Saints and Soldiers of Humanity: Mormons and Icarians in Nauvoo

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SAINTS AND SOLDIERS OF HUMANITY

Mormons and Icarians in Nauvoo

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of American Studies
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

by

Sarah Jaggi

2003
This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Approved by the Committee, October 2003

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my profound appreciation to Lynn Weiss for her patient direction, criticism and encouragement. I am also indebted to Professors Maureen Fitzgerald and Christopher Grasso for their reading and invaluable criticism of an imperfect manuscript. I also wish to thank those at the Center for Icarian Studies at Western Illinois University for their patient guidance and assistance. Finally, thank you to my family for their unfailing interest and understanding.
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ABSTRACT

Nauvoo, Illinois was the setting for two important social experiments in the middle of the nineteenth century. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, also known as the Mormon church, made this city their headquarters of their rapidly expanding church from 1838 until 1846. Only three years after the departure of the Mormons, a group of Frenchmen calling themselves Icarians came to the same spot to realize a system of communal living and brotherhood that lasted in Nauvoo until 1856. While several studies have been devoted to these groups, as yet none have combined a study of the two communities who shared the same space.

This essay is a preliminary attempt to understand the Mormons and Icarians, their goals, motivations, programs and fates. Beyond the location at Nauvoo, the Mormons and Icarians shared a commitment to many of the same ideals including unity, an economic system in which people had all things in common, and a vision of making their community an example to an imperfect world and a path to a bright future. Yet in spite of certain similarities, these communities differed widely. The most important and often cited difference between the two is the fundamental nature of the communities—the Mormon community was a religious undertaking meant to usher in the second advent of Christ while Icaria was a secular social experiment in communism. However, this study seeks to complicate the familiar secular-sacred dichotomy by examining several parallel elements—their histories, their fundamental texts and the ideologies expounded in them, and the economic and social composition of the two communities.
SAINTS AND SOLDIERS OF HUMANITY
MORMONS AND ICARIANS IN NAUVOO
INTRODUCTION

On 4 February 1846 a train of covered wagons sheltering shivering families and holding their meager belongings stretched along the Illinois side of the Mississippi River. These were Mormons, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, forced to leave all they had built—the city Nauvoo, their temple, and their homes of seven years—never to return. As they faced the partially frozen Mississippi River and the Iowa shore on the other side, the Saints cast a parting glance back at their beloved city and temple. Priddy Meeks, one of the Mormon pioneers who left in the winter of 1846, wrote, "While crossing over a ridge seven miles from Nauvoo we looked back and took a last sight of the Temple we ever expected to see. We were sad and sorrowful." After the Mormons' departure, the city of Nauvoo, once a thriving, bustling city on the banks of the Mississippi, became what journalist Thomas Kane described as a "Dead City," consisting of empty houses, abandoned workshops, and the temple standing stark against the sky on the bluff overlooking the river.¹

Three years after the Mormons' departure, another group of pioneers, the self-styled "soldiers of humanity," came around a bend in the river and saw Nauvoo for the first time. The Icarians, destined to inherit Mormon Nauvoo, came from across the Atlantic, spoke a different language and were disciples of their own brand of Icarian

communism. Retreating from defeat in Texas, the small band of French pioneers saw their abandoned Mormon town as their promised land. Their first glimpse of Nauvoo, like the Saints’ parting view, was dominated by the temple on the bluff, now reduced to a blackened shell. The homes were ramshackle and the gardens overrun, but on 15 March 1849 the Icarians greeted the sight of their new home with enthusiasm and optimism.

Nauvoo, a small town on the western border of Illinois, is located on a bluff overlooking a bend in the Mississippi River. From the Hebrew for “beautiful situation of rest,” Nauvoo, with its cultivated fields and rolling hills, lives up to the picturesque name chosen by Joseph Smith. Dominated then and now by two landmarks, the mighty Mississippi and the towering temple, Nauvoo offers more than a charming picture. The nineteenth century found the edge-of-the-frontier town as the center of not one but two utopian communities—the Mormons and Icarians, whose plans, histories and destinies were centered around the two landmarks of Nauvoo, the temple and the river.

For the Mormons, Nauvoo was and still is a place of special importance. Often referred to as the City of Joseph, Nauvoo emerged from the swampy land cradled by the Mississippi to become a monument to the faith and fortitude of the Latter-day Saints. The people who built Nauvoo were believers in and members of a new religious community led by a prophet seeking to establish Zion. Having been forced from Missouri, the Mormons saw Zion as a “land of peace, a city of refuge,” a home and shelter where they could worship God as they thought right. For these Latter-day Saints Zion was more than a place or a religious sanctuary. Geographically, Zion was a holy city on earth, a point on

2 Doctrine and Covenants 45:66.
Figure 1 View of Nauvoo from the western shore of the Mississippi River about 1848. Center for Icarian Studies, Western Illinois University.
America's western frontier, but it was also a divine society and an organized community headed by an ecclesiastical government, the harbinger of a millennial kingdom that would be ushered in by the Saints' righteousness and by the second advent of Jesus Christ.

The fabric of the Mormon community at Nauvoo included the interwoven threads of any other American community—economic, social, political—but its primary pattern was religious. The fundamentally spiritual and religious character of Nauvoo is evident in the layout of the city. Nauvoo, its homes and farms, streets and shops, families and neighborhoods, and especially its temple presumed a purpose and destiny that were fundamentally spiritual. When the Mormon Saints designed Nauvoo they eliminated the traditional public square, courthouse or city hall that dominated most American towns and instead placed the "House of the Lord" at the center of their city. The building which dominated the Nauvoo landscape was a place of gathering and instruction. According to Mormon theology, only in its walls could believers receive necessary ordinances and an endowment of knowledge and spiritual power that would allow them to build up the kingdom of God on earth. The construction of the temple remained a priority for the Saints even after the period of peace in Nauvoo had relapsed into persecution. Brigham Young, Joseph Smith's successor, gave first priority to the finishing of the temple "as a great and glorious public work." The Saints continued to work on the temple until its completion and dedication 1 May 1846, months after the departure of thousands of Saints to the west.3

The temple provided a primary reason for gathering to Nauvoo, for nowhere else

3Leonard, 81, 475. *Church History in the Fulness of Times* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1992), 317.
was there a house of the Lord. Converts to Mormonism also came to Nauvoo because they wanted to live in a community that provided a moral haven for themselves and their families. Those who believed in and followed Joseph Smith to Nauvoo gathered there in obedience to what they believed was God’s command to “go out from among the nations, even from Babylon, from the midst of wickedness” to “prepare the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight, for the hour of his coming is nigh.” While motivated by economic opportunities and the goading appeal of the Jacksonian dream, the Saints gathered to Nauvoo primarily to withdraw from the evils of the world and to realize a religious community created to save souls.

The roads and rivers that had been traveled by Mormon converts seeking a spiritual haven were the same that brought the Icarians to deserted Nauvoo. The Icarians’ voyage up the Mississippi to Nauvoo was also motivated by a desire to leave behind the world they had known to create a better society. However, their reasons for seeking sanctuary in Nauvoo were very different from those of the Mormons. Unlike Smith and the Mormons, Cabet and his Icarians were not fleeing persecution or intolerance at home, but rather the French monarchy and the hierarchical European society that misunderstood these pioneers of social change. The “vices and evils” that the Icarians were escaping were not the moral evils excoriated by the Mormons but were the miseries essentially caused by the inégalité of society. The solution for Étienne Cabet and his followers was not spiritual but social: la communauté with its two primary components, la fraternité and l’égalité, was the unique remedy and only system of salvation for a world that had fallen into

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4 *Doctrine and Covenants* 133:14, 17.
corruption, selfishness and destructive competition.\(^5\)

In order to realize his ideal Icaria, Cabet needed a location, a geographical point from which he would spread the Icarian philosophy. Strangely enough, he settled on the former center of the Mormons' religious community to realize his secular, social agenda. From the moment he saw them from the deck of the ship moving up the Mississippi, the temple walls captured Cabet’s imagination. He appraised it as one of “the most beautiful monuments in America” and imagined the restored building as a fitting symbol of and monument to the glory of Icaria and its communalist doctrines. Icarian Emile Vallet reported that from the moment he saw them the “temple ruins worked on Cabet’s brain.”\(^6\) Cabet almost immediately purchased the temple and its contiguous blocks with a view to restore it to a very different purpose from that the Mormons had intended when they built the impressive structure. Cabet planned for the former Mormon temple to become a “grand common house” that would house their “Academy, schools, library, offices, physical and chemical offices, assembly courses, observatory and propaganda [office].” Rather than a spiritual beacon and gathering point, the building would be the “high peak” from which “republican, communitarian doctrine and [the] evangelical principles of Fraternity of Men and People would be sent out.”\(^7\) The Icarians planned for the reconstructed temple as common house and academy to be at the center of their


\(^7\)*Le Populaire* (Paris), 7 April 1850.
community, both geographically and ideologically. Under the Icarians the Mormon’s
House of the Lord would become a new and modern sedes sapientia, the throne of
reason.

It is perhaps tempting to distinguish the Mormons and Icarians solely along the
religious-secular divide that is so common in histories of nineteenth-century religious
communities. This distinction is an accurate and helpful one, especially in examining two
communities that had much in common but that were also widely divergent. Historian
Richard Bushman asserts that an understanding of Mormon Nauvoo is impossible without
a consideration of the spiritual impetus that drove Joseph Smith and his followers.
“Nauvoo,” he claims, “never would have risen or fallen without that spiritual life. Belief
powered the entire enterprise.” And on the other hand the Icarian community seems to be
a secular community par excellence. Avoiding any starkly denominational views or
practices, the Icarian communities are often distinguished as one of the longest secular
communal experiments in America. Yet these two communities defy easy classification.
Cabet, for example, equated his system of communalism with the pure Christianity of the
New Testament. And the religious community the Mormons built at Nauvoo was at the
same time an important economic, political and social undertaking.

This study seeks to examine and understand the two communities who shared the
same space at Nauvoo. The religious-secular taxonomy provides the conceptual
underpinnings for this study as the fundamental differences between sacred and secular
formed the foundation of the two communities. This distinction, however, leads to a more

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8Quoted in Leonard, xvii.
complicated view of the shared and singular elements of the communities that played an important role in their formation and fate. Key among these are their histories, their fundamental texts and the ideologies expounded in them, and their economic and social composition. It is important to remember, however, that the elements contributing to these two communities were more than mere mechanisms; the economic programs, their lofty plans, the very houses, farms and workshops all presumed a greater purpose. The different purposes and plans of the Mormons and Icarians, their successes, struggles and eventual succumbing to stronger forces than themselves endow the sleepy town of Nauvoo, Illinois with special significance.
On 28 April 1838, Commerce City, the future site of Nauvoo, became an officially recognized city. Far from a city in anything but name, Commerce City was an improbable site for utopia; the “city” was composed of one stone house, three frame houses, and two block houses on marshy, bug-infested land. When Joseph Smith arrived there in May 1839, he commented that,

The place was literally a wilderness. The land was mostly covered with trees and bushes, and much of it was so wet that it was with the utmost difficulty that a footman could get through, and totally impossible for teams. Commerce was unhealthy, very few could live there; but believing that it might become a healthy place by the blessing of heaven to the saints, and no more eligible place presenting itself, I considered it wisdom to make an attempt to build up a city.9

In spite of the grim outlook offered by the disease-infested swamps along the Mississippi, Smith predicted, a mere four years after the founding of Nauvoo, that Saints would come to Illinois by the “thousands and tens of thousands.”10

Whatever its future destiny, Nauvoo’s beginning was humble enough. Smith’s arrival in Nauvoo was preceded by that of approximately five thousand of his followers.


Forced to flee from their Missouri Zion and facing an extermination order signed by Missouri governor Lilburn W. Boggs, the nearly destitute Mormons were desperate to find a place to live and worship in peace. During the winter and spring of 1838-39, with their prophet and leader in jail, thousands of Mormons abandoned their homes and lands in Missouri and made a one-hundred-fifty-mile trek to the east; they crossed the Mississippi to Quincy, Illinois and settled in tents along the river until a permanent location could be found. In late spring 1839, the Reverend George Peck, who was traveling up the Mississippi River, noted the unusual sight offered by the homeless Saints: “Some two hundred miles above St. Louis, we saw, on the Illinois side of the river, a very singular encampment. A multitude of people, men, women, and children, ragged, dirty, and miserable generally, seemed to be living in tents and covered wagons, for lack of better habitations. This strange scene presented itself along the shore for a mile or more. We were informed that they were Mormons, who had recently fled from Missouri. The place where we saw them became afterward Nauvoo, the city of the Latter-day Saints.”

Prior to their arrival in Nauvoo, the Mormons experienced a turbulent history. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was officially organized with six members under Joseph Smith’s direction on 6 April 1830 in Fayette, New York. The new church and its doctrine was based on the recently published *Book of Mormon* and on subsequent revelations received by Joseph Smith. The center of the church soon moved to Kirtland, Ohio where converts from the United States, Canada, and Britain swelled the Mormons ranks and contributed to the building of a city and a temple. In 1831 Joseph Smith

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declared that the location of Zion, the new Jerusalem, was in Missouri and Mormon Saints began slowly to gather in the west. Smith remained in Kirtland until 1838 when he joined his people in Missouri. The Mormons' stay in Missouri was punctuated by persecution; they were driven from Jackson County in 1833, from Clay County in 1836 and from the state in the winter of 1838-39. Enemies of Smith and Mormonism categorized Smith as the great religious imposter of the nineteenth century who had so effectively pulled the wool over his followers' eyes. They also denounced him for treasure hunting, necromancy, and counterfeiting. But the most common and virulent attack stemmed from Smith's success and ambitions in establishing a religious and political kingdom of God on earth which he claimed "shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever." Smith's enemies caught hold of this ambitious millennial rhetoric and accused him of attempting "to usurp power and to tyrannize over the minds of men." Forced to leave Missouri, the Mormons turned to Nauvoo, hoping to find there peace to practice their beliefs and build a community of believers.

