

The Psychology of Religious Genius: Joseph Smith and the Origins of New Religious Movements

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THE NATURE OF GENIUS—ESPECIALLY RELIGIOUS GENIUS—is an elusive and controversial topic. Great and recognized creativity in fields such as art, science, or politics has been the subject of extensive investigation without leading to clear and generally agreed upon criteria for assessing and accounting for such achievement. Religious genius, especially the prophetic leadership of founders of new religious movements, has proven even more difficult to evaluate with any degree of openness and objectivity. Adherents to new faiths often accept at face value prophetic claims to having had direct communication with the divine, while naive critics and apostates in equally one-dimensional fashion tend to see nothing but fraud and delusion in such claims. Neither approach begins to do justice to complexities that characterize the classic foundational phenomena that noted American psychologist William James explored so convincingly in his still unsurpassed analysis of the psychology of religious genius, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.¹

This essay focuses on one particularly well-documented case of religious genius—that of Mormon prophet Joseph Smith, founder of a rapidly-growing religious movement that now numbers more than 8 million

1. The edition cited here is William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: New American Library, 1958). I am grateful to Syracuse University Press for permission to use some material in this article that first appeared in my book *Women, Family, and Utopia: Communal Experiments of the Shakers, the Oneida Community, and the Mormons* (copyright 1991 by Syracuse University Press).

members worldwide. Joseph Smith's motivation and the psychological dynamics that made possible both his successes and failures have proven highly controversial, both in his own time and today. Critics of Smith such as Fawn Brodie have often found him opaque and disingenuous. They have speculated that his was a highly conflicted personality with enormous powers to rationalize his own impulses as being the will of God. Devout Latter-day Saints, on the other hand, have often ignored whole areas of Smith's personality and actions, creating an almost unbelievable paragon who could do nothing wrong as he consistently attempted to do God's will. Despite the apparent polarization of opinion, recent scholarship increasingly has seen Smith as a complex figure who nevertheless creatively attempted to come to terms with and fuse seemingly conflicting elements within his personality and his world into a new synthesis.²

The analysis that follows is an admittedly speculative personal reflection on elements that need to be kept in mind in understanding the psychological dynamics of Joseph Smith's creativity. I begin with some general observations on the nature of great religious creativity and prophetic leadership, drawing on the work of scholars such as William James, Anthony F. C. Wallace, Kenelm Burridge, and others. The core of the article then presents a new hypothesis about one possible element in Joseph Smith's psychology that might help explain some of his most puzzling and disturbing actions associated with his concerted effort to introduce plural marriage among his followers during the last three years of his life. Finally, I ask whether the hypothesis about Joseph Smith's psychological characteristics may help us in understanding the psychological dynamics of other great prophets and foundational religious figures throughout history.

2. For an early call to consider Joseph Smith in all his complexity, see Jan Shippy, "The Prophet Puzzle: Suggestions Leading Toward a More Comprehensive Interpretation of Joseph Smith," *Journal of Mormon History* 1 (1974): 3-20. Especially revealing recent treatments are Gary James Bergera's articles "Joseph Smith and the Hazards of Charismatic Leadership," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 6 (1986): 33-42, and "Toward 'Psychologically Informed' Mormon History and Biography," *Sunstone* 16 (Dec. 1991): 27-31. For some of the classic psychological reductionist accounts, see Isaac Woodbridge Riley, *The Founder of Mormonism: A Psychological Study of Joseph Smith, Jr.* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1902); Bernard De Voto, "The Centennial of Mormonism," *American Mercury* 19 (Jan. 1930): 1-13; Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, 2d. ed. rev. and enl. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 418-21; and Louis J. Kern, *An Ordered Love: Sex Roles and Sexuality in Victorian Utopias—the Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981), 137-43. Marvin Hill, "Secular or Sectarian History? A Critique of *No Man Knows My History*," *Church History* 33 (Mar. 1974): 78-96, analyzes the tendency toward psychological reductionism that is present in Brodie's revised edition. For treatments of Smith as a paragon who could do no wrong, see almost any of the works published by official Mormon publishers such as Deseret Book.

I

Great religious creativity, as many scholars have argued, always begins with a problem or complex series of problems that the future prophet finds deeply disturbing. To use psychological jargon, "cognitive dissonance" is always present. Individuals who eventually become prophets find this dissonance more disturbing than do many of their contemporaries, and they seek with unusual intensity to try to make sense of both their personal lives and their world. The dissonance for religious geniuses—as opposed to geniuses in art, science, or politics—focuses with unusual intensity on *value* conflicts and inconsistencies. Ultimately, as anthropologist Kenelm Burridge suggests, the prophetic figure attempts "to initiate, both in himself as well as in others, a process of moral regeneration."³

How does this process take place in the prophetic figure? Anthropologist Anthony F. C. Wallace has presented a classic description of the way in which new religions—or as he calls them "revitalization movements"—originate in a context of high social disorder and perceived stress.⁴ Based on a consideration of hundreds of different groups on five continents, Wallace concludes: "With a few exceptions, every religious revitalization movement with which I am acquainted has been originally conceived in one or several hallucinatory visions by a single individual. A supernatural being appears to the prophet-to-be, explains his own and his society's troubles as being entirely or partly a result of the violation of certain rules, and promises individual and social revitalization if the injunctions are followed and the rituals practiced, but personal and social catastrophe if they are not."

Wallace observes that thereafter the "prophet feels a need to tell others of his experience, and may have definite feelings of missionary or messianic obligation. Generally he shows evidence of a radical inner change in personality soon after the vision experience: a remission of old and chronic physical complaints, a more active and purposeful way of life, greater confidence in interpersonal relations, the dropping of deep-seated habits like alcoholism. . . . Where there is no vision (as with John Wesley), there

3. Kenelm Burridge, *New Heaven, New Earth: A Study of Millenarian Activities* (New York: Schocken, 1969), 162. For a compelling example of Burridge's analysis of a single cult leader, see his *Mambu: A Study of Melanesian Cargo Movements and Their Social and Ideological Backgrounds* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).

