

MORMON SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

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Michael E. Nielsen, Editor

**In This Issue**

President's Message

SSSML now MSSA

Meet me in St. Louis

Albuquerque Highlights

1995 Vernon Lecture

Business Meeting Summary

Constitution Update

Announcements

Book Review

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**President's Message**

1994 was a productive year for the association. With the appointment of Mike Nielsen as editor, we were able to publish both a spring and fall newsletter. We received over \$300 in dues and contributions, we sponsored two successful paper sessions at the meetings in Albuquerque, and we adopted a new name that we hope reflects the changing scope and diversity of our membership.

We still have several tasks on our agenda for 1995:

- Revising and updating the constitution;
- Commissioning someone to write a brief history of the association; and
- Expanding our membership.

I want to thank all of you for your support, financial and otherwise. It has been a pleasure working with the officers, council members, editor, and many others who work quietly behind the scenes to make our association a success. Thanks to all of you.

1995 promises to be an exciting year for the association and I look forward to seeing many of you in St. Louis.

Perry Cunningham

**SSSML is Now MSSA**

As the banner of the newsletter makes apparent, the name of our organization has been changed. Over the past few years, many members of our organization have expressed a

desire for the name to reflect the diversity of our membership. This issue of the newsletter marks our change toward a more inclusive name.

Group members present at the 1993 meeting in Raleigh, NC, voted to poll all members of the organization. Included with the last issue of the newsletter was a ballot of alternatives suggested at the Raleigh meeting. A count of ballots showed that, although most people agreed with the motion to change names, there was no clear preference. Responses also revealed the possibility of confusion stemming from one of the options, Mormon Studies Association, which closely resembles the name of another group, the Canadian Mormon Studies Association.

At the Albuquerque meeting it was moved and seconded that we change the group's name to Mormon Social Science Association. A vote on the proposal passed, and we now have a name that better reflects the diversity of our members. While many in our association are sociologists, we include a variety of social science perspectives. Not only does MSSA better reflect our membership, it also may help our efforts to recruit additional people to our group.

### **Meet Me In St. Louis!**

The 1995 meeting of MSSA will be held in St. Louis, October 27-29 in conjunction with SSSR and RRA. The "Gateway to the West" is an interesting city, and the hotel for the conference is reported to be an excellent facility near many fascinating sites.

The themes of the conference are Women and Religion (SSSR) and Religious Pluralism in America (RRA). MSSA will co-sponsor the Vernon Memorial Lecture, a panel session on Pluralism Within and Between Mormon Congregations, and our annual business meeting. If other members of the association have papers to present, you can send them to the following program chairs. Join us and present your thoughts and research in St. Louis!

#### **SSSR Program Chair**

Adair Lummis  
Harford Seminary  
77 Sherman St.  
Hartford, CT 06105  
Fax 203-236-8570

#### **RRA Program Chair**

Jim Spickard  
Department of Sociology & Anthropology  
University of Redlands  
Redlands, CA 92373  
Fax 909-793-2029

### **Albuquerque Highlights**

Albuquerque provided a beautiful setting for the annual meeting. We sponsored two sessions in addition to the business meeting, and there were several other SSSR and RRA sessions that featured work on Mormon studies or by MSSA members. Interest in our groups' work was evident by many new faces at the "Mormon" sessions. For example, the "authors meet critics" session devoted to The Angel and the Beehive and Contemporary Mormonism, was well-attended--in spite of the fact that it was held during the last session of the conference. Thank you, all who helped make the Albuquerque meetings a success!

### **1995 Vernon Lecture**

The 1995 Glenn M. Vernon Memorial Lecture will be delivered by Jim Duke Sr., Professor of Sociology at BYU. The title of his lecture is "The Determinants of the Growth of the Mormon Church: A Test of Stark's Model of the Success of Religious Movements."

Jim is a past president and long-time member of SSSML. He has served as the BYU Sociology Department Chairperson, and currently teaches courses in the Sociology of Religion and the Sociology of Mormonism at BYU. His major research interests are in religion and social theory. Included among his publications are articles in the Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion and Review of Religious Research, as well as chapters in edited volumes.

Jim's research tends to focus on "macro" variables, such as religious transformation and change at the denominational level, or religious affiliation and representation in the US Congress. He also has examined more micro-level variables, and performed "in-house" research for the LDS church. In addition to his reputation as a careful researcher, Jim also is known as a warm colleague. We look forward to his remarks on the sociology of Mormonism.

### **Business Meeting Summary**

The following items were discussed at the Albuquerque business meeting.

- The newsletter was discussed. We plan to maintain a twice-yearly publication of the newsletter, with issues appearing in February and August. Features that may be included in future newsletters were discussed. Mike Nielsen and Armand Mauss were thanked for their work on the newsletter.
- Election results were discussed. (See item in Announcements section.)
- Nominations for officers to begin in November 1995 were entertained. Gary Shepherd was nominated as President-Elect, Lynn Payne as Secretary-Treasurer,

and Jim Duke, Darryl White and Jessie Embry to fill two positions on the council. The third council position is filled ex officio by the past president. Ballots are enclosed with this issue of the newsletter.

- Revision of the Constitution was discussed. (See following item.)
- Participants felt that the board should commission someone to write- a history of the association. The board will contact someone with good organizational experience to do this.
- The Glenn M. Vernon Memorial Lecture will be given biannually, with the next lecture to be presented in October 1995 in St. Louis. The board will develop a set of criteria for selection of the presenter. The possibility of publishing the lecture in the newsletter was discussed.
- Lynn Payne reported on the association's finances. As of the fall meeting in Albuquerque, current balances include \$806.65 in checking and \$302.73 in savings. The amount collected from dues and other contributions in the Spring of 1994 totaled \$291.39.
- Dues. A vote to increase dues to \$5.00 was passed. (See item in Announcements for details.) At least eleven individuals on our membership list do not have current addresses. We will drop people from our membership list who are not interested. Related to this is our need to do a better job of recruitment in the next two years. Prospective members would include BYU CES PhD candidates, past BYU graduates, and other acquaintances with "hard core" members of the association.
- 1995 Meetings will be held in St. Louis.
- The name of the association was discussed and voted on. The new name is Mormon Social Science Association. (See story in newsletter.)

### **Constitution Update**

At the Albuquerque business meeting, Perry Cunningham noted that our association's constitution needs to be rewritten. He and the board members will pursue this during the coming months, and will present recommendations for updating the constitution at the St. Louis meetings. If you have suggestions or recommendations, please contact Perry or one of the board members.

### **Announcements**

#### **Dues**

Dues now are \$5. Since the inception of the organization, yearly dues have been only \$3.00. By unanimous vote, dues were increased to \$5.00 per year. This will be in effect in 1995 and is reflected in the dues notice accompanying this newsletter. The mailing label for this newsletter has a date showing the expiration of your membership. For your convenience, you may pay dues for as many as three years in advance. Also, be sure to complete the ballot for officers. Return them to Lynn Payne.

### **Election**

A count of ballots from the Spring election showed, for President Elect: Larry Young; Secretary Treasurer: Lynn Payne; Council Members: Merlin Brinkerhoff, Marie Cornwall, Ken White. A ballot is enclosed for the election of new officers. Although we voted recently for officers, because of the lag in mailings from our office, our present officers served a significant portion of their term prior to being voted into office. In order to maintain the customary term of office, it is necessary to vote for new officers at this time. The term of office is among the "constitutional issues" to be addressed by Perry and the Board members in their efforts to revise the constitution. Updating the constitution, and regular publication of the newsletter, should result in an improved election cycle.

### **All Points Bulletin**

Missing Persons Report! The following people appear on our membership roster, but have no forwarding address: Tim Behrend, Jeff Bradshaw, Tom DeJong, Howard Forsythe, David Walden, Jeff Johnson, Dave McCammon, Pat Murphy, Steven Mayfield, Patrick Robbins, and Max Stanton. If you know any of these people, please contact Lynn Payne (Research Information Division, 18th Floor, LDS Church Office Building, 50 E. North Temple, Salt Lake City, UT 84150). People who aren't located will be dropped from our mailings.

### **Methodology Conference**

The Fourth International Conference on Social Science Methodology will be held at the University of Essex, Colchester, UK, from July 1 - 4, 1996. Contributions on all aspects of social science methods are invited. For more information, contact:

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### **Newsletter Items**

Please send items for the newsletter to Michael Nielsen. Announcements, book reviews, and abstracts of articles are especially welcome. If you seek information or wish to collaborate on a project, an announcement in our newsletter may put you in touch with precisely the right person.

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## **Book Review**

Armand Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

Reviewer

Steven Epperson

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Unlike the bulk of recent scholarly studies of Mormons and Mormonism, *The Angel and the Beehive* is not a historical investigation of the 19th century church and its members; rather, it identifies and applies recent social science theories to interpret modern developments in the Mormon community. Dr. Mauss argues that understanding those developments ultimately bedevil students of Mormonism who would apply the classical sect-to-church model to explain recent growth rates, doctrinal redefinition, lay beliefs, and institutional behavior in the Mormon Church. As scripted by this model, new religious movements like Mormonism survive turbulent beginnings and the "predicament of disrepute" by repudiating particularist and militant beliefs and practices in favor of assimilated, church-like behaviors, doctrine, and institutions. That is to say, new religious movements have survived, in this nation for example, by becoming main-line Protestant churches in all but name. The process seems predictable, progressive, and, it should be added, to its authors, ultimately to be desired. The sect to church model generally and persuasively explains aspects of Mormon growth and development well into the mid 20th century. Indeed, Mormons had survived and grown as a people and a Church, Mauss asserts, by "deliberately pursuing a policy of assimilation with the surrounding [Protestant] American culture" (Mauss, ix).

What the Weber-Troeltsch model could not account for, was the appearance of persuasive fundamentalist theologies and the concomitant growth of "otherworldly" and "high demand" religions in sophisticated, contemporary cultures. What it did not foresee, because it functioned in the hands of its interpreters as an ideology of late 19th, early 20th century Protestant theological triumphalism, was what Mauss calls the "predicament of respectability." (Mauss, p. 5) Sectarians of various persuasions variously awoke to the fact that the pursuit and acquisition of respectability is a Faustian endeavor, a bargain with the enemy whose price for fellowship is subsumption of distinctiveness and, hence, loss of identity. When heretofore particular beliefs and practices become, by a process of rejection or amendment, less dissonant with the theologies and institutions of the great cultural religions, then sectarians churchify, assimilate, and even change affiliations. Dr. Mauss has shown that this is precisely what was happening to Mormons in the first half of the 20th century.

The singular strength of Mauss' study is his synoptic account of contemporary Mormon reaction against the "predicament of respectability." Informed by theories attempting to account for the sources, renewal, and maintenance of particularist religions belief and

commitment, Mauss surveys the profound and wide-ranging reversal against assimilation taking place within Mormon communities, a retrenchment process "back toward a more sect-like posture accompanied by some increase in tension with the rest of North America" (Mauss, 8).

Retrenchment is a rational strategy consciously or quixotically adapted and employed to maintain truth claims, membership loyalty, institutional authority, and distinctive identity. The strength of Mauss' use of retrenchment as an interpretive category is in the way it comprehends recent Mormon developments in an extraordinary array of behaviors, doctrines, attitudes, and institutions: from the rise in belief in the devil, to the professionalization of church building procedures; from the increase in temple attendance to the opposition to the MX missile system, from assaults on apostolic collegiality by church leaders promoting political and doctrinal crusades, to the opposition to the Equal Rights Amendment. Mauss convinces and explains to us that gut reactions and disconnected observations about a fundamentalist turn within sectors of the Mormon community are essentially correct, and that this phenomenon is wide-spread; deliberately articulated, of recent vintage, and comprehensible. We are in his debt for weaving so many dangling threads together. This is a learned, and engaging work of scholarship.

Earlier, I quoted deliberately from a passage in *The Angel and the Beehive* where the Mormon anomaly of retrenchment is identified. Mauss calls this aberration "a reversal ... back toward a more sect-like posture accompanied by some increase in tension with the rest of North America." (Mauss, 3) The ensuing two hundred and twenty pages identify and detail the retrenchment phenomenon, but fail to explain what it is that comprises "the rest of North America" against which those who are retrenching throw up perimeter bulwarks and new fortifications. To put it another way, isn't retrenchment just another way of saying assimilation? Only now, instead of aligning with mainline Protestantism, retrenching Mormondom is assimilating with the diverse cultures of the new religions right, which are bent on replacing one defacto national religious establishment with another.

In fact, two of the most important, if unemphasized, disclosures of this work, are the profound commitment by advocates of retrenchment, to a Constantinian, political theology of the Church, and to a one-dimensional, institutional ecclesiology. It can be argued that Mormons are never as truly American, never so assimilationist, as when they "retrench". That is, according to Richard Hughes and C. Leonard Allen, Mormons may be prototypically assimilationists when they attempt to recapture (or restore) a lost "primordial innocence" in company with other Americans in and outside of churches. It can also be argued that Mormons are never so "en-churched," or accommodated to traditional churchly, Christian political theology as when they resort to secular powers-that-be in order to promote, embody, and protect the values, institutions, and programs of the Mormon religion. Instead of viewing itself as a pilgrim church, or alternative society, as is the case in the sectarian, peace church tradition, the definers of institutional Mormondom have persistently tied the health of the LDS Church to that of the state and

to which ever public religious culture predominates. (Mauss, 112) The emergent southernized, evangelical, family values oriented one is only the latest in a succession of public cultures to which those who would maximalize Mormonism's capital seek accommodation. (cf. Mauss, 123-4, 191)

Concerning institutional ecclesiology, Mauss amply documents retrenchment as advocated and pursued by Mormon Church administrative elites. He notes that retrenchment programs and dicta are often expressive of the world view and *modus operandi* of American bureaucratic culture. But again, he calls this retrenchment, where it could perhaps be more reasonably construed as another instance of assimilation. The quest for the elimination of "duplicate and inefficient programs," "standardized and sanitized instructional curriculum" (Mauss, 82); "competence to manage the Church's burgeoning commercial and industrial resources" based on "pragmatic decisions," and "cost-benefit analysis" (Mauss, 84) sounds neither like retrenchment toward a more sect-like institution, nor a return to the "old-time religion." (Mauss, 87) These are terms for mind sets and management techniques expressive of modern bureaucratic culture tailored to define and direct the Church of Christ along corporationist, institutional lines. Indeed, the overt sense of retrenchment, "the act of cutting down, off, or out... the act of economizing, or cutting down expenditure"<sup>3</sup> is a term from administrative lexicography; an old-fashioned, more martial way of saying "downsizing."

Avery Dulles, in his *Models of the Church*, published twenty years ago, has urged that Christianity has been best served when its members create and use a variety of models to interpret and articulate the miracle of the "body of Christ." Hence, mystical communion, sacrament, institution, herald, servant have all been and are employed to express the complex nature of the church's identity. To promote only one model, at the expense of others, handicaps well-balanced and mature affirmation of the church and can lead to unfortunate consequences in Christian life, both personal and corporate. (Dulles, 40) Dulles notes that while an institutional model helps promote corporate identity, (Dulles, 39) its hierarchical conception of authority tends to discourage lay participation, individual moral responsibility, creative theology, and meaningful dialogue within the church, and between the church and other religious communities. (Dulles, 35-41) The cost of assimilation to and entrenchment within modern bureaucratic culture is very high. The reader of *The Angel and the Beehive* could have profited from further discussion, and more sustained reflection upon the bureaucratic cultures from which Mormon lay and professional leadership is being recruited, the nature and extent to which those cultures are reshaping Mormon ecclesiology, and whether we name this process retrenchment or assimilation.

The resort to institutionalism and fundamentalism are both expressions of a profound and contemporary movement within the Mormon community. Whether we call them modes of retrenchment or assimilation, neither strike Mauss, nor myself, as "authentically Mormon." (Mauss, 191) However, it is precisely here that, with one work finished,

another task begins necessarily. For what is authentically Mormon and how is that decided?

"Entrenched bureaucracies die hard," (Mauss, 139) as you say, and there are thousands of members of the Church, employed in its various departments, auxiliaries, schools, universities, and subsidiary companies who comprise a de facto professional clergy. (pace Mauss, 125) They are a clerical and administrative elite whose livelihoods depend literally upon the institutional Church, and upon a deferential laity, who contribute generously to the upkeep of the institution and its employees from the top down. Surely there must be a vested interest here to promote and secure the success of retrenchment and an institutional ecclesiology as that which is authentically Mormon. Hence, the insistence on obedience to Church authorities, of linkage between ecclesiastical worthiness, temple attendance and tithing. It also helps to explain the official promotion of a "regressive methodology" in historical and theological scholarship which begins with the latest teachings of church authorities as indicative of what must have been present from the beginning since the Lord, and therefore his "body," the Church, is "the same yesterday, today and forever. "

To indicate what is an authentic Mormonism and then argue persuasively for it will require patience, scholarship, and generosity. And here we encounter an additional challenge; for if Mormonism is defined, in part, as the "restoration of all things," isn't its authentic agenda an assimilationist one par excellence? By what criterion do we admit to fellowship what may be congruent with and expressive of what we claim as authentically Mormon?

I would suggest that we take Dulles' advice to heart: Christianity is better served by augmenting, rather than downsizing the number of authentic models by which we attempt to deepen our understanding of the reality of the Church. Mormon historical and religious experience offers an additional interpretive model: that of a gathering church; a church which in the language of I Corinthians (echoed in D&C 121 and Article of Faith 13), seeketh not her own; but rather the image of God manifest, in the words of the Psalmist, in "the fullness of the world, and they that dwell therein. " (Psalm 24:1) Here is a criterion with which to begin: a people convoked by and centered around the distinctive narratives of their mythic origins and by the covenants which bind them individually to God and to one another with cords of charity. A community of seekers, of gatherers who willingly enter the resonant dialogue between the psalmist David, the pharisee Paul, the Mormon prophet Joseph:

The psalmist when he asks: "who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord  
...or-stand in his holy place?" "He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart...  
The generation of them that seek him, that seek thy face." (Ps. 24:3,4,6)  
The pharisee who claims that the Church is: "that people which "seeketh  
not its own ... vaunteth not itself. .. but rejoiceth in the truth" (I  
Corinthians 13:4-6)

The prophet who proclaims that the church is that people who "believe all things ... hope all things... [and] seek" after "anything virtuous, lovely, or of good report, or praiseworthy." (13th Article of Faith)

It must be added here, that Mormonism does not manifest distinctive and abiding characteristics of a new world religious tradition. (pace Mauss, 204: Shippo and Stark) Mormons have not produced a comprehensive and sustained corpus of supersessionist theological writing comparable to that created by the Patristic Fathers of the Church or the ulema of Islam. In addition, the belief system of Mormonism is profoundly christocentric. Its theology, ritual, hymnody, prayers, sacraments, holidays, and personal devotional piety all attest a deep lasting commitment to Christian soteriological (doctrine of salvation) foundations. In an eagerness to appear massively important, Mormons have and may embrace this mis-definition. But in doing so, they are accepting an ascription ("new world religion," that is to say, neither Christian, Jewish, Muslim, etc.) many in the Christian religions right have long wanted to foist upon Mormonism and the Mormon Church.

Bryon Wilson's definition of a "sect" is more descriptively accurate of Mormonism's relationship to its Christian matrix when he describes a sect as "A distinctive, persisting, and separately organized group of believers who reject the established religious authorities; but who adhere to the authentic elements of the faith."<sup>5</sup>

Armand Mauss' *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* is an articulate and provocative work of scholarship informed by a mastery of social scientific tools and by an attentive consideration for the well-being of the community which is the focus of this study. Technical mastery and personal engagement combine here for a compelling examination of contemporary Mormonism. This is a timely work, which will serve over time as essential reading for those who seek to understand that congeries of beliefs, practices, discourses and communities which we call collectively the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

1. See the discussion in Hauerwas Stanley and Willimon, William H., *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 39-41.
2. Hughes, Richard T. and C. Leonard Allen, *Illusions of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism in America, 1630-1875*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), 224.
3. "Retrenchment," *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, Volume II, P-Z, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 2523.
4. Dulles, Avery, *Models of the Church*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974).
5. Wilson, Bryon, "Sect," *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology*, edited by Alan Richardson and John Bowden, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983), 532.