

# MORMON SOCIAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

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Ryan T. Cragun, Editor

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### President's Message

Greetings colleagues,

It is an interesting time to be a student of Mormonism. The academic study of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has blossomed in recent years, culminating in Mormon Studies programs and endowed posts at a number of secular universities. We have reached a point in the social scientific study of religion where leaders in the field now acknowledge that Mormons are much more representative of the religious mainstream in the United States than are some of the "mainline" Protestant faiths. Yet while our understanding of the Church has grown by leaps and bounds, it seems that this knowledge hasn't made its way down the ivory tower to the general public. A recent poll, for instance, found that when they hear the word "Mormon," the average American is still most likely to associate it with polygamy. (Indeed, many of my students are genuinely surprised to learn that members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints do not practice polygamy.) Moreover, polls assessing the candidacy of Mitt Romney find that a large percentage of Americans would not vote for a Latter-day Saint

for President regardless of who it might be. Pop culture and current events exacerbate these perceptions. Witness the HBO series Big Love, with its portrayal of polygamy in the Salt Lake Valley. Or the media fascination with the case of Warren Jeffs. Or the controversy surrounding a new feature film based on the Mountain Meadows tragedy. The paradox of increasing scholarly progress and persistent public ignorance is puzzling when you consider that Mormonism is among the nation's largest denominations, and that many of those who have inaccurate perceptions of the church most likely live within a stone's throw of a Mormon neighbor. Nevertheless, despite these curious conditions, the acceptance of Mormon Studies as a legitimate academic pursuit is on solid ground. (And, unless I've read my Amazon.com wishlist wrong, I see a number of forthcoming books on polygamy and Mountain Meadows. Oh dear ...)

With respect to the activities and state of the MSSA, those of us who attended the meetings in Portland were treated to a number of interesting Mormon themed sessions, both sponsored by our organization and dispersed throughout the program. At the business meeting some important initiatives were passed.

Chief among these was our decision to experiment with offering MSSA sessions in conjunction with the MHA meetings. This will provide an opportunity for us to present some of our research to the much larger and firmly established Mormon history contingent. Joining forces with the MHA while keeping our spot on the SSSR program is a good move for our organization and allows us to reach a different kind of audience. The MHA meetings this year are in Salt Lake, and the MSSA is sponsoring two sessions:

*May 25, 10:00 – 11:30 am. Session 1B. From Regional Subculture to Global Religion: The Sociology of Latter-day Saint Expansion*

- “The Mormons of the World: The Meaning of LDS Membership in Central America,” Henri Gooren, Utrecht University, The Netherlands
- “Growth, Retention, and Internationalization in the Twenty First Century Church,” David G. Stewart Jr., M.D., Children’s Bone and Spine Surgery, Las Vegas, NV
- “‘That Sociality’: Mormons and Globalization in the Twenty First Century,” Sarah Busse Spencer, The College of New Jersey

*May 25, 4:00 – 5:00 pm. Session 3G. Contemporary Mormon Identities: Gender and Sexuality.*

- “Mormon Women’s Issues in the Twenty-first-Century,” Janet Benson Bennion, Lyndon State College, Lyndonville, VT
- “The Current Crisis in the Formation and Regulation of Latter-day Saints’ Sexual Identities,” Melvyn Hammarberg, University of Pennsylvania

Other members of the MSSA are elsewhere on the program. If you plan to attend the MHA meetings in Salt Lake this year, I hope you will attend these sessions and support our colleagues. If our sessions are a success, if interest keeps up, and if the MHA is amenable, I think it is likely we will propose a session or two for the 2008 meetings in Nauvoo.

