

# MORMON SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

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Ryan T. Cragun, Editor

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### President's Message

Greetings!

I hope this newsletter finds you well. I appreciate this opportunity to update you on the state of the MSSA. We are approaching a new milestone in 2008—the publication of our first sponsored volume of essays on the sociology of Mormonism. I am speaking of course, about the upcoming volume commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of Thomas F. O’Dea’s classic, *The Mormons*. The seeds of this book emerged from a conversation at the 2005 MSSA business meeting in Kansas City. The original discussion centered on putting together a session for the 2006 meetings assessing O’Dea’s contribution half a century later. But then our delusions of grandeur took over. The idea of an edited volume comprised of essays written by our membership was tantalizing and seemed like something we might be able to do. Armand Mauss, Ryan Cragun and I were charged to find a team of editors who could pull it off, and the MSSA board was pleased to accept the offer extended by BYU sociologists and fellow MSSA friends Cardell Jacobsen, John Hoffman, and Tim Heaton. These capable scholars have contracted with the University of Utah Press to publish the book, which is entitled *Revisiting Thomas F. O’Dea’s The Mormons: Contemporary Perspectives*. The

other day while browsing Amazon.com (a favorite pastime of mine) I came across the website advertising the book complete with front cover design. The book weighs in at over 400 pages, and so we can look forward to a great deal of penetrating insight and analysis from a number of the gifted scholars we call colleagues and fellow members of the MSSA. I can't wait to have it in my hands.

We are also anticipating a fun time in Tampa for the 2007 meetings of the MSSA, held, as always, in conjunction with the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. Members of the MSSA are well represented on the program, both in sessions we have sponsored, and in various other sessions. We will also meet on Friday for our business meeting. Finally, I congratulate the new MSSA officers. We are in good hands going forward. I look forward to seeing you in Tampa.

Rick Phillips  
University of North Florida

### MSSA Election Results

President-Elect: Ryan T. Cragun, University of

Tampa  
Secretary/Treasurer: Michael McBride, UC Irvine  
Directors-At-Large: Tim Heaton, BYU; Henri  
Gooren, Oakland University

### **MSSA Sessions & related sessions @ SSSR**

*A-2: Issues in Denominational Research Using  
Prominent National Data Sets: The Case of the  
Mormons [MSSA]*

#### **Convener and Discussant:**

Rick Phillips, University of North Florida

"Sampling Issues for Small Populations." John P.  
Hoffman, Brigham Young University

"Finding Religion in Census Data: Mormons in the  
Mexican Census." Tim B. Heaton, Brigham Young  
University

"Combining Surveys to Draw Conclusions on  
Mormons." Cardell Jacobson, Brigham Young  
University

*E-5: Global Growth of Mormons, Witnesses, and  
Adventists [MSSA]*

#### **Organizers and Conveners:**

Henri Gooren, Utrecht University; Rick Phillips,  
University of North Florida

"International Stagnation: Declining Mormon  
Growth Rates and Secularization" Ryan Cragun,  
University of Tampa

"Mormon Dilemmas in Nicaragua" Henri Gooren,  
Utrecht University

"On the Political Economy of Mormon Growth"  
David C. Knowlton, Utah Valley State College

"Comparing Further the Global Growth-Rates and  
Distributions of Adventists, Mormons, and  
Witnesses" Ronald Lawson, Queens College  
CUNY

*A-6: Religious Renewal and Traditionalism*

"Is There a Mormon Evangelical Christian

Rapprochement?" O. Kendall White, Jr.,  
Washington and Lee University

*B-11: New Book Panel Discussion - Faith in  
America [Three Volumes] Changes, Challenges,  
New Directions Praeger 2006 edited by Charles  
Lippy*

"The Shifting Role of the Latter-day Saints as  
the Quintessential American Religion." Ethan  
Yorgason, Brigham Young University Hawaii

*D-5: Race and Religion: Socio-historical  
Considerations*

"The Declining Significance of Religion in the  
Black Community?" John P. Hoffmann, Brigham  
Young University, Cardell K. Jacobson, Brigham  
Young University

*H-5: Religion, Politics, and the Individual*  
"Mormons and the State: LDS Politics and  
Identity" Michael Nielsen, Georgia Southern  
University; Barry Balleck, Georgia Southern  
University

*J-4: Faith and the Internet*

"Predictors of Online Browsing by Mormons"  
Michael Nielsen, Georgia Southern University;  
Meryem Sevinc, Georgia Southern University

### **Glenn M. Vernon Lecture**

*The Mormons of the World: The Meaning of  
LDS Membership in Central America by Henri L.  
Gooren*

*Introduction*

The membership growth of the Church of Jesus  
Christ of Latter-day Saints is impressive, going

from six Latter-day Saints in 1830 to approaching 13 million by 2006. The LDS Church boasts a very strong top-down organization, which is analyzed in detail by O'Dea (1957: 174-185; see also Gooren 1999: 64-65). Especially since the 1950s, the Mormon Church is gradually becoming an international church. Rodney Stark may be exaggerating in calling Mormonism the next world religion,<sup>1</sup> but there is no doubt that the LDS Church is gaining many new members worldwide. Growth has been strong in some Pacific islands (like Tonga) and especially in Latin America.

Nowadays more than 35 percent of the worldwide membership is concentrated in Latin America, compared to about 45 percent in the USA and Canada. Growth in Latin America there has been particularly strong in Chile, Uruguay, the Andean countries, and Central America as a whole (Gooren 2007). By 2020, if the current growth rates would continue, the majority of Mormons in the world will be Latin Americans (Grover 2005: 85). This would have surprised Thomas O'Dea and other scholars of Mormonism in the 1950s.

The success of the Latter-day Saints or LDS Church in Latin America begs two questions. What is the meaning of LDS Church membership for the multitudes of Latin Americans who converted to the church? And what does the future majority of Latin American Mormons mean for the organization and functioning of the LDS Church itself?

This article will deal mostly with the first question, the meaning of LDS Church membership for Latin Americans. It will also analyze the supposed rational and intellectual appeal (O'Dea 1957: 241-242)<sup>2</sup> of the LDS doctrine for Central Americans and contrast it with the more emotional – and certainly less intellectual – tendencies of the main religious competitors of the Mormon Church in Central America, the Pentecostals.

As in Pentecostalism, the attractions of Mormonism are not sufficient to keep more than

half of the new converts active in the church after the first year. Knowlton (2005: 54) shows that only about one-quarter of all baptized Mormons identify themselves as such in the national censuses of Mexico and Chile. These are the core members, 'the church within the Church' (Davies 2000: 4). I shall argue here that perhaps another one-quarter are still (occasionally) active as members, although membership does not form an essential element of their lives and identities.

Some of the initial attractions of Mormonism turn out to be its principal obstacles to sustained commitment, especially the church's organization and its strict rules of conduct, which are difficult to maintain for some people. I first analyze the recruitment process of Mormons in Central America. Following O'Dea (1957: 222 ff.), I then analyze three principal sources of strain and conflict for Mormons in Central America: callings, *machismo*, and inactivity. All three are connected to local leadership performance. A final section probes the meaning of LDS membership in contemporary Central America. What is the relevance of Thomas O'Dea's 1957 book on the LDS way of life in the United States for analyzing Mormonism in contemporary Central America?

#### *Mormon Success in Central America*

Following O'Dea, I focus especially on the supposed rational and intellectual appeal of Mormonism in Central America. O'Dea wrote in *The Mormons* (1957: 241):

*Mormonism has been inclined toward rationality from the start, and this has long been related to a certain utilitarianism in the general Mormon outlook.[...] Argument rather than emotion plays an important part in Mormon proselytizing.*

In my 1990 study of an LDS ward in San José, Costa Rica, I closely observed how the missionaries tried to convince the *investigators* or potential converts (Gooren 1991: 29-32). Most of the investigators came from the upper lower classes and the lower middle class; the

<sup>1</sup> Stark (1984, 1990, 1996, 1998) ignores that the drop-out rate for Mormon converts in the first year is at least fifty percent (Decoo 1996: 98; Gooren 1991: 58, 1999: 66; Grover 1985: 137-139; Knowlton 2005: 54). O'Dea (1957: 185) estimated that 'between one-third and one-half of the church membership' in the USA was active.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. John A. Widtsoe, *Rational Theology: As Taught by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (1998).

majority of them were women. These investigators were invariably young, usually between 15 and 25, and intellectually very curious. But they were not critical: almost all accepted everything the Elders told them at face value (ibid.: 30). The high literacy rate in Costa Rica of 92 percent aided the missionary work, because investigators were required to read many texts (Gooren 1991: 30). Giving away the Book of Mormon in Spanish for free was an important part of the mission strategy.<sup>3</sup> The missionaries would subtly pressure people to make the next appointment soon, usually in a few days. But the investigators often complained that they had no time to do their 'homework': to read texts from the Bible, the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and the brochures containing the *Discussions* (called *Charlas* in Spanish).

