# STRESS POINTS IN MORMON FAMILY CULTURE

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There is much that is commendable about the Latter-day Saint family system: its attention to lasting values and eternal life; its embeddedness and centrality within the religious culture; organized efforts to stimulate and strengthen the inter-solidarity of family members, such as through the Family Home Evening. These are the kinds of things that ordinarily receive attention from the pulpit and in the official Church publications. Standard doctrines and programs are explained and eulogized. Personal shortcomings are pointed out, sometimes specifically. Church members are told about their special blessings and admonished to do better. But, the underlying assumption has seemed to be that the system itself is beyond criticism. The usual emphasis, therefore, has been almost entirely upon repentence and greater effort on the part of the individual. Relatively little attention has been given to institutional analysis or to what the sociologist might label "structural weaknesses." The following remarks represent an attempt at just this sort of constructive structural analysis.

## *More Divorce than Expected*

Not every unproductive marriage ends in divorce, but when divorce does occur it certainly can be said that *that* particular marriage has failed. Some unhappy families remain nominally intact out of consideration for the children or because of the stigma or expense of divorce. To measure the full extent of marriage failure, one would need to get at these "hidden" conditions as well as the actual dissolutions. Yet, for the very reason that internal family troubles tend to be hidden from the public gaze, they do not often come to light without special enquiry or research — or until things get bad enough to cause an open break. While divorce percentages do not give a complete picture of marital difficulty, they are readily available and, by indicating extreme trouble, provide a convenient index of the whole.

It probably will come as a surprise to most Latter-day Saints that Utah is above average in its divorce rate. This is confirmed by the following figures from official government reports:

DIVORCES (including annulments)
PER 1,000 POPULATION

| | *Utah* | *United States* |
|---|---|---|
| 1940 | 2.7 | 2.0 |
| 1950 | 3.1 | 2.6 |
| 1960 | 2.4 | 2.2 |
| 1968 | 3.3 | 2.9 |

While not all years are presented here, examination of ratios over the past quarter of a century or so reveals very few exceptions to this overall comparison. In most years, Utah had a higher divorce rate than the United States as a whole. And the differences lie in the same direction when the comparison is made in terms of a *marriage-divorce ratio* rather than just divorce rate, which has the effect of controlling for the influence that number of marriages may have upon potential number of divorces. In 1960, for example, Utah experienced one divorce for every 3.29 marriages as compared with one divorce for every 3.88 marriages in the country overall — demonstrating that divorces were proportionately higher in Utah. Comparable rates for 1965 were 3.04 and 3.76 respectively.

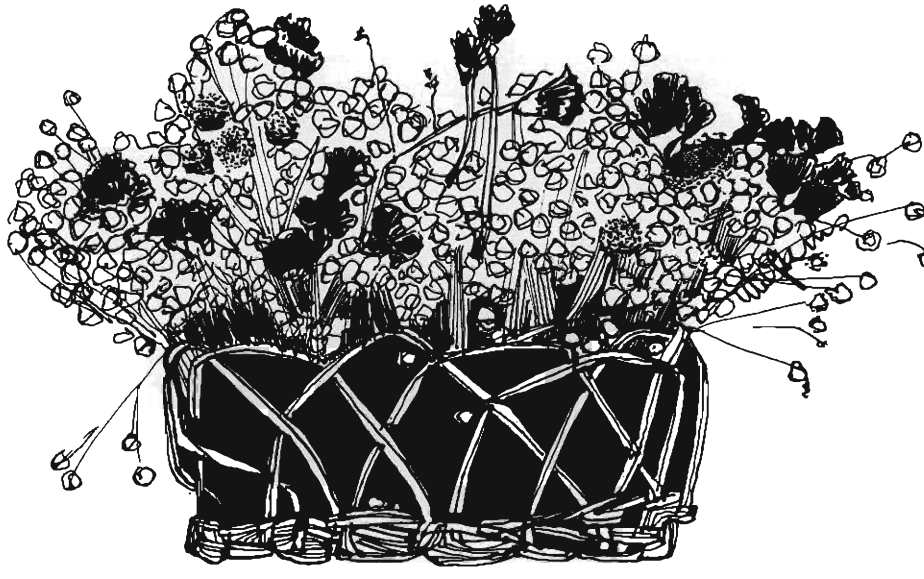
One would expect it to be otherwise. Of the fifty states, Utah is unique in at least two respects: It is the most churched, meaning that a larger percentage of its population has membership in some denomination; and it is the most homogeneous in church membership, meaning that religious affiliation is more concentrated into one denomination — in this case the Mormon. Somewhere between two-thirds and three-fourths of Utah's entire population is Latter-day Saint. Furthermore, with an exceptionally high valuation placed upon marriage and family within the Mormon culture, the logical expectation would be for a *lower* than average divorce rate, rather than a higher one. And it would not be reasonable to try to explain the higher rate away by the presence of a non-Mormon element in the Utah population. For other states have even higher proportions of non-Mormons and there is no reason for thinking that Utah's non-Mormons have higher divorce rates than their counterparts outside the State.

