to give him their wives, whatever his motives in such cases may have been.

In a sermon delivered on February 19, 1854, in the Tabernacle in Salt Lake City, Jedediah Grant, second counselor to Brigham Young, discussed the confusion that arose when Joseph Smith asked for the wives of some of his followers:

> When the family organization was revealed from heaven—the patriarchal order of God, and Joseph began, on the right and the left, to add to his family, what a quaking there was in Israel. Says one brother to another, "Joseph says all covenants are done away, and none are binding but the new covenants; now suppose Joseph should come and say he wanted your wife, what would you say to that?" "I would tell him to go to hell." This was the spirit of many in the early days of this Church.

> If Joseph had a right to dictate me in relation to salvation, in relation to a hereafter, he had a right to dictate me in relation to all my earthly affairs...

> Did the Lord actually want Abraham to kill Isaac? Did the Prophet Joseph want every man's wife he asked for? He did not, but in that thing was the grand thread of the Priesthood developed. The grand object in view was to try the people of God, to see what was in them.\(^2\)

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\(^1\) An example of a seemingly clear case based on LDS sources is that of Zina Diantha Huntington Jacobs. In an interview with J. W. Wight on October 1, 1896, in the Zina D. H. Young Papers in the Church Archives, Zina was unwilling to give the date or even the year of her marriage to Joseph Smith. When asked how she could have been married to Joseph Smith "for time and eternity," as she asserted, while she was at the same time the wife of Henry Jacobs for "time," she became very upset and said: "I do not wish to reply. I only know that this is the work of God upon this earth, and I know by testimony from God that Joseph Smith was a Prophet." This interview is reproduced in Elder D. Stead, *Doctrines and Dogmas of Brighamism Exposed* (Independence, Mo.: Reorganized Church of Latter Day Saints, 1911), pp. 212-216. The Mormon writer Vesta Crawford lists eight other cases of Joseph Smith's plural wives who were married women with living husbands. Vesta Crawford Papers. Little would be gained by detailing these other possible cases.

\(^2\) *JD*, 2: 13-14.
This account suggests a part of the context within which Joseph Smith at least asked some of his followers for their wives.

A similar but more concrete statement appears in Orson F. Whitney's biography of his grandfather Heber C. Kimball. Allegedly Joseph Smith asked Heber to give him Vilate to be his wife, saying that it was a requirement. After enormous inner turmoil. Heber presented Vilate to Smith. At that point, Smith wept, embraced Heber, and said that he had not really wanted Vilate. He had only been determining if Heber's loyalty to him were absolute. There and then, Smith proceeded to seal Heber and Vilate for time and eternity.1 If this story is an accurate representation of events—and it is inconceivable that there could be any reasonable motive for fabricating such a story and printing it in a standard biography of a respected Mormon leader—it suggests that Smith was showing supremely poor judgment. A number of Mormons whose loyalty to Smith was not so absolute apostatized or began working to undermine his leadership within the Church after they alleged that he had attempted to marry their wives.2

How are such actions to be explained? Of course, one easily could make the assumption that most non-Mormons and anti-Mormons have that Smith simply was letting his sexual impulses get away with him in these or other cases. Or, as most Mormon writers have done, one could ignore the evidence entirely and hope that it would be forgotten.

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1Whitney, Life of Heber C. Kimball, pp. 333-335. According to Whitney, Joseph Smith asked Heber for Vilate in this manner prior to acquainting him with the implications that the idea of celestial marriage had for the practice of plurality of wives. When Heber was informed about plural marriage and commanded to take a plural wife himself, Joseph Smith told him not to tell Vilate about the situation for fear she would not accept it. Actions of this sort were almost certain to lead to serious misunderstandings, particularly in cases of individuals whose loyalty was not so total as was that of Heber and Vilate Kimball.

2A classic case was reported in the affidavit of M. G. Eaton on March 27, 1844, which was printed in the Nauvoo Neighbor on May 15, 1844. The affidavit describes in detail Robert D. Foster's allegations that Smith had tried to seduce his wife. Although the affidavit does not mention Smith by name, other sources make clear that he was the person whom Foster was accusing. Some of the other individuals who joined the Expositor group also became disaffected due in part to similar misunderstandings.
Neither approach is very satisfactory. What was happening in Nauvoo was considerably more remarkable than a "common sense" point of view recognizes. The process must be judged in terms of its own dynamics. These include Joseph Smith's millennial framework and the problems that are inherent in any transitional period between two different and partially incompatible value systems.

The revelation on plural and celestial marriage makes quite clear that marriages under the standards of the external world were not considered valid for eternity:

All covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, oaths, vows, performances, connections, associations, or expectations, that are not made, and entered into, and sealed, by the Holy Spirit of promise, of him who is anointed, both as well for time and for all eternity.

(and I have appointed unto my servant Joseph to hold this power in the last days, and there is never but one on the earth at a time, on whom this power and the keys of the Priesthood are conferred,) are of no efficacy, virtue, or force, in and after the resurrection from the dead;

Therefore, if a man marry him a wife in the world, and he marry her not by me, nor by my word; if he covenant with her, so long as he is in the world, and she with him, their covenant and marriage is not of force when they are dead, and when they are out of the world; . . .

Later Mormon theology has naturally taken this statement as referring to the afterlife. Mormon theology and practice in Nauvoo and early Utah, however, were an attempt to apply presumptive heavenly standards directly on earth. Earthly and heavenly standards were seen as inextricably intertwined; an imminent earthly millennium was to be realized. In marriage, this meant that the standards of "the world" were invalid. Marriage, whether monogamous or polygamous, was only valid under the sanction of the "new and everlasting covenant" as sealed and practiced on earth.

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1Doctrine and Covenants, 132: 7, 15.

2In denying the allegations made by the Expositor concerning polygamy, Hyrum Smith "referred to the revelation read to the High Council of the Church, which has caused so much talk about a multiplicity of wives. . . ." He said "that said Revelation was in answer to a question concerning things which transpired in former days [see Doctrine
to the more elaborate temple rites, involved a re-birth into a new and
different world that was being created on earth by the Church. Prior to
the initiation into the new standards, however, there was a brief but
disruptive interregnum when neither set of standards were operative and
the basis of social authority was unclear.

Possibly the best analysis of this development in Nauvoo is
provided in the following statement by a former member of Smith's
secret Council of Fifty, a council which, along with other Church agencies,
attempted to regulate the transition:

About the same time [1842] the doctrine of "sealing" for an eternal
state was introduced, and the Saints were given to understand that
their marriage relations with each other were not valid. That
those who had solemnized the rites of matrimony had no authority of
God to do so. That the true priesthood was taken from the earth with
the death of the Apostles and inspired men of God. That they were
married to each other only by their own covenants, and that if their
marriage relations had not been productive of blessings and peace,
and they felt it oppressive to remain together, they were at liberty
to make their own choice, as much as if they had not been married.
That it was a sin for people to live together, and raise or beget
children, in alienation from each other. That there should exist
an affinity between each other, not a lustful one, as that can never
cement that love and affection that should exist between a man and
his wife. ¹

This moving statement by John D. Lee suggests the interplay of tangible
marital dissatisfactions and the larger theological framework that
underlay the introduction of plural marriage.

In addition to the larger argument that the revelation on plural
and celestial marriage superceded all earthly bonds and covenants, a

¹Lee, Mormonism Unveiled, pp. 146-147.
second argument also suggests why Joseph Smith might have asked for the wives of other men. Speaking before a conference in the Tabernacle on October 8, 1861, Brigham Young is reported to have discussed the ways "in which a woman could leave a man lawfully." The primary valid cause for giving a divorce was: "When a woman becomes alienated in her feelings and affections from her husband, . . . " "Also there was another way—in which a woman could leave a man—if the woman Preferred—another man higher in authority & he is willing to take her. & her husband gives her up—there is no Bill of divorce required in the case it is right in the sight of God."¹

This passage suggests that in early Utah it may have been possible for a married woman to "move up" in the hierarchy without securing a formal divorce. Could this practice date back to Joseph Smith?² If so, in conjunction with the belief that all existing covenants were done away with, it provides a further link which could help to explain otherwise strange early practices. Note that early Mormon belief stressed that wives, just as all other temporal and spiritual blessings, were held as a stewardship or trust from God, subject to the continuing good behavior of the husband. When John Hyde apostatized in the mid-1850s, for example, his wife was considered automatically forfeited, and she was remarried to another worthy man who could insure her salvation.³ If Joseph Smith approached wives of some of his followers who were on the verge of apostasy, as numerous allegations suggest, he might have justified that action by the view that since those men had become unworthy and had forfeited their salvation, they also had forfeited their wives. Needless to say, however internally logical such a view might have been, it could only have further embittered Smith's relations with associates whose loyalties were wavering or already lost.


²In the original stenographic report of Brigham Young's speech of October 8, 1861, he states that he and a few others learned this belief from Joseph Smith himself. Brigham Young Addresses, box 49, folder 8, in Church Archives.

³JD, 4: 165.
The "all previous covenants suspended" and the "moving up" arguments still fail to cover adequately all possible cases under which Joseph Smith appears to have approached or taken married women as plural wives. A third, extremely conjectural possibility remains. If true, it would probably be capable of accounting for all additional cases for which there is reliable documentary evidence. The earliest base for this third argument is a passage in the revelation on plural and celestial marriage which declares: "And as ye have asked concerning adultery, verily, verily, I say unto you, if a man receiveth a wife in the new and everlasting covenant, and if she be with another man, and I have not appointed unto her by the holy anointing, she hath committed adultery and shall be destroyed" (emphasis added). ¹ Jason Briggs, who was a bitter anti-polygamist and life-long opponent of the Utah Mormons as well as one of the most intellectually astute early leaders of the RLDS Church, asserted that this passage apparently meant that when a polygamist was gone for many years, as sometimes happened, it would theoretically be possible for another man to be appointed by the President of the Church, through the power of the holy anointing, to serve the part of a temporary husband until the return of the first one. The children born under such arrangements would be considered to belong to the first man. Thus, in his absence in the service of the Church, his "Kingdom," a key element of which was based on the number of his children, would not suffer loss. ²

This is, to say the least, an extraordinary allegation. Is it supported by any reliable evidence? Would such a practice have been compatible with early Mormon intellectual and social concerns? Although not an iota of manuscript evidence explicitly supporting such a theory or practice in the early Church has come to the attention of this author, at least one statement in official printed Mormon sources would seem to suggest the possibility that a practice of assigning temporal "proxy husbands" may have existed on a very limited scale in early Utah. In a public speech on October 4, 1857, Erastus Snow first stressed the importance of each woman doing her best to cooperate with her husband

¹Doctrine and Covenants, 132: 41.
²The Messenger 1 (March 1875): 17.
and honor him as Lord. He then declared: "I ask can you get into the Celestial Kingdom without him? Have any of you been there? You will remember that you never got into the Celestial Kingdom without the aid of your husband. If you did, it was because your husband was away, and some one had to act proxy for him."¹ Another statement by an ex-Mormon who was evidently well-informed about the events of the Mormon Reformation of 1856-57, alleged that Heber C. Kimball had publicly supported such beliefs during that period, and that when a group of angry women descended on Brigham Young the next day to ask whether he endorsed such beliefs or not, he simply parried them with an evasive answer.²

The primary source for allegations of "proxy husbands" comes from John Hyde, who rose rapidly in the Church and then apostatized during the troubled period of the Reformation of 1856-57 in one of the most bitter of such breaks. Although Hyde frequently exaggerates or fails to understand the deeper spirit underlying Mormon actions, his factual allegations often are surprisingly accurate. Hyde stated:

As a man's family constitutes his glory, to go on a mission for several years, leaving from two to a dozen wives at home, necessarily causes some loss of family, and consequently, according to Mormon notions, much sacrifice of salvation. This difficulty is however obviated by the appointment of an agent or proxy, who shall stand themward [sic] in their husband's stead. . . . This is one of the secret principles that as yet is only privately talked of in select circles, and darkly hinted at from their pulpits and in their works. They argue that the old Mosaic law of a "Brother raising up seed to his dead brother" is now in force; and as death is only a temporary absence, so they contend a temporary absence is equivalent to death; and if in the case of death, it is not only no crime, but proper; so also in this case it is equally lawful and extremely

¹JD, 5: 291.

²This statement appeared as an open letter to Brigham Young signed "A Mormon and Defender of the Truth," in Christian Advocate of March 1877, as quoted in Ivins, Notebook, 8: 233-234. For another statement giving such allegations see the statement of John Benjamin Franklin as recorded in Ivins, Notebook, 1: 113-114. In contrast to the highly polemical and obviously imaginary accounts characteristic of many semi-novelistic exposés of Mormon polygamy, the relatively few allegations of proxy husbands that appear in the literature are frequently given in an essentially straightforward manner by individuals who appear basically accurate in their other statements.
advantageous! This practice, commended by such sophistry, and commanded by such a Prophet was adopted as early as Nauvoo.

Much scandal was caused by others than Smith attempting to carry out this doctrine. Several, who thought that what was good for the Prophet should be good for the people, were crushed down by Smith's heavy hand. Several of those have spoken out to the practices of the "Saints." [Consider the case of John C. Bennett.] Much discussion occurred at Salt Lake as to the advisability of revealing the doctrine of polygamy in 1852, and that has caused Brigham to defer the public enunciation of this "proxy doctrine," as it is familiarly called. Reasoning out their premises to their natural and necessary consequences, this licentious and infamous dogma is their inevitable result.¹

Note that by Hyde's own tacit admission, the existence of "proxy husbands" is described primarily as a "principle" rather than as a present "practice." Hyde's only concrete allegation of the practice of such arrangements was the case of Joseph Smith himself, and according to Hyde, Smith did not allow his followers such privileges. Hyde appears correct in his assertion that both from a theoretical and a social perspective a practice of a limited arrangement of "proxy husbands" for some missionaries' wives, would have appeared logically consistent. Since logic based on unorthodox premises is a primary characteristic of the early Mormon faith, it would seem unlikely that early Mormon leaders could have avoided considering such a possibility, even if they never actually introduced such a practice. If such a practice ever existed, it must have been on an exceedingly limited scale, and it must soon have been discontinued as a social experiment. Intellectually, the idea of a form of proxy marriage, the provisions of which reach force only in the afterlife, still remains a part of Mormon belief. Briefly stated, when the husband of a woman who had been sealed to him "for time and eternity" dies, that woman is free to marry another man "for time" only. Mormon theology teaches that in the afterlife the children who had been born on earth to this latter union would be a part of the family of the first husband to whom the woman had been sealed for "eternity."²

¹Hyde, Mormonism, pp. 87-88.
²For an early description of the various categories of marriage sealings, see Orson Pratt's comments in the Seer, pp. 141-143. A
This belief is a very interesting elaboration of the Old Testament Jewish practice of the levirate. The levirate is based on the Jewish concern for carrying on the family name through a male line. Thus, in Mosaic law, when a man dies leaving a widow and no male heirs, it becomes the duty of the next oldest brother to marry the widow and to raise up children to the dead man's name. The much misunderstood "sin of Onan," for which God supposedly slew him, lay in practicing coitus interruptus with his brother's widow and thereby failing to fulfill his divine obligation to raise up children to that family line.¹ That this practice of the levirate, which implies the possibility of polygamy, was widely accepted is evident from its appearance in the New Testament when Jesus was asked about marriage in the afterlife.² When the Mormons made their unusual elaboration of the levirate, it is conceivable that they could have linked present and afterlife together in a complex fashion. In just such a way, marriage sealings "for eternity" were not simply a future heavenly practice, but they also made possible new earthly marriage forms, including polygamy. In early Mormonism, the distinction between the heavenly ideal and the earthly practice is often difficult to disentangle.

From a practical social perspective, the possibility of appointing a temporary proxy husband, under strict controls, to provide temporal and emotional support for the harassed wives of absent missionaries must sometimes have appeared desirable. Apparent practices of this sort by Joseph Smith himself have led to erroneous allegations that he sanctioned polyandry.³ If such practices ever occurred, they could be seen as showing a compassion for the enormous strains under which wives of missionary elders were placed when they underwent what amounted to

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¹Genesis 38:8-10.


³For instance, see Brodie, No Man Knows My History, esp. pp. 301-304, 335-337.
prolonged periods of "widowhood." It is known that Mormon men sometimes were assigned to help with the temporal support of women whose husbands were away on missions. Such support, particularly when the women were actually living in the men's households, would have had a natural tendency to lead to more intense emotional involvement. Some women must have wondered why, if men were allowed to have plural wives, they should not be granted a similar privilege, even if it was only to have a temporary replacement for their absent husband.

Whether this sort of arrangement ever occurred under official sanction must remain moot, but if such an intellectual rationale existed, it could satisfactorily explain documented or highly probable cases in which Joseph Smith sustained relations with married women who continued to remain with their original husbands. Given Smith's mind-set and concern for authority, it seems inconceivable that he could have done what he apparently did without some sense of higher justification for his actions.

However appealing an abstract social or intellectual argument for allowing proxy husbands might have been, such arrangements could not have been practiced on any scale without leading to anxieties, jealousies, and uncertainties that would have threatened to tear the Church apart. Perhaps the most judicious summary assessment of this issue was provided by T. B. H. Stenhouse. He said:

The Author has no personal knowledge, from the present leaders of the Church, of this teaching; but he has often heard that something yet would be taught which "would test the brethren as much as polygamy had tried the sisters." By many elders it has been believed that there was some foundation for the accusation that Joseph had taught some sisters in Nauvoo that it was their privilege to entertain other brethren as "proxy husbands" during the absence of their liege husbands.

1 Vesta Crawford lists nine women whom she says were married to Joseph Smith while still having living husbands. See Vesta Crawford Papers. Fawn Brodie lists twelve such alleged cases, at least one of which is highly conjectural. See No Man Knows My History, pp. 335-336. There is strong reason to believe that in at least some of the cases cited by Crawford and Brodie, the women remained with their original husbands while they also sustained a sexual relationship with Joseph Smith. The most clear-cut such case is that of Zina D. Huntington Jacobs, who remained with Henry Jacobs until 1846. Also consider the complex cases of Elvira Cowles and Sarah Ann Whitney.
lords on mission. One lady has informed the Author that Joseph so taught her. All such teaching has never been made public, and it is doubtful if it ever extended very far, if, indeed, at all beyond a momentary combination of passion and fanaticism.¹

X

How is one to explain the many extraordinary early developments associated with the introduction of Mormon polygamy? Seen in isolation, the process of introducing new marriage and social forms in the Mormon Church might well appear bizarre or disordered. However, a comparative perspective from anthropology and studies of other millenarian movements suggests that the Mormon experience may in many respects serve as an almost paradigmatic illustration of such transition states. The discussion presented in Chapter I of the characteristics of the "liminal" phase of rites of passage or larger social transitions is especially applicable to the Mormons. In such an intermediary state, an individual is suspended as it were between two worlds, between an old order that is dying and a new order that is yet to be born. A person's position then is ambiguous: "he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state." A feeling of intense comradeship, egalitarianism, and exhilaration is liberated as a sense of direct personal contact replaces the institutional constraints that normally separate individuals. Men and women become maleable, capable of being molded by their ritual leaders into new cultural forms of great beauty and power.

This type of feeling tone and the associated release of powerful emotions, which is so difficult to convey in words, is unmistakeably present in the early Mormon experience. That experience shows a passionate involvement, comradeship, and enthusiasm of the selfless Mormon dedication to what they saw as the supremely important goal of realizing the kingdom of heaven on earth. There is a pervading sense of awesome wonderment that mysteries that had been hid since before the foundation of the world are now to be revealed, and a corresponding sense of heady exhilaration. Whether it be in cases of men leaving wives and children

¹Stenhouse, Rocky Mountain Saints, p. 301.
to go bravely into the unknown "without purse or scrip," or of women sacrificing their husbands temporarily and trusting in God to bring them through, the Saints felt an intense closeness as they engaged in a common enterprise that they felt was of cosmic significance. Distinctions between "mine" and "thine" were reduced to an absolute minimum in the face of a common challenge and crisis. In Heber C. Kimball's oft-repeated phrase, Mormons undergoing this transition process were expected to become as "clay in the hands of the potter"; totally subordinating their wills to that of the group, they would allow themselves to be reshaped into a new and more perfect social form as Latter-day Saints.

This intense sense of camaraderie which was combined with an implicit trust in the authority of their leaders, is well indicated in a letter of Joseph Smith's. That letter appears beyond reasonable doubt to have been sent to Nancy Rigdon by Joseph Smith after she had refused his proposal of marriage.\(^1\) The letter begins by saying that: "Happiness is the object and design of our existence" but that this can only be achieved through "virtue, uprightness, faithfulness, holiness and keeping

\(^1\)The letter was first printed in Bennett's History of the Saints, pp. 243-245. Bennett stated that Smith had proposed marriage to Nancy Rigdon and had been refused. After that refusal, Smith had allegedly dictated the letter, through his secretary Willard Richards, to Nancy Rigdon. In a roundabout and equivocal statement, the Mormon paper the Wasp stated on August 27, 1842, that the letter was more moral than anything that Bennett would write, but that Smith was not the author. In the Wasp on September 3, 1842, Nancy's father Sidney Rigdon asserted that the use of the letter was not authorized by his daughter and that he considered its publication a violation of the "rules of gallantry." Rigdon also noted that the letter was not in Smith's hand but rather in the hand of another person. In an affidavit of July 28, 1905, Nancy Rigdon's brother John W. Rigdon confirmed the truth of Bennett's allegations and commented on the hard feelings between the Rigdon family and Joseph Smith that the episode had produced. Joseph F. Smith, Jr., Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage, pp. 83-84. The letter is currently printed in the History of the Church, 5: 134-136, with wording identical to Bennett's version, as an essay on "Happiness" that was given by Joseph Smith under unspecified circumstances. Even apologetic contemporary Mormon scholarship now accepts that the letter was authorized by Joseph Smith after his marriage proposal to Nancy Rigdon had been rejected. For instance, see John J. Stewart, Joseph Smith, The Mormon Prophet (Salt Lake City: Mercury Publishing Co., 1966), pp. 170-171.
all the commandments of God. But we cannot keep all the commandments without first knowing them, . . . That which is wrong under one circumstance, may be, and often is, right under another."

A parent may whip a child, and justly too, because he stole an apple; whereas if the child had asked for the apple, and the parent had given it, the child would have eaten it with a better appetite; there would have been no stripes; all the pleasure of the apple would have been secured, all the misery of stealing lost.

The letter continues:

This principle will justly apply to all of God's dealings with his children. Everything that God gives us is lawful and right; and it is proper that we should enjoy his gifts and blessings whenever and wherever he is disposed to bestow; but if we should seize upon those same blessings and enjoyments without law, without revelation, without commandment, those blessings and enjoyments would prove cursings in the end, . . .

In a powerful peroration, the letter concludes:

Our heavenly Father is more liberal in His views, and boundless in His mercies and blessings, than we are ready to believe or receive; and, at the same time, is more terrible to the workers of iniquity, more awful in the executions of His punishments, and more ready to detect every false way, than we are apt to suppose Him to be. He will be inquired of by His children. He says: "Ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find;" but, if you will take that which is not your own, or which I have not given you, you shall be rewarded according to your deeds; but no good thing will I withhold from them who walk uprightly before me, and do my will in all things --who will listen to my voice and to the voice of the servant whom I have sent; for I delight in those who seek diligently to know my precepts, and abide by the law of my kingdom; for all things shall be made known unto them in mind own due time, and in the end they shall have joy.¹

At a cursory first reading, this statement might easily be taken for mere sophistry. Such an explanation is too simple, however. When this letter is viewed within the context of Joseph Smith's larger sense of mission and from the perspective of anthropological analyses of the process of change, it clearly reveals an exceptional awareness of the whole basis of social order and human relatedness itself. In a related example, Joseph Lee Robinson remembered that when Smith spoke of polygamy in Turkey or India, he declared: " . . . God dosnt [sic]
care what laws they make if they will live up to them. . . "1 In other words, faced with conditions of extraordinary social fluidity, Joseph Smith appears to have realized at the deepest possible emotional level how variable were the social forms within which certain underlying values must be expressed. The one absolute essential was that authority itself not be questioned, that there be one common basis of belief and practice to achieve unity and avoid social chaos. Joseph Smith felt that he himself was uniquely called by God to exercise that unifying authority and create that consensus of belief for his followers.

This Pauline awareness that the spirit of the gospel can be expressed in a number of different external forms depending upon changing circumstances, underlies the whole Mormon concept of authority, particularly in the early period. Joseph Smith frequently acted with remarkable rapidity to introduce new social forms such as the Order of Enoch, yet he could discard such forms equally quickly when they proved ineffective in contributing to the achievement of the underlying goals for which they had been established. What was essential, and what remains essential in the Mormon Church to this day, is that there be an ultimate consensus that the head of the Mormon Church is able authoritatively to determine the specific social forms through the underlying spirit is expressed in dealing with the ever-changing temporal circumstances affecting the whole Church.

The other side of this concern for authority is the direct personal sense of communion or "communitas" present in the transition phase between two divergent and partially opposed states of being. Powerful emotions, including sexual emotions, frequently are liberated during this phase. One cannot read for long in the Mormon literature without realizing that Joseph Smith's passionate sincerity and quality of direct emotional engagement with his followers was a key factor in his appeal and charisma. But such emotional power was a two-edged sword; it could lead to passionate love or, equally, to passionate hatred. There often seemed to be no middle ground. Either one was for the prophet, or one was against him.

For the most part, the Mormons appear to have attempted to minimize the inevitable disruption of the transition process, just as earlier they had attempted to eliminate some of the more extreme excesses of the revivalistic fervor to which some of their members had been subject. But disruptive phenomena at this stage could by no means be entirely eliminated. At precisely this critical stage in their development, many millennial groups founder. Normal rites of passage within a society are socially sanctioned and have a known end point. In contrast, in millennial groups such as the Mormons the end point and the means of arriving at it are often less clear. Thus such groups frequently disintegrate due to internal dissension or are broken up by an external society which feels threatened by the group's behavior and unorthodox claims. The Mormons brilliantly avoided the danger of disintegration at this stage. Effective and often ruthless leadership, maintenance of secrecy at all costs, a relatively clearly-formulated sense of the end point desired—and eventually a forced migration to the relative isolation of the Intermountain West—were among the factors that made the successful Mormon transition possible.

XII

The preceding developments and conflicts were largely contained within the circle of Joseph Smith's most intimate followers. But the new beliefs and practices could not long be kept secret from the majority of Church members or from the outside world, as the observations of Charlotte Havens, an articulate young non-Mormon resident of Nauvoo, suggests. Rumors of strange new standards and unusual behavior soon became widespread. Distorted accounts began circulating. Since the entire movement to introduce plural marriage was secretly carried on, unrecognized by law, and in direct violation of existing moral and religious standards, Mormon authorities must have found great difficulty in checking variant interpretations arising within the group. The difference between polygamy as accepted in a long-established tradition

1Mulder and Mortensen, *Among the Mormons*, pp. 116-123, prints some of her letters.
and polygamy when newly introduced into a situation in which people are unfamiliar with the practice is very great. In the latter case, it was almost inevitable that some flagrant irregularities should have occurred and that some individuals within the group should have come out in public opposition to the new beliefs and practices.

Some of the most flagrant irregularities as well as one of the most potentially devastating individual apostasies ever to occur in the Mormon Church was that of the problematic adventurer, John C. Bennett. In a meteoric eighteen month career between 1840 and 1842, Bennett had risen from a relative nobody to become the mayor of Nauvoo and Joseph Smith's right hand man, only to fall from favor, write a lurid exposé of alleged Mormon misdeeds, including polygamy, and become one of the most thoroughly execrated men in the whole of Mormon history. In the late spring and early summer of 1842 as Bennett's break with the Church became definite, his exposés began appearing in the Sangamo Journal and were widely reprinted throughout the state and elsewhere in the nation. Eventually in the early fall of 1842, Bennett's account appeared in enlarged book form, with fifty pages of preliminary statements defensively attesting to the purity of his own character, as The History of the Saints; or, An Exposé of Joe Smith and Mormonism.

A severe crisis for the Church was created by this defection of the second most well-known Mormon in Nauvoo and an intimate friend of Joseph Smith's. Bennett's battery of charges against the Mormon hierarchy contained almost every imaginable sin, including a highly inflated account of the problems of the early development of polygamy, the first such to appear. Only Bennett's own penchant for polemical exaggeration and a carefully orchestrated Church campaign to destroy his character and to neutralize his influence eventually succeeded in allowing the Mormons to weather the storm his apostasy created. Because of Bennett's inflated rhetoric, his opportunistic and equivocal character, and the hostility his allegations understandably aroused among the Mormons, his relationship to the early development of polygamy has never been dispassionately analyzed. Without such an analysis, however, the problems associated
with the early efforts to introduce this new form of family organization cannot fully be understood.¹

Bennett's character and political aspirations are the key to understanding his relation to the early development of polygamy. An opportunist par excellence, he has been described variously as a "prototypical booster," "a small time Aaron Burr," and "probably the greatest scamp in the western country."² Bennett was a man on the make, possessed of immense ambition, undeniable talent, and considerable charm, but never able to decide what he really wanted to do or to carry any project through to completion.³ He joined the Mormon Church as a

¹Two important and as yet largely untouched sources providing a more positive perspective on Bennett's activities are the Ralph V. Chamberlin Papers and the Martin Wilford Poulson Papers in the Brigham Young University Special Collections. Arriving at a realistic assessment of Bennett's role is extraordinarily difficult. Later Mormon historiography has tended to assume that Bennett did not really know the factual details of the development of polygamy in Nauvoo. This seems highly improbable. Given Bennett's pivotal position in the secular life of Nauvoo and his high position in the Church as an "Assistant President" (an office which apparently was created just for him and which was discontinued after his apostasy), it strains credulity to believe that Joseph Smith would not have taken the man into his full confidence. B. H. Roberts, The Rise and Fall of Nauvoo (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1900), p. 136, succinctly stated a major reason why Joseph Smith initially became attracted to Bennett: "Joseph said Bennett was the first man who'd do exactly what he wanted done, the way it should be done, and at once." Bennett was capable, imaginative, and initially something of a sycophant, but as soon as he had created his own power base, he became an extraordinarily disruptive figure. The social disorganization in Nauvoo which could allow a man like Bennett to rise and fall so rapidly deserves serious historical attention. For a further discussion of Bennett's role see the section on James J. Strang in the following chapter.

²These were the evaluations, respectively, of Kimball, "Study of the Nauvoo Charter," p. 25, footnote 21, which sees Bennett as an excellent example of the "booster type" described in Daniel J. Boorstin, The Americans: The National Experience (New York: Vintage Books, 1965); of Robert Flanders in a conversation with this author in Summer 1974; and of Thomas Ford, History of Illinois (Chicago: S. C. Griggs and Company, 1859), p. 263.

³The anti-Bennett exposés, as well as the Poulson and Chamberlin Papers, suggest how incapable Bennett was of staying with any particular project for any length of time. Bennett's religious affiliations ranged from the Cambellites, to the Methodists, the Mormons, and the Strangite Mormons. As
means of his own personal advancement, but when he found himself incapable of wresting control of the organization from Joseph Smith and as he perhaps became increasingly disgusted with his own profligate behavior, he turned on the Mormons and denounced their entire operation as a monstrous fraud.

Seen with the perspective of hindsight and isolated from Bennett's personal value judgments, his knowledge of the scope of the early development of plural marriage often is astonishingly accurate, as will be indicated in the following paragraphs. As described in the affidavits of women whom he allegedly seduced under the pretext of developing polygamous beliefs, Bennett's actual statements are very similar to those reported in some later Utah testimonies and affidavits.1

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summarized by the medical historian Frederick C. Waite, Bennett's medical career included writing a short book on gynecology, establishing a number of short-lived colleges, making use of medical innovations in his private practice, and helping to found several state medical societies. Following Bennett's Mormon interlude, which included a brief and similarly stormy affiliation with the Strangite organization, he returned to secular life to re-establish a successful medical practice, write an important treatise on the raising of poultry, and develop a strain of the Plymouth Rock chicken.

1 Bennett's actions as described in the Mormon affidavits against him differ in two respects from the later Mormon accounts of the way in which plural marriage was introduced. First, if Bennett had relations with as many women as the accounts against him indicate, it seems virtually impossible that he could have taken all of them with Joseph Smith's official sanction. In 1842 there is evidence of only a very limited practice of polygamy among Joseph Smith's closest associates. If Bennett was taking women without Joseph Smith's sanction and going through an external form in which he did not really believe, he was corrupting the new practices.

Second, Mormon affidavits against Bennett indicate that he promised the women whom he tried to seduce that if they became pregnant he would give them medicines to produce abortions. Whether or not such charges are true, such practices would seem plausible in view of Bennett's background in medicine and midwifery, and his later printed advertisements in 1846 stressing his knowledge of various French remedies for women's private ailments. If Bennett did provide abortions for women in Nauvoo, such actions would have been fundamentally inconsistent with the development of plural marriage, which always stressed that the primary purpose of polygamy was to raise up a numerous progeny in the families of righteous men. Bennett's perversion of plural marriage seems to have left Joseph Smith apoplectic. See his comments in the Wasp Extra for July 27, 1842. Although allegations of abortions in Nauvoo appear in
Only Bennett never really believed the line he was giving; he thought it was all a hoax, as he told William Law when he said he didn't need Smith's line to seduce women.¹

Eventually realizing that his dreams of unlimited and irresponsible power were blocked, Bennett turned on Joseph Smith and the Mormons. He decided to make a career of exposure. Then his self-righteousness knew no bounds. But Bennett only told what he thought others were doing; he never was honest about his own feelings or behavior. A frequently reliable contemporary source for Nauvoo gossip hypothesized that Bennett's major sin was moving too fast into polygamy.² If the number of women who allegedly had relations with him are accurate, this certainly would be the case. Bennett's indiscretions and excesses thus threatened the legitimate development of polygamy, as William Smith's behavior later would as well. Joseph Smith was caught on the horns of a dilemma in trying to deal with Bennett, for the man knew too much to be summarily thrown out, yet his indiscretions were so great that if he weren't thrown out the lid would blow off eventually anyway. Bennett never understood the real meaning of what Joseph Smith was trying to do. His account thus is like the image one gets in looking into a fun house mirror. It is grotesquely elongated or distorted in different directions, although the original object reflected did in fact exist.

How accurate was Bennett's knowledge of developing polygamy? Ironically, once Bennett's factual claims are separated from his lurid personal attacks, many of his statements provide strong corroboration for both the manuscript and printed sources for the period, it is impossible to determine the accuracy, or lack thereof, of the accounts.

¹See William Law's affidavit of July 20, 1842, printed in the Wasp Extra of July 27, 1842. Law's veracity can be relied upon. At the time that he made the affidavit, he was unaware that the Church sanctioned polygamous practice.

²Oliver Olney's private journal, the original of which is in the Coe Collection at the Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, notes in an entry for June 16, 1842: "They [Joseph Smith and John C. Bennett] have moved together hart [sic] and hand in all their windings. If Bennett had not moved quite so fast all would have been well now, as I look at things with them."
later Utah Mormon testimony. An example is his identification of Joseph Smith's early plural wives. Almost as an afterthought in his account, Bennett "semi-states" seven women who allegedly had become plural wives of Joseph Smith, using asterisks to indicate omitted letters in the names. One of these women was a "Miss L**** B****" married to Smith by "Elder Joseph Bates Noble." Some thirty years later, the Mormon Church claimed that a Louisa Beaman had been sealed to Smith by Joseph Bates Noble on April 5, 1841, the first instance of a plural wife for whom evidence of a definite ceremony exists. That the Utah Mormons should have deliberately fabricated this marriage account to corroborate Bennett's claims is highly unlikely--especially since his statement never was put forward to support their testimonies. Most other wives mentioned by Bennett also can be identified from Mormon and apostate accounts.

That Bennett's knowledge of polygamy may have gone deeper than simply knowing of plural wives is suggested in his straightforward account of the ceremony allegedly used in marrying plural wives. At a key point in this solemn ceremony, the administrator was said to have declared:

I now anoint you with holy, consecrated oil, in the name of Jesus Christ, and by the authority of the holy priesthood, that you may be fully and unreservedly consecrated to each other and to the service of God, and that with affection and fidelity you may nourish and cherish each other, so long as you shall continue faithful and true in the fellowship of the Saints; and I now pronounce upon you the blessings of Jacob, whom God honored and protected in the enjoyment of like special favor; and may the peace of Heaven, which passeth all understanding, rest upon you in time and in eternity.

1Mormon scholarship has already shown that Bennett was factually accurate in some of his other allegations which appeared grossly inflated at the time. See Hansen, *Quest for Empire*, for an account making serious use of Bennett's testimony regarding Mormon political aspirations. Given Bennett's closeness to major developments in the Church, it strains credulity to believe that he could have produced an account of polygamy devoid of all truth, even if he had wanted to do so.


4See Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, p. 302n.

5Bennett, *History of the Saints*, p. 224. Bennett concludes this straightforward description of the plural marriage ceremony with his own
This statement is essentially identical to—that suggested as the model in a recently published revelation dated July 27, 1842, which was allegedly given through Joseph Smith to Newel K. Whitney at Nauvoo. It also is supported by the testimony of Melissa Willes in the Temple Lot Case many years later. Bennett typically extreme personal reaction, p. 225: "The above is a faithful and unexaggerated account of the most enormous and detestable system of depravity that was ever concocted by the corrupt heart of a human being." Evidently Bennett eventually reached a point at which the only way he could intellectually comprehend what Joseph Smith was doing was by viewing it as a monstrous fraud—as it would have been had he been setting up such a program without Smith's sense of religious mission and compulsion.

1See Marquart, Strange Marriages, p. 23, for the text of the alleged revelation. The instructions to Newel K. Whitney include:

"These are the words which you shall pronounce upon my servant Joseph and your daughter S. A. Whitney. They shall take each other by the hand and you shall say, You both mutually agree, calling them by name, to be each other's companion so long as you both shall live, preserving yourselves for each other and from all others and also throughout eternity reserving only those rights which have been given to my servant Joseph by revelation and commandment and by legal authority in times passed [sic]. . . . Let immortality and eternal life hereafter be sealed upon your heads forever and ever."