There were six *Discussion* brochures, which were officially called Study Guides (*Guías de estudio*).<sup>4</sup> The missionaries practiced a verbatim rendering of the charlas at the Missionary Training Center in Provo, Utah. As their Spanish improved, they sometimes improvised more – or 'trusted the Holy Spirit' as they described it (Gooren 1991: 30). The Elders would take turns in giving the talks. A Discussion was supposed to take about half an hour, but they usually took more than an hour in Costa Rica because of frequent digressions and interruptions (unexpected visitors, children demanding attention, and general noise).

A typical charla meeting always started with an opening prayer by an Elder, followed by the singing of one or two hymns, and then the talk. The first Discussion explained *Our Heavenly Father's Plan* for humanity and included the story of how Joseph Smith was guided by God to find the gold plates of the Book of Mormon and found a new church, the only true church. The second charla, *The Gospel of Christ*, discussed the resurrection of Christ.

The key Discussions were three and four, entitled *The Restoration* and *Eternal Progress*. Three

<sup>3</sup> Giving away copies of the Book of Mormon remains an important strategy. A Nicaraguan Mormon gave me a copy with a long hand-written message, including an earnest appeal to me: read it and pray to the Holy Spirit for guidance (research notes, Managua, June 21, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> In 1990, there were still six Discussions. Since 2004, there are only four charlas, which are conducted jointly by the missionaries and ward elders (interview LDS bishop Las Palmas, Managua, February 6, 2005).

dealt with the corruption of the church in the centuries after Christ, resulting in the loss of the 'keys to the authority of the lay priesthood.'

Joseph Smith was told by God in his First Vision that all churches were false. Around this time, the missionaries would urge investigators not only to read the Book of Mormon, but to pray about its contents and ask the Holy Spirit for a confirmation that it is true. The reasoning is as follows: if the Book of Mormon is authentic, then Joseph Smith is a true prophet of God, and then the Mormon Church must be the true church of Christ. Again I would like to stress that it is a form of reasoning that is mostly intellectual.

Discussion four dealt with the *pre-existence*, where spirits exist before they are born with a body. The missionaries explained the importance of the law of chastity to maintain pure bodies. They then asked the investigator in a very direct manner if s/he complied with this God-given law. The answer was always accepted at face value. The Discussion ended with an explanation of Joseph Smith's revelation on the Word of Wisdom: 'We shouldn't consume alcohol, tobacco, coffee, tea, or harmful drugs.'

Charla five talked about the importance of leading a Christ-like life; afterwards the missionaries inquired after a possible date for baptism. The final discussion was called *Members of God's Kingdom* and discussed Christ's roles as Creator, Savior, Example, and Judge in our final judgment. The conditions to accept Christ in our lives were explicitly mentioned: baptism by immersion, faith, repentance, accepting the gifts of the Holy Spirit, following God's commandments, and serving His true church. A date must be set for baptism after the final Discussion, unless the investigator had not yet been to church on a Sunday. But this was rare. Out of the thirty investigators I followed in Costa Rica, only two failed to be baptized (Gooren 1991: 32).

The missionaries aimed to have at least one Discussion every week with the investigator, which they usually accomplished. Investigators hardly ever cried or showed other emotions, except curiosity. They typically said that Mormonism made sense to them; it was 'logical' and it 'could answer the questions they'd had for

a long time.’ We see traces of what O’Dea called the intellectual appeal of Mormonism and its use of logical argument as a conversion method. The most eager investigators went through all six charlas in two weeks. This meant that their knowledge of the Mormon Church was rudimentary at best. But the Utah-born LDS mission president in Costa Rica did not consider this a problem: ‘The most important thing is that they get baptized. After that they still have a lot to learn’ (ibid.).

Table 1. Key LDS indicators for Guatemala, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua (2005).

	Guatemala	Costa Rica	Nicaragua
Year of arrival	1947	1946	1953
Registered members	200,537	34,036	52,184
LDS population percentage	1.37%	0.85%	0.95%
Number of stakes	40	5	7
Number of wards	236	42	44
Annual growth percentage 2004-05	1.9%	1.6%	9.0%
High growth years	1982-90	1988-92	1990-98

Sources: Deseret News (2006), Gooren (2001, 2007).

How successful are the LDS missionaries in the region? Table 1 gives an overview of key indicators of the Mormon Church in three key countries in Central America. I analyze LDS growth here by referring to my current fieldwork on religious competition in Managua, Nicaragua and to my earlier studies of representative urban LDS wards in Guatemala City and San José, Costa Rica.<sup>5</sup>

Guatemala has the largest number of Mormons, the result of explosive growth throughout the 1980s, as well as the highest LDS population

percentage. But Guatemala’s current annual growth rate is barely two percent, which is similar to Costa Rica. Since LDS Church growth equals the general population growth in these countries, there is a relative stasis of membership occurring here. Only in Nicaragua is there still strong growth, exceeding nine percent a year. The growth explosion in Nicaragua took place in the 1990s and was actually a catching-up process. The war and government harassment by the ruling left-wing Sandinistas severely limited the missionary work of the church. Between 1982 and 1990, several Mormon Church buildings were confiscated and used by Sandinista youth groups and the Sandinista army. For about eight years, the LDS Church functioned underground in Nicaragua (see Gooren 2007 for details).

Various authors<sup>6</sup> concluded that the main general attractions of LDS membership in Latin America are its smooth organization that radiates success and middle class values, its style of worship and hymns, its lay priesthood, its strict rules of conduct, its huge missionary force, its practical teachings (e.g., on household budgeting and on raising children), its social networks, and its doctrine or ‘spirituality.’ Guatemalan members themselves mentioned the church’s strict morality,<sup>7</sup> learning new things,<sup>8</sup> feeling the joy of God’s love,<sup>9</sup> being blessed with miracles,<sup>10</sup> and receiving support from other members.<sup>11</sup>

However, Guatemalan Mormons mentioned *not* receiving support from other members – especially leaders – as the main factor in becoming inactive. Hence, I concluded that successful integration in church depended mainly upon acquiring a testimony of its truthfulness and building up relations with other members (Gooren 1999: 207). During my studies in Costa Rica and Guatemala in the

5 Gooren (1991, 1999, 2007). The 1991 MA thesis explored the reasons for LDS growth in San José, Costa Rica. My 1999 dissertation analyzed the connections between church membership and having a micro-enterprise among Mormons, Pentecostals, and Catholics in Guatemala City. My current research focuses on competition between Charismatic Catholics, Pentecostals, and Mormons in Managua, Nicaragua. All three were ethnographic studies with an emphasis on qualitative methods (participant-observation; formal and informal interviews).

6 Gooren (1999, 2000); Grover (1985, 2005); Knowlton (1996, 2005); Stark (1998). This is Stark’s (1998: 47-66) full list of attractions: medium tension with society, legitimate authority, lay priesthood, labor force (callings, missionaries), ethic, fertility, success among the unchurched, network ties, and effective socialization.

