

Dissent and Schism in the Early Church: Explaining Mormon Fissiparousness

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SCHISM (OR FISSIPAROUSNESS), THE DIVISION of an organization into two or more separate collectivities, is a prominent and interesting feature of Mormonism. Since it was formally organized by Joseph Smith, Jr., and a few followers on 6 April 1830, this new American religion has spawned more than a hundred independent groups.¹ There was a host of dissidents and at least ten breaches in its organization between 1830 and 1844. The founding prophet's martyrdom in 1844 effected a crisis of leadership, fragmentation of the church at Nauvoo, Illinois, and at least twelve more distinct collectivities over about the next ten years. Subsequently, many early Latter-day Saint churches have generated additional schisms.

Unfortunately, Mormonism's schismatic proclivities rarely have

1. Reasonably comprehensive lists and brief reviews of Mormon dissenters and schisms are provided by Dale L. Morgan, "A Bibliography of the Churches of the Dispersion," *Western Humanities Review* 7 (Summer 1953): 255-66; Albert J. Van Nest, *A Directory to the "Restored Gospel" Churches* (Evanston, IL: Institute for the Study of American Religion, 1983); and Steven L. Shields, *Divergent Paths of the Restoration* (Los Angeles: Restoration Research, 1990). Steven L. Shields, *The Latter Day Saint Churches: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1987), is the most adequate single guide to the primary and secondary literature on different Mormon organizations.

been treated seriously as an intellectual issue.² Scholars of this religious movement, like believers, have found it difficult to think about schism apart from faith-based, essentially theological contentions about how particular Latter-day Saint groups are related to the earliest church.³ Dissent and conflict in Mormonism frequently have been envisioned as hostility, violence, and persecution by outsiders or enemies.⁴ When Mormon historians have acknowledged internal conflict, dissent, and schism, they have concentrated on particular episodes. These incidents have been attributed to disruptive changes or crises in American culture and society, the corresponding psychosocial deprivation of societal members, and social differentiation, particularly economic and subcultural differences.⁵

Theories of sociocultural change, relative deprivation, and differentiation contribute to a scholarly understanding of the general conditions whereby schism develops, but they do not account for why and how

2. For a systematic review and discussion of the scholarly literature on Mormon schisms, see Danny L. Jorgensen, "Studies of Mormon Fissiparousness: Conflict, Dissent, and Schism in the Early Church," in Roger D. Launius, ed., *Reinterpreting the Mormon Experience: Essays in Mormon History* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, forthcoming). Multiple versions and organizations of Mormonism are almost completely ignored by most of its leading interpreters, including those who stand outside any of its traditions. See, for example, Mark P. Leone, *Roots of Modern Mormonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979); Klaus J. Hansen, *Mormonism and the American Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); and Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985).

3. Dale Morgan, "A Bibliography of the Churches of the Dispersion," 258, astutely noted more than forty years ago that: "The death of the Prophet totally changed the picture for Mormonism's dissenting churches. Henceforth individual churches could and did claim to be not only the one true church but the legitimate inheritor of the Prophet's mantle." Cecil E. McGavin's 1944 series on "Apostate Factions Following the Martyrdom of Joseph Smith," *Improvement Era* 47, Russell R. Rich's, *Those Who Would Be Leaders* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1958) and *Little Known Schisms of the Restoration* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1962), Kate B. Carter's *Denominations that Base Their Beliefs on the Teachings of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1969), and a series of essays on particular factions published in 1976 by William Y. Beasley in the *Gospel Anchor* all provide serviceable information but from a partisan viewpoint.

4. See, for example, James B. Allen and Glen M. Leonard's treatment of dissenters as "apostates" in *The Story of the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1976). Too little has changed since Dale Morgan, "A Bibliography of the Churches of the Dispersion," 255, observed, "Instructive studies could be made of all [Latter-day Saint factions], and a book to discuss them comprehensively is one of the imperative needs of Mormon scholarship."

5. See, for example, Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992); Marvin S. Hill, *Quest for Refuge: The Mormon Flight from American Pluralism* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989); Thomas F. O'Dea, *The Mormons* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957); and Kenneth Winn, *Exiles in a Land of Liberty: Mormons in America, 1830-1846* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989).

splintering in a religious group happens. Two other theories of schism merit consideration. One focuses on the social organization of religious movements and the mobilization of scarce resources. The other holds that knowledge claims provide certain means of authoritative legitimation effecting religious organization and fragmentation. I proceed by reviewing current scholarly thinking about schism, including specific formulations of all three of these theories. Then I critically evaluate these theoretical models by analyzing and interpreting conflict, dissent, and schism in early (about 1829-54) Mormonism.

SCHOLARLY PERSPECTIVES ON RELIGIOUS SCHISM

Current scholarship suggests that religious schism is a product of complex social processes.⁶ It involves dissent and conflict over ideology (values, beliefs, norms), practices and activities, and authority, resulting in a power struggle. Conflict inevitably is expressed symbolically by competing ideologies, and it may center predominately on collective values and beliefs or practices and means of goal attainment. Disharmony may extend over a lengthy time before separation. Opponents proceed by defining one another as significantly different, and then deviant, commonly eventuating in charges of heresy or apostasy.⁷ Through a labeling process, the parent group, the seceding faction, or both may define the other as straying from or perverting the truth.⁸ Disputes about authority

6. Nancy T. Ammerman, "Schism: An Overview," in Mircea Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 13:98-102.

7. Whether an idea, act, or person is deviant depends on its social definition. It is accomplished through a social interactional process whereby a label of deviance is applied to something or someone in concrete situations. See Howard S. Becker, *Outsiders* (New York: Free Press, 1963); and Kai T. Erikson, *Wayward Puritans* (New York: Wiley, 1966).

8. Ammerman, "Schism," 99, identified three types of schism by examining who does the defining. One form results when the leadership (or powerful) defines perceived innovations as deviant. If the reputed changes are seen as intolerable, those defined as heretics or apostates may be forced out. Schism consequently may be unintentional (or accidental) in the sense that the reformers did not deliberately seek independence. Another type develops when protesters label the parent organization illegitimate and depart. In such cases, there frequently are efforts to retain the schismatics, as illustrated by disputes over local autonomy. Instances in which competing factions define each other as deviating from the truth comprise still another common form of schism. In such a case, conflicting parties may pursue reconciliation before concluding that their differences preclude unity. Since schism generally results in sectarian organizations, various sect typologies may suggest additional forms. See, for instance, Bryan Wilson, *Religious Sects: A Sociological Study* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970).

and battles for power are mostly inescapable when an organization splinters.

The intuitively pleasing idea that schism is caused by doctrinal disputes has been substantially rejected by conventional theories of religion in preference of social differentiation.⁹ The hypothesis that social class, ethnic, or regional differences galvanize ideological conflict and, in turn, fissiparousness along lines of cleavage has been very influential.¹⁰ It, however, largely has been incorporated into the theory that schism is

9. This viewpoint derived specifically from Max Weber's concern for the interrelationship between religious and economic institutions, including socioeconomic classes or particular social stratification systems. See Max Weber (Talcott Parsons, trans.), *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958); Weber (Ephraim Fischhoff, trans.), *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon, 1963); Weber (A. M. Henderson and T. Parsons, trans.), *The Theory of Social and Economic Organizations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947); H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, trans. and eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946); and S. N. Eisenstadt, ed., *Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968). Weber was responding to Karl Marx and his school. While rejecting the economic determinism attributed to Marx, Weber retained a fundamental concern for socioeconomic relationships and conflict. This general thesis also might be derived from Emile Durkheim's (Joseph W. Swain, trans.) *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1965), a classic discussion of religion as a social phenomenon and how it promotes social cohesion, particularly under conditions of institutional segmentation and differentiation.

