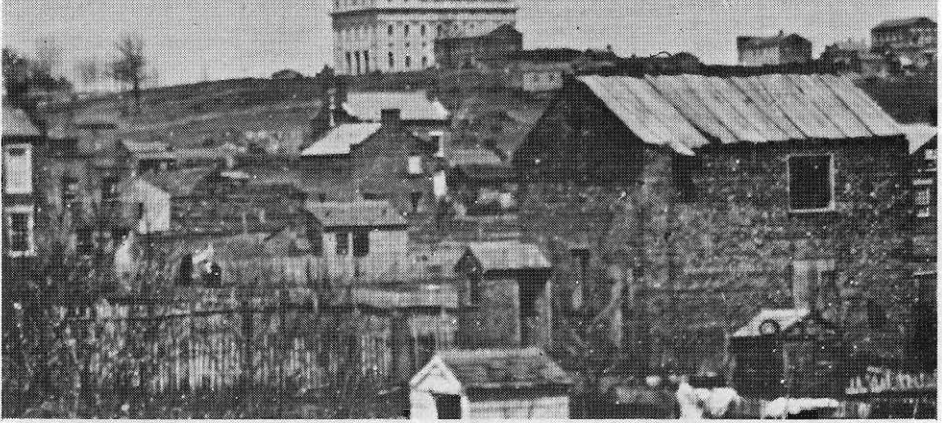


THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN ILLINOIS: POLITICS IN UTOPIA

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The purpose of this paper is to re-examine, in a political frame of reference, the persistent question as to why the Mormons were so ferociously constrained from their attempt to establish at Nauvoo a society that was for them the beginning of the Kingdom of God on Earth.

The "Mormon Question," as it was called in the nineteenth century, remains an important one in a nation concerned with the real nature and functional limits of an open society. Increased interest in Mormon history — along with immigrant, Negro, and Indian history, and the history of nativist and other illiberal manifestations of American life — reflects not just an increase in what might be termed "social problem" history, but an increased desire to have a more profound understanding of the dynamics of restriction in American life. The same generation that drove the Mormons from Missouri to Illinois and from Illinois into the wilderness, also uprooted the remaining southeastern Indians and transported them to western reservations and counted as progressive and liberal the scheme to transport Negroes back to Africa. Was the United States, as exemplified by the Commonwealth of Illinois in the late Jacksonian period, really a "promised land" for the Mormons to establish God's Kingdom in the "last days"? Or was it rather a cursed land? Within Mormon society and probably within the hearts and minds of individual Mormons, this was a dilemma never fully resolved.

A comparison of Nauvoo with other contemporary communitarian societies which were also religiously heterodox, but which did not suffer persecution in the same manner, suggests that the Mormon community was, in important ways, essentially different. Nauvoo was larger and growing more rapidly. The contemporary community of Swedish Jansonites at Bishop Hill, Illinois, in the north-central part of the state, numbered only 780 people at the most. The Jansonites were mobbed once, but the existence of the community was never seriously threatened from the outside probably because it was itself no threat. Illinoisans did not fear the Jansonites like they feared the Mormons. Nauvoo had its thousands and talked stridently of tens of thousands to come. A comparison of the Mormons with other religious Utopian societies such as the Amana Church Society, the Harmonists, the Shakers, the Separatists of Zoar, and the Perfectionists of Oneida, suggests that the Mormon endeavors were of an entirely different order of magnitude.