4. Anthony F. C. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements," *American Anthropologist* 38 (Apr. 1956): 264-81. For the work that most directly influenced Wallace's formulation of his "revitalization movement" theory, see his *The Death and Rebirth of the Seneca* (New York: Vintage, 1972). A revealing attempt to use Wallace's theory to deal with the dynamics of American religious history is William G. McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

occurs a similarly brief and dramatic moment of insight, revelation, or inspiration, which functions in most respects like the vision in being the occasion of a new synthesis of values and meanings."⁵

One need not accept the value judgment Wallace makes when he refers to such visionary experiences as "hallucinatory" (that is, not literally true) to accept his general description of what happens in such instances as strikingly similar to the case of Joseph Smith. Young Joseph, though highly talented, was at loose ends initially—viewed by some as a pleasant and outgoing ne'er-do-well who spent much of his time hunting for hidden treasure. The series of visions he had in his teens ultimately led to the transformation of his life and the founding of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Although surviving accounts of Joseph Smith's first vision are far from consistent on points of detail, such as whether one or several figures appeared to him, they do indicate that young Joseph was deeply disturbed by the competing claims to religious truth that were being put forward in his area. Joseph was bright enough to understand that such mutually exclusive claims simply could not all be true. Eventually he would conclude that he had been specially called by God to introduce a new religious synthesis that would integrate and supercede all previous ones.⁶

All this is well-known among scholars of Mormon history. But what were the *psychological* dynamics that led young Joseph to see visions and be open to the notion that he was specially called by God to lead the way in developing a new synthesis of truth, and later a new social system, including polygamy? To place this issue into a larger context, let us return to the perspectives of William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* and realize that religious prophets, including Joseph Smith, are in some sense, at least initially, "sick," "disturbed," or "abnormal." Successful, as opposed to unsuccessful, religious prophets eventually work through their psychological disturbance by creating a new synthesis, but the intensity of

5. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements," 270-71.

6. For a summary of some of the major issues involved with Joseph Smith's "first vision" experience and a bibliographic essay on major studies, see my "First Visions: Personal Observations on Joseph Smith's Religious Experience," *Sunstone* 8 (Sept.-Oct. 1983): 39-43. More recent studies such as Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), have expanded our understanding of the social context of Smith's religious concerns but have added little to our understanding of the psychological dynamics of his religious experiences. For a preliminary listing of studies that could be used to reconstruct the visionary components of later products of Smith's religious creativity such as the Book of Mormon, see my *Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 294-97; and Scott C. Dunn, "Spirit Writing: Another Look at the Book of Mormon," *Sunstone* 10 (June 1985): 16-26.

their drive always continues to owe something to the magnitude of the problems they feel they have escaped by developing their new understanding of reality.

James is particularly eloquent in discussing the psychology of religious genius in individuals for whom "religion exists not as a dull habit, but as an acute fever." Genius in such individuals, according to James, is frequently associated with "symptoms of nervous instability."

Even more perhaps than other kinds of genius, religious leaders have been subject to abnormal psychic visitations. . . . Often they have led a discordant inner life, and had melancholy during part of their career. They have known no measure, been liable to obsessions and fixed ideas; and frequently they have fallen into trances, heard voices, seen visions, and presented all sorts of peculiarities which are ordinarily classed as pathological. Often, moreover, these pathological features in their career have helped to give them their religious authority and influence.⁷

James explains how psychological disorder may contribute to greatness in a person who also has a "superior intellect":

The cranky person has extraordinary emotional susceptibility. He is liable to fixed ideas and obsessions. His conceptions tend to pass immediately into belief and action; and when he gets a new idea, he has no rest till he proclaims it, or in some way "works it off" . . . Thus, when a superior intellect and a psychopathic temperament coalesce . . . in the same individual, we have the best possible condition for the kind of effective genius that gets into the biographical dictionaries. Such men do not remain mere critics and understanders with their intellect. Their ideas possess them, they inflict them, for better or worse, upon their companions or their age.⁸

James also emphasizes that even if religious inspiration may often occur in psychologically unstable or disordered individuals, that fact does not necessarily discredit the *fruits* of such inspiration. He quotes Dr. Henry Maudsely's statement:

What right have we to believe Nature under any obligation to work by means of complete minds only? She may find an incomplete mind a more suitable instrument for a particular purpose. It is the work that is done, and the quality of the worker by which it is done, that is alone of moment; and it may be no great matter from a cosmical standpoint, if in other qualities

7. James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 24.

8. *Ibid.*, 36.

of character he was singularly defective—if indeed he were a hypocrite, adulterer, eccentric or lunatic.⁹

James concludes that the only ultimate test of the validity of religious inspiration is practical—in Jesus' words, "By their fruits ye shall know them." He concludes: "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."¹⁰

One final observation needs to be added before we can briefly explore one possible approach to understanding Joseph Smith's psychological states and how they may have influenced some of his most controversial beliefs and actions. The line between health and illness, between normal mood swings and those that might be called extreme, is a fine one indeed. It is often difficult for a contemporary psychiatrist who has worked closely with a patient to make an accurate diagnosis. To diagnose with confidence someone long dead, even when extensive records exist on his or her life, is far more difficult and speculative. The observations that follow are therefore intended to be suggestive, not definitive. These observations will have served their purpose if they open up new possibilities for better understanding aspects of Joseph Smith's beliefs and behavior that might otherwise appear opaque or incomprehensible.

II

My ongoing interest in the psychology of Joseph Smith's religious experience and its impact on his actions has been greatly stimulated by nearly two decades of intensive research as a non-Mormon scholar into the origin and early development of plural marriage among the Latter-day Saints.¹¹ Initially, I tried to separate my concerns about Joseph

9. *Ibid.*, 33. Brigham Young made a similar point in a sermon on 9 November 1856, when he reported how, shortly after he became attracted to Mormonism, he responded to a man who attacked Joseph Smith's character at every conceivable point. Young told the man that he had never seen Smith and did not know his personal character, but that the doctrine was what mattered. "He may get drunk every day of his life, sleep with his neighbor's wife every night, run horses and gamble, I do not care anything about that, for I never embrace any man in my faith. But the doctrine he has produced will save you and me, and the whole world; and if you can find fault with that, find it" (*Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. [Liverpool, Eng.: LDS Bookseller's Depot, 1855-86], 9: 77-78).

10. James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 37. James's acute sensitivity to the implications of abnormal psychology for profound religious experience may have been due, in part, to the fact that he had also experienced many of the extraordinary states about which he wrote. See Harvey Mindess, *Makers of Psychology: The Personal Factor* (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1988), 35-44.

