

A Sister to Oneida: The Missionary Community at Mount Holyoke

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AT FIRST GLANCE, Mary Lyon (1797-1849) and John Humphrey Noyes (1811-1896) seem opposing figures, and the communities they founded suggest a study in contrasts. Lyon was a theological conservative who emphasized the ever-present reality of sin, while Noyes was a theological radical who declared himself free of sin. Lyon accepted conventional ideas about marriage that Noyes rejected. She founded Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in South Hadley, Massachusetts, in 1837 in order to bring advanced education to women in the "common walks of life" who could not otherwise afford it. With the approval and support of many religiously conservative New Englanders, she trained young women to become teachers and missionaries in the American West and overseas. In contrast, John Humphrey Noyes founded Oneida Community in upstate New York in 1848, after he and his religious family were rejected by the people of Putney, Vermont, for their Perfectionism and alleged endorsement of free love. Unlike Mount Holyoke, the Oneida Community was a cradle-to-grave society in which all property was held in common.

But for all these differences, Lyon and Noyes were also kindred spirits, and their communities shared an important underlying dynamic. This dynamic combined the ideal of psychological consensus characteristic of earlier Puritan communities with enthusiastic participation in the culture of invention and efficiency characteristic of the new industrial age. The concern Lyon and Noyes shared to shape modern society in consensual terms was common to other antebellum religious movements and leaders as well, and can be understood as a defining element of antebellum culture. Like other religious leaders of their time, Lyon and Noyes embraced many of the ideas and behaviors associated with the emerging national economy by redefining them in

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the context of face-to-face relationships organized around an authoritative leader.

Historians have overlooked this underlying dynamic common to many antebellum groups because of a tendency to perceive traditional community and modern society in mutually exclusive terms. The distinction between community and society was first articulated by Sir Henry Maines, who argued in the 1860s and 1870s that modernity entailed a shift from social organizations based on status and identification with authority to those based on contract and personal autonomy. Ferdinand Tonnies expanded the distinction in his book, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, published in 1877, which concluded that in the *Gemeinschaft* of traditional community, people "remain essentially united in spite of all separating factors, whereas in *Gesellschaft* they are essentially separated in spite of all uniting factors." Emile Durkheim drew a similar distinction between simple societies characterized by interchangeable labor and more complex societies characterized by division of labor. In the 20th century Louis Wirth and Talcott Parsons interpreted these ideal types in the context of an evolutionary model that required *Gesellschaft* to replace *Gemeinschaft* in developing societies. Bernard Bailyn, Gordon Wood, and other historians of American culture change adhered to this evolutionary model in numerous accounts of the breakdown of traditional community in the face of the gathering power of modern society.¹

In an important critique, Thomas Bender argued that such zero-sum interpretations of the relationship between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* cannot be justified on historical grounds, and that the relationship is actually a dynamic, interactive one. Thus, in America after 1820, Bender writes:

The emerging national economic system, together with the increased mobility made possible in part by improvements in transportation, with national political parties, and with other regional and national voluntary associations, brought a new configuration to local life. Although the first impulse of the historian and social scientist is to describe this transformation as an eclipse of local life by larger and more important social aggregates, something different seems actually to have happened.²

Revitalization at Oneida and Mount Holyoke

It was not only local identity that flourished after 1820 but also intentional communities more or less separate from local towns.

1. Thomas Bender, *Community and Social Change in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982; originally published, 1978), 3-43, quotation from 17-18.

2. Bender, *Community and Social Change*, 87; see also 48-49.

Moreover, the role of these communities with respect to the emerging national economy was not simply reactionary. In the case of Mount Holyoke and Oneida, the revitalization of an older style of social existence based on face-to-face consensus and authority made enthusiasm for industrial society possible.