Compare this with Orson Pratt's description of the plural marriage ceremony in Utah as printed in the Seer 1 (February 1853): 31-32. This author has not verified the accuracy of Marquart's unauthorized printing of the July 27, 1842, revelation from scholars in the Church Historical Department. However, the fact that such a revelation did exist is corroborated by Orson F. Whitney's statement in The Contributor 6 (January 1885): 131.

2In Abstract of the Temple Lot Case, p. 314, Melissa Willes stated:

"As nearly as I can remember or understand it, the marriage ceremony at the time I married Joseph Smith is as follows: 'You both mutually agree to be each other's companion, husband and wife, observing the legal rights belonging to this condition, that is, keeping yourselves wholly for each other, and from all others, during your lives.'"

The puzzling references to "keeping yourselves wholly for each other, and from all others," a statement apparently left from the earlier Mormon marriage ceremony, would seem to be directed primarily at the woman. Note that the emphasis on companionship that is expressed in this statement could be seen as a significant liberalization and humanization of earlier marriage concepts.
evidently was much more deeply involved in the early development of polygamy than either he or the Mormon Church later cared to admit.

Possibly the most controversial and frequently-cited allegation of Bennett's was that the developing sub-rosa marriage system in Nauvoo involved three special statuses for women. Significantly, this claim did not appear in Bennett's original series of exposes in the Sangamo Journal, but was first mentioned in a letter to the Louisville Journal from Cleveland, Ohio, dated July 30, 1842. At that point, Bennett's own personal indiscretions were still being thoroughly aired in the Mormon press. As elaborated in his still later History of the Saints, Bennett argued that the Mormon "Seraglio" consisted of three levels of depravity which he called, from lowest to highest, "Cyprian Saints," "Chambered Sisters of Charity," and "Consecrates of the Cloister" or "Cloistered Saints." These were also said to be known as "Saints of the White, Green, or Black Veils," respectively. Bennett is the sole source for the allegation that such terms were used by the Mormons, although other critical contemporary accounts did allege that some sort of a degree organization for women existed in the Church. Probably these terms are a typically Bennettian concoction like the secret "Order of the Illuminati" which he accused Smith of trying to start, but which he himself later introduced under that very name in the schismatic Strangite Mormon sect.

If Bennett's terminology is omitted, however, his concrete allegations require serious consideration. His basic assertion was that the Mormons had established "a very strictly and systematically organized" secret marriage system "divided into three distinct orders or degrees." At the highest level were women who were married under the ceremony cited above to Smith and a few of his most trusted followers as "secret, spiritual wives." All such marriages had to be approved

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1 Bennett, History of the Saints, pp. 217-225.
2 Durham, "Mormonism and Masonry," pp. 5-6.
3 Bennett's references to "spiritual wives" and to the "spiritual wife system" must be clarified. Although the use of such terminology was almost universal by knowledgeable ex-Mormons, anti-Mormons, and
by Smith himself. A second category of women were married under almost identical provisions, including Smith's necessary approval, but without the benefit of any formal ceremony. The lowest level, which Bennett himself stated was very small and in effect unofficial, was a sort of tolerated prostitution on a limited scale. Probably this last category could best be seen as Bennett's backhanded way of attempting to justify his own irregular behavior. However, some evidence does exist for a two-fold division of plural wives in Nauvoo. The revelation on plural and celestial marriage begins with Smith's inquiry concerning the taking of "wives and concubines" by Old Testament figures. Throughout the schismatic Mormons during the Nauvoo period, the Mormon Church at the time and subsequently has consistently denied that such terminology was ever used to refer to its own form of plural marriage. The phrases are almost invariably taken to be a shorthand for the irregularities of Bennett and others. In fact, however, there can be little doubt that Bennett was using terminology that was being used by contemporary Mormons to refer to polygamy. That the term "spiritual wife" was used by Nauvoo Mormons is clear from a statement in the Nauvoo Neighbor, January 1, 1845, which responded to part of Governor Ford's message on the disturbances in Hancock County:

"To relieve the Governor's mind, on this subject, we will just say that the meaning of spiritual wives is to be married for eternity, instead of natural lifetime; and should a man die after they have been married, they have a legal right to get married again; and should they do it for eternity, especially a man, he must have spiritual wives."

What this does not say is that when this doctrine was translated into temporal terms, it served as a justification for polygamy. In a defense of polygamy in 1882, Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, a former wife of Joseph Smith's, described the use of the term "spiritual wife" during the early development of polygamy in Nauvoo: "At that time spiritual wife was the title by which every woman who entered into this order was called, for it was taught and practiced as a spiritual order and not a temporal one though it was always spoken of sneeringly by those who did not believe in it. . . . " Plural Marriage as Taught by the Prophet Joseph (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1882), p. 15. This author has never encountered the term "plural marriage," and almost never encountered the term "celestial marriage," in Mormon or non-Mormon accounts from the Nauvoo period, although the term "spiritual wife system" was in common usage. When the Mormon Church finally admitted in 1852 that it had been practicing polygamy (which it had vehemently denied earlier), the Church evidently decided to replace the pejorative term "spiritual wife system" with "celestial marriage," which also had a "spiritual" sound but lacked the negative connotations associated with the earlier expression.
revelation "wives and concubines" are again mentioned together. A "concubine" is a lower status wife and sometimes may be taken without any formal ceremony. Thus "wives and concubines" could well correspond to Bennett's upper two levels of plural wives.  

Bennett may have included information in his account which is of value to historians when carefully analyzed. But his own concerns were almost purely polemical. Very simply, he wanted to destroy Joseph Smith. To this end, Bennett waged a personal vendetta against Smith, calling on many of Smith's associates to "come out" and expose the prophet's iniquities. Some, including George W. Robinson and John F. Olney, did just that. Others, chiefly Orson Pratt and Sidney Rigdon, were severely disaffected, but did not take decisive action. Still others, such as F. M. and C. L. Higbee, eventually became associated with the Expositor schism in 1844 which led directly to Smith's martyrdom. But in 1842, the dam held for the most part. This was due primarily to Bennett's personal instability and to his betrayal of the personal confidences of his friends. Bennett's penchant for publicly printing the private letters of his associates appears to have angered them more than anything Joseph Smith may have done.

Bennett's lack of consideration for his friends was never more obvious than when he printed detailed accounts of the personal reactions of women whom he alleged had bravely refused to become wives of Smith and other Mormon leaders. Among the women whom Bennett forced into largely unwilling notoriety were Sarah Pratt, wife of apostle Orson Pratt; Nancy Rigdon, eldest daughter of Sidney Rigdon, a long time associate of Smith's; Mrs. Emmeline White, a non-Mormon; and Nancy Brotherton, a young English convert who wrote a detailed affidavit describing how she allegedly had been asked to become a plural wife of

1D. Michael Quinn has identified a number of wives of General Authorities whom he calls "lesser known wives" because they apparently sustained some sort of marriage relationship with early Church leaders but were not publicly acknowledged as their wives. Apparently a marriage ceremony was performed for these women, and some definitely secured a divorce before remarrying, but the precise status of this group of women remains ambiguous. Quinn, "The Mormon Hierarchy," pp. 154-156.
Brigham Young. Bennett apparently assumed that the characters of these women were beyond reproach, but this was a tragic miscalculation. To discredit Bennett, the characters of all these women were blackened in varying degrees.

That accounts should have been put out under Church auspices defaming the character of the wife of one of Smith's twelve apostles in very explicit terms shows the desperate state of affairs, even should the allegations have been true. Bennett obviously had to be discredited at any cost. Although Bennett's defection was made so dangerous by dissatisfactions already existing within the Church, his exposé probably did more than any other single factor to further disrupt the social atmosphere in Nauvoo and to impede the establishment of a viable polygamous system. Joseph Smith's distress at the backbiting that resulted was heartfelt. In a speech on February 21, 1843, he said: "This biting and devouring each other I cannot endure. Away with it. For God's sake, stop it." The divisiveness that Bennett represented seems to be almost inherent in any attempt to introduce radically new social forms.

XIII

As if in response to Bennett's misrepresentations and to attempt to acquaint Mormons with the deeper significance of the new marriage forms which Bennett so singularly failed to comprehend, a remarkable thirty-seven page pamphlet defending polygamy was printed by the Mormon press in Nauvoo.

1After over one hundred years of non-productive contention about the veracity or falsehood of Bennett's allegations about these women, it is obvious that establishing exactly what did happen in these cases is impossible. Based on this author's research, he believes that whether or not Bennett's allegations are true, none of his statements regarding Martha Brotherton, Nancy Rigdon, and Sarah Pratt are implausible. But to document this point of view is counterproductive. The Church was extremely successful in obscuring what was really going on in this period. If one looks at polygamy from the standpoint of its politics, as this author has done here, one might possibly be able to bypass the endless character defamations and counter-defamations which make this period of Mormon history so unpleasant. For a summary of much of the evidence supporting Bennett's contentions in these cases, see Jerald and Sandra Tanner, Joseph Smith and Polygamy, pp. 62-75.

2History of the Church, 5: 286.
in the late autumn of 1842, little more than a month after Bennett's book-length exposé appeared. The account allegedly comprises two chapters from a larger manuscript—apparently never published—entitled *The Peace Maker, or The Doctrines of the Millennium.* The pamphlet presents a brilliant and often highly unorthodox intellectual and social argument for the "Biblical" basis of marriage, divorce, and polygamy, which were seen as closely related. Apparently this was the only explicit defense of polygamy ever printed under the auspices of the main body of the Mormon Church prior to 1852.

As if to compensate for the explicitness of its argument, the *Peace Maker* seems deliberately to suggest ambiguity as to its authorship. An "Udney Hay Jacob" is indicated as the author. The "Preface" to the account states: "The author of this work is not a Mormon, although it is printed by their press. It was most convenient. But the public will soon find out what he is, by his work." Yet, on the title page, Jacob was identified as "An Israelite, and a Shepherd of Israel"—implying a possible leadership position in the Church. Beneath that was the note: "J. Smith, Printer."

The "Preface" to the *Peace Maker* further indicates that the goal of the account is "to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children" and vice versa as indicated in Malachi 4:5-6 and that the author of the account professes to stand in relation to the coming millennium as Elijah did to Christ's first coming. These two claims were strikingly similar to those being developed at the time by Joseph Smith as the underlying rationale

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1The title page of the pamphlet reads as follows: An Extract. From a Manuscript Entitled The Peace Maker, or the Doctrines of the Millennium: Being a Treatise on Religion and Jurisprudence. Or a New System of Religion and Politicks [sic]. For God, My Country, and My Rights. By Udney Hay Jacob. An Israelite, and a Shepherd of Israel. Nauvoo, Ill. J. Smith, Printer, 1842. Apparently there are only two extant copies of this extremely rare document. The one to which references are made in this paper is found in the William Robertson Coe Collection of the Beinecke Library at Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. A xerox made from this pamphlet is found in the Library of the LDS Church Historical Department in Salt Lake City, Utah. The other copy of this document is in the Everett D. Graff Collection of the Newberry Library, Chicago, Illinois. A typescript made from copy by Dale Morgan is located in the Utah State Historical Society Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.
for temple sealing ceremonies connected in part with polygamy. And polygamy was one of the last major practices which must be restored before the millennium could be ushered in.¹ In an exhortatory conclusion, the Peace Maker declares:

The truth on this important matter is now clearly set before you my countrymen: . . . The question is not now to be debated whether these things are so: neither is it a question of much importance who wrote this book? [sic] But the question, the momentous question is, will you now restore the law of God on this important subject, and keep it? Remember that the law of God is given by inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Speak not a word against it at your peril. . . . (emphasis in original).²

Coming as it did in the wake of the Bennett allegations, publication of the Peace Maker created a brief furor in Nauvoo. A usually reliable retailer of contemporary Nauvoo gossip, Oliver Olney, expressed what must have been a common opinion when he said: " . . . if the pamphlet was not written by the authorities of the Church, it by them was revised in Jacobs [sic] name."³ As a rebuttal to such arguments, Smith mildly dissociated himself from the publication in a brief statement in the Times and Seasons on December 1, 1842. He denied that he had seen it in advance or that he would have printed it had he known its contents. Significantly, however, Smith defended the author's right to publish such opinions and he did not make any criticisms of the extraordinary claims to authority made by the pamphlet—claims that in effect would have threatened to supersede his own leadership.⁴

¹Hyrum L. Andrus, Doctrines of the Kingdom: Volume III, Foundations of the Millennial Kingdom of Christ (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1973), esp. pp. 1-19 and 439-489, discusses the context within which the restoration of the patriarchal order and plural marriage was conceived of by nineteenth-century Mormons as part of a necessary prelude to the coming of the millennium.


⁴The complete statement as printed in the Times and Seasons 4 (December 1, 1842): 32, read:

"NOTICE: There was a book printed at my office, a short time since, written by Udney H. Jacobs [sic], on marriage, without my knowledge; and had I been apprised of it, I should not have printed it; not that I am opposed to any man enjoying his privileges; but I do
In the tense political situation in Nauvoo following the Bennett fiasco, Joseph Smith had moved to centralize all power in his own hands. As part of this effort, he had placed the Church press in control of a totally loyal subordinate, John Taylor. Taylor apparently had replaced Ebenezer Robinson in part because of Robinson's hostility to plural marriage. Under such circumstances, it is hard to imagine how—short of extreme and uncharacteristic carelessness—the pamphlet could have been published without the sanction of the leadership of the Church. Probably, as John D. Lee later alleged, the pamphlet was put forward as a "feeler" to test Church opinion but was denied when public reaction proved too unfavorable.

Whatever the authorship of the pamphlet and the circumstances of its publication, its primary significance lies in the argument that it presents. As has been shown elsewhere, the highly unusual argument for divorce given in the pamphlet is virtually identical to that used in early Utah. Utah Mormon leaders later explicitly linked their divorce beliefs with those of this pamphlet. In addition, the argument for not wish to have my name associated with the authors [sic] in such an unmeaning rigmarole of nonsense, folly, and trash. JOSEPH SMITH."

This is one of the mildest of all Joseph Smith's carefully worded apparent denials of polygamy. Far stronger denial statements were made of beliefs and practices which contemporary apostate and later Utah Mormon sources clearly verify existed with official sanction in Nauvoo. Note the possible double entendre in the phrase: "not that I am opposed to any man enjoying his privileges." At the obvious level, this statement could be taken to mean that Joseph Smith would not oppose publication of the pamphlet. But in later Utah Mormon usage, statements about men exercising or enjoying their privileges often referred to polygamy. And there is some evidence that Joseph Smith may have made similar oblique references to polygamy in some of his statements. Thus, this phrase could also have been a word to the wise that even if Smith was disavowing this particular pamphlet for the record, he was not opposing properly sanctioned polygamy. Since polygamy was illegal in Illinois at this time, any explicit public statement in its support was hardly to be expected from Mormon leaders.

\[1\] See p. 236, footnote 2 in this chapter.

\[2\] Lee, Mormonism Unveiled, p. 246.

\[3\] For instance, on October 10, 1895, at a meeting of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve, Abraham H. Cannon records:
polygamy presented in the pamphlet, which is a relatively close approximation of Old Testament law on the subject, appears largely compatible with early Utah beliefs for the most part. Thus it is possible that the Peace Maker may provide one of a handful of contemporary accounts giving an insight into the larger social purposes which may have underlain the attempt to introduce Mormon plural marriage.

In brief compass, the complex and sometimes convoluted social argument of the first chapter of the Peace Maker may be summarized in three primary assertions. First, patriarchal authority and proper related patterns of male-female roles in the home and in society must be restored if social chaos is to be avoided. Woman's unnatural usurpation of power in the family has led to ungoverned and ungovernable children and to male desertion of their families. "Multitudes of families are now in confusion and wretchedly governed. This is a great evil." Second, to reestablish patriarchal authority and end this social disorder, a true or "Biblical" standard of divorce must be reinstituted. It would allow women whose affections had become irrevocably alienated from their husbands to be divorced by them. Thus the atmosphere of the home would not become poisoned because women were held in wedlock against their will. Finally, as a counterpart to restoring the supposedly "Biblical" standard of divorce, polygamy, the "Biblical" form of marriage, must be reinstituted. Polygamy would allow men to reassert their proper authority and leadership. It would free them from the unnatural sexual influence women hold over men in a monogamous system. And it would provide

"Joseph F. Smith holds that where the President gives a divorce it disunites the couple for time and eternity, for the same power which unites them together dissolves the bond. No man is justified in putting away his wife, however, save for fornication, and this, as explained in a pamphlet issued in the days of Joseph the Prophet, is alienation."

Called to this author's attention courtesy of D. Michael Quinn. The original of the Cannon Journal is in the Brigham Young University Special Collections.

men with an acceptable response to unsatisfactory marital situations short of the socially irresponsible one of divorcing or deserting uncooperative but not fully alienated wives.

Underlying the three-fold social argument presented in the *Peace Maker* is the assumption that only by reestablishing such a patriarchal basis for social authority can the true order of Christ's Church on earth be realized. The relationship which should exist between a husband and wife is seen as analogous to the relationship which should exist between Christ and his Church. Inversion of the correct relations between the sexes was a key factor in the Great Apostasy from Christ's Church. Such role inversion destroyed the Patriarchal Order, thereby undermining the whole family organization and resulting in social chaos. A restitution of patriarchal authority is thus of overriding importance both for the social order and for Christ's Church on Earth. Whatever the origin of this argument, it is a coherent theory which plausibly suggests some of the possible reasons for the preoccupation of Mormon leadership with introducing polygamy, the "patriarchal family system," in Nauvoo.¹

**XIV**

With the recording of the revelation on plural and celestial marriage on July 12, 1843, and its presentation by Hyrum Smith before the High Council of the Church on August 12, 1843, the lines of division over this issue began to harden within the Church. Previously, Bennett's extreme statements and the obviously biased accounts printed in anti-Mormon newspapers in Illinois such as the *Warsaw Signal* could be dismissed by most Mormons as inaccurate. Indeed, in the long run attacks from such sources actually may have helped solidify Mormon in-group loyalty and indirectly have strengthened the Church. But

¹The social argument of the *Peace Maker* is integrally connected with and receives its intellectual justification from an argument for the nature of true religious authority. A discussion of the relationship of the religious and social argument of the *Peace Maker* to contemporary Mormon values is presented in C. Jess Groesbeck, "Psychosexual Identity and the Marriage Relationship," *Dialogue* 2 (Spring 1967): 130-135.
when loyal and respected members within the Church who were among the most influential citizens in Nauvoo became disaffected and began building an organization against Smith and his policies in the very heart of the Church, currents were set in motion which led with almost tragic finality to Joseph Smith's death and to the temporary disarray of his Church.

The writing of the revelation on plural and celestial marriage and its presentation before the High Council were chiefly important in signalling unmistakably to leading Mormons the seriousness of Smith's intent to carry through his policies on polygamy. Before this time, not all the leading elements in Nauvoo were aware of this policy, and some may have dismissed it as an aberration or a negotiable issue. But as Ebenezer Robinson noted, early in the summer of 1843, the "spiritual wife doctrine" was "so closely pressed that I felt that the time was at hand when I must determine whether to accept or reject it."¹ Robinson's course was almost unique: he decided that he could never personally accept the doctrine and practice, but he reserved judgment on what others might do.

Many Mormons took a stronger stand, however. When the revelation was read before twelve members of the High Council, three of them, the president William Marks, Austin Cowles, and Leonard Soby bitterly opposed it. Cowles, whose daughter Elvira had become one of Joseph Smith's plural wives, wrote in an affidavit on May 4, 1844, that: "This revelation with other evidence, that the aforesaid heresies were taught and practiced in the Church; determined me to leave the office of first counsellor to the president of the Church [in the Nauvoo Stake], inasmuch as I dared not teach or administer such laws."² Contributions of disaffected Mormons to surrounding anti-Mormon newspapers increased and a bitterly satirical account called "The Buckeye's Lament for Want of More Wives"—which revealed an intimate knowledge of the revelation and of Joseph Smith's plural wives—appeared on February 7, 1844, in the Warsaw Message.

¹The Return 3 (February 1891): 29.
²Nauvoo Expositor, June 7, 1844.
Faced with mounting opposition from all sides, Smith broadened his efforts to prepare the minds of his followers for the new marriage standards and for the larger religious and social vision which underlay them. In the winter of 1843-44, he repeatedly preached the spirit of Elijah, and the imminence of an earthly millennium in which the hearts of the fathers would be turned to the children. He warned his followers from the stand that some of his closest associates would seek his blood because of the "mysteries" that he had revealed and would reveal to them.

Externally, Joseph Smith appeared confident, if not overconfident. On March 10, 1844, he declared in a speech:

I will make every doctrine plain that I present, and it shall stand upon a firm basis, and I am at defiance of the world, for I will take shelter under the broad wings of the work in which I am engaged. It matters not to me if all hell boils over, I regard it only as the crackling of thorns under the pot.

In what has appeared a rather extraordinary move, Smith started a campaign for President of the United States, eventually sending out more than three hundred followers to preach his candidacy and defend his character. Smith also took action to prepare his inner circle, particularly the Twelve, with a full knowledge of his programs. He set up a secret Council of Fifty on March 11, 1844, to try to handle the increasing problems in Nauvoo and to serve as the secular arm eventually to rule an all-encompassing earthly government. And he pressed forward with the building of the Temple where mysteries hid from before the beginning of the world would be revealed.

Yet underneath the external front of confidence, indeed of bravado, Smith seems to have realized the extreme tenuousness of his position, the degree to which he was poised, as it were, on the brink of eternity. His moods seem to have fluctuated widely. Between 1841 and 1844, his frustration at his inability to get across his message to his followers and to handle the ever more complex problems which beset him became increasingly palpable. Close followers recall his deep discouragement.

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1 History of the Church, 6: 253.

2 Hansen, Quest for Empire, pp. 72-89.
on different occasions. Mary Rollins Lightner, one of his plural wives, remembers him saying:

I am tired, I have been mobbed, I have suffered so much, from outsiders and from my own family. Some of the brethren think they can carry this work on better than I can, far better. I have asked the Lord to take me away. I have to seal my testimony to this generation with my blood. I have to do it for this work will never progress until I am gone for the testimony is of no force until the testator is dead. People little know who I am when they talk about me, and they will never know until they see me weighed in the balance in the Kingdom of God. Then they will know who I am, and see me as I am. I dare not tell them, and they do not know me.\(^1\)

Although this was recounted many years later, it seems accurately to reflect the spirit of many of Joseph Smith’s private statements during his last days. His sermon of April 7, 1844, at the funeral of Elder King Follett may appropriately serve as his own epitaph. In a sermon, he described his glorious vision of men progressing to the achievement of full godlike powers. He declared in a concluding statement, which George A. Smith said referred to plural marriage:

You never knew my heart; no man knows my history; I cannot tell it. I shall never undertake it; if I had not experienced what I have, I should not have known it myself. . . . When I am called at the trump of the archangel, and weighed in the balance, you will all know me then.\(^2\)

Here, it seems to me, is a most profoundly lonely man, poignantly aware of the inability of the world to understand the underlying significance of his ideas and mission, and seeing with stark clarity that he is about to be overwhelmed by forces which he has helped to set loose, but which are beyond his control. Throughout his life, Smith was painfully aware of his singularity and never able to escape it.

But if Joseph Smith may have appeared somewhat fatalistic about his own long-term prospects, externally he continued to the end to show his essential dynamism and commitment to the larger goals which he had

\(^1\)Remarks at Brigham Young University, April 14, 1905, p. 5.

\(^2\)Millennial Star 5 (November 1844): 93. See the letter of George A. Smith to Joseph Smith III, dated October 9, 1869, as reproduced in Bailey, "Emma Hale," p. 84.
set for the Church and its welfare. Events began to move rapidly toward their tragic denouement on June 7, 1844, when a group of Smith's disaffected followers—including William and Wilson Law, Robert D. Foster, Austin Cowles, and Charles and Francis Higbee—published a newspaper, The Nauvoo Expositor, which decried polygamy and presented a number of straightforward affidavits about the practice in Nauvoo which were difficult to dismiss as mere slander. The Expositor group was loyal to early Mormon beliefs and sincerely desired to purify the Church. Thus it represented a severe threat to Smith's control.

Knowing that the publication and circulation of such reports would undercut the faith of many members who were as yet unaware that the Church sanctioned and advocated the new practices, Smith acted quickly to have the press of the Expositor and any remaining copies of the paper destroyed. Almost inevitably this action brought outside hostility against the Mormons to a fever pitch. Rather than see outright civil war erupt, Smith surrendered himself to the authorities in Carthage, Illinois, to stand trial. There, on June 27, 1844, a mob in collusion with local militiamen entered the jail and shot Joseph and his brother Hyrum to death.

With the martyrdom of the prophet Joseph Smith, the stage was set for a new phase in the development of plural marriage. Between 1844 and 1852—in the course of the chaotic final years in Nauvoo, the exodus to the West and the early years in Utah—what had been largely one man's private vision would be introduced as the ideal model for family life in the whole Mormon Church. To this remarkable story, we shall now turn.
I have looked upon the community of Latter-day Saints in a vision and beheld them organized as one great family of heaven, each person performing his several duties in his line of industry, working for the good of the whole more than for individual aggrandizement; and in this I have beheld the most beautiful order that the mind of man can contemplate, and the grandest results for the upbuilding of the kingdom of God and the spread of righteousness upon the earth. . . . Why can we not so live in this world?

—Brigham Young

The death of the prophet Joseph Smith at the hands of a mob in Carthage, Illinois, on June 27, 1844, was associated with a period of major conflict and transition in the Church he had founded. Many of these problems were connected with the closely related issues of the struggle for succession and the continuing attempt to introduce polygamy. An important factor which had preceded Smith's death and contributed to it had been the extreme dissatisfaction of many of his closest followers with his policies and practices. One major faction had coalesced around William Law, Smith's respected former Second Counselor, who sought to create an organization to reform the Church from within. More idiosyncratic had been the response of the mercurial Sidney Rigdon, estranged third member of the First Presidency, who deserted Nauvoo for Pittsburgh shortly before the Carthage martyrdom, declaring that the city faced destruction. In the spring of 1844, Joseph Smith had sent out most of the Twelve as well as some three hundred of his followers to support his candidacy for President of the United States, thereby presenting a positive program. A combination of internal Mormon
uncertainties and bitter external anti-Mormon sentiment created an explosive situation in Nauvoo during the first half of 1844. Smith's death for a time seemed to leave his Church adrift and allowed simmering divisions to break out into the open. Many followers were stunned at his death and uncertain of direction. Almost immediately a complex succession struggle ensued to gain control of the remarkable spiritual and temporal organization that he had created. Despite all the problems that Smith had faced, he had managed in a little less than five years to create the largest city in Illinois, to greatly expand Mormon missionary outreach, and to put forward to his close associates the framework for a compelling, if as yet not fully internalized, new belief system, including celestial and plural marriage. Although no clear method of succession had been established, Brigham Young and the Twelve Apostles almost immediately assumed effective control of the Church in Nauvoo. They stood foursquare behind the martyred prophet's policies, including the gathering, completion of the Temple, and, more secretly and cautiously, the gradual introduction of new marriage beliefs and practices. Elsewhere, throughout the 1840s in the eastern states and in England, a bitter struggle over power and the polygamy issue continued.¹

Tragic as the prophet's death had been, his martyrdom also helped to pull his Nauvoo followers together in a new unity growing out of their shared sense of crisis. After having "sealed his testimony with his blood," Joseph Smith became a unifying symbol to his followers, and many of his controversial personal idiosyncrasies were largely forgotten. In addition, his death temporarily defused anti-Mormon sentiment, since many anti-Mormons expected the Saints to lose cohesion without their prophet. By early autumn 1845, however, the Mormons still remained in local politics and the temple which would serve as the symbol of Mormon

unity and peculiarity, and sanction new sealing ceremonies and marriage
practices, neared completion. Non-Mormons and anti-Mormons realized that
the Saints still hoped to remain in Illinois. Hostility suddenly rose to
such a fever pitch that it became obvious that coexistence between the
two groups was impossible.

At this point, the Mormons announced their intentions to leave
Illinois and began hurried preparations to depart. Endowment and
sealing ceremonies were performed in the nearly completed Temple on
a round-the-clock basis in December 1845 and January 1846. And in early
February 1846, in bleak mid-winter, the first large group of Mormons
left Nauvoo for an unspecified destination in the West, trusting only
in their leaders and in the faith which had brought them through repeated
trials and persecutions before. Neither the survival of the Mormon Church
itself, nor its controversial new marriage practices—which still were
not known by all the members—would have seemed at all probable.

This difficult and unsettled period which came between the death
of the prophet Joseph Smith in 1844 and the beginning of the establishment
of a Mormon Zion in Utah in 1847 has remained a largely untold story.
During this period, the most important preparatory steps were taken to
institutionalize a polygamous marriage system. How was this transition
accomplished? This is an exceedingly difficult question to answer. The
preceding chapter has attempted to describe and document the way in
which polygamous beliefs originated in the mind of Joseph Smith and were
introduced into practice among a small group of his most loyal and
devoted followers before his death. This problem of the "true origin"
of Mormon polygamy has drawn much popular and scholarly speculation.
Virtually no one, however, has even attempted to approach the difficult
problem of the complex process by which thousands of men and women were
led to accept beliefs and practices fundamentally at variance with their
previous training.

Based on manuscript accounts, it appears that not until the
encampment of the main body of the Latter-day Saints at Winter Quarters
(now Florence, Nebraska) in late 1846 did knowledge of polygamy practice
become general within the group. Considerable sifting out of less
committed members apparently took place at this time.
This transition created great problems. The period between 1844 and 1847, when many of the major steps to institutionalize Mormon polygamy occurred, has rightly been described as the "apostolic interregnum" or "period of chaos." No one leader was in complete control of the main body of the Mormons during those years, and only one Mormon publication, the Millennial Star, covers the entire period between 1844 and 1852. Until recently, secondary treatments have almost exclusively written in polemical terms of the succession struggle or else stressed the heroic westward migration. Yet in conjunction with Joseph Smith's Nauvoo years, the years between 1844 and 1847 are of critical importance in Mormon history, second only to the origin of the Church itself in setting the future course of the Mormon faith. Had the Saints faltered during this crucial transitional period, the Mormon Church might well have fragmented and become no more than a curiosity, like the surviving remnants of so many of the other enthusiastic religious movements of the antebellum period. Understanding the political, social, and intellectual factors making possible the successful transition to the patriarchal family system is thus of major import.

Just as in the third great transformation crisis of the Mormon Church in the last decades of the nineteenth century, which was associated with the end of the Mormon political kingdom and polygamy practice, the introduction of polygamy and of Mormon concerns for establishing a literal Kingdom of God on earth in the 1840s and 1850s contains much unpleasantness, heartbreak, and bitterness, as well as examples of courage, dedication, and idealism. Transitions are inevitably painful, and at times in the following account the negative aspects of the Latter-day Saint experience may seem to predominate. Yet like the Shakers and Oneida Perfectionists, who left less complete records of their transition periods, the Mormons eventually reestablished a new order. This chapter will attempt to lay out the outlines of some of those swirling and often contradictory movements in the period and suggest some directions of investigation for much-needed scholarship in this area.

The key figure in this second phase of Mormon history was Brigham Young. By virtue of his presidency of the Twelve Apostles and his capable
management, he increasingly assumed effective power between 1844 and 1847. After December 5, 1847, when the First Presidency of the Church was reconstituted, he assumed the role of President of the Latter-day Saints, as well as "Prophet, Seer, and Revelator," which positions he continued to hold until his death in 1877. Without the steady hand and organizational genius of this Mormon Moses, or a figure of comparable stature, the history of the Mormon Church and the nature of the achievements of this second period of their history might have been very different. Brigham Young was born in Whittingham, Windham County, Vermont, on June 1, 1801. Like many other early Mormon leaders, including Joseph Smith, he spent his formative years in an economically marginal family in the Burned-over District of central New York. Also like Smith, Young's early life gave little indication of the leadership potential and importance that he would later display.

Brigham Young's personality and role in Mormon development frequently has been contrasted with that of Joseph Smith. Smith had begun as a poverty stricken unknown with minimal formal education and no social standing. Of necessity, he made use of frequent revelations in attempting to establish his religious authority in the early 1830s. Highly innovative both in doctrine and practice, he had sought to break down the old order and to provide a framework for the restoration of ideal religious and social relations that he conceived to be that of the "dispensation of the fulness of time." Unlike Smith, Brigham Young stepped into an already existing organization of great potential which was in temporary disarray and he sought to pull it together again. For him to receive revelations as such was no longer necessary. Young's temperament was almost solely that of an organizer; he showed few original ideas apart from organizational matters and he initially felt uncomfortable in the role of a "prophet." Basically confident of his powers, Young did not have to prove his authority continually to himself and to his followers. Once Young observed that some Latter-day Saints complained because he didn't deliver formal revelations. Young replied that he could give all manner of revelations about specific issues such as whether particular individuals should go to England, but he did not
feel that such steps were necessary; he would just tell the Saints what to do and expect them to obey.¹

Experiences during more than a decade of loyal association with the Mormon Church in positions of ever-increasing responsibility had given Young an excellent preparation to accede to leadership after Smith's unexpected martyrdom. In the troubled period from 1838 to 1839, Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball were among the few prominent leaders of the Church who were on the scene, not in jail, and still loyal, and who therefore could help to oversee the difficult departure from Missouri. In a small way, this action prepared the pattern for the much larger exodus of the Saints to the Rocky Mountains several years later. In the 1840s, Young acceded to the leadership of the Twelve Apostles and played a leading role in organizing the far-flung and effective home and foreign missionary activities of the Church. By 1846, for example, more than 4,000 British converts had come to Nauvoo.²

The Twelve developed an effective working relationship and comaraderie which led them to assume increasing importance in Church affairs even before Joseph Smith's death. Because they operated as a body, they were less subject to allegations that they were acting simply for self-aggrandizement than were Smith and the numerous prophetic pretenders who arose after his death. It was natural for this group to attempt to carry on the policies of the martyred prophet, including the polygamy to which many of them had already become committed by personal action. As Young noted, the Saints already had more than enough revelations to last them for many years, even if no new ones were added.³ Even the few new doctrines which Young propounded may well have been simply an extension of some of Smith's unpublished revelations. By building on Smith's work, publicly stressing the gathering and the completion of the temple, Brigham Young and the Twelve adopted the most powerful possible position available to them.

¹Woodruff, Journal, April 7, 1852.


³Woodruff, Journal, July 6, 1851.
The westward saga of the Mormons and their remarkable work in settling the Great Basin understandably has drawn the greatest attention of historians and popular writers. Yet probably an even more difficult and challenging organizational development was the successful introduction of a patriarchal marriage system and polygamy into the whole Mormon Church. To accomplish this feat, Young and his associates eventually had to severely restrict the increasing liberality in sexual attitudes and practice which had spread among Mormons during Joseph Smith's last years. Young acted to centralize and tighten up polygamy, reducing the role of women in comparison with what Smith had allowed. Young's actions in this area paralleled his similar moves away from Smith's more liberal attitudes and actions on racial policies and certain other topics. Many of the humane concerns which underlay the introduction of polygamy under Joseph Smith underwent significant modification in order to allow the establishment of a functioning patriarchal system.

Throughout this chapter, Brigham Young's pervasive influence will be felt. As the man behind the scenes, he would show a remarkable ability to maintain calm and effective control in the face of an extraordinary range of problems, thus helping the Mormons retain cohesion and successfully reach the Great Basin. Rather than focus on Young's quiet, basically self-assured, step-by-step organizational activities, however, this chapter will analyze the numerous difficult problems faced by Young and the Nauvoo Church, especially those connected with the succession struggle and the internal polygamy controversy. By successfully dealing with these many challenges, Young eventually would bring the Mormons through to their new Zion.

II

A large part of the organizational transition to new marriage beliefs and arrangements within the Mormon Church occurred between Joseph Smith's death and the beginning of the westward migration in February 1846. The move west and the establishment in the Great Basin may be seen as a group rite of passage of the Mormons, which further solidified the loyalty of those who underwent it to the beliefs and practices which already had been introduced, at least in embryonic
form, during the one and a half final hectic years in Nauvoo. Plural
and celestial marriage was integrally related to other doctrines,
ceremonies, and practices, including baptism for the dead and the law of
adoption, which represented an attempt irrevocably to seal the loyalty
of the Mormons to each other and to their Church as a literal
enlargement of the family of God. Out of the last years in Nauvoo and
the westward migration emerged an elaborate patriarchal tribal system
modeled on the experiences of the early Hebrews.

The symbolic focal point for this achievement of group loyalty
among the Mormons found expression in the effort to complete the building
of the Nauvoo temple, where the various priesthood, endowment, and sealing
ceremonies would be carried out, especially after December 1845. The
great effort to complete the temple provided the Saints with a sense of
continuity with Joseph Smith's basic program. Smith had emphasized the
importance of the temple by revelation as early as 1841. The Saints
had been told that unless they completed the temple within an allotted
time, they and all their dead relatives would be rejected by God. Intense
emotional commitment thus was generated by the building of the temple.
The temple served as a tangible, physical sign of Mormon unity in a
troubled period when many Saints felt very much in need of such external
validation.

