

MORMON SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

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President's Message

Our organization has the potential to shed light on many questions. How does a religion change as it grows? What characteristics do individuals have as they become members of the Church, and what proselytizing strategies are effective? How do Mormons use their religion in order to cope with stress? As LDS demographics change, how does culture affect doctrine? To what extent do parents use religion, and in what ways does it facilitate or hinder effective parenting?

Many of us have investigated these questions, but it is fair to say that much remains to be understood. Ultimately, we will make progress on these and other interesting questions if we use other people's expertise in addition to our own. In other words, we need to have more members in MSSA, and we need their involvement in the organization. This will help us address the interesting questions we have about religion generally, and Mormonism in particular.

One aspect of increasing our membership involves generating interest among our immediate colleagues. If you have colleagues or professional acquaintances that are interested religion, take the time to mention MSSA. Tell them that the combined meeting with SSSR and RRA is a wonderful opportunity to examine religion in a cross-disciplinary setting. Let them know what

you get from the organization, and how they might benefit from it as well.

To make this easier, I hope to have a brochure ready for the group by the end of the year. At the October business meeting, we will discuss the rough draft and how it might be improved. The brochure will have several brief sections summarizing the organization's purpose, membership, history, annual meeting, and the Glenn M. Vernon Lecture. If you have any thoughts on these, please send them to me so that we can have a solid draft ready for the meeting in October. If you were one of the people working on a section of the brochure, send me what you've prepared so that I can put the pieces together.

Also, think about how YOU might help the organization grow. We have been criticized for a high representation of people who live in Utah, particularly for having a leadership based primarily at BYU and LDS Church headquarters. MSSA may mirror the Church in that respect, with most of our interest growing from Utah. This won't change, however, unless we ALL become involved in the organization. At a minimum, think about the people you know, and let them know about MSSA. Better still, contact me mnielsen@gasou.edu and let's see what you can do to help MSSA grow and improve. We all have different talents; help others benefit from your unique talents by getting involved!

I look forward to seeing many of you in Houston. Let's make it an interesting and productive conference!

Michael Nielsen

Book Review

Mormon Passage: A Missionary Chronicle

Gary Shepherd and Gordon Shepherd, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998, 454 pp.

Rex E. Cooper

In their preface to this important and interesting book, Gary and Gordon Shepherd cite authors who lament the lack of significant descriptions and analyses of the Mormon missionary experience. Their book is an attempt to remedy that situation.

They explicitly pattern their work on Oscar Lewis's autobiographical extended case studies. The book consists primarily of excerpts from the detailed journals the Shepherds kept and the letters they exchanged while serving as missionaries in Mexico from 1964 to 1966. (Gary served in the Mexican Mission, centered in Mexico City and Gordon in the South-East Mexican Mission, centered in Veracruz.) Interspersed with this primary data is general material on Mormon missionary work and sociological analyses of the missionary experience.

The book may be usefully considered on three levels: a personal narrative of missionary work, a thick description of missionary life in Mexico during the mid-sixties, and an analysis of the Mormon missionary experience.

On the first level the book chronicles the passage of two serious, hardworking, achievement-oriented missionaries from their missionary farewell and struggles with Spanish at the Language Training Mission, through their rookie days as greenies, on to their work as assistants to their respective mission presidents. Such a narrative provides insight into the maturation process that missionaries undergo as they gain experience, assume the responsibilities of missionary service, and deal with the complexities and ambiguities of the mission field.

On the second level the book gives an essentially uncensored account of daily missionary life in Mexico during the mid-1960s. Having served in the Mexican Mission at the same time as Gary, it was this aspect of the book that I found most interesting. The minutia of daily mission life is recounted in almost endless detail: the filthy, cockroach-infested missionary apartments; the bouts with dysentery and hepatitis; discouragement; the pleasures of missionary camaraderie and the pettiness of missionary conflicts; endless tracting; missionaries' ambivalence toward Mexican culture and their disdain of Catholicism; competition for position and rank; flirtations between some elders and Mexican girls, involvement with struggling branches and inexperienced members; and, above all, the struggles, frustrations, and exhilaration of helping investigators move toward baptism. At times the events and experiences chronicled in the journal entries seem repetitive almost to the point of monotony. But it should be kept in mind that much of missionary work is repetitive and monotonous.