At Oneida, John Humphrey Noyes pictured his community as a superior version of the middle-class business society then coming into its own. He made the publication of a daily newspaper a priority, and hoped that this modern form of communication would create and maintain a "Perpetual Revival" among its readers: "We shall stop short of nothing less than the establishment of a paper that will act on the minds of our people as steadily and powerfully as the *Tribune* and *Herald* do in their spheres; so bringing up the religious machinery in full competition with mammon's machinery." In 1858, the *Oneida Circular* argued that business, properly understood, could redeem the world: "So far as business proceeds from a new center—the power driving the machinery is different from that of the world; as our points of contact increase, we shall expect to see one kind of business 'cog in' until the whole business world is won over to Christ."³

As Robert S. Fogarty points out, the Oneida Community survived because of its success in manufacture; although agricultural production was a fundamental part of the Community's economy, the manufacture of steel traps invented by one member enabled the Community to survive and flourish. As Fogarty also points out, Noyes's pro-business, pro-machinery philosophy enables us to place the Community "within the progressive framework of the factory system's take off in these years," although Noyes's theories of shared, family-style labor harken back to an earlier time.⁴

We might build on Fogarty's insight that "progressive" and "reactionary" tendencies coexisted at Oneida by noting that old and new patterns were thoroughly synthesized. A revitalization of old-style communal life occurred at Oneida, characterized, as all revitalization movements are, by the incorporation of new ideas that pressed old patterns into new forms, and by an embrace of modernity that reframed it in terms of traditional principles.⁵

A similar process of revitalization occurred at Mount Holyoke, where Mary Lyon defined industrialization as an opportunity for the enlargement of Puritan influence. She believed that new economic

3. Quoted in Robert S. Fogarty, "Oneida: A Utopian Search for Security," *Labor History* 14 (Spring 1973): 212,220.

4. Fogarty, "Oneida," 221.

5. For the classic definition of revitalization, see Anthony F. C. Wallace, "Revitalization Movements," *American Anthropologist* 58:2 (1956): 264ff.

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developments undermining women's role in the traditional Puritan family were also opening the way for a revival of Puritan piety in which women played a foundational, if not leading role. As New England women began to be less occupied in spinning cloth, making soap and candles, and other household industries, without having the same freedom men enjoyed to travel to cities for work or mechanical training, and as the average age of marriage increased, young women faced the prospect of being economic burdens on their families for a few years at least. But new opportunities for women teachers provided a solution to the decline in the importance of the home as an economic center and opened possibilities for women previously unheard of. "Without this wide and increasing field of usefulness," Mary Lyon wrote in 1837, "that would be a dark providence, which, by manufacturing establishments, has taken from families so much domestic labor, which had its influence in forming the character of our maternal ancestors. But 'providence meets providence,' " she added confidently. Might not one see, she wondered, "the hand of One, wiser than Solomon, in all the labor-saving machinery of the present day?"⁶

Mount Holyoke capitalized on social stress and change by providing advanced education and teacher training at low cost to the daughters of poor farmers and artisans in New England and upstate New York. Like Noyes, Lyon defined her embrace of current economic trends in terms of a reestablishment of communal values. The consensual atmosphere of the seminary revolved around the principle of self-sacrificial benevolence, which Lyon expected her students and teachers to embody and carry forth with them into the world. In teaching young women to embody this spirit of benevolence as well as to be knowledgeable about current advances in science and history, Lyon believed she was helping to create a middle-class culture that would inspire the world. "This middle class," she wrote in 1833, "contains the main springs, and main wheels, which are to move the world."⁷

Both Lyon and Noyes envisioned a future in which mutuality characterized all human relations and, with this end in mind, they utilized the concept of family life in establishing their communities as models of the world to come. As Lawrence Foster emphasizes, life at Oneida was based on "an enlarged family model," in which members woke together, ate together, did chores together, and "almost all

6. Mary Lyon, *General View of the Principles and Design of the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary* (February 1837, Mary Lyon's Letters and Publications).