In addition to providing Mormons with a sense of continuity with
the program of their martyred prophet, the temple building effort also
served important economic functions. Building the temple served, in
effect, as a massive public works project, absorbing energies, skills,
and idealism which might otherwise have degenerated into idleness or
other unproductive or anti-social activities. Except for the missionary
program itself, building the temple constituted the primary project
through which Mormon men of the period could contribute to a group
enterprise. Furthermore, the project provided a concrete reason for
encouraging the Saints both in Nauvoo and abroad to make unselfish
donations of much-needed labor, produce, and money. Saints were told

1Doctrine and Covenants, section 124. Revelation received by
Joseph Smith at Nauvoo, Illinois, on January 19, 1841.
that if they did not tithe, they would be unworthy and ineligible for the awesome benefits and powers to be achieved through the temple ceremonies. The capital thus collected by the Church could be used directly on the temple itself, or, as some critics claimed, it may also have been diverted at times to support other Church efforts deemed necessary for the building up of Nauvoo, since at this time the city still had a rather shaky basis of economic self-support in the absence of any large-scale manufacturing enterprises.\footnote{The enormous importance that building the temple had for Mormons of the period can be seen in numerous articles in the *Times and Seasons* and other Church publications. For a treatment emphasizing economic factors, see Flanders, *Nauvoo*, pp. 190-210. Also dealing with related issues, see Roger L. Henrie, "The Perception of Sacred Space: The Case of Utah and Other Sacred Places in Mormondom" (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1972).}

Undoubtedly the sense of awe, mystery, and expectation with which the Saints awaited the highly secret sacred ceremonies of power to be conducted in the completed temple was the most important single function of the temple building effort. The general membership had no clear idea exactly what the ceremonies would entail, but few doubted that mysteries hidden since before the foundation of the world were soon to be revealed. Eternity would be brought directly into the experience of the living. Keys of power received through the prophet Elijah by the leaders of the Church would be used to link indissolubly the living and the dead. Would the Millennium itself actually follow? This sense of expectation, combined with the experience of common crisis, was of cardinal importance in preparing the Saints to accept the new celestial and plural marriage system. Even the intense hatred shown by the apostates of the period who tended to see the demonic rather than the divine in the temple ceremonies, suggests that the pervasive sense of the raw power of supernatural origin supposed to be inherent in the rituals could not easily be overcome. Extremes of commitment or of disillusionment thus would become associated with the temple endowment and sealing ceremonies.

III

The leadership of Brigham Young and the Twelve in spiritual and temporal matters, most vividly symbolized in the continuing stress on
the gathering and on building the temple, served as a unifying element in Nauvoo itself. In Nauvoo, the introduction of new marriage ideals and practices could be tightly overseen and carried on with a considerable degree of order. Outside Nauvoo, however, the situation was much more complex. An almost fratricidal struggle for succession was seriously complicated by the increasing knowledge in Mormon circles outside Nauvoo that some sort of polygamy was being taught and practiced by the authorities of the Church in that city. This knowledge created grave problems for the Church and threatened to undercut the effort at centralization by Brigham Young and the Twelve.

Although by 1845, some 10,000 to 12,000 Mormons were living in Nauvoo, with many more to be found in the surrounding counties of Illinois and Iowa, the Nauvoo region may not have contained a majority of all the members and sympathizers of the Church. Sizeable numbers of Mormons also lived in the eastern United States, as well as in England and in Western Europe.¹ In 1846, for instance, a conference of the English mission reported some 12,247 Saints in the British Isles alone.² Maintaining the spiritual and temporal support of those Mormons was essential to the success of Brigham Young and the Twelve. Without that support, the building up of Nauvoo, the westward migration, and the settlement of Utah would have been impossible. The Nauvoo Mormons therefore made a vigorous effort to combat the claims of various schismatic elements, especially those which eventually coalesced around Sidney Rigdon, William Smith, and James J. Strang.

Possibly the greatest initial problem for the missionary program of the Nauvoo Church came not from the as-yet-unorganized potential schismatics, but from their own over-zealous members who tried on their own initiative to teach polygamy, and sometimes even to practice it, outside Nauvoo. Generally these individuals lacked full knowledge of the rights and responsibilities implicit in the newly developing system.


²Roberts, Comprehensive History, 2: 460.
This is far from surprising since even many of the leaders of the Church appear to have been finding difficulties determining how the new marriage arrangements were to be organized and practiced. Few could have known the proper forms for the all-important endowment and sealing ceremonies which would serve to justify the new arrangements. And many undoubtedly must have misconstrued statements such as "It is your privilege to have all the wives you want," as an excuse for licentiousness. Even broaching the doctrine itself was enough to scandalize many loyal Mormons who had been taught that the Church supported strictly monogamous norms. Saints abroad tended either to assume that the teachers of the doctrines were wicked men, or that the Church itself had fallen.

Faced with such problems, the Nauvoo Mormon leadership in the post-1844 period counseled missionaries over and over again to preach only the "first principles" of the Gospel. They must leave the "mysteries" alone until the people could be gathered to Nauvoo, taught the proper belief and behavior, have those norms sanctioned by the temple ceremonies, and accept the new way of life in the right spirit. The eastern mission was subject to the most severe strains from the polygamy controversy in this period. Not until the official announcement of plural and celestial marriage in 1852, however, would the English mission suffer severe internal dissension over the polygamy question.

Even before Joseph Smith's death, problems of unauthorized teaching of polygamy outside Nauvoo created difficulties. For instance, an announcement by Joseph and Hyrum Smith on February 1, 1844, cut off a Hiram Brown in Lapeer County, Michigan, for preaching: "... Polygamy, and other false and corrupt doctrines. ..." The concern, evidently, was not over the doctrines themselves, but over their unauthorized promulgation. More striking was a statement of March 15, 1844, by Hyrum Smith, then second in command of the Church under

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1Jenson, "Plural Marriage," p. 225. This was a statement of Joseph Smith's as reported in an affidavit by William Clayton.

2This notice originally appeared in the *Times and Seasons* 5 (February 1, 1844): 423, and was reprinted with critical analysis in Shook, *Origin of Mormon Polygamy*, pp. 177-180.
Joseph Smith. According to available Mormon, non-Mormon, and anti-Mormon accounts, Hyrum was serving as Joseph Smith's primary agent in introducing the belief and practice of polygamy in Nauvoo in 1843 and 1844. In a general letter to the Saints at China Creek, Hyrum made what appeared to be a flat denial of the allegations that the Nauvoo Mormons taught that a man "having a certain priesthood" could have as many wives as he pleased. Hyrum declared, for the record, that such a false doctrine was "neither taught nor practiced here."

Despite this seemingly explicit denial of polygamy involvement, Hyrum then went on to speak clearly to initiates of their responsibility in teaching polygamy-related doctrines. He emphatically counseled missionaries to preach only first principles and to let the mysteries entirely alone. "Let the matter of grand councils of heaven, and the making of gods, worlds and devils"--all doctrines intimately connected with temple sealing ceremonies, spiritual marriage, and polygamy--"entirely alone: for you are not called to teach any such doctrine--for neither you nor the people are capacitated to understand any such principles--less so to teach them."

For when God commands men to teach such principles the saints will receive them. Therefore beware what you teach! For the mysteries of God are not given to all men; and unto those to whom they are given they are placed under restrictions to impart only such as God will command them; and the residue is to be kept in a faithful breast, otherwise he will be brought under condemnation. . . .

And as to the celestial glory, all will enter in and possess that kingdom that obey the gospel, and continue in the faith of the Lord unto the end of his days. Now, therefore, I say unto you, you must cease your preaching of miraculous things and let the mysteries alone until by and bye [sic].

This statement, which is almost identical to numerous ones made by Brigham Young and his associates between 1844 and 1852 when they

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1Times and Seasons 5 (March 15, 1844): 474. Shook, Origin of Mormon Polygamy, p. 180, points out that, strictly construed, this statement does not deny that polygamy was taught or practiced, but simply that "a man having a certain priesthood" might have as many wives as he pleased. Shook correctly observes that such a doctrine was never taught, either in Nauvoo or in Utah. The Nauvoo-Utah Mormons never restricted the practice of polygamy to men holding "a certain priesthood," although the Strangite Mormons, with their more elite polygamy system, apparently did limit polygamy to the higher eschelons of their church.
indisputably were practicing polygamy, constitutes an attack on the premature and unauthorized teaching of spiritual marriage and polygamy-related doctrines, not a condemnation of the doctrines themselves. The wording of the letter is carefully calculated to convey an entirely different message to the initiated and uninitiated. In effect, the letter contains two partially opposed and contradictory statements within itself. What is taken for truth at the lower, everyday level of reality, eventually would be replaced by a new and different state for those with a knowledge of the mysteries.

Arguments with such doubles entendres predictably created grave intellectual and emotional problems for many Mormons. It is not surprising that during the 1840s some Saints came to the utterly frustrating conclusion that their leaders were introducing and engaging in heinously sinful practices, and also were deliberately lying to cover for their sins. The resultant disrespect for the leadership which developed did more to undercut the authority of the Church than any other single factor in the years following Joseph Smith's death. Only in the late nineteenth-century transition when the practice of polygamy was given up would the Mormon Church experience such internal stress once again. It is a tribute to the underlying spiritual and organizational strengths of the Mormon faith that it was able to weather the strains of such painful transitions without disintegration.

IV

One of the most complex examples of the emotional and organizational problems associated with the premature preaching and practice of polygamy both inside and outside Nauvoo is provided by Joseph Smith's brother William. Next to John C. Bennett, William Smith probably is the most difficult early Mormon figure to place into context and to treat fairly. It has been observed that a history of almost all the problems besetting the Mormon Church immediately following Joseph Smith's death easily could be written simply around William's erratic career. William Smith never was able to make up his mind or to carry out a consistent long-range policy. In no area was this deficiency more obvious than in his response to polygamy.
William was always something of the black sheep of the Smith family, a loner who felt neglected in comparison to his more famous brothers and who had difficulty taking responsibility for his own life. As early as 1835 and 1836, William's repeated insubordination, which included a physical assault on his brother Joseph, almost led to his excommunication from the Church.\(^1\) Allegations that William diverted tithing money to his own private use appear to have had a foundation in fact.\(^2\) And when William in a fit of anger in 1843 threatened to kill his brother Joseph, the prophet took pains to avoid William until he cooled off.\(^3\) It seems that Joseph Smith tolerated William's activities to some extent as part of an attempt to maintain family harmony, and, at a deeper level, out of compassion for his brother's personal problems. This was much the same way that he initially had attempted to deal with John C. Bennett as well.

After the deaths of Joseph and Hyrum Smith on June 27, 1844, and of Samuel H. Smith shortly thereafter, William, the only brother in the Smith family who still remained alive, initially cooperated with the governing Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, of which he was then a member. Secretly, however, he began to build up his own power base in an attempt to seize the leadership of the Church. William's claim to act as Patriarch over the Church and to succeed to supreme leadership because of his position in the Smith family had some initial plausibility on purely legalistic grounds. The family-dynastic perspective has remained an extremely popular one in the Mormon Church to this day. From such a framework, William could plausibly claim a right to guide the Church, at least until the prophet's young son Joseph III reached his majority. Even


\(^{2}\)For instance, after Joseph Smith's death William Smith was living in Boston for a time with two young sisters whom he claimed were his plural wives, properly sealed to him by priesthood authority. He was apparently supporting them from funds raised for the completion of the temple. Lyon, "Nauvoo and the Twelve," p. 203.

\(^{3}\)Ibid., p. 185.
in the 1850s, William's claim to have the right of holding a post of dynastic leadership in the Church simply because he was a member of the Smith family continued to attract supporters, despite the man's personal instability which unsuited him to such leadership.

Just how much William Smith knew about the polygamy system that his brother Joseph had been attempting to introduce into the Church before his death remains open to question. In a personally revealing though highly self-serving and factually dubious statement written for publication to Joseph Smith III many years later, William declared for the record that he never had been apprised of polygamy either by Joseph Smith or by the Twelve before they excommunicated him the the fall of 1845. William asserted that it was only his own observation that had revealed to him the disturbing fact that the Twelve in Nauvoo were practicing one thing and saying another. He, of course, a paragon of virtue, had been unable to accept such hypocrisy.

In fairness to William, it should be noted that he does indeed appear to have felt deeply ambivalent about the new practices. He clearly showed himself upset by the policy of public secrecy maintained about polygamy by the Twelve. However, the evidence is overwhelming that William Smith was heavily involved in both the advocacy and practice of polygamy himself. Given William's high position in the Nauvoo Church, which he claimed had included full knowledge of the ceremonies of the Melchizedek of High Priesthood; his ill-advised advocacy and practice of polygamy among Mormons in Boston in the late summer and early fall of 1844; his even more ill-advised speech from the stand in Nauvoo in late August of 1845 urging the Saints to publicly acknowledge their belief and practice of polygamy to the world; and his continuing involvement in irregular attempts to introduce polygamy from the mid-1840s through the mid-1850s (which he also flatly denied in this letter), William's assertions in this statement would appear disingenuous, to say the least.

1 Undated handwritten statement from William Smith to Joseph Smith III in the Archives of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, The Auditorium, Independence, Missouri. The statement evidently was written close to the end of William Smith's life.

2 Documentation for these specific allegations will be provided in the following pages. Major sources from the LDS, Strangite, and RLDS
like John C. Bennett, he never was able to come to a consistent position on the new beliefs and practices.

Whether or not William Smith ever learned the proper forms of plural marriage and the necessary sealing ceremonies may well be unimportant historically, although there is strong reason to believe that he was fully aware of the basic forms. Rather, William's historical importance appears to lie in the trail of confusion his ill-advised printed and manuscript accounts are all in basic agreement on William Smith's instability and on the erratic character of his activities. For a bibliography of the writings of William Smith's faction of the Church, see Dale Morgan's bibliography in Western Humanities Review 7 (Summer 1953): 131-138. Among the numerous LDS sources, see the Church newspapers such as the Times and Seasons and the Prophet, the testimony of William's alleged plural wife Mary Ann West in Abstract of the Temple Lot Case, pp. 379-384, as well as Quinn, "The Mormon Hierarchy," p. 280, which identifies several of his alleged plural wives, their dates of marriage and separation, and related information. The James J. Strang Papers in the Coe Collection at the Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, hereafter cited as Strang Papers, are perhaps the richest single manuscript source on William Smith. These papers contain many of his letters and much other information on his activities. Early leaders of the RLDS Church such as Jason Briggs and Isaac Sheen, who for a time were close associates of William Smith's, also left testimony about their split with him over the advocacy and practice of polygamy. For instance, see Jason Briggs's reminiscences in his publication The Messenger 2 (November 1875): 1. That William Smith was initiated into the knowledge of the temple ceremonies is asserted in his exposé in the Warsaw Signal, October 29, 1845, and by Reuben Miller, James J. Strang, Weighed in the Balance and Found Wanting (Burlington, Wisconsin Territory: n.p., September 1849), p. 19. Note that Miller, who is remarkably accurate in most of his assertions which can be checked from early manuscript and printed sources, states that both William Smith and John C. Bennett had received ordination into the Melchizedek Priesthood at the hand of Joseph Smith.

In addition to the evidence cited in the preceding footnote, see John K. Sheen, Polygamy, or the Veil Lifted [York, Nebraska: n.p., 1889]. This prints the full title page of the manuscript Elders' Pocket Companion, allegedly written in 1844 by William Smith, as well as the passages in one of the sections of that work justifying and explaining the rationale for polygamy. That the Elders' Pocket Companion is authentic appears likely. John K. Sheen was the son of Isaac Sheen who, with William Smith, edited the Melchisedek [sic] and Aaronic Herald in Covington, Kentucky, between February 1, 1849 and April 1, 1850. When Sheen broke with William Smith, apparently in part because he discovered that Smith secretly advocated polygamy, he secured a number of Smith's papers.
statements and personal behavior introduced into the Church. As
described in printed Utah Mormon and early RLDS sources, as well as
the Strangite manuscripts, all of which were cited above, William's
string of short-term relationships during his peregrinations in the East
and elsewhere proved extremely disruptive. In a plaintive letter that he
wrote half a year prior to his adultery trial which was associated with
his expulsion from the Strangite organization in 1847, William Smith
complained: "... even J.C Benit [sic] has a wrng [sic] conception
of me in women affairs. ..." 1

William Smith only remained with the Nauvoo Church for a little
over a year between Joseph Smith's death and his own excommunication on
October 19, 1845. During that time, one of the most damaging activities
in which he was engaged was an attempt, along with George J. Adams, and
Samuel Brannan, to introduce the doctrine and practice of polygamy in
Boston in the late summer and early fall of 1844. Since the Mormon
community in that area numbered only a few hundred members, such a
venture was pure folly, even had it been conducted with the best of
skill and intentions. An outraged John Hardy, respected head of the
Boston branch of the Mormon Church before his expulsion by the Smith,
Adams, and Brannan faction, wrote an extremely detailed and bitter
critique of the power play involved and the allegedly disreputable
behavior of the three men. 2 Although Hardy's charges would have been
highly libelous if false, William Smith declined to deny the accuracy
of the accusations. He simply said that the criticisms were maliciously
put forward with a "false coloring." 3

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1Letter of William Smith to James J. Strang, dated Knoxville,
Illinois, December 2, 1846, in the Strang Papers. Although the ostensible
reason for William Smith's expulsion from the Strangite organization in
October 1847 was adultery committed on the occasion of his first visit
to Voree in July 1846, the primary reason probably was insubordination.
See Milo M. Quaife, The Kingdom of Saint James: A Narrative of the

2John Hardy, History of the Trial of Elder John Hardy, Before
the Church of Latter Day Saints in Boston, for Slander, in Saying that
G. J. Adams, S. Brannan and William Smith Were Licentious Characters
(Boston: Conway & Co., 1844). Hardy's trial was on October 22, 1844.

3One rejoinder by William Smith was printed in the Prophet,
February 8, 1845. Another letter that he wrote in self-defense appeared
This unfortunate embroilment was followed by a string of similar if less sensational activities by William Smith. The climax of these appears to have come on August 17, 1845, when William is reported to have declared from the stand in Nauvoo that polygamy doctrines and practices were "taught in Nauvoo secretly--that he taught and practiced it, and he was not in favor of making a secret of the matter. He said that it was a common thing amongst the leaders and he for one was not ashamed of it." In conjunction with all William Smith's other indiscretions, this was too much. On October 6, 1845, after a final attempt to get him in line had proved fruitless, the Twelve lost all patience with William and removed him from any leadership position in the Church. Orson Pratt, summarized the two key charges. First, William had been an "aspiring man" who sought to undercut the leadership of the Church so that he could take power himself. Second: "... while Brother William was in the east, to my certain knowledge, his doctrine and conduct have not had a savory influence; but have produced death and destruction wherever he went."2

True to form, William Smith did not go quietly. After being totally removed from all status in the Church at the October 6th conference, he proceeded to write a highly disingenuous blast against Brigham Young and the Twelve for polygamy, immorality, and hypocrisy. Knowing of the exposé, the Twelve excommunicated William on October 19. Williams' statement then appeared plastered across the entire front page of the bitterly anti-Mormon *Warsaw Signal* on October 27, 1845. Very probably William Smith's numerous indiscretions and that five column exposé played

in the *Nauvoo Neighbor*, May 14, 1845. Wilford Woodruff had several encounters with Smith, Adams, and Brannan, and reported his adverse judgment on them to the Twelve in Nauvoo. Lyon, "Nauvoo and the Twelve," p. 203, citing Journal History, September and October 1844, as well as Wilford Woodruff letters in the George J. Adams and Brigham Young Letter Files, Church Archives.

1 *Warsaw Signal*, September 3, 1845. Needless to say, this speech resulted in widespread gossip. William Smith was still trying unsuccessfully to live down this part of his past as late as the self-justificatory statement that he wrote to Joseph Smith III, cited above.

2 *Times and Seasons* 6 (November 1, 1845): 1008.
a significant part in creating the intense hostility to the Nauvoo Mormons which flared up in the late summer and early fall of 1845.

The extent to which Brigham Young and the Nauvoo Mormons were forced to put up with such a difficult character as William Smith suggests the extraordinary bind in which the Church was placed in trying to discipline its own members when it attempted to introduce new marriage practices that were at odds with local laws and mores. A person who had been privy to Church secrets and deeply involved in the introduction of polygamy could not lightly be thrown out, lest he create an even worse public scandal. This happened in the cases of John C. Bennett and William Smith. Not without reason had Brigham Young for the first time in his life "desired the grave" when he first heard the polygamy revelation and thought of all the troubles that would ensue in putting it into practice. Only with the relative isolation of the Great Basin would the Mormons under Brigham Young be able to establish the new system of marriage and family organization on a secure footing.

V

Dealing with premature and irregular attempts to teach or practice polygamy inside and outside Nauvoo thus presented severe problems for the Twelve between 1844 and 1846. The approaches used by the Nauvoo leadership to deal with members outside Nauvoo under such trying conditions are most clearly suggested in the newspapers put out by the Church, especially the Prophet, official organ of the eastern mission, and the Times and Seasons, printed in Nauvoo primarily for the benefit of the Saints abroad. Particularly during the months immediately following Joseph Smith's death, when everything remained in flux, many Mormons remained unsure whether or not the new and often only partially understood doctrines were to be discussed or practiced outside Nauvoo. It simply was not practical just to cut off individuals who became confused or over-zealous unless they proved totally unmanageable and unresponsive to authority. Instead, a concerted effort was made to secure total loyalty to the Church in Nauvoo, irrespective of the problems which might be occurring in practice. This effort did not reach its full culmination until late 1845, when the temple neared completion and the Saints prepared to move west.
The *Prophet* and other Church periodicals of this period suggest that many of the conferences of the eastern mission in this period were heavily involved with silencing or cutting off Mormons who heard of the new beliefs and practices, and opposed them. Usual charges against such individuals included "slandering" the Church or its leaders, or engaging in "unchristian-like" or "unvirtuous" speech or conduct. Some of these cases may have involved moral lapses of the accused; others, however, appear to have been those of upright and respected individuals like John Hardy, who were sincerely opposed to polygamy and to other beliefs being introduced in the Nauvoo Church. Hardy, for instance, observed icily that he could not be accused of "slander" "unless truth is slander."¹ The uncertain loyalty of some of the branches is suggested by the fact that a variety of forms of pressure and innuendo had to be used to silence and discredit those opposed to the leadership and policies of the Twelve. Frequently this was done most effectively by accusing opponents of being guilty of the very alleged evils that they were attacking.

The effects of such perhaps-necessary but hardly-pleasant tactics was to alienate some of the most capable and devoted Saints. Many of these individuals, among them figures like William Marks, Ebenezer Robinson, Jason Briggs, Zenos Gurley, Isaac Sheen, and others, remained sincerely committed to what they understood to have been the restored Gospel message of early Mormonism. Characteristically, these individuals drifted for years between various splinter factions, searching against hope for a leader and a group whose beliefs and practices they could accept. They were not prepared to countenance the possibility that they could have devoted so much of their lives to the new faith in vain. Eventually a remnant of these individuals would reunite to form the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, whose primary early platform lay in opposing polygamy and the other doctrinal developments of the Nauvoo period which they felt had corrupted the Church. Much of the animus which still remains between the LDS and RLDS branches of

¹*Trial of John Hardy*, p. 4.
the Mormon Church is a result of the conflicts and honest differences of principle between individuals in this troubled period.¹

In order to establish its authority and its controversial new polygamous marriage system, the Nauvoo leadership thus was forced to engage in actions which deeply distressed themselves as well as many other sensitive Mormons. Somewhat ironically, the very tactics which were used suggest the sincerity of belief of the Twelve. Having overcome their own initial deep doubts about the new marriage system, the Twelve had become convinced that the new order was of such cosmic importance that almost any tactics were acceptable to support its establishment. They could not back out. Given such absolute commitment, the Nauvoo leadership attempted as best they could to prepare their followers both inside and outside Nauvoo for the new way of thinking and way of life. To have failed to do so would have been to act irresponsibly and without any organizational sense. One of the finest examples of the indirect preparation of Mormons for the new way of thinking was Parley P. Pratt's article "Celestial Family Organization," which appeared both in the Prophet, and in the Millennial Star, official publication of the British Mission.² This and other similar articles focused on the awesome mysteries and ceremonies soon to be introduced in the Temple. Awe and curiosity were stimulated without divulging the concrete content and specifics of such mysteries.

Moves to tighten up preaching and practice in the eastern mission corresponded to the nearing completion of the Temple in Nauvoo. Parley P. Pratt, then head of the eastern mission, acted in 1845 to centralize the dissemination of Church literature by allowing only officially authorized individuals to put out pamphlets. After being


²The Prophet 1 (March 1, 1845): 1-2; Millennial Star 5 (May 1845): 189-194. This has been reprinted many times.
called to replace his brother Parley Pratt to preside over the entire eastern mission, Orson Pratt wrote in a letter printed in August 1845:

All covenants and promises which may have been entered into by any of the saints in the east, in relation to the eternal union, independent of the sanction and approbation of him who holds the keys of sealing power as conferred by Elijah are null and void, being made in unrighteousness, and directly in opposition to the order of the kingdom of God.

Orson went on to say that everything should be done in its proper time and place, that tithing and the gathering were necessary prerequisites for receiving the benefits of the temple, and that: "There never was a more eventful day than the one we live in. . . . The whole earth seems to be in commotion. . . . It is a mistaken notion that man can govern man in the world. Man cannot govern man but by revelation and the spirit of God."¹

VI

Individuals within the Mormon organization who either taught or practiced polygamy improperly or prematurely, or who privately opposed the practice, caused serious problems for the Church. However, the threat that would be posed should highly placed individuals apostatize and publish their views and knowledge to the world was even greater. The Twelve evidently felt that it was essential that secrecy be maintained as much as possible, as their cautious handling of William Smith showed. The most potentially damaging apostasy immediately after Joseph Smith's death was that of Sidney Rigdon. In retrospect, Rigdon's movement proved ephemeral. For all his intellectual acuity, Rigdon was an erratic figure who worked best under the guidance of another, stronger leader. He was only able to sustain an independent movement of any significance for a little more than a year after his break with Brigham Young and the Twelve, and the full-scale exposé that he threatened to publish never appeared.²

¹Times and Seasons 6 (August 15, 1845): 995-999.

²A repeated theme in the minutes of the trial and excommunication of Sidney Rigdon from the Church as reported in the Times and Seasons for
This denouement was by no means certain at the time, however. Rigdon had played a major role in the early life of the Church. He had converted to Mormonism and had brought with him his sizable personal following at Kirtland in 1831. That first major accession of members to Joseph Smith's movement was closely associated with the decision to move the Church's headquarters to Kirtland. Throughout the early and mid-1830s, Smith and Rigdon worked closely together. By the Missouri troubles of the late 1830s, however, Rigdon's inflammatory rhetorical style and his personal idiosyncracies were proving more of liability than an asset to the Church. The estrangement between Smith and Rigdon deepened in Nauvoo, especially when Rigdon continued to maintain close personal contact with the apostate John C. Bennett. Yet so great was Rigdon's remaining support in the Church that in 1843 Smith did not feel able to remove him from his position as technically the third member of the governing First Presidency. When Joseph and Hyrum Smith were unexpectedly murdered in 1844, Rigdon, as the sole surviving member of the First Presidency, made an abortive bid for the leadership of the Nauvoo Church. That bid was promptly quashed by the Twelve. Then Rigdon retreated to his Pittsburgh base to organize his own counter-movement.

In addition to his legalistic claims to lead the Nauvoo Church, Rigdon's major criticism of the Twelve was a vitriolic attack on the "spiritual wife system" which he accused the Nauvoo leadership of advocating and practicing. Rigdon's attacks were contained in his revived Latter Day Saint's Messenger and Advocate which he printed in September 15, October 2, and October 15, 1844, was the charge that Rigdon had threatened to "publish all your secret meetings, and all the secret works of this church" if he were expelled. Ibid. 5 (September 15, 1844): 650. Rather than doing a single major exposé, however, Rigdon put out a string of separate allegations in a newspaper which he started, reviving the title of an earlier publication, The Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate. For some sources on Rigdon, see the Sidney Rigdon-Stephen Post Papers in the Church Archives; other papers on Rigdon held in the Brigham Young University Special Collections; Daryl Chase, "Sidney Rigdon--Early Mormon" (M.A. thesis, University of Chicago, 1931); and F. Mark McKiernan, The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness: Sidney Rigdon, Religious Reformer, 1793-1876 (Lawrence, Kan.: Coronado Press, 1971).
Pittsburgh between October 1844 and May 1845. The first issue of that paper, on October 15, 1844, just a month after Rigdon's expulsion from the Church, contained sharp and explicit criticisms of polygamous practices from Rigdon, John A. Forgesus, and Benjamin F. Winchester. Rigdon blasted the "desperate lengths" to which the leadership of the Church had been forced to go in order to keep their "corruptions" from the public. He stated that these included character assassination of uncooperative females (presumably thinking of his daughter Nancy's case), and blatant perjury. It was also alleged in later issues that counterfeiting and theft were conducted on a large scale in a desperate attempt to support extra plural wives.

So inflammatory was the tone in this as well as the immediately succeeding issues of the paper, which laid the blame for all the troubles in Nauvoo on the new marriage system, that the Twelve accused Rigdon of trying to bring a mob down upon his former friends and associates in Nauvoo. Stung by these charges, Rigdon toned down some of his statements in later issues. After mid-1845, as he gave up this, his primary concrete charge against the Twelve, Rigdon's following appears to have melted away.

How much did Rigdon know about the development of polygamy in Nauvoo? His own statements, those of the Twelve, and subsequent scholarly research shows that he was a latecomer to the inner councils of the Church on secret new developments such as the political kingdom of God and polygamy. For instance, Rigdon reported that when William Law had given a lecture discussing Nauvoo polygamy to one of his own

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1This charge was repeatedly made in the Mormon press through the fall of 1844. Rigdon replied to such charges in his *Messenger and Advocate* on November 1, 1844. He denied that he had ever threatened to bring a mob down on Nauvoo (the practical effect that his allegations could have had), but said that he was merely trying to tell a full and true account of what had been going on. He stated, nevertheless, that from then on he would stress his positive message, not his criticism. Subsequent issues of his paper continued to present some rather vitriolic statements, however.

2This author is informed that Rigdon was briefly a member of the Council of Fifty and even more briefly a member of the Quorum of the Anointed, a group that was even higher than the Council of Fifty.
groups, Rigdon had learned interesting information about the practice that he had never known before. And in Rigdon's excommunication trial on September 8, 1844, Heber C. Kimball stated that Rigdon had not participated in the council on the High Priesthood, except briefly, and that he "has not got the same authority as the others; there are more than thirty men who have got higher authority than he has." Fortunately for the health of the Nauvoo Church, Rigdon's newspaper had an extremely limited circulation; direct statements on polygamy were eliminated from it by May 1845; and his organization itself almost completely disintegrated by the end of 1846. Neither Rigdon nor his associates were prepared to "go public" in the way that John C. Bennett had earlier. Rather, they felt that the issues with which they were dealing were an internal matter which should be handled internally.

It is a sad and somewhat ironic postscript to Rigdon's career that in spite of his earlier extreme attacks on Nauvoo polygamy, the remnants of his own group in 1846 apparently practiced a short-lived form of polygamy briefly under his leadership. At least this is the allegation contained in letters in the James J. Strang manuscripts.

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1 *Messenger and Advocate* 1 (March 15, 1845): 145. Rigdon reported attending a series of meetings in Kirtland, Ohio, from February 18 to 20, 1845, at which William Law spoke to the congregation at length about the people and affairs of Nauvoo.

"He settled the question forever in the public mind, in relation to the spiritual wife system, and the abominations concerning it. As Joseph Smith and others had attempted to get him into it, and in order to do so had made him acquainted with many things about it that we never knew before."

2 *Times and Seasons* 5 (October 1, 1844): 663.

3 For the disorders associated with the disintegration of the Rigdonite faction, see the following letters in the Strang Papers: Benjamin Chapman to James J. Strang, March 24, 1846; Hazen Aldrich to Strang, April [14?], 1846; James Smith to Strang, May 16, 1846; and Peter Hess to Strang, December 14, 1846. This important source was kindly called to my attention courtesy of D. Michael Quinn. None of these letters provides conclusive evidence of the practice of polygamy among the Rigdonite faction. Shook, *Origin of Mormon Polygamy*, p. 183, states categorically: "That Sidney Rigdon did advocate a spiritual wife system of his own will not be denied. . . . " President Joseph Smith in the RLDS Church wrote in a letter to Joseph Davis, dated October 13, 1899,
Whether Rigdon himself ever actually engaged in polygamy practice is unclear. A letter to Strang on December 14, 1846, described Rigdon's revelatory excesses of the period and reported that a Mr. Sandburn, who had just returned from spending three months with Rigdon at his new headquarters at Greencastle, Pennsylvania, "says that Mr. Rigdon has introduced a system of Wifery on the Battle Axe System or free or common intercourse with women."¹ Presumably this arrangement was unrelated to that of John Humphrey Noyes, but its precise character and duration is almost as obscure as is Rigdon's own career from 1845 until his death in 1876.²

that Sidney Rigdon had one form of polygamy "practiced by but a few, and that spasmodically, as an outburst of religious fervor rather than as a settled practice." Ibid., p. 194.

¹Letter of Peter Hess to James J. Strang, from Philadelphia, dated December 14, 1846, in the Strang Papers. It is not difficult to understand how both revelatory and practical excesses may have occurred during the course of the disintegration of the Rigdon faction.

²Rigdon's personal relationship to the development of polygamy in the early 1830s also remains an unanswered question. Is it possible that Rigdon himself could have played a significant role in the formation of Joseph Smith's beliefs on polygamy? An affirmative answer to this question is suggested by two pieces of evidence. First, Joseph Smith is usually said to have conceived the idea of reintroducing polygamy during the period when he was engaged in his inspired "translation" of the Bible--a "translation" conducted in close association with Rigdon. If polygamy beliefs were formulated at this time, might not such beliefs have been stimulated by the intellectual interaction of these two men? Second, two dates are commonly mentioned in LDS accounts as the origin of polygamy belief. It is said that Smith may have conceived the idea of polygamy "as early as 1831"--evidently an extrapolation from the revelation of July 17, 1831, cited in the preceding chapter. More commonly, however, men who were close associates of Joseph Smith during the early period stated that the origin of polygamy belief occurred "in early 1832."

What could have been the occasion of this latter date? In the public announcement of the belief and practice of polygamy to the world in the Deseret News Extra for September 14, 1852, and in the reprint of that information in a supplement to the Millennial Star for 1853, two revelations are cited in full. One of these, of course, is the revelation on plural and celestial marriage itself, dated July 12, 1843. The other statement--a somewhat more puzzling choice which was read in full by Brigham Young in preparing the minds of the Latter-day Saints for the polygamy revelation--was a revelation received by Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon in Hiram, Ohio, on February 16, 1832. This revelation, now section 76 of the Utah Mormon Doctrine and Covenants, promises
Knowing something of the extent of the problems faced by Brigham Young and the Twelve in gaining control over the Mormon Church, one can more easily understand the reasons such an extreme stress on authority eventually became institutionalized in the Utah Church. From the very beginning of their return to Nauvoo, the Twelve began to act to try to rationalize the system and to restore order. Just as they had developed, organized, and overseen a far-flung missionary effort in the eastern states and in England, the Twelve attempted to set Nauvoo and the Church as a whole in order. As the first priority, they forced out or neutralized supporters of actual or potential dissident factions, including those of William Law, Sidney Rigdon, Lyman Wight, and Emma Smith.

Beginning in the late summer and autumn of 1844, they further developed and divided up the administrative system of Nauvoo and Church government. Among other things, they eventually created a number of new quorums, or councils, of Seventies, the elders who are called to be traveling missionaries and who work under the direction of the Council of the Twelve. When the State of Illinois revoked the Nauvoo city charter in January 1845, the Twelve further secured authority to set up a police force of 500 men to maintain internal and external order. Later, during the trek west, an extraordinary range of organizational methods were utilized, some of which will be described in the following pages. In short, organizational ventures of a highly imaginative nature were carried out by the Twelve between 1844 and 1847. Indeed, a wide range eventually to "reveal all mysteries; yea, all the hidden mysteries of my Kingdom from days of old. . . . " It also declares that Smith and Rigdon then saw and understood all "things of God, even those things which were from the beginning before the world was. . . . " As an hypothesis for further investigation, this author would suggest that perhaps on this occasion "in early 1832" not only the basic Mormon cosmology with its telestial, terrestrial, and celestial stages may have been formulated, but also that the idea of polygamy as an integral part of the "restoration of all things" may first have been conceived by Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon.

1William Huntington, Reminiscences and Journal, October 27, 1844. Typescript in Church Archives.

2Times and Seasons 6 (January 15, 1845): 774.
of brilliant organizational activities are characteristic of the whole period of Brigham Young's leadership until 1877.¹

One of the most difficult problems of organization facing the Twelve in Nauvoo was how the controversial new world view and marriage practices which Joseph Smith had advocated in his last years in Nauvoo were to be introduced to the general membership. If many of Smith's closest associates had apostatized and even sought his life because he promulgated such views, then getting a much larger group of Mormons who were even less acquainted with the developing framework to accept it would be even more difficult.

According to Utah Mormon sources, Joseph Smith had begun to introduce the ritual framework to justify his new marriage practices at least as early as May 4, 1842. On that day he is said to have taught "the ancient order of things for the first time in these last days" and to have overseen the "washings, anointings and endowments" of a few of his close followers in his private office in the upper part of his store in Nauvoo.² Since the Temple was not yet completed, the ceremonies could not be conducted there. When the temple was effectively completed, however, those ceremonies were re-enacted. Even those closest to the prophet evidently found themselves unwilling to proceed without securing the fullest possible ritual justification for what they were doing.

In early 1844, evidently recognizing the possibility of his death due to apostate or anti-Mormon activities, Smith had formally organized his secret governing Council of Fifty. He had taught many close followers his most secret beliefs and practices. And he had publicly preached "the spirit power & calling of Elijah" which involved the "power to hold the keys of the revelations ordinances, cirlces

¹Numerous treatments stress Brigham Young's brilliant organizational abilities. As examples, see Arrington, Great Basin Kingdom; Milton R. Hunter, Brigham Young The Colonizer (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1940); and Werner, Brigham Young.

powers & endowments of the fulness of the Melchizedek Priesthood & of the kingdom of God on Earth & to receive, obtain & perform all the ordinances belonging to the kingdom of God even unto the sealing of the hearts of the children unto the fathers who are in heaven."\(^1\)

Were the various endowment and sealing ceremonies that Joseph Smith taught and practiced before his death identical in form to those later instituted by Brigham Young and the Twelve in the Nauvoo Temple? This may never be known conclusively. However, there is every reason to believe that the ceremonies as taught by Joseph Smith and as practiced in the Nauvoo Temple remained essentially the same, just as the temple ceremonies in Nauvoo and today appear to have remained virtually identical.\(^2\) The belief in the necessity and efficacy of the exact form of the passwords, grips, and other ritual elements in the ceremonies appears to have been deeply ingrained. It strains credulity to argue that the core membership of the Twelve could have fabricated such a set of rituals and then continued to firmly support those rituals even in cases in which they apostatized.\(^3\) On the other hand, the rituals that Joseph Smith had "sealed with his blood" must have been seen as having special binding power.