There were other less tangible differences between Mormons and other communitarian groups. The slower communitarian societies were to attempt assimilation into the competitive web of American political and economic life — or to put it another way, the less committed they were to typically middle-class American goals and values — the more likely they were to be free from outside interference. The German Pietist communities provide a good example. They were exclusive and separate, if not always ascetic; they were walled off by barriers of language and by a pious, peasant, Christian communism; and they were non-political. They did not generally seek participation in the main stream of American life. The Mormons, conversely, were more typically American in significant ways. They were of westering New England stock, Puritan in religious background, and lower-middle class rather than peasant or proletarian in outlook. They were typical old-stock American farmers, artisans, and small entrepreneurs.¹ The Mormons were committed to group development to be sure, but they were also committed to upward socio-economic mobility for themselves as individuals. In their politics, in their attitude toward the national issues of the day, and in their understanding of American history, they were Jacksonian Democrats.² Nor was the Mormon group life and collectivist spirit as unusual in American history as might be supposed. Pioneering by groups was common; from Massachusetts and Virginia in the seventeenth century to Illinois in the nineteenth, many towns were settled by groups moving *en masse*. The Mormons were welcomed to Illinois in 1839 as yet another group of pioneering, colonizing fellow Americans for whose contribution the Prairie State hungered.

Many of the things which Joseph Smith wanted for Nauvoo were typical of the time and place: population growth, commercial and industrial development, economic security and a modicum of prosperity (including an increment of property values), and freedom under the law to live and worship as they pleased. If Mormon evangelical zeal be defined as the gentiles were wont to define it — as aggressive and successful promotion of Mormon enterprise — it was as American as apple pie. The Mormons shared a typical American ambitiousness. Nauvoo was growing more rapidly than any other city in the state and, so said the Saints, that was only the beginning. The Illinoisans, whose frontier boosterism and expansiveness masked apprehension about the depression, the state debt, and the future in general, were inclined to believe the Mormons and to be disquieted in doing so. The Nauvoo City Charter, a typical charter intrinsically, was manipulated in practice to produce a quasi-independent municipal government that seemed to rival the sovereignty of the state itself. It was said in the region that Nauvoo sheltered cutthroats and desperadoes from the Illinois government. "They murdered many of our best citizens," said a Carthage man bitterly, "and

¹Immigrant Mormons, arriving in substantial numbers after 1841, are excluded from these generalizations inasmuch as they did not form the fundamental character of Mormon society in Illinois.

²Marvin Meyers' *The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Belief* (Stanford, 1957) is a provocative study suggesting by implication many parallels with the Mormon persuasion.

there was nothing (eight ox team [or] a diaper) that they would not steal . . . our lives and property was at the mercy of the worst set of outlaws that ever congregated together . . . and the law could not reach them. . . .³ As Smith became unpopular in Illinois, the fact that the Nauvoo Municipal Court protected him from extradition to Missouri by issuing writs of *habeas corpus* was increasingly irksome. Perhaps the mildest gentile opinion of the use of the Charter to gain unwarranted privilege was an official one expressed in 1842 by Governor Thomas Carlin in a letter to Emma Smith: "I have examined both the Charters and the city ordinances upon the subject and must express my surprise at the extraordinary assumption of power by the board of aldermen as contained in said ordinance!"⁴

Of the most far-reaching consequence for Mormon life in Illinois was the fact that the Church became involved in a complex process of political action. Nothing could have been more typically American than such use of the power of their numbers, actual and potential. Nor could anything have been more hazardous. Bishop George Miller, on a mission in Kentucky in 1844, was adjured that it was acceptable for him to preach, but if he preached "political Mormonism," the Negroes would hang him to an apple tree.⁵ Mormon political ambition, founded as it was on a powerful religious base and in the hands of a powerful leader like Smith, sounded the tocsin in Illinois. Ambition in an ambitious country could be a threat as well as a virtue.

Politics may be broadly defined as the pursuit and exercise of power. Political action by individuals, groups, and corporations has ever been the essence of American self-government. However, the political power of religious leaders and corporations found in Colonial America in the Puritan Commonwealth of Massachusetts and in the established churches in all the colonies was eroded by eighteenth-century secularism and further reduced by the American Revolution. The churches were disestablished, and separation of church and state became an enduring objective of American republicanism. Despite the revival of religion in the early nineteenth century, of which the Mormon Church was a beneficiary, separation of church and state continued to be axiomatic. The idea of the Kingdom of God on Earth per-

³Letter of Dr. Thomas Barnes in the manuscript collection of the Illinois State Historical Library. According to correspondence with Mrs. Donald E. Martin, the great granddaughter of Barnes (1812-1901), this letter was written in 1897. Mrs. Martin has the original letter, copies of which are in the Huntington Library and in the Illinois State Historical Library. It should be noted that this letter was written more than fifty years after the events it describes. In 1845 Barnes was secretary of an anti-Mormon society in Carthage, Illinois.