11. For an account of how my interests in this area developed, see "A Personal

Smith's religious and sexual drives, avoiding reductionistic approaches while attempting to make sense of the extraordinarily complex religious and social phenomena associated with the early development of the Mormon movement. Clearly Joseph Smith, like any dynamic personality, *can* be analyzed using a variety of different psychological and other perspectives. How convincing any one such approach can be as an *explanation* of what actually made him tick remains highly questionable since reality is always far more complex than any single way of conceptualizing reality can be.¹²

Ultimately, however, the psychological question continued to recur. Why did Joseph Smith feel so preoccupied with introducing plural marriage among his followers during the last three years of his life between 1841 and 1844 that he eventually put many other vital aspects of his prophetic leadership at risk? Was there some hidden psychological key that could help make sense of this seemingly obsessive drive? As difficult as understanding the introduction of polygamy may have been, it ultimately proved not to be the most challenging task. A variety of factors including biblical precedent, concerns for expanding kinship ties in a socially chaotic environment, and Joseph Smith's own strong sex drive all made plural marriage an idea with considerable power for the Mormon prophet in Nauvoo, Illinois, during the early 1840s.¹³

The most intractable problem associated with the early development of polygamy, instead, was something else. One curious bit of evidence simply did not make sense. William Marks, president of the Nauvoo Stake high council and a man of unquestionable honesty and integrity, emphatically insisted that Joseph Smith had approached him in the spring of 1844, shortly before his martyrdom, and had said: "This doctrine of polygamy or Spiritual-wife System, that has been taught and practiced among us will prove our destruction and overthrow." According to Marks, Smith went on to say that he had been "deceived, in reference to its practice," that it was "wrong," and that Marks should go to the high council and prefer charges against all who practiced the doctrine, while Joseph would "preach

Odyssey: My Encounter with Mormon History," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 16 (Autumn 1983): 87-98. My major findings are reported in *Religion and Sexuality and Women, Family, and Utopia*.

12. On this point, see Foster, "Personal Odyssey," esp. 96-97. A rather apologetic example of how Joseph Smith's experiences could be analyzed using the perspectives of Freud, Jung, Adler, Ego Psychology, Erik Erikson, and so forth is T. L. Brink, "Joseph Smith: The Verdict of Depth Psychology," *Journal of Mormon History* 3 (1976): 73-83. More revealing of the substantial contribution that different analytical approaches can offer in understanding one complex personality is Mindess, *Makers of Psychology*, 147-68.

13. See Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 125-46, and *Women, Family, and Utopia*, 124-33.

against it, with all my might, and in this way we may rid the church of this damnable heresy."¹⁴

Apart from this remarkable statement from a man of unimpeachable honesty, there is evidence from both LDS and RLDS sources that Joseph Smith may indeed have talked about abandoning polygamy near the end of his life. In *Mormon Enigma*, a superb biography of the Mormon prophet's wife Emma Hale Smith, Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery refer to the minutes of an 1867 meeting within the RLDS church in which a man named Hugh Herringshaw stated that he had "heard Joseph tell the 12 that they must abandon polygamy and turned to Brigham Young and asked if he was willing to do so. Young said he had been asleep. Then Joseph spoke upon the matter as only he could talk denouncing the doctrine of polygamy. Brigham replied that he and Taylor had determined what course they would pursue."¹⁵ A year earlier, in 1866, Brigham Young had conceded in a carefully qualified statement, "Joseph was worn out with it, but as to his denying any such thing I never knew that he denied the doctrine of polygamy. Some have said that he did, but I do not believe he ever did."¹⁶

I believe that these and other reports that could be cited accurately reflect the tenor of statements made by Joseph Smith during the last months of his life. If Smith did indeed talk to Marks and to his closest associates among the Twelve about possibly stopping polygamy, such statements are extraordinary in the context of 1844 Nauvoo. For three years, Joseph Smith had engaged in a major, carefully orchestrated effort to introduce plural marriage among his closest followers in the Quorum of the Twelve and other high church councils. He himself had led the way by taking at least sixteen wives besides Emma in a full physical sense during that time. He had put enormous pressure on unwilling associates such as Heber C. Kimball and Orson Pratt to accept the belief and practice, and as many as

14. Letter of 15 June 1853, printed in *Zion's Harbinger and Baneemy's Organ* 3 (7 July 1853): 52-54. Marks reaffirmed this statement in a letter dated 23 October 1859 that appeared in the first issue of the *True Latter-Day-Saint's Herald* 1 (Jan. 1860): 22-23, and in a letter to Hyrum Faulk and Josiah Butterfield on 1 October 1865, in the archives of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Independence, Missouri (hereafter RLDS archives).

15. Council of the Twelve Minutes, Book A, 6 Apr. 1865-12 Apr. 1869, RLDS archives, as quoted in Linda King Newell and Valeen Tippetts Avery, *Mormon Enigma: Emma Hale Smith—Prophet's Wife, "Elect Lady," Polygamy's Foe* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 179.

16. Brigham Young address, 8 Oct. 1866, as quoted in Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, 179. In support of the idea that Joseph Smith may have seriously considered ending polygamy in Nauvoo, it may be significant that he apparently did not take additional plural wives himself after November 1843. Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, 179.

thirty of his closest associates had taken plural wives under his influence, committing themselves in very tangible form to the new beliefs and practices.¹⁷

How under such circumstances would it even have been conceivable for Joseph Smith to talk about rejecting plural marriage without forfeiting all credibility with his closest associates? One could understand why he might have feigned such an intent with an associate such as William Marks, who opposed polygamy, but if he actually spoke in such terms to members of the Twelve who were already living in polygamy, how could such statements possibly be explained? Was Smith, as some of his previously most loyal followers at the time asserted, losing touch with reality during his final months in Nauvoo?¹⁸

A compelling psychological approach to explaining this and other puzzling features of the Mormon prophet's behavior during this period was suggested to me by a Mormon psychiatrist, Dr. Jess Groesbeck.¹⁹ For nearly two years, I dismissed his suggestion as reductionistic, but gradually the explanatory power of the interpretation came to seem more and more compelling to me. Groesbeck argued that many aspects of Joseph Smith's behavior, especially during the last years of his life, appeared strikingly similar to behavior that psychiatrists associate with manic-depressive syndromes. Although one could understand that any individual under the pressures Joseph Smith faced might have experienced substantial mood swings, in the Mormon prophet's case those mood swings appear so severe that they may be clinically significant. Groesbeck also

17. For the most important accounts of this process, see Charles E. Shook, *The True Origin of Mormon Polygamy* (Cincinnati: Standard, 1914); Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*; Foster, *Religion and Sexuality and Women, Family, and Utopia*; Daniel Bachman, "A Study of the Mormon Practice of Plural Marriage before the Death of Joseph Smith," M.A. thesis, Purdue University, 1975; Richard S. Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy: A History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1976); and Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*.