The Saints first purchased one hundred seventy acres on 30 April 1839 from land speculators Hugh White and Isaac Galland and founded the city that Joseph Smith named Nauvoo. Almost immediately after purchasing land, the Saints settled in and began to build

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13Daniel 2:44 KJV (King James Version).

14Quincy Whig, 22 January 1842.
their city. Smith and his associates directed their attention to the business of building a
city; they quickly established several brickyards, lumber mills, factories, and shops. For
materials and goods unavailable in Nauvoo and its environs, the river proved an excellent
and efficient highway. These projects were directed by any number of organized bodies in
Nauvoo including an Agricultural and Manufacturing Association, various building
committees and even a “Female Relief Society of Nauvoo” which was organized to “show
[the women] how to work.” These efforts were supported by large numbers of new
converts from the United States, Canada, and Great Britain where Mormon missionaries
were spreading the gospel.

Nauvoo rapidly became one of the largest and most flourishing cities in the state of
Illinois. Estimates of the population of Nauvoo during Mormon occupation vary widely,
ranging from seven thousand to twenty thousand. Most demographic studies put the
population of Nauvoo by 1845 at about fifteen thousand, making the city the second
largest in the state after Chicago. Throughout the first half of the 1840s Nauvoo, with its
wealth, population, cultural achievements, and military and political power, dominated
Hancock County. One visitor reported that from the six homes existing in 1839, Mormon

\[\text{\footnotesize 15Record of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo, 17 March 1842 (The Church of Jesus
Christ of Latter-day Saint Archives, Salt Lake City), pp.7-8. Also Janath Cannon, \textit{Nauvoo
Panorama} (USA: Nauvoo Restoration, 1991), 26-29. I treat the Relief Society, its genesis
and role in Nauvoo in Chapter 6.}\]

\[\text{\footnotesize 16By 1846 more than four thousand British converts to Mormonism had come to Nauvoo.
B.H. Roberts, 2:185. See also M. Hamlin Cannon, “Migration of English Mormons to
America,” \textit{American Historical Review} 57 (April 1947): 436-55. For information on the
population of Nauvoo see Susan Easton Black, “How Large was the Population of
Nauvoo?” \textit{BYU Studies} (Spring 1995): 91-95 and Dean May, “A Demographic Portrait of
the Mormons, 1830-1980,” in \textit{The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past},
ed. D. Michael Quinn (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 121-135.}\]
Nauvoo grew to comprise over two thousand houses, many of them solid brick constructions. Nauvoo came to include manufacturing industries, a city militia, an educational system comprised of a common school and a few university courses, and various cultural organizations. Among the most impressive of the Mormon projects in Nauvoo was the construction of a limestone temple which became the center of Nauvoo and a symbol of the Saints’ faith and determination. Begun in 1841, the temple was completed in 1846 at a total estimated cost of approximately one million dollars. Monetary donations for the temple were solicited from all of the Saints. They were expected to contribute one-tenth of their possessions and one-tenth of their time as a tithing for the construction of the temple. However, in spite of the Saints’ efforts and enthusiasm, the prosperity of Nauvoo also rested largely on borrowed money; the Mormons’ debts grew almost as fast as their city.

The Mormons settled in Nauvoo with great hopes of peace and prosperity, which they realized to a certain extent. But they carried with them the seeds of conflict that had sprouted in Ohio and Missouri and had led to their forced expulsion from both states. Whether the Saints were law-abiding citizens denied of their constitutional rights or a lawless group of religious zealots as the Missourians claimed, they were certainly a distinctive people, defined by a religion that affected every aspect of life. Their difference and coherence as a people made it difficult to live among others not of their community. As early as 1842, as Nauvoo continued to grow and prosper at an astonishing rate, Joseph

17 Launius and Hallwas, 2.

Figure 2 One of the few known photographs of the Nauvoo temple after its completion. Center for Icarian Studies, Western Illinois University.
Smith spoke of the Saints' imminent removal from Nauvoo to the West:

I had a conversation with a number of the brethren . . . on the subject of our persecutions in Missouri, and the constant annoyance which has followed us since we were driven from that state. I prophesied that the Saints would continue to suffer much affliction and would be driven to the Rocky Mountains, many would apostatize, others would be put to death by our persecutors, or lose their lives in consequence of exposure or disease; and some of you will live to go and assist in making settlements and build cities and see the saints become a mighty people in the midst of the Rocky Mountains.19

As Smith had predicted, the “beautiful place of rest” soon degenerated into a site of the same unrest and persecution that the Mormons had experienced in Ohio and Missouri. While converts continued to arrive and the city continued to expand, hostilities and persecutions intensified as surrounding citizens became alarmed at Nauvoo’s rapid growth and increasing social and political influence. Locals found the Mormons’ concentration of religious, political and economic power (especially in the person of Joseph Smith) threatening and antithetical to the American values of democracy and equality. In many Illinoisans’ eyes, Nauvoo became an almost “kingdom on the Mississippi,” led by a prophet-monarch. Particularly irksome to enemies of Mormonism was Nauvoo’s judicial power which they used to rescue their prophet-leader from arrest with writs of habeas corpus. The unique religious beliefs of the Mormons also added to the growing hostilities; Mormons believed themselves chosen for a high destiny, and leaders enthusiastically stated that Nauvoo would become the largest city in the world and that the Mormon gospel would fill the earth. Tensions escalated until Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum were arrested and then killed by an angry mob in nearby Carthage on 27 June 1844.20

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20 Church History in the Fulness of Times, 3.
After Smith’s death, the threat of expulsion increased, but the Mormons continued to build their city and temple with unfailing vigor, in spite of the growing certainty that they would be forced to abandon their beloved city in the not-too-distant future. The Nauvoo city charter was revoked in January 1845, leaving the Mormons without a legal government or the protection of their own militia.21 In the face of continuing threats, the Mormons finally decided to abandon Nauvoo. In February 1846, the Saints turned their backs on Nauvoo and began their long exodus west. While most Mormons fled Nauvoo and the growing persecution, some stayed behind. Many were too sick to travel or too poor to purchase the necessary supplies for the voyage west. Some stayed in the vain hope of getting more than a pittance for their lands and homes. Among those who stayed in Nauvoo were church trustees Almon W. Babbitt, Joseph L. Heywood, and John S. Fulmer who were commissioned to dispose of unsold properties, including the temple. The trustees did their best to obtain fair prices for abandoned Mormon properties, but they were far from successful. Those who sold early received fair prices; however, with the forced departure of almost the entire population, others were driven to sell their lands and homes at half or quarter their value, and often the best they could do was trade for wagons and cattle. Many buildings and lands sold nothing more than the payment of back taxes.22

The low prices that proved a scourge for the retreating Mormons meant salvation to another beleaguered band of pioneers seeking paradise at a bargain. The removal of the

21Church History in the Fulness of Times, 299.

22Heber Kimball, one of the first to leave Nauvoo, received a reasonable six hundred dollars for his brick home. Later the three story brick Masonic Hall sold for a mere four dollars and forty-seven cents. B. H. Roberts, 2:537; Janath Cannon, 46.
Figure 3 The Brigham Young House, an example of the homes the Mormons left when driven from Nauvoo. Center for Icarian Studies, Western Illinois University.
Mormons left Nauvoo open to the Icarians who themselves had also failed in their previous efforts to establish their own utopia in Texas. Led by Étienne Cabet, the Icarians were mostly French artisans seeking to escape the social upheavals, economic inequalities and poverty that they experienced in France. Cabet was born 1 January 1788 in Dijon, France. The son of a cooper, Cabet was educated for the bar; he practiced law and soon became involved in politics. His socialist leanings and focus on such themes as universal suffrage, improved working conditions and other so-called social reforms garnered popular support, but also incurred royal displeasure. As a result of his incendiary writings Cabet was exiled to England for five years. While there he encountered Thomas More’s *Utopia*, which led him to embark on an intensive study of communism in history and philosophy. After extensive readings, Cabet finally wrote his own utopian novel, *Voyage en Icarie*, a book much like More’s in its detailed description of life in Icaria, an imaginary communist paradise. Cabet returned to France in 1839 where his book “seized all France by its communal ears” and pushed Cabet into the position of “prophet” of communalism.

Christopher Johnson notes that *Voyage*’s ideal republic was “more than was needed to capture the imagination of the poor workers who suffered, who were uneasy about their future and that of their children, and who saw no possibility of bettering their lot.”

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many French laborers in the contrast it provided to the reality of injustice and disadvantages that they faced in France. Cabet’s following continued to grow until Cabet finally exclaimed in 1847, “Let’s go to Icaria!”

The Icarians first attempted to locate a colony along the Red River in Texas in 1848, but it failed. The Icarian vanguard, sent ahead to settle land purchased in Texas, met with fraud, defeat and death. After a valiant but unsuccessful effort to get a foothold in Texas, the vanguard returned to New Orleans where they met up with a second Icarian group and settled down to await the arrival of Cabet. By the beginning of 1849, when Cabet joined his people in New Orleans, the Icarian population consisted of 480 members crowded into two rented houses. Upon Cabet’s arrival, approximately two hundred Icarians voiced their determination to return to France and took with them three thousand dollars, leaving those determined to carry on with a mere twelve thousand dollars with which to buy or build utopia. Cramped circumstances, rapidly diminishing funds, and an enthusiasm to realize Cabet’s utopian vision prompted the faithful Icarians to leave Louisiana and seek another location for Icaria.

On 31 December 1848, the day of Cabet’s arrival in New York City, four scouts

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27The Peters Company sold the Icarians non-contiguous plots in Texas with ownership contingent upon construction of permanent structures. In Texas the advance guard was attacked by malaria and cholera, resulting in the deaths of four men. Many chose to desert rather than continue with what seemed a hopeless task. For more information on the Texas phase of Icarianism see Sutton, *Les Icariens* and Prudhommeaux, *Icarie et son Fondateur, Étienne Cabet*.

left New Orleans in search of a site for the future Icaria. In late January, after stopping briefly at other spots along the Mississippi River, the men reached Nauvoo. By then the Mormon city was nothing but a shadow of its former glory, but it presented several advantages. The Mormons had left behind brick homes, workshops, stores, and fertile farmlands. The river promised commercial activities and easy transport for the Icarians from New Orleans. And perhaps most enticing of all, in their desperation to make even a paltry profit, the Mormon trustees were selling everything cheap. Additionally, the city in at least one sense, seemed a real-life embodiment of Cabet’s ideal city as outlined in *Voyage en Icarie*. In the novel Cabet’s narrator rhapsodizes about the perfect layout of the city as he examines a map and exclaims, “See the roads, all straight and wide! There are fifty which cross the city parallel to the river and fifty which cross perpendicular. The others are more or less long. Those you see in black which join the square are planted with trees like the boulevards in Paris.” This description, written years before Cabet had ever heard of Nauvoo, seems an almost exact description of the city laid out by Joseph Smith. In acquiring Nauvoo, Cabet was already one step closer to realizing his vision of a well-organized, beautiful and peaceful utopia.

After the scouts returned with a favorable report, the Icarians remaining in New Orleans voted to relocate to Nauvoo. Encouraged and revitalized by the happy prospect of Nauvoo, in February 1849, 142 men, 74 women, and 64 children boarded a steamship and embarked on a journey to utopia. The journey was not without tragedy—five people died

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Figure 4 Planned layout of Nauvoo, revealing grid pattern favored by both Smith and Cabet. *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, A Place of Promise.*
from cholera during the voyage and ice on the river forced the Icarians to walk the final thirty miles to Nauvoo, dragging the sick and their belongings behind them through the snow. In spite of these obstacles, the Icarians arrived in Nauvoo on 15 March 1849 full of enthusiasm and bright plans for the future. Cabet reported that their potential neighbors in Nauvoo “showed them a lot of sympathy” and seemed eager for the Icarians to infuse new life into the city.31

Upon their arrival in Nauvoo, Cabet and the Icarians, like Smith and the Mormons, showed an inordinate interest in Temple Square. The Mormon temple had by then been destroyed by an arsonist’s fire, leaving only the blackened limestone walls. But Cabet enthusiastically praised it as “one of the most beautiful monuments in America” and nurtured visions of reconstructing the magnificent building that would serve the Icarians as assembly hall, school, and academy and as a fitting monument to the glory of the Icarian system.32 Rather than purchasing fertile farmland, Cabet spent the limited Icarian funds on the temple square and on two contiguous blocks. He then purchased cows, food, supplies, and tools. This left no money for the purchase of land, so the Icarians were forced to contract for two thousand acres of farmland.33


32 Garmo, 490.

33 The temple had been all but destroyed by fire on 9 October 1848. Cabet comments on the temple in a letter to Krolikowski dated 25 March 1849: “Nous allons acheter le temple des Mormons. . . . L’effet de cette acquisition sera grand en Amérique et en France, nous l’espérons.” Prudhommeaux, 247. See also P. Bourg’s letter in Le Populaire 7 October 1849; Sutton, Les Icariens, 65.
Figure 5 The temple ruins as they appeared to the Icarians in 1849. Cannon, *Nauvoo Panorama*. 
Tragedy struck in May 1850 when a tornado destroyed the temple walls that the Icarians had been laboring to reconstruct. However, the Icarians and Cabet pushed on with determination, if not optimism, and attained a certain amount of success, although never on the same scale as the Mormons. Even though new Icarian recruits continued to arrive from France and other countries, the Icarian population of Nauvoo never exceeded five hundred, as disaffected members continually deserted the community. Nor were the Icarians ever able to surmount completely their financial problems. Plagued by continual debt and internal strife over the exigencies of the Icarian system of communism, especially the absolute equality Cabet demanded and the separation of parents and children, the group eventually lost any semblance of unity.