Although the preliminary program has not been released, if all goes according to plan we will also have two MSSA sponsored sessions at the

annual meeting of the SSSR in Tampa this fall. The first is tentatively titled, “Global Growth of Mormons, Witnesses and Adventists,” and features papers by Ryan Cragun, Henri Gooren, David Knowlton, and Ronald Lawson. The second session will feature work from John Hoffman, Cardell Jacobson, and Tim Heaton, all affiliated with the Brigham Young University sociology department. It is tentatively entitled, “Denominational Research Using Prominent National Data Sets: The Case of the Mormons.” This session breaks new ground for the MSSA, in that it explores the promises and pitfalls of studying small denominations using prominent national level data sets using Mormonism as an example. Hence, the session is designed to be useful to the general conference-going crowd, and is not limited to those with an interest in Mormonism specifically.

Aside from our conference activities, it is time to consider the future leadership of the MSSA. I became President-Elect in 2005 but was appointed, in accordance with the By Laws, to the position of acting president to complete an unexpired term of office upon its vacancy in early 2006. My original term as President was to be from 2007 to 2009, which is the term I will begin at the end of the Fall meeting. At present, we have not chosen a President-Elect nor a new Secretary/Treasurer.

At the 2006 business meeting two individuals were nominated for these positions and agreed to run in the election. Additionally, the terms of the Directors-at-large expire at the end of the 2007 meeting and we need to elect new Directors. Nominations for these positions should be emailed to Ryan Cragun ([ryantcragun@gmail.com](mailto:ryantcragun@gmail.com)) by April 30<sup>th</sup>.

Also of note, at the meeting we agreed to reduce the number of Directors-at-large from 3 to 2, reducing the total size of the Board of Directors from 7 to 6 (the Board includes: the current President, the President-Elect, the most recent past-President, the Treasurer/Secretary, and two Directors-at-large). Lastly, as we have moved most of the distribution of the newsletter to an electronic format, I have also discussed

with Ryan Cragun using electronic voting. Ryan laid out a plan to use the MSSA website for voting. Traditionally the newsletter included paper ballots. We will still distribute paper ballots to those who do not want to vote online or have difficulties doing so. Ryan will be emailing the MSSA membership with further instructions on the voting procedures after April 30<sup>th</sup>.

Finally, I am pleased to inform those who do not already know that Ryan Cragun, our yeoman webmaster and newsletter editor, has accepted a tenure-track position at the University of Tampa. Thus, the MSSA meeting will be on his (new) home turf, and he will be on the spot to provide restaurant recommendations. Congratulations to Ryan! It's great to see another sociologist of Mormonism gainfully employed within the academy. If we can get a few more of you to move to Florida, we can make this the "southern hub" for Mormon Studies.

Rick Phillips  
University of North Florida

### Book Review: The Rise of Mormonism

Rodney Stark, edited by Reid L. Neilson. *The Rise of Mormonism*. New York etc.: Columbia University Press, 2005. xi + 173 pp. ISBN: 0-231-13634-X. Price: US\$ 39.50 (hardcover).

Sociologist of religion Rodney Stark has published over a dozen books and anthologies and is a leading proponent of the use of rational choice theory in the study of religion.<sup>1</sup> Among a broad public, Stark is famous for his prediction that Mormonism will be the first new world religion to appear after Islam. Stark's projections of future LDS growth worldwide have even been picked up by the LDS hierarchy and PR network.<sup>2</sup>

1 See, e.g., Rodney Stark & William Sims Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996 (Second Edition). Rodney Stark & Roger Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human side of Religion*. Berkeley etc: University of California Press, 2000.

2 See, e.g., Deseret News, *2001-2002 Church Almanac*, 'An imaginative look into the next century,' 148-152. Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 2000. See also two conference papers by Rick Phillips and O. Kendall White, quoted by Reid

The anthology *The Rise of Mormonism* – skillfully edited by Reid L. Neilson, who also wrote an insightful Introduction – contains seven essays by Rodney Stark on the LDS Church, including two explicitly describing Mormonism as a future world religion. The book also makes clear why and how Mormonism came to be Stark's favorite religious case. In his Preface, Stark explicitly credits Armand Mauss for introducing him to the study of Mormonism when they were both graduate students at Berkeley (p. x; see also Neilson, p. 1).