7 Gooren (1999: 2, 153, 155, 161, 186).

8 Ibid. (156, 161).

9 Ibid. (155, 162).

10 Ibid. (160, 166, 167-168).

11 Ibid. (155, 169).

1990s, I observed that there were many new baptisms, but not nearly as many new members. Half of all new converts left the religion within a year – a figure that seems to be constant all over Latin America (Gooren 1991: 58; Gooren 1999: 66; Grover 1985: 137-139; Knowlton 2005: 54). O’Dea (1957: 120) already pointed out that ‘close personal integration into the church community lent a heightened intensity to the Mormon experience and gave it added personal relevance.’ After baptism, the new members hardly had contact anymore with the missionaries, who occupied a marginal position in the ward and stake structure. New members had to deal with the bishop and the stake president – or usually with their counselors. They were reminded to pay their tithing. Occasionally, they would be asked to give an opening or closing prayer or share their testimony on fast Sunday. They would be invited to come to various sorts of meetings. Most new converts would receive a time-consuming *calling*, a voluntary church assignment, within weeks of their baptism. For some, a calling raised their self-esteem, integrated them in the church community, and thus became a mechanism for commitment. But for others, receiving a calling was the first step on the road to inactivity (see below in the section on callings).

In summary, the typical Mormon *conversion career*<sup>12</sup> in Central America went as follows. After the first contact with Mormon members or missionaries, the investigator received the Discussions. S/he was invited to study the *charla* Study Guides and the Book of Mormon – the rational elements of conversion – and to ask the Holy Spirit for a confirmation of its veracity. In about half of the cases, a testimony of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon and hence Joseph Smith and the Mormon Church was gradually built up. With the testimony came acceptance of the church organization and its hierarchical, lay priesthood for men. If new members built up a good relationship with the leaders and members, they were more likely to accept a calling and thus became more integrated into the local church community: the ward and

12 See Gooren (2005, 2006a) for an elaboration of the conversion career approach and its five levels of religious commitment: pre-affiliation, affiliation, conversion, confession, and disaffiliation.

stake. In turn, this integration strengthened their commitment.

### *Pentecostal Success in Central America*

In the current context of strong Pentecostal growth all over Latin America,<sup>13</sup> it is interesting to contrast the supposed intellectual appeal of Mormonism with the more emotional and experiential appeal of the Pentecostal churches. The early literature analyzed the growth of Pentecostal churches in the context of processes of modernization and especially urbanization (Lalive 1969; Roberts 1968; Willems 1967). Pentecostalism offered people social networks, a closely-knit community, a strict code of conduct, the possibility of increased self-esteem through empowerment, and ‘free social space’ (Martin 1990: 180) for cultural innovations. Above all, the heterogeneous Pentecostal churches offered some unique ‘products’, which ultimately allows them to dominate – at least for the time being – the religious market in almost all Latin American countries (Chesnut 2003; Gooren 2006b).<sup>14</sup>

Some of the products that Pentecostalism offers are not unique. I already mentioned that people were attracted to Mormonism because of its social networks, sense of community, strict rules of conduct, and potential for empowerment. All of these elements can also be found in Pentecostalism. But the myriad Pentecostal churches – most of them anyway – offer a few elements that are truly unique and form the basis for their success. Pentecostalism is about experience more than tradition or study.<sup>15</sup> Pentecostal churches offer direct access to the *charismata*, the gifts of the Holy Spirit: healing, prophesying, and speaking in tongues. Pentecostalism allows room for emotional catharsis: the electric band rocks, people sing their lungs out, some believers dance

13 See, e.g., Bonino (1997); Chesnut (2003); Chiquete & Orellana (2003); Corten & Marshall-Fratani (2001); Garrard-Burnett & Stoll (1993); Martin (1990, 2002); Samandú (2001); Schaefer (1992); Stoll (1990).

14 The religious market perspective is developed most clearly in Stark & Finke (2000). However, I find their conceptualizations of both rational choice and interreligious competition quite problematic (Gooren 2006b).

15 During my 2005 and 2006 fieldwork in Nicaragua I was surprised that hardly any Pentecostal church, whether the classic Assemblies of God or a mega-church like Hosanna, offered Sunday school study classes anymore.

themselves into a trance, and famous international preachers can put hundreds of people unconscious ('falling in the Spirit'). In short, Pentecostalism is about experience and emotion; Mormonism is about study and work: serving others in a voluntary calling as teacher, counselor, etc. The myriad Pentecostal churches are still mostly – though certainly not all – in the early stages of institutionalization. The routinization of charisma is only just beginning and the institutionalization process is causing conflicts in some Pentecostal churches. Mormonism, on the other hand, has been thoroughly institutionalized, rationalized, and even bureaucratized – in classical Weberian form (Weber 1978) – at least since the 1950s.

People looking for intense religious experiences and emotions may thus find that Pentecostalism caters better to their needs. These people might join the Mormon Church for a while, but they will almost certainly become inactive within a few months. Conversely: people with a more intellectual approach to religion might become disillusioned after some months of singing and joyous clapping in a Pentecostal church. Should they happen to come into contact with Mormon members or missionaries, they might find out that the LDS Church is better suited to their preferences. People pursuing their options on the religious market may not try out one church and another as if test-driving a Ford or Chrysler,<sup>16</sup> but if they do not like the church they are in, they will certainly look for another one better suited to what they consider important in a church. This explains why the desertion rates in Pentecostal churches all over Latin America are very similar to the fifty percent drop-out rates of Mormon converts after the first year.

In Mexico, for example, '68 per cent of those baptized in Evangelical churches in the 1980s had dropped out by the end of the decade' (Bowen 1996: 225). Based on Bowen's extensive surveys in over 40 Mexican congregations, the total disaffiliation rate in Pentecostal churches was 43 percent, meaning that a little over half of all those who once belonged to a Pentecostal church actually stayed in it (Bowen 1996: 70-71, 218-219).

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16 Gooren (2006b: 57).

In summary, Pentecostalism offers intense religious experiences and emotions in a context of urbanization and (often) political turmoil. Pentecostal churches offer direct access to the gifts of the Holy Spirit: healing, prophesying, and speaking in tongues. As with Mormonism, people were also attracted to Pentecostalism because of its social networks, sense of community, strict rules of conduct, and potential for empowerment. The high inactivity rates in Pentecostal churches of up to almost fifty percent are quite similar to Mormonism in the region.

Following O'Dea, the subsequent sections will explore the connections between sources of strain and conflict in Mormonism – callings, machismo, and inactivity – and local leadership performance in Central America.

*Sources of Strain and Conflict, One: Callings* O'Dea (1957: 222 ff.) identified various sources of strain and conflict in the North American Mormon Church of the 1950s, which will obviously be different in contemporary Central America. Influenced by the secularization thesis, O'Dea (1957: 222) wrote that 'Mormonism's greatest and most significant problem is its encounter with modern secular thought.' The rising levels of education among LDS members would create a strong current of intellectuals, who would inevitably get into conflict with the church leadership. Mormon orthodoxy would ultimately drive more liberal intellectuals away or into a less active membership status (O'Dea 1957: 222-240). O'Dea foresaw events that would happen fifty years later. The September 1993 excommunication of six prominent intellectuals discouraged active LDS scholars to study the Mormon Church with methods from the social sciences or humanities.<sup>17</sup> No such disputes exist as yet in Latin America, where there are still very few LDS scholars – especially in these disciplines – anyway .

O'Dea (1957: 241-242, 242-245, 253-255) was also prophetic by foreseeing already the tensions between rationality and charisma, political conservatism versus social idealism,

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17 For an illuminating look at the 'September Six,' see Shipps (2000: 198-203). See also Annus (2006: 109-111).

and between authority and individualism. These tensions were also visible in the interaction between members and the church organization in Central America. The main problems, in Central America and all over the world, seemed to be the church's demands on its members and, partly connected with this issue, the performance of local church leaders (Brown 1978; Craig 1970; Gooren 1999; Hawkins 1988; Knowlton 1996; Tullis 1980).

In a later work on the sociology of religion, O'Dea (1966: 90 ff.) noted that the institutionalization of religion always faced 'a set of structurally inherent dilemmas', which subsequently caused 'internal strains and functional problems' in the churches concerned (ibid.: 90). O'Dea (1966: 90-97) identified five such *dilemmas of institutionalization*.