\(^1\)Woodruff, Journal, March 10, 1844. The reference to [prayer] circles, an important element in the endowment, is a strong indication that the ritual as described by Woodruff was similar to later forms.

\(^2\)In a highly critical account seeking to find differences in the temple ceremonies, Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality*, pp. 474-483, describe a small number of alleged changes. These include a softening of the various oaths of secrecy, the elimination of an oath to avenge the blood of the prophet Joseph Smith on this nation, slight modifications in the marriage sealing ceremony owing to the elimination of polygamy practice, and the elimination of an earlier form of the law of adoption, a practice which will be discussed later in this chapter. These changes constitute a minimal modification of the overall character of the temple ceremonies. For a bibliography of published accounts of the temple ceremonies prepared by Wesley P. Walters, see Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *The Mormon Kingdom*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm Co., 1969), 1: 170-172.

\(^3\)Even in apostasy, men such as William Smith, George J. Adams and others apparently remained loyal to ceremonies that appear identical to those used by the Nauvoo-Utah Mormons.
What were those temple ceremonies that were of such importance to Mormon believers? Why was so much controversy associated with them?

The sociologist Thomas F. O'Dea has noted that although the Latter-day Saints consider the various temple rites sacred and are strictly forbidden to discuss them outside the temple, enough has been written by apostates that a fairly accurate idea of what takes place in the ceremonies can be identified. "These rites were once described in lurid terms or surrounded by hints and innuendo in the writing of some apostates, but there is actually nothing more to them than a ritualization of the beliefs that Joseph taught in Nauvoo. . . . "¹ Controversy was generated not so much by the rites themselves as by the new beliefs which the rites served to introduce. Something of the intellectual and emotional power of the world view underlying these Mormon ceremonies has already been suggested in the last chapter. Here only the briefest of outlines of the rites themselves will be presented as a point of reference and in order to dispel possible misconceptions. Our primary concern will be the relationship of the ceremonies to the historical developments in Nauvoo and in early Utah.

As reported in the early accounts, which probably described the rites as being conducted in a more literal fashion than they actually were, the endowment ceremony, which is only one of several temple rites, normally lasted about a day. On arrival at the temple, the men or women who would undergo the ceremony were bathed (each separately by one of the same sex) and symbolically anointed with oil. All important external organs were anointed, including the procreative, with the prayer that they might serve their function well. The anointing began at the head,

¹O'Dea, The Mormons, p. 58. Two important early accounts of the temple ceremonies are those of I. M. Van Deusen, A Dialogue Between Adam and Eve, the Lord and the Devil, Called the Endowment (Albany, N.Y.: C. Killmer, 1847), who reported that he and his wife went through the ceremonies in Nauvoo in February 1846; and Hyde, Mormonism, pp. 89-101. The highly abbreviated account of the ceremonies given here is based on these accounts as well as on O'Dea, The Mormons, pp. 57-60, and on the more detailed account in William J. Whalen, The Latter-day Saints in the Modern World: An Account of Contemporary Mormonism (New York: John Day, 1969), pp. 158-194, which practicing Mormons have confirmed as an essentially accurate description of the current temple ceremonies.
"that I might have knowledge of the truths of God," and ended at the feet, "that they might be swift in the paths of righteousness and truth."

Temple garments, a kind of long underwear with cut and markings resembling Masonic symbols, were given each member; each man or woman received a secret name; and special robes were provided for the occasion. Participants witnessed an elaborate series of dramas depicting the creation and plan of development of the world as understood by the Mormon Church. Special grips and passwords were learned and dire threats were uttered concerning those who would break the vows of secrecy about the rites. At the conclusion, the man—and the woman who accompanied and was assisted by the man—went "through the veil," in a ritual passage that was symbolic of entering the celestial kingdom. In conjunction with this ceremony, at the appropriate point, the man and woman might be sealed together in marriage for time and eternity. Parts of the ceremony and its accouterments bore striking resemblance to Masonic rites. As described in these early accounts, the endowment

1 Like almost every feature of Mormonism connected with the introduction of polygamy, the origin of the endowment ritual remains a point of considerable sensitivity in Mormon circles. An outsider reading the early accounts is struck by the remarkable similarities between certain aspects of Masonic ritual and the endowment ceremony, both of which began to be introduced in Nauvoo by Joseph Smith at almost exactly the same time. See Whalen, *Latter-day Saints*, pp. 195-206. In his judicious evaluation, O'Dea, *The Mormons*, p. 57, stated simply:

"To find appropriate materials for ritual development, his [Joseph Smith's] own non-liturgical background made it necessary to look outside strictly religious practices. Joseph went to Masonry to borrow many elements of ceremony. These he reformed, explaining to his followers that the Masonic ritual was a corrupted form of an ancient priesthood ceremonial that was now being restored."

This line of interpretation is supported by a letter of Heber C. Kimball to Parley P. Pratt and his wife, dated Nauvoo, June 17, 1842, in the Church Archives which states: "... there is a similarity of priest Hood in masonry. Br Joseph Ses Masonary was taken from priesthood but has become degenerated. but menny things are perfect. ... " To introduce new marriage practices such as polygamy in nineteenth-century Illinois obviously necessitated some means of maintaining strict secrecy and determining who had first hand knowledge of the new practices from those who did not. Some form of secret society thus was a pragmatic necessity.

An overall assessment of the origin of the endowment ceremonies might most appropriately place them within the context of Joseph Smith's primary effort to institute the "dispensation of the fulness of times,"
ceremonies could be seen as almost paradigmatic examples of rites of passage as analyzed by Van Gennep and Victor Turner.

The endowment ceremony and related temple rites served to symbolize a number of basic Mormon beliefs which were developing to full fruition in Nauvoo. Included were a tendency toward polytheism, as well as a belief in the eternity of matter, the eternity of man, and the authority of the new and restored priesthood with its all-encompassing power to bind and to loose on earth and in heaven. Underlying all this were new marriage doctrines and a stress on the duty of bringing waiting spirits into the world by having children and rearing them within the righteous framework provided by the Mormon Church. But the endowment ritual was far more than the framework for a marriage ceremony during which a relationship between a husband and wife could be sealed for time and eternity (whether in a monogamous or a polygamous context). It also established the unchangeable loyalty of the couple to the larger goals and purposes of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Viewed in conjunction with the marriage sealing rites, the endowment ceremony suggests some of the ways in which Mormons were reorganizing the relations of the sexes. Paradoxically, despite the association of the temple ceremonies with the introduction and justification of polygamy in Nauvoo, the rites appear to signal a rise in woman's status and importance in Mormonism. Whereas the earlier temple ceremonies in Kirtland had been only for men, the Nauvoo temple ceremonies were for both men and women, and made clear that the highest which was conceived as a synthesis of all previously valid human truth. In that effort, Masonic as well as Biblical elements were of central importance to Joseph Smith, as Reed Durham has shown through a careful analysis of the statements and actions of Joseph Smith and other early Mormon leaders. Without an appreciation of the importance which Joseph Smith attached to Masonry as a true but partially corrupted form of ancient "mysteries," the richness and complexity of his own thought cannot be understood. See Durham's "Mormonism and Masonry." For another assessment of the relationship of Mormonism and Masonry, with major bibliographic references, see Kenneth W. Godfrey, "Joseph Smith and the Masons," in Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 64 (Spring 1971): 66-78.

1JD, 2: 216. Speech of George A. Smith, March 18, 1855.
exaltation in the afterlife could only be reached by being properly sealed in a reciprocal marriage relationship. Both husband and wife would progress together toward literal godhood, the men as kings and priests and the women as queens and priestesses. The women held the key to their husband's and to their own exaltation through their marriage relationship with its sanctioned power of bearing children, and, prior to the 1890 manifesto, through their power to allow their husbands to take additional wives who would bear children and add to his kingdom.

In a provocative analysis of the role of women in early Mormonism, Ileen Waspe suggests that much of the liberalism toward women which developed in Nauvoo was related to the introduction of plural and celestial marriage. Early Mormonism had given women a much more limited role than they had in Nauvoo. Women were hardly mentioned in the Book of Mormon itself and they were excluded from formal leadership roles and participation in the early Church. Throughout the 1830s greater efforts were made to use women's talents. Yet it was during the two year period from 1842 to 1844 when the first major efforts to introduce polygamy were made that also saw "the establishment of the first woman's organization in the Church, the ordaining of women to positions of leadership, the bestowing of authority to administer certain ordinances of the Church, and the admission of women to the ordinances of the endowment." The Rigdonite Messenger and Advocate criticized the excessive female influence which it said had developed as a result of polygamy. And Parley P. Pratt, an important early advocate of polygamy, showed that Mormon men at least were exposed to women's issues when he published a long extract from Mary Wollstonecraft, an early English feminist, on "Women: Their Condition and Influence" in the Prophet.

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1Ileen Ann Waspe, "The Status of Woman in the Philosophy of Mormonism from 1830 to 1845" (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1942), p. 205.
2Ibid., p. 194.
4June 15, 1844. The obvious reason for including her statement was that she supported polygamy! Wollstonecraft wrote: "... when a
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Perhaps the most important indication of the rise in women's
status in conjunction with the introduction of polygamy was the formation
of the Nauvoo Female Relief Society in 1842. Led by the prophet's wife
Emma, this first official Mormon women's organization officially concerned
itself with supporting the building of the temple and with benevolent
activities such as relieving the poor, the sick, and the destitute. In
addition, the group provided women with a forum through which they could
gain public experience and have the possibility of independent action,
even though the group was still under the official authority of the male
priesthood.
VIII

The complexity of the effort to introduce polygamy and the problems
that Mormon leaders faced in dealing with the women of the Church in
Nauvoo on that issue can be graphically illustrated by an analysis of
the development of the Relief Society there. The complex relationship
of the Relief Society to changes in women's status and to the politics
of the development of polygamy in Nauvoo has received virtually no
scholarly discussion. It is puzzling that the last formal minutes of
the Nauvoo Relief Society should end abruptly in March 1844 and that the
Society appears not to have functioned effectively again until at least
the mid-1850s in Utah. During that decade-long period when Brigham Young
and the Twelve were trying to utilize every conceivable means to solidify
group loyalty why did they allow this powerful women's organization to
lapse? Could the Relief Society in Nauvoo have stood in a different
relation to the Church and served different functions there than in Utah?
To place these issues in perspective, one must go back to the
origins of the Relief Society in Nauvoo. The primary motivation of
Sarah M. Kimball and the other women who initially sought to form the
Relief Society appears to have been to organize Church women so that
they could more effectively assist, first, in the completion of the
temple, and second, in various charitable activities such as relieving
man , seduces a woman, it should, I think, be termed a left-handed marriage,
and the man should be legally obliged to maintain the woman and her
children. . . . "


the poor, aiding the sick, and so forth. When Joseph Smith was approached about the idea of organizing a women's group in the Church, he reportedly favored a conception of a much more far-reaching priesthood-type organization for the women, saying: "... this [proposed constitution and by-laws for the Society] is not what you want. ... [the Lord] has something better for [the sisters] than a written constitution. ... I will organize the sisters under the priesthood, after a pattern of the priesthood."¹

As part of creating that priesthood-related organization for women, Joseph Smith set up a structure for the Relief Society which was analogous at the top to that of the First Presidency of the Church. It was composed of a President and her two counselors. When he installed his wife Emma as first President of the Relief Society—a position of power over the women potentially similar to his own in the whole Church—Joseph Smith made special reference to his earlier revelation which described her as the "Elect Lady." In addition to having a Biblical precedent and overtones of possible revelatory and priesthood powers, this term was also, interestingly, the same as the term for the highest women's position in French Adoptive Masonry.² The first leaders of the Relief Society were "ordained"—although Church President John Taylor in a later speech denied that this gave women the priesthood except in conjunction with their husbands. The significance of this ordination was apparently subject to differences of opinion in Nauvoo, however.³ Finally, the support of the Relief Society for the building

¹"Story of the Organization of the Relief Society," The Relief Society Magazine 6 (March 1919): 129, as reported in Relief Society of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, History of the Relief Society, 1842-1966 (Salt Lake City: General Board of Relief Society, 1966), p. 18.


³Woman's Exponent 9 (September 1, 1880): 53. This important speech was called to my attention courtesy of Jill C. Mulvay. During this early period, the precise relationship of women to the developing priesthood organization in the Church remained a focus of some confusion and controversy. For instance, in 1845 Brigham Young acted to stop the then-current practice of allowing women to be baptized for deceased male relatives and receive their priesthood endowments for them by proxy. He
of the temple suggests potential priesthood concerns. The temple would serve as the place for conducting the major ordinances of the priesthood, including the marriage sealings for time and eternity which would make possible the introduction of polygamy.

If the Relief Society initially functioned in some fashion as a women's auxiliary to Joseph Smith's developing priesthood organization, the early allegations that the Society had some Masonic connection become easier to understand.\(^1\) As suggested elsewhere,\(^2\) the creation of an oath-bound secret society was essential if Joseph Smith were to successfully introduce his controversial new doctrines and practices such as the political kingdom of God and polygamy. Masonry—which Joseph Smith is reported by close followers to have viewed as a corrupted form of priesthood organization—may have served as a stepping stone to prepare Mormon men for the more complete priesthood plan and ancient mysteries which Smith felt he was restoring.\(^3\) Likewise, the earliest meetings of

realized that by a logical extension of such powers in present-day life, women might demand the direct right to exercise the priesthood. Hence, by implication, such action could support the equality of the sexes in Mormonism and undermine the patriarchal system that he was seeking to create. *Times and Seasons* 6 (July 1, 1845): 953-957.

\(^1\)Such allegations were made by a number of apostate and ex-Mormon sources, including John C. Bennett, Oliver Olney, and Ebenezer Robinson. Durham, "Mormonism and Masonry," pp. 5-6. Oliver Olney, for instance, wrote in his typical doggerel verse that the Mormon women were instructed that "there were some few degrees of Masonry for the fair sex of the land ... They soon came together and formed a lodge, But altered the name that they could be distinguished from the lodge of the men." Olney, *Absurdities of Mormonism*, p. 11. Among the evidence which might suggest a connection between Masonry and the early Relief Society is the fact that the Relief Society was formally started just one day after Masonry was introduced to the men of the Church; the first and many subsequent meetings of the Society were held in the Masonic Lodge Room; and numerous phrases used during the earliest meetings of the Relief Society have strong Masonic overtones. See Minutes of the Nauvoo Female Relief Society, 1842-1844, in Church Archives. Godfrey, "Joseph Smith and the Masons," p. 84, attributes the contemporary allegations that Joseph Smith violated his oath never to initiate a woman into the Masonic lodge to the fact that a few women received their endowments from him.

\(^2\)See p. 319, footnote 1, and the discussion in the text.

\(^3\)See Durham, "Mormonism and Masonry," pp. 8-10, 19-23.
the Relief Society suggest the possibility that a similar use may have been being made of Masonry to introduce a priesthood plan for women. A statement of April 2, 1842, from Joseph Smith and other Church leaders to the Relief Society noted that "there may be some among you who are not sufficiently skilled in Masonry to keep a secret," and in an earlier statement on March 30, 1842, Smith said that "the Society should move according to the ancient Priesthood, hence there should be a select Society separate from all the evils of the world. . . . " He also said that "he was going to make this Society a kingdom of priests as in Enoch's day. . . . "

Whatever Smith's original goals for the Relief Society may have been, the organization soon developed special concerns of its own which reflected the concerns of its own rapidly expanding membership. By the end of 1842, the Society had grown to over 1,000 members, far too many to operate efficiently as any form of secret or semi-secret group. After the first year when much attention was devoted to countering John C. Bennett's allegations about moral laxity in the Church, the women increasingly concentrated on charitable work and little evidence of direct priesthood involvement occurs. Furthermore, new organizations associated with the endowment, including the little-known Quorum of the Anointed (composed of husbands and wives who had personally received their endowments at the hand of Joseph Smith) eventually appear to have taken over any functions that the Relief Society might initially have played in introducing priesthood organization and ceremonial to the women of the Church.

A second factor complicating the early development of the Relief Society was the vigorous opposition of its strong-willed and capable

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1This statement was printed in Nauvoo Relief Society Minutes, p. 87.

2This was the third meeting of the Society, a meeting at which Joseph Smith cautioned the sisters that their zeal must not exceed their knowledge in their attempts to purge out iniquity.

3The existence of this organization has been verified by the research of D. Michael Quinn in primary source materials. Personal conversations of this author with Mr. Quinn in March 1976.
leader Emma to the polygamy system that her husband was trying to introduce. The Relief Society was first organized on March 17, 1842, shortly before the Bennett scandal became public and Bennett provided the first concrete allegations from an individual who had been high in the Church that polygamy was being taught and practiced with the sanction of the highest figures in the Church. At this point, exactly how much Emma knew and how much she only suspected about her husband's polygamous activities remains unclear. What is clear, however, is the vehemence with which she used the Relief Society in attempting to ferret out "iniquity," a term which in many cases may have been synonymous with the practice of polygamy. Certainly some of the allegations of "iniquity" which were bandied about, particularly Clarissa Marvel's "scandalous falsehoods" about Joseph Smith's alleged improper behavior with Agnes Smith, almost surely refer to the suspicion of polygamy.\(^1\) Joseph Smith was repeatedly forced to caution the sisters to deal circumspectly with their discoveries of "iniquity" in the Church. He urged them to "keep all your doings within your own bosoms, and hold all characters sacred," said that their zeal must not exceed their knowledge, and declared that "if you know anything, hold your tongues, and the least harm will be done."\(^2\) Eventually, according to LDS sources, four of the five initial leaders of the Relief Society became wives of Joseph Smith, while the fifth gave her daughter to Smith as a plural wife.\(^3\)

\(^1\)For evidence of the existence of strong concerns with "iniquity" in the Church, see the first four meetings of the Relief Society on March 17, March 24, March 30, and April 14, 1842, as well as the meetings of June 9, June 23, and August 31, 1842. These early concerns appear to have been a complex combination of disturbance at actual misbehavior, John C. Bennett's activities and allegations, and early misunderstandings about the practice of polygamy by Joseph Smith. For the Clarissa Marvel allegations about Smith's supposed misbehavior with Mrs. Agnes Smith, see the Relief Society meetings on March 24, March 30, and April 14, as well as the certificate of Clarissa Marvel on April 2, 1842, which gave a denial that she had ever made the statements attributed to her. Nauvoo Relief Society Minutes, p. 89.

\(^2\)Nauvoo Relief Society Minutes for March 17, March 30, and August 31, 1842, respectively.

\(^3\)The women who were or became wives of Joseph Smith, according to LDS sources, were Emma Smith, Sarah M. Cleveland, Elvira Cowles, and Eliza
Insofar as the organization of the women of the Mormon Church "under the priesthood, after a pattern of the priesthood," was a precursor to an attempt to introduce polygamy, there can be little doubt that Emma and her husband were operating at cross purposes. Possibly Emma first fully realized that Joseph was unalterably committed to the introduction of polygamy on July 12, 1843, when Hyrum took the revelation to her to attempt to convince her of its truth. He returned and reported crestfallen to Joseph "that he had never received a more severe talking to in his life, that Emma was very bitter and full of resentment and anger."¹ The following day Joseph Smith "was in conversation with Emma most of the day . . . ," evidently in an attempt to soothe her initial anger.² Emma's trip to St. Louis also failed to improve matters. According to an entry in William Clayton's Journal of August 16, 1843:

This a.m. Joseph told me that since Emma came back from St. Louis, she had resisted the principle [of plural marriage] in toto, and he had to tell her he would relinquish all for her sake. She said she would give him Eliza and Emily Partridge, but he knew if he took them she would pitch [sic] on him, and obtain a divorce and leave him. He however told me he should not relinquish any thing.³

Under the circumstances, Emma's leadership of an independent Relief Society which she evidently may have tried to use to block her husband's plans on polygamy, posed increasing problems. In 1844, when Emma's dissatisfaction with polygamy was becoming increasingly known

R. Snow. The fifth early leader of the Society, Eliza Ann Whitney, is reported by LDS sources to have given her daughter Sarah Ann to Joseph Smith as a plural wife, in the first such case sanctioned by both parents. There is no evidence that Emma Smith ever sanctioned any of these plural marriages by her husband.


²History of the Church, 5: 509-510.

³Copy of William Clayton's Journal account for that date as recorded in a book of plural marriage affidavits comprising part of the Plural Marriage Affidavits held in the Church Archives. That this statement is a true and correct copy of the original entry for that date was attested by Joseph F. Smith, John Henry Smith, and Robert L. Campbell on August 17, 1869.
both inside and outside the Mormon community, the Society met only on
two separate days in March before it quietly ceased official functioning
for the remainder of the Nauvoo period. Many years later, John Taylor
stated that

... after this organization [of the Relief Society] at Nauvoo, much
disturbance arose among the sisters. ... Sister Emma got severely
tried in her mind about the doctrine of Plural Marriage and she made
use of the position she held to try to pervert the minds of the sisters
in relation to that doctrine. She tried to influence my first wife
and make her believe that the revelation was not correct.¹

Bathsheba W. Smith, wife of George A. Smith, also verified Emma's
disaffection over polygamy. Bathsheba stated that in late 1843 or
early 1844 when she received her anointings in Emma Smith's house,
Emma "said in my presence, to me and to others who were present upon
that occasion: 'Your husbands are going to take more wives, and if you
don't consent to it, you must put your foot down and keep it there."²
Taylor concluded: "After the death of the Prophet Joseph, in consequence
of the confusion then introduced President B. Young thought it best to
defer the operations of this organization--and the labors of the Society
ceased, until he organized the sisters again in this City."³

Emma Smith's experience is one of the most tragic in Mormon
history. After the death of her beloved husband in 1844, she appears
for a time to have been emotionally shattered. Her feelings about poly-

gamy became even more bitter and ambivalent and she grew to intensely
dislike Brigham Young, the man who systematically sought to institutionalize
the practice which she had abhorred, even before it had contributed to
costing her her husband. Yet though Emma may have been emotionally
distraught, she could not be disregarded as a political factor in Nauvoo
after Joseph Smith's death. Still capable and strong-willed, highly
regarded among the women of the Church, with an independent family

¹Woman's Exponent 9 (September 1, 1880): 53-54.

²Affidavit of Bathsheba W. Smith on November 19, 1903, as
recorded in the Plural Marriage Affidavits held in the Church Archives.

³Woman's Exponent 9 (September 1, 1880): 54.
power base in Northern Illinois (later utilized by William Smith), and sufficient knowledge and ambivalence about certain aspects of the inner workings of the Mormon Church—specifically polygamy—that she apparently considered writing an exposé after her husband's death, Emma may have posed a not-insignificant threat to the Twelve and their policies.\(^1\) Although it is uncertain whether or not she wrote the bitterly critical letter published in the *New York Sun* on December 7, 1845, Emma's profound dissatisfaction with polygamy and with the idea of going West with Brigham Young is well-known.\(^2\)

In retrospect, Emma Smith's chief importance in Mormon history after the death of her husband Joseph may well lie in her role as mother

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\(^1\) For evidence of the Church's fear that Emma might write an exposé, see *Times and Seasons* 6 (January 15, 1845): 776. The tone of this statement is similar to the tone of other statements which tried to discourage Rigdon from writing exposés.

\(^2\) The text of the letter which was purportedly written by Emma Smith on November 20, 1845, appeared in the *New York Sun* on December 9, 1845, and was reprinted in full in Bailey, "Emma Hale," pp. 142-143. A rejoinder stating that the first letter was a forgery, was printed in the *Sun* on December 30, 1845. As Bailey notes, the letter seems wholly consistent with Emma's subsequent activities and actions. The rejoinder stating that the first letter was a forgery—"the whole of it" (as if to suggest that only part of the letter might be a forgery)—also is curious. This author is informed by a Mormon scholar who is closely acquainted with Emma's letters and writings that the letter bears strong evidence of Emma's distinctive style. The letter shows a subtle ambivalence throughout which is not usually characteristic of forged documents—particularly of this period; in fact, if the letter was a forgery it is undoubtedly one of the most convincing forgeries in Mormon history, and it is difficult to know who would have been capable of forging it. Bailey observed:

"If Emma Smith wrote the . . . letter to the Editor of the *New York Sun* and meant every word of it, the story of her life would be much less inexplicable and enigmatic; some very definite conclusions could be drawn concerning her actions and attitudes and the whole problem of succession in the leadership of the Church would be greatly simplified. . . ."

Bailey concluded: "I am inclined to believe that Emma wrote the letter, and when there were so many repercussions from it, she published a denial of it." Bailey, "Emma Hale," pp. 142, 145. Emphasis in original. This author agrees with Bailey's evaluation and believes that only by treating this document as a serious piece of historical evidence can the full depths of Emma's tragic experiences by sympathetically understood.
to young Joseph III, the heir apparent to the Mormon dynastic crown.\(^1\) Through him she indirectly would eventually contribute to the founding of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and would unintentionally become the most successful single schismatic figure in the history of the Mormon Church. Sinking her roots firmly in Nauvoo, she would remarry to a non-Mormon, briefly join the Methodist Church, and begin to rebuild her life anew, before eventually uniting with the Reorganization.\(^2\) The full scope of Emma's tragedy as possibly the greatest single casualty of the introduction of Mormon polygamy, her greatness and personal courage, and her role in Mormon history still remains to be adequately assessed. As her husband so eloquently said of himself, so could it be said of her: "You don't know me; you never knew my heart. No man knows my history."\(^3\)

IX

The preceding description of the problems of introducing polygamy into the Mormon Church after 1844 has stressed the internal difficulties facing Brigham Young and the Twelve. However, it must be remembered that this internal Mormon reorganization was being conducted in the face of an increasingly hostile external situation in Illinois. There is evidence that as early as 1842 Mormon leadership seriously began considering the possibility that the Church might once again be forced to migrate to a new location where they would be free to practice and regulate their own distinctive religious and social beliefs without outside molestation. This time, primary consideration was given to locations outside the bounds of what was then the United States, including Texas, California, Oregon, Vancouver Island, and, of course, the

\(^{1}\) Quinn, "Mormon Succession Crisis," pp. 222-232, discusses the evidence that many Mormons initially envisioned succession to Joseph through one of his descendents, in particular Joseph III, and that even Brigham Young and the Great Basin Mormons were strongly influenced by such beliefs.

\(^{2}\) Ibid., p. 230.

\(^{3}\) Brodie, No Man Knows My History, p. vii.
Rocky Mountains. Following the death of the prophet Joseph Smith in 1844, the Mormons continued to build up their base at Nauvoo, evidently hoping against hope that they would be able to continue to live peacefully in Illinois. As late as the summer of 1845, solid brick homes were still being built in Nauvoo by Mormon leaders. But in the late summer and early autumn of 1845 when wide scale anti-Mormon violence, looting, and burning of property broke out, the Church reluctantly recognized the inevitable and publicly committed itself to move again, even though that move would be made at great personal cost.

What were the causes of this intense anti-Mormon feeling, and to what extent was it related to the introduction of polygamy and to the temple ceremonies which sanctioned that and other aspects of developing Mormon peculiarity? The preceding pages have suggested some of the factors which may have led to conflicts between Mormons and their neighbors, and other Mormon studies have analyzed such factors at some length. By way of background, it should be noted that Hancock County where the Mormons settled, had a long tradition of extra-legal action, violence, and mob activity. When the Mormons entered the county, they both suffered from this atmosphere and themselves came to participate in this sort of spirit as well. Governor Thomas Ford of Illinois, who attempted ultimately without success to avoid the outbreak of outright civil war between the Mormon and anti-Mormon factions in Hancock County, acidly criticized both sides for being guilty of ignoring legal measures.

1Writing as early as July 20, 1842, in a manuscript account, Oliver Olney recorded the stories that a plurality of wives was being taught by commandment of God "to raise up a righteous branch," and that the Saints were about to start West as far as the Rocky Mountains and there raise up a righteous branch without being molested by the laws of the land. Oliver Olney Papers, in the Coe Collection at the Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut. Numerous reports of explorations in different parts of the West appeared in the Wasp and Nauvoo Neighbor, probably to acquaint Mormons with information about possible locations for settlement. Special expeditions, such as the one by Lyman Wight to Texas, also suggest the concern of Mormon leaders to locate a new location for possible Mormon settlement.

2Perhaps the best overall treatment of these problems in this period is found in Godfrey's "Causes of Mormon Non-Mormon Conflict."
in seeking to attain their objectives. In 1844 and 1845, anti-Mormon groups became increasingly organized for mob action. Highly incendiary and usually false rumors were set in circulation and spread rapidly.

When existing anti-Mormon sentiment was further fueled by bitterly disaffected Mormon seceders the situation became explosive. Many of the seceders were evidently well-informed about the new doctrines and practices, and highly critical of them. Non-Mormons in Hancock County appear to have been hostile toward the Church primarily on political grounds, but their existing hostility was heightened by the bitterness of Mormon apostates. Three doctrines in particular led many Mormons to turn on their Church and oppose it with great intensity. These were the political kingdom of God, the new spiritual marriage beliefs, and the doctrine of blood atonement. All three of these doctrines were closely associated with the new temple ceremonies and with the introduction and practice of polygamy in Nauvoo and early Utah.

Mormon political aspirations and group cohesion were the first and primary reason for external hostility toward the group. In a socially disordered situation, a well-organized and centrally directed group such as the Mormons was almost certain to be perceived as a threat by non-Mormon neighbors concerned about their own power and influence. As Mormons reacted to the resultant external pressures and to the necessity of controlling their own new beliefs and practices, including polygamy, their own stress on Church authority came to be almost compulsive. Recent Mormon scholarship, ranging from the work of Hyrum Andrus to that of Klaus Hansen, has demonstrated that in their attempt to restore order, Mormon leadership in the 1840s and 1850s looked toward the eventual creation of a literal earthly Kingdom of God,

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1 Thomas Ford, *A History of Illinois, From Its Commencement as a State in 1818 to 1847* (Chicago: S. C. Griggs & C., 1859), pp. 353-359, discusses the conflict from a point of view independent of either of the contending factions.

2 For a criticism of these doctrines in full or nascent form, see the *Nauvoo Expositor*.

3 Hyrum L. Andrus, *Joseph Smith and World Government* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1958); Hansen, *Quest for Empire*.
governed by the leaders of the Mormon Church. This government eventually would become world-wide in scope with the coming of the Millennium. In the words of the Old Testament Book of Daniel: "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever."¹

This was a heady belief and one fraught with great danger. Even among nineteenth-century Mormons, few were aware of the full extent of the political aspirations associated with the political kingdom of God and with the secret Council of Fifty which Joseph Smith had organized on March 11, 1844, to serve as its temporal arm. When Mormon leaders such as Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, Orson Hyde, or John Taylor, spoke from the stand of Mormons through the endowment ceremonies becoming "kings and priests" or "queens and priestesses," they meant such terms in more than a simply spiritual sense. Family linkages would be extended to a whole society and throughout eternity, with no one left out. Even if Mormon apostates and anti-Mormons didn't know the particulars of the new plans, they could hardly fail to sense the grandiose implications of the Mormon desire for total self-determination and the power to achieve that end. The result in Illinois was a bitter political struggle with no holds barred on either side.

The political kingdom of God and polygamy were closely associated, although the exact relationship is uncertain. Was the political kingdom developed to deal with the problems of polygamy or was polygamy a by-product of the concerns of the political kingdom? Probably the whole millennial complex is part of a larger, closely interconnected concern for social reconstruction which is essentially indivisible. For example, polygamy, the political kingdom, and the gathering rose to great prominence in Nauvoo and earth Utah. Likewise, the great Mormon internal re-organization at the end of the nineteenth century saw not only the end of polygamy practice, but also of the political kingdom with its associated direct Church control over political life, and, to a lesser

¹Daniel 2:44.
extent, the gathering as well. Today, although Church planning and social programs remain of great importance to Latter-day Saints, the Millennium itself has largely receded in the Mormon mind to an indefinite future. Order has been fully restored and distinctive new cultural patterns have become deeply established. As a result, the earlier emphasis on authority is no longer so compulsive and the Mormon Church has become a thoroughly acceptable part of the American consensus.  

A second reason for controversy associated with the temple ceremonies and what they stood for is related to the difficulties inherent in introducing the patriarchal family system and polygamy. Many of these problems have already been discussed. The vast majority of the various endowment and sealing ceremonies which were conducted between the late Autumn of 1845 and the Spring of 1846 involved monogamous relationships. Such was the case, for instance, of the rambunctious apostate Increase Van Deusen and his wife, who wrote one of the first and most widely circulated exposés of the endowment ceremonies.  

Even many Mormon couples who were sealed together in Nauvoo for "time and eternity" were unaware of the possibility of polygamy inherent in the ceremonies. Thus the primary initial problem connected with the endowment and marriage sealing ceremonies was not so much the direct result of polygamy belief as of the conception that unless a couple were properly sealed in the temple, their marriage was not valid in the afterlife. Since the afterlife was conceived of as being so close to this life, such a statement was tantamount to saying that unsealed marriages were not really valid in this life either.

One result of this belief may have been to sanction a good deal of marital re-arrangement in Nauvoo from late 1845 to early 1846, when

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2Van Deusen, *The Endowment*. This went through editions in 1847, 1848, 1849, 1852, 1854, 1864, and possibly other dates as well.
the temple ceremonies were initially being introduced. At least this was the allegation of a number of apostate accounts, and receives some support from diaries and journals.\(^1\) Dissatisfaction with the idea of the westward migration probably accounted for most marriage terminations in this period. It was not practical to try to force an individual to undergo the difficult westward trek if he or she were adamantly opposed. In such cases, a man or woman who was willing to go probably would have been sealed to someone else. In addition, one partner may have accepted or not accepted polygamy. And fluid conditions generally must have contributed to such variation. It seems highly unlikely that in Nauvoo and during the difficult move west there should have been less divorce and marital rearrangement than in early Utah, where, as will be indicated later, recent evidence suggests that divorce may have been widespread and a significant social problem. When marriages were terminated under Church auspices, disgruntled parties must have felt considerable bitterness. Those who came through such conditions had a loyalty which had been thoroughly tested.

A final factor provoking hostility in conjunction with the temple ceremonies and the attempt to establish a new Church order, was the highly controversial and much misunderstood doctrine of blood atonement. Integral to the establishment of the new Mormon social order was an adequate means of enforcing the new standards. Given the extra-legal character of some of the Mormon efforts in Illinois, such enforcement

\(^1\)Writing from memory many years later, Lee, *Confessions*, p. 146—a passage quoted in the previous chapter—implied that the introduction of marriage sealings for eternity was associated with the termination of unsatisfactory present relationships as well. Van Deusen, *The Endowment*, p. 16, gives a more detailed account of the rationales for the abrogation of all previous covenants prior to initial marriage sealings for eternity. His description is strikingly similar in wording to the revelation on plural and celestial marriage itself. The *Warsaw Signal*, December 24, 1845, makes similar allegations, and concludes:

"The reason why the Lord concluded to endow his saints in this singular manner was because, some husbands were willing to go to Oregon and their wives objected and vice versa; so they being mismatched, the Lord concluded to prevent difficulty by giving all willing ones a chance to select new partners for the expedition."

Quinn, "The Mormon Hierarchy," pp. 246-291, based on intensive manuscript research, verifies that numerous divorces and separations occurred among
was peculiarly difficult. Of course, there were the normal means of social control, including religious exhortation, social pressure, and occasional strong-arm tactics such as those of the "whistling and whittling societies" which made life uncomfortable for those opposed to the Church. ¹

The establishment of the Council of Fifty and similar groups were also part of the attempt to set up an alternate authority.

In addition to such measures, the temple ceremonies also contained an oath that those who revealed the secrets taught them should be subject to a rather gruesome death. As a last resort in cases of individuals who had become fully initiated into the temple ceremonies and then apostatized and revealed them publicly, or in cases of flagrant and incorrigible adultery after being sealed for eternity in the temple ceremonies, there was the theoretical possibility of a form of capital punishment under Church auspices. Early Mormon theology taught that in such particularly heinous cases of apostasy or adultery, the offending individual should be killed in such a way that his blood would run out onto the ground and rise to the heavens as a sort of sacrifice to God. Only in such a manner could the extreme miscreant atone for his sins and achieve salvation in the afterlife.²

members of the hierarchy in this period. Presumably this was true of the general membership as well.

¹The "whistling and whittling societies" were groups of young men who would constantly follow close to individuals that the Church felt were a threat and wanted to get to leave the city. These men would do nothing but whistle with their knives on sticks and whistle ominously. After a day or two of such treatment, including an all-night guard by the whistling and whittling society outside one's place of residence, even the strongest-willed of individuals usually would decide to leave the city. See Thurmon Dean Moody, "Nauvoo's Whistling and Whittling Brigade," BYU Studies 15 (Summer 1975): 480-490.

²The most detailed presentation of the doctrine of blood atonement is found in the numerous statements of Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Jedediah Grant, and others, in the early volumes of the Journal of Discourses. For a small selection of the more important such passages, see JD, 3: 235, 4: 53-54, and 4: 219-220. These and many similar statements about blood atonement were made at the height of the extremely tense Mormon Reformation of 1856-1857, and can not be considered typical of Mormon attitudes at more normal times. For a relatively complete listing of printed references to the doctrine of blood atonement and to
Was this rather gruesome doctrine ever actually carried into practice, or was it simply a theory, like the similar verbal threats of dire penalties many other fraternal secret societies make against those who reveal their secrets? For instance, the Masons use an oath of secrecy virtually identical to that in the Mormon temple ceremonies, yet few would argue that they apply it literally.¹

Even such assiduous present-day anti-Mormon writers as Jerald and Sandra Tanner have only been able to produce evidence of a handful of potential cases of blood atonement, even during the highly charged allegations of its practice, see the Index to Ivis's Notebooks and Transcripts. For statements on blood atonement that may be considered to represent authoritatively the nineteenth-century Mormon position, see Charles W. Penrose, Blood Atonement, As Taught by the Leading Elders of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1884); and Joseph F. Smith, Jr., Blood Atonement and the Origin of Plural Marriage. These accounts stress the importance of the doctrine but deny that it was ever practiced. Also see Gustive O. Larson, "The Mormon Reformation," Utah Historical Quarterly 26 (1958): 44-63.