7. Mary Lyon to Zilpah Grant, March 1, 1833, published in Edward Hitchcock, *The Power of Benevolence Illustrated in the Life and Labors of Mary Lyon* (Northampton, Mass.: Hopkins, Bridgman, and Company, 1852), 178.

necessary activities were carried out within the Community itself."⁸ Jobs rotated, not only for the purpose of discovering otherwise hidden talents in Community members, but also, as Fogarty put it, to "reaffirm the conviction of each individual that he was part of a larger scheme into which he had to fit."⁹

Noyes's system of "complex marriage" was an important part of his enlarged scheme of family life, and epitomized his effort to integrate traditional concerns for mutuality and submission to authority with modern enthusiasm for experimentation and rational system building. In complex marriage, sexual intimacy was not confined to monogamous relationships that harbored "special" love, but was more open, as Noyes believed the Christian commitment to universal love required. Sexual intimacy was also thoroughly orchestrated, and involved both the self-control of male continence and a system of "Ascending Fellowship" controlled by Noyes, in which older members initiated younger ones. Noyes systematized sexual relations even further in the eugenics experiment he launched at Oneida, in which he selected pairs of men and women best suited to conceive children.

At Mount Holyoke, no radical interpretations of marriage were explicitly celebrated, but the seminary did provide women an alternative to marriage for a few years or a lifetime, while at the same time offering them the experience and structure of a family. Lyon often referred to her students as daughters, and encouraged them to regard each other as sisters. Two years after Mount Holyoke opened, she wrote that she was working to "form a family, that from day to day might illustrate the precepts and spirit of the gospel."¹⁰ The enlarged family life of Mount Holyoke did not involve explicit sexual relations as was the case with the Oneida system of Ascending Fellowship, but there was a tiered system of spiritual experience. At the top rank, Lyon encouraged students who best exemplified Christian life to be missionaries or to remain at Mount Holyoke as teachers, and from this latter cohort she chose special assistants with whom she was particularly intimate.

Much as Noyes redefined family life in highly organized, almost mechanical terms, Lyon was intent on "introducing system" into every aspect of life at Mount Holyoke. Each day was carefully compartmentalized, beginning with rising bells at 5:00 and 5:30. A balanced sequence of activities during the day included calisthenics, long walks,

8. Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: Three American Communal Experiments of the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 77.

9. Fogarty, "Oneida," 216.

10. Mary Lyon, *Female Education, Tendencies of the Principles Embraced and the System Adopted in the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary* (June 1839), 6-7.

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and prayer meetings, all of which were designed to contribute to both academic productivity and to religious life. Lyon's desire for system also expressed itself in the layout of the domestic department of the seminary basement, where ovens, sinks, crockery, cutlery, flour barrels, potatoes, ironing boards, tubs, doors, stairs, and post office were arranged in ways that maximized time and efficiency.

She took great pleasure in the way this department worked like a well-oiled machine. "I need not go into the kitchen once a month unless I prefer," she wrote in 1838, "though I do love daily to pass round from room to room in the basement story & see how delightfully the wheels move forward." Lyon's passing round was as energetic as the system itself. According to an alumna who absorbed her leader's enthusiasm for mechanistic imagery, "Lyon used to come sometimes driving into the Domestic Hall like a veritable steam engine."¹¹

At Mount Holyoke as well as at Oneida, cooperative labor fostered a spirit of mutuality, while at the same time enabling the community to survive economically with its religious principles intact. Mount Holyoke students were grouped in "circles" devoted to particular domestic tasks, such as washing, ironing, baking bread, making pies, setting tables, cleaning tumblers and dishes, washing floors, and sweeping hallways. These domestic requirements were the most controversial aspect of the seminary, and Lyon answered numerous objections about the supposed drudgery of these assignments and repeatedly corrected the impression that Mount Holyoke was an institution of manual training.

Lyon regarded domestic work at Mount Holyoke "not as a matter of drudgery, but of elevated independence.... The thought of degradation or servility never seems to enter (the students') minds, & why should it?" Lyon believed that shared domestic work fostered an "obliging disposition," and that willing cooperation in a "continued scene of conferring and receiving favors" built Christian mutuality and overcame loneliness. She proudly reported that one of the seminary's first students had initially "been rather homesick, but the first washing day, was an effectual remedy."¹²

Avoidance of economic distinction was crucial to that "union of

11. Mary Lyon to Theron Baldwin, 12 July 1838, Mary Lyon's Letters and Publications, Mount Holyoke College Library Archives; Elizabeth Alden Green, *Mary Lyon and Mount Holyoke: Opening the Gates* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1979), 173-83; Louise Porter Thomas, *Seminary Militant* (Portland, Maine: Mount Holyoke College, 1937).

