

## TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE AND EROSION OF THE PATRIARCHAL FAMILY

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Technological change is adequately recognized as a pervading influence in American and, to a lesser degree, Western European life. Technological progress is measured by the ability of technology to increase the output of a unit of human labor. Its current pace is sufficient to double the output of an hour's labor in a little over twenty years or twice in a working lifetime. Its economic fruits are both abundance and displacement. But the economic consequences have been the easiest ones to adapt to, because the incentives are built into the change. The vast majority have experienced greater wealth. The negative economic impacts have been on those left behind because they were isolated by location or preparation. If there is any inadequacy in current consciousness of technological change, it is a tendency to overstress the economic impact and underestimate its broader social impacts. Thus, much has been heard of skill obsolescence, unemployment, and involuntary leisure but little of the family, the law, and religion.

Mormons, by and large, have been among those swept along by economic progress. They have concerned themselves more with moral issues, being particularly concerned with changes in the nature of family life. They have probably been less aware of the impact of technological development upon those family and moral issues. The family is, after all, an economic unit and cannot be insulated from the results of changing economic relationships. One need not go all the way to economic determinism to observe that our materialistically-oriented society rarely passes by opportunities for economic benefit just because the longer run social adjustments may be difficult. Which social trends can be halted or reversed and which can only be adapted to and perhaps channeled more positively can be identified by observing their economic and technological bases.

### *THE PATRIARCHAL FAMILY*

Judging from the only indicators available—the editorials in Church publications and sacrament meeting, stake conference, and general conference ad-

dresses—Mormons see about them a world abounding in wickedness. Judging also from these same indicators, plus the Melchizedek Priesthood, Relief Society and Family Home Night lessons, an apparent slippage of the father from his traditional role as head of the home is identified as a major cause of divorce, juvenile delinquency, sexual promiscuity, drug addiction, and lack of religious faith. It is useful, therefore, to ask how the male ascended that throne to begin with, what are his chances of retaining it, what are the consequences of his failure to do so, and what policies give promise of keeping him enthroned or avoiding undesirable consequences from his demotion. As an economist, I invade the jurisdiction of the sociologist and anthropologist cautiously, but perhaps some useful economic and technological insights can be supplied.

Though Mormons tend to explain the traditional male-dominated patriarchal family structure by the theological concept of priesthood, once dominant but now declining economic and technological relationships are sufficient if not necessary explanation. The patriarchal family had its origin in an economy where change was slow, physical strength was important, and real property was the primary source of wealth. Its distinguishing mark was dominance by the father of a family unit extended vertically over several generations and laterally over a wide range of kith and kin. Primogeniture and entailment (the secular analogues to Esau's birthright) were practiced to prevent the family's means of subsistence from division into uneconomic units by successive equal inheritances, but a by-product was perpetuation of economic power in the hands of the male heir. Disobedience was a luxury which could rarely be afforded, not only by women and children but by all family members and retainers without real property of their own (note Jacob's subservience to Laban until his ownership of flocks and herds had been established). Even in communal societies, control of property and wealth was firmly held by the "elders." Children, particularly boys, were an eagerly sought addition to the family work force. The aged retained an economic function as long as attachment to the fields or flocks or, at a later date, even ownership of rudimentary industry allowed gradual withdrawal from productive activity. In fact, age was respected as the receptacle and purveyor of accumulated, still relevant wisdom. But the respect was immaterial. If the patriarch could not attract fealty, he could demand it.

### *THE IMPACT OF INDUSTRIALIZATION*

Social change, lacking the immediate incentives, typically lags decades behind economic change. Transition from the tribe and manor to the workshop and factory rapidly weakened the extended family, but dominance by the male family head remained relatively untouched for two centuries after the industrial revolution. Nevertheless, its primary reasons for being were threatened by three basic components of industrialization—the replacement of human strength by machines, specialization of labor, and the corporate form of enterprise. The first imperiled the physical basis of male dominance; the second implied that individual skill rather than property ownership would become a primary determinant of income; and the third diffused ownership and made management a skill rather than a right.

Rising productivity freed labor from the soil for service in concentrated urban industry. Specialization provided outlets for personal skills and eliminated the tie to a particular spot of real estate. With that increased mobility, the extended family unit was replaced by the primary unit of husband, wife, and children. In the urban environment children were a luxury and a consumer good rather than an economic investment. Yet the dependence on skills as the primary source of income came to require large investments by parents in the education of children, with little likelihood of financial return. The result was not only a demand for education but for publicly supported education, because, though the parent could not profit economically, society could. Human capital became the most important source of economic growth, but the income was the individual's and the productivity was society's. That parents continue to invest in their children is comforting evidence that economic considerations do not always prevail. Yet it is worth noting that child labor was outlawed only when it had lost most of its economic value—and even then agriculture, where child labor remained a useful resource, was exempted.