On the third level, the Shepherds attempt to identify sociological categories by which the missionary experience might be described and analyzed. They discuss missionary life in terms of such concepts as plausibility structure, rites of passage, turning-point status, supernatural compensation, ascetic religious attitude, reward structure, and punitive sanctions. I found this aspect of the book a little disappointing and underdeveloped. I wish the Shepherds had spent more time analyzing the events they chronicled from the perspective of various sociological categories. And it would have been of considerable value and interest if they had used these categories for retrospectively discussing the impact that those events had on their personal development as missionaries. Despite such limitations, they have made a good attempt to define analytical categories in terms of which the missionary experience can be analyzed. Subsequent researchers can profitably build on their work.

Because of the commonplace and seemingly unexceptional nature of the events which are chronicled, some may question the importance of such a book. I suspect that the routineness of missionary service within Mormon society in large measure accounts for the lack of interest that Mormon social scientists have had in focusing upon it as a subject for analysis. Perhaps such a situation should generate self-reflection. Ruth Benedict wrote about the difficulty people have attempting to determine the color of the lenses through which they view the world. Mormon social scientists might well be overlooking some of the key elements of the Mormon experience because they are so commonplace to them that they are hardly aware of them. When attempting to provide justification for his detailed analyses of everyday Mexican life, Oscar Lewis indicated how invaluable similar accounts would be of life in “ancient Egypt, Rome, or feudal Europe.” I suspect that 500 years from now the Shepherd’s book will be regarded as invaluable for understanding twentieth-century Mormon missionary activity.

Independent of the Shepherds’ work, we are well aware that commonplace, routine missionary service is one of the pivotal events in the lives of countless Mormons and one of the most significant processes in the development of the LDS church. This alone is sufficient justification for attempting to understand it better. The Shepherd’s pioneering work has suggested some of the ways in which analyses of this topic might proceed. Given the host of returned missionaries that might be interviewed and the thousands of missionary journals lying about, the field is white for such an endeavor.

Gary Shepherd is professor of sociology at Oakland University (Michigan) and past president of MSSA. Gordon Shepherd is professor of sociology at the University of Central Arkansas and a past MSSA Council member. Gary and Gordon have collaborated on a number of research and writing projects over the years, including *A Kingdom Transformed: Themes in the Development of Mormonism* (University of

Utah Press).

Rex Cooper holds a PhD in anthropology from the University of Chicago. He is the 1986 recipient of the Reese History Award for that year’s most scholarly exposition in the field of Mormon history. He is author of *Promises Made to the Fathers: Mormon Covenant Organization*. He is currently employed as a research analyst in the Research Information Division of the LDS Church.

Article Review

“Mormons”

Brigham Young Card, in *Encyclopedia of Canada’s Peoples*, (Robert Magocsi, Ed.), Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999, pp. 979-997.

Richard E. Bennett

In this 18-page article on the Mormons and their religion, retired Professor Brigham Young Card, formerly of the University of Alberta and a Mormon himself, has produced one of the most even, carefully worded encyclopedia articles on the Latter-day Saints ever written. An avid scholar of the history of Mormonism in Canada, Card’s writing style is engaging, his insights quite profound, and his command of the topic far-ranging and unquestionable. It is a tidy gem, a fine scholarly contribution.

The emphasis is on the Mormons as a people in Canada and less on the organization of the Church. Beginning with a discussion of Joseph Smith and the origins of the Church in the early 1820s, he quickly moves on to a more thorough look at the arrival and settlement of Latter-day Saints in various parts of Canada. Although the earliest converts were made in Upper Canada (Ontario) in the 1830s not far from the cradle of Mormonism, their permanent presence in Canada really began with Charles Ora Card and his Mormon settlement of Cardston, Alberta in 1887. What began as a small outpost settlement of just a few families near Lee Creek in southern Alberta, has multiplied into a

significant Mormon population with as many as 130,000 Latter-day Saints now living all across Canada, approximately half of whom still live in Alberta.