12. Mary Lyon, *Prospectus of Mount Holyoke Female Seminary* (Boston: Perkins and Marvin, 1837), 8; Mary Lyon to Mr. Galbraith, June 1842; Mary Lyon to Mr. Baldwin, 12 July 1838; Mary Lyon, *Female Education*, 10-14.

interests" which enabled members of the community to live together in coherent and amiable society. "The principle of entire equality among the pupils is to be adopted," Lyon wrote eight months before the seminary opened. "Servile dependence on common domestics," Lyon wrote, "endangers the simplicity, kindness & mutual confidence, which have been so tenderly fostered at home, & tends to cultivate artfulness, selfishness & distrust."¹³ The family-style organization of the seminary stood against these individious tendencies. As one of the first students at Mount Holyoke wrote, "I believe if ever there was a happy family it is this! We are so independent; that is if we wish *for* anything or to *do* anything we are at perfect liberty to get it, without a parcel of Irish girls scowling upon us, or wishing us out of the way."¹⁴ As this quotations reveals, ethnocentrism and anti-Catholicism characterized family life at Mount Holyoke.

The experience of mutuality was so palpable at Mount Holyoke that alumnae far away from the community believed they were still tied to each other by invisible spiritual bonds. Missionary maps hung in all the common rooms of the seminary to encourage students and teachers to remember their sisters abroad, and a journal recording seminary life was circulated among missionary alumnae. One contemporary described this journal, which later evolved into *The Alumnae Quarterly*, as "galvanic wires ... through which the missionary spirit is transmitted back and forth." Members of the Mount Holyoke community also joined with missionaries and missionary supporters around the world in concerts of prayer scheduled for specific times, in which people felt they communed with one another and raised their prayers to God together. On her voyage en route to Persia to establish a girls' school in Urmiah, Fidelia Fiske regretted that the time for group prayers onboard her ship was "not in concert," but two hours earlier than prayers at South Hadley.¹⁵

Conversion and the Missionary Spirit at Oneida and Mount Holyoke

Both Lyon and Noyes were millenarians intent on making the Kingdom of God a social reality; both were charismatic leaders able to transmit their spirituality to others, and both founded religious communities based on the presupposition that personal transmissions

13. Mary Lyon to Mr. Baldwin; Mary Lyon, *General View of the Principles and Design of the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary* (February 1837), 4-5.

14. Nancy Everett to her uncle, 26 November 1837, quoted in Green, *Mary Lyon*, 176.

15. Edward Hitchcock, *Power of Benevolence*, 347; Fidelia Fiske to Mary Lyon, 13 March 1843, Fidelia Fiske's Letterbook, Mount Holyoke College Library Archives.

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of insight were foundational to community life and social reform. In addition, both leaders grew up under the tutelage of intensely religious mothers who instilled in them the ethos of New England Puritan tradition. Both endured grueling episodes of melancholy and perhaps even derangement, and both found an antidote for their distress in strenuous effort to make every aspect of life an expression of religious love.

Both leaders underwent conversion experiences in the context of the revival of New England theology that occurred during the Second Great Awakening, and their visions of Christian life flowered out of the common soil of Jonathan Edward's theology. This indebtedness to Edward's theology, which Lyon and Noyes shared with other reformers and millenarians of their time, has often been overlooked by historians of American religion. As Joseph Conforti argued recently, "Edwards and his eighteenth-century clerical disciples have often been viewed as the last hurrah of Calvinism, a gasping and doomed doctrinal outburst of a dying system of thought. Yet, Edwards's reputation and influence as well as the popularity of his writings peaked in the Second Great Awakening, not in the eighteenth century when he found a more receptive audience abroad than in America."¹⁶

Both Lyon and Noyes adhered faithfully to Edward's central idea that grace was an indwelling principle in the soul transforming every aspect of a person's behavior, thought, and feeling. For Edwards, Lyon, and Noyes, one of the most likely ways of receiving this grace was to recognize it in others. The Christian embodied the beauty of God and represented it to others, these thinkers believed, and thus Christian society inevitably resulted from this indwelling principle of grace working in individuals.¹⁷ As a logical extension of this belief in the contagious and cumulative power of grace, Edwards, Lyon, and Noyes all understood that a golden age of Christian harmony and righteousness would occur within history, and that its construction had already begun to progress.¹⁸

These beliefs had their source in the English Protestant Reformed idea that grace enabled individuals to live according to moral law.

16. Joseph A. Conforti, "Mary Lyon, the Founding of Mount Holyoke College, and the Cultural Revival of Jonathan Edwards," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 3 (Winter 1993): 71.

17. Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning the Religious Affections* (1746), *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 2, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959).

18. C. C. Goen, "Jonathan Edwards: A New Departure in Eschatology," *Church History* 28 (1959): 25-40; John F. Wilson, "History, Redemption, and the Millennium," *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience*, eds. Nathan O. Hatch and Harry S. Stout (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 131-41.

Edwards crystalized this long-standing idea through his system of religious psychology, which enumerated the signs of grace and distinguished them from other forms of feeling and expression. Both Lyon and Noyes built further on Edwards's ideas by founding religious communities that fostered the expression of this indwelling principle of grace. While Edwards encouraged the development of this principle in the context of a society of 18th-century New England towns in which individual identity was still largely shaped in face-to-face relationships with ministers and other community leaders,¹⁹ Lyon and Noyes found that they had to establish independent communities of their own in order to facilitate the kind of personal transformation required.

Under the influence of Nathaniel Taylor at Yale in 1832-1833, Noyes learned to emphasize the importance of individual initiative in religious life. Taylor's motto was "Follow the Truth if it carries you over Niagara,"²⁰ and Noyes embraced this dare-devil spirit even more fully than Taylor himself, who disowned Noyes and introduced the motion revoking Noyes's license to preach.²¹ Both Taylor and Noyes turned away from the preoccupation with God's awful omnipotence that characterized Edwards's thought, and Noyes took the further step of casting aside the Puritan warning that assurance of sanctity was a sure sign of sinful pride. But Noyes never turned away from that aspect of Calvinist election that concerned the perseverance of the saints; still following Edwards, Noyes maintained that once an individual had grace, he or she was completely transformed and reoriented toward God—in short, a visible saint. This belief in the irrevocable power of grace was the central ingredient in Noyes's doctrine of Perfectionism.

Edwards's belief in the unfolding of the millennium within history was also foundational to Noyes's theological development. While Noyes was at Andover Theological Seminary in 1831-32, Moses Stuart argued that Jesus believed that the Second Coming would occur in the lifetime of his disciples. Convinced that Stuart was right, and even more convinced that Jesus could not have been wrong, Noyes came to the conclusion that the Second Coming had already occurred.²² Ed-

19. Edwards's own authority in the town of Northampton, Massachusetts, where he was minister from 1727 to 1750, was ultimately challenged and defeated. Although he facilitated an important revival in Northampton in the 1730s in which his powerful ideas were a decisive factor, his opponents eventually triumphed and he was voted out of office in 1750.

20. Quoted in Robert S. Fogarty, *All Things New: American Communes and Utopian Movements, 1860-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 27.

21. George Wallingford Noyes, *The Religious Experience of John Humphrey Noyes* (New York: Macmillan, 1923), 124.

22. Lawrence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 77.

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wards might have reached the same conclusion himself had he believed that Jesus thought the Second Coming imminent. Edwards certainly believed that the millennium was occurring in history, and the life and death of Jesus played a crucial part in that work. And like Noyes and Lyon, he was a biblical literalist convinced that everything told or foretold in the Bible was true or would come to be.

Noyes acknowledged the influence of Edward's thought during his year at Andover, before he embraced Perfectionism. In agony over his "meanness," his "desperate wickedness before God," and his "utter impotence to resist temptation," Noyes "consulted Edwards on the religious affections," and concluded that "I must yet be in the gall of bitterness." Being "inclined to melancholy," and lacking in that "charity for the faults of Christians" that was supposed to "grow with growth in grace," Noyes found himself wanting. In his diary, Noyes wrote, "I find too I grow eagle-eyed about such things—a bad sign I fear; (and) so says President Edwards."²³

During the same year, Noyes was taken by the diary of David Brainerd, which Edwards edited and published in 1749 after the missionary died in his house. In his own diary, Noyes wrote, "Was greatly troubled about my state by reading the account of Brainerd's conversion and President Edwards' reflections upon it." Like Brainerd, Noyes was beset both by feelings of inadequacy and weakness. "My religion is of too dubious a character to afford me much comfort," he wrote, "and yet my health is so poor that I cannot conscientiously impose upon myself the effort which is necessary to faithful self-examination, though I would most gladly make it, if my body would bear it."²⁴

Noyes committed himself to follow in Brainerd's footsteps to become a missionary, and joined the secret group of young men dedicated to missionary work known as "The Brethren," which became famous for its catalytic role in generating American enthusiasm for foreign missions.²⁵ Young men who followed the Brethren to become missionaries after graduating from Andover often found wives at Mount Holyoke. In both communities, commitment to foreign missions was a hallmark of highly developed piety; if one was truly devoted to God, that devotion spilled over into an irresistible urge to represent

23. John Humphrey Noyes, "Extracts from Diary," quoted in Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 46,53.

24. Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 45.

25. "The Brethren," also called the "Society of the Brethren," originated with the "Haystack Prayer Meeting" at Williams College in 1806, and then flourished at Andover Theological Seminary after Samuel J. Mills, Jr., one of the original founders, matriculated there.

God to others and contribute to his mighty work of redemption. While every true Christian, whether they left home or not, was a missionary in heart and deed, those who actually left home to embrace sickness and possible death as opportunities of testing, strengthening, and expressing their love of God, carved out lives of dramatic sanctity that others emulated.

Noyes never lost his commitment to this missionary principle, even though he resigned from the Brethren in 1834, after he declared himself free of sin. He gave three reasons for relinquishing his pledge to become a foreign missionary: "First, because I now know that I was not a Christian when I made (the pledge); second, because I had discovered that God was my owner and had the right to direct me by his Spirit, and therefore I had no right to let myself unreservedly to the missionary society; third, because I saw that I was already on missionary ground, among a people who though professedly Christian needed to be converted quite as much as the heathen."²⁶ Thus in embracing Perfectionism, Noyes did not so much reject the missionary spirit as ratchet it up a notch in terms of intensity of religious expectation. In this intensity of religious expectation, Noyes regarded the Oneida Community as a "sortie or raid from the kingdom of God."²⁷ As Fogarty described the missionary commitment of Noyes and his Perfectionist followers, they were inspired by "the belief that by faith and example they might show a sinful world the road to regeneration."²⁸

At Mount Holyoke, Edwards's millenarian view of history, his enumeration of the signs of grace, and his edition of Brainerd's diary also fueled a missionary spirit. Lyon came to the idea of building a seminary while organizing a subscription drive for a reprinting of the *History of Redemption*, and one alumna of the seminary recalled that Lyon often lectured with "Edwards' History of Redemption in her hand."²⁹ That book pictured Christ as the chief cornerstone of the building of redemption, and prophets, apostles, and a growing number of Christians around the world as other parts of the edifice. Lyon referred to this building of redemption when her seminary's first cornerstone was laid, confiding to a close associate that "the stone and brick and mortar speak a language which vibrates through my very soul." She called the first thousand dollars contributed to Mount Holyoke the seminary's "cornerstone," and used the same term to describe the seminary's graduates. The first diplomas issued at Mount

26. Quoted in G. W. Noyes, *Religious Experience*, 115.

27. G. W. Noyes, *Religious Experience*, 291.

28. Fogarty, "Oneida," 219.

29. Fidelia Fiske, *Recollections of Mary Lyon* (Boston: American Tract Society, 1866), 93, 104.

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Holyoke pictured a palace, with a quarry in front, blocks of stone, and a small group of women standing beside. A passage from Proverbs printed below read: "That our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace."³⁰

In addition to conceptualizing her seminary's role in the millenarian terms of Edwards's *History of the Work of Redemption*, Lyon used a variant of Edwards's religious psychology in working to shape the religious experience and social behavior of her students. Like Edwards, Lyon was committed to the belief that grace was an indwelling principle, and she facilitated its receipt and development in her students through analysis of their feelings, thoughts, and actions. The criteria she used in assessing the religious states of her students were essentially the same as those articulated by Edwards, and emphasized love of God, submission to God's will, and thirst for continued growth in grace.

Lyon was so heavily involved in the religious lives of her students that one alumna wrote that, "it is harder to be a Christian anywhere than at Mount Holyoke." Another boasted that "the seminary out-ranked every church in the land as a seat of divine grace. Its almost annual revivals were a topic of interest to religious circles everywhere; many a student enrolled in the express hope of finding salvation."³¹

Lyon facilitated the conversion process and its higher development by grouping seminary students according to the states of their souls. Professors of religion met separately to examine their lives, increase their devotion to God, support missionary causes, develop missionary commitments, and lay plans to help others find God. A second group hoped for conversion, subjected their lives to scrutiny in private and group prayer sessions, and received facilitating counsel from Lyon. A third small group of the admittedly hopeless felt their distance from the rest as well the pressure of communal expectation to get with the Holyoke program.

The groups Lyon organized for religious examination and development resembled Noyes's regimen of "Mutual Criticism," which he learned from the Brethren at Andover. The Brethren invented the technique of subjecting each individual in turn "to a thorough criticism of his character and prevailing habits." Like the groups of religious examiners Lyon organized, Mutual Criticism was a variant of the

30. Jonathan Edwards, *A History of the Work of Redemption* (Boston: American Tract Society, [n.d.]; originally published, 1774), 15, 18, 22, 128, 474, 479; Mary Lyon to Zilpah Grant, October 1836, and Mary Lyon, Circular of November 1836, Mary Lyon's Letters and Publications, Reel 1, Mount Holyoke College Library Archives; Hitchcock, *Power of Benevolence*, 201, 311.

31. Thomas, *Seminary Militant*, 25.

pastoral examinations administered by countless Puritan ministers, which Jonathan Edwards systematized in his writings on conversion, revivals, and religious psychology. Noyes alluded to this heritage in noting that "the institution of Mutual Criticism belongs to Congregationalism ..., the honor of the invention belongs to the missionary spirit of the Congregational church, and I would as soon rob the grave of my mother as take credit to myself for what that church has done for me."³²

Conclusion

Lyon and Noyes established these new forms of Congregationalism at Mount Holyoke and Oneida in response to the emergence of a national industrial economy. In constructing these new forms, both reached back to the tradition of the Puritan community to recapture the sense of authority, security, and belonging it provided for individuals. But in their systematic organization of individual development, and enthusiasm for labor-saving devices and systems of domestic efficiency, they also embraced the trends of their age. And in their millenarian belief that their own communities were sites of redemption that could inspire America and the world, they expressed a zestful spirit of entrepreneurship along with the sense of emotional righteousness characteristic of communal identity.

While Noyes was for more radical in his theology and social programming than Lyon, the visions of both grew out of the religious soil of New England theology, and together demonstrate the underlying coherence in some of the various movements of personal and social reform characteristic of Northern antebellum culture. This underlying coherence involved neither a static ideal of the past nor helpless acceptance of current trends, but was rather a dynamic and harmonious integration of past and present, expressive of that vital principle of grace revered so highly at Mount Holyoke and Oneida. In reframing modern industry in communal terms, and in revising traditional concepts of community in light of modern experience, Lyon and Noyes were not escaping into an Utopian past or future but, as they might have put it, were trying to live in the world truthfully.

32. John A. Vinton, quoted in John Humphrey Noyes, *Mutual Criticism* (Oneida, N.Y.: Office of the American Socialist, 1876), 10,12-13.