18. In a profound reflection based on his extensive study of Joseph Smith and his role in Mormon Nauvoo, Robert Bruce Flanders explores this possibility in his "Dream and Nightmare: Nauvoo Revisited," in F. Mark McKiernan, Alma R. Blair, and Paul M. Edwards, eds., *The Restoration Movement: Essays in Mormon History* (Lawrence, KS: Coronado, 1973), 141-66. On page 152, for example, Flanders speculates that "in 1844, Smith was losing control of many of his affairs, and perhaps of himself."

19. Personal conversation with R. Jess Groesbeck in May 1988 immediately following Valeen Tippetts Avery's Mormon History Association Presidential Address, which was subsequently published as "Irreconcilable Differences: David H. Smith's Relationship with the Muse of Mormon History," *Journal of Mormon History* 15 (1989): 3-13. For Groesbeck's published speculations, see his "The Smiths and Their Dreams and Visions: A Psycho-Historical Study of the First Mormon Family," *Sunstone* 12 (Mar. 1988): 22-29. I am grateful to Dr. Groesbeck for sharing with me other unpublished materials he has written about Joseph Smith's psychology.

pointed out that there is substantial evidence that tendencies toward manic-depression tend to be inherited. Although many people are aware that one of Joseph Smith's brightest and most appealing sons, David Hyrum, tragically lapsed into insanity and spent the last years of his life in a mental institution, few realize at least six other male descendants of the Mormon prophet also have suffered from psychological disorders, including manic-depression.²⁰ The possibility that Joseph Smith himself may also have been subject to similar tendencies cannot be discounted.

What are some of the characteristics of psychological mania, and how do such states reflect themselves in behavior? According to Harold I. Kaplan and Benjamin J. Sadock's *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry/IV*:

The critical clinical feature for a manic episode is a mood that is elevated, expansive, or irritable. The associated symptoms include hyperactivity, pressure of speech, flight of ideas, diminished need for sleep, increased self-esteem to the point of grandiosity, extreme distractibility, short attention span, and extraordinarily poor judgment in the interpersonal and social areas. . . .

The person speaks more rapidly, thinks more rapidly, or moves more rapidly. The person frequently requires much less sleep and has apparently limitless energy. Many people with a manic illness feel that they are highly creative during these attacks. The reason, in part, is because there is a flooding of consciousness with ideas and associations that at times are imaginative and creative but that at other times are idiosyncratic and of little artistic merit. . . .

Although the elevated mood is often described as euphoric and cheerful and having an infectious quality, it is characterized by an absence of selectivity and an unceasing driven quality. Mania is also characterized by an extremely poor frustration tolerance, with resulting heightened irritability. A manic patient may be quite humorous, good natured, and friendly until frustrated in some trivial way. The good humor then promptly disappears and is replaced by anger and even rage. . . .

20. For discussions of David Hyrum Smith's case, see Valeen Tippetts Avery, "Insanity and the Sweet Singer: A Biography of David Hyrum Smith, 1844-1904," Ph.D. diss., Northern Arizona University, 1984; Avery, "Irreconcilable Differences"; and Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*, 288-95. Of the six other male descendants diagnosed as having mental disorders, one committed suicide at about age forty-five after showing signs of manic-depression, and another, who had been diagnosed as schizophrenic (dementia paradoxia), also committed suicide. Documents in my possession from a living associate of the Smith family. Name withheld by request. On 22 May 1993 in Lamoni, Iowa, I corroborated examples of manic-depression in the family with a Joseph Smith, Jr., descendant.

The increased activity often takes the form of sexual promiscuity, political involvement, and religious concern. . . .

The manic episode may or may not include psychotic symptoms. The impairment of judgment may not be sufficiently severe to justify a psychotic diagnosis. Delusions and hallucinations are not unusual. The context is usually consistent with the dominant mood. It is quite common for the person to communicate with God and to have it revealed that he or she has a special purpose or mission. Patients frequently describe themselves as an "organ" of God through whom God speaks to the world.²¹

In the various forms of manic-depressive illness, the manic highs alternate in bipolar fashion with periods of depression.²² Current diagnostic opinion, described by psychiatrists Frederick K. Goodwin and Kay Redfield Jamison in their synthetic study *Manic-Depressive Illness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990),²³ emphasizes that manic-depressive illness expresses itself in an extraordinarily complex variety of forms, on a spectrum of intensity ranging from relatively mild, cyclothymic ups and downs that would be hard to distinguish from normal mood swings to extreme highs and lows that clearly display full-blown psychosis.

At the extreme end of the manic-depressive spectrum, the bipolar I form of the syndrome, individuals feel the full force of manic excitement or depressive despair. During their manic phases, they feel invincible and often do outrageous things. In full psychotic manias, individuals lose touch with reality, experience delusions and hallucinations, and lack any sense of judgment in interpersonal relations. At the other extreme, depression can become so severe that individuals can come to feel utterly hopeless and eventually may commit suicide if not treated.

A milder form of manic-depressive illness, bipolar II, typically involves recurrent depressions alternating with brief "hypomanic" (less than manic) periods of several days to a week or more when they feel mildly euphoric and full of self-confidence and energy.

21. Harold I. Kaplan and Benjamin J. Sadock, *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry/IV*, 4th ed. (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 1985), 761.

22. It is also important to note that some individuals apparently are subject only to depressive states. Treatment of such individuals is handled differently from treatment of those who experience manic-depressive states.

23. For a recent popular treatment of the subject that is also utilized here, see Patty Duke and Gloria Hochman, *A Brilliant Madness: Living with Manic-Depressive Illness* (New York: Bantam, 1992). The presentation in the following paragraphs is highly compressed. Anyone interested in understanding the full dimensions of manic-depressive experience, should closely consult Goodwin and Jamison's fascinating 938-page analysis. To an extent rare in medical texts, it conveys the personal dimension of the manic-depressive spectrum, with both its positive and negative elements.