Now this is not to suggest that divorce is rampant among the Latter-day Saints. Unquestionably, many are experiencing success in their marriages and there is evidence that divorces following temple marriage are disproportionately few in number. For example, in a record-linkage study of Salt Lake and Utah Counties — with the divorce records search for about ten years following each marriage — I found the following divorce percentages: civil marriages, 13.4; Latter-day Saint non-temple marriages, 10.2; non-Mormon religious marriages, 5.5; and Latter-day Saint temple marriages, 1.8 percent divorced.[1] Note that divorce was proportionately greatest following civil or nonreligious weddings, where it might be presumed that church influence is at a minimum. There is no reason for thinking that Mormons would be either under or overrepresented in this group.

But note also that while the temple marrying group showed up with substantially the lowest divorce percentage, the Latter-day Saint non-temple group showed up with a percentage nearly twice that of all other churches grouped together. Why? The obvious explanation seems to be that the screening process involved in getting a "recommend" necessary for entering a temple discourages some from trying and results in the rejection of others; and many Latter-day Saints who for one reason or another don't make it to the temple turn next to their local Bishop for a religious but non-temple ceremony. Temple marriage is highly valued and zealously promoted in the Mormon culture, but it is available only to those who conform to the essential doctrines and standards of the Church. It stands to reason, therefore, that the "rejects" would be more divorce-prone to start with, and that their inclusion in the Latter-day Saint non-temple group makes that group's divorce rate higher than it would be normally. Thus, there seems to be a selective process operating which, by narrowly restricting the temple marrying group, reduces the divorce rate there while at the same time increasing it in the group that receives the spillover.

I am of the opinion that temple marriage in and of itself provides strong motivation for successful marriage and family life. By viewing the family in terms of eternity and defining expectations and fixing responsibilities at higher levels than usual, it causes husband and wife to try harder. Nevertheless, this built-in incentive is not the sole reason for the temple marrying group's very low divorce percentage. Another important factor is the selective process mentioned above — the fact that those who make it to the temple have a higher probability of success from the very start.

Not only does Utah, which is largely Mormon, have a higher-than-normal divorce rate, but average marriage duration is significantly shorter than in



most states, and the proportion of divorces involving children is higher than in most states. For example, from the twenty-two states reporting in 1968, average marriage duration to the time of divorce was 7.0 years overall, but for Utah it was only 5.8. Furthermore, a special analysis of 1962 data revealed that 39.8 percent of the divorcing couples were childless and only 3.3 percent had five or more children in the total group, as compared with 28.2 percent and 5.6 percent respectively for Utah. High divorce rate and short marriage duration prior to divorce are usually found to be correlated, as suggested by Utah's relative high rank on both. Utah's disproportionate weighting with regard to divorce cases involving children can probably be explained by an abnormally high overall birthrate among Mormons (which we will deal with at greater length below). But, regardless of the explanation, children are known to pay a high price when their parents divorce. And, since Utah seems to have more than its share of *both* divorce and the children of divorce, its problems in this respect are inevitably compounded.

Really all that I have been trying to say up to this point is that we have a problem and that to solve it we might do well to first take an honest look at some of its sociological (or structural) dimensions. Even if the divorce percentages were just equal with (and not higher than) the nation as a whole, we still would have a problem — for with all that the Church stands for and has to offer we *ought to do better* than the rest. But "doing better" may require institutional correction at certain points; not *just* greater personal effort to live up to the teachings, as important as that is.

If the problem can be recognized the next step is to examine its dimensions. To me, there seem to be about five major points of strain in Mormon family culture which are at least partly responsible for the marriage trouble we are experiencing: (1) a pattern of terminal petting; (2) a tendency to marry very young; (3) a guilt-laden premarital sexuality; (4) an unrealistic approach to family size; and (5) an overemphasis upon authoritarian control.

## *Terminal Petting*

In popular parlance, "necking" refers to the lighter forms of kissing and embracing, and "petting" to the more intimate patterns of caressing and fondling short of sexual intercourse (coitus). Usually, as a young person develops and his interactions with the opposite sex expand, there will be a somewhat gradual progression from one stage of intimacy to the next. A central concern of moralists has been with the rate and extent of this progression prior to the wedding. The problem is one of timing and management in intimacy development.

Cultures differ in the quality of norms set up to govern premarital sexual intimacy. My own cross-cultural research may be used as an illustration of this point and also to show how Latter-day Saint norms and practices compare with those of other cultures. Samples were taken from three subcultures — Mormondom in the Intermountain region of western America, Midwestern United States, and Denmark in Scandinavia — and studied by means of both record-linkage and the questionnaire, to get at attitudes, behavior, and certain consequences of premarital sexual behavior as related to the respective cultural norms.[2] Virtually every measure used showed the

Intermountain (Mormon) to be the most conservative or restrictive of the samples, and the Danish to be the most liberal or permissive. This basic difference was noted with reference to both attitude and behavior.