⁴The Emma Smith-Thomas Carlin correspondence is in Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*, Period I, ed. Brigham H. Roberts (6 vols.; Salt Lake City, 1948-51), V, 132-34, 153-55. Hereafter cited as *DHC*.

⁵George Miller, *Correspondence of Bishop George Miller with the Northern Islander from his first acquaintance with Mormonism up to near the close of his life, 1855*, Wingfield Watson, compiler and publisher (Burlington, Wisconsin, 1916), p. 21. A copy of this rare pamphlet is in the library of the Wisconsin State Historical Society. A more widely available publication containing much of the same material is H. W. Mills, "De Tal Palo Tal Astilla," *Publications [of] the Historical Society of Southern California*, X:III (1915-17), 86-174.

sisted of course, especially where the Puritan influence was strong. But the implications in the Kingdom concept for the conjoining of civil and ecclesiastical rule were generally left at the apocalyptic or allegoric level in American Protestantism. Nor was the Catholic Church, which was growing in America, aggressive on the subject.

The Mormons, however, believed that the latter-day restoration of the gospel brought to an end such "spiritualizing" of the Kingdom of God. "Now, when we speak of the Kingdom of God," wrote Apostle Parley P. Pratt, "we wish it to be understood that we mean his organized government on the earth. . . . Four things are required in order to organize any kingdom in heaven or on the earth: namely, first, a king; secondly, commissioned officers duly qualified to execute his ordinances and laws; thirdly, a code of laws by which the subjects are governed; and fourthly, subjects who are governed. Where these exist in their proper and regular authority there is a kingdom. . . . In this respect the Kingdom of God is like other kingdoms. . . ." Apostle John Taylor added, "The Lord is that king; his people are his subjects, his revealed will is the law of the kingdom; the Mormon priesthood is the administrator of those laws." The Mormon priesthood, said Brigham Young, is a "perfect system of government."⁶

Such a view of government within the Kingdom had its external counterpart, albeit somewhat less simplistically conceived, in the idea of using political power to abet and protect the Kingdom. There would be government and politics in the Mormon Utopia, both managed by God's priests. To most Mormons, such an arrangement was truly Christian and truly American. In addition, Mormon political action was an expedient, seemingly necessary for survival. The implication that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints should be established as the national church was not only visionary, it was revolutionary as well. And it may be that the bitter anti-Mormon antagonism of Christian clergy and laity developed not because they did not believe in the literal establishment of God's Kingdom — but, rather, that in their hearts they did.⁷

Although the Mormon expulsion from Missouri set the stage for political involvement in Illinois, it also suggested a cautious entrance there. In the spring of 1839, when the Mormons first arrived in Illinois as refugees, Lyman Wight, an outspoken Mormon apostle, publicly attacked Democratic Governor Lillburn Boggs of Missouri, the Missouri Democratic Party, and Democrats in general. He even called the powerful and prestigious Senator Thomas Hart Benton a demagogue. Wight's remarks, reported in the *Quincy Whig*, caused a stir in Democratic circles right up to the governor's mansion in Springfield, which was occupied by a Democrat, Thomas Carlin.

⁶Parley P. Pratt, *A Voice of Warning and Instruction to All People, Containing a Declaration of the Faith and Doctrine of the Church of the latter Day Saints, Commonly Called Mormons* (New York, 1837), p. 85; *Times and Seasons* (Nauvoo), December 1, 1842; *DHC*, V, 550.