Wage and salary employment replaced the gradual transition from childhood to adulthood to age with fixed points of labor market entry and exit. Youth and age became economic burdens. Youth could be written off by society as a preparatory period but age was left without a productive role. Mobility and the breakup of the extended family unit reduced the likelihood of an old age surrounded by posterity. Income maintenance for the aged became increasingly a social responsibility. With youth dependent not upon the inheritance of the family property but upon the development of salable skills, the economic tie between the generations was weakened. Even the management of industry passed from inheriting owners to salaried professionals, making an MBA a more sure, and a more accessible, road to economic power than inherited shares of ownership.

As machines proved more productive than physical strength, the advantages of men over women declined. Given equal education, a man's wife could be as productive as he. She could stay with him out of love, responsibility, or inertia, but she was no longer bound by economic necessity. With the household services available in an urban environment, she could even support her children alone if necessary. In an era of accelerating change, the practical experience of parents was of decreasing relevance to the vocational decisions of youth, and if the scientific knowledge of the parent proved outmoded, how was the youth to know the moral and religious instructions were not equally faulty?

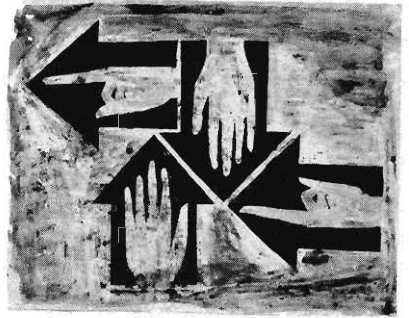
In the isolated rural environment the family lived—ate, worked, and played—together twenty-four hours a day. Life might be at the subsistence level, with little surcease from toil, but what leisure they had was spent together as well. Much of the early increment of productivity following the industrial revolution was taken in added leisure—approximately one-third in the United States between the Civil War and the Second World War, with the other two-thirds of the productivity increase added to income. After the average work week fell to forty hours, the marginal value of more leisure seemingly became less attractive than more income, and in the past quarter century we have chosen to take only one-tenth of our productivity gains in added leisure.

Technology created the productivity which gave society a choice between income and leisure, but either choice loosened the bonds of parental control. Commercialized recreation was shared with peers rather than family. The ubiquitous automobile made impossible parental supervision of destination or activity. Chaperonage became an anachronism. Only trust, worry, or apathy were left. Youth rarely had the opportunity to work beside parent, gaining respect for his abilities, receiving the transmitted family legend and lore, experiencing the satisfaction of physical achievement, and sharing the profound confidences of morality and religion. Today's young may have only the vaguest notions of the substance of the father's vocation or the nature of his daily activities.

### THE STATE OF THE MODERN FAMILY

These descriptions of both the patriarchal family and its erosion are oversimplified caricatures, but they do provide useful insights into contemporary phenomena. They also raise a most troublesome issue: leaving aside theology for the moment, if the patriarchal family were in large measure the creation of a once universal but now declining set of circumstances, what if any are its peculiar values under a different set? Many disturbing contemporary developments which impinge upon the family are closely related to the same technological and economic changes, but it is not clear that erosion of the patriarchal family is a causal rather than coincidental factor.

The rise in divorce rates may have been a natural consequence of the declining economic dependence of women. The fact that the rate appears to have stabilized and that so few second marriages fail may suggest greater freedom to correct mistakes of initial choice without irresponsible repetition. With the changing nature of work and the technological revolution in the kitchen, the proportion of married women working has doubled in twenty years. Most have been beyond child rearing age, but the rate of increase among mothers of young children has been similar. The latter development is worrisome, but there is apparently no conclusive evidence that the children have suffered. Given the relative economic costs and benefits of childbearing, it is less surprising that family size appears to be declining than that large families became so popular in the post-war years.



To characterize the so-called new morality as only the old immorality is to miss the essence of change. A double standard of sexual morality based on fear of pregnancy appears hypocritical in the light of modern medical knowledge. Two challenges must be met by society under the new circumstances. Adults must articulate for youth an acceptable rationale for chastity based on choice rather than fear, something they were never successful in doing for their own generation. Given choice, youth must learn to choose wisely and responsibly. Climbing illegitimacy and venereal disease rates imply that both are failing.