It is often very hard to determine whether an individual is experiencing the bipolar II form of manic-depression needing treatment or just a normal period of enthusiasm or low spirits, but the recurrent nature of the experience is diagnostically important. In the mildest, cyclothymic forms of the manic-depressive spectrum, the distinction between normal expressions of enthusiasm or low spirits and those suggesting illness is particularly difficult to determine.²⁴

III

How do descriptions of psychological mania square with Joseph Smith's actions during the last three years of his life in Nauvoo between 1841 and 1844? To anyone who has worked closely with the records of the Mormon prophet's life during those final years, the parallels are striking. Only a few key elements can be highlighted here, especially as they relate to his involvement with introducing the belief and practice of plural marriage among his closest followers.

Most obvious is the Mormon prophet's extraordinary expansiveness and grandiosity throughout this period. During the last year of his life, to mention only the most well-known examples, Smith served as mayor of Nauvoo and head of his own private army, became "king" of his secret Kingdom of God that he anticipated would eventually encompass all of North and South America, ran for president of the United States (that effort was cut short by his martyrdom), and was the "husband" in some sense of dozens of wives.²⁵ About a year before his martyrdom, he declared:

24. Even with living individuals, diagnosis of manic-depression is difficult because the symptoms can mimic other types of mental disorder. Reliable diagnosis of someone no longer living is even more difficult, particularly if the symptoms are mild. If Joseph Smith suffered relatively mild forms of manic-depression, knowing whether his behavior represented normal volatility of mood or possible illness would be difficult to determine with any degree of conclusiveness. I have, nevertheless, been encouraged to pursue the manic-depressive hypothesis by positive reactions from both Mormon and non-Mormon scholars. For example, Kay Redfield Jamison, in a letter to me on 7 May 1992, responded to the preliminary version of my argument in *Women, Family, and Utopia*, 161-66, by saying: "[Y]ou make a very convincing case. It has always seemed that Joseph Smith would be a likely candidate."

25. For discussions of this period of Joseph Smith's life, see Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Period I*, ed. Brigham H. Roberts, 6 vols., 2d ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1948), vols. 4 and 5; Brigham H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Century I*, 6 vols., (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1930), vol. 2; Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*; Donna Hill, *Joseph Smith: The First Mormon* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1977); Robert Bruce Flanders, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965); Klaus H. Hansen, *Quest for Empire: The Political Kingdom of God and the Council of Fifty in*

"Excitement has almost become the essence of my life. When that dies away, I feel almost lost."²⁶ Those who supported Joseph Smith during his last years were impressed by his sense of divine mission and his feeling that he was discovering the very secrets of the universe. Those who opposed him, including some of his previously most loyal lieutenants such as William Marks and William Law, thought instead that he had slipped his moorings and become a "fallen prophet," unfit to lead the church he had founded.

In no area were Joseph Smith's manic qualities more evident than in his efforts to introduce and practice polygamy during the last three years of his life. The point at which Joseph Smith began systematically to introduce polygamy to his closest associates has strong suggestions of mania. As Danel Bachman, summarizing the account by Helen Mar Kimball, wrote:

Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and John Taylor [key members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles who were returning from England] arrived in Nauvoo on July 1, 1841. . . . Joseph Smith was waiting at the landing with a company of horsemen. As soon as the missionaries disembarked from the boat, he rushed them to dinner at his home, not even giving them time to visit their own families. Vilate Kimball thought that this discourtesy continued after dinner when Smith brought the entire party to the Kimball home. The Prophet, wrote Helen Kimball, "seemed unwilling to part with my father and from that time kept the Twelve in Council early and late." Helen said her mother "never dreamed that he was during those times revealing to them the principles of Celestial Marriage" or that her trials were about to begin.²⁷

If the initial systematic attempt to introduce the concept of plural marriage among his closest associates bespeaks possible manic enthusiasm on Joseph Smith's part, his subsequent surge of activity with the sixteen or more women with whom he appears to have sustained sexual relations as plural wives (the full number may have been much greater) is even more suggestive of the hypersexuality that often accompanies manic periods. Some earlier writers such as Fawn Brodie, who have closely investigated the evidence on Joseph Smith's plural relationships, have suggested that he was in effect essentially a lusty, good-natured libertine giving vent to

Mormon History (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1967); Newell and Avery, *Mormon Enigma*; Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*; and Bachman, "Plural Marriage."

26. Sermon on 14 May 1843, as reported in Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of the Church* 5:389.

27. Bachman, "Plural Marriage," 179, based on Helen Mar Whitney, "Scenes in Nauvoo," *Woman's Exponent* 10 (15 Aug. 1881): 42.

impulses that more cautious individuals keep under better control. I have increasingly come to the conclusion, however, as did Brodie upon later reflection, that this argument cannot adequately explain the extent of Smith's sexual relationships and activities. Something more surely was involved.²⁸

Clinically significant manic episodes often alternate with correspondingly deep states of depression. Once again it must be noted that many individuals experience mild depression and that such states of mind are not uncommon during periods of severe stress. Whether such periods of depression were clinically significant in Joseph Smith's case remains debatable. That he *did* have periods of severe depression and discouragement during the last years of his life is, however, indisputable.

One such period was described by one of his plural wives, Mary Rollins Lightner. She recalled Smith 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.²⁹

Although this was recounted many years later, it seems to reflect accurately the spirit of many of Joseph Smith's private statements during his last days, including those in which he allegedly expressed doubts about polygamy. His sermon of 7 April 1844 at the funeral of King Follett may appropriately serve as his own epitaph. In this sermon, he described his glorious vision of men progressing to the achievement of full godlike powers. He declared in his conclusion, 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."³⁰

28. Although this was the emphasis in the original edition of *No Man Knows My History*, Brodie's "Supplement" to the second, revised and enlarged edition in 1971, pages 405-25, increasingly emphasizes theories of psychological disorder in trying to explain the Mormon prophet's behavior.

29. Mary Rollins Lightner, Remarks at Brigham Young University, 5, 14 Apr. 1905.

30. *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* 5 (Nov. 1844): 93. See the letter of George A. Smith

Here, it seems to me, was a profoundly lonely man, poignantly aware of the inability of the world (or even himself) to understand the underlying significance of his ideas and mission and seeing with stark clarity that he was about to be overwhelmed by forces he had helped set loose but which were beyond his control. Throughout his life, Joseph Smith was painfully aware of his singularity and never able to escape it.