But there was one important exception. When the 1968 university student respondents were asked to indicate the most advanced level of sexual intimacy that they so far had experienced, the picture for *petting* turned out to be in reverse of the usual cross-cultural pattern: Intermountain showed *higher* petting percentages (41.7 for males and 36.3 for females) than the Danish (5.2 for males and 3.3 for females). Midwestern petting percentages were also higher than the Danish, but for males this difference was not as great as between Intermountain and Danish. Coital percentages, as expected, showed up highest of the three cultures in the Danish and lowest of the three in the Intermountain, for both sexes. Furthermore, when petting and coital incidence figures were added together, these combined percentages followed the same expected pattern — though with cross-cultural differences less than when coitus alone was compared, due to the leveling effect of having the "reverse" petting figures added in. The question is: *why* did petting take a reverse cross-cultural pattern to that of other intimacy measures, including coitus?

The explanation seems to be that it is *terminal* petting (petting and stopping there) that is being measured and that when a culture puts heavy emphasis upon premarital chastity, technically defined as just non-coitus, there tends to be an unwanted corollary increase in petting, participated in as an end activity. In Scandinavia the norm is to view petting and coitus as belonging together, as part of the same thing, so that when one pets it is regarded as normal to go on to coitus — in fact, unhealthy to do otherwise. Elsewhere I have labeled this viewpoint "the package concept." It avoids drawing a line between petting and coitus before marriage with the one considered more acceptable than the other. But in America, and especially in Mormon culture, that line *has* been drawn. In our more narrow interpretation of chastity — non-coitus whether or not petting occurs — and in our extremely heavy condemnation of deviation from the chastity norm, we have encouraged (unconsciously perhaps) petting as a terminal and hence substitute activity.

There is no implication in this analysis (made without value judgment) that our culture *deliberately* encourages premarital petting. Quite the contrary. Yet, the structure is such that some petting as a terminal activity is the result, whether one likes it or not. Mormon culture is very clear in its strong and uncompromising position against premarital coitus. But less is said about petting; and the somewhat meager treatment that is given generally lacks specificity regarding both limits and penalities. Both biological and social pressures push young people in the direction of physical intimacy, which *in the face of ambiguity* causes many to take a chance.

Now, of course, petting may be either exploitative or non-exploitative (with mutuality and love). Nevertheless, for a person to become extremely intimate without being able to consummate the erotic drive can result in psychological frustrations and pressures which often lead to a too-early marriage. Whichever way one looks at it, terminal petting is apt to create problems for those who participate.

### *Youthful Marriage*

Median age at first marriage has been on the decline in the United States since about 1890. In that census year, males on the average married at age 26.1 and females at age 22.0. Corresponding figures for 1971 were 23.1 and 20.9 respectively. A large factor in this drop in age has been an increase in number and percent of teen-age marriages. Students of the family recognize this movement toward youthful marriage as one explanation for the increasing divorce rate.

Any number of studies have shown higher-than-average divorce rates for couples who marry very young. Undoubtedly there are many reasons for this: immature notions of love; inadequate time for testing and preparation; the greater likelihood of the marriage occurring as an escape from other problems, such as a premarital pregnancy or an unhappy home situation; and the relative inability of youngsters to earn a decent living or adequately cope with the other responsibilities of marriage and rearing a family. Statistically speaking, the odds are against success for teen-age marriages.

How is it with Latter-day Saints? The evidence seems clear that Mormon culture has more than its share of youthful marriages. In 1958, for example, 1.1 percent of Utah's brides were under fifteen, 49.1 percent were fifteen through nineteen, and 21.9 percent of Utah's grooms were fifteen through nineteen years of age. Most importantly, each of these percentages was higher than comparable ones for all of the remaining twenty-four states which reported age at marriage. In 1963, median age at first marriage was 19.9 for brides and 22.5 for grooms in Utah as compared with 20.5 and 23.0 respectively in the United States; furthermore, these age averages were lower for Utah brides than in twenty-three of the thirty-six states reporting at that time and lower for Utah grooms than they were in thirty of the reporting states. While Utah has not been at the very top in teen-age marriages during every year, for the past several decades at least it has been near the top in this respect. Undoubtedly this is one factor explaining the higher-than-expected divorce rate discussed above.

But here again, I make no claim that the Church is promoting youthful marriage; actually the practice is officially discouraged. When I compared temple with non-temple marriages by ages of bride and groom, for example, I found *fewer* of the temple marrying group aged 19 or under: 40.8 percent of the brides and 12.6 percent of the grooms, as compared with 59.0 percent and 21.6 percent respectively for the non-temple marrying group.[3] It seems reasonable to assume that this smaller proportion of young marriages in the temple marrying group is one reason for its substantially lower-than-average divorce rate. Nevertheless, when all marriages are considered, the average age tends to be disproportionately low in Utah and overall divorce rate tends to be disproportionately high.

