

Four Characteristics of the Mormon Family: Contemporary Research on Chastity, Conjugality, Children, and Chauvinism

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FROM ITS INCEPTION, MORMONISM HAS BEEN CHARACTERIZED by a blend of traditional American culture mixed with unique, sometimes even radical, elements. The nineteenth-century Mormon family combined aspects of Puritan family morality with a unique theology of family continuity in the hereafter and a form of marriage — polygamy — then known only in “pagan” or primitive societies. During the twentieth century, the Mormon family has felt the same social forces that impact the nation. Parallels between Mormon and national trends might lead to the mistaken impression that the Mormon family is no longer distinctive. Some have hypothesized that Mormon social patterns follow national trends with a time delay of several years.

I will argue that, despite being influenced by pervasive social forces, the American Mormon family remains distinctive in many ways; that these elements are integrated into a yet distinctive family system; and that this family system will continue to influence individual and organizational behavior in Mormondom for years to come. The first section documents four areas of contemporary Mormon family distinctiveness. The second discusses the theological, demographic, and social bases for these aspects. The third section speculates about the future of this family system.

MORMON FAMILY DISTINCTIVENESS

Chastity

Studies of adolescents and young adults demonstrate the conservative nature of Mormon premarital sexual behavior, reflective of the Mormon injunction against extramarital sexual activity. In a comparison of Mormons at an

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intermountain university with non-Mormon students at several other college campuses, Christensen (1976) finds that Mormon men and women have lower approval of and exposure to premarital coitus than other students, with the exception of a Midwestern Mennonite college. These findings are corroborated in surveys of college students done by Wilford Smith (1974), who found low percentages of Mormons reporting nonmarital coitus when compared with Catholics, Protestants, or those having no religious preference. Similar conclusions apply to a small subset of adolescent Mormons in the 1971 National Survey of Young Women (in my possession). It shows that 15 percent of Mormon teenage women had engaged in premarital intercourse, compared to 26 percent for the entire national sample of teenage women. Obviously, not all Mormon youth conform to their church's moral code, but the evidence consistently indicates that premarital chastity is more common among Mormons than among their peers.

These differences in premarital sexual intercourse are confirmed in a more recent survey of high school students. Brent C. Miller and his associates (1985) surveyed students in several high schools in three Western states. Seventeen percent of the Mormon students reported premarital sexual experience, compared with 48 percent of Catholics, 51 percent of those with no religion, and 67 percent of Protestants. In a multiple regression analysis, religious affiliation was second only to church attendance in predicting sexual experience, with Mormons showing substantially less experience than other groups.

Religious influence on sexual behavior becomes even more evident when we compare active and inactive Mormons, as rated by church attendance. In the 1971 National Survey of Young Women, only 3 percent of the active Mormons have had premarital intercourse, compared to 23 percent for the inactive group. Indeed, the inactive group's sexual activity was not appreciably different from the national average. Information on college students collected by Wilford Smith (1974) yields a similar conclusion (see Table 1). Moreover, the difference in sexual experience between active and inactive Mormons is greater than that same difference for Protestants or Catholics. The percentage point difference between most and least active is 30 for Catholic men, 36 for Protestant men, and 48 for Mormon men. Comparable figures for women are 26 for Catholics, 18 for Protestants, and 43 for Mormons. So membership in the Mormon Church, especially active membership, predicts more conservative sexual behavior.

TABLE 1
PERCENTAGES WHO ARE PREMARITAL VIRGINS BY RELIGION
AND FREQUENCY OF CHURCH ATTENDANCE

| Religion | MEN — ATTENDANCE | | | WOMEN — ATTENDANCE | | |
|----------------------|------------------|-------|------------|--------------------|-------|------------|
| | Often | Never | Difference | Often | Never | Difference |
| Catholic | 47 | 17 | 30 | 48 | 22 | 26 |
| Protestant | 63 | 27 | 36 | 55 | 37 | 18 |
| Mormon | 85 | 37 | 48 | 91 | 48 | 43 |

SOURCE: W. Smith (1974).

The high teenage birth rate in Utah — 6.5 percent of Utah teens gave birth in 1980 compared to 5.3 percent nationally — appears to contradict claims that premarital sex is low among teens. The birth rate is mistakenly equated with the pregnancy rate, which is a better indicator of sexual activity. When teenage abortions are taken into account to estimate teenage pregnancy (birth plus abortions equal pregnancies), however, my conclusion is sustained (Chadwick 1986; Smith forthcoming). The low teenage pregnancy rate (7.8 percent of Utah teens compared to 11.4 percent nationally) in Utah is consistent with survey reports of premarital chastity.