I argue that the *dilemma of power* is important for the LDS Church in Latin America. O'Dea (1966: 96-97) noted that the routinization of religious charisma invariably led religions to seek protection from worldly authorities and thus to accumulate worldly power. This is essentially what happened in Deseret in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and why Joseph Smith entered state and even national politics since the 1840s (O'Dea 1957: 63). In Latin America, however, the Mormon Church has little hope of making an alliance with worldly governments: the Roman Catholic Church beat them to it. Instead, the institutional dilemma of power has consequences for local LDS congregations in Central America. I will demonstrate below that there is a direct link between bad leadership performance, especially at local ward and stake levels, and the high inactivity rates in Central America.

The dilemma of *mixed motivation*, as church offices gradually become paid jobs, is addressed by Mormonism through its lay priesthood and volunteer assignments (callings). In O'Dea's (1966: 91) own words: 'Institutionalization involves a stable set of statuses and roles, defined in terms of functions, upon which are incumbent rights and obligations.' Because the Mormon Church generally uses volunteers and usually rotates callings after three to five years, there is no established clergy. But the church bureaucracy could cause problems for its leaders

(see below) and could foster alienation among its members, much more than the supposed alienation caused by the wearing-out of religious symbols over time (ibid.: 92).

The Mormon Church requires from its (active) members a very strict morality. Only members 'in good standing,' about one-fourth of all registered members in the Central American LDS wards I studied, will receive a *temple recommend*. This is a card which allows one to enter the temple and participate in essential rituals. Faithful members are required to pay their tithes, follow the Word of Wisdom (abstaining from coffee, tea, and alcohol), and obey the commandments (especially the law of chastity, which condemns sex before marriage). The church also demands that members spend many hours a week in church meetings, study the scriptures and the manuals and fulfill the obligations of their callings.

Three-quarters of all active members in the La Florida ward I studied in Guatemala City had a calling. Bishop Mario of this ward said:

*Any calling in church provides the opportunity to serve. The whole point is that the person who's called finds the way to serve the others in his calling.[...] Any assignment, any calling in church, gives this blessing of knowing that you're useful for other people.[...] It gives you life experience (Gooren 1999: 169).*

In most cases, receiving a calling will strengthen a member's church commitment. In Guatemala, Patricio returned to the Mormon Church after God helped him to stop drinking. He received a warm welcome in his ward after many years of backsliding and inactivity:

*About two days later the bishop came and asked if I'd accept a calling as second counselor of the bishop. I even started to cry. How was it possible that I'd moved away and there's so many who deserve it more than I, and I even failed... When I was in church before I never had a calling. Nothing.[...] Never. But he told he this would help me and really: it did! (Gooren 1999: 162).*



But Bishop 'A' in San José, Costa Rica, also uttered a warning:

*A calling is not a guarantee for instantaneous success. Many people have to grow into it, that's exactly how it's meant to be (Gooren 1991: 25).*

The situation of most LDS members in Central America was very different from the United States. Hence, performance in callings was often problematic in Guatemala:

*The top-down authority model with rotating voluntary callings is probably very well suited to the United States, with its high levels of organization, education, and prosperity. However, the situation of LDS members in a Guatemalan low-income neighborhood like La Florida is radically different. A hard life, marked by poverty and health problems and low schooling, makes performance in callings generally sub-standard. New members often find it hard to handle a calling and many shirk responsibility (Gooren 1999: 85).*

Growing into a calling was supposed to raise commitment and bring life experience to new members; church leaders were responsible for encouragement and coaching during this process. Although most members had a calling, there are only a dozen or so really important leadership positions at the ward level. The church seemed to prefer to recruit young leaders in Central America and other growth areas like Africa (Gooren 1991: 58). Young leaders were expected to be more open to instruction.<sup>18</sup> Former Church President Spencer W. Kimball succinctly summarized what was expected of good church leaders:

*This kind of leader must have a strong feeling of responsibility, moral courage, and a will to complete his responsibilities against all odds. He will need to develop good judgment and effective administration, always as guided by the spirit.*

*He recognizes and acknowledges the work and the worth of others. He has a warm*

<sup>18</sup> 'Being teachable' is the expression that is often used (Gooren 1991: 17).

*personal relationship with people and he commands their respect by his treatment of them, He exerts influence with, rather than power over, his people. He listens attentively and sympathetically[.] He encourages self-responsibility in others (Brown 1978: 108).*

In a nice understatement, church authority Harold Brown recognized that President Kimball's standard was a high one.<sup>19</sup> In truth, the members' performance in a calling was always directly linked to leadership performance. Local LDS leaders in Central America were generally young, inexperienced, and often quite authoritarian:

*Bishops and stake presidents are simply unable to imitate the North American managerial leadership model.<sup>20</sup> Young people lack the necessary experience and maturity to perform as leaders. Those few leaders who do function well often stay in office too long, because there is nobody to replace them. This sometimes makes good leaders complacent, thus destroying leadership dynamism. Good leaders often find it hard to delegate responsibilities to church organizations like the Quorum of Elders or the stake High Council. They lack confidence in ordinary members (Gooren 1999: 85).*

Local LDS leaders preferred to handle almost all issues themselves, instead of delegating them to groups, like the Quorum of Elders. Hence the role of the *bishopric*, consisting of the bishop and his two counselors, was vastly inflated in Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. The same process was visible for the stake council: although the high council was very active, most members preferred to deal directly with the stake president (Gooren 1991: 35; Gooren 1999: 85, 90, 93).<sup>21</sup>

A lack of self-confidence among teachers made most Sunday school classes boring and thus

<sup>19</sup> 'As you might imagine, not all stake presidents and leaders, either in the United States or in Latin America, meet the ideal criteria set forth by President Kimball' (ibid.).

<sup>20</sup> See also Reynolds (1978: 16).

<sup>21</sup> Ryan Cragun noted in an e-mail (June 21, 2006) that this also happens to some degree in the United States.

reduced participation of visitors. Insecure leaders and members preferred to follow the manuals to make sure they got things right. A lack of self-confidence among many (new) members strengthened the authoritarian attitudes of some leaders: many new converts simply wanted to be *told* what to do, instead of finding out for themselves.

The LDS leadership in Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Nicaragua was certainly more authoritarian than in the United States (although the Utah-born mission president in Costa Rica was quite authoritarian as well). Authoritarian leaders in Central America often presented their orders as divinely-inspired messages, making it hard for members to question them (Gooren 1991: 36).<sup>22</sup> But where did this authoritarianism come from in the first place?

*Sources of Strain and Conflict, Two: Machismo*  
Tullis (1980) identifies hierarchical and *machista* elements in the local cultures of Latin America as important factors in the problems surrounding leadership performance:

*Cultural inclinations [...] have led to some ecclesiastical and leadership atrocities in Latin America. [...] As it is the most prepared and qualified people who tend to speak up against abuses [...], they find their own membership status placed in question. They are either cowed or driven underground. The Church is therefore not able to enjoy the benefit of its most able people because they are afraid to become involved. Such behavior turns counselors and advisors into 'yes men' who refuse to voice a disagreement with their leader even in private counsel (Tullis 1980: 72).*

The highest church leaders are well aware of the cultural conflicts that are caused by conversion to Mormonism, especially the problem of machismo. This is a quote from Regional Representative Harold Brown, from the BYU Centennial conference in 1976:

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<sup>22</sup> The authoritarianism of LDS leaders in Central America reminds me of O'Dea's (1957: 165) characterization of early Mormonism: 'What had developed was a democracy of participation and an oligarchy of decision-making and command.'

*Paternal or maternal authority as exercised in Latin America ranges from tender understanding to despotic paternalism. [...] A male child frequently is given a position of deference and privilege within the family relative to his sisters. Indeed, he often grows up "spoiled." Thus begins the attitude of male dominance, rather widespread in Latin America, popularly called machismo. In its traditional packaging, this element of self-esteem is incompatible with the gospel and LDS culture because it relates more to privilege than to responsibility, more to self-assertion than to cooperative action (Brown 1978: 111).*

The LDS mission president in Costa Rica identified the training of capable leaders as the biggest challenge for the Mormon Church in Latin America. He thought pride was the main problem for men in the region. An LDS missionary from California told me: 'Men have big egos here' (Gooren 1991: 45).