10. H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism* (New York: Meridian, 1929). Also see the supporting case studies by Christopher Dawson, "What About Heretics: An Analysis of the Causes of Schism," *Commonweal* 36 (18 Sept. 1942): 513-17; Gus Tuberville, "Religious Schism in the Methodist Church: A Sociological Analysis of the Pine Grove Case," *Rural Sociology* 14 (1949): 29-39; S. L. Greenslade, *Schism in the Early Church* (London: SCM Press, 1953); and Robert Doherty, *The Hicksite Separation: A Sociological Analysis of Religious Schism in Early Nineteenth Century America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1967). James S. Coleman, "Social Cleavage and Religious Conflict," *Journal of Social Issues* 12 (1956): 44-56, subsequently argued that various forms of social cleavage, based on differences in nationality, ethnicity, regionality, status, power, individualism, values, and generations, are underlying sources of ideological conflict. Observations of American religion reinforce the notion that religious bodies are separated by socioeconomic class, ethnic, and regional differences and tend toward intraorganizational homogeneity. See, for instance, Liston Pope, *Millhands and Preachers: A Study of Gastonia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1942); Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew: An Essay in American Religious Sociology* (NY: Doubleday, 1955); and Andrew M. Greeley, *The Denominational Society: A Sociological Approach to Religion in America* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1972).

caused by social changes that produce stresses and strains in the structure of society and the corresponding deprivation or relative deprivation of its members.¹¹

Modernity, especially industrialization, urbanization, and rationalization, it is widely thought, has induced radical sociocultural transformations.¹² Cultural pluralism, structural differentiation, and individualism specifically have been linked to certain forms of religious organization, churches, denominations, sects, and cults, as well as their propensity to

11. Sociocultural change commonly is seen as a necessary condition, if not a sufficient cause, of schism. Many influential formulations of the theory are indebted to the structural-functionalism of Talcott Parsons, *The Structure of Social Action* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1937), *Toward a General Theory of Action* (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), and *The Social System* (New York: Free Press, 1951); as well as the functionalism of Robert Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (New York: Free Press, 1949). In a popular variant of the theory specific forms of "relative deprivation," economic, social organismic, ethical, psychic, or combinations thereof are linked to types of religious collectivities, sects, churches, healing movements, reform movements, and cults, respectively. See Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark, "On the Origin and Evolution of Religious Groups," in Glock and Stark, eds., *Religion and Society in Tension* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1965). Applications of Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis about the American frontier to the emergence of Mormonism, such as that of Mario De Pillis, exemplifies this general theory. See Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," in *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962); and Mario De Pillis, "The Quest for Religious Authority and the Rise of Mormonism," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 1 (Spring 1966): 68-88. Whitney Cross's counter proposal and related efforts by David Davis, Marvin Hill, and others to locate the origins of Mormonism in New England culture, especially its religious manifestations, were more a debate over the specific structural consequences of change and responses to it than a repudiation of this theoretical framework. See Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1950); David Brion Davis, "The New England Origins of Mormonism," *New England Quarterly* 24 (June 1953): 147-68; Marvin S. Hill, "The Shaping of the Mormon Mind in New England and New York," *Brigham Young University Studies* 9 (Spring 1969): 351-72; Laurence Milton Yorgason, "Some Demographic Aspects of One Hundred Early Mormon Converts, 1830-1837," M.A. Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1974. Interpretations by Klaus Hansen, *Mormonism and the American Experience*, and Marvin Hill, *Quest for Refuge*, among others, that see Mormonism as a conservative reaction to modernity also reflect this perspective.

12. The theories of Max, Durkheim, and Weber, among other major thinkers, may be viewed as responses to modernity. Inclusive issues have assumed renewed relevancy with the current concern for the conditions of a postmodern world. See Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), for an outstanding discussion.

schism.¹³ Theorizing about religious fragmentation consequently is at the center of current debates about modernity and especially its secularizing influences.¹⁴ Viewed in this way, schism is a consequence of peoples' efforts to address grievances effected by perceived deprivation and then resolve the resulting uncertainties in a group. A derivative sociological model, modified by a theory of collective behavior, specified that successive conditions—a conducive environment, a sense of grievance and crisis, precipitating events, conflict and struggles for power—must accumulate to produce schism.¹⁵

The theory has been substantially modified by an approach to so-

13. The Weberian church-sect dichotomy was developed by Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches* (New York: Harper and Row, 1960). Because of problems in applying it to the United States, the denomination type was added by H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of Denominationalism*. Clarifying the residual category of mysticism found in the work of Weber and Troeltsch, a fourth type, the cult, was added by Howard P. Becker, *Systematic Sociology on the Basis of the Beziehungslehre and Gebildelehre of Leopold Van Wiese* (New York: Wiley, 1932). It was developed further by J. Milton Yinger, *The Scientific Study of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 266-73; and especially Colin Campbell, "Clarifying the Cult," *British Journal of Sociology* 28 (1977): 375-88. Application of "church-sect typology" has stimulated controversy and dissatisfaction, leading some thinkers to reject it entirely. It, however, continues to provide a conventional point of departure for thinking about the social organization of religion. A sound discussion of the disputed issues is provided by Meredith B. McGuire, *Religion: The Social Context* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1992), 133-247.

14. The secularization debate is at the center of current theorizing about religion. See, for instance, Olivier Tschannen, "The Secularization Paradigm: A Systematization," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30 (Dec. 1991): 395-415; and R. Stephen Warner, "Work in Progress Toward a New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion in the United States," *American Journal of Sociology* 98 (Mar. 1993): 1044-93. One line of argument holds that the modern world has become secularized and that the influence and significance of religion has declined in the West. See, for example, Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967); David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978); Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society* (London: C. A. Watts, 1966); and Steve Bruce, ed., *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992). The counter line of argument holds that secularization is a self-limiting process since there is a constant, ongoing need for the rewards religion provides and the functions it serves; and, rather than declining, religion changes to meet these needs. See Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, "Religious Economies and Sacred Canopies: Religious Mobilization in American Cities," *American Sociological Review* 53 (Feb. 1988): 41-49; and Robert Wuthnow, *Rediscovering the Sacred: Perspectives on Religion in Contemporary Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1992).

15. John Wilson, "The Sociology of Schism," *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain* (London: SCM Press, 1971), 4:1-21. Schisms originate, according to the model, in an intraorganizational dispute over norms and allegations that the existing group deviated from its original values. For an application of the model, see Mary Lou Steed, "Church Schism and Secession: A Necessary Sequence?" *Review of Religious Research* 27 (June 1986): 344-55.

cial movements that de-emphasized structural stress and strain as well as deprivation, concentrating instead on the mobilization and deployment of scarce organizational resources (such as time, money, members, rewards, and so on) in the encompassing sociocultural environment.¹⁶ An application of the reformulated theory observed that conflict and schism sometimes are functional as well as dysfunctional.¹⁷ Resource-mobilization theory has netted several other hypotheses.¹⁸ Higher probabilities of schism are predicted as organizational size and diversity increase, while lower probabilities are anticipated as authority becomes more centralized.¹⁹ Schism also may be exasperated by different styles of leadership, interpersonal conflicts, and personality differences.²⁰

Another theory of schism has been derived from a sociology of knowledge perspective.²¹ Claims to truth and authority, viewed from this standpoint, define certain organizational parameters and conditions that explain schism. The crucial feature of fissiparousness is the ability of potential leaders to secure authority for legitimating separation. The theory specifically hypothesizes that "the propensity to schism increases directly

16. K. Peter Takayama, "Formal Polity and Change of Structures, Denominational Assemblies," *Sociological Analysis* 37 (1976): 83-84, and "Strains, Conflicts and Schism in Protestant Denominations," 298-329, in Ross P. Scherer, ed., *American Denominational Organization* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1980).