Just as the Mormons had early anticipated their departure from Nauvoo, Cabet, after only two years’ residence in Nauvoo, abruptly changed his mind and decided to locate a permanent Icaria in Iowa. While Nauvoo offered many advantages, including opportunities in industry and trade, Cabet felt that the city’s location allowed an unwanted influx of outsiders who corrupted the Icarians’ community with American individualism and led the Icarians away from the purity of his system of communism. Cabet also believed that the town exposed his followers to the prejudices of the “older social organization against the community.” Cabet was concerned about the attitudes of his non-Icarain neighbors for two primary reasons. After the first flush of excitement at the Icarians arrival, Cabet and others became aware of latent hostilities of the neighboring Illinoisans toward any insular community remotely resembling the troublesome Mormons. Secondly, Cabet was careful about the influence outsiders who practiced capitalism and individualism exercised over his fragile followers. While the Icarians’ language acted as a protective
barrier and insulated them from the dangerous individualism of outsiders, the surrounding communities and especially the heavy traffic on the Mississippi River compromised this isolation and exposed Icarians to the outside world. Cabet thus announced that Nauvoo would serve only as a "champ de manoeuvre," or staging ground, preparatory to the permanent Icaria which would be established elsewhere.  

In the fall of 1851 Cabet dispatched Icarian Jules Reynaud to southwest Iowa to investigate new federal lands that had just opened for sale. Reynaud returned with a favorable report. An advance guard of ten men soon moved to Iowa and began preparing for the impending arrival of the main body of Icarians by constructing buildings and breaking the soil to plant crops. Cabet planned for a gradual removal from Illinois to Iowa to allow for the secure establishment of the planned Iowa community and to provide sufficient time for the payment of debt still owed for their Nauvoo property. In spite of the slow transition, the Icarians constantly kept Iowa in view; Cabet offered glowing reports of the community in Iowa and its progress in each installment of the Icarian newspaper.  

However, the Icarians never found the prosperity that Cabet had promised. While the Mormons struggled but survived in Utah, eventually establishing a near empire of communities in the West, the Icarians were doomed to die a slow death. In 1855 factional strife developed in Nauvoo and spread to Iowa as Cabet imposed a number of new  

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restrictions on his followers. These changes, known as the Forty-Eight Articles defied previous Icarian regulations and revealed their leader’s growing despotism.\textsuperscript{36} Conflict escalated into 1856 when the Iowan Icarians sided against Cabet, who decided to abandon the Nauvoo community. In October 1856 Cabet and almost two hundred followers moved to St. Louis, Missouri, where Cabet died within days of their arrival. Heartbroken but determined, the Icarians loyal to Cabet formed a new community at Cheltenham near St. Louis which lasted until 1864.

The schism in Icarian Nauvoo in 1856 seriously crippled the movement, and while the Nauvoo period was far from prosperous for the Icarians, they never attained even that modest level of success and prosperity at any point throughout the rest of their history; the post-Nauvoo period was one of gradual decline and decay. During 1855-1860, the Icarians remaining at Nauvoo slowly moved their community to land near Coralville, Iowa. In 1877 a conflict developed between the “radical younger generation” and the “older conservatives” over the direction and progress of the community. The younger generation, the so-called “Progressives” wanted to change admission requirements, to allow women to vote and to focus more on social problems and their solutions rather than just the survival of the community, while the older members wanted things to continue as they were. These two groups split in 1878, the radical group remaining in the old community and the conservatives moving. Some attempted a community in California in 1881 called Icaria Speranza which lasted until 1886. But in spite of continuing efforts to realize their

\textsuperscript{36} Among other things the Forty-Eight Articles forbid alcohol and tobacco, demanded silence in the workshops, required that every initiate renounce all individual property, and eat whatever they were served. For a complete list of the articles see Prudhommeaux, 348-61.
communal dreams, the last Icarian members at Corning officially dissolved the community in 1898, fifty years after its inception.
CHAPTER TWO

PEOPLE OF THE BOOK

Just as the city of Nauvoo during both Mormon and Icarian years formed around the temple, the two movements and their adherents coalesced around a focal point that proved the sustaining force for both communities. For the leaders of both communities, books were central to their conversion and mission; these books, the Bible and More’s *Utopia*, led the two leaders to produce books of their own—books which firmly grounded and outlined their respective movements. These two books, the *Book of Mormon* and *Voyage en Icarie*, not only lent their names to the movements, but their publication and promulgation remained central to the communities. The texts were central to the two leaders’ prominence and authority, and they also served as the ideological foundation which both empowered the community as such and ensured the communities’ survival even after the untimely deaths of both Smith and Cabet. While the two books played a similar role in the creation and continuation of the communities, as texts they are very different. The *Book of Mormon*, while a history of ancient America, is primarily a religious

37 The sobriquet Mormon was attached to the formally-named Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints because of the prominence of the *Book of Mormon* in its theology and conversion efforts. The Icarians were known as such because of the fictional utopian land of Icaria painted in the pages of Cabet’s communistic treatise; scholars are unable to trace the genesis of the name Icaria with any certainty—some posit a derivation from the mythic story of Icarus and Dadylus; others claim a relation to a French expression, *ça ira*, prominent in revolutionary circles. See Sylvester A. Piotrowski, *Étienne Cabet and the Voyage en Icarie* (Washington D. C.: Catholic University of America, 1935), 76.
text; Cabet’s *Voyage en Icarie* is a detailed social treatise and blueprint for building utopia.

Smith claimed to be the inspired translator, not the author, of the *Book of Mormon*. His account of the genesis of the book is an unusual one that directly challenges the Protestant belief of a closed canon and the New Testament as the final chapter of God’s revelation to his people. Joseph Smith said that a heavenly messenger, Moroni, the last prophet of the *Book of Mormon*, appeared to him and told him about an ancient record:

> While I was thus in the act of calling upon God, I discovered a light appearing in my room, which continued to increase until the room was lighter than at noonday, when immediately a personage appeared at my bedside, standing in the air. . . . He called me by name, and said unto me that he was a messenger sent from the presence of God to me and that his name was Moroni; that God had a work for me to do. . . . He said there was a book deposited, written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent and the source from whence they sprang. He also said that the fulness of the everlasting Gospel was contained in it, as delivered by the Savior to the ancient inhabitants.38

Smith, as prophet, was called to translate the record known as the *Book of Mormon* through divine revelation. He completed the book and secured a copyright in June 1829, and in August Egbert B. Grandin of Palmyra, New York agreed to print five thousand copies of the book for three thousand dollars.39

The *Book of Mormon* details the experiences, religious and otherwise, of ancient inhabitants of the American continent. The primary civilization stemmed from a small

38Joseph Smith Jr., *History of Joseph Smith, the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 52.

39*Church History in the Fulness of Times*, 63.
group who left Jerusalem around 600 B.C., came to the Americas, and afterwards separated into two nations, one of which became the principle ancestors of the American Indians. The book outlines the groups’ religious experiences—revelations, visions, teachings—and other experiences such as wars and political conflicts. The narrative culminates in the account of the visit of the resurrected Jesus Christ who teaches the people and establishes a church among them. The book concludes around 400 A.D. with the account of the wars between the two groups, which results in the destruction of the Nephite nation, except for the prophet Moroni who lives to complete the plates and bury them, and who later appears as an angel to Joseph Smith.

The Book of Mormon and its unusual genesis established Smith’s reputation as prophet and proved a central force around which Mormonism coalesced. This book was and continues to be central to the Mormon movement; Joseph Smith stated that it was the “keystone of our religion,” and Lawrence Foster claims that the book, published in 1830, provides the framework for much of subsequent Mormon developments. The Book of Mormon is the keystone of Mormonism, because, as Jan Shipps explains, a belief in the Book of Mormon entailed much more than the acceptance of the historicity of the document: “Such belief led directly to an acceptance of Joseph Smith’s prophetic role, membership in the Church of Jesus Christ whose organization was foretold in the Book of Mormon, and union with like believers in the community of Latter-day Saints.” Smith’s claim to revelation and status as prophet and founder of a new religious order rested

40Introduction to the Book of Mormon, (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981); Lawrence Foster, Religion and Sexuality: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois, 1984), 130.
squarely on the book he produced. An acceptance of the miraculous appearance of the Book of Mormon is thus as important to the Mormon movement as its contents. To believers the book remains a book, but by manifesting the sacred, both in its contents and in its miraculous genesis and history, it becomes something other than a book.\textsuperscript{41} For Mormons the book is the word and will of God, an inspired history of his people, and a pattern to follow.

The Book of Mormon continually emphasizes the setting in the Americas as a key element to the narrative that threads through one thousand years. Passages throughout the book refer to the New World as a “land of promise” and “a land which is choice above all other lands.”\textsuperscript{42} This emphasis resonated with many of its American readers at a time when the people of the United States were invested in creating a history and heritage and in validating an emerging sense of American nationalism. A history of America stretching back for well over a thousand years to Judeo-Christian roots in Jerusalem created a link with ancient history and cultures that bypassed any English or European connections, thereby allowing American readers of the Book of Mormon to assert an identity independent of England and Europe. The Book of Mormon also served to legitimize European descendants such as Smith and his followers to move to the American frontier and possess Native American lands.

The history infused into Mormonism through the Book of Mormon implied not only a rejection of the traditional history of Christianity, but also their immersion in a new


\textsuperscript{42} 1 Nephi 2:20.
and complex understanding of time—past, present and future. While a record of the past, the *Book of Mormon* operated at the same time in the past, the present and the future. As a history of ancient American inhabitants it connected believers to the ancient past; at the same time it contained prophecies dealing with the Latter-day Saints, their day, and with events yet in their future. Shipps points out that the *Book of Mormon* thus disrupted the linear fabric of history and time and allowed for an “experiential ‘living through’ of sacred events in a new age.”\(^{43}\) In accepting the *Book of Mormon*, the Saints firmly anchored themselves in time and founded their identity in relation to people and events in the past, present, and future.

However, the *Book of Mormon* was not uniformly hailed as a legitimate and legitimizing history. The miraculous happenings contained in the pages of the *Book of Mormon* and the miraculous manner of its production as outlined by Joseph Smith divided its readers into those skeptical of visions, angels, and a “golden bible” and those who accepted its message and became converted to its doctrines and the church it represented. The popular view of the Mormons then and now centers around the *Book of Mormon* as both Mormons and others see the book as the defining element of Mormonism. Those who rejected Joseph Smith’s account claimed that the *Book of Mormon* was “an amateurish historical novel masquerading as scripture.” Other critics claimed that the book was patterned after a romance by Solomon Spaulding entitled either *Manuscript Found* or *Manuscript Story*.\(^{44}\)

\(^{43}\)Shipps, 51-3.

\(^{44}\)Foster, 61; *Church History in the Fulness of Times*, 59.
In spite of widespread skepticism and criticism, the *Book of Mormon* was the “best missionary tool” in the early days of the Mormon church. Foster asserts that most early converts came into the church and eventually to Nauvoo as a result of reading the book themselves or through the testimony of those who declared their personal knowledge of its truth and authenticity.\(^{45}\) Traveling missionaries carried and distributed copies of the *Book of Mormon* which yielded remarkable results: at the end of 1830, the year of its official organization, the Mormon church counted between two hundred and five hundred members; by 1845 the Mormon population in Nauvoo alone numbered between twelve and fifteen thousand, with many others in the eastern United States, Canada and Britain slowly making their way to Illinois.\(^{46}\)

Early Mormon missionaries focused on the miraculous genesis and nature of the *Book of Mormon*, emphasizing Smith’s personal vision and the invitation for individual conversion found in the *Book of Mormon*. Because of the religious nature of the book and its production, an acceptance of its truth rested not on intellectual verification, but on individual spiritual confirmation. From the hundreds of conversion accounts, one is sufficient to illustrate the centrality of personal spiritual confirmation which leads to absorption into the body of the Saints. Parley P. Pratt, who became a leader in the early Mormon church, describes his first encounter with the *Book of Mormon* as follows:

I opened it with eagerness, and read its title page. I then read the testimony of the several witnesses in relation to the manner of its being found and translated. After this I commenced its contents by course. I read all day; eating was a burden, I had no desire for food; sleep was a burden when the night came, for I preferred reading

\(^{45}\)Foster, 40.

\(^{46}\)May, 122-23.
to sleep. As I read, the spirit of the Lord was upon me, and I knew and comprehended that the book was true.⁴⁷

Pratt’s conversion, like that of many Saints, hinged upon the “spirit of the Lord” and was expressed in terms of the spiritual. It was through this spirit rather than study, reflection and comparison that Pratt accepted the Book of Mormon. After his powerful personal conversion to the truth of the Book of Mormon Pratt abandoned almost everything and moved west to join Smith and the Saints. Pratt’s experience was typical of many others’; from across New England and Canada, and from as far away as Great Britain, converts to the Book of Mormon and Mormonism followed a spiritual impetus that prompted them to leave their homes and journey to the edge of the American wilderness to join the prophet Joseph Smith and their fellow Saints in realizing the utopian vision of Christian unity presented in the Book of Mormon in which people had all things common and lived in complete harmony.

The Book of Mormon, however, was not exactly the blueprint for the ideal community that Voyage en Icarie was for the Icarians. Only one short passage in the Book of Mormon refers directly to the community and unity that the Mormons were striving to realize: the Book of Mormon explains that following the visit of Christ to the Americas the ancient inhabitants live in peace for a period of two hundred years during which they have “all things common among them; therefore there were not rich and poor, bond and free, but they were all made free.”⁴⁸ While devoid of any detailed instructions on the nature and

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⁴⁸Book of Mormon, 4 Nephi 1:3.
mechanisms of an ideal community, the book still played an important role in the lives of
Mormons seeking to found Zion. The narrative of the Book of Mormon explored the
doctrinal and religious concepts which would form the foundation of the Mormon
community—faith, love, sacrifice, etc.—and led to the emergence of other texts more
accurately described as blueprints of paradise. An acceptance of the Book of Mormon
cemented the identity and authority of Joseph Smith as prophet and led the Latter-day
Saint convert to an acceptance of the Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price,
other books of Mormon scripture produced by Smith, which explained in much greater
detail the vision of unity and the mechanisms that would help the Saints realize their dream
of Zion. The Doctrine and Covenants outlined the law of consecration and the
expectations of the Lord’s chosen people, while the Pearl of Great Price documents
experiences of the ancient Old Testament patriarchs. Most notable among these was
Enoch who established with his people a Zion community, “A City of Holiness” whose
people held all things in common and that “in process of time was taken up into heaven.”