There is much to like about this work. First of all, it is truly encyclopedic. From giving the names of early settlers to listing modern provincial and federal Mormon politicians, from explaining the Book of Mormon and other peculiarly LDS doctrines to showing how the Church differs from other religions, Card tries hard to show what it really means to be a Mormon in Canada today. He speaks of their “sense of peoplehood,” (p. 995)--their religious sense of a unique identity, their economic and community life, family and kinship patterns, culture and education, politics and other intergroup relations. Though very much a part of the Canadian cultural mosaic, Mormons are, he argues, very different and distinct from other believing communities.

Second, it is well-reasoned and very well-organized. Card does not merely recite, for instance, the well-worn details of the early Alberta settlement. Instead, he posits the three greatest challenges to their successful settlement and shows how each was successfully met and overcome. First was “their perceived undesirability as immigrants” (mainly because of their reputation for plural marriage, a practice they did not introduce into the country); second their own “self-perception as temporary exiles;” and third, “the limited land available for settlement around Cardston.” (p.982)

He then identifies four vital processes that “have been at work” ever since those early beginnings which define a uniquely Mormon culture. They are 1) “amelioration, that is, the improvement of Mormons and their environment; 2) countering, in which the culture is used to offset other cultures; 3) exchange with other cultures, as they seek to find a place in the broader society; and 4) the preservation of their culture through such means as community histories and ancestral research.” (p. 990)

Another plus is the author’s careful use of statistical information. Using the most current census data available, Card’s tables illustrate Mormon population by province and major city, marriage and fertility rates and other distinctive characteristics of Mormon family life. (Mormons, for instance, on average marry at a younger age than most Canadians and have larger families, 3.2 children compared to the national average of 2.5 in 1991, and much higher than average literacy rates.) Particularly worthwhile are Card’s efforts to differentiate between the Latter-day Saints in Alberta and those in eastern Canada. (For example, Mormons in the west tend to be better educated and have larger families than their eastern counterparts.)

A fourth winning characteristic of the article is its interpretive and distinctly Canadian nature. He tries hard to show what it means to be a ‘Canadian Mormon’ as opposed to his or her American counterpart. More liberal, politically, than their Utah Mormon cousins, “political activity by individual Mormons has tended not to differ greatly from that of the country as a whole.” (p. 994). Without explaining why, Card offers that Canadian Latter-day Saints embraced such social reforms as old age pensions and family allowances when once opposed by Salt Lake leaders.

There are other things to like about this study. Card does well to include at least a paragraph on the history of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints which broke off from the “Utah Church” under Brigham Young in 1860 over the Mormon practice of plural marriage. “Historically, the RLDS have been concentrated in Ontario; 80 percent lived in that province in 1921 and 68 percent in 1981.” (P. 985)

Nor is the author afraid to show that though a distinct people because of their religious organization, patterns of worship and doctrines, Mormons in Canada are unlike some other religious groups that shun culturalization and

accommodation with other peoples. “The associational dynamics in Mormon communities reflect an organizational completeness within the church, together with an openness to innovation and cooperation with the larger society.” (P. 987) Mormon communities, for instance, are active in the Canadian political process, and Latter-day Saints have fought in both World wars. Likewise, Latter-day Saints today are very much involved in local and regional sports, music, drama, the visual arts, and creative literature and historical research. He is quick to show that through these methods of expressions, including the use of the computer in family historical research and other modern technologies, Mormons have and will make contributions to their own faith as well as to the Canadian society at large.

Though recognizing them as a distinctly religious people, Card rightfully does not argue for their ethnic uniqueness. “Whether Mormons are best described as an indigenous North American ethno-religious people . . . or an embryonic world faith remains a moot issue in scholarly circles. The fact that they are a people in Canada invites further study.” (P. 996) Canadian Mormons come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, although this is an area the article could have better developed.

There are, of course, some other weaknesses. Though not meant to be a doctrinal piece, what doctrines he does discuss are not always clear or accurate. The Mormon concept of the Godhead (three separate beings) and of the Christian atonement are erroneously presented. The great story of Mormon missionary work, particularly the vast number of Canadian Mormons who have served missions around the world, is virtually non-existent. Nor is the story of Canadian patriotism to ‘King and Country’ properly developed. One can also argue with his bibliography, particularly his curious omission of some of the most complete studies of the history of the Church in eastern Canada.