But then drafting a new moral code without a firm philosophical base from which to work is not a task to be accomplished in a few short years. One of the most surprising developments is the rising rate of illegitimate births among adult women, leading one to wonder whether some economically self-sufficient women might come to choose motherhood but reject wifehood.

Concern for the plight of the under-educated rises as the school dropout rate declines. In 1940, only one-half of the appropriate age cohort completed high school, currently three out of four do. The dropout suffers less because the economy cannot use him than because it has better alternatives. With income, power, and prestige depending upon formal training, those who can afford it or who have better counsel obtain it. With higher quality labor available, the economy has built a technology which requires such labor and relegates the undereducated to the margins of economic life.

Rates of criminality, particularly among the young, are a major blot on American society. Yet it is not clear how much should be attributed to familial failure and how much to other causes. Rates may indicate more police and better statistics as well as increased crime. The pranks of rural youth become crimes in crowded cities. A wealthy urban society offers more opportunity and profit for crime. We have more youth to commit crimes as well as the possibility of a more crime-prone youth. However, one should clearly differentiate between criminality and civil disobedience. The latter often represents a useful means to dramatize the obsolescence of statutes and mores. The anti-tax demonstrations of the 1770's, the sitdown strikes of the 1930's, the lunch counter sit-ins of the 1950's, and the anti-Vietnam demonstrations of the 1960's were all disruptive of the established order but they were a traditional, though often extra-legal, part of the legislative process.

Civil disobedience is an act of faith and hope for a better future. The riots in the urban ghetto are acts of hopelessness and frustration. Every community has an underlay of hoodlumism, held in check by the constraint of the majority. Americans have been more given to violence in private affairs than many societies, but a basic trust in the established mechanisms for change has given us less reason to resort to violence in public affairs. When the majority of any community becomes disillusioned and alienated from the broader society and withdraws its active restraint, that society is left only to meet violence with violence.

Even the "hippie" movement may have an element of positive search underneath its dirt, drugs, and escapism. When survival was at stake, material wealth could easily be confused as an end rather than a means in life. Having achieved relative abundance, some are certain to ask, "What is life all about?" and find no answer. Though current experiments will undoubtedly fail, the rejection of competitive materialism and the awkward search for a more permissive society based on respect for individual differences may prove prophetic.

The "death of God" concept also finds its impetus in the search for a dependable philosophy in an unstable world. A few endorse Christian atheism, but to most the phrase is only a dramatic way of saying that the orthodox concepts of God no longer satisfy the yearnings of a science-saturated age.

It is difficult to see how keeping father at the head of the house would

resolve these issues. It is not the fact of declining male dominance but the uncertainties of the transitional search for new relationships which contributes to family disorganization. It is not so much that the male is no longer as dominant as it is that tradition and custom say he *should* dominate, while reason asks *why* and economics asks *how*.

The critical nature of this search for identity is most apparent in the plight of the urban Negro family. Recent studies have emphasized the matriarchal traditions of Negro family life, having its origin in the cruelties of slavery and in post-slavery discrimination. However, middle class Negroes show no significant differences from middle class whites in family ideals. Neither are there significant differences between the family lives of the white and nonwhite rural poor. But technological change and low rural incomes have forced migration to the cities by poorly educated Negroes. Poverty, segregated housing, slum schools, inadequate transportation, and harsh welfare rules have condemned many Negro males to economic impotence and left them only a sexual role. The only available housing is in the central city slums; the jobs they could fill are moving to the suburbs, but transportation systems are designed to bring white suburbanites to their downtown offices and return them at night, not vice-versa. The occupational structure of the city often offers more favorable employment opportunities for Negro women than men. Public welfare is more often than not denied the family of an able-bodied, unemployed male, which provides built-in economic pressure for family breakup.

And one-fourth of Negro families do break up, one-fourth of Negro babies are born illegitimately, and one-fourth of Negro families are headed by women. These national averages are multiplied in the slum ghettos where the impact is concentrated. Some 350,000 Negro males simply disappear from the purview of the Census takers in early manhood, returning to statistical existence only in middle-age. It is not the denial of the patriarchal role itself which destroys the identity of the Negro male. It is the enforcement of matriarchy in a society where custom demands male dominance for self respect. Even priesthood, which for a few might provide a theological substitute for economic competence as a base for male self respect, is foreclosed as well.