To be sure, Mormons have been influenced by the sexual revolution of the '60s. Moreover, there is some evidence that Utah Mormons are more conservative than Mormons living elsewhere (Mauss 1976). Nevertheless, the most active Mormons appear to have been insulated from such national trends as sexual behavior. According to the surveys done by Wilford Smith (1974, 1976), between 1950 and 1972 premarital virginity actually increased slightly for Mormons who attended church regularly — from 95 to 98 percent for men, and from 96 to 98 percent for women. Among Mormons who did not attend church, premarital virginity slipped from 63 to 52 percent among men, and from 85 to 62 percent among women. To say that Mormons simply follow national trends on a delayed basis does not accurately account for these differences among attending and nonattending Mormons.

The Church's consistent and clear direction about sexual behavior gives it considerable influence over family life (Christensen 1976). The agreement by members that the Church has a right to regulate sexual behavior extends into nonsexual areas as well — particularly the three areas examined next: conjugality (marriage rates), children (birthrates), and chauvinism (sex role allocations).

Conjugality

Conjugality is the tendency to be married. In comparison with Catholics, Protestants, and persons with no religious preference, Mormons have a higher percentage of persons over age thirty who have ever married than any other religious group (Heaton and Goodman 1985). Data from the 1981 Canadian census also indicate that Mormons have an above-average proclivity toward marriage: 74.2 percent of Canadian Mormons have been married compared to a national figure of 72.2 percent. Since most people marry, the difference between percentages seems small. But the comparison of never marrying makes the difference more dramatic. Catholics over thirty are more than three times more likely than Mormons not to have married, Protestants are about twice as likely, and those with no religion are at least four times more likely never to have married than Mormons.

The marriage norm also shows up in divorce rates. Mormons are less prone to divorce than Catholics or Protestants and are far below the unchurched in divorce (see Table 2). The lower divorce percentages often go unnoticed because Utah's divorce rate, which is often taken as a measure of Mormon trends,

TABLE 2
MARRIAGE PATTERNS OF MORMONS COMPARED WITH OTHER
RELIGIOUS GROUPS

| | Sex | Catholic | Protestant | Mormon | None |
|---|--------|----------|------------|--------|------|
| Percent over thirty who have ever married | Male | 88.6 | 94.9 | 97.5 | 81.0 |
| | Female | 91.2 | 95.9 | 97.2 | 86.7 |
| Percent of ever married who have divorced | Male | 19.8 | 26.4 | 14.3 | 39.2 |
| | Female | 23.1 | 30.9 | 18.8 | 44.7 |
| Percent of ever divorced who are remarried | Male | 49.5 | 62.2 | 66.6 | 48.4 |
| | Female | 35.2 | 53.0 | 53.0 | 37.3 |

NOTE: Nonwhites are excluded from the data.

SOURCE: Heaton and Goodman (1985).

is above the national average. The divorce rate is defined as the number of divorces in a given year divided by the married population.

At least three factors create a high rate in Utah. First, Utah has liberal divorce laws compared to most other nonwestern states. Second, the married population of Utah is concentrated in the younger ages when the risk of divorce is greater. This concentration accentuates the year-to-year number of divorces, even if the percentage who will ever get divorced is relatively low. Finally, Utah has a high rate of remarriage. Of ever-divorced persons in Utah, 65 percent of men and 49 percent of women have remarried compared with 58 percent and 43 percent respectively in the nation, according to 1980 census figures. This fact creates a large group susceptible to multiple divorces which increases the number of divorces, but not the percent ever divorced (Goodman and Heaton 1986).

Religious involvement is negatively correlated with divorce. Data reported by Heaton and Goodman (1985) indicate that of Mormons who attend church regularly, 10.2 percent of men and 15.2 percent of women have been civilly divorced compared to 21.6 percent of male and 26.3 percent of female Mormons who do not attend regularly. These percentages do not tell us whether people who attend church don't get divorced or divorced people don't attend church. Temple marriage, however, gives some indication of the couples' religious commitment at the beginning of the marriage. Among ever-married Mormon men, of those married in the temple, only 5.4 percent have been civilly divorced compared to 27.8 of the civilly married group. Among Mormon women, the comparable figures are 6.5 for temple marriages, and 32.7 for civil marriages (Heaton and Goodman 1985). In other words, civil marriages among Mormons run a six times higher risk of divorce than temple marriages.