These, however, are minor points. Brigham

Young Card has written probably the best single encyclopedia article available anywhere on the Mormons in Canada.

Brigham Young Card is a professor emeritus, University of Alberta. Reporting on a prize he won, a newspaper once referred to him as Alberta’s father of sociology. He has been married to Naomi Test Card for 50 years, and they are the proud progenitors of 5 daughters, 17 grandchildren, and 2 great grandchildren.

Richard E. Bennett is a Professor of Church History and Doctrine at BYU. Originally from Ontario, Canada, he was Head of the Department of Archives and Special Collections at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Manitoba for almost 20 years. His most recent book is *We’ll Find the Place—The Mormon Exodus 1846-1848* (Deseret Book, 1997). He and his wife, Pat, have 5 children.

A Few Thoughts on Mormon Studies Then and Now

Armand L. Mauss

Note: This article was solicited by the editor because of Armand’s significant contribution to Mormon studies and his recent “retirement.”

After a mission, four years in the military, and college overseas, I finally started graduate work at UC-Berkeley in 1955 with the expectation of an academic career in ASIAN religious studies. Many factors intervened to derail my career in Asian studies, including a new requirement to learn a second Asian language (I already knew a lot of Japanese and had passed the usual reading exams in two European languages required in those days for a Ph.D., but learning Chinese besides was just more than I could take on!). With a wife and several children to support, I decided that I would have to turn to more conventional academic pursuits.

After that, I cannot claim to have followed a carefully devised career plan - it was all more a

matter of serendipity - but eventually I enrolled in the sociology graduate program at Berkeley, which was then (mid-50s) brand new and looking very hard for new students. I was attracted to sociology in part by Wolfram Eberhard, an Asianist whose courses I had already taken, discovering thereby my latent interest in that discipline. Then, just after I was enrolled in sociology, Charles Y. Glock joined the faculty from his earlier post at Columbia University. Once I met him, my interests in the sociology of religion grew rapidly, and my Asia interests receded correspondingly.

Glock had three commitments with which I came quickly to identify : (1) religious studies from a social science perspective; (2) the importance of fostering a detached perspective on religion, while avoiding a debunking attitude; and (3) survey research as the most promising method for establishing comparative and chronological trends in religious studies. Glock's first big project at Berkeley was a study of the Christian roots of anti-Semitism, financed by the Anti-Defamation League. The California Bay Area survey of Catholics and Protestants, on which this study (with Rodney Stark) was based, had no LDS sub sample. Indeed, anyone coming from the East Coast in the 1950s, as Glock did, would not have thought an LDS sample important enough to include. Accordingly, when I started explaining to Glock the connection in Mormon tradition between religious beliefs and racial/ethnic attitudes, he was immediately interested. From then on he became my chief mentor and encouraged me to do a dissertation on the Mormons that would yield comparative data for his Catholics and Protestants (after getting my promise that I had no dissident agenda and would not be doing a debunking job on the Mormons!). This was the beginning of a personal and academic relationship that still endures through periodic visits and correspondence.

From there on, it was only natural that I would devote a major part of my academic career to the sociological study of Mormons, and my main

regret in my career is that I did not focus ENTIRELY on Mormon Studies, but instead allowed myself to be pulled into a lot of "trendy" career-building research on things that I really didn't care about. Beginning about 1980, though, when I was finished with career-building and had gotten my last academic promotion, I decided to phase out entirely from research and writing outside the sociology of religion in general, and/or Mormon studies in particular. Getting fully extricated from all that other stuff took some time, but the last twenty years have been much happier for me.