The Introduction by Reid Neilson (pp. 1-19) gives an overview of the seven essays and their origins. Neilson (5-6) also charts the many different categorizations of Mormonism in the scholarly literature: as a mystery cult, an American subculture (Sydney Ahlstrom), a new religion (Fawn Brodie), a new community (Thomas O'Dea), a new religious tradition (Jan Shipps), or even a new world 'tribe' (Joel Kotkin). One can see the ascending order of importance in these categorizations, leading logically to Rodney Stark's first characterization of Mormonism as a new world religion in 1984. By extrapolating the current LDS growth rates per decade (far) into the future, Stark came up with the startling predictions of almost 80 million Mormons in 2050 and over 267 million by 2080. Table 1 on p. 7 goes even further (one is tempted to write: 'where no-one has gone before') by projecting over 600 million Mormons in the decidedly Star Trek-ish year 2100.

Reid Neilson puts Stark's projections of future LDS growth further into perspective by combining them with the future growth projections of other important (world) religions from the *World Christian Encyclopedia*.<sup>3</sup> In the year 2000, there were 2 billion Christians, 1.2 billion Muslims, and 11 million Mormons, making them the tenth largest religion in the world.<sup>4</sup> By the year 2050, according to Stark's high

Neilson in notes 33 and 48 on p. 18.

3 David B. Barrett; George T. Kurian & Todd M. Johnson, *World Christian Encyclopedia, Second Edition. A comparative study of churches and religions in the modern world*. Oxford etc: Oxford University Press, 2001.

estimate of 50 percent LDS growth per decade, there will be 80 million Mormons. Mormonism will by then be the eighth largest religion, though still comprising a little less than 1 percent of the total world population. (Incidentally: scholars expect there to be 3 billion Christians and 2.2 billion Muslims by 2050.)

Although I have some serious criticisms of the book, which I mention below, I would recommend this book to anyone with an interest in the study of Mormonism, especially those with a social scientific perspective. Stark is certainly to be commended for bringing Mormonism to the attention of both social scientists and a broader public. *The Rise of Mormonism* is an absolute joy to read. It is a sociological feast because it contains so many thought-provoking ideas. Stark's background as a journalist is clearly visible in some of the more controversial sound bites he offers:

'The last weeks before the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Olympics were dreadful. Most of the news people who called had their own agenda down pat, knew exactly what quotation they wanted from me, and were uneducable.[...] Fortunately, every sportswriter who called me got it immediately [...] and went on to write sensible things about the Mormons. Do all the smart journalists flee into the sports departments?' [p. x]

'[S]omeone who at least knows what it actually feels like to be religious wrote the following chapters. Most sociologists, including many sociologists of religion, don't even understand what that statement

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4 Though this ranking assumes that Mormonism is not a Christian religion and groups all other Christian religions (e.g., Pentecostalism, Episcopalians, Roman Catholics) together.

means.' [p. xi]

'The rapid growth of Mormonism has gone amazingly unremarked on by outsiders. There are many probable reasons for this, including the persistence of considerable prejudice against Latter-day Saints (Stark & Bainbridge 1985) and the seeming inability of the mass media to cover adequately much of anything that happens west of Chicago.' [p. 140]

The first essay is called 'Extracting Social Scientific Models from Mormon History' and was originally given as the O.C. Tanner Lecture at the meeting of the Mormon History Association in 1998. It nicely turns around the usual order of scholarly articles. Instead of showing how general social scientific principles influenced the history of Mormonism, Stark shows how he developed his social scientific models of religion from Mormon history. In his book *The Rise of Christianity*,<sup>5</sup> Stark demonstrates that no miracles or mass conversions were necessary for early Christianity to grow from 1,000 members in C.E. 40 to about 6 million members by the year C.E. 300 (pp. 22-23). All that was required was a growth rate of 40 percent per decade, which is comparable to recent LDS growth rates per decade.

Stark goes on to document the importance of Mormon networks of faith in achieving this growth, which is a confirmation (or repetition) of Stark's thesis that conversion runs along social networks: social networks make religion plausible. The influence of Peter Berger's *Sacred Canopy* (1967) is clearly visible here.<sup>6</sup>

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5 Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996 (p. 7, 14).

