

MORMON SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

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Fall 2005

Ryan T. Cragun, Editor

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President's Message

This will be my last opportunity to address you as president of MSSA. My two year term will end at the conclusion of our Fall meetings in Rochester. We all welcome John Hoffmann as our new MSSA President for the next two years. John can be reached at john_hoffmann@byu.edu.

I am very excited about the MSSA sessions that are planned for Rochester on November 4-6th. Revisiting Thomas O'Dea's *The Mormons, 50 Years Later* will be held Friday at 10:15am. A review of Richard Bushman's cultural biography of Joseph Smith will convene Saturday at 10:15am. We hope that you will be able to attend these sessions at the conference.

There are a number of important issues to discuss at our MSSA Business Meeting, Friday at Noon. The agenda will include the following: nominations for new MSSA leadership (including President Elect and MSSA Board Members) — elections to be held in Spring of 2006; report on progress of the O'Dea edition; nominations for the Glenn Vernon Lecture (Fall 2006) and other MSSA sessions for the Fall meetings in Portland; student paper competition; electronic newsletter and on-line MSSA journal proposal.

Please come prepared to discuss these issues. Bring other agenda items to the meeting.

Friday at 1pm, SSSR has arranged a tour of the Mormon sites in Palmyra. If you have interest check to see if there is still space on the bus.

In the Fall of 2006, MSSA will meet in Portland, October 20-22, in conjunction with SSSR/RRA. Session proposals are due in mid-January with paper proposals due in mid-March.

We look forward to visiting with many of you in Rochester in early November. Thanks for all your support in the past two years. It has been a pleasure helping direct the work of MSSA.

Lynn Payne

MSSA Sessions at SSSR – November 2005

Revisiting Thomas O'Dea's The Mormons 50 Years Later: A Discussion on Editorial Direction and Content for an Updated Volume

Convener:

Lynn Payne, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, paynelr@ldschurch.org

Panelists:

Ryan Cragun, University of Cincinnati
ryan@genesoc.com

John Hoffmann, Brigham Young University
john_hoffmann@byu.edu
Cardell Jacobson, Brigham Young University
cardell_jacobson@byu.edu
Rick Phillips, University of North Florida
rphillip@unf.edu

A Review of Richard Bushman's Cultural Biography of the Prophet Joseph Smith

Convener:

Jan Shipps, Indiana University Purdue University at Indianapolis
shipps@iupui.edu

Panelists:

Ryan Cragun, University of Cincinnati
ryan@genesoc.com
Rick Phillips, University of North Florida
rphillip@unf.edu
Gordon Shepherd, University of Central Arkansas
gordons@mail.uca.edu
Gary Shepherd, Oakland University
shepherd@oakland.edu

Also of Note at SSSR

Friday, November 4. 1:00 p.m.- 5:00 p.m.
Mormon History Tour, Palmyra NY. Rochester is in the heart of the "Burned Over District," which witnessed extraordinary levels of religious energy and innovation during the 19th century. This trip takes us to Palmyra, NY, the site of crucial events in the development of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. We will begin at the Hill Cumorah Visitors Center for a brief introduction to the origins of Mormonism. Stops include the Smith family homes; the Sacred Grove, where Joseph Smith received his first vision; Hill Cumorah, where Moroni is believed to have buried the golden plates from which the Book of Mormon derived; and the building where the Book of Mormon was first published. Cost: \$20.00 per person.

Friday 8:30
Mormonism's Roots in the Burnt-Over District: American Pariahs, American Heroes?
Myna German, Berkeley College

myna2@aol.com

Friday 12:00 - 1:00 p.m.
MSSA Business Meeting

Friday 3:00
Comparing the Global Growth Rates and Distributions of Adventists, Mormons, and Witnesses?
Ronald Lawson, Queens College CUNY
rlawson@cloud9.net

Saturday 10:15
Reading an American Scripture: Interpreting Mormon's Book?
Terry Givens, University of Richmond
tgivens@richmond.edu

Saturday 10:15
Health and Mental Health among Latter-day Saints: An Evaluation of Potential Moderating and Mediating Effects?
Timothy B. Smith, Brigham Young University
tim_smith@byu.edu