Why do couples marry so young in Mormon culture? Since it certainly is not Church policy, what is there in the structure of the culture to encourage and perpetuate this pattern? Terminal petting must be a large part of the reason — especially when combined with exceptionally high valuations upon marriage and upon chastity prior to marriage. Latter-day Saint youth are taught to think of family relationships in terms of eternity and potential

Godhood. They are a part of American culture which itself romanticizes love and glamourizes marriage; and on top of that they are almost constantly indoctrinated, in home and chapel, with the notion that nothing is more important. So their motivations toward love, marriage, and family are exceptionally strong. But they are equally indoctrinated to accept the chastity norm, being taught that "adultery is next to murder" in its sinfulness and that fornication (premarital coitus) is nearly as bad. So they develop a sharpened conscience in this regard, with guilt standing by to guard against offenses upon the "law of chastity." At one and the same time they are exposed to the erotic stimulation of the general culture to about an equal extent as everyone else, are additionally motivated to find a loved one and establish a family with a view toward eternity, and also experience the added pressure of an overdose of terminal petting. The result is the setting up of a very strong love-sex tension, which cannot find easy release in premarital coitus because of the culture's high emphasis on chastity and which therefore seeks release through early marriage. Many Mormons marry early because they are enamored with love, supercharged with the sex drive, and so feel that they "cannot wait." Their consciences tell them that they *must* wait for coitus until marriage; and so, to avoid an impending tragedy — or in some cases to alleviate guilt already there from indiscretions already committed — they decide to get married. This pressure toward marrying young is one of the very real stress points in Mormon family culture.

### *Sexual Guilt*

My cross-cultural study, referred to earlier, revealed substantially lower rates of both premarital coitus and premarital pregnancy in the Intermountain (Mormon) group as compared with samples from Midwestern United States and from Denmark. Percentages of university males in 1968 reporting premarital sex experience were 36.5, 50.2, and 94.7 respectively; females, 32.4, 34.3, and 96.6 respectively; and proportions of marital first births occurring within six months following the wedding (clearly indicating premarital conception) were 3.4, 9.4 and 24.2 respectively. These results, consistently showing the Mormon samples to have the least premarital experience, were in line with expectation. They demonstrate, I believe, the controlling power of strong religious motivation in holding members to the chastity standard. Although the revealed percentages for the Mormon samples undoubtedly are higher than adherents to that culture would like them to be, their *relatively* low level must be a source of satisfaction.

Yet even this qualified satisfaction needs to be tempered with the realization that the controls (as they often are carried out) seem to be exacting an unwelcome price. I again refer to my own cross-cultural research for clues. It was found that, while the Mormon culture clearly had the lowest rates of coitus and pregnancy before marriage, it nevertheless — for those with experience — generally showed *highest rates* in measures such as these: having premarital coitus because of force or felt obligation rather than mutual desire; engaging in premarital coitus without the protection of contraception; accompanying premarital coitus with some degree of alcoholic drinking; and feeling guilt or remorse following the premarital coital experience. Furthermore,

when approval and behavior percentages for premarital coitus were compared, it was the Mormon-based sample that showed the greatest discrepancy; more of the offenders in that culture were found to be violating their own standards. And finally, when divorce rates between premarital and postmarital conceivers of the first child were compared, it was the Mormon again that showed the greatest difference: divorce rates were higher for premarital than postmarital conceivers in each of the three cultures, but the *magnitude of that difference* was greatest by far in the Mormon culture.[4]

Thus, there is apparent evidence of undesirable side effects emanating from our controls. Our religious culture is at least *relatively* successful in controlling for chastity. Yet, as was pointed out earlier, this may be resulting to some extent in excessive petting and in youthful marriage. And also, as indicated in the above paragraph, its accomplishment may be partially at the expense of irresponsible behavior, blunted satisfactions, and greater negative effects on the part of those who do break over. To the extent that this is true, the important questions become: Why? And what can be done about it?

Without in any sense assuming to know it all, let me at least suggest directions in which I think the answers will lie. Overall, Mormon culture is comparatively strict and demanding; it lays down rather rigid rules governing personal conduct and this means very little tolerance of nonconformity. The tendency is to define things as either "black" or "white," with not much of a gray area in between. As a result, persons who "sin a little" may feel themselves rejected and so go on to sin a lot. Furthermore, the sex area tends to be avoided in official discussion. Or, when it is not, the treatment is apt to be preachment — with admonitions and warnings but with little specific information or personal help. Even words like "coitus," "pregnant," or "sex" itself are usually avoided in the sermons and writings. This ultra-conservative stance has been made all the more evident in recent years by the stated position of some prominent Church officials opposing sex education in the schools. The matter is still in a state of flux, but as of this writing Latter-day Saint parents are charged with full responsibility for the sex education of their children; and yet, with few exceptions, they are not given the explicit instructions or personal assistance needed to accomplish that job. This need may be even greater in Mormon culture than some other places because of the strains peculiar to that culture, such as those outlined in this paper.