6 Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. New York City:

The original 1980 article by Stark & Bainbridge, 'Networks of Faith,'<sup>7</sup> is a true classic in the sociology of religion. It is included in the book as essay number 3 and includes the famous reference to a 13-step recruitment scheme, aimed at bringing in new members, which was presented to all Mormons in a 1974 *Ensign* article (pp. 79-80).<sup>8</sup>

Stark follows up on this by exploring Larry Iannaccone's notion of religious capital.<sup>9</sup> Stark defines religious capital as 'the degree of mastery and attachment to a particular religious culture' (65). Stark notes that LDS growth is usually more rapid in Christian areas (like Latin America) than in non-Christian societies (Africa, India). 'Converts are overwhelmingly recruited from the ranks of those lacking a prior religious commitment or having only a nominal connection to a religious group' (25). When people change religion, they prefer new options that allow them to retain part of the religious knowledge they learned in their parental religion. This seems to me to be a complicated way of saying that people often like something different, but not too different.

'Joseph Smith Among the Revelators,' the second essay, develops a sociology of revelation by comparing and analyzing the experiences of various famous founders of new religions: Joseph Smith, Muhammad, Jesus, and Moses.<sup>10</sup> Stark explicitly challenges 'the orthodox position [in science] that the world's major religious figures, including Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, as well as thousands of more recent revelators such as Joseph Smith, Bernadette Soubirous, and Sun M.

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Doubleday, 1967.

7 Rodney Stark & William Sims Bainbridge, 'Networks of Faith: Interpersonal Bonds and Recruitment to Cults and Sects.' *American Journal of Sociology* 85 (6): 1376-1395 (1980).

8 Ernest Eberhard, 'How to Share the Gospel: A Step-by-Step Approach for You and Your Neighbors.' *Ensign*: 6-11 (June 1974).

9 Laurence R. Iannaccone, 'Religious Practice: A Human Capital Approach.' *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 29 (3): 297-314 (1990).

10 Some theologians question whether Jesus Christ wanted to found a religion, or a church, in the first place.

Moon, were psychotics, frauds, or both' (32). Stark's final conclusion is that prophets, like converts, need social networks to produce and sustain them. 'Had his wife rejected his claims, Muhammad may well have remained unknown to history' (45).

The fourth essay, 'Rationality and Mormon Sacrifice,' is actually an excerpt from Chapter 2 of *Acts of Faith* (Stark & Finke 2000: 42-56), entitled 'Rationality and the "Religious Mind".'<sup>11</sup> Stark rejects in two pages older views of religion as psychopathology or irrational choice and firmly places himself in the tradition of studying rational self-interest, as originally developed by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). I am not sure LDS Church leaders appreciate Stark's claim that Mormons generally have more children for two prominent reasons, but make the claim he does: First, being able to support more children gives rich Mormons more status. Second, having more children gives all Mormons 'a new source of benefits – approval, status, and blessings that the Church of Jesus Christ offers in return for large family size' (88).

Based on a 1997 article, Stark reports that local wards – one assumes this refers to the U.S. situation – usually have between 150 and 250 callings or volunteer assignments. Duke calculated that the average LDS congregation in the U.S. thus receives between 400 and 600 hours of voluntary labor per week.<sup>12</sup> Stark points out that this is the source of many concrete benefits that Mormons receive from their church membership and that the callings also screen out the free-riders, who – also quite rationally – want to enjoy the benefits without paying the costs (90). Mormon membership is costly not only in terms of the time invested, but also in terms of tithing and contributions. As a result, according to Stark (92-93), Mormons are highly satisfied with their own church: 'members of strict churches give more, because they receive

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11 A typo in Reid Neilson's Introduction erroneously identifies it as Chapter 6 (see p. 16, note 15).