⁷See Klaus J. Hansen, *Quest For Empire: The Political Kingdom of God and the Council of Fifty in Mormon History* (East Lansing, 1967), Chapter 2 and *passim*.

Joseph Smith's response to the situation revealed his political orientation at the outset of the Illinois experience. In two letters (dated May 11th and May 18th) to the *Quincy Whig* he expressed a strictly non-partisan position for the Church. It was Elder Wight's privilege, he said, to express his opinion in either political or religious matters, but "we profess no authority in the case whatever, [and] we have thought, and still think, that it is not doing our cause justice to make a political question of it in any manner whatever." The Missouri barbarities were not the responsibility of any party or religion, said Smith, but were committed by a mob "composed of all parties. . . ." By the same token, Smith continued, members of all parties and religious societies had befriended the exiled Saints in Illinois and, he said, "Favors of this kind ought to be engraven on the rock, to last forever." Smith wrote Lyman Wight privately: "We do not at all approve of the course which you have thought proper to take, in making the subject of our sufferings a political question. At the same time . . . we . . . feel . . . a confidence in your good intentions" (*DHC*, III, 366-67). Many circumstances in the succeeding years would prompt Smith to alter his apolitical statements.

Both Whigs and Democrats wooed the Mormon vote between 1839 and 1842, but the Saints went solidly Whig in the elections of 1840 and 1841. By 1842 the Democrats had succeeded in turning this preference around. Stephen A. Douglas was especially influential in this reversal. Douglas was a leader in the Democratic Party and a newly appointed Supreme Court Justice whose circuit, by choice, included Nauvoo. Of a visit Douglas made in May, 1841, Smith wrote the Nauvoo *Times and Seasons*:

I wish, through the medium of your paper, to make known that, on Sunday, last, I had the honor of receiving a visit from the Hon. Stephen A. Douglas, Justice of the Supreme Court, and Judge of the Fifth Judicial Circuit . . . and Cyrus Walker, Esq., of Macomb, who expressed great pleasure in visiting our city, and were astonished at the improvements which were made. . . . Judge Douglas expressed his satisfaction of what he had seen and heard respecting our people. . . .⁸

In 1842, as the state gubernatorial campaign got under way, Smith announced that the Mormon vote would go for the Democrats. He explained that in 1840 the Saints had voted for William Henry Harrison "because we loved him — he was a gallant officer and a tried statesman." He did not mention that at the time of the presidential campaign there was a lingering Mormon reaction against the Democratic government in Missouri. Nor did he mention his own bitterness toward President Martin Van Buren, who had refused to act on Mormon claims for damages against the State of Missouri. Now it was 1842; Harrison was dead, and, said Smith, "All of his friends are not ours." He added, "In the next canvass, we shall be influenced by no party consideration . . . , so the partizans in this county, who expect to divide the friends of humanity and equal rights, will find themselves mistaken — we care not a fig for Whig or Democrat; they are both alike to us, but we

⁸May 6, 1841.

shall go for our friends, our tried friends, and the cause of human liberty, which is the cause of God" (*DHC*, IV, 479–80). Smith's views had changed dramatically in three years. By now the Mormons were eager to obtain the aid of both state and federal governments, and the growing Mormon community was widely expected to be an important element in the future of Illinois politics. Smith announced that the Mormons would vote as a bloc, that they had no party loyalties or interests, that they would, in effect, sell to the highest bidder, which at the moment was the Democratic Party.

The death of Adam Snyder, the Democratic gubernatorial candidate, early in the 1842 campaign, did not change the Mormon commitment, despite the fact that Thomas Ford was the new candidate. Ford had said publicly that Joseph Smith was an imposter and a scoundrel, and pledged himself if elected to seek alteration or repeal of the Mormon charter. Although the Mormon vote was too small to play a significant role in Ford's subsequent election, he carried Hancock County (where Nauvoo was located) 1,174 to 711. Inasmuch as Hancock was previously a Whig county, the result showed the Mormon vote to have been solidly Democratic.