*Machismo* is easier to describe than to analyze. Lancaster's first description in his classic study of machismo presents it as the mirror image of appropriate women's behavior in Nicaragua:

*Feminine action emphasizes planning over risk, self-abnegation over self-promotion, domesticity over worldliness, action in and through networks rather than interpersonal competition (Lancaster 1992: 93).*

From this passage, it logically follows that men influenced by machismo will like risks, indulge in self-promotion, enjoy 'the world', and above all like to compete with other men. The main elements of this male competition seem to be the number of women they can have sex with, the number of children they can father (usually with different women), the amount of alcohol they can stomach, and – occasionally – the number of fights they can win. Machismo is primarily about power relations with other men and not so much with women (Lancaster 1992: 236).

This may sound like a caricature, but consider

another passage from Lancaster's fascinating study of machismo and power in Nicaragua:

*What is machismo? Why do Nicaraguan men behave as they do (as Nicaraguan women vigorously complain): beating their wives, simultaneously fathering children in multiple households, abandoning compañeras and children, gambling away hard-earned money, and drinking to excess? (Lancaster 1992: 235).*

Lancaster's answer is that men are afraid to lose their dignity, their honor. They are afraid to be seen as a homosexual and thus to be ridiculed by other men and women. Machismo kept both men and women locked in conduct that was negatively affecting family welfare. Conversion to evangelical churches, or to Mormonism, provides one possible way out of this conduct:

*[Evangelism] strengthens the social and economic base of the family by prohibiting competing activities such as drinking, dancing, and (directly and indirectly) contact with other women. Perhaps more important, Evangelism [or Mormonism, HG] provides a social alternative to male 'street culture.' [...] Men who lead virtuous lives can gain recognition and respect from the congregation when they participate in preaching and leading the hymns at the nightly meetings (Bossen 1984: 175).*

The connections between gender roles, machismo, conversion, and the household are most thoroughly analyzed, although perhaps slightly idealized as well, in the classic study by Elizabeth Brusco on evangelicals in Colombia:

*With conversion, machismo is replaced by evangelical belief as the main determinant of husband-wife relations. The machismo role and the male role defined by evangelicalism are almost diametrical opposites. Aggression, violence, pride, self-indulgence, and an individualistic orientation in the public sphere are replaced by peace seeking, humility, self-restraint, and a collective orientation and identity with the church and the home.[...] In evangelical households the*

*husband may still occupy the position of head, but his relative aspirations have changed to coincide with those of his wife (Brusco 1995: 137).*

Ramiro provided a good example of this process happening in the Mormon Church in Guatemala City. Ramiro was a second-generation Mormon, who had drifted away from church and became inactive during his adolescence. He led a very machista life and continued with this in part after his marriage at 25:

*After we got married I still drank for a time. Maybe what made me reflect was when my first daughter was born and the responsibilities of the home became greater. We needed more money to live on and sometimes there wasn't enough and I felt a bit irresponsible. All of this made me reflect and think about improving my situation. Because when you're in this environment you waste a lot of money. You're not particularly interested in the state of your family [...]. But I tried to correct this error by becoming active in church. So there I started to improve my situation (Gooren 1999: 156-157).*

In many of the lower-class Mormon families I studied in Costa Rica and Guatemala, however, the men were not active in church. They had dropped out because of conflicts with other members – like Miguel in Guatemala City (Gooren 1999: 164) – or they stopped going to church because they valued their freedom too much. That is, many men initially came to church and got involved in a calling. But after a while, they found church life tedious and resented the many hours a week they spend on church affairs. They started neglecting their callings. If they still had many non-member friends, they might be invited to go out together. Mormons are not forbidden to see a film or go to a bar, but the temptations are routinely stressed: non-Mormons drink and flirt in these places. If they experienced marital problems, many men found it easier to follow the patterns of machismo – spending most time outside the home – than to talk openly about these problems with their wife.

If active male members persisted in leading a life of drinking, gambling, and womanizing, they were censured and – if failing to repent – ultimately excommunicated by their bishop. This happened to 50-year-old ‘C’, the father of a big and highly active Mormon family with three daughters and one son in San José, Costa Rica (Gooren 1991: 22-23). ‘C’ cared nothing for the church and ridiculed his wife and children, who spent many hours a week there.

*Active Mormons ‘in good standing’ (i.e., core members) were not supposed to cheat on their spouses or drink alcohol. The social control in the ward strongly discouraged even flirting between people who were not married (Gooren 1991: 47). Mormon machismo in matrimony was expressed mainly in another way: the husband would force his views on his wife. This often resulted in a lack of communication and a tense situation. A typical example could be found in Costa Rica with husband ‘K’ (bank employee, 28) and spouse ‘L’ (housewife, 32) and their two children.*

K was a second-generation Mormon whose parents divorced when he was twelve. His mother subsequently dropped out of church, but his father was an important leader in the Paseo Colón ward on the other side of San José. K was a lukewarm member in the *affiliated* category, until he served his mission in Panama in 1981-83. There he met his future wife L. Their seven years of marriage were not easy: K was a congenial man, but he could go into a temper when he felt dominated by his wife. L had a strong character. As the secretary of the stake high council, K was away from home on most nights, which suited both well.

But K was determined that they leave their rented home in Curridabat, near the homes of L’s mother and sister, and move in with his father in Moravia. L was resisting him, because living in Moravia meant going to another LDS ward and thus losing contact with her friends and her brother in her current ward. She also feared seeing her mother and sister less. L became disillusioned when she saw that some church leaders, like the bishop, supported her husband. When she told her

bishop of her marriage problems, he told her to talk it out with her husband K. But the bishop told K in private that he should find a psychologist to treat his wife. L was very upset about this breach of confidence; the stake president seemed to agree with her. But since her husband was adamant, L had no choice but to accept the move (Gooren 1991: 25, 53).

The hierarchical, top-down organization of the LDS Church would seem to strengthen some elements of machismo, like the authoritarianism, while helping to weaken other elements (like adultery and alcohol abuse). The LDS Church manuals and magazines always stressed family harmony and counseled couples to talk openly, respect each other’s opinions, and to share responsibilities (Gooren 1991: 47). In Central America, this strengthens women’s capability for empowerment.<sup>23</sup> In some cases, the marriage problems were structural and ended in a divorce. Although Mormons are not forbidden to go through a civil divorce, and LDS divorce rates are similar to mainstream US society,<sup>24</sup> dissolving a marriage sealed ‘for time and eternity’ in a temple was extremely difficult. Additionally, divorce after civil marriage carried stigma and social consequences in the religion. If the husband left, so did the priesthood holder of the family (unless there were adult sons). Male Mormons often lost their leadership calling after divorce, although the church usually allowed them to finish their regular ‘term’ of three to five years. In some cases, a divorce eventually led to inactivity of either husband or wife.<sup>25</sup>

*Sources of Strain and Conflict, Three: Inactivity* I noted above that for some new converts, like Patricio in Guatemala, receiving a calling helped them to become integrated in the ward organization. But for others, receiving a calling was a pressure they were not able to deal with,

23 O’Dea (1957: 249) thought that early Mormonism ‘came very close to accepting the equality of women with men.’ Women in Utah received the right to vote already in 1870. Typically, the increasing institutionalization of the church weakened the position of women in the LDS Church (O’Dea 1957: 250).

24 O’Dea (1957: 141) already noted in the 1950s: ‘the rate of divorce is high in Utah and among Latter-day Saints.’

25 For the US, see also Bahr & Albrecht (1989) and Heaton *et al.* (1994). For Belgium, see Decoo (1996: 102, 108).

hence they dropped out (Gooren 1999: 170). If the testimony of the new member was (still) relatively weak, if outside pressure from non-member relatives was strong or if no good rapport was established with leaders, the new converts would most likely drop out. Other important disaffiliation factors were the time and money demands the church made (Gooren 1999: 207; Mauss 1996: 240) and backsliding into alcohol problems (Gooren 1999: 163-165). Since many new converts were attracted to the smooth church organization, many dropped out when it proved to be anything but smooth. Knowlton (1996) mentions the weak church organization as the main factor in the high inactivity rates. I noted earlier that inactivity is often directly related to bad leadership performance (Gooren 1999: 85; Tullis 1980: 72).