17. Bryan V. Hillis, *Can Two Walk Together Unless They be Agreed? American Religious Schisms in the 1970s* (Brooklyn, NY: Carlson, 1991).

18. A recent proposal subordinated propositions about social differentiation, stress-strain and deprivation, and organizational dynamics, as well as the idea that religion sometimes is an expression of psychopathology, to behavioristic mechanisms of exchange in a formal deductive theory of religion. See Stark and Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion*, 99-125, and *A Theory of Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 121-53. Schism, in this rational choice model, is reduced to the analysis of individuals' motives, defined by a hedonistic reward-seeking, cost-avoiding calculus.

19. See Mayer N. Zald and Roberta Ash, "Social Movement Organizations: Growth, Decay and Change," *Social Forces* 44 (1966): 327-40; Mayer N. Zald, "Theological Crucibles: Social Movements in and of Religion," *Review of Religious Research* 23 (June 1982): 317-36; Robert C. Liebman, John R. Sutton, and Robert Wuthnow, "Exploring the Social Sources of Denominationalism: Schisms in American Protestant Denominations, 1890-1980," *American Sociological Review* 53 (June 1988): 343-52; William Gamson, *The Strategy of Social Protest* (Homewood, IL: Dorsey, 1975).

20. See Steed, "Church Schism and Secession," 344-55; Malcolm J. C. Calley, *God's People* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).

21. Roy Wallis, *Salvation and Protest: Studies of Social and Religious Movements* (New York: St. Martin's, 1979), especially 174-92. Part of the power of this deceptively simple contention is that it directly and indirectly subsumes the related hypotheses concerning size, diversity, and centralization of authority. Increased organizational size and diversity tend to increase availability of the means of legitimating authority, while greater centralization reduces the possibilities. Unlike the hypotheses of stress and strain or deprivation, this hypothesis moves much closer to fulfilling the necessary and sufficient conditions of causal explanation.

with the availability of means of legitimating authority."²² In other words: "The more bases of legitimation there are, or the more widely available they are, the greater the likelihood of schism."²³ This sociology of knowledge model is especially useful for analyzing (or deconstructing) the sacred story or myth of Mormon origins and explaining Mormonism's propensity for schism.²⁴

TRUTH AND AUTHORITY IN EARLY MORMONISM

In the spring of 1820, at fifteen years of age, according to Latter-day Saint accounts, Joseph Smith prayed in anguish for divine guidance as to which church was right and how to be saved. In response to his existential dilemma, Smith reportedly had a vision in which he was visited by God and Jesus Christ and told that all of the churches were in apostasy

22. Ibid., 186. In this view there are two dimensions of "availability": the number of sources of authority that may be employed, and the number of people who have access to these means of legitimation. "Bases of legitimation" are conceptualized by Wallis, 186-92, in terms of Weber's typology of traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal sources of authority, including assorted derivations.

23. Ibid., 186. This theory of schism, it should be noted, also involved specific images of "cults" and "sects." See Roy Wallis, ed., *Sectarianism: Analyses of Religious and Non-Religious Sects* (New York: Halsted, 1976), and *The Road to Total Freedom: A Sociological Analysis of Scientology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977). The notion of "epistemological authoritarianism" is used to characterize "sect" beliefs and distinguish them from those of "cults" which are defined by "epistemological individualism." A sect, he argued, is "uniquely legitimate" in that it claims a monopoly on truth and provides the only means of access to truth and salvation. Cults, on the other hand, are described as "pluralistically legitimate" since they acknowledge other possible paths to truth. The demand that all members conform to absolute beliefs results in exceptionally strong, tight-knit, cohesive organizations, yet it also provides the conditions for intense ideological conflict. Cult beliefs demand less conformity and result in weaker, less cohesive organizations. Cults tend to be short-lived and there is a tremendous propensity for dissolution and fragmentation, but for reasons that differ substantially from the propensity of sects to schism. For a related analysis of cults, see Danny L. Jorgensen, *The Esoteric Scene, Cultic Milieu, and Occult Tarot* (New York: Garland, 1992). Also see Bruce, *A House Divided*. He explained different propensities for Protestant and Catholic bodies to divide by this proposition.

24. The idea of "religious myth," as it is employed here, refers to a socially constructed sacred story or history, and it does not involve any pejorative connotations. See, for example, Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1954), especially 108; and Mircea Eliade (Willard R. Trask, trans.), *Myth and Reality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), esp. 5. Questions about the absolute or literal truth of religious myths are unanswerable by way of contemporary secular scholarship, and more importantly they are irrelevant and uninteresting. To ask whether a myth is True or False (or to juxtapose "myth" with "reality") is to miss the point entirely. What is of scholarly interest is that people create and subscribe to myths; they are meaningful to them; and they therefore have significant consequences for human existence. For a definitive discussion of Joseph Smith's "first vision" (or visions), see Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 43-64.

and to join none of them. A new scripture, the Book of Mormon, he asserted, subsequently was received through an angel of the Lord and translated supernaturally. Yet before it was published, he and an associate, Oliver Cowdery, maintained that they were ordained by Christ's apostles to the priesthood. Based on priesthood authority and guided by heavenly instructions they claimed to restore the original church of Jesus Christ to the earth in 1830.

The Mormon origin myth indicates that this new religion was created in response to a perceived sociocultural crisis: The lack of absolute means for evaluating claims to truth and especially a perceived need for certain knowledge about what was necessary for a human being to be united with the ultimate, supernatural reality—or at least avoid the meaningless nothingness of the ordinary conditions of human existence. The perceived crisis resulted from the multiplicity of rival claims to truth advanced by different religions composing the pluralism of American religious culture. Viewed in this way, Mormonism was a product of a uniquely modern condition, one that socially acknowledged multiple sources of truth, even ultimate or religious ones, in which no religion could be imposed politically and religious freedom was mandated legally by the secular state.

Sociocultural crisis, according to the sacred story, was experienced as a sense of epistemological and spiritual deprivation. This problem, by its very definition, presupposed that the solution was an absolute and exclusive form of truth.²⁵ The answer, whatever form it might take, could only be epistemologically authoritarian, a unique, privileged, and exclusive knowledge of ultimate reality. It was approached by culturally available means, belief in prayer, and ascertained in a culturally possible yet extraordinary way, through *charisma* or direct contact with the ultimate source of knowledge. It was learned by charisma that none of the existing religions was sufficient, all of them being at least partly untrue or false, and the only remaining choice consequently was to create a new one. Mormonism thereby rejected cultural *tradition*, relegating its authority to an inferior epistemological position. Since the new religion was revealed charismatically, potentially available *rational* grounds for authority also were demoted to a subordinate epistemological position.