Even when Mormons do divorce, they are more likely to remarry than is generally the case (Table 2). This high rate of remarriage attests to the value placed on conjugality.

Contrary to popular opinion, the Mormon Church does not contain an overabundance of single people. In fact, it may be the strong emphasis placed

on marriage that accentuates the plight of the singles. High rates of marriage, low divorce, and high remarriage after divorce clearly point to marriage as the normative status. Given the large group that conforms to this norm, the singles form a minority group within the Church. Thirty percent of the LDS population is single compared to 37 percent nationally (Goodman and Heaton 1966.)

Children

The most widely noted demographic characteristic of the Mormon family is its high fertility. Even in the early Utah period when the nation as a whole had a high birth rate, Mormon fertility was above the national average (Mineau *et al.* 1979). Mormon fertility has remained above average throughout the twentieth century, at least in Utah (Thornton 1979). During the 1950s, for example, the Utah rate was generally above 30 per 1000 population compared to a national rate of less than 25 per 1000. Although Utah fertility (often accepted as a barometer of Mormon fertility) has followed the national trend, it does not run parallel. The smallest difference between Utah and national birth rates in the recent past occurred in the mid-sixties. Between 1965 and 1980, the Utah rate increased from 23 to 28 while the national rate declined from 19 to 16, creating an even wider gap between the two areas (Heaton and Calkins 1983). Since 1980, the Utah rate has dropped substantially — down to below 24 — but it still remains among the highest rates in the nation. In 1984, Utah's birth rate was 23.7 per thousand persons, 50 percent higher than the national rate. Likewise, a national sample of Mormons shows the number of children ever born to be approximately 50 percent higher than other religious groups. Excluding nonwhites has little effect on the Mormon-non-Mormon difference. (Heaton and Goodman 1985). Thus, the pattern of higher fertility has continued into the present. Studies of Utah's Mormon high school students asking how many children they expect to have also imply that such differences will persist into the future (Toney *et al.* 1985).

It is important to note that higher Mormon fertility is not simply a result of reluctance to use birth control. In fact, information from a small sample of Mormons participating in national studies conducted between 1965 and 1975 indicates that Mormons are just as likely as the national population to use modern methods of birth control at some point in their lives (Heaton and Calkins 1983). However, about half of Mormon women delay using contraceptives until after the birth of the first child and use contraceptives to space children thereafter. For lack of a better term, this type of purposeful contraception might be called positive pronatalism based on a desire for more children as contrasted with negative pronatalism based on ethical restrictions against the use of contraceptives.

Despite the documentation of a higher fertility rate, surprisingly few empirical analyses have been done on the determinants of Mormon fertility. One recent analysis of a national sample of Mormons demonstrates two interesting aspects of their fertility (Heaton 1986). First, no single variable explains why some Mormons have larger families. Temple marriage, commitment to large

families, and activity in church where a husband and wife would associate with other like-minded couples, hearing (and teaching) lessons and sermons on the joys of family life each share in the explanation. In combination, these factors can predict larger Mormon family size, since couples who lack them have fertility rates no higher than the national average. Second, the demographic factors which influence fertility affect Mormons in a way different than is generally the case. For example, national studies show that couples with higher socioeconomic status, as measured by more education and higher income, often have fewer children. Among Mormons, however, the higher the family income and the higher the wife's education, the more children a couple is likely to have (Heaton 1986, Thomas 1979).

Religious involvement has a stronger relationship to fertility among Mormons than is generally observed for other religious groups. For example, the difference in family size between regular church attenders (at least twice a month) and irregular attenders is .2 for Catholics, $-.01$ for liberal Protestants, $-.33$ for conservative Protestants, and .68 for Mormons (Heaton and Goodman 1985). Moreover, socioeconomic variables like education and income have a different relationship to fertility among highly involved Mormons than is the case among less involved Mormons. For example, among temple-married regular church attenders, each additional year of education implies a .039 increase in family size compared to a .119 decrease in family size per year of education for nontemple married couples who rarely attend church (Heaton 1986). These differences add to the evidence that religious commitment plays an important role in Mormon family size.

Discussions with Mormons who have large families also point to the importance of religious belief (Bahr, Condie, and Goodman 1982). Mormon women who had at least seven children gave mainly religious explanations for having large families — for example, each family has a predestined number of children, they want to obey the counsel of Church leaders, birth control is wrong, and spirits should have the opportunity of coming to good Mormon families. Individual reasons did vary, but all reflected a religious orientation to fertility decisions.