It is not surprising that apprehension in the state about "political Mormonism" gained momentum during 1842. Whig papers and politicians were understandably bitter. *The Peoria Register and Northwestern Gazeteer* editorialized on January 21, 1842: "As we at various times expressed ourselves pretty decidedly against political tendencies of this sect . . . , we have no recollection anywhere of a movement similar to that of the Mormon prophet. We trust that all parties will see its dangerous tendency, and at once rebuke it." The following day the *Quincy Whig* described Smith's support of the Democrats as a "highhanded attempt to seize power and to tyrannize over the minds of men," and concluded that "this clannish principle of voting in a mass, at the dictation of one man, and this man who has acquired an influence over the minds of his people through the peculiar religious creed which he promulgates, is so repugnant to the principles of our Republican form of Government, that its consequences . . . will be disagreeable to think of — bitter hatred and unrelenting hostility will spring up, where before peace and good will had an abiding place."

In 1842 the idea of the Mormons as a political power became established in the state, in the nation, and in the minds of Mormon themselves. The *Niles National Register* for August 6, reported that the Mormons had "six thousand votes under their immediate control, sufficient to give them the balance of power between the parties in the state. It is alleged they have found out how to make profitable use of this power. . . ." Although such an assessment of Mormon votes was a wild exaggeration, no accurate figure was available to counter it. The spectre of "political Mormonism" was enlarged in the fall of 1842 when, in his *History of the Saints*, John C. Bennett charged that the Saints had "a vast and deep-laid scheme . . . for conquering the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, and Missouri, and erecting upon the ruin of their present governments a despotic military and religious empire . . ." (*DHC*, V, 80n). Bennett's intent was to defame and his exaggera-

tion was immense. But the undoubted seriousness of Mormon political intent lent an unwarranted credibility to his accusation.

Criticism in Illinois focused on the Mormon bloc vote and Joseph Smith's ability to manipulate it. As early as 1840 one observer had said, "These remarkable sectaries . . . hold in their hands a fearful balance of political power. . . . Should they ever become disposed to exert their influence for evil, which may Heaven prevent, they would surround our institutions with an element of danger, more to be dreaded than an armed and hundred-eyed police" (*Quincy-Whig*, October 17, 1840). Smith himself relied on the bloc vote and its power, both at election time and as a bargaining point between elections. During the 1843 congressional campaign Smith offered his vote, and by implication the Mormon bloc, to the Whig candidate Cyrus Walker in return for a desperately needed favor. Then by a subterfuge he diverted the Mormon vote to the Democrats. It was a provocative act which made the Whigs rabid and doubtless contributed to the outbreak of violence and depredations against the Mormons soon afterward.⁹ It was Smith's last gambit in state politics; within ten months he was dead.

The Mormon bloc vote, with the hopes and fears that surrounded it, was not the only reason for Mormon-gentile political conflict. For one thing, voting *en bloc* was not entirely novel, even for religious groups. The Irish in the Illinois canal counties voted *en bloc*, and they normally voted Democratic. Of course the Whigs did not like it, but the depth of antagonism against the Catholic Irish was in no way parallel with the hostility toward the Mormons, despite the fact that the Irish exercised the vote but did not have citizenship. Whigs tended to be less aroused at the Irish than at the Democratic Party, which brazenly and successfully defended the legality of the alien Irish vote.¹⁰ Bloc voting *per se* was unusual but not unique. It was not the *sine qua non* of the "Mormon Question."

Mormon unwillingness to identify permanently with either party was, in reality, more provocative than the bloc vote. When the Mormons came to Illinois it was assumed that they, like the Irish or other groups with a particular identity and self-interest, would become identified with and constituents of one party or the other. Each party hoped to win Mormon loyalties and votes. In a normal course of events, the Mormons, like the Irish, would have become welded into the federation of groups and interests that composed the Illinois Democratic Party.