The alleged apostasy of traditional Christian churches marked them and the surrounding sociocultural environment as profane. Mormonism's claim to restore sacredness meant that it was founded in radical tension with and revolutionary opposition to the secular society. Against the pluralistic legitimacy of American culture, Mormonism as-

25. For an outstanding discussion of this issue, see Roy Wallis, "Introduction," 9-16, in Wallis, ed., *Sectarianism*.

serted itself as uniquely legitimate.²⁶ Americans could either accept Mormonism's monopolistic claims or reject them as deviant. To the extent that Mormons and other Americans differed, conflict was inescapable. It would help define the boundary between this emergent sect and the surrounding environment, underscoring for Latter-day Saints the distinction between the sacred and the profane, and add immensely to their sense of in-group solidarity.²⁷ Mormonism consequently was a profoundly conservative reaction to the secular society and its religious pluralism.²⁸ It rejected modernity, advancing a distinctively premodern image of a sacred culture and society as outlined in the Book of Mormon.²⁹

MORMONISM'S PROPENSITY TO SCHISM

The founding of Mormonism by charismatic authority and its exclusive, monopolistic claim to absolute truth provided the fundamental conditions for its propensity to schism.³⁰ Although it has been largely ignored, Thomas O'Dea's sociology of Mormonism treated the problem of its fissiparousness.³¹ His use of a stress and strain-deprivation model is unnecessary for an account of schism. Crisis theory simply is not compelling as an explanation. Connections among deprivation, structural condi-

26. Roy Wallis, "The Cult and Its Transformation," 35-49, in Wallis, ed., *Sectarianism*.

27. See D. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 25-47, for an insightful discussion of how Mormonism cultivated an ideology of persecution that reinforced their sense of collective distinctiveness and cohesiveness.

28. See De Pillis, "The Quest for Religious Authority"; Hill, *Quest for Refuge*.

29. O'Dea, *The Mormons*, 22-40, provided an outstanding discussion of how these themes were manifest in the Book of Mormon. Also see Winn, *Exiles in a Land of Liberty*.

30. These were the conditions, yet other ones, such as denominational or cultic forms of organization and other kinds of authority, were possible. Cults are even more prone to fragmentation than sects, and denominations also schism. A sect-like organization consequently provides one of several possible conditions for schism. Charismatic authority, I argue, does increase the propensity for schism, although it is not in-and-of itself a sufficient cause. It is the availability of several means of legitimation, not the particular form of legitimation, that increases the propensity for schism. For these reasons, among other possible ones, I do not find anything especially compelling about the thesis that Mormonism resulted from changes, structural ambiguities or contradictions, and relative deprivation. It certainly is possible to interpret the emergence of Mormonism in this way, yet other forms and kinds of interpretations are possible. To explain schism, furthermore, it is not necessary to account for the why or how a sect-like form or charisma arose. It is entirely adequate, for an explanation of fissiparousness, to simply observe that this in fact happened.

31. O'Dea, *The Mormons*, 155.

tions, and change are difficult to specify except in a mostly ad hoc fashion, and the argument tends to dissipate into circularity. It is possible to specify conditions of schism in this way, but it is almost impossible to identify why they are necessary and exactly how they operated to effect schism. O'Dea's Weberian interpretation of charismatic authority and its consequences for the social organization of the early Mormon church, however, are invaluable. "The problem of authority," he noted, "is one that every human community must solve in some way, for the co-ordination of social life and its stability depend on the solution."

Charismatic authority, unlike tradition or reason, is uniquely suited for legitimating radical sociocultural innovations, especially new religions.³² But, when it is left unregulated, it also contains tremendous potential for disunity. Charisma is extremely individualistic since it inevitably and characteristically is a private, subjective, personal experience. When charisma is a culturally available option, nothing about it prevents almost anyone from claiming the gift of prophecy, and, by its very character, such a claim strongly resists refutation. Because of the implicit expectation that charisma is more or less accessible to everyone, it carries a strong democratic impulse, resulting in "epistemological individualism."³³ Collectivities organized on this basis tend to be inclusive, egalitarian, and loose-knit, or "cults," as they are defined sociologically. When charisma is available to almost everyone, authority is dispersed, there is little basis for legitimating an organizational structure, and any such group is readily subject to fragmentation. The potential for fission remains great even when charisma is restricted to a few people since rival claims to truth commonly lead to organizational precariousness in the absence of authoritative means for adjudicating conflict.

The problem of organizational fragility does not immediately disappear when charisma becomes epistemologically authoritarian. An absolute claim to truth indicates, however, that not all assertions of truth are equal, and it presupposes some means for deciding among rival contentions. Epistemological authoritarianism consequently includes a hierarchical principle. Hierarchy may be dissolved by resorting to otherwise unrestrained charismatic authority whereby everyone's claims are asserted as absolute truth. Or the hierarchical principle may be conceived in terms of rational or traditional authority. When this happens, charisma is constrained and rationalized, and activities organized on this basis

32. Ibid., 155-85.

33. Wallis, "Introduction," 9-16, in Wallis, ed., *Sectarianism*.

tend to exhibit more sect-like characteristics.³⁴ Uniquely privileged claims to truth are then more likely to be expressed in terms of particular goals, reinforced by certain norms, and hierarchically-ordered statuses and corresponding roles whereby authority is defined and centralized in a very cohesive organizational structure with exclusive boundaries.

Early Mormonism, as O'Dea observed, faced a choice between two paths of development: "It could permit unrestrained prophecy and thereby splinter into smaller and smaller groups, finally breaking into a Babel of private revelation"; or "it could restrain prophetic gifts, restricting revelation and prophecy to one man, and develop a centrally directed organization about that one leader."³⁵ An emphasis on unrestricted charisma would have propelled early Mormonism toward a cult-like group, but its regulation by authoritarian principles counteracted this tendency, launching it in the direction of a sectarian organization. Charismatic authority, O'Dea observed, was constrained by a process of rationally binding charisma through its progressive routinization within an emergent organizational hierarchy.³⁶ Charisma became constrained to an even greater extent by rational-legal principles through the centralization of leadership. Exactly how this happened in Mormonism further explains its fissiparousness.

For the purpose of identifying and explaining particular dissidents and schisms, the institutionalization of early Mormonism may be divided into four temporal periods.³⁷ A rudimentary sectarian organiza-

34. Within a pluralistic cultural environment religious organizations exist in competition with one another for scarce resources, especially members, according to Mary Douglas, *How Institutions Think* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1986). As voluntary associations they therefore must provide something of perceived value, if they are to be successful in recruiting members and retaining them. The valued goods and services provided by the organization are more rewarding when they are equally accessible to all of the members. Voluntary associations, such as religious sects, therefore contain strong democratic tendencies. Left unregulated, democracy tends to produce anarchy. Yet one of the costs of developing a stronger form of organization is a loss of individual freedom. Egalitarian organizations are inherently unstable since unrestricted democracy commonly leads to anarchy. Yet, unlike Douglas, O'Dea failed to recognize adequately that there is nothing inevitable about the hierarchical solution. It is the preferred solution when greater group cohesion and solidarity are desired. For many religious groups, such as contemporary American neopagans, spiritualists, and pentecostals, this is not a desirable end or not worth the cost of less individual freedom. Furthermore, the loss of freedom must be somehow compensated if the organization is to retain the commitment of its members.

35. O'Dea, *The Mormons*, 156. He thereby anticipated Wallis's more explicit formulation of a theory of schism as reviewed above. Sociologists of religion, very much like the new Mormon history, generally have ignored O'Dea's study.

36. *Ibid.*, 160-65.