12 James T. Duke, 'Church Callings as an Organizational Device in the LDS Church.' Paper read at the annual meeting of the Association for the Sociology of Religion, 1997.

more.' One is tempted to suppose that this axiom also works when it is reversed: people receive more, because they give more. But in this case their conduct would not only be rational, but more like a self-rationalization.

'Modernization, Secularization, and Mormon Growth' is the fifth essay and in my opinion by far the weakest. It starts with a radical debunking of secularization theory, using the same title under which it was already published at least twice earlier: 'Secularization R.I.P.' Essentially, according to Stark (95-100), secularization originated in the Enlightenment as both a process and a desired outcome of intellectuals. Over time, it evolved into an automatic outcome: with modernity and rationalization, de-churching and secularization would automatically follow. Stark agrees with Weber that modernity and rationalization will cause a decline of specific religious organizations, but he does not believe it will lead to the 'final fall of religion' (100).

Stark believes that secularization actually offers opportunities for new religions, like Mormonism, as old religions wither away under the forces of modernity. Hence, he expects Mormons to grow, especially in the most modernized areas, where a considerable portion of the population is religiously independent. In the United States, this means the West. Stark then uses a less than clear method to illustrate his claims. He uses 17 nations from Latin America and 13 nations from Western Europe as the units of analysis to test his propositions about the correlations between modernization, secularization, and Mormon success. Secularization is measured by 'the proportion of the population that is unaffiliated with a religious organization' (104). Modernization is measured by the percentage of the labor force employed in agriculture, the urban percentage, and per capita income (103-105). Mormon success is measured by national percentages of LDS membership. Not surprisingly, the results overwhelmingly confirm Stark's expectations: modernization and secularization stimulate Mormon growth. This leads to a conclusion that is certain to surprise the LDS Research Information Division: 'We can see clearly that the Latter-day Saints are on the brink of becoming a significant

religious body in Europe, if we keep in mind that they have only really been active there for about fifty years' (112).

While the book has many great qualities, these claims merit closer scrutiny. First, the LDS Church has a very weak presence in Western Europe and has all but stagnated there. The statistical data in the *Church Almanacs* are confirmed by various articles on the LDS Church in Europe.<sup>13</sup> Second, even in Latin America, the LDS Church is not growing in every county and growth varies over time. Countries with high LDS population percentages are not always the most 'modern' (i.e., wealthy, urbanized), as all of Central America, the Andean countries and the Dominican Republic show. The countries where the LDS Church is currently growing strongest are, if anything, among the *least* modernized: again the Andean countries, Paraguay, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua.<sup>14</sup> Third, there are huge variations in the average annual growth rates for each country, which are related to local issues (poverty, politics, church policy, missionary distribution, etc.).<sup>15</sup> By only using the indicator 'LDS population percentage,' these differences are obscured and the information is meaningless. Fourth, I have serious doubts about the reliability of Stark's statistical sources. Per capita income, labor force, and urban/rural percentages are notoriously unreliable or at best controversial in almost all Latin American countries (with the possible exception of the

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13 See, e.g., Wilfried Decoo, 'Feeding the Fleeting Flock: Reflections on the Struggle to Retain Church Members in Europe.' *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 29 (1): 97-118 (1996). Walter van Beek, 'Ethnization and Accommodation: Dutch Mormons in Twenty-first-century Europe.' *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 29 (1): 119-138 (1996). Walter van Beek, 'An Afro-European View on Religious Colonization.' *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 38 (4): 3-36 (2005).

14 Henri Gooren, 'Latter-day Saints Under Siege: The Unique Experience of Nicaraguan Mormons.' *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 40 (3): 2007 (forthcoming). Whether these countries (Paraguay, the Andean countries, etc.) are currently undergoing a process of modernizing is also open to debate.

15 See for an elaboration: Henri Gooren, 'The Dynamics of LDS Growth in Guatemala, 1948-1998.' *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 34 (3&4): 55-75 (2001).