However, inactivity was also related to the new converts' experiences with the older members in general. 'Veteran' members were supposed to coach new members and even to become friends with them. But I noticed in Costa Rica that only a handful of the most active members would regularly devote attention to the new members. Most of the older members showed a definite *lack* of interest in the newcomers, which came as a cold shower after all the attention the (North American) missionaries devoted to them (Gooren 1991: 33). The LDS wards in Costa Rica and Guatemala had campaigns to visit inactive members and ask why they dropped out. However, only a handful of these people returned to church. LDS leaders put more emphasis on prevention: they wanted the older members to coach the converts through the whole recruitment process. Bishop A in Costa Rica mentioned older members setting bad examples – cheating, gossiping, radiating pride and arrogance – as the prime reason why new members became disillusioned in the church and dropped out (Gooren 1991: 34). But the bishop also acknowledged that some people took the step of getting baptized into the church too lightly and without sufficient preparation or instruction. The new converts, the older members, and the missionaries were *all* failing here, he thought (ibid.).

The Utah-born LDS mission president in Costa Rica mentioned four factors causing inactivity,

which partly overlapped with the bishop's assessment (Gooren 1991: 34). First, new converts often felt excluded by older members, who were aloof and uninterested in their problems. Second, many new converts never understood the information in the six charlas well: they underestimated the severe responsibilities connected to baptism. Third, a lack of knowledge and a lack of commitment caused people to have a weak testimony of the church. Fourth, the mission president mentioned 'a lack of responsibility among Latinos': he thought that many Latinos in general had a hard time fulfilling the promises they made.

All of the above factors contributed to the high drop-out rate of fifty percent in the first year after joining. New members found it hard to follow the Word of Wisdom, especially when non-Mormon friends and relatives would offer them coffee. When many new members did not show up regularly in church on Sundays, social control was minimized. But new members who did go to church faithfully and who made a genuine effort to perform well in their calling soon found out that they had to devote many hours a week on church matters. People who lacked the skills or resources for effective time management would be unable to meet the church's demands and hence gradually dropped out (Gooren 1991: 34). In San José, I was able to follow 28 people after their conversion to Mormonism. Only nine people, or about one-third, became well-integrated into the church organization during the seven months I could observe them. Four others occasionally showed up in church; two people I saw in church only once more. Out of 28 people I monitored, only nine remained active according to the strictest definition and perhaps a total of fifteen – a little over one-half – in the broadest definition (ibid.). These data again confirm that the Mormon Church in Central America is better at *bringing* people in than in *keeping* people in.

So what does it mean to be a Mormon in Central America for those members who remained active in the Mormon Church?

### *The Meaning of Being a Mormon in Central America*

Curious as it may seem, the rather obvious question of what it means to be a Mormon – whether in Latin America or in the USA – has hardly been addressed *directly* in the literature on Mormonism. O’Dea (1957: 54-60) identified five important elements of early Mormonism: a new definition of God, new forms of religious expression (the baptism for the dead, endowment rituals, sealed marriages), the gathering of Zion, and – until 1890 – polygamy.

This section probes the meaning of LDS membership in contemporary Central America by comparing experiences from members in Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. The Mormon Church has operated freely in Guatemala and Costa Rica since the 1950s and experienced a boom in the 1980s. By contrast, the left-wing Sandinistas in Nicaragua occupied Mormon buildings and forced the church organization to go underground between 1982 and 1990 (Gooren 2007). A subsequent membership boomed followed in the 1990s.

The question of what it means to be a Mormon in a certain country is obviously related to the original attractions that Mormonism offered people in the first place. People initially felt attracted to Mormonism because of its organization, its doctrine and spirituality, its practical teachings, its strict rules of conduct, and its social networks. Studying another subject, I analyzed three further meanings of LDS membership in Guatemala: achieving a closeness to God, providing a framework for personal growth and empowerment, and maintaining commitment as an ongoing struggle against backsliding (Gooren 2000: 109-111).

Especially during my fieldwork in Guatemala I could closely observe what being a Mormon meant for people. My Guatemalan LDS informants mentioned the following elements most often.<sup>26</sup>

1. a strong focus on the family (cf. O’Dea 1957: 140-142),
2. a focus on spiritual progress, including going to the temple and the temple marriage (cf. O’Dea 1957: 133),

<sup>26</sup> Gooren (1999: 2, 154-156, 159, 160, 161-162, 169, 173).

3. being part of God’s Kingdom through belonging to the church community and obeying its rules,
4. being different from other people by complying with the Word of Wisdom (try drinking no coffee in Central America!) and the strict moral code of conduct (cf. O’Dea 1957: 146),<sup>27</sup> and
5. spending many hours (between four and nineteen hours a week!) on church affairs, ranging from the three Sunday meetings, weeknight meetings, proselytizing activities, and preparations for callings and speeches.

The emphases in Nicaragua were slightly different, judging from my recent fieldwork there. The sense of being part of God’s kingdom and the sense of being different from others were stronger under the influence of harassment by the Sandinista government (1982-90). The strong focus on the family was always there, but perhaps the focus on spiritual progress and spending many hours on church affairs were of relatively lesser importance. In Costa Rica, the focus on spiritual progress was important, but it was less connected to going to the temple as this was a lengthy and costly process, the closest temple at that time still being in Guatemala City 2,000 miles away.<sup>28</sup> Being part of God’s kingdom and hence being different from other people were just as important in Costa Rica as in Guatemala or Nicaragua. The focus on family was always strong, as was the social control on spending many hours on church affairs.

Apart from these country differences, which were mostly connected to the political context, the main differences in how people experienced being a Mormon in daily life were related to their church commitment. Looking closely, an increasing order of importance was visible in the five key elements I identified as relevant to the Mormon identity.

The focus on the family was visible even among *inactive* members, including those who no

<sup>27</sup> According to O’Dea (1957: 146), the Word of Wisdom ‘has become for Mormons a most salient mark of their membership in the church. Together with tithing, it separates the loyal and fervent from the Jack Mormon and the half-hearted.’

<sup>28</sup> The LDS temple in Costa Rica is functioning since June 2000 (Deseret News 2006: 548).

longer identified with the LDS Church at all. Many inactive Mormons would probably become Pentecostals in the long run. The local culture in Central America idealized family life, although the role of the husband was considered secondary to the wife, especially in the education of the children. In Mormonism, both parents shared in this responsibility. Only the affiliated and core members connected this focus on the family to the idea of spiritual progress. Although most informants typically talked about their *individual* spiritual progress, Mormon teachings closely connect this element to their spouses and their children (Gooren 1991: 46).

The third element, being part of God's kingdom through belonging to the church community and obeying rules, also worked out differently for different sorts of members. *Affiliated* members still felt part of God's kingdom, even though they did not always show up on Sunday for Sacrament and Priesthood (or Relief Society) meetings. But these affiliated members did not know much about the unique history of the Mormon Church, after Joseph Smith's first vision and the foundation of the church's 'charismatic bureaucracy' (Bushman 2005: 258). Affiliated members who still complied with the Word of Wisdom doubtless felt a stronger connection with the church. Church leaders and members expressed confidence that following the church rules concerning morality, sexuality, and food helped people in their spiritual progress. Besides, it also strengthened their family life.

Complying with the many church rules also heightened the sense of separation of *core members* from non-members in mainstream Costa Rican, Nicaraguan, or Guatemalan society. Through machismo, sexuality was strongly present in the street life in all of these countries. By *not* engaging in looking, flirting, or talking to members of the opposite sex, committed Mormons enhanced their sense of being different from other people. Every day, Mormons were challenged to prove their worth, to assess their spiritual progress, to fight the possibility of backsliding.<sup>29</sup> Many of the affiliated members

<sup>29</sup> The parallel with Pentecostalism is obvious here. I am also reminded of Max Weber's Protestant ethic thesis: individual action becomes rationalized, because continuous evaluation of each act is necessary to probe its possible effects upon one's salvation (Gooren 1999: 6-7; Weber

found it impossible to comply with all of the church's demands, especially the taboos on coffee and tea (and alcohol).