37. This temporal periodization of Mormonism's institutionalization is almost explicit in O'Dea, *The Mormons*, esp. 155-85.

tion emerged during the earliest period from approximately 1829 to 1837. It was refined and elaborated further between about 1838 and 1840. The Mormon church was modified substantially by innovations from around 1841 to 1844, and it became increasingly centralized. A crisis of authority was effected by the Mormon prophet's assassination in 1844, resulting in organization fragmentation and schism over about the next ten years.

The Emergent Sect Organization

The containment of charisma, O'Dea noticed, began even before the Mormon church was formally organized. In 1829 Oliver Cowdery's "flirtation with [a] prophetic calling . . . threatened Joseph's uniqueness."³⁸ When the priesthood office of elder was established, it was addressed by a vague but hierarchical distinction between the first and second elder, and it was subsequently reinforced by Smith's designation as "prophet, seer, and translator" when the church was organized formally.³⁹ The Mormon prophet employed charisma to direct the day-to-day affairs of the church, and he "concentrated the charisma of prophecy upon himself by receiving revelations for other members of the church."⁴⁰ The organizational precariousness of charismatic authority was accentuated, however, by other challenges. Hiram Page's claim to prophetic gifts, for example, was supported by Oliver Cowdery in 1830.

In 1831 Smith and a small collection of followers relocated from New York to Kirtland, Ohio. Throughout the Kirtland period conflict and dissension plagued the rapidly growing movement. While it commonly has been attributed to "apostate mobocracy," there were important sociocultural differences among these early converts.⁴¹ The conflict between the Colesville, New York, Saints and the new Ohio converts that provoked Smith to send the New Yorkers to Missouri derived from socioeconomic differences. The Colesville Saints predominantly were economically unsuccessful and socially marginal Americans, while the Ohio converts generally were much more economically secure former New Englanders.

In early 1831 charismatic gifts of the spirit provoked tremendous enthusiasm at Kirtland, Ohio. After John Noah claimed charismatic author-

38. *Ibid.*, 157.

39. *Ibid.*, 157. Also see D&C 21:1, 4 (LDS version).

40. O'Dea, *The Mormons*, 157.

41. See Marvin S. Hill, "Cultural Crisis in the Mormon Kingdom: A Reconsideration of the Causes of Kirtland Dissent," *Church History* 49 (Sept. 1980): 286-97; and Roger D. Launius, "The Kirtland Experience: Writing the History of Mormonism's Middle Period," in Launius, *Reinterpreting the Mormon Experience*.

ity, he was excommunicated the same year.⁴² The tarring and feathering of Smith and Sidney Rigdon by a mob at Hiram, Ohio, in 1832 involved church members, former members, and their relatives, but it was attributed to apostates. Returning to Kirtland following the Zion's Camp expedition to Missouri, Smith was accused of being a false prophet and faced trial before the church. His leadership was secured, partly by rallying the Saints to build a temple. Before its dedication, however, an unnamed young woman charismatically asserted that the prophet had fallen and would be replaced by David Whitmer.⁴³ A ten-year-old boy, James C. Brewster, was expelled from the movement in 1836 for unauthorized communication with an angel (and he eventually founded a splinter group in 1848).⁴⁴

What little is known about the earliest Mormon schisms indicates that all of them derived from charismatic claims.⁴⁵ About 1831 at Kirtland Wycam Clark asserted that he had been appointed by the Mormon prophet through divine revelation. With Northrop Sweet and four other people, he formed the Pure Church of Christ. Almost nothing is known about three other early schisms: the Independent Church formed by a man named Hoton in 1832; the Church of Christ founded by Ezra Booth around 1836; and the Church of Christ founded by William Chubby sometime in the 1830s or 1840s to minister to blacks.

Changes in American culture and society provided conditions conducive to innovation, religious and otherwise. While sociocultural change and differentiation help explain why Americans might find a new religion, such as Mormonism, to be attractive and why they might hold conflicting images of its doctrines and organization, the theory does not directly account for why or how conflict, dissent, and schism occurred in this emergent sect. Resource mobilization theory also helps explain why some religious innovations, including splinters in the movement's organization, are or are not successful, but it does not indicate why and how this happens. Dissent and schism during this earliest period of the Mormon church's organization are explained by ambiguity about who had legitimate access to charismatic authority and how it would be defined and restrained by rational principles.

Implementation and Elaboration

The Church of Christ (Warren Parrish), organized at Kirtland, Ohio,

42. Shields, *Divergent Paths of the Restoration*, 21-22, 249. Although no other information is provided, according to Shields, Hyrum Page founded a Church of Christ in 1842.

43. O'Dea, *The Mormons*, 159.

44. Shields, *Divergent Paths of the Restoration*, 56-57.

45. *Ibid.*, 21-23, 249.

in 1837 reflected the most serious organizational crisis up to this point in the history of the infant movement. It involved a substantial number of dissenters, including prominent leaders such as apostles Luke S. Johnson, John F. Boynton, and Lyman Johnson as well as Leonard Rich, Stephen Burnett, Sylvester Smith, Cyrus P. Smalling, and Joseph Coe. The Kirtland conflict, according to faithful versions of Mormon history, was a product of "apostate mobocracy."

Two significant scholarly studies, however, have interpreted the conflict in terms of sociocultural stress and strain, psychosocial deprivation, and related differences among the Kirtland Mormons.⁴⁶ While they were not agreed over exactly what caused the crisis, both studies maintained that the result was ideological conflict and dissent over rival images of Mormon beliefs and the church's organization.⁴⁷ Joseph Smith and supporters advanced innovative beliefs and doctrines, including a radical image of the Kingdom of God based on a "higher law," and a more authoritarian, sectarian organization, one created in opposition to the surrounding culture and society. The Mormon prophet's detractors favored less authoritative control of charisma, a more open, less centralized organization, a less revolutionary image of the Kingdom, and other beliefs and doctrines that were closer to evangelical Protestantism.

Asserting his authority, Joseph Smith resolved the conflict in the summer of 1838. Quoting Sidney Rigdon, Kenneth Winn observed that the dissenters were sent "'bounding over the prairies' of Missouri."⁴⁸ "The doubters who remained," Winn noticed, "were intimidated into silence with strong-arm tactics." These challenges to the prophet's leader-

46. Marvin Hill, "Cultural Crisis in the Mormon Kingdom," 286-97; and Winn, *Exiles in a Land of Liberty*. Also see Launius, "The Kirtland Experience," 2.

47. Marvin Hill, "Cultural Crisis in the Mormon Kingdom," envisioned the conflict as a result of underlying sociocultural differences that effected ideological conflict and a struggle for power. Winn implicitly and deliberately advanced a version of the stress-strain and deprivation theory. He maintained that the basic conditions for schism were provided by economic crisis. It was experienced by the Mormons as uncertainty and conflict over economic means and goals. Some of them felt that the church should reject conventional, materialistic norms and values, while others thought that kingdom building required them to employ traditional economic norms. Collapse of the U.S. economy, compounded by the "debacle of Zion's Camp," according to Winn, 111, "triggered sharp and bitter dissent within the church." Following Hill's interpretation, Winn elaborated on O'Dea's contention that the Book of Mormon's republican ideology served as the fundamental model for the organizational development of early Mormonism. The seeds of ideological conflict were planted with the first church organization but did not mature until triggered by events beginning in about 1834 at Kirtland. The dissidents, Winn, 106, argued, "retained a deep affinity for mainstream American values" and perceived Smith's leadership as "a departure from the democratic elements inspired by the Christian primitivism of early Mormonism, and the subsequent growth of the church's tyranny over its membership."