Book Review

Conservative Christian Identity and Same-Sex Orientation-The Case of Gay Mormons by Rick Phillips
(Publisher: Peter Lang, 2005)

Rick Phillips's recently published book on gay Mormons brings together novel research, trend analysis, and changes in LDS Church policy to present a concise but comprehensive picture of the lives and conflicts of individuals who find themselves torn between their identities as Mormons and homosexuals. The book complements an insider's understanding of Mormonism (see page 15) and interviews with Mormon leaders with seventy-one interviews with male homosexual Mormons gathered using snowball sampling (pp. 13-14). Phillips also attended various homosexual Mormon support groups and meetings, including a week-long visit to the "gay underground" at BYU (p. 13).

Framing his discussion in the labeling perspective of social psychology (see page 3), Phillips explains that, "Homosexuality is an archetypal master status. This does not, of course, mean that the process of labeling causes

homosexuality, but rather that once the accouterments of the label "homosexual" have been successfully applied, the social interactions of homosexual people revolve around this essentializing label" (p. 7). This leads Phillips to argue that the LDS Church is, like the gay rights movement, a moral entrepreneur with a stake in defining the label "homosexual". While Phillips is not entirely clear in what he means by "moral entrepreneur", it is implied that these are groups with a vested interest in engaging in public debate over morality in society. According to Phillips, the LDS Church, like other conservative political and religious groups, "seek[s] to convince the public that homosexuality is unnatural, sinful and a threat to American values" (p. 5).

Phillips then details the changing policies of the LDS Church since it first began to address the issue of homosexuality in the late 1950s. The official position of the LDS Church – that homosexuality is "a sexual perversion and an abuse of the sacred power to create life" (p. 20) – has remained relatively unchanged since the 1960s. However, how often homosexuality is discussed as being sinful by the leadership of the church has increased (p. 20), while the policies in place to deal with homosexuals have changed. Initially the LDS Church took a firm position that homosexuality was a choice and that homosexuals not only could but should change. LDS leaders, with the help of LDS psychologists and mental health clinicians, developed the first formal treatments, which included counseling and aversion (shock) therapy (pp. 32-33).

The aversion therapy program was not successful. As a result, LDS Church policy changed its emphasis in dealing with homosexual members. According to Phillips's informants, "the church has, in recent years, become more realistic in helping gay members cope with their problems" (pp. 37-38). The new approach combines greater understanding of the problem with alternative solutions. Rather than attempting to "cure" homosexuals, the LDS church is willing to accept "earnest effort to live within the church's guidelines" and celibacy for homosexuals. Granted, those who openly and unrepentantly

engage in homosexual behavior are still excommunicated, but there is a general consensus now "that being gay is not a sin, but acting gay is" (p. 40).

In addition to a change in policy, local leaders appear to be both more open about homosexuality and are better educated about ways to address it. Some of Phillips's older informants talk about how their local leaders often gave misguided advice, like encouraging them to spend more time around men – e.g., playing church basketball – and wearing boxers instead of briefs. One informant likened this advice to telling a heterosexual male who is struggling with intimacy problems with women to solve it by spending time with them in the shower; obviously it was not good advice for dealing with the "problem" of homosexuality. Younger informants note that they are often referred to LDS Social Services for therapy once it is revealed they are homosexual. Their local bishop remains involved, but primarily as the arbiter of worthiness and not as a therapist.

The last chapters of the book explore the lives of homosexuals who fall into Phillips's typology of homosexual Mormons. The typology is based on whether they accept: (1) the LDS Church's definition of homosexuality, and (2) the LDS Church's prescribed behaviors for homosexuals. Included in the discussion are: former-Mormon homosexuals, married/divorced homosexuals who are either still Mormons or who have left the LDS Church, celibate and non-celibate singles, closet and open homosexuals, and members of some of the more well-known homosexual groups, including Affirmation. Phillips explores how homosexuals who fall into these categories were treated by their leaders and how they have dealt with that treatment.