For the rest of American families the stresses of change are apparent, but the status and outcome of the transition are unclear. What is clear is that the goal of the struggle is to replace the economic ties of the patriarchal family with bonds of more ephemeral but loftier stuff. Whether patriarchal families loved each other more or less than modern families can never be tested. They were bound by necessity. The father who could once demand respect now must earn it. The husband who could once require submission now must be worthy of love. The prodigal who once returned seeking the relative comfort of servant status in his father's house now returns seeking and offering mutual affection. Considering the replacement of necessity with choice it is not surprising that so many families fail. For those who succeed, the reward is a new, more democratic family of independent equals bound together by love.

#### THE MORMON FAMILY

A Mormon can sympathize with all of the yearnings and stumblings of the

modern family. The Mormon family has been buffeted by the same changes but with special doctrinal and administrative safeguards. A single sex standard and rejection of orthodox concepts of deity are basic principles of our religion. Civil disobedience and rejection of competitive materialism arouse almost forgotten memories of Mormonism's formative period. Both theology and practice have been ambivalent between freedom and equality for women and the role of the priesthood-holding male.

The nature of the family and the father's role in it has changed for Mormons as well as for others. The Mormon family has become more democratic, its members more independent, its head less autocratic, but it cannot fragment into a household of individuals because the family, not the individual, is the key unit of salvation.

The Church has responded administratively to the new stresses by reorienting most of its program to emphasize the strengths of family life. The pulpit rhetoric has been "put father back at the head of the house," but the program application, though ambiguous in intent, seems to lead in a different direction. Priesthood, Relief Society and Family Home Night lessons say little of the shackles of obligation and much of the bonds of love. Fathers are admonished

not to *demand* obedience and allegiance but to merit it. Mothers and children are taught not only to respect father, but also to cherish their own integrity as individuals. Interestingly, the Melchizedek Priesthood lessons seem to indicate a more equal role for a wife than the Relief Society Magazine, which tends to stress her role as a counselor subordinate to the final decisions of her president-husband. Whether one of its purposes or not, the notion of a Family Council suggests a democratic relationship with father as chairman, mother as an equal partner, and children as voting though vetoable members.

Family Home Nights perpetuate some values of the long winter evenings on the farm or the days spent side by side in the field as

periods of "togetherness" and conduits for transmission of family values. But these home-centered activities are supplemented by the Church programs of recreation and religious instruction. Regardless of preachment, the practice does not appear to seriously lament the erosion of the male-dominated family but emphasizes the worth of each individual as an independent as well as interdependent, member of the family society.

The implication, nowhere articulated, may be that male dominance and the patriarchal priesthood were always separate but coincident phenomena, the one a creation of temporary technological and economic circumstances, the other eternal. The essence of priesthood may be only specialization of labor, the male specializing in the external and the female in the internal affairs of family life, but neither with exclusive jurisdiction. A household needs a head





only when the alternative candidates cannot agree. When a "boss" is necessary, it should be the wisest—but wisdom is not an exclusive characteristic of either sex. Children need submission to absolute rule only when they cannot be taught to respect superior experience and trust unvarying love while participating in family decisions to the limits of their wisdom. Perhaps the greatest value of patriarchal decision-making has been not that the decisions were wiser but that it saved arguments over who should decide. In a world of constant and rapid social change, the Mormon family must suffer stresses. There are many families that may fail. Gospel principles, if followed, increase the probabilities of successful adaptation to change, but those probabilities can be further increased if the principles are interpreted in full recognition of the realities of the contemporary environment.

### EPILOGUE

Since the fundamental premise of Mormon theology is the literal brotherhood of man within the literal family of God, one can usually find a theological analogue to any development in family life. During the same ages when families were subjected by necessity to the dominance of the patriarchal father figure, superstitious men relied on an omniscient, omnipotent God as an explanation of catastrophe and as a talisman against the threatening unknown. Sophisticated modern man, rejecting that God, has nothing else with which to replace him. Perhaps the remarkable durability of Mormon theology among an increasingly educated membership is in part attributable to the fact that Joseph Smith brought from the grove the concept of a Father God to love and trust rather than a Creator God to fear.

From the Correlation Program appears to be developing the first major doctrinal innovation since the welfare plan. Like the latter it involves not a new revelation but a new emphasis and application of a familiar principle. The coexistence of man with God is such a principle. The stress has been on the omnipotence of God. As we emphasize his role as Father of a divine family of love-bound individuals rather than Creator of a world, we emphasize our likeness to him and our mutual interdependence with him. The end result of this theological development may be not only a closer kinship and communion with God but a new respect for man in an overly pessimistic and doubtful world. Perhaps "if you have seen me, you have seen the Father" may be, to a lesser degree, but still validly, said by a good father. And Christ's description, "God is Love," may describe the road to as well as the chief attribute of Godhood.