48. Quoted from Winn, *Exiles in a Land of Liberty*, 107.

ship may be seen as functional for the movement since, although they provoked conflict and schism, Smith preserved and reinforced his supreme leadership of the church. As a result, O'Dea argued, three precedents were established by the late 1830s: "[Smith] concentrated the right to receive revelations in his own person . . . as 'prophet, seer and revelator'"; "he successfully dominated the first two duumvirates in church leadership"; and he assumed "the presidency of the High Priesthood," at the time the leading organizational body of the emergent sect.⁴⁹

Economic crisis resulting in perceived deprivation and sociocultural divisions over values among the Saints no doubt contributed to the immediate situation at Kirtland in which conflict and dissent became more likely. These conditions, however, do not explain adequately why schism was the result, even though they point to certain ideological differences. Cultural crisis and differences are neither necessary nor sufficient to account for schism. If Joseph Smith's leadership had been more secure, less ambiguous and indisputable in terms of existing movement principles, dissent and schism would have been much less probable. Rather, the likelihood of schism was directly related to the availability of different means (charismatic, rational-legal, traditional, and combinations thereof) for legitimating authority. By limiting charisma to himself (exclusively, at least for official purposes) and linking it to a more clearly defined organizational hierarchy, the Mormon prophet thereby reduced the available means whereby rivals could claim authority for legitimating separation. The sociology of knowledge theory, unlike sociocultural crisis or differentiation, consequently explains why and how schism happened and what would be necessary to reduce this possibility in the future.

There were at least two other schisms during this period of Mormonism's development, neither of them particularly significant in terms of the number of participants, leadership figures, organizational principles, or consequences. The Alston Church was founded by Isaac Russell in 1839. He claimed a prophetic revelation telling the Mormons to remain in Missouri. This incident indicates that while charisma previously had been restricted, it was not yet completely subordinated to rational organizational principles. Another Mormon schism, The Church of Jesus Christ, The Bride The Lamb's Wife, was established in Missouri on 24 June 1840 by George M. Hinkle. It is an anomaly from the standpoint of all three theories. Separation apparently was provoked when Hinkle was rebuked by the Saints for perceived treachery during the conflict between the Mormons and their Missouri neighbors. Hinkle's schism therefore seems to be explained best by unique historical circumstances and events.

49. O'Dea, *The Mormons*, 159.

Innovation and Centralization

There were few attempts at organizational separation from about 1841 until Joseph Smith's death in 1844 in spite of the introduction of novel doctrines, substantial changes in Mormon organization and community, and considerable conflict and dissent. Hyrum Page, a Mormon who had been claiming prophetic powers since 1830, founded the Church of Christ in 1842. Francis Gladden Bishop who had been excommunicated in 1835 and then restored to membership was cut off from the church again in 1842, apparently for claiming unauthorized revelations that were regarded as inconsistent with Mormon doctrine. He subsequently established the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints at Little Sioux, Iowa, and attracted a following. Oliver H. Olney also was expelled from the church on 17 March 1842 for claiming to be a prophet. Whether Olney successfully created a schismatic organization is unknown.

Much of the conflict and dissent in Mormonism at this time directly focused on the practice of plural marriage as well as related doctrinal innovations and, although less specifically, on the development of an increasingly centralized, authoritarian organization. This situation resulted in the True Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Law, Foster, Higbee) in 1844. While this organization dissolved shortly thereafter, many of the dissenters (as well as substantial proportions of the dissenting participants in previous and subsequent schisms) eventually joined the "new organization."⁵⁰

Conflict, dissent, and schism in Mormonism between 1841 and 1844 do not correlate with significant changes or crises in American culture or society. There is, in other words, little indication that change triggered a sense of relative deprivation among the Saints. Changes in Mormonism generally resulted in disaffection from the movement rather than schism. Its propensity for schism therefore seemed to decline as the available means for legitimating separation were abridged by constraining charisma rationally in an increasingly centralized organization. Although charisma had been restricted, it remained an option for those seeking separation. Many of the dissenters and all of the known schisms employed charisma to a greater or lesser extent in justifying and legitimating separation. Resource mobilization theory also predicts that schism decreases as an organization becomes more centralized. But, unlike the sociology of knowledge model, it less adequately accounts for why or how religious movements develop in this way. Resource mobilization

50. Formed by a variety of Nauvoo dissenters during the early 1850s, this group eventually became the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (or RLDS). The founding prophet's eldest son, Joseph Smith III, assumed leadership of the sect in 1860.

theory is much more helpful in accounting for why and how schismatic organizations are or are not successful.

Fragmentation of the Nauvoo Church

The Nauvoo Mormon organization fragmented following Joseph Smith's martyrdom in 1844.⁵¹ The largest single body of the church, headed by Brigham Young and nine of the twelve apostles, has occupied scholarly attention.⁵² Yet Sidney Rigdon, James J. Strang, and William Smith also claimed leadership of the movement and formed independent organizations. Lyman Wight, James Emmett, Alpheus Cutler, and George Miller initially continued with Brigham Young's organization, but they attracted followers and separated from it within the next ten years. Besides the Nauvoo Saints already in dissent at the time of the prophet's death (such as William Law, Robert D. and Charles A. Foster, Francis M. and Chauncey L. Higbee, Charles Ivins, among others), William Marks, John E. Page, William E. McLellin, and Charles B. Thompson, along with many other Mormons, remained independent of Brigham Young's group. In the early 1850s many of the independent Saints, especially those who remained dispersed throughout the middle West, as well as assorted factional leaders and groups, began forming a "new organization" of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Mormonism had become a mostly established, stable, sectarian movement by 1844. The charisma whereby it was created, O'Dea concluded,

had been successfully contained within the organized structure of the church and identified with the functions of church office. It had, in fact, to some extent been routinized, and organizational procedures under the direction of a strong authoritarian leader largely replaced visions and revelations, a process that had already started in the last days of Joseph's rule in Nauvoo.⁵³

51. See Shields, *Divergent Paths of the Restoration*, 31-83, for a mostly comprehensive list and brief description of the rival leaders and group of the immediate post-1844 period.

52. Ronald K. Esplin, "Joseph, Brigham and the Twelve: A Succession of Continuity," *Brigham Young University Studies* 21 (Summer 1981): 333, estimates that about one-half of the Nauvoo Mormons continued West with Brigham Young's organization. Since organizational instability and discontinuity, rather than stability and continuity, could be expected to result from this situation, that historians overwhelmingly have focused on perpetuation of the movement by Brigham Young and his organization is defensible. This does not justify, however, the tendency to ignore rival groups, excepting what subsequently became the RLDS movement, and other derivatives of early Mormonism. Using the continuity, stability, and subsequent organizational success of Young's movement to reinforce and support sectarian contentions about its legitimacy is without scholarly justification.

53. O'Dea, *The Mormons*, 160.

Charisma, however, remained an important source of authority among the Nauvoo Saints. "Gifts of the spirit" frequently were employed in worship and daily life; the priesthood and ordinary Saints depended on divine guidance, including revelations for making practical, everyday life decisions; and the prophet continued to use his power and authority as "prophet, seer, and revelator" to create, elaborate, and legitimate organizational structures, make special assignments, and otherwise direct the daily activities of the Saints.