Several noteworthy points are made in these chapters. First, Phillips notes it is usually "the gay man himself who eventually gives up on the church, and not the other way around" (p. 73). The implication here is that while the LDS Church does excommunicate non-repentant and sexually active homosexuals, it is willing to work with homosexuals who are trying to curb their sexual desires and adhere to Church policies. Another point I found particularly interesting was that abstaining gay Mormons "are admonished to divulge their sexual orientation to others on a "need to know" basis" (p. 79). The reason for this is to prevent their mistreatment by members of their local

congregation. While the intent may be worthy, the outcome is often that abstaining gay Mormons are lonely and feel isolated. Finally, Phillips notes that even among the excommunicated Mormons, many would be interested in returning to the LDS Church if its policies on homosexuality changed in the future (p. 105). Apparently the affinity toward Mormonism is substantial, but the master identity of homosexuality is too powerful to be subservient to the religious identity.

Phillips laid out his goal for the book early on, "This book attempts to show how people who hold these two incongruent statuses [homosexual and Mormon] struggle to reconcile the contradictions in their lives. It also examines how the church's stand on the issue of homosexuality has evolved through contact with its gay members and through interfacing with the larger society (pp. 1-2). I believe Phillips has admirably accomplished his aim. The book is well-written and brings data to bear on an issue many scholars of Mormonism have been considering for quite some time.

That said, there are a few minor problems with the book. First, while the book is initially presented within a labeling theory framework, this framework is seldom employed explicitly to help the reader understand the situations of the informants in the book. Employed to its fullest, this book would likely have included discussions of how the master status of "homosexual" overwhelms the lesser label "Mormon", leading to apostasy or excommunication, or how the master status of "homosexual" is toppled by the competing master status of "Mormon", leading to abstaining gay Mormons. These notions are implied in relating the stories of informants in different categories of the typology, but are never stated explicitly. In short, I believe the theoretical framework could have played a larger role in the book and added to our understanding of how identities and labels are negotiated for people with competing master statuses.

While I generally agreed with the conclusions of the book, there was one instance where the book drew a conclusion that didn't seem to fit. Phillips argues that "Homosexuality threatens personal exaltation

and, by implication, family exaltation... Thus, excommunicating homosexual members has ramifications on the worthy members of the gay person's family. This, more than anything else, has led to the church's decision not to excommunicate homosexuals and, more importantly, to accept those living a celibate lifestyle rather than demanding a change in sexual orientation" (p. 69). While there is reason to argue that Mormon theology does not claim family exaltation is threatened by the loss of exaltation of one member of the family (either through homosexuality or apostasy), the more serious criticism is that there is no way of knowing whether the threat to familial exaltation was the primary motivation of the change in policy. And, according to Phillips's earlier argument, it was likely the lack of effectiveness of the LDS Church's early therapeutic approach that led to the change in policy rather than the concern for family members of homosexual Mormons. Perhaps this issue has played a role in the change of policy, but it is not clear it is the primary motivation in changing the LDS Church's approach to homosexual members.

My only other criticisms of the book are extremely minor. First, who decided to use the inverted question marks? While I appreciate novelty in presentation, it bothered me throughout the book. Second, given the price, I was expecting a much lengthier work. And, in fact, I think the book could easily have been extended by thirty to fifty pages to include a chapter or two detailing the experiences of some of Phillips's informants. Not only would that information be engaging, but it would provide a closer look at the life and struggles of homosexual Mormons as they negotiate their identities. And, finally, a purely external critique: Phillips notes he funded the research himself, which precluded him from spending the time and resources necessary to investigate the experiences of lesbian Mormons. While this book is an excellent study of gay Mormons, there is obviously a need for a companion volume on lesbian Mormons. Who is going to write that book?

Criticisms aside, Phillips provides some compelling insights. For instance, in his brief discussion of suicide among homosexual Mormons, Phillips ties together homosexual identity and Mormon theology, "Suicidal thoughts were quite common among informants, and several admitted to an attempt. Moreover, the prevalence of suicidal thinking among these men seemed to be linked to

Mormonism's unique doctrine of repentance. The church teaches that part of the process of repentance is never committing the sinful act again. In order to be forgiven, immoral deeds must be forsaken and abandoned for good" (p. 53). The implication here, of course, is that because homosexuality is a defining and unchanging characteristic of these men, the only way they believe they can truly repent of their sins is to end the very thought of sinning; and the only way to accomplish that for gay Mormon men is to end all thought... or commit suicide. I had not made this profound connection between Mormon teachings concerning repentance and the conflict it can lead to when one's very identity is, in some views, a sin. The one element here left unaddressed is how these same gay Mormons reconciled the LDS Church's teachings on suicide – also a sin – with their desire to end their sinning, but that is a minor point.