The origin of the doctrine of blood atonement would appear to be closely related to the origin of polygamy. In the revelation on plural and celestial marriage there is an important section on the sealing up of Latter-day Saints against all sins "except the shedding of innocent [i.e., in practice, Mormon] blood, or the consenting thereto." If a person who had been entrusted with secrets about the "new and everlasting covenant" apostatized and publicly attacked his former associates with full disclosure, those actions could be tantamount to the mobbing or assassination of those associates. This in fact happened in the case of Joseph and Hyrum Smith, whose deaths may be traced indirectly to the actions of William Law and his faction. In such cases, following "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" logic, the lives of flagrant apostates could be seen as legitimately forfeited—at least theoretically. At the same time, both believing Mormons and embittered apostates still retained complex emotional bonds which went back to the period when they were all in the same cause together. Hence, there was an emotional logic in formulating the doctrine of blood atonement to mean that if an incorrigible apostate were killed, the action was conducted for his own ultimate good in order that he could be saved in the afterlife and return to the fold in heaven. A vestigial remnant of the doctrine of blood atonement is found in the fact that the state of Utah continued to allow capital punishment by firing squad, an option that had been taken earlier by John D. Lee.

¹See Whalen, Latter-day Saints, pp. 176-177, 182-183.
emotional climate of the Mormon Reformation of 1856-1857 in early Utah.\(^1\)

To establish authoritatively whether or not any of these unfortunate cases were actually authorized by the Church would probably be impossible.

Early Utah may have seen occasional idiosyncratic revenge slayings, which certainly were not unknown in the early West, but these show little about Church policy. In the highly charged emotional atmosphere of Nauvoo in the early 1840s, Oliver Olney recorded in his journal the fears of assassination of many individuals who opposed the Church, yet he himself continued to live with impunity and no apparent personal fear in the city, even after his anti-Mormon expose appeared and he began abortive attempts to organize his own schismatic church.\(^2\) In early Utah, rather harsh verbal threats against individuals who opposed the Church were delivered from the pulpit by Brigham Young and others, yet it appears

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\(^1\)See Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *The Mormon Kingdom*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm Co., 1971), 2: 134-169. Available evidence, including that summarized by the Tanners, shows that the Mormon Church in early Utah was taking upon itself the primary responsibility for all aspects of civil life. This included responsibility for capital punishment in certain extreme cases. By way of explanation though not of extenuation, it should be remembered that the nineteenth-century penal context and attitudes differed greatly from those of the present. In England into the nineteenth century, the poor were still being publicly hanged for stealing as little as a loaf of bread. American thought and practice also still retained strong remnants of the earlier "eye for an eye" attitudes and practices. By comparison, Utah practice if not rhetoric was relatively lenient. The knowledgeable apostate John Hyde in *Mormonism*, pp. 177-181, was unable to make any specific allegations of the actual practice of blood atonement. Instead, he was reduced to discussing cases of individuals who should have been blood atoned, but weren't. Blood atonement may well have been one of the few instances in which the threat of capital punishment really did serve a deterrent function. One clear instance in which the possibility of applying the death penalty unofficially under Church auspices was formally discussed in Church Council was that of Ira West and Thomas Byrnes which was presented before the Council of Fifty on March 3, 1849. The two men were adjudged guilty of death, but in the end neither of them were put to death, either by blood atonement or by other means. Robert Glass Cleland and Juanita Brooks, eds., *A Mormon Chronicle: The Diaries of John D. Lee*, 2 vols. (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1955), 1: 98. Like many other ethnic groups which went outside the legal power structure in struggling to gain a foothold in America, the Mormons in early Utah engaged in some unpleasant excesses, with or without Church sanction.

\(^2\)Olney Papers.
that the vast majority of those cases simply constituted an attempt to cajole individuals into shaping up and were never intended for action.¹

The record does seem to suggest clearly that contrary to popular anti-Mormon views that polygamy was sanctioned licentiousness, the polygamy system in fact embodied the most intense possible disapproval of loose sexual behavior. Under special circumstances when plural marriages were fully authorized by the Church, the number of sexual contacts in marriage could be expanded. However, any deviation from those accepted outlets was seen as heinously sinful. Early Utah law and social practice assumed as a matter of course that death would be the unofficial penalty for adultery, especially in flagrant cases.²

In this as in many other respects, the Mormons simply were accentuating general American attitudes. David Brion Davis in his Homicide and American Fiction notes the close connection in popular nineteenth-century novels between sexual transgression and death.³ Even today one does not have to look far to find cases of adultery resulting in passion slayings. In a system like Mormon polygamy where paternity was considered of such great significance and where such an emphasis was placed on family life, maintaining marital fidelity became of the utmost importance. Perhaps at times in the early phase of settlement, a sort of crude "frontier justice" may have prevailed in

¹The astute traveler Richard Burton observed of Young: "He often reproves his erring followers in purposely violent language, making the terrors of a scolding the punishment in lieu of hanging for a stolen horse or cow." Richard F. Burton, The City of the Saints (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), p. 264. This is a reprint of the 1861 edition, with an introduction and notes by Fawn M. Brodie. Similar evidence could be adduced to explain many of Young's other extreme statements.

²For instance, see JD, 1: 95-103, on the trial of Howard Egan for the murder of James Monroe who had committed adultery with his wife. Speaking in defense of Egan's action, the Mormon leader George A. Smith declared: "The principle, the only one that beats and throbs through the heart of this Territory, is simply this: The man who seduces his neighbor's wife must die, and her nearest relative must kill him!" (emphasis in original). Speech given during the October Term, 1851. Ibid., 1: 97.

some cases of sexual transgression in Utah, but this would have been more a result of individual excess than of any clearly formulated policy.

X

The period from late 1845 through early 1846 may be seen as a major crisis point for the Nauvoo Mormons under the leadership of Brigham Young and the Twelve. That period marked the peak, of both internal and external tensions which would not be resolved until the settlement of the Great Basin. In conjunction with the introduction of a new world view and marriage practices, the preparation for another forced migration led to considerable dissatisfaction. Some fell away altogether; others remained with the Church only as a result of the strenuous efforts and cajoling of the Twelve. Into this partial power vacuum and attendant crisis of confidence stepped the greatest of the early Mormon schismatics, one of the most remarkable men in the whole of Mormon history--James J. Strang. In comparing Joseph Smith and James J. Strang, the scholar Klaus Hansen has suggested: "I believe a strong case can be made that the two were the most creative individuals in Mormon history."¹ In addition to intellectual brilliance, Strang possessed great organizational talents and a complex combination of passionate idealism and driving ambition which for a time made him a formidable rival to Brigham Young and the Twelve.

Strang's career would seem hard to believe if it were not so thoroughly documented by printed and manuscript sources.² At times this


²Among the major sources consulted for this section are: Quaife, Kingdom of Saint James, the only scholarly biography of Strang; Dale L. Morgan, "A Bibliography of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints [Strangite]," Western Humanities Review 5 (Winter 1950-1951): 42-114, an exhaustive annotated bibliography of all known early Strangite publications; and the Strang Papers at Yale University, an extremely rich source comprising 544 lots, most of which are four page letters in foolscap, but many of which are documents of greater length or lots that contain several related letters. I am grateful for the hospitality of Klaus and Joan Hansen and their family, which made possible extensive research in this superb collection. Strang's own
man seemed to be almost too self-consciously replicating Joseph Smith's career, yet Strang's ventures nevertheless have their own distinctive character. Only four months before Joseph Smith's assassination, Strang, an unknown, was baptized a Mormon in Nauvoo. Yet just a month after Smith's death, Strang produced a letter that had ostensibly been written to him by Joseph Smith just before his death. With considerable eloquence, Strang argued that the letter, in conjunction with an angelic ordination which he had received, made him Joseph Smith's true successor. To buttress these claims, Strang proceeded to deliver revelations in Smith's "Thus saith the Lord" style. He denounced polygamy as an abomination. He called for Mormons to gather to his headquarters at Voree, Wisconsin, rather than to undertake a foolhardy migration westward. Under the eye of four witnesses in the Autumn of 1845, Strang dug up brass plates near Voree, which he then "translated." Later

Strang would "translate" a brilliant elaboration and extension of Mosaic Law within a Christian framework which he called the Book of the Law of the Lord. This work has been described by Strang's skeptical non-Mormon biographer Milo M. Quaife as "... a complete framework of government... applicable to any population, however great, and laying down regulations for the most important relations of human society." In short, Strang appeared to be everything that the committee, caretaker government of Brigham Young and the Twelve initially were not. He effectively presented himself as a single legal successor to Joseph Smith, a prophet and charismatic, an anti-polygamist carrying on the purity of the early Mormon message, and a supporter of the Mormon gathering who nevertheless opposed the idea of going west. For a newcomer to the Mormon faith, Strang showed an almost uncanny knowledge of Mormon beliefs and sensitivity to Mormon thought patterns.

Although Strang was a rank newcomer to the Mormon faith and began without any organizational base whatsoever, he nevertheless soon managed through force of personality, rhetoric, gimmickry, and organizational skill to attract most of the dissenters from the policies of Brigham Young and the Twelve. The founders of the Reorganized Church, James C. Brewster's Church, William Smith's Church, and many other early Mormon factions were first associated with James J. Strang. In the summer of 1846, Strang's highly successful missionary trip to the eastern United States threatened to undercut essential sources of support for the westward migration. By the 1850s, with the main body of the Mormons securely established in the Great Basin, Strang no longer posed such a great threat. The scope of his operations had shrunk. Nevertheless, by 1855 Strang had established a community of over 2,500 in his literal Kingdom on the Beaver Islands in Lake Michigan. Contrary to his earlier stance, he had also introduced a form of polygamy in his community. Yet when Strang was assassinated by disgruntled followers in 1856, his following melted away. Today only a handful of devoted individuals remember this tragic figure, a classic example of a prophet who failed.

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1Quaife, Kingdom of Saint James, p. 138.
What nerved this remarkable man and his decade-long career as a Mormon prophet? How was polygamy related to his initial successes and eventual failure? And how was his career related to that of the Great Basin Mormons? James J. Strang was born on March 21, 1813, at Scipio, New York, in the heart of the Burned-over District. He early showed himself an intellectually and emotionally precocious child, painfully attuned to the conflicting currents which swirled around him. His remarkable diary, written between the ages of nineteen and twenty-four, records the complex relation between his passionate idealism and his overweening ambition. On the one hand, he could write: "I am resolved to devote my life to the service of mankind." On the other, he could write in cipher of his ambition to "rival Caesar or Napoleon," to be "a Priest, a Lawyer, a Conquerer, and a Legislator," or to contrive some means of marrying the heiress to the English throne (later Queen Victoria). 1

Perhaps the key to Strang's character is the passage which followed his vivid imaginative description of "all the horrors of anarchy and civil war" which he saw growing out of the 1832 South Carolina Nullification Crisis. That crisis was, of course, a precursor to the similar South Carolina crisis which triggered the Civil War. Writing in cipher, Strang initially toyed with the idea of forming some sort of prankster club. Then he came to the core of his concern. He wrote: "Amidst all the evils of the disturbances of our national affairs there is one consolation: that if our government is overthrown some master spirit may form another. May I be the one. I tremble when I write but it is true." 2 Like the founders of so many of the religious and social movements of the antebellum period, Strang appears to have felt deeply the hopes, fears, and ambitions which were characteristic of the lack of institutional supports in the period. He could not trust his social world, he would have to create another.

1Mark A. Strang, Diary of James J. Strang, pp. xvi, 17, 19, 22.

2Ibid., p. 32. It is interesting that Joseph Smith had a similar visionary sense of the impending Civil War at the time of the 1832 South Carolina Nullification Crisis. Both Strang and Smith were extraordinarily sensitive to major currents of their time, and showed an ability to see such events within a framework of cosmic significance.
Much of Strang's early appeal lay in his claim to be Joseph Smith's legal successor, and in the similarity of his prophetic style, which included visions, revelations, and translations of plates. Even more important, manuscript materials show that many Mormons were attracted by Strang's eloquent opposition to unpopular policies of the Twelve, primarily polygamy and the westward migration. As Quaife notes, reading Strang's biting denunciation of the Twelve for polygamy still makes one's flesh creep.\(^1\) Strang appeared to offer a genuine alternative. His trip east in the Summer of 1846 was virtually a triumphal procession, with group after group falling to his influence. Orson Hyde and John Taylor, who had put down many another pretender, flatly refused to meet Strang in public confrontation, presumably because they feared (with justification) that they might be trounced by this accomplished debater.\(^2\) Strang even attempted to seize control of the English mission by sending Martin Harris, one of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, to support his cause. Had Mormon support in the East and in England dried up, the followers of Brigham Young and the Twelve would have been placed in a desperate position. The intensity with which the Twelve made use of every conceivable tactic to put down Strang shows their awareness of the threat he posed.

Despite this early flush of success, Strang's own organizational efforts were soon torn by internal dissension and weakness that made competing with the Twelve difficult. Thanks to the incompetence of Martin Harris, the Twelve soon regained firm control of the English mission. At home, Strang also encountered difficulties. His basic problem was that during his hectic career he managed to attract both the best of the dissenters from the Twelve such as William Marks, Zenas Gurley, Jason Briggs, and Reuben Miller, and the worst such as the unsavory triumvirate of William Smith, George J. Adams, and John C. Bennett. This motley concentration of disaffected talent never coalesced into a satisfactory organization. Strang consequently was caught in

\(^1\)Quaife, *Kingdom of Saint James*, p. 43. Strang's curse appeared in the *Voree Herald*, April 1846.

\(^2\)Ibid.
the position of trying to run not only his communities in Wisconsin and later in Michigan but also his missionary efforts in the East by himself. He had only a handful of subordinates who were both capable and loyal. Although Strang proved able to hold his own organization together under his iron grip while he lived, his personal style of leadership was incapable by itself of forging a truly effective counter-organization to the Twelve.

Most disastrous of the accessions to Strang's group was that of John C. Bennett. Why Strang should have accepted Bennett's support and allowed him briefly to rise to second in command of his organization remains somewhat puzzling in view of his knowledge of Bennett's earlier betrayal of Joseph Smith. Apparently, Strang like Smith initially looked upon Bennett as the indispensable man. For instance, the reliable Reuben Miller, who briefly joined the Strangite organization 1846, reported that Strang apparently had learned the crucial ceremonies, passwords, and grips of the Melchizedek or High Priesthood from John C. Bennett. Without such knowledge, Strang's claim to have been Joseph Smith's true successor would have seemed fragile indeed from a Mormon perspective. Strang evidently learned much else about Mormon organization and belief from Bennett. In 1846, for example, Bennett was largely responsible for introducing Strang's followers to a form of the "law of adoption" and to an explicitly "tribal" form of organization similar to that then being experimented with by Brigham Young.

1Miller, James J. Strang, Weighed in the Balance, pp. 18-19. Miller indicates that shortly after the arrival of John C. Bennett at Voree about July 1, 1846, Strang did an abrupt about-face and began advocating "by revelation, some things that he had a few days before condemned in the strongest and most positive terms, viz. The signs and keys of the priesthood, and the everlasting covenant of the same, as well as the organization of the kingdom." Miller's pamphlet is a straightforward and utterly devastating demolition of Strang's prophetic pretensions. Every major allegation of Miller's which can be checked, including his detailed description of the organization of Strang's secret Order of the Illuminati, is corroborated from the Strang Papers.

In spite of Bennett's organizational capabilities and knowledge of many aspects of early Mormon belief and practice, his opportunism soon poisoned everything that it touched. Apparently at Bennett's suggestion, Strang organized a secret Order of the Illuminati in the Spring of 1846, shortly before going East. This secret society, complete with Masonic grips and passwords, pledged total loyalty to "James J. Strang and his lawful successors, if any he has . . . in preference to the laws, commandments, or persons of any other Kings, Potentates, or States whatsoever. . . ." Bennett became second in command. This oath, similar to that which Joseph Smith had administered to the Council of Fifty in the Spring of 1844, led to dissatisfaction among many Strangites.

These dissatisfactions were further exacerbated when in Strang's absence, Bennett evidently attempted to gain personal control over the Order of the Illuminati and to use the secrecy engendered by that group as a cover for the introduction of a very loose form of "polygamy" that amounted to little more than casual licentiousness. Bennett's string of philanderings and adulteries proved highly disruptive to the Strangites, as they had earlier to Joseph Smith's own organization. Bennett's utter cynicism and lack of moral scruples are plainly revealed in the extraordinary minutes of his October 4, 1846, trial. It was reported that when Bennett was asked by a married woman whom he approached whether doing things like committing adultery were right, he responded: " . . . I do not believe they are wrong." Despite Bennett's severe moral

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1 Quaife, *Kingdom of Saint James*, p. 56, quotes the key portion of this "Covenant of the Order of the Illuminati" which is found at the Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut, Ms S-189. This is not a part of the Strang Papers. This statement includes secret passwords, grips, and oaths strikingly similar both to Masonic ritual and to the ritual of the LDS endowment ceremony.


3 MS. Minutes of the High Council in Voree, October 4, 1846, which heard testimony against John C. Bennett for teaching "False Doctrines such as Polygamy & Concubinage and attempting to carry them into practice," and "Threatening Life and ridiculing Sacred Things." Item 38 in the Strang Papers. This is, to say the least, an extraordinary document. For example, in Willard Griffiths's testimony it is reported that
insensitivities, Strang chose to bear with him for a full year after the trial. By the time Bennett finally was thrown out, the damage that he had done to Strang's efforts could never be fully repaired.

Throughout the mid-1840s, both before and after Bennett's expulsion, Strang inveighed publicly and privately with telling effect against polygamy in any form. As late as August 1847, Strang could affirm his "unchanged" and "unchangeable" opposition to "spiritual wifery" or anything of the kind, and he could assert that his views were "established on a full consideration of all the scriptures, both ancient and modern" and that "the discipline of the church shall conform thereto." Outside of his own prophetic claims, this argument was and remained his chief early basis for attacking the Twelve.

Despite these considerations, on July 13, 1849, Strang privately took as his first plural wife the nineteen-year-old Elvira Field, thereby abandoning his anti-polygamy stance in practice. Accompanied by Elvira, who dressed in a page boy's garb and posed as his private male secretary "Charles J. Douglass," Strang went East in 1849-1850 on a missionary trip to try to attract Mormons to gather at the community he was trying to organize on Beaver Island in Lake Michigan. On that island, in July 1850, Bennett told him that he "was about to exalt him and wished him to fill a certain quoram [sic] and by doing what was directed he would become a Father of a tribe. Willard asked him concerning illicit intercourse with woman [sic]. Bennett told him there was no harm in it, wanted good Fuckers." This last word is in heavy ink with fancy printed characters covering over the beginning of a partially written word, in the normal handwriting of the secretary, which looks like "fuc." Evidently the secretary initially stopped writing when the word was spoken, left a partial blank, and then went back and emphasized the word! In evaluating such trials, Quaife, Kingdom of Saint James, is inclined to think that men such as Bennett were framed. Given the character of Bennett as it can be reconstructed from many other sources and the reliable character of the witnesses against him, as well as the fact that Bennett would eventually be expelled, but not engage in any public attacks on Strang, the probability that this testimony is accurate seems extremely high. It is not difficult to see why the epithet "John C. Bennett!" apparently was used as an informal expression of extreme disgust by the Nauvoo-Utah Mormons. Woodruff, Journal, December 20, 1846. Brigham Young is reported to have used Bennett's name in lieu of a curse in a public speech of that date.

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1Quaife, Kingdom of Saint James, p. 98, quoting the Voree Herald, August 12, 1847. Emphasis in original.
Strang publicly announced to the world his support of polygamy. This was the first open espousal of the practice by a major Mormon group, antedating by more than two years the public commitment of the Utah Mormons to the practice. Also in July 1850, Strang proclaimed the establishment of the Kingdom of God and had himself literally crowned King in a ceremony that was complete with regal robes and all the assorted paraphernalia of office. This ceremony was witnessed by more than two hundred of his followers.

Why did Strang abandon his initial "unchanged" and "unchangeable" opposition to polygamy? Although the move undercut his ability to offer a real alternative to Brigham Young and the Twelve, yet it was logical from several perspectives. First, Strang undoubtedly had learned from Bennett and others of Joseph Smith's own strong commitment to polygamy. If Strang were to replicate at least the external form of Smith's activities, he logically would have to introduce polygamy at some point.

1Ibid., p. 105.

2MS. testimony of 234 witnesses to "the organization of the Kingdom of God, and the Crowning of the King of Zion," at the city of St. James, Beaver Island, Lake Michigan on July 8, 1850. Item 188 in the Strang Papers.

3The profound impression that Joseph Smith made on James J. Strang as well as on so many other followers can not be more clearly shown than by the fact that almost every important faction of the Mormon Church before 1850, and many unattached individuals as well, introduced or attempted to introduce some form of polygamy practice. Such efforts were made by the main body of the Mormons in Nauvoo, as well as by Lyman Wight, Sidney Rigdon, William Smith, and James J. Strang, among others. A letter from President Joseph Smith of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints to Joseph Davis, dated October 13, 1899, notes:

"Nearly all the factions into which the church broke had plural marriage in some form. None in the form instituted by President Young. Sidney Rigdon had one form practiced by but a few, and that spasmodically, as an outburst of religious fervor rather than as a settled practice. William Smith had a sort of Priestess Lodge, in which it was alleged there was a manifestation of licentiousness. This he denied, and I never had actual proof of it. Gladden Bishop taught something like it, but I believe he was himself the only practicer. James J. Strang had a system something like Mahomet, four, I think being allowed the king. Lyman Wight had a system, but it had no very extended range. President Young's system you may know of."

Quoted in Shook, Origin of Mormon Polygamy, p. 194.
Second, by 1850 Strang was no longer competing effectively with the Great Basin Mormons. The polemical uses of polygamy thus became of less importance to him than in the early rough and tumble struggle. Finally, and perhaps most important, Strang's personal inclinations appear to have played a significant part in his decision. During his trip East in 1849-1850, for instance, Strang's private statements clearly show how vital "Charlie's" support was to him as he struggled with a combination of exhausting travels, poverty, discouragement, illness, and missionary failures such that he once could write that only his "iron will" kept him going. In defending his polygamy stance, Strang declared that the type of polygamy practice that he advocated would alleviate many of the severe social problems of antebellum marriage practice, especially for women. Whether one accepts the sincerity of his arguments or not, Strang's polygamy ideals and practice appear among the most humane and sensitive of those practices introduced by any Mormon group after Joseph Smith's death.

The polygamy system that Strang advocated publicly and introduced on a small scale in his Beaver Island Kingdom between 1850 and his assassination in 1856, may well have displayed the greatest liberality toward women's position of any of the similar systems instituted in the various Mormon factions. The intellectual rationale for Strang's system is presented in his newspaper, the Northern Islander, as well as in the explanatory notes to his Book of the Law of the Lord. With the exception of a relatively straightforward Old Testament exegesis in part of the Book of the Law of the Lord, Strang's argument is propounded in almost wholly social terms, eschewing the elaborate cosmological rationale of spiritual marriage "for time and eternity" which underlay the Utah Mormon system.

1 Letter of James J. Strang to his wife Mary Perce Strang, dated Baltimore, January 25, 1850. Item 73 in the Strang Papers. Numerous other private letters suggest the importance that "Charlie's" presence had for Strang on this missionary trip.

2 One of the most detailed presentations of Strang's social argument for polygamy is found in his defense of the Seer, Orson Pratt's detailed
In the *Northern Islander*, Strang eloquently argues for polygamy almost exclusively as a means of alleviating the problems that women face in finding husbands and making satisfactory marriages. This argument also was widely used in Utah, but it never was so powerfully expressed there. Strang begins by outlining the "universally felt" inadequacy of the existing marriage system. Although antebellum monogamous practice supposedly grants women their free choice of a husband, in fact women who want to marry at all usually are placed under intolerable pressure to take any man they can get.

In consequence many talented women find themselves tied for life to puerile men, whom they cannot but despise; and just and amiable women, to unjust and selfish men, whom they are compelled to dread; and they set about preaching women's rights, in the hope of finding some relief by relaxing the matrimonial bond as much as possible.

Strang did not feel that the popular remedy which proposed "making marriage so near nothing at all, that it shall be only a partnership at will, for propagating the human species," was the solution to women's problems in marriage. He did not favor borrowing a husband "for the occasion" or hiring him as "a lackey or personal attendant," any more than he would favor casual sex with a woman or hiring a prostitute. Rather his goal was the best possibility for a marriage relationship of commitment between whole human beings. Polygamy would have the effect of giving women "a wider range for the selection of husbands" and more bargaining power.

Consequently they will accept only such as suit them. Higher talent, purer virtues, more constant kindness, more enterprise [sic], better business capacities, a larger share of everything that makes the man the gentleman is then requisite to get wives at all.

argument for Utah polygamy. *Northern Islander*, March 2, 1854. An account which uses Old Testament sources to justify polygamy, as well as a social argument similar to the one presented in the *Northern Islander*, is found in the Book of the Law of the Lord, pp. 318-328, in an extended footnote elaboration of the text of the book itself. Interestingly, there is not a single passage in the text of the original *Book of the Law of the Lord* which directly supports polygamy. Striking though Strang's arguments for polygamy are, they seem almost exclusively to be an after-the-fact justification, rather than an outgrowth of religious belief.
Both sexes would continually be put on their best behavior.

What of possible jealousy between plural wives? Strang argued that such jealousy was only "conventional." "That love is undiminished, every father, every mother of several children well knows. It is only prejudice which prevents the application of this rule to wives as well as children."

Women admire and love every manly excellence, and they are fond of each other's society. Take away the feeling of degradation, and shame, and a half dozen intellectual, amiable and beautiful women would spend their lives far more happily, with one man, such as either would really choose, than separately with the same number of men, such as they can get, in the existing state of society.

Men, too, suffer because of their wives' lack of free choice of husbands.

... the worst fault of the system is, that wives being generally mated rather than matched to their husbands, treat them without affection, and those men who have any degree of kindness acquiesce, because they feel that it would be cruel to exact more than the heart can feel. Desolate in the want of love, they seek the affection in vile places, which is denied at home, and too often their delinquencies are returned upon them, and the household made a desolation. The few that are really well matched, are carried away by the prevailing custom, and virtuous women are ashamed to show their affection for their husbands. It is an unpardonable weakness. Thus connubial felicity is denied the good and the evil, the well and ill matched.

Although one may well differ with Strang in prescribing polygamy as the answer to the problems he saw in antebellum marriage practice, one can not help being impressed at Strang's sensitivity to the difficult problems facing men and women in the period. How well did his polygamy system work out in practice? Because of the limited extent and documentation on Strang's system, this question is almost impossible to answer. Out of a Mormon population in 1856 numbering more than 2,500, with probably 500 heads of households, there never were more than 18 or 20 polygamous families on the Beaver Islands. Strang had four wives in addition to his first, L. D. Hickey had three, and all other polygamous families contained but two wives. The limited practice of polygamy appears to have been due to personal disinclination, simple poverty,
lack of eligible females, and to the more elite character of Strang's system than that which existed in the Great Basin.¹

Strang's own family all lived together in the same house, with separate rooms for each wife. One wife described Strang as judicious and mild, yet a firm leader.² Given the crowded circumstances and the other difficulties they faced, Strang's wives appear to have maintained as good relations between themselves as could be expected. Strang made no pretensions that his marriages to his plural wives were legal, but he simply said that they were women "whom I would marry if the law permitted me."³ Strang's polygamy belief and practice did not hinder him from giving women considerable powers. He introduced a bloomer outfit for women, made his first wife Mary Perce a member of his Governing Council in April 1851, and repeatedly emphasized in his Book of the Law of the Lord the importance of a mutual relationship of love between husband and wife, rather than the more pragmatic property and kinship considerations that underlay marriage in the Old Testament.

As the only Mormon polygamy system outside that of Utah for which anything more than the most superficial documentation exists, the marriage ideals and practice of James J. Strang are of considerable intrinsic and comparative interest. Nevertheless, the primary historic importance of Strang's adoption of polygamy lay in its political impact. That step formally signalled Strang's inability or unwillingness to provide a true alternative to the policies of the Great Basin Mormons under Brigham Young. The most devoted and capable of the disaffected Mormons who followed Strang, such as William Marks, Zenos Gurley, and Jason Briggs, left him when he followed Joseph Smith's lead in introducing secret societies and polygamy. Marks, Briggs, Gurley and others would continue to "wander in the wilderness" until the formal establishment of

¹For a treatment of the practical operation of Strang's polygamy system on Beaver Island, see Quaife, Kingdom of Saint James, pp. 106-110.

²Ibid., pp. 107-108. Statement of Strang's last surviving wife, Mrs. Sarah A. Wing, in an interview with Quaife in the summer of 1920.

³Ibid., p. 101, quoting Strang's statement in the Northern Islander, October 11, 1855.
the Reorganized Mormon Church in 1860. To be sure, Strang could not have seriously challenged the Utah Mormons after the late 1840s in any event. Yet, had he not formally introduced polygamy and had himself crowned king in 1850, he might well have been able to establish the nucleus of a successful non-polygamous branch of the Mormon Church. Instead, Strang retreated to his isolated Beaver Island Kingdom and increasingly became simply a curiosity rather than a dynamic force in history.

XII

The core of the Strang problem still remains unanswered: What are we to make of the prophetic pretensions which underlay the career of James J. Strang? Was he a prophet, a charlatan, or perhaps, both? Such questions cannot be fully dealt with here, but a tentative hypothesis must be offered if we are to place Strang within the larger context of Mormon history. To many of his contemporaries and to most of the handful of present-day Strang scholars, Strang's claims appear to be contrived. He seems to have self-consciously tailored his activities to fit Smith's prophetic model and to have continually modified his positions, or, if necessary, reversed them to try to make the most convincing image. The assiduous research and careful reasoning of the historian Dale Morgan appears to establish beyond any reasonable doubt that the so-called letter of appointment from Joseph Smith was forged, and almost surely forged by Strang himself.¹ Evidence which cannot be detailed here also suggests self-conscious manipulation in many of Strang's other ventures,

¹In his Calendar of the Strang Papers, pp. 21-28, Dale L. Morgan points out a number of factors which suggest a forgery. First, the letter is hand printed. No other extant letter ever written or dictated by Joseph Smith was hand printed. Second, the signature of the letter, written by the same hand as the text of the letter, bears not the slightest resemblance to Joseph Smith's distinctive signature. Finally, the content of the letter itself is extremely uncharacteristic of Joseph Smith's writing style, but it is strikingly similar to a beautiful passage in Strang's own diary for March 20, 1833. For these and a number of other complex reasons, Morgan concludes that the letter is probably a forgery by Strang. This author has carefully examined the original "letter of appointment" and fully concurs with Morgan's judgments.
including his revelations, translations, and reversals of position on issues such as polygamy. The limited and essentially personal character of Strang's leadership can be seen in the fact that although he retained full consciousness for more than three weeks after he was fatally shot in 1856, he refused to the end to appoint a successor to carry on his work after his death.

Yet if Strang was manipulating the credulity of his followers at the surface level, at a deeper level he does indeed appear to have been a sincere prophet who genuinely believed in the truth of his primary goals. One cannot plausibly explain the sustained dedication Strang showed in the face of all the hardships, poverty, and buffettins he experienced, or the generally well-thought-out, humane, and internally consistent quality of his ideals, personal life, and programs as due to simple fraud or psychopathology. By almost any standards Strang reveals himself to be a profoundly impressive human being. He showed a combination of intellectual acuity, dedication, and personal character rarely encountered in any age. Why then did he apparently feel compelled to forge his external credentials for power?

The first and most obvious reason was a pragmatic one. Strang was an unknown who wanted to attract a following among whom he could realize his ideals. He evidently saw the potential of the Mormon organization to achieve his objectives, particularly after Joseph Smith's death. Yet he had to find some way of attracting attention and legitimating his authority. Brigham Young and the Twelve had the core of the Mormon organization in Nauvoo under their control. Strang therefore took the only means open to him of attempting to gain power. He

1 It has not been possible here adequately to suggest Strang's remarkable human sensitivities which are starkly revealed in his personal letters and the articles in his newspapers, as well as in the extremely high calibre of so many of the people whom he attracted. Dale L. Morgan writes of the Strang Papers as a whole in his Introduction to them, p. 17: "They are so full of human hope, fear, mistrust, and anger, often sad and as often exalted, that to read them is to be given a fresh understanding of Mormonism, what it brought into the lives of its believers, and what they suffered in the cause. . . . " Like Joseph Smith himself, James J. Strang profoundly affected the people with whom he had been associated.
attempted to embody in his own life and actions the spirit and the forms of Joseph Smith's prophetic career even more closely than the prophet himself had. The committee-caretaker government of the Twelve for a time appeared to many Mormons to be departing from that spirit. By trying to recapture the spirit and forms of Joseph Smith's prophetic career, Strang was able to create the largest and most impressive challenge to the Nauvoo-Utah Mormon Church prior to the establishment of the Reorganization in 1860. But the task which Strang set himself was, in the last analysis, an impossible one. The result was the eventual failure and dispersal of his community.

A second reason that Strang apparently attempted to fabricate his prophetic credentials is suggested by a comparison of his career with the very different ones of Joseph Smith and John C. Bennett. In this writer's opinion, a large part of Joseph Smith's success lay in his formative visionary experiences which convinced him beyond any doubt of the divine nature of his mission. It is quite possible that Smith may in some instances have presented his own personal desires as though they were revelations from God. Certainly he did rework some of his earlier translations and revelations in the light of new insights or "continuing revelation." Yet Joseph Smith's core sense of prophetic mission—his sense that a power greater than himself alone was speaking through him—appears never to have weakened. At the opposite end of the spectrum was John C. Bennett, a man who never spoke for anyone but himself and his own narrowly conceived self-interest. Bennett never knew what he really wanted in life and he never had any higher goal than personal self-aggrandizement. As a result, he never could work for long with anyone else and he never was able to carry any long-term project involving other people successfully to completion.

James J. Strang appears to have fallen midway on the prophetic spectrum between Smith and Bennett. Although Strang possessed an intense sense of personal mission, he never appears to have had Joseph Smith's sense of having his life taken over by a higher power. Yet Strang's ambition was more than Bennett's crude self-interest. Strang sought to

1Howard, Restoration Scriptures.
achieve personal fame and immortality by creating an appealing and humane community that would embody his ideals. That Strang chose to make explicit revelatory claims instead of simply asserting that he had authority, as a figure such as John Humphrey Noyes did, was probably due to the special circumstances that he faced.

In the last analysis, however, a self-consciously contrived role could never have the effectiveness of real belief. The greater success of Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and the Great Basin Mormons can be attributed in part at least to their sincere belief in the divine nature of their mission. Furthermore, although the cooperative leadership of Brigham Young and the Twelve after Joseph Smith's death might initially have appeared unwieldy, it had the great advantage of avoiding the inevitable vagaries of one-man prophetic leadership, whether of Joseph Smith or of James J. Strang. Brigham Young and the Twelve had real power and they used their existing organization with considerable skill during the movement west and the settlement of Utah.

XIII

The epic story of the great Mormon migration to the West, with all its heroism, suffering, drama, disappointments, and ultimate much-deserved success is well-known and need not be rehearsed in detail here. This Mormon exodus was one of the great group movements in history and set in high relief the remarkable organizational talents of Brigham Young. At the Mormon resting point at Winter Quarters, near what is now Omaha, Nebraska, on January 14, 1847, Brigham Young delivered as the "Word and Will of the Lord" an organizational plan which would comprise a key part of the successful move West.¹ This statement was the only directive of Young's to be included along with Smith's revelations in the Doctrine and Covenants. All the Saints were organized in companies with captains of hundreds, fifties, and tens. Some were sent on ahead to plant crops to be harvested later by those coming behind. And provisions were to be made for the poor, the widows, and the fatherless.

¹Doctrine and Covenants, section 136.
By following this plan and using a number of other ingenious means, the main body of the Mormons eventually would reach the Valley of the Great Salt Lake.

If one keeps in mind the larger family and kinship model being developed by the Mormons at this time, this great migration becomes both more comprehensible and more impressive. One method of organization which preceded Young's 1847 statement by at least a year and to some extent underlay it was the limited practice of the "law of adoption." Adoption as practiced by the Mormons probably went back in theory even earlier in the Nauvoo period. Gordon Irving has characterized the law of adoption as "an experiment" in "the organization of Mormon society along family lines" which was "tried out on a small scale within the families of the leaders."1 The adoption experiment reached full fruition during the difficult migration westward between 1846 and 1848, though eventually it was largely discontinued because of difficulties connected with its practice.

Through the law of adoption, some Mormon men and their families were literally as well as spiritually linked as part of the families of higher Mormon figures such as Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Wilford Woodruff. These adopted "sons" in turn sometimes would serve as "fathers" to whom other men and their families would be adopted. The belief was that eventually all Mormons would be indissolubly linked in a family relationship to each other, both in this life and in eternity. This adoptionary order was seen as more than simply figurative; it also entailed temporal rights and obligations. Looking back thirty years later, John D. Lee characterized the adoptionary system as follows: "... I was adopted by Brigham Young, and was to seek his temporal interest here, and in return he was to seek my spiritual salvation, I being an heir of his family, and was to share his blessings in common with his other heirs."2 When Lee was adopted into Young's family, he

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1Irving, "The Law of Adoption," p. 297. This fine analysis is the primary basis of the brief discussion which follows.

2Lee, Confessions, p. 197. Emphasis in the original.
chose to emphasize the relationship by signing his name: "John D. Lee Young."¹

As both a spiritual and a temporal linkage, the adoptionary system thus could have helped to make the westward trek more orderly and to solidify Mormon loyalties to the Church. Problems developed with the new arrangements, however. Conflicts arose over who should have precedence among the adopted "sons" of a particular father. Other conflicts inevitably developed between leading figures and those whom they had adopted. Some family leaders came to fear that if they allowed themselves to be "adopted" to another higher figure, the size of their own "kingdoms" might suffer in consequence. In many instances, the result was that the practice of adoption accentuated conflict instead of contributing to unity. Since that early form of the "law of adoption" failed to serve its primary purpose of encouraging unity, it was largely abandoned by Mormons by the late 1840s.