Southern Cone).<sup>16</sup> Fifth, even in a single Latin American country, the regional differences in LDS growth are substantial. Sixth, the statistical information is more reliable in Western Europe, although there are big differences in how the data are gathered and reported from one country to another. Seventh, statistics on religion are among the most unreliable of all in Latin America. Even the opinion polls of Gallup, which are reported to be the most reliable, show huge variations from year to year – especially in the ‘No religion’ category for each individual country.<sup>17</sup>

Conclusions based on these data are circumspect at best and deeply flawed at worst. Finally, using countries as the units of analysis often provide meaningless results and are certainly no basis for sophisticated correlations of the sort that Stark claims.

‘The Basis of Mormon Success’ is an edited version of Stark’s 1998 book chapter in *Latter-day Saint Social Life*.<sup>18</sup> This sixth essay is my favorite. It is a very nuanced and careful analysis of the many factors that attract people to become members of the LDS Church: conservation of cultural and religious capital, non-empirical doctrines that cannot be disproved, legitimate authority, the LDS labor force (missionaries and callings), the LDS ethic, LDS fertility rates, ecological factors (appeal to the religiously independent), network ties (see above), effective socialization, and an optimum (i.e., medium-level) strictness vis-à-vis society.

‘The Rise of a New World Faith,’ the last essay,

16 Just watch how often the two dots (..) appear to indicate ‘no data available’ for Latin American countries in the statistic tables of the various World Bank *World Development Reports*.

17 See for an extensive overview, based on statistical material on religion from Guatemala: Henri Gooren, ‘Reconsidering Protestant Growth in Guatemala, 1900-1995.’ In: James W. Dow & Alan R. Sandstrom (eds.). *Holy Saints and Fiery Preachers: The Anthropology of Protestantism in Mexico and Central America*, 169-203. Westport (CT) etc.: Praeger.

18 Rodney Stark, ‘The Basis of Mormon Success: A Theoretical Application.’ In: James T. Duke (ed.), *Latter-day Saint Social Life: Social Research on the LDS Church and its Members*, 29-70. Provo (UT): Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1998.

updates Stark’s projections on future LDS growth from his well-known 1984 and 1996 articles. Stark points out that the 5.5 million Latter-day Saints in the U.S. in 2003 already formed the fifth largest church in the U.S.: smaller than Catholics, Southern Baptists, and United Methodists, but bigger than Presbyterians, Episcopalians, and even Lutherans (140). Based on a conservative growth rate of 30 percent per decade, there should be 64 million Latter-day Saints in the world by 2080. When Stark uses a 50 percent growth rate per decade, which the LDS Church actually achieved from 1960 to 1990, there will be 267 million Mormons by 2080. Stark delights in pointing out the media attention his predictions attracted and adds: ‘I have been given the benefit of an amazing amount of counseling concerning the pitfalls of straight-line projections. In assessing this earnest advice, I have had to consider that it was coming to me mainly from people who were utterly horrified at any conceivable possibility that in a century there might be 267 million Latter-day Saints on the planet’ (142). Apart from all-out nuclear war or a collision with a meteor (144), Stark cannot really conceive of any factors that might slow LDS growth (145-146), since he assumes that he has convincingly shown that modernization and secularization will stimulate rather than curtail LDS growth.

Perhaps some additional counseling is in order... It is true that the LDS church is still gaining many new members in Asia, Africa, and especially Latin America. Nowadays, over 35 percent of the worldwide membership is concentrated in Latin America, in contrast to about 45 percent in the USA and Canada. By the year 2020, most Mormons in the world will be Latin Americans if the current growth rates continue.<sup>19</sup> Instead of the Wasatch Front, judging from current LDS growth rates, the future Mormon heartland will be the Andes and Central America. But it is clear that the impressive average annual growth rates are already declining rapidly in most Latin American

19 Mark L. Grover, ‘The Maturing of the Oak: The Dynamics of LDS Growth in Latin America,’ *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 38 (2): 79-104 (2005, p. 85).

countries where the LDS Church was successful in the past: all of Central America (except Nicaragua), Chile, and Colombia. In most of the other countries, the average annual growth rates are between 3 and 6 percent.<sup>20</sup>