Another insightful contribution of this book involves Phillips's analysis of the stagnant membership in Affirmation, "One of the leadership's biggest woes is the inability of the organization to retain members. A full 40 percent of Affirmation's members choose not to renew every year, and the group's core membership is largely comprised of long-term members with little new blood. The reason for this... is not that the organization is necessarily being mishandled or that the polarization of members is the harbinger of inevitable extinction. It may be, rather, that Affirmation is most effective as a "halfway-house" for gay Mormons who are deciding whether to place their faith in the church's definition and prescription for homosexuality and homosexual behavior, or to part with the church once and for all and assume a more mainstream gay identity" (pp. 110-111). While Affirmation may want to maintain its membership, I believe Phillips is right in noting that many homosexual Mormons find the conflict between their identities too profound to live with for any length of time. While Phillips could have introduced another social psychological theory to address this conflict (i.e., cognitive dissonance), his insight here is compelling.

Overall, I believe Phillips's book is a valuable contribution to the social scientific

literature on Mormonism. While Phillips is modest in claiming that his findings should not be generalized beyond the small communities he studies, I think his careful methodology and insightful analysis are one more block in a growing foundation of Mormon studies and an invaluable summary and extension of the information previously available on homosexual Mormons.

Ryan Cragun

Announcements

Call for Papers on International Mormonism

During 2005 and 2006, Dialogue expects to publish a series of articles on the Mormon experience and identity outside the usual Anglo-American cultural realm.

Guest edited by Ethan Yorgason, this series will feature articles on a variety of topics from the perspective of various scholarly disciplines, including history, literature, and the social sciences. Each paper may focus in depth upon a particular cultural setting or offer cross-cultural comparisons among two or more settings.

As the Church continues to grow, cultural-geographic distinctions promise to assume greater significance in both doctrine and practice. We would therefore welcome papers that examine the following questions.

- What are some of these possible distinctions?
- How might the Church respond to an impetus toward varieties of Mormonism?
- How do these distinctive varieties of Mormonism contribute to the relationship of Mormonism to the host society/culture?

We are also interested in the interpretations given Mormon history by both members and nonmembers within cultures beyond the Anglo-American sphere. Articles could also treat the level of historical "literacy" among Church members, the aspects of Church history that are best and least well known, the purposes to which historical knowledge is put, and the relationship between Mormon history and Mormon identity.

Submissions. Manuscripts for this series will be accepted until January 2006. Early submission of manuscripts is encouraged. In formatting and documentation, submissions should follow the Chicago Manual of Style (15th ed.). Electronic

submissions are preferred and should be sent as attachments in MS Word or WordPerfect to yorgasoe@byuh.edu. Please provide mailing address and phone number. Paper copies, if unavoidable, may be sent in triplicate to Ethan Yorgason, BYU-Hawaii, Box 1970, Laie, HI 96762..Address queries to Yorgason at (808) 293-3617; fax: (808) 293-3888. For Dialogue's publication policy, please see <http://www.dialoguejournal.com/>.

News Items

Library of Congress Conference on Joseph Smith (submitted by Armand Mauss)

The Conference on Joseph Smith at the Library of Congress (in D. C.) in early May was rather a remarkable and unprecedented event - somewhat reminiscent of the conference at Yale University two or three years ago, but under auspices much more imposing and quasi-official (Library of Congress, after all!). I did not attend either conference but more than 500 attended at the Library of Congress - so many that the conference had to be moved to a larger auditorium than had been originally intended. The proceedings will eventually be published, and are available in both audio and video through the lds.org website:

<http://www.lds.org/library/display/0,4945,510-1-3067-1,00.html>

I listened to the entire conference by audio and was generally impressed by the sophistication of the presentations of the LDS scholars (with a couple of definite exceptions!) and the seriousness with which the non-LDS scholars were taking the subject-matter. The after-conference assessments that I have heard and read have been almost as interesting as the conference itself, with considerable variety even among those who attended personally and thus had first-hand impressions. Two or three of the LDS scholars made presentations (either as formal papers or as commentaries on others' papers) that were rather ham-handedly apologetic in nature and tone. For this they were gently scolded by a couple of the non-LDS scholars, and even some of my informants at BYU and at LDS Public Affairs were themselves quite uncomfortable, trying to distance themselves from the apologetic

offerings of these LDS speakers. A general authority of my acquaintance, who has a finely honed PR sense but shall remain anonymous, made the comment that the D.C. conference was an improvement in these respects over the Yale one, but that "we are not 'there' yet" -- which I took to mean that many LDS scholars still do not know how to deal with the issue of apologetics in such conferences.

Mormon History Association Conference in Vermont (submitted by Armand Mauss)

I did participate in the conference of the Mormon History Association held at the end of May in Vermont. Despite the remote location, this conference too had one of the largest turnouts in MHA history (600+). Several of the papers were solid scholarly pieces with strong social science theoretical frames (but most MHA participants are "history buffs" rather than history scholars). A new book by my friend (and home teaching partner) Val Rust, entitled *Radical Origins*, was the subject of a review session. He argues persuasively (but not conclusively), with actual genealogical data, that the earliest Mormons were descendants of New England families already well-known for their religious radicalism, so that their conversion to Mormonism was not as complete a break with the past as we might be inclined to suppose. There was a wonderful session reviewing the history and fate of modern feminism in Mormon circles, which included a paper by our own Marie Cornwall. A real high point of this conference was the plenary lecture by Richard Bushman, author of the new (and doubtless definitive) biography of Joseph Smith, due out in October. This lecture, entitled "The Inner Joseph Smith," got into some social and psychological theorizing that was unusual for a historian. On the basis of that lecture and other interactions that I have had with Bushman, I am expecting his Smith biography to have much more of a social science framework than did his 1984 biography of the early life of Smith. A general overview of this conference is available on the MHA website:

http://mha.wservers.com/pubs/newsletter/05_July_Newsletter.pdf

Two general developments at MHA have been noticeable during the past few years : (1) a growing professionalization (which is somewhat uncomfortable for the "buffs"), and (2) a growing and public "approval" of the organization by the

LDS leaders (at the last two conferences, leaders of the Seventy have been sent out "on assignment" from SLC as keynote speakers and/or other kinds of participants). There is no evidence yet of any ecclesiastical constraints on the organization (which originated and has always operated entirely independently of church auspices), probably because the leadership of MHA (including both Mormon and non-Mormon members) has been very judicious and discreet, as have the program committees in their selections of papers. I guess the idea is to keep MHA as the "non-Sunstone" organization!

Mormon Studies Program at Claremont Graduate University (submitted by Armand Mauss)

Progress is steady, but not as fast as we would like it to be, in the development of a new Mormon Studies Program in the School of Religion at the Claremont Graduate University. A Council on LDS Studies is guiding the creation of this program, a group of a dozen or so members including a couple of BYU people, an Area Authority Seventy, three or four scholars (including yours truly), and some high-powered LDS lawyers and PR people. Whatever their backgrounds these Council members are strongly committed to the establishment of a program that will be simultaneously (a) academically respectable and (b) respectful of the LDS religious heritage and tradition. The lawyers are doing the necessary (and delicate) negotiations among the three interest groups involved in this process : (1) Claremont University, (2) LDS headquarters (which is very supportive but cautious), and (3) the family of the late Howard W. Hunter (since the new program will be built upon a generously endowed "Howard W. Hunter Chair of Mormon Studies"). It has not been easy to reconcile the key interests of all three of these parties, but the end appears to be in sight, and there should be a top-flight LDS scholar in the new Chair by the Fall of 2006 (or 2007 at latest). To help jump-start the new program, I allowed myself to be dragged out of retirement to teach the first Mormon Studies course there, "Mormons in the History of the American West" (Spring 2005), and next year (Spring 2006), I will teach "Mormons in

Sociological Perspective." The classes are small (6-10) and consist of graduate students getting degrees in various general fields of religion (Comparative Religion, Women in Religion, Religion in North America, etc.). Last spring I had a mix of LDS and non-LDS students, about half and half, and the class seemed to go really well. I expect to see some dissertations on Mormons out of that group. I hasten to add that at my age I am not an aspirant for the new Chair, and if my wife has her way, I'll do no more teaching there after my current commitments.