Where does all this leave us with regard to understanding the dynamics of Joseph Smith's psychology and its impact on his beliefs and practices? It must be emphasized again that the analysis presented here about Joseph Smith's possible tendencies toward manic-depressive mental states is not intended as anything but an hypothesis. It is in no way intended to reduce the mystery—and the greatness—of Joseph Smith's accomplishments. Even if this hypothesis be true, the ultimate question remains not the *origin* of Smith's genius but the *fruits* of that genius.

To restate one of William James's observations, "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."³¹ It may be that only individuals whose inhibitions are bypassed by various forms of mania may be able to convince themselves and others that their insights emanate directly from God or other higher spiritual powers.

It must further be emphasized that individuals with manic-depressive tendencies can be extremely effective leaders, especially during times of crisis. One striking example is Oliver Cromwell, the great Puritan general and leader of England during the 1640s and 1650s, who never lost a battle and who dealt with a host of issues that would have destroyed any lesser person.³² A related example, Abraham Lincoln, who was subject to recurrent depressive states (though probably not manic-depression), nevertheless showed extraordinary creativity in handling the most intractable crisis the United States has ever faced and has been recognized by both scholars and the general public as the greatest president this country has ever had.³³

to Joseph Smith III, 9 Oct. 1869, as reproduced in Raymond T. Bailey, "Emma Hale: Wife of the Prophet Joseph Smith," M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1952, 84.

31. James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 37.

32. Both Robert S. Paul, *The Lord Protector: Religion and Politics in the Life of Oliver Cromwell* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), and Christopher Hill, *God's Englishman: Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution* (New York: Harper, 1972), convincingly document Cromwell's manic-depressive tendencies. Cromwell's manic-depressive behavior is also discussed in H. Belloc, *Cromwell* (London: Cassell, 1934); Antonia Fraser, *Cromwell: The Lord Protector* (New York: Knopf, 1973); and W. D. Henry, "The Personality of Oliver Cromwell," *Practitioner* 215 (1975): 102-10.

33. All the standard biographies of Lincoln discuss his depressive tendencies and the problems they caused for those who had to deal with him. See especially James G. Randall, *Lincoln the President: Springfield to Gettysburg* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1945); R.

And in the twentieth century, Winston Churchill, himself with the cyclothymic tendencies that ran throughout his distinguished lineage, led England to victory over the Nazis in World War II at a time when an individual with less manic drive might well have assumed that defeat was inevitable.³⁴

Thus William James's insistence that the *fruits* of religious inspiration must be considered apart from the *sources* of such inspiration must be seriously considered. Even if cyclothymic or manic-depressive psychological states may arguably have provided much of the *occasion* for Joseph Smith's remarkable creativity, the validity of the *product* of that inspiration must be judged on its own merits. Nonbelievers no doubt will still continue to see Joseph Smith's creativity as a product of his own fertile mind, but devout Saints may equally well see that creativity as an emanation from the divine.³⁵

IV

If this hypothesis about the impact of possible manic-depressive tendencies on Joseph Smith's complex religious creativity holds up under scrutiny, does it also suggest any new insights for understanding the creativity of other great foundational religious figures and the origins of

W. Hudgins, "Mental Health of Political Candidates: Notes on Abraham Lincoln," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 130 (1973): 110; and Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice Toward None: The Life of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: New American Library, 1977). Goodwin and Jamison, *Manic-Depressive Illness*, 358, note that although Ronald R. Fieve, *Moodswing: The Third Revolution in Psychiatry* (New York: William Morrow, 1975), describes Lincoln as a "mild bipolar manic-depressive," "the evidence for hypomania is far less clear-cut than for his serious depressions."

34. For discussions of Churchill's sharp alternation between periods of depression and high energy, tremendous drive, and sometimes questionable judgment, see Martin Gilbert, *Churchill: A Life* (New York: Henry Holt, 1991); John Pearson, *The Private Lives of Winston Churchill* (New York: Touchstone, 1991); A. Storr, *Churchill's Black Dog, Kafka's Mice, and Other Phenomena of the Human Mind* (New York: Grove Press, 1988); and Lord C. M. W. Moran, *Winston Churchill: The Struggle for Survival, 1940-1965: Taken from the Diaries of Lord Moran* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1966).

35. Of course, any effort to use psychological theories to understand major religious figures inevitably will be dismissed as "reductionistic" by devout believers. But the manic-depressive hypothesis appears to me to be less reductionistic than many other psychological approaches because it does not imply any necessary judgment about the quality of the product of the experience. Furthermore, as Anthony F. C. Wallace noted to me in a letter of 4 August 1992 after reading an earlier draft of this article, "One advantage of the [manic-depressive] hypothesis is that it answers, to some degree at least, the tricky question of timing. Why did the prophet have his revelation just when he did rather than months before or later? In a sense the choice of date becomes random, a function of the cyclical mental evolution of the prophet's mood."

new religious movements as well? Although a fuller investigation, both cross-culturally and cross-temporally, would be necessary to establish how frequently manic-depressive states may have influenced foundational religious figures, a convincing argument can be made that such figures have sometimes exhibited behavior that could be described as manic-depressive and that such a hypothesis may help explain otherwise puzzling aspects of their prophetic careers.

Among the individuals I have studied most intensively who exhibited behavior suggesting manic-depression are Ann Lee, founder of the Shaker movement, and John Humphrey Noyes, founder of the perfectionist community at Oneida, New York. The candid reminiscences of Ann Lee in the rare 1816 *Testimonies of the Life, Character, Revelations and Doctrines of Our Ever Blessed Mother Ann Lee, and the Elders with Her*, vividly describe how she was subject both to periods of extraordinary euphoria when she had visions of walking with Jesus Christ as her Lord and Lover and seeing glory after glory, as well as other visions in which she felt herself living literally in the uttermost depths of hell with those in unbearable suffering and torment.³⁶ As historian Clarke Garrett has suggested in a sophisticated reconstruction using contemporary evidence, Lee's untimely death at age forty-eight in 1784 may not only have been due to the physical and mental abuse she had suffered, but also to heavy drinking associated with severe depression during the last year of her life.³⁷

The thoroughly documented case of John Humphrey Noyes is even more suggestive of manic-depression. Indeed, historian Michael Barkun, who has worked extensively with manuscript materials relating to Noyes's early life, has argued that Noyes may provide almost a classic illustration of the manic-depressive syndrome.³⁸ Noyes's emotionally devastating three weeks in New York City in May 1834, for example, saw him swing

36. *Testimonies of the Life, Character, Revelations, and Doctrines of Our Ever Blessed Mother Ann Lee, and the Elders with Her* (Hancock, MA: J. Talcott & J. Teming, Junrs., 1816). Other primary sources also make this point clearly. For secondary starting points that suggest these issues, see Ann White and Leila S. Taylor, *Shakerism: Its Meaning and Message* (Columbus, OH: Fred. J. Heer, 1904), and Edward Deming Andrews, *The People Called Shakers: A Search for the Perfect Society*, new enl. ed. (New York: Dover, 1963).