Finally, it should be clear by now that only the core members spent an average of between five and twenty hours a week (Gooren 1999: 173, 196) on church matters. This included not only the three hours they spent each Sunday in church, but also activities to prepare for their calling responsibilities, doing church administration work (i.e., filling out forms), and participating in church meetings. People with administrative or teaching callings needed five to ten hours a week, but leaders in Guatemala routinely needed between eight (bishopric counselors) and eighteen (the bishop himself) hours a week. Mormon commitment required great amounts of time to be dedicated to the church. In the form of tithing, people were also expected to donate money to the church. I concluded that almost everybody in Guatemala City was occasionally skipped paying their tithing, while those that did comply rarely donated a full ten percent of their income (Gooren 1999: 196). The bishop was the only one in the ward who really knew how much everybody was paying. He awarded the temple recommend to all members who regularly tithed. These were the members in good standing: the core members.

### Conclusion

I showed that the number of registered members was actually a poor indicator of LDS penetration in Central America, since the inactivity rate hovered around fifty percent (or higher). I argued that inactivity and the meaning of LDS membership in Central America were closely related; they are like two sides of the same coin. Many new members were unable to make Mormonism an important element of their lives. In this conclusion I elaborate my typology of LDS members to help analyze the meaning of membership in Central America.<sup>30</sup> I think that the

1958: 117, 136).

<sup>30</sup> My dissertation distinguished four types of members: inactive members, less active members, more active members, and voluntary leaders (Gooren 1999: 84-85). LDS missionaries in Costa Rica had their own membership classification. Article 6 from the apocryphal articles of faith for missionaries read: 'We believe in the same organization that existed in the primitive church, viz.: active members, inactive members,

meaning of being a Mormon was ultimately connected to the question of what type of Mormon member we were talking about. I think there were at least four 'ideal typical' membership categories in Central America.

*Apostates* were ex-members who no longer considered themselves Mormons and who had often joined another church. They came into contact with the LDS missionaries, received the charlas (Discussions) and were baptized, but Mormonism did not offer what they were looking for. Most of these people were now active in a Pentecostal church; others may have returned to the Catholic Church or became disaffiliated from organized religions altogether. Hence, calling all of these people 'inactive members' is a meaningless euphemism.

A second category consisted of *inactive members*, who still considered themselves Mormons, although they never went to church. They formed at maximum about half of all registered members. All of the disaffiliation factors mentioned above – bad experiences with leaders and members, a weak testimony, insufficient knowledge of the church, insecurity, bad performance in callings – applied to them. However, they were sufficiently socialized into the church to maintain an identity as Mormons. Some still obeyed the Word of Wisdom, which was at odds with the machista mentality. They shared Mormonism's focus on the family and its emphasis on spiritual growth. Many of them still felt part of the Mormon community, even though they were inactive. Miguel in Guatemala was a good example (Gooren 1999: 164).

*Affiliated members*, the third group, regularly went to church, but they did not comply with all of the membership requirements. Not all of them would be tithing. If they had a calling at all, their performance was probably often sub-standard. For affiliated members, especially those with friends who were not Mormons, backsliding into machismo always formed a risk. Most obeyed the Word of Wisdom, although for a sizeable minority this was a problem: they were occasionally backsliding into drinking a cup of coffee or a glass of *guaro*. Hence, the bishopric did not consider

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disfellowshipped members, excommunicated members, dead members' (Gooren 1991: 64).

them to be 'members in good standing' and would not award them a temple recommend. A central feature of Mormonism, temple work, was thus beyond their reach. The 65-year-old carpenter Bernardo in Guatemala City was a typical affiliated Mormon. He did not have a calling, because he said he was 'too old' (Gooren 1999: 168). He admitted having struggled with his alcohol problem for all of his life and claimed that only through the support of the church rules and church members he managed to stop drinking (ibid.: 167-168). He was focused on his family and – less so – on spiritual progress, but he had never been to a temple. He only spent about four hours a week on church matters, the lowest score for all active Mormon informants (Gooren 1999: 173).

Finally, the *core members* conformed to all the expectations of LDS membership and were thus eligible for a temple recommend.<sup>31</sup> They made up no more than about one-quarter of all registered members. All of them had a calling and carried it out as was expected of them. All church leaders – i.e., anyone with an important leadership calling at the ward, stake, branch, or district level – could be found in this group. They were strongly focused on their family and on their spiritual progress. They strongly felt a part of God's kingdom and were deeply aware that they were different from inactive Mormons and non-members. Machismo was a taboo, although its remnants could be found in leaders' authoritarian attitudes. All core members spent between five and eighteen hours a week on church matters.

Albrecht (1998: 270) distinguished no less than nine types of Mormon members in the United States, based on the markers of identification, belief, and community in Brinkerhoff & Burke (1980). In Albrecht's scheme, my *core members* would all fall in the categories of Fervent Followers or Ritualists, who combined a high identification with Mormonism with a high or low belief. The *affiliated members* could be placed in the properly termed categories of Outsiders or Marginal Saints. They fostered a low

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31 Core members were thus the only members in Central America who were influenced by what O'Dea (1957: 143-150) succinctly identified and analyzed as the LDS 'work, health, recreation, and education complex.'



identification of Mormonism, paired with a high or low belief. The *inactive members* could be either a Splinter Saint or a Social Apostate. Both rejected the LDS community; the Splinter Saint had a high belief and the Social Apostate a low belief. The members I designated *apostates* myself, since they now rejected their former LDS identity entirely, formed a combination of Splinter Saints, and Social or Doctrinal Apostates. These people all rejected the LDS community and maintained at best a low belief or else no belief at all.

The conversion careers typology<sup>32</sup> offers an alternative perspective to analyze the four Mormon membership categories I found in Central America. However, LDS members in Central America seemed to fit in only three categories of the conversion careers typology. The core members were situated at the level of *confession*, involving a high level of participation inside the church and a strong evangelism on the outside. Apostates and inactive members were at the level of *disaffiliation*, affiliated members at the level of *affiliation*, and core members combined elements of *confession* (the highest level of church participation) and conversion. *Conversion* in the limited sense of the conversion careers approach referred to a (radical) personal change of identity and world view (Gooren 2005: 154).

The typical conversion careers of LDS members in Central America are easy to sketch. People's involvement in church is typically connected to their moving through the life course. Anyone joining the LDS Church in Central America had a 50 percent chance of becoming inactive in the first year.<sup>33</sup> The odds of becoming an affiliated member were 25 percent. These affiliated members got along with members and leaders, but their social networks were mostly situated outside of the LDS Church. The new Mormon also had a 25 percent chance of becoming a core member, who got along well with members and leaders and whose social networks were dominated by fellow-Mormons. The key distinguishing trait for core members was their

ability to developing friendship ties with other Mormons. After all, most people perform best when interacting with their own kind.

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32 For elaborations and applications of the conversion careers approach, see Gooren (2005, 2006a, 2006b).

33 O'Dea's (1957: 185) estimate of between 33 and 50 percent active Mormons in the United States suggests that this (in)activity rate is very stable and should perhaps be considered normal for the LDS Church.

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## Announcements and News

### *Conference on Mormon Studies in Europe*

A new scholarly society was created during the past year by a group of young LDS graduate students, two of whom are British (David Morris and Ronan Head) and one Finnish (Kim Östman). The new European Mormon Studies Association (EMSA) held its inaugural conference during August 2 – 4, 2007, at the University of Worcester, UK. A call for papers had been issued early in the year, and eventually more than a dozen were submitted and accepted for the program. Topics of the papers ranged geographically from Finland to Holland to the Isle of Man and thence to British Columbia; and historically from the ancient past to modern times. The subject matter varied, but most of the papers dealt, in one way or another, with the differences in the Mormon experience between Europe and the U. S. (See the Final Programme on the EMSA website : [www.euromormonstudies.com](http://www.euromormonstudies.com)). The invited keynote address by Armand Mauss outlined the differential costs of LDS membership in Europe vs. the U. S., and what the Church is doing to reduce the cost in Europe. The conference organizers expect to publish the papers next year in a volume of proceedings or

elsewhere.