Another less likely alternative would have been for the Church to remain apolitical, a course which Smith seemed to prefer at the outset. In such a case, there would have been no "Mormon vote." The Mormons guarded against such an eventuality, however. In urging the Saints to vote unitedly for the Democratic candidate in 1843, Apostle John Taylor told

⁹For a detailed description of Mormon political developments in 1842 and 1843 see Robert Flanders, *Nauvoo; Kingdom on the Mississippi* (Urbana, 1965), pp. 232-39.

¹⁰For a discussion of the alien vote controversy in Illinois, see Frank E. Stevens, "Life of Stephen A. Douglas," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, XVI (1923), 336-37; and Raymond C. Buley, *The Old Northwest; Pioneer Period: 1815-1840* (Indianapolis, 1950), II, 232.

them, "It can serve no good purpose that half the citizens should disfranchise the other half, thus rendering Nauvoo powerless as far as politics is concerned."¹¹ In the end the Mormons were not assimilable into the structure of party politics. They had no party loyalties, interests, or connections. They gave no party service, contributed no funds, and perhaps most importantly they could not be trusted by either party. Smith's quixotic politics were easily interpreted as evidence of insincerity and duplicity. In January, 1843, midway between the elections of 1842 and 1843 in which the Mormons played so controversial a role, Smith said, ". . . as my feelings revolt at the idea of having anything to do with politics, I have declined, in every instance, having anything to do on the subject. I think it would be well for politicians to regulate their own affairs. I wish to be let alone, that I may attend strictly to the spiritual welfare of the Church" (*DHC*, V, 259). In August of the same year, Smith declared, "I am above the kingdoms of the world, for I have no laws. I am not come to tell you to vote this way, that way or the other. In relation to national matters, I want it to go abroad unto the whole world that every man should stand on his own merits. The Lord has not given me a revelation concerning politics. I have not asked Him for one. I am a third party, and stand independent and alone" (*DHC*, V, 526). Such a characteristic mixture of apparent innocence and naïveté with shrewdness and design enraged the Prophet's enemies and added to his reputation for political intrigue.

In the political course they pursued, the Mormons appeared, to those who feared them, to be singularly successful. Nauvoo was safe to go its own way protected by its charter, and potentially by the Nauvoo Legion. The Democratic majority in the legislature might have despised the Saints, but as beneficiaries of their vote, it was slow to prescribe limits to Mormon power. And that power increased every day as new converts thronged to Nauvoo. The Mormon Kingdom flourished. It was in such a context that religious — as well as political — prejudice against the Mormons developed.

The fundamental gentile objection to the Mormon religion was not that it was unorthodox but that it was responsible for the alarming successes of the Saints in worldly affairs — it was the wellspring of corporate Mormonism and the Mormon political Kingdom. This analysis was fundamentally correct. At the very heart of the Latter-day Saint gospel was the testimony that the Kingdom would "roll forth" to fill the whole earth. As citizens of Carthage and Warsaw watched Nauvoo outstrip the modest proportions of their own towns and saw the city limits of Nauvoo expand into county real estate, they felt new uneasiness at the Mormon prophecy.

The separation of church and state, which was now firmly established, and the secularizing, materialistic values of nineteenth-century America seemed to prescribe some outer limits for the practice of religion. A religious leader was allowed pulpit opinions on affairs of the day, particularly if they coincided with those already held by the congregation. But when a religious leader such as Joseph Smith — who was regarded as charismatic in the gen-

¹¹*Nauvoo Neighbor*, August 2, 1843.

tile community and who was regarded as a prophet in the Mormon community — was simultaneously in the Temple, the counting house, the seat of government, the land office, and on the stump, it was too much. As de Tocqueville said, "Religions ought to confine themselves within their own precincts; for in seeking to extend their power beyond religious matters, they incur a risk of not being believed at all."¹²

The prevailing Mormon view of the proper role for religion was, of course, exactly the opposite — the "one true Church" was rightly at the heart of all affairs; there was and could be no legitimate separation. Here was the fundamental and irreconcilable conflict. After 1842 it was apparent that accommodation was impossible and the history of the Mormon Kingdom of God in Illinois became increasingly political — not only in the partisan sense, but in the radical sense of a total struggle for power and for survival. A Carthage man put it bluntly; it was, he said, to be "war to the knife and knife to the hilt."¹³ The conflict was waged on every front, first in the press, in the pulpit, and in political campaigns, and finally in bushwhackings, burnings, and lynchings.