The Book of Mormon was the primary means to effect conversions, a record of an
unknown past which emphasized religious doctrines, but subsequent texts were needed to
provide a detailed pattern of the necessary elements of Zion.

If the Book of Mormon provides an instructive spiritual narrative of the forgotten
history of the Americas, Cabet’s Voyage en Icarie is a detailed blueprint for the future
founding of Icaria. The production of Cabet’s most important book was fundamentally
different from Smith’s experiences with the Book of Mormon, therefore creating a very

\[49\] Moses 7:19, 21 in The Pearl of Great Price (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ
different text and resulting in very different experiences among its readers. Cabet’s book stemmed not from visions of angels, but from poverty and inequality and the vision of a utopian community characterized by equality, peace, and prosperity. As a political exile in England, Cabet was perturbed and intrigued by the inequalities, conflicts and calamities in his day, including inescapable reminders of the on-going revolution in his country. Cabet asserted that history revealed nothing but “troubles and disorder, vice and crime, wars and revolutions, tortures and massacres, catastrophes and calamities.”

Cabet excoriated the same social problems that had been addressed by French reformers Charles Fourier and Count Henri de Saint-Simon including the degradation of wage labor, the evils of commercialism and competition, and the corruption of the Church. Cabet’s answers to these problems, while similar to those of Fourier and Saint-Simon, differed in fundamental ways.

Cabet’s conversion to communitarianism hinged on his discovery of one text, Thomas More’s *Utopia*, and an ensuing period of intense study. Cabet’s encounter with More led to a vision of his own mission and started him on the path to power as “prophet” of French communism. Cabet writes of his reaction to More and his conversion to communism in terms reminiscent of Smith’s vision a decade earlier:

> It was *Utopia* by Thomas More, that I wished to read in English, that determined my study of the communitarian system. This system struck me so, from the first lines, that I closed the book to immerse myself in my own meditations which led

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50 Cabet, *Voyage en Icarie*, i.

me to the most complete conviction. I formed and began drafting my plan. It was then that I read all the works, beginning at the origin and following them down through time.52

Cabet then read over one thousand works from more than one hundred fifty authors, philosophers and moralists from every country and from every era, including, significantly, the Bible. Cabet went almost every day to the Reading Room of the British Museum and sometimes spent up to eighteen hours a day in study and contemplation.53 After studying the foremost communist thinkers and works, Cabet did not join an existent movement, but rather created his own and produced his own chef-d’oeuvre, *Voyage en Icarie*, which became the bible of Icarianism and established Cabet “as prophet and his book as Koran.”54 Shortly after completing *Voyage*, Cabet was able to return to France in 1839 where he published his socialist novel and began actively and successfully recruiting followers. Cabet’s book attracted very little attention among the upper classes, but it became wildly popular among the laboring classes of France. With fourteen thousand copies circulating in France, *Voyage en Icarie* quickly became one of the most popular and influential books in nineteenth-century France and appeared as number twenty-two on the list of French bestsellers from 1846 to 1850.55

Cabet’s *Voyage en Icarie* is a six-hundred-page blueprint of the ideal communist

52Cabet, *Toute la vérité au peuple* (Nauvoo: Imprimerie Icarienne, 1856), 93.

53Sutton, *Les Icariens*, 17. For a list of Cabet’s readings and his reactions see *Voyage en Icarie*, 470-527. Also Prudhommeaux, 126-144.

54Prudhommeaux 140, 194.

community which attracted large numbers of readers; it served not only to promulgate Cabet’s unique communist theories, but it also cemented his reputation as founder and leader of Icarianism and was the force around which scattered malcontents coalesced. With a transparent veneer of fiction, in *Voyage* Cabet outlines in great detail the perfections of Icaria, a fictional land in the New World visited by the imagined English Lord Carisdall. The enthusiastic Carisdall introduces the reader to Icaria’s history, politics, education, economy, religion, and family life, all of which glorify the equality and community of goods which are the hallmarks of Icarian society. The narrative overlay imposed by Cabet on his vision of paradise is spotty and secondary to Cabet’s agenda to explore in detail the real possibilities of a utopian society. It is however, important. Cabet chose to expose Icarian principles in a novel because he was “profoundly convinced that it is the simplest, most natural and most intelligent way to understand a difficult and complicated system.” He wanted to write “not only for scholars, but for all the world.”56

In locating his ideal community in an imaginary land and an imaginary future, Cabet made his philosophical and political system more accessible to his readers, especially to uneducated laborers and women. However, in fictionalizing the account, Cabet lost the real connection to history and the location in time that the Mormons found in what they claimed was the history of actual ancient civilizations and divine prophecy of their destiny. While the Mormons’ book declared what had been and would be, Cabet’s book only outlined what could be.

However, unlike the *Book of Mormon*, Cabet’s *Voyage en Icarie* was explicit in

56 *Voyage*, 550.
outlining the nature and character of the ideal community and how to realize it. The volume is divided into three parts. The first comprises over three hundred pages and contains a detailed description of the imagined country of Icaria and its social structures. The Icarians abjure private property and money. All Icarian citizens labor in workshops to contribute to the amazing productivity of the imagined nation. The country is run by a government consisting of a two thousand-member legislative assembly elected every three years by Icarian men. Leisure time is filled with uplifting activities shared by family members who live in love and harmony. In addition to descriptions of the social and political structure of Icaria, Cabet includes dizzying details on labor, transportation, governmental organization, domestic arrangements, and entertainment. The second section, consisting of over two hundred pages, tells of the transformation of Icaria from debauched monarchy to enlightened communistic republic under "le bon dictateur Icar." It also paints in vivid color the injustices of other nations in contrast to the peaceful and prosperous Icaria. The second section also contains a careful and exhaustive study of philosophers and historical movements related to communal life in which Cabet outlines their strengths and weaknesses in comparison to the Icarian system which is cast as clearly superior. The concluding part is a succinct summary of Cabet's principles of communism.

Like *The Book of Mormon*, Cabet's *Voyage en Icarie* encountered mixed reactions. While some dismissed it as a mere "pretty dream," others considered it as "one of the most clever and captivating volumes of social philosophy ever written." To

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Voyage en Icarie Cabet added a large body of pamphlets and other texts which he continued to produce until the end of his life which outlined in greater detail the characteristics of Icaria and the means to achieve the vision.\textsuperscript{58} However, as with the Book of Mormon, the success of Voyage en Icarie and Icarianism in general cannot be measured by numbers alone; a more striking testimony to its influence is the mass of Icarian converts who, like many Mormon converts, left their homes and native France, crossed an ocean, and gave their all to realize Cabet’s vision of paradise that he had outlined so convincingly in print.

Cabets book had a less spectacular genesis than the Book of Mormon, but it too effected dramatic conversions among nineteenth-century groups.\textsuperscript{59} Readers’ experiences with Voyage en Icarie and their “conversion” to its precepts were usually expressed in very personal terms, but unlike the Mormon responses were couched in rational rather than religious terms. In the republic of Icaria, reason rather than religion is enthroned as the ultimate virtue, and intellectual verification of the Icarian system rather than spiritual confirmation provides the basis for Icarian conversions. Emile Vallet, a Le Mans shoemaker, told Cabet after reading Voyage en Icarie, that his whole family was “enthusiastic” about the idea of “establishing a society where reason and conscience would rule. . . . A paradise on earth.”\textsuperscript{60} Among the most common attractions and responses to Cabet’s system was the supreme reign of reason that declared all men equal regardless of

\textsuperscript{58}For a complete list of Cabet’s publications see Sutton, Les Icariens, 183-187.

\textsuperscript{59}Letters written by Icarian adherents to Cabet printed in Le Populaire often express their acceptance of Icarianism in terms of “conversion.”

\textsuperscript{60}Ibid; Sutton, Les Icariens, 40.
rank or riches. Even the most common laborer could study Cabet’s system, exercise his innate intellect, and recognize the virtue of Icarianism. Some responses, however, mixed both reason and religion. One communist wrote that he had “studied all the systems, the Saint-Simonians, the Fouriests, [and] had found good in all, but a mixture of bad also, and none seemed to satisfy me.” He had since “read it for the fourth time” and had come to view it as his bréviaire.”^61 This Icarien presents an interesting blending of the rational and religious; the comparison of Icarianism with other social systems is common among Icarian adherents, but rarely occurs in tandem with the evocation of religion and religious symbols such as a breviary.

While the responses of Icariens to Icarianism emphasized the rational, the responses of Icariennes to Voyage and to the Icarian movement in general were often emotive and contained more overt religious references. Male readers often emphasized a close study of the book and the appeal of a society ruled by reason, but their female counterparts wrote of being “transported with joy” and feeling overwhelming gratitude for the man who would regenerate them and give them the title “daughters of God.”^62 Women’s reactions to Voyage were more similar to Mormon responses to the Book of Mormon in their focus on feelings and the connection with religious ideas. Whatever the response, rational or religious, the results were much the same. Through Voyage people became acquainted with and joined the Icarian movement, and those who were able left their homes to become part of the Icarian community, following Papa Cabet to the edge of

^61 Le Populaire, 5 September 1847. A bréviaire is often defined figuratively as a bible; it is an ecclesiastical book with prayers, hymns and offices used by clergymen.

^62 Le Populaire, 30 May 1847 and 15 August 1847.
the American frontier to realize the paradise that had be so appealingly presented in the pages of *Voyage*.

As crucial elements of the movements and subsequent communities, *Voyage en Icarie* and the *Book of Mormon* were central to the formation and continuation of the groups' ideological and actual communities. The widespread proselytizing efforts launched by both groups rested on the authority of the texts and the personal conversion they brought about as people read them; the private nature of reading underscored the role of the individual within the two movements. At the same time, the groups' texts were central in creating a sense of what Benedict Anderson terms "imagined community." Both the Mormons and Icarians gathered their adherents from a large area, all of France in the case of the Icarians, and across the American and European continents for the Mormons. The *Book of Mormon* and *Voyage en Icarie* ensured that "in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."63 These two books served as a tangible object connecting unknown strangers until they could come together in both an ideological and physical community.64 In the case of the Mormons, the *Book of Mormon* led almost immediately to the formation of an officially recognized religious community, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The official organization of the church on 6 April 1830 in Fayette, New York


64 Exact numbers of adherents living outside the respective communities are unclear. Dean May estimates that there were near ten thousand British Mormons, with another thousand in Europe, and five thousand scattered over North America by the end of 1846. The number of Icarians outside of Nauvoo remains unmeasured. However, Cabet received a steady flow of communications from French Icarians desiring but unable to join the group in America. The Paris Bureau of *Le Populaire* also remained active during the Nauvoo period, constantly garnering new adherents.
followed close upon the heels of the release of the *Book of Mormon* on 26 March 1830.\(^6\)

The church continued to gain converts who were encouraged to join the main body of the Saints in America. The Icarians, however, existed for several years as an ideological community scattered over much of France. The publication of *Voyage en Icarie* in 1839 garnered many adherents, but there was no official announcement of actually organizing a community until 1847. Even after the community was founded and settled in Nauvoo, there was still a strong adherence of people in France unable to join their communist brothers in Illinois and who were linked to the movement only through their adherence to *Voyage* and through the continued publications of the Paris Icarian Bureau.

The ideological force of the two books becomes evident when one considers the history of Icarianism and Mormonism after Nauvoo. The last Icarian community officially dissolved in 1898, finally bringing to a close fifty years of Icarianism, one of the longest secular communal experiments in nineteenth century America. This conclusion developed over decades after the expulsion and death of Cabet, after two major schisms, and seven different Icarian communities. While environments, leaders, and membership changed drastically, one thing did not change over the course of Icaria’s fifty year history—each community’s adherence to principles of communal living laid out in Cabet’s book. This faith in the utopian vision captured by Papa Cabet’s pen remained a real force in the lives of hundreds of Icarian individuals and enabled the community to survive for fifty years.

The Mormons’ continuing trajectory presents an even more spectacular picture. From a small beginning near the Great Salt Lake, the Mormons spread out from Utah to

\(^6\) *Church History in the Fulness of Times*, 66.
form a great western empire under Smith's successor, Brigham Young. Over one hundred fifty years after the death of its founder and prophet, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints continues to grow at an astonishing rate. This church has become the fifth largest denomination in America and has a worldwide membership of over eleven million. While Brother Joseph's death prompted a real crisis in early Mormonism, the members' commitment to the *Book of Mormon* and its principles ensured the movement's survival. The *Book of Mormon* continues to be a vital force in modern Mormonism; it lends its name to the movement, plays a central role in modern conversions, and provides an important link between Mormons all over the world.

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CHAPTER THREE

TRUE CHRISTIANITY

Just as the Book of Mormon and Voyage en Icarie can be distinguished as religious and secular texts, the communities they led to can be divided along the same line. Historians commonly divide nineteenth-century communal experiments into two broad categories—religious and secular—and point to the greater success and longevity of religious communities. The two communities fit the pattern—while both groups left Nauvoo after a relatively short period of time, the Mormons went on to flourish in the West and spread to other parts of the world while the Icarians slowly dwindled and died. However, the distinction is an oversimplified one. Sacred and secular, success and struggle are not simple dichotomies; nor are Mormonism and Icarianism easily categorized. The role of religion, however, offers an important distinction between the Mormons and the Icarians. While neither community constructed a church in Nauvoo, the Mormons differ fundamentally from the Icarians in their religious beliefs which lay at the center of Mormons’ life and community. Eventually this faith proved a fundamental element of the Mormon community that ensured their survival after the death of their leader and their departure from Nauvoo. While the Icarian experiment lasted for fifty years and proved one of the longest secular communities, the basic lack of religious faith was one of the reasons they faded rather than flourished.