While purity should be regarded as the ideal, there is good reason for thinking that prudery is not the best way to bring this about. The real challenge is to find ways to encourage chastity without creating pressures within the individual, which can be equally destructive in the long run. Perhaps the answer lies in the direction of a more open and, at the same time, more positive approach to sex education.

### *Underplanned Parenthood*

The phrase "planned parenthood" is commonly used to designate the practice of birth control: the willful regulation of the number and/or spacing of children. This is a widespread practice today, especially in the western

world, and most population specialists argue that considerably greater control of this sort is urgently needed if the world is to be saved from an impending doom. In recent years, average family size in the United States has been about three children, which, although considerably lower than at any other point in the country's history, is believed by the experts to be too high still. Hence the contemporary movement for a two-child norm, or, as it is sometimes expressed, for "Zero Population Growth."

Mormon family culture has generally resisted the declining birth rate: stressing the desirability of large families and justifying its position in this regard by doctrinal references — giving bodies to spirits waiting in the pre-existent world; building a religiously meaningful home life around off-spring; adding to one's eternal glory through progeny. This emphasis upon relatively unrestrained reproduction has had its effect. Utah, for example, had a birth rate in 1969 of 23.6 births per 1000 population compared with an overall United States rate of 17.7; and for nearly every year in recent decades Utah's birth rate has shown up among the highest of the fifty states. Or again, my own cross-cultural research not only demonstrated a lower premarital pregnancy rate for Mormon culture than Midwestern United States and especially for Denmark (as reported above), but also revealed that it had substantially higher *early* postmarital conception — modal timing coming about one month after the wedding. The typical Mormon pattern, therefore, seems to be for greater self restraint prior to marriage and less interference with reproduction (that is, less birth control) once the wedding has occurred.

Yet, there can be no denying that Mormon families today are smaller on the average than in yesteryears, which means that more of them are "planned." During the 1946-47 school year I was able to study over sixteen hundred students at Brigham Young University asking, among other things, "About how many sons and daughters do you desire in marriage?" and "Do you believe that Mormon couples are justified in having smaller families than nature intended, that is, in practicing birth control?" Unmarried Mormons in the sample wanted 4.6 children on the average, and 53.6 percent of them answered "yes" to the question on birth control. An overall summary of findings was stated as follows:

> Mormon fertility is responsive to both religious and socioeconomic pressures; while maintaining itself at a level significantly above that of the rest of the nation, it is, at the same time, paralleling the general downward trend. Sampled Mormon university students desire larger families than do non-Mormons by about 50 per cent, but families smaller, nevertheless, than those that they came from. Slightly over half believe in birth control within marriage, a figure that is probably higher than for their ancestors but lower than for contemporary non-Mormons. The expense of child-rearing is given as the major reason for wanting to limit the family.[5]

It is this middle or two-directional position — with the fertility pattern reflecting the influence of both religious precept and general social pressure — that has caused me to title this section *Under*planned Parenthood. Mormon fertility is neither as planned as it is in American society as a whole, nor can it be called unplanned (except, of course, in certain families).

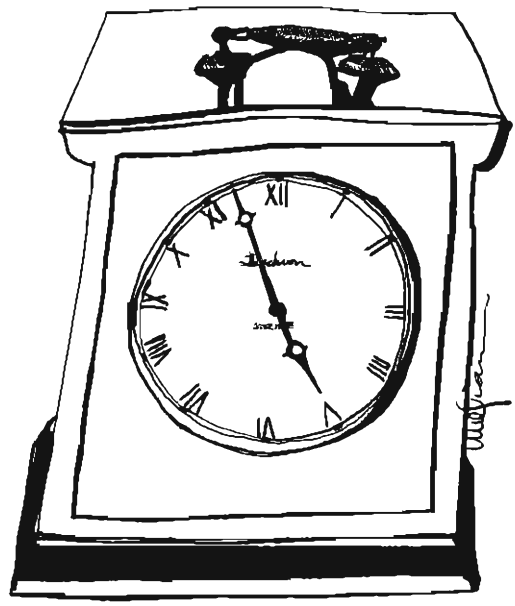
The Church's position on birth control — if indeed it can be said to have an official position — has been, and remains somewhat ambiguous; perhaps deliberately so. About a quarter of a century ago, the late apostle John A. Widtsoe told me in a private conversation that the Church took no official stand on birth control (though his own position allowed for only "natural" methods and, even those, to be justified chiefly by reasons of health, never out of selfishness). Other high Church officials have from time to time taken positions, as individuals, very similar to that expressed by Doctor Widtsoe. But to my knowledge there has never been any clearly spelled out *Church Position.* Coming nearest to this is a statement over the signatures of the First Presidency mailed to Presidents of Stakes, Bishops of Wards, and Presidents of Missions under the date of April 14, 1969. It speaks of the commandment to "multiply and replenish the earth," decries a tendency among some Church members to limit their children, and warns especially against artificial curtailment when the parents are healthy and free from hereditary blights; but then it concludes:

> However, we feel that men must be considerate of their wives who bear the greater responsibility not only of bearing children, but of caring for them through childhood. To this end the mother's health and strength should be conserved and the husband's consideration for his wife is his first duty, and self-control a dominant factor in all their relationships.
>
> It is our further feeling that married couples should seek inspiration and wisdom from the Lord that they may exercise discretion in solving their marital problems, and that they may be permitted to rear their children in accordance with the teachings of the gospel.

Now it is clear to me that, although this position remains extremely conservative on the birth control issue, there is also some flexibility and responsibility for individual interpretation. It would seem that the First Presidency recognizes the possibility of extenuating circumstances within a given marriage and that they expect the persons involved, in communication with Deity, to make their own decisions. If I am correct in this view (and certainly I don't want to be interpreted as trying to speak for the Church) the only position that may be regarded as official within Mormondom is for members to keep the basic doctrines in mind, seek inspiration, and then make their individual decisions according to the particular circumstances that face them.

Sociologically speaking, the coming of children is most apt to prove stressful to a married couple when it catches them off guard, so to speak, or finds them unprepared to cope with the new situation. American culture in general, and perhaps Mormon culture in particular, tends to glamourize both marriage and parenthood. This invites disillusionment; and disillusionment produces frustration, conflict, and even divorce. Just as an overdose of romanticism in courtship often means a crisis in early marriage, so an unrealistic view of babies and children can mean a crisis in early parenthood — when husband and wife are jolted into a life of dirty diapers, interrupted sleep, confining schedules, and the like. Yet, it is not the children themselves so much as it is the discrepancy between what one has been led to expect and what parenthood actually brings, that causes the difficulty.[6]

During the early 1950's I was involved in a study of several hundred married student couples at Purdue University to determine, among other things, if



there is any relationship between family size and marital adjustment. While our indices of marital adjustment were found to be positively related to *desired* number of children, the relationship to *actual* number of children was a negative one. This suggested that some couples, who want children eventually, were having them before they were ready, and that this failure in timing might be causing disappointments, hardships, and maladjustments. Furthermore, when several tests were made comparing couples who expressed a discrepancy between actual and desired number of children against those with no such discrepancy, it was the discrepant groups that consistently showed up with the lowest marital adjustment scores. Our overall generalization was that marital adjustment increases according to the ability of couples to control fertility in line with their desires.[7] And research reports appearing during the last two decades have tended to support this same basic conclusion.

A recent investigation into how much children are valued gathered opinion data from approximately 15,000 college women, including nearly 400 Mormon coeds in a nonsectarian university. The Mormon respondents wanted 4.7 children in marriage, on the average, which was lower than Catholic respondents with an exclusively Catholic education, but higher than other Catholics and especially higher than Protestant, Jewish, and "no religious preference" respondents. The investigators concluded that family size preference is a function of "the overall religious and social system in which women find and orient themselves." They reported, among other things, that as the importance attached to religion goes down, the number of children desired goes down also and the percent of women who intend to plan their families goes up — a relationship found to be particularly strong among Catholics and Mormons. With regard to the religiously oriented family systems of Catholics and Mormons they said: "Marriage is considered a career in itself, one only to be entered if the goal is to have a family. . . . In a certain sense, the woman has a divine mission to perform."[8]

If I were to hypothesize concerning the Latter-day Saint family on this score, it would be that our religious culture — by romanticizing parenthood and playing down some of the reality factors within contemporary society — invites disenchantment after the children come (or when too many come too fast) and that this disenchantment in turn is a factor in our higher-than-expected divorce rate. Unquestioning faith plus a willingness to obey what is believed to be a commandment (abstaining from birth control as this is sometimes interpreted, for example) may be causing certain married couples to move rapidly and deeply into parenthood, only to feel disillusioned and trapped later on. Of course, the hypothesis needs empirical testing, but it does impress me as plausible.

In a lesson manual used by Latter-day Saint Sunday Schools during the 1940's, I at one place dealt with the question of family size — pointing out objections to the two extremes (both planned childlessness, and letting pregnancies follow each other in quick succession) and urged couples to set their goals and establish their controls in the light of circumstances and in the spirit of responsibility.[9] I feel the same way about it today, only even more strongly than before.