Much of Mormonism's formal organization still was new and undeveloped in 1844. Contrary to Michael Quinn's influential interpretation, Mormonism's organizational development therefore was not especially logical, linear, or evolutionary.⁵⁴ Gregory Prince concluded, more accurately, that organizational innovations were followed by periods of evolutionary implementation, then punctuated by new, revolutionary additions, and again followed by gradual execution and implementation, repeatedly.⁵⁵ While charisma had been rationally constrained by organizational principles, it had not been rationalized completely, and the precise connections among the various hierarchical structures of the organization remained at least partly ambiguous. During Joseph Smith's lifetime organizational looseness and ambiguity were not critical problems. Smith was able to resolve problems and mediate conflict either by his supreme authority as president of the church and the high priesthood or, if necessary, his exclusive access to charismatic authority over the entire movement.

The situation changed completely with the founding prophet's death. Charisma continued to be an important potential source of authority, yet no one else indisputably could claim it for the entire movement. The complex hierarchical structure of the movement's organization constrained access to and use of charisma, subordinating it to rational authority. Existing organizational principles, however, left questions about continuation ambiguous and, thereby, open to dispute. The "succession crisis of 1844," as Michael Quinn demonstrated, resulted from the existence of multiple means for claiming authority.⁵⁶

54. D. Michael Quinn, "The Evolution of the Presiding Quorums of the LDS Church," *Journal of Mormon History* 1 (1974): 21-38. The plausibility of Quinn's static consensus theory of the hierarchy's evolution implicitly presupposed that God acted rationally in creating the priesthood through the Mormon prophet. By taking rationality, rather than irrationality, as the basic intellectual problem to be explained, his interpretation became part of the rationalization process, part of the ongoing theology and institutionalization of rationality, rather than a historical account of it.

55. Gregory A. Prince, "Having Authority:" *The Origins and Development of Priesthood During the Ministry of Joseph Smith* (Independence, MO: John Whitmer Monograph Series, 1992).

56. D. Michael Quinn, "The Mormon Succession Crisis of 1844," *Brigham Young University Studies* 16 (1976): 187-234.

Most of the eight different methods of succession he identified derived from rational organizational principles: counselor to the First Presidency; the office of Associate President; the position of presiding Patriarch; the Council of Fifty; the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles; and the three major priesthood councils. Another method, succession by special appointment, could be derived from rational principles, appointment to an organizational position, and/or from charismatic authority, transfer of Smith's charisma by him or a supernatural source to the successor. The remaining method of succession identified by Quinn, through a descendant of Joseph Smith, Jr., ensued from an entirely different origin: kinship and birthright.⁵⁷

Based on strictly rational principles, Sidney Rigdon's claim probably was stronger than that of anyone else. It was rejected on several accounts. Uncertainty about what rational principles applied permitted Brigham Young to advance the rational authority of the apostles as a plausible option. Rigdon's claim was weakened by personal and historical circumstances, specifically his lack of direct leadership at Nauvoo during Joseph Smith's lifetime and a general public awareness of strong differences with the martyred prophet. He, unlike Young, was unable to reinforce a claim to rational authority with charisma. Finally, it was rejected on other rational grounds, by a vote of the membership. Although democracy was a lesser organizational principle, it was an available option and proved useful for this purpose.

None of the remaining rivals had stronger claims to rational authority than the apostles. In 1844 only James Strang and William Smith even endeavored to advance a claim. William Smith's claims were ambiguous and implausible on a variety of accounts. That Strang attracted a following is amazing. It may be attributed to his rather ingenuous ability to draw on a combination of rational (his appointment to the presidency) and charismatic (transferred by the prophet and supported by an angel) principles for authority. It was reinforced by historical circumstances, particularly the lack of other alternatives for already disaffected Nauvoo Saints and/or those Mormons who objected to the apostles' leadership on other grounds.

For good reasons, Cutler, Wight, Miller, and Emmett did not advance claims to leadership of the movement in 1844. While all were able to make plausible claims to rational authority, reinforced by charisma, their specific grounds derived from partly invisible organizational units, particularly the Anointed Quorum and/or the Council of

57. Kinship and birthright, when viewed in terms of the ideal typical forms of authority discussed here (charisma, rational-legal, traditional), derive from traditional authority insofar as it seems to correspond to some understanding of the Bible and thereby one of the forms of traditional scriptural authority recognized by Mormonism.

Fifty.⁵⁸ Eventually, these grounds (based on rational principles and reinforced by charisma) served to legitimate separation from Utah Mormonism. Multiple means for legitimating authority combined with a certain confusion about rational principles enabled subsequent schismatic organizations to legitimate their existence and advance more or less plausible claims to be a valid successor to the original Mormon church.

The organizational fragmentation of Nauvoo Mormonism immediately following the martyrdom of its founding leader might be interpreted as a product of rapidly changing conditions in the larger society as well as in this new religion. No matter what specific changes are cited, however, they inevitably fail to indicate exactly why fragmentation was a necessary and sufficient outcome. Sociocultural differences, resulting in ideological conflict, and unique circumstances of particular individuals, families, and communities probably did contribute to organizational factionalism and segmentation, even if they do not account adequately for schism.

Ronald Esplin, for instance, attributed the splintering of the Nauvoo church to underlying ideological differences (over the gathering for theocratic community building, the emergent temple theology, its rites, and especially plural marriage) rooted in the Kirtland period and continuing through the exodus of Brigham Young's movement to the intermountain West.⁵⁹ These differences, as important as they probably were for many of the Latter-day Saints, do not explain the schismatic propensity of Nauvoo Mormonism. While this argument may account for why some Mormons, particularly those in dissent before Smith's death, did not join Young's group, it does not explain why some of those who disagreed over these issues continued West or why some of those who had much more in common with the ideology and practices of Young's organization, such as the Cutlerites, Wightites, and Millerites, subsequently dropped out of the

58. See D. Michael Quinn, "The Council of Fifty and Its Members, 1844 to 1945," *Brigham Young University Studies* 20 (1980): 163-97; and Andrew F. Ehat, "Joseph Smith's Introduction of Temple Ordinances and the 1844 Mormon Succession Question," M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1982, and "'It Seems Like Heaven Began on Earth': Joseph Smith and the Constitution of the Kingdom of God," *Brigham Young University Studies* 19 (1978): 69-105. Also see Richard E. Bennett, "Lamanism, Lymanism, and Cornfields," *Journal of Mormon History* 13 (1986-87): 45-59, and *Mormons at the Missouri, 1846-1852: "And Should We Die . . ."* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987); as well as Danny L. Jorgensen, "The Old Fox: Alpheus Cutler, Priestly Keys to the Kingdom and the Early Church of Jesus Christ," chap. 7 in Roger D. Launius and Linda Thatcher, eds., *Differing Visions: Dissenters in Mormon History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), "Building the Kingdom of God: Alpheus Cutler and the Second Mormon Mission to the Indians, 1846-1853," *Kansas History* 15 (Autumn 1992): 192-209, and "Conflict in the Camps of Israel: The Emergence of the 1853 Cutlerite Schism," *Journal of Mormon History*, forthcoming.