37. Clarke Garrett, *Spirit Possession and Popular Religion: From the Camisards to the Shakers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 195-213.

38. Barkun indicated to me that after reading one of his papers on Noyes, a psychiatrist commented to him that Noyes's experiences provided almost a classic example of the manic-depressive syndrome. See Michael Barkun, "The Wind Sweeping Over the Country': John Humphrey Noyes and the Rise of Millerism," in Ronald L. Numbers and Jonathan M. Butler, eds., *The Disappointed: Millerism and Millenarianism in the Nineteenth Century* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1987), 153-72; and "The Visionary Experiences of John Humphrey Noyes," *Psychohistory Review* 16 (Spring 1988): 313-34.

from extraordinary euphoria and direct self-identification with Christ to the depths of depression in which he was unable to sleep, wandered the streets among down-and-outers and prostitutes at night, and consumed copious amounts of cayenne pepper and other stimulants to try to convince himself that he really existed.³⁹ Throughout Noyes's subsequent career, though he never faced such near-total collapse, he continued to experience wide mood swings. Whenever serious crises would develop in his Oneida Community, for example, he would go away, sometimes for months or years at a time, leaving responsibility for straightening out problems to trusted subordinates.⁴⁰

In their pathbreaking study *Manic-Depressive Illness*, psychiatrists Frederick K. Goodwin and Kay Redfield Jamison discuss as illustrations four other important religious leaders who appear to have exhibited manic-depressive tendencies.⁴¹ Most notable and well-documented of their cases is that of Martin Luther, the initiator of the Protestant Reformation and founder of the Lutheran movement. As Luther himself and his biographers such as Roland Bainton, Heiko A. Oberman, Erik Erikson, and H. G. Heile have shown,⁴² he was subject at times to periods of the most profound depression, with even psychotic and suicidal components, going back to childhood. At other times, he experienced periods of exaltation and extraordinary energy, during which he showed an astonishing verbal and literary productivity.

In many ways similarly complex was George Fox, founder of the

39. John Humphrey Noyes's graphic description of the episode was published in his *Confessions of John H. Noyes. Part I: Confession of Religious Experience, Including a History of Modern Perfectionism* (Oneida Reserve, NY: Leonard, 1849). For other primary evidence relating to his extremes of emotion, see the edited collections by George Wallingford Noyes, *Religious Experience of John Humphrey Noyes, Founder of the Oneida Community* (New York: Macmillan, 1923), and *John Humphrey Noyes: The Putney Community* (Oneida, NY: By the Author, 1931). The most relevant secondary studies of Noyes are Robert Allerton Parker, *A Yankee Saint: John Humphrey Noyes and the Oneida Community* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1935), and Robert David Thomas, *The Man Who Would Be Perfect: John Humphrey Noyes and the Utopian Impulse* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977).

40. One of the reasons for Noyes's success in staying in control of the Oneida Community throughout virtually its entire existence was his willingness to step aside during periods of crisis until his loyal associates were able to resolve major problems by appealing to his authority and principles in his absence. If such flexibility were more common among charismatic figures, perhaps fewer of them would be killed or deposed.

41. Goodwin and Jamison, *Manic-Depressive Illness*, 360-63.

42. Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: New American Library, orig. ed. 1950); Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Between God and the Devil*, trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New York: Image, 1992); Erik Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: Norton, 1962); and H. G. Haile, *Luther: An Experiment in Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

Religious Society of Friends, better-known as Quakers. Fox, like some other key Quaker leaders such as James Nayler, was subject to extreme mood swings with apparently psychopathological elements. William James, for instance, cites the entry in Fox's *Journal* when he describes feeling called to go to Litchfield in the middle of winter, take off his shoes, and walk through the town during market-day crying out, "Woe to the bloody city of Litchfield! Woe to the bloody city of Litchfield!" Yet Fox was an enormously capable and level-headed person at other times, and his organizational efforts were largely responsible for the Quakers being the only significant religious group originating during the period of the Puritan Revolution to survive to the present.⁴³

Sabbatai Sevi, whose messianic claims convulsed much of the Jewish community of Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa during the seventeenth century, is another figure who illustrated classic manic-depressive behavior, with sharp alternation between days of anguish and ecstasy. Gershom Scholem's magisterial study of Sevi's life and impact leaves no doubt about his wide mood swings and the tremendous emotional impact of the "frenzied ecstasy" that his associate Nathan of Gaza helped channel into a powerful millenarian movement.⁴⁴

Emmanuel Swedenborg, the eighteenth-century Swedish scientist, philosopher, and mystic whose ideas profoundly influenced a variety of movements from nineteenth-century spiritualism to more recent new age and occult groups, also exhibited manic behavior and wide mood swings after his mid-fifties. He began having a series of dreams, ecstatic visions, and trances that led him to spend the last third of his life producing a prolific series of writings, including *Heaven and Hell, from Things Heard and Seen*.⁴⁵

43. James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, 25-26. For similar examples, see *The Journal of George Fox*, rev. ed. by John L. Nickalls (London: Religious Society of Friends, 1975). Tendencies toward emotional excess among early Quakers are thoroughly documented in standard scholarly treatments of the movement, including William C. Braithwaite, *The Beginnings of Quakerism*, 2d ed. rev. by Henry J. Cadbury (York, England: William Sessions Limited, 1970), and John Punchon, *Portrait in Grey: A Short History of the Quakers* (London: Quaker Home Service, 1984).

44. Gershom Scholem, *Sabbatai Sevi: The Mystical Messiah*, trans. R. J. Zwi Wesblowsky (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973). On page 126 Scholem describes Sevi's symptoms, "with almost absolute certainty," as "manic-depressive."

