

Newsletter
SOCIETY FOR THE SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF MORMON LIFE (SSSML)

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June, 1985

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

The Society for the Sociological Study of Mormon Life was formed in an effort to foster and promote the scholarly study of the social, cultural, and religious institutions and behavior of Mormons as a people. Since its organization in the fall of 1979 it has tried to do so by publishing this newsletter and by organizing sessions on the Sociology of Religion at the annual meetings of the Pacific Sociological Society. As of this last year SSSML will also be organizing sessions at the annual meetings of the Association for the Sociology of Religion.

The most exciting effort of SSSML to date was the sponsorship of the special issue (September, 1984) of Review of Religious Research

The next major effort the society will sponsor is a series of lectures (hopefully to be published in a monograph) entitled "Toward the Sociology of Mormon Life." We are hoping to negotiate co-sponsorship with sociology departments at different universities and colleges to help support the lectures and the cost of publishing.

Rodney Stark (Review of Religious Resear, September, 1984) has suggested that the study of Mormonism is the study of an incredibly rare event: the rise of a new world religion. Jan Shippes has likened the rise of Mormonism out of Christianity to the rise of early Christianity out of Judaism. It is the intent of SSSML to sponsor these lectures as a means of organizing and giving direction to the study of Mormonism. What are the essential elements that must be examined, how do we approach the study of this new world religion, and what theoretical traditions are most important to the discovery of what is unique about this religion?

As we explore the possibilities of such a lecture series, we would be glad for the comments and suggestions of the member-ship. Thanks should go to one of the members, Brigham Young Card, for suggesting the idea of a lecture series.

Marie Cornwall President

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE PACIFIC SOCIOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Although we did not have a separate session on the Sociology of Mormonism at the PSA meetings April 17-20 this year, three of the papers in two Sociology of Religion sections

were based on Mormon samples or were specifically about Mormonism.

Merlin B. Brinkerhoff, Jeffrey C. Jacob, and Marlene M. Mackie (all from the University of Calgary) presented a paper entitled "Mormonism and Moral Majority Make Strange Bed-fellows?: An exploratory critique."

Shupe and Heinerman recently presented a provocative case for the possible emergence of an alliance between two traditionally hostile religious movements: Mormons and various Fundamentalist/ Baptist groups (Moral Majority, New Christian Right, etc.). This paper examines their argument that "on many social issues from abortion to pornography, the Mormon and Fundamentalist/Baptist positions are virtually indistinguishable." It clarifies the nature of the relationship between Mormons and the New Christian Right through a structural analysis of the Shupe/Heinerman hypotheses and the presentation of original data. The paper notes the lack of institutional linkages between Mormons and the Moral Majority through an analysis of the dynamics of Mormon organizational culture and then examines survey data which demonstrate the degree of social distance among these groups and argues against a convergence in the Mormon/New Christian Right positions.

Brian L. Pitcher, Marie Cornwall, Stan L. Albrecht, and Perry H. Cunningham (Brian is at Utah State, Marie and Stan are at Brigham Young University, and Perry is in the L.D.S. Correlation Department) presented a paper entitled "Contextual and Institutional Factors in Religious Commitment: An Examination of Mormon Congregations."

This study assesses the effects of various contextual and institutional factors on levels of religious commitment and participation in local Mormon congregations. A framework identifying basic organizational dimensions was developed, then variables were selected to operationalize these dimensions.

Data were collected from 150 Mormon wards to test the effects of the various factors on three measures of organizational effectiveness, specifically: rates of youth advancement, adult activity and adult reactivation. Compositional characteristics of the membership of the units -- e.g., religious background, age and socioeconomic distribution -- were most relevant for differentiating levels of performance. Characteristics of the local communities also seemed to have some significant effects. Variables measuring specific aspects of the "church life" in the local unit were not relevant for differentiating unit success. Overall, these variables accounted for most of the variation among units in rates of youth advancement and adult activity, but significantly less of the variation in adult reactivation rates.

Marie Cornwall (Brigham Young University) presented a paper entitled: "Social Bases of Religion: A Study of Factors Influencing Religious Belief and Commitment."

This paper examines both (1) the importance of socialization processes in acquiring a particular world view, and (2) the importance of plausibility structures which help maintain that world view. Peter Berger has suggested that plausibility structures such as the nuclear and extended family, friendship networks, or churches and other voluntary

organizations socialize individuals into a particular world view and help them maintain their subjective reality. Three sources of religious socialization are examined (family, peers, and the church institution). In addition, the importance of personal communities (family and friendship ties within and outside the religious congregation) is also examined. Both religious socialization and personal community relationships were found to have an important influence on religious belief and commitment. Religious socialization directly influences the development of a religious world view, but also channels individuals into a social world that maintains subjective reality. In addition, personal communities serve as important plausibility structure for maintaining a religious subjective reality. The number of ingroup and outgroup ties influences belief and commitment and the strength of ingroup ties also has a significant influence. Personal communities also appear to have a stronger influence on institutional modes of religious belief and commitment than on personal modes.

Special thanks to Merlin Brinkerhoff and Jeffrey C. Jacob for organizing the religious sessions at PSA.

ANNUAL MEETING ASSOCIATION FOR THE SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

More papers are to be presented at a special session on the Sociology of Mormonism at the ASR meetings in Washington D.C. on August 23-25. The following papers are currently on the program.

James T. Duke and Barry L. Johnson "Marital Happiness in Mormon Couples: The Effect of Wife's Employment Status, Religiosity, and Age of Children."

Tim B. Heaton and Kristen L. Goodman "Husband's and Wife's Church Attendance: Cross Cultural Comparisons."

Phillip R. Kunz "Ancestors and Origins: A Comparative Study of Knowledge of Ones Roots."

Marie Cornwall "The Normative Bases of Religion: A Study of Factors Influencing Religious Behavior."

See you in Washington D.C.

MORMON ANTHROPOLOGY

In a letter from Armand L. Mauss (His address will be P.O. Box 13988, Santa Barbara, CA., 93107 for the remainder of 1985.) the final issue (Vol. 4, No. 3) of Mormon Anthropology was included. John Sorenson said that he has produced it and wishes no longer to continue. He stated: "The few contributions of information received for inclusion and the slight interest expressed in its contents suggest it fills no more than a

limited need."

Among the items of information in this final newsletter, John reported the following:

Max Stanton of BYU-Hawaii is on leave at Ricks-College where he taught some in the sociology curriculum; he is currently doing some research in Alberta on Hutterites, Blood Indians, and Mormons.

Rex Cooper, continuing work on his Chicago dissertation, was in Mexico last summer with John Hawkins engaged in research for the LDS Church on cultural considerations in local church unit operations and activity.

Steve Olsen, who is a staff member at the Church's Museum of History and Art in Salt Lake City has been completing his dissertation for Chicago.

John Sorenson and Mark Leone have a contract with the University of Utah Press for a book of readings on "anthropological perspectives on the Mormons." John intends to retire in April 1986,

SUGGESTIONS FROM B. Y. CARD

In a letter to Armand, B. Y. Card (11007 83rd Avenue, No. 603, Varscona Tower, Edmonton, Alberta T6G OT9, Canada) made some interesting observations and suggestions and, with his permission, we would like to include them in this newsletter.

"1. Have you [Armand] and your research associate, J. Franks, considered trying to type the kinds of sociological perspectives used in the references you have located on the sociology of Mormonism? I would hypothesize that two types prevail, one that I'd call the "primitive" American sociological empiricism, consisting of a deliberate attempt to observe and report objectively, but without much self-conscious concern about what ones scientific approach really was. Examples of this approach are Nels Anderson's, Lowry Nelson's and some of the other early sociological writers. Growing out of this approach is the other that I see dominant at B.Y.U. and U. of U. sociology departments, which is a deliberate postivistic empiricism. I see little use of conflict theory, and not too much of self-conscious symbolic interactionism, though I thought Kimball Young's work of polygamy could have used this approach better than it did. The phenomenology of Mormonism is implicit in some of O'Dea's writing and in other works that you'd probably know better than I. My point is that I think you have a good opportunity to address the approach-es to knowledge used by various sociological writers whom you have so carefully indexed. My hope is that we might have a richer sociology of Mormonism as we have a greater repertoire of approaches to knowledge used by sociologists, especially among those closest to Mormon phenomena in the U.S.

"2. My second concern is the current dominance of the sociology of religion as the 'field'

concerned with the sociology of Mormonism. While religion may be an anchor field, and its publications and meetings friendly to scholarship on Mormonism, hope the sociology of religion does not become proprietary. I'd like to see Mormonism studied from a variety of 'specialisms' that make sociology as a broad field, including the sociology of education, which focusses on structures and processes used to deliberately prepare persons for roles, in the way Znaniecka formulated sociology of education. Strategically I think it important to keep the challenge of sociological study of Mormonism as wide-based as possible.

"3. More specifically, I wonder if somehow it might be possible to have Lowell Bennion's thesis on Mormonism from Weberian perspectives translated? To go a step further, could this translation be part of, or one volume of, a work wherein some strong Weberian scholar, preferably but not necessarily L.D.S., might extend and up-date that work. As I recollect, Weber was 'scared off' from studying Mormonism, partly at least by his visit to the U.S. and his contacts during that visit. At least it did not fit into his agenda. Lowell Bennion told me he had wanted to do this, to write a Weberian sociology of Mormonism, but was not able to get down to the work required during his very busy career.

"4. As I look at your Review article, and the last Newsletter of the SSSML, I yearn for something beyond what I see happening, a collection of many unsynthesized, disparate studies, conducted in what seems like a chaotic market place approach. I wonder if something could be done to encourage a larger sociological vision, without in any way putting a lid on free and detailed or specific inquiry. What comes to mind is an annual or biennial lectureship [See Marie's comments earlier.], which could be focused in one university or offered peripatetically through a network of universities or other lecture outlets. The series I would like to call: Toward A Sociology of Mormonism. Specific lectures might take more specific titles, but the general aim would be to bring together the best conceptualization and synthesizing of thinking about Mormon or LDS phenomena. I had thought, and suggested the idea to the current president and editor of SSSML recently, that the series could be named after Lowell L. Bennion and carry on the ideal he had of a sociology of Mormonism. I would like to see persons with a capacity to conceptualize whole systems, cultures, religions, etc., have a chance to outline how they would like to see the sociology of Mormonism developed, as well as scholars deeply involved in specific Mormon studies. For instance, I'd like to hear what Bill Reader would have to say about his approach to a sociology of Mormonism, or a Dean Louder, coming at the subject as a geographer, or a Guy Rocher, coming as a strong positivistic-empirical sociologist in the Parsons' tradition, who would see Mormon sociology with its analogy to the sociology of French Canada, but with a key play for the role and function of prophecy. I think this kind of endeavor could be a way of involving the whole quality of the sociology of Mormonism, would tend to bring conceptual strength and synthesizing and interpreting to the fore, to offset disparate empiricism, and further, I think it is a big enough goal to generate some solid financial support for the enterprise. <There is one other sociologist whose conceptualizations are highly pertinent for the sociology of Mormonism, Henry Zentner, formerly of U. of Calgary, whom you may know, now in retirement at RR #3, Olicer, B.C. V0H 1T0. He just sent me a fascinating collection of his papers, wherein he extends Durkheimian conceptualization of fundamentals such as time, space, causality, and does so well with regard to different frames of reference,

including Native American Ways of thinking, Marxian and traditional Christian.)"

LDS GERONTOLOGISTS

At the last meeting of the LDS Gerontologists, it was decided to start a newsletter in which the current activities and research of those involved in gerontology with Mormon samples could be reported. If you know someone who is involved with such samples or if you would like your name added to the mailing list (no charge, incidently) please contact Evan T. Peterson, 880 SWKT, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah 35602.

NEWS OF THE MEMBERS OF SSSML

Other than the excellent comments of B. Y. Card and the letters of Armand L. Nauss, we do not have anything to report. As the editor of the newsletter, I rely on information from you concerning your current activities. I would hope that you could take the time, all of you, to drop me a line and include your reactions to some of the content of this newsletter as well as your current research activities. Any suggestions as to ways in which this newsletter could be made more profitable to you would be very much appreciated.ETP

MEMBERSHIP DUES

Membership dues for 1985-86 are due as of September 1. Many of you have not yet paid. We have placed an asterisk by your name if we have not received your 1985-86 dues. There are two astericks by your name if you have not paid for 1984-85.

The \$3.00 dues help us meet the costs of publishing this newsletter. However, it also helps us with the projects we are trying to get off the ground. Please be sure to send us your dues.

Send your membership dues to Rosemary Banr, Department of Sociology, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah 84602.

LECTURE SERIES

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

TOWARD THE SOCIOLOGY OF MORMON LIFE

In a further effort to promote the scholarly study of the social, cultural, and religious institutions and behavior of Mormons as a people, the Society for the Sociological Study of Mormon Life is sponsoring a series of lectures entitled "Toward the Sociology of Mormon Life". The lectures should focus on providing a broader sociological vision to the empirical study of Mormon life, and provide a focus for the current unsynthesized and disparate studies being conducted. The aim is to bring together the best conceptualization and synthesizing of thinking about Mormon phenomena.

The first lecture will be given at Brigham Young University in March of 1986. This lecture is being jointly sponsored by the Sociology Department and the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies. Travel expenses will be paid by the sponsors and a \$200 honorarium is being provided.

Individuals will be selected to give the lecture based on a five page abstract of the major points and conclusions of the lecture. Selections will be made by the SSSML Council and will be based on (1) level of scholarship, (2) potential contribution to the study of Mormon Life, and (3) scholarly history of the person submitting the abstract.

Please send abstract and vita to:

Dr. Marie Cornwall
Department of Sociology
Brigham Young University
Provo, UT 84602.

Abstracts for the March 1986 lecture to be held at Brigham Young University in Provo are due November 1st, 1985.

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