The law of adoption as practiced during the westward trek was closely connected with the developing Mormon concept of salvation, with sealing ceremonies such as baptism for the dead, and with spiritual marriage and polygamy, as part of a larger effort to reestablish both spiritual and temporal cohesion within the group. With the adoptionary model in mind, one can more easily understand certain aspects of the development of polygamy just before and during the westward trek. One of the most puzzling features of early polygamy development is why many prominent Mormon leaders took large numbers of plural wives just before beginning the exodus or during the migration itself. What relationship did these "wives" sustain to them? For instance, recent Mormon scholarship verifies that at least fifty-five women can be considered to have been "married" in some sense to Brigham Young, and that most of those women were sealed to him in 1846. In addition to the twenty-seven women officially considered to have been Young's wives, there were at least twenty-eight other, evidently non-connubial, wives who have been characterized by the historian Michael Quinn as "lesser-known wives." Although

none of these lesser-known wives apparently bore Young any children, the relationship they sustained was considered significant enough that there are records of some of the women securing formal divorces before remarrying.¹ Many other Mormon leaders also took large numbers of wives and "lesser-known wives" in this period. Why did this occur?

One could argue, of course, that these large numbers of plural wives taken in 1846 or during the exodus were taken as part of the confusions and excesses of the period. Putting it crudely, some anti-Mormons might argue that the passions when released from normal constraints simply went wild. A more convincing explanation, however, is suggested by the law of adoption. Under the law of adoption, a man could be sealed to his superior as an adopted son. Likewise, it seems likely that in polygamy during the period, a woman might well have been sealed as the wife of a prominent figure even if she had no actual sexual relations with the man. Mormons considered marriage essential for full salvation. A single woman going west would face great difficulties and should she die in the exodus she would be alone for all eternity as well. But if she were sealed to a husband, even if only for eternity, should she die in the migration at least her status and relationships in the afterlife would remain secure. And during the move west, she could call upon her husband and his family for temporal assistance as well.

Polygamy as practiced in Utah also shows many instances where wives were taken as a means of looking after their temporal support or eternal salvation and not for sexual reasons at all. For instance, the most influential leader of women in early Utah, Eliza R. Snow, evidently was married to Brigham Young in name only. She might be characterized as a "married spinster" (or, more properly, "widow"), having both the economic security and status of a wife with the freedom of a single woman. In yet another case, John D. Lee married the mother of one of his plural wives only "for her soul's sake" and emphatically did not include her as a wife in a full sense.² Thus, polygamy like adoption may be

¹See the discussion in Quinn, "The Mormon Hierarchy," pp. 154-156.
²Lee, Confession, p. 289.
considered in important respects primarily as an experiment in social cohesion which can not easily be characterized within our everyday uses of terminology. Whereas the early adoptionary experiment was soon dropped, polygamy survived and became a significant social force which sustained a complex relationship to other aspects of social life during nearly forty years of public practice in the Great Basin.
CHAPTER VI

PURITAN POLYGAMY: THE PATRIARCHAL MORMON FAMILY SYSTEM
IN EARLY UTAH

It has required courage, and a great amount of it, too, to stand and contend against the prejudices and customs of the age. And this is one of the strongest proofs of the courageous and daring spirit that possesses those who will take upon themselves this cross, and endure all that is put upon them, to be numbered with the ones who are so highly honored by the Almighty. We are the advance guard to meet and break through these trammels of prejudice, and "dare to follow truth wherever it may lead." From these mountains is to roll the little stone that will bring to pass the purposes of the Almighty and settle this social question by a practical reform in the marriage system.

--Helen Mar Kimball Whitney

By the late 1840s and early 1850s in the Great Basin, plural marriage had become a generally accepted part of Mormon patriarchal family arrangements and of the social practice in the area as a whole. Tensions remained, of course, but the primary activity during the early period was directed toward the demanding effort to settle and develop the arid, mountainous, and initially inhospitable Intermountain West. The surface of social life in the region would continue to remain relatively smooth, except during times of major internal and external crisis such as the Mormon "reformation" of 1856-1857 or the external persecution that began to gather force in the late 1870s and early 1880s. Once in the relative isolation of the Great Basin, the Mormons were freed to take charge of their own destiny and to make a concerted effort to establish their conception of the Kingdom of God on earth. Despite frequent hardships and deprivation, a sense of adventure, dedication, and commitment would run as an underlying emotional current in the period.

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1Why We Practice Plural Marriage (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1884), p. 53.
The basic stability of early Utah social practice was commented upon both by external observers and by internal Mormon accounts. Writing in 1852, Howard Stansbury of the United States Corps of Topographic Engineers observed, for example, that while as an outsider he was unable to see more than "the surface of what is in fact as yet but an experiment, the details of which are sedulously veiled from public view," yet "Peace, harmony, and cheerfulness seemed to prevail, where my preconceived notions led me to look for nothing but the exhibition of petty jealousies, envy, bickerings, and strife." 1 Another acute early observer, John W. Gunnison, commented that while there were still problems with the regulation of polygamy, "any equal number of persons in the states can hardly exhibit greater decorum." 2 Even the petty wife of Benjamin G. Ferris, who made no secret of her hostility to the Mormons, inadvertently seconded such judgments. Although by her own admission she sought to portray Mormon polygamous society as a "sink of pollution," she succeeded in doing little more than affix derogatory adjectives to people that her own descriptions reveal to have been generally friendly, hardworking, and sincere in living a difficult system to the best of their capacities. 3


2 J. W. Gunnison, The Mormons, or, Latter-day Saints, in the Valley of the Great Salt Lake (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo & Co., 1852). Gunnison was also a member of the United States Corps of Topographic Engineers with Howard Stansbury. Gunnison's account shows much the same sort of sensitivity to mid-nineteenth-century Mormon culture and experience that O'Dea showed in his mid-twentieth-century treatment, The Mormons. For other useful early accounts of non-Mormons, see William Kelly, Across the Rocky Mountains (London: Simms & M'Intyre, 1852); William Chandless, A Visit to Salt Lake and Mormon Settlements in Utah (London: Smith Elder & Co., 1857); Burton, City of the Saints; and [William E. Waters], Life Among the Mormons and a March to Their Zion, By an Officer of the U.S. Army (New York: Moorehead, Simpson & Bond, 1868). Burton's account is the most important of the early travel literature. Though Waters is frequently inaccurate, his account provides many conceptual insights worthy of further investigation.

3 Mrs. Benjamin G. Ferris, The Mormons at Home (New York: Dix & Edwards, 1856), pp. 122-164. Mrs. Ferris's resolute determination to find negative adjectives to describe positive characteristics of individuals she met becomes almost laughable at times.
Internal Mormon accounts from the late 1840s and early 1850s bear out the general acceptance of the new arrangements and the matter-of-fact adjustment made by most Mormons to the difficulties and renunciations involved in "living the Principle." In a remarkably introspective journal written from 1850 to 1856, for example, Martha Spence Haywood recorded in detail her own reactions to becoming a plural wife and the emotional interrelationships among men and women in the upper hierarchy of the Mormon Church. ¹ From accounts such as Martha Heywood's, it appears that from almost the beginning of Utah settlement many of the worst strains of the transition to the new family practices had been overcome. In the relative isolation of the Great Basin region, Mormons initially were largely free from the problem of external attacks. Moreover, many of the individuals who had been opposed to polygamy had dropped out of the Church during the Nauvoo period or during the difficult westward migration, so that the Saints who remained were among the most loyal and dedicated members. Finally, the challenges of simple survival and of building a new society with its own cohesive religious, economic, and social patterns left little energy to devote to questioning the validity of the new polygamous arrangements.

What was plural marriage like in early Utah? How was it justified internally and how did it restructure the relations between the sexes? What were the sources of internal strength and tensions in the new arrangements and how well did polygamy work out in practice? And what was the significance of this effort at marital and familial reorganization within the context of the larger Mormon effort at religious, social, economic, and political restructuring of their Great Basin kingdom?

In approaching these complex questions, this section will provide a brief overview of the relationship of polygamy to other aspects of Mormon life in the Great Basin and will point to some topics deserving further study. Orson Pratt's initial public defense of polygamy in 1852 will be presented to suggest most of the major intellectual arguments

¹Martha Spence Heywood, Journal, 1850-1856. A typescript prepared by the Federal Writer's Project is available in the Utah State Historical Society Library.
used to support polygamy during the period when it was publicly practiced in Utah. Then the polygamous relationship of Franklin D. and Jane Snyder Richards will be analyzed and the degree to which it may be a representative example of both the positive and negative features of polygamy as described in the growing body of contemporary studies of early Mormon marriage and family patterns will be assessed.

I

Although polygamy appears to have become an accepted part of Mormon social practice in the Great Basin region from the earliest days of settlement, not until the belief was publicly advocated and openly practiced and acknowledged by the leaders of the Church could the new arrangements be considered to have achieved established status. As long as the practice was continued secretly while public denials were issued, the resulting inconsistency would continue to disturb some members of the Church and the possibility would remain that plural marriage might die out or be discontinued. The public announcement of Mormon commitment to plural marriage at the special Church conference in Salt Lake City in late August 1852, thus was of the utmost importance. There Orson Pratt delivered a sophisticated defense of the new beliefs and practices and Joseph Smith's 1843 revelation was read for the first time. Numerous missionaries were sent out to defend the Church's position to the world. Just as individuals had previously staked their personal lives and reputations on the correctness of the new beliefs, so now the Church publicly committed itself to the new marriage and family forms as an integral part of its doctrine and social practice.¹

It is easy to see why the developing sub rosa belief and practice of polygamy should have been kept secret as much as possible between 1831 and 1847 when the Mormons were living in close contact with a monogamous

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¹The full minutes of the conference were first printed as a Deseret News Extra for September 14, 1852, and were reprinted as a supplement to vol. 15 of the Millennial Star in 1853. It is interesting to note that the Mormon Church did not make a full public commitment to plural and celestial marriage until 1876 when the revelation finally was included in the Doctrine and Covenants, and the 1835 Kirtland statement on marriage was removed.
American society which was extremely hostile toward such variant forms of marriage. But why did the Mormons wait five years after they reached the Great Basin before making public their belief and practice of plural marriage?

The most obvious reason was the difficulties that the Mormons had in establishing themselves in the hostile physical environment of the Great Basin and setting up a fully functioning system of social relations there as well. Simple survival initially took almost all the efforts of most early settlers. Furthermore, Mormon colonization of the region and successful establishment of cohesive group life demanded elaborate organizational efforts in many areas of economic, social, and religious life. Before the Mormons chose to face a hostile world with news of their new marriage beliefs and practices, it was logical that they should attempt to make sure that their own house was in order so that they could operate from as strong a position as possible. ¹

A second factor was political. The Mormons were eager to gain statehood. Had they been able to achieve such status initially, they would have been much less subject to outside interference. At least theoretically they then could have controlled their own social institutions, including polygamy, much as the Southern states, using a "states rights" argument, defended their own "peculiar institution." The effort to achieve statehood for Utah failed, however, and only territorial

status was achieved for the region in 1850. Moreover, friction between Mormons and the gentile appointees sent to the territory, including the famous case of the "runaway judges" in 1851, soon made Mormon polygamy an open secret anyway and removed any advantage of maintaining secrecy about the system.¹

Finally, the public announcement of polygamy may be seen as serving important internal functions in Utah as well. The work of Stanley Ivins suggests that periodic revivals of support for polygamy, stimulated by leadership action or as part of a response to external threat, were an important element in keeping the practice alive.² Relatively few polygamous marriages appear to have been entered into between the beginnings of the Mormon attempt to establish themselves in the Great Basin in 1847 and the announcement of polygamy in 1852.³ While this may well have been due to deliberate policy and to involvement with pressing immediate concerns, it may also have reflected less than enthusiastic


²Stanley Snow Ivins, "Notes on Mormon Polygamy," Western Humanities Review 10 (Summer 1956): 229-239, still provides the best overview of the trajectory of the development of polygamy in Utah. Ivins notes that according to his data, which is based on some 2,500 polygamous marriages covering the whole period of the experiment, peak periods during which polygamous marriages occurred, were the winter of 1845-1846 in Nauvoo, 1852, 1856-1857, 1862, 1868-1869, and 1883-1884. Overall he finds a decline in the taking of plural wives following the period of the 1856-1857 Reformation.

³Ibid., p. 231. Jane Snyder Richards, first wife of Franklin D. Richards, stated that "in the first two or three years [in Utah] polygamy was not much entered into." Reminiscences of Mrs. F. D. Richards. Hubert Howe Bancroft Collection of Mormon Manuscripts in the Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley, California. Hereafter cited as Bancroft Collection.
support for polygamy among much of the Mormon rank and file. As long as a system about which many felt a deep ambivalence was publicly denied, there was always the possibility that polygamy might be undermined by disuse and aversion even before it had really begun. The process of completing the institutionalization of polygamy gained support by the completion of a new endowment house in 1851 and the beginning of work on a new temple. Public acknowledgment and defense of the new system, which was eagerly awaited by its supporters, was a final essential step.¹

The occasion for the 1852 announcement of Mormon belief in polygamy was a special conference of the Church on August 28 and 29 in Salt Lake City. At that time, elders were called to go out on missionary assignments throughout the world. The assignments were difficult ones which the men were told might last as long as from "three to seven years." During that absence from their families, the men were of course supposed to maintain strict continence. Using his typically colorful rhetoric, Heber C. Kimball suggested the possibility that Saints might take plural wives as a reward for their renunciation and faithful service in preaching the Gospel, building up the Kingdom of God, and gathering the sheep into the fold: "You are sent out as shepherds to gather the sheep together, and remember that they are not your sheep, they belong to Him that sends

¹In his diary on August 29, 1852, after the revelation on plural and celestial marriage was first publicly read, Hosea Stout recorded "the great joy of the Saints who have looked forward so long and so anxiously for the time to come when we could publicly [sic] declare the true and greatest principles of our holy religion and the great things which God has for his people to do in this dispensation." Juanita Brooks, ed., On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout, 1844-1861, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1964), 2: 449-450. While many Mormons responded with enthusiasm to the announcement of plural marriage publicly in 1852, an undercurrent of hostility to the practice appears to have remained strong throughout the 1850s among some Mormons, particularly Mormon women. See numerous statements suggesting such dissatisfaction in the early issues of the Journal of Discourses. A statement of Heber C. Kimball's in the Deseret News 5 (October 6, 1855): 274, notes, for example, that some women had had a revelation "that when this time passes away, and they go through the vale [sic], every woman will have a husband to herself." Such opposition never became formally organized.
you, then do not make a choice of any of those sheep, do not make selections before they are brought home and put into the fold. . . . "1

The major speech in defense of polygamy, later reprinted under the title "Celestial Marriage," was delivered by Orson Pratt, one of the twelve apostles, and the leading intellectual spokesman for the Church. This speech contained at least a hint of every major pro-polygamy argument that would be put forward during the succeeding forty years of public practice of "the Principle." Davis Bitton has noted that he has been able "to discern no real development" of the Mormon arguments for polygamy over those years. 2 The basic themes simply continued with changes of emphasis.

The religious justification for polygamy ran throughout Pratt's speech and also underlay all Mormon pro-polygamy in the nineteenth century, both for internal and for external consumption. Over and over again, polygamy was emphasized as an essential part of the Mormon faith. In making this argument, Pratt began with a lengthy description of the Mormon cosmological theory of stages of human development. Souls began in a pre-existent, "telestial" state prior to coming to earth. These pre-existent souls were said to be eager to be born into the second, "terrestrial" state, acquiring earthly bodies or "tabernacles." Only by passing through this second probationary earthly state could souls progress on to the highest, "celestial" world.

Marriage was the God-ordained channel by which souls could take earthly tabernacles. The first marriage, Pratt declared, had been between Adam and Eve, two immortal beings who were not initially subject to death; hence, ideally human marriages should also last beyond death for all eternity. The primary object of marriage, as Pratt repeated over and over again, was procreation, the peopling of this world and also worlds in the hereafter. Polygamy, the blessings of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, served as a means of raising up a numerous righteous posterity

1Supplement to vol. 15 of the Millennial Star, p. 3. Emphasis in original removed.

in the families of good men, a glorious eternal increase throughout worlds without end.

In addition to the basic cosmological arguments for polygamy, Pratt dealt with a number of anticipated religious objections to plural marriage. He emphasized that polygamy was not opposed by the Bible. It was practiced under divine sanction in the Old Testament, and was never explicitly disavowed in the New Testament. This fact was not by itself a sufficient justification for the present practice of polygamy by the Mormons, however. The justification for its present practice was a divine revelation to Joseph Smith which authorized and indeed commanded Mormons to practice polygamy under special conditions and with special restrictions as part of the restoration of all things.

The Mormon defense of plural marriage to the external world also was based on the argument that polygamy was an integral part of Mormon religious beliefs. Mormons would repeat over and over again, as Pratt did in this sermon, that since the United States Constitution guaranteed "freedom of religion," the government could not justifiably interfere with the Mormon practice of polygamy, which was an essential part of their religion. Because nineteenth-century Mormons considered polygamy inseparably linked with their religious beliefs, they often found difficulty believing that United States persecution of them for polygamy practice constituted anything but a round-about way of assaulting their entire religious structure. Even today, many Mormons find great difficulty in understanding how profoundly threatened many Americans felt by having a functioning polygamous system within the borders of the continental United States.¹ That the primary conscious motivation for nineteenth-

¹Much of earlier Mormon historical writing has tended to be guided, either implicitly or explicitly, by a tendency toward polemic and toward interpreting history as a cosmic conflict between the forces of light and the forces of darkness. Recently a more realistic understanding of historical dynamics and cultural interaction appears to have been developing. One sign of this change is the interest in Mormon political concerns and the political kingdom of God, as typified in the work of historians such as Klaus Hansen and Robert Flanders. Another, and possibly even more promising approach involves the analysis of images of the Mormons held by other Americans. For some examples of such studies, see: Leonard J. Arrington and Jon Haupt, "Intolerable Zion: The Image of Mormonism in Nineteenth Century American Literature," Western Humanities
century attacks on the Mormons was due to their practice of polygamy, and to other behavior divergent from American norms, rather than to hostility toward their religious beliefs per se is strongly suggested in a recent quantitative analysis by Jan Shipps of attitudes toward Mormons as expressed in American periodical literature between 1860 and 1960.¹ Shipps's careful content analysis shows that there were more objections to polygamy and to the Church's political activities and control than there were to Mormon theology. In other words, the practice of divergent cultural patterns rather than the holding of unorthodox beliefs was the primary cause of conflict. Only as the memory of the practice of polygamy faded and as the Church accepted a degree of pluralism in political life in Utah did public opinion toward the Mormons become more favorable. The question to many Americans appears to have been the extent to which social practices that were perceived as deeply offensive to public morals would be justified by classing them as part of a religion.

To supplement the religious justification for Mormon polygamy, Orson Pratt also provided a detailed social defense of plural marriage in his speech in 1852. This defense was based on the awareness that a practice established primarily on religious grounds also had to meet man's social needs. As the special supplement to the *Millennial Star*

which printed the minutes to the 1852 conference noted: "One of the principal faults . . . in the religions of men, is this, they do not reach the social condition, nor meet the needs of the human family; indeed it is the boast of many religious teachers that their religions are 'not of this world' . . . ."

The chief excellence of the religion of heaven consists in this, that it meets the needs of man in every condition in which he may be placed, morally, socially, physically, temporally, or spiritually; it blesses him according to his capacity both in this world and in the worlds to come. Time does not comprehend eternity; but eternity comprehends time. 1

The starting point for the social argument for polygamy that Pratt and so many other Mormons after him put forward was the corrupt and debased state of the wicked external world. There adulteries, fornications, whoredomes, abortion, infanticide, and all manner of evils and irregularities abounded. Hypocrisy was rampant. Major public figures clucked their tongues in supposed horror at the Mormon practices while secretly engaging themselves in extra-marital affairs that lacked any justification or sanction whatsoever.

How is this to be prevented? for we have got a fallen nature to grapple with. It is to be prevented in the way the Lord devised in ancient times; that it, by giving to His faithful servants a plurality of wives, by which a numerous and faithful posterity can be raised up, and taught in the principles of righteousness and truth; and then, after they fully understand those principles that were given to the ancient Patriarchs, if they keep not the law of God but commit adultery and transgressions of this kind, let their names be blotted out from under heaven, that they may have no place among the people of God. 2

In short, existing monogamous restrictions were contrary to human nature—or, to be more precise, to man's nature. Implicit in this argument was the belief that men were naturally polygamous in their propensities. Hence, if the most vigorous and active men were not allowed legitimate and regulated channels to express their sexual

1Supplement to vol. 15 of the Millennial Star, p. 63.

2Ibid., pp. 24-25.
drives, the inevitable alternative would be vice and disorder. As a later writer declared:

Man is endowed with polygamic qualities and woman with monogamic ones. This is no question of equality in intelligence or excellence, it turns on uncreated qualities of man's being that enables him to be perfectly one with more than one woman. Woman is not so endowed. She can love many men in a degree, but she can be truly with one only.¹

Perhaps even more important, the primary childbearing function of women was not served by having more than one husband. Men, on the other hand, were capable of having children by a number of different women at the same time, and in a patriarchal, lineage-conscious system, being certain of paternity was a significant concern.

What advantages did such formally male-dominated arrangements have to offer to women? Apart from overriding religious commitment, why would many strong-willed and dynamic women have accepted polygamy? Pratt spends little time explicitly discussing such questions in this speech. Elsewhere, however, he elaborates on how plural marriage would eliminate the double standard, while also allowing every woman the freedom to marry a man of her choice and have children, thereby fulfilling the "measure of her creation." Every woman then would be able to share in the security and status associated with having a regularized relationship. Similar arguments based on Biblical grounds, the end of the double standard, and the freedom of choice that plural marriage could provide women were also made in 1854 in a statement of Belinda Marden Pratt, one of Orson Pratt's plural wives, a statement that has been described as "virtually a classic embodiment of articulate Mormon womanhood's pro-polygamy stance."² Later in this chapter some of the

¹Statement by the editor of the Utah Magazine, October 2, 1869, as quoted in Kimball Young, Isn't One Wife Enough: The Story of Mormon Polygamy (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1954), p. 44. Whitney, Why We Practice Plural Marriage, pp. 50-53, makes this argument at some length.

²Casterline, "Images of the Mormon Woman," p. 101. Belinda Marden Pratt's defense was originally printed in pamphlet form as an anonymous "Defence [sic] of Polygamy, by a Lady in Utah, In a Letter to Her Sister in New Hampshire" (n.p., n.d.). The letter was dated "Great Salt Lake City, Jan. 12, 1854" and was addressed to "Mrs. Lydia
ameliorating features that Mormon polygamy had for women and the ways in which it could make possible women's independent self-development will be discussed more fully.

In concluding his argument, Orson Pratt emphasized that polygamy could only serve as a means of raising up a righteous posterity and overcoming the evils of a wicked world if it were practiced under strict controls. Only the President of the Mormon Church held the keys of the sealing power of Elijah and could authorize plural marriages. Any irregular relationships, no matter how well they might be conducted, were heinously sinful. This belief was graphically illustrated by a pamphlet defense of polygamy by Helen Mar Kimball Whitney. In it she gently but severely criticized a sensitive non-Mormon male correspondent who had written her to ask about the Mormon position on polygamy and then had requested her advice on his apparently fairly good bigamous relationship. Even as she eloquently defended the divine nature of plural marriage, she informed him that he was living in great sin. As always, the question in Mormon religion eventually became one of authority and control. Manuscript evidence from the Brigham Young period shows that every marriage or divorce had to be formally cleared with the President of the Mormon Church, even if the lower levels of the hierarchy had made the initial judgment.

The relation of Pratt's intellectual justification of plural and celestial marriage to the actual practice of Mormon polygamy remains somewhat unclear. As in the case of Smith's 1843 revelation, little was said in Pratt's speech about the actual operation of polygamy. Probably the average Mormon was less concerned about the subtleties of Pratt's reasoning than that there was a cosmic rationale for the practice. Considerable possibilities for variation in practice existed within the general limits of the new arrangements.

Kimball, Nashua, N.H. The letter was reprinted in Burton, City of the Saints, pp. 484-493.

1Whitney, Why We Practice Plural Marriage, pp. 4-22.

2I am grateful to Ron Esplin for allowing me to see uncatalogued marriage and divorce requests which were approved by Brigham Young.
Although the practice of polygamy may have involved considerable variation, the problem of how polygamy, marriage, and sexual relations in general should be organized do appear to have received considerable attention from the hierarchy. Pratt himself discussed such issues in a periodical called The Seer, which he published from January 1853 through August 1854 while on Church assignment to Washington, D.C. The Seer was primarily devoted to a comprehensive defense of polygamy beliefs to the outside world, but it went beyond that justification to print concrete detail about the practice of polygamy, including the plural marriage ceremony itself and a set of twenty-seven rules suggesting how successful polygamous living should be conducted. The advice was relatively straightforward. The men were advised to use good judgment in choosing wives, not to show favoritism, to maintain private confidences, and in general to be considerate yet firm in managing their households. The wives were admonished to cooperate with each other, avoid backbiting, and to bring up their children with proper discipline. Both husbands and wives were urged to continually remember to live with the idea of eternal relationships in mind.

While Orson Pratt eventually was recalled from Washington and the Seer discontinued, the correctness of his beliefs on polygamy presented in the periodical do not appear to have been at issue. Rather, Pratt’s error in dealing with polygamy was that he had said too much. In September 1854, Brigham Young is reported to have said that Pratt "... ought not to have published the marriage ceremony [sic] it was sacred & one of the last cerimonies [sic] attended to in the Endowments and ought not to have been given to the world." Later, Young was reported to have criticized the Seer because: "... there were many principles the world were unworthy to receive; for they would only trample on it. If he [Brigham Young] had ever erred it was in giving too much revelation; instead of not giving enough."  

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1See the Seer, pp. 31-32, for the plural marriage ceremony, and pp. 174-176, and 183-187, for the rules on polygamous living.

2Woodruff, Journal, September 17, 1854.

3Brigham Young’s Office Journal, Book D., February 4, 1860, in Church Archives. Citation called to the author's attention courtesy of
Young's political observation was well taken. During the years immediately following the public announcement of polygamy in 1852, the belief and practice significantly complicated Mormon relations with the outside world.¹

II

The preceding pages have stressed the religious and theoretical arguments for polygamy during the early Utah period. Perhaps more interesting is the question of how polygamy worked in practice in this period, how it was related to the reorganization of the relations of the sexes, and how it was associated with larger Mormon concerns such as the missionary effort and the settlement of the Great Basin region. Aspects of these questions have been approached quantitatively and qualitatively by a number of previous scholars, including James E. Hulett, Jr., Kimball Young, Stanley Snow Ivins, D. Michael Quinn, and Vicky Burgess-Olson, among others, but the possibilities for the investigation of this rich area of social history still remain largely unexplored.² In the

Klaus Hansen. Orson Pratt did encounter criticism on some of his doctrinal stands in the Seer on issues other than polygamy, most notably his criticism of Brigham Young's position supporting the Adam-God doctrine, but this convoluted dispute need not concern us here. For a convenient summary of the course of this disagreement see Eldon J. Tanner, "Orson Pratt and Brigham Young." Typescript in Church Archives.

¹For the early national political reaction to polygamy, see Poll, "The Mormon Question Enters National Politics."

²The first scholarly study of the dynamics of polygamous family life was made by James Edward Hulett, Jr., "The Sociological and Social Psychological Aspects of the Mormon Polygamous Family" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1939). Hulett's study was based on interviews with seventy-eight individuals who had lived as husbands, wives, or children in forty-seven polygamous families which were established in the late nineteenth century prior to the 1890 manifesto which ended public Church support of continuing the practice. Two important articles which Hulett wrote based on his study were "Social Role and Personal Security in Polygamy," American Journal of Sociology 5 (January 1940): 538-549 and "The Social Role of the Mormon Polygamous Male," American Sociological Review 8 (June 1943): 279-287. Hulett's dissertation advisor, Kimball Young wrote an impressionistic popular treatment of polygamy based on Hulett's work and some additional research, entitled Isn't One Wife Enough? in 1954. Young's notes and other materials collected by Hulett
remainder of this chapter, the accounts of these scholars and impressionistic information from diary and journal accounts will be evaluated with special reference to one classic early polygamous relationship which illustrates many characteristic features of the early practice of this new form of marriage.

The case in question is that of Jane Snyder Richards, first wife of Franklin D. Richards, a Mormon apostle who had a distinguished career both as head of the English Mission and in a wide range of Church assignments in the Great Basin as well. In 1880 Mrs. Richards spoke at length of her experiences as a plural wife in an interview with the non-Mormon Mrs. Hubert Howe Bancroft, who was then helping her husband to collect data on which to base his monumental history of Utah. Evidently the meeting between the Bancrofts and the Richardses was arranged because the travels of the Richardses made it convenient and because the Mormon Church felt that the couple would serve as worthy representatives of the best of the Mormon system. The interview with Mrs. Richards, appropriately titled "The Inner Facts of Social Life in Utah," sensitively portrays experiences which span the early development of plural marriage, and suggests the complex adjustments necessary to make polygamy work in even an unusually good relationship. Observing Mr. and Mrs. Richards, Mrs. Bancroft wrote:

and other interviewers are held in the Huntington Library, San Marino, California, and the Garrett Theological School Library in Evanston, Illinois. After years of assiduous collecting data on all aspects of polygamy, Stanley Snow Ivins wrote an article: "Notes on Mormon Polygamy" which remains possibly the best overview treatment of the subject. D. Michael Quinn's prosopographical study of "The Mormon Hierarchy" between 1832 and 1932 provides an invaluable source on family relationships among the leading families of the Mormon Church. Vicky Burgess-Olson, "Family Structure and Dynamics in Early Utah Mormon Families--1847-1885" (Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1975), uses survey research techniques to analyze historical documents on four types of early Mormon families: (1) monogamous families, (2) polygamous families in which the wife concerned was the first wife, (3) polygamous families in which the wife concerned was the middle wife, and (4) polygamous families in which the wife concerned was the last and youngest wife. A forthcoming doctoral study by James L. Kimball, Jr., analyzes the demographic characteristics of early Mormon Nauvoo,
He seems remarkably considerate and kind and speaks of her with gratitude and pride, and that he wanted her to enjoy this little visit to California for she has suffered so much affliction and so many hardships. . . . his attentions and kind consideration for her are very marked. She is certainly very devoted to him, and I am imagining this trip and the one they have just returned from East, as a sort of honey-moon in middle life.1

Before abstracting out some of the characteristic aspects of polygamy illustrated by the Richards case, their own relationship and experiences may be briefly sketched, based on the interview and on other sources. Jane Snyder was born on January 31, 1823, in Pamelia, Jefferson County, New York, one of the youngest of eleven children of a prosperous farmer and stock raiser. Her father had not belonged to any Church before joining the Mormons, while her mother had been a devout Methodist. Jane showed her strength of will when, at age seventeen in La Porte, Illinois, she decided to join the Mormon Church. Even though it was the middle of winter, she insisted in undergoing a proper immersion out of doors in a stream.

Franklin D. Richards was born in Richmond, Berkshire County, Massachusetts, on April 2, 1821. The fourth of nine children, he grew up accustomed to hard manual labor on his father's farm, but in his spare time he showed an avid interest in reading and intellectual pursuits. At age ten, Franklin left home to find employment, and for an additional eleven years until his marriage to Jane Synder in 1842, he traveled from place to place with no fixed abode. After joining the Mormon Church in 1838, Franklin rose rapidly in the hierarchy as he demonstrated his remarkable organizational and proselytizing skills.

1Interview of Mrs. Hubert Howe Bancroft with Mrs. F. D. Richards, "The Inner Facts of Social Life in Utah," p. 11. Bancroft Library Collection. Also see "Reminiscences of Mrs. F. D. Richards" and "Narrative of Franklin Dewey Richards" in the Bancroft Collection. For a bibliographic sketch and family data on Franklin D. Richards, see Andrew Jenson, comp., Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson History Co., 1901), 2: 115-121, and Quinn, "The Mormon Hierarchy," p. 271. Also see Franklin L. West, Life of Franklin D. Richards, President of the Council of the Twelve Apostles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1924). Hubert Howe Bancroft's study appeared as History of Utah, 1540-1886 (San Francisco: History Company, 1889).
Jane Snyder and Franklin Richards met through their mutual involvement in the Mormon Church. Robert Snyder, Jane's father, was one of Franklin Richards's traveling missionary companions. When Franklin became seriously ill on one occasion, Jane nursed him back to health in the Snyder family home in La Porte. Thereafter, he became a frequent visitor to La Porte, eventually marrying Jane in December 1842. Their first child was born on November 1843, and in the spring of the following year Franklin was called on a mission to England. They both felt the separation keenly.

As an increasingly prominent member of the Mormon Church, Franklin soon learned of the new belief in polygamous marriage as a necessity for the highest exaltation in the afterlife. About eight months after their marriage, he approached Jane about the possibility of taking another wife. She felt extremely upset at this suggestion, and probably her opposition may have been partly responsible for his waiting more than three years before finally taking seventeen year old Elizabeth McFate as a plural wife in January 1846, eight days after he and Jane had been sealed for "time and eternity" in the new temple.

Though Jane Richards had severe misgivings about polygamy, she found that she and Elizabeth could get along well together. Aware of the awkwardness of the situation, Elizabeth was deferential to Jane and tried hard to be especially considerate and kind. Jane lived in the lower half of the house, while Elizabeth was assigned to the upper story. They divided the labor between them. If Elizabeth did the cooking, for instance, Jane did the washing, and vice versa. To those who were aware of the practice of polygamy, Jane Richards spoke of Elizabeth as Mrs. Elizabeth Richards.

In May 1846, the Richardses reluctantly sold for a mere pittance the house that they had sacrificed so much to build. Fleeing the anti-Mormon mobs in Illinois, Jane and Elizabeth Richards began an incredibly difficult journey west. They were largely on their own resources, since Mr. Richards was called away on another mission to England at the time of their departure from Nauvoo. During the trip west, Jane Richards gave birth to a second child, who promptly died. She also lost her first daughter. Elizabeth Richards, whose health had never been robust, died
of "consumption" en route. During the trip Jane Richards was so sick at times that, in her own words, "I only lived because I could not die." Seeing her pitiable state at Winter Quarters, Brigham Young expressed special concern for her, saying that if he had known her situation, he would not have required her husband to go on a mission at that time.

After arriving in Salt Lake, conditions improved somewhat, but life was still exceptionally difficult for Mrs. Richards. In 1849, after her husband Franklin had been back only a short time, he was appointed one of the Twelve Apostles, and shortly thereafter he was called to undertake yet another mission to England. There he was playing an increasingly important role in originating and developing the remarkable Mormon emigration system. Before he left, he was married to Sarah Snyder, a sister of his wife Jane. Sarah had been deserted by her first husband while she was coming west, and she was having considerable difficulty managing alone with five children. Apparently this was the major reason that Franklin Richards took her as a wife. Also in 1849, Franklin took Charlotte Fox as a plural wife.

The succeeding fifteen years were marked by repeated missionary and Church appointments, and by the resulting long absences from home. Following a highly successful term as president of the English mission from 1850 to 1852, during which time 16,000 people joined the Mormon Church, Franklin Richards returned to the Great Basin, taking three additional wives, Susan S. Peirson in 1853, Laura A. Snyder in 1854, and Josephine de la Harpe in 1857. After Willard Richards died in 1854, Franklin was counseled by Brigham Young—following the Mormon variant on the Mosaic practice of the levirate—to marry some of his uncle's widows. As a result four women, Nancy Longstroth, Mary Thompson, Susannah Bayliss, and Rodah H. Foss were sealed to him by Brigham Young in March 1857.

Living conditions for the various wives differed greatly during the course of their marriages to Franklin Richards. The early years were the hardest. When Franklin was called to go to England in October 1849, for instance, Jane Richards was left temporarily in a one-room, floorless, and almost roofless house. As soon as possible, she and the other wives who married Franklin took steps to improve their condition. To a considerable extent they were on their own resources, at least until
1869 when Franklin finally came back permanently to live in the Great Basin region after the last of his four major missionary trips to England. Jane Richards eventually established a house in Ogden, while the other wives lived in different cities in Utah. In Utah, Franklin Richards continued to manifest his enormous reserves of energy and commitment, serving variously as a judge, as Church Historian, and as president of the Twelve Apostles. Though his work still called him away much of the time, many of the greatest pressures from the early period were gone after he had finally completed his missionary activities abroad.

Underlying the entire interview between Mrs. Bancroft and Mrs. Richards was an awareness of the intense personal commitment and the difficult personal renunciations involved in the practice of polygamy, especially for women, and most especially, for the first wife. Romantic love was undercut for both men and women by the new arrangements. Mrs. Richards spoke of her initial "repugnance" when she first learned of polygamy in Nauvoo; how "crushed" she felt when her husband first approached her about the possibility of taking another wife; and of her unhappiness when he married three new wives in Utah after he had returned from an extended mission to England. Like many other Mormon women, Mrs. Richards was only able to accept polygamy because she convinced herself that it was essential to her salvation and to that of her husband. She found that in practice polygamy "was not such a trial as she had feared," and that she and the other wives were able to cooperate effectively. On several occasions during the interview, Mrs. Richards felt it necessary to reassure herself that her husband was motivated by a sense of religious duty and not by any lustful desires. Mrs. Bancroft concluded her record of the interview by observing that on the whole it seemed to her that Mormon women considered polygamy

... as a religious duty and schooled themselves to bear its discomforts as a sort of religious penance, and that it was a matter of pride to make everybody believe they lived happily and to persuade themselves and others that it was not a trial; and that a long life of such discipline makes the trial lighter.¹

¹"Social Life in Utah," p. 18. This attitude runs throughout many accounts written by Mormon women. For instance, Helen Mar Kimball Whitney in Why We Practice Plural Marriage, pp. 23, 24, wrote:
That this religious motivation was the key stated reason that most Mormon men and women entered into polygamy is supported by diary and journal accounts; the interviews of James E. Hulett, Jr., with individuals from polygamous families; and the recent quantitative studies of Vicky Burgess-Olson. Burgess-Olson's carefully controlled quantitative study of early Mormon polygamous families showed that, except for the last-and-youngest plural wives who gave first place to economic concerns and desire for status, men, first wives, and middle wives all gave dedication to religious principle as the primary reason that they entered into the practice of plural marriage. In a moving defense of plural marriage, Helen Mar Kimball Whitney, a plural wife of Joseph Smith's and later of Orson F. Whitney, stressed the primary importance of religious renunciation in the service of higher goals as the motivation for entering into polygamy. And the perceptive Mormon mother Annie Clark Tanner, who grew up in a polygamous household and became a plural wife herself, declared:

I am sure that women would never have accepted polygamy had it not been for their religion. No woman ever consented to its practice without great sacrifice on her part. There is something so sacred about the relationship of husband and wife that a third party in the family is sure to disturb the confidence and security that formerly existed.

The principle of Celestial Marriage was considered the capstone of the Mormon religion. Only by practicing it would the highest exaltation in the Celestial Kingdom of God be obtained. According to the founders of the Mormon Church, the great purpose of this life is to prepare for the Celestial Kingdom in the world to come. The

"I did not try to conceal the fact of its having been a trial, but confessed that it had been one of the severest of my life; but that it had also proven one of the greatest of blessings. I could truly say it had done the most towards making me a Saint and a free woman, in every sense of the word; and I knew many others who could say the same, and to whom it had proven one of the greatest boons—a 'blessing in disguise.'"

1 Burgess-Olson, "Early Utah Mormon Families," pp. 69-82, 131.

2 This sense pervades her account of Why We Practice Plural Marriage.
tremendous sacrifices of the Mormon people can be understood only if one keeps in mind this basic otherworld philosophy. ¹

If the practice of polygamy required great emotional renunciations from wives, it also demanded significant renunciations from husbands who took on the responsibility of marrying plural wives. This seeming paradox that the successful practice of polygamy demanded almost as many renunciations from men as from their wives can be understood if one looks at the experience of Franklin D. Richards. Like other Mormon polygamists studied by Quinn and Burgess-Olson, he was of a higher Church and economic status than the average membership. As a result, he was frequently away from home, either overseas or in difficult assignments in the Great Basin region. Mrs. Richards noted that during their first fifteen years of married life, her husband was away on missions for ten years. During those extended periods of separation, both Mr. and Mrs. Richards were engaged in demanding activities in support of various aspects of the building up of the Mormon kingdom, she largely on the home front and he in the mission field.

Like other leading polygamists, Mr. Richards found that when he returned home he was faced with complex problems of family management that made significant expression of romantic love rather difficult. He had to try to avoid favoritism toward his plural wives in order to maintain family harmony, and he had to try to make an equitable division of his time, money and affections during those interludes when he wasn't away on Church business. Mrs. Richards remembered how even her husband's most sincere efforts to treat them equally led to frustration and heart-ache. Even with the best of will, individuals who had been socialized to monogamous norms found the necessary transition to new patterns of relationships in polygamy difficult.

Indicative of the problems of maintaining even-handedness in polygamous families are the diary and journal accounts of Mormon men. These almost never mention their emotional reactions to their wives, but

usually simply give matter-of-fact information such as "Went to town with Susan." While it is true that men often are less likely than women to include personal emotional reactions in diaries and journals, the extreme avoidance of inclusion of such evidence in Mormon men's accounts is striking.\(^1\) Such omissions of personal reactions probably were not accidental. Diaries and journals might later be read by different wives and children, so it would not do to show any trace of favoritism.\(^2\)

Probably the extreme bitterness of some of the inheritance fights over the estates of polygamists and the embarrassment of Mormons about such fights are in part the result of previously suppressed hostilities or frustrations breaking out into the open.\(^3\)

A major result of these sorts of renunciations by both men and women who "lived the Principle" was the sublimation of sexual impulses into the arduous group enterprise of settling Utah and building up Zion in the wilderness. Men and women were repeatedly enjoined to love their spouses only insofar as their spouses loved the Lord and worked to establish his Kingdom on earth.\(^4\) Although Young spent time with his...

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\(^1\)After reading and surveying hundreds of diaries of Mormon men and women, Davis Bitton indicates that only a handful of the diaries and journals of Mormon men practicing polygamy discuss their emotional reactions to their plural wives.

\(^2\)Mormon folklore would be an interesting source for understanding the problem of achieving equal treatment of wives in polygamy. One humorous dialect story, for instance, tells of a Scandinavian immigrant who took the requisite two wives who were considered necessary to achieve his highest exaltation and who became proverbial for his equal treatment of the two wives in all respects. He even arranged that he would be buried between the two wives. On his death bed this even-handed polygamist finally broke down and made one last request that when he was buried: "Just tilt me a little toward Tilly." Record of J. Golden Kimball Stories and Brother Peterson Yarns. Folk Legacy Record FTA-25, Sharon, Connecticut. For a discussion of Mormon folklore that includes stories about polygamy, see Austin and Alta Fife, Saints of Sage and Saddle: Folklore Among the Mormons (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1956).

\(^3\)Hulett, "The Mormon Polygamous Family," includes a long section analyzing such conflicts, pp. 118-164, and includes one complex case in an appendix, pp. 426-433.

\(^4\)Such references were made in the supplement to vol. 15 of the Millennial Star and were repeatedly made in the early issues of the Journal of Discourses.
various plural wives, he slept in a separate room by himself, and once observed: "There are probably but few men in the world who care about the private society of women less than I do."\(^1\) In essence, then, early polygamy can be seen as a "puritanical" means of de-sexualizing the husband-wife relationship so that relations between the sexes became first and foremost a goal-directed activity. This is not to suggest that considerable affection was not expressed between husbands and wives or that Mormon men and women did not enjoy sexual relations, but procreation rather than pleasure per se nevertheless remained the primary goal. It could be argued that in their practice of polygamy, the Mormons "merely carried conventional morality to an extreme."\(^2\)

Though such relationships might seem less-than-appealing in retrospect, such arrangements can be viewed in context as part of the necessary subordination of individual pleasure in favor of long-term group goals which underlay Mormon successes in the rapid settlement and development of the Intermountain West. As Leonard Arrington has observed, initially: "Only a high degree of religious devotion and discipline, superb organization and planning, made survival possible."\(^3\) Mormon men, and particularly the leading Mormon men who were most often polygamists, had to be willing to move flexibly on Church assignments as the demands of the group required. By partially breaking down exclusive bonds between a husband and a wife and by undercutting overly intense direct emotional involvements in family affairs in favor of Church business, polygamy may well have contributed significantly to the long-range demands of centralized planning and to the rapid establishment of religious and communal order.\(^4\)

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\(^1\) JD, 5: 99.

\(^2\) Werner, Brigham Young, pp. 300-301. For a provocative discussion of the complexity of Mormon sexual attitudes, attitudes which paradoxically combined an intense concern for sexual self-control with an ultimately positive attitude toward sexual relations, see Klaus Hansen, "Mormon Sexuality and Sex Roles in the Context of Nineteenth Century American Society: Some Preliminary Observations" (unpublished paper to appear in Dialogue--read through the courtesy of the author).

\(^3\) Arrington, Great Basin Kingdom, p. 38.

\(^4\) It would be interesting to compare the voluntarily accepted strains on family life that appear to have been a necessary part of the early Mormon
Given the renunciations inherent in the practice of polygamy, it is not surprising that this form of marriage appears never to have been particularly popular among either men or women in the Mormon areas of settlement in the Great Basin region. Based on a sample of more than 6,000 prominent Mormon families, Stanley Ivins estimated that at most only 15 to 20 per cent were polygamous. Using a sample of 1,784 polygamous men, Ivins found that a large majority, 66.3 per cent, married only the one extra wife considered necessary for the highest exaltation in the celestial kingdom. Another 21.2 per cent married three wives, and 6.7 per cent went so far as to take four wives. The remaining group of less than 6 per cent married five or more women. Another factor which may have contributed to the relatively limited incidence of polygamy was the limited number of available women. At no time in Utah history did the total number of women outnumber the men. Thus, neither the institution nor the survival of polygamy can be adequately explained as a means simply of finding husbands for surplus women. Finally, according to

settlement of the Great Basin with the many involuntary pressures on the family that were generated by the relatively unplanned developments and dislocations of the early "industrial revolution."


3 United States census figures for Utah always show a preponderance of men over women. Whether this necessarily would mean that there were a preponderance of eligible men over eligible women is unclear and deserves further investigation. It was not acceptable for a Mormon woman to marry a non-Mormon man in Utah, for instance. Nevertheless, a numerical excess of women over men can not be said to be a cause of polygamy. In fact, there are accounts suggesting that due to lack of women young men may have occasionally found some problems securing wives, though this was never a major problem. The fact that the Utah sex ratio was more nearly balanced than in other frontier states meant that polygamy was a possible option. Had Utah had an extreme excess of men over women, it is hard to imagine polygamy successfully being established. See Arthur L. Beeley, "Utah's Population: Some Significant Characteristics and Trends," Proceedings of the Utah Academy of Sciences 9 (1932): 65-66. William Mulder, Homeward to Zion: The Mormon Migrations from Scandanavia (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957), indicates that slightly more Scandanavian men
Ivins's figures, the rate of polygamous marriages was always in overall decline after the early 1856-1857 peak. Sporadic increases in the rate of plural marrying occurred during times of internal or external crisis when polygamy served as a rallying point through which Mormons could prove their loyalty to the Church, but continued exhortation and group pressure appears to have been necessary to sustain the practice.1

than women migrated to Utah, but that the proportion was almost equal. In contrast, Scandanavian migration to other parts of the United States during the period showed a significant preponderance of men. Evidently Mormon polygamy made possible the migration of more than the usual number of single women. Frequently these women were from the poorest and most exploited servant class which found any marriage a step upward. The possible appeal of polygamy to such servant women from England, Germany, and Scandanavia is a very interesting question.

1Ivins, "Notes on Mormon Polygamy," pp. 231-232. This author is informed that unpublished research by S. George Ellsworth on the demography of early Cache County, Utah, shows that relatively high concentrations of polygamous families occurred in certain parts of the county, while other areas were almost exclusively monogamous. If this variation in the concentration of monogamists and polygamists also occurred elsewhere in the Great Basin, it could suggest that polygamists felt more comfortable in areas where there were significant numbers of polygamists and that in other areas of Mormon settlement there may have been undercurrents of opposition to the practice.

There are several organized groups of present-day Mormon "fundamentalists," i.e., Mormons practicing polygamy despite the refusal of the main body of the Latter-day Saints to sanction such practice. It is difficult to determine the numbers of individuals involved in such groups, but the fundamentalists put out a considerable and often highly ephemeral printed literature. For an entrée into such literature and arguments, see Dennis R. Short, Questions on Plural Marriage, With a Selected Bibliography and 1600 References (Salt Lake City: Dennis R. Short, 1975); [Gilbert A. Fulton, Jr.], The Most Holy Principle, 4 vols. (Murray, Utah: Gems Publishing Co., 1970-1975); and the numerous writings and publications of Ogden Kraut. The reaction of Gilbert A. Fulton, Jr.'s first wife, who left him after he became a polygamist, is found in Melissa Merrill (pseud.), Polygamist's Wife (Salt Lake City: Olympus Publishing Co., 1975). The most important of the periodicals issued by the various fundamentalist groups was Truth, a magazine which appeared in twenty-one volumes between June 1935 and May 1956. For a critique of fundamentalist claims from the perspective of the main body of the Mormons, see Dean C. Jesse, "A Comparative Study and Evaluation of Latter-day Saint and 'Fundamentalist' Views Pertaining to the Practice of Plural Marriage" (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1959). Although several other studies of such groups have been put out in refutation of their claims to authority, a social analysis of the persistence of such groups and of their relation to the emotional and intellectual upheavals caused when
The practice of polygamy clearly required difficult emotional renunciations from both men and women and tended to undercut, though not to eliminate, emotional attachments based on romantic love. Yet the new marriage arrangement also contained positive features which helped to give it staying power. It would be hard to imagine that any social practices without certain appealing features for both men and women could be maintained for any length of time. A good polygamous relationship clearly was better than a bad monogamous one, and since individuals who entered into polygamy tended to be an elite of the most religiously and economically successful, the odds in favor of good polygamous relationships were by no means slight. Kimball Young's rather impressionistic study of 110 plural marriages led him to conclude that 53 per cent were highly successful or reasonably successful, 25 per cent appeared moderately successful, and 23 per cent experienced considerable to severe conflict.1 Previous sections have suggested how polygamy affected men and some of the positive features that it offered them. This section, therefore, will focus on how polygamy affected women--some of the possible compensatory advantages which it offered them, the means by which they adjusted to its demands, and some of the features of the arrangements which helped women to develop self-reliance and independence.

The status advantages of being a plural wife have seldom been seriously considered. Non-Mormon critics of polygamy have almost invariably assumed that since they would have felt degraded under plural marriage, plural wives must also have felt degraded. There is very little printed or manuscript evidence from internal Mormon sources which would support such a view. Life may have held special difficulties for plural wives, but at least until the 1880s, being a polygamous wife brought higher

the main body of the Mormons gave up polygamy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries remains to be written.

1Young, Isn't One Wife Enough? pp. 56-57. Young's criteria for judging the degree of success of polygamous marriages are somewhat unclear. It would appear that his sample may be biased by the inadvertent exclusion of many cases of plural marriages which resulted in divorce.
status through association with the most influential men and through
the sense of serving as a religious and social model for others. Although
first wives such as Mrs. Richards who married under monogamous expecta-
tions often found difficulties in adjustment, many other plural wives
had other reactions. In some cases first wives actively encouraged a
reluctant husband to take a plural wife so that they both could reach
the highest state of exaltation in the afterlife, or for other more
pragmatic economic or personal considerations. As part of the attempt
to create a cohesive Mormon community, marriages, both plural and other,
were sometimes arranged between leading Mormon families. Viewed as
an honorable and desirable practice, plural marriage could lead to a
sense of pride and importance for women.

The most important elevation of woman's status under the
patriarchal Mormon marriage system, and polygamy in particular, came
through the cosmic importance attached to home and family life. Children
were highly valued in Utah. Like outside converts, they provided an
essential work force to help in settling the new land and building up
an essentially agrarian economy in Utah. Mrs. Whitney emphasized the
extreme importance that Mormons placed on childbearing and childrearing:

Our children are considered stars in a mother's crown, and the more
there are, if righteous, the more glory they will add to her and
their father's eternal kingdom, for their parents on earth, if they
continue righteous will eventually become as Gods to reign in glory.
Nothing but this, and a desire to please our Father in heaven,
could tempt the majority of Mormon men or women either, to take upon
themselves the burdens and responsibilities of plural marriage.2

1Quinn, "The Mormon Hierarchy," discusses the many ways in which
kinship relationships were used to strengthen the cohesion of the group,
creating a sort of Mormon "dynasticism." For a discussion of one
specific example suggesting an "arranged marriage," see ibid., pp. 157-169.

2Whitney, Why We Practice Plural Marriage, p. 53. Of course
children were stars in the crown of the monogamous mother as well. Further-
more, there is evidence that polygamous married women had a smaller total
number of children per wife on the average. See Ivins, "Notes on Mormon
Burgess-Olson, "Early Utah Mormon Families," pp. 100-104, 133-134, found
that the status of plural wives was not necessarily related to the number
of their children. It would seem that polygamy was viewed as desirable
in a patriarchal system not because it allowed the largest number of
As Susa Young Gates suggested, the woman chooses to "magnify her sphere" as the man does his.\(^1\) In terms strikingly similar to those used by many of their contemporaries, Mormons stressed the positive and vital social role that women could play in the home and the family—and, by extension, in the larger community, which, in the Mormon case, was generally coterminous with the family. "Polygamy seemed to introduce no outstanding change in how Mormon women viewed themselves in their home role; the family was often treated in the same sentimental tones used by those who lauded the monogamous family."\(^2\)

The Mormon emphasis on the mother-child relationship served compensatory emotional functions for women whose husbands were often absent. Mrs. Richards, like many other plural wives, indicated that her primary emotional involvement was with her children, rather than her husband. Significantly, too, children of plural wives generally spoke of their descent through the particular wife rather than through the father, and had a strong tendency to idealize their mothers. Mrs. S. A. Cooks, who became a Mormon despite her aversion to polygamy, described how Heber C. Kimball's wife Vilate had advised an unhappy plural wife that "her comfort must be wholly in her children; that she must lay aside wholly all interest or thought in what her husband was doing while he was away from her" and simply be as "pleased to see him when he came in as she was pleased to see any friend." In short, the woman was advised to maintain an emotional distance from her husband in order to avoid psychic hurt. Mrs. Cooks concluded: "Mrs. Kimball interested herself very much in the welfare of other's wives and their children to see that there was plenty of homespun clothing etc for all; and set a noble example to others situated as she was."\(^3\) Similar accounts appeared both in

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\(^2\) Casterline, "Images of the Mormon Woman," pp. 85-86.

\(^3\) Mrs. S. A. Cooks, "Theatrical and Social Affairs in Utah" (Salt Lake City, 1884), pp. 5-6. Original MS in Bancroft Collection.
Mormon sources and in accounts of critical former Mormons such as Mrs. T. B. H. Stenhouse.  

The strong stress on ties of sisterhood between plural wives also served a compensatory emotional function when the husband was absent. Important informal female support networks and cooperation among women developed, especially during crisis periods such as those associated with childbirth, economic hardship, and bereavement. Mormon "sister-wives" often literally were blood sisters. Of Burgess-Olson's sample, for instance, 31.2 per cent of the polygamous marriages included at least one pair of sisters. Although such sororal polygamy was a departure from Old Testament standards and led to erroneous allegations that the Mormons practiced "incest," such arrangements made much practical sense. If two sisters were married in polygamy, they could more easily adjust to each other than total strangers could. Formal organizational ties between women, which will be discussed below, were also developed through the wide-ranging religious, social, and political activities of the independent-minded Relief Society.

Even without polygamy, the emphasis on the importance of home and family has continued to give women a place of special importance in Mormonism. The Mormon religion, as we have seen earlier, has always been fundamentally about the family to an extent rare in other religions. As Mrs. Gates declared:

The family is the divine as well as the earthly unit of group life. Without the close-knit family cohesion there is no stimulus for human struggle and social evolution. In ever widening divine circles we shall reach out some day until we can grasp the full meaning of the Saviour's glorious revelation concerning the infinitude of "Our Father in Heaven."  

1Mrs. T. B. H. Stenhouse, A Lady's Life Among the Mormons. A Record of Personal Experience as One of the Wives of a Mormon Elder During a Period of More than Twenty Years, 2d ed. (New York: American News Co., 1872), pp. 147-148.


3Gates and Widtsoe, Brigham Young, p. 294.
The Mormon's two duties were to his family, and to his Church which was, in effect, simply an extension of his family. So deeply were family values and kinship ties felt that the Mormons could not imagine them ending even at death; God Himself must have created the universe according to a family model. Given such an outlook, the position assigned to women was in no sense a mean one.

The popular semi-novelistic American stereotype of the plural wife in the Mormon "harem" had almost no basis in fact. Casterline has noted the many positive features for women created by the cohesive Mormon village society:

As in New England colonial families, the Mormon wife seemed to move with relative ease and frequency between home, neighborhood, and church; the Mormon village plan of settlement allowed a variety of social contacts outside the immediate family. Wives were not cloistered or excluded from the larger society as in a harem, although husbands did seem to have a possessive attitude on the issue of their womenfolk associating with Gentiles.¹

In fact, then, the Mormon wife may have had a greater degree of freedom and independence than her typical non-Mormon counterpart of the period.

Women's independence was stimulated in a variety of ways by the social conditions of frontier Utah and by the practice of polygamy in particular. With husbands frequently away on Church missions, wives and their children tended to be thrown back on their own resources. Mrs. Richards said that her husband

... was away so much she learned to live comfortably without him, as she would tell him to tease him sometimes; and even now he is away two thirds of the time as she is the only wife in Ogden, so that she often forgets when he is home, and has even sat down at meals forgetting to call him. She says she always feels very badly about it when it happens, but that he was more necessary to her in her early life.

Mrs. Bancroft concluded: "And yet she is a very devoted wife, and he is remarkably attentive to her. To see them together I should never imagine either had a thought but the other shared."²

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¹Casterline, "Images of the Mormon Woman," p. 71.
Other accounts also stressed this same tendency of polygamy practice to encourage women's independence. After stating that "Plural marriage destroys the oneness of course" and that it "is a great trial of feelings," Mrs. Horne noted that the practice got her away from being "so bound and so united to her husband that she could do nothing without him." She became "freer and can do herself individually things she never could have attempted before; and work out her individual character as separate from her husband."¹ Evidently some women were grateful for the possibilities polygamy offered of freedom from male sexual demands in certain cases; as Mary J. Tanner noted: "It is a physical blessing to weakly women."² And Martha Hughes Cannon, who was the first woman state senator in the United States and the fourth wife of a polygamist argued that a plural wife was in a better position than a single girl: "If her husband has four wives, she has three weeks of freedom every single month."³

While this might be the kind of "freedom" that some wives would wish to be freed from, it does seem that polygamy and the general exigencies of the development of the Great Basin region did force women into new roles and helped to break down certain sex stereotypes, at least temporarily. In the absence of their husbands, women and their children ran farms and businesses; some early census reports even went so far as to indicate plural wives as "heads of households."⁴ Burgess-

¹Mrs. Joseph Horne, "Migration and Settlement of the Latter Day Saints" (Salt Lake City, 1884), pp. 34-35. Original MS in Bancroft Collection.

²Letter of Mrs. Mary J. Tanner, Provo City, Utah, 1880, in Bancroft Collection, pp. 5-6. See Casterline, "Images of the Mormon Woman," p. 103, for a discussion of the Mormon women's argument that polygamy freed from from masculine demands and allowed for a healthy continence. It also made possible continence during gestation as recommended by nineteenth-century medical theory, and therefore was seen as making for healthier, better-spaced babies. The larger context of these concerns are discussed in Hansen, "Mormon Sexuality and Sex Roles."


⁴Ivins, Notebook, 4: 276, indicates that the 1851 census indicated some plural wives as heads of households.
Olson's sample showed that in polygamous marriages, husbands and wives exercised approximately equal responsibilities in financial management, while in her monogamous sample, men exercised greater control. By the late nineteenth century, a relatively large class of professional women had developed in Utah. Women dominated the medical profession, for instance, and a sizable number worked as teachers and writers.

Brigham Young and early Church leaders recognized the necessity of making use of female talent in establishing and maintaining the group in the hostile, arid environment of the Great Basin. Mormon leaders encouraged education for women from the very early years, as indicated by the establishment of the University of Deseret as a coeducational institution in 1850. Women voted earlier in Utah than in any other state or territory in the United States, including Wyoming. And, somewhat ironically in view of the non-Mormon attacks on the degradation which polygamy supposedly caused women, the efforts of Mormon women in the 1870s and 1880s to organize independently to support polygamy against external attacks served as a significant means of increasing their political awareness and involvement.

The Relief Society served as the major arm of women's expression in the Church. Originally founded in 1842 in Nauvoo, the Relief Society as we have seen was organized by the women of the Church "under the Priesthood after a pattern of the Priesthood," to support a variety of activities.

1Burgess-Olson, "Early Utah Mormon Families," p. 135.


3For accounts of the vital role that women played in the development of early Utah, see Susa Young Gates and Leah D. Widtsoe, Women of the Mormon Church (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1926); and Leonard J. Arrington, "Blessed Damozels: Women in Mormon History," Dialogue 6 (Summer 1971): 22-31. Casterline, "Images of the Mormon Woman," pp. 94-100, discusses the development of political awareness and involvement among Mormon women as they organized independently in support of polygamy.

4General Board of the Relief Society, A Centenary of Relief Society, 1842-1942 (Salt Lake City: General Board of Relief Society, 1942), p. 14.
activities including the building of the temple, charitable work, and cultural betterment. During the troubled period which followed Joseph Smith's death, the Relief Society became largely inactive, but with the reestablishment of the Society in 1855 under the leadership of Eliza R. Snow, it went on to play an important role in Utah social and cultural life, including many economically-oriented pursuits.

One of the most impressive achievements of the Women of Utah in the late-nineteenth century was the publication of the Woman's Exponent. Although it was not officially sponsored or financed by the Church, this largely woman-managed, supported, and produced newspaper served as the major voice for Mormon women's concerns during its publication between 1872 and 1910. The Exponent was the second periodical expressly for women to appear in the trans-Mississippi West. A respectable and well-produced periodical by any standards, the Exponent spoke highly for the literacy and intelligence of its women contributors and designers. The wide-ranging historical and literary concerns of this publication were by no means limited to sectarian matters.

As suggested by its masthead slogan: "The Rights of the Women of Zion, the Rights of the Women of All Nations," the Woman's Exponent provided an important forum for discussion of many problems of "woman's sphere." Even as it expressed a strong feminist awareness, however, the Exponent did not show any sense that Mormon women were specially oppressed because of polygamy. Rather, the Exponent's primary concerns were the universally inequitable position of women in politics, education, and the professions. The Exponent did not even preach marriage as an absolute imperative for women. Overall, the Woman's Exponent portrayed Mormon women as individuals of character, intelligence, and high aspirations, and served an important identity-building function and as a means of reinforcing pride and unity among the women of the Church.

As Gail Casterline summarized:

The reinstitution of the ancient custom of polygamy may have in its own subtle ways served as a liberating force for women. This may

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1This brief discussion of the Woman's Exponent utilizes material from the excellent presentation in Casterline, "Images of the Mormon Woman," pp. 83-94.
have occurred by default, with restless or dissatisfied plural wives looking for places to direct their energies, or it may have occurred through the necessity of a wife's supporting her family. Some women may have welcomed polygamy as a great boon as it decreased some of the demands and divided the duties of the wife role, allowing them more time to develop personal talents. By these quirks in its machinery, plural marriage did in some cases provide a working method for women to achieve independence from men.¹

IV

Although Mormon plural marriage may have had certain attractive or mitigating features for both men and women, polygamy was nevertheless in many respects a more demanding way to organize marriage than monogamy. Many factors mitigated against successful polygamous marriages. As we have seen, the initial attempt to introduce new marriage beliefs and practices created severe internal tensions for many individuals. Furthermore, even in practice, normal problems in marriage such as finance, personality adjustment, sexual relationships, childrearing, and discipline were magnified in plural marriages. Long periods of separation when leading men—who were most often polygamists—were off on missions inevitably placed strains on relationships, as did the economic pressures of early life in the region. And in cases where individuals entered into plural marriages out of a sense of religious fervor or duty rather than because of personal inclination, as appears to have been the case during the Reformation of 1856-1857 or during other times of federal opposition or persecution, dissatisfactions could be expected possibly to develop. Even under the best of circumstances, men with several wives must have had difficulties finding time enough to develop an optimal relationship with each of their wives.²

How were the inevitable tensions associated with the practice of plural marriage to be handled? Hulett and Burgess-Olson indicate that great variation in the handling of conflict situations existed in

¹Ibid., pp. 80-81.

²Eugene Campbell's unpublished paper "Mormon Polygamy--A Loose Marriage System?: Preliminary Impressions" raises some important questions which deserve further investigation. Called to this author's attention courtesy of David J. Whittaker.
nineteenth-century Utah for both monogamous and polygamous relationships. However, tend to be in general agreement that however domestic problems were to be dealt with, they should be dealt within the family as much as possible. As Mrs. Richards noted: "It is making confidants of other women in their domestic disturbances that has brought about most of the trouble in Polygamy, and the less people gossip, the better off they are." In the practice of polygamy, as in other aspects of social life in Utah, great stress was placed on unity and consensus and on the avoidance of public expressions of hostility. This emphasis may well help to account for the impressive degree of external order and social harmony described by many of the more openminded visitors to Utah in the nineteenth century.

Despite the best of good will, some cases must have developed in which marital problems could not adequately be handled within the family circle. When Church assistance and counsel as well as all other efforts to salvage a relationship failed, the possibility of separation or divorce always remained. For instance, in her interview with Mrs. Bancroft, Mrs. Richards was quite frank in telling how she had once discussed the possibility of that option with her husband. She said that when her husband first talked with her in Nauvoo about the possibility of taking another wife, she told him that he should do what he felt he had to do and that "if she found they [she and the new wife] could not live without quarrelling she should leave him." This never became necessary. However, Mrs. Richards did observe that others had taken such steps: "If a marriage is unhappy, the parties can go to any of the council

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2 Mrs. F. D. Richards, "Reminiscences," p. 47.

3 May, "The Making of Saints," provides an analysis of the ways in which the Mormons handled conflict situations and developed communal solidarity. May compares the Mormon experience with the New England Puritan experience as suggested in recent studies of the New England town.

"Mrs. F. D. Richards, "Social Life in Utah," p. 1."
and present their difficulties and are readily granted a divorce."¹ Such action was deemed better than allowing a truly unsatisfactory relationship to continue.

How representative were Mrs. Richards's informal observations of Utah Mormon belief and practice in the period? How were problems of divorce handled in early Utah, what were the causes and frequency of divorce, and how was divorce related to the inevitable difficulties of establishing a new marriage and social system? Until recently, this topic has remained almost wholly untouched by scholarship. Here only a few preliminary observations will be made and some possible lines for future scholarly investigation will be suggested.

One starting point for understanding this situation might be Utah territorial divorce policy, although—as will be indicated below—this policy was not necessarily representative of Mormon Church belief or practice. The Utah divorce law of February 4, 1852 was one of the most liberal in the country. For instance, a divorce could be granted not only to a person who "is a resident of the Territory" but also to a person "who wishes to become one." Presumably this proviso allowed the Church flexibility in dealing rapidly with converts who had separated from an unbelieving spouse and who needed to be reintegrated as quickly as possible into the new Mormon society. In addition to the usual causes, a divorce could be granted to the plaintiff in cases in which the defendant was guilty of "absenting himself without reasonable cause for more than one year." If liberally applied, such a provision could be used to terminate unsatisfactory relationships with missionaries who were gone for extended periods of time. Finally, the territorial law contained an omnibus clause allowing divorce "when it shall be made to appear to the satisfaction of the court, that the parties cannot live in peace and union together, and that their welfare requires a separation."²

¹Mrs. F. D. Richards, "Reminiscences," p. 55.

²The Utah territorial divorce law is printed in Acts, Resolutions and Memorials, Passed at the Several Annual Sessions of the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of Utah (Great Salt Lake City: Joseph Cain, 1855), pp. 162-164.
The primary function of the Utah divorce law probably was to provide maximum flexibility for the Church in handling its own affairs. Since marriage and divorce, like all other aspects of social life in Utah, were handled primarily through Church courts and procedures, an understanding of actual Mormon belief and practice must be based primarily on Church records. As previously indicated, the official stand of the Mormon Church was strongly opposed to divorce. Marriage was viewed in the light of eternity as a vital part of life which embodied the finest aspects of human relationships. Numerous statements by Brigham Young and other early leaders inveighed against divorce, particularly in cases involving eternal sealings and in cases when requested by the man. Nevertheless, the official stand of Church leaders was a highly complex one, shaped by the difficult circumstances that they faced in settling the Great Basin and building up a new society. It is sometimes difficult to tell where rhetoric ends and practice begins; much further research will be necessary to recover the full picture of the Utah marriage and divorce policy of the Mormon Church.

Speaking at a Church conference meeting in the Tabernacle on October 8, 1861, Brigham Young made a statement suggesting the complexity

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1For examples of Brigham Young's strong official disapproval of divorce, see JD, 8: 202, JD, 17: 119, and Historian's Office Journal, 1858-1859 Book, p. 11 (December 15, 1858). In ibid., p. 15 (December 17, 1858), Brigham Young told a man who asked him for a divorce: "It is not right for the brethren to divorce their wives the way they do. I am determined that if men do not stop divorcing their wives, I will stop sealing. I am determined men shall not abuse the gifts of God & privileges of the Priest-hood the way they are doing." Citation called to this author's attention courtesy of D. Michael Quinn. On the other hand, note that Young was relatively flexible in granting divorces requested by the women. For instance on October 5, 1861, Young "... remarked he liked a woman to live with her husband as long as she could bear with him and if her life became too burdensome then leave and get a divorce." Brigham Young's Office Journal, 1858-1863, p. 300. Called to this author's attention courtesy of David J. Whittaker. For secondary discussions of Utah Mormon divorce policy and practice, see Larsen, "Mormon Social Structure," pp. 201-205, and Young, Isn't One Wife Enough? pp. 226-240.

2An example of Brigham Young's rhetorical statements on divorce, given during one of the most troubled periods of Utah history, is found in JD, 4: 55-56.
of the early Church's position on divorce. Because of the importance of this statement, the relevant portions are given here in full. Brigham Young

... then gave some instructions in relation to sealing. He said that there were many men & women who after having been sealed to each other for time & all Eternity. Came to him for a Bill of Divorce. & for the sum of 10 dollars he gave them a Bill. Because the Lord permitted it but it was of no use to them. they might Just as well tear off a Peice of their shirt tail or have a Peice of Blank Paper for a divorce. But on account of the hardness of their hearts, the Lord permitted it. as it was in the days of Moses. But there was a way in which a woman could leave a man lawfully. When a woman becomes alienated in her feelings & affections from her husband, it is then his duty to give her a Bill & set her free which would be fornication for the man to cohabit with his wife after she had thus become alienated from him. the children begotten of such a woman would be bastards in the true Scriptural term of the word Fornication. for the crime of adultery a woman (& also men) would be stoned to death and then come up in the morning of the Resurrection & claim all her rights and Priviledges in the marriage covenant. Also there was another way--in which a woman could leave a man--if the woman Prefered--another man higher in authority & he is willing to take her. & her husband gives her up--there is no Bill of divorce required in the case it is right in the sight of God. But if he ever after has any connexion with her. he is then guilty of committing a very great sin & will be Punished accordingly. If a Man is faithful & Should his wife leave him & be married to another without his consent there is no Power in heaven or on Earth that can Prevent him from claiming her in the Resurrection.

The intricacies of this remarkable statement can not be analyzed closely here, but two main points should be emphasized. First, as indicated in detail in a previous article by this author, this state-

ment of Brigham Young's contains virtually a précis of the unusual argument for divorce put forward in the Peace Maker, the extraordinary pamphlet defense of polygamy printed under Mormon auspices in Nauvoo in 1842. That pamphlet argued that the only legitimate "Biblical" grounds for divorce was "fornication," which was defined as the alienation of

1Recorded with all spelling, capitalization, and punctuation as in the original. James Beck, Notebooks, 1859-1865, I, in Church Archives. Beck's account is an accurate summary of the original speech given by Brigham Young and stenographically recorded by G. D. Watt, in Church Archives.

2"A Little-Known Defense of Polygamy."
the affections of the wife from her husband; on the other hand, a man who was dissatisfied with his wife could not legitimately divorce her—his option in such a case was to take additional wives. Early Utah practice appears to have been similar to that advocated by the Peace Maker. Women had the primary initiative in determining when to terminate a relationship, while the husband could not easily divorce his wife if she were opposed. There also was little problem for a divorced woman to remarry. In contrast to some other polygamous societies, where women may have little to say about such matters and husbands have the initiative in obtaining a divorce, in Utah women appear to have possessed a significantly higher and safer status.

This statement also suggests certain considerably more flexible attitudes toward divorce arrangements in early Utah than have previously been realized, including the possible existence of some social practices which have long since been forgotten. That divorce was relatively more frequent than was previously known is also suggested by the recent recovery of the records of more than 1,700 divorces granted during the Brigham Young period (1847–1877).¹ These records have not yet been thoroughly analyzed. Thus it is unclear how many of these divorces involved polygamous as opposed to monogamous marriages or the degree to which the situation in the Great Basin region differed from other frontier areas. Quite possibly the stress that the Mormon Church placed on formalizing marriage and other kinship relations may have left the erroneous impression that the divorce rate was higher than it actually was. D. Michael Quinn's listing of Mormon Church leaders and their wives between 1832 and 1932 also must be carefully analyzed. Although a simple analysis of his data shows that 72 Church leaders who practiced plural marriage had a total of 391 wives, with 54 divorces, 26 separations, and 1 annulment, it must be remembered that many of these cases were non-conjugal wives whose kinship ties were only symbolic.² Nevertheless,

¹Letter of David J. Whittaker to this author, dated August 31, 1975. Apparently this figure is based on the work of Eugene Campbell.

there is considerable evidence to support Eugene Campbell's conclusion that "a certain looseness"—or what could also be termed "flexibility"—may have existed in the early practice of polygamy. Evidently the Mormon ideal of eternal marriage relationships was not fully realized in practice.

To understand the significance of this data on divorce, it must be placed within the larger context of the development of plural marriage and other early Mormon social institutions. There is much evidence that plural marriage never became fully institutionalized during the relatively brief period when it was publicly practiced in Utah. Hulett, one of the earliest serious scholars to study polygamy, commented that he had "expected to find a variety of behavior but not so great a variety."1 No fully standardized patterns of handling the needs of polygamous families for things such as shelter, food, clothing, and amusement appeared to have developed, although there were tendencies toward such standardization. Hulett argued that Mormon society of the period continued to remain basically monogamous in its norms and expectations and that "except for the broad outlines, the local culture provided no efficient and detailed techniques for control of the polygamous family; each family in a sense had to develop its own culture."2 Hulett's sample was taken from the period of extreme stress when polygamy was under heavy attack in the late nineteenth century. However, Burgess-Olson also found that great variability was present in her sample dealing with the earlier period from 1847 through 1885.3 Burgess-Olson placed greater emphasis than Hulett did on the tendency of polygamy toward developing regularity in social forms.

One example of the variability in polygamy practice and of the tendency toward the crystallization of new behavior patterns can be seen by looking at housing arrangements for Mormon polygamous families. In most long-established polygamous societies there are definite ways of

1Hulett, "The Mormon Polygamous Family," p. 11.

2Ibid., p. 406.

3Burgess-Olson, "Early Utah Mormon Families," pp. 59-68.
handling housing. Either all wives live under one roof, or all have separate houses, or there is some standardized pattern of development between different types of arrangements during different stages of the marriage and life cycle. Early Mormon social practice in the Great Basin, however, showed almost every conceivable pattern of housing.

The same family was usually reported as occupying at different periods quarters ranging from the most uncomfortable and primitive to comparatively spacious and well-built houses on farms or in towns. Individual taste and ability determined the kind of houses a man provided for his wives; the preference most usually indicated, but not always achieved, was that each wife should eventually have her own separate house. . . .

Housing patterns ranged the gamut from the one rather atypical extreme of Brigham Young, second president of the Church, who set up most of his wives and children—with one or two exceptions—in two large houses, each with accommodations for a number of wives; to John Taylor, third president of the Church, who eventually established all of his wives in separate houses. Great variability also existed in many other aspects of Great Basin marriage practice.

The primary reason that plural marriage never became fully standardized in Utah was the short period of time that it existed before the intense anti-polygamy persecution of the late nineteenth century led the Mormon Church to discontinue the practice. Had there been greater time for the new cultural patterns to develop free of external pressures, plural marriage probably would have overcome many initial difficulties and would have continued to adapt itself to the changing conditions of life in the Great Basin region. Just how the new marriage practices might have developed now will never be known, however. Faced with overwhelming external pressures, the Mormon Church gave up the practice of plural

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1 Hulett, "The Mormon Polygamous Family," p. 42. This is supported by Burgess-Olson, "Early Utah Mormon Families," pp. 129-130.

marriage in the late nineteenth century. The Church showed its continuing vitality by finding new means of expressing its underlying family ideals in monogamous practice and by creating complex new institutional means of achieving group identity and cohesion. Remaining would be the memory of the rich legacy of commitment and dedication associated with this remarkable effort to introduce new marriage and family patterns in nineteenth century America.
CHAPTER VII

RADICAL PRODUCTS OF THE GREAT REVIVALS: REFLECTIONS ON RELIGION, THE FAMILY, AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Revivals breed social revolutions. All the social irregularities reported in the papers followed in the train of revivals; and, so far as I know, all revivals have developed tendencies to such irregularities. . . . A worldly wise man might say, that [these facts] show that Revivals are damnable delusions, leading to immorality and disorganization of society. I should say, they show that Revivals, because they are divine, require for their complement a divine organization of society, which all who love Revivals and the good of mankind should fearlessly seek to discover and inaugurate. . . . Revivals lead to religious love; religious love excites the passions; the converts, finding themselves in theocratic liberty, begin to look about for their mates and their paradise.

Here begins divergence. If women have the lead, the feminine idea that ordinary wedded love is carnal and unholy rises, and becomes a ruling principle. . . . Then, if a prudent Mother Ann is at the head of affairs, the sexes are fenced off from each other and carry on their Platonic intercourse through the grating. . . . On the other hand, if the leaders are men, the theocratic impulse takes the opposite direction, and polygamy in some form is the result. Thus Mormonism is the masculine form, as Shakerism is the feminine form, of the more morbid products of Revivals. Our Oneida Socialism, too, is a masculine product of the Great Revivals.

It is notable that all the socialisms that have sprung from revivals have prospered. They are utterly opposed to each other [yet] however false and mutually repugnant the religious socialisms may be in their details, they are all based on the theocratic principle—they all recognize the right of religious inspiration to shape society and dictate the form of family life.

--John Humphrey Noyes

This provocative statement from John Humphrey Noyes to the English journalist William Hepworth Dixon highlights many of the key issues which have been raised in this study. Some of these key findings and

1As quoted in Tyler, Freedom's Ferment, pp. 193-194. Paragraphing added.
hypotheses will be presented in comparative overview in this chapter, and lines for further investigation will be suggested. Questions of motivation are of primary importance. What religious and social factors could lead individuals to conceive of radically new forms of social organization and to feel a compulsion to act the prophetic role? What were the backgrounds and concerns of individuals who joined such groups? Why was there such a strong interest in marital and family reorganization, and how did the different patterns emerge? Were there deeper similarities underlying the rather idiosyncratic stated goals of each group? Finally, why did these three groups achieve a degree of "success" and what was the nature of that success as seen from their own perspective?

If this study has made any single point, it is the extraordinary complexity of the reasons that individuals form and join millennial religious groups. To understand these complex individual and group motivations, a distinction must be made between prophetic leaders and their followers. Although both respond to certain common problems and share certain common goals, the way in which they express their concerns varies. Prophetic leaders, like leaders in other fields of public life, often have a more far-ranging vision than their followers and an ability to articulate what the many only dimly sense. This prophetic vision is more than a product of, or a response to, simple economic, social, or political factors. In the economic sphere, for example, while Ann Lee and Joseph Smith came from desperately poor families, James J. Strang appears to have had a middle class background, and John Humphrey Noyes grew up as a member of the business and social elite. Likewise, none of these figures conceived their primary goals in narrow economic terms, although each of them dealt with economic issues as a part of their complex effort at religious and social reconstruction.

1 The social background of James J. Strang is difficult to determine with certainty from available records, but he appears to have come from a relatively well-educated family and a family that was not in economic want. See the introductory autobiographical statement and the later correspondence with his family in the Strang Papers, and Strang's published diary.
Frank Manuel once observed that: "The utopia may well be a sensitive indicator of where the sharpest anguish of an age lies." As individuals who are perhaps most acutely sensitive to that sharpest anguish of an age, prophets may best be viewed from a complex psychological perspective which takes into account their interaction with existing social reality. The prophetic figure might then be described as a man or woman in whom an overriding sense of personal destiny or mission comes in conflict with a sharp sense of religious and social disorder. Unable or unwilling to work within what they perceive as an unstable value environment, prophetic figures try a new way. They seek to work through their own inner conflicts and those of their contemporaries by creating a new value universe and an external order to support it. By attracting a personal following which will conform to the new rules, the prophet validates his or her own ego and reason for existence. Thus, paradoxically, the ego of the prophet may be viewed simultaneously as both unusually strong and unusually weak.

The paradoxes of the prophetic figure and his or her psyche were suggested by William James when he wrote of individuals in whom a "superior intellect" and a "psychopathic temperament" coalesce, thereby creating

... the best possible condition for the kind of effective genius that gets into biographical dictionaries. Such figures do not remain mere critics and understanders with their intellect. Their ideas possess them, they inflect them, for better or worse, upon their companions or their age. If there were such a thing as inspiration from a higher realm, it might well be that the neurotic temperament would furnish the chief condition of the requisite receptivity.

1Frank E. Manuel, "Toward a Psychological History of Utopias," in Utopias and Utopian Thought, ed. Frank E. Manuel (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), p. 70. This insight was developed with regard to John Humphrey Noyes in Thomas's "Psychoanalytic Study of John Humphrey Noyes."

2See ibid. for a sophisticated analysis of John Humphrey Noyes's personality along such lines using the perspectives of contemporary ego psychology.

3James, Varieties of Religious Experience, pp. 36-37.
James's suggestion of psychopathology is both apt and misleading. It is apt because these individuals are indeed acutely aware that they are outsiders, strangers in their own land, in some sense misfits. For every aspiring prophet who "succeeds" in whatever sense, there are many who drift off into unconstructive ego-mania, social isolation, or madness of one form or another. Some also succeed by introducing socially destructive solutions. There are Hitlers and Stalins as well as Gandhis. Simply having a sense that the world is out of joint is no indication that an individual will find a way to surmount the perceived difficulties or that the solution discovered will be socially constructive.

If the prophet's experience stopped simply with an acute sense of personal and social disorder, then the label "psychopathic" might indeed be appropriate. But successful prophets move beyond a response of simple alienation; they actively attempt to reshape their lives and environment. In Burridge's words, the prophet "specifically attempts to initiate, both in himself as well as in others, a process of moral regeneration." The prophet seeks to combine both internal and external regeneration. New value premises, as well as a new economic and social order must be constructed. Few men or women have the insight, capabilities, and organizational sense to successfully carry the process of regeneration through to its final conclusion; in most instances other leaders eventually move in to institutionalize a portion of the prophet's original vision.

In a deeper sense, too, the label "psychopathic" is inappropriate when applied to successful prophets. One could well argue that every social order is in some sense illusory, a human construct designed to make comprehensible a world that can never be categorized. Viewed from such a perspective, social systems--particularly social systems undergoing rapid change and a painful readjustment to new circumstances--can be seen as containing an element of psychopathology. Yet value systems, religious systems, or social systems are necessary illusions; without common cultural values, aspirations, and expectations, social life in any meaningful sense would be impossible. To the outside observer looking at a foreign culture, the system may appear incomprehensible or

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1Burridge, New Heaven, New Earth, p. 162.
oppressively restrictive. Once one begins to enter into that other
culture and to operate within its constraints, however, a person is
able to develop a considerable degree of freedom. The most oppressive
of all systems is one in which norms and expectations are unpredictable;
individuals recoil from such disorder and seek new patterns, sometimes
at almost any price.

Viewed from such a perspective, the prophetic figure acquires a
new importance. Prophets articulate new assumptions about power and
social relations, and without such pivotal figures it becomes difficult
to imagine how radically new assumptions could be articulated. The
religious prophet can be understood as an aspiring social architect in
the broadest sense of the term, an individual who endeavors to formulate
a cosmic system of meaning. During periods of perceived social crisis
or rapid change, individuals and groups characteristically attempt to
return to their cultural roots and to reinterpret old values within a
new social context. As suggested earlier, from such a perspective the
Shakers, Oneida Perfectionists, and Mormons can be viewed as part of a
self-conscious attempt to relate the radical Protestant, and especially
the New England Puritan experience, to the changing conditions of ante-
bellum America—to create a sort of Anglo-American ethnicity.

That such millennial ventures, like all aspects of social life,
are impermanent, ever-changing, and eventually assume new forms does not
detract from their interest. The groups studied here struggled with
basic problems of religious and social disorder which affect any society
in times of change and upheaval. Only during a period of remarkable
fluidity is it possible to imagine so many individuals becoming so
starkly aware of the arbitrary nature of social reality and managing to
attract a significant following to alternative visions. In another age,
many of these men and women probably would have followed their drive and
powers of charismatic leadership into more narrowly circumscribed fields,
whether in business, education, or politics. During an age of crisis,
however, the overriding sense of personal mission of some individuals
found expression in a millennial quest to reconstruct all aspects of
religious and social life.
The motivation of prophetic leaders, complex though it may be, can at least be partially reconstructed from their own statements and actions. Reconstructing the background, motivation, and membership characteristics of hundreds or even thousands of individuals, many of them inarticulate, poses a considerably greater challenge. Fortunately, as we have seen, all three groups studied here left impressive records from which membership characteristics and motivation can to some extent be recovered. To date, however, only a small portion of this rich source material has been tapped and analyzed. Furthermore, even with the most assiduous efforts one can never be certain how representative surviving records are of the background and concerns of the overall membership. For instance, many individuals who kept extensive diaries and journals may have had more in common with the governing elite than with the larger body of less articulate membership. In the absence of more comprehensive quantitative and qualitative studies, therefore, the following observations can only be tentative and somewhat impressionistic.

Like their prophetic leaders, the membership of these three groups appears to have been motivated by a considerably more complex constellation of factors than simple economic, social, or political background and concerns. One might use the economic argument again to illustrate this point. Social movements often have been popularly explained in economic or class terms. Either such movements are a product of the upward striving of the poor and dispossessed, or they result from the activism of the middle classes, or they are a response to the fear of loss of status of threatened elites. None of these three economic and class arguments adequately accounts for the appeal of the millennialism represented by these three groups. Whereas the Mormons drew most of their membership from the lower classes, the Shakers appear to have had a more middle class background, and the Oneida Perfectionists were heavily based on the educational and financial elite.\(^1\) Thus, although each of

\(^1\) Though the relative economic and social status of the Mormons and Oneida Perfectionists appears relatively well-established, the economic background of the Shakers is somewhat more problematical. Persons,
these groups appears to have had a special appeal to a certain segment of the population, the appeal of the common type of millennialism which they shared transcended economic and class levels. This suggests that more than simple class background accounts for the appeal of such ventures at total religious and social reorganization.

Likewise, external economic conditions do not fully explain the development of these groups. To be sure, it is probably no accident that a peak period of religious and sexual tension in all three groups occurred in the wake of the Panic of 1837, and that all three groups were beginning to reestablish order by the late 1840s or early 1850s, about the same time that strong signs of stabilization could be seen in the external society as well. Yet it also appears significant that simple economic concerns were seldom discussed directly as a motivation for joining these movements. Rather, economic concerns were subsumed to larger religious and value concerns about the overall state of society. These larger concerns were expressed primarily through an attempt to "restore" the faith of early Christianity and to find one true basis of religious and social order suitable to the times in which they lived.

If economic factors alone fail adequately to explain these groups, then what other measures can be used? One promising way of beginning to understand the experiences of members of these groups is by looking at their degree of mobility—geographic, intellectual, and social—both before and after entry. Although the evidence is far from being fully developed, converts to these movements may well have moved more frequently and suffered more of the pains of dislocation and resettlement before joining these groups than had other Americans of their day. Certainly, members had often experienced great emotional and intellectual turmoil.

"Christian Communitarianism in America," pp. 127-128, argues that the Shakers and many other American communitarians were not comprised of the poorest elements of society, but of "moderately prosperous farmers and craftsmen, the donation of whose property to the cause frequently furnished the initial investment that made communal living possible." For a somewhat divergent view, see Mario S. De Pillis, "Shakerism, Communitarianism and American History" (unpublished paper delivered at the Shaker Bicentennial Conference in Cleveland, Ohio, October 1974). A systematic study of the backgrounds of individuals who joined the Shakers remains to be conducted.
and had considered or participated in other enthusiasms before deciding that these movements offered them what they really wanted. As will be discussed later, each of these groups also developed a defined hierarchy through which converts could progress upward organizationally and economically. Moreover, even after joining, converts continued to display a restless mobility within and between communities, as well as with the outside world. Such frequent movement, which was connected with factors such as missionary activity, trading ventures, and persecution, left an indelible imprint on those who experienced it. Finally, the continuing influx of new members and departure of old ones, particularly in the Shaker and Mormon communities, must have significantly influenced the development of these communities. In short, all of these groups shared, and perhaps even accentuated, the fluidity which was so characteristic of the antebellum period as a whole.

One result of these various forms of mobility was that all three of these groups, which have often been seen erroneously as "utopian" or isolated from their environment, actually were in close touch with larger currents of thought and action in the external society. Although the degree of mobility of individuals prior to joining the Shakers has not yet been systematically studied, the probability that such high mobility existed is suggested by a number of factors, including the large number of individuals who entered and left different Shaker communities throughout their history. For example, in the Sodus Bay, New York, Shaker community, which retained a population of about one hundred, an average of more than ten people entered and more than ten left each year during the entire period from 1826 through 1838. Such fluidity of membership, when also coupled with missionary activities, trading ventures, and the continuing influx of curious visitors to the communities, helps explain at least one reason why the Shakers took up so many of the popular enthusiasms of their day, including temperance and dietary reform, with almost preternatural rapidity. In addition, within Shaker communities, individuals were frequently shifted to new

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1 *History of the Society of Believers at Sodus & Portbay, 1826-1838.*
occupations and personal associations in order to break down any special attachments which might interfere with group loyalty. And the leaders of the group, ever concerned with the problem of recruiting new members, showed themselves extremely sensitive to shifting currents of opinion and interest in the outer world.

At Oneida, many members had undergone great religious turmoil prior to entry. Often they had gone from group to group seeking a satisfying religious faith. Whether this religious turmoil was associated with geographic mobility as well remains unclear, although if the peripatetic activities of Perfectionist leaders are any indication the membership must have been highly mobile. After the initial troubled transition to communal living at Oneida and the sifting out of less committed members, the composition of the Community remained remarkably stable, in contrast to the Shaker and Mormon groups which continued active proselytizing. Within their community, however, the Oneida Perfectionists were similar to the Shakers in restlessly shifting occupations, activities, and associations in order to break down any exclusive attachments which might interfere with group loyalty. As late as 1875, Charles Nordhoff commented on the phobia that individuals in the Community had about any fixed forms of occupation, personal association, or residence.¹ Noyes himself was absent from Oneida more than half the time that it was in existence, and many of his followers moved frequently back and forth between Oneida and Wallingford, or other communities of the larger Association. In addition to maintaining contact with the outside world through their own trading activities and the influx of weekend visitors, the Community stayed in touch with outside events by eventually receiving more than twenty newspapers on a regular basis and by means of their own lively newspaper, addressed both to the Community and to their supporters in the outside world, which discussed many issues of contemporary concern. Selected individuals also were sent to the outside world for specialized training.

As in the case of the Shakers and Oneida Perfectionists, the extent of the mobility of Mormon converts prior to the time that they joined the

¹Nordhoff, Communistic Societies, p. 286.
Church remains to be assessed. A study of one hundred early converts for whom detailed information was available suggests that Mormons may have had a higher degree of geographic mobility than other Americans of the period, although the evidence is inconclusive.\(^1\) Certainly, as in the cases of the Shakers and Oneida Perfectionists, a pattern of religious uncertainty and seeking preceded entry into the group. After joining the Mormon Church, individuals must have been affected by the problems of frequent movement. Persecution led the Church to move from New York, to Ohio, to two different locations in Missouri, to Illinois, and finally to Utah. Missionary activity, which became accelerated after the Saints moved to their "isolated" Zion in the Intermountain West, not only placed strains on family relationships but also brought the Saints in close contact with American society and, indeed, the world. This cosmopolitan experience may well be reflected in the remarkably close correspondence of many Mormon values and concerns to those in the changing external American society.\(^2\) And the exigencies of the difficult settlement of the Great Basin region necessitated great individual flexibility in moving to new locations as directed under the centralized Church planning for colonizing the region.

In short, the high degree of geographic and intellectual mobility which occurred either before entry, within the group, or through continuing contact with the external society, presumably had significant social and intellectual consequences. This author's own experience during five years of alternating work and study throughout the country while at Antioch College between 1965 and 1970, suggested to him the enormous

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\(^1\)To this author's knowledge, the study by Laurence Milton Yorgason, "Some Demographic Aspects of One Hundred Early Mormon Converts, 1830-1837" (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1974), is the only currently available source which systematically analyzes early Mormon mobility. A demographic study of early Mormon Nauvoo using records on more than 3,000 individuals is now nearing completion as a Ph.D. dissertation by James L. Kimball, Jr., and should provide further information on the extent of early Mormon mobility. Jan Shipps contemplates beginning a large-scale demographic study of the early Mormons in the near future.

impact that simple geographic mobility alone could have on attitudes. During most of those years, the school was usually between six months to two years ahead of popular interests and trends. By analogy it seems reasonable to suppose that the rapidity with which these allegedly "isolated" millennial religious communities became aware of popular concerns was related to their extensive interaction with their environment. Like their prophet-founders, the members—or at least the articulate members—of these communities were in close touch with the larger world and acutely sensitive to its contradictions. The intense boundary maintenance devices and stress on authority in the groups can be seen at least in part as an effort to avoid or overcome the potential fragmentation that such mobility and fluidity could produce.

II

Perhaps the most challenging question posed by these three groups is the one first raised in this dissertation—how and why they originated new forms of marital and familial organization and how those new forms were related to the larger millennial concerns and development of the groups. The body of this dissertation has already attempted to trace out some of the concrete personal, social, and intellectual factors associated with the origins and introduction of these three systems. In summation here, therefore, the dynamics of the larger process of transformation itself will receive our primary attention. Returning to Victor Turner's theories of liminality and communitas, we shall discuss the dialectical tensions between structure and anti-structure as a means of placing the marital reorganization of these groups in a comparative perspective.

First and most important, Shaker celibacy, Oneida Community complex marriage, and Mormon polygamy are most appropriately seen as a part of the liminal or transition stage in the larger development of new religious and social patterns in these three groups. Although the life span of the new marital forms ranged from thirty-five years to several centuries, the transition to the new forms took place over a ten to fifteen year period in each case and drew its primary impetus from the larger communal concerns and the intensity of the transition period. As
that original intensity weakened and a new social order replaced the more informal commitment of the liminal phase, the communal marriage forms correspondingly also weakened or changed their character.

Shaker celibacy remained a dynamic force only in conjunction with the ecstatic, outgoing, aggressive period of Shaker growth before the Civil War. After the Civil War when the Shakers were losing their religious fervor and in some instances were reduced to advertising their communities as "a secure home for life,"

1 celibacy increasingly hardened into a sterile form and lost its cutting edge. The group continued to change and develop, of course, but it became increasingly derivative—more often responding to external forces rather than actively attempting to influence them. Though celibacy itself has survived along with this numerically declining group to the present, the inherent limitations on membership introduced by the practice have hampered efforts at the effective revitalization and renewed institutional growth of the Shakers. The Shakers have become widely admired for their external achievements such as their art and architecture, but the driving religious vision which underlay those achievements has been less often understood.

Oneida Community complex marriage likewise served as a dynamic force only during the period of intense dedication when the influence of the early leadership was strong. As a new generation came of age and as the authority of the early leadership waned, the rationale both for the existence of the Community and for its distinctive marriage practices also weakened. Eventually internal conflicts exacerbated by the demanding marriage practices led the group to revert to monogamy. Oneidans would go on to successfully reintegrate themselves both economically and socially into the larger American society, though they would almost wholly leave behind their early Perfectionist religious ideals in this process.

Like Shaker celibacy and Oneida Community complex marriage, Mormon polygamy acted in a special way as a dynamic force during the expansive phase of early Mormon history in Illinois and in Utah, but

it too changed form as it became institutionalized. The Mormon case was complicated by the Church's continued aggressive missionary activities and by the recurrent waves of external persecution which helped to prolong the liminal period. The regularized polygamy practice which was developing and which probably would have survived and become institutionalized if external persecution had not led to its official abandonment at the end of the nineteenth century would have been a social practice among other social practices, rather than the fervent precursor of an earthly millennium in which all would be devoted to the group. Instead, with the passing of the leadership of the generation which had known Joseph Smith personally, the Mormon Church moved to realize their patriarchal marriage ideals within the confines of the nuclear family and to reintegrate themselves as a new sub-culture within the larger American society.

In short, the dynamic phase in the development of these three marital forms occurred during the period when liminal, transitional concerns were still strong. In each case, the impulse toward total communal unification, both emotional and material, led to a temporary renunciation of normal sexual contacts. Concerns of the group, both sexual and spiritual, were given precedence over those of either the individual or of the nuclear family. The Shakers renounced all physical intercourse between the sexes and all private personal contacts in favor of the common goal of establishing the kingdom of heaven on earth. The Oneida Perfectionists enlarged the range of sexual contacts, but renounced any exclusive sexual attachments in favor of a difficult form of group marriage which was controlled by communal mechanisms of group criticism, male continence, and ascending and descending fellowship. And the Mormons paradoxically combined both celibate and sexual systems in alternation. While men were on missions, they and their wives maintained a temporary celibacy in the service of the Lord. At other times, men's potential sexual contacts were enlarged so that procreation could serve the larger group purposes.

All three of these systems, then, were associated with the intense, revivalistic-expansive phase of total emotional commitment to the group which characterized the early development of these religious communities. Is one being accurate or merely rhetorical, however, in describing
these marital systems, as Noyes did, as "masculine and feminine products of the Great Revivals"? Does the fact that the Shakers were started by a woman while the Oneida Perfectionists and Mormons were started by men explain why they either contracted or expanded the possible range of sexual contacts, or is this explanation simply a result of Noyes's Victorian attitudes which may have distorted his approach to male and female sexuality? This question may be ultimately unanswerable, but a few tentative suggestions will be offered here.

The celibate Shaker system clearly received its initial impetus from the tragic sexual experiences of their foundress Ann Lee. Those experiences convinced her that sexual intercourse was inherently exploitative—particularly of the woman—and that total dedication to God was best served by celibacy. Shaker theological concerns and expansion of the role of women in church governance also appear to have been related to Ann Lee's concerns. On the other hand, it is worthy of note that the Shaker revision of sexual roles was institutionalized by a man—with the aid of a woman whom he appointed as his co-worker. Furthermore, during the dynamic period of Shaker growth, nearly as many men as women were attracted to the Shaker communities. And the Shakers never tampered with the economic division of labor between the sexes, unlike the more patriarchal Oneida Perfectionists and Mormons which allowed women to engage in a broader range of economic activities. Thus, it would be difficult to see the Shakers as simply a product of feminine concerns.

Oneida Community complex marriage is similarly difficult to categorize. Noyes clearly did conceive of his system as a patriarchal one, with women subordinate to men in the final analysis. Yet Noyes's system of birth control through male continence was developed in large part as a result of the suffering of his wife Harriet in childbirth and that system ironically contributed to the full sexual satisfaction of women while denying such satisfaction to men. Furthermore, Noyes's patriarchal system more radically broke down ordinary sex role and occupational divisions between the sexes than did any other successful American community for which comparable documentation exists. In short, it would be difficult to see the Oneida Community as simply a product of masculine concerns.
Mormon polygamy might initially appear more obviously a masculine product, yet if polygamy is looked at closely it also defies simple characterization. Polygamy as taught by Joseph Smith was represented as a "privilege" for men, yet the process of the restructuring of sex roles which took place as the practice was introduced also gave women a new importance in the temple ceremonies and in church life generally. Whether it was intended or not, women under the patriarchal family system in nineteenth-century Utah came to play an important role in business, social, and even political affairs, and were given more freedom in choosing or leaving a husband than was characteristic in much of American society of the period. Though polygamy favored men, it also gave women many possibilities for independent development as well.

In short, whether or not the initial impulse for the introduction of new marriage forms in these groups was a product of "masculine" or "feminine" desires, the introduction of these new forms of marriage in the liminal period led to a total restructuring of the roles of both men and women in ways that are not easily categorized as "masculine" or "feminine." If all of religious and social life was to be reorganized, then the relations of the sexes would also have to be restructured to fit into the new system. All three groups thus explicitly attempted to define new and more satisfying roles for both men and women, roles that would allow a cooperative and satisfying relationship between the sexes to replace one of competition and conflict. Different yet complementary spheres of influence were sought for both sexes.

From such a perspective, the tendency of these three groups to identify "the family" with "the community"—while breaking down or enlarging the nuclear family itself—assumes a new significance. Just as these groups were opposed to class conflict or conflict between the sexes, so they also sought to overcome the divisive features associated with the nineteenth-century nuclear family by placing it within a larger context of communal and kinship loyalty. "Family" values and concerns were emphasized—in the Gemeinschaft sense—but to do this an attempt was made to transcend the Gesellschaft features of the nineteenth century which related the family so closely to the rise of exploitative individualism and unchecked economic growth.
Inevitably, perhaps, these ventures failed to sustain that quality of liminal commitment and direct personal communion. As individuals who had felt themselves adrift in the outer world began to reestablish new roots, they created new social patterns to give form to their social life. Each group became economically successful and eventually moved to partially reintegrate itself into American society. The Shakers, who have dwindled today to a handful of members, are now left with over $2,000,000 in assets. The Oneida Community, which reorganized as a joint stock corporation in 1880, became one of the most successful small businesses in the country. And the Mormons, now praised for "taking care of their own," have been remarkably successful in both economic and social terms.

Even as these three groups reintegrated into American society as new sub-cultures, they looked back with a certain nostalgia on their early expansive, committed, liminal phase. For us these groups may serve as an instructive model for analyzing the complex process of social change in both its positive and negative aspects. They attempted to introduce alternative forms of marriage and family life as part of a total, cohesive new religious and social system, "a new heaven and a new earth." We still have much to learn from their rich experience.
parts of it, when we undertake to speak to the people.

It is all connected with the exaltation of man, showing how he becomes exalted to be a king and a priest, yes, even a God, like his Father in heaven. Without the doctrine that this revelation reveals, no man on earth ever could be exalted to be a God. Do you find out now, when you are exalted, what your will be, yonder? W read in the Scriptures, that Jesus declared he is the first and the last. It is written again in this book, by the Prophet Joseph, that He is the first and the last; the last and the first. This principle you see in all the works of the Lord. Wism a this revelation reveals, no man on earth ever could be exalted to be a God. Do you find out now, when you are exalted, what your will be, yonder? W read in the Scriptures, that Jesus declared he is the first and the last. It is written again in this book, by the Prophet Joseph, that He is the first and the last; the last and the first. This principle you see in all the works of the Lord. Wism a this revelation reveals, no man on earth ever could be exalted to be a God. Do you find out now, when you are exalted, what your will be, yonder? W read in the Scriptures, that Jesus declared he is the first and the last. It is written again in this book, by the Prophet Joseph, that He is the first and the last; the last and the first. This principle you see in all the works of the Lord. Wism a this revelation reveals, no man on earth ever could be exalted to be a God. Do you find out now, when you are exalted, what your will be, yonder? W read in the Scriptures, that Jesus declared he is the first and the last. It is written again in this book, by the Prophet Joseph, that He is the first and the last; the last and the first. This principle you see in all the works of the Lord. Wism a this revelation reveals, no man on earth ever could be exalted to be a God. Do you find out now, when you are exalted, what your will be, yonder? W read in the Scriptures, that Jesus declared he is the first and the last. It is written again in this book, by the Prophet Joseph, that He is the first and the last; the last and the first. This principle you see in all the works of the Lord.

None of you will receive your crowns of glory, immortality, and eternal lives, before you receive his; he will be crowned first, and then we will be crowned, every one in his order, for the work is finished, and the spirit is complete in its organization with the tabernacle. The world is the first to be redeemed, and the people last to be crowned upon it. I leave these remarks with you, and we will now have the Revelation result.

Elder Thomas Bullock then read the following:

REVELATION.

Given to Joseph Smith, Nauvoo, July 12th, 1843.

Verily thus saith the Lord, unto his servant Joseph, that hitherto as you have espoused of my hand, to know and understand wherein I the Lord justified my servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; as also Moses, David, and Solomon, my servants, as touching the principle and doctrine of their having many wives, and concubines: Behold! and lo, I am the Lord thy God, and will answer thee as touching this matter: Therefore, prepare thy heart to receive and obey the instructions which I am about to give unto you; for all those, who have this law revealed unto them, must obey the same; for behold! I revealed unto you a new and everlasting covenant, and if ye abide not that covenant, then are ye damned; for no one can, that this covenant, and be permitted to enter into my glory; for all who will have a blessing at my hands, shall abide the law which was appointed for that blessing, and the conditions thereof, as we have received them from the foundations of the world: and as pertaining to the new and everlasting covenant, it was instituted for the fulness of my glory; and he that receiveth a temple thereof, must, and shall abide the law, or he shall be damned, saith the Lord God.

And verily I say unto you, that the conditions of this law are these: All covenants, contracts, bonds, obligations, covenants, promises, expectations, that are not made

and entered into, and sealed, by the Holy Spirit of promise, of him who is anointed, both as well for time and for all eternity, and that no other man can, by or by word, or by any other means, when they are out of the world, it cannot be removed, but remain separately, and singly, without exaltation, in their saved condition, to all eternity, and from henceforth we not God, but angels of God forever and ever.

And again, verily I say unto you, if a man marry a wife in the world, and be with her not by me, nor by my word, and be covenant with her, so long as he is in the world, and she with him, their covenant and marriage is not of force when they are dead, and when they are out of the world; therefore, they are not bound by any law when they are out of the world; therefore, when they are out of the world, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are appointed angels in heaven, which angels are ministering servants, to minister for those who are worthy of a far more, and an exceeding, and an eternal weight of glory; for these angels did not abide my law, therefore they cannot not be enlarged, but remain separately, and singly, without exaltation, in their saved condition, to all eternity, and from henceforth we not God, but angels of God forever and ever.

And again, verily I say unto you, if a man marry a wife in the world, and be with her not by me, nor by my word, and be covenant with her, so long as he is in the world, and she with him, their covenant and marriage is not of force when they are dead, and when they are out of the world; therefore, they are not bound by any law when they are out of the world; therefore, when they are out of the world, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are appointed angels in heaven, which angels are ministering servants, to minister for those who are worthy of a far more, and an exceeding, and an eternal weight of glory; for these angels did not abide my law, therefore they cannot not be enlarged, but remain separately, and singly, without exaltation, in their saved condition, to all eternity, and from henceforth we not God, but angels of God forever and ever.

Appendix

The first printed version of the revelation on plural and celestial marriage, as it appeared in the Deseret News Extra, September 14, 1852, pp. 26-28.
Abraham received promises concerning his seed, and of the fruit of his loins— from whose loins ye are, wise, my servant Joseph— which were to continue, so long as they were in the world; and as touching Abraham and his seed, out of the world, they should continue; both in the world and out of the world should they continue as innumerable as the stars; or, if ye were to count the sand upon the sea-shore, ye could not number them. This promise is yours, also, because ye are of Abraham. And by this law are the continuance of the works of my Father, wherein he glorifies himself. Go ye, therefore, and do the works of Abraham—enter ye into my law, and ye shall be saved. But if ye enter not into my law, ye cannot receive the promises of my Father which he made unto Abraham.

God commanded Abraham, and Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham, to wife. And why did she do it? Because this was the law, and from Hagar sprang many people. This, therefore, was fulfilling, among other things, the promise. Was Abraham, therefore, under condemnation? Verily I say unto you. Nay; for I the Lord commanded it. Abraham was commanded to offer his son Isaac; nevertheless, it was written, thou shalt not kill. Abraham, however, did not refuse, and it was accounted unto him for righteousness.

Abraham received concubines; and they have him children, and it was accounted unto him for righteousness, because they were given unto him, and he abode in my law; as Isaac also, and Jacob did none other things than that which they were commanded; and because they did none other things than that which they were commanded, they have entered into their exaltation; but there are none other things than that which they are commanded, they have entered into their exaltation, and sit upon thrones; and are not angels, but are Gods. David also received many wives and concubines, as also Solomon, and Moses my servant, as also many others of my servants, from the beginning of creation until this time; and in nothing did they sin, save in those things which they received not of me.

David's wives and concubines were given unto him, of me, by the hand of Nathan, my servant, and others of the prophets who had the keys of this power; and in none of these things did he sin against me, save in the case of Uriah and his wife; and, therefore, he hath fallen from his exaltation, and received his portions; and he shall not inherit them out of the world, for I gave them unto another, saith the Lord.

I am the Lord thy God, and I gave unto thee my servant Joseph, an appointment, and restore all things; ask what you will, and it shall be given unto you, according to my word; and as ye have asked concerning adultery— verily, verily I say unto you, if a man receiveth a wife in the new and everlasting covenant, and if she be with another man, and I have not appointed her to him by the holy anointing, she hath committed adultery, and shall be destroyed. If she be not in the new and everlasting covenant and she be with another man, she hath committed adultery; and if her husband be with another woman, and he was under the law, he hath broken his vow, and hath committed adultery; and if she hath not committed adultery, but is innocent, and hath not broken her vow, and she knoweth it, and I reveal it unto you, my servant Joseph, then shall you have power, by the
power of my Holy Priesthood, to take her, and give her in marriage, so she hath not committed adultery, but hath been faithful; for she shall be made ruler over many; for I have conferred upon you the keys and power of the priesthood, wherein I restore all things, and make known unto you, all things, in due time.

And verily, verily I say unto you, whatsoever you bless I will bless, and whosoever you curse, I will curse, with the Lord; for I am the Lord thy God.

And again, verily, verily I say unto you, my servant Joseph, that whatsoever you give on earth, and to whosoever you give any one on earth, by my word, a secret unto my law, shall be sealed with blessings, and not cursings, and with my power, saith the Lord; and shall be without condemnation on earth, and in heaven; for I am the Lord thy God, and will be with thee even unto the end of the world, and through all eternity; for verily, I seal upon you, your exaltation, and possession in the kingdom of my Father, with Abraham, your father. Behold, I have seen your sacrifices, and will forgive all your sins; I have seen your sacrifices, in obedience to that which I gave unto you: go, therefore, and I will make a way for your escape, as I accepted the offering of Abraham, of his son Isaac.

And again, verily, verily I say unto you, if any man have a wife who looks the keys of this power, and teacheth unto her the law of my Priesthood, as pertaining to these things; then shall she believe, and administer unto him, according to the Lord your God, for I will destroy her; for I will sweep all your names upon those who receive and abuse in my law. Therefore, it shall be lawful in me, if she receive not this law, for him to receive all things, whatsoever I the Lord his God will give unto him, because she did not believe and administer unto him, according to my word; and then she becomes the transgressor, and he is exempt from the law of Sarah, who administered unto Abraham according to the law, when I commanded Abraham to take Hagar to wife. And now, as pertaining to the law-script, verily I say unto you, I will reveal more unto you hereafter; therefore, let this suffice for the present. Behold, I am Alpha and Omega—Amen.

Conference then adjourned to the 10th of October, 1832, 10 o'clock A. M.

Benedictions by H. C. Kimball.

In the evening the Tabernacle was filled with elders, who were addressed by the Twelve, presidents of Seventies, &c., on various things concerning the building up of the kingdom of God.

A DISCOURSE.

Delivered by President B. Young, in the Tabernacle, G. S. I. City, Aug. 8, 1832.

I will read a revelation given to Joseph Smith, junior, and Sidney Rigdon. But previous to my doing so, I must acquaint the people with the subject that I expect to lay before them this morning, I will say to them, my understanding with regard to preaching the gospel of salvation is this: there is but one discourse to be preached to all the children of Adam, and that discourse should be believed.
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The literature of Mormonism, both printed and manuscript, is vast, complex, and often highly polemical. Because the Mormons have been
assiduous in collecting and recording information on their past and because much of that material is now becoming available for serious research, the scholar is now faced in some instances with almost an embarrassment of riches. A valuable entrée into this rich literature and contemporary Mormon historiographic concerns is furnished by many articles in Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought and Brigham Young University Studies: A Voice for the Community of LDS Scholars. Chad Flake's comprehensive bibliography covering more than ten thousand imprints on the Mormons during the first century of their history should soon be available in published form. Useful for this study were David J. Whittaker's Early Mormon History: A Selected Bibliography, 1771-1847 (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 1973) and the bibliographies in works by Brodie, Godfrey, Hill, and Quinn, cited below. Arrington's Great Basin Kingdom, also cited below, provides valuable information on the nineteenth-century Mormon experience, with special reference to Utah. The most important single source for this study was the thoroughly indexed Notebooks and Transcripts of Stanley Snow Ivins, the originals of which are held by the Utah State Historical Society in Salt Lake City, Utah. Without the aid of this remarkable product of Ivins's extensive reading in manuscript and printed sources in Mormon history, a thorough study of the development of polygamy could easily take a lifetime.

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