In the state of Illinois, the Mormons could not have won a political struggle in which the "Mormon Question" thus defined was the real issue, as indeed it was by 1843. Outside Hancock County the Mormon vote was miniscule, and Mormon influence was small. By 1842 the Mormons probably had a sufficient number of votes to take over the Hancock County government. To do so, however, was not their objective. Nauvoo sought separation and independence from county government and law enforcement. When the County Sheriff, Jacob Backenstos, was elected by Mormon votes in 1845 and served Mormon interests (albeit entirely legitimate ones), it merely fanned the flames of a smoldering civil war.

But the futility of the Mormon political enterprise was not at all clear to the Mormons or to their gentile antagonists. The Church moved ever deeper into a political maelstrom on a local, state, national and even supranational level, led on by a combination of circumstance, naiveté, optimism, recklessness, fear, and faith. On one hand, their political response was a predictable one. They were in many ways typical Americans of the time and place, normally Jacksonian Democrats, old-stock citizens whose grandparents had fought in the War for Independence — a fact to which they frequently alluded. Like most citizens they had great faith in (if small grasp of) the processes of law and politics which was related to a prevailing optimism and exuberance in America. (Zeal for territorial expansion and belief in Manifest Destiny were, for example, prototypical of Mormon thinking.)

¹²Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve (New York and London, 1900), 2:24. Tocqueville continued, "The human mind does not consent to adopt dogmatical opinions without reluctance, and feels their necessity in spiritual matters only. . . . The circle in which [religions] seek to bound the human intellect ought therefore to be carefully traced, and beyond its verge the mind should be left in entire freedom to its own guidance."

¹³Thomas Barnes, *op cit.*

Like many a beleaguered minority they were afraid; but they had the inclination, the hope, and perhaps sufficient power to fight.

On the other hand, the deepening political involvement of the Nauvoo years evidenced a dreamlike, apocalyptic quality that marked it as the politics of Utopia. It was felt that God would open a way. Millenarianism, rather than a sense of process and continuity in history, dominated the Mormon mind. In 1840, Smith wrote in his journal, "Since Congress has decided against us, the Lord has begun to vex this nation, and He will continue to do so except they repent. . . . A hailstorm has visited South Carolina . . . which swept the crops, killing some cattle. Insects are devouring crops on the high lands, where the floods of the country have not reached, and great commercial distress prevails everywhere" (*DHC*, IV, 145). In 1843 when Stephen A. Douglas was a guest at his table, Smith said, "I prophesy in the name of the Lord God of Israel, unless the United States redress the wrongs committed upon the Saints . . . in a few years the government will be utterly overthrown and wasted, and there will not be so much as a potsherd left. . . ." He warned Douglas further, "If ever you turn your hand against me or the Latter-day Saints, you will feel the weight of the hand of Almighty upon you..." (*DHC*, V, 394). In the same year Smith prophesied that as soon as the Temple was completed, the Saints would be gathered into Illinois by the "thousands and tens of thousands." And he announced to an inner group of leaders, "From the sixth day of April next [the anniversary of the founding of the Church], I go in for preparing with all present for a mission through the United States, and when we arrive at Maine we will take ship for England and so on to all the countries where we shall have a mind to go. . . . If I live, I will yet take these brethren through the United States and through the world, and will make just as big a wake as God Almighty will let me. We must send kings and governments to Nauvoo, and we will do it" (*DHC*, V, 255-256). The extravagant self-confidence of Smith and other Mormon leaders, reinforced by the faith and expectations of their followers, knew no bounds. It was in such a temper of mind and heart that the Council of Fifty, that extraordinary group for strategic planning, proposed to detach Nauvoo from the State of Illinois and make it a powerfully garrisoned independent state under the guise of a federal territory; to launch vast, paramilitary mission-colonizing ventures beyond the western territories of the United States; to create a Mormon state in Texas; and to nominate Joseph Smith for President of the United States.¹⁴ While Smith lived, any and all of these schemes seemed possible, although there are suggestions that in the case of his candidacy, he and other leaders quietly sought to prepare themselves and the Mormon community for failure.