In short, Mormons take seriously the Genesis injunction to “multiply and replenish the earth.” The most religious and those with greater resources (like education and income) tend to have the largest families. If any single demographic trait distinguishes Mormon families, it is high fertility.

Chauvinism

Mormon marriages tend to be characterized by chauvinism, where power is concentrated in the husband's hands. Two elements of chauvinism have received some attention in empirical research: the division of labor between husband and wife, and attribution of authority in the home. A division of labor is not necessarily chauvinistic; but in contemporary society it often turns out that way. The person who earns the money usually has more control over economic resources, more prestige, more recognition, and more opportunities for advancement. The homemaking role seldom supplies many of these rewards.

Although earlier studies did not consistently find more chauvinism among Mormons than other religious groups (Thomas 1983, Campbell and Campbell 1977), more recent evidence shows greater consistency. Table 3 compares responses from men and women selected in an unpublished 1981 random state-wide survey of Utahns with the national sample used in the General Social Survey, conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago in 1977. When asked the same two questions, Mormon respondents were about twice as likely as the national sample to reflect a traditional position: the mother should be the homemaker and the father should be the breadwinner.

In comparing role definitions (who *should* perform the task) and role enactment (who actually *does* perform the role), Mormons have different patterns than other religious groups (Bahr and Chadwick 1984). When asked who should earn the money, keep house, care for children, teach family values, and make home repairs, Mormons are less inclined than Catholics or Protestants to give husband and wife equal responsibility. When it comes to role enactment, Mormons are less egalitarian in housekeeping, caring for children, and socializing children; but interestingly, the gap is much smaller than is the case for role definition (Bahr 1982). In other words, husbands and wives are likely to agree that the dishes are her job, but when it comes down to doing them, he'll actually do them about as often as other men.

On the issue of Mormon women working, statistics clearly contradict a gender-based division of earning. Census data covering the period from 1900 to 1976 show that Utah women are much less distinctive in their employment patterns than they once were (Bahr 1979). Much of the convergence, however, is because Utah women have experienced a greater increase in part-time work than is the case nationally. Utah's married women with children under age six are less likely to work than their national counterparts (33 percent of Utah women aged twenty-five to thirty-four with preschool children work, compared to 42 percent nationally). Married women with preschoolers are

TABLE 3
MORMON AND NATIONAL OPINIONS ON SEX ROLES

| | PERCENTS | |
|---|----------|----------|
| | Mormon | National |
| A preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works | | |
| disagree | 17.0 | 32.2 |
| agree or not sure | 83.0 | 67.8 |
| It is more important for a wife to help her husband's career than to have one herself | | |
| disagree | 26.3 | 41.4 |
| agree or not sure | 73.7 | 58.6 |

also 1.4 times more likely to work part-time (Heaton and Parkinson 1985). A 1981 survey of Mormon women in the United States shows a similar pattern: about 36 percent of married women with preschoolers are not employed, but among women without children about 53 percent work, compared to a national average of 48 percent (Goodman and Heaton, forthcoming).

Working — and earning money — usually leads to more decision-making power; but so far, Mormon women seem to have less power in their marriages than women in other religious groups (Bahr and Bahr 1977). In fact, Mormon men reportedly have more decision-making authority than women even in the tasks where women are expected to take more of the responsibility, like taking care of the house and caring for children. In sum, the traditional Mormon position on sex roles is more a matter of stated attitude (role definitions), or perhaps even ideology, than one of actual behavior (work and family role performance).

Mormons who attend church regularly are less inclined to have egalitarian views of the household division of labor than those who seldom attend church (Bahr and Chadwick 1984). An average of 7 percent of the active Mormons give egalitarian definitions (i.e., husband and wife share equal responsibility) to the roles of provider, housekeeper, and caretaker of children, compared to 13 percent of the group who seldom attend church. Likewise, 9 percent of the active group and 14 percent of the inactive group report that both husband and wife are equally likely to actually perform these tasks.

Information from a younger age group suggests that these trends may continue into the future. In a survey of college students from four universities, Mormons scored higher on a macho scale than Catholics, mainline Protestants, or persons with no religious preference. The Mormon scores were comparable to those of fundamentalist Protestants (Brinkerhoff and MacKie 1984). Using age to represent trends shows no clear-cut trend toward egalitarian marital relationships (Albrecht, Bahr, and Chadwick 1979). In short, traditional chauvinism seems likely to continue as part of the Mormon family lifestyle.