The unique nature of the two communities, as products of two visionary and
charismatic leaders, can be traced to the founders, their characteristics and early formative experiences. Joseph Smith’s narrative, his mission and life were shaped by a profound sense of spirituality and a deep religious conviction fostered by a very religious family and a general social climate infused with the spiritual. Smith was born in 1805 in Sharon, Vermont, the fourth surviving child of a New England farming family. Smith worked with his hands and had a minimal formal education, but from humble beginnings, he grew to power, influence, and renown. Smith was part of a large, close-knit family consisting of his father, Joseph Smith Sr., his mother, Lucy Mack Smith, and eight brothers and sisters. His family attended church services and prayed, and the young Smith pored over the Bible. As Alan Taylor asserts, for Smith and many of his contemporaries religion was often not lived within any one denomination but was a fluid discussion and influence that spilled over into their everyday life and experiences. The religious upheaval that was part of the Second Great Awakening caused the collapse of this close family community as individual members of Smith’s family joined different religious groups.

While unique in its effects and outcome, Smith’s narrative is representative of religious experience in the Second Great Awakening in its complex navigation of individual self-reliance and the pressures of community. While the individual sought a personal conversion and an intimate relation to God, full integration into the religious community usually followed closely on the heels of conversion. The fundamental conflict between the appeal of community and the autonomy of the individual undergirded the religious climate of the Second Great Awakening of which Smith was part, and it

continued to shape his life experiences and the community of Saints that he would find.

Alan Taylor describes the religious climate of New York at the time of Smith as “an open-ended, fluid, porous, multivalent, and hyper-competitive discourse involving multiple denominations and many autonomous clusters of seekers.” Taylor claims that Smith’s narrative was in many regards similar to experiences of other religious “free seekers” who sought and experienced sincere conversion but who were never incorporated into an organized religious body nor founded distinct communities.68 Smith’s narrative of his early life recalls his experience with religion and reveals an emerging conflict between a sense of community and a predilection for self-reliance.

There was in the place we lived an unusual excitement on the subject of religion. . . During this time of great excitement my mind was called up to serious reflection and great uneasiness; but though my feelings were deep and often poignant, still I kept myself aloof from all these parties, though I attended their several meetings as often as occasion would permit. In process of time my mind became somewhat partial to the Methodist sect, and I felt some desire to be united with them; but so great were the confusion and strife among the different denominations that it was impossible for a person young as I was, and so unacquainted with men and things, to come to any certain conclusion who was right and who was wrong.69

The appeal of community and identification with a religious group is clear in Smith’s narrative. But the genesis of Mormonism lies in an intensely personal experience. Smith’s personality and the nature of religious conversion pressed him to seek an individual conversion experience independent of organized religious groups:

While I was laboring under the extreme difficulties caused by the contests of these parties of religionists, I was one day reading the Epistle of James, first chapter and fifth verse, which reads: *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.* Never did any

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69 *History of Joseph Smith, the Prophet*, 48.
passage of scripture come with more power to the heart of man than this did at this time to mine. It seemed to enter with great force into every feeling of my heart. I reflected on it again and again.70

Smith’s experience with the Bible led him to seek God in prayer, which in turn led to the vision he outlines in his history. Beyond biblical and other religious influences common to those who were part of the Second Great Awakening, Smith’s mission stemmed from a personal communication with Deity, communications which, he claimed, were ongoing and an integral part of his prophetic call and mission. God and Jesus Christ, he said, appeared to him and told him that as none of the churches were true he would be called to restore the truth and establish the church of God. Joseph Smith’s powerful encounter with a single Biblical text led directly to his call as prophet and leader of what was to become an important American religious group. This single religious encounter cemented Joseph Smith’s identity as an individual and set him apart from the rest of the religious community. He later commented that while he was only “an obscure boy . . . of no consequence in the world,” his experience was such that “men of high standing would take notice of [him].”71 Smith’s “First Vision” was a seminal event that was central not only to subsequent events in his life, but to his followers and their acceptance of his prophetic role and divine appointment as prophet of the latter days.72

Through other visions and the production of the Book of Mormon, Smith’s

70History of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, 48.

71Ibid, 50.

religious reputation grew until he officially organized the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on 6 April 1830 in Fayette, New York. While Smith’s assertion of heavenly visions garnered much attention, both credulous and critical, Smith’s attraction and influence as a religious and political leader were also dependent on his powerful personality. Smith was the everyman to his people in Nauvoo and exerted extraordinary power over the religious, social and political lives of his followers. He was at the very center of Nauvoo and Mormonism; for his Mormon followers he was the prophet. As the spiritual leader and prophet of the Mormons, he announced important new doctrine, began and directed the building of a temple, and proclaimed the kingdom of God on earth and the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. And these were only his religious roles. In Nauvoo, Smith’s religious authority and influence extended into secular matters as well. Accepting Smith as a prophet called of God translated to accepting all of his other roles and following not only his prophetic decrees, but also his political and social decrees. In addition to his place as prophet Joseph Smith became mayor of Nauvoo, leader of the militia, and one of the city’s leading entrepreneurs, a range of activities and influence that was limited only by his death.

Unlike Smith, Cabet did not grow up in an environment which fostered spirituality and religious expression. Born in 1788 on the eve of the French Revolution, Cabet was the son of a French cooper. Cabet was part of a post-Revolutionary France that asserted the

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73 Launius and Hallwas, 5.
74 Cabet was the youngest of four sons. He had a long-lasting relationship with Denise Lesage, with whom he had a daughter, Céline, and whom he married in 1839. His wife and daughter remained in France when he went to America.
Figure 6 Joseph Smith Jr.
Center for Icarian Studies, Western Illinois University.

Figure 7 Étienne Cabet.
Center for Icarian Studies, Western Illinois University.
basic right of religious liberty as it concomitantly assaulted the monopoly of the Catholic Church, choosing instead to sanctify the nation as a divine object. In 1793, about when Cabet would have started attending school, the National Convention dechristianized the schools, replacing Catholicism with what they called “la morale républicaine.” For the French and Cabet, the traditional trinity was replaced with a new trinity of Liberté, Égalité, and Fraternité, a litany which Cabet adopted wholeheartedly and repeated in his writings and throughout the rest of his life. Cabet excelled in school, studied for the bar and eventually became a successful lawyer and politician.

If Smith’s formative experiences were visionary and religious, Cabet’s were political and social. Early in his life Cabet became disenchanted with traditional spiritual beliefs and religious organization. Cabet’s disenchantment with divinity stems from an experience in his early adolescence which he recounts in Voyage en Icarie:

“I was thirteen when a respectable curé . . . persuaded me that God always had his eye open, that he saw all, that one could do nothing without his support, that one obtained his aid by sincere evocation and prayer. . . . I seemed, always and everywhere, to see the eye of God, an immense eye, open and fixed on me. . . . I prayed to God with all the fervor of my soul, I begged him on my knees, I pleaded with joint hands to reveal the truth by some sign, by a wink of the eye, for example, promising him that I would devote the rest of my life to him. . . . I remember saying, ‘Oh my God, almighty God, God infinitely good, show yourself once to the earth, as you showed yourself to Moses! Show yourself, speak from heaven, command!’” . . .

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“And then?”
“My great eye did not make the least wink; and I stopped believing, without the least discomfort of conscience.”

Cabet’s experience is in stark contrast to Smith’s experience with divinity at approximately the same age. While Smith’s query was answered with a divine manifestation which led to the *Book of Mormon*, the formation of a church, and a life devoted to his religious convictions, Cabet saw nothing, not even a divine wink, and consequently abandoned his religious beliefs with seemingly little regret. Cabet thus gave up on God and religion and turned instead to man and community as the answers to every problem—social, political and moral. Smith found answers in God and religion; Cabet found solutions in intellectual and cultural reform.

In one of two chapters in *Voyage* devoted to religion, Cabet reviews how religion and the traditional belief system in Icaria changed after the Icarian Revolution. The Icarians formed a grand council of priests, professors, philosophers, moralists, scholars and writers who discussed questions concerning divinity and religion over a period of four years. “Is there a God, that is to say a first cause of which all that you see is the effect?” The Council voted yes to this, but when asked, “Can you know this is God?” they replied with a resounding “No!” “Can you know its form? Unanimously No!” “Did God make man in his image? We would like to believe that,” they answered, “but we know nothing at all about it.” The Council further decided that the Bible was a work of man and they did not believe what was written in it. They could “extract some precepts of morality from it,

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*Voyage*, 281-2. Eugene, a French character, tells this story, but it is part of Cabet’s autobiography’ Prudhommeaux, 3.
but the rest was erroneous, absurd, even indecent, immoral, useless and harmful.” 78

This passage leads to another text by Cabet, his *Credo communisme*, which Cabet published in 1841 and which expresses the basic tenets of Icarianism. Each indented declaration in the Credo begins with the words, “I believe.” In his Credo, Cabet admits a “first cause,” which was “Nature” and which had given man reason or intelligence. The Credo continues to outline Cabet’s beliefs about the original state of Nature and its natural affinity with communal life. However, the focus quickly shifts from the theological to the social as Cabet identifies inequality as the cause of all the “rivalries, antagonisms, disorders, conspiracies, insurrections, crimes, and calamities.” 79 Most of the following text is focused around the social problems arising from inequality and the solution promised through communism.

Cabet’s *Credo communisme* is important in its clear expression of Cabet’s social and religious tenets and in its relation to a similar Mormon document, known today as the Articles of Faith, but originally part of a letter Joseph Smith sent to John Wentworth, editor of the *Chicago Democrat*. These thirteen statements outlining Mormon beliefs were published in March 1842, only months after Cabet’s *Credo* and have since been placed in the Mormon canon. Like Cabet’s *Credo*, the articles begin with the words, “We believe,” followed by a succinct summary of the basic tenets of the Mormon faith. However, unlike Cabet’s document which quickly slides from the religious to the social and political, the Articles of Faith are purely religious in their focus. Like the *Credo*, the Articles begin by

78 *Voyage* 275-5.

expressing a belief in God (not the impersonal and incorporeal "Nature" of Cabet) and by speaking of Adam’s fall from Eden. The Articles continue by focusing on Christ (who is not mentioned in the Credo) and by exploring other overtly religious themes such as spiritual gifts, priesthood, and Christ’s millennial return.80

While Mormonism was clearly a more spiritually oriented system, this is not to say that Cabet’s organization was devoid of any religious overtones. The Mormon and Icarian communities were based largely on many of the same concepts and even relied on the same scriptural texts and tenets for their foundation. Both viewed men as children of God and brothers; both looked forward to a New Jerusalem or kingdom of God that would realize peace, equality, and brotherhood of man. Both groups cited the Biblical doctrine that “the earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein,” and both established communal systems based on this concept.81

For Icarians, however, religion remained secondary to the economic and social motivations that carried them to America and Nauvoo. Cabet’s communistic treatise, Voyage en Icarie, remained the most important text for the Icarians, overshadowing the Bible and another of Cabet’s works, True Christianity. While Cabet’s Voyage acknowledges the role of religion, it defines religion in utopia as “only a system of morality and philosophy which has no other use than to bring men to love each other as brothers.” Cabet somewhat modified this stance with the publication of True Christianity in 1846, in which he explored Christianity and its intersections with Icarian communism.

80The Pearl of Great Price, 60-1.

81Psalms 24:1 KJV (King James Version).
*True Christianity* is a small volume of about six hundred pages which was a compendium of Cabet’s theological studies which he claimed had stretched to fill over a decade of his life. In it Cabet examines Biblical passages through the lense of Icarianism. He isolates passages in both the Old and New Testaments—original sin, Moses in the wilderness, the life of Christ, his parables, etc.—which highlight the effects of egoism and individualism and which illustrate the beneficent effects of unity and brotherhood. The focus is clearly on *fraternité*, which Cabet identifies as the basis of Christ’s doctrine. Finally, he concludes by a direct equation of communism and Christianity: “It is a clear and incontrovertible fact that Christianity, for the apostles, for the first Christian, for the Fathers of the Church, is communism.” He declares the Christ, “the prince of communists,” came to earth to teach the doctrine of God which is the love of others or fraternity.

However, in *Vrai Chistianisme* Cabet was more invested in implanting his own findings of equality and fraternity in Christ’s teaching than in absorbing Christianity into his view of communism. Christopher H. Johnson suggests that Cabet’s Christian emphasis that emerged in 1846 with the publication of *True Christianity* was a calculated and very successful effort to increase the number of Icarian adherents and to deepen their faith in Cabet and his system rather than an expression of any deeply-held religious conviction. Having been raised in Catholic France, Cabet recognized the incontrovertible power exercised by those who enjoyed recognized religious authority. In spite of the religious liberation in France following the Revolution, Catholicism remained the religion of the

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83 Ibid., 58, 619, 631.
majority and the Catholic clergy continued to exercise tremendous religious, social and cultural influence. This authority and influence stemming from a religious affiliation and divine sanction was something Cabet, unlike Smith, lacked. *True Christianity* was key in cementing Cabet’s authority and position as “prophet” of communism, a title which became increasingly common after the 1846 publication. Cabet’s religious book found resonance among French citizens, most of whom continued to participate in Catholic sacraments that marked key moments in their lives. Aware of this persistent attachment to the Church, Cabet effectively incorporated religion into his Icarian doctrines to increase his popular following. Whatever the motivation, Cabet’s plan was tremendously successful; two thousand copies of *True Christianity* were sold in three weeks, and Christianity became the “touchstone” of Icarian doctrine. At the same time, Cabet’s Icarian followers came to see him as a martyr and apostle of a religious faith in the face of misunderstanding and unjust persecution.84

Although Cabet focused on Christianity in Icarian print, he never officially incorporated Catholicism or organized Christianity into Icarian life, nor were they widely practiced among Icarians in Nauvoo. The focus for Cabet had been and continued to be *La Fraternité*:

If one asks us:
“What is your science?” —*La Fraternité*, we answer.
“What is your principle?” —*La Fraternité*;
“What is your doctrine”? —*La Fraternité*.
“What is your theory?” —*La Fraternité*.

"What is your system?" — *La Fraternité*.

In spite of a brief religious emphasis in 1846, Icarianism remained true to its original secular stance as Cabet largely abandoned the religious overtones he had adopted to focus on the original social and economic tenets he outlined in *Voyage en Icarie*. Icarians who came to America were seemingly content to live without an organized religious system; they made no efforts to build a church in Nauvoo or in any of the other Icarian communities. Sundays were devoted to outings and social gathering, and while they did hold what they termed *Cours Icarien* on Sundays, these courses consisted in readings from the works of Cabet, primarily *Voyage en Icarie*, rather than readings from the Bible or from any other religious text, including Cabet’s *True Christianity*. Icarians in Nauvoo believed that the Divinity found their system of fraternity, equality and justice to be the best form of worship.