59. Esplin, "Joseph, Brigham and the Twelve," 331.

movement.⁶⁰ Although, as Esplin noticed, the loss of significant leaders, such as Cutler, Wight, and their followers, was dysfunctional in that it weakened the resource base of the movement, expelling perceived deviants also functioned to unify the church.⁶¹

Resource-mobilization theory predicts that schism becomes more likely as the size and diversity of the movement's organization increase and less likely as it becomes more centralized. These contentions are useful for understanding fragmentation of the Nauvoo church. The extremely rapid growth of Mormonism, especially the influx of Europeans, American southerners, and other people who differed significantly from the New Englander core of the early movement, surely increased the probability that sociocultural diversity would produce internal conflict. Centralization of the movement's organization helps explain why these potential conflicts did not result in even greater organizational division and schism. These contentions, however, supplement and complement rather than replace the more direct explanation provided by conflict over multiple sources of authority and its organizational consequences. Efforts to specify more immediate causes of schism from an organizational perspective generally involve an analysis of the motivations of leaders and their followers, resulting in circularity.⁶² Whatever the motivations or decisions involved, peoples' actions are presumed to be rational.

The theory is more helpful for analyzing and interpreting why particular fragments of Nauvoo Mormonism were more or less successful. Simply put, the Mormon apostles, no matter the reasons, were able to more effectively mobilize existing human, ideological, and material resources than anyone else. It is important, for example, that Utah Mormonism subsequently was reinforced by substantial numbers of British converts. The eventual success of the new organization, now the second largest post-Nauvoo fragment, largely resulted from its ability to attract sizable numbers of disaffected, unaffiliated, and independent Saints. Although

60. *Ibid.*, 331-32. These, and other possible exceptions, also refute Esplin's contention that "authority was not the central issue," and it "strictly speaking . . . was not a succession crisis." Cutler, Wight, Miller, and probably many others became disaffected or were cut off from the movement in large part because of disputes over authority and conformity to it. What ideological differences existed between them and Young's movement did not provoke schism but emerged later and were used to justify separation. On Cutler and his schismatic organization, see Jorgensen, "Conflict in the Camps of Israel." Cutler and his eventual followers did not disagree substantially with the major tenants of Brigham Young's Mormonism. Cutler was excommunicated following conflict with the Iowa High Council over his claim to authority for Lamanite ministries. Interestingly, he never disputed the authority of Young and the Twelve for leadership of the movement.

61. *Ibid.*, 332.

62. See Douglas, *How Institutions Think*, esp. 9-44; Roy Wallis and Steve Bruce, "The Stark-Bainbridge Theory of Religion: A Critique and Counter-Proposals," *Sociological Analysis* 45 (1984): 11-27; and Bruce, *A House Divided*, 14-47.

some of the smaller factions have persisted to the present day, their size and lack of growth seem to be a function of an inability to mobilize resources.

DISCUSSION

Unfortunately, scholars of Mormonism all too frequently have been unable to approach the existence of its multiple organizations without prejudice for the theological claims of these rivals. Viewed from the standpoint of Utah Mormonism, other Latter-day Saint organizations have been seen as impostors and ignored or treated as insignificant curiosities. For other Latter-day Saints it has been impossible to disregard the largest Mormon church, but they have responded to it as an abomination and aberration.⁶³ Labeling one another deviant has become a tradition, and it is an extremely useful Latter-day Saint strategy for accentuating exclusive claims to truth and moral superiority, thereby generating in-group solidarity, but it has seriously inhibited scholarly thinking about schism.

Mostly unintentionally and indirectly, many of the more significant scholarly interpretations of Mormonism partly have addressed its propensity to schism. There is considerable agreement that dramatic socio-cultural change is a necessary condition, if not a sufficient cause, of religious schism. Modernity or, more specifically, industrialization, urbanization, and rationalization produced radical transformations in American culture and society. Still other concrete features of modernity, such as cultural pluralism, structural differentiation, and individualism, may be directly related to certain forms of religious organization and their propensity to schism.

Insofar as interpretations of early Mormonism have examined the ways in which it was shaped by a particular set of social, cultural, and historical circumstances, they also have specified some of the conditions that may be related to its schismatic propensity. The theory is not compelling, however, as an explanation. The definition and measurement of social change, structural conditions, and deprivation are difficult. These variable conditions tend to be used in an ad hoc manner, and the result-

63. The identities of almost all other Mormon groups were fashioned from their opposition to Utah Mormonism, as is illustrated in the primary literature produced by these groups. Excellent discussions of how this was accomplished within the RLDS movement are provided by Roger D. Launius, *Joseph Smith III: Pragmatic Prophet* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988); Roger D. Launius and W. B. "Pat" Spillman, ed., *Let Contention Cease: The Dynamics of Dissent in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (Independence, MO: Graceland/Park Press, 1991); and Richard P. Howard, *The Church Through the Years* (Independence, MO: Herald House, 1992-93).

ing arguments frequently dissolve in circularity and tautology. Even if it is possible to specify and interpret conditions of schism from this perspective, it is not possible to defend why they are necessary or articulate exactly how they operated to effect schism.

Resource-mobilization theory avoids these problems by concentrating on organizational dynamics and consequences. While organization theory yields certain hypotheses about size, diversity, and centralization that facilitate a more adequate understanding of schismatic propensity, it does not provide a usable way of accounting for how these conditions arise. The rational choice model of human action presupposed to explain these conditions and the causes of schism inappropriately reduces the account to the utilitarian motives of individuals. Yet social action simply is not rational in the hedonistic, pleasure-seeking, pain-avoiding sense assumed by rational choice theories. Since whatever choices individuals make are interpreted in this way, the resulting explanation ultimately is circular and tautological. If the theory is not pushed to this reductionistic extreme, a resource-mobilization framework is valuable for analyzing, interpreting, and understanding some of the organizational consequences of schism.

Early Mormonism's propensity for schism is explained more adequately by the relatively simple hypothesis that fissiparousness increases directly with the availability of means for legitimating authority. Having been created by charisma, the earliest Mormon church was highly susceptible to splintering. The likelihood of schism was reduced, although hardly eliminated, as charismatic authority for the movement was located exclusively in the person of Joseph Smith and gradually constrained by rational authority in an increasingly centralized, hierarchical organization. Once effected, the ability of rival leaders to claim the authority necessary for legitimating schism was reduced. Claims made on the basis of charisma were possible and highly dependent on the personality of the claimant. Because charisma had been constrained by organizational rationality, the plausibility of any authority claimed in this way required further justification in terms of one's rank in the church. The death of the founding prophet created confusion over succession because there were multiple means for claiming legitimate authority. The organizational crisis of 1844 mostly was derived from the ambiguity over rational principles for succession.

The theologically-based claims to exclusive legitimacy advanced by different early Mormon organizations cannot be adjudicated by secular scholarship. For scholarly purposes the substance of these claims is unimportant and irrelevant. From its formal organization in 1830 through the immediate period following the death of the founding prophet in 1844, Mormonism provided multiple and conflicting bases for legitimat-

ing authority. On these grounds arguments about the plausibility of various claims are possible. Although the apostles' claims to rational authority were no stronger than those of Sidney Rigdon, they were strong and plausible when judged by organizational principles. The theological principle of apostolic succession advanced by Utah Mormonism, however, emerged later and was used to justify the apostles' previous claim to rational authority as well as their subsequent organizational success. It takes a significant leap of faith to get from their plausible claim to rational authority for organizational succession to its exclusive legitimacy. Similar leaps of faith are required to move from the more or less plausible claims of Cutler, Wight, or the new organization to the theological grounds that all claimed for succession and exclusive legitimacy. What, therefore, can be said from a scholarly standpoint is that there are multiple versions of early Mormonism, all of which traditionally claim exclusive theological legitimacy.