THE MORMON FAMILY SYSTEM

These four aspects of the Mormon family are not isolated behavior patterns. Rather they stem from common theological roots, from interrelatedness of demographic characteristics, and from a social structure which integrates them into a particular lifestyle.

Theology

The Mormon doctrines of pre-mortal existence and the post-mortal continuation of identity impact directly on family life. Because the highest degree of resurrected glory is reserved for married couples who will continue their roles as parents by creating spirit children, a temple marriage becomes a major and irreplaceable factor in an eternal future. Family life is the mechanism for

bringing premortal spirits to earth and the training and proving ground to qualify parents for their post-mortal roles. (For a more detailed discussion of Mormon theology along with scriptural references, see McConkie 1966 under topics including pre-existence, spirit children, heaven, celestial kingdom, sexual immorality, and celestial marriage.)

Consequently, premarital and extramarital sexual relations are anathema because they threaten the integrity of the marital bond and violate God's plan for bringing premortal spirits to earth. Mormon theology does not condemn nonreproductive coitus in marriage, but it assumes that those who engage in the pleasures of sex are also willing to accept the responsibilities of parenthood. Thus, marriage is the only legitimate arena for sexual expression and violations of this moral code can jeopardize one's membership in the Church.

Obviously, marriage is essential to the entire plan. The minority of women who do not marry but who are "worthy" are consoled with a promise that they will have the opportunity for marriage and motherhood in the post-mortal existence. Similar promises are generally not made to men. Those who avoid marriage are advised that they are not in conformity with God's plan. Divorce is permitted but not advised. Since a temple marriage is performed as an eternal "sealing," couples are encouraged to work out their problems (Kimball 1981).

In having and rearing children, parents participate with God in furthering the development of pre-mortal spirits and gain experiences in preparation for their own role as eternal parents. The family is the divinely ordained organization designed for the reproduction and socialization of children. Any other institution is an inferior substitute, and couples who avoid having children are missing a key aspect of their own religious and spiritual development.

Male authority is an integral aspect of the theology. Men are designated spiritual leaders and heads of Mormon households (Kimball 1981). As a prerequisite for entering the temple, men must be ordained to the Melchizedek Priesthood, which gives them administrative powers not only in the Church but also in the household. Within Mormonism ideally husbands assume the provider role and wives that of homemaker. Of course, wives and mothers can seek spiritual guidance from God through prayer and can help with the provider role when necessary. Men are also encouraged to support their wives in homemaking tasks. In short, each of the aspects of the family described in section one is born of the theology of the family.

One egalitarian aspect of the theology is not widely discussed. In temple marriage, a husband and wife jointly enter into an "order of the Priesthood" called the new and everlasting covenant of marriage (McConkie 1966). Identical blessings are promised to husband and wife, including "thrones, kingdoms, principalities, powers, and dominions" (D&C 132:19). Neither has access to these powers and privileges without the other, and neither is promised more than the other. Such a marriage suggests unity, interdependence, and joint priesthood rather than hierarchy and male dominance. Greater emphasis on this aspect of the theology might fit more comfortably with current tendencies in many families.

Demographic Implications

Restricted sexual activity promotes near-universal marriage and also eliminates ambiguity of parentage. In a well-functioning family, husband and wife know they belong to each other and that there are no competitors outside the nuclear unit. Similarly, children know they have exclusive claims on their parents and on each other.

Getting married and having children commits Mormons to family life. Conformity to this norm creates a sense of fellowship with the Church. A major Church activity is providing instruction and programs for families. At the same time, these children provide a significant share of new members. The interdependence between the two institutions of church and family is clear.

Rearing children also creates increased demands on the parenting roles. Each child places increased demands on both the provider and the homemaker roles. Specialization of roles becomes a common solution to the increased demands. At the same time, as organizing a large family becomes more complex, the need for authority and leadership increases. In many cases, the designation of leader, provider, and homemaker roles makes managing the tasks much easier, even though such assignments made only on the basis of gender make a large assumption that personality and individual skills are less important than gender.

Social Structure

Conforming to appropriate family behaviors is deeply ingrained in Mormon social and normative structure. Those who violate the sexual code of conduct or who intentionally avoid marriage or having children are deviants.

The strong sense of community which develops in many Mormon congregations reinforces a family-centered lifestyle. Moreover, the family norms help to reinforce the community bond. The demands introduced by marriage and children form the basis for common interest, leisure activities, time schedules, and other lifestyle elements. Children's friendships or interchanges of child care often form the basis for adult friendships. Social networks are heavily influenced by Church involvement (Cornwell 1985).