### *Authoritarian Family Relationships*

Power structure within the American family (and to some extent the family everywhere) has been shifting from an older so-called *patriarchal* pattern where the husband-father held most of the authority and both wife and children were expected to give him unquestioning obedience, to a more *equalitarian* arrangement based on notions of mutual respect and more-or-less democratic decision making. This long-range and almost universal trend within the family system has paralleled a similar movement toward personal freedom and responsibility taking place within the political arena and throughout the general culture. Of course there have been set-backs and not every person enjoys the privilege of self-expression — in dignity and without fear of reprisal — even today. But the overall trend has been in that direction and family democracy now can be said to be the central goal, at least in democratic societies.

Nevertheless, the Mormon Church has viewed governance in a significantly different manner, believing in *theocracy* rather than straight democracy. It brings God into the picture, one might say, and, as a consequence, stresses priesthood and obedience to divine authority. The priesthood is given to every worthy adult male and is expected to operate in the governing of families as well as of the Church proper. Thus the husband-father is regarded as head or patriarch of his family. The wife can enjoy benefits of the priesthood, she is told, but only "through her husband" in his priesthood role; and the children likewise are expected to honor their father as the ultimate source of authority in the home. Whatever might be said about this conceptualization of family governance, at least there should be recognition that it resists the movement of our times and so is apt to produce a certain amount of strain for Church members, who are literally a part of the world and yet asked to be separate from it.

There is evidence from research that the patriarchal family structure of

Mormon culture is persisting as a religious concept, but at the same time adapting to the changing times at the level of daily living. Patriarchal authority in the Mormon family has declined some, although not to the same extent as in America as a whole.[10] Just as Mormon fertility was shown to be responsive to both religious and social pressures, the same can be said of Mormon authority patterns within the family. And this in-between position, in both instances, may pull loyal Church members in two directions at the same time.

At the level of doctrine, Latter-day Saints are told that "the rights of the priesthood are inseparably connected with the powers of heaven"; are warned against the evils of "unrighteous dominion"; and are admonished to exercise the authority of the priesthood only "by persuasion, by long-suffering, by gentleness and meekness, and by love unfeigned . . ." (D&C 121:34-43). To the extent that this doctrine finds application in the home, it insures against arbitrary or dictatorial maneuvers on the part of the husband-father. But with power comes the temptation to misuse it.

I am not suggesting that the abuse of patriarchal power is any more common in Mormon than non-Mormon families. It may even be less, and only carefully designed research could give us the true comparison. It has been my personal observation, nevertheless, that *some* Latter-day Saint family heads take their priesthood authority too seriously (or perhaps just become too ego-involved) and that this sometimes results in a discontented or even rebellious wife or child. The abuse of power to any degree may be harmful.

Frequently there will be an accommodation to the personalities or situations involved by accepting certain inconsistencies into the authority pattern that develops. Note the following from Christopherson's study of Mormon marriages:

> During the thirty interviews, the investigator noted in seventeen instances what might well be interpreted as a curious discrepancy between the concept of patriarchal authority and its exercise. Typical of such instances was an interview with one family in which the woman had just finished expressing a point of view to the effect that in her family the husband and father was regarded as the ultimate seat of recourse with respect to most, if not all, family disputes. Almost in the same breath, she interrupted her husband to correct him with an air of finality with regard to a point of Church doctrine.[11]

Two powerful movements are shaking the family structure of American society today: woman's liberation and youth's rebellion. If the upheavals have been less in our Mormon communities, the differences are in degree only; for we too have those who feel abused by the system. When women or youth act restless and militant it often is a rebellion against what is considered to be arbitrary authority. Yet, how often do Latter-day Saints make an authoritarian approach in family matters in order to "keep the lid on" — and thus invite further rebellion later on? Perhaps it is part of our unfinished business to build real equality within the home; to see family theocracy as righteous only when it is democratically carried out; to avoid letting our concept of authority make us authoritarian.

Just as the Latter-day Saint male is prepared from the time of early childhood to anticipate and later function in his priesthood role, so the female is trained to value most such things as motherhood, homemaking, and giving

support to her husband. These respective male and female models are consciously promoted and strongly reinforced by the religious culture. To a considerable extent the Mormon female is socialized into a role of dependancy. And in all likelihood more of them accept this traditional position than is true with non-Mormon women today. Yet there is evidence that some — and perhaps increasing numbers, especially those with superior talent and self-motivation — are feeling a degree of discontent or even entrapment within the system.

The summer 1971 issue of *Dialogue* brought into focus the views and problems of contemporary Latter-day Saint women, many of whom experience conflict between their loyalty to the priesthood and the Church, on the one hand, and their felt need for understanding and self-expression on the other. Most of the contributors to this issue were women and all seem dedicated to their faith. But their faith does not stop them from thinking and speaking out. In reading what they have to say, one does not sense any real rebellion against men, or against the priesthood, or against the Church. Yet, neither are these women as a group entirely satisfied with status quo. Some of them cry out against the traditional stereotypes which circumscribe woman's role and tend to force women into behavioral molds. They ask for greater acceptance as persons and greater opportunity to express their individual talents and proclivities over and above homemaking — but typically in addition to, rather than in place of, being wives and mothers. Perhaps this is the kind of dialogue needed in a larger number of Latter-day Saint homes: speaking out within a framework of love and loyalty; tolerating differences and then capitalizing upon diversity for the benefit of all; building genuine partnerships in place of an arbitrary administration of authority; respecting the dignity of human personality — whether the person be male or female, adult or child.