For young scholars today who are interested in Mormon studies, it would be hard to imagine the state of this field in the 1950s. (I have reviewed extensively the development of this field in a forthcoming bibliographic essay, "Flowers, Weeds, and Thistles," in *Mormon History*, a collection of essays edited by James Allen, Ronald Walker, and David Whittaker, to be published in early 2001 by University of Illinois Press - pardon the commercial!). By 1960, we had seen the early work on agricultural economics, Mormon village communities, and the like, by Lowry Nelson, Hamilton Gardner, and Nels Anderson. Leonard Arrington, in the same general vein but in more general and sweeping terms, had just published *Great Basin Kingdom*. Fawn Brodie, already in 1945 or 1946, had taken the literary world by storm with *No Man Knows My History*, which was more psycho-history than social history, but very innovative and engaging. Thomas O'Dea had published a wonderful socio-anthropological interpretation of LDS origins and society in his *The Mormons* (1957), preceded by a few tantalizing articles. Harold Christensen, beginning in the 1930s, had published a number of articles on family life and sexual mores, some of which made use of Mormon data. Glenn Vernon had published two articles in 1955 on Mormon beliefs and their measurement (taken from his dissertation at Washington State University). The decade ended with Juanita Brooks's *Mountain Meadows Massacre* in 1960, as I recall, a wonderful

historical account of a major tragedy, which made even the evil-doing understandable if not forgivable, and did not resort to dubious psychological or psychopathological explanations. That was about it. That was pretty much the state of social science literature on the Mormons as of about 1960, and a great deal of THAT could not be called sociological - or even social science.

Space is running out here, so I will have to refer readers to my long essay in the forthcoming collection, mentioned above. Here I will add only that my intellectual life - and, yes, my spiritual life too - has been greatly enriched by the feeling during the past half century that I have been part of a community of scholars trying to get the remarkable "Mormon story" told in constructive terms - terms that are NEITHER simple-minded and parochial to "build faith" at all costs, NOR debunking and disrespectful to a people and their leaders who have sacrificed so much and tried so hard to build lives that could be exemplary of the best in Christianity. At least, that has been the intention and motivation behind my contributions to the field, and, I believe, of the contributions of most others, too.

As we enter the new century, we have come into difficult times intellectually and organizationally. In part, we have seen a return among many Church leaders to the "circle the wagons" mentality that had begun to wane during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. This has been due in part to a feeling among some that they are losing control of a Church and people who are now simply too numerous and diffuse to be controlled. It has been due also to the apparent effort of some in the scholarly community to give higher priority to undermining the faith and truth-claims of traditional Saints than to understanding the roots and rationales of their commitments. As I look ahead, it seems to me that neither effort will ultimately prevail. Various peoples of the world, from time to time and place to place, have more to gain than to lose by conversion to Mormonism. They will make the Church exceedingly diverse

in intellectual and cultural terms during the coming decades, no matter how sophisticated the "explanations" of social scientists for their commitments. At the same time, Church leaders, especially those from Utah and the West, will see the pragmatic necessity for joining in the dialogues about diversity among the Saints, rather than trying to control them. Scholars in Mormon studies, accordingly, will be required to do a lot more work on the DIFFERENT WAYS of being Mormon in different cultures, and the differential consequences thereof. At least, such is my assessment of the likely future. I welcome dialogues with others on such matters.

Armand L. Mauss is a professor emeritus of sociology and religious studies, Washington State University, now living in Irvine, California (almauss@home.com). He is past president of MSSA and MHA and past editor of JSSR. He regrets that he cannot attend the SSSR/MSSA meetings this year but plans to attend in 2001 and 2002.

Highlights of the Mormon Studies Conference in Durham

Douglas J. Davies

A small, specialized conference on Mormon Studies was held at the University of Durham, England in April 1999 to consider the theme of Mormonism's potential as a world religion. This conference was a successor to a similar one held at the University of Nottingham in 1994, resulting in the *Mormon Identities in Transition* (ed. Douglas J. Davies, London, Cassell, 1995).

Three key speakers, chosen for their world authority in differing aspects of the study of religion, focused on the notion of Mormonism as a world religion. Professors Ninian Smart and John Hinnells addressed the subject from their perspective of comparative religion; Dr. Bryan R. Wilson addressed it as a sociologist of religion. Christie Davies, Professor of Sociology from the University of Reading, Malise Ruthven and Seth Kunin from Scotland, Henri van Gooren from the

Netherlands and Massimo Introvigne from Italy all gave papers. Two research students also presented papers, Staffan Arnar from Sweden and Hildi Mitchell (who has subsequently taken her doctorate at Queen's University Belfast on aspects of LDS life in Britain). The conference was also attended by several Anglican clergy including the priest in whose parish the new British LDS Temple was recently built near Preston. Dr. Warrick Kear also spoke. Other contributions were made by numerous scholars from the U.S. including Eric Eliason, Terry Givens, Mark Grover, Malcolm Thorp, Grant Underwood, David Whittaker and Armand Mauss.