Like the Icarians, the Mormons constructed no churches in Nauvoo, yet religion and worship were at the center of the city and the people’s lives, as symbolized by the temple which dominated the city. Public worship in Nauvoo revolved around Joseph Smith, the prophet, who preached regularly to the Saints in Nauvoo. Before the completion of the temple, the Saints gathered for Sunday meetings in “the grove” when weather permitted where they sat on logs or on the grass. Priesthood leaders who addressed the congregation sat on a raised stand from which they spoke. Sunday meetings involved a spiritual meeting in the morning and a business meeting in the afternoon.

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85 *Voyage*, 567.

86 Garno, 261.
Individuals and families often held religious meetings in their homes and had a rich private spiritual life which included prayer, healings, testimonials and fasts. And while there was no church in Nauvoo, the temple looming on the hill was a constant reminder and representation of the Mormons’ religious faith.

Contrary to the Mormons, the Icarian community slowly abandoned any religious overtones in its focus on communal living. Charles Gide traced the failure of Icarianism to the lack of a fundamental “moral element.” While some Icarians still claimed a Catholic heritage, in Icaria they had limited means to express and practice any religious beliefs they may have held or retained. Cabet did not outlaw religion—he stated that members may hold any religious belief they wished as long as it did not interfere with the agenda of the community—but he did not provide a forum for actively practicing religion in Illinois. With the waning of the role of religion within the community, the suffering and vicissitudes of life did not disappear (indeed they seemed to crescendo for the Icarians), but the system for making sense of these disappointments was disintegrating, and so the Icarians turned to secular communism to lend a larger meaning to their experiences and struggles in their Illinois Icaria.

The slow abandonment of organized religion and religious belief had further consequences for the Icarians. Benedict Anderson asserts that one of the primary elements

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of traditional religious belief was its concern with "man-in-the-cosmos," which offered the people a sense of individual identity at the same time it connected them with the larger world and universe around them. With the loss of religion, the Icarians also lost the place of the individual and an avenue for self-discovery and self-definition. While Sutton identifies the Icarian emphasis on the importance of the individual as the "élan vital" of the movement, the disintegration of religion meant that Icarians’ avenue to individuality was restricted to their contribution of goods and labor.89 Once they had abandoned their belongings to the community, Icarians were completely absorbed into the Icarian communal machine and could express individuality only through dissent, which proved a slow but fatal blow to Icarianism and the utopia they tried to establish at Nauvoo.

While Icarians viewed religion and Christianity as appendages to and justifications of their social and economic system, for Mormons religious belief and faith were the center of their life and community; the ethical and spiritual qualities of both the individual and the community as a whole were of primary importance.90 Mormon converts joined themselves to a church that claimed to be the restoration of primitive Christianity and the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. For Mormons the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was literally God’s kingdom on the earth that would usher in the millennium and restore peace and brotherhood to the earth. They believed that God himself was at the head of the church and directed its path through divine inspiration and revelation given to


90Gide, 150, 214.
his prophet on the earth, Joseph Smith. For those believing in Joseph Smith’s account of his visions and the origins of Mormon scripture, Mormonism and its mechanisms, such as the law of consecration, were not mere social and economic expediencies, but the will of God as revealed to his divinely appointed prophet.

In contrast to the Icarians, not only did Mormons’ religious belief provide a reason for their suffering and a means to prepare for the afterlife and Christ’s millennial reign, but it functioned as the centripetal force that held their community together even as it allowed for individual identity and expression. Paired with the Mormon’s doctrinal emphasis on unity and brotherhood was a profound belief in individuality and agency that began with Smith’s vision and calling and extended to every member’s conversion and personal relationship to God. Thus, personal conviction of divine and eternal truths served as a firm foundation for Mormon faithful when systems failed and the community was threatened. The temple and all it represented proved a sufficient focus to sustain a sense of community even after the Saints had abandoned their city and their temple, carrying with them only their belief and a few belongings. The intellectual and philosophical bastion that operated at the center of Icarianism carried a steadily dwindling community through fifty difficult years, but in the end it could not sustain a community torn by dissent.
CHAPTER FOUR

COMMUNISM AND THE LAW OF CONSECRATION

For communities both sacred and secular two institutions threatened the realization of a harmonious communal life. These “bulwarks of individual interests” were private property and the nuclear family.\textsuperscript{91} Communitarians, including the Mormons and Icarians, were acutely aware of the problematic nature of these traditional institutions and attempted to modify them in their quest for the ideal community. Both Smith and Cabet believed that in founding their respective communities they were instituting a system of unity and cooperation that would remedy the existing malignant ills of society and usher in a new era of harmonious accord, peace, and prosperity. Their systems of cooperation and common labor would begin to eliminate the exploitation, contention and inequality that existed in the societies, American and French, that they tried to leave behind. The visions of both men included fundamental changes to the prevailing notions of property and ownership and to traditional views of family, gender roles and parenting. While the two systems resembled each other in some important ways, they differed widely in their “conceptualizations of equality” and the role of the individual within the community.

From the moment of his discovery of Thomas More’s communal paradise outlined in the pages of \textit{Utopia}, Cabet remained throughout the rest of his life a devoted disciple

and advocate of communism. The first page of *Voyage en Icarie* declares that the poor organization and inequality of society are the root of all existing evils; Cabet then proposes a simple solution which he outlines in great detail over the next six hundred pages of the book—equality and fraternity through the practice of communism. Icarian communism, as outlined in *Voyage en Icarie* and as practiced in Nauvoo, called for the abolition of all private property in order to ensure the “natural equality” of man and to allow him to enjoy his “natural and divine right” to exercise all of his physical and intellectual faculties. At the same time, man must fulfill his natural responsibilities to love his fellow man and to respect their rights. Cabet’s ideal vision of community embraces every aspect of life—political, social, moral, etc. Robert Sutton, in *Les Icariens*, provides a succinct summary of Icarianism’s central tenets:

*Icaria is . . . an organic society. Each part of the system leads to and reinforces the other parts. Its symmetrical and healthy physical environment provide[s] the setting for a rational democracy of complete equality. The egalitarian economy, without private property or money, is based on a uniform operation of machine production, scientific agronomy, and mass distribution that assures every citizen the necessities of life. Democratic education stimulates the body and mind and prepares all Icarians for their political and economic responsibilities as adults. Leisure time is filled with uplifting amusements that evoke the highest feelings of patriotism and morality. Family life and mores stress commitment to the welfare of the Republic above self-interest and result in the elimination of serious crime. Finally, Icarian religion unifies all members of the community in a bond of brotherly love and public virtue and thus completes the circle of utopian felicity.*

*Voyage en Icarie* presented a picture of a people living in absolutely equal and uniform conditions, which extended to their homes, clothes, education and entertainment. This uniformity was hailed in the book as “enchanting,” and Cabet required of interested

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92 *Voyage en Icarie*, 551, 554.

Icarians absolute conformity to this principle of uniformity. From the moment of their inclusion in the community, the Icarians relinquished any claim to individual property or autonomous identity; they were Icarians pure and simple, equal with their Icarian brothers and sisters. From its inception and throughout its history, Icaria was governed by this vision.

For Cabet and the Icarians absolute equality and absorption into the community was the rule in theory as well as in practice. If every Icarian was not able to have a watch, then no one had a watch. Members absolutely renounced all possessions and markers of identity to the community, with the possibility of regaining only a fraction of their contribution should they quit the community. Icarian parents even relinquished ownership of their children to a certain extent, as the Icarian educational system dictated that children live in boarding schools. In Icaria all land and property was owned and worked by the community and its members. Members worked for the common good of the community without wages or pay, doing whatever was necessary. Thus, in Icaria it was common to see trained professors working in the fields and highly skilled furniture makers carving out the rough sabots (wooden shoes) worn by the Icarians.

The Mormon system of community was, like Cabet’s communal system, “designed to bring about relative economic equality and to eliminate greed and poverty.” However, for the Icarians communalism and its attendant brotherhood was the ultimate end of

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94 *Voyage en Icarie*, 71.


96 *Church History in the Fulness of Times*, 99.
Icarianism, while for Mormons it was a means to an end—unity and equality were necessary prerequisites for the ushering in of the millennium and for the preparation of a people to live with God. The Mormons' communal plan included an important religious overlay that the social system of the Icarians lacked. The Mormons began adopting a new economic system called the law of consecration as early as 1831 while still in Kirtland, Ohio. This economic system was instituted to answer the financial needs of the growing church. Revenue was needed for church undertakings such as the construction of the temple. The influx of converts and immigrants who were often poor and without financial means to support themselves necessitated the accumulation and supervised administration of money, goods, and property. While the law of consecration was not new or unique to Nauvoo, this period “set permanently in Mormonism the communitarian vision and mode” and led to continuing communal experiments of varying success in Utah and other Mormon settlements in the West.97

The Mormons' communal system, called the Law of Consecration or Order of Enoch, was derived largely from formulations outlined in writings held sacred by the Mormons. The Book of Mormon speaks of isolated moments during the history of the ancient American civilizations when the people enjoyed continual peace, prosperity, and brotherhood. “They did not send away any who were naked, or that were hungry, or that were athirst, or that were sick, or that had not been nourished; and they did not set their hearts upon riches; therefore they were liberal to all . . . having no respect to persons.” Another book of sacred scripture dealing with the prophet Enoch described the people

97Flanders, 90.
that were the model for the Mormons' communal efforts and which lent its name to their communal program and their vision of Utopia: "And the Lord called his people Zion, because they were of one heart and one mind, and dwelt in righteousness, and there was no poor among them." 98

Smith used these scriptures and others as the foundation for a communal society that would restore all things and usher in the millennial reign of Christ. Smith's task was to build an "enclave of unity and order in a highly individualistic and fragmented society." The Mormon system of community was more complex than straightforward Icarian communism; the Mormon method was aimed at equalizing the standards of living while "preserving significant elements of individualism, including individual entrepreneurial responsibility, separate family dwellings, and to a considerable extent, the exercise of personal tastes and preferences." While there was never a time when all Mormons lived under the regimen of an economic communal order, communalism was at the heart of Mormonism, and was an important part of the Nauvoo experience. 99

Under the law of consecration members of the church were asked to deed all of their property to the bishop of the church who, in turn, granted an "inheritance" or stewardship to the individual from the properties received. The size of the stewardship depended on several factors—the size of the family, its circumstances, and the wants and needs as determined by the bishop and the prospective steward. The family entrusted with

98 Alma 1:26; The Pearl of Great Price, Moses 7:18.
the stewardship then administered it to the best of their ability, operating under the conviction that they were only managing what belonged to God and his church and not their own private property. If they were industrious and successful, at the end of the year they would have a "surplus," a net gain. Any surplus above and beyond the needs and wants of the family was again to be turned over to the church to be administered by the bishop to those in need. Those who were excommunicated or who left the church were allowed to maintain their "inheritance," but they relinquished any surplus that had been consecrated to the poor. Finally, in all other respects business relations were to be carried on in the usual manner under the "competitive, capitalistic system. Simplicity, frugality, cleanliness, industry and honesty [were] enjoined." Idleness was not tolerated. Thus, in the Mormon system of consecration private property was both in a sense eliminated and maintained. Property and possessions were not doled out equally among all members; rather, each individual and family was allotted a specific portion and became the sole steward for that portion. The law of consecration allowed for an individual to maintain his sense of independence and agency while it concomitantly weakened the conception of private property. Under the system individuals believed that all ownership belonged to God and that they were at best stewards accountable to God for their actions and labor.

While the Mormons maintained private property to a certain extent, like the

100 The Doctrine and Covenants 42:32-33, 51:3, 42:34.

Icarians they devoted both land and labor to the benefit of the whole community. Church leaders in Nauvoo organized community projects destined to succor the poor and needy and to nurture equality and a sense of brotherhood among the Saints. While most families maintained and cultivated an acre of land in the city with vegetables, fruit trees, etc., the church designated a field on the outskirts of Nauvoo as a community farm. It was regulated by the Big Field Association which determined which crops were planted and how much acreage was cultivated, the members of the church working together to provide for themselves and others. In another attempt to foster unity and prosperity the city council established a sort of government works program to drain the swamps and to construct homes, businesses, and other buildings, thereby providing employment and a livelihood to residents of Nauvoo. Laborers were usually paid in provisions, sometimes in brick or store scrip as cash in Nauvoo was scarce.102

The construction of the temple in Nauvoo offered a unique aspect to the establishment of community and equality in Mormonism. The magnificent building which became a noted landmark was built largely by donated labor. Harking back to the ancient system of tithing outlined in the Old Testament, the Saints built their temple through a similar system in which members donated one-tenth of their time and possessions to the construction of the temple. Thus, much like the Icarians, men of whatever profession labored together on the temple. These men left their employment one day in ten to quarry stone or prepare lumber while women provided meals and clothes for temple workers.103

102 *Church History in the Fulness of Times*, 243-44. Also Leonard, 133, 155.

The differences between the Icarian and Mormon systems of community and equality are seen perhaps most clearly in one of the most commonplace and simple aspects of the communities—home gardens—which illustrate to what extent the Mormon communities were able to integrate personal property into a communal system, while the Icarians favored and suffered from an “all-or-nothing” mentality. Both communities had separate homes for individual families surrounded by small plots of land. Mormon leaders in Nauvoo encouraged their people to plant and cultivate various plants and trees around their homes to beautify the city and to add to the comfort of life on the frontier. Many planted fruit and shade trees, vines, and flowers; some constructed fences around their yards and lined the fences and walks with peach and mulberry trees and currant, raspberry, and gooseberry bushes. Contemporary accounts of the beauty and order of Nauvoo at the time testify to the Saints’ success in their attempts to beautify their homes and city.\textsuperscript{104} No evidence points to any conflict arising among the Mormons over the use and ownership of products from individual gardens.