The use of the term "Utopian politics" denominates a fundamental incongruity in the Mormon situation. Politics is normally the essence of prag-

¹⁴Klaus Hansen defines the Council of Fifty as ". . . a political organization [founded by Joseph Smith in Nauvoo] intended to prepare the world for a literal, political government in anticipation of Christ's millennium" (*Quest for Empire*, ii). For a fuller discussion of these matters, see Hansen (*Quest for Empire*, Chapters 4 and 5) and Flanders (*Nauvoo*, Chapter 10).

matism, while the Mormon millenarian concept of a new heaven and a new earth was speculative, visionary, idealistic, and doctrinaire. Herein lay the fundamental Mormon dilemma as far as the pursuit and exercise of power was concerned. The attempt to translate Smith's apocalyptic social vision — conditioned as it was by Bible literalism and a passion for true doctrine — into *political* action created a spectre of theocratic tyranny intolerable to Illinoisans (and a minority of Mormons as well). Just as many Saints had faith in their wildest dreams, so did many gentiles come to have faith, so to speak, in their wildest fears, and hastened to crush the Mormon community in Illinois, as it had been crushed in Missouri. The attempts of the state to preserve the life of Joseph Smith and then the city of Nauvoo were feeble, to be sure; but it is unlikely that a greater effort would have proved more effectual. Governor Ford later reflected:

"[A] cause of mobs is, that men engaged in unpopular projects expect more protection from the laws than the laws are able to furnish in the face of popular excitement. . . . If the government cannot suppress an unpopular band of horse thieves . . . , how is it to suppress a popular combination which has the people on its side? I am willing enough to acknowledge that all this is wrong, but how is it to be avoided? . . . This brings us to treat of the Mormons."¹⁵

The literalism of the Mormon doctrine of the Kingdom of God on Earth was dangerous in America. Fundamentally the Mormons denied the legitimacy of a pluralistic society — the Kingdom was to fill the whole earth. Although Mormonism was a product of a pluralistic society where religious freedom was possible, it seemed to threaten such a society and so the society denied the Mormons the right to participate in it.

Because the Saints dared to live outside of American law, antagonistic citizens felt justified in doing likewise. "What would be thought," wrote an Illinois editor, "if Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, or Episcopalians had military organizations . . . ?"¹⁶ The Mormons sought to alter the course of American religious history; in this they were true revolutionaries. The result was civil war in Missouri, Illinois, and finally Utah. The Mormons could not be protected by law or government in such conflict, and neither could they win. The most that nineteenth-century America was willing to grant the Mormons was well stated in the seventeenth century by the Dutch Directors of New Amsterdam when they enjoined Director-General Peter Stuyvesant to be tolerant of religious deviants: "The *consciences* of men, at least, ought ever to remain free and unshackled. Let everyone be unmolested, as long as he is modest; as long as his conduct in a political sense remains irreproachable; as long as he does not disturb others, or oppose the government."¹⁷

¹⁵Thomas Ford, *History of Illinois from its Commencement as a State in 1818 to 1847* . . . (Chicago and New York, 1854), pp. 250-251.

¹⁶*Sangamo Journal* (Springfield), June 3, 1842.

¹⁷Quoted in Sidney Mead, *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America* (New York, 1964), p. 21.