The conference lasted over a five-day period and, devoid of parallel sessions, enabled all delegates to listen to each paper and to engage in a fair amount of reflection and debate in a relaxed atmosphere. Included in the social program was an organ recital by two Durham University organ scholars, which included work from a classical repertoire and two impromptu variations on traditional LDS hymns.

It is likely that selected papers from the conference will be published in 2001.

Dr. Douglas J. Davies holds a personal chair as Professor in the Study of Religion at Durham's Department of Theology. He recently published a major study of Mormonism, *The Mormon Culture of Salvation* (Ashgate Press, 2000).

Announcements

The annual MSSA meeting will be held in Houston in conjunction with the meetings of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion and the Religious Research Association, October 19-22, 2000. Tim Heaton will present the Glenn M. Vernon Lecture, titled "The State of Mormon Families in the U.S." The MSSA business meeting will be held Sunday morning, October 22. All members of MSSA are invited to attend.

Are you teaching Mormon studies-related classes? Send a copy of your syllabus to Mike Nielsen. He will collect them for inclusion on the MSSA website, which will be on-line shortly after the brochure is complete. Send your syllabus to Mike by email mnielsen@gasou.ed or by regular mail, Dept. of Psychology, Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, GA 30460-8041

When you receive your dues announcement, please consider making a small donation above the regular \$5.00 yearly rate. Although MSSA is in the black, we have begun to whittle away at our reserves. Please donate, as you are able, above the low dues rate.

An unusual conference opportunity is a conference on religion and mental health, to be held in Tehran, Iran. The conference will be held April 16-19, 2001, and will examine a wide variety of issues related to religion and mental health. See their webpage <http://www.angelfire.com/ri/tehranpsychinst/2001.html> for more details, or send an email to mental2001@mentalhelp.net.

Michael Nielsen, president of MSSA, received an honorable mention in the most recent Templeton Foundation Program for Exemplary Papers in Humility Theology. His award-winning article, "An Assessment of Religious Conflicts and Resolutions," was published in the March 1998 issue of *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*.

Michael explains:

"Previous attempts to examine religious conflict have focused on specific levels of analysis at which conflict may occur. For example, researchers have examined broad conflicts between practitioners of different religions, within a denomination, or within an individual who holds two contradictory cognitions. Here subjects were to describe a religious conflict that is significant to them, without constraining the conflict to the social, institutional, or personal

level. People also indicated if the conflict had been resolved and described how the resolution occurred. Conflicts were provided by nearly two-thirds of the sample of 202 adults. Most of the conflicts people reported were interpersonal in nature, rather than intrapsychic, and tended to be caused by another person's actions. Intrapsychic conflicts tended to result from conflicting thoughts, rather than a conflict between thoughts and actions.

“Although conflicts were stimulated by other people's actions, the resolution of the conflicts rarely involved other people. Instead, people most often attempted to deal with the conflict individually, reconciling the situation by changing their cognitions. Although one third of the resolutions involved some action, such as seeking forgiveness or rectifying an error, most of the conflicts were resolved intrapsychically. Whether or not resolution had taken place, people indicated that the conflict was more important to them at the time it occurred than at the present time, suggesting that the resolution was effective.

“The nature of people's religious beliefs also was investigated, using the Literal, Antiliteral, Mythological scales developed by Hunt. When compared with people who had not experienced religious conflicts, those people who described conflicts showed higher scores on the Mythological scale, which indicates a preference to interpret religious texts and information in a mythological or metaphorical way. There was no relation, however, between the presence or absence of a conflict and scores on the Literal and Antiliteral scales. Furthermore, although the Antiliteral and Mythological perspectives demonstrated similar patterns of correlation with measures of church attendance and prayer frequency, the difference in correlations with religious conflict suggested that conflict may change the nature of one's religious belief, without prompting disbelief.”