The same little gardens caused a terrible conflict and rift in the Icarian community. Various early visitors to Icaria had commented on its primitive condition, the community’s poverty prohibiting them from enjoying luxuries.\textsuperscript{105} However, once the community became more financially stable the Icarians were encouraged to beautify their dwellings. They did so in much the same way as the Mormons—planting fruit trees, grape vines, and bushes that were not only beautiful, but productive. However, unlike the Mormons, the Icarians’

\textsuperscript{104} Godfrey, 85.

\textsuperscript{105} Nordhoff, 338.
gardens led to uproar. Arguments developed over the ownership of fruit and wine made from vines in members' family gardens. Some argued they should belong to the community, while others claimed that home gardens and their produce were private and separate from the community. These small gardens proved to be an important part of the conflict that eventually split the Icarian community.

The conflicts over personal gardens and other incidents reveal that both communities were plagued by different understandings of the individual's role within the community and the operation of the respective communal systems. Among those who joined the two communities, there were various levels of commitment to communal living and equality. In France enthusiastic contributions in 1847 and 1848 accompanied the announcement of the founding of Icaria. Donations poured into the Populaire's Paris offices—paintings, books, clocks, silverware, fishing nets—gifts sometimes inspired more by enthusiasm than by practicality. However, Cabet's increasing militancy (as evidenced in the Forty-Eight Articles) and the realities of rough frontier living quelled much of the enthusiasm that had originally met Cabet's fantastic scheme of founding Icaria. Members began to feel that in enforcing universal equality, Cabet was condemning them to universal mediocrity. Some members secretly kept certain items such as heirlooms or other valuable items as an escape clause in case their experiment in communism went sour. Cabet was especially virulent in condemning Icarian women for only halfheartedly committing themselves to communism, keeping jewels or fine clothes and sighing over them in the confines of their homes because they were unable to wear them outside in view of other members. Many Icarians kept certain articles to which they were personally attached or felt they could not live without. For the most part Icarians were careful to keep such
things secret, but at the schism in 1856 much of it came to light. An outside trustee called in to divide the community’s assets between the two groups found and filled eight large wagons with every imaginable item found in the private possession of various Icarians. He discovered approximately two hundred gallons of wine and well as other articles—tools, implements, heirlooms, etc.—that had been hidden and in some cases even buried in gardens and out-buildings to protect private possessions and to ensure individual ownership.106

The Mormons encountered similar degrees of commitment to living the law of consecration. Mormon consecration records reveal enthusiastic members who, like their Icarian counterparts, contributed valuable and personal items. One member, Frederick Rowlett, went so far as to include his daughter in his consecrations to the church.107 However, not all members were so enthusiastic or honest in their contributions. Even after church members consecrated their properties and received a stewardship, church leaders encountered continual problems in determining what constituted the surplus that was to be turned back over to the church. Brigham Young recounted his early experiences in attempting to get the people to live completely the law of consecration:

I found the people said they were willing to do as counseled, but upon asking them about their surplus property, most of the men who owned land and cattle would say, ‘I have got so many hundred acres of land, and I have got so many boys, and I want each of them to have eighty acres, therefore this is not surplus property.’ . . . Some were disposed to do right with their surplus property, and once in a while you would find a man who had a cow which he considered surplus, but generally she was of the class that would kick a person’s hat off, or eyes out. . . . You would once in a while find a man who had a horse that he considered surplus, but at the

106 Prudhommeaux, 324; Gide, 152.

107 Leonard J. Arrington et al., 65.
same time he had the ringbone, was broken-winded, spavined in both legs, and had the pole evil at one end of the neck and fistula at the other, and both knees sprung. ¹⁰⁸

In spite of the numerous and continual attempts to encourage the Saints to live the law of consecration and to provide for the welfare of their fellow Saints, they were unable to overcome completely their tendency to promote their own interests rather than sacrifice their comfort and future for others, many of whom were strangers. The *Doctrine and Covenants* contains a clear explanation of why the law of consecration failed among the Mormons: “Behold, I say unto you, there were jarrings, and contentions, and envyings, strifes, and lustful and covetous desires among them, therefore by these things they polluted their inheritances.” ¹⁰⁹

Members’ inability to transcend self-interest crippled both communities. One incident illustrating the failure of communal living and the quest for equality reveals a remarkable similarity in the failings of both the Mormon and Icarian systems. A central conflict in both communities, interestingly enough, arose over dairy products. Cows were scarce in both communities, and milk products were carefully controlled. The Mormon incident took place in Missouri shortly before their removal to Nauvoo, but it is illustrative of simple conflicts with important consequences. When the Saints were living in Far West, Missouri, the wife of Thomas B. Marsh, an important Mormon leader, agreed to exchange milk with a Sister Harris in order to enable them to make larger cheeses than they could do separately. They agreed to take each other the milk as well as the *strippings*


or cream. Mrs. Harris kept her part of the agreement, but Mrs. Marsh kept a pint of cream from each cow for her own personal use. When this became known, the matter was brought before the leadership of the church who decided against Mrs. Marsh. Thomas Marsh, a leader in the church second only to Joseph Smith himself, refused to accept the decision discrediting his wife and continued to appeal the decision until he finally brought it before the prophet who approved the previous findings. Marsh was furious and asserted that he would uphold the character of his wife “even if he had to go to hell for it.” He and his family consequently left the Mormon church.\textsuperscript{110}

The first major conflict over community of goods in the Icarian group also involved milk. Robert Sutton points out that the ink was barely dry on the Icarian constitution when women began complaining about the scarcity of milk. Because of the community’s meager funds after purchasing their holdings in Nauvoo, Cabet was only able to purchase three milk cows. Milk was scarce and was thus largely reserved for the small children and those who were sick. The women of the community were angry, each thinking she had the right to some of the milk for her own children and for cream in her own café au lait.\textsuperscript{111} Later, conflict in the community sprouted over butter. All members of the community assembled in the large refectory to take their meals together seated at long tables. As bread and butter were passed down the tables, those at the end complained that they were consistently forced to eat their bread plain because those at the head of the table took too much butter, leaving none for the rest. The butter problem became such a

\textsuperscript{110}Journal of Discourses, 3:84.

\textsuperscript{111}Sutton, Les Icariens, 67-68.
divisive issue that the Icarians finally devised a butter mold that divided each stick of butter into ten equal portions. This solved the problem of unequal distribution of butter, but members were incensed at being treated like children.\textsuperscript{112}

The conflict over milk in both communities was symptomatic of a larger problem which caused constant consternation on the part of both Smith and Cabet. Members’ unwillingness to give up something as small as milk revealed a fundamentally divisive selfishness among members that leaders tried vainly to eradicate. While many members of both groups were converted and committed to laboring and sacrificing for the common good, many were unable to relinquish property, personal weaknesses, and pet habits to serve the larger community. Eventually individualism won out.

While the Icarians were able to maintain communism for fifty years in the face of recurring conflict, they eventually abandoned Cabet’s vision of complete equality. Looking back on their attempts at equality, many Icarians thought they had been too optimistic in their quest for utopia. Emile Vallet, a Nauvoo Icarian, wrote, “Why not be honest and admit frankly that we made a mistake; that we donned a habit much too long for us; that we did everything we could to behave decently, but we step on it because it is too big for us. . . . Human nature does not agree with the principles of communism, or the principles of communism do not agree with human nature.” Icarians agreed that they were perhaps unprepared to live communism fully; they also noted that their inability to be good

communists was exacerbated by those “ordinary” people (Illinois residents who were not Icarian) living around them who operated on principles of self-interest and prevented the development of a feeling of common purpose among the Icarians.\textsuperscript{113}

Early Mormons were convinced that Smith's and others' basic approach to organizing utopian communities was correct, but that they had tried to accomplish too much too quickly. They believed that both the Mormons and their non-Mormon neighbors had not been sufficiently prepared to overcome their fundamentally selfish human nature and accept a lifestyle based on sharing, sacrifice, and equality. Roger D. Launius asserts that the Saints "lacked the mutual respect necessary for a communitarian society as well as the personal piety and a desire for perfection crucial to the successful establishment of such a Christian utopia; non-Mormons didn’t understand the significance of such a society and mistook the theocratic-democratic ideal for pure political takeover."\textsuperscript{114} For the most part, those who understood and attempted to follow the law of consecration moved on with the Church to undertake other communal experiments in Utah, while those who did not consecrate stayed behind. In spite of repeated efforts over many years Mormons were never able to implement a widespread and successful communal program.

\textsuperscript{113}\textit{Revue Icarienne} (Corning, Iowa), August 1884; Jacques C. Chicoineau, "Étienne Cabet and the Icarians," \textit{Western Illinois Regional Studies} 2 (Spring 1979): 11.

CHAPTER FIVE

FAMILY MATTERS

The second great bulwark of individual interests, closely tied to the first bulwark of private property, was the nuclear family, an institution which involved important and powerful notions of gender roles, labor, authority, and parenting. Icarian communism and the Mormon law of consecration and their practice in the two communities were inseparable from fundamental notions of family and gender roles. The family and its changing definition in the two communities played a central role in the formation, struggles and final destinies of the two communities. Both communities and their leaders viewed the family as an ideal model for the community at large. “Papa Cabet” spoke of the Icarians as “one grand family,” and the Mormons, led by “Brother Joseph,” thought of themselves as a family in the faith and called each other brother and sister. However, this grand vision of the community as one great family rested on individual families and households, their struggles and successes.

Cabet’s vision of utopia as outlined in *Voyage en Icarie* suggested a radical reordering of the family in the community. Cabet determined that marriage and family were essential for the happiness and success of the community. His vision allowed for “no celibates” and “no dowries,” a policy that he believed would ensure the perpetuation of
marriage and family in "all their purity" as the foundation of an ideal society.\textsuperscript{115} The families showcased in \textit{Voyage} were models of happiness, health, and productivity. Carisdall observes that at the start of a typical day, everyone awakened at 5 a.m. Men went to the workplace by six where they were served breakfast. Wives and children remained at home in the morning to eat, clean and organize their model households. No servants were employed as the Republic had eliminated almost all fatigue and unpleasantness from household chores. Following breakfast and morning chores women went to work and children went to school. Families were reunited for dinner and wholesome recreation in the afternoon and evening. Harmony and happiness reigned in the Icarian families and homes depicted in the novel. However, this happy picture was deceptive and not representative of Cabet’s actual immediate intentions for the community he founded in Illinois. The scenario of warm domestic scenes with children at home and families united only occurred after the transition period of fifty years that Cabet outlined in the novel. His ideas of the family during the transition period that Nauvoo constituted were quite different.

While modeled loosely on the imagined Icaria, families in real Icaria enjoyed anything but an ideal lifestyle. Indeed, the family revisions Cabet proposed and tried to enforce were an important reason for many Icarians’ precipitous departure from the community and for the uprising and ensuing schism in 1856.\textsuperscript{116} The Icarians in Nauvoo

\textsuperscript{115}Le Populaire, 9 May 1847. Single men were at first prohibited from joining the community, but were later allowed to join the Icarians on the condition that they marry as quickly as possible.

\textsuperscript{116}Garno, 509-510.
experienced a radical domestic transformation that separated children from their parents from the time the children were two years old. For only the first two years of children’s lives, they lived with their mother, who was required to nurse her children. Husbands and wives were generally segregated for much of the day in gender-specific workshops. Couples were together only at meals (which they ate in silence) and during scheduled leisure activities. The Icarians cooked and ate communally rather than in their own homes as families as Cabet had depicted in *Voyage*. Parents and children were together for only a few hours on Sundays when children were released from boarding school to visit their parents, visits which Cabet deemed “useless” and even dangerous. He did not want children to value family relationships over the fraternity espoused by the community.

The boarding schools in Cabet’s Icaria were designed to protect children from the old world contamination carried by their parents who still clung to old ways and ideas and who were unable to live Icarian ideals completely. Children over the age of four lived at the school and were considered wards of the society. School was thus more than a place of learning and training for a future vocation; it was an institution designed to create model Icarians by instilling unselfish principles and promoting absolute fidelity to the Icarian concept of *fraternité*. In 1854 Cabet exclaimed, “what a spectacle and what a propaganda in action it will be when we have thousands of little girls and thousands of little boys in uniforms in one grand family. They will all practice fraternity and be disciplined, docile, respectful, polite, instructed and working. . . . They will be happy

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Figure 8 The Icarian schoolhouse made from temple stones. Center for Icarian Studies, Western Illinois University.
because of *la Communaute*. For Cabet education was the supreme mechanism of human perfection and the ideal substitute for the traditional family. However, parents, and especially mothers, found this arrangement distasteful. Cabet admitted that the proposition to institute a boarding school had been “the object of long discussion,” but exulted that it had been accepted by all Icarians but four families who wished to keep their children with them. Icarian women who submitted to Cabet’s system of education and family separation did so grudgingly and were unhappy at surrendering what they considered was their fundamental and natural right to make maternal choices involving their own children.119

Most Mormon families did not undergo such a radical reorganization as Icarian families in Nauvoo. Marriage was an important tenet of the Mormon faith, and Smith emphasized the possibility of family relations continuing after death. The eternal view of family relations reinforced the importance of the family in Mormon society. Unlike the Icarians, Mormons for the most part maintained the traditional family and household in which families, parents and children, lived in separate homes and associated closely with each other. Religious, social and recreational activities centered around the family unit. Children attended school and then returned to live and labor with their families.120

While most Mormon families followed the traditional model of a patriarchal household, during the Nauvoo period, Joseph Smith first revealed the practice of plural marriage, a policy which generated much opposition from Mormons and from their neighbors. Kathryn M. Daynes asserts that plural marriage was a way of fostering and

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118 *La Colonie Icarienne*, 19 July 1854.