I need to address an additional, complicating factor in detail to appreciate what these LDS membership statistics actually mean: the drop-out rate. Stark grossly exaggerates his claims when he labels Mormonism the next world religion because he ignores the fact that the drop-out rate for converts generally exceeds fifty percent.<sup>21</sup> One year after joining the LDS Church, only about half of the new converts remain active, visiting church at least once a month. In most parts of the world, the LDS *inactivity* rates are between 45 and 75 percent. Many of the 64 million Mormons Stark expects to be there in 2080 will actually be members of other churches, which will also happily count them as members (or, perhaps, they will be completely unaffiliated by then). The LDS Church may still count them as 'inactive Mormons' and have their members visit them at home occasionally, but it is more likely that most of these people will be Pentecostals (perhaps even inactive Pentecostals).<sup>22</sup> In sum, the declining LDS growth in the main reservoir, Latin America, combined with the inactivity rates leads me to doubt whether the LDS Church will manage to continue its 30 percent, let alone 50 percent, growth rates per decade.

I will end by pointing out another shortcoming in Stark's book. Stark himself has not conducted empirical research on the LDS Church, of course, but he quotes from various trusted sources, like Mauss (1994, 2003), the Cornwall, Heaton & Young anthology (1994), and the Duke anthology

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20 Gooren (2007 forthcoming).

21 Henri Gooren, *Rich among the Poor: Church, Firm, and Household among Small-scale Entrepreneurs in Guatemala City*. Amsterdam: Thela, 1999 (p. 66). Mark L. Grover, *Mormonism in Brazil: Religion and Dependency in Latin America*. PhD dissertation, Indiana University, 1985 (pp. 137-139).

22 Most religions all over the world have inflated membership statistics, of course. Mormons, Witnesses, and Pentecostals generally have higher commitment rates than other (Christian) churches.

(1998).<sup>23</sup> Although he likes to refer to LDS growth in Latin America, Stark never quotes from Mark Grover (1985) or David Knowlton.<sup>24</sup> Research that does not confirm his expectations, even when it fits the religious market paradigm, is never mentioned.<sup>25</sup> Although Richard L. Bushman is quoted,<sup>26</sup> the historical contexts of Mormonism are never dealt with directly; Jan Shipp's work is never even mentioned. In-depth studies of how an LDS ward works in practice (as opposed to "in theory") are never referred to either.<sup>27</sup> The net result of all of this, I fear, is that Stark's view of Mormonism is rather uncritical and tends to accept much about the religion (doctrines, leadership, callings, etc.) at face value. It sometimes appears to be 'quick and dirty': very nicely readable, lots of memorable quotes, but always scratching on the surface. Stark offers a somewhat rosy picture of Mormonism, one that will probably appeal to active Mormons. Scholars of Mormonism, on the other hand, won't always see the religion they study in his writings, nor will inactive and former Mormons.

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23 Armand L. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation*. Urbana etc.: University of Illinois Press, 1994. Armand L. Mauss, *All Abraham's Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage*. Urbana etc.: University of Illinois Press, 2003. Marie Cornwall, Tim B. Heaton & Lawrence A. Young (eds.), *Contemporary Mormonism: Social Science Perspectives*. Urbana etc.: University of Illinois Press, 1994. See also Duke (1998).

24 David C. Knowlton, *Searching Minds and Questing Hearts: Protestantism and Social Context in Bolivia*. PhD dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1988. David C. Knowlton, 'Mormonism in Latin America: Towards the Twenty-first Century.' *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 29 (1): 159-176 (1996).

25 See, for example, Rick Phillips, 'Religious Market Share and Mormon Church Activity.' *Sociology of Religion* 59 (2): 117-130 (1998). See also Rick Phillips, 'Rethinking the International Expansion of Mormonism.' *Nova Religio* 10 (1): 52-68 (2006).

26 Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*. Urbana etc.: University of Illinois Press, 1984.