Wholesome family life requires fundamental respect for others and a spirit of give and take. Furthermore, there must be effective communication. Anything short of this bespeaks the "unrighteous dominion" that Latter-day Saints have been warned against. Authoritarian governance within the home, when it exists, is apt to be destructive of love and harmony and crippling to the personalities involved — husband, wife, and children alike.

* * * * *

So we end where we began: with a call for introspection and self-analysis. For facts to supplement faith. For the exercise of the intellect, along with the spirit, in grappling with the problems which face us.

One of those problems is family disorganization. In outlining these five stress points within Mormon family culture I have not intended to imply either that the system is without strengths, or that all families within the system exhibit the various weakness dealt with. Certainly neither of these possible claims is true. Nevertheless, to the realistic observer, *all* is not well in Latter-day Saint family culture; and we had better be honest with ourselves about this or there will be less chance of self-correction. I have been dealing only with *tendencies*, not with universals. Furthermore, I see my conclusions more in terms of partially-tested hypotheses than final judgments and I

recognize that their tentative nature calls for further thought and research.

Since this paper has been analytical rather than promotional, some readers may possibly interpret it as an attack upon the Church. It is not that. By simply studying a phenomenon, the social scientist shouldn't be accused either of endorsing it or of assessing blame for the problems uncovered. My intent has been, not to tear down, but to build. As I see it, one of the first steps in strengthening the Latter-day Saint family is to realistically recognize the stress points that may be affecting it. And this would seem to require probing as well as praying, thinking as well as believing, and initiating as well as obeying.

[1]Harold T. Christensen and Kenneth L. Cannon, "Temple Versus Non-temple Marriage in Utah: Some Demographic Considerations," *Social Science*, 39 (January, 1964), 26-33. Figures from Table 5, page 31.

[2]There have been a dozen or more published articles, mostly in professional journals, reporting on one aspect or another of this research. For a summary treatment see Harold T. Christensen, "Scandinavian and American Sex Norms: Some Comparisons, with Sociological Implications," *Journal of Social Issues*, 29 (April, 1966), 60-75. For an analysis emphasizing time trends along with cross-cultural comparisons, see Harold T. Christensen and Christina F. Gregg, "Changing Sex Norms in America and Scandinavia," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 32 (November, 1970), 616-627. For the record-linkage analyses reporting premarital pregnancy, see Harold T. Christensen, "Timing of First Pregnancy as a Factor in Divorce: A Cross-Cultural Analysis," *Eugenics Quarterly*, 10 (September, 1963), 119-130. Each of these sources lists references to the additional articles. Where there have been collaborators, they are named in the appropriate references.

[3]Christensen and Cannon, *Op. cit.*, Table 2, p. 28.

[4]Details of these and other comparisons may be found in the sources previously cited (see footnote 2). There was a record-linkage analysis of child spacing, including premarital pregnancy, and a questionnaire study of the attitudes, behaviors, and consequences related to premarital sex. The questionnaire was administered first in 1958 and then repeated at the same universities in 1968. For present purposes I have ignored the time trends, as well as numerous other findings which have only limited relevance to the arguments of this paper. Wherever possible, my reporting here is from the most recent data.

[5]Harold T. Christensen, "Mormon Fertility: A Survey of Student Opinion," *The American Journal of Sociology*, 53 (January, 1948), 270-275. Quotation from page 270.

[6]See E. E. LeMasters, "Parenthood as Crisis," *Marriage and Family Living*, 19 (November, 1957), 352-355; and E. D. Dyer, "Parenthood as Crisis: A Restudy," *Marriage and Family Living*, 25 (May, 1963), 196-201.

[7]Harold T. Christensen and Robert E. Philbrick, "Family Size as a Factor in the Marital Adjustments of College Couples," *American Sociological Review*, 17 (June, 1952), 306-312.

[8]Charles F. Westoff and Raymond H. Potvin, *College Women and Fertility Values* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967). The points and quotations given here are from pp. 33-49, 160, 219, and 222.

[9]Harold T. Christensen, "Size of Family: Trends and Implications," Chapter 25 in Section I of *The Latter-day Saint Family* (Salt Lake City: Desert Sunday School Union Board, 1946), pp. 97-101.

[10]See Victor A. Christopherson, "An Investigation of Patriarchal Authority Patterns in the Mormon Family," *Marriage and Family Living*, 18 (November, 1956), 328-333; and William G. Dyer and Dick Urban, "The Institutionalization of Equalitarian Family Norms," *Marriage and Family Living*, 20 (February, 1958), 53-58.

[11]*Ibid.*, pp. 330-331.