

# MORMON SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

Vol. 20, No. 2  
Fall, 1999

Michael E. Nielsen, Editor

## IN THIS ISSUE:

President's Message	1
Boston Program Preview	1
Announcements	2
Featured Book Review	3
Signs on Church Property	5

continuing my association with all of you who have been actively involved in MSSA over the years. See you in Boston.

## Boston Program Preview

### President's Message

I must say that my feelings are mixed at the conclusion of my two-year term of office as President of MSSA. When I first agreed to assume this position, I was more than a little dubious that it was a good idea. Among other concerns, I thought that I might be too far removed - geographically and otherwise - from the center of current social science scholarly activity on Mormonism to effectively fulfill responsibilities. I will not say that my performance has subsequently reversed this concern. What I will say is that great support from other officers of MSSA has eased me through the experience. Mike Nielsen, Newsletter editor, and Lynn Payne, Secretary/Treasurer, are especially deserving of credit for whatever small successes MSSA might claim over the last two years. As for myself, I have developed a number of new associations with people I value highly, and I will hope to sustain these relationships into the foreseeable future.

I am much more optimistic about the new regime that Mike will usher in as president after our November meetings in Boston than I was about the prospects of my own presidency two years ago. Mike is both a conscientious guy and a well-connected, well-informed follower of Mormon studies. I look forward to future MSSA developments under his leadership and to

Our annual convention, held in conjunction with the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion and the Religious Research Association, will be November 5-7 in Boston, Massachusetts. The Swissotel is our location in this historic city. Come prepared for stimulating papers and discussion, as well as for a bit of adventure in a setting with a rich religious history.

SSSR has arranged four special group events. Thursday evening before the convention will be a reception at the hotel lobby lounge. Friday evening, anti-death penalty advocate Sister Helen Prejean will give the Sister Marie Augusta Neal Lecture at Emmanuel College. Friday afternoon you can delve into the history of the famous witch trials as you take a tour of Salem, Massachusetts. Finally, on Saturday afternoon there will be a tour of the Church of Christ, Scientist headquarters and Mary Baker Eddy's home. You also can walk The Freedom Trail, which connects many of Boston's historic sites. The special historic attractions of Boston add to the interest of this convention.

MSSA is cosponsoring three sessions at this year's meeting. Here are the MSSA sessions, along with their tentative dates and times.

### MSSA Sessions

*The Role of Researchers in Religious Organizations*, Friday, Nov. 5, 9:45 a.m. Organized

by Perry Cunningham (LDS Church)

Panelists include C. Kirk Hadaway (United Church of Christ), Richard Houseal (Church of the Nazarene), John O' Hara (Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod), Craig This (United Methodist Church), and Cynthia A. Woolever (Presbyterian Church).

*Faith and Fathering in Times of Change and Challenge*, Friday Nov. 5, 1:15 p.m. Organized by David C. Dollahite (BYU) Convener: Gary Shepherd, (Oakland U) Life Events and the Development of Religious Faith, by Rob Palkovitz (U Delaware). Religious Belief and Practice in Latter-day Saint Fathers of Children with Special Needs, by David C. Dollahite  
Discussant: John P. Bartkowski (Mississippi State U)

*MSSA Breakfast*  
Sunday, Nov. 7, 7:00 a.m.

In addition to the MSSA-sponsored sessions, three sessions address aspects of Mormonism. These include:

James T. Duke (BYU): Converts to the LDS Church in South Africa and Swaziland, Friday, Nov. 5, 8:00 a.m.

O. Kendall White (Washington and Lee U) and Daryl White (Spelman College): Preparing for a Major Doctrinal Change: The Mormon Church and Polygamy, Saturday, Nov. 6, 9:45 a.m.

Bryan Waterman (Boston U) and O. Kendall White (Washington and Lee U): The Prospects of a Mormon-Conservative Christian Coalition Revisited, Saturday, Nov. 6, 4:15 p.m.