27 For instance, Susan Buhler Taber, *Mormon Lives: A Year in the Elkton Ward*. Urbana etc.: University of Illinois Press, 1993.

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## Announcements and News

### *EMSA: The European Mormon Studies Association*

A new association interested in the study of Mormonism in Europe recently formed. Interest parties should visit their website at:  
<http://www.euromormonstudies.com/>

### *MHA Meeting in SLC*

The Mormon History Association is holding its annual conference on 24-27 May. This year the event will be in Salt Lake City. The complete conference program with dates and times for sessions and other related matters is available at:  
[http://www.mhahome.org/conferences/salt\\_lake\\_conference/07\\_Salt\\_Lake\\_Pre-Conference\\_Program.pdf](http://www.mhahome.org/conferences/salt_lake_conference/07_Salt_Lake_Pre-Conference_Program.pdf)

### *"Rethinking Expansion" discussed on By Common Consent*

MSSA President Rick Phillips's recent *Nova Religio* article "Rethinking the International Expansion of Mormonism" was recently reviewed and discussed on the Mormon blog *By Common Consent*. To get a sense of how it was received, you can find the discussion here:  
<http://www.bycommonconsent.com/2006/10/review-phillips-rethinking-expansion/>

### *MSSA to Update Mauss Bibliography*

We will soon be posting on the MSSA website (<http://www.mormonsocialscience.org>) an addendum to Armand Mauss's Bibliography of published social scientific studies of Mormonism. His bibliography covered 1830-1997; the addendum will include all relevant publications from 1997 on. Please note the following:

- The first draft we put up will likely miss many less-known publications.
- Once it is on the web site, if you know of any publications not in the addendum (or not in Mauss's bibliography), please note them in a

comment on the web site or email the website editor (Ryan Cragun)

- MSSA will assume responsibility for continually updating this addendum, and your help in submitting references via the web site or to the website administrator is much appreciated.
- We anticipate that this addendum, together with the original bibliography, will be a valuable resource for all who pursue the social scientific study of Mormonism.
- Michael McBride is currently putting together a first draft of the addendum. Please contact him at [mcbride@uci.edu](mailto:mcbride@uci.edu) if you have any questions.

### *Job News*

Henri Gooren is moving to the United States with his wife and daughter! He will be joining Gary Shepherd at Oakland University in the Fall of 2007 as a tenure-track Assistant Professor.

### *Mormon Studies Programs*

- Philip Barlow accepted the position as Leonard J. Arrington Chair of Mormon History and Culture at Utah State University.
- The University of Wyoming is moving forward with its Mormon Studies Initiative in the Religion Department:  
[http://www.wyomingnews.com/articles/2007/03/01/news/local\\_news/03local\\_03-01-07.txt](http://www.wyomingnews.com/articles/2007/03/01/news/local_news/03local_03-01-07.txt)
- The selection committee for the Howard W. Hunter Chair at Claremont has narrowed the candidates to a "short list." Finalists will be visiting the campus during April.

## Future SSSR Meetings

2007: November 2-4, Tampa, Florida  
2008: October 17-19, Louisville, Kentucky  
2009: October 23-25, Denver, Colorado

## MSSA Leadership

*President:*

- Rick Phillips (2005-2009)

*President-Elect:*

- None

*Board Members:*

- Michael Nielsen
- Gordon Shepherd
- Kendall White
- Lynn Payne

*Treasurer/Secretary:*

- Cardell Jacobson (2001-present)

*Newsletter Editor:*

- Ryan T. Cragun (2003-present)

*Nominations for Candidates: Due by April 30th*

*Elections finished by May 30<sup>th</sup>.*

*Next elections: Spring 2009*

## Dues Due

Please send your dues for 2008 to Cardell Jacobson, Department of Sociology, 2008 JFSB, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah 84602. Dues are \$10.00 annually.

If you would like to receive this newsletter by email, and don't already, save the MSSA some money by sending your email address to:

[cardell\\_jacobson@byu.edu](mailto:cardell_jacobson@byu.edu)