Church programs are designed to support this family-centered social structure. Family home evening and home teaching reinforce the image of the ideal family as one which includes several children and is headed by a man. The Primary, Young Men, and Young Women programs are designed to help in socializing children. The Relief Society concentrates heavily on promoting the homemaker role. Ironically, even though many Relief Societies hold homemaking meetings in the evening to accommodate working women, the mini-lessons and projects have much more to do with maintaining a house and raising children than with jobs and working.

The development of the Correlation Program of the Church in the 1960s and '70s created an even closer organizational correspondence between families and the Church. This program shifted more of the decision-making power to men, thus partially disenfranchising the women's organizations (Cornwall

1983). It established a pipeline of authority from the president of the Church down through the organizational hierarchy to the husband as head of the household. Children and wives were linked to the Church through their fathers and husbands. Thus, the Church programs and the husband's role in these programs further legitimize his authority.

In sum, the distinctive aspects of the Mormon family grow out of theology, demographic requisites, and social structure — all of which promote marriage and children. The Church promotes family life, and the family reciprocates by socializing children to become active participants in the Church. Thus, the interdependence between Church and family is solidified.

PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

However, this pattern of conservative forces has not produced a static institution. A 50 percent decrease in fertility since the turn of the century, coupled with equally large increases in divorce and female labor force participation are three important changes.

LDS ideology has been remarkably flexible in accommodating social change (Leone 1979). The same central doctrine of eternal marriage used to sanction polygamy in the nineteenth century is currently used to promote contemporary family patterns. As the Church has spread to more culturally diverse areas and as new social trends have been adopted by the LDS membership, policies and practices have modified accordingly. For example, much less is said about birth control now compared with the late '60s and early '70s. Stress points within the Mormon family system such as terminal petting, sexual guilt, and underplanned parenthood also provide impetus for social change (Christensen 1972).

At the same time, direct confrontations with the Mormon family ideology, at least since the discontinuance of polygamy, have been ill fated. The failures of Utah, Florida, Virginia, and Illinois to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment, at least in part because of open and organized Church opposition, were claimed as victories in protecting the family. A more recent case is Gordon B. Hinckley's absolute prohibition of artificial insemination for single women (1985, 89). The procedure would allow more women to achieve one characteristic of the family — children — but without the other characteristics. In fact, official statements on reproductive medicine (Bush 1985), homosexuality, and women holding the priesthood can all be seen as efforts by the Church leaders to "defend" the family.

Recent changes in family size, divorce, and female labor force participation have not been a result of direct ideological confrontation. Rather, perspectives have more naturally shifted. Couples now have three, four, or five children instead of eight, nine, or ten and still feel they are multiplying and replenishing the earth. Their justification rests on a consideration for the economic and emotional well-being of the individual family members, not a rejection of the Church's theology of the family. Likewise, it seems acceptable for women to work as a means of supplementing family income or to use their talents; they

thus are not usurping the provider role of the husband. Divorce is a realization that not all marriages work out, not a rejection of the ideal eternal family. In this fashion, behavior changes without direct confrontation with theological positions.

Other changes may occur in the future. Family size may decline further without eliminating the Mormon fertility difference or destroying the image of Mormons as a family-centered church. As medical technology advances, attitudes toward specific procedures affecting reproduction may change without threat to fundamental doctrines of the Church (Bush 1985). Modification in the sanctions applied to violators of the sexual code may occur without changing the code itself. Single adults may better be assimilated into the programs of the Church without denying the ultimate importance of marriage. Husbands and wives may be told to arrive jointly at important decisions without changing policies regarding the priesthood. Greater emphasis may be placed on the joint holding by husbands and wives of priesthood responsibilities. This same priesthood theology may some day be used to encourage egalitarian rather than authoritarian relationships.

Not only is change possible, it is very probable. The stresses and strains engendering societal change in family structure must be dealt with. Working women, reconstituted families, and singles are each growing segments of the Church membership that do not fit well within the existing structure. The reorientation of sex roles will continue within the Church. As they have done in the past, most Mormons will adjust to these changes while maintaining their sense of uniqueness. In fact, unwillingness to change may be more detrimental in the long run than open acceptance of change, as was the case with those who tried to continue polygamy. At the same time, attempts to induce change through direct confrontation with the core ideology of the Mormon family will fall on deaf ears. Those who see change as a means to preserve the core values by alleviating existing stresses and strains will have more success. To observe, understand, and even participate in change in the Mormon family is the challenge.

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