The attendance at this inaugural conference was not large – only about 25, including the presenters. Double that number had originally committed to come, but many of them were deterred, either the weeks of flooding in the UK, or by the reports of terror incidents, or both. Many of those who did attend were Americans, but most were from the UK, with a sprinkling of continentals. Two important luminaries who came and made important presentations were Professor Douglas Davies of Durham University (probably Europe's best known and best informed non-Mormon scholar on the Mormons) and Professor Walter Van Beek, LDS anthropologist now at Leiden University in the Netherlands. Both names will be familiar to the readers of *Dialogue*. Rather surprisingly, even Professor Jiro Numano (also familiar from *Dialogue*) came all the way from Japan! One advantage of the relatively small enrollment was that all sessions were plenary, so everyone could hear all the papers. The small size also made for special conviviality and new friendships during the meals taken together. The concluding event on Saturday was a picnic at the historic Gadfield Elm Chapel in Worcestershire, the first LDS chapel in history (inherited from early United Brethren converts to Mormonism). See the story about this chapel at [http://www.lds.org.uk/gadfield\\_elm\\_chapel.php](http://www.lds.org.uk/gadfield_elm_chapel.php). NEXT YEAR the conference will be held in Finland. Watch for details early in the year on the EMSA website.

### *Spanish and Portuguese Mormon Studies Association*

The Spanish and Portuguese Mormon Studies Association was organized last May in Salt Lake City during the annual conference of the Mormon History Association. For details, contact Mark Grover ([mark\\_grover@byu.edu](mailto:mark_grover@byu.edu) or Stirling Adams ([sadams@novell.com](mailto:sadams@novell.com)).

### *Bushman named Hunter Visiting Professor*

Richard L. Bushman has been appointed Howard W. Hunter Visiting Professor in the School of Religion at the Claremont Graduate University, pending the completion of funding for

the endowment that will support a permanent Hunter Chair in Mormon Studies. Richard will be on fellowship at the Huntington Library in Pasadena during the 2007-08 academic year, but he and his wife Claudia will both participate during the year in the planning and organization of a full-fledged Mormon Studies program, with full funding for the Chair expected before the 2008-09 academic year.

#### *New Books of Interest*

- John P. Hoffmann, *Japanese Saints: Mormons in the Land of the Rising Sun* (Lexington, 2007)
- Eric A. Eliason, *The J. Golden Kimball Stories* (University of Illinois Press, 2007).
- Cardell K. Jacobson, John P. Hoffmann, and Tim B. Heaton, *Revisiting Thomas F. O'Dea's The Mormons: Contemporary Perspectives* (University of Utah Press, 2008).

(Note from Newsletter Editor: If you are interested in reviewing one of the above books for a future edition of the newsletter, please let me know: [rcragun@ut.edu](mailto:rcragun@ut.edu))

#### *Job News*

MSSA member Walter van Beek was appointed to the newly created chair of Anthropology of Religion at Tilburg University in the Faculty of Humanities as of January 1, 2007. Professor van Beek will retain his Senior Research Fellowship at the African Studies Center at Leiden, Netherlands.

#### *Updated Mormon Social Science Bibliography*

Now available online at the MSSA website ([www.mormonsocialscience.org](http://www.mormonsocialscience.org)) is Version 1 of the updated bibliographic database on social scientific studies of Mormonism. Armand Mauss's original bibliography, "A Topical Guide to Published Social Science Literature on the Mormons," covered up to 1997, and the current database includes his entries and all that we have found from 1997 on. Some details:

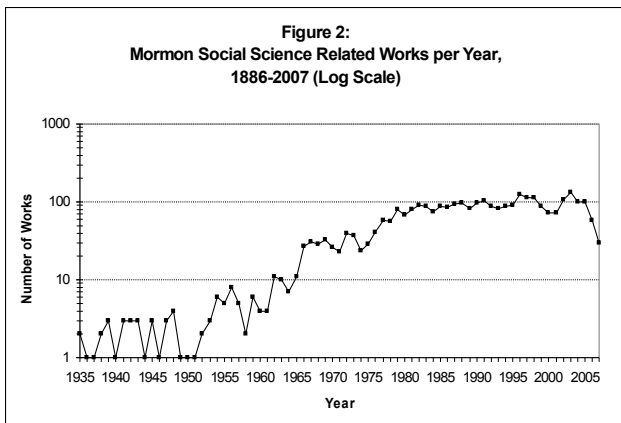
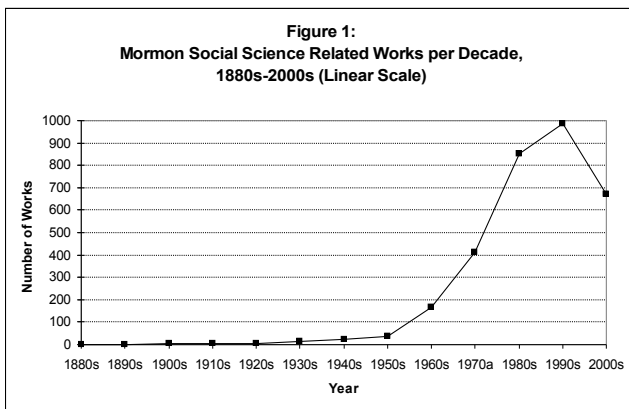
1. The bibliography is available in several electronic formats: EndNote bibliography format (requires EndNote 9 to open; this is

zipped and has instructions inside it), a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, an rtf file (viewable in any word processor; this is also zipped), an Adobe pdf file, and a RIS file. These files can be freely viewed or downloaded by anyone on the internet.

2. When deciding whether or not to add a work, we asked ourselves if a social scientist studying Mormonism might find the work helpful. This criterion implies that many works included are not social science strictly defined, yet it is hoped that it makes the bibliography useful for a wider social scientific audience. We have, however, restricted ourselves to published works.
3. The database uses the same classifications as in Armand's bibliography under the field name "Label" in the EndNote and Excel files.
4. We hope that MSSA will formally assume responsibility for maintaining and updating the database. In practice, this means a single person (i.e., Michael McBride for now) will be responsible for entering and updating references.
5. The database has some errors, some worse than others. For example, a bad error is that for chapters in edited volumes, the editors appear as authors and the book titles do not appear. This apparently occurred during our change from one bibliography software to another. Please notify us as you identify other errors. It will take some time to correct all of these errors.
6. The database almost surely omits works that should be included (we especially apologize if we omitted one of your works!). We appreciate and need help identifying such works. Please email any references for inclusion to Mike ([mcbride \[at\] uci \[dot\] edu](mailto:mcbride@uci.edu)) or go to the MSSA website and type that reference as an electronic comment under the bibliography post.
7. How frequently this database will be updated is not yet determined but probably at least annually.

Figures 1 and 2 provide two snap shots of the number of works in the database. Figure 1 plots

the number of works per decade since the 1880s (the first publication in 1886). We see a sharp rise in the number of works in the 1950s. The large drop in publications from the 1990s to the 2000s is primarily due to our only listing publications through the first half of 2007. Figure 2 plots the number of works per year from 1935-2007 in logarithmic scale to better capture the rate of growth in published works. We notice a sharp increase in the growth rate in 1950, yet from around 1980 on we notice very low growth in the number of works (consistent with a prediction in 2001 by Armand, see "Flowers, Weeds, and Thistles: The State of Social Science Literature on the Mormons," in Mormon History).



### Future SSSR Meetings

2007: November 2-4, Tampa, Florida  
 2008: October 17-19, Louisville, Kentucky  
 2009: October 23-25, Denver, Colorado

### MSSA Leadership

*President:*

- Rick Phillips (2005-2009)

*President-Elect:*

- Ryan T. Cragun (2009-2011)

*Board Members:*

- Tim Heaton (2007-2009)
- Henri Gooren (2007-2009)

*Treasurer/Secretary:*

- Michael McBride (2007-present)

*Newsletter Editor:*

- Ryan T. Cragun (2003-present)

*Next elections: Spring 2009*

### Dues Due

Please send your dues for 2008 to Michael McBride, 3151 Social Science Plaza; Irvine, CA 92697-5100. Dues are \$10.00 annually. Checks should be made payable to "Mormon Social Science Association" or "MSSA."

If you would like to receive this newsletter by email, and don't already, save the MSSA some money by sending your email address to:

[mcbride@uci.edu](mailto:mcbride@uci.edu)