Distinguished Service Award from the APA

(submitted by Michael Nielsen and Ryan Cragun)

Michael Nielsen, Georgia Southern University, recently received a Distinguished Service Award through the American Psychological Association's Division 36: Psychology of Religion. The award is offered to individuals who have made an outstanding contribution to Division 36 through service and leadership. It is likely due to Mike's scholarly contributions and his excellent website, which is ranked #1 on Google when you search for "psychology of religion":

<http://www.psywww.com/psyrelig/>

New Mormon Journal – Archipelago; Call for Papers (submitted by Michael Nielsen and Ryan Cragun)

A new, entirely electronic journal with an aim similar to Dialogue (though seemingly less focused on history and social science and more on literature) has recently been created. The journal has also issued its first call for papers. The journal can be found here:

<http://www.archipelago-journal.org/journal/index.php/arch>

The call for papers can be found here:

<http://www.archipelago-journal.org/Archipelago.pdf>

Salt Lake Tribune Series on Mormon Population in Utah (submitted by Michael Nielsen and Ryan Cragun)

The Salt Lake Tribune recently ran a series of articles looking at the declining proportion of Mormons in Utah:

http://www.sltrib.com/ci_2886596

The articles include an interactive feature that allows visitors to view the proportion of Mormons by County. In addition to demographic data, several interviews with Mormons and non-Mormons are

presented to illustrate how these changes are affecting individual people. Tim Heaton, a member of the MSSA, appears to have been involved in the articles.

Dues

Members are encouraged to send their yearly dues to Cardell Jacobson. Dues are \$10.00. Also, we are hoping to move to electronic distribution of the newsletter. Please contact Cardell with your email address to receive an

electronic copy of the newsletter. For additional information, please contact Cardell at: cardell_jacobson@byu.edu

Future SSSR Meetings

2005: November 4-6, Rochester, New York

2006: October 20-22, Portland, Oregon

Flyers

(see below)

CALL FOR PAPERS

Would you like to see early publication of your work on Mormons from a thesis, dissertation, senior project, or class paper? The Mormon Social Science Association (MSSA) is sponsoring a student paper competition (both undergraduate and graduate) for papers employing social scientific perspectives in the analysis of Mormon social life and culture.

The top three winners will be invited to present their research at the annual meetings of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion in a session sponsored by the MSSA, and the papers will be published on the MSSA website (www.mormonsocialscience.org). The winners will also receive \$300 each to defray travel costs to the conference. In addition, the first place winner will receive a \$100 prize, and a summary of his or her paper will be included in the semi-annual MSSA newsletter. Submission of a paper to this MSSA competition will not preclude submission of the same paper to any other competition.

Requirements:

An abstract of about 250 words must be submitted for each entry by December 31, 2005. The abstract should describe the general nature and thesis of the paper, as well as the kind of data on which it will be based. The completed paper, postmarked by March 1, 2006, should be no longer than 30 pages, including tables, notes, and references. Submissions and questions should be sent electronically to ryan@genesoc.com.

A \$10 submission fee is required but the fee includes a 1-year membership in the MSSA and a 1-year subscription to the MSSA newsletter. Winners will be announced within 1 to 2 months of the submission deadline.

MSSA members:

Please post this notice in your department and spread the word about the competition.

Joseph Smith and the Prophetic Tradition:

A Comparative Inquiry

October 20-21, 2005

Featured Speakers:

**Richard Bushman, Columbia University
Jan Shippo, Indiana University-Purdue University**

Presenters:

**Robert Millet, Brigham Young University
Carl Ernst, University of North Carolina
Rennie Schoepflin, La Sierra University
Grant Wacker, Duke University Divinity School
David Carpenter, St. Joseph's University**

Sponsored by:

Claremont Graduate University, School of Religion

**Thursday, 7:30 pm – Mudd Theatre, Claremont School of
Theology
Northwest corner of Foothill Boulevard and Harvard Avenue**

**Friday, 9am – 5:30pm – Scripps Humanities Building
981 North Amherst Avenue**

For More Information

909-607-9592

religionculture@cgu.edu