45. Goodwin and Jamison, *Manic-Depressive Illness*, 362-63, present evidence that Swedenborg's major visionary experience at age fifty-six was associated with an attack of acute mania. For vivid descriptions of Swedenborg's role as a seer and his subsequent impact, see Slater Brown, *The Heyday of Spiritualism* (New York: Pocket Books, 1972); J. Stillson Judah, *The History and Philosophy of the Metaphysical Movements in America* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967); and Colin Wilson, *The Occult* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973).

Beyond such cases, one cannot help speculating that the most influential of all religious founding figures, Jesus of Nazareth, called the Christ by his followers, may have been subject to manic-depressive tendencies. Of course, the primary records are so limited and the accretions of interpretation so great that almost nothing can be stated with historical certainty about Jesus except that he lived and had a profound impact on those who knew him best. Nevertheless, if one could look freshly at the reported events of Passion Week, for example, one might at least wonder whether such activities may not suggest manic-depressive behavior. Jesus' actions riding into Jerusalem on a donkey while ecstatic followers spread their garments and leafy branches in front of him on the road and shouted Hosanna, or scourging the money changers from the temple, when juxtaposed with Jesus' profound depression shortly before his final arrest when he felt that his soul was "very sorrowful, even unto death" (Mark 14:34), "and being in agony . . . his sweat became like great drops of blood falling on the ground" (Luke 22:44), could raise the question of whether something more than normal mood swings may have been present during Jesus' experience as well.⁴⁶

Irrespective of whether any particular foundational religious figure may or may not have experienced cyclothymic or manic-depressive states, the question nevertheless remains how and why such states may contribute to great creativity, especially religious creativity. Let us touch briefly on the question of the relationship between manic-depression and artistic creativity, before returning to the question of its role in religious prophetic leadership. In a recent investigation of the links between artistic creation

46. Many scholars have been unwilling to deal frankly with early Christianity using the same criteria they apply to the analysis of other religious movements. Jesus, in particular, is always treated as *sui generis*. If Jesus and some other figure are reported to have done something descriptively similar, the framework used for analysis often is quite different.

A case in point relates to the Quaker James Nayler. Scholars readily agree that psychological excess characterized his behavior on 24 October 1656 when he rode into Bristol while followers sang and chanted, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Israel," and spread their garments before him. Nayler, one of the most eloquent of the early Quaker leaders, was punished for his "blasphemy" by brutal whipping, imprisonment, and having his tongue bored through with a red-hot iron before saying, shortly prior to his death: "There is a spirit which I feel, which delights to do no evil nor to revenge any wrong, but delights to endure all things in hope to enjoy its own in the end." For a detailed analysis of this episode, see the chapter on "Nayler's Fall" in Braithwaite, *Beginnings of Quakerism*, 241-78.

If orthodox Christianity asserts that Jesus must be viewed as both "wholly man" and "wholly God," then perhaps scholars should at least consider whether the full complexity of human psychological dynamics, with both its heights and depths, may not have characterized his life as well.

and mood disorders, for example, psychiatrist Kay Redfield Jamison found that in forty-two award-winning playwrights, poets, and novelists, rates of treatment for emotional illness (mainly depression or manic-depression) were vastly more common than one would expect in the general population. For example, whereas only 5 percent of the general population had ever been treated for a major depression, Jamison found that 13 percent of the novelists, 28 percent of the poets, 38 percent of the artists, and 50 percent of the playwrights she interviewed in depth had undergone such treatment.⁴⁷ Why should this be the case?

At a session on the creative mind at the annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association in San Francisco in 1989,

panelists argued that at the heart of artistic expression lies the process of change: changes in mood, in perception, in energy levels. "The creative process involves a cycle of disruption and re-integration in response to stress," said Frederick J. Flach. . . . If it is true that the cycle occurs in all of us . . . it is also true that some people—artists—undergo it more frequently. In some of them, the process of re-integration after disruption fails. "Mental illness," suggested Dr. Flach, "is a failure in the regulation of this process."⁴⁸

Even more than in other types of artistic creativity, religious creativity shows what a fine line separates insanity and social disorganization from ecstasy and the highest visionary reorganization of the individual and society. The prophet, as Kenelm Burridge suggests, is both a dangerous and a necessary person, an adventurer who puts himself at risk in order to try more fundamentally than the average person to make sense of his confusing world. As Burridge notes: "It is not appropriate to think of a prophet as reduced in size to a schizophrenic or a 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."⁴⁹

47. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 21 June 1989, A2, A6, based on Kay Redfield Jamison, "Mood Disorders and Patterns of Creativity in British Writers and Artists," *Psychiatry* 52 (May 1989): 125-34. Also see Goodwin and Jamison, *Manic-Depressive Illness*, 332-56, and Kay Redfield Jamison, *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament* (New York: Free Press, 1993). *Ibid.*, 240-60, raises the question whether treatment of manic-depressive disorders may inhibit some forms of great creativity. As with almost every aspect of manic-depressive illness, there are no simple answers. Also see Kay R. Jamison et al., "Clouds and Silver Linings: Positive Experiences Associated with Primary Affective Disorders," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 137 (Feb. 1980): 198-202.

48. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 21 June 1989, A6.

49. Burridge, *New Heaven, New Earth*, 162.

The result in many cases is only partially successful. Perhaps one reason that prophets so often face martyrdom or early death is that they have attempted to take on too much. Like Moses, they may be able to lead their followers to the edge of the promised land yet be unable to enter it themselves. Just as for every positive genetic mutation there are hundreds that are destructive, so too, I would argue, for every successful prophet there are hundreds of other would-be prophets who fail to realize their promise.⁵⁰ And even "successful" prophets often fall short of their ideals. Although prophets' experiences are deeper and richer than those of their followers, prophets, even the greatest of prophets, are not omniscient. Inevitably they are striving toward goals that to some extent can never be fully achieved.⁵¹

50. A recent analysis, for example, argues that many of the post-World War II problems of the Bruderhoff religious movement were due to the depressive tendencies of Heine Arnold, who led the group from 1957 to 1982. Julius Rubin, "The Society Syndrome: Depressive Illness and Conversion Crisis in a Christian Fundamentalist Sect," *KIT Newsletter* 5 (Mar. 1993): 6-8. Rubin's larger study *Forsaken by God: Religious Melancholy and the Protestant Experience in America* is scheduled for publication by Oxford University Press in fall 1993.

51. This point, which is central to my analysis of religious leadership, is also developed in my article "James J. Strang: The Prophet Who Failed," *Church History* 50 (June 1981): 182-192, and in *Religion and Sexuality*, 245-47.