120 Godfrey, 77, 82.
demonstrating undeviating loyalty to the prophet and cemented loyal relationships between church members. She also claims that plural marriage, “with its sacred covenants and rituals superimposed on already strong moral obligations to family members” increased commitment to the church organization and to one’s own family.\(^{121}\) While polygamy in the Mormon faith is considered one of its defining features, it is important to note that during the Nauvoo period polygamy was practiced on a controlled and very limited scale by those personally invited by church leaders. Many of the plural marriages performed in Nauvoo were considered spiritual unions and did not alter living arrangements or the traditional household structure.\(^{122}\)

All of the elements of communal living—marriage, family arrangement, labor, and education—had a profound influence on the female members of the community who were often overlooked and marginalized. Women in both Mormon and Icarian communities had to make many sacrifices in a society that claimed to espouse liberating, egalitarian theories that were often in conflict with the reality women experienced as members of a utopian group. Women, both Mormon and Icarian, had considerably fewer avenues than their male counterparts to contribute in meaningful and recognizable ways to their communities. The activities in Nauvoo, religious, political, and economic, were overwhelmingly male. In the official capacity of the priesthood, Mormon men directed the church, ran the city, built the

\(^{121}\)Kathryn M. Daynes, “Mormon Polygamy: Belief and Practice in Nauvoo” in *Kingdom on the Mississippi Revisited*, 142. Smith began instructing priesthood leaders on polygamy in 1841; it was not until 1852 that the revelation was presented to and passed by the general membership of the church.

\(^{122}\)Scholars estimate that during Joseph Smith’s life 114 women were sealed to 30 men. Most men took one or two additional wives. Smith was a notable exception with 29 wives. Leonard, 346-349.
temple and traveled as missionaries, leaving their wives and children at home. Latter-day Saint men owned almost all property which allowed them to express their conviction and faith by dedicating their property to the church and then becoming stewards over their individual portion. Icarian men filled all administrative positions in the community and were the only members able to vote on admissions and constitutional changes. Men ran the workshops and conducted any trade or exchanges with people outside of the community. The men in both Mormon and Icarian Nauvoo thus had innumerable opportunities to participate actively in the community and to lay claim to an individual identity within a homogenizing environment. Women, on the other hand, remained in the domestic sphere, fulfilling the traditional household tasks, away from the public sphere that opened to receive their husbands, brothers and sons, often struggling against the patriarchal machine that circumscribed their sphere.

In Icaria women were ostensibly the object of worship. *Voyage* paints its female characters and women in general as “enchanting and divine,” the “flower of the nation,” adored by the people. Cabet urged his followers to “render to women all her rights and all her dignity... We want men... to consider her as a divine species, ... the source of all his joys.” Actual practice in Icaria revealed the laudatory acclamation of women as mere lip service. Diana Gano further claims in her detailed study of women in Icaria that the disjuncture between Cabet’s theories and the reality experienced by women was a primary cause of the internal factions, high turnover and the eventual collapse of Icaria.

Cabet realized early the importance of appealing to women in his quest for

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adherents. *Voyage* was what it was, he claimed, because he wanted it to be read by women, who could best understand his social, political and philosophical system in the format of a novel. He later addressed several articles and pamphlets to question of women and women's rights. Icaria was not only the ideal society, but was the ideal place for women where "le bonheur des femmes" would be fully realized. Cabet's ideal vision included women who were happier and better educated than their old world counterparts, but who were equally submissive. Women in *Voyage* never went out unaccompanied by men. They had no political voice and were allowed to legislative meetings only as passive spectators who applauded the decisions made by the Icarian men of reason. Women in *Voyage* continued to do domestic tasks, but the Republic had, through science, reason and technology, made these tasks easy and not unpleasant. Women were thus free to labor in the national workshops, contributing to Icarian prosperity, but still limited to labors considered feminine—sewing, millinery, etc.—as specifically outlined in the Icarian newspaper.

Women in the real Icaria had the ideal vision of a life of easy and productive labor floating before them, but were faced with the reality of a life of difficult labor both in the home and in the community's workshops. Icarian women not only performed all the tasks of a traditional household (without the help of Cabet's imagined labor-saving machines in *Voyage*) but, those accomplished, they spend their days in communal workshops. Rather

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124 For Cabet's works on women see chapters 15 "Ateliers des femmes" and 40 "Des femmes" in *Voyage en Icarie*. Also Cabet's 1848 pamphlet, "La Femme, Son Malheureux Sort dans la Société Actuel, Son Bonheur dans la Communauté." Also numerous articles and letters in both *Le Populaire* and *La Colonie Icarienne*.

125 *La Colonie Icarienne*, 13 September 1854.
than doing the laundry and cooking for their own family, women became responsible for feeding and clothing the entire community. Men worked as many hours as women, but had relief from monotony as they rotated tasks and learned new skills including agriculture, manufacturing, and administration. Women, on the other hand, did the same work they had always done with no prospect of change or relief.

Moreover, women in both communities were denied the possibility of participating in and contributing to the communities because of their sex. Icarian and Mormon women were largely left to their own devices to make a mark on their communities. Women in both communities, as legal and social appendages to their husbands and fathers, had neither the property or authority to make what the communities considered meaningful contributions. Making such contributions was important in a society that valued equality and conformity and offered limited avenues to distinction and self-definition. Icarian women had limited possessions compared to their male counterparts, yet many were eager to contribute to the community along with the men. Some women sent their silverware, jewels, and even their wedding rings, to Cabet for the building of the community. Such unusual sacrifices constituted one of the only ways that women garnered recognition in the community. While the Icarian newspapers are replete with laudatory accounts of Icarien contributions—financial, intellectual or otherwise, the Icariennes, their devotion and sacrifice go largely unrecognized.126

Compared to the volume of Icarian writings devoted directly or indirectly to women and their condition in Icaria, Mormonism reveals little direct attention devoted to

126Le Populaire, 28 January 1848.
women. While Cabet’s *Voyage* devoted a significant number of pages to women, the *Book of Mormon* is almost silent on the topic of women. Very few women are named in the pages of the text, and those women who do appear are usually presented as appendages of their husbands and sons who take precedence in the patriarchal order. Of the more than 130 revelations contained in the *Doctrine and Covenants*, only one is directed to a woman, Emma Smith, Joseph Smith’s wife; the rest are directed to priesthood leaders and to the church members in general. This focus on men is reflective of the larger organization of the church, which was based on a priesthood leadership open only to men. While Mormon doctrine emphasized unity and equality—early revelation commanded that Saints must “be one, and if you are not one ye are not mine”—Mormonism nurtured separate roles from men and women philosophically, organizationally and doctrinally. As the church grew dramatically during the Nauvoo period, an increasing number of men were included in the priesthood organization, which took them away from their wives and children who had no comparable position, responsibilities or privilege.127

One reason for the longevity of the Mormon movement is the role which women managed to claim for themselves within a largely patriarchal organization without undermining the status quo. As Jill Derr reveals, women in Nauvoo were constructing their own informal and personal networks as their husbands and fathers participated in the official organizations in Nauvoo. The most important of these was an organization known as the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo which started as a grass-roots movement initiated

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by several women and then brought under the aegis of the priesthood when it was
officially recognized by the prophet Joseph Smith in 1842. The society emerged from
women's desire to take a more active role in furthering the work on the temple, which was
done largely by men. Like the Icarian women who gave their jewels, the Mormon women
felt a desire to contribute to the community and give what they had, even if not the
expected labor and capital that men were able to contribute. Acting on this desire, women
began gathering to sew shirts for the men working on the temple. From this small
beginning, the role of the Relief Society grew to include not only charitable service but
“administering to the wants of the poor,” “correcting the morals and strengthening the
virtues of the female community,” expounding doctrine and exercising spiritual gifts.\textsuperscript{128}

The Relief Society was an important avenue for women to exercise some authority
and to make meaningful contributions to a community in a system that was largely
patriarchal. Men as priesthood holders and property owners were empowered in their
control of resources. Those who believed in Mormon theology and its programs such as
the law of consecration had property and possessions at their disposal to contribute to the
community and to offer tangible evidence of their faith and commitment.

Mormon women made similar sacrifices. During the building of their first temple in
Kirtland, Ohio, nearly impoverished women saved pennies to add to the temple building
fund and crushed their china which was added to the stucco to make the walls glisten.
Heber Kimball, a Mormon leader, commented during the building of the temple that “Our

\textsuperscript{128}Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, “The ‘Leading Sisters’: A Female Hierarchy in
Nineteenth-century Mormon Society” in \textit{The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past}, 158.
wives . . . [were] just as busy as any of us” as they made clothes for the temple workers.\textsuperscript{129}

The organization of women’s efforts to help in the construction of the temple led to the official organization of the Relief Society. The importance of the Relief Society to Mormon society and Mormon women cannot be overemphasized. Over 1,300 women, or about fifteen percent of the city’s population, became society members in Nauvoo. The Society allowed women access to the public sphere and provided for the formation of important female networks. The society’s activities allowed women to extend the “hand of charity in a conspicuous manner,” something which lent them authority, visibility, and a definable role in the developing town and church organization.\textsuperscript{130} It further provided a sense of identity to women who were without access to the priesthood, the most important and visible organization in Nauvoo. Such avenues to independence, however, were still carefully controlled by the priesthood hierarchy who appointed female leaders within the Relief Society. Jill and Brooklyn Derr point out that Mormon women illustrate important differences between formal and informal power structures. While Mormon women held no priesthood authority and were subject to their male leaders, informal power structures such as those operating within the Relief Society functioned to stimulate, facilitate or interrupt the formal organizational system when it is inadequate or counter to the best interests of its members.\textsuperscript{131}

Icarian women had no such formal organization, and little evidence remains of any important or influential female networks. While both Cabet and Smith exercised

\textsuperscript{129}Church History in the Fulness of Times, 163-4.

\textsuperscript{130}Derr, 158.

\textsuperscript{131}Beecher, 154.
tremendous authority over their communities, Cabet named women as the principle cause of desertions and withdrawls from the community. As Diana Garno points out, Cabet was partly correct in assessing the influence of the female members on the rest of the community; but at the same time women became the scapegoat for the shortcomings of the Icarian system and for the weaknesses of all the members. Women had no official political voice in the communities, but that they had tremendous influence in the communities and especially in families is clear. The conflict over dairy products in the two communities and the resultant upheaval and desertions are evidence of women’s influence and their ability to maintain or disrupt the equilibrium of the two communities.

Icarian women were especially vocal about their complaints and drew husbands and children with them in their discontent. Cabet, however, was convinced that his system was perfect and that people’s imperfections, not the systems, doomed it to fail. What Diana Garno terms his “gendered myopia” prevented him from seeing that the very institutions he had established as ideal created a family and gender system that in many ways was more restrictive than that of the France they had left behind. His radical changes privileged Icarian “men of reason” and tightly controlled women’s production, labor, and identity. In order to become an Icarian, women had to relinquish control over traditional female domains and obey the men who headed the Icarian patriarchy. In becoming Icarians, women lost their claim to their identity as mothers, homemakers and producers. In the end, they found the exchange disappointing and many of them left to find fulfillment elsewhere.
CONCLUSION

VISIONS OF UTOPIA

Both Mormons and Icarians harbored great visions of the potential of their communities and the role they were destined to play in America and among all mankind. The Saints in Nauvoo harbored a millennial vision that convinced them they would be able to “rescue the American Republic from the brink of ruin.” The Saints exulted that “Nauvoo . . . is the nucleus of a glorious dominion of universal liberty, peace and plenty; it is an organization of that government of which there shall be no end—of that kingdom of the Messiah which shall roll forth, from conquering and to conquer until it shall be said, that ‘the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ,’ And the Saints of the Most High shall possess the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven.”132 Cabet’s vision of the destiny of his communal experiment was no less optimistic and far-reaching than that harbored by Smith and the Saints. For Cabet and his Icarians, Nauvoo was only the first of a host of Icarian settlements that would ultimately dot the American frontier, and, from there, remake human society. “This colony,” Cabet wrote, “does not therefore resemble any other, since it has for its goal not only the interest and happiness of its members, but all the interest and happiness of all mankind.”133

Neither of these visions were destined to be realized, at least not in Nauvoo, the

132 The Millennial Star (Nauvoo, Ill.) August 1842.

133 Cabet, La Colonie Icarienne aux États-Unis, 1; Bush, 413.
Figure 9  View of Nauvoo in 1848 after the departure of the Mormons. Center for Icarian Studies, Western Illinois University.
small town which sheltered intrepid pioneers, American and French, for a few short years. Individual conviction and collective memory sustained the fabric of Mormon faith as the Saints moved West, and they continue to create a sense of community in what has become a church that spans the globe. Millions of members around the world looked on with interest as Mormon leaders recently rededicated the Nauvoo, Illinois temple, which looms up once again from the bluff overlooking the Mississippi—a tangible symbol of community, conviction and faith. In rebuilding the temple that was the center of Mormon life at Nauvoo, members of the Mormon church have recaptured a unique moment in their history which embodies the essence of the Mormon faith and fight for survival and which connects them to a sacred past. The temple reminds the faithful today of the individual saints who built the original temple and of the small community of saints that has grown to include millions.

While the Mormon temple once again dominates the Nauvoo landscape, the visitor to Nauvoo has to search for traces of Icaria. The Icarians are represented only by a small sign directing the interested seeker to a barn on the outskirts of town which serves as a museum. Lillian Snyder, Icarian descendent and owner of the barn-museum, regretfully informs visitors that the museum is closed because of lack of funds. Snyder herself ran the makeshift museum for many years, but at eighty-seven, can’t keep up with the demands of maintenance. However, she is eager to talk to the interested listener, sharing a wealth of details about Icarian practices and contributions to Nauvoo, contributions less visible but not less vital than those of the Mormons. And so, over one hundred years after the official end of Icarianism, it has returned largely to what it once was—a movement of one with the
vision to see beyond.\textsuperscript{134}

Neither the Mormons nor the Icarians exist today in the form their leaders envisioned—the Icarians are now a memory evoked by historians and a small number of descendants; and in spite of the Mormon’s success and growth, the community of equality and brotherhood, the reconciliation of individual and community, has yet to be realized. Americans and people throughout the world still struggle to come to terms with a problem central to democracy and to humanity in general, that of reconciling the individual with the community. Perhaps this inherent conflict makes utopia the “no place” that Thomas More originally articulated, a beautiful vision impossible to realize except in the pages of fiction.

\textsuperscript{134}Lillian Snyder, interview by author, Nauvoo, IL, 29 June 2002.
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