Finally, two MSSA members are delivering papers not specifically limited to Mormonism:

Armand L. Mauss (Washington State U.): The

Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion: A Study in Intellectual Evolution, Friday, Nov. 5, 9:45 a.m.

Michael Nielsen (Georgia Southern U): Religious Witnessing as a Norm Violation, Friday, Nov. 5, 3:00 p.m.

These events promise to give us plenty of 'food for thought' as we enjoy the attractions to be found in Boston. We hope to see you there!

## **Announcements**

### **Election Results**

The previous issue of the newsletter included ballots for the election. Results of the voting are tabulated, and show Daryl White being elected as President Elect. Lynn Payne has been re-elected Secretary/Treasurer. MSSA Board members will be Cardell Jacobson, Mary Lou McNamara, and Grant Underwood. Please extend to them a hearty congratulations and offer your support when they request your help with the organization.

### **New Book**

Henri Gooren, one of our MSSA members from the Netherlands, recently published his thesis as part of the Thela Latin America Series. The name of the publication is: Rich among the Poor: Church, Firm, and Household among Small-scale Entrepreneurs in Guatemala City

Here is a quick abstract that comes from the back cover of the bound publication:

The vast majority of people living in developing countries are deeply religious, which suggests that they devote a good deal of time and money to their church. In Latin America, traditionally a Roman Catholic stronghold, other Christian churches have grown explosively over the last two decades. In Guatemala, as much as a quarter of the population now considers itself Pentecostal, Mormon,

Adventist, or Jehovah's Witness.

Rich among the Poor explores possible social consequences of these religious changes, by focusing on a group of Mormons and Neo-Pentecostals in a low-income neighborhood of Guatemala City. They are all small-scale entrepreneurs, an important target group in current international cooperation. Following an actor-oriented approach, the study deals with the problems they each encounter while starting a small firm and changing to a new church. The main questions concern how a person's membership in a particular church may help or limit the success of a small firm and what role the owner's household plays here.

Heni Gooren was trained as a cultural anthropologist at Utrecht University, specializing in development issues, Latin America, and religion. He conducted prior fieldwork in San Jose, Costa Rica.

### **Featured Book Review**

Bennion, Janet. 1998. WOMEN OF PRINCIPLE: FEMALE NETWORKING IN CONTEMPORARY MORMON POLYGyny. New York: Oxford University Press. ix + 178 pp.

Reviewed by Hans A. Baer, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, University of Arkansas at Little Rock

Anthropologist Janet Bennion has written a penetrating and provocative ethnography and analysis of female networking in a Mormon Fundamentalist sect called the Apostolic United Brethren or the Allredites. Her book draws and expands upon ethnographic research that she conducted for her 1990 MA thesis at Portland State University and her 1996 Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Utah. The author's book joins a small but growing corpus of ethnographic studies of Mormon polygynous sects and other Mormon schismatic groups in the Intermountain

West.

In the Introduction, Bennion hypothesizes that certain women join Mormon polygynous groups because they feel marginalized in the Mormon church and the American society. She draws inspiration from Phillip Kilbride's assertion that polygyny functions as one mechanism for addressing the increasing prevalence of broken families in the larger society. In her examination of female networks among the Allredites, she focuses upon female members belonging to the Harker community (pseudonym) situated at the base of the Rocky Mountains in southwestern Montana. Despite the highly patriarchal structure of the Allred group, Bennion asserts that Harker women "complemented the men's authority role with a support system -- a system that has worked effectively to provide a haven for women's political, economic, and emotional needs for more than 30 years" (p. 9).

Chapter 2 (The People: An Ethnographic Sketch) discusses the process by which certain men and women convert to the Allred group, a history of Mormon Fundamentalist groups and specifically the Allredites, the politico-religious organization of the Allredites and the social and economic structure of Harker.

Chapter 3 (Ideological Blueprints) examines the means by which Harker women utilize religious concepts in their quest for empowerment. They reinterpret the misogynist Mormon Fundamentalist cosmology in such a way that they believe that they will reign as queens alongside their husbands and over their children and others in their respective celestial kingdoms. Chapter 4 (Economic Challenges and Creative Financing) examines the socioeconomic background of both male and female converts to the Allred group and the jobs that women, particularly converts as opposed to "established" ones, assume in order to supplement the often meager incomes of their husbands. Chapter 5 (Courtship, Marriage, and Sexuality) provides evidence that most Harker female converts "are upwardly mobile in their progression

to marry well and find a relatively comfortable home for themselves and their children" (p. 80). Chapter 6 (Living Arrangements and Individuality) discusses how Harker women cooperate with each other in their efforts to maintain a home for themselves and their children from modest resources. Chapter 7 (About Sickness, Barrenness, Aging, and Death) examines how Harker women work together in their efforts to address various hardships. In Chapters 3-7, Bennion provides numerous vignettes that describe how composite Harker women meet the various challenges of living in a polygynous community.

Chapter 8 (The Nature of Female Relationships and the Network) summarizes various aspects of women's networking patterns, including their strength, longevity, and proclivity for either cooperation or competition. Bennion observes that due to their tendency to distribute work tasks, women in polygynous households actually perform less work per person than do women in monogamous households.

In the concluding chapter, the author observes that women converts face fewer obstacles in their efforts to achieve a relatively high status within the Allred group than do male converts. She asserts that "the Allred polygynous system successfully constrains the flow of men, provides more marriable, potentially reproductive women, and provides more young established dependent men than could be obtained with a more homogeneous gender system" (p. 150). In addition to polygyny as an alternative to the modern American nuclear family, Bennion suggests that other options include polyandry and group marriage.

Perhaps the author's principal contribution to the examination of Mormon Fundamentalist polygyny and polygyny in general is her "thick description" of the strategies by which women preserve a sense of autonomy and dignity in an otherwise patriarchal subculture within the larger American society. Conversely, the book's

major drawback is its failure to embed its examination of women's networking within the larger corpus of feminist literature in anthropology and the other social sciences. Like women in any patriarchal social system, Harker women only achieve a partial empowerment which can only be more fully actualized with the creation of a system organized around egalitarian principles, including ones emphasizing gender equality.

## **SIGNS ON CHURCH PROPERTY**

"No God -- No Peace. Know God -- Know Peace."

"Free Trip to heaven. Details Inside!"

"Try our Sundays. They are better than Baskin-Robbins."

"Searching for a new look? Have your faith lifted here!"

An ad for St. Joseph's Episcopal Church has a picture of two hands holding stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments are inscribed and a headline that reads, "For fast, fast, fast relief, take two tablets."

When the restaurant next to the Lutheran Church put out a big sign with red letters that said, "Open Sundays," the church reciprocated with its own message: "We are open on Sundays, too."

"Have trouble sleeping? We have sermons --come hear one!"

A singing group called "The Resurrection" was scheduled to sing at a church. When a big snowstorm postponed the performance, the pastor fixed the outside sign to read, "The Resurrection is postponed."

"People are like tea bags -- you have to put them in hot water before you know how strong they are."

"Come in and pray today. Beat the Christmas rush!"

"When down in the mouth, remember Jonah. He came out all right."

"Sign broken. Message inside this Sunday."

"Fight truth decay -- study the Bible daily."

"How will you spend eternity -- Smoking or Nonsmoking?"

"Dusty Bibles lead to Dirty Lives"

"Come work for the Lord. The work is hard, the hours are long and the pay is low. But the retirement benefits are out of this world."

"It is unlikely there'll be a reduction in the wages of sin."

"Do not wait for the hearse to take you to church."

"If you're headed in the wrong direction, God allows U-turns."

"If you don't like the way you were born, try being born again."

"Looking at the way some people live, they ought to obtain eternal fire insurance soon."

"This is a ch\_\_ch. What is missing?" (U R)

"Forbidden fruit creates many jams."

"In the dark? Follow the Son."

"If you can't sleep, don't count sheep. Talk to the Shepherd."

"God so loved the world that He did not send a committee." (Said by Winston Churchill)