

“Regeneration—Now and Evermore!”:  
Mormon Polygamy and the Physical  
Rehabilitation of Humankind

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LATTER-DAY SAINT BELIEF in polygamy, although introduced in the 1830s and 1840s, was not publicly defended until the church relocated from the Midwest to the Great Basin. Its practice by thousands of Mormons in the late nineteenth century may have constituted the largest prescribed departure from traditional monogamy in Western civilization since the Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup> Determined to present their views as persuasively as possible, church leaders commenced a campaign in 1852 to convince the world that what they were doing was not only scriptural but practical and scientific.<sup>2</sup> Most accounts of Mormonism’s polygamous experience

<sup>1</sup>In the strictest sense, the marriage of one man to several women is “polygyny.” Because Mormons and non-Mormons of the nineteenth century commonly referred to their system as “polygamy,” “celestial marriage,” “the principle,” “plural marriage,” or simply “plurality,” we will employ these same usages throughout this paper. For Mormonism’s famous 1843 revelation approving polygamy, see *The Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints* (Salt Lake City, 1982), sec. 132 (hereafter *D&C*). Scholarly overviews of Mormon plural marriage are provided in Kimball Young, *Isn’t One Wife Enough?* (New York, 1954); Stanley S. Ivins, “Notes on Mormon Polygamy,” *Western Humanities Review* 10 (Summer 1956): 229–39; Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: Three American Communal Experiments of the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1981), 123–225; Louis J. Kern, *An Ordered Love: Sex Roles and Sexuality in Victorian Utopias—the Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1981), 137–204; and Richard S. Van Wagner, *Mormon Polygamy: A History*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City, 1989).

<sup>2</sup>The 1852 announcement, first delivered in sermons by Orson Pratt and Brigham Young on August 29, 1852, was printed in pamphlet form as *Deseret News, Extra, Containing a*

grant only incidental importance to the naturalistic arguments used. And those who acknowledge the unique biological powers ascribed to plural marriage generally fail to integrate Mormon claims with sexual assumptions common at the time.<sup>3</sup> While revelatory command was always significant to them, nineteenth-century Mormons borrowed extensively from guidebook authors, scientific thinkers, and sexual theorists of the day. Their purpose was to convince others that only through the substitution of polygamy for monogamy could men and women be restored to their pristine capacities and the world prepared for the millennium.

To understand their claims, one must recall that Mormon plurality arose in a period when American society was regularly addressed by reformers contending for domestic revolution.<sup>4</sup> John Humphrey Noyes, whose familial reconstructions followed the Nauvoo period of Mormonism by only a few years, said that secular and religious reformers were at that time “wonderfully similar” in their goals.<sup>5</sup> Both Robert Dale Owen and Charles Fourier, who together inspired scores of communitarian attempts, sought

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*Revelation on Celestial Marriage, a Remarkable Vision, . . .* (Great Salt Lake City, UT, 14 September 1852). The best analysis of the event is that of David J. Whittaker, “The Bone in the Throat: Orson Pratt and the Public Announcement of Plural Marriage,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 18 (July 1987): 293–314.

<sup>3</sup>The most extensive attention given to arguments for polygamy’s physiological gifts, all providing less detail and granting less emphasis to the proposal than is done here, occurs in relevant portions of Lester E. Bush, Jr., “Birth Control among the Mormons: Introduction to an Insistent Question,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 10 (Autumn 1976): 12–44 (hereafter *Dialogue*); E. Victoria Grover-Swank, “Sex, Sickness and Statehood: The Influence of Victorian Medical Opinion on Self-Government in Utah” (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1980); Julie Dunfee, “‘Living the Principle’ of Plural Marriage: Mormon Women, Utopia, and Female Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century,” *Feminist Studies* 10 (Fall 1984): 523–36; and B. Carmon Hardy, *Solemn Covenant: The Mormon Polygamous Passage* (Urbana, IL, 1992), 84–126. Passing acknowledgment is found in the work of several authors, including Thomas G. Alexander, “An Experiment in Progressive Legislation: The Granting of Woman Suffrage in Utah in 1870,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 38 (Winter 1970): 22–24; Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 202–4; Kern, *An Ordered Love*, 153–57; David J. Whittaker, “Early Mormon Polygamy Defenses,” *Journal of Mormon History* 11 (1984): 63; and Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, 85–86, 91–92.

<sup>4</sup>The literature dealing with sexual reform in nineteenth-century America is enormous. Better-known treatments of the early period include the appropriate sections of Alice Felt Tyler, *Freedom’s Ferment: Phases of American Social History from the Colonial Period to the Outbreak of the Civil War* (1944; reprint, New York: Harper Torchbook, 1962); Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800–1850* (1950; reprint, New York: Harper Torchbook, 1965); Raymond Lee Muncy, *Sex and Marriage in Utopian Communities: Nineteenth Century America* (Bloomington, IN, 1973); Ronald G. Walters, *American Reformers, 1815–1860* (New York, 1978); Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*; and Kern, *Ordered Love*. For the later period, see Hal Sears, *The Sex Radicals* (Lawrence, KS, 1977).

<sup>5</sup>John Humphrey Noyes, *History of American Socialisms* (Philadelphia, 1870), 25.

greater freedom in marital experimentation—Fourier specifically commenting that polygamy was “a practice which cannot in any case be prevented.”<sup>6</sup> Another spokesman of the 1830s frankly asked why men should not be permitted to take additional women into their households, if first wives approved, and thereby diminish the number of husbands “ranging about.”<sup>7</sup> Whether contending for an end to all sexual activity, as did the Shakers, or inviting the freedoms associated with Frances Wright at Nashoba, the times were filled with proposals for sexual innovation.<sup>8</sup>

Millennialist expectations ran parallel to the visions of utopian claimants, many declaring that the end of the world was near. The Saints were part of a numerous company urging attention to signs and wonders as evidence that the fateful time was at hand. “Prepare ye, prepare ye,” they were told in an early communication from heaven, “for that which is to come, for the Lord is nigh.”<sup>9</sup> As one scholar described it, early nineteenth-century America was “drunk on the millennium.”<sup>10</sup> Here, as in other areas, Mormons were in close stride with the nation’s religious mood. And, as with others, early Mormon belief in an apocalyptic, premillennial Second Coming gradually yielded to postmillennial meliorism. It was a halting, never fully completed transit, with the Saints alternating between cataclysmic and gradualist expectations, but one in which they always saw themselves as builders as well as heralds of a perfected earthly kingdom that Christ would inherit at His coming. Efforts to create a “new heaven” were closely dependent on making a “new earth.” And, as we shall see, many Mormons were certain that only plural marriage could fully redeem the world from its decadence.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, utopian and postmillennial notions often united with an enthusiasm for scientific achievement, mostly in the area of biological theory,

<sup>6</sup>*The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier: Selected Texts on Work, Love, and Passionate Attraction*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Beecher and Richard Bienvu (Boston, 1971), 333. Also see Arnita Ament Jones, “Free Love and Communal Households: Robert Dale Owens and Fanny Wright on Women’s Rights,” *Indiana Academy of the Social Sciences Proceedings*, 1974, Third Series (October 1974) 9: 93–102.

<sup>7</sup>“Enquirer,” *Cleveland Liberalist* 1 (4 February 1837): 164.

<sup>8</sup>Regarding Shaker sexual thought, see Stephen J. Stein, *The Shaker Experience in America: A History of the United Society of Believers* (New Haven, CT, 1992), 31–32, 34–36, 75, 231–32, 267. For Frances Wright, see Celia Morris, *Fanny Wright: Rebel in America* (Urbana, IL, 1992), 141–47.

<sup>9</sup>*D&C* 1 (1831): 12–13.

<sup>10</sup>Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, CT, 1989), 184.

<sup>11</sup>For the history of Mormon millennialism within the context of American religious belief, see Grant Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* (Urbana, IL, 1993); Dan Erickson, “As a Thief in the Night”: *The Mormon Quest for Millennial Deliverance* (Salt Lake City, 1998). Historians who hold that Mormonism vacillated between pre- and

reflecting what James Whorton in his discussion of antebellum health reform called “Christian physiology.”<sup>12</sup> Because of the possibilities for directed mutation, Lamarckian suppositions were especially popular. Belief that conscious reproductive choice would bring improvement to the human species logically comported with both utopian and postmillennial expectations. While Sir Francis Galton did not invent the term “eugenics” until 1883, and social programs associated with the Mendelian revival were primarily a development of the early twentieth century, confidence in humanity’s capacity for physical improvement was commonplace among nineteenth-century reformers.<sup>13</sup> Careful attention to sexual behavior seemed an entirely appropriate way to build a better civilization. Galton himself, reflecting the cultural hauteur of his time, was certain that careful breeding could carry even “superior” European “races” to higher levels.<sup>14</sup>

Mormon polygamous advocates drew extensively on these strands of thought. And, like so many of the thinkers on whom they relied, these advocates held few assumptions more dear than the proposition that semen was invested with extraordinary qualities and all who wished long, robust lives must not waste it. As the French writer Alexander Mayer warned, dissipation of “la liqueur séminale” was certain to impair health

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postmillennialism include Klaus J. Hansen, *Quest for Empire: The Political Kingdom of God and the Council of Fifty in Mormon History* (East Lansing, MI, 1967), 20–21, and *Mormonism and the American Experience* (Chicago, 1981), 118; David E. Smith, “Millenarian Scholarship in America,” *American Quarterly* 17 (Fall 1965): 542; J.F.C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism 1780–1850* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1979), 176–92. On the movement from pre- to postmillennial thought generally, see James H. Moorhead, “Between Progress and Apocalypse: A Reassessment of Millennialism in American Religious Thought, 1800–1880,” *Journal of American History* 71 (December 1984): 524–42. An understanding of the convergence of utopian, millennial, and nationalist optimism must begin with works like that of Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America’s Millennial Role* (Chicago, 1968); Conrad Cherry, *God’s New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1971); and William A. Clebsch, “America’s ‘Mythique’ as Redeemer Nation,” *Prospects* 4 (1979): 79–94.

<sup>12</sup>James C. Whorton, *Crusaders for Fitness: The History of American Health Reformers* (Princeton, NJ, 1982), 38–61. As another scholar put it, “[S]cience did not grow up divorced from religion. Preachers, hungry for the millennium, joined in, even led, the cheering for science.” James Turner, *Without God, without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore, MD, 1985), 244.

<sup>13</sup>For accounts of the eugenics movement, see Mark H. Haller, *Eugenics: Hereditarian Attitudes in American Thought* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1963); Daniel J. Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity* (New York, 1985).

<sup>14</sup>See the entire preface to both the original 1869 and revised 1892 editions of Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius: An Inquiry into Its Laws and Consequences* (London, 1892). Also see Haller, *Eugenics*, 3–4, 23; William H. Tucker, *The Science and Politics of Racial Research* (Urbana, IL, 1994), 41–47; Diane B. Paul, *Controlling Human Heredity: 1865 to the Present* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1995), 4–40.

and longevity.<sup>15</sup> Sexual prodigality, many feared, was afflicting society with a vast seepage of energy. One American physician, illustrating the perils of careless expenditure, described a masturbatory victim as “the most shamed and degraded looking human being conceivable; it was next to impossible to catch his eye; he stooped and walked as tottering as a man of ninety.”<sup>16</sup> Joining the lament, Mormons declared it a “fact . . . patent to all” that, because of licentious behavior, the majority of men were “feeble, undersized and shorter lived than their ancestors . . . [and were] small of stature, slight of limb, and look[ed] like boys turned old suddenly.”<sup>17</sup>

<sup>15</sup>Alexander Mayer, *Des rapports conjugaux considéré sous le triple point de vue de la population, de la santé et de la morale publique* (Paris, 1857), 256. Also see the American writer John B. Newman, *The Philosophy of Generation: Its Abuses, with Their Causes, Prevention, and Cure* (New York, 1853), 26. The fascinating early history of ideas about sperm is followed in Elizabeth Gasking, *Investigations of Generation, 1651–1828* (London, 1967), and Michael Stolberg, “Self-pollution, Moral Reform, and the Venereal Trade: Notes on the Sources and Historical Context of *Onania* (1716),” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 9 (1–2): 37–61.

While this paper focuses chiefly on physical benefits associated with theories of sexual control, there was another category of advantages thought to result from restraint, one less attended to by the Mormons, but very important in Victorian culture on both sides of the Atlantic: creative activity, ethical character, social class, and even empire. Referred to many times, these ideas are most extensively set forth in Peter T. Cominos, “Late-Victorian Respectability and the Social System,” *International Review of Social History* 8 (1963): pt. 1: 18–48, pt. 2: 216–50; Charles E. Rosenberg, “Sexuality, Class, and Role in Nineteenth-Century America,” *American Quarterly* 25 (May 1973): 131–53; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “Sex as Symbol in Victorian Purity: An Ethnohistorical Analysis of Jacksonian America,” *Turning Points: Historical and Sociological Essays on the Family*, ed. John Demos and Sarane Spence Boocock, *American Journal of Sociology* 84, Supplement (1978), 212–47; and most memorably by G. J. Barker-Benfield’s writings: “The Spermatoc Economy: A Nineteenth-Century View of Sexuality,” in *The American Family in Social-Historical Perspective*, ed. Michael Gordon (New York, 1973), 336–72; and *The Horrors of the Half-Known Life: Male Attitudes toward Women and Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York, 1976), 175–88. Also see the interesting comments of Michel Foucault in “The Repressive Hypothesis,” *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books ed. of 1976 original, 1990), 15–49.

<sup>16</sup>Samuel Bayard Woodward, *Hints for the Young on a Subject Relating to the Health of Body and Mind* (Boston, 1838), 41. Orthodox and ultraist alike insisted that, in the words of one, inattention to such things had led to “continual deterioration of the race.” William A. Alcott, *The Physiology of Marriage* (Boston, 1866), 23. The centrality of sexual behavior in nineteenth-century American thought, for both destructive and improving consequences, is further illustrated in Ronald G. Walters, *Primers for Prudery: Sexual Advice to Victorian America* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1974). For the extraordinary fears associated with masturbation, see Robert Neuman, “The Priests of the Body and Masturbatory Insanity in the Late Nineteenth Century,” *Psychohistory Review* 6 (Spring 1978): 21–32. Mormon concern with masturbation is examined in Lester E. Bush, Jr., *Health and Medicine among the Latter-day Saints: Science, Sense, and Scripture* (New York, 1993), 148.

<sup>17</sup>Charles W. Penrose, “Physical Regeneration,” *Millennial Star* 29 (August 10, 1867): 497, 498. Also see Daniel H. Wells in an 1857 address, *Journal of Discourses by Brigham Young, President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, His Two Counsellors, the*

Only by arresting this “great leakage of vital force,” they warned, could the fateful descent be reversed.<sup>18</sup>

Commentators argued that the problem lay as much with married partners as with those who engaged in the “solitary sin” or visited prostitutes. In the words of one authority, married people “thinking themselves entitled to a perfect glut of indulgence . . . little suspect it as the cause of their physical diseases or mental alienations.”<sup>19</sup> Sexual license, it was believed, deranged the balance of vital energies in both genders, exhausted their bodies, and left them vulnerable to illness. By such abandon, couples “make their lives wretched, and give birth to short-lived, suffering children.”<sup>20</sup> Amatory embraces during pregnancy were considered especially dangerous because the expecting mother was in a fragile condition and the unborn child susceptible to injury. T. L. Nichols summed up the perils succinctly: “Every time a husband excited in his [pregnant] wife the sexual passion, he robs his child of some portion of its vitality, and her of some of the strength she needs.”<sup>21</sup>

With such views, one might naturally ask whether seminal expenditure was safe under any circumstance. Some, believing American society to be ailing from sexual excess of all kinds, were reluctant to approve more than what was needed for reproduction. Extensive abstinence was urged as both morally necessary and hygienically restorative. Seminal

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*Twelve Apostles, and Others* . . . , 26 vols. (Liverpool, 1855–1886), 4: 254–55 (hereafter *JD*). In the words of another scholar, “The Mormons . . . did not perceive themselves in quite the same light as did their critics. Yet, at the level of ‘physiologic’ theory, the views they expressed had many similarities.” Lester E. Bush, Jr., “Mormon ‘Physiology,’ 1850–1875,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 56 (Summer 1982): 231.

<sup>18</sup>“‘Mormonism’ Not Sensual,” *Millennial Star* 39 (3 December 1877): 790. The idea that all human society was in decline was a proposition easily accepted by a people believing that the world had stumbled in darkness for centuries. In the founding revelation given to Joseph Smith, Jr., the young prophet was told that the world had departed from divine truths and that “none doeth good no not one.” *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, comp. and ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City, 1984), 6.

<sup>19</sup>Orson Squire Fowler, *Amativeness: Or Evils and Remedies of Excessive and Perverted Sexuality Including Warning and Advice to the Married and Single* (New York, 1857), vi. Also see his *Sexual Science; Including Manhood, Womanhood, and Their Mutual Interrelations* (Cincinnati, OH, 1870), 695–97; Thomas L. Nichols, *Esoteric Anthropology* (London, 1853), 98, 115, 179, 180, 190; Newman, *Philosophy of Generation*, 55–64.

<sup>20</sup>Nichols, *Esoteric Anthropology*, 180–81. O. S. Fowler warned that sexual excess took an especially heavy toll on wives, constituting the chief reason for “female complaints” and sending half of all married women to the grave prematurely; *Amativeness*, 43–46. For concern with the dangers of “sexual excess” among Victorian women generally, see Daniel Scott Smith, “Family Limitation, Sexual Control, and Domestic Feminism in Victorian America,” *Clio’s Consciousness Raised: New Perspectives on the History of Women*, ed. Mary Hartman and Lois W. Banner (New York, 1974), 129.

<sup>21</sup>Nichols, *Esoteric Anthropology*, 311.

preservation's best-remembered American proponent, Sylvester Graham, after describing the average man of his time as "a living volcano of unclean propensities and passions," recommended that husbands and wives improve their health by engaging in only twelve sexual encounters a year.<sup>22</sup> Then, citing Jeremy Taylor, Graham said this was why God commanded circumcision: as a metaphor for the "cutting off all superfluity of naughtiness."<sup>23</sup>

There was another tradition, of course, as old as that urging spermatic conservation, and one most Americans, including Mormons, found more congenial to their natures. This was the argument that sexual intercourse was a universal practice in one form or another and that excessive repression was unreasonable. A disciplined accommodation, especially when employed with reproductive intent, could actually be salubrious.<sup>24</sup> In the words of E. N. Jencks, a Massachusetts author whose work was frequently cited by Mormons, "divine law has taught us that . . . normal gratification of the reproductive instinct is the highest function of the body."<sup>25</sup> One of the nineteenth century's most widely read American writers of advice books, William Alcott, warned that "long continued celibacy [actually] *contracts* the mind, if it does not enfeeble it."<sup>26</sup> Wilford Woodruff, an apostle and

<sup>22</sup>Sylvester Graham, *A Lecture to Young Men, on Chastity. Intended Also for the Serious Consideration of Parents and Guardians* (Boston, 1839), 38–39, 72–73.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 189. For anxiety in nineteenth-century American thinking concerning recreational as opposed to reproductive employment of sex, see Hal D. Sears, "The Sex Radicals in High Victorian America," *Virginia Quarterly Review* 48 (Summer 1972): 379–81; Estelle B. Freedman, "Sexuality in Nineteenth-Century America: Behavior, Ideology, and Politics," *Reviews in American History* 10 (December 1982): 203–4; for the study of efforts to use science to justify a more relaxed approach to sexual intercourse, see Anita Clair Fellman and Michael Fellman, "The Rule of Moderation in Late Nineteenth-Century American Sexual Ideology," *Journal of Sex Research* 17 (August 1981): 238–55; and for the survey of authorities and advice books on this question, see Peter Gardella, *Innocent Ecstasy: How Christianity Gave America an Ethic of Sexual Pleasure* (New York, 1985), 58–60.

<sup>24</sup>See Aristotle concerning natural pleasures, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 7.14. On Maimonides recommending sexual intercourse for health, see the comments of Victor Robinson, *The Story of Medicine* (New York, 1931), 182. Among writers contemporaneous with the Saints, see Robert Dale Owen, *Moral Physiology; or, a Brief and Plain Treatise on the Population Question* (New York, 1859), 42; Lorenzo Niles Fowler, *Marriage: Its History and Ceremonies* (New York, 1847), 6, 213–14. Also see the references provided by Peter Gay, *Education of the Senses*, vol. 1: *The Bourgeois Experience, Victoria to Freud* (New York, 1984), 150, 152, 153.

<sup>25</sup>[E. N. Jencks], *History and Philosophy of Marriage; or, Polygamy and Monogamy Compared. By a Christian Philanthropist* (Boston, 1869), 235. The Mormons cited Jencks more frequently than any other author. See, for example, the following: "A Christian Plea for Plurality of Wives," *Millennial Star* 31 (27 October 1869): 699; "Is Polygamy a Blessing," *Millennial Star* 32 (15 March 1870): 166; "Presbyterians and Polygamy," *Deseret News* [Weekly], 31 December 1879, pp. 758–59. One of Mormonism's female champions of plural marriage, Helen Mar Whitney, said Jencks taught "a great deal of what we Latter-day Saints believe." *Plural Marriage as Taught by the Prophet Joseph* (Salt Lake City, 1882), 53.

<sup>26</sup>William A. Alcott, *The Young Man's Guide*, 8th ed. (Boston, 1836), 255–56. And, as another writer said, "There is no virtue in *disuse*, any more than in wrong or over-use."

later president of the Mormon Church, so agreed with Alcott's views that he declared his book "one of the best Gentile works I ever saw."<sup>27</sup>

Latter-day Saints, while concurring on the importance of spermatic preservation, said that scripture and nature alike commanded the race to perpetuate itself. Hence, sexual activity for reproduction was encouraged, but only when it was "an object of purpose, and not merely the accidental results of passion."<sup>28</sup> From the 1850s until the end of the century, church members were told that a major distinction between themselves and the rest of Christendom was that people outside the Mormon fold "regulate their sexual intercourse by lustful feelings, not by the pure and holy feeling of procreation."<sup>29</sup> Like Augustine, who said it was not sexual congress but the lascivious imagination accompanying it that ensnared men's souls, Mormons believed they could multiply for God without surrendering to carnal passion.<sup>30</sup> Until well into the twentieth century, Mormon leaders were unyielding in condemning conjugal relations for pleasure, saying that such practices too easily led to sensuality and abortion.<sup>31</sup>

Few themes are more prominent in Mormon homiletic literature at the time than disavowal that concupiscence either had or should have any part

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Charles S. Woodruff, *Legalized Prostitution: Or, Marriage As It Is, and Marriage As It Should Be* (Boston, 1862), 100.

<sup>27</sup>Wilford Woodruff's *Journal*, ed. Scott G. Kenney, 9 vols. (Midvale, UT, 1983–85), 3: 366, 9 September 1848. Mormon familiarity with nineteenth-century family advice manuals is discussed in Dorice Williams Elliott, "Women, the Mormon Family, and Class Mobility: Nineteenth-Century Victorian Ideology in a Twentieth-Century Church," *Sunstone* 15 (December 1991): 19–26.

<sup>28</sup>Elder Joseph Birch Defends Polygamy," *Millennial Star* 25 (23 December 1873): 804.

<sup>29</sup>"A Reply to the 'Christian Herald' on the Plurality of Wives," *Zion's Watchman* 1 (12 November 1853): 31. Also see Brigham Young, "A Few Words of Doctrine," 8 October 1861, Brigham Young Collection, Church Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter, documents in this repository will be cited only as in Church Archives); and Apostle John Henry Smith who warned that "married people who indulged their passions for any other passion than to beget children, really committed adultery." As reported in Abraham Hoagland Cannon Diaries, 8 September 1890, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University Library, Provo, Utah (hereafter Lee Library). The strong emphasis on reproductive sexuality in connection with polygamy was remembered for decades by both participants and their children. See the interview with "WW" reported in James Edward Hulett, Jr., "The Sociological and Social Psychological Aspects of the Mormon Polygamous Family," (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1939), 37–38; Annie Clark Tanner, *A Mormon Mother: An Autobiography*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City, 1973), 221–22; Beulah Stout Limb, interviewed by Leonard R. Grover, 4 January 1980, p. 11, LDS Polygamy Oral History Project, Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; and, from the same collection, Winnie Haynie Mortensen, interviewed by Leonard R. Grover, 26 January 1980, pp. 19–20.

<sup>30</sup>Augustine, *The City of God*, 14.21.

<sup>31</sup>Apostle George Q. Cannon said in 1884 that he would as soon put his hand on the head of a rattlesnake as baptize, administer to, or perform any religious ritual for a woman who aborted her child. *JD* 26: 14–15. As Lester Bush, Jr., indicated, Mormons of the last

in marital life.<sup>32</sup> In the first sermon he delivered after arriving in the Salt Lake Valley, Brigham Young told of the ruin imposed on children whose mothers were distracted by erotic excitement during gestation.<sup>33</sup> Apostle Orson Hyde warned both monogamous and polygamous Mormons in 1857 that shortened life spans and “puny . . . helpless, scrubby children” resulted from parents who had exhausted themselves through sexual indulgence beyond what was needed for conception.<sup>34</sup> Apostle Erastus Snow censured an audience in St. George, Utah, for “bringing on premature decay and early death by the too frequent use of sexual intercourse.”<sup>35</sup> Sexual relations with barren wives were also considered sinful and unhealthful. Heber C. Kimball chastised church members for continuing to cohabit with partners who could not conceive, for they were thereby living “in the spirit of adultery.” Such men should “take a course to regenerate,” not “degenerate.”<sup>36</sup> Kimball promised parents that, on the other hand, when conjugal relations were undertaken to have children, their offspring would “be mighty and godlike.”<sup>37</sup>

Agreement between Mormon and non-Mormon concerning the importance of reproductive sexuality did not save the Saints from attack, however. How, it was asked, could concerns over the dangers of sexual excess be reconciled with a practice that, presumably, involved the expenditure of more, not less, of life’s germinal treasure? Indeed, the most scathing criticisms made of the Saints described them as a people weakened and in physical decline because of polygamy and its presumed excessive seminal effusion. The most famous and oft-quoted of such portrayals, that of Dr. Roberts Barthelow, an assistant military surgeon who visited Utah in the summer of 1857, was almost identical to passages in advice manuals warning of the consequences of masturbation, spermatorrhea, and debauchery: altered

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century made no distinction between abortion and infanticide. Bush, “Birth Control among the Mormons,” 13.

<sup>32</sup>For a few examples, see Brigham Young (1856), *JD* 3: 266; Charles W. Penrose (1880), *JD* 22: 97; Erastus Snow (1883), *JD* 23: 228; and, “‘Mormonism’ Not Sensual,” *Millennial Star* 39 (3 December 1877): 789–90.

<sup>33</sup>Reported in *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 3: 242, 28 July 1847.

<sup>34</sup>As reported in Luke William Gallup, “Reminiscence and Diary,” pp. 193–95, 11 February 1857, Church Archives. Hyde’s remarks resembled those of the non-Mormon writer, Wesley Grindle. In the same year that Hyde delivered his sermon, Grindle, in the tradition of homuncular theory, warned against wasted spermatic emissions because every drop, he said, was “the habitation of living beings.” *New Medical Revelations, Being a Popular Work on the Reproductive System* (Philadelphia, 1857), 45.

<sup>35</sup>As reported in *Diary of Charles Lowell Walker*, ed. A. Karl Larson and Katherine Miles Larson, 2 vols. (Logan, UT, 1980), 2: 620, 3 November 1883.

<sup>36</sup>Heber C. Kimball (1857), *JD* 4: 278.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 277.

countenances, disease, and shortened lives. In a later report on the same subject, Barthelow declared that the Mormon community was so weakened by sexual prodigality that they would surely die out were it not for the regular arrival of new converts.<sup>38</sup>

Mormons answered by appropriating another assumption of the time: the widely held conviction that men possessed greater sexual need and capacity than women.<sup>39</sup> Dr. George Napheys, a respected physician and author of the day, bespoke the common belief that wives seldom felt one-tenth the desire for amorous fulfillment that their husbands did.<sup>40</sup> In the words of another writer, although men called “to . . . heaven and earth . . . [for help], the intensity of . . . [their] passion sweeps down every barrier, and rushes to its gratification.”<sup>41</sup> Emphasizing this difference, Mormons said that a plurality of wives, when sexual intercourse was confined to perpetuation of the species, allowed both genders to live in greater harmony with their respective natures. “A person possessing [only] a moderate knowledge of physiology, or who has paid attention to his own nature and the nature of the gentler sex,” said Brigham Young, “can readily understand this.”<sup>42</sup>

<sup>38</sup>Barthelow’s description, first presented in a military report, was reprinted in medical reviews throughout the United States and in London. See, e.g., the paper by Samuel A. Cartwright and C. G. Forshey before the New Orleans Academy of Science, published as “Hereditary Descent; or, Depravity of the Offspring of Polygamy among the Mormons,” *DeBow’s Review* 30 (1861): 208–16; and the later account by Barthelow himself, “The Physiological Aspects of Mormonism, and the Climatology, and Diseases of Utah and New Mexico,” *Cincinnati Lancet and Observer* 10 (April 1867): esp. 196–97. The most complete investigation of Barthelow and his reports is that by Bush in his “Mormon ‘Physiology,’” 221–31. For further comment regarding criticism of Mormon polygamous physiology, see Charles A. Cannon, “The Awesome Power of Sex: The Polemical Campaign against Mormon Polygamy,” *Pacific Historical Review* 43 (February 1974): 61–82; Gary L. Bunker and Davis Bitton, “Polygamous Eyes: A Note on Mormon Physiognomy,” *Dialogue* 12 (Autumn 1979): 114–19; and Grover-Swank, “Sex, Sickness and Statehood,” 49–71.

<sup>39</sup>The history of this belief was a major thread in Keith Thomas’s classic, “The Double Standard,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 20 (April 1959): 195–216. Also see Cynthia Eagle Russett’s description of the nineteenth century’s scientific location of women, in all their capacities, at a lower station on the phyletic ladder, in her *Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood* (Cambridge, MA, 1989), 78–103. With specific regard to female lack of sexual desire, this was a common and emphatic claim in nineteenth-century human interest and advice literature. See Anna Ferguson, *The Young Lady; or Guide to Knowledge, Virtue, and Happiness* (Boston, 1848), 117; Orson Squire Fowler, *Love and Parentage, Applied to the Improvement of Offspring* (New York, 1857), 89; and especially popular among Mormons, Jencks, *Philosophy and History of Marriage*, 62, 168–69, 171–72, 220–22.

<sup>40</sup>George Napheys, *The Transmission of Life: Counsels on the Nature and Hygiene of the Masculine Function* (Philadelphia, 1871), 173–74.

<sup>41</sup>The quotation is from Jencks, *Philosophy and History of Marriage*, 171–72.

<sup>42</sup>Brigham Young (1870), *JD* 13: 317.

Associated with this rejoinder was the popular judgment that males were often less spiritual than females, a conviction that not only justified a gendered division of social and domestic vocations but one that explained the difficulty of finding enough righteous husbands for the larger number of virtuous women.<sup>43</sup> Again, it was said, plurality better answered the differing spiritual natures of the sexes. Principled men, fewer than their female counterparts, could find acceptable outlets for sexual urgency through reproductive encounters by husbanding the surplus of deserving women. As Julie Dunfey has pointed out, arguments for polygamy were thus brought to support, rather than erode, Victorian premises: “If most men were depraved and most women pure and lacking in passion, it followed that there were not enough good men to marry all the good women and thus allow them to fulfill their proper sphere.”<sup>44</sup>

As early as 1842, Mormonism’s first pamphlet defense of plurality alluded to male difficulty with the sexual constraints of monogamous marriage.<sup>45</sup> And, as George Q. Cannon put it in 1869, everyone knew male fecundity endured longer than that of females, thus justifying a man’s need for additional partners at midlife and beyond.<sup>46</sup> Not only did women possess only a fraction of male libidinous impulse but, in order to preserve the purity and health of a coming child, mothers needed to retire from sexual excitement until pregnancy and lactation were complete.<sup>47</sup> Without other spouses, the argument ran, monogamous husbands too easily yielded to their passions, turned to dissipating resorts, or imposed themselves on already pregnant wives, flouting “the great principle that nothing should be done in vain.”<sup>48</sup>

<sup>43</sup>The proposition that women’s natures logically assigned them to different “spheres” of activity and that their spiritual sensitivity specially fitted them to serve as moral guardians in the home was fully accepted by nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints. One Mormon writer, while pleading the benefits of polygamy, referred to the female sex as “the fairest and most lovely specimen of the creative power of God.” Jesse Haven, *Celestial Marriage, and the Plurality of Wives!* (Cape Town, South Africa, 1854), 4.

<sup>44</sup>Julie Dunfey, “Living the Principle’ of Plural Marriage,” 529.

<sup>45</sup>[Udney Hay Jacob], *An Extract, from a Manuscript Entitled “The Peace Maker,” the Doctrines of the Millennium* (Nauvoo, IL, 1842), 37.

<sup>46</sup>George Q. Cannon (1869), *JD* 13: 206.

<sup>47</sup>Belinda Marden Pratt, *Defence of Polygamy, by a Lady of Utah, in a Letter to Her Sister in New Hampshire* [Salt Lake City, 1854], 6; Joseph Birch, “Is Polygamy Unnatural?” *Millennial Star* 36 (27 January 1874): 50; and, Abraham M. Musser, “Polygamy,” *Millennial Star* 39 (11 June 1877): 390.

<sup>48</sup>As quoted from an unnamed Mormon apostle by the French observer, Jules Remy. *A Journey to Great Salt Lake City . . . with a Sketch of the History, Religion, and Customs of the Mormons*, 2 vols. (London, 1861), 2: 109. Disregard for the delicate, nonsexual feelings of wives was alleged by Mormons to be commonplace with monogamous husbands: “Such will indulge their appetites, and every pernicious and unhallowed lust must be gratified at the risk of . . . [his wife’s] poor heart breaking.” Helen Mar Whitney, *Why We Practice Plural Marriage. By a “Mormon” Wife and Mother—Helen Mar Whitney* (Salt Lake City, 1884), 54–55. But to require men to live in a condition of celibacy during their wives’ pregnancies was naive, for, as another Mormon put it: “Nature speaks.” William Budge,

Female members who defended polygamy were as forceful as the men. Mary Jane Mount Tanner, commenting on the problems of a cousin, pithily observed: "I think she has children fast [but] . . . it was not her husbands fault[.] if it was she should be a Mormon and get him some more wives that would save her all that trouble[.]"<sup>49</sup>

The argument found such support that one of Utah's earliest dissident publications, at odds with church leadership on other issues, admitted that "the two sexes . . . are different in their tendencies; and . . . upon this very difference turns the whole question of the propriety of plural marriage. Women are endowed with monogamic tendencies and men with polygamic ones."<sup>50</sup> Thus, plural marriage permitted both sexes to fulfill their natural inclinations without, as Mormon Apostle Amasa M. Lyman said, "stepping aside from the path of virtue and honor."<sup>51</sup> George Q. Cannon was more direct. Rather than yielding to derelict monogamous habits, he said, "We close the door . . . and say that whoredoms, seductions and adulteries must not be committed among us . . . at the same time we open the door in the other direction and make plural marriage honorable."<sup>52</sup>

Mormonism's indictment that traditional marriage was inclined to dissipation was complemented by another concern widely held in Western society: the belief that thoughts and proclivities were "faithfully daguerre-typed" onto offspring.<sup>53</sup> Parents' thoughts could be passed to the embryo during coitus and other intimate moments, with women's emotions further imprinting the child during gestation and the time of nursing.

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*The Marriage Institution* (Liverpool, 1879), 15–16. Also see the interesting conversation reported by a British visitor to Salt Lake City, in Keith Sinclair, ed., *A Soldier's View of Empire: The Reminiscences of James Bodell, 1831–92* (London, 1982), 194.

<sup>49</sup>Mary Jane Mount Tanner, *A Fragment: The Autobiography of Mary Jane Mount Tanner*, ed. Margery W. Ward and George S. Tanner (Salt Lake City, 1980), 159.

<sup>50</sup>"Woman and Plural Marriage," *Utah Magazine* 2 (19 December 1868): 150. For a history of the Godbeites or "New Movement," and the growing difficulty their leaders experienced over the question of polygamy, see Ronald W. Walker, *Wayward Saints: The Godbeites and Brigham Young* (Urbana, IL, 1998), esp. 326–30.

<sup>51</sup>Amasa M. Lyman (1866), *JD* 11: 206.

<sup>52</sup>George Q. Cannon (1869), *JD* 14: 58. Benjamin Ferris said that during his short residence in Utah in the 1850s, the major argument used to defend polygamy was that it eliminated male sexual temptation to prey on those to whom they were not married. *Utah and the Mormons* (New York, 1854), 251. For other statements by the Saints contending that their marriage system, by its fidelity to nature, cultivated a more civil society, see "A Mormonite's Plea for Polygamy," *Millennial Star* 16 (25 November 1854): 746–50; "Baptism and Plurality of Wives," *Millennial Star* 17 (13 October 1855): 645; "Polygamy vs. Monogamy," *The Mormon* 1 (8 December 1855): n.p.; George Q. Cannon in *The Bible & Polygamy . . . A Discussion between Professor Orson Pratt . . . and Rev. Doctor J. P. Newman . . . To Which Are Added Three Sermons on the Same Subject, by Pres. George A. Smith, and Elders Orson Pratt and George Q. Cannon* (Salt Lake City, 1877), 102 (hereafter *The Bible & Polygamy*); and recollections by the non-Mormon, John Hanson Beadle, *Life in Utah* (Philadelphia, 1870), 355.

<sup>53</sup>Fowler, *Sexual Science*, 750. Subscription to the theory was commonplace. See Lydia Maria Child, *The Mother's Book* (Boston, 1831), 4; William A. Alcott, *The Young Mother, or*

Conception should therefore occur only when both parents were tranquil, relaxed, and filled with tender emotions. The uncanny certitude of the possibility of influencing the developing child could be frightening. One non-Mormon said that if a woman, when copulating, thought about someone other than her actual physical partner, the resulting child would resemble the person imagined.<sup>54</sup> Another told of a gentleman who “abused himself” when in bed beside his pregnant wife with the result that, after the baby was born, it soon fell victim to “exhaustion and decrepitude.”<sup>55</sup> Some writers provided rules of thought for prospective parents to assure poetic, mathematical, and other gifts in their offspring.<sup>56</sup>

Mormon acceptance of these ideas was complete. When Latter-day Saint husbands were hunted and sent to prison for polygamy, some wives were convinced that emotional distress brought by the ordeal was transferred to and left “marks” on their unborn children.<sup>57</sup> Because vice was considered hereditary, mothers were told to conceive and carry their infants in a prayerful frame of mind that “a Noble Spirit from Eternity may Come

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*Management of Children in Regard to Health* (Boston, 1838), 120–28; Newman, *Philosophy of Generation*, 32–33, 36–38, 80; Russell Thacher Trall, *Home-Treatment for Sexual Abuses. A Practical Treatise* (New York, 1853), 78–79; L.F.E. Bergeret, *The Preventive Obstacle, or Conjugal Onanism: The Dangers and Inconveniences to the Individual, to the Family, and to Society*, trans. P. DeMarmon (New York, 1870), 118; Napheys, *Transmission of Life*, 174. Charles E. Rosenberg pointed out that “the assumption that acquired characteristics could become hereditary remained essentially unchallenged until the twentieth century.” “The Bitter Fruit: Heredity, Disease, and Social Thought in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Perspectives in American History*, ed. Donald Fleming and Bernard Bailyn (Cambridge, MA, 1974), 224. Also see Walters, *Primers for Prudery*, 13–14. The history of this theory was most extensively traced by Conway Zirkle, “The Early History of the Idea of the Inheritance of Acquired Characters and of Pangenesis,” *American Philosophical Society Transactions* 35, pt. 2 (1946): 91–151.

<sup>54</sup>Interestingly, O. S. Fowler contended that the greater excitement aroused in forbidden unions was transmitted to the illegitimate offspring, producing dispositions that were “lively, sprightly, witty, frolicsome, knowing, quick of perception, apt to learn, full of passion, quick-tempered, impulsive throughout, hasty, indiscreet, given to excesses,” etc. See his *Love and Parentage*, 33.

<sup>55</sup>Newman, *Philosophy of Generation*, 80.

<sup>56</sup>Fowler, *Sexual Science*, 780–803. These assumptions continued until the end of the nineteenth century. In 1898, the unusually large number of male births in New York City was credited to military excitement generated by the Spanish-American War. “Schenk to World on Excess of Boys,” [*New York*] *World*, 30 December 1898, p. 1. Also see Alice B. Stockham, *Karezza: Ethics of Marriage*, rev. ed. (Chicago, 1903), 24, 64–65.

<sup>57</sup>Julietta Bateman Jensen, *Little God Pieces: The Story of My Mormon Mother's Life* (Salt Lake City, 1948), 205; James L. Wyatt, interviewed by Leslie Embry, 18 June 1976, p. 11, LDS Polygamy Oral History Project, Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah; and the comments of Apostle Moses Thatcher as reported in Abraham Hoagland Cannon Journal, 2 October 1890, Lee Library. For further remarks, see Bush, “Birth Control among the Mormons,” 37 n. 43, and *Health and Medicine among the Mormons*, 146–47.

into the tabernacle & that the Holy Ghost may rest upon the father Mother & child.”<sup>58</sup> One Mormon writer urged that, to assure that a new child would not inherit “disease, distortion, decay, and death,” appropriate food and music should precede the procreative act.<sup>59</sup> Apostle Orson Hyde, as part of a sermon urging the taking of additional wives, warned listeners that idiocy and other deficiencies were caused by fathers who did not restrain themselves during their wives’ pregnancies.<sup>60</sup>

Again, Mormons turned the matter to a defense of plurality. Inasmuch as more sexual outlets were available, wives were less likely to suffer the impositions of sexually needful husbands and were thus able to conceive and carry infants in a more peaceful, spiritual state of mind. As Belinda Marden Pratt, a plural wife herself, explained, sexual indulgence was intended for the procreation of healthy offspring; therefore “natural law would dictate, that a husband should remain apart from his wife” during her pregnancy so that “her heart should be pure, her thoughts and affections chaste, her mind calm, her passions without excitement.”<sup>61</sup> And polygamy, it was said, permitted this far more than monogamy.

Another concern assimilated into Mormon apologetic discourse involved spousal incompatibility and the dangers of “alienation” of affections. Some believed that costs associated with spermatic loss were partially restored by an exchange of energies between loving partners. Conversely, when mutual affection was absent or when the natural course of the sexual act was interrupted, serious harm followed. This was why “the solitary sin” was considered more hurtful than consensual intercourse; why coitus interruptus, or “conjugal onanism” as it was called, was considered a theft of the compensating current; and, especially important, why alienation of feelings between married partners should be avoided.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>58</sup>Brigham Young, as reported in *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 4: 122, 8 April 1852; and *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 5: 7–8, 11 January 1857. Apostle Moses Thatcher, pleading the powers of polygamy on “natural” and “scientific” grounds, urged members to live by “the laws of nature,” if they wished to escape penalties transmitted to the third and fourth generations of their children. “Discourse by Elder Moses Thatcher,” *Deseret News*, 26 May 1883, p. 1.

<sup>59</sup>Hannah T. King, “Procreation,” *Woman's Exponent* 14 (1 September 1885): 51.

<sup>60</sup>As recorded in Gallup, “Reminiscence and Diary,” pp. 193–95, 11 February 1857, Church Archives.

<sup>61</sup>Pratt, *Defence of Polygamy*, 4–5; Whitney, *Why We Practice Plural Marriage*, 54–55.

<sup>62</sup>These ideas were set forth in Europe with as much enthusiasm as in the United States; see Bergeret, *The Preventive Obstacle*; Mayer, *Des rapports conjugaux*. For the United States: A. M. Mauriceau, *The Married Woman's Private Medical Companion* (New York, 1847), 36–37, 144; Newman, *Philosophy of Generation*, 64; and the discussions provided in John S. Haller and Robin M. Haller, *The Physician and Sexuality in Victorian America* (New York: 1977), 96–99, 112, 256; Gail Pat Parsons, “Equal Treatment for All: American Medical Remedies for Male Sexual Problems, 1850–1900,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 32 (January 1977): 58–60.

In his 1842 pamphlet defending polygamy and patriarchal authority, Udney Hay Jacob identified alienation of wives' feelings as a national scourge that he believed had caused social disorder, bad offspring, and loss of longevity.<sup>63</sup> Writers in Utah also used the term "alienation," occasionally employing it as grounds for divorce.<sup>64</sup> The greater emotional satisfaction possible in a family of several female partners, where jealousy was subordinated to concern for the common good, was a claim repeatedly heard from the Mormon pulpit. Parental affection, peace, and happiness, it was said, exceeded by many times what one found in monogamy.<sup>65</sup> An imaginative conversation written to persuade a reluctant female member of polygamy's advantages stated that monogamy vitiated the body and mind of offspring, sowing "the seeds of death and mortality in their systems." By contrast, in plurality a synergistic current was generated making the entire family "stronger than they otherwise could be."<sup>66</sup> As one Mormon enthusiast expressed it to a monogamous friend: "I wish you were a polyomist [*sic*] there is Something immensely Godlike in it it increases the powers of the mind, [and] brings forth inbolder relief all the powers of the human Soul."<sup>67</sup>

An American writer of the time observed that Latter-day Saints so effectively turned the arguments of their critics to their own use that champions of monogamous marriage were placed on the defense.<sup>68</sup> And Mormon spokesmen, sensing the strength of their claims, condemned monogamy with a sharpness that would astonish most Latter-day Saint church members today. Nothing, they said, had been so corrupting to society and health as Christianity's departure from the divine economy of the sexes

<sup>63</sup>Jacob, *An Extract*, 10, 13, 25, 32. Also see the speech George A. Smith made in the Nauvoo Temple, as reported in George D. Smith, ed., *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City, 1991), 221.

<sup>64</sup>See, e.g., *Journals of John D. Lee, 1846-47 and 1859*, ed. Charles Kelly (Salt Lake City, 1938), 220; Robert Glass Cleland and Juanita Brooks, eds., *A Mormon Chronicle: The Diaries of John D. Lee, 1848-1876*, 2 vols. (San Marino, CA, 1955), 1: 176; Brigham Young, "A Few Words of Doctrine," 8 October 1861, Church Archives.

<sup>65</sup>For a sample of the chorus (mostly men) making these claims, see Erastus Snow (1881), *JD* 22: 152; "Discourse by Apostle Erastus Snow," *Deseret News*, 14 July 1883, p. 1; Jedediah M. Grant (1856) *JD* 4: 84; and Margaret S. Smoot, "Experience of a Mormon Wife," Provo City, Utah County, Utah, 1880, p. 8, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, California.

<sup>66</sup>"Nelly and Abby: A Familiar Conversation between Two Cousins, on Marriage," *Millennial Star* 15 (9 April 1853): 227. Also see the comments made to Elizabeth Wood Kane in the early 1870s: Elizabeth Wood Kane, *A Gentile Account of Life in Utah's Dixie, 1872-73: Elizabeth Kane's St. George Journal* (Salt Lake City, 1995), 119-20.

<sup>67</sup>Charles Smith to Henry Eyring, February 1869, Charles Smith Diaries, copy, Lee Library.

<sup>68</sup>[Dyer Daniel Lum], *Utah and Its People: Facts and Statistics Bearing on the "Mormon Problem" . . . by a Gentile* (New York, 1882), 41.

found in Old Testament polygamy. Joseph F. Smith, an apostle and counselor in the First Presidency, was uncompromising: "Our system of marriage promotes life, purity, innocence, vitality, health, increase and longevity, while the other engenders disease, disappointment, misery and premature death, that is the difference. . . . They are not alike at all."<sup>69</sup> And in an epistle of 1885, the church's First Presidency described the consequences of adherence to the monogamous ethic as one where the "channels which God has provided for the lawful exercise of the appetites with which He has endowed man . . . have been dammed up, and the history of Christendom informs us with what terrible results—the degradation and prostitution of woman, and the spread of the most terrible scourge known to humanity, the social evil, with its attendant train of loathsome horrors."<sup>70</sup>

So confident were the Saints that God had revealed the truths of nature to them that they proudly pointed to what they perceived as evidence of the gift. Disputing their critics, they boasted that nowhere in the world were there more intelligent, faster-learning children than in the Territory of Utah.<sup>71</sup> Latter-day Saint young men and women were more virtuous than those found elsewhere.<sup>72</sup> And those practicing polygamy, they said, were stronger, more vigorous, and longer-lived.<sup>73</sup> In a frequently quoted sermon, Heber C. Kimball, a counselor to Brigham Young, said he could promise sixty-year-old men that if they would enter polygamy it would "renew" their age.<sup>74</sup> And Luke William Gallup, a monogamist Mormon, but one who supported the Saints' polygamous program, wrote his doubting family in the East: "all who practice Nature's laws are rewarded, becoming healthy & strong, and the Man who observes this & marries more than one wife for the sake of posterity will lengthen out his days, enjoying a long life & a happy one."<sup>75</sup> How could anyone say their marriage practices were a threat

<sup>69</sup>"Discourse by President Joseph F. Smith," *Deseret News*, 24 February 1883, p. 1.

<sup>70</sup>"EPISTLE of the First Presidency," 4 April 1885, in James R. Clark, comp., *Messages of the First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1833–1964*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City, 1965–75), 3: 11.

<sup>71</sup>"Prejudice against Nature," *Millennial Star* 29 (17 August 1867): 522–24; Brigham Young (1870), *JD* 13: 88.

<sup>72</sup>George Q. Cannon, "Discourse," in *The Bible & Polygamy*, 104.

<sup>73</sup>Brigham Young (1860, 1870), *JD* 8: 136; 14: 43; Charles W. Penrose, "Why We Practise Plural Marriage," *Millennial Star* 29 (14 August 1867): 577–80; A. M. Musser, "Polygamy," *Millennial Star* 39 (28 May 1877): 341; Moses Thatcher (1885), *JD* 26: 314.

<sup>74</sup>Kimball (1857), *JD* 5:22. Both Kimball and Young said they meant to live until they were 135 to 150 years of age, and that it was not unreasonable to expect to live until one was 200, yet feel as lively as when 40 or 50. Journal of Heber C. Kimball, bk. 90, p. 137, 17 July 1846, Church Archives; Brigham Young (1857, 1860, 1867), *JD* 5: 210; 8: 62; 12: 119.

<sup>75</sup>Gallup "Reminiscence and Diary," May 1841–March 1891, summary of a letter to his family, December 1866, Church Archives. Also see Spencer J. Palmer, "Eliza R. Snow's 'Sketch of My Life': Reminiscences of One of Joseph Smith's Plural Wives," *Brigham Young University Studies* 12 (Autumn 1971): 129–30.

to health, asked one anonymous enthusiast, “when we daily meet boys, resultants of such unions, weighing over 200 pounds and their parents perhaps not over 150.”<sup>76</sup> Because the Saints better understood “the social relations,” Apostle George A. Smith declared, Mormon men and women were even better looking than those produced by monogamy.<sup>77</sup>

Assumed in all of these arguments was a certainty that God’s command to practice polygamy placed Mormons in greater harmony with the laws of nature. One of their founder’s communications had said that matter and spirit were the same and that God’s commandments did not distinguish between things temporal and things spiritual.<sup>78</sup> John Taylor defined religion so broadly that he said he could not tell whether plural marriage was a religious or a secular principle.<sup>79</sup> And George Q. Cannon, an important church spokesman of the time, said “the physiological side of the question” constituted the most powerful case one could make for polygamy. Travelers to Utah reported that more was said of plurality’s social and biological advantages than of its spiritual gifts.<sup>80</sup>

As the Saints saw it, God had simply shown them the most reasonable process for ending human decadence and restoring the race to its primeval stature.<sup>81</sup> Like others in the nineteenth century, they also believed natural law was God’s instrument for accomplishing such things.<sup>82</sup> Opponents were challenged to show them where Mormon arguments failed.<sup>83</sup> Wanting such

<sup>76</sup>“Mormon Polygamy from a Philosophical Standpoint,” *Deseret News*, 15 February 1881, p. 2.

<sup>77</sup>George A. Smith (1856), *JD* 3: 291.

<sup>78</sup>*D&C* 29: 31–35 (1830); 131: 7 (1843). “One of the greatest things Joseph Smith ever did,” said Brigham Young, “was to familiarize Heaven & Earth and Cause them to shake hands together and become Familiar Together.” As reported in *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal*, 5: 422, 27 January 1860.

<sup>79</sup>John Taylor (1866), *JD* 11: 219. In a summons to live and abide by the law of plural marriage in the mid-1850s, church members were told to “[e]stablish the laws of Nature and of Nature’s God in your houses, and teach them to your offspring. Thus shall Zion boast of noble sons and fair daughters; and so shall man be brought back into the presence of his Maker.” “A Chapter on Restitution,” *Deseret News*, 12 January 1854, n.p.

<sup>80</sup>Comments from the *Philadelphia Press*, reprinted in “The Men and Women of Utah,” *Millennial Star* 35 (21 October 1873): 657–58; and “Celia Logan on Mormon Life—1,” [New York] *Daily Graphic*, 28 November 1873. George Q. Cannon’s statement, made in 1869, is found in *JD* 13: 206.

<sup>81</sup>“Dialogue between Father and Son, on Physiology,” *Deseret News* [Weekly], 1 December 1853, n.p.; and “Discourse by Elder Orson Hyde,” *Deseret News* [Weekly], 5 October 1854, n.p.

<sup>82</sup>Turner, *Without God*, 95; Elisabeth Hansot, *Perfection and Progress: Two Modes of Utopian Thought* (Cambridge, MA, 1974).

<sup>83</sup>Those who disagreed with them were challenged to produce evidence of Mormon error, “either from the Bible or Nature—we are willing to meet you on these grounds.” [George Q. Cannon], “‘Pacific,’ ‘Post,’ and Mormonism,” *Western Standard* 1 (15 November 1856):

proof, Mormons insisted that the man who married two or more wives and honorably provided for them would do more for humankind than “ten thousand monogamists who write and preach about morality and virtue.”<sup>84</sup> Plural marriage was “the cord that shall revolutionize the whole world . . . [the] leaven hid in three measures of meal until the whole is leavened.”<sup>85</sup> Others were invited to join in the great project.<sup>86</sup> Success was inevitable, they said, because there was “such a tide of irresistible arguments, that, like the Grand Mississippi, it bears on its bold current everything that dares to oppose its course.”<sup>87</sup>

While denying an evolutionary explanation of life’s origins, throughout the balance of the nineteenth century Mormons appropriated Darwinian imagery in behalf of plurality’s transforming effects. Benjamin F. Johnson said “survival of the Fittest,” assured that polygamy would become “the . . . centre of light and life” for human society on earth.<sup>88</sup> And George A. Smith proudly told of a professor who, after studying Mormon society, predicted that their health and marriage practices would “in about seventy years . . . produce a race of men who would be able to walk the rest of the human race under foot.”<sup>89</sup> In these ways, Mormon polygamous thought was more than Darwinian. It was eugenic. “Let us get the body improved first,” said Apostle Amasa M. Lyman, “that the spirit may live and dwell in a pure tabernacle. When this is done, we can go and cultivate the spirit as much as is needful.”<sup>90</sup> Such improvements, George Q. Cannon reminded his readers, must commence “in the marriage bed.”<sup>91</sup>

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n.p. “Upon this subject, the people want arguments, not denunciations; reason, not sophistry; evidence, not popular traditions or customs; they want a clear, lucid demonstration that the practice is evil.” Orson Pratt, “Celestial Marriage,” *Seer* 1 (August 1853): 127.

<sup>84</sup>“The Only Remedy,” *Deseret News* [Weekly], 31 July 1867, p. 244.

<sup>85</sup>“Lecture by Elder Orson Hyde,” *Deseret News* [Weekly], 19 Oct. 1854, n.p.

<sup>86</sup>“The Only Remedy,” *Deseret News* [Weekly], 31 July 1867, p. 244.

<sup>87</sup>“Lecture by Elder Orson Hyde,” *Deseret News* [Weekly], 19 October 1854, n.p.

<sup>88</sup>Benjamin Franklin Johnson, *Mormonism as an Issue* (Tempe, AZ: privately published letter to the editor of the *Arizona Republican*, 1890), 15. A Mormon apostle had stated this idea earlier when he said, “[U]pon natural principles, upon scientific principles,” those who live in plurality “will have stronger bodies, stronger minds, and by the force of the ‘survival of the fittest,’ will, eventually, under the direction of divine revelation, govern the affairs of the world.” Thatcher (1883), *JD* 24: 116.

<sup>89</sup>George A. Smith (1867), *JD* 12: 144.

<sup>90</sup>Lyman (1866), *JD* 11: 208. “The church’s goal,” a writer for *Harper’s* was told, was “to produce a perfect race of men, and to make each generation more nearly perfect than the last.” Julian Ralph, “A Week with the Mormons,” *Harper’s Weekly* 37 (8 April 1893): 330.

<sup>91</sup>George Q. Cannon, “The Improvement of Our Species,” *Western Standard* 2 (7 August 1857): n.p.

Locating the rise of Latter-day Saint religion within the nineteenth century's reform tradition is commonplace.<sup>92</sup> But, if we are to recapture the full character of Mormon intentions, the centrality of plural marriage for physically restoring humankind needs greater emphasis. Repeatedly, the Saints referred to themselves as engaged in a "revolution," as being pioneers of thought that would break down debilitating habits of the past.<sup>93</sup> The Mormons, John Taylor affirmed, "are taking a stand to revolutionize the ideas of ages, to overturn the fallacies of centuries, and to root out and destroy the corruptions of past generations."<sup>94</sup> "Our business," said Apostle Joseph F. Smith, "is to reclaim this earth. We have set out to regenerate the human family."<sup>95</sup> George Q. Cannon predicted that if members did all they were told, they could become a special race, possessing the complexions of angels.<sup>96</sup>

When the national crusade against polygamy became threatening, Mormon defenders said that they never intended for the practice to be generally adopted, and that even among themselves, few took plural wives. But this was a rhetorical retreat, part of a larger effort to discourage hostile legislation.<sup>97</sup> Before that time, Mormon tenets, including plural marriage, were regularly held up by churchmen as lamps to the nation. After polygamy was first publicly announced, Brigham Young predicted it would "sail over, and ride triumphantly above all the prejudice . . . of the day; it will be fostered and believed in by the more intelligent portions of the world, as one of the best doctrines ever proclaimed to any people."<sup>98</sup> Until

<sup>92</sup>While the church of the late nineteenth century was different from that of the 1830s and 40s, many of the insecurities that gave rise to reform impulses, including Mormon polygamy, remained the same. There is no better review of the context and possible motivations for such innovations than the opening essay, "A New Heaven and a New Earth," in Lawrence Foster's *Religion and Sexuality*, 3–20.

<sup>93</sup>See, for example, Erastus Snow's account of a comment by Joseph Smith, in *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 4: 203, 16 February 1853; Brigham Young (1870, 1877), *JD* 13: 273; 19: 47; [George Q. Cannon], "The Mission of 'Mormonism,'" *The Western Standard* 2 (1 May 1857): n.p.

<sup>94</sup>Taylor (1867), *JD* 11: 354.

<sup>95</sup>Joseph F. Smith, as quoted in Journal of Jesse Nathaniel Smith, typescript, p. 363, 26 September 1884, Church Archives. Also see Kimball (1856), *JD* 5: 203; Thatcher (1884), *JD* 25: 114–15.

<sup>96</sup>George Q. Cannon (1868), *JD* 12: 224.

<sup>97</sup>See the defensive tactics described in Hardy, *Solemn Covenant*, 52–54. The two best studies of the anti-polygamy crusade and its eventual success, are Gustive O. Larson, *The "Americanization" of Utah for Statehood* (San Marino, CA, 1971); Edward Leo Lyman, *Political Deliverance: The Mormon Quest for Utah Statehood* (Urbana, IL, 1986).

<sup>98</sup>*Deseret News, Extra*, p. 25. On another occasion in 1867, after saying that society had accepted some of Joseph Smith's ideas, Brigham Young added that he wished society would do the same with polygamy (*JD* 12: 165). Charles W. Penrose recommended that Great Britain pass laws permitting plural marriage as a way to take care of those widowed and orphaned by losses in the Crimean War. "Jealousy," *Millennial Star* 17 (20 January 1855): 33–34. Also see George Q. Cannon (1880), *JD* 20: 2.

the end of the century, many Mormons continued to believe that scientific support for plurality was so compelling that the arguments would eventually sweep away all opposition. Progressive attitudes assured adoption of the idea.<sup>99</sup> All great innovations had brought criticism when first introduced, they said. Polygamy was no different. Mormons would someday be recognized for their marital reform as heroes and benefactors, as “the Galileos” of their time.<sup>100</sup>

Mormon confidence in polygamy’s transforming power carried such strength that remarkable things were predicted. Heber C. Kimball was remembered by his daughter to have prophesied that in no more than fifty years the nation would pass laws permitting the practice.<sup>101</sup> Charles W. Penrose, dizzied by the vision, predicted that before the century ended, Mormon polygamists would be sent abroad as “rulers and ambassadors” and would “receive as much adulation, world-wide applause, and national respect . . . as the Grandest Sultan, the Holiest Pope, or the most powerful Emperor could desire.”<sup>102</sup> Like the Puritans, they were “a city on a hill,” a pattern to the rest of the world.<sup>103</sup> Orson F. Whitney captured the euphoria in verse:

’Twas thus Celestial Marriage was revealed,  
The Patriarchal Order, long concealed,  
The Abrahamic Covenant, restored,  
To raise a chosen seed unto the Lord.  
.....  
“Regeneration—now and evermore!”<sup>104</sup>

The millennium, Mormons said, could not commence before the “primitive law” of plural marriage was restored, until “the old patriarchal institutions” were again put in place.<sup>105</sup> Only this principle would fully

<sup>99</sup>“Lecture by Elder Orson Hyde,” *Deseret News* [Weekly], 19 October 1854, n.p. Also see “Free Love in the Church,” and “Polygamy, etc.-,” both in *Millennial Star* 18 (29 March 1856): 201–2. How could anyone disagree with the Mormons, asked Abraham M. Musser: “Our system is Scriptural, natural, and consistent. It promotes longevity, gives every woman a husband and a home, and multiplies the ‘noblest work of God’ by filling the earth with joyous, robust children.” “Polygamy,” *Millennial Star* 39 (28 May 1877): 341.

<sup>100</sup>“Expressions from the People,” *Deseret News*, 1 April 1885, p. 2; “The Only Remedy,” *Millennial Star* 29 (21 September 1867): 593–94; Whitney, *Why We Practice Plural Marriage*, 16, 24, 53–54.

<sup>101</sup>Helen Mar Whitney, “Scenes and Incidents in Nauvoo,” *Woman’s Exponent* 10 (1 November 1881): 83.

<sup>102</sup>Charles W. Penrose, “Polygamy and the Visit of the Sultan,” *Millennial Star* 29 (3 August 1867): 492–93.

<sup>103</sup>Elder Willard Done, in “Sunday Services,” *Deseret Evening News*, 22 September 1890, n.p.

<sup>104</sup>Orson F. Whitney, “The Women of the Everlasting Covenant,” in Helen Mar Whitney, *Why We Practice Plural Marriage*, 69–70.

<sup>105</sup>Charles W. Penrose, “Marriage,” *Millennial Star* 30 (30 May 1868): 340; Alexander Robbins, “Baptism and Plurality of Wives,” *Millennial Star* 17 (13 October 1855): 643;

renew humankind for Christ's return. Brigham Young declared that "the whole Curse of the Earth had got to be taken off . . . by the Latter day Saints."<sup>106</sup> Young's successor, John Taylor, remembered that Joseph Smith, Mormonism's founder, had told him that polygamy was so important that "the kingdom could not go any further unless this law was observed."<sup>107</sup> The Saints, Taylor said, were thinning the veil that separated them from heaven.<sup>108</sup> By joining sexual reform to the American sense of redemptive destiny, Mormons believed they were hastening the coming of a perfected, millennial world.<sup>109</sup>

Certain that both God and nature approved their system, Mormons often predicted that the practice would never be abandoned.<sup>110</sup> It was described as the most important revelation God had given the Saints, the "very keystone" of their faith, the "chief corner-stone" of the world they were trying to build.<sup>111</sup> After 1890, when the practice was formally ended in exchange for Utah's statehood, hundreds of plural marriages were secretly performed by authorities who believed the principle had to be kept alive.<sup>112</sup> And arguments dating from the first decades of the church's history, affirming polygamy's redeeming advantages, continued to be heard in Mormon discourse until well into the twentieth century.<sup>113</sup> Its practice declined only slowly and is adhered to by thousands of Fundamentalist

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Orson Pratt (1875), *JD* 27: 221; "Diary of L. John Nuttall, (1834–1905), Dec. 1876–Mar. 1884," 13 August 1881, 395–96, typewritten copy, Lee Library; Whitney, *Why We Practice Plural Marriage*, 7–8.

<sup>106</sup>Brigham Young, as quoted in *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, 6: 232–33, 13 July 1865.

<sup>107</sup>"L. John Nuttall Diary," 13 August 1881, 395–96. Underlining in original.

<sup>108</sup>"Discourse by President John Taylor," *Deseret News*, 30 September 1882, p. 1; Daniel H. Wells (1874), *JD* 16: 126.

<sup>109</sup>For a discussion of the "redeemer nation" theme as context for Mormon millennialist thought, see Erickson, "*Thief in the Night*," 19–32. Describing the connection between millennial expectations and American expansionist visions, another writer said that, for the Mormons, "Millennium and Manifest Destiny turned out to be hardly more than variant spellings for the same thing." Wallace Stegner, *The Gathering of Zion: The Story of the Mormon Trail* (New York, 1964), 5.

<sup>110</sup>There are many statements to this effect. The following are illustrative: Brigham Young (1868), *JD* 12: 262; Pratt in *The Bible & Polygamy*, 56; "Discourse by Apostle George Teasdale," *Deseret News*, 26 January 1884, p. 1; and Apostle John Henry Smith, in *Charles Walker Diary*, 2: 718, 16 September 1890.

<sup>111</sup>In the order quoted: William Clayton in "Plural Marriage," *The Historical Record* 6 (May 1887): 226; Thatcher (1884), *JD* 25: 114–15; "Remarks by Apostle Moses Thatcher," *Deseret News*, 26 April 1884, p. 1; "Expressions of the People," *Deseret News*, 14 April 1885, p. 4; and, "Be Not Led Astray by Deceivers," *Deseret News*, 13 December 1879, p. 2.

<sup>112</sup>This is the chief theme of Hardy's *Solemn Covenant*.

<sup>113</sup>See the instances described in Hardy, *Solemn Covenant*, 103–4, 187–90, 345–46.

dissidents today who, still proclaiming polygamy's social and physical gifts, criticize the mainline church for abandoning "the principle."<sup>114</sup>

Romania Pratt, a nineteenth-century medical doctor and polygamous wife, gave what was perhaps the best summary of Mormonism's expectations concerning plurality: "With this principle universal, but limited and governed by laws of marriage inhibiting sensuality and selfishness . . . , the solution to the growing social evil would be found. . . . Were this the order of the world, abortions, feticides, infanticides, seductions, rapes and divorces would be relics of the barbarous age, while intelligence, light, peace and good will and love would be the motor forces of the world—in short, the Millennium would have come."<sup>115</sup>

Mormons did not view polygamy as an inscrutable trial imposed from heaven; neither was it looked upon as a requirement with rewards reserved only for the hereafter. Rather, as we have attempted to demonstrate, plural marriage was held out as an improving reform with palpable results. Its implementation was considered necessary if humankind was to be physically redeemed and prepared for the millennium. By allowing men to take additional wives, but confining sexual intercourse to reproduction, actual physiological transformations were expected to occur. Theories current at the time were imported and adapted to support such views. Most of what was said, however, has been largely forgotten. Mormon leaders left behind not only the practice but the promises once claimed for their best-remembered doctrine. And contemporary church members, enlarged in numbers and respect beyond what their nineteenth-century predecessors thought possible, now champion monogamy as what the world needs most.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>114</sup>Examples of Fundamentalist adherence to the transforming powers of polygamy are to be read in "Our Position," *Truth* 10 (March 1945): 268; "I Too Am a Man," *Truth* 10 (March 1945): 276; unpaginated foreword to Joseph W. Musser, comp., *Celestial or Plural Marriage* (Salt Lake City, 1944); Lyn L. Bishop and Steven L. Bishop, *Keys of the Priesthood Illustrated* (Draper, UT, 1971), 321–24; Harold W. Blackmore, *All about Polygamy: Why and How to Live It!* (Hurricane, UT, 1978), 47–52; and Dorothy Solomon, "A Very Different Kind of Family," *Good Housekeeping*, April 1979, p. 246. Accounts of the rise and history of Mormon polygamous Fundamentalism are found in Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy*, 177–217; Martha Sonntag Bradley, *Kidnapped from That Land: The Government Raids on the Short Creek Polygamists* (Salt Lake City, 1993), 6–40; and Irwin Altman and Joseph Ginat, *Polygamous Families in Contemporary Society* (New York, 1996), 43–60.

<sup>115</sup>Romania Bunnell Pratt, "Extract from Dr. R. B. Pratt's Lecture," *Woman's Exponent* 10 (15 June 1881): 16.

<sup>116</sup>For accounts of this change in Mormon thought and practice, see the appropriate sections of Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890–1930* (Urbana, IL, 1986); and Hardy